

Making Democracy Work for Women?

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Democratic institutions have been for most women either a form of governance that has *exclusively* ruled women, or a form of governance in which women have ruled and been ruled *unequally*. These facts about democracies suggest that one should not presume that democracy is good for women; democraticization does not necessarily improve the conditions for women (Di Stephano, 1997, 206). Democratic institutions, from the perspective of women’s experiences, can be tools of domination *or* tools of liberation. Such a perspective on democratic institutions means that we need to ask different types of questions, ones that do not presume democracy—especially, representative institutions — to be an unqualified good. Instead we need to understand why democratic institutions do not work for women as well as they work for powerful men and we need to know what conditions contribute to democracies working better for women. To do this conscientiously requires attending to the differences among women and acknowledging that the benefits from democratic institutions can be distributed unjustly.

Adding women to any discussion of democracy admittedly “complicates” matters (Childs, 2006). In this article, I explore how feminist theorists have improved our understanding of democracy, generally, and of the relationship between women and democracy, in particular. I will do so by taking stock in recent developments of democratic theory and to highlight the contributions of feminist theory to these developments. Because a full discussion of democratic theory,<sup>1</sup> let alone the feminist contributions to democratic theory,<sup>2</sup> is clearly beyond the scope of this paper, my focus will be on only one aspect of the relationship between women and democracy—namely, the political representation (or lack thereof) of women in democracies.

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<sup>1</sup> For a very helpful overview of democratic theory, see Shapiro (2003).

<sup>2</sup> As Christine DiStephano noted, “feminists disagree mightily among themselves, though they are generally united in their commitments to the empowerment of women and to the eventual elimination of gender hierarchy” (1997, 205). Following DiStephano, my discussion of feminist contributions does not presume that all feminists accept representative institutions; rather, my assumption is that feminists are committed to eliminating gender hierarchies.

I do so because political representation is an important, albeit limited, way that power is distributed in democracies.<sup>3</sup> Since women are disproportionately represented by men in all democratic states (Inglehart and Norris, 2003), it is important to understand the costs of having lower numbers of women among the political elites. It is also important to consider whether increasing the number of women will necessarily improve the representation of women. To evaluate the costs and benefits of the ways democratic institutions currently represent women, it is necessary to clarify what we mean by the representation of women. Consequently, I begin by articulating several important developments in democratic theory concerning how we should understand political representation. I then address the contributions made by feminist theorists to our understanding of the representation of women. Next I turn to two problems that complicate those who wish to assess the significance of the representation of women in democracies: the standards problem and the inclusion problem. Finally, I conclude by recommending some future research areas.

### *Democratic theory and Representation*

Contemporary democratic theory possesses three main models of democracy: the aggregative model, the deliberative model, and the anti-domination model.<sup>4</sup> Each model identifies democracy by a distinctive set of characteristics. The aggregative model identifies democratic institutions by the way they amass citizens' preferences. In particular, the competition provided by elections creates incentives for public officials to

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<sup>3</sup> Not all feminists endorse getting more women into the elite of the political system. For some, the integration of women into the political system is only significant to the degree to which such integration changes the structure of the political system (see Cohen, Jones, Tronto, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> All of these models reflect the general tendency among democratic theorists to identify democratic institutions by the existence of representative ones. As David Plotke (1997) succinctly put it, "representation is democracy." Increasingly, contemporary democratic theorists insist that representative institutions are not mere substitutes for or a second best alternative to direct democracy (Young, 2000); rather, representative institutions provide their own distinctive benefits, those benefits distinctive of democratic practices.

weigh citizens' preferences in ways that maximize the most preferences.<sup>5</sup> Such an understanding of democratic institutions makes voting the "primary political act" (Young, 2000, 22). In contrast, the deliberative model identifies democratic institutions by the ways they subject political disagreements to public reason.<sup>6</sup> Put simplistically, democracy is a way of discussing problems. Democratic institutions are understood by their ability to provide citizens with the opportunity to express and to refine their political positions. In this way, deliberative models do not presume that citizens have fixed preferences; rather, democratic institutions require citizens to justify their preferences and to confront those with whom they disagree. Finally, the anti-domination model identifies democratic institutions by their ability to resist the arbitrary and unjust use of power. Here, democratic processes resist the monopolization of power.

Interestingly, representative institutions occupy a central location in all three models of democracy. The aggregative model assumes that the competition among elites takes place primarily in representative institutions. The deliberative model also often assumes that deliberations will occur between citizens and their representatives or among different representatives. For example, Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson report that most deliberative democrats "favor some form of representative democracy. . . citizens rely on their representatives to do their deliberating for them" (2004, 30). The anti-domination model identifies representative institutions as one of the constraining devices of power. For example, Ian Shapiro maintains that the courts must balance, but not perform the functions of legislatures. Controversial issues should be sent back to the legislature with guidelines but not policy recommendations. Shapiro draws on aspects of the deliberative and aggregative models of democracy; however, he stresses that democratic institutions are ones that prevent the monopolization of power.

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the aggregation model, see Iris Marion Young, 2000, 19-21 and Shapiro, 2003, Chapter One. For summaries and critiques of the aggregative model, see Christiano, 1996, 133-50.

<sup>6</sup> There is an extensive literature on deliberative democracy, e.g Elster, 1998; Dryzek, 2002, Gutmann and Thompson, 1998, 2004; and Macedo, 1999.

Representative institutions, such as legislatures, are vital to resisting the monopolization of power.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, each model of democracy identifies different benefits from representation. For instance, the aggregative model identifies the benefits of representative institutions as having responsive and accountable forms of governance. Representative institutions provide incentives to maximize the preferences of citizens. In contrast, deliberative model contends that citizens' articulating and defending their demands on public resources educates citizens about their own and other citizens' preferences. Like the aggregative model, the deliberative model also values representative institutions for fostering accountability. The deliberative model, though, maintains that accountability occurs when citizens via their representatives must justify and articulate their preferences as well as listen to the preferences of their opponents. Finally, the anti-domination model of democratic theory understands the value of representative institutions as arising from their ability to resist oppressive power relations. Representative institutions are one mechanism for curtailing the monopolization of power. They do so by channeling competition and setting up internal checks that resist the arbitrary and unfair uses of power.

