'Rethinking Women's Substantive Representation'
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Introduction

Over the last ten years, gender and politics scholars have engaged in extensive theoretical and empirical discussions on women's political representation. Although political representation is widely regarded as having a number of dimensions – formalistic, symbolic, descriptive, and substantive (Pitkin 1967; cf. Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005) – most feminist work on the topic focuses on descriptive and substantive representation and the ways in which these two forms of representation may be linked (Carroll 2001; Phillips 1995; Young 2000). More specifically, researchers ask whether an increase in the number of female representatives (women's descriptive representation) results in an increase in attention to women's policy concerns (women's substantive representation). Recent work criticizes this approach on two grounds: (1) the focus on female representatives ignores important differences among women, at the same time that it overlooks men as potential actors on behalf of women as a group, and (2) the focus on policy change formulated and approved by members of parliament limits substantive representation to one set of actors and a single site of political representation. Not only have scholars uncovered important differences among women, as well as initiatives among men, in efforts to promote women as a group (Childs and Krook 2006), but they have also observed a variety of other sources, locations, and modes of political representation (Celis 2006a; Lovenduski 2005; Weldon 2002). Drawing on and extending the insights of this research, we call for a new approach that recognizes multiple actors, sites, motivations, and goals in the substantive representation of women.

Our starting point is Saward's (2006) request to investigate 'what is going on' in political representation. In the case of women's representation, we suggest shifting the terms of debate from questions like 'do women represent women?' or 'do women in politics make a difference?' to questions like 'what is the substantive representation of women?' or 'what do we mean by the substantive representation of women?' The former set of questions reflects traditional approaches in the literature, which assume that only women can substantively represent women, that substantive representation occurs only in elected political bodies, and that the substantive representation of women requires that women be 'distinct' in some way from men (cf. Cowell-Meyers 2001). The core assumption in these studies is that 'numbers matter': an increase in women's descriptive representation in parliaments will generally – even automatically – translate into an increase in the substantive representation of women's policy concerns. The latter set of questions, in contrast, leaves open the question of who might act on women's issues, where substantive representation might take place, and what the substantive representation of women might entail (cf. Childs and Krook forthcoming). It thus does not presume that women's substantive representation requires a 'critical mass' of women, but rather explores the many ways in which women – and men – may seek to promote women's concerns.

To explore what is meant by the substantive representation of women (SRW), we engage in a critical reading of three literatures: mainstream theories of representation, feminist research on the SRW, and feminist literature on women's movements and the state. This work suggests four guiding questions for empirical investigation. The first is '*who* acts in the SRW?' Most existing

work focuses only on the behaviour of female representatives in national parliaments. However, it is well known that not all women in parliaments seek to promote women's concerns, at the same time that some men do. Further, research on women's movements and the state suggests that actors other than parliamentarians may seek to promote women as a group, as much and perhaps even more than women in parliament (Lovenduski et al 2005; Weldon 2002). For this reason, we argue that it is more fruitful to search for 'critical actors,' who we define as individuals or agencies who initiate policy proposals and often – but not necessarily – embolden others to take steps to promote women's policy concerns (Childs and Krook forthcoming).

The second question is '*where* does the SRW occur?' Most theoretical and empirical studies centre their attention exclusively on national parliaments. However, the broader literature on gender and politics suggests that the SRW may in fact take place in multiple sites. Women's issues are often pursued and debated at different and often interacting levels of government, namely supranational, national, regional, and local political assemblies. They also appear in a variety of political fora, like legislatures, cabinets, non-governmental organizations, women's policy agencies, civil society, courts, constitutions, and political parties (Banaszak et al 2003; Chappell 2002; Lovenduski et al 2005; Ferree and Tripp 2006). As such, we argue that it is crucial to consider the opportunities and constraints presented by multiple possible sites of representation, which may vary across countries and over time with regard to their potential to promote the SRW.

The third question is '*why* is the SRW attempted?' The existing literature generally assumes that women in parliament will pursue 'women's issues' – however these are defined – because they are motivated to promote interests that all women share in common. Scholars take different approaches to defining these interests, which are variously taken to include the autonomy and well-being of women (Bratton 2005), concerns that belong to the private sphere according to established views on gender relations (Meyer 2003), areas where surveys discover a gender gap in the population (Schwindt-Bayer 2006), and any issues of concern to the broader society (Dolan and Ford 1995). However, this approach involves making *a priori* assumptions about the nature of 'women' as a group, thus essentializing women and their interests and – in many cases – eliding the SRW with the feminist SRW (Childs 2004). Instead, we argue for taking a more eclectic view of the motivations behind the SRW, allowing them to surface – individually and collectively – over the course of the research process (Celis 2005; Weldon 2002)

The fourth question is '*how* is the SRW expressed?' Current work focuses primarily on documenting differences in the policy priorities, as well as the voting records, of male and female legislators. However, a number of scholars criticize this approach on the grounds that policy priorities do not always translate into policy initiatives on behalf of women as a group. Further, some are increasingly sceptical of the usefulness of voting as a measure of the SRW, arguing that voting in favour of women's issues simply requires a legislator to prefer a policy to its alternative. In contrast, activities like drafting bills, participating in public debates, and lobbying legislators and colleagues require a far greater commitment to the cause in terms of time, knowledge, and money (Swers 2004; Tamerius 1995). For this reason, we argue that it is necessary to explore interventions at various points in political processes to identify the claims made in favour of the SRW, the actions taken to promote the SRW, and the outcomes of these attempts in relation to various perspectives on the SRW. This approach enables – and in fact requires – researchers to treat failed and successful attempts at policy change as various instances of the SRW.

Answers to these four questions then allow us to ask '*what is* the SRW?' – or, perhaps more to the point, '*what do we mean* by the SRW?' Most studies implicitly suppose that the goal of the SRW is to take steps to empower – or at least, improve the lives – of women as a group. In

addition to specifying the content of the SRW, this approach identifies 'women' as the group to which representatives are both accountable and responsible. However, these assumptions can be criticized on several grounds: they adopt a paternalistic view of women's interests, allowing elite women to decide what 'women' as a group need; they often privilege some issues over others, rather than adopting a perspective that is more open to variations in the definition of 'women's issues' across countries and over time; and they leave men as a group out of the equation, neither allowing men to be actors in the SRW nor anticipating that men as a group will also be affected by these kinds of policy change. For this reason, we argue for a more agnostic definition of the SRW that leaves its means and goals as open for empirical investigation.

Structure of the paper

The first section of the paper examines three literatures that might inform a broader understanding of the SRW: mainstream theories of representation, feminist research on the substantive representation of women (SRW), and feminist literature on women's movements and the state. We summarize the main claims of each literature and then outline a number of key criticisms. The second section builds on these to develop an analytic framework for analyzing the SRW, which we argue can be used not only to better understand individual cases, but also to undertake the first comparative studies of the SRW.

