

REPRESENTATION DEBATES

What do we mean by *descriptive, substantive and symbolic* representation, and how do these relate to women's political representation?

#SHE School Seminar series

Dr Fiona Buckley

Department of Government & Politics, UCC

Email: f.buckley@ucc.ie

Seminar

- Why is it important to have women in politics?
- Do women and men politicians prioritise certain policy interests?
- Representation debates:
 - *Descriptive (Hannah Pitkin, Jane Mansbridge)*
 - *Substantive: Politics of presence (Anne Philips)*
 - *Critical Mass: (Moss Kanter, Drude Dahlerup)*
 - *Critical Actors & Acts: (Sarah Childs, Mona Lena Krook)*
- Current and emerging research emphasis:
 - *Women's diversity and diverse experiences*
 - *Women's representation through an intersectional lens and analysis (Hancock, 2007; Murray, 2016; Mügge et al, 2019)*
 - *Representation of men and masculinity as well as through an intersectional lens (Bjarnegård and Murray, 2018; Childs and Hughes, 2018);*
 - beyond political science see work of Michael Flood and Raewyn Connell where work is more advanced
 - *There is a need to reflect on binary assumptions about sex and gender; not all experiences are encapsulated by the male/female binary (Heath-Kelly, 2020).*

Why is it important to have women in political office?

- The presence of women in political office is **normatively desirable**
- Women's presence in political leadership may act to **sever the strong association between masculinity and political leadership**
- Women's presence in political office in one country may have a **contagion or diffusion effect** on women's participation in public life in other nations
- Women in political office (in particular **cabinet office**) **influence policy outcomes**
 - *Atchison and Down (2009) argue that the presence of women in cabinet is of **greater importance** than the presence of women in legislatures*
 - *In their study of OECD countries, Atchison and Down (2009) found that **the representation of women in social welfare ministries in particular was key to explaining the extent of what they describe as 'female-friendly' social policies***
 - *Mushaben (2005) studied the presence of women in the Red-Green coalition of 1998 to 2002 and found that during this five-year period, **gender equality issues became a routine part of the policy agenda.***
 - *In theory, holding a portfolio may give ministers a **veto over any policy***

It is not enough for women to be in politics, they must be in power

(Mo Mowlam)

Why is it important to have women in political office?

- Phillips (1998: 224–40) identified four arguments to support women’s political representation.
 1. women politicians act as role models for aspiring women candidates;
 2. women should be equally represented for justice reasons as they compose 50 percent of most populations;
 3. women’s interests are inadequately addressed in a politics dominated by men; and
 4. women’s political representation revitalises democracy.
- Others have demonstrated that having women candidates and representatives boosts *women’s political interest, knowledge and efficacy* (Burns et al. 2001: 355).
- Increases perceptions of *electoral integrity* (PEI) (Stockemer and Kchouk, 2017)
- Clayton et al (2018) show that *women’s absence* from government makes Americans view government as *less democratic*. More women = to more trust in government.
- Catalano (2009:50) argues that women should be equally represented for symbolic reasons as *the historical absence of women in political institutions may be associated with perceptions of women’s second-class citizenship and the notion that politics is a ‘male domain’*
- Jane Mansbridge (1999) women’s presence as candidates and officeholders changes our sense of who has the “ability to rule”
- Thomas and Welch (1991) and Epstein, Niemi and Powell (2005) show that *female legislators are more inclined than male counterparts to advance policy proposals on issues of concern to women*.

Do women & men politicians prioritise certain policy interests?

- 3 trends to note from IPU's research:
 1. *Women & men politicians do not hold significantly different policy priorities overall*
 2. *All prioritise economic, finance & social issues*
 - *However, women emphasise the importance of social issues more often than men;*
 - *Men emphasise the importance of economic issues more often than women*
 - *However, women politicians are more likely to allocate a higher importance to issues/policies of women's interest than men politicians*
 3. *In general, women politicians take more parliamentary initiative than men on women's issues*
- **GENERALLY**, *the international literature shows that women in parliament are more likely than men to raise issues that are considered 'women-friendly' issues, or those issues, gendered to affect more women than men.*
 - Substantive representation
 - *But, not always the case.*

