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## WOMEN'S GOOD POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

**ABSTRACT** In this 'state of the art' mapping the major contours of three decades of politics and gender analysis, Celis and Childs re-make the case for women's group representation. Drawing on their recent book, *Feminist Democratic Representation* (2020), they call for rejecting traditional disaggregated conceptions of representation derived from Hanna Pitkin (1967) in favour of a procedural-plus approach. They hold that formal representational processes can and must accommodate women and do so in ways that take intersectionality seriously. Indeed, some three decades on from the publication of key presence theories – by Anne Phillips, Jane Mansbridge, and Melissa Williams – Celis and Childs urge politics and gender scholars to engage with recent work on democratic design as a means to re-design and re-build representative democracy 'for' women. In the face of women's ongoing poverty of representation, feminist democratic design's centering of equality has the potential to realize the good representation of *all women*, in their ideological and intersectional diversity, in and through electoral politics.

**Keywords:** political representation, gender, women, presence theories, democratic design, gender equality, descriptive representation, substantive representation, women's interests, intersectionality

As we look towards the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Anne Phillips' *The Politics of Presence*, we want to pay due respect to the transformation in the theoretical and empirical study of women's political representation it engendered. No one after Phillips regarded descriptive representation as unimportant (Childs and Lovenduski 2013). In this 'state of the art,' we broadly map out the major contours of the politics and gender literature over the last three decades and re-state the case for women's group representation as made in our recent

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book, *Feminist Democratic Representation* (2020). We do this by advancing a conceptualization of political representation that rejects the traditional disaggregated concept derived from Hanna Pitkin (1967). To date, this has been the dominant way scholars have applied and tested presence theories in favour of a procedural-plus approach. Rather than walking away from gender as a category of representation, we maintain that representational processes can and must accommodate women and do so in ways that take intersectionality seriously – ‘what is in the interests of women’ will frequently not only be contested but will also be in competition. With most of the world’s parliaments remaining unequal regarding the numbers of women and men elected representatives, we still contend that women’s presence within our political institutions is necessary, even as it can never be sufficient to deliver women’s good political representation. Indeed, we urge politics and gender scholars to engage with recent work on democratic design; there is a lot of feminist democratic designing and building work we can and should be doing. Ending women’s poverty of representation requires re-designing democracy with a feminist commitment at its very heart. Feminist democratic designers design for equality and, in so doing, realize the good representation of *all women* in their ideological and intersectional diversity, in and through electoral politics.

## THE DIMENSIONAL APPROACH

Hanna Pitkin’s *The Concept of Representation* has been a key source for politics and gender scholarship on representation, with many, ourselves included, introduced to her work via Phillips (1995). We avoid an extensive summary here primarily because these are already available (Childs and Lovenduski 2013; Celis 2008; Childs 2004), but also because we both recommend the (re)reading of the original text for how it speaks to contemporary debates within the field, and because any summary cannot do full justice to Pitkin’s reach, comprehensiveness and ongoing relevance (see, for example, Celis and Erzeel 2020, and Harder 2023, as we discuss below).

Drawing upon the word’s etymological origins, Pitkin defines representation as *making present again*. She further qualifies it as “The making present *in some sense* of something which is nevertheless *not* present literally or in fact” (Pitkin 1967, 8–9; emphasis in the original). Exploring the family of words

on the root 'represent' and its close synonyms, Pitkin advanced her four-part typology: (i) Formalistic representation; (ii) 'Standing for' descriptive representation; (iii) 'Standing for' symbolic representation; and (iv) Representing as 'acting for.' Outlined in Box x.1, Pitkin's dimensional approach continues to inform many theoretical and empirical studies of women's political representation. Chronologically, there has been a notable development that started with descriptive (and implicitly formalistic) representation, moved onto and/or added substantive representation, as the numbers of women in the world's parliaments increased, and with some scholars then turning their attention to examining symbolic representation. That said, these dimensions are observable, concurrently. In the 2000s, Michael Saward's (2006; 2010) concept of representative claims was warmly embraced by politics and gender (P&G) scholars engendering studies of the constitutive representation of women. In short, how gender and gender relations are constituted through representative claims-making (Squires 2008; Severs et al. 2016; Siow 2023a; 2023b). In the later 2010s, and following the affective turn in social science, Johanna Kantola's (2018) groundbreaking study on affective representation demonstrated how affect and emotions play out intersectionally in representation: by the representatives, in the representations they make, and amongst the represented. Whilst still a research domain 'under development,' we expect (and hope) the study of gendered dimensions of affective representation to be burgeoning soon, not least because affect is so central in the political strategies *against* gender and other equalities (Graff and Korolczuk 2022).

Of Pitkin's four dimensions of representation, the true meaning, in her opinion, is 'acting for' representation. This preference is reproduced in much of the P&G scholarship, where what is termed the substantive representation has given rise to extensive research. Many, again ourselves included, wanted – and want – to know of 'the difference women in politics makes.' Even as we think framing the question in this way is problematic (something we will return to), there is an intuitive appeal that changing who sits in our parliaments and governments will transform what is produced therein. Notwithstanding the seductive appeal of substantive representation, Pitkin's privileging of this dimension risks downplaying the other dimensions and reduces attention to how each might together mediate the quality of political representation experienced by women (see also Lombardo and Meier 2014).

