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FIELD ESSAY

New Research on Gendered Political Institutions

SALLY J. KENNEY, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

This essay reviews four texts that analyze women in political institutions in order to develop a more general theory of gendered institutions. Scholarship on women in political institutions will be advanced by continuing to look beyond the confines of the traditional subfields of political science, drawing on interdisciplinary work in feminist theory, critical race theory, and the sociology of work. Gender should be theorized, not as a word that is interchangeable with sex, but as a continuous, variable, and tenacious process that, while usually leading to women's disadvantage, is challenged, negotiated, subverted, and resisted. Such scholarship should explore how masculinity, work, and politics are intertwined.

Before the resurgence of the second wave of the women's movement, political scientists usually ignored women as voters, activists, and elites (Shanley and Schuck 1974). In the 1970s, feminist political scientists—a beleaguered few who were nevertheless less isolated than their predecessors—began to augment the rare studies that documented women's political behavior. They began to correct the distortions of women's political activities while criticizing the omission of women from research in the discipline. This compensatory political science documented women's political activities while simultaneously calling into question women's exclusion from political life. Feminists were dissatisfied with accounts that explained the absence of women by pointing to flaws in women themselves—their conservatism, lower levels of politicization, or biological limitations (Bourque and Grossholz 1974). Instead, they brandished democratic theory to call into question the legitimacy of political structures that systematically exclude, subordinate, and erase the value and potential contributions of the majority of its citizens. By centering the focus on women, these pioneers successfully shifted the question of inquiry from "what's wrong

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with women” to “what’s wrong with the system.”¹ The texts this essay reviews carry that debate still further. By exploring women’s integration in four very different political institutions, these works reformulate the simplistic and limiting question, “Are women legislators, foreign policy advisors, or lawyers different from men?” They instead began to explore how political institutions are gendered. They go beyond cataloguing the attributes of the exceptional women in male-dominated institutions and go beyond counting the women at various levels to explore the gendered culture of the institutions as well as how the particular institutions interact with the larger political culture. “The term ‘gendered institutions’ means that gender is present in the processes, practices, images and ideologies, and distributions of power in the various sectors of social life” (Acker 1992: 567).

Focusing on gender within and outside of political institutions leads feminist political scientists to rethink the conventional political science paradigm (Nelson 1989). Long excluded from the intellectual life of the discipline, feminists learned from colleagues in other disciplines who were also exploring questions of gender (and, in the cases of anthropology, history, sociology, and literature, had been doing so longer).² The infusion of ideas from other disciplines as well as feminists’ immersion as activists in the women’s movement led them to redefine what constituted politics (Fowlkes 1987; McClure 1992; Sapiro 1991). To understand how the political system excluded, erased, and oppressed women, one needed to examine, for example, the sexual division of labor, sexual violence, and the construction of gender identity in childhood—topics that moved political scientists beyond the arenas of legislatures, voting booths, and cabinet meetings. The interdisciplinary group of women’s studies scholars, meanwhile, was moving beyond thinking of women as a monolithic group to reconceptualizing gender as a category of analysis (Acker 1992). Research on women who were neither white, middle-class, Western, nor heterosexual undermined fragile generalizations that masked differences among women. The construction of gender, the anti-essentialists argued, operates differently according to race and class. Moreover, shifting the focus

¹ For a summary of the subfield see Carroll and Zerilli (1993). For a bibliography see Kelly and Fisher (1993). Carroll (1979) demonstrates how political science exaggerated differences between women and argued that women’s absence from politics was a function of their sex-role socialization.

² Bernice Carroll (1980) raised the question early on as to why there was so little fruitful interaction within political science of feminists with different ideological commitments compared to other disciplines. See Hawkesworth for a definition of gender as an analytical category (1994: 97-98), and Peterson (1992: 9).
from women to gender allowed feminists to investigate the gendering of institutions and processes where women were largely absent, such as the state department or the military, and to explore to what extent the state itself is gendered (Enloe 1990; Franzway, Court, and Connell 1989: 6-10; Grant and Newland 1991; Pateman 1988; Peterson 1992; Tickner 1992).

Feminist political scientists have had much success in opening up a dialogue on gender issues in even the most intractable subfields (you know who you are). The discipline could hardly be said to reward anyone whose scholarship focuses on gender. Yet the discipline values more highly work that addresses central or fundamental questions of the subfields rather than asks new ones or crosses subfields or disciplines. For example, those whose interest is in the legislative process might be interested in research on women legislators, not because of an interest in women or gender per se, but because of what such research reveals about fundamental questions regarding legislative behavior. As the subfields become more receptive to such scholarship, the attractions of operating intellectually and socially solely within one's subfield become very strong. For example, in some ways it is more comfortable and intellectually rewarding for me as someone who studies women and the law to interact solely with other public law scholars, rather than those who work on gender in entirely different subfields.

