

International Women's Day Interviews

Written by E-International Relations

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To celebrate International Women's Day this year we asked several of our former interviewees about women and IR: What can we do to forge a gender equal discipline? Below are responses from Kristina Mani, J. Ann Tickner, Ruth Blakeley, Swati Parashar, Kimberly Hutchings, Emma Mc Cluskey and Sophie Harman.

Kristina Mani is Professor of Politics and Chair of the Latin American Studies Program at Oberlin College. Read her previous interview with E-International Relations here.

Even more than 30 years after Cynthia Enloe asked it, we still need this question every day: "Where are the women?" Where are they in the events and processes we study? Where are they among the authors we read, or cite, or assign in our teaching? Where are they in the classroom, and are we giving space to hear their perspectives? Where are they among the mentors and leaders in our professional organizations, our departments, on our search committees and review boards? Where are they among the presenters at academic and policy-related events? Where are they on the salary scales compared to men in the same rank? You know the answer: they're in the minority – and in most cases not even close to that. Yes, there has been progress: in the United States, if in 1980s a mere 5% of tenured faculty in political science (all fields) were women, by the 2010s that had grown to a still underwhelming 25% – and IR as a field remains just behind that curve.

In my view the most effective way to *quickly* enhance gender equality would be to populate the field's professional journals with women editors. This would hardly be a shocking extreme – the *American Political Science Review* did it recently, appointing an all-women team of editors for 2020 with the goal of diversifying its research and authors. Publication in top-tier journals is a key to the door of tenure and promotion, so changes like these matter.

Over the longer term, I think that what happens in our classrooms matters just as much. I work at a liberal arts college well known for its progressive history and culture – we pride ourselves on being the first college in the United States that admitted women and African Americans to earn degrees back in the 1830s, but we also know that women had to continue to fight for several years for right to earn degrees in *all the same areas* as men. In other words, the hard work for inclusion and equity does not end. Hence "Where are the women?" needs to be asked by all of us every day.

Beyond that, we *all* can empower the role of women in IR in several ways that can start right in your department and classroom. First, *create equal opportunities for all to engage with women in the field*. Invite women colleagues to speak professionally at your institution, assign women authors (and point them out to your students!), include literature that prominently recognizes women in the global world, not only in a token week on "feminism in IR." Hire women research and course assistants as it is powerful when students see women peers from whom they can learn.

Second, *be a good mentor to young women scholars*. If they're interested in pursuing work in IR or policy analysis, encourage them but also tell them about the field as it is demographically and in terms of power relations (I *have* to tell them that because if they base expectations on what they see in the IR faculty at Oberlin, they might think that a 2:1 ratio of women to men is normal in the field!). If your women students are going to graduate school, give them practical advice to 1) find mentors – ideally more than one, both in their particular area of interest and outside it, 2) network widely – especially with other women in the field, both on the scholarly and the policy-oriented side, 3) pay

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attention to the norms in the profession – how we frame questions, how we challenge each other as peers, the language and tone we use to engage debates, how hierarchies within departments and graduate student cohorts evolve, and 4) model the best practices you see and know, and support others who do the same.

Finally, *be real with your students and colleagues and don't hide what you do*. Women must promote their research and other professional achievements, set clear boundaries with students and colleagues, and protect their time by saying no to the siren call of service. But also, don't shy away from acknowledging the multiple commitments women hold to professional and personal lives. That's right: I can only meet during regular office hours, because my kid has a soccer game today and I'm preparing a paper for a conference next week. If they don't know you do it (all) they will think it's easier than it really is – and that myth has burdened women for far too long.

A closing thought: maybe gender *equality* shouldn't be the goal. What if women dominated the field of IR? How might that change not only the focal areas of study and methodology, but also departmental dynamics and compositional diversity, and maybe even the relevance of the field to inform policy choices? Sure, moving from one imbalance to another isn't ideal, but sometimes radical change is what's needed. And if an institution as staid as the APSR journal can make that leap, maybe the rest of us can too.