Dimension	What constitutes representation	Critique/limitations
<i>Formalistic</i>	<p>The formal bestowing of authority (the right) onto a person to act for others and the ending thereof</p> <p><i>Authorization</i> – the represented become responsible for the consequences of the representatives' actions</p> <p><i>Accountability</i> – where representatives are 'to be held to account... for what they do.'</p>	Assumes that 'as long as they have been authorised, anything that representatives do is representing.'
<i>'Standing For': descriptive</i>	Correspondence or connection between a representative's characteristics and the represented.	<p>The characteristics warranting representation are not always self-evident or constant.</p> <p>There is 'no simple correlation' between representatives' characteristics and their actions.</p> <p>Risks concentration on the composition of political institutions (who is present) rather than their activities (what they do).</p> <p>Representatives can 'only be held to account for what they have <i>done</i>' and 'not for what they <i>are</i>.'</p>
<i>'Standing For': symbolic</i>	Symbols represent something or someone because they 'stand for' and 'evoke' their referent – the flag representing the nation, for example.	<p>Symbols can be arbitrary, lacking any obvious connection to what they represent.</p> <p>The basis for symbolic representation is 'emotional, affective, irrational psychological responses.'</p>
<i>Representing as 'acting for'</i>	<p>Representatives act 'on behalf of others', 'in their place' and 'in their interest'</p> <p>The relationship between the represented and the representative is such that the former is 'logically prior'; the representative must be 'responsive to' the represented 'rather than the other way around.'</p>	Assumes that 'normally' the wishes of the represented and the action of the representative will converge. When this does not occur, non-responsiveness can be justified in terms of the public interest.

### Box 1. Pitkin's Typology of Representation

(Source: Pitkin 1967)<sup>3</sup>

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3 Building from other overviews of gender and the dimensions of representation including: Childs and Lovenduski 2013; Galligan 2014; Childs forthcoming; Celis 2008.

## POLITICS OF PRESENCE THEORIES

The politics of presence literature is most associated with the work of Anne Phillips (1995) but includes key contributions by Jane Mansbridge (1999) who identified the contexts in which presence is necessary; Suzanne Dovi (2007) who offered a conception of the 'good' (preferable descriptive) representative; Melissa Williams (1998) who addressed the presence of historically marginalized groups based on the need for voice trust and memory; and Iris Marion Young (1990a; 1990b; 2000) who provided a framework for identifying social groups and what their representation entails. Again, and regrettably, we cannot do justice to their work here, but collectively, these theorists make the case for the political presence of descriptive representatives regarding gender, race, and other historically excluded, oppressed, and marginalized groups. In this, they directly challenge Pitkin's dismissal of descriptive representation. Phillips made a case for women's political presence on four bases. First, principles of justice. Now rarely contested, women's absence from our political institutions is increasingly regarded as *prima facie* evidence of injustice (Phillips 1995, 65). Secondly is the role model effect. Here, the presence of women representatives should engender women's greater descriptive representation as women see representatives who look like them 'doing politics.' Third is the realist argument that women's interests are discounted in the absence of women's political presence, and fourth is a claim that women have a different relationship to politics, one in which women will introduce a different set of values and concerns.

Whilst not always appreciated in cursory accounts of her work, Phillips turns away from a strong interpretation of presence and advocates instead for 'gender parity.' Her reasoning is both compelling and revelatory; early theorists acknowledged and recognized women's heterogeneity, prior to intersectionality becoming a dominant concept in, and concern of, the P&G field. There is, Phillips admits, no 'empirical or theoretical plausibility' to the idea that women share experiences or that women's shared experiences translate into shared beliefs or goals. Nor is it likely that women will organize themselves and formulate agreed interests (Phillips 1995, 53–55). Even so, their gender is part of what determines women's experiences and which requires their political interests to be heard and listened to within elect-

ed political fora.<sup>4</sup> In response to these seemingly contradictory assertions, Phillips (*ibid.*, 83) advanced her now famous ‘shot in the dark’ metaphor: “far more likely to reach its target than when those shooting are predominantly male but still open to all kinds of accidents.” In these lines, too, lie her concern about accountability, an aspect of representation that has still to receive significant attention (Lovenduski 2018); many of the limitations signalled in Box x.1 above relate to accountability.

Approaching the theoretical motivation for presence from a slightly different angle, Jane Mansbridge (1999) identifies four contexts necessitating descriptive representation:

- 1 Mistrust between disadvantaged and advantaged groups,
- 2 Uncrystallised, not fully articulated interests,
- 3 Where the social meaning of ‘ability to rule’ has been seriously questioned for members of disadvantaged groups, and,
- 4 Past discrimination against disadvantaged groups.

Similar to Phillips, Mansbridge distinguishes between substantive and non-substantive reasons for political presence. Of her four, only the first and second engender substantive representation: via communication and innovative thinking. The third and fourth – creating a social meaning of ‘ability to rule’ and increasing the polity’s *de facto* legitimacy – provide non-substantive, albeit significant goods. In her oft-cited words, which recognize experiential differences amongst women, Mansbridge writes:

“Although a representative need not have shared personally the experiences of the represented to facilitate communication and bring subtlety to a deliberation, the open-ended quality of deliberation gives informational and communicative advantages to representatives who are existentially close to the issues” (Mansbridge 1999, 635–636; *emphasis added*).

