

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Gender Matters (Even More): Reflections on the Future of *Politics & Gender*

Sara Angevine 

Department of Political Science, Whittier College, Whittier, CA, USA
Email: sangevine@whittier.edu

(Received 09 February 2025; accepted 10 February 2025)

As this article is being finalized, US President Donald J. Trump has taken numerous executive actions to challenge gender identity; diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs; and the rights of marginalized populations broadly. These xenophobic, anti-gender political agendas are gaining momentum worldwide (Ayoub and Stoeckle 2024). My hope is that these brief words inspire future politics and gender scholars to apply their research skills to challenge these heteropatriarchal policies that so often reinforce sexism, racism, and homophobia in the name of nationalism. When the *Politics & Gender* journal began in 2005, the justification question underlying much of its existence was “Does gender matter?” In 2025, if one is to measure the importance of gender by the amount of resistance to gender inclusive policies and feminist advances, one could easily argue that not only does gender matter-but it matters even more.

The history of the discipline of political science illustrates a social world where the value of paying attention to gender as a category of analysis has long been seen as irrelevant. Like other forms of structural privilege, such as whiteness, Western values, language, or class, gendered harms can be rendered nonexistent by those shielded from its divergent impact. For those who experience or empathize with these injuries, the academic burden has been to justify changing the status quo by showing precisely how gender matters (and perhaps even its statistical significance in relation to certain phenomena). As a result, we now know that gender shapes the answers to vital political science questions regarding political representation, power, decision-making, and diplomacy, among many other topics (Han and Heldman 2023). One could argue that this higher bar for demonstrating the importance of gender as a category of analysis has led to an even higher quality of politics and gender scholarship, paralleling findings on the effectiveness of women in elected office (Volden, Wiseman, and

Wittmer 2013). Yet the lack of scholarly attention can also result in a messier terrain for evaluating quality research, an unclear canon on politics and gender contributions, and divisions on methodological approaches.

The value and importance of *Politics & Gender* is that it creates the necessary space for rigorous conversations on the impact and import of gender as a category of political analysis. On the pages of this journal, our academic dialogues help us reach a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of how and why gender matters (see also Baldez and Beckwith 2025). I argue that over the past twenty years academic conversations applying gender as a category of analysis have deepened in a number of areas, including public opinion, political participation (Cassese and Friesen 2025), and political representation (Jalalzai 2024; Krook 2025). Applying gender as a category of analysis has expanded and improved our ability to answer the critical questions of our field. Hegemonic heteropatriarchy¹ can no longer devalue the experiences of women as citizens, as political candidates, and as elected officials – nor shield the gendered nature of political institutions, organizations, and general power dynamics.

While we can see much success, particularly in the fields of American Politics and Comparative Politics, I suggest that the gender knowledge revolution is incomplete. Much gender and politics scholarship has been focused on the gender dynamics in advanced industrialized countries (Tripp 2024), has been based on a gender-binary system (Zein 2024), and has focused on gender as an attribute rather than gender as a process (Baldez and Beckwith 2025). While we celebrate the impressive growth of gender and politics scholarship, therefore, there are still important gaps in our disciplinary knowledge. I suggest that the areas of feminist political theory, sexuality and politics, and gender and international relations are the next spaces for future critical investigation, research, and growth in *Politics & Gender*.

Feminist Political Theory

First, the journal could take a more proactive approach towards fostering the growth of feminist political theory. Though the discipline more broadly is struggling to justify the value of political theory after the behavioralist turn, *Politics & Gender* could be a leader in this critical conversation. Having feminist political theorist Mary Caputi as lead editor was one tactic to encourage more participation from theorists (see also Caputi 2025). Another idea, similar to the Notes from the Field section, could be to reserve a space in the publication for theoretical conversations. We need to protect and promote theoretical development to address the big questions of our time that have much to do with gender, sex, and sexuality. Ideas are as, if not more, valuable than execution.

We need to reclaim and restore feminist political theory as foundational to *Politics & Gender*. One could argue that the discipline of political science was the

1 Hegemonic heteropatriarchy refers to the social, cultural, economic, and political norms and laws that center heterosexual patriarchal relations as the base for all human aspiration and expected performance.

original home for feminist political theory and queer theory. Yet today feminist political theory seems to find its home in Departments of Women and Gender Studies rather than in Political Science. One potential model is the annual Feminist Political Theory Workshop preconference at the Western Political Science Association's (WPSA) annual meetings.

