

APSA Short Course

Gendering Political Science: Strategizing New Directions for Advancing Women in Political

Science, August 2013

Panel 1: Developing Leadership Skills

Jane Junn

Professor of Political Science

University of Southern California

Kerry Rockquemore and Tracey Laszloffy are the authors of a book popular among scholars of color entitled *The Black Academic's Guide to Winning Tenure – Without Losing Your Soul* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008). I wish I had that book when I came up for tenure in 2000 because its practical advice and insight on traversing the minefield of advancement through the tenure track are vast. For those beyond tenure, however, there is no analogous text that identifies guideposts and distills wisdom from the lived experience of being a woman political scientist in the journey to full professor and the advancement to formal and administrative leadership positions. The papers by Brooke Ackerly and Lynne Ford and this short course overall go a long way in helping to lay the groundwork for strategizing about developing networks, cultivating alliances, thinking strategically, as well as preparing oneself for the challenges, demands, and indeed the disappointments and triumphs of life on the other side of tenure.

I hope to contribute to the discussion by highlighting several insights from the literature on intersectionality and the politics of marginalization. In particular, I focus on how being a woman (and being a woman of color in my case) structures both the context in which we work and interact, as well as the ways our actions and achievements are judged by the already-existing system in American higher education. What we learn from our collective experiences should compel us to search beyond existing models of leadership, and in so doing, challenge us to articulate new forms of leadership that do not require one to lose their soul or crush someone else's.

Intersectionality and the Default Category

I know my physical image is not what appears in the mind's eye when one is asked to say what a college professor looks like. Instead, and despite the growing gender and racial diversity of the political science professoriate, most of us still have a vision of a political science professor as someone who looks like Sidney Verba. Great storyteller that he is, Sid likes to recount the tale of his appearance in the glossy trade fashion magazine *W*. The magazine was looking for faculty to photograph for a "tweedy professors" feature. Not only did Sid have the perfect tweedy blazer (an essential component of the Harvard professor's uniform), he also very much

looks the part. But we do not. We are not the default category of college professor because most political science professors are still white, male, and more advanced in age. Our non-default category status evokes a higher level of scrutiny about our knowledge, our experience, and even what we look like. I have often wondered what it must be like to read teaching evaluations absent comments about clothing or shoes. That would be a relief, but I rest assured knowing that the collective work we do in our physical presence in front of college classrooms across the country is slowly but surely changing that image in the mind's eye of our students. For example, and before Barack Obama was elected President of the United States, we could see only a white male when asked to imagine an American president. My children were 4 and 6 years old in November of 2008, and to them, the president has always been a black man. This is, for the time being, their default category, and I feel the audacity to hope that leaders can be judged beyond their gender and racial categorization. Happily, I can report that in the 4 years since I have been at the University of Southern California, I have yet to get a teaching evaluation commenting on the clothes or the shoes I wear to class.

But in addition to gender, there is also race and ethnicity, and the influence non-default category status has on evaluations of teaching performance, particularly for courses about U.S. politics. Some students expect me to have an Asian-language accent, and they complement me on the high quality of my English-language skills. This form of added scrutiny occurs on an everyday basis outside of school as well, and when I give the answer "Michigan" in response to the question "where are you from?" people will often ask me again, this time with a nudge, "no, you know, where are you *from*?" They know I know what they mean, and so I tell them where my people came from, and this usually satisfies. The point here is that women and minorities are not the default category as political science professors and we usually have some explaining to do. That explaining and the curiosity or suspicion that engenders it is one of the more benign ways intersectionality is experienced by women of color in academia. I am one of only a handful of Asian American female full professors specializing in U.S. politics. That is not only a mouthful, but it is also rather shocking. The fact that I need to say it at all – that I must modify full professor or senior faculty with "Asian American female" – is the best indicator that we are long way from default category status, or better yet, the absence of a dominant default category.

The same dynamic is true for women in politics, who while running for office are not known as simply the Republican from Missouri, but are instead described as the female Republican from Missouri. Likewise, and to the point with respect to intersectional identification, is the fact that the wife of the 2008 Republican presidential candidate, Cindy McCain was never referred to as the potential "white first lady" in the same way that the wife of the 2008 Democratic presidential candidate, Michelle Obama was referred to as the potential "black first lady." At a campaign appearance during the general election, Mrs. Obama made a comment about feeling being proud to be an American for the first time. Republicans

seized on her words, and Mrs. McCain made an effort to clarify for reporters that she had always been proud to be an American. But unlike Michelle Obama, Cindy McCain had not experienced a conditional membership in the American polity, had not been questioned with a nudge about where she was from, and had not experienced systematic exclusion as a function of her racial categorization. Interpreted by some as a jab by McCain at the insufficient patriotism of the potential “black first lady,” the insinuation was consistent with the controversy over whether or not Barack Obama was a U.S. citizen by birth. In contrast, the Americanness of the McCains was not challenged; together as war hero and blonde heiress, their image was consistent with what an American president and first lady should look like.