For these reasons, descriptive representatives are more likely than non-descriptive representatives to ‘react more or less the way’ the represent-

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4 In Iris Marion Young’s (2002, 97–98) words, women’s social position ‘conditions’.

ed would have (Mansbridge 1999, 644). The presence of 'a women representative' is an 'enabling yet insufficient' condition – in Suzanne Dovi's words, just any woman will *not* do. Surprised, as we are, by the lack of research that has applied her concept of the preferable descriptive representative empirically, her distinction is hugely instructive. *The preferable descriptive representative* experiences a sense of belonging, has strong mutual relationships with, and shares aims with others in the group – they want to see their "social, economic, and political status" improved – and experience a "reciprocated sense of having [their]... fate linked" (Dovi 2002, 736–737). Preferable descriptive representatives should be judged by whom they know and interact with and should have "strong mutual relationships with dispossessed subgroups of historically disadvantaged groups" (ibid., 729). In contrast, the *non-preferable descriptive representatives* "fail to further, and can even undermine, the best interest" of those they represent (ibid., 742)<sup>5</sup>; they do not share 'policy preferences' or 'values' with those they represent (ibid., 737–738).

## DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION

What do we know today of women's descriptive representation? For one thing, it is no longer the case that only feminist political scientists care about it. Descriptive representation is *the* dimension of representation that has international currency in the real world of politics and amongst the wider public. The Inter-Parliamentary Union's database provides international and regional comparisons (The Inter-Parliamentary Union 2019–2023a) and single country snapshots (The Inter-Parliamentary Union 2019–2023b), which in turn provide for over-time comparison. International organizations and academics have also constructed databases on political quota for women (Hughes 2018; Quota Project 2023; and International IDEA 2023). Anecdotally, more and more individual parliaments monitor and publish the numbers of women returned at each election. It is also fair to state that civil society women's groups and the media are, in many places, keen campaigners, reporting on the rising or falling percentages of elected women.

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5 See Dovi (2002, 733) for the risks of this leading to a questioning of the 'authenticity' of some descriptive representatives' identities.

Finally, we have direct experience of men politicians who seemingly do not care in principle about the number of women MPs, voicing concern about how their parliament or country will be judged if their international ranking falls or if their numbers are lesser than neighbouring or comparator parliaments. This is not to say that descriptive representation, nor sex quota, the central design intervention adopted to increase the numbers of women elected representatives, are uncontested. Over the last five years or so, any earlier optimism that this conceptual and real world battle was won has been severely tempered. Anti-identity critics, populists, and authoritarians – whether scholars, politicians, or members of the general public – are increasingly vocal in their accusations against ‘feminists’ obsessed with gender. Some critics argue for the reclamation of the abstract individual of liberal theory, as if feminist criticism of ‘him’ had never been made (Phillips 1991; Pateman 1988).

Within P&G scholarship, there also remain lively debates about the concept and operationalization of descriptive representation. Premised as it is on a correspondence between the representative and the represented, the extent to which a particular parliament ‘mirrors’ or is a microcosm of a country or region can appear as a straightforward test of the quality of women’s representation. Simply count the number of women present and compare the percentage within the parliament to those outside. Even as we agree about the critical importance of still counting their number, the study of women’s descriptive representation today is far from a simple task, as Table 1 below lays out. If intersectionality demands we always ask ‘which women’ are present, we must also be sure that our data and methods are up to the task of documenting women in their diversity and that our conceptual frameworks can explain the dynamics of differential political participation and recruitment.



<b>What is counted</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
<b>Sex</b>	Easily documented.	Single-axis; essentialist; non-intersectional; reductionist; misses ideology; exclusive of non-binary/queer persons.
<b>Gender</b>	Group identity is socially rather than biologically constructed; potentially trans-inclusive; with a femininities-masculinities continuum may include feminine men.	Single-axis; reductionist; rejects binary distinctions; non-intersectional; inaccurate data; misses ideology; potential rejection by some cis-women.
<b>Sex/Gender &amp; X</b>	Dual/Tri-axe counts the numbers of different kinds of women; documents the relative presence of different women.	Essentialist when sex-based; additive rather than intersectional; reductionist; misses ideology; missing data; potential rejection by some cis-women when gender-based.
<b>Multiple Characteristics</b>	Documents a parliament's makeup according to a range of identities; non-essentialist and non-reductionist.	Avoids single, dual, tri-axis approach; complexity of data collection; non-intersectional; risks inattention to women's descriptive representation.
<b>Representative Claims &amp; Acts</b>	Non-essentialist; agential; active correspondence is the result of the interplay of representative's presentation to and recognition on behalf of the represented; potentially ideology inclusive; men, transwomen, and non-binary inclusive.	Labour-intensive data collection; potential rejection by some cis-women and trans-women when men inclusive.

**Table 1. Changing Operationalizations of Women's Numerical Representation**

(Source: Celis and Childs 2020, 59–64)<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Building from Celis and Mügge 2018; Evans 2015, 2016; Kenny 2017; Yuval-Davies 2006.

## SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION

If justice arguments are sufficient to call out men's over-representation in politics, it is women's substantive representation that became the rallying cry for many, not least women already active in electoral politics and women activists in civil society. Whether theoretically sophisticated in making the links between the two conceptions or reliant on everyday assumptions about women and gender, this is the claim, contra Pitkin, that women once present in our politics would 'make a difference'. As already noted above with regard to Phillips, the linkage is qualified within academia, even if enthusiasm beyond it might downplay or even park the contingency and complexity of the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation. In scholarly studies, a veritable smorgasbord of intervening variables is identified (critical mass, acts and actors, newness, party representation, women's caucuses, parliamentary type, and so on and so forth – see Paxton, Hughes and Barnes 2020). The emergence in the 2000s of feminist institutionalism (FI) (Krook and Mackay 2010; cf. FIIN 2023) provided a particular and increasingly employed framework for analysing the gendered rules in use and gendered logic of appropriateness that characterize male-dominated and masculinized parliaments (Chappell 2006; Lowndes 2020; Curtin 2022). More recent scholarship thus maps the “fine grained descriptions of gendered environments accompanied by *explanations* of how gender constrains or enhances agency and affects stability and change” (Lovenduski 2011, x, emphasis added; cf. Erikson 2017; Miller 2021).

Empirical data have provided both supportive and querying findings regarding women's substantive representation. Whilst methodological differences in approaches to the study of women's substantive representation must always be taken into consideration, a recent review of over 500 publications by the Global Institute for Women's Leadership at Kings College London (Cowper-Cowles 2021) drew the following conclusions:

- Women policymakers prioritise issues that benefit the most vulnerable in society, such as healthcare, welfare, and education. As such, more women leaders seem to make for more equal and caring societies;

- Women may be more likely to focus on these issues because they have greater experience of deprivation and because they are often responsible for caring for others;
- On average, women work harder than men to represent their constituencies, which is linked to a stronger sense among voters that the government is (should be?) responsive to their needs;
- Increased representation of women in elected office is associated with counteracting corruption and focusing resources on the quality and consistency of public service delivery;
- States where women hold more political power are less likely to go to war and less likely to commit human rights abuses;
- Women bring collaborative and inclusive leadership styles into political environments that are often characterised by division and one-upmanship.

Looking back at the kinds of data and approaches used by P&G scholars studying women's substantive representation, it is clear that this has been troubled by the concept of women's interests, noted already in our discussion of Phillips (cf. Schwindt-Bayer and Taylor-Robinson 2011; Celis et al. 2014; Severs 2010; Campbell and Erzeel 2018; Dovi 2015; Schreiber 2014; Evans 2015; Kantola and Squires 2012; Smooth 2011). Key questions include: do women's interests reflect sex or gender? Are women's interests feminine or feminist ones? What is to be done with ideological differences amongst women? Can Conservatives act for women? How can the concept of women's interests cope with intersectionality? If there is competition amongst women over what is in their interests, whose should win out? The majority? The most marginalized? Then there are questions relating to what counts as sufficient to qualify as substantive representation: Is it when MPs raise particular questions, talk about an issue in their speeches, transform the agenda, or vote in a certain way? Does substantive representation include only parliamentary acts that are observable and measurable, or does it also include acts that happen behind the scenes (like *preventing* a law from being passed or mobilizing women to put informal pressure on a particular government minister)? Do representative acts always need to be explicitly feminist and/or even gendered? The search for sex differences may hide the

transformative effects on men by women rather than constitute a failure of substantive representation by women MPs. Nor is it clear ‘how much’ acting for women is needed for the substantive representation of women to be said to be taking place.

With so much rich empirical and theoretical P&G research and so many different ways and foci of women’s political representation to study, it can sometimes feel overwhelming, especially when faced with the enormity of what we have previously termed women’s poverty of representation. A few years ago, eight linked, overarching research questions were identified from existing empirical scholarship (Childs and Lovenduski 2013, citing Celis et al. 2008; Lovenduski and Gaudagnini 2010; Dovi 2007, 2010): (i) Why should women be represented? (ii) Who are the representatives of women? (iii) Which women are represented? (iv) Where does the representation of women occur? (v) How is the substantive representation of women done? (vi) When does the representation take place? (vii) To whom are representatives accountable? (viii) How effective is the (claimed) representation?

Against this backdrop, we want to draw attention here to three recent interventions which point to key agendas for future research: the first makes a case for a comparative approach to the substantive representation of sex and gender); the second offers an intersectional critique of empirical research on substantive representation; while the third implores the P&G field to walk away from the concept of women’s interests in favour of Pitkin’s notion of unattached interests. Erzeel and Rashkova have provided a very welcome meta-analysis of the substantive representation literature published from 1995 to 2021 (Erzeel and Rashkova 2023; Rashkova and Erzeel 2023). They structured their analysis around two key questions: (i) *What* is studied? Which social groups; which venues of representation; with what country/region focus; and how is substantive representation conceptualized; and (ii) *How* is it studied? Which methods, units of analysis, case designs, and what, if any, links are drawn to other dimensions of representation? In brief, they establish the dominance of studies of women’s representation (single-axis conceptualization) within a single country case, focusing on the governmental/parliamentary sphere. In response, Erzeel and Rashkova make the case for future research to be, inter alia, comparative (cross-country and cross-group) in ways that properly capture contextual specificity and are pluralistic regarding methods.

In this way, they contend, scholars will gain new insights into the quality and the dynamics and conditions of substantive representation.