Understanding the concept of representation in feminist scholarship

- *Descriptive* representation
 - ❖ *The number or proportion of women in parliament*
- *Substantive* representation
 - ❖ *Assesses if women, when elected, act on behalf of women*
- The relationship between *descriptive* and *substantive* is the 'critical mass' concept
 - ❖ *Once women reach a particular proportion of parliament, they are able to exert a 'real' influence on decisions*
 - ❖ 4th UN World Conference on Women (Beijing: 1995) – 30%
 - ❖ European Parliament (2001) – 40%
 - ❖ Council of Europe (2009) – 35%
- *Critical Acts and Critical Actors*

Descriptive Representation

Hannah Pitkin (1967)

- Closely related to the *resemblance* model
 - *'Micro-cosmic representation'* (Judith Squires)
- Representation is multi-dimensional; has 4 distinct aspects (Hannah Pitkin: 1967) :-
 - *Formalistic; descriptive; symbolic and substantive*
- Descriptive
 - *'Standing for'*
 - *Addresses the question of who a representative is?*
 - *Promotes democracy, democratic values and citizen's political involvement*
- Used by scholars of identity politics, women in politics, multi-culturalism and minority interests
- **Mansbridge (1999)** argues that descriptive representation plays an important role in enhancing their substantive representation
 - *The importance of descriptive representation lies in the fact that women's interests are oftentimes uncrystallised*
 - *If women's interests are clear and well-articulated from the start, then it could be hypothesised that men are capable of representing those interests as well as women*
 - But issues not always crystallised and clear-cut;
 - Need women, who have a multiplicity of experiences of the issue/issues, at the decision-making table
 - *To offer a woman's perspective;*
 - *To bring a lived experience*

Substantive Representation (1)

Anne Philips (1995)

- ‘Acting for’ (presence) and ‘What is being represented?’ (ideas)
- If women as a group have interests arising from their particular experiences and perspectives as women, these will be best advanced by representatives with similar experiences and perspectives.

“There are particular needs, interests, and concerns that arise from women’s experience and these will be inadequately addressed in a politics that is dominated by men. Equal rights to a vote have not proved strong enough to deal with this problem; there must also be equality among those elected to office”
(Philips, 1995: 66)

Substantive Representation (2)

Anne Philips (1995)

What is a 'woman's interest'?

- *Wagnerud (2000)*
- *Mazur (2002)*

Critiques:

- *Is this not 'essentialist' – assuming all women are the same?*
- *If women's interests are diverse, which of these diverse interests are being represented*

Responses

- *Lovenduski (2005) speaks of bringing 'a woman's perspective' to policymaking, whatever the issue*
- *Philips (1995) has incorporated a distinction between sex and gender*
- *Philips (1995), Mansbridge (1999) Young (2000) speak of 'shared experiences'*

Is there a link between women's descriptive and substantive representation?

- *Yes, research has illustrated a link but it is not conclusive. Case studies have also shown that some women politicians are reluctant to be 'labelled' as "the woman politician" only available to speak about "women's issues".*
- *In 2000, Galligan et al found that women TDs were reluctant to be over-identified with feminist issues*
 - *Could this be shaped by the low numbers of women in politics at the time, as well as the culture and context perhaps? Trying to conform to the gendered (masculine) nature of politics in Ireland?*
 - *20 years on, had this changed?*

Must examine what determines the extent of substantive representation

- *Party Ideology*
- *Individual-level factors*
- *Institutional structures – traditionally party whip very string in Ireland*
- *Social climate; cultural change; are equality issues more generally side-lined during times of economic crises*

Critical Mass

Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977) and Drude Dahlerup (1988)

