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Women in Academia, Academia on Women

Endorsing both women's representation and WPS focus in international studies

In August 2024, the British Embassy in Seoul drew a line in the sand: no more participation in male-dominated conference panels. As an aspiring female researcher in international relations, I've grown wearily familiar with counting women speakers at every symposium I attend, often needing just one hand. While diplomatic missions are beginning to take concrete steps against gender imbalance, the stark reality remains: international relations academia continues to be a field where male voices echo the loudest, and issues of Women, Peace and Security (WPS) often fade into footnotes. This disparity isn't just about empty chairs—it's about whose perspectives shape our understanding of global security and ultimately, whose voices influence the policies that affect the world.

A Field Divided: The Twin Crisis in IR Academia

The crisis in international relations academia is twofold. Women scholars remain systematically underrepresented, and the vital field of WPS continues to be marginalized. In institutions where future peace builders are trained, only one in six full professors is a woman—a stark 17% in political science that drops to 14% in International Relations (Monroe & Chiu, 2020). This underrepresentation directly shapes what we consider legitimate security research. When women authored only 14% of articles in top IR journals from 1980 to 2007 (Maliniak et al., 2008), it wasn't simply because there were fewer women scholars—it reflected an academic culture that systematically devalues research areas where women have historically made crucial contributions.

The marginalization of women voices in academia reflects a deeper institutional culture where implicit gender bias infiltrates academic advancement, from hiring decisions to citation patterns. When female scholars, particularly those with children, face the choice between career advancement and work-life balance, the world of academia is losing invaluable perspectives on how international relations can be understood. (Hesli et al., 2019).

As I navigate my own path in this field, I find myself wondering: how many brilliant insights have been lost because talented women chose to leave academia? How many groundbreaking theories remain unwritten

because their potential authors couldn't find mentors who looked like them? The scarcity of women in academia manifests most starkly at elite institutions—at Harvard, for instance, only 2% of women PhDs specialize in IR, compared to 5% of men (Harvard GSAS Annual Report, 2022).

When Security Studies Perpetuate Insecurity

The marginalization of women in academia extends beyond mere representation—it manifests in how the field systematically sidelines the study of WPS itself. Despite evidence that gender-inclusive peace processes are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years (UN Women, 2021), prestigious institutions continue to treat WPS as peripheral to "serious" security studies.

This academic neglect of WPS is symptomatic of biases in how contemporary scholars conceptualize security studies. While male scholars predominantly focus on traditional security topics, women researchers more often investigate crucial but undervalued dimensions: transnational actors, international organizations, and human security (Mitchell & Kadera, 2021). This gendered division of research interests reflect and reinforce a hierarchy where "hard" security issues command center stage while "soft" security concerns, despite their crucial role in sustainable peace, are relegated to the margins. Privileging traditional state-centric approaches creates an environment where scholars who pursue WPS research face reduced funding opportunities and limited recognition. A recent survey revealed that less than 5% of research grants in security studies focus on WPS-related topics (International Studies Association Survey, 2023), creating a self-perpetuating cycle where limited resources lead to limited research output.

The Human Cost of Academic Hierarchies

In a world where women are 14 times more likely to die in disasters (UN Women, 2022), where one in five refugee women faces sexual violence (UNHCR, 2023), and where 84% of conflict-displaced populations are women and children (World Bank, 2023), the marginalization of both women scholars and WPS research creates real-world casualties. The challenges women face in academic IR—from implicit gender bias in hiring to the struggle for work-life balance—aren't just personal hurdles—they're structural barriers that limit our collective capacity to create more inclusive approaches to peace and security. The absence of WPS in core curricula isn't just an academic oversight—it's a failure to equip the next generation with the tools they need to build lasting peace.

Addressing this intertwined crisis requires solutions as interconnected as the problems themselves. The University of San Diego's Women PeaceMakers Program demonstrates how targeted intervention can break the publication and citation barriers identified earlier—increasing WPS research publications by 42% and cross-citation between traditional security and WPS scholars by 38% over five years (Kroc IPJ Impact Report, 2021). The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) further quantifies what institutions lose when excluding women's voices: countries with higher women's representation in academia and policy showed 35% lower likelihood of violent conflict (GIWPS, 2021/22).

Drawing from these successes, I propose three concrete initiatives. First, establishing "WPS Faculty Committees" in IR departments, modeled after LSE's Centre for Women, Peace and Security, which achieved a 45% increase in WPS-focused dissertations through systematic curriculum integration (LSE, 2023). Second, creating an International WPS Research Consortium, that builds upon the foundation laid by the International Conference on Action with Women and Peace—expanding from annual conferences to a permanent network of scholars with shared funding pools and mentorship programs. Third, implementing gender quotas for academic conferences and journals, ensuring women's voices are heard not just in classrooms but in every forum where security is discussed.

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As an aspiring young woman in international studies, I witness how the absence of women's voices and WPS research leaves fundamental challenges in peace and security unaddressed. The transformation must start in the academic environment where scholars understand—or overlook—the crucial role of women in pertaining to global peace and security. The world needs a generation of scholars ready to ensure that women's perspectives are recognized as indispensable to our understanding of how lasting peace is built. The future of peace depends on reimagining the very architecture of how individuals study, teach, and build peace—with both women scholars and WPS research integrated at its foundation.

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