The Leaky Pipeline

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Represent *is a series from the CSIS International Security Program on diversity, inclusion, and representation in national security. Dr. Naazneen H. Barma outlines how the national security academic pipeline leaks diversity at every step of the way, and what steps it can take to prevent the problem and promote more inclusion, equity, and representation.*

The last decade has brought a series of welcome initiatives to amplify, bolster, and expand the diversity of voices in the national security sphere—including the Leadership Council for Women in National Security, the Diversity in National Security Network, Out in National Security, and Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security. What each of these seeks to redress is the simple fact that a paucity of diverse voices in the national security spaces results in poorer national security dialogue and practice. There is a normative imperative: our national security professional cadre *should* represent us and the diversity of identities that comprise this country; it is the *right* thing to do. And the goal is also instrumental: bringing the wealth of a wider range of lived experiences into national security policy formulation *does* improve the process; it is the *effective* thing to do.

A crucial part of the challenge of achieving better representation in national security lies in the pipeline that runs through academia and into the policy-making sphere. Whether we are talking about those who undertake graduate education in order to pursue national security careers or about emerging scholars who want to make a career of studying and informing national security, the pipeline leaks diverse voices all along the way.

The "leaky pipeline" metaphor encapsulates the recognition that, **at various steps along the way, structural sexism and racism in the academy and in our society lead women, people of color, and other under-represented and historically marginalized groups to leave what could have been successful and influential careers**—in this case, in national security academia and policy. In any starting cohort of graduate students interested in pursuing such a career, some will be discouraged at the outset by blatant bias—the false message that minorities cannot contribute meaningfully and will not have successful policy careers. Others will feel the sting of the more subtle yet incessant signals sent to them over the course of their academic careers: such as a lack of representation in the classroom (in terms of both faculty and other students) and such a high degree of gender bias in curricula that only one in five required readings in core international relations graduate seminars are written by women.

For those who choose the path of creating knowledge via a PhD program, there are yet more hurdles to overcome. Recent surveys of both the International Studies Association and its International Security Studies Section found systematic evidence that women feel less welcome in the "club," are more likely to actively experience exclusion, and report alarming rates of harassment. People of color are often inaccurately siloed as area studies scholars and, as a

result, are not published in equal proportions in the "top" journals, which privilege particular perspectives, empirical areas, and regions of study. There are structural and institutional impediments to balanced hiring, tenure, and promotion experiences, as well as "unwritten rules" that systematically disadvantage minorities, especially people of color, in tenure and promotion processes. The numbers speak for themselves: women earn half of undergraduate political degrees but only 40 percent of PhDs; 35 percent of assistant professors in political science are women and only 22 percent of full professors. In the academy writ large in 2017, only 28 percent of assistant professors and 19 percent of full professors classified themselves as non-white (compared to around 40 percent of the U.S. population overall identifying as non-white).

For those who manage the balancing act of producing and publishing scholarship in the national security field as an under-represented minority, there are still more barriers to successful and satisfying careers in influencing or participating in the national security policy sphere. There is the constant discounting of expertise and experience. There is the role fatigue, even exhaustion, of often being the "only X" in the room. And then there is the more blatant shouting down and outright harassment made more visible perhaps by social media but always there behind closed doors. Anyone on social media knows viscerally that women, people of color, LGBTQ individuals, and members of other marginalized communities are more likely to be harassed and trolled for simply voicing an opinion, let alone having the temerity to engage in policy-relevant and public-facing work on the basis of true expertise.

I am a queer, gender non-conforming woman of color and a first-generation naturalized American. And yet my personal experience is not one of systematic disadvantage in my career—something I puzzle about a lot today. I survived my pathway in international security scholarship and policy engagement mostly by mimicking dominant strategies—like teaching myself to speak up with more certainty and fewer qualifiers, as much as that sits uneasily with my personality and intellectual style. I think that my path was also made easier because of ways in which my lack of conventional legibility (in terms of gender and race, in particular) doesn't allow people to easily put me in boxes. Not being in an obvious box made it easier for me to codeswitch. But I worry today, from a place of privilege, that mimicking and codeswitching also made me complicit; and it certainly sapped my energy. Other women, people of color, and queer folks in my various cohorts had much more difficult experiences. Many also survived, in different ways, and many got worn down over time, not for a lack of trying.

In addition to whatever individual strategies I employed, consciously or subconsciously, I have also had the extreme fortune of a great deal of socioeconomic and educational privilege along with an extraordinary network of peer and senior mentors that I know have combined in tempering any marginalization or adversity I have faced based on my visible identities. This personal experience has impressed upon me three things.

First, **intersectionality matters** when it comes to the effects of identity on access and representation. First-generation students and scholars of all races and genders face unique challenges in gaining access to the tacit knowledge and often unseen networks that can be so crucial in fostering success in academia. We must make the tacit as explicit and transparent as we can in order to make access equitable.

Second, **allies and networks matter**—which means there is *always* something we can do to enhance inclusion. To have earned success as a woman, a person of color, or an LGBTQ individual journeying the academic route into national security is to have survived. Simply crucial is the support of a wide circle of mentors and allies who never tire of giving hands up and advocating for inclusion.

And third, **representation matters**. For those who experience marginalization as a result of their gender, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and so on, we must commit to listening to and bearing witness to their challenges and, to the extent that any of us can, offering resources and advice based on our own diverse experiences.

The work of enhancing diversity and equity does not only lie in bringing people to the table. The bigger challenge is twofold. It lies in sharing with under-represented people the skills, both learned and tacit, as well as the resources that enable them to stay and thrive in the conversation. And it requires expanding the conversation in ways that enable diverse voices to be heard. Access to networks of support are essential in this regard. The team I am part of at Bridging the Gap is dedicated to fostering these conversations across cohorts of emerging as well as established scholars and to offering mentorship, allyship, and professional hands up to our network. Other initiatives, such as #NatSecGirlSquad and the Future Strategy Forum, are reaching across student and professional populations at all levels to lift up both new and established voices.

Under-representation—and the effects of sexism, racism, and other forms of bigotry—are systemic problems that require institutional measures to combat. In international security studies, tools to expand the representation of women and people of color on syllabi are making inroads. So, too, are deliberate efforts by journal editorial boards to demand balanced representation in citation practices and attempts to solicit more manuscripts from under-represented scholars. Although it is incredible that it took this long, it has become normatively unacceptable to feature conference panels or hold workshops that do not include diverse voices. And universities are redoubling their diversity and inclusion efforts in hiring and retaining faculty. [The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security project on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Higher Inclusion has just recently launched a rich set of resources to advance these efforts.] For those security studies scholars who are interested in policy-relevant and public-facing impact, social media and internet platforms for women and other under-represented scholars to promote their work and amplify its relevance for the policy and public spheres have also had some success.

On a final note, perhaps the metaphor of a leaky pipeline is itself flawed because it promotes the notion of a single pathway into the national security space, along with a dominant paradigm about what successful, credentialed national security academics and practitioners look like. Even as we continue to fix the leaks in the pipeline, we must also expand our definition of where national security academics and practitioners come from and how our diverse identities and lived experiences can redefine and expand the national security policy sphere and even our collective national security goals.

Author

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