Of course, not everyone endorses representative institutions (Barber, 1984; Pateman, 1970). Some see representative institutions as a tool of domination (Rousseau, 1978). Some feminists have explicitly rejected the activity of representing others. For instance, Joyce Trebilcot (1988) rejects speaking for others with a lesbian feminist community on the grounds that to "try to get other wimmin to accept my beliefs in place of their own" is a kind of "discursive coercion and even a violence" (1).<sup>8</sup> Trebilcot's

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<sup>7</sup> Ian Shapiro has argued that "democracy is best thought of a means of managing power relations so as to minimize domination" (2003, 3). To view representation through the anti-domination model is to focus on the power relationships that constitute and shape the activity of representation. For instance, it would examine how institutional norms can constrain the actions of representatives. Like those who endorse the aggregative model, Shapiro insists that we assess the degree of competition, instead of the fairness or representativeness, of democratic institutions. He endorses representative institutions for creating incentives that keep democratic institutions responsive.

<sup>8</sup> For example, some feminists consider the task of speaking on another's behalf to be an act of domination. (For a full discussion of these views and the problems with these views, see Alcott, 1995). Political representation is not simply an act of political

views might strike some as extreme, indicative of an anti-political and anti-deliberative stance, however, her position reflects a deep skepticism about the ways in which the activity of political representation occurs—masking important differences within the community and placing different members’ opinions, interests and perspectives in an antagonistic relationship. Underlying the practice of representative institutions is an implicit assumption that antagonistic political relationships are the best way of adjudicating conflicts.

When one considers the extent to which representative institutions and practices legitimize democratic authority, and the extent to which democratic authority is used to legitimate the status quo, it is easy to see that our understanding of political representation might be part of the problem. The extent that the status quo disadvantages women, then, is the extent that our understanding of representation, specifically, our understanding of what counts as good representation of women, needs to reflect the political realities facing women in democracies.

### *The Meaning of Political Representation*

Most theoretical discussions of representation begin with Hanna Pitkin (1967). Pitkin’s classic work *The Concept of Representation* set the terms of how we discuss and think about political representation. In particular, Pitkin identified four alternative views of representation: the formalistic view which focuses on the processes of authorization and accountability; descriptive representation which focuses on the extent to which representatives “resemble” or “look like” the represented; symbolic representation which examines the emotional response of the represented to the representative; and substantive representation which focuses on the activity of advancing the represented’s interests.

Each view of representation provides an alternative approach for assessing the representation of women within a democratic polity. Women could vote their representatives in and out of office (formalistic view). Women could look like or share certain experiences with their representatives (descriptive representation). Women can

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assistance; rather, it can be a way of keeping certain interests, opinions, and perspectives off the policy agenda.

feel represented (symbolic representation). Finally, their representatives can act on women's behalf, advancing "women's interests" (substantive representation).

Moreover, Pitkin's analysis of political representation also shows why assessing the proper representation of women is such a difficult task. After all, Pitkin holds that the concept of representation is itself paradoxical: each of the different views of representation contains different and sometimes contradictory standards for how political representatives should behave. For instance, the descriptive view assesses representatives by their correspondence with their constituents while substantive view can assess a representative by their ability to be good delegates (follow the expressed preferences of their constituents) or good trustees (follow their understanding of the best interests of the represented).

Not surprisingly, conceptions of the representation of women possess similar contradictions. Women can be represented when their representatives follow the expressed preferences of women and women can be represented when a representative ignores the expressed preferences of women and acts in what she thinks are women's best interests. The standards for assessing representatives can contradict one another.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Pitkin's understanding of political representation seems to dictate the need for objective criteria for identifying who counts as a constituent as well as objective criteria for identifying the objective interests of constituents. Pitkin's analysis of political representation is certainly helpful in identifying different approaches to representing women; however, to the extent that women are heterogeneous group and to the extent that the concept of gender can expand or constrict, Pitkin's concept of representation is less helpful for determining whether women are being properly represented in democracies.

Recent theoretical work on political representation has shown the need to move beyond Pitkin. After all, contemporary political realities, such as how democratic citizens are being represented as well as who represents democratic citizens, have changed (Warren and Castiglione, 2004). Consider the important role of non-

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<sup>9</sup> Similarly, when a representative advances the preferences of women, it might be unclear whether that representative is responding to women or responding to other considerations, e.g. party demands or instrumental interests. This point was made by Mansbridge (2003b).

governmental actors, such as multilateral organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations, and even interest groups play in modern democracies. The activities of these organizations suggest that democratic citizens are not represented by their formally elected officials; rather, they can be represented by those whom they did not formally authorize and whom they lack any mechanisms for holding them directly accountable.

In her important article “Rethinking Representation” Mansbridge identifies four forms of democratic representation: promissory, anticipatory, gyroscopic and surrogacy. Promissory representation is the way we traditionally understand political representation: representatives are evaluated by the promises they make to constituents during campaigns. For this reason, promissory representation strongly resembles Pitkin's discussion of formalistic representation.<sup>10</sup> For both conceptions of representation are primarily concerned with the ways that constituents give their consent to a representative's authority. Drawing on recent empirical work and contemporary political practices, Mansbridge identifies three additional forms of democratic representation. Anticipatory representation occurs when representatives behave in ways informed by what they think their constituents will reward in the next election and not on what they promised during the campaign of the previous election. Anticipatory representation is forward-focused, as opposed to retrospective and challenges those who understand accountability as primarily a retrospective activity. Gyroscopic representation occurs when representatives “look within” to derive from their own experience conceptions of interest and principles to serve as a basis for their action. For gyroscopic representation,

