

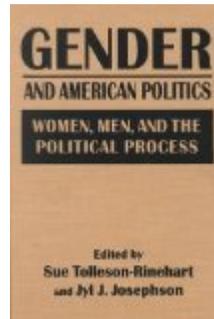
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Sue Tolleson-Rinehart, Jyl J. Josephson, eds. *Gender and American Politics: Women, Men, and the Political Process*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2000. ix + 262 pp. \$66.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7656-0408-8.

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This collection of works will enjoy a significant place in the literature of women and politics. Each of the articles included demonstrates three meaningful aspects of any solid work of this sort: relevant topics, diverse subject matter, and a variety of methodologies. The emerging nature of the study of women and politics, as well as gender issues and the political process, give the selections that much more value. Together, the text shows us that studying gender issues in the political process is not a monolithic enterprise in its issue agenda or in its methodological approaches. As such, the book shows great value for graduate students; its value demonstrating the diverse methodological approaches particularly provides excellent models for students embarking on their own independent research. The book's only weaknesses may be in its organization and place in a larger curriculum.

The book is divided into three sections: political behavior, public policy, and institutions. Each section includes several articles addressing a particular issue within that category. The book is introduced by the editors. Tolleson-Rinehart and Josephson outline their framework for approaching gender in the political process and provide an overview of the key questions and findings of the individual authors. They note that the articles do not necessarily agree on whether a gender gap exists in American politics or on what form such a gap takes. This aspect of the volume alone has significant value because it acknowledges that women's systematic exclusion as a group from political, economic and social opportunities has not fostered a monolithic approach among either women or men in their attitudes and behaviors as a part of the political process even in those arenas having direct gender connections.

The section on political behavior includes three chapters. The first of these, "Gender and Political Knowledge" by Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter, explores why and within which parameters women's political knowledge differs from men's political knowledge. They also consider the implications of such differences. Della Carpini and Keeter find that women demonstrate less political knowledge than men on national issues. These findings confirm those of other scholars who argue that women's political and educational socialization actively discourages women from becoming well versed in political issues on the grounds that politics is considered a public experience whereas women's primary experiences are meant to be private in nature. Further, women are not socialized in schools to excel particularly in fields, such as politics, that are traditionally reserved for men. Combining these two forces, that politics belongs in men's public world while women should not excel in those educational arenas except where it would help them perform their private roles better (such as teaching and nursing), means that women's political knowledge levels will be lower on average than men's.

Delli Carpini and Keeter look for those areas of political knowledge where the gender gap may narrow rather than accepting that findings looking across a range of policy areas provide sufficient evidence that men exceed women in their political knowledge levels. They find that women's knowledge levels near those of men's when the issue, such as health care policy or a candidate's position on abortion, is of particular interest to women. Women's ready exposure to local politics makes that level of government particularly accessible to women and encourages local-level political activism. Opinion differences tend to move further apart once political knowledge lev-

els increase.

Eric Plutzer focuses on decision-making among pregnant women faced with the decision of whether or not to tell the person fathering her child (referred to as the co-conceiver by the author) of her choice to terminate her pregnancy. Plutzer's article is framed in the context of Carol Gilligan's seminal work, *In a Different Voice*. One important sub-theme of this piece is the discussion of the impact that Gilligan's work has had on numerous disciplines including psychology and political science.

Gilligan's primary thesis is that women and men approach ethics from different perspectives; women use a "different voice." Gilligan's approach looks at moral reasoning from the perspective of an ethic of care versus an ethic of rights. Plutzer found evidence of both "moral voices" (Gilligan's terminology) and corresponding ethics among most respondents who decided to tell their co-conceivers of their decision to abort. Determination of these findings was based on the percent of women who argued that it was their co-conceiver's right to know that prompted them to tell them. Plutzer's findings suggest that women's approaches to telling their co-conceiver of their decision are indeed couched "in a different voice."

The final chapter in the section looks at political participation. M. Margaret Conway asks whether women participate at the same rate as men and whether women's participation is influenced by gender role orientations.

Conway compares participation rates between women and men in a variety of activities. She then compares participation across subgroups of women with different gender role orientations and then considers the effects of other influences on political participation. Conway argues that women are socialized to approach politics from a more passive perspective than are men. Accordingly, men's activity levels tend to be higher although voting in presidential elections is now higher among women than men. Conway also argues that many of the resources necessary for effective political participation are often not available to women. These resources include educational attainment which has the concomitant effects of both advancement of knowledge and access to important social and political networks. Conway also asks whether feminist consciousness and women's political generation affect women's political participation in voting, campaigning and giving. She finds that differences between women and men are not statistically significant; however, role orientation differences among women do foster differences in political

participation rates.