- Closely related to the discussion of whether “women politicians make a difference.”
- Argues that it is unrealistic to expect major changes until women’s representation had reached a critical mass
- A qualitative shift will take place when women exceed a proportion of about 30% in an organisation
- However, Dahlerup (1988: 234) found “no specific turning point can be identified, and that consequently the *critical mass* perspective should be replaced by a focus on *critical acts* that will empower women in general, for example, gender quotas”.
- Pin-pointing the exact ‘turning point’ or ‘critical mass point’ remains inconclusive
 - *Is it 20%, 30%, 35% or 40%?*
 - *Is it higher or lower than the above figures?*
- ***But***, Dahlerup (1988) argues that the story or hypothesis of critical mass is ***important***
 - *To justify more women in politics*
 - *To explain why small numbers of women in politics have limited impact on policymaking*
 - *A crucial tool for gender quotas campaigners as it succinctly illustrates the need for quotas as a ‘fast-track’ measure to increase women’s political representation.*

Critical Actors/Acts

Sarah Childs & Mona Lena Krook (2009)

- An alternative approach to ‘critical mass’:-
 - *focused not on when women make a difference, but on how the substantive representation of women occurs,*
 - *not on what women do, but on what specific actors do.*
- Critical actors are those who act individually or collectively to bring about women-friendly policy change.
- Critical actors as legislators who initiate policy proposals on their own and/or embolden others to take steps to promote policies for women, regardless of the numbers of female representatives.
- Importance of
 - *Institutional (legislative) constraints/opportunities*
 - *Party ideology and affiliation*
 - *Legislators’ identities and interests*
- Critical acts
 - *Gender quotas but should gender parity be the aim?*

Examining representation through an intersectional lens

- Murray, R. (2016) 'The Political Representation of Ethnic Minority Women in France', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 69(3): 586-602.

This article nuances the argument that ethnic minority women experience cumulative disadvantage within politics. Drawing on the French case study, I demonstrate a complex relationship between gender and ethnicity. The gender parity movement saw ethnicity as competing with gender and rejected claims for ethnic minority representation, but still drew attention to the homogeneity of French politics. Descriptive representation of minority women is now slowly progressing, as they simultaneously promote gender and ethnic diversity within politics. However, their inclusion is conditional on their willingness to act as symbols of secularity and assimilation. This particularly constrains the substantive representation of Muslim women.

- Mügge, L.M. et al (2019) 'Representing their own? Ethnic minority women in the Dutch Parliament', *West European Politics*, Volume 42, Issue 4, 705-727.

Ethnic minority women tend to be better represented in parliaments than ethnic minority men. What does this mean for their substantive representation? This article makes use of *intersectional* analysis to study how the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation differs within and between gender and ethnic groups. Drawing on written parliamentary questions and the committee memberships of MPs in seven parliamentary sessions (1995–2012) in the Netherlands, a strong link is found between descriptive and substantive representation. Female ethnic minority MPs more often sit on committees and table questions that address ethnic minority women's interests than male ethnic minority and female ethnic majority MPs. The link, however, is fragile as it is based on a small number of active MPs. This demonstrates the importance of an intersectional approach to understanding how representation works in increasingly diverse parliaments, which cannot be captured by focusing on gender or ethnicity alone.

Examining representation through an examination of men and masculinity

- Bjarnegård, E., & Murray, R. (2018) 'Revisiting Forms of Representation by Critically Examining Men', *Politics & Gender*, 14(2), 265-270

Research on gender and politics has made use of Pitkin's (1967) distinction between descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation to conceptualize and understand the different facets of women's underrepresentation and misrepresentation. The corresponding overrepresentation of men has seldom been explicitly recognized in this literature. We explore what the critical study of men and masculinities could contribute to the study of different forms of representation. Researching the descriptive overrepresentation of men implies recognizing male dominance and turning our attention from the factors that constrain women from entering politics to the factors that enable and reproduce men's presence. Researching the substantive representation of men also implies investigating how men represent men and identifying whether hegemonic masculinities privilege the representation of some men while neglecting others. Finally, a study of the symbolic representation of men implies identifying and describing the masculine signals and symbols that permeate political life but remain largely invisible because they constitute the political norm. Naming them as "masculine" will facilitate a gendered analysis of political institutions, practices, and discourses that are seldom questioned. We also consider the symbolic representation of men who do not conform to hegemonic masculine ideals and are not represented descriptively.