Ann Tickner is a Distinguished Scholar in Residence in the School of International Service at the American University, Washington DC. Read her previous interview with E-International Relations [here](#).

The most obvious answer to this question is that there needs to be more women in tenure or tenure track positions in International Relations. Women make up the majority of non-tenure track appointments. And when they hold tenure track positions, they often fall behind as the tenure clock coincides with women's child-bearing years. We need a more friendly work environment for women who often suffer pay discrimination, disproportionate service burdens, and even sexual harassment.

But I would like to focus on a deeper issue – that of subject matter. Security studies, still the most prestigious specialty in IR, often has little appeal to women and women who do security studies sometimes have had a hard time being accepted by the field. Granted there is now a thriving sub-discipline of feminist security studies but it is not accorded the same degree of respect by the discipline. In fact, many of the issues that women find important and worthy of investigation, such as gender-based violence, are often deemed to be “not IR”. Another barrier to gender equality, especially in the US, is the overwhelming adherence to quantitative and rational-choice methodologies. Since gender is a social construction, many feminists choose to answer their research questions, using critical or post-positivist methodologies. Such work often fails to get published in the top journals in the field.

It has been thirty years since feminist IR was introduced into the discipline. Undoubtedly, it has made enormous strides. There is a rich and diverse literature on a wide variety of topics. But let's not wait another thirty years for feminist IR to be accorded equal respect by the discipline. Only when gender and women's issues are treated as being as important as “men's issues”, rather than being accorded one week at best on many IR syllabi, will we have a truly gender equal discipline.

Ruth Blakeley is Professor of Politics and International Relations at the University of Sheffield. Read her previous interview with E-International Relations [here](#).

The under-representation of women scholars in leading IR journals, both in citations and authorship, is stubbornly persistent. As is now well-documented, this has significant impacts on women's career progression. I recently completed a four-year term as lead editor of *Review of International Studies*, a well-ranked journal published by BISA and Cambridge University Press. With my co-editors, we set ourselves the challenge of increasing submissions and publication of manuscripts from women. When we began our tenure, men outnumbered women in both submissions and publication at a ratio of three to one. During our editorship, the submissions ratio improved, with submissions from men now outnumbering women two to one. Over the course of our tenure, 41% of the manuscripts published were authored or co-authored by a woman. In the last two years of our tenure, we further improved, with 49% of manuscripts published in 2018 authored or co-authored by a woman, and 50% in 2019. There is no single

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explanation for these improvements. The composition of our editorial team was an important factor – three of the five editors were women. Relatively few leading IR journals are edited by a female lead editor, or have a majority of female co-editors. All members of the editorial team took seriously the need to encourage women authors to submit work. The gender-balanced composition of our editorial advisory board also sent important signals, and members of the board strongly encouraged submissions from women scholars. We were also clear to authors and reviewers that we take gender bias in citation practices seriously.

At the International Studies Association Annual Convention in 2019, I participated in a roundtable on the gender gap in IR journals. I posed a question: Given the well-documented under-representation of women in IR journals, why don't editors simply establish a policy of ensuring 50% of the work they publish is by women as lead author? In response, the male editor of *International Affairs* launched the 50:50 in 2020 initiative. Direct action by editors of influential journals is significant: it sets the agenda, inspiring others to follow suit. But until editorial teams and boards are more diverse, these biases will persist. Professional associations and publishers have a responsibility to end decades of male-dominated editorial teams and boards. Attitudes also need to change. Unfortunately, there are those who ask whether such initiatives mean good scholarship by men is less likely to be published, and whether work by women will be accepted if it is of lower quality. The prejudiced and sexist assumptions underpinning these questions is one reason why high-quality work by excellent women scholars fails to make it into our top journals. Educating about the structural impediments to women's fair and equal representation is a top priority, and one I hope editors and others with leadership roles in IR, male and female, will continue to take seriously, and address with meaningful action.