I. Existing Research on Political Representation

Mainstream Theories of Political Representation

Mainstream discussions of representation are dominated by Hanna Pitkin's (1967) seminal work, *The Concept of Representation.* In this she identifies four types of representation but contends that only one - 'acting for' representation - is the true type (Pitkin 1967, 224).[1] The other three - formalistic, symbolic and descriptive- are, in her view, limited. In formalistic representation, which Pitkin defines as the formal bestowing of authority onto a person to act for others or where a representative is 'held to account…for what he does', 'anything a man does' counts as representation, leaving no guarantee as to the quality of representation *as it occurs* (Pitkin 1967, 55-9). Similarly, symbolic representation involves symbols that are often arbitrary - which rules out criteria of accuracy - meaning that the quality of symbolic representation lies entirely in the represented's 'attitudes and beliefs', which are open to manipulation by representatives (Pitkin 1967, 100). For example, women may be persuaded that they are symbolically represented by male representatives, but this conviction may have little or no substance (Childs 2006; Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995). Finally, the poverty of descriptive representation – where the representative 'stands for' the represented by virtue of a correspondence in their characteristics or a connection between them (Pitkin 1967, 61) – lies, crucially, in the key assumption that

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[1] Similar divisions of representations can be found in the works of other scholars. Griffiths (1960) distinguishes four types of representation: descriptive representation (the representative resembles the person to represent); symbolic representation (the representative embodies the spirit of what to represent); ascriptive representation (based upon an agreement between representative and represented which gives the former the right to act while the latter is bound to the consequences of those acts) and the representation of interests (the represented acts in the interests of the represented). Birch (1971, 1993) distinguishes descriptive representation, symbolic representation, delegated representation and elected representation. Braud (1985) distinguishes four 'ideas' that are inherent to the concept of representation: the idea of delegation or mandate; the idea of similarity; the theatrical idea (symbols, ceremonies, jargon and codes of conduct); the symbolic idea (representation of interests).

underpins it, namely a simple correlation between one's characteristics and actions, which is by no means certain. Moreover, a focus on descriptive representation, 'almost inevitably', and in Pitkin's view regrettably, leads to a concentration on the composition of political institutions (who is present) rather than its activities (what they do) (Pitkin 1967, 226). This is problematic because a representative cannot be held to account for 'what he is' but only 'for what he has done'. At the same time, the characteristics that warrant representation are not always clear nor self-evident (Pitkin 1967, 87; Judge 1999; Voet 1992).[2]

Representation as 'acting for', Pitkin's preferred type, properly refers to a relationship between the represented and representative in which the represented are 'logically prior'. More specifically, the representatives must be responsive to the represented and not the other way around (Pitkin 1967, 140). This implies that 'normally' the wishes of the represented and the action of the representative will converge (Pitkin 1967, 163-165). This congruency can be realised in two ways: first, where the represented give the representatives a mandate clearly stipulating what they should do, the representative is regarded as a delegate with no independence; second, where representatives are given a mandate to act on behalf of the represented, the representative is a trustee who may act independently from the represented. According to this latter vision, parliament is a forum where the interests of the constituents are formulated by the representatives and subsequently reconciled as the general interest. Since the represented are absent from parliament, they do not know what the general interest is, and thus by extension their own interests, and therefore representatives should not be restricted by the opinions of the represented.

Whether representatives act as trustees or delegates – to a lesser or greater degree – reflects their 'metapolitics': opinions about the nature of interests, needs, and demands; opinions about the capacities of the representatives and the represented; the relation between the nation and its subdivisions; and the nature of the political question at stake (Pitkin 1969, 19-21; 1972, 211-214). The representative should behave as a trustee the more the representative is considered to be superior in wisdom and experience to the represented, political problems are regarded as having clear and objective solutions which can be defined through a rational investigation, and national interests as a whole are stressed. Alternatively, the representative should incline more towards acting as a delegate where representatives and the represented are considered to have equal capacities; when political issues are more linked with personal preferences, thereby making objective, rational deliberation less appropriate; when personal and local interests are opposed to national interests; and when representation involves criticizing government and policy.

Recently, scholars of political representation such as Mansbridge (1999, 2003) and Saward (2006) have taken these debates one step further. In their accounts, 'creative' acts are fundamental aspects of representation. Mansbridge's conception of anticipatory representation, for example, refers to cases where representatives focus on what they *think* their constituents will approve at the next election, not on what they promised to do at the last election (Mansbridge 2003, 515, emphasis added).[3] In our view, this implies that the interests of the represented are in part a construction, created by the representatives as they act to please the voter at a later moment in time, i.e, at 'T+2'. Where this

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[2] Mansbridge's (1999) distinction between microcosmic and selective descriptive representation limits the 'moron' criticism which suggests that descriptive representatives will be 'less able' than others to act for others. Selective descriptives, rather than microcosmic ones, will not necessarily be less skilled.
[3] Reflecting on traditional political science debates on representation, Mansbridge (2003) draws out three new conceptions: anticipatory, gyroscopic and surrogate representation. In gyroscopic representation, the representative looks within, as a basis for action, to conceptions of interest, 'common sense', and principles derived in part from the representative's own background. Surrogate representation occurs when legislators represent constituents beyond their own constituencies.

process of construction is accepted by the represented, they will approve the representatives' actions by re-electing them. Arguably, the represented's acceptance may be based upon either the representative having correctly assessed the represented's interests at T+2 or, alternatively, the representative having transformed the represented's perceptions of what their interests are at T+2.

Saward (2006) deals more explicitly with this 'creative aspect' of representation. He rejects the assumption, often present in the delegate-trustee debate, that interests exist 'out there' to be simply brought into the representational process. He therefore advocates a 'basic shift' towards understanding representation in terms of 'representative claims' (2006, 298), contending that during the process of representation the representative creates, via these 'claims', the represented, himself or herself, and the broader audience. Such 'claims to be representative' may be made by a 'variety of actors', which include elected politicians but also 'interest group or NGO figures, local figures, rock stars, celebrities and so on' (2006, 306). For Saward, this reformulation highlights the dynamic, claim-based, performative, and constitutive aspects of representation. From this perspective, Pitkin's notion of 'acting for' representation is wrongly 'unidirectional', with the representatives acting for the represented, who remain passive (2006, 300). Indeed, Pitkin 'screens out by definitional fiat the idea that representatives…are actively engaged in constituting' the represented. Such an approach is misguided, according to Saward, because it ignores the fact that 'at the heart of the act of representing is the depicting of a constituency *as* this or that, as requiring this or that, as having this or that set of interests' (206, 300-1, emphasis in the original). This is because 'would-be political representatives…*make claims* about themselves and their constituents and the links between the two' (2006, 302, emphasis in the original). As a result of this process of construction, the '"interests" of a constituency have to be "read in" more than "read off"; it is an active, creative process, not the passive process of receiving clear signals from below' (2006). Pushed to its limits, this conception implies that the represented exists by virtue of the representative who subsequently seems to become the principal and the represented the agent.

The benefits of Saward's new conception of the representative process are four-fold. First, it widens the focus beyond actors traditionally understood as 'representatives,' namely, elected officials. Second, it reveals that the representative claim 'can never been fully redeemed,' as claims can be accepted or rejected. Third, through its depiction of representation as a performance, it 'forces us to look at representation in its cultural contexts.' Finally, it opens up the 'character of constituency and the stability and ready knowability of its interests'. On first sight, these two notions of representation as 'acting for' and as creative acts and claims (which, indeed, might be viewed as a discursive dimension of 'acting for') appear to resolve feminist concerns about the SRW. For the representative relationship to be operating, representatives – irrespective of whether we label them as trustees, delegates, or 'claimants'- must be responsive to women, otherwise they are failing in their 'acting for' representation.[4] But further consideration suggests that the story of the SRW is more complicated than this.[5] First, there exists little agreement as to what Pitkin's notion of the representative being 'logically prior' and 'responsive' to the represented actually means in practice. For example, is explaining one's actions and claims to the represented when the actions of the representative differ from the represented's wishes sufficient to be considered 'representation'?

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[4] Of course, a 'claimant' for SRW might act either as a trustee or a delegate.

[5] An additional concern we have regarding acting for representation, is that in representative democracies, which have complex institutional designs and where parties are the main political actors, responsiveness between represented and representatives is mediated by the wider contexts within which this relationship functions and it is difficult to hold individual representatives to account for particular actions or claims. This is addressed later in the paper.

(Pitkin 1967, 140; Birch 1971, 15-16; Rao 1998, 29, 31).[6] This concern takes us back to Saward's terrain of the represented as the product of the representatives' actions, which raises, inter alia, questions about the responsiveness of the claims, notably the degree to which they capture women's experiences in society, as well as the means by which women (the represented) can make alternative or contesting claims present in political decision making. More specifically, can a claim to be substantively representing women be revealed as not-acting for women? Can actions not claiming to be substantively representing women be so considered? And who has the power and legitimacy to do so: the 'created represented', other representatives, the women's movement, the female voter, or public opinion?