Avoiding heteronormative and cis-normative assumptions

- Heath-Kelly, Caroline (2020) 'Rejoinder: Women in the Profession? Assuming Gender in the Analysis of the Composition of UK Politics Departments', *Political Studies Review*
 - *There is a need to 'reflect on binary assumptions about sex and gender; ... assumption has been made that the M/F binary encapsulates all experiences'.*
 - *'I am concerned about the erasure of non-binary, gender non-conforming and trans people from the research'*
 - *Could deploy a survey whereby people could indicate their gender identity*

References

- Philips, A. (1998) 'Democracy and Representation: Or, Why Should It Matter Who Our Representatives Are? In A. Philips (ed.) *Feminism and Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pps. 224 – 240
- Burns, N; Schlozman, K.L. and Verba, S. (2001) *The Private Roots of Public Action: Gender, Equality and Political Participation*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press
- Catalano, A. (2009) 'Women Acting for Women? An Analysis of Gender and Debate Participation in the British House of Commons 2005–2007', *Politics & Gender*, Vol. 5, # 1, pps. 45 – 68
- Pitkins, H. (1967) *The Concept of Representation*, Berkeley: University of California Press
- Philips, A. (1995) *The Politics of Presence*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Mansbridge, J. (1999) 'Should blacks represent blacks and women represent women? A contingent "yes"', *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 3, pps. 628 – 65
- Young, I.M (2000) *Democracy and Inclusion*, Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Childs, S. and Krook, M.L.(2009) 'Analysing Women's Substantive Representation: From Critical Mass to Critical Actors', *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 44, No. 2, pp. 125–145
- Mansbridge, J. et al (2005) 'Gender Quotas 1', *Politics & Gender*, Vol. 1; No. 4
- Baldez, L. et al (2006) 'Gender Quotas II', *Politics & Gender*, Vol 2, No. 1, pps. 101 - 127
- Krook, M.L. (2007) 'Candidate gender quotas: A framework for analysis', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 46, pps. 367–394
- Grey, S. et al (2006) 'Do Women Represent Women? Rethinking the "Critical Mass" Debate', *Politics & Gender*, Vol. 2, No. 4, pps. 491–530
- Hancock, A. (2007) 'Intersectionality as a Normative and Empirical Paradigm', *Politics & Gender*, 3(2), 248-254.

References

- Celis, K. (2008) Chapter 4 'Gendering Representation' in *Politics, Gender and Concepts: Theory and Methodology* G. Goertz and A. Mazur (eds). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Caul Kittilson, M. (2006) 'In Support of Gender Quotas', *Politics and Gender*, 1 (4): 638-645
- Tripp, A. M., and Kang, A. (2008) 'The Global Impact of Quotas: The Fast Track to Female Representation', *Comparative Political Studies* 41(3): 338-36
- Atchison, A. and Down, I. (2009) 'Women Cabinet Ministers and Female-Friendly Social Policy', *Poverty and Public Policy*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, Art. 3, pps. 1 – 23
- Mushaben, J. (2005) 'Girl Power, Mainstreaming and Critical Mass: Women's Leadership and Policy Paradigm Shift in Germany's Red-Green Coalition, 1998-2002', *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, Vol. 27, No.1, pps.135 — 161
- Galligan, Y; Kathleen Kinight and Una Nic Giolla Choille (2000) 'Pathways to Power: Women in the Oireachtas 1919-2000 in' McNamara, M and Mooney, P. (2000) *Women in Parliament: Ireland 1918 – 2000*, Dublin: Wolfhound Press, pps. 48 – 50
- North, A. (2020) Are women leaders better at fighting coronavirus? It's complicated, Vox - <https://www.vox.com/2020/5/21/21263766/coronavirus-women-leaders-germany-new-zealand-taiwan-merkel>
- Beard, Mary (2014) 'The public voice of women', *London Review of Books*, 36(6) - <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v36/n06/mary-beard/the-public-voice-of-women> (accessed 6 June 2020).
- Lovenduski, Joni (2014) 'The institutionalisation of sexism in politics', *Political Insight*, September 2014, 16-17.
- Clayton, Amanda; Diana O'Brien and Jennifer Piscopo (2018) All Male Panels? Representation and Democratic Legitimacy, *American Journal of Political Science*, 63 (1), pp. 113-129