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<sup>10</sup> An advantage of focusing on formal procedures of authorization and accountability is that it clearly identifies potential benefits that female citizens can acquire from representative institutions. For instance, the aggregative model touts the benefits derived from authorizing representatives in terms of the policy preferences one receives. It follows that all things considered representative institutions should provide incentives to public officials to be responsive and accountable to female citizens. The deliberative model stresses the educative function of representative institutions: Representative institutions provide a forum for hearing women's voices and thereby allowing them to impact the policy preferences of other citizens. The deliberative model suggests that women's understanding of their interests can be transformed and improved by democratic institutions. The third model emphasizes the protections that representative institutions provide against domination. It captures what is so unjust about the underrepresentation of women. As Anne Phillips explains, “it is patently and grotesquely unfair for men to monopolize representation” (Phillips, 1998, 229).

citizens do not seek to influence their representatives' actions; rather, they seek to impact the outcome of democratic institutions by simply introducing their representative into those institutions. Gyroscopic representation can take account the importance that character holds for democratic citizens. In an environment where one cannot know or even care to know all the political issues confronting representatives, gyroscopic representation functions as a less demanding form of accountability on democratic citizens. Finally, surrogate representation occurs when a legislator represents constituents outside of their districts. Surrogate representation captures the ways that citizens rely on legislators whom they do not elect to advance their interests. For example, Mansbridge discusses how Senator Barney Frank (MA) represents gays and lesbians who live outside of his district.

For Mansbridge, the different forms of representation generate a different normative criterion by which representatives should be assessed. For instance, gyroscopic representation requires citizens have access to information that allow them to assess a representative's character. All four forms of representation, then, are ways that democratic citizens can be legitimately represented within a democratic regime. Yet none of the latter three forms representation operates through the formal mechanisms of authorization and accountability.

Following Mansbridge's discussion, we should no longer talk about democratic representation as a completely unified concept — one that focuses primarily on formal procedures of authorization and accountability. Democratic representation has multiple dimensions. Given these changing ways that women are being represented, it is important to assess how of these different forms of representation can increase or decrease women's power in democratic polities, specifically, how they increase or decrease the ability of women to hold their representatives accountable. As Squires (2005) and Childs and Krook (2005) suggest, it is important not to assess not only *who* represents and *what* gets represented but also to examine *how* the substantive representation of women occurs. Following Mansbridge's advice on how we should re-envision democratic representation, those who study democratic representation need to be

alert to the different forms that women's representation as well as whether the conditions for accountability are present.<sup>11</sup>

Andrew Rehfeld contends that we need to go farther: focusing our conception of political representation on the audience's reaction (Rehfeld, 2006). According to Rehfeld, political representatives are whoever is recognized as a representative—implicitly suggesting that women's representative are whomever are recognized by women (and maybe even whom men recognize as representing women). For Rehfeld, political representation is not necessarily democratic. The concept of political representation, and thereby the representation of women, is not necessarily linked to democratic norms and practices. For Rehfeld, political representation is not necessarily democratic. His argument suggests that those who evaluate the representation of women cannot assume that increasing the number of women in public office is evidence of further democraticization. Building on her argument for criteria to evaluate descriptive representatives, Suzanne Dovi (2006) specifies the criteria for distinguishing democratic from non-democratic representatives. For Dovi, women will only be adequately represented in democratic institutions when they possess representatives who are good democratic representatives—that is, excel at representing in a democratic fashion.

Thus, contemporary theoretical discussions of political representation hold some important lessons for empirical scientists. First, there are multiple forms of representation within democratic polities. These different forms of representation do not rely exclusively on the ballot box—democratic citizens do not always have access to direct mechanisms of accountability. For this reason, those who study the representation of women need to specify which form or forms of representation they are examining,

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<sup>11</sup> Questions remain about how we should study the different forms of democratic representation. What exactly makes any of these particular forms of representation democratic ones? Are they democratic to the degree they foster aggregation, deliberation, or anti-domination? Is it the synergy among the different forms of representation that makes these forms democratic? If it is the synergy, then women would be adequately represented in democracies when they have the right mix of gyroscopic, promissory, anticipatory, and surrogacy forms of representation. Or should we examine each form of representation in isolation from other forms to determine whether it is aiding or abetting democratic institutions? For instance, the gyroscopic representative would violate the standards of democratic representation if the only citizens that he refused to meet with happened to be women?

determine whether that the form of representation is democratic, and evaluate the effectiveness of the mechanisms of accountability for each form. As can be seen, the job of the empirical scientist just got a little harder.

*Feminist Contributions to Understanding the Representation of women*

Let me begin by acknowledging the many important and shamefully overlooked contributions that feminist theorists have made to democratic theory. To view democratic institutions from feminist perspectives is to enter a much rich richer and complicated vision of politics. Anne Phillips captured this insight in the following way: “Feminism multiples the places within which democracy appears relevant, and then it alters the dimensions as well. ‘Details matter.’”(Phillips, *Engendering Democracy* 158). Not only do feminist theorists challenge conventional ways of knowing and researching political life (Carroll and Zerilli, 1993), they also expand the proper scope of democratic theory: broadening the unit of analysis from the individual to the family unit (Okin, 1989) rejecting simplistic divisions between the public/private arena (Elshtain 1981; Landes 1988), criticizing the gendered assumptions of political research (Evans 1980, Sapiro 1979, 1987, 1991), and providing a more fluid and complex understanding of our political identities. Political behavior is not limited to the actions occurring within formal governmental institutions (Weldon, 2002).

Recognizing these many contributions, I will concentrate on how feminist theorists have helped us understand the question, “what would it mean for women to be adequately represented in a democracy?” In particular, I identify 4 major feminist contributions to democratic theory: 1) feminist theorists have expanded our understanding of what needs to be represented; 2) feminist theorists have identified formal as well as informal barriers to the representation of women; 3) feminist theorists have identified certain functions representatives perform; 4) feminists have identified the dangers of democratic norms that justify representative institutions.

