

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

## Our Editorial Experience at *Politics & Gender*, 2016–19

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(Received 29 December 2024; accepted 30 December 2024)

I, Mary Caputi, was humbled and honored to be offered the editorship of *Politics & Gender*, a position that I filled between 2016–19. With my hard-working associate editors Sun Young Kwak, Steve Gonzales, and Timothy Kaufman-Osborn, we strove to build upon the journal’s already strong reputation as an agenda-setting academic publication that offers cutting-edge scholarship in all areas of gender studies. Because the relationship between “politics and gender” is so rich and complex, we tried to faithfully represent the depth and variety of interplay in our scholarly articles, Critical Perspectives contributions, Special Issues, and our choice of books to be reviewed. As a team, the task of editing the journal sent us on an enlightening journey that proved both challenging and educational. Throughout my tenure, I learned a great deal about my own field of contemporary feminist theory, and about how gender is studied in other subfields of political science and other academic disciplines across the university.

The journal is highly rated and thus plays a pivotal role in reflecting the advances, changes, theoretical nuances, and leading debates in the field; consequently, its readership relies on *Politics & Gender* to showcase the directions that the study of gender assumes today. By now, “gender” doesn’t only mean “women,” nor is it limited to issues of sex and sexuality (although these continue to be important). It now comprises an array of categories that accompany gendered meanings, mandating an intersectional, multilayered, cross-national approach that now assumes prominence in the field. Indeed, gender studies is now a highly variegated field that has become more complex than in its earliest

days because our understanding of gender is far more polyphonic and complex, and its intellectual reach is far more extensive.

“Gender” now nearly always takes into consideration race, class, sexuality, intersectionality, religion, multiculturalism, disability, and age. Its critique includes the oppositional politics of the North/South divide; the perils of a Eurocentric worldview; the urgencies of ecocide and needed insights of ecofeminism; the realities of ingrained racism, homophobia, transmisogyny, and Islamophobia; and the need for those in the global North to become better educated regarding the realities of women and girls in settings far more hostile to their sex. Because the field has expanded exponentially over time, the study of gender now has bearing upon many more academic areas than before and is welcomed in not only the social sciences, but equally in the humanities and hard sciences. Moreover, within the academy, feminism now plays a pivotal role in helping define emerging disciplines such as sex and sexuality studies, queer and disability studies, ecocriticism, and green political theory.

The community of scholars not only understands “gender” to be a capacious and multidimensional term, but interprets the word “politics” equally broadly, taking into consideration the array of topics that it comprises. The power relations at work in political life operate on clearly defined — as well as on more subtle — levels. To use Foucault’s terminology, power exerts its influence in the less obvious capillaries of social relations just as forcefully as it does in the halls of Congress, the Oval Office, and the Supreme Court. Power’s influence is felt in institutional life, the military, electoral politics, diplomacy, economic policy, and the key actors and dynamics that determine international relations. Yet it is also vibrantly alive in social institutions such as the family, schools, media, religious and civic organizations, and social and cultural trends. All of these spaces carry gendered components and need the attention of scholars and activists; subsequently, *Politics and Gender* serves as an important mouthpiece for their much needed contributions as its articles analyze these many iterations of power.

The current political climate that is hostile to feminism lends an added layer of urgency to the journal’s mission, since the fractious polarization between right and left that besets us demands a response from feminist circles. As editor of the journal and with the help of my indispensable team, it was therefore my aim to represent gender’s wide and varied reception in multiple academic circles and to showcase the variegated way in which it informs contemporary political life: in government, in policymaking, and in political activism and organized resistance. Efforts at undoing changes made in progressive circles demand responses that address the harm of reactionary politics, giving voice to how feminist scholars and activists seek to redress their opponents.

We thus chose themes that are current and culturally relevant in order to demonstrate the needed insights of feminist scholarship in the turbulent present moment. We also showcased conservative efforts at appropriating feminism for political ends unaligned with how many understand feminism’s agenda. Our Special Issues, Critical Perspectives, and thematic book reviews thus featured such topics as feminism and neoliberalism, “conservative” feminism, men and masculinities, LGBTQ rights under Trump, transgender politics, and violence

against women. We featured essays that analyzed various challenges of women running for political office, as well as of those in the spotlight both at home and abroad.

