

Lauren Gambier  
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### Where Are the Women?

The year 1920 brought with it a landmark advance in the women's rights movement: allowing women the right to vote in the United States. However, though it has been over eighty years since women have no longer been legally excluded from the politics of this nation, there are nonetheless at present remarkably few women of high political stature. Ask an average American to name a woman currently or recently in a position of political power, and they will likely say such names as Hillary Clinton or Condoleezza Rice, the slightly more informed perhaps bringing up Janet Reno or Madeline Albright; however, the list tends to end there. Ask the same person to name a man of political power, and they will likely not know where to begin, being able to name numerous members of the American government, as well as many political leaders of other nations. This is why such a frequent question asked by feminists in the realm of politics, international politics in particular, is "where are the women?" That is to say, why is it that women are so rare in the political field, and also that political discourses generally tend to exclude them. In fact, even when a woman does reach a position of power within the political spectrum, as feminist writer Cynthia Enloe puts it, "...it is presumably because she has learned to 'think like a man'" (Enloe, in Mingst and Snyder, 204). In seeking to remedy this situation, one must consider the aforementioned question being asked from multiple perspectives: is there an innate characteristic in women that makes them either unfit or unwilling to be political actors, or is this political passivity socially adopted by or imposed upon them, or is it some combination? International relations critic Jan Jindy Pettman contends that there is a distinction between sex and

gender, that “sex [is] seen as biology: we are born male or female. Gender [is] a social construction: what it means to be male or female in any particular place and time” (Pettman, in Baylis and Smith 587). Whereas Pettman and other feminist critics would contend that it is the oppressive nature of gender, and thus a social construction, that keeps women from the political field, there are also those who contend that, from a biological perspective, traits such as political interest and capability are actually heritable traits, and thus women are biologically predisposed to remain predominantly in the private sphere.

Psychologist John Money, in the 1950's, theorized that human beings are “psychosexually neutral” (Ridley 56), meaning that the sex of a person did not depend on biological factors at all, but was rather determined by the early experiences of that person. However, his experiment into this proved his theory to be completely false. The experiment involved a twin boy, who had been castrated due to a faulty circumcision, whom, at the advice of Money, was raised as a female by his parents, while his twin brother was raised as a male. Despite early signs of success, by the time that he had reached thirteen, the boy, having been raised as a female, had physically masculine traits, acted quite masculine, and was particularly unhappy. By adulthood, he was a married man, with adopted children, thus disproving Money, and substantiating the distinction between sex and gender; the sex of a person is clearly completely biological, and cannot be socially altered. Matt Ridley, in his inquiry into the nature/nurture debate Nature via Nurture, suggests, however, that traits that are normally viewed as being environmentally induced, and thus attributable to gender rather than sex, are often actually genetically heritable traits, and are thus biological. He cites the example of preferences for toys

based on the sex of children, how female children prefer dolls where male children prefer dinosaurs and swords. He states that “Parents may support nature with nurture, but they do not create the difference ...there is no ‘doll gene’ – but dolls and many other toys are designed to appeal to predisposing prejudices” (Ridley 235), those said prejudices being assumedly biological. This therefore leads to the belief that things from a preference for the color pink, to a preference for remaining in the private, domestic sphere of activity, may actually be genetically determined. Thus, the substantially higher level of men as political actors would be simply a response to the biological construction of human beings.

Even if such things as preference for colors or careers are regarded as being simply personality traits, and thus variant from person to person, Ridley asserts that personality too is heritable. An even more relevant example appears in the American Political Science Association journal, which purports the heritability of political beliefs. If this is true, that “...political attitudes have genetic causes...” (Alford et al. 153), then this could mean that political apathy is also genetic in nature. This would thus substantiate the argument that there is a biological propensity for women to abstain from political careers. However, the critical flaw in the assumption that personality is purely biological is that biology is affected and changed by environment, that is, by social forces. Ridley describes genes as being “the mechanisms of experience” (Ridley 248); certain genes are ‘turned on,’ or off, as a result of environmental factors. He gives the example of the SRY gene, the gene responsible for masculinity. This gene “...sets in motion the sequence of events that leads to men sitting on couches drinking beer and watching football while women shop and gossip” (Ridley 247-248). However, this