This essay argues that scholarship on women and gender in political institutions will be advanced by continuing to look beyond the confines of the traditional subfields, narrowly defined. Recently published texts whose subject matter appears to rest squarely within one area of study—legislative behavior, bureaucracies, or law—draw on and add to the insights of feminist theorists. This essay searches for the general insights we may glean from studying women and gender across political institutions and offers my thoughts on the direction of future research. With the advent of postmodernism, I would no longer claim my purpose is to build a general or universal theory of women or gender in political institutions. I would argue more modestly, however, that the best scholarship on women and gender in political institutions will be that which draws on interdisciplinary work in feminist theory and places its work in an historical context (Sapiro 1991: 178-81). Furthermore, those works that adopt a variety of methods, and those that employ what some would call a feminist methodology will advance our understanding more than those that adopt more conventional social science approaches. I encourage scholars to move beyond questions about whether women are different and move toward an exploration of how institutions are gendered. I examine four recently published texts on women in four types of institutions, roughly corresponding to the three branches of government (and the press): Nancy E. McGlen and Meredith Reid Sarkees's Women in Foreign Policy: The Insiders, Cynthia Fuchs

**Some Common Themes**

The four works form a continuum with respect to their optimism about the rate and sustainability of progress for women within their political institutions. Thomas sees progress on the numbers of women in legislatures as unstoppable.

Whether or not circumstances conspire in the near future to create growth spurts on each level of government, steady future increases in the proportions of women in legislative bodies are inevitable. . . . It would be naive to believe that no backlash, no struggle to maintain power will ensue. That this will occur is certain; what is also certain is that with time, women will overcome resistance and take their rightful place beside men in the public arena (1994: 153, 155).

Although Thomas sees progress as inevitable, she does not minimize the significant and persistent obstacles women legislators attribute to sexism. Despite a greater social acceptance of women politicians, “Women still felt, as did their sisters in the seventies, that politics was a place that was, in many respects, hostile to women” (1994: 48).

Epstein, like Thomas, classifies the changes as significant and is optimistic: “I am convinced that the story of women lawyers is essentially a success story” (1993, xiii [preface to the 1983 edition]). Her work provides a comprehensive and nuanced account of the persistence of sexism and gendering and the complexity of the obstacles to women's full participation in the profession. Although Epstein's preface to the 1993 edition expresses the concern that many young women lawyers are more pessimistic about their collective successes than the evidence of progress warrants, she does not see progress as unimpeded or unstoppable.

The future of women in the legal profession cannot be viewed as a simple progression from exclusion to inclusion, with accession to all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities due to any true member of the profession. . . . In the past decade, men have *relaxed* their hold on the legal profession, permitting women to enter, but they have not *released* their hold (1993: 382).

Robertson, like Epstein, celebrates victories while continuing to recognize obstacles. Unlike Epstein's nuanced, scholarly, and complex account of how the obstacles operate, Robertson's narrative deftly and precisely traces

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3 Epstein's work is relevant to all the branches of government, beyond the judiciary (and, perhaps, excepting the press) since they include many lawyers.
how the attitudes and behaviors of individuals accumulate to form an institution’s policy of progress, stagnation, or obstruction. She documents the gains in hiring, promotion, assignment, and pay for women at the New York Times at all levels following the lawsuit (although they are “nothing to crow about” [1992: 239]). Her account of the 1988 reunion of the plaintiffs with other women employees of the New York Times, however, reveals continuing discrimination on all measures. Her final chapter is aptly named “Promises,” indicating her position that although much has changed, many problems remain (defined largely in terms of individuals’ attitudes). In addition to illustrating the powerful forces of prejudice and discrimination through the stories of individuals, perhaps the most enduring lesson of Robertson’s account is how individuals and institutions can shamelessly and pompously proclaim their institution’s embodiment of the liberal values of equality and nondiscrimination while refusing to rectify their own clearly identified failure to live up to those values.

McGlen and Sarkees are even less optimistic than the other three. They have less progress to report (“agonizingly slow progress” [1993: 298]) and more severe obstacles to analyze. Both Epstein and McGlen and Sarkees present broad accounts of different types of obstacles: societal, environmental, and individual. Like Thomas, McGlen and Sarkees ultimately focus on the limitations of societal views, in particular, societal views about women as leaders and as warriors. The conclusion of a senior state department official after Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait that the first lesson to be learned is “don’t send women as Ambassadors” (April Glaspie) is sobering (McGlen and Sarkees 1993: 300). Less than half (48.1 percent) of their respondents expected the influence of women in the Departments of State and Defense to increase in the future (1993: 305). While optimistic about changing views of women’s employment and impressed by the efforts of the women pioneers, McGlen and Sarkees conclude that “the future role of women in the foreign policy process is thus highly contingent” (1993: 305).