Compounding these limitations, alternative types of representation may have been too quickly dismissed or downplayed in the mainstream literature (Birch 1971; Judge 1999). Feminists, in particular, have devoted considerable efforts to conceptualizing (and arguably, reclaiming) the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation, between 'being like' and 'acting for' or 'speaking for' women (Phillips 1995; Mansbridge 1999; Young 2002). In these efforts, they can - and have - drawn on Pitkin herself. A careful reading of *The Concept of Representation* shows that she chose to take seriously the idea that elected bodies are determined to some (unsubstantiated) degree by those who constitute them even while she was aware that advocates of descriptive representation are concerned about ensuring such representation 'precisely because they expect the composition [of a political forum] to determine the activities' (Pitkin 1967, 63, cited in Judge 1999, 22). Proponents of descriptive representation emphasize the need for a resembling composition to assure that the representatives *would* act the way the represented would. In the absence of direct democracy (Brennan and Hamlin 1999), descriptive representation is seen as a means of providing information about the represented, but also as a way to avoid representatives taking care of their 'own' interests rather than of those of the constituents.

Feminist Research on Descriptive and Substantive Representation

1. The Complicated Relationship between DRW and SRW[7]

Accepting some kind of link between women's descriptive and substantive representation is the overwhelming position advanced in much of the feminist literature on representation. This does not undermine Pitkin's claim that our focus should be on what representatives *do* rather than what they *are*. Rather, it is to agree with Anne Phillips (1998) that the sex of our representatives matters to how they act - in the sense that women's gender may be an enabling factor in women's substantive representation - even when it is not *only* or *all* that matters. Such sentiments are evident in the numerous and explicit qualifications that temper claims about a strong relationship between women's descriptive and substantive representation: there may be a generalized agreement that the political actors central to women's substantive representation are likely to be

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[6] Mansbridge (2003) distinguishes between four types of representation in practice: promissory representation (the traditional model of representation where accountability is achieved through sanctions at the subsequent election); anticipatory representation (where the representative anticipates the position of the voters at the subsequent election) which encourages deliberation between the representative/represented; gyroscopic representation (where voters select representatives of the basis of how they will behave based on observable characteristics, which may include descriptive ones); and surrogate representation where there is no electoral relationship between the represented and representative although they may be a relationship based on contributions. The point relevant to this paper, is her claim that representatives' may act legitimately in several ways.

[7] The case for women's descriptive representation may be made for reasons other than substantive representation, most notably for reasons of justice and fairness (Phillips 1995; Mansbridge 1999) but also for reasons of trust and legitimacy of democratic institutions (Williams 1998).

women, but this is not the same as maintaining that they will, or have to be, biologically female (Young 2002, 148). This leads to a general recognition that in situations of social differentiation - namely, contexts of mistrust or uncrystallized interests (Mansbridge 1999; Dovi 2002) - women's descriptive representation enhances women's substantive representation.

Such assumptions, despite what critics might suggest, are not inherently essentialist. Indeed, in most, if not all, of the feminist literature, the SRW is premised explicitly upon gender (a notion of shared experiences) rather than sex (visible characteristics) (Phillips 1995; Mansbridge 1999). Further, as Young points out, objections to the SRW on the grounds of essentialism or heterogeneity among women in fact hold true for all representatives, whose constituencies are themselves diverse, even if they are rarely acknowledged as such (Young 2002, 126).[8] Moreover, many feminists explicitly recognize women's heterogeneity, observing that there is 'no empirical nor theoretical plausibility' to the idea that women share *all* or even *particular* experiences (Phillips 1995, 53-5; Mansbridge 1999; Dovi 2002).[9] It is for these reasons that feminists prefer to talk in terms of women having a higher likelihood of 'hitting the target' in terms of acting for women, even whilst admitting that women representatives are still 'shooting in the dark' (Phillips 1995). What feminists hold on to, though, is an acceptance of a generalized sense of shared gender identity (Tamerius 1995). Because of their biology and their roles in society women are likely to have personal experiences that are different from men as well as differently gendered perspectives on situations and experiences that are objectively the same. Furthermore, shared experiences and perspectives foster group identification, which in turn might create shared experiences. This not only provides 'resources' in terms of consciousness and expertise for the SRW but also impacts upon women's assessment of priority of and engagement for SRW (Tamerius 1995, Phillips 1995).

It is these more nuanced conceptions of gender and women's interests which provide women representatives with various kinds of 'communicative and informational advantages' vis-à-vis male representatives. Hence, at moments when representatives act as trustees – i.e., when they base their judgements on their own insights and personal principles – the presence of female representatives can improve the chances of (better) SRW (Phillips 1995; Mansbridge 2003). To paraphrase Mansbridge and Saward: female representatives have specific resources of knowledge and expertise to 'create' the female representative and her interests, and therefore to make successful claims regarding representation of women.[10] Moreover, acknowledging that interests and needs can take shape during the political decision making implies that only when a group is systematically present in the process of working out alternatives, is it capable of formulating new subjects and challenging/transforming conventional agendas. The case for more women – present in all their diversity – is further strengthened for reasons of deliberative synergy (more representatives usually produce more, and sometimes better information and insights), the

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[8] Young (2002, 126) writes: 'It is perhaps even more difficult to imagine a shared will for the residents of a metropolitian legislative district than for members of an ethnic group.

[9] Both Dovi and Young are in agreement with S. Laurel Weldon's contention that women's group perspective are a collective product and develop through intra-group interaction, not least with those who are different (2002, 1153-7; Childs 2006).

[10] Furthermore, the utilitarian vocabulary coinciding with the promotion of interests is, according to Diamond and Hartsock, not aimed at women. They prefer the more enclosing terms *wants* and *needs* (Diamond and Hartsock 1981: 196). They thereby refer to female values, behavior and psyche, that have been determined through a couple of studies on the socialization of women in that period (Rich 1976, Chodorow 1978).

dispersion of influence (one representative cannot sit on all a legislatures' committees), and the need to reflect differences of opinion amongst women (Mansbridge 1999, 636).[11]

Recognising diversity amongst women also has an impact upon the motivations behind the SRW, namely 'women's interests'. While early research in the 1980s focused on defining women's interests in terms of the sexual division of labour (Sapiro 1981, Diamond and Hartsock 1981), later work has tended to adopt an approach that is more aware of he diverse life experiences of different groups of women. In this process, 'women's interests' have become more differentiated, a priori undefined, context-related, and subject to evolution.[12] Iris Marion Young draws a helpful distinction between the representation of interests, i.e., what affects or is important to the life prospects of individuals; the representation of opinions, i.e., the various principles, values and priorities which affect what policies should be pursued; and the representation of a social perspective, i.e., that which derives from a shared social positioning, experience, history and social knowledge. For Young, women may have different and/or conflicting interests and opinions but nonetheless share a social perspective (Young 2002).[13] This approach enables a 'starting-point for discussion' – namely, a set of questions, experiences, and assumptions with which reasoning begins - rather than offering more rigid prescriptions as to what all of these necessarily entail (Young 2002, 137 and 140; see also Mansbridge 1999).[14]

Accepting a link between women's descriptive and substantive representation, albeit one that is not straightforward, nonetheless begs the question that Suzanne Dovi (2002) poses: will 'any woman' representative do? In her view, the answer is no. Rather, it is important to delineate criteria for selecting 'preferable group representatives', who she defines as those who experience a 'reciprocated sense of having [their]… fate linked' with other women. They should also have 'strong *mutual* relationships with *dispossessed* subgroups' (emphasis in the original). Through these connections, preferable female representatives should reach out to, and participate in social networks with, dispossessed subgroups of women (Dovi 2002, 729, 736). The point here is that whom our representatives know and interact with is an important dimension of 'good' 'acting for' representation (Dovi 2002, 736). In a somewhat similar fashion, Young (2002, 128) portrays the representative 'connected' to the represented in determinate ways'.

