

Book Review: Deeds and Words: Gendering Politics after Joni Lovenduski, edited by Rosie Campbell and Sarah Childs

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*This book addresses key themes in pioneering feminist political scientist Professor Joni Lovenduski's work. Alongside chapters on gender and political parties, quotas and recruitment, and public opinion and women's interests, vignettes by prominent politicians and practitioners provide innovative thinking thought pieces. This is a call to action for feminists within and outside of the academy, writes **Muireann O'Dwyer**.*

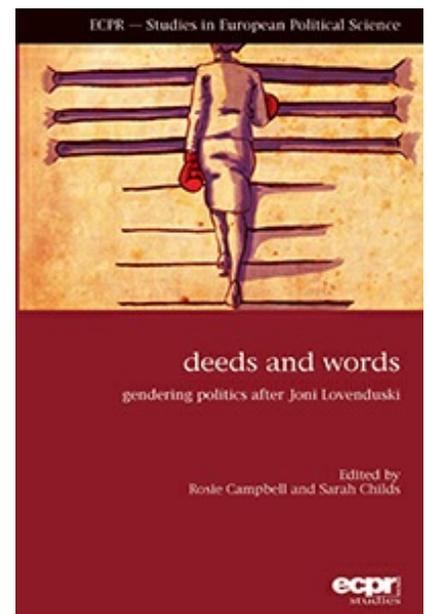
Deeds and Words: Gendering Politics after Joni Lovenduski. Edited by Rosie Campbell and Sarah Childs. ECPR Press. 2014.

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Though it is a collection of essays from some of the leading scholars from feminist political science, *Deeds and Words* is more than a review of the field. While it does indeed offer an excellent overview of the key contributions to feminist political science, and would therefore be a useful read for any students of gender and politics, there are two core arguments present in this volume that make it much more than a textbook. Firstly it shows the need for interaction between research and activism, and secondly it demonstrates the continuing need for the process of bringing gender into the political science mainstream. It is fitting then, that the collection aims to celebrate [Joni Lovenduski](#), a feminist political scientist who contributed so much to those two aims.

In their chapter on "Gender and Political Institutions", Fiona Mackay, Faith Armitage and Rosa Malley discuss the interaction between feminist political science and new institutionalism. This chapter highlights the potential for developing a distinctively feminist institutionalism – a way of exploring, explaining and testing the gendered nature of institutions, or the "rules of the game". Feminist institutionalism incorporates study of both formal rules and structures and the informal side of institutions. It shows how both aspects of institutions can be gendered, whether that means rules which exclude or inhibit women's participation, or informal expectations of behaviour that are built on gendered assumptions. This chapter offers two highly illustrative examples of the feminist institutionalist approach: Armitage's work on the Office of the Speaker in Westminster and Malley's comparative study of inclusion at Westminster and the Scottish Parliament. These cases highlight how the application of a gender lens can deepen understandings of the functioning of critical political institutions. As this chapter argues, the feminist institutional approach is one of great potential for feminist political scientists seeking to explore the expressions of power both within and on behalf of political institutions.

Among Lovenduski's many contributions is her work in the establishment of the [Research Network on Gender, Politics and the State](#) – the RNGS. Amy G. Mazur and Dorothy E. McBride discuss this work in their chapter of the same name. This project draws upon many of the approaches within feminist political science, including feminist institutionalism, gender and comparative politics, state feminism and gender and representation. The project is characterised by rigorous empirical work, combining methods both qualitative and quantitative, as well as a commitment to translating the findings from such work into practical, and usable information that can influence policy, activism and politics. The RNGS project produced several influential reports and briefing papers, including a



“User’s Guide” for the implementation of gender equality mechanisms which contains concrete advice for the adoption of best practice in this area. The project has also been truly global, with research and dissemination crossing national boundaries, and engaging with national, supranational and international actors. As such, the project exemplifies some of the finest characteristics of Lovenduski’s career – a focus on collaboration, consistent engagement with activism, as well as a commitment to the highest standards of research.

One of the innovations of this book is the inclusion of several “vignettes” – short pieces contributed by policy makers, activists and politicians. These vignettes were contributed by women working within politics – women such as Conservative Party MP Theresa May, Baroness Howe, Labour Party MP Dame Anne Begg and policy activists such as Mary-Ann Stephenson. Stephenson’s vignette discusses her work with the Fawcett society. This is a story that illustrates the need for engagement between feminist political scientists and activists, with each informing and supporting the work of the other. The Fawcett Society relied on empirical work on women’s voting behaviour in order to advance its claims in mainstream political contestation. In particular, it was the work of feminist activists, key amongst them Lovenduski herself, which informed the campaign to make all women shortlists a legal reality. In another vignette, Baroness Howe brings her experience of working with many public bodies, including the Equal Opportunities Commission. By drawing on her extensive experience in public life, Baroness Howe is able to highlight several key moments where feminist research was combined with activism and an opportunity for change to advance anti-discrimination laws.

These vignettes transform the call for interaction between activism and the academy from rhetoric into reality, and offer inspiring examples of where such collaboration generated meaningful change. They offer a strong reminder that research can have profound, and if utilised correctly, hugely beneficial impacts in the real life practice of politics. It is this understanding of the work of feminist political scientists as comprising more than words, but deeds also, that runs through this book, and makes it so much more than a review of an academic field – it transforms into a call to action for feminists within and outside of the academy.

It would have been easy for a book of this type to amount to little more than a celebration. Celebration of Joni Lovenduski’s work is certainly appropriate and deserved, and it is important to recognise how far feminist political science has come in recent decades. But there is a real danger of the project of reviewing the development of the field to encourage complacency. In an era where gender is present as a variable in most political research, and grant applications often require a gender statement as standard, it can be all too tempting to believe that political science has been sufficiently gendered. This book takes care, however, to point out that the work is not nearly finished. The various chapters point out potential avenues for future work, as well as highlighting continued gaps and areas of gender blindness. Further, to look back over the work of recent decades should serve as inspiration to keep working, rather than to sit back. To see the influence that feminist political science has had is to see the influence it can have in the future. In the end, there can be no more fitting tribute to Joni Lovenduski’s work and career than to continue this work.

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