In 1996, Professor Shane Phelan decided to create a workshop before WPSA as a dedicated space for feminist theory conversations (Ferguson et al 2022). At the initial preconference workshop, Nancy Hartsock and Renée Heberle were the highly anticipated discussants for Wendy Brown's *States of Injury* (1995). Brown is now considered one of the most important political theorists of the 21st century (along with her partner Judith Butler). These engaging workshops continue to this day. Everyone who attends sits in a circle and two pieces, typically a recently published book connected to feminist theory and a work-in-progress or newly published article, are discussed by the workshop participants. I first attended the WPSA feminist theory pre-conference in graduate school in the late 2000s. I was so impressed and inspired that I have continued to participate each year (that I am able).

My hope would be to see a stronger connection between these WPSA Feminist Theory pre-conferences and the feminist theory conversations inside *Politics & Gender*. For me, this is not just about making sure we have an inclusive and diverse range of topics. We also need stronger theory to enrich how we think and improve how we politically engage in the world. Theory is vital for extending our creative imagination, developing cognitive relationships, and constructing new solutions for humanity. While empirical research is arguably an effective tactic to test and improve theories, as well as probing causal relationships, I believe that there also needs to be more protected space for innovation, vision, and deep thought. Gender, sex, and sexuality discrimination persists and is even expanding, at least in the United States.² We need feminist political theory to help us imagine new ways forward and beyond neoliberal empowerment (Prügl 2015).

Gender, Sex, and Sexuality

Second, the relationship between gender and sexuality research could be strengthened in this journal. While *Politics & Gender* has increased attention towards intersectionality (Christoffersen and Siow 2025), this often is collapsed to investigations that address race and gender. While this is critical for challenging white privilege, I would hope to see similarly rich and comprehensive attention to the relationship between sexuality and gender. For both concepts, we need to not only think of the gender/sexuality attribute (woman/man versus LGBTQ) but also the socializations and processes of heteropatriarchy. Although the journal has recently published a number of articles on sexual orientation and

² In the United States, the gender pay gap has hardly changed in twenty years, although more women are in corporate leadership roles. The #MeToo movement no doubt helped shift conversations on sexual harassment, but the rape rate is currently higher than it was twenty years ago. And, according to much public opinion data, sexist attitudes are on the rise.

gender identity (Albaugh and Baisley 2023; Bell and Borelli 2024; Linders, Dudink, and Spierings 2023; Murib 2024; Schotel and Mügge 2024), there is scope to see greater attention towards LGBTQ+ political issues on the pages of *Politics & Gender* and more attention to sexuality and gender as co-constitutive.

The social construction of gender and race hinge upon notions of sex and sexuality. Yet these ideas are all too often siloed as areas of study. As a cisgender lesbian, I personally see how gender, sex, and sexuality politics are co-constitutive. I expect that is the case regardless of one's sexual orientation, but it rises in saliency when both are experienced as outside the hegemonic norm. In the discipline of political science, I find myself trapped much like the lesbian activists of the 1970s who felt outside of the feminist social movement (as homosexual) and outside of the gay social movement (as women). In political science, I have observed that the gender and politics community is mostly (white) heterosexual women, and the sexuality and politics community is mostly (white) homosexual men. Publications mirror these trends (Piscopo 2025). Wider diversification is needed in both the lived bodies and the intentional focus of this scholarship.

I suggest that the *Politics & Gender* journal continue its work addressing intersectionality along the lines of gender and race while also fostering research on sexuality. Sex and sexuality matter for gender because sexuality, sexual practices, and the sexed body matter for our notions of gender as an attribute (or product) and as a process. Female sexual organs and feminine sexuality are the central foundations of their socially defined difference as a gendered/sexed body. Male sexual organs and masculine sexuality are the central foundations for the construction of male-only public institutions. Women were not permitted in schools, governments, or workplaces because they would sexually distract men. Compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980) remains thick in the air we breathe. The anti-transgender movement has escalated exponentially worldwide, placing strong pressures on rigid gender roles and body essentialism.