The four texts also differ in their methods and approaches to the study of women and gender within institutions. They differ in the number and type of variables that matter, in how they go about examining the intersection and interplay of the variables, and the number of settings they consider. All combine different kinds of methods: interviews, surveys, and aggregate statistics. They differ, however, in how they use narratives and “rich description.” To oversimplify, they differ in whether they are merely telling the story (aware of their role in shaping and constructing that reality) or whether they are testing hypotheses. Sociologist of work Steinberg suggests that special methods are required to uncover how institutions are gendered: “The feminist approach to developing organizational theory has a methodological corollary. It calls for
heavy reliance on intensive case studies of well-selected organizations to uncover systematic patterns of social behavior” (1992: 580). Acker agrees:

But it is necessary to go beyond gender as category, social role, or identity in order to understand how gender differentiation and women's disadvantage are produced. For example, the processes creating and maintaining sex segregation are complex and vary with time and place (e.g., Cockburn 1985), having as much to do with employers' calculations of their advantage and their exploitation of gender differences as with male workers' collective creation of their identities as men and workers or female workers' identification with their domestic roles. Methodological implications follow from this sort of conceptualization; qualitative and historical studies are necessary to comprehend concrete practices and processes (1992: 566).

At one end of this continuum lies Nan Robertson. Since she is a journalist, it is not surprising that her work is what some social scientists might dismissively label mere description. She tells the story of the women who brought suit against the New York Times for sex discrimination. While her aim is to report the names of who did what when with what consequences, to record for history the stories of brave women seeking social justice, as is the case with all good journalism the line between it and the case study is a difficult one to draw. Robertson's story provides specific illustrations and confirmation of more general patterns. She vividly documents how tokenism and gendering operated by recounting how even her closest male colleagues who had a high opinion of her abilities failed to consider her for plum assignments or expressed surprise when she won a Pulitzer Prize (1992: 236). She shows the high emotional and economic costs of litigation and demonstrates how the institution operates to reward those not party to the suit while punishing the “troublemakers.” In short, she provides much important information about tokenism, the gendering of institutions, and “othering,” without framing the information with theoretical works or presenting the material as a case to test general theories. Although she documents vividly the gender ethos of her workplace, provides evidence of systemic discrimination, and occasionally refers to the women's movement, her story is about individuals—the women who fight, reluctantly or with gusto, the women who side with the men, the men who are openly sexist, the men who refuse to let the evidence contradict their sense of themselves as “good to women,” and the smaller group of men who are supportive or capable of changed consciousness. Robertson describes these people rather than theorizes about processes.

At the social science end of the spectrum lies Thomas. She attempts to test hypotheses about women legislators in general. Therefore she does not present the story of the gender integration of state legislatures by identifying
individual women in each state or legislature. Nor does she focus on the culture of particular institutions to show how tokenism operates in these settings or how the particular institutions are gendered. Thomas does introduce some elements of the individual stories through illustrative quotations. She aptly demonstrates the importance of numbers and percentages in affecting policy change and more far-reaching structural change in the institution. She provides a sophisticated analysis of the simplistic questions: "are women legislators different from men?" and explores some of the determinants of when the answer is yes and when it is no.

Because she is focusing on the aggregate, however (though supplemented by interviews), she is unable to explore under what conditions institutions lag behind social norms and when they lead them because of the efforts of well-placed individuals (either promoting or obstructing social change) or the operation of environmental factors particular to that institution. Focusing on the totality leads to a flattening of the variable "society's attitudes about women's roles" (or the numbers of women) as the causal agent determining the degree to which women's agenda will be furthered within the institution. Similarly, she cannot explore in depth when the efforts of exceptional individuals can combine with factors internal to the institution to impede or promote change. Thomas does, however, begin to address this point by considering the effect of a women's caucus (1994: 100-101). But by noting its presence or absence as a variable rather than presenting historical and personal accounts (why Bella Abzug was an obstacle to the formation of the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues, for example [Gertzog 1984: 164-81]) we know little about what historical, individual, and institutional cultural factors determine when women will come together to define themselves as a group and seek to further a shared agenda. As Thomas recognizes, the number of women in each legislature is but one important factor in this story.

I would place Epstein next to Thomas on the continuum. Epstein's project is broader in scope and time because her topic is the entire legal profession rather than one particular subgroup of it. Because Epstein is what McGlen and Sarkees would call a minimizer, unlike Thomas and McGlen and Sarkees, Epstein does not pose the question, "are women lawyers different from men?" but explores instead how gender differences are constructed, deployed, and recreated in a variety of settings. All three works combine survey research with in-depth interviews. Epstein and McGlen and Sarkees, however, discuss specific individuals, groups, lawsuits, and events, and intertwine the aggregate findings with particular histories. While survey research can tell us much about women in political institutions and is an essential foundation, a more ethnographic approach reveals the gendering of institutions. Epstein interweaves her conclusions from interviews throughout the text while McGlen
and Sarkees include extended interviews (and pictures) of individual women.