The three articles comprising the political behavior section each make an important contribution to this volume both in their political and policy implications. Delli Carpini and Keeter find that women are often as knowledgeable as men particularly in ways that are of especial importance to them. Conway's findings suggest why women are more knowledgeable about politics in certain areas because they would be otherwise passive about the political process. Political activism comes from perceiving a direct connection between the political process and one's private experience. Here, that connection is that the political process is responsible for certain experiences related to gender discrimination. Plutzer's findings indicate that women's personal decisions are not in line with perceived stereotypes that women will not tell their co-conceivers of their decision to abort. His findings suggest that most women, because of their notions of what constitutes their co-conceiver's "right to know," will tell them unless there are circumstances which would prevent such information from being readily transmitted or would result in physical harm to those women.

The next section of the text looks at public policy. The chapters look at numerous policy debates and note how such debates are gendered in their orientation. These chapters also look at stereotypes about women that guide such processes and ask whether they achieve a differential impact on women and the associated consequences.

Edward McCaffery and Michael Alvarez's chapter on "Gender and Tax" looks for gender differences linked to specific aspects of taxation. They note that so much of the current research on gender and tax is related to perceptions of candidates and vote choice. What is missing is a comparison of women's and men's attitudes toward substantive tax issues. McCaffery and Alvarez note that important aspects of substantive tax law, such as limited tax relief for those employing child care providers, mean that women and men would likely have different opinions toward tax policy. Their study is also premised on the notion that men vote based on narrower "pocketbook" issues whereas women are more supportive of redistributive taxes which achieve social justice in some form. McCaffery and Alvarez's findings suggest that men and women share similar attitudes toward taxes. However, men give substantive tax issues greater political priority than do women. Women tend to give less importance to tax issues relative to other political questions. One important policy consequence is that men's tax preferences tend to be more often reflected in public policy

than are women's tax preferences.

Dorothy McBride Stetson's look at job training and abortion policies compares how distributive and "emotive-symbolic" issues (Stetson's terminology) are approached as gendered policy debates. Her focus on the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) of 1978 and the 1982 Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) shows the extent to which gender roles were integral to the framing of the policies. A critical aspect of these debates was the role of feminist organizations in their efforts to shape the policies. Stetson finds that certain categories of women, in this case displaced homemakers, were more successful policy targets than were others. She also argues that feminist organizations had moderate success with these debates because of the targeted efforts toward such groups as displaced homemakers.

The abortion policies that Stetson analyzes are the Freedom of Choice Act debate in the early 1990s (which was never voted on by Congress) as well as the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 1995. She argues that feminist advocates were so successful with the latter that congressional leaders communicated their positions effectively during the policy debates. At the same time, there was a critical shift in how the latter policy was perceived by policy makers. The debate was not about preserving abortion rights as stipulated in *Roe v. Wade* (1973); rather, it was about whether a physician had a right to use a specific medical procedure. Focus shifted away from women's rights to physician's rights, which brought policy advocates to the issue from different perspectives.

Stetson's inclusion of two seemingly divergent policy areas reinforces the importance of analyzing a wide array of policy debates from gendered perspectives. Such approaches are critical particularly in light of Delli Carpini and Keeter's findings which indicated that women are more knowledgeable on those issues that they consider to be of special interest to them. Stetson demonstrates how divergent policy debates become gendered; should such approaches be reflected in public opinion then women may end up broadening their political knowledge on this basis.

Jyl Josephson's chapter on "Gender and Social Policy" looks at the termination of General Assistance (GA) in Michigan in 1991 and Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in 1996. Josephson places her analysis in the context of Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram's notion that social policy is made and implemented based on the relative power of targeted groups as well

as public perceptions about these groups. By portraying target populations as deviant rather than deserving, for example, it is considered far more rational to terminate assistance policies. Josephson shows that termination advocates of both General Assistance and Aid for Families with Dependent Children argued that the recipients of either policy were considered deviant based on gender role expectations. In the former case, recipients of GA were portrayed as lazy minority males who refused to work whereas recipients of AFDC were portrayed as unfit mothers who continued to have children in order to increase their monthly benefit. Josephson's piece dovetails well with Stetson's piece which looks at policy creation. Together, it is clear that policy debates, whether for policy creation or termination, and whether for gender-targeted policy or otherwise, are each affected by a gendered approach to policy making and accordingly have a differential impact on men and women.

The final chapter in the public policy section looks at the role that gender plays in health politics. Sue Tolleson-Rinehart notes that gender plays an integral role in all aspects of health policy including treatment, research and prevention. Tolleson-Rinehart argues that many women's health issues, because they were considered private rather than public concerns, were not addressed in the public realm until quite recently. She also draws attention to the apparent contradiction between such a seemingly objective (science-based medical care) set of standards with gender ideology, a subjective standard. She argues that such ideologies play just as critical a role as they ever have despite medical advances and raised awareness about the subjective impact of such ideologies.