statement itself exhibits the socially constructed nature of gender, as, obviously, this behavior is not the norm of men the world over; what Ridley cites as stereotypically masculine behavior is only stereotypical to a certain culture. What this then leads to, which undermines the biological argument for gender roles, is that certain genes that cause the expression of specific personality traits and preferences are ‘turned on’ by social forces. Ridley states that the function of genes is “to extract certain kinds of information from the upbringing and environment of [their] landlord organism” (Ridley 248). Therefore, there is not an inherent genetic quality in women that makes them unwilling or unable to be political. It is rather that their genes respond to the social forces of their environment; because the political realm in particular is gendered to exclude women, their genes for it simply turn off in response to this.

Now that the causes of the lack of women in politics have been established as socially induced, it must be examined how these social factors, the construction of gender and the gendering of politics in particular, operate to relegate women to the private sphere. As Lisa McLaughlin, in her inquiry into the ‘separate spheres’ theory, states,

The modernist construction of ‘separate spheres’ produces a social distinction structured by gender and differentiates the ‘public man’ of work and politics from the ‘private woman,’ who either remains in the domestic realm or risks violating the norms of ‘idealized femininity’ through her public presence (McLaughlin 327).

In fact, public presence is often in direct conflict with the idealized femininity, which praises nurturing and motherhood, pacifism, caring, and passivity. The traits that are viewed as valuable to be a political actor, however, such as aggression, rationality,

power, and leadership, defy idealized femininity to the point where, particularly when acting in politics, "...men use homophobic innuendos to delegitimize arguments for women's rights" (Enloe, in Mingst and Snyder 205). Furthermore, even when a woman does act in public life, she must be masculinized in order to do so; even the clothing that women wear, particularly working in the political realm, is simply a restructured version of the masculine. In sum, to be of the feminine gender is to be apolitical; once one becomes political, and enters the public sphere, she invariably must become masculine.

Not only are women themselves, by the definitions of femininity, confined to the private life of the home, but political actions and discourses themselves are structured so as to keep women, if not completely absent, at least on the margins of the realm of political power. The glorification of war and military action is a primary example of political practices which are structured to exclude women. As Pettman describes,

War stories ... tell of brave soldier men, the protectors, and the women they protect ... these stories construct men as the agents of the state or nation, and women as passive ... they disguise some women's active support of or participation in wars ... and they force conditions of dependence on women, who are expected to be grateful for this protection (Pettman, in Baylis and Smith 584).

This method of constructing femininity as synonymous with passivity is also seen in the feminization of the nation. When men go to fight wars, the country they defend is spoken of as a female, and thus again the female is established as the passive body to be protected and defended by the male actor, "...a feminized victim, with male villain and male hero fighting for her possession" (Pettman, in Baylis and Smith 592). Another way in which the feminine is constructed as passive is the association of femininity with

peace. This association creates the image of a woman as disarmed, thus needing protection, reinforcing the dominant role of protector upon the masculine. As is described in J. Ann Tickner's "Man, the State, and War," "The association of femininity with peace lends support to an idealized masculinity that depends on constructing women as passive victims in need of protection. It also contributes to the claim that women are naïve in matters relating to international politics" (Tickner, in Mingst and Snyder 98). The significance of constructing women as passive is that it creates the impression that "women do not have a taste for either wielding or understanding power" (Enloe, in Mingst and Snyder 204), and are thus seen as not being fit to be political actors.