The first contribution of feminist theory is to expand our understanding of *what* needs to be represented. Traditionally, political theorists focus on representation has been on interests. Brian Barry (1968) identifies at least three different meanings of the phrase “x is in A’s interests.” To be in A’s interest it could mean that 1) “A wants x”; 2) “x would

be a justifiable claim on the part of A”; and 3) “x will give A more pleasure than any other alternative open to him.” As can be seen, there are subjective as well as objective conceptions of interests. Problems occur when the two conflict. Such problems have led political scientists to set aside the issue of interests and focused on the policy preferences of constituents (Achen, 1975). In this way, democratic theorists have assumed that what needs to be represented is the expressed preferences of citizens.

Feminist theorists have refined our understanding of what needs to be represented in three important ways. The first refinement occurs in their recognition of the problem of essentialism. Feminists noted that conceptions of “women’s interests” often assume some essential understanding of women — that is, they assume all women possess a common identity or shared set of interests.<sup>12</sup> They argue that we should not assume that all women view political issues from the same perspective—we should not conceptualize the representation of women by whether representatives enact a laundry list of women-friendly public policies.<sup>13</sup>

In response to the problem of essentialism, feminists have introduced two important distinctions: 1) the sex/sexuality/gender distinction and 2) the women/feminist distinction. The sex/sexuality/gender distinction is important because it differentiates sex (biology, physiology) from sexuality (sexual preferences, sexual orientation, sexual practices) from gender (social roles and status). These distinctions allow us to recognize how gender is socially constructed within any given society women are depends on the norms and practices of their society.<sup>14</sup> The women/feminist distinction emerges because

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<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of the problem of essentialism, see Fuss (1989) and Williams (1998).

<sup>13</sup> Ironically, the easier it is to identify a list of policies that all women support, then the less it is necessary to have a female representative according to Phillips. For this reason, Phillips rejects attempts by feminists to a list of policy preferences that all “real” women should support.

<sup>14</sup> A tremendous amount of feminist attention ranging from Simone De Beauvoir (1957) to Judith Butler (1990) has been paid to how we define women. For interesting contemporary discussion, see Young (1994) and Zerilli (1998). Patricia Mann contends that feminists “stop worrying about issues of identity and focus on issues of agency, or significant action.” (date, 225) For Mann, feminists need to stop paying so much attention to how we define the category of women and pay attention to how people are uncertain about how to act or how meaningful action is understood and changed.

not all women are committed to gender equality, let alone to the elimination of gender hierarchies.

Both the gender/sex/sexuality distinction and the women/feminist distinction reveal that conceptions of “women’s interests” are deeply ideological. Evaluations of the representation of women in terms of “women’s interests” will reflect a particular political bias of the researcher. How we identify interests reflects our commitment (or lack thereof) to feminism.

Iris Marion Young is responsible for the second feminist refinement about what needs to be represented. She identifies three important dimensions of political representation:

First I feel represented when someone is looking after the interest I take as mine and share with other people. Secondly, it is important to me that the principles, values, and priorities that I think should guide political decisions are voiced in discussions. Finally, I feel represented when at least some of those discussing and voting on policies understand and express the kind of social experience I have because of my social group position and the history of social group relations (Young, 2000, 134).

For Young, the representation of women occurs when their *interests*, *opinions*, and *perspectives* are being advanced. For Young, interests are what affects or is important to the life prospects of individuals such as material resources. Opinions are the values, principles and priorities of individuals. Perspectives are understood as particular kinds of social meanings. In fact, Young suggests that we identify whether women’s perspectives are being represented by what types of questions are being asked. The perspectives of women approach issues with questions that attend to how issues impact women. Again, any adequate understanding of the representation of women needs to move beyond their policy preferences on the issues being decided.

The third refinement about what needs to be represented explicitly links identities to interests. Here the work of Lorraine Bayard de Volo (2001) is particularly instructive. In *Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs*, Bayard examines the gendered Nicaraguan politics from 1979 and 1999 by examining the ways in which grieving mothers organized. Bayard convincingly documents how both the Sandinistas and their opponents used the image of grieving mothers to consolidate their own popularity and to attack their opponents’.

These mothers were not mere pawns of political campaigns; rather, they actively pursued their own political agendas and adapted their maternal identities to meet the shifting demands of changing political regimes. For instance, during the Sandinista regime, these mothers emphasized the image of mothers who continued the revolutionary cause out of respect for their fallen children. During the neoliberal presidency of Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, they emphasized the shared suffering of all mothers (the mothers of fallen contra soldiers and the mothers of fallen Sandinistas) in an effort to gain resources from Non-Governmental Organizations. Their public image and their “policy preferences” depended on the available sources for support. Bayard’s analysis shows that policy preferences cannot be divorced from identity formation.

For this reason, representatives should not be understood as responding to fixed policy preferences.<sup>15</sup> In fact, feminists have argued that representatives play a role in shaping (and thereby constraining) the political identities of female citizens. Most notably, Melissa Williams’ (1998) understanding of “representation as mediation” asserts that representation is not simply the aggregation of interests; rather, the reason that descriptive representation is crucial is because the political representation of women shapes the identity of those women. In order to be autonomous, members of a group need to participate in the formation of the identity of that group. Political representation is not merely how we settle political conflicts about competing policy preferences: what is being represented is a fluid and in some ways moving target.

The second major contribution that feminists have made to democratic theory is explanation of the formal and informal barriers to the representation of women.<sup>16</sup> Feminists have denounced the formal barriers as simply unacceptable to the proper functioning of democratic institutions be those barriers formal prohibitions against

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<sup>15</sup> Here feminist analysis overlaps in important ways with the insights of John Zaller (1992).

<sup>16</sup> Feminists have also identified various barriers that prevent women from participating in numbers equal to those of males, such as political recruitment (Norris, 1995), socialization (Jennings, 1983).

women voting or against women from running for office.<sup>17</sup> However, feminists have also identified informal barriers to “real representation.”

