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Book Note

Global Gender Issues in the New Millennium

Anne Sisson Runyan and V. Spike Peterson (eds). (4th ed).
Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2014. 360pp.

Mary Ann Powell*

Global Gender Issues in the New Millennium is a valuable resource for understanding how gender and gendered processes are broadly influential in our global world. Runyan and Peterson provide clear explanations of terminology needed to participate in meaningful conversations about gender, and they make a strong case for examining the world through a gendered-lens.

The book is structured with two introductory chapters that establish the importance of considering gender in global issues and explain why using gender as a lens for understanding world politics is critical. The first chapter defines the important terms in the book, and demonstrates the value of an analysis of gender and gendered processes needed for true change to occur in global inequalities. Language is powerful and the authors assume that readers need to understand meanings. For example, they explain not only the meaning of “intersectionality,” but also why it matters for truly understanding global politics. They argue for the importance of understanding how gender, race, class, nations and sexuality interact to make simple dichotomies of gender inadequate for understanding world politics and inequalities. “Our somewhat longer explanation lies in the interaction of gender with the other identity markers and power relations of race, class, nation, and sexuality that intersectional analysis reveals” (30).

* **Mary Ann Powell** is Chair of the Department of Sociology & Anthropology and an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She is an affiliated faculty member with the Women’s and Gender Studies Department and the Office of Latino/Latin American Studies. Her research and teaching interests include family inequality, both within the U.S. and comparatively, gender, work and family, and quantitative research methods. She is also interested in ways to improve methods and statistics teaching to make this information more accessible to math and statistics anxious students. She is currently a member of a research team that is exploring how to recruit more women into STEM disciplines.

The second chapter describes what it means to use a gendered lens to see the world. Without the use of this lens, the meta-lens that assumes a “naturalness” of gender hierarchies is not questioned. “...the “naturalness” of sex difference becomes indistinguishable from the “naturalness” of dichotomized and hierarchical gender differentiation that we reproduce, consciously and unconsciously, as we act out gender in all areas of social life” (71). The use of stereotypes, dichotomies, and ideologies make the status quo of masculinized superiority seem natural. The authors argue that the instrumentalist view of gender progress is limited and counter-productive. In spite of progress made on issues of women’s equality around the world, and the particular progress of some women and some men, the authors argue that looking at specific women in the world of politics does not reflect the real power of how gender operates. All of this helps readers understand the feminist critique of positivism.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 provide the body of the book, with discussions of issues of gender in global governance, global security, and global political economy inequalities, and replete with up-to-date scholarly information. At first glance, these chapters appear to use a dichotomous definition of gender by reflecting on progress and conditions of women and men in the various arenas. Closer examination reveals that intersectionality is carefully woven throughout the remainder of the book by examination of what is happening in varied nations, with varied races, and for varied classes. Using the gendered lens, the authors connect diverse issues, from the environment to work conditions to political leadership to gender violence. They demonstrate how the gendered ways of viewing the world affect our everyday lives.

The authors end with a description of resistances to the “natural” assumptions of a gendered division: “the *power of gender* continues to foster dichotomizing, stratifying, ‘othering,’ and depoliticizing in thought and action. These moves produce and maintain *crises of representation, insecurity, and sustainability*, despite some *repositionings of some women and men* on the world stage” (237).

Readers will find several features particularly useful. For those who are not familiar with this area of study in political science, an extensive list of acronyms appears at the beginning. As I read, I referred to this section regularly. Each chapter begins with a series of provocative questions that guide the reader through the chapter. The final pages include a list of web and video sources to consult, great references, and a thoughtful list of activities for research and discussion.

The book may be challenging for readers who are not familiar with the language used in gender studies or IR (international relations) in political science, intersectionality, and globalization. But the resources provided assist readers who want to understand this broader and deeper picture of our gendered world. As a sociologist, I learned a great deal and found the book well worth my time.