

Overcoming Barriers to Women's Advancement in Political Science

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Some troubling findings

Women almost half of the entering classes of political science Ph.D. programs at top U.S. universities, but lost at **critical conversion points**:

- Fewer women go on academic job market.
- Fewer tenure-track assistant professors are women (especially at R1s).
- Fewer associate professors are women.
- Fewer full professors are women.
- Fewer women on prestigious associations, e.g. American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

(e.g. NSF Survey of Earned Doctorates, APSA Graduate Placement Surveys; APSA Report on Women's Advancement, 2005.)

More troubling findings

- Fewer articles in top journals are by women (40% authored by a single man & 24% by all-male team, vs. 17% by single woman & 2.4% by all-female team).
- Men, either solo or in all-male research teams, less likely to cite women, even in fields where leading scholars are women!
- Co-authoring is growing, but evidence this doesn't benefit women.
- Textbooks and course syllabi feature fewer woman.
- Under-representation of woman is especially stark in IR, political economy, and methods.
- Women may be held to higher standards in peer-review, leading to e.g. longer review times.
- Women receive more negative comments in teaching evaluations.

(e.g. Sumner 2018; Dion et al 2017; 2018; Teele and Thelan 2017; Sarsons 2017; Hengel 2018; Maliniak et al 2013).

Talk Outline

What could be contributing?

- ➊ **Demand-side factors** (features of professional life, and in our discipline)
- ➋ **Supply-side factors** (things early-career scholars might do, which might have worse consequences for women)
 - ▶ **Caveat:** do *not* mean under-representation is our fault or our responsibility to fix.
 - ▶ **Goal:** offer strategies that can help early-career women navigate a world that remains, based on many indicators, unfair.

Demand-side Factors

Are women being **treated differently to men**?

If so, creates **burdens** that take women **away from research**. e.g.:

- **Sexist views** about: e.g. women's intelligence, competence, ability to cope with criticism, seriousness, effort willing to devote to career.
- Different expectations for how women **ought to behave**: e.g. expect more politeness, deference, respect, or gratefulness.
- Attach less value to a women's time.
- Less willing to **confer authority** onto women.

Also, **career structure** (expectations of enormous productivity overlap with time we're making decisions about family). Seems to **hurt** women more than men.

What can we do right now?

Today: offer strategies to help you **get through these conversion points**.

Junior faculty on the panel have made it through the first one. Senior faculty have made it through more.

Will downplay other outcomes (e.g. work-life balance, feeling happier, etc.) because (I believe) we won't make progress on under-representation unless we focus on **critical junctures**.

Strategies are **general**. Absolutely not gender-specific.

Critical Juncture 1: Becoming an Assistant Professor

What you need to do: **recognize what is required to get a tenure track job.**

Simpler than it might seem! To get an interview, helps to:

- 1 Be in a respected PhD program.
- 2 Have excellent letters from advisors.
- 3 Have one or more publications and recognizable research agenda.

To be offered the job:

- 4 Give an excellent job talk.

How to get good letters

- Signal your **seriousness**. e.g. be responsive over email (don't overthink responses), show up to meetings on time, etc.
- Jump at **every opportunity** offered, if it increases exposure to you/your work *or* involves an experience that advisors can write about.
 - ▶ Comes at a bad time? The quicker you get used to that, the better!
 - ▶ Feel you're not capable? Then you *must* say yes. People who only do things they're comfortable doing won't reach their potential.
- Find opportunities to **demonstrate your initiative** (separates excellent from good students). e.g. pitch a project to your professor.
- Be **professional** (e.g. don't take criticism personally, don't take a bad mood personally, don't turn your advisor into a therapist).
 - ▶ But don't be a robot! Tell us what is going on with you, just don't let it *overshadow* research.

How to get a good publication

- Recognize that **framing is everything** (figuring out how best your paper contributes to existing literature. Whose mind will your paper change about what?)
 - ▶ Is the difference between placing your paper in a top journal, and scope of paper's impact.
 - ▶ You won't hit on the right framing without a **deep understanding of a substantive literature** and the questions it cares about.

This means: **don't skimp on framing**. Work hard in your substantive classes, as well as your methods ones. Don't under-estimate time it can take and literature you will need to read (from the library!), to get this right.

How to get a good publication, cont.

- Recognize that fantastic papers **can still take years to place in a great journal**. Because: e.g.
 - ▶ *You* are getting used to writing for top journals (and may not have realized how important framing is).
 - ▶ Reviewers can be biased toward people they have *already* deemed knowledgeable about the subject matter. You're an **unknown quantity**, who has had fewer opportunities to demonstrate your expertise.
 - ▶ Means that editors may be less likely to send your paper to a “good reviewer” (one who works in your area!) or to hurry reviewers along.

This means: **allocate lots of time to place your paper.**

How to get a good publication, cont.

- Once you have 2-3 strong working papers (involve substantial data collections, cutting-edge methods, theoretical advances, etc.), **don't take on new projects prior to going on the market.**
 - ▶ Why not? Students consistently under-estimate time it takes not only to place their paper, but to ready it for submission. Lots of work goes in **right at the end.**
 - ▶ Observed *many* cases of strong working papers sitting idle while student tackles new project. By market time, student hasn't placed anything, so don't obtain the position they could have.

This means: recognize that **departments want to hire finishers.** Showing you can actually finish a project lowers the risk you are not a finisher.

How to get a good publication, cont.

- **Select your projects carefully.**
 - ▶ Everyone benefits from **working with a professor**. (Most-successful scholars of my generation worked on a big paper with their advisor in graduate school).
 - ▶ That said, contributions by women PhD students will, in general, be **heavily discounted**.