In two recent articles, Orly Siow (2023a; 2013b) adds important new intersectional empirical research and accompanying research design to what she notes is the limited number of intersectional studies of women's substantive representation, and in so doing, provides the first such study of minoritized women's constitutive representation – as outlined in Table 2 below. Using an extensive data set of parliamentary speeches from the UK House of Commons, Siow identifies who speaks *about* a group, speaks *on behalf of* a group (Siow 2023b), and *speaks against* a group (Siow 2023a, 534). Arguably employing a narrow measure of what constitutes substantive representation – critics within and beyond P&G might want evidence of something more than talk even as FI scholarship would suggest that talking may be all that they can do in male-dominated and masculinized institutions – Siow nevertheless captures previously undocumented, even if suspected, representative dynamics. Finding them “uniquely motivate[d]”, “descriptive representatives are far more likely than other legislators (including white women and minoritized men) to mention minoritized women in parliamentary debates” (Siow 2023b, 13; see also Mügge et al. 2019). More than this, descriptive representatives “improve the quality of representation by constituting minoritized women less homogenously and in relation to a wider range of issues” (Siow 2023b, 3; emphasis added). At the same time, there are two important qualifications that Siow brings to bear. First, she reminds us that not all descriptive representatives are critical actors (as Dovi's work posited), whereas some non-descriptive representatives are. In her case, non-descriptive representatives act seemingly because the minoritized women's interests are “quite literally on their doorstep” (Siow 2023b, 11); minoritized women and their concerns are part of their electoral constituency. Secondly, Siow argues scholars of substantive representation should evaluate the performance of the institution *as a whole*, pushing the focus beyond both descriptive representatives and claims *for* a group. Some representatives might well be speaking on behalf of a group. Yet, others might well do so about and even against a group, counterbalancing desirable representations from the group's perspective with ones that instrumentalize, essentialize, stereotype, and actually disempower them (see also Joly and Wadia 2017).

<b>Substantive representation includes: Speaking on Behalf Of</b>	<b>Substantive representation excludes: Speaking Against/About</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Constitutes the group in a way that is not negative or hostile</li> <li>2. Constitutes the group as an end in itself</li> <li>3. Constitutes the group in relation to the structural factors which positions it as vulnerable</li> <li>4. Constitutes the group’s heterogeneity and in relation to a wide range of issues</li> <li>5. Constitutes the group on its own terms, including relevant civil society</li> <li>6. Maintains agency</li> <li>7. Makes an explicit request</li> <li>8. Constitutes both the problem and the solution intersectionally</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Constitutes the group in a way that is negative or hostile</li> <li>2. Constitutes the group solely as a means to an end (instrumentalizing)</li> <li>3. Constitutes problems as solely within a racialized community (stigmatizing)</li> <li>4. Constitutes the group as homogeneous or in relation to a limited range of issues (homogenizing)</li> <li>5. Constitutes the group relying on stereotypes</li> <li>6. Fails to maintain agency</li> <li>7. Does not make an explicit request</li> <li>8. Constitutes either the problem or the solution in relation to a single axis or structure</li> </ol>

**Table 2. Siow’s Facets of Substantive Representation**  
(Source: Siow 2023b, 4)

The final contemporary contribution, which has the potential to refine if not redirect P&G scholarship, is Mette Marie Staehr Harder’s reconsideration of the concept of women’s interest (2020; 2023). Hers is a bald call: P&G scholars should adopt Pitkin’s ‘unattached interests’ concept. In her reading, and even as she recognizes the field’s rejection of definitions of women’s interests premised on notions of women’s homogeneity, she argues that there are clear benefits of shifting to the concept of ‘gender equality interests.’

“When we conceive of an interest as unattached, neither the social attributes of the interest participants nor their membership in social groups form the analytical point of departure; rather, the shared political beliefs or attitudes of these people do” (Harder 2023, 6).

Empirically, what P&G scholars study might end up being very similar, she admits; a particular feminist operationalization of women’s interests may well be identical or very similar to the operationalization of gender equality. Table 3 below specifies three different ways of operationalizing gender equality interests.

	<b>Objectivist Path</b>	<b>Subjectivist Path</b>	<b>Constructivist Path</b>
<b>Interest Operationalization</b>	Interests are operationalized as facts about the world or as normative feminist goals.	Interests are operationalized as subjective matters.	Interests are operationalized as constitutive acts.
<b>Input needed to operationalize the interest</b>	Factual knowledge of the world (e.g., gender equality indexes, international conventions) or of normative feminist theory.	Knowledge of relevant actors' views.	Knowledge of the claims made by relevant actors.

**Table 3. Harder's Three Approaches to Operationalizing Gender Equality Interests**  
(Source: following Harder 2023, 12)

This is not to say that Harder does not recognize efforts to work with an open, rather than *a priori* understanding of women's interests (e.g., Celis and Mügge 2018) or start from the premise that critical actors are not limited to women (reinforcing recent findings by, e.g., Siow 2023a; 2023b; Joly and Wadia 2017; Mügge et al. 2019). She also acknowledges that her new approach does not resolve how to undertake empirical studies of substantive representation nor necessarily change what empirical studies find. It may well be that representatives with gender equality attitudes (disproportionately) map disproportionately onto women representatives (Harder 2023, 7). Even so, there are other benefits to adopting unattached interests that might be more compelling. In the first instance, even without prescriptions regarding the identity of critical actors, there remains an expectation that places the responsibility on descriptive representatives to act for those they descriptively represent. In turn, this effectively lets all other representatives off the hook. There are two other benefits from working with the concept of gender equality: it separates P&G scholars from "problematic assumptions that women and men have different interests and that there are only two genders." In discussing the implication of her approach, Harder identifies questions left begging: gender equality interests might misrepresent shared interests between women and men; may risk the 'political spearhead' (read: urgency and collective mobilization) when women are no longer the sub-

ject or actor of representation (Harder 2023, 12). We agree with Harder that future research must explore what might be lost in walking away from the concept of women's interests. These include, but are not limited to, how the concept of gender equality interests sit with an acknowledgment that women are *ideologically* and intersectionally diverse. If P&G scholars (including Siow as discussed above) have worked hard to ensure that studies include analyses of conservative and even radical right women (Celis and Childs 2014; Schreiber 2008; Wiliarty 2010), will they now be without our theories and frameworks for empirical study? Finally, as Harder raises, what will happen to arguments for women's descriptive representation if they are permanently divorced from any concept of women's interests? Will new arguments emerge? (Harder 2023, 13) Her own thoughts link women's presence to deliberation on the grounds of the importance of diverse testimonies, experiences, and perspectives.

## SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION

Women's symbolic representation has been studied to a lesser extent than substantive representation and in varied and often discrete ways, as noted in Table 2. Role model literature is quite limited, with some studies establishing that women role models in politics positively influence attitudes toward politics, participation in politics more generally, and individual women's decision to stand for political office.<sup>7</sup> Unlike substantive representation, it remains to be seen if a comparative research agenda will emerge in this respect, something we consider a highly useful development. This is particularly the case given Meier and Severs' recent intervention, which contends that positive assumptions are too easily made regarding the direction of the role model effect (Meier and Severs 2018, 36). What if role models promote the exclusion of some women? If the women present in parliaments are skewed to elite, majority women (as is currently the case), and/or if 'too

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7 Cf. Ladam et al. 2018; Sweet-Cushman 2019; Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007; Zetterberg 2008a; 2008b; Childs and Webb 2012; Carroll 2001. Hinojosa and Kittilson in this respect point at the importance of the visibility of women in politics to engender role model effects (Hinojosa and Kittilson 2020).



much weight' is given to their experiences, might other women not find themselves non- or misrepresented? (see also Dittmar 2020; Piscopo and Kenny 2020). Adding to the negative effects of women's presence in politics are those related to the violence they, and especially ethnic minority and racialized women, experience in politics, which might temper young women's political ambitions (Campbell and Lovenduski 2016). Another agenda-setting study by Amanda Clayton, Jennifer Piscopo, and Diana O'Brien (2018) tested the perceived legitimacy of all-male and 50/50 women/men committees. Over and above the findings of their case – that anti-feminist decisions regarding sexual harassment were 'more legitimate' when women were present, and especially so among men, those with less crystalized views, and self-identified Republicans – is the implication from their study for additional new research exploring how symbolic representation can manipulate, just as Pitkin had long foreseen.

The most popular approach to symbolic representation examines how women politicians are subject to gendered media copy with studies of women Prime Ministers and Presidents, Cabinet Members, and MPs. These are both qualitative and quantitative, and the experimental method has more recently been adopted (Haraldsson 2021; Rohrbach et al. 2023). The links with descriptive representation are often implicit in symbolic representation studies – women politicians and/or images or stereotypes about women are *the object* of the study. However, not all such studies draw direct links to conceptual work on representation; they may be more oriented to media and communication studies. As indicated above, Lombardo and Meier's (2014) innovative work offered sophisticated ways of understanding the relationship between symbolic and substantive representation. Notably, they identified an active role in symbolic representation by asking how the represented subsequently feel and act (Lombardo and Meier 2014, 7). Symbolic representation is here not merely 'standing for' but is also 'acting for.' Whereas substantive representation is responsive 'to the interests and needs' of the represented, the content of symbolic representation is determined by the symbol and its maker (Lombardo and Meier 2014, 28). It is, then, for the represented to respond – to judge this.

Conception	Key Research Question
Role Model Theory	What are the effects of elected women representatives on other women?
Media Representation	What is the nature and prevalence of media representations of women politicians? How do these differ from representations of men politicians?
Legitimacy	How does the symbolic representation of women affect the legitimacy of our political institutions?
Visual and Discursive Symbolism	Who is symbolically made present and absent in and through visual and discursive political symbols, visual and discursive symbols such as constitutions and laws, national flags, or public buildings?

**Table 4. Concepts of Symbolic Representation**

(Source: Celis and Childs 2020, 73–79)<sup>8</sup>

## REPRESENTATION AS A MÉLANGE

In *Feminist Democratic Representation (FDR)*, we explicitly rejected the dimensional approach to representation. This conclusion had been some time in the making. We had long accepted that it was more satisfactory, theoretically and empirically, to ask not “when women make a difference” but rather how the substantive representation of women occurs (Childs and Krook 2008). We strongly felt that focusing on one or two dimensions of representation risked false accounts of the quality of representation experienced by women, especially in their ideological and intersectional diversity. The case for a conception of representation “in the round” is presented in the following way:

“Conceiving of representation as a *mélange* requires us to establish not only whether women agree with the claims and acts made in their name, or the extent to which they are able to engage in counter claim-making, but also how they feel about their representation. It is entirely conceivable to feel badly represented not because of what the representatives do but because of a per-