Understanding structural changes such as industrialization, economic growth, or the demands of a wartime economy for domestic labor, analyzing attitudinal changes in women's role in society, and monitoring the numbers and positions of women in institutions are all crucial information for understanding how institutions are gendered. Responding to and resisting broader trends, however, are individuals set in a particular historical context. McGlen and Sarkees demonstrate the importance of exceptional individuals—men and women—in bringing about or impeding change within institutions. They effectively intersperse the aggregate information about women's employment, attitudes toward women, and numbers of women with the stories of women, usually in the first person. These accounts demonstrate how what Duerst-Lahti calls the "gender ethos" of an institution affects the spirit, aspirations, perceptions of, and opportunities provided to individual women (1987). The narratives also vividly demonstrate that the individual women responded to the structural constraints differently and conceptualized them differently. McGlen and Sarkees confirm Cockburn's finding that the particular views of individual men in institutions help to establish the institutional culture and determine the success of both the short and long agendas (Cockburn 1991: 39, 226). McGlen and Sarkees cite a 1984 State Department report as concluding "The single most important factor in achieving equal employment opportunity in the Department of State is the commitment demonstrated by the Secretary of State and the UnderSecretary for Management" (1993: 84). They later note: "As one woman respondent indicated, the chain of command can have devastating influence on a woman's effectiveness when those military officers in charge decide to discriminate" (1993: 87). While Robertson and McGlen and Sarkees both provide vivid and concrete examples of the effect of the views of men at the top, Cockburn also demonstrates the effect of hostile middle managers (1991: 44).

All four works provide interesting comparisons between different groups of women—the pioneers of the 1960s and 1970s and the more recent cohort who entered the profession in the 1980s and 1990s. Both groups report continuing if often more covert or subtle obstacles. Perhaps one of the more interesting and also encouraging findings is the difference in aspirations and perceptions of the newer cohort of women. In the 1950s and 1960s, women lawyers or legislators recognized their uniqueness and that they faced overwhelming obstacles to practice their professions at all, let alone to aim for distinction. Women lawyers now want to make partner and to move from the library or trust and estates work into litigation. Epstein reports women comparing themselves to "similarly situated" men rather than women non-lawyers. Women legislators want to continue to excel at constituency service but
also to chair committees and assume leadership roles. Robertson, Epstein, and Thomas document this generational effect. Robertson describes one of the original plaintiffs in the suit against the New York Times reporting her surprise at the meeting.

When she came up from Washington, Eileen [Shanahan] said, she knew she was going to see old friends and find out how they were doing, and meet some younger women she knew by their bylines alone. What she did not expect was that she would be thrilled. "I am thrilled to hear women stand up here and say, 'I'm good, I'm the best. I was the best-qualified person for that job and I still am and I'm not grateful that they gave me the job; I deserved it!' I have to tell you that that is the most tremendous difference" (1992: 224).

Thomas found that the first generation of women legislators reported working harder and being better prepared than their male colleagues but perceived themselves to be less effective (1994: 34-35). By the 1980s, in contrast, women legislators still saw themselves as harder working than male legislators but at least as effective. More importantly, compared to their male counterparts (40 percent) they thought their ranks should contain greater numbers of women (92 percent) (1994: 48-49). (McGlen and Sarkees's greater pessimism may be the result of their finding that 25.8 percent of men but only 2.8 percent of women surveyed thought there were adequate numbers of women in the Departments of State and Defense and that resistance to women increased as one ascends the hierarchy [1993: 275-76]). This psychological shift from considering oneself lucky to be plying one's trade at all, whether as legislator, lawyer, or foreign service specialist, to demanding that one have the same opportunities for growth as one's male cohort has revolutionary implications. What leads women to reject the gender coding of an institution, to refuse to be limited to their social role, to form together with groups of other women and to seek social change through lawsuits? What makes women run for office and form a Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues?

Robertson, McGlen and Sarkees, and Epstein offer some insight into the more narrow question of why women bring sex discrimination lawsuits. Alison Palmer, who led a class-action lawsuit against the Department of State reported: "I felt that if I didn't proceed my only reason for not going was this fear, and for the rest of my life, whenever I thought about this (which would be a thousand times a day, depending), I would know myself to have been a coward" (McGlen and Sarkees 1993: 117). While contemporary feminist theory may have provided the framework for these works, the three works that painstakingly document the experience of women in particular institutions with attention to both theory and history have an important insight to offer recent feminist legal theory. Lawsuits are a catalyst for significant and enduring insti-
tutional change. Contemporary feminist legal theory is moving in the direction of a more critical discourse analysis of legal action. Optimism for litigation is “mainstream” and liable to earn one the derogatory label of “liberal feminist.” Carol Smart warns liberal feminists to be skeptical and critical of “law’s imperialism”—the belief that all wrongs can be righted through the legal system and that law can be used simply as a tool for social change (1989: 12-13). Such scholars document the pitfalls and limitations of litigation: the costs (emotional, physical, and psychological) to the plaintiff, the failure to control how issues are defined, the undesirability of handing over of issues to elites, and the greater likelihood that the legal system will co-opt and exhaust feminists rather than deliver to them progressive social change.

Yet Epstein recounts case after case of law firms pressured into hiring agreements by litigation, of law students using litigation to bar firms that discriminate from recruiting at their schools, and consent decrees that ended law firms’ patronage of male-only clubs (1993: 184-89). Robertson demonstrates how legal action documented and exposed widespread discrimination in pay that had been previously concealed and forced the New York Times to adopt an affirmative action program (1992: 178-212). McGlen and Sarkees show the dramatic results of Alison Palmer’s lawsuits against the State Department (1993: 114-21). And Cockburn describes the consciousness-raising effects of a comparable worth lawsuit (1991: 130-31). Lawsuits have played only the most indirect of parts in increasing the number of women legislators. In this setting, the employment analogy breaks down.

