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DIALOGUE: DIVERSITY IN THE DISCIPLINE

Diversity in political science: why it matters and how to get it

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Introduction

This symposium responds to a stubborn reality: slow progress both in diversifying political science faculty at all ranks and in redressing bias in the discipline. Why do diversity and bias in political science matter? What persistent obstacles impede the diversification of the profession and contribute to persistent discrimination? And how might political scientists overcome these problems? This set of contributions to *PGI* offers fresh ways of thinking about, and tackling, these questions by inviting colleagues to apply their research expertise in political science to the discipline and academe.

The lack of a diverse faculty in political science is longstanding and significant. In 1980, female faculty comprised an estimated 10.3% of political science faculty nationwide. By 2010, that share had increased only to 28.6%, despite record numbers of women earning advanced degrees in political science (APSA 2011, 41–43; Hesli, Lee, and Mitchell 2012). Female faculty of color remain severely underrepresented. In 2010, African-American women constituted a mere 1.7% of political science faculty (APSA 2011, 41, 42). As a result, many undergraduates complete their degrees without having ever taken a course taught by a woman of color (cf. Evans 2007). Compare the figures from political science to other social sciences such as psychology or sociology, and the underrepresentation of women in our discipline becomes stark (APA Center for Workforce Studies 2014 on 2013 data; ASA 2015 on 2007 data).

Moreover, we know that marginalized groups often encounter a difficult environment and obstacles to career advancement in political science and elsewhere in academe (e.g., Anonymous and Anonymous 1999; Ford 2016; Hesli, Fink, and Duffy 2003b; Claypool and Mershon 2016; Smooth 2016; Van Assendelft et al. 2003; but see Ginther 2004). Implicit bias, “old boys” networks, and skewed hiring, promotion, and tenure practices have contributed to these problems (e.g., Monforti and Michelson 2008; Mathews and Andersen 2001; Williams, Alon, and Bornstein 2006; Wolfinger, Mason, and Goulden 2008). Strategies for combating discrimination in academe and in the workplace more broadly have emphasized mentoring, building leadership skills, and encouraging the marginalized to adapt to the status quo (e.g., Hesli, Fink, and Duffy 2003a; Monroe et al. 2008; Sandberg 2013). Despite these strategies, political science remains largely the domain of white men.

This dominance likely undermines the goal of advancing knowledge and leads to omissions in research agendas and thus misunderstandings and gaps in the discipline’s scholarship (cf. McClain et al. 2016). Recent research indicates that diversity matters for

corporations, for academe, and for political science. Social scientists document that diverse personnel lead to better outcomes, such as more effective problem-solving, greater creativity, more productivity, increased profits, and higher rankings (e.g., Henderson and Herring 2013; Herring 2009; Page 2007). Problem-solving, creativity, and productivity are in turn central to advancing intellectual inquiry in political science, and can generate new areas of inquiry in the profession, such as racial politics, as well as new insights and new answers to both longstanding and long neglected questions. To the extent that high rankings help departments and universities recruit and retain outstanding faculty and students, they contribute to the general aim of enhancing knowledge.

Recent research into gendered citation patterns in international relations journals, moreover, shows that research produced by women is read and cited less often than is research by men, which means that this research is “systematically undervalued” (Maliniak, Powers, and Walter 2013, 31; cf. Mitchell, Lange, and Brus 2013; Østby et al. 2013). Because scholars tend to cite those of the same sex, Maliniak et al. argue that greater diversity will foster more rapid intellectual development in the subfield, and will yield research that investigates a wider array of questions and that attains greater methodological innovation. Deliberative democrats (e.g., Chambers 2003) add the normative argument that diversity and inclusive institutional practices contribute to better understanding and more just outcomes. Likewise, feminists from Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) to Iris Marion Young (2000) have argued that inclusion is not only instrumentally advantageous but also necessary as a matter of justice. To achieve these outcomes, members of underrepresented groups will require strategies for thriving in difficult environments.

The contributions to this symposium shed new light on the importance of diversity in political science, identify the persistent obstacles to diversity in the discipline, and also develop strategies for thriving during the drive to diversify the profession. They arrive at their conclusions by applying scholarly insights to academe and our own field. As a result, the contributors demonstrate that knowledge generated by political science can be applied to a wider range of institutions and contexts than is often assumed. By drawing on genealogical and survey analysis, and research on gender equity and intersectionality, each contribution assesses the status of and obstacles to diversity in political science. Together, all contributors show how we can construct a more equitable and productive future for the discipline and academe.