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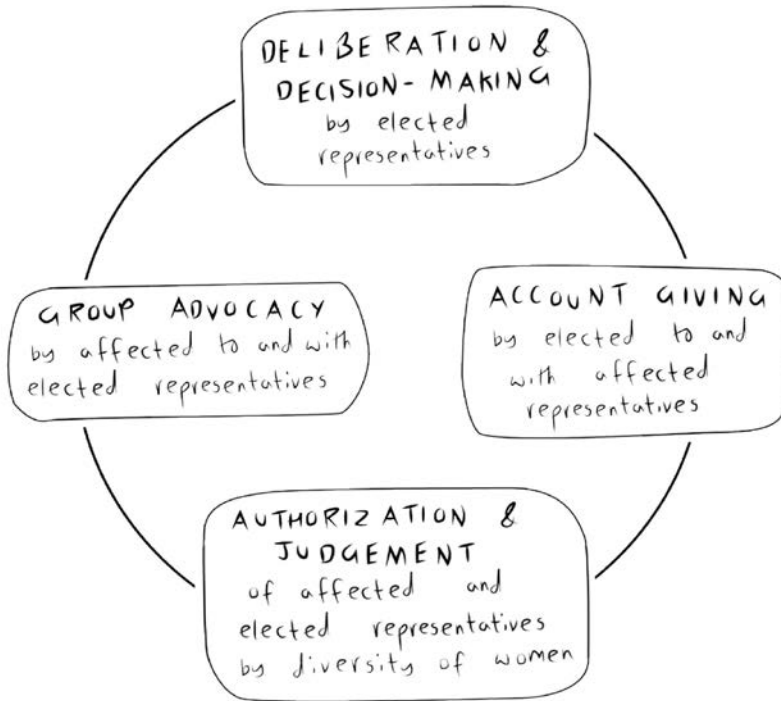
8 Building from Lombardo and Meier 2014; Meier and Severs 2018; Dittmar 2020; Piscopo and Kenny 2020; Childs 2004; Campbell and Childs 2018; Thomas and Bittner 2018; Clayton et al. 2018.

ception that those doing the representation are not the 'right representative at that moment in time and place.' Representatives making the 'right' claims might still be judged to have the 'wrong' ideological profile in the eyes of the represented or have made the 'wrong' arguments. Claims makers belonging to intersectionally privileged groups, might for example, be experienced as engaging in colonial or racist practices when claiming or acting for the oppressed and marginalized groups" (Celis and Childs 2020, 73).

Understood as a *mélange*, representation's classic dimensions are conceived as thoroughly entwined:

"Being well represented encompasses how women feel about their formal, elected representative relationships, the workings of democratic institutions and processes, and how those who stand and act for them speak, act and decide. Whether women feel and experience good representations is wrapped up with ideas and feelings of affinity, trust, legitimacy, symbolism and affect" (Celis and Childs 2020, 18).

Sceptics, and even sympathetic scholars, might ask what this means in practice: how can representation as a *mélange* be operationalized and tested? Here, our earlier move away from a *content-only* approach to the study of women's representation – with its focus on the 'what' of representation – in favour of consideration of the quality of *processes* of representation – the 'how' – is the starting place for our response. *FDR* makes the book-length case for the formal, institutionalised political presence of a new set of political actors, the affected representatives of women, within existing legislatures alongside the augmentation of established representational processes. At the core of our newly designed process of parliamentary representation are two additional representative moments: group advocacy and account-giving moments. Both take place publicly within a parliament and are designed to produce the virtuous circle depicted in Figure X.1 below. We offer here an introduction to this 'second-generation' design for women's group representation, with the 'first-generation' referring to designs focused on *presence only*, most importantly, gender quota (Celis and Childs 2023). Note that our new design complements, and does not replace existing ones.



**Figure 1. The Process of Feminist Democratic Representation**

Affected representatives are those who are epistemologically and experientially, but importantly also affectively, close to, and chosen by those they represent. These new representatives represent groups of women who are differently affected by the political issue under consideration due to their intersectional or ideological positioning. In securing the representation also of the most marginalized groups of women and countering within-group privileging and oppression, we give women's group representation a much-needed 'intersectional update.' Affected representatives are not merely witnesses or informants to extant parliamentary proceedings undertaken by elected politicians. Nor, crucially, is the presence of affected representatives in a parliamentary representation process a one-off, compensatory intervention, but is instead a permanent institutional provision.

In group advocacy, elected representatives *hear from and listen to* the voices of differently affected women. This increases the overall available 'store of knowledge' within parliament and beyond it (Young 2002, 83). Account giving is where affected representatives hold elected representatives

to account; elected representatives explain and justify the content, course, and conclusions of their deliberations directly to affected representatives and, through them, differently affected women in society. The affected representatives' status and their new institutionalised role render them 'equal of sorts' with elected representatives. In turn, this empowers the former and incentivizes the latter to know more and care more about representing women. It is for elected representatives, in other words, to show the affected representatives within the parliament as well as women (and men, for that matter) beyond it, that they have done something – *processed* in some way or other – the affective and factual knowledge provided by the affected representatives during their deliberations and decision-making (Celis and Childs forthcoming 2024).<sup>9</sup> A failure to be adjudged representing women well should invite criticism and incur costs to elected representatives, engendering greater responsiveness and representative relationships over time. In designing for highly visible, twin 'close encounters' (advocacy and account giving), we importantly also position the represented to judge their representation as a *mélange*: Did my affected representative do a good job? Have elected representatives (descriptive or non-descriptive) listened well? Is there a response to my needs, and did I like how they addressed me? Or did I feel talked about and over? Do I trust my representatives, and do they make me feel an appreciated, equal, and respected member of the polity?