For people of non-default category status in one or more characteristics, these are part and parcel of everyday interactions and negotiations at work, in social settings, and in politics. There is no better statement about the politics of intersectional marginalization, in my view, than the words of the women who formed the Combahee River Collective (April 1977): “The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking.”

Encountering those systems is both annoying and distracting to one’s productivity; to be more heavily scrutinized, to be commented about and on, to be mistrusted, to be criticized takes its toll. But intersectional positionality has many other more serious consequences for physical safety and autonomy, as well as for material and psychological well being. Sexual harassment and employment discrimination based in protected categories of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 are technically prohibited by federal, and in most cases, state law. But discriminatory behavior is undertaken by entities as vast and far-removed as educational institutions writ large and as singular and close as individual colleagues in one’s department. It is unlawful, but as Ackerly observes (Ackerly 2013, p. 7), public law governing anti-discrimination and sexual harassment has evolved to require an extremely high standard to achieve redress and justice for actionable claims. Living through and witnessing first-hand situations such as these evoke the kind of feeling I imagine Harry Potter anticipates when the dementors fly overhead.

Academic “Dementors”

For those unfamiliar with the plot and characters in the *Harry Potter* series of books, dementors are evil creatures who remove the psyche and soul with a “dementor’s kiss.” Even the simple presence of a dementor brings with it a rush of cold air and evokes feelings of hopelessness and the sense that one will never be happy again. Intersectional positionality *via* ascription, membership, or association with marginalized groups creates a higher level of vulnerability to

the two academic dementors I know best: sexual harassment and employment discrimination. It is not a coincidence that the least powerful and the most marginalized in American colleges and universities are at the receiving end of a disproportionate share of harassment and discrimination.

The stories are all-too familiar, and the first-hand experiences I have had are documented in the public domain. In 2008, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* published a lead story about bias against women faculty in the Department of Political Science at Rutgers University (“Rutgers U. Weighs Complaints of Bias Against Women in Political Science,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 8, 2008). I was a member of that department’s faculty and at the time was under review for promotion to full professor. The nature of the bias against women encompassed both sexual harassment and pay discrimination. With respect to the latter, women faculty made \$.78 for every \$1 male faculty took home, controlling for rank. There were men and women at all ranks, and as I found out after the salary data for the university was released after a local newspaper requested the information in order to publish the annual compensation for the Rutgers University football team coach, I was the lowest paid associate professor regardless of years in rank and record of productivity. But it was all of us who were being treated systematically differently because we were women. Discovering the disparity and revealing the incidents of harassment are not dementor material; instead, it was how colleagues, administrators, and the university more generally responded to the discrimination that ushered in the cold air and cast a pall of hopelessness on our struggle. There is really nothing quite like hearing a dean wonder aloud (to an assembled group of accomplished female faculty) whether the men were paid more simply because they were better. Armed with productivity and citation data, we rejected that hypothesis easily. There was indeed a relationship between citations and salary, but the problem for the dean’s hypothesis was that the relationship between citations and salary was negative. Women faculty had significantly more scholarly visibility and were still being paid less than the men faculty. No more perfect an example could one find of the phenomenon of failing upward.

A second example of unequal treatment in employment is reported on in another piece published by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (“Tenure Decisions at Southern Cal Strongly Favor White Men, Data in a Rejected Candidate’s Complaint Suggest,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 13, 2012). An analysis of tenure decisions across social science and humanities departments over a 14-year period revealed that while 92% of white males were successfully awarded tenure, a much smaller proportion of 55% of female and minority faculty made it through the process. I conducted that analysis and will continue to stand by it until I see official data demonstrating my conclusions to be inaccurate. But hard data supporting a position seen as unfavorable by the university will, I have learned yet again, get you no more than a dementor fly-by.

Beyond Existing Models of Leadership: Leading Without Losing Your Soul

Recognition of one's intersectional position of marginalization by interlocking systems is something we feel every day and know in our soul, but it is something we do not want to know and feel. But perhaps most difficult is the knowledge that those systems include and are often led by female faculty and administrators. Sometimes the administrators on the proverbial other side of the table are also people of color. We wonder, "How does she sleep at night? A dementor must have sucked out his soul, and that's why he acts like a Stepford wife." It seems readily apparent that we need more women academic leaders as well as more scholars of color in academic administration. But as we engage in strategies to more fully populate the pipeline or create work-life balance to entice women and minorities into administration, it worth pausing to consider the quality of existing models of leadership and, more precisely, what constitutes a desirable leader.