Nonetheless, one question that Dovi's account of preferable descriptive representatives fails to fully address is how preferable representatives should act when they 'act for' women. Like representatives generally, she argues, they should sometimes act as trustees and at other times act as delegates (Dovi 2002, 734; Pitkin 1967).[15] Yet as preferable descriptive representatives, they

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[11] We have removed Mansbridge's fourth reason - 'critical mass' – because of our critical reading of the concept which is fully explicated later in the paper.

[12] In this way recent theory concerning the representation of women thus positions itself on the trustee side of the trustee-delegate scale. 'Own' (i.e. female) insights are considered to be a valuable source for substantive representation. An important difference with the traditional mandate-trustee debate though, is that the 'own' insights are not explicitly linked to the capacity of reconciling specific interests with the 'general interest' but mainly with life experiences that are a 'source' for representing specific interests (i.c. women's interests, wants and needs).

[13] Dovi's (2002) reading of Young (2002) suggest that Young's reconceputalization of representation has led her away from group representation – we disagree.

[14] Male representatives can claim to and/or make woman's perspectives present if they possess social relations that provide them with similar experiences and social knowledge, although this might be less likely because men are mostly differently 'positioned' from women.

[15] Young conceptualizes representation as a differentiated relationship among political actors engaged in a process extending over space and time in which the representative relationship is between constituents and

must also share 'aims' ('a kind of direction for politics') with the represented. With this qualification, Dovi seeks to 'capture the fact that members of historically disadvantaged groups, despite having different policy preferences and values, can still share a political vision aimed at relieving the plight of their communities' (Dovi 2002, 738). Whether Dovi's conclusion sufficiently addresses the oft-made, and implicit, elision between the substantive representation of women and the *feminist* substantive representation of women or between women's bodies and feminist minds is debatable. In particular, it is not clear how scholars should respond to – or even conceptualise – the actions of female representatives who act in non-feminist or anti-feminist ways with regard to the social, economic, and political status of women. Dovi's answer (2002, 736), namely, that members of a group can possess 'different conceptions of what is necessary' to achieve these aims (Dovi 2002:737), seems to throw insufficient light on this question. Arguably, her notion of 'improvement' is being asked to do too much here.

2. 'Critical Mass Theory'

If the first strand of feminist engagement with the SRW examines the theoretical basis upon which women representatives might be able to act for women – what makes women inclined or predisposed to act for women - the second strand re-examines the degree to which female representatives are predisposed to represent women substantively *and* the conditions under which they 'act for' women in practice. These questions are frequently conceptualised in terms of the notion of 'critical mass', or perhaps more accurately, what Childs and Krook (2006) term 'critical mass theory'. In its simplest and most common form, this approach suggests that only when a certain percentage of women are present in a political institution will those women be able 'to act' for women as a group. The assumption here is that when women are tokens – where the ratio of men to women is 'perhaps 85:15' - they have 'little choice about accepting the culture of dominants', in this case men (Kanter 1977b, 231), and are unable to 'act for' women (Kanter 1977a, 966). The implication is that when the ratios of women to men change, these dynamics will also change, purportedly for the better, thereby enabling women to act for women.

Contrary to these expectations, research across a range of countries and political institutions has found little evidence for a single relationship between the percentage of women present in our political institutions and women representatives' acting for women.[16] This should not be surprising. First, there is much confusion about what number constitutes a 'critical mass.' A great deal of work has focused on establishing a precise percentage point, although scholars variously focus on 15, 20, and 30 percent. Related to this, there continues to be ambiguity regarding whether group dynamics change gradually as the percentage of women increases, or whether change only occurs at the 'tipping point' (Childs and Krook 2006; Dahlerup 1988). Second, critical mass theory, which draws upon the work of Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977), often reduces her three claims into one, namely that an increase in women's relative numbers may enable them women are find allies, form coalitions, and affect the culture of the group. However, Kanter also made two additional speculations that rarely noted in this literature. The second claim suggests that 'with an increase in relative numbers, minority members begin to become individuals differentiated from each other' (Kanter 1977a, 966), while the third suggests that despite a lack of change in relative numbers, 'women-identified-women' may still take steps to change the broader

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the representative and among constituents and which should be characterized by ongoing moments of authorization and accountability (Young 2002, 123, 127).

[16] Dahlerup 1988; Grey 2002; Lovenduski 2001; Norrander and Wilcox 1998; Thomas 1991, 1994; Towns 2003; Trimble 1993, 1997, 2000; Thomas, Berkman, and O'Connor 1993; Hansen 1995; Gelb 2002; Antolini 1984; Carroll 2001; Reingold 2000.

culture (Kanter 1977b, 238; Dahlerup 1988). These latter two claims question the blind optimism of the first regarding the potential for increased numbers of women to promote the SRW.

Kanter's third claim might be better understood as pointing to the role of 'critical actors' in the SRW (Childs and Krook 2006). Critical actors are those with a low threshold for action who engage in 'critical acts', initiatives that 'change the position of the minority and lead to further changes' (Dahlerup 1988, 296). Thus, they initiate policy proposals on their own, even when women form a small minority, and embolden others to take steps to promote policies for women, regardless of the proportion of female representatives (Childs and Krook 2006). Indeed, they may not even be women: in some situations, individual men may play a crucial role in advancing women's policy concerns (Celis 2004; Tamerius 1995). The common feature of critical actors is their relatively low threshold for political action: although they may hold attitudes similar to those of other representatives, they are much more motivated than others to initiate women-friendly policy reforms (Childs and Withey 2006; Chaney 2006; Reingold 2000). Crucially, these 'critical actors', like other political actors, act in particular contexts which themselves require investigation (Childs and Krook 2006). Importantly, the framework of critical actors allows for a separation of attitudes from the ability and willingness to act on them, offering insight into situations where women are constrained in acting in line with their individual preferences (Childs and Krook 2006). Furthermore, and whilst the actions of critical actors may stimulate others to act in a supportive fashion, on other occasions they might provoke a backlash (Crowley 2004). As such, the shape and impact of critical actors are neither absolute nor unidirectional.

Over and above the issue of determining the percentage of women considered necessary for women's substantive representation, feminist empirical research has documented a range of mediating factors that influence whether a particular institution is more or less favourable to the substantive representation of women. These include, but arguably should not be limited to, political party affiliation,[17] institutional position,[18] institutional norms,[19] legislative experience,[20] the external political environment,[21] the presence of women's networks and committees within parliaments,[22] and the possibility of a backlash.[23] Although this literature crucially recognizes that contextual factors mediate and determine whether or not women represent women, most do not connect these constraints to the content of the SRW. Three features of the broader political context that might play a role include: social, economic, and cultural structures and norms; political opportunities; and institutions. More specifically, the type of women's issue articulated, tolerated, and/or stimulated, at a particular moment, might be, for instance, influenced by whether a socio-economic system is characterized as neo-liberal or a strong welfare state regime, whether there is an economic revival or economic crisis, and in respect of the ideology of the political party in question and whether this party is in government or in opposition.[24]

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[17] Childs 2004; Poggione 2004; Purdy 1991; Reingold 2000; Burt and Lorenzin 1997; Trimble 2000; Gelb 2002; Erickson 1997a, 1997b; Diamond 1977; Ghelen 1977; Leader 1977; Thomas 1989, 1991.

[18] Frisch and Kelly 2003; Norton 1995, 2002; Swers 2004; Reingold 2000; Thomas 1991; Towns 2003; Caul 1999; Celis and Woodward 2001; Duverger 1955; Norderval 1985a, 1985b; Saint-Germain 1989; Swers 2002a; O'Regan 2000.

[19] Dodson 2001; Considine and Deutchman 1996; Kathlene 1995; Rosenthal 1998; Cramer Walsh 2002.

[20] Beckwith 2002; Cowley and Childs 2003; Jeydel and Taylor 2003.

[21] Swers 2004; Tremblay 2003; Gertzog 1995.

[22] Burrell 1994; Carroll, Dodson and Mandell 1991; Carroll 1992; Gertzog 1995, 2002; Saint-Germain 1989; Swers 2002a; Thomas 1991; Young, L. 1997.