Swati Parashar is Associate Professor in the School of Global Studies at the University of Gothenburg. Read her International Women's Day interview with E-International Relations [here](#).

The issue of gender equality cannot be seen in isolation to other equalities that we are struggling for. We have to think beyond the category of 'women'. A useful category but which women are missing? Who else is missing? In the name of 'gender equality' what other kinds of marginalisations and erasures have we normalised? Diversity and intersectionality cannot be tokens. What is 'gender equality' for us? I am afraid 'more women' in positions of influence and power (often behaving like patriarchs) is not gender equality. Several institutions and academic departments love to talk about the male-female ratio and the overwhelming presence of women in their faculty and management. That is not the kind of gender equality that will change much on the ground.

We need to pay more attention to our own complicity and privilege. It is always good to be vigilant about racism and sexism in academic institutions and professional spaces, but what kinds of spaces are we creating for those whom we consider marginalised, those from whom we wish to hear, those who have something new to contribute? Are we giving up some of those privileges, those panel slots, those workshop opportunities, speaking invitations and creating inclusive spaces for those whom we think we need to hear from? Are we ready to dismantle embedded hierarchies in institutions, structures and systems that continue to undervalue and undermine women, LGBTQ colleagues, people of colour? Self-reflexivity can make us attentive to these questions.

Gender/race/class/ diversity continues to be invoked in tokenistic ways. It should not make us 'look' good but make us feel good about a different and more equal, just world we have created together. I have worked in multiple academic contexts in Singapore, UK, Ireland, Australia, India and now Sweden, visited many parts of the world and have been greatly enriched by these experiences. These opportunities of mobility and learning are the lifeline of academia and we cannot afford to lose them. If we do not enable transnational intellectual exchanges (and challenge the politics and discursive limits of borders), we will never be able to understand the problems we are grappling with. Collaborative forms of knowledge production and dissemination will make us thrive, prolong our intellectual curiosity and take us towards more creative solutions to problems. A gender equal discipline has to be a participative, shared and enabling vision, not a top down approach.

Kimberly Hutchings is Professor of Politics and International Relations at Queen Mary University London. Read her previous interview with E-International Relations [here](#).

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This question appears quite straightforward, but is of course actually a complicated one. A decade ago, it might have been read predominantly in representational terms, so that forging a gender equal discipline would be about increasing numbers of women at all stages within the profession. That interpretation of the question has not gone away, there is still under-representation of women, in particular in senior roles within the IR academy. Nevertheless, over the thirty years of my teaching career, I have seen the visible representation of women increase massively at undergraduate and taught postgraduate level, and begin to increase significantly at PhD, post-doctoral and academic levels. The experience of attending a professional conference in IR as a woman is now completely different from my early years, when it was common to be the only woman in the room. More progress still needs to be made in terms of the pipeline of women colleagues from early career researchers to full professors, and more generally in enabling those with major caring responsibilities (still mostly women) to be able to make progress in their careers. However, even if equality of representation were to be completely achieved, would it mean that we had forged a gender equal discipline in IR? Two issues in particular make it difficult to answer this with a straightforward 'yes', one relates to the meaning of 'gender' and the other to the substantial content of the IR curriculum.

Feminist IR scholars have spent a lot of time over the past 30 years insisting that 'women' does not equate to 'gender', even though thinking about 'women' makes gender visible. I am not going to rehearse 30 years of scholarship here, but we cannot have a gender equal discipline without being clear that neither 'woman' nor 'man' is a unitary category and that the concept of 'gender' is marked by a history that too often neglects the hierarchies and exclusions built into unitary and binary understandings of what it means to be a gendered human being. The formation of categories of sex and gender are bound up with histories of heteronormativity, class and racialisation, suggesting that gender equality may only be achievable through a rejection of the term 'gender' as carrying any singular meaning, and the need to always bear in mind multiple axes of inequality. In this respect, we can only forge a gender equal discipline if we pluralise meanings of gender inequality. What does the gender equality of our discipline look like in representational terms if we put the situation of white or middle class men and women out of the picture?