Going forward, *Politics & Gender* is an excellent space for scholarship in the emerging field of sexuality and politics. As politicians in the US have begun to harden the lines around biological sex as a synonym for gender, the journal can instead take a more inclusive approach. Because we see gender as a language of power, we can readily show that forces deploy gender power to harm all gender identity minorities (transgender men, transgender women, and cisgender women) who fall outside of the expected cisgender man citizen archetype. We also need to strengthen our resolve to fight back. The term "gender" has become so potent that some political leaders request it be removed and stricken from policy. Standing on the sidelines is no longer an option. Instead, *Politics & Gender* could and should serve as a highly relevant source illustrating the connections and distinctions between gender, sex, and sexuality.

Gender and International Relations

Third, gender and international relations (IR) scholarship is a further area for future growth. Having participated at the International Studies Association (ISA)

annual meeting in San Francisco, CA in April 2024, I ran into many interesting feminist scholars whose work I would love to see on the pages of *Politics & Gender*. One wonders where they perceive to find their best research audience. *Politics & Gender* coexists alongside the *International Feminist Journal of Politics* and the recently formed *European Journal of Politics and Gender*. While gender and politics scholarship is relevant worldwide, *Politics & Gender* may be seen as a journal primarily devoted to American politics and/or centered on US American scholars.

The steadily rising number of contributions to the journal in comparative politics show that the journal can attract work on international topics (Tripp 2024). Until recently, the field of IR has been highly resistant to gender analysis, in part due to the low share of women scholars in this field. However, feminist IR research has expanded tremendously over the last thirty years (Sjoberg and Thies 2023). Perhaps due to norms of hegemonic masculinity among IR scholars, this body of work has been more explicitly feminist than in other political science subfields and worked to redefine traditional IR concepts using post-positivist methodologies. Consequently, encouraging submissions from feminist IR scholars would not only diversify the content but also the methodological approaches seen in the journal.

It may be that, because the journal is not explicitly feminist (in title), the *International Feminist Journal of Politics* appears to be a more favorable outlet for these scholars. However, *Politics & Gender* could be an excellent site to develop and deepen conversations in feminist IR and gender and IR scholarship. I would hope that, moving forward, gender researchers addressing questions of globalization, international political economy, foreign policy, artificial intelligence, security, war, and other critical areas of IR could see this journal as a valuable place to submit scholarship. As the IR field pivots to methods and topics that tend to ignore gender, like big data and artificial intelligence, scholars who can demonstrate within those epistemologies how and why gender matters are particularly important. As our global polity grows increasingly interconnected, we need to have gender politics scholars investigating important IR questions. The journal could do this by publishing special issues focused on IR questions and appointing more editors from the IR subfield and/or from outside of the United States, which could together signal that *Politics & Gender* is an attractive, inclusive journal for their global/IR gender research.

Conclusion

One journal cannot be all things to all people. However, the last twenty years have proven that *Politics & Gender* has been a critical actor for those of us in the profession who want to understand the power of gender – and, for the feminists among us, how to best dismantle the pervasive power of hegemonic heteropatriarchy. *Politics & Gender* has arguably transformed the discipline of political science (Sawer 2025). But our critical work must continue. Going forward, the journal should take more explicit steps to support feminist political theory, teaching readers its history as well as nurturing its future. Gender, sex, and

sexuality and politics scholarship is another important horizon for the journal to develop. The feminist movement and the LGBTQ rights movements stem from the same argument against heteropatriarchy, which persists as a site for moral panics (Rubin 1984) and intersectional oppression (Currah 2022). Finally, *Politics & Gender* can open new directions for gender and feminist international relations scholarship. As graduate students perpetuate the paths already formed by those before them, academia ironically has a propensity for preserving the status quo in its quest for innovation. My hope is that the journal, through these future directions, will further expand the theoretical and practical impact and importance of gender as a category of analysis in political science.

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Sara Angevine is Associate Professor of Political Science at Whittier College: sangevine@whittier.edu

Cite this article: Angevine, Sara. 2025. "Gender Matters (Even More): Reflections on the Future of Politics & Gender." *Politics & Gender* 21, 137–143. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X2500011X>