Iris Marion Young’s discussion of the five faces of oppression is particularly instructive for understanding the barriers that can prevent citizens from expressing their interests, opinions, and perspectives. For Young, real representation is blocked to the extent that women face violence, powerlessness, exploitation, cultural imperialism and marginalization within a democracy. All of these faces of oppression can prevent female citizens from being full members of a democratic polity. Although Young’s faces of oppression could be updated, e.g. an account of exploitation that takes into account the effects of globalization, Young improves our understanding of how democratic institutions can perpetuate forms of domination. Domination does not only occur when one group monopolizes power; as Shapiro seems to contend; rather, domination can occur when members of groups confront double-binds—that is choices in which all of their options punish them. How we understand and create our political choices is part of the problem according to Young’s understanding of oppression.<sup>18</sup>

For many feminists, formal and informal barriers to women’s representation can be detected when rates of participation of women or numbers of women in public office do not reflect their demographic numbers of women. As Catherine MacKinnon wrote, “Feminists have this nasty habit of counting bodies and refusing not to notice their gender” (1987, 35). Differences, specifically relative lower numbers of women, are seen as evidence of discrimination. Of course, feminist analyses of discrimination should not and are not limited to observable and measurable sex differences in the behavior of female representatives or of female citizens (Lovenduski and Norris, 2003). After all, the absence of sex differences does not mean that the political arena is free from structural forms of discrimination (Squires, 1999, Sudbury, 1998, Randall, 2002). For example, women’s presence in legislatures may cause men to be more concerned about women’s

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<sup>17</sup> Famously, Joseph Schumpeter (1976) argues that democracies should be able to determine the scope of who participates. Since democracies are allowed to decide who counts as the people, a democracy can legitimately decide to rule out women as full citizens.

<sup>18</sup> Clarissa Hayward’s analysis of power (2000) offers an alternative view of how choices are constrained institutionally.

issues and thereby leaving no room for gender differences (Reingold, 2000). However, feminist understandings of gender differences contribute to our method for identifying when women are not adequately represented.

Feminist theorists have also contributed to our understanding of the functions of political representatives. These functions emerge in feminist explanations of why it matters who participates. Feminist theorists have articulated a number of different explanations for why women are needed to represent women (e.g. Sapiro, 1998; Diamond and Hartsock, 1998; Gould, 1996; Williams, 1998; Phillips, 1991; 1995; 1998; Mansbridge, 1999; Young, 1990; 2000).<sup>19</sup> To contend that the actual choice of representative matters, as these feminists do, contradicts the faith that democratic theorists place in institutional design. From James Madison to Joseph Schumpeter, democratic theorists often assert that democratic institutions do not require “angels” because by channeling competing interests against each other, democratic institutions create incentive structures for responsive and accountable government. Feminists’ arguments for descriptive representation identify reasons for why institutional designs are not enough—representatives play certain functions in democratic institutions, ones that only some people can perform.

The number of reasons for having female representatives sometimes seems to be growing exponentially. Moreover, these reasons are often refined by empirical analysis. There are at least seven distinct arguments for why female representatives are necessary: *the role model argument, the justice argument, the trust argument, the increase participation argument, the legitimacy argument, the transformative argument, and the*

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<sup>19</sup> In their terminology, they have advanced reasons to think that “descriptive representation,” “group representation,” “the politics of presence,” or “self-representation” is important. For my purposes, I shall refer to all of these different views as simply descriptive representation. By descriptive representation, I mean the view that women need to be represented by female representatives. I recognize that there are important differences among these different views. However, for my purposes, what is important is their explanation of why it matters who represents.

*overlooked interests argument*.<sup>20</sup> Each of these arguments points to a different function that representatives, specifically descriptive representatives, can have in democracies.

The role model argument contends that having female representatives improves female citizens' self-esteem. Seeing Margaret Thatcher or Nancy Pelosi in leadership positions increases female citizens' sense of the possible, expanding their career choices to include the highest political positions of power and inspiring other female citizens to imitate their career paths.<sup>21</sup> The role model argument captures how female representatives can "mentor" other females, e.g. showing them how to raise money (Driscoll and Kanthak, 2006). The *justice argument* contends that fairness demands that men and women be present in roughly equal numbers in the political arena. As Anne Phillips (229) explains, "it is patently and grotesquely unfair for men to monopolize representation." Descriptive representation makes up for existing inequalities and combats the formal and informal barriers to participation by supplementing certain groups access to the political arena. The justice argument suggests that the need for female representatives is tied to citizens' sense of fairness.<sup>22</sup> The *trust argument* focuses on the past betrayals of historically disadvantaged groups by privileged groups. Given the experiences that women have had with men claiming to represent them, descriptive representatives are needed to increase

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<sup>20</sup> Anne Phillips identifies four main arguments for representation: overlooked interests, justice, revitalized democracy and role model argument. Drawing on Phillips' discussion, my 7 arguments draw on differences that have emerged within the empirical and theoretical literature.

<sup>21</sup> For an alternative explanation of the role-model effect, see Wolbrecht and Campbell, 2006.

<sup>22</sup> For this reason, we need to explore whether women feel unfairly represented by male and female representatives as well as explore whether men feel unfairly represented by male and female representatives.

the trust of democratic citizens in their institutions.<sup>23</sup> The *increased participation argument* contends that participation rates respond to the number of women in office. Having more women in office will raise the number of women who vote, lobby, and get involved in politics (or at least increase the political interest and participatory attitudes on women in the electorate).<sup>24</sup> If Hillary Clinton runs for office, the increased participation argument would predict a rise in the number of women voting and supporting her candidacy.<sup>25</sup> The *legitimacy argument* contends that the perceived legitimacy of democratic institutions varies with the number of representatives from historically disadvantaged groups. To have a legislature with 100% women would indicate that such a legislature would illegitimately represent men. Evaluations of representative institutions are based on who is present. The *transformative argument* contends that the presence of women allows democratic institutions to live up to their ideals. There is a general recognition that no fully democratic state has ever existed. To the extent that the presence of women in positions of power marks a change in the norms of democratic institutions, descriptive representation has the potential to improve democratic institutions, creating fairer and more equitable forms of governance. This argument implicitly assumes that women will behave differently than powerful male

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<sup>23</sup> For an interesting alternative explanation of the value of descriptive representatives for trust, see Claudine Gay (2002).