[23] Kathlene 1995; Towns 2003; Yoder 1991; cf. Heath et al 2005; Skjeie 1991, 1993; Hansen 1995.

[24] Purdy 1991, Reingold 2000, Burt and Lorenzin 1997, Trimble 2000, Gelb 2002, Erickson 1997a, 1997b; Gertzog 1995; Swers 2002a.

3. Critiquing Bodies as 'the' Site of SRW

Notwithstanding the important nuances that have been made in more recent empirical and theoretical research, discussions of the SRW continue to face the charge that the presence of women's bodies in political institutions 'are extremely limited as an avenue of substantive representation' (Weldon 2002, 1154; see also Maillé 1997). In her critique, Weldon argues that individual representatives may constitute one medium of representation, but she suggests that other sites, like women's movements and women's policy agencies, offer alternative – and perhaps more effective – sites of representation (Weldon 2002, 1157). Because 'women's interests' are best defined through collective processes of interest articulation, women's group perspective is at best inadequately captured within a single representative. As Weldon notes, 'If [a representative] is a white, straight, middle class mother, she cannot speak for African American Women, or poor women, or lesbian women *on the basis of her own experience'* (emphasis in the original). Women's group perspective emerges only 'when members of the group come together, [when] they can compare…and each person gains a greater understanding of the larger puzzle' (Weldon 2002, 1156).

For these reasons, Weldon contends that institutional sites are more conducive to women's SRW than the presence of women's bodies in elected legislatures. Consequently, feminists who have studied female representatives in parliament have in fact been looking in the wrong place. All the same, Weldon tempers her optimism regarding the possibility of SRW via institutional sites, noting that the mere presence of women's movements and women's policy agencies (WPA's) is not sufficient. In order to substantively represent women, WPA's must have resources and authority and 'a degree of independence' (Weldon 2002, 1160),[25] while women's movements must not be coterminous with the state so that they may criticize government policy (Weldon 2002, 1161). Moreover, and as her study of domestic violence legislation demonstrates, successful SRW lies in the interaction between WPA and the autonomous women's movement: a strong women's movement 'improve[s] the institutional capabilities of government in addressing women's issues', while strong WPA's provide 'additional resources to women's organizations (Weldon 2002, 1162).

There is much to value in Weldon's thesis. But two key questions remain outstanding. The first centres on her methods. Whilst she is correct in arguing that comparing a 'number of modes of representation' allows us to deduce which of these different sites are most effective for women's substantive representation, it is not so clear in her empirical case study of domestic violence whether she is accurately testing the impact of female representatives. Stated in the language outlined above, she is testing 'critical mass theory'. Thus, whilst she is right to assert that 'there is no linear relationship between the overall number of women in the legislature or in cabinet and government responsiveness to violence against women' (Weldon 2002, 1169), her methods do not allow her to capture the role of 'critical actors', as she herself acknowledges: 'It may be that individual feminist women are more important in getting policies passed'.[26] Second, and relatedly, it is not necessary that Weldon's critique, based on her empirical study, undermines the case for a relationship between women's descriptive and substantive representation via women representatives. It is possible to agree with Weldon when she concludes that 'examining multiple sources of representation provides a more complete picture of the possibilities for – and limits on' the SRW (Weldon 2002, 1171) but retain a

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[25] Her insistence on the autonomy of women's movements can be challenged on the grounds that this is unduly limited: women's organizations within political parties may be highly effective sites (Sainsbury 2004).

[26] Risking tautology it is interesting to speculate how, in future research, the inclusion of critical actors affects the dynamics of interaction between the different sites/modes of representation. We return to such issues in the conclusion of this paper where we consider the methodological implications of our analysis.

stronger focus on the potential of female representatives as critical actors to be important modes of the SRW, albeit often in interaction with actors in other institutional sites (Childs and Withey 2006). For us, this is not a zero-sum game between women representatives, WPA's, and women's movements (Young 2002), but rather one in which the conditions under which the SRW occurs are fully delineated (Childs and Krook 2006). Indeed, evidence of 'critical mass theory', whatever its other faults, shows that in some instances, women representatives have both sought to and acted for women.[27]

Feminist Research on Women's Movements and the State

A third literature has focused on 'state feminism' as another means to represent women's concerns in government (McBride Stetson and Mazur 1995, 3, 5). This term is used to denote efforts by women's policy machineries – that is, structures established by governments with the express purpose of bettering women's social status – to pursue social and economic policies beneficial to women. This work is carried out in special units charged with promoting women's rights including offices, commissions, agencies, ministries, committees, secretaries, or advisers for the status of women (Chappell 2002; Goetz 2003; Rai 2003; McBride Stetson and Mazur 1995; Weldon 2002). These policy agencies may take a variety of different forms. For example, they might be (1) advocacy or *advisory units* located in a central political unit responsible for promoting attention to gender issues and giving advice to various government units, (2) *policy monitoring units* that have the right to review projects before approval, (3) *units with implementation responsibilities* that create programmes, respond to policy needs that are not well catered for else where (for example violence against women), or (4) *commissions with investigation powers*, that is women-dedicated public ombudspersons or public protectors, equipped to receive and investigate complaints by the public regarding gender-based rights violations (Goetz 2004, 2-4). Studies from the 1980s and 1990s argue that 'state feminism' exists: many agencies are important in realising women's movements' demands in policy-making and in gaining access for women to decision-making arenas. One could therefore argue on the basis of these studies that women's policy machineries have succeeded in substantively representing women's concerns.

The assumption that these bodies are 'feminist' has generated a lot of debate. Yet, the term women's policy agency, as opposed to state feminism, does not make a priori assumptions about how 'feminist' these agencies are. Rather –just like the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation of women in parliaments – the extent to which they are 'feminist' is an empirical question where feminism itself can be defined and operationalised in a number of different ways. At the most basic level, women's policy agencies are theorised as the links between women's movements and the state. Their effectiveness in making these connections, however, is an empirical question. Most of the state feminist literature makes a representative claim: women's policy agencies are 'feminist' in a sense that they claim to help the actors that speak for women and gender equality (Mazur 2005, 3, for a discussion see Squires forthcoming, 159-160). In this way, the relationship between women's movements and women's policy agencies is transformed into a question of women's policy agencies' accountability to its imagined constituency, women's movements. Laurel Weldon suggests that women's policy agencies in consultation with women's movements better represent women's concerns and claims for justice than unorganised groups of women in the legislature (Weldon 2002, 1161). Yet there are no formal mechanisms of accountability by which the women's movement might hold the

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[27] Childs and Krook citing Bratton 2005; Thomas 1991; Thomas 1994; Saint-Germain 1989; Skard and Haavio-Manila 1985; Vega and Firestone 1995; Flammang 1985; Swers 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Cramer Walsh 2002; O'Regan 2000, Carroll 2001.

women's policy agencies to account (Squires forthcoming) and, indeed, the women's policy agencies are formally accountable only to the government (Goetz 2005, 6). One can therefore inquire whether the women's policy agencies perhaps represent only certain parts of the women's movement and not others (Squires forthcoming, 169-179) and what this means for substantive representation.

Research on state feminism has explored two questions in particular. The first is whether the women's policy agencies have been successful in advancing women's concerns both substantively and descriptively. The second concerns the specific conditions for their success or failure. This research has made a strong argument for the important role played by state feminism in aiding women's demands in public policy-making. It has been established that women's policy agencies constitute effective links between women's movements and the state, as well as facilitate women's access into decision-making processes, though studies of various policy debates on abortion, domestic violence and prostitution, job training, and political representation (Lovenduski et al 2005, Mazur 2001, Outshoorn 2004, McBride Stetson 2001; Weldon 2002). All the same, other scholars like Shirin Rai (2003) note that important conditions for the success of such agencies include location, resources, and the presence of strong democratic movements. More specifically, women's policy agencies need to be located at a high level within the decision-making hierarchy in order to be able to influence government policy. Further, they need to have a clear mandate and functional responsibility, as well as human and financial resources. Lastly, links with civil society groups supportive of the advancement of women's rights and enhancement of women's status are important to assure accountability of the national machinery itself (Rai 2003a, 26).

