

# 1 Women's Political Voice in Political Science

*The Women's Movement Challenges  
Conventional Wisdom in the Academy*

WHY DID political scientists fail to see the political significance of the women's movement? Possibly it was because until the 1970s, almost all political scientists were men who considered their politics more interesting and important than those of women. To take nineteenth-century politics as an example, men found nation-building, war, and diplomacy more interesting than the suffrage, temperance, and settlement house movements. Scholarly interest in women's politics grew as the number of women in the discipline increased. But the absence of women was only part of the explanation. Many female political scientists found that when they tried to understand the political significance of the women's movement, the discipline's tools were flawed in three important ways: epistemologically, methodologically, and empirically.

Conventional political science epistemology posits objective observers who study atomistic, autonomous individuals; feminists posit gendered observers of socially interdependent people. It uses neutral categories in value-free research to construct universal theories; feminists use socially constructed categories in value-encoded research to construct socially contingent theories. Conventional political scientists seek explanations; feminists, understanding and interpretation. The conventional approach tacitly assumes that the male is normative; feminists uncover this tacit assumption. Conventional political scientists think quantitative methods and survey research techniques that impose concepts and meanings on respondents are adequate to the task of cap-

turing the most important features of people's political lives; feminists prefer qualitative methods such as participant observation and intensive, open-ended interviews that do not impose concepts and meanings on people. And there are important differences in what the two camps find empirically interesting, or worth knowing about: state vs. community, government vs. politics, military state vs. welfare state, stability vs. change, powerful vs. powerless, insiders vs. outsiders, elite vs. mass, interest groups vs. social movements, electoral politics vs. family politics, political parties vs. voluntary associations, opinions vs. consciousness, power over vs. power to, force vs. empowerment, rights vs. responsibilities, public-private separation vs. public-private integration, and the separation of politics and morality vs. the integration of politics and morality.

#### *The Invisibility of Women's Politics in Political Science*

In the United States the academic discipline of political science began in 1880, when the first graduate program in the field was established at Columbia University by John W. Burgess, whose scholarly concern was improving state-building in the German mode. He opposed women's suffrage for fear it would turn middle-class women away from their voluntary, charitable work, which would then be taken over by the state. As a proponent of limited government, Burgess saw an expansion of the social welfare state as an incursion on individual liberty. In addition, he was alarmed by the Progressive claim that women would have a distinctive point of view in government, and he opted for the separate spheres argument, namely, that women should remain in "their sphere of communal action" while government and politics should be left to men. The discipline's professional association, the American Political Science Association (APSA), was founded in 1903. The two most important journals during this time were Burgess's *Political Science Quarterly*, published at Columbia beginning in 1886, and the APSA's *American Political Science Review*, first published in 1906. Both journals paid scant attention to women's suffrage or any other women's issues. Between their respective foundings and the mid-1920s, the *Political Science Quarterly* published 1,038 articles, only 10 of which dealt with women; and only 3 of the *American Political Science Review*'s 406 articles dealt with women.<sup>1</sup>

Barbara Nelson notes the gender bias in the early days of the discipline. Its epistemology was a positivist dualism: "An omniscient, rational, neutral, separated observer recorded and analyzed political and historical events, discerning patterns that repeated over time"; the separation of the political tasks and places of women and men was "a positivist re-

construction of the dualism of the Enlightenment, a dualism that defined reason, rationality, severity, and action as male and emotion, irrationality, generosity, and dependency as female." Methodologically and empirically, early political scientists emphasized statutory governmental forms and official functions over individual or group actions: "A state-centered view of politics emphasized the offices and activities where men predominated. Women were often legally and customarily excluded from precisely the activities and positions that the authors defined as essentially political. The authors ignored women's efforts in social movements directed at their own enfranchisement just as they did not comment on the role of women in the creation of the welfare state."<sup>2</sup>