The extent of the marginalization of women from the political arena continues, from the confinement of women to the private sphere by the basic nature of the feminized gender, to the exclusion of women from political roles by the gendering of political actions and discourses, to the disregarding of women altogether where political actions and discourses occur. Because "The citizen is presumed to be male..." (Pettman, in Baylis and Smith 584), the actions that are taken on behalf of citizens of a state only consider the needs of men. Karen Brown Thompson, discussing the issue of human rights in "Women's Rights are Human Rights," explains that "The dominant construction of international human rights issues was silent on gender-specific violations..." (Thompson, in Khagram et al. 102), the problem with this being that women face markedly different problems than do men. Yet the violations that occur in the private sphere, such as rape and domestic violence, are not taken into account in human rights discourses, because they are not violations of the rights of men; essentially, the term 'human rights' actually means 'men's rights.' And even when actions are taken

specifically for women, these actions still distinguish women's rights as being separate from human rights, and still relegate women to the private sphere. Consider that the United Nations has two separate commissions for human rights protection: the commission on human rights, and the commission on women's rights, implying that 'women' and 'human' are mutually exclusive entities. Consider also that the World Plan for ending violence towards women "explicitly connects women's rights with family relations" (Thompson, in Khagram et al. 99), thus directing the focus of women's rights towards keeping women safe in the private sphere so that they can remain there. Thus women are, by social construction, excluded or marginalized from political action, and the public sphere in general, on multiple fronts. The fact that this is accepted by women can possibly be attributed to the aforementioned biological aspect of personality, that the genes that would cause women to be or desire to be political actors have simply not been turned on, in response to the social factors that give them no need to turn on.

The gendered nature of politics and the construction of feminine passivity are pervasive; it is not only directly present in political discourses, but extends to literary ones as well. The female representation of the state, the idealized female in need of protection, and the fear of women in positions of power can all be seen in Shakespeare's The Tempest, through the characters Miranda and Sycorax. Miranda is the daughter of Prospero, former Duke and ruler of the island which he and Miranda inhabit. Lorie Jerrell Leininger, in a feminist critique of the play, describes Miranda as "beautiful, loving, chaste, and obedient ... believ[ing] her father to be incapable of error..." (Leininger, in Greene et al. 286), essentially the definition of idealized femininity. She is also seen as "...symboliz[ing] all human virtue" (Leininger, in Greene et al. 289), thus

virtue and goodness are synonymous with the embodiment of the ideal femininity. Miranda is also represented, just as a state in international politics, as the female victim in need of protection. Prospero, in saying to her “What! I say, / My foot my tutor?” (Shakespeare I.ii.471-72), implies that she is not to question, only to be commanded by those who are stronger than she. As Leininger describes, she “...has no way out of the cycle of being a dependent foot in need of protection, placed in a threatening situation which in turn calls for more protection, and thus increased dependence and increased subservience” (Leininger, in Greene et al. 289). Thus again the glorified woman, representative of virtue and goodness, is in a subservient role to her male protector, displaying the idea that the virtuous and good woman is the subservient woman. The witch Sycorax, on the other hand, substantiates this same idea, but in the opposite way. She is described by Prospero as committing “mischiefs manifold and sorceries terrible / To enter human hearing” (Shakespeare I.ii.264-265). Yet feminist critic Rachana Sachdev contends that this portrayal of Sycorax as ugly and evil, in contrast with the beautiful, and thus good, Miranda, is actually representative of the “...the fear of the power of old women ... [in that] within the text, Sycorax dominates and ‘emasculates’ Ariel by keeping him in servile bondage...” (Sachdev, in Callaghan 223). Thus the idealized femininity is again conveyed, as the good and beautiful Miranda is the antithesis of Sycorax, who takes the form of ugly and evil because she holds power over men.

Because genetics simply reflect responses to environmental factors, women are essentially at the mercy of the social forces that create gender, insofar as their potential to hold a political career is concerned, as the system is essentially stacked completely against them. However, this is often not a concern of women, in that since they are

genetically predisposed, due to the social construct of gender, to simply have no interest to do so. Karen Brown Thompson states that “global norms do not simply emerge and affect actors, but are (and must be) constantly made and remade in the practices of women and men” (Thompson, in Khagram et al. 110); because this is occurring, the status of women as belonging in the private sphere is not popularly questioned, as it has become normalized. The only way for women to overcome this is for women to realize that “...many of the common issues faced by women must be addressed in terms of the global structures underlying them” (Thompson, in Khagram et al. 115), for it only when the flaws in the system are recognized that they can be changed.