Conceptualizing Women’s Interests: A Look at the U.S. Congress

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Abstract

This study aims to identify how, when, and by whom representational claims regarding women are made, which forms they take, and assess the nature of the connection between descriptive and substantive representation of women. Looking at floor speeches and bills for the 111th through 113th Congress, as well as campaign ads from the 2008 and 2010 elections, the paper creates a typology of representational claims and represents a first step at disentangling the complex patterns of women’s representation by analyzing different representational activities and contextual factors.

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1 Introduction

Even though the subfield of ”Women and Politics”, and most especially questions about women and political representation, has been receiving much attention within political science in recent years, there remain several areas with significant theoretical and empirical gaps. Accordingly, the focus of this paper will be on the connection (or lack of connection) between types of representation: a) descriptive - does it matter for the process and success of political representation to be represented by those who ”look like you”? b) substantive - is there actually a substantive overlap between the interests of the constituents and the representative actions of their elected officials?, and c) surrogate - do those claiming to represent women focus on the women within their districts, or is their conception of ”women’s interests” broader? To do this, this paper focuses on a number of questions that remain unanswered and unexplored, specifically: Who claims to speak for women? Do such claims lead to actual representation?

Previous work on women and representation has focused primarily on descriptive and substantive representation separately, and to some lesser extent on the link between the two. To this end, scholars have explored differences between men and women as candidates as well as office holders, investigating whether men and women campaign or govern differently. Studies have investigated whether female citizens are more likely to participate when women run for office, and others have looked at whether women are likely to focus on women’s issues during their campaigns and then as public officials. Much of this work, however, has produced contradictory results, and there is at this point in time no clear indication of whether, how, and to what extent gender influences the process of representation. This study builds on existing work in the field of women and political representation and aims to add to our knowledge by filling in some of the gaps potentially responsible for the lack of clear findings.

Here, I address the question of gender and representation on two levels: a) claims : campaigning/issuing public statements, and b) actions: governing/initiation and support for
bills. With respect to the first step, claims, I focus on which candidates (and elected officials) speak for women, and in what way they do so. In other words, this is an investigation of which candidates and office-holders actively and expressly include women’s interests in their campaign platforms and legislative statements, and how they define those interests. Previous research has used a more limited definition of women’s interests, without ever investigating whether this definition reflects what is meant by this term as used by political candidates and elected officials.

For this reason, many forms of representation of women’s interests (for example, by conservative women) have been excluded a priori. In addition to providing us with a better idea of what representational claims look like, we should be able to see whether there is a connection between descriptive and substantive representation of women: are women more likely to reference women’s interests than men? Previous work has also mostly excluded men, liberal or conservative, from studies of how well women’s interests are represented.

Secondly, I investigate whether claims are followed by actions. Do those invoking women’s interests in their campaigns or in their speeches tend to accompany these claims with representational actions? Is there a gender difference? Are women more likely to attempt turning claims into actions, or vice versa? Conversely, are there office-holders who represent women, but do not include explicit references to women’s issues in their campaign platforms and public statements? Is there a connection between claims and actions? Does gender play a role in this? Does the definition of women’s interests matter?

2 Literature

2.1 Conceptual Difficulties

When discussing representation, either specifically in the context of women and representation, or more generally, one has to begin with Pitkin (1967)’s four-dimensional concept of representation. Phillips (1998) has pointed out that Pitkin herself considered substantive
representation to be the most important of her dimensions, and thought of it as the realm where true representation - in the sense of "acting for" - takes place. However, feminist scholarship has criticized this concept by introducing the importance of shared experiences (Hartsock (1983)). More specifically, the argument brings up the fundamental problem associated with "acting for" someone else (for an "other"), a situation that implies that this person, or group of persons, cannot, for one reason or another, speak or act for themselves (Gouws (1996); Spivak (1988)).

This goes to the heart of the debate about representative democracy and its problems and shortfalls. Feminist standpoint theory (Hartsock (1983)) raises concerns about someone’s ability to act for an "other", any "other", but most specifically a member of an oppressed or marginalized group. Can a member of a dominant group, even with the best intentions, ever truly represent marginalized "others", without sharing any experiences with that "other" (Hinterberger (2007))? In the context of substantive and descriptive representation, this suggests the value and importance of the descriptive aspect in order for the substantive component to be fully effective. According to standpoint theory, therefore, experience "as a woman" is necessary to fully represent women and their interests in the political realm - a strong call for descriptive representation.

Critical mass theory has been the theory used most often as a basis for empirical studies. It relies heavily on the work of Kanter (1977) and Dahlerup (1988). Kanter’s work focuses on "tokenism" and the importance of critical, numerical thresholds, at which the descriptive representation of women will become (more) effective (1977). The practical application of this concept oftentimes involves determining fixed, testable thresholds of, for example, 25 percent, despite the fact that Kanter herself was very vague in this respect, and did not explicitly mention what constitutes an appropriate threshold (Childs and Krook (2006)). Dahlerup was the first to apply Kanter’s economical model to the political realm, but she eventually abandoned the concept of a "critical mass" in favor of "critical acts" (1988).