Political scientists seemed indifferent to the fact that there were no scholarly books devoted exclusively to women in American political life. That changed in 1968 with the publication of Martin Gruberg's *Women in American Politics*, which challenged the discipline by taking women's politics seriously enough to write a book about it, dethroning a state-centered view of politics, finding political significance in women's organizational activities, and letting women speak for themselves through the extensive use of quotations, a methodology deemed unrigorous by many in the discipline.<sup>3</sup> Gruberg located the roots of women's political subordination deep in the subconscious and in American culture. Things would change only by an act of women's will and organization. Women had to change sex-role socialization, provide girls with citizenship programs and role models, alter school curricula, and promote job and educational opportunities for women.

Gruberg could see such acts of women's will and organization looming on the horizon, as the nation began to reassess its attitude toward women. To support this claim, he cited three political events that we now know were emblematic of an emerging women's movement: President Kennedy's creation of the Commission on the Status of Women (1961), Betty Friedan's publication of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), and Republican Senator Margaret Chase Smith's candidacy for the presidency (1964).<sup>4</sup> A closer look at these three events illustrates important themes of this book: that the academy reconsidered women's politics in response to the women's movement, that the women's movement was a dynamic relationship between political insiders and outsiders, and that political scientists' claims to understanding the political world were only partial until they paid attention to what female activists and officials were doing.

Journalist Betty Friedan wrote about the problem of women's vicarious identity through husband and children and recommended women's

increased labor force participation. In 1966, she became a founding member of the National Organization for Women (NOW), an organization formed by women critical of the federal government's inattention to sex discrimination, which had recently been made illegal. President Kennedy, in need of the female vote in 1964 that had gone to Nixon in 1960, had established the Commission on the Status of Women in 1961 to identify discriminatory laws so that an Equal Rights Amendment would not be necessary. The pro-labor faction in the Democratic party had opposed the ERA for fear it would undo protective labor laws for women, and the Republican party gained points with business and professional women for its support of the amendment.<sup>5</sup> And in 1964, insider Senator Margaret Chase Smith (R-Maine) boldly challenged the sanctity of separate spheres in a speech announcing her candidacy for the presidency: "We often hear the comment that 'women are all right in their place.' But what is their place? The answer of practically all men and women is The Home. You never hear the comment that 'men are all right in their place,' because their place has never been restricted."<sup>6</sup>

Smith's relationship to women's groups reflected the historical transformations in such organizations that had occurred during her political lifetime, namely, the 1940s to the early 1970s. Smith credited Business and Professional Women (BPW) for her first political success, in a 1940 congressional race, since it gave her leadership opportunities and an apprenticeship in public service.<sup>7</sup> BPW had been formed during World War I, when the secretary of war was anxious to recruit the services of business and professional women in the war effort; by 1968, there were 174,000 members in 3,550 clubs nationwide. BPW sought to promote the interests of business and professional women and to encourage their political participation. It consistently supported the Equal Rights Amendment, along with equal pay and uniform social security retirement benefits.<sup>8</sup> In the Senate, Smith supported the ERA and prevented her colleagues from adding hostile amendments to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which outlawed race and sex discrimination in employment. Smith warned her fellow Republicans that they could not afford to be seen as anti-woman. She also publicly expressed attitudes and supported policies at odds with the new women's movement, however. She rejected feminism for seeking special privileges for women. Smith saw herself as an exceptional woman, with no special affinity to women as a group, and she supported a strong military buildup. In her unsuccessful reelection bid for the Senate in 1972, the Maine NOW chapter actively worked against her.<sup>9</sup>

It would take two decades of feminist scholarship to unearth the

complex relationship among the ERA, partisan concern about attracting the women's vote, the agendas of women's groups and elected female officials, the mobilization of female campaign workers, and the federal government's role in the creation of women's groups (BPW directly and NOW indirectly). Meanwhile, during the 1960s and 1970s, the women's movement proceeded apace while an oblivious discipline of political science went about business as usual. After Gruberg's pioneering book, the task shifted to female political scientists to alert the discipline to its shortcomings.