<sup>24</sup> Empirical evidence seems to support that the number of women in elective office or the number of credible female candidates increases the political interest and participatory attitudes on women in the electorate. See Atkeson 2003, Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005, Burns, Schlozman and Verba 2001; Verba, Burns and Schlozman 1997.

<sup>25</sup> Often this argument for descriptive representation cites the increase of black voters when Jesse Jackson ran for president (although they do not cite the Alan Keyes effect). For a discussion of the difference between descriptive representation of women and the descriptive representation of racial and ethnic groups, see Htun (2004).

representatives. Here the inclusion of women is assumed to be only possible when the political system has changed (Hartsock and Diamond, 1981). The final argument is the *overlooked interests argument*. According to overlooked interests argument, democratic deliberations and political agendas can be improved by having female representatives in public office. Put bluntly, male representatives are not always aware of how public policies impact female citizens. For this reason, the presence of female representatives can contribute to “the feminization of the political agenda” that is the articulation of women’s concerns and perspectives in public debates as well as “the feminization of legislation” that is public policies are desired to take into account their effect on women (Childs, 2006, 9).<sup>26</sup>

Jane Mansbridge (1999) has offered an important qualification to the functions of descriptive representation, claiming that the need for descriptive representation is contingent. Certain functions are only necessary in certain contexts. More specifically, Mansbridge identifies four contexts in which descriptive representatives perform certain functions. It follows that female citizens should prefer female representative when they need

- 1) to foster adequate communication in contexts of mistrust
- 2) to promote innovative thinking in contexts of uncrystallized, not fully articulated interests<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Improvements to the quality of deliberations comes because women are presumed to have more insight and attention than male representatives to women’s concerns, e.g. fully appreciating the inconvenience or hardship imposed on making female prisoners give birth in shackles.

<sup>27</sup> As Jane Mansbridge points out, the need for descriptive representation depends on the degree to which interests are crystallized. The more we know what disadvantaged groups want, the less descriptive representation is necessary. (This argument often relies on the example of Senator Carol Braun’s refusal to renew the patent of the confederate flag. In some ways, this example—which relies on an ah-ha moment—that is, once it is revealed that something was missing from a democratic deliberation, the omission is obvious—is misleading because it centers on an overlooked interest that did not spark much controversy within the African-American community.)

- 3) to create a social meaning of “ability to rule” for members of a group in historical contexts where that ability has been seriously questioned and
- 4) to increase the polity’s de facto legitimacy in contexts of past discrimination (Mansbridge, 628).

Note that descriptive representation will only improve the substantive representation of women in the first and second context. The third and fourth contexts promote goods other than substantive representation. Mansbridge’s discussion reiterates that those who study the representation of women should not only be concerned with substantive representation. Representatives can enhance the capacities of some citizens to rule themselves and can even increase the legitimacy of democratic institutions.

The final contribution of feminist theory is to point out the danger of seemingly benign and neutral values, values that underlie and justify representative institutions. For example, Iris Marion Young noted how standards of deliberation are biased against women’s ways of speaking, as well as their ability to be heard. Similarly, standards for full citizenship, such as autonomy, can be biased against the kinds of work performed by women. Democratic participation is often only available to those who have the time and resources to get involved (someone else is taking care of the housework, the kids, the sick, and the elderly). In this way, representative institutions are biased against those who provide care and those who depend on others (Smiley, 1992). The extent that democratic participation, and thereby certain forms of democratic representation, is only available to those who have the time and resources to get involved is the extent that some citizens lack fair opportunities to be full members of democratic institutions. Democratic institutions presume that citizens are roughly equal enough to contribute to policies that impact their lives and legitimate democratic authority. However, like other democratic theorists, feminists have revealed how democracy runs on the non-participation and non-involvement of citizens; feminists, though, have shown how democracy runs on the non-participation and non-involvement of certain female citizens.

### *Persistent Problems*

To study the representation of women in democracies is to confront two particular problems: *the standards problem* and *the inclusion problem*. Although these problems are interrelated, by separating them out, it is possible to see how each of these problems can adversely impact our assessment of the representation of women in democracies.

*The standards problem* addresses the difficulty of identifying a proper benchmark for assessing women's political performance in democracies. How do we know how female representatives and female citizens should be behaving? Whose behavior should we be comparing female representatives' behavior to? The standards problem arises because the proper comparison class of female representatives is unclear: should female representative's performance be measured against democratic ideals, male representatives' behavior, other female representatives' behavior, powerful male representative's behavior, or some different standard altogether?

Catharine MacKinnon is perhaps one of the most helpful theorists for articulating the different sides of the standards problem. For MacKinnon warns against understanding women's behavior primarily in terms of its difference from male behavior. Such an approach, what she calls "gender as difference" sets male behavior as the norm. The difference approach does not leave any room for standards that are better adapted for women's distinctive roles in society. Besides, a difference approach can also hide problems that occur when gender roles of male citizens and female citizens converge (Swers, 2002).

MacKinnon, though, is also skeptical of standards that affirm gender differences, e.g. posit standards designed to affirm and/or incorporate women's experiences. Such woman-specific standards risk affirming "the qualities and characteristics of powerlessness" (1987, 39). To the extent that women adapt to the status quo, and the extent that the status quo rests on the systemic injustices, MacKinnon encourages us to see standards themselves as part of the problem, products of systemic injustices. Although many feminists reject MacKinnon's account of women's culture, noting its failure to give women agency and its failure to account for the differences among women, MacKinnon's analysis of difference leaves those who are concerned about the lack of women in the political arena, and who wish to assess the performance of female representatives in a bind: In particular, the presence of women alone is not necessarily

evidence of progress. To recognize that there is no simple oppressor/oppressed distinction within democratic societies suggests that women can play an important role in perpetuating inequalities.