Tolleson-Rinehart also draws attention to the notion that both women and women's health issues have been either marginalized or privatized: that women's health concerns are not important public concerns, nor should women be allowed or expected to represent their own interests in the public arena. By men defining and formulating the women's health policy agenda, various approaches and research questions are placed in a framework that does not serve their best interests. As stated in the chapter title, "women get sicker; men die quicker."

The last section of the book looks at gender and political institutions. The primary questions that this section asks are: does a female presence in male-dominated policy making institutions alter the way that those institutions function? Are there other influences on those institutions that impact how they respond to women's

presence?

The first of these chapters, by Mary Anne Borrelli, looks at the president's cabinet. Borrelli notes that most research on presidential cabinets has ignored gender centered questions: specifically, attention to how men and women shape their identities, and how such identities impact the way that one approaches one's cabinet position. Borrelli focuses on two "firsts." She looks at Janet Reno, the first female Attorney General who was appointed during Clinton's first term and Madeleine Korbelt Albright, named the first female Secretary of State during Clinton's second term. Borrelli looks at the academic and political backgrounds of the two women and notes that each took quite divergent career paths from the other. One key result of these differences is how these women approach their cabinet positions. Borrelli also couches her analysis in the context of how cabinet members interact with the president and relevant interests.

Borrelli's analysis shows that, despite natural comparisons between the two "firsts," their career paths, educational experiences, and relationship with the president differed significantly. For example, Albright's experience as United States Ambassador to the United Nations made her a natural choice for the position of Secretary of State. Reno possessed no national experience when she was tapped for the position of Attorney General.

Susan Gluck Mezey summarizes a significant body of research on whether gender affects judicial decision making. She opens the chapter by noting that the nominations of both Sandra Day O'Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg were surrounded by speculation that these women would vote on Supreme Court cases differently from their male brethren because of their gender alone. The rarity of women on the U.S. Supreme Court means that other areas of the judiciary branch must be investigated in order to assess whether women's presence impacts decision making and what form that influence takes.

Mezey's discussion is placed in the context of Pitkin's notion of whether women "stand for" other women (descriptive representation) or whether they "act for" (substantive representation) other women. Standing for other women means that women's presence only changes what the bench looks like; acting for other women means that women's presence will actually change the nature of decision making.

Mezey finds that the federal bench was altered by presidents committed to diversity. Specifically, both Carter and later Clinton made concerted efforts to

appoint more women and minorities to the bench. Mezey notes that there are conflicting views on whether women's presence on the federal bench has changed it in predicted (liberal activist) ways. She cites one study where women and men differed significantly in their approaches to personal liberties, minority policy issues and economic regulation. However, these differences were not in the predicted direction; women were more likely to defer to other political branches than were men. Mezey notes that the scholarship suggests that gender differences are contextual rather than absolute.

Finally, Richard Fox's work on "Gender and Congressional Elections" ends the text with questions about whether the expectation that legislatures will be male dominated has created a situation where women have a more difficult time running for office than do men. Fox notes that the diversity of both women's and men's political career paths of late makes stereotyping less useful than in the past. This makes competing for a nomination easier on women because they are not expected to meet conditions predicated on "masculine values" (Fox's terminology).

Fox notes similar success with fund raising between women and men. His anecdotal reports suggest otherwise, however. Men have the advantage of incumbency, as well as greater appeal with well financed interest groups such as labor. Male candidates also conduct themselves differently when their challenger is a female. Similarly, female candidates consider themselves subject to greater media scrutiny than do males. Fox finds that his results are not applicable nationwide. Women have an easier time running for the House of Representatives in western and southern states when compared with mid-western states. He finds that, overall, the electoral arena remains gendered to women's disadvantage.

Together, these ten articles present an excellent representation of the state of gender politics research today. The numerous methodological approaches, from qualitative case studies to empirically driven quantitative analyses, all speak to the diversity and breadth of approaches to women and politics research. The choice of topics, combined with the various methodological approaches, makes this a rich collection of work.

At the same time, the text's two weaknesses stem from these same matters. First, it would be difficult to assign this text in an advanced undergraduate class unless it was accompanied by more general texts. The issues that so many chapters introduce are fundamental to women and politics research such as representation,

gender ideologies and role socialization. However, the basis for these approaches would need to be introduced in an accompanying text so that advanced undergraduates would fully understand the nature of the research. The narrow set of issues that the text approaches make it fully worthwhile for a graduate seminar in either political science or gender studies. The second concern is the organization of the text. The introductory chapter by the editors is a helpful guide to the remaining chapters. However, a short summary at the beginning of each section would introduce the reader to connections among the section chapters which would make the text more ap-

proachable.

In all, the chapters in the text are extremely well written and cover a wide range of topics. It is clear that the editors were careful in their consideration of materials to include and this shows in the individual quality of each contribution as well as the overall quality of the work as a whole.

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