*Earliest Feminist Critiques of Political Science: 1974*

The first three salvos were fired in 1974. One was an accommodationist appeal to the discipline to add to its lexicon "gender roles" as an explanatory variable, based on an interdisciplinary literature review of more than two hundred works published over five years. The other two were full-blown transformational critiques of the discipline.

The cautious critique, by Wilma Rule Krauss, appeared in the prestigious *American Political Science Review*, a journal that never became an outlet for feminist revision of the discipline.<sup>10</sup> Krauss defended the sociological notion of gender roles as an explanatory variable for understanding "the complex of civic cultural relations," which both caused and were affected by political participation (e.g., voting, campaigning, and officeholding). She wanted to remove barriers to women's political participation; unlike later critics, she did not challenge the discipline's definition of political participation. In carving out "civic cultural relations" as an important part of political life, however, she called into question the standard political science practice of divorcing politics from culture, which was usually left to the anthropologists. Krauss was concerned with both explanation (determining causal variables for politics) and understanding (making sense of politics), emphasized both behavior (political science) and thought (political theory), and called attention to the women's protest movement as a subject worthy of study.<sup>11</sup> These concerns emerged even more centrally in two other critical essays published in the same year.

Susan C. Bourque and Jean Grossholtz catalogued male bias in the political science classics of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>12</sup> Some authors were so quick to accept sex roles as natural or necessary that they made assertions without evidence; for example, that childrearing responsibilities led to permanent sex differences in political participation.<sup>13</sup> Expecting to find sex-role differentiation, one researcher distorted original sources,

which had in fact found evidence of role sharing.<sup>14</sup> Some political scientists had assumed, without evidence, that just because a husband and wife voted the same way, the husband had influenced the wife's decision.<sup>15</sup> Women were described as "moralistic," without a clear definition of what was meant by that term but with the assumption that moralistic concerns were either irrelevant or unsophisticated.

Male political behavior was the norm. Evidence for boys' "natural enthusiasm" for politics came from a study in which most of the boys (9 of 12) and none of the girls (0 of 9) liked pictures of war; when a girl's response to how she would like to change the world was "get rid of all the criminals and bad guys," this response was labeled "distinctly nonpolitical."<sup>16</sup> When girls were more likely than boys to describe the rich and labor unions as powerful, political scientists saw yet "another expression of the tendency of girls to personalize the governmental process."<sup>17</sup> When men voiced higher levels of political efficacy than women, they were seen as more political, despite the fact that it could be argued that women were more realistic in their appraisal of the political influence any one individual could have.<sup>18</sup> It was assumed that women personalized politics. One political scientist said that in the 1952 presidential elections, women were more "candidate oriented" than men. Yet on the same page he cited a poll indicating that in the campaign, women were more concerned than men with the issues of the Korean war and allegations of government corruption.<sup>19</sup> The author did not comment on this seeming contradiction, which was especially odd since Eisenhower's candidacy was so focused on ending the Korean war. It was just assumed to be natural that women would be more swayed by the personal attractiveness of the candidate and that men would have issue reasons for their votes.

Even when women managed to make their way into top decision-making posts, male researchers often failed to see them or downplayed their significance. One political scientist described the "men" in a local power structure, even though five of the powerful were women.<sup>20</sup> Another described the "men" who were local subleaders, even though one-third were women.<sup>21</sup> Another researcher asserted that the presence of women as decision makers on a bond issue reinforced his judgment that these decision makers were relatively less powerful than other decision makers. Women leaders in this study were categorized as "specialists" rather than the more powerful "decision makers" or "influentials." "Specialists" were highly educated people with "an exceptional interest in community improvement of a welfare kind."<sup>22</sup>

Implicit assumptions about women's nature and proper sphere got in the way of doing good political science: females were emotional, do-