Interestingly, there is a growing consensus about the inadequacy of focusing exclusively on the performance of individual female representatives. Those who endorse a “critical mass,” arguing that female citizens will be adequately represented when somewhere between 15% to 30% of the legislature is female, recognize the importance of relationship among representatives for determining their performance level.<sup>28</sup> Laurel Weldon (2002) goes further arguing that it is inadequate to count bodies, women’s representation depends on the existence of women’s movement and divisions of the bureaucracy devoted to women’s issues. Hence, it seems that the representation of women cannot be isolated in the formal legislatures.

However, this trend of expanding the scope of representation of women also expands the standards problem. After all, if we need to expand the scope of representatives to evaluate the representation of women, we need to posit more standards for evaluating those representatives. Should all descriptive representatives be judged by the same criteria? Or should we judge female Senators differently from female, appointed bureaucrats? Furthermore, an additional worry is that explicating such standards will focus our attention on outliers (those female or male representatives who fail to adequately meet those standards) as opposed to paying attention to how existing standards for assessing representatives are created in ways that perpetuate gender hierarchies.

The second persistent problem that haunts evaluations of the representation of women is *the inclusion problem*. The inclusion problem recognizes the problems with becoming political insiders. The inclusion problem can take three forms: 1) the political inclusion of some women can marginalize others; 2) the concept of political inclusion can be biased against certain women; and 3) political inclusion is only desirable under certain conditions.

The first form of the inclusion problem results because of the significant differences among women. Women differ when they have children or not, are divorced

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<sup>28</sup> For criticisms of the critical mass approach, see Carroll (2003) and Childs (2004).

or not, employed or not, been raped or not, are straight or gay, obese or thin, Muslim or Christian, menopausal or prepubescent. These differences matter to the degree that attempts to increase descriptive representation of one group cannot be enacted without marginalizing further other vulnerable subgroups of women. For instance, Young discusses how the increased representation of Latinos can come at the expense of the representation of gay and lesbian Latinos. (Note that Young emphasize that this is a problem for all representatives, not simply for descriptive representatives. It occurs because one person cannot adequately capture the differences among the many). Cathy Cohen referred to how including some representatives from marginalized groups leads to marginalization of other members as “secondary marginalization” (1999, 70). Members of marginalized groups construct and police group identity as to regulate behavior, attitudes, and the public image of those groups. It follows that bringing some women into politics, representing some women’s interests, perspectives and opinions, can come at the expense of other women’s interests, opinions and perspectives.

To the degree that women is a heterogeneous category, democratic institutions can advantage some women as they disadvantage others. Representative institutions can divide women, pitting some women’s interests and preferences against other women’s interests and preferences. The inclusion of some female representatives should therefore not be taken to entail the inclusion of all women.<sup>29</sup> For this reason, those who study the relationship between women and democracy should not focus simply on the disadvantages that all women share. Rather, four additional considerations need to be examined:

- 1) How representative institutions confer benefits on some men at the expense of conferring the same or different benefits on other women?
- 2) How representative institutions confer benefits on some women at the expense of conferring the same or different benefits on other women?
- 3) How are *most* women impacted by representative institutions?
- 4) How are *the most vulnerable* women impacted by representative institutions?

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<sup>29</sup> For my discussion of preferable descriptive representatives, see Dovi (2002).

Since representative institutions create political winners and losers, feminists must be suspicious of patterns of privileging, ones that transform and improve the lives of some women as they disadvantage and marginalize other women.

The second form of the inclusion problem occurs because of the concept of political inclusion can be biased. Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) revealed the racial biases of our understanding of inclusion in her discussion of discrimination law. More specifically, Crenshaw showed how the court refused to allow black women to file charges of gender discrimination on the behalf of women because the firm in question had hired white women. White women were allowed to represent all women because they were only discriminated as women. White women were recognized as representing all women but black women were not. Black women are treated as a more restrictive category. Crenshaw concluded that

The court failed to see that the absence of a racial referent does not necessarily mean that the claim being made is a more inclusive one. A white woman claiming discrimination against females may be in no better position to represent all women than a Black woman who claims discrimination as a Black female and wants to represent all females 318

Crenshaw's analysis suggests those who study the representation of women should not assume that white women can represent black women any more than black women can represent white women. Here, how we understand the relationship among different forms of oppression, e.g. racism and sexism, shapes how we understand and "count" political inclusion (Spellman, date). It appears that feminists need more nuanced tools for assessing which groups need representation and which females gain from political representation.<sup>30</sup>

The third and final form of the inclusion problem focuses on the costs that come with political incorporation. Political inclusion is not always desirable. John Dryzek made this point when he argued that marginalized groups should only aim at inclusion in the state when "a) a group's defining concern can be assimilated in an established or

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<sup>30</sup> For an example of a nuanced understanding of gender, see Young (1994).

emerging state imperative and b) civil society is not unduly depleted by the group's entryway into the state"(1996, 475). For Dryzek, marginalized groups must be strategic about when and how they want to be included in the state. "If the interest of an oppositional group cannot be so related to an imperative, then inclusion means that the group will be co-opted or bought off cheaply"(480). Here Dryzek warns that political inclusion can simply be a form of tokenism and contribute to the loss of the outside pressure needed to transform the bargaining and self-interests found in representative institutions.