We are especially proud of our special focus issues on Hilary Clinton (Volume 14, March 2018) and Michelle Obama (Volume 15, September 2019). Relatedly, we wanted to make visible the efforts to make “feminism” synonymous with various forms of political critique, for instance the critique of neoliberal policies, of conservatism, of a revisited and reconstituted masculinity, and of the dangers of institutionalized, hegemonic control even within feminist scholarship itself. As Michaele Ferguson (2018) asks in her article “Where Have All the Activists Gone?,” it is imperative that feminism resist becoming an academic discipline that lacks political clout or real-life impact. In our contentious political climate, these topics carry special weight, and as illustrated by the articles’ Altmetric attention scores, have contributed significantly to debates in the field.

As an editorial team, we also deliberately strove to ensure that *Politics & Gender* reflected the manner in which feminist scholarship continues to evolve and change intellectually. We thus sought out articles scrutinizing gender’s expression from a wide variety of critical angles: in art, television, film, fashion, body politics, history, and cultural studies. Lori Marso’s (2019) engaging piece, “Feminist Cringe Comedy: Dear Dick, the Joke Is on You,” exemplifies this effort, as does Amanda Barnes Cook’s (2016) “Breastfeeding in Public: Disgust and Discomfort in the Bodiless Public Sphere,” Lorraine Krall McCrary’s (2019) “From Hull House to *Herland*: Engaged and Extended Care in Jane Addams and Charlotte Perkins Gilman,” and Nancy J. Hirschmann and Emily F. Regier’s (2019) “Mary Wollstonecraft, Social Constructivism, and the Idea of Freedom.”

An important feature of the journal is, of course, its book review section. Timothy Kaufman-Osborn served as the book review editor of *Politics & Gender* during our tenure, and his presence on our team enriched the experience greatly. Timothy renamed the book review section, changing it to “Reviews of Scholarship” in the hopes of conferring a more broadly construed profile in keeping with our larger, expansive efforts in representing the field. He had the excellent idea of coordinating the themes present in the journal in any given issue with the scholarly reviews selected for that edition; in other words, he solicited reviews that complemented the issue’s essays. This innovative change brought more cohesion to individual issues of the journal and helped readers identify recently-published books whose topics they could readily learn more about. Timothy worked hard at selecting both the books and the reviewers, and himself wrote introductory text that helped contextualize the books under review as they related to the ideas in play.

Such coordinating efforts were always welcome, but served a particularly useful purpose in our special issues by illustrating the timeliness and cultural relevance of the special editions’ themes. Specifically, these included issues on gender and conservatism, Michelle Obama, LGBTQ politics, and women’s rights law and policies. Timothy also worked hard to increase the amount of scholarship reviewed in the journal, and succeeded in delivering a steady increase in the number of reviews presented in each volume. This of course represents a great accomplishment, since so many academics rely on book reviews to stay abreast

of their field. In so doing, he also strove to represent different areas of feminist scholarship, with special emphasis put on increasing the visibility of feminist theory. Moreover, the book review team showed creativity in the nature of reviews, featuring symposia on important works such as *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, edited by Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (2016), wherein several scholars reviewed a book followed by a response from the author(s) or editor(s).

Finally, Timothy and his assistants devised a sophisticated system for managing reviews, and also spearheaded the effort to have emails with live links sent out to subscribers of the Women & Politics Section of APSA announcing new issues of the journal. Another change in the mechanics that my team proposed was to focus on enlarging the pool of potential reviewers while advertising more specificity in terms of their expertise. We felt it might also help to offer incentives to reviewers to take on the task of reviewing by giving them publicity for their service, and recognized these scholars with Outstanding Reviewer Awards. Finally, we recommended that incoming editorial teams be trained well in advance of assuming responsibilities, something that Editorial Manager and online tutorials could help with, along with the invaluable in-person training that former teams could offer.

As a feminist scholar myself, the need to cultivate a deeper awareness of how the study of gender continues to change has perhaps helped me the most in my own research and writing. Serving on the journal significantly widened my purview of the field and pushed my boundaries of understanding regarding the scope and magnitude of feminist scholarship, enriching my training in feminist theory by enlarging my knowledge of other gender-focused methodologies, epistemologies, and operative canons. I am grateful for the fluidity this has brought to my writing, given that my vision of the discipline has widened and my knowledge of other approaches to gender – such as those from the fields of cultural and ethnic studies, literature, film studies, history, and development – has deepened.

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**Cite this article:** Caputi, Mary, Sun Young Kwak, Steven Gonzales, and Timothy Kaufman-Osborn. 2025. "Our Editorial Experience at *Politics & Gender*, 2016–19." *Politics & Gender* 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X24000552>