The representational effects on the represented over and above being and feeling better represented include becoming *more knowledgeable* through repeated encounters between elected and affected representatives, and *more interested in and mobilised for electoral politics* because they will see the affected representatives of diverse operating as equals of sorts within the formal political arena. In turn, this should generate greater feelings of worth, efficacy, and affinity with the actors and institutions of representative democracy and engender greater participation as representatives, both elected and affected. If these are direct representational effects for the represented, additional indirect ones include increased participation of a wide diversity of women as a consequence of the affected representatives' role model effects (qualifications regarding role models noted above), and more broad-

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9 We would like to thank Dr Fraser King for suggesting this word to us.

ly still, greater societal appreciation of the democratic unacceptability of male-dominated and masculinized political institutions, and even more, of the reprehensible effects of superordinate intersectionality (Norocel et al. 2018).

## CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE FEMINIST DEMOCRATIC DESIGN IMPERATIVE

“How might or how should democratic institutions and practices be organized and activated for a given time and place?” is the question posed by Saward in his award-winning book, *Democratic Design* (Saward 2021, 109). His is an agenda-setting call to action to address issues of incomplete democratization to those who value democracy, academics, and practitioners. P&G scholars are well-positioned to respond. As this contribution has shown, P&G research on gender, intersectionality, and representation has not only contributed to a better understanding of politics *as is* but has much to offer an understanding of what it *could and should be* for women. Indeed, feminist democratic theory and empirical research have delivered new arguments and tested innovative practices. The feminist imperative to study and improve politics on the ground shows the relevance of P&G scholarship, not only for women and intersectional gender equality (important though this is) but for democracy overall. This is increasingly necessary in our times, where pervasive attacks on representative and liberal democracy are newly entwined with attacks on equality (Krizsán and Roggeband 2021). Constructed as an elite project operating against the people, gender ideology and anti-feminism is the ground where anti-democratic, populists, and illiberals come together (Graff and Korolczuk 2022). Here, oppositions are drawn between *inter alia*, gender ideology, feminism, identity politics vs. the people, and the ‘common good.’ Such confrontations are manifest in, for example, race and religious hate speech, political misogyny, and intersectional gendered political violence. All this is not just on or about women and racialized and marginalized groups but constitutes an attack on fundamental democratic values, spaces, and culture (Kantola and Lombardo 2021). To wit, democratic designers need P&G scholarship to further and protect democracies.

As we look to close this piece on women's political representation, we also want to say something about the new P&G research agenda that Saward's design work triggers. As we discuss elsewhere (Celis and Childs 2024), we refract his above-cited question through a feminist lens to imagine democracies that realize equality for women in their ideological and intersectional diversity. Democratic Design here becomes Feminist Democratic Design (FDD), outlining a bold and ambitious research agenda consisting of (i) designing *thinking*, the imagining of an intersectional feminist theory of democracy; (ii) designing, the creation of a plan that realizes the principle of equality, defined in an open-ended, expansive fashion (following Phillips 2021); and (iii) *building*, where new plans trial and revise their plans in situ, ensuring that democratic practices and devices deliver on the principle of equality. Feminist institutionalism, the gender-sensitive parliament literature (Palmieri 2019; Childs and Palmieri 2023), and the wider gender, political parties, and representation literature provide important theoretical and empirical guides, including offering a 'menu of feminist democratic practices' for establishing gender equality. This menu includes gender quota, gender mainstreaming, women's policy agencies, and the yet-to-implement ones, such as the new process of women's group representation described in *FDR*. FDD calls for sequencing and ordering these *single-institution* practices and, where needed, mixing and matching them with other (existing and yet to be designed) democratic innovations and interventions so that they engender political equality at the system level. FDD is but embryonic. But we very much hope that P&G scholars engaged in researching political representation are ready and willing to take up this challenge.

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## Dobro političko predstavljanje žena

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**Sažetak:** U ovom prikazu područja istraživanja koje mapira glavne konture tri decenije istraživanja i analize odnosa između politike i roda, Selis i Čajlds ponovo predstavljaju argumente za grupnu reprezentaciju žena. Oslanjajući se na svoju nedavnu knjigu *Feministička demokratska reprezentacija (Feminist Democratic Representation, 2020)*, autorke pozivaju na odbacivanje tradicionalnih raščlanjenih koncepcija reprezentacije koje su izvedene iz dela Hane Pitkin (1967), u cilju proceduralnog-plus pristupa. One smatraju da se formalni predstavnički procesi mogu i moraju prilagoditi ženama, i da oni to čine na načine koji uzimaju ozbiljno u obzir intersekcionalnost. I uistinu, neke tri decenije od objavljivanja ključnih teorija prisustva – onih koje su formulisale En Filips, Džejn Mensbridž, i Melisa Vilijams – Selis i Čajlds podstiču teoretičare i teoretičarke politike i roda da se late novijih radova o demokratskom dizajnu kao sredstvu za re-dizajn i obnovu predstavničke demokratije „za” žene. Suočen sa siromaštvom predstavljanja žena, fokus feminističkog demokratskog dizajna na jednakost ima potencijal za ostvarenje dobrog predstavljanja svih žena, u njihovoj ideološkoj i intersekcionalnoj različitosti unutar i preko izborne politike.

**Ključne reči:** političko predstavljanje, rod, žene, teorije prisustva, demokratski dizajn, rodna ravnopravnost, deskriptivno predstavljanje, suštinsko predstavljanje, ženski interesi, intersekcionalnost