

Does Gender Matter When Discussing Foreign Policy and International Relations?

Written by Matthew A. Hill

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MATTHEW A. HILL, OCT 12 2012

I recently was on a panel alongside Wendy Ngoma from Womankind at an event organised by two former MA students at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) talking about our understanding of the role of gender within governmental and non-governmental development work. Looking at it from different perspectives, we covered some important and interesting ground. Wendy raised some important issues, for example, in order to support local ownership Womankind partners with local women's rights organisations as opposed to setting up an office and running the projects themselves. I raised some initial thoughts based on my interview data (from the Women and USFP project) on the role of gender equality as an element of the US national interest framework, and discussed the difficulties of a project that has an audience of gender and non-gender interested researchers.

But for the rest of this entry I want your thoughts to focus on the aim of the event. It was to launch a report by Ellen Berry and Portia Roelofs on the role of gender within SOAS' Masters teaching in politics and development courses. They decided, whilst writing their dissertations, that discussion of gender was not sufficiently integrated into the modules they were taking. So they looked into the matter with a little more detail and produced a report *Critical and Inclusive? Report and Recommendations on Gender Teaching at SOAS*. It is not a long report, and I recommend you read it, for it provides a neat insight into the role of gender, or lack of it, in the design of politics modules. A feminist analysis of international relations, for example, is often placed at the end of a module syllabus. I ask you to consider how could a gender discussion be better incorporated into a module syllabus? Is it simply a case of putting it at the beginning of the module, or is it more complicated than that? These are questions I am raising with myself as I am currently designing a module on US democracy promotion, so your thoughts would be greatly appreciated!

I want to close with an extract from the report: 'SOAS masters students will be key in future policy making and critique internationally. Without decent gender education, bad policy that forgets or ignores gender will continue to be made. If women are invisible in the syllabi of a university like SOAS, they are likely to remain invisible in subsequent policy.' Whilst the report refers to SOAS, I think that the discussion should be expanded and applied to all universities in the UK. It is an encouraging sign that the head of the politics department at SOAS was in the audience at the report launch.

Ps. I am a SOAS alumni so have a personal interest in this matter.

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Read more from Matthew A. Hill in his e-IR blog, Reflections on American Politics from an Outsider

About the author:

Matthew A. Hill is a senior lecturer in International Relations at Anglia Ruskin University. The aim of this blog is to

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examine US politics and pick an idea not fully-formed and run with it to see where it goes. Sometimes it will wither away but othertimes it will inspire to think about the idea further. Your input is encouraged and welcomed.