We can also think about gender equal representation in relation to the substance of our discipline. As with the concept of 'gender', the concept of 'discipline' is also a contested one, and people will disagree about the boundaries of IR as a field of study. One way of delimiting the meaning of the discipline is through paying attention to the curriculum. How is IR taught and what do we teach? For example, what are the texts that form the standard core of a course on the history of international thought or on IR theory? Across US and European contexts, such courses include virtually no women or men and women of colour. At the moment, I am working on a project, led by Patricia Owens, on 'Women in the History of International Thought'. Within this project, we have found that the absence of women, including many women of colour, from the IR canon, is not because there were no women writing on the international in the first decades of the twentieth century. Rather it is because the mechanisms of canon-formation within IR operated to render women's work invisible. Perhaps we will have forged a gender equal discipline when IR students will be as likely to know the work of Ellen Churchill Semple as that of Halford Mackinder, of Helena Swanwick as that of Norman Angell, of Rosa Luxemburg as that of Antonio Gramsci, of Merze Tate as that of Hans Morgenthau.

Emma Mc Cluskey is a Research Associate and Teaching Fellow at the Department of War Studies, King's College London. Read her previous interview with E-International Relations [here](#).

The primary way to forge a gender equal discipline is to make sure that women don't opt out of the discipline as they advance in their careers. And here, it seems like some good progress has been made, albeit slowly. I was recently interviewed by my own institution's diversity and inclusion team about my experience of having a baby during my PhD, as post-grad student mothers had been flagged up as an 'at risk' group. A lot of the things I had normalised as my own problem to deal with five years ago, from pumping milk in the disabled toilets to going back to GTA-ing with a twelve week old baby at home, now suddenly appeared to me as deeply problematic. I suppose I'd just buried it very deeply at the time. Objectivising the structures which lead to the 'motherhood penalty' is an indispensable first step, but there is still much work to do here. And though a lot of institutional initiatives have been put in place across the board, women are still much more likely to be paid less than their male counterparts, more likely to be affected by precarious contracts and less likely to be cited as widely or included in reading lists. These problems are exacerbated when you bring race or disability into the picture.

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I see more promising progress in the transformation and pluralisation of what International Relations as a discipline valorises and holds up as legitimate knowledge. Though some of the stocktaking type of articles that appeared last year at IR's so-called centenary still rolled out the hackneyed stories of dead, white founding fathers, this *illusio* seems increasingly shaky. The boring, 'macho' article, complete with a direct and aggressive arguing style, with the scholar as a 'sovereign voice' now has to sit alongside research which forges more transversal paths, often sitting at the intersection of more anthropological or sociological approaches to the 'international', and proceeding with much more understatement about the authority of the knowledge produced. In this vein, feminist scholarship which has pioneered a more narrative or autoethnographic approach, has broken new ground in terms of pluralising modes of knowledge in the discipline, and revolutionised discussions on reflexive scholarly practice. This trend towards pluralisation, though flourishing, is however still quite fragile and requires nurturing on multiple fronts.

Sophie Harman is Professor of International Politics at Queen Mary University of London. Read her previous interview with E-International Relations [here](#).