Other studies, namely those coming out of the Research Network on Gender, Politics and the State (RNGS), have shown that the probability of women's policy success is higher when the policy sub-system in question is moderately closed or open in character; the left is in power; and the women's movement which is mobilised by the debate is close to the left, the issue is of high priority to the movement, and the various strands of women's movements are unified on the issue (Mazur 2001; McBride Stetson 2001, cf. Outshoorn 2004, 291). Another factor is the compatibility of the framing of women's movement demands with the dominant discourse in the policy arena (Outshoorn 2004). This could be seen as an example of the way in which the context shapes the representative claims. Furthermore, different policy sectors seem to offer very different political opportunity structures from women's point of view (Mazur 2002, 184-5; Holli 2006). Women's movements have tended to be more successful where women's policy agencies have gendered policy debates in ways that have coincided with women's movement goals. By contrast, the movements have been less successful when women's policy agencies have played some other role, whether it is marginal, non-feminist or symbolic (Holli 2006).

These conditions for success or failure have sometimes proved to be contradictory. For example, location at high level may be a problem rather than a source of influence: proximity to high office can work against women's machineries making them overly-associated with the chief executive and subject to its control, making them unattractive to the women's movement (Goetz 2004, 4). For this reason, Weldon (2002, 156) makes a strong argument for focusing on the interactions between autonomous women's organizations and effective women's policy machinery. Goetz finds this useful because it brings two key issues of relevance to the impact of national women's machineries to the fore: the overall quality of governance and the capacity of women's movement to make power-holders accountable (Goetz 2004, 4).

The ability of state feminist bodies to substantive represent women has been put under question. Many have expressed concerns that their creation may 'co-opt' women's demands – or worse,

promote non-feminist ends – at the same time that they reduce the mobilization power of women's movements (e.g. in recent years Franceschet 2003; Weldon 2002). Governments can, for example, make important political gains at the international and domestic levels by espousing gender equality, without serious risk of being held accountable and having to operationalize the promises made in top-level rhetoric (Goetz 2003, 91). Half-hearted support is also evidenced in the under-resourcing of the agencies. The gains in state feminism may also be reversible. For example, in the Netherlands and in Australia, right wing governments have axed the women's policy machinery (Outshoorn and Kantola 2007).

The issue of state feminism is further complicated by the fact that as state bodies women's policy agencies are embedded in the changing modes of governance. Here location becomes interesting: the closer the women's policy agency is to the neoliberal government, the more co-opted it might be to the neoliberal discourse. Ultimately, its work may provide legitimacy to neo-liberal measures, often antithetical to women's concerns. For example, gender mainstreaming budgets might not alter in any significant way the government's commitment to fiscal restraint and economic restructuring (Teghtsoonian 2004, 268). This line of argument highlights the pertinence of the where question in relation to substantive representation of women.

Recently, it has been argued that the focus on 'women' rather than 'gender' does not reflect the remit of the agencies that are charged with issues relating to gender equality. This development can also be seen at the UN level with the new definition of the main task of the national machinery in Beijing Platform for Action 1995: 'to support government-wide *mainstreaming* of a *gender*-equality policy perspective in all policy areas' (Rai 2003, 2, our emphasis). Many scholars now write about 'gender equality agencies' rather than 'women's policy agencies' (Bergqvist et al 1999, Olsson Blandy 2003). The strength of this concept is that it also encompasses men's role in achieving gender equality. It does, however, raise interesting questions about the agencies accountability to the women's movements – should this now encompass men's movements? (Holli and Kantola 2007). The term 'gender equality machineries' furthermore assumes that *equality* is the goal of women's movements and women's public policy, which is not necessarily the case with those movements pursuing identity politics. Nevertheless, the question of naming equality machineries is becoming a burning one as some countries in Europe are moving towards 'single equalities bodies' that bring together different bases of discrimination and do not deal only with gender based inequalities (Lovenduski 2007).

II. Towards a New Conceptual Framework

Taken together, the mainstream research on political representation, feminist perspectives on the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation, and studies of state feminism provide important insights regarding the SRW. In particular, this work demonstrates that if we want to capture the richness of 'what is going on in representation' in general (Mansbridge 2003, Saward 2006, Squires 2005), and the SRW more specifically, we as researchers need to broaden our scope of enquiry. Most importantly, it is clear that multiple actors are involved who engage in various kinds of representative activities in a multitude of different sites. Further, these actors, claims, and acts interact, thereby (re)defining their course. Context is also of utmost importance: it defines who the actors are, which acts are possible and which not, as well as the content of the SRW. Asking what the SRW is thus pushes us in a very different direction than questions like 'do women represent women?' or 'do women make a difference?' For this reason, we take this broader question as our point of departure.

Who acts in the SRW?

The dominant focus on gender and politics research on women representatives as the primary site for the SRW is arguably accounted for by feminist political scientists' application of one of the traditional political science research questions, 'who governs?' (Mackay 2004, 99). This focus led the first generation of gender and politics scholars to document the numbers of women present in our legislatures. Combining this with a feminist politics arguably underpinned the link to saying that women representatives might make a difference and then devising research that would investigate whether that was so. And it was not as if there was an absence of anecdotal evidence of behavioural differences to support this link (Vallance 1979; Currell 1974; Brookes 1967; Duverger 1955), nor more systematic evidence of attitudinal differences somewhat later in the 1980s and 1990s when the numbers of women standing for, and winning political office began to increase (Norris and Lovenduski 1995: Haavio-Manila et al 1985; Cf footnotes 16-20). Here, research largely focused on women representatives and asked: do women recognise the existence of 'women's interests' or the need to improve the situation of women[28]; do women representatives feel a certain responsibility to act for women[29]; is it a priority to them[30]; do they have the same opinions as female voters[31] and the women's movement.[32] The main goal of this research was to focus on the link between representatives' attitudes and behaviours.[33] Feminist activists also found it strategically helpful to draw connections between women's descriptive and substantive representation in order to mobilize women to participate in politics and to compel political parties and governments to respond. This led many to present their case for women's inclusion in terms of the importance of a 'critical mass' – often defined as 30% – which itself soon became a powerful demand for women's presence, justified by its predicted effects on the SRW (Childs and Krook 2006).

More recent research, informed by the insights of feminist literature on representation and state feminism (Mackay 2004, 101), suggests that research should seek to identify the critical actors in the SRW in other spheres as well, namely women's policy agencies and women's movements. This shift is not to suggest that female representatives are not important, but rather that female – and possibly male – ministers, party members, bureaucrats, and members of civil society groups are likely to also emerge as important actors in the SRW. Who these 'critical actors' are, however, remains an empirical question.[34] Expanding the range of potential actors in the SRW, in turn, spills over into the issue of the conditions under which such critical actors may substantively

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[28] E.g. Diamond 1977; Eichler 1979; Lake and Breglio 1992; Skjeie 1991, 1998.

[29] E.g. Whip 1991; Thompson 1980; Wängnerud 2000b; Waring, Greenwood and Pintat 2000; Diaz 2005, Childs 2001; Carroll 2002; Reingold 2000.

[30] E.g. Mezey 1978c, Kirkpatrick 1974; Diaz 2005; Lake and Breglio 1992; Carroll 2001; Reingold 2000; Thomas and Welch 1991, 2001, Thomas 1991, 1994; Carroll, Dodson and Mandel 1991; Mandel and Dodson 1992.

[31] E.g. Conover 1988, 1994, Costain 1988, Lewis 1999, Norris 1988; Diaz 2005; Mc Allister and Studlar 1992.

[32] E.g. Burt and Lorenzin 1997, Carroll, Dodson and Mandel 1991; Carroll 1984; Tremblay 1993; Mezey 1978a, 1978c, Reingold 2000; Vallance 1979; Carroll, Dodson and Mandel 1991, Carroll 1984, Carroll 1992, Dolan and Ford 1998; Norris 1996, Norris and Lovenduski 1995, Lovenduski 1997, 2004; Erickson 1997a, Lilie, Handberg and Lowery 1982.