Having said that lawsuits may bring about more social change (at least in the U.S. context) than critical legal theory suggests, it is worth noting that the beneficiaries of the changes are without exception not those who labored longest to bring them about. For example, the New York Times, under pressure from discrimination lawsuits, did not respond by promoting those most dedicated to documenting and exposing the discrimination (i.e. the troublemakers) but other women, largely unconnected with the legal battles.

Not one of the plaintiffs regretted becoming a plaintiff, even though not one thought it had helped her in her own career. But all thought the effort was for others, those who would come after. . . . The plaintiffs’ stalled careers at the Times were in distinct contrast to those of the women who came after them (Robertson 1992: 212, 216).

Those who challenge discriminatory practices of Wall Street firms will see the success of their efforts largely in the hiring of new associates. Many beneficiaries of lawsuits will believe that discrimination is a thing of the past, that affirmative action is a bad thing, and that they got where they are by merit alone (Robertson 1992: 212). Alison Palmer unhappily reports:
What I think is very interesting, this last lawsuit, the one we've just won and gotten all these goodies for over 200 women FSO's [Foreign Service Officers], not a single woman has said 'thank you' to me in any way, shape, or form, which I find quite amazing (McGlen and Sarkees 1993: 120).

All of the works merit close examination to see whether they are successful on their own terms. I would argue that they are. They are impressively solid pieces of scholarship that make major contributions to their subfields as well as the subfield of women and politics. Their careful analyses help move the focus away from the simplistic and ultimately retrograde inquiry of "are women different from men?" These works provide rich material to mine for feminist theorists across disciplines. I would like to encourage the subfield of women and politics to continue its forward trajectory shifting from women in to the gendering of political institutions. Drawing on the work of feminist theorists, sociologists of work, and legal scholars would enhance such scholarship. But as interdisciplinary feminist theory and feminist scholarship pulls us in this direction, the discipline of political science may be exerting countervailing pressures. Shifting from women in to the gendering of political institutions makes it more difficult for scholars to situate themselves neatly within the paradigms of conventional political science subfields. The gendering of political institutions may well be unintelligible within the discipline as currently constituted. It may be what Sapiro calls "intellectual treason" (1991: 180).

**Defining Gendered**

What, then, does it mean to argue that political institutions are gendered? First, it means that all people within the institution have a gender. There is no universal category of foreign service officer, reporter, law partner, or legislator. These works document that women report clearly being seen as and treated as women holders of a role. Work is part of the construction of masculinity for many workers. Jobs, as well as institutions, have gender, and institutions will mount enormous efforts to contain threats to the gendered identity of the institution. Once we understand the process of "othering" the gendered cul-

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4 I agree with Runyan in her review of McGlen and Sarkees that "their findings with respect to the minimalist/maximalist debate are less interesting and more predictable than the rich data that emerged from their surveys, interviews, and institutional analysis... [the minimalist/maximalist debate] which is itself a problematic and oversimplified characterization of contemporary feminist theorizing, especially in the wake of postmodernist thought" (1994: 333-34). See Kenney (1995).

5 For a discussion of formal rights as gendered, see Kingdom (1990). For a superb analysis of gender, androcentricism, and feminist methodology in policy studies see Hawkesworth (1994).
ture of institutions leads us to anticipate new forms of resistance rather than simple progress, as Cockburn and Bell (1992) predict and demonstrate.

Second, the experience of participants within an institution will vary according to gender. Not only will women most likely have fewer opportunities than men, but their perceptions of the obstacles and the existence of circumscribed opportunities will vary by gender (Epstein 1993: 214). Thomas documents this clearly.

Perhaps ironically, men's perceptions of women's difficulties do not coincide with women's perceptions of them. Male officeholders saw less sexism and stereotyping of women than did the women themselves, and they less often perceived that women had to exert greater effort to prove competence. It is interesting to note that men expressed less belief than women in stereotyping or sexism and then identified areas of deficiencies for women that tended to conform to stereotyping (1994: 37).

Finally, political institutions produce, reproduce, and subvert gender. All of the works recognize that gender is not a static thing that inheres in a biological category of women, but rather something that is socially constructed, variable, and subject to negotiation. Each political institution has a distinctively gendered culture and interacts with larger issues of gender being negotiated and renegotiated in the larger society. Scott would admonish us to continue to explore the interaction: "When historians look for the ways in which the concept of gender legitimizes and constructs social relationships, they develop insight into the reciprocal nature of gender and society and into the particular and contextually specific ways in which politics constructs gender and gender constructs politics" (1988: 46). To say that an institution is gendered, then, is to recognize that constructions of masculinity and femininity are intertwined in the daily culture of an institution rather than existing out in society or fixed within individuals which they then bring whole to the institution.

