

Book Review

The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics

Georgina Waylen, Karen Celis, Johanna Kantola, S. Laurel Weldon
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The editors of Oxford University Press' *Handbook of Gender and Politics* have provided the field with an essential research and teaching gem. The tome is global, timely, thoughtful, theoretical, and thorough. The editors assembled an impressive international group of political scientists to write reflective and prospective (w.w.?) chapters in their areas of expertise regarding gender and politics. The *Handbook* is a pleasure to read and full of great ideas for future research and collaborations. The book includes all the important literature which built up the field of gender and politics within political science and the latest research and theory by young scholars who are continuing the struggle to get political science to fully incorporate gender into mainstream (what Mary Daly re-labeled "malestream") teaching and research.

The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics is organized into seven sections: Gender and Politics: Concepts and Methods; Body Politics; Gendered Political Economy: Production and Reproduction; Civil Society; Participation and Representation; The State, Governance, and Policy Making; and Equality, Citizenship, and Nation. Each section has a trenchant introduction by the editors which deftly places the chapter within the larger issues each section addresses. The bibliographies for each chapter are treasure troves for scholars wanting to know the important foundational and current literature in each subtopic of the gender and politics field. Particularly useful is the incorporation of on-line sources, NGO reports and publications, and evidence from within regions, nations, and local communities themselves about the impact of gender.

The editors and all the authors are well aware of the imperative to insure that local activists, citizens, and scholars speak for themselves and

to eschew large generalizations from often Western scholars unaware of the complex local contexts of people's lives and social and political arrangements. Judith Squires, for instance, warns against "particularity masquerading as universalism" (p. 732). Strengths of the book include comprehensive global essays on representation, policy making, gendered violence, gender and economics, militarization, reproductive politics and feminist methods.

The infusion of gender deep into the foundational structures of societies, nations, institutions, and social practices is smoothly illustrated by the editors and authors. The point that gender is not just a variable in politics, but a backbone in the hardwiring of politics and society is clearly made in this volume. From dominant political theories, to religious dogmas, and patterns of discourse within "master" languages, from the military to the courts, from old to new state constitutions and international charters, gender shapes the template and the direction of much that follows. These entities "are not just gendered but also gendering: they produce the very gendered subjects of politics" (pp. 14-15). The editors explain, "this handbook makes gender the point of departure for thinking about political science, taking it, in the words of bell hooks (1984), from the margin to center" (p. 3). Treating gender as a simple variable, particularly after publication of this *Handbook*, should now be over and done with. Research which blithely "adds women and stirs" heretofore should always be marked as not potable, teachable or publishable.

Intersectional research is also emphasized throughout the *Handbook*. Authors do not just gesture to intersectionality, however, but garner theories, methods, and research designs which "deal with complexity without particularism" (p. 16). Moving beyond additive approaches, Mary Hawkesworth explains in her chapter, "feminist scholarship seeks to investigate the mutually constitutive and structuring power of race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and nationality in social relations. Illuminating how hierarchies of difference are created, sustained, and reproduced through the intricate interplay of concrete social practices, feminist scholars construe racialization, gendering, and heterosexualization as interlocking processes that produce not simply difference but also political asymmetries and social hierarchies, simultaneously creating the dominant and the subordinate" (p. 49). Sensitivity to these simultaneous matrixes

of privileges and oppressions points us toward actionable reforms to alleviate human misery and injustice.

We should tip our sun bonnets, hijabs, hats, helmets, and veils to these editors for the hard work, forethought, careful and sensitive planning for and accomplishment of an inclusive wisdom which went into this stellar *Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics*.

Biographical Note: **Laura R. Woliver** is a professor in the Department of Political Science and the Women's and Gender Studies Program at the University of South Carolina in Columbia. Her expertise is American politics, women and politics, interest groups and social movements, and reproductive politics. She is the author of two books: *From Outrage to Action: The Politics of Grass-Roots Dissent* (1993) and *The Political Geographies of Pregnancy* (2002) both by the University of Illinois Press. In addition, she has published dozens of articles, book chapters, reviews and comments. She has served on many leadership committees in the American Political Science Association, the Southern Political Science Association, the Political Science Women's Caucus, and the University of South Carolina. E-mail: WOLIVER@mailbox.sc.edu