Similarly, Sonia Alvarez argues that the inclusion of women in global politics came at the price of mobilization of grassroots locally. For Alvarez, women were encouraged to "think locally and act globally." Alvarez (1998) warns that the growing specialization of feminists, what she calls the "NGOization" of the feminist movement, "has divided local public policy research organizations from grassroots political movements. Privileged women have become advocates for local women at the UN, but by focusing their activities in the international arena they have cut themselves off from local politics. As a consequence, those who advocate for feminist causes at the United Nations are not strongly affiliated with organizations trying to transform local political relations. For Alvarez, the logic of lobbies and negotiation does not easily lend itself to systemic reforms. Inclusion can promote instrumental bargaining at the expense of engaging in more transformative politics. Thus, all three forms of the inclusion problem will present difficulties for those who evaluate the representation of women.

*Future Areas of Study*

So where do we go from here? I would like to conclude by identifying briefly three future areas of study. The first area focuses on the ability of women to hold their representatives accountable. Recall the insight that not only are women being represented in different democratic forms but also that women can hold their representatives accountable in different ways. Here Ruth Grant and Robert Keohane's discussion of accountability in the international arena is instructive. Grant and Keohane (2005) identify seven types of accountability mechanisms: hierarchical accountability, supervisory accountability, fiscal accountability, legal accountability, market accountability, peer accountability and public reputational accountability.<sup>31</sup> They suggest that in the international arena, we should not assume that the ballot box is necessary for preventing the abuse of power. Sometimes indirect forms of accountability, relying on experts to monitor each other or the use of international law can be effective. Grant's and Keohane's insights about alternative forms of accountability suggest that the question is not simply what are women representatives doing, but whom are they responsive to and who holds them accountable. It is important to be able to determine when representatives are being responsive to women's movements and when they are merely responding to the demands of their party. Recall Virginia Sapiro's insight that "women's own actions have sometimes played only minor roles in some of the most profound legal or policy changes in comparison with other current problems and features of the political system" (1981, 705). Thus, the first future area of research is assessing how well women can directly and indirectly hold their representatives accountable. We need to examine what kinds of

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<sup>31</sup> Grant and Keohane (2005) attempt to explain how accountability is possible for organizations, especially international organizations, that are not typically considered democratic.

accountability are available to the various institutional reforms aimed at increasing the number of women in public office. It is also necessary to consider which forms of democratic representation enhance the ability of female citizens (and to specify which female citizens) to sanction their representatives and to increase the responsiveness to women.

The second future area of research concerns the differences among women. Feminist scholars need to determine when and how differences among women matter. Understanding the differences between descriptive representation of women and descriptive representation of race is one important step (Htun, 2004). However, if we are to take the heterogeneity of gender seriously, then assessments of descriptive representation need a more nuanced and politically salient way of determining which subgroups of marginalized groups require descriptive representation and how much descriptive representation is necessary. Here, feminists need to move behind identifying historically disadvantaged groups by their historical exclusion to justify which groups obtain descriptive representation. After all, sometimes democratic citizens must choose between which disadvantaged group (straight Latinos or gay Latinos) receive more descriptive representation.

Assessments of how democracy works for women must acknowledge how their fates are tied to racial problems and policies but also how their fates can benefit racial problems. Understanding how democratic institutions can serve some women at the expense of other women means that present forms of exclusion are relevant for assessing who needs more descriptive representation. Melissa Williams defines a historically disadvantaged group as one that has been marginalized over multiple generations, but can some forms of marginalization count immediately? Under what conditions do present forms of exclusion outweigh historically past ones? These questions are not easy but they are important for determining which women are adequately represented in a democracy.

Besides, determining which differences matter and when they matter is not limited to vulnerable subgroups of marginalized groups. Ideological differences, especially ones that take into account religious differences among women, need to be

addressed. Here feminist scholars are going to have to explore how conservative women can, in fact, advance the interests of some women by empowering certain women. We need a better understanding of the relationship between a politics of presence (what Phillips calls descriptive representation) and the politics of ideas. (For Phillips, democratic politics occurs when both a politics of presence and a politics of ideas are represented in a democratic polity but she doesn't specify how they relate to each other). One place to begin is the ways in which political ideologies contribute to the exclusion of certain groups. Simone Chambers and Jeff Kopstein (2001) have argued that we need to make distinctions between bad civil society and good civil society. Bad civil society is understood as civic associations that promote xenophobic, racist or sexist views. Feminist scholars need to make distinctions among representatives-- between those who promote gender hierarchies, e.g. justify policies by presuming certain gender hierarchies or inciting violence towards women and those who undermine gender hierarchies. A lot more needs to be said about how empirical research and theoretical accounts need to account for differences among women. What I can say here is that feminists should not presume that privileged representatives—be them white males or white women, promote hierarchies and that representatives from disadvantaged groups seek to undermine those hierarchies. When one adopts a complicated vision of representation, one realizes the need to be suspicious of all representatives.

This leads to the third and final area of future research: under what conditions do males adequately represent women? Because women have never had a democracy of their own, democracy is a form of political organization that is unavoidably done with men. Of course, women can have their own political spaces organized democratically; however, when one confronts the state, as feminists almost unavoidably do, they must negotiate, bargain, plead and demand for recognition and policies with, for, and from men. It would appear that democracy can only incorporate women's perspectives, opinions, and interests if that democracy has a sufficient number of good men — that is, male citizens who can go beyond chauvinism, who can identify their own policy preferences as enhanced by incorporating some women's perspectives, opinions, and interests. A democracy run primarily by Macho Men—to borrow Ursula Le Guin's

term—is unlikely to give a voice to the vulnerable; rather, such a democracy is likely to show that women can compete for power like the boys do.

Thus, it is necessary to identify the institutional conditions that constrain women's choices of representatives. Here the standards problem and the inclusion problem can be instructive for they can reveal how women face double-binds in democratic states. Pursuing one political strategy, e.g. incorporation, or adopting one set of standards, may serve some women while harming others. If this is true, then perhaps, one of the most enduring lessons from feminist theorists is that we need to be suspicious of how democratic institutions –specifically representatives ones --distributes privileges. Feminist contributions to democratic theory provide an important check on the rhetoric of democracy, exposing the ways our democratic rhetoric is over-inflated and the need to proceed cautiously.

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