Paula McClain and co-authors Gloria Ayee, Taneisha Means, Alicia Reyes-Barrientez, and Nura Sedique apply the tools of genealogical analysis to political science and argue that the discipline’s power relations and institutional legacy marginalize research about race. The authors suggest that, before we can devise strategies for counteracting this legacy, we must first recognize it and understand how and why it persists. The fact that the authors are minority women who span cohorts – a senior scholar and several junior ones – reinforces the contemporary implications of the discipline’s past. The problems rooted in the past continue to reverberate, leading scholars across cohorts to grapple with the same marginalization of their scholarship.

Marginalization of scholarship is but one facet of discrimination in the discipline. Another is how political science faculty interact with one another in our departments. Relying on data from a 2009 APSA-sponsored survey on the attitudes and experiences of political science faculty, Vicki Hesli Claypool, with Carol Mershon, appraises whether and under what conditions greater diversity in our departments is associated

with higher levels of collegiality and productivity. The survey furnishes groundbreaking data on the extent, nature, and effects of diversity in our discipline, while underscoring that the limited number of diverse political science faculty hinders our ability to assess their effects quantitatively. For example, precisely because of the paucity of African-American women in the discipline, a theme developed by Smooth in this symposium, Hesli Claypool cannot analyze separately the attitudes of members of this subgroup.

Even as the experiences of several underrepresented groups remain to be assessed, some strategies for thriving in the current environment can be developed. Lynne Ford speaks to ambitious women scholars who, as she explains, continue to face serious structural barriers to their attainment of, and exercise of power in, leadership positions. Ford itemizes these barriers, explains how and why they endure, and observes the pervasive failure of universities to dismantle these barriers. She then turns to the gender equity and academic leadership literatures to highlight three career strategies – social efficacy, social modeling, and mentoring – that might guide individual women who, in this hostile climate, aim to climb the academic administrative ladder and create a more inclusive environment than the one Hesli Claypool's research uncovers. Ford also discusses strategies that universities can pursue to facilitate women's promotion and foster institutional change.

Finally, building on the theme of leadership at the heart of Ford's contribution, Wendy Smooth applies the logic of intersectionality to identify faculty situated at the intersection of multiple inequalities as capable of spearheading the creation of new, intersectional leadership norms and alliances in academe. She thus responds to the observations by McClain et al. that black scholars face persistent challenges in the discipline by inviting those at the margins to draw on their lived experience to expand the strategies that diversity advocates might adopt.

All of the contributors thus employ their research expertise in political science to enhance our understanding of diversity in the discipline. We learn that increased diversity in political science brings complex effects that are mediated by a range of factors including academic rank, and that we must grapple with the fraught legacies of our discipline, and of academe more broadly, which perpetuate elite male dominance. Absent institutional transformation, women who have honed their leadership skills to acquire power bear the burden of spearheading reform. Such women, along with women aspiring to positions of power, will thus need to pursue the strategies articulated here to forge new, intersectional coalitions that challenge the structural obstacles to diversity in academe.

The contributors to this symposium seek to inspire all scholars, including privileged men, to reflect on how their areas of research expertise, joined to their broader disciplinary training and their knowledge of the political arena, might spur new strategies for diversifying political science, the academy, and the workplace. Privileged men have a particular responsibility to craft, implement, and collaborate on new strategies, precisely because of their privilege.

We also believe that innovative collaborations beyond our discipline are essential for generating new strategies to advance diversity at work, and that these collaborations have the potential to enrich political science inquiry by helping us address questions that, as yet, we have failed to answer. For instance, what lessons might our research on marginalized groups in political contexts yield for scholars in business schools studying diversity in corporations? And since departments are workplaces, how might the insights of business school scholars inform our strategies for changing political science

departments (e.g., Davidson 2011)? Or what lessons might we offer to, and gain from, cognitive psychologists whose research probes the conditions under which the experience of diversity is most likely to generate flexible thinking and creativity (e.g., Crisp and Turner 2011)? As these examples illustrate, our collaborative work with scholars in other fields promises to generate fresh questions and answers about issues at the core of our discipline: inequality, individual and group behavior, power, (in)justice, institutions, and institutional reform.

This symposium contributes to our project of Gendering Political Science by applying political science research to academe (e.g., Mershon and Walsh 2014, 2015a, 2015b, <http://genderingpoliticalscience.weebly.com/>). It also contributes to what we hope will become an ongoing conversation within and across disciplines about how to make the workplace a more equitable and intellectually exciting place for us all. In promoting the application of political science knowledge and tools beyond the political arena, this Dialogues symposium traverses subfield and disciplinary boundaries and engages in the “border crossing” that distinguishes *PGI* (Bowler et al. 2013, 2).

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