[33] Indeed, in some cases attitudes were regarded as constituting SRW (Diaz 2005) whereas we consider as this falling short of SRW, the twilight zone between DRW and SRW. Empirical research regarding 'women representing women' deal with the attitudes and the acts of women representatives. Attitudes belong to the domain of 'standing for', thus are about descriptive representation.

[34] In one of the few qualitative (policy-tracing) case studies undertaken so far, the role of key male allies is identified: the man who had to agree to the decision to reduce VAT (value-added taxation) on sanitary products in the UK was the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown; if the women 'critical actors' - women backbench MPs and women ministers in the Treasury - had failed to convince him, sanitary products would still be liable to 17.5 percent VAT (Childs and Withey 2006).

represent women. Scholars have increasingly begun to appreciate that 'acting for' women is not 'universally or perpetually available to political actors', nor is it dependent solely on political will (Beckwith 2002, 10). Thus, it is important to tease out the most conducive relations for SRW. Here, we might hypothesize that critical actors are more likely to effect feminized change in instances where they are strong, they act in association with a supportive women's movement and networks inside and outside of parliament in 'strategic alliances', and they seek policies that are ideologically congruent with the governing party (Childs and Krook 2005; Weldon 2002). However, it is also worth considering here the possibility of competition and conflict – and not just collaboration, mutual reinforcement and reciprocity – between actors in these different sites of representation. Different actors may have alternative, if not competing, conceptions of what the substantive representation means in terms of its content and direction.

Where does the SRW occur?

The location where the SRW occurs is crucial because it both enables and constrains actors who seek to 'act for' or make 'representative claims' on behalf of women as a group. Importantly, these locations are in fact multi-faceted, including spaces like parliament, the state, the courts, and political parties, which themselves constitute actors and their behaviour. A useful set of theoretical tools in this regard is new institutionalism, which argues that institutions – understood broadly not just as formal structures, but also in terms of more informal practices and norms (Krook 2005) – may shape processes of political representation in a number of distinct ways. As such, groups often frame their claims to 'fit' a particular context, which in turn provides – and sets constraints on – discursive and practical opportunities. A good example of this is the account given by Barbara Hobson and Marika Lindholm, who trace the process of creating a women's constituency at a time when the women's movement was fractured in the 1930s when the tenets of the Swedish welfare state were first formulated. They illustrate the ways in which Swedish women activists used the particular image of themselves as mothers to articulate their claims and demands in a discursive space of *folkhem*, a metaphor of a community collective (Hobson and Lindholm 1997: 490). The importance of such discursive opportunities suggests that institutional contexts are not stable configurations, but rather dynamic systems 'in which historical contingency, social actors, and new discursive fields destabilize and reconfigure institutional arrangements' (Hobson and Lindholm 1997: 479). In other words, the process of substantive representation changes the context by creating certain opportunities, structures, and definitions whilst also closing off others. The actors and the context of the SRW are thus mutually constitutive or dialectical.

The relevant contexts are not just national, but also local and supranational as well. This is because the state has 'reshaped, relocated, and rearticulated its formal powers and policy responsibilities' throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Banaszak, Beckwith and Rucht 2003: 3). As a result, women's movements and women's policy agencies face a 'reconfigured' state that offers opportunities for advancing women's concerns but also threatens their successes. Lee Ann Banaszak, Karen Beckwith and Dieter Rucht (2003) conceptualize these changes through the notions of uploading, downloading, lateral loading, and offloading. State authority has been *uploaded* to supranational organizations, as well as *downloaded* to substate, provincial, and regional governments. A weakening of the power of elected state spheres and a growing reliance on other and partly nonelected state bodies represent *lateral loading* (Banaszak, Beckwith and Rucht 2003, 4-5). *Offloading*, in turn, signals delegating state powers and responsibility to actors in civil society. As governments have increasingly engaged in lateral loading and offloading, women's movements have been presented with a depoliticized and more remote set of state policy-making agencies at the national level (Banaszak, Beckwith and Rucht 2003, 6, 7).

The discussion of the 'reconfigured' state indicates that there is a new diversity of mechanisms and partnerships that may be involved in promotion of gender equality in the reconfigured state. For example, *state* feminist bodies may be located at the regional and supranational levels as well as the national state level. For example, the EU can be theorized as another location of state feminism, perhaps to be termed as 'suprastate feminism'. Alison Woodward and Agnes Hubert (2006) show that there is indeed a wide array of women's policy agencies in the EU. These represent new actors in both the EU and member states policies on gender equality. Hilary Footitt (2002), in turn, studies the European Parliament as a site where female MEPs create new languages of politics.

Why is the SRW attempted?

If we accept Saward's (2006) thesis that representation is, at least in part, a performance of claim making, the discursive aspect of representation becomes a central feature in the substantive representation of women: acting for women is claiming to represent women and framing issues as being of importance to women. Several actors can make claims regarding the representation of women, which can be complementary, but also contradictory and lead to contestation about what constitutes 'women's interests' (Celis forthcoming). There are a number of distinct ways in which claims and non-claims can affect political outcomes. One particularly striking example can be seen in the case of nineteenth and early twentieth century protective labour laws limiting night and mine labour for women. These were discursively constructed as protecting the nation's offspring and diminishing competition for male labourers rather than as improving the labour conditions of women (Gubin 1991: 99). Nevertheless, these laws were supported by certain feminist women's organizations as positively improving women's working conditions even whilst they restricted access to certain forms of employment.[35] A second example illustrates how claims can be transformed. In her work on the EU, Maria Stratigaki shows that the concept 'reconciliation of working and family life', a core concept in gender equality policy, gradually shifted from a feminist meaning ('sharing family responsibilities between men and women') to a market-oriented strategy ('encouraging a flexible workforce') embedded in the European political and economic priorities of the EU (Stratigaki 2004: 30). Thus, despite the language of acting for women, claims can become 'empty' for women, if not disadvantageous - part time labour chiefly taken up by women to reconcile family tasks and paid work, reinforces stereotypes about gender division of labour within families and can thus be considered as a non feminist outcome. A third set of examples surfaces in instances where measures that are not originally intended to improve the lives of women may ultimately improve some women's positions/circumstances. In other words, the substantive representation of other interests -such as economic and electoral interests - can be a vehicle for the substantive representation of women's interests. In this case 'acting for women' becomes 'acting *also* for women'. A fourth case is where claims are absent: the outcome of the policy process may meet the demands of the women's movement without any claim about women being made during the policy process. For example, in 2000 the Belgian nationality law was changed in such a way that it realised a central demand of the women's movement, notably better protection of illegal female immigrants (Woodward 2006). Nevertheless, the women's movement was not attentive to the legislative process, it did not intervene or lobby and the parliamentary debates were not gendered. In this example, acting for women appeared to happen 'by accident'. In other cases, not making claims for the SRW can be a strategic decision: demands for legalising abortion might be better advanced by making claims about the well-being of children, for example.

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[35] Similarly, the history of women's enfranchisement in Belgium shows that electoral balance between the socialist and the catholic parties were a more important reason for the granting of women's right to vote than any principled take on women's rights or equality (Van Molle and Gubin 1998).

How is the SRW expressed?[36]

Speaking broadly, the literatures on women's representation and state feminism not only restrict themselves and the conclusions they can draw to specific actors, they also limit their scope by focusing on specific activities and specific issue areas. Empirical research on the SRW within parliamentary contexts focuses mainly on legislative activity: initiating, accompanying, speaking in favour of, and voting for legislation that benefits women.[37] Illustrative research questions include: (1) do women vote more than their male colleagues for legislation related to women's issues such as the Equal Rights Amendement (Hill 1983) and abortion laws (Lake and Breglio 1992); (2) do women vote more than their male colleagues for laws that are indicated by the *Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues* a beeing of specific importance to women;[38] (3) are female MP's more engaged in establishing laws regarding feminist demands (e.g. rape and equal pay) or regarding the traditional female role in society (e.g. health care and children's welfare);[39] and (4) are women in Congress more active in (co)signing women's rights laws (Wolbrecht 2002) or in developing a reproductive rights policy (Norton 1995).