Cynthia Enloe is not the only feminist working in International Relations (IR). Not all women working in IR are feminists. Cite women, look for new work by women, diversify your sources, citations, and reading lists. If that old copy of *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* is your totem of inclusion you have work to do. These things take time but reading around the field and keeping up to date with your research is part of good scholarship not some conspiracy to make you care about diversity (which I assume you care about as you're reading this and hopefully want to be a good scholar). Only invite someone onto your panel or attend your workshop when you have read their work and intend to cite it. Don't ask women to join your editorial board/co-organise a workshop/co-edit a book/be a co-Investigator/become Deputy of anything and think this gives you permission to burden them with the work you don't want to do and no-one else will. If you are in one of these roles keep a record of how you apportion work and notice who you send the grunt work to. A compliment to a female academic is to engage with their ideas, scholarship and teaching, not their appearance. Ditto referring to a female colleague (who is not your friend) as fun/cool/up for a laugh: women can be all of these things but it is boring and exhausting to be referred to in these terms in a professional setting when you want to be valued by your work. These points may seem petty but they are micro-aggressions that add up to a devaluation of why women matter in academia (for fun, tokenism, and decoration rather than ideas, research, and knowledge exchange). When in doubt, assume the woman you are talking to is a senior academic, this will save you a lot of embarrassment and change the perspective of who or what a Professor looks like (anecdotal experience would suggest a PhD student). Don't proposition women. If you ignore this advice, take no for an answer. Definitely don't proposition your female students. Mentors, focus on your mentees rather than listing your own achievements. Experiment saying 'yes, here's how...' rather than 'no, too soon, too many gaps...' when talking about career progression and ambition. Don't be a troll, yeah women can hack a debate and exchange, but most of the time what is said to be debate is an attempt to silence or discredit women and/or negate both their experience and existence as women. Don't use your daughter as a signifier of your commitment to women's issues and interests. Good leadership is everything: someone who congratulates you when you're pregnant and is sensitive to the pain of a miscarriage and changes in your body during menopause, knows it is their responsibility to understand HR guidelines, values all forms of diversity, is thinking about career progression and enabling supportive environments, values all staff, never uses race or gender against you or in a tokenistic way, does not have favourites, is collegiate, diversifies committee membership, follows the rules and procedures (that are there for a reason), is fair and transparent in everything they do (hiring, promotion, mentorship), and understands that equality work is work. Calling yourself a feminist is not enough. White privilege disclaimers are not enough. Be an ally to *all* women. Do better, we can all do better.

Equal pay for equal work. Higher education in the UK has a gender pay gap of 15.1% in universities and a race pay gap of 26% in Russell Group universities. This piece is published at the same time as 74 branches of the UK Universities and College Union (UCU) are undertaking 14 days of industrial action on the four fights: pensions, precarity, gender pay gap, race pay gap. You know pay discrimination is happening, you may know why, but this is not always about who is a Professor and who is a caterer (which is a problem not an explanation), it could be your Lecturer buddy who you've worked alongside for years. If we want gender and racial equality in higher education and IR we need to confront the taboos that hold us back: we need to start talking about our pay. As the gender pay gap at the BBC demonstrated, pay transparency is central to pay equality (and like the BBC, I imagine UK universities will

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trot out the same 'talent' and 'market competition' excuses to resist this). I can't be the only person who goes straight to the 'How I Spend it' section of The Guardian every Saturday: if we want to get practical about the pay gap we all need to talk about what we earn. We need an IR 'How I Spend It'. This will not only enhance pay transparency, it will provide human stories and insight into job precarity, opportunity, and the gross inequalities within the sector, hidden costs (e.g. from credit card fees when awaiting expense claims to buying books, equipment etc), and levels of debt (personal and financial) required to be an academic.

I could similarly list all the things women could do as individuals – Publish! Say no! Be strategic! Be a team player but not too much of a team player! Big yourself up! Establish good networks and support systems! Go for the senior leadership roles! Get that research grant! – but as Michelle Obama put it 'sometimes that shit doesn't work.' In contemporary academia, sometimes the more you do, the more indicators or criteria you exceed, the higher the bar is raised. Sometimes your university and/or the discipline of IR is gaslighting you. It is employers, managers, fellow researchers, universities, that need to change. You're enough. You're doing fine.

You can read last year's special feature for International Women's Day [here](#).