This means:

- Invest in a **solo-authored project that showcases your skills and signals what your research agenda is**.
- Save co-authoring with a romantic partner for **after** you have established your reputation as a scholar (contribution may be even more discounted, can put advisor in a difficult position, etc.)

How to give a good talk

- Your talk should be the **best talk they have ever seen**. You already have the resources to make this happen, you just need the **will** to do so.
 - ▶ Your JMP will be scrutinized from **every imaginable angle** by every member of the search committee and, if invited to give a talk, the entire department.
 - ▶ Need to present your **very best work** (even if you have had this paper for two years and are tired of it.)
 - ▶ A paper you wrote the summer before is **unlikely to withstand this level of scrutiny** (at least, seen **very** few cases of success, at the very least, is a risky strategy).
 - ▶ By **July**, start working on your talk. Practice it every day while on market, in every possible venue, to different audiences, to every possible colleague and friend.

Why This Isn't Overkill

Doubt whether effort is worth it? Let us consider **the stakes**.

- The job you're interviewing for, if at an R1, will pay you \$800k-\$1M in salary + benefits over 7 years (more if have clock extended).
- The positions you're applying for likely receive 300+ applications, some of which are from scholars with PhDs from "more-prestigious" Departments.
- In most Departments, most people **get tenure**. Interviewers are thinking about what it would be like to have you as a colleague *indefinitely*.
- **Counterfactual**: you have several great working papers, but you didn't present most-polished paper and didn't practice talk enough, so don't get a job.
 - ▶ People who don't get a job their first time on the market have a **much tougher time** (postdoc and visiting positions can be costly, right when you're expected to produce).

Recognize what is required to build a tenurable file

High-quality research that **establishes you as a leading scholar in your area**.

- While goal is well-known, **formula for achieving this** is usually not.
- We all know conferences and talks help, but what about other invitations? (e.g. book reviews, book chapters, articles for special issues, contributions to public debate).
- Can be **difficult to say no** because the impact of these activities on our ability to produce high-quality research is not zero.
- Must **constantly ask ourselves**:
 - ① What is the **expected impact** on my ability to produce high-quality research, and is this **worth the cost** in terms of time?
 - ② Am I under-estimating how much time it will take? (Chances are, you are.)

A helpful mantra should be **“I have less time than I think”**.

Recognize what is required to build a tenurable file, cont.

Co-authoring should not be entered into lightly.

- Co-authoring means giving someone a veto over what you are going to produce together, which gives them power over **your progress on the TT**.
- Even with very best of intentions, your co-author could become overwhelmed, ill, or busy, imperiling your ability to finish the project. Even if you finish it on your own, still need their okay to submit.

This means:

- Develop strategies to **distinguish type**: e.g. mirror your contributions to the project. **Never** sink months of work into a project with the expectation your co-author will follow suit.
- You have to **prioritize your own ability to produce high-quality research** (chances are, your co-author is.) If you need to “postpone” a project, do it.

Recognize what is required to build a tenurable file, cont.

Take your teaching seriously and do it properly.

- You don't need a problem arising with your teaching (e.g. students can't complete assessment).
- Normal to spend a lot of time on teaching in first 1-2 years (8 hours of prep per 1 hour of lecture). More hours you put in initially, less you need to put in subsequently.
- Amount of time it takes to prepare **excellent** lectures typically **much greater** than to prepare **good** lectures. Weigh up costs of making your lecture perfect.
- With students, work on communicating that your **time is valuable**.
- Tenure committees at R1s won't pay attention to how many different classes you have taught. Research productivity of someone who has prepped 3 classes compared with that of someone who prepped 7.

This means: **prioritize getting a TT job first time around**. Typically, can keep preps down to 4.

Quash thinking that makes it difficult for you to succeed

- PhD students **prone to self-doubt**: e.g. “I’m not smart enough”. “I’m not good enough at X”.
 - ▶ Counterproductive and boring. Being in the program → over the bar → **smart enough**.
 - ▶ Biggest predictor of success: **how much effort you’re prepared to put in** (will you fold when rejected over and over, or will you persevere?)
 - ▶ As an advisor, I don’t fear a failure to deliver **results**, I fear a **failure to deliver effort**.
 - ▶ Every minute you spend thinking these thoughts is time away from working, which is the **only way to succeed**.

This means: no need to be endlessly optimistic, but **don’t allow self-doubt** to impact your responsiveness to emails and opportunities.

If it does, **please seek help** from those qualified.

Life beyond your career happens

- Seems to be a **life tax** for women that many men don't have to pay (may even be a subsidy!)
- Is also a **survivor bias**. Be careful about updating only from “success stories”. Are many, many missing observations.
- My “advice”:
 - ▶ Recognize that asking a partner to relocate for a tenure track job is a **very big deal**, typically more than either partner realizes.
 - ▶ Recognize that if you're geographically constrained, you're **professionally constrained** → much less likely to get a job, and that job is much less likely to be a good fit.
 - ▶ If spouse doesn't want to move and I don't get a job locally → what is our game plan? Start discussing now. Weigh up tolerance for e.g. living apart, long commutes, going to work 3 days a week, leaving career, etc.

To conclude

- I could add caveats: (“these things work for me, but they may not work for you. Everyone is different. You shouldn’t do something that feels alien to you. There is no single route to success”).
- But won’t, because **I don’t believe them!**
- Worry that saying such things to under-represented groups can be **counterproductive**. Gives the impression nothing to be gained from learning about traits/practices of the over-represented group, some of which likely have causal impact on their success.
- Reality is:
 - ▶ Of the political scientists of my generation I know well, successful ones do **all of these things automatically**, and those who have been less successful do many fewer of them.