**Theoretical Insights**

1. *Numbers affect power in institutions:* Reading the texts, one is immediately struck by the enduring relevance of Rosabeth Moss Kanter's central insight that in institutions numbers matter. Kanter's *Men and Women of the Corporation* posited that women's behavior (although she would extend her claim to other nondominant groups in institutions) and ability to affect change as well as how other actors in the institution perceive them, and how they perceive themselves, depends on their number in the institution. To understand how

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6 For a sophisticated analysis of the application of Bell and Kanter to Title VII case law, see Chamallas (1994).
institutions are gendered, we must first know the proportion of women—are they tokens or minorities, or at parity? We need to know if the institution is uniform, skewed, tilted, or balanced. Thomas skillfully documents how the number of women legislators determines not only whether they can pass their priority legislative agenda items and get members of the dominant group to support their aims, but also whether women have any hope of changing the structures of the institutions and the rules of the game (1994: 105-27). McGlen and Sarkees contrast the number of women at the Departments of State and Defense to explain differences in initiatives to improve the status of women (1993: 73-78). Epstein documents the consequences of greater numbers of women in Wall Street firms between the '50s and '60s and '70s and now (1993: 181) and demonstrates the impact of new women associates in law firms on changes in policies at the firms (1993: 196-206). And Robertson demonstrates the impact of a critical mass of women employees at the New York Times, all of whom suffered widespread discrimination in pay and assignments (1992: 40–51).

2. Numbers affect the culture of an institution: Kanter went farther that merely asserting that their numbers determine whether women can affect policy changes within an institution. As sociologist Steinberg notes: “Integrating women into male institutions cannot be reduced to majority X’s and minority O’s” (1992: 579). The number of women in an institution also determines how the dominant group sees them and how they see themselves: how the institution is gendered. The number of women determines the room available for individual self-expression, the kinds of work they are asked to do, how their contribution is judged, and the extent to which they are included in informal channels of power. Nelson elaborates: “Many theorists, myself included, assert that all of social life is gendered, reflecting the differences between and among women and men in activities undertaken, opportunities available, outcomes experienced, and values held and assigned to them (1989: 4).

3. Gender has no universal content—it is produced and reproduced in daily interactions: Feminist theorist and historian Joan Scott defines gender this way:

My definition of gender has two parts and several subsets. They are interrelated but must be analytically distinct. The core of the definition rests on an integral connection between two propositions: gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power (1988: 42).7

Scott argues that the attributes associated with men and women and deemed masculine and feminine vary, not only across time, culture, race, and class,

7 See also Jones and Jonasdottir (1988) and Jones (1990).
but institution. That is to say that what it means to be masculine, as well as which jobs are reserved for men is, in part, institutionally specific. Moreover, the meaning attached to these attributes is continually renegotiated and reinscribed.

Joining Kanter's insight that numbers matter with Scott's reminder that gendering is a continuous process—one that takes place repeatedly at the seemingly trivial level of personal interactions, helps make sense of women's accounts of their day-to-day lives in male-dominated institutions. State Department officials reported to McGlen and Sarkees that they, like all tokens, must prove themselves over and over again—the battle does not stay won (1993: 68). Every time they confront someone new they must overcome presumptions about gender which cancel the presumptions they are entitled to because of their role. They will be taken for the secretary, assumed to not know about "throw weights," assumed to not be as tough, and feared as emotional—"fear of the shrieker" (McGlen and Sarkees 1993: 49-51). While the pattern is a general one that Kanter outlines—one's gender is incompatible with one's role and, on a daily basis, this point will be made repeatedly in subtle or overt ways—Scott's point would be that the content of the specific shortcomings of the non-dominant group member will vary from institution to institution. Perhaps even more troubling for those seeking progress, if a woman foreign policy expert or journalist's competence ever is established, rather than subject to continuous challenge and need for proof, she will be regendered as a man, or alternatively, a third sex (McGlen and Sarkees 1993: 99-100; Robertson 1992: 224). By recoding the competent woman as an honorary male, the job and the qualities associated with it remain gendered male (McGlen and Sarkees 1993: 35). Another example would be the way Margaret Thatcher's womanhood was somehow eclipsed by the way she wielded power. "Woman" and "Prime Minister" thus remain irreconcilable.

4. Gender is oppositional and hierarchical: Any understanding of gender would be incomplete without reference to de Beauvoir's concept of the "Other." De Beauvoir argued that gender was not only socially constructed and contingent, but that the genders were not reciprocal: what it is to be a man is to be not a woman. Men are defined and define themselves in opposition to a set of categories assigned to women, usually whatever qualities or characteristics are less valued for the fully human, rational, creative, or competent.