Importantly, such questions reflect assumptions about what constitutes evidence of the SRW – and, therefore, how researchers take distinct approaches to the operationalisation of 'women's interests'. Questions (1) and (4), for example, privilege feminist legislation; question (2) draws on conceptions of women's interests held by feminist organizations and measures representatives' actions against these; and question (3) includes issues that reflect traditional understandings of gender roles. A similarly focus on specific activities and specific issues can also be seen in some of the state feminism literature. Researchers associated with the RNGS project, for example, examine whether and how political debates are gendered, and how this relates to women's inclusion in the policy making process and broader interpretations of 'women's interests' on issues like prostitution, abortion, representation, and job training.[40] Admittedly, assessing the effectiveness of WPAs regarding these interests is of great importance. However, such an approach limits the scope of investigation by delimiting a priori what kinds of activities WPA's can and might engage in.

Viewed from this perspective, these various literatures proceed with a misguided operationalisation of 'women's interests', what Celis (forthcoming) terms the 'thematic selection of women's interests'. This approach is problematic in a number of ways. First, the conclusions reached regarding the role of the actors limit themselves to the issue that was investigated in that particular case. In other words, research about the voting of women MP's relating to abortion bills only tells us about voting on abortion. Whatever conclusions are reached cannot necessarily be extrapolated to the question of the SRW more widely. Second, 'traditional' women's interests are sometimes interpreted so widely that the link with the SRW becomes increasingly unclear.

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[36] The question of 'how' refers to both conceptual concerns and technical questions of methods.

[37] Reingold 2000, Swers 2002, Wolbrecht 2002, Cramer Walsh 2002, Trimble 2000; Burt and Lorenzin 1997.

[38] Dolan 1997, Burrell 1994, Swers 2002a, 2002b, 2002c.

[39] Carroll, Dodson and Mandel 1991, Carroll 1992, Carroll 2001, Mandel and Dodson 1992, Dodson 2001, Boles 1993.

[40] Next to these themes, the RNGS network also tested relative degrees of women's movement and women's policy agency strength in influencing the debate and decisions under the hottest issues to face countries since the 1990s (Haussman and Sauer 2006). These varied from country to country and included welfare-state shrinkage, the expansion of state activity, including funding and/or regulation of policies deemed to be market-related, and state reorganization as a response to various mandates, such as in the workings of Parliament, devolution, electoral system reform, and citizenship requirement changes.

Policies related to children and families clearly contain an explicit gender dimension, given the traditional role of women (Carroll 2001; Cramer Walsh 2002). However, this does not mean that 'gender' affects every child or family policy in the same way.

Third, the common approach of researchers to equate a number of current themes of the women's movement with 'women's interests' often leads to in an elision between the SRW and the feminist SRW. In fact, 'women's interests' are broader than 'feminist interests,' for the simple reason that not all women are feminists. This type of approach therefore obscures the diversity of points of views present inside the feminist movement and among women more widely (cf Trimble 1993, 1997, 2000). Fourth, the need to delimit 'women's interests' in some way causes researchers to choose what constitutes 'women's interests' on a purely subjective basis. Finally, these approaches to 'women's interests' tend to essentialize – and indeed, reify – 'women' and their 'interests,' thus denying diversity among women. This contrasts sharply with post-1990s feminist literature on gender that recognizes differences – and even conflicts – among women as a group. Respecting the diverse and changing character of women's interests must therefore be made an object of study, rather than something that is assumed prior to the investigation, through a close look at the various claims made by women, women's movements, parliamentarians, WPA's, and other actors with regard to the content of 'women's interests.'

In addition to concerns about the operationalization of women's interests, much of the research in the SRW literature, especially when informed by 'critical mass theory', frames the empirical research questions in terms of a search for sex difference: women act for women when they act differently from men. Classic approaches include quantitative and qualitative surveys of legislators' attitudes; quantitative analysis of legislative behaviour, such as roll call and; qualitative interviews with women legislators.[41] The finding of sex differences in such studies is then celebrated as 'proving' the link between women's descriptive and substantive representation whilst its absence is usually interpreted as confirming the failure to achieve sufficient numbers of women that could 'make a difference' or with an acknowledgement to the constraining contexts within which women representatives act (Childs and Krook 2006).

Searching for sex differences per se is, if not misguided, then more complex than often acknowledged. The absence of sex differences, and/or a convergence in the attitudes or behaviour or women and men representatives over time, may occur for a variety of reasons: women and men may share the same policy priorities, but diverge in terms of their support for, and willingness to propose legislation on, feminist issues (Dodson and Carroll 1991; Schwindt-Bayer 2004; Taylor-Robinson and Heath 2003); the increased presence of women may transform male interest in and behaviour related to women's concerns, thereby negating any previous sex differences (Bratton 2005; Reingold 2000); a successful transformation of party programmes will, at least where party cohesion is strong, produce similar behaviour amongst women and men of the same party; the presence of anti-feminist women and pro-feminist men may even out the aggregate balance of preferences across women and men as groups (Chaney forthcoming; Tremblay and Pelletier 2000); and 'gendering' processes and norms may silence women by pressuring them to conform to positions taken by men on various political issues or by blocking their opportunities to freely articulate their own views (Hawkesworth 2003; Rosenthal 1998). Moreover, if 'gender' is not a pre-political and fixed identity that women bring with them when they enter politics, but one that is partially produced and reproduced within the context of

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[41] We acknowledge debates in the literature that question particular methods and techniques – for example, roll call analyses versus agenda setting stage; the limitations of aggregate data relating to 'meaning' versus the lack of generalizability of qualitative interviews - as well as debates over whether acting differently is the same thing as acting 'for' women.

particular legislatures, testing women and men's behaviour against their previously indicated attitudes is highly problematic (Towns 2003; Whip 1991;). A focus on difference might also be criticized on the more abstract grounds that it identifies women as the sex with special interests and experiences (Skjeie 2001). In any of these cases, null-findings (Reingold 2000) tell us very little about what is going whilst positive findings still reveals very little of the explanation for the SRW.

III. Conclusions

In this paper, we attempt to develop an argument for shifting the terms of the debate on the SRW. Rather than asking questions like 'do women represent women?' or 'do women in politics make a difference?', we advocate moving towards alternative questions like 'what is the substantive representation of women?' or 'what do we mean by the substantive representation of women?' The former approach assumes that (1) women are the actors, (2) elected assemblies are the site, (3) women's interests are the reason, and (4) distinct policies are the result. The latter opens up these assumptions to explore (1) who acts in the SRW, (2) where the SRW occurs, (3) why the SRW is attempted, and (4) how the SRW is expressed. Rather than making a priori decisions about the actors, sites, motivations, and outcomes of the SRW, this framework remains more agnostic – and subjects to empirical investigation – the processes and modes of political representation on behalf of women as a group. In this sense, it reflects a quintessential 'problem-driven' approach (cf. Shapiro 2005) to political research that approaches cases more holistically, with a view to the multiple and varied actors, sites, motivations, and outcomes of the SRW.

Our research contributes to existing literature in two main ways. First, in this paper, we produce a new conceptual framework for understanding the SRW, focused on the acknowledging the multiple actors, sites, motivations, and outcomes involved in the SRW. Secondly, and on the basis of this new conceptual framework, we suggest that there is need for the development of a new methodological framework for studying the SRW. This would be centered on the process-tracing and comparison of instances of the SRW in multiple countries over time (Childs and Krook 2006). Developing and applying such a methodological framework lie outside the remit of this paper and are for future research. However we are minded to outline a common structure of inquiry, that facilitates comparison across cases by enabling scholars to pinpoint more specifically how the findings of one study 'speak' to those of another. As the number of these comparisons grows, it should then become possible to identify more systematically some key variations in conditions consistent with the substantive representation of women across countries and over time.

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