For him she is sex—absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject,

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8 Some reported, however, that the military command structure at the Department of Defense made the problem less severe.
he is the Absolute—she is the Other. . . . I have lingered on this example because the masculine attitude is here displayed with disarming ingenuousness. But men profit in many more subtle ways from the otherness, the alterity of woman. Here is a miraculous balm for those afflicted with an inferiority complex, and indeed no one is more arrogant towards women, more aggressive or scornful, than the man who is anxious about his virility (1949: 16, 25).9

If “lawyer” or “legislator” or “diplomat” contain within them the stated assumption that the occupant of that role is a man (hence the need for the marked designation “lady MP”), the very meaning of the role itself is defined in opposition to women. To draw on psychoanalytic accounts, if forming one’s identity as a boy or becoming a man depends in large part on distinguishing oneself from the mother as a woman and from girls, then the very notion of being a lawyer, or foreign service officer, or legislator is intertwined with notions of masculinity—a masculinity that takes its shape from being “not woman.” Epstein defines this with respect to the field of law:

The legal community has long been successful in maintaining cohesion by creating its own confrontations and adversaries; by welcoming “ins” and repelling “outs.” Sometimes that task has been easy—the outsiders literally come from outside; another country, another place. But where the facts are not obvious, justification may come merely from the act of defining certain people as outsiders. Women, forever integrated with the lives and communities of men, have been defined as “outsiders” serving the purpose of reinforcing the bonds of male association. Rationalizations may follow the exclusion rather than account for it; rationalizations change, become dated and absurd, yet new ones arise because what is necessary is that the division remains—that outsiders are labeled by those whose interests are served by creating a sense of difference (1993: 80-81).

5. Masculinity is constructed and fiercely defended: Psychoanalytic accounts of the construction of masculinity may help to explain the special humiliation male law students report experiencing when they do less well than women in an environment in which all students are ranked competitively against one another. “We do know, however, that many a man feels diminished when a woman does better than he; and in law school, which is so evaluative and where grades count for so much, it is not surprising to find women the butt of

9 Derrick Bell makes a similar point about othering with respect to race: “Black people are the magical faces at the bottom of society's well. Even the poorest whites, those who must live their lives only a few levels above, gain their self-esteem by gazing down on us. Surely, they must know that their deliverance depends on letting down their ropes. Only by working together is escape possible. Over time, many reach out, but most simply watch, mesmerized into maintaining their unspoken commitment to keeping us where we are, at whatever cost to them or to us” (1992: v, 8).
antagonism" (Epstein 1993: 65). Brigadier General Evelyn Foote relayed the same point with respect to the military.

The presence of women who are as competent and productive as a man is a devastating blow to the psyche of a lot of men who thought only men could be soldiers. It is a real blow to the ego of many males that women are doing so well in the military (McGlen and Sarkees 1993: 128).

Understanding the process of "othering" helps to account for the virulence of the opposition to women's full inclusion and participation as majority leaders, foreign service officers, partners in firms, or reporters on political beats. The opposition exceeds what one can rationally comprehend as merely an interest in monopolizing economic power.

We must put aside this contradiction for the moment, however, to look at what happens when positive action for sex equality introduces to men the idea that women too can run organizations, control computers and manage men. Many women may write this off as 'mere' liberal feminism, women buying into the system. Men nonetheless, often respond as though the end of the world were at hand (Cockburn 1991: 47).

Some men's opposition to women legislators, judges, diplomats, or journalists can be explained by the threat women's full participation poses to the construction of masculinity itself. Sociologists have long studied the connection between work and the construction of masculinity.

Indeed, as Cockburn brought to our attention in her contemporary classic, Brothers (1983), for men, work is not just about earning a paycheck but also about constructing a masculine identity. If women can perform male work competently, she argues, then the men performing these jobs are not real men (Steinberg 1992: 576).

6. Political institutions can be theorized as workplaces: Feminist scholars studying the gendering of political institutions are thus well served by those who have studied the sociology of work. Although some state legislators are part-time or unpaid, and despite the distinctive features of political institutions, courtrooms, defense departments, embassies, and statehouses are workplaces, peopled by those in pursuit of a career. Sociologists such as Cockburn document how work is intertwined in the construction of masculinity itself (1983: 132-40). The connection between masculinity and certain jobs is most evident in those jobs closely associated with waging war (Cooke and Wollacott 1993), but sociologists who study workplaces other than the military document this interconnection. Looking at political institutions as workplaces also enables us to draw on the sophisticated and well-established body of work on employment discrimination. Legal scholar Vicki Schultz, for example, implic-
itly expands upon the frameworks of Kanter, Scott, and de Beauvoir to illustrate how workplaces are gendered. By this she means that certain jobs are more masculine or feminine than others and are reserved for one group rather than another with alarming consequences for women's pay and opportunities. More importantly, however, Schultz argues that one's career aspirations, intertwined as they are with one's gender identity, change over time in response to work experience. Contrary to what courts have held in such high-profile cases as *EEOC v. Sears,* women do not arrive at the workplace with fixed, unchanging job expectations (in this case low ones due to "feminine values"). Schultz's point is that the employer bears some responsibility for creating, recreating, and reinforcing rather than subverting job segregation by sex and tracking women into dead-end jobs (Chamallas 1994: 2383-84). What political scientists can appropriate from her work, however, is that the determination of who should do what job, which workers possess what attributes, and how those jobs and attributes are distributed across sex is continuously negotiated. The workplace, like political institutions, is gendered. Gender is continually produced in the workplace rather than something existing, stable, and fully formed, prior to one's entry in it.

7. *Gender is reinscribed:* If understanding the process of "othering" as set out by de Beauvoir helps to understand the construction of certain occupations as masculine and helps explain deep-seated opposition to women's participation in them, it also explains why the continued gendering of institutions will reinscribe notions of gender that lead to women's subordination rather than liberation. Many of those who theorize gender as a continuous process of change and negotiation do not see this process as leading inevitably and irrevocably toward progress. While they note the substantial progress for women in achieving electoral office, political appointments, or partnerships in law firms, they also carefully document how gender is then reinscribed in the institutions in pernicious ways. Sociologists of work note that when women enter certain jobs they often cease to be stepping stones for higher positions (Cockburn 1991: 49; Steinberg 1992: 579). Cockburn reports that in the four institutions she studied, sexism was not restricted to the older generation of power holders who would eventually wither away (1995: 165). "Male power is not dying out with the retirement of the old traditionalist men. It is being reproduced in new, one might say literally 'virulent,' forms that are appropriate and effective for the late twentieth century" (1991: 158).

8. *Institutions will try to contain progressive change:* Political scientists can draw on discrimination law, as well as sociology, for inspiration, in this case,

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appropriating the insights of critical race theory. Derrick Bell, in his essays *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, analyzes the intractability of racism. He argues:

> racism in America is not a curable aberration—as we all believed it was at some earlier point. Rather, it is a key component in this country’s stability. . . . we risk despair as the necessary price of much-needed enlightenment. Facing up to the real world is the essential prerequisite for a renewed vision, and for a renewed commitment to struggle based on that vision (1992: x-xi).

I would argue that a careful examination of critical race theory, such as that of Derrick Bell, can provide insights to feminists about the intractability and resilience of sexism as well as insights into the intersection of racism and sexism for women of color. Bell argues that racism is not an aberration in our liberal democracy but an essential component of it (1992: 10). Similarly, it is no oversight or accident that allows women to be excluded from political life or participation in the military. Political institutions are in a very real sense constructed on the basis of women’s exclusion. Cockburn and Bell would caution us against seeing progress with numbers as the end of gendering in institutions. Instead, the gendering will alter to accommodate changes in membership while simultaneously disadvantaging the newcomers.

Cockburn, Bell, and Chamallas would warn us that the numbers are unlikely steadily to increase automatically. At some point, the point at which women go from minority to parity according to Kanter, more than the masculinity of individuals is at stake. The gender ethos of the entire institution is threatened. Cockburn argues that at this point the dominant group will work to contain the threat (1991: 49, 68-69). There is an informal ceiling on the number of women the institution can absorb and still maintain its gendered identity. Epstein discusses this containment with respect to Wall Street firms (1993: 194). She also describes how new gender stereotypes can be deployed to make sense of women’s changed roles. “For every stereotype that was used in the past to rationalize women’s segregation in the hidden legal specialties, another stereotype can be mustered to explain women’s entry into the areas of law once forbidden to them.” Women cannot litigate because they are passive and yielding or they can because they are naturally argumentative. Finance bores them or alternatively they are good at details (1993: 108). Thus a dichotomous gender system is rebuilt rather than demolished by women’s presence. Cockburn documents what she calls the tension between the short agenda and the long agenda of equal employment opportunity.11 The short agenda

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11 For an account of the long agenda item of making organizations less hierarchical and more consensual, see Iannello (1992). See recent feminist interest in the phenomenon of the Femocrat (Eisenstein 1991; Franzway, Court, and Connell 1989).
might include efforts to recruit and promote equally qualified women and minority men. The long agenda provides an alternative conception of power, breaking down hierarchy in the workplace (1991: 125). Similarly, Thomas distinguishes between women legislators' public policy goals—passage of legislation funding battered women's shelters, funding childcare, instituting comparable worth—and the more structural changes to legislative norms and campaign finance (1994: 128-48). The two exist in a certain degree of tension as success on the short list may endanger progress on the long list.

**Conclusion**

Future scholarship will continue to explore how political institutions are gendered. Such work should neither ignore women nor feminism. It should treat gender as a continuous, variable, and tenacious process that, while usually leading to women's disadvantage, is challenged, negotiated, subverted, and resisted. It should explore how masculinity, work, and politics are intertwined. These four works, to greater or lesser degrees, succeed in moving beyond the important work of documenting exclusionary practices, exploring whether women are different from men, and questioning simple liberal assumptions about the march of progress for women in institutions. They employ different methodologies to expand our understanding of how women's experiences in male-dominated institutions have changed over time—and the role of lawsuits in shaping that experience and changing the institutions. The study of political institutions benefits from the insights of feminist theorists such as de Beauvoir and Scott, as well as sociologists of work such as Kanter, Cockburn, Acker, and Steinberg and those who theorize about discrimination law: Bell, Schultz, Chamallas. Such scholarship will advance our understanding of the gendering of institutions by adopting an eclectic methodology that draws on ethnography as well as survey research—one that moves us beyond social science methods narrowly understood. I worry, however, that the discipline as traditionally constituted will be unable to appreciate the work of scholars who pursue the most fruitful methodologies and ask the most interesting questions about gender and political institutions.

**References**