Critiques from within feminist theory have since, even when not specifically talking about
political representation, called into question this notion of experiences shared by all women (Mohanty (2003)). Intersectionality points to a "matrix of domination" (Collins (1991)), created by the intersecting experiences of belonging to more than one oppressed group (Collins (1991)). Rather than being a purely additive experience, intersectionality posits that new, specific experiences are created, that are particular to those individuals who find themselves at a given intersection of oppression. Experiences, therefore, are not shared by a whole group of people (for example, all women, all men, all African Americans), but rather by different subgroups within these populations. Of course, one of the potential criticisms of this concept is the fact that it creates a "slippery slope", where the group of individuals actually sharing a characteristic becomes smaller and smaller, until an atomistic, truly individualistic conception emerges. However, the critique presented by intersectionality is helpful when considering whether it is in fact useful to think about "women" as a homogenous group with respect to political representation.

Mansbridge (2003) introduced additional dimensions of representation (gyroscopic, surrogate, and anticipatory), out of which the aspect of surrogate representation matters especially for the connection between descriptive and substantive representation in the sense of female elected officials acting "for women". Surrogate representation attempts to take into account the fact that representatives might try to represent citizens who are not directly their constituents - women who do not reside in their respective districts, for example (Celis et al. (2008)). This poses additional obstacles for the idea of descriptive representation, again in the form of "Which women are the ones being represented?", or even "Which women’s interests are being represented?".

"Politics of presence" is a term coined by Phillips (1995) in order to justify the continued use of, and demand for, descriptive representation, even in the face of criticisms, this time coming not from intersectionality scholars and post-modern feminists, but rather from other scholars of political representation who call for a focus on substantive representation alone, because they do not find additional value to be provided by the inclusion of descriptive
components in the process of representation. Phillips argues that, based on arguments regarding justice and representation of interests, a case can be made that women as a group will be better represented by another woman, who is more likely to share her experiences, at least to some extent. The "politics of presence" allow us to acknowledge that representatives are never true and pure delegates, since they always retain some autonomy. This makes it, according to Phillips, important who these representatives are.

Other scholars have in recent years begun to question the other side of the pair descriptive and substantive representation: our conceptualization, and operationalization not only of the category women, but also of women’s interests (Celis and Childs (2012); Smooth (2011)). In order to measure, in empirical terms, the effectiveness of women in politics (mostly legislators, as will be discussed in the literature review on empirical studies), researchers have to decide what women’s interests are. How does an elected official represent this elusive constituency "women", and how do we measure this act of representing? For the most part, scholars have applied what has recently been criticized as a feminist definition of women’s interests (Celis et al. (2008)). How does this conceptualization account for conservative women, both in office as well as in the electorate (Celis and Childs (2012))? Can we measure something that seems almost impossible to define without falling into the traps of essentialism and vagueness?

Several scholars have thus more recently argued for a more open notion of women’s interests. One of the most elaborate theories involves opening "women’s interests" up to be defined by those who claim to act for women, and then to check these claims against the actual interests of the women they claim to represent. This would enable scholars to deal with the phenomenon of conservative women (Celis and Childs (2012)), as well as differences based on things other than ideology, such as race or geography or level of government at which representation takes place (Smooth (2011)). This new notion of conceptualizing women’s interest is a big part of what I aim to accomplish with this study, specifically within the context of varying levels of descriptive representation within the United States.
Arriving at the same question via a very different route, sociology and social psychology have long grappled with the question of groups, specifically reference groups, and how we choose the groups with which to identify (Merton and Rossi (1968)). Reference groups are generally considered to be groups with which the individual shares some common characteristic. However, which characteristic that is may vary, as may the type of connection the individual has with the group in question. People may use their personal friends and acquaintances as a references group, meaning that they may compare themselves to those they are in close personal contact with, or they may choose a group of people they do not personally interact with, but still feel a connection to. To make matters even more complicated, Merton and Rossi (1968) suggest that under certain conditions, individuals may choose to identify with an ”out-group” (a group they do not belong to, but wish to belong to) rather than with their respective ”in-group(s)”.

This theory, though originating from a very different point than the feminist thought presented above, poses, consequently, some similar questions with respect to women and representation. Do women use other women as ”reference groups”, not only to compare themselves to, but rather to appeal to? Which sub-groups of the overly broad category of ”women” are chosen, and in which situations, and by whom? Do the women thus appealed to also conceive themselves to be part of this reference group called ”women”, as conceptualized in this particular instance, and is this particular reference group salient to them when it comes to their assessment regarding their representation in the political arena?

To put it differently, which sub-group of women is used as a reference group by a legislator or candidate for legislative office when he or she talks about ”women’s interests”. Legislators’ conceptualizations of women’s interests might also be influenced by some of their potential reference groups - namely, the other legislators as well as the broader political environment in which they act. How does the presence or absence of women in these potential reference groups influence the conceptualization of women’s interests? All of these theoretical questions arise once ”women” are no longer conceptualized as a monolithic and homogeneous group.
2.2 Empirical Research

Empirical studies on women and political representation are numerous, and provide mixed results. They cover areas such as effects on political participation by female voters (Atkeson and Rapoport (2003); Banwart and Bystrom (2005); Chaney et al. (1998); Hansen (1997), Fridkin and Kenney (2014)), feelings of political efficacy (Atkeson and Carillo (2007); Campbell and Wolbrecht (2006); Dolan (2006); Kanthak and Krause (2011); Wohlbrecht and Campbell (2007)), campaign styles (Banwart and McKinney (2005); Benze and Declercq (1985); Dabelko and Herrnson (1997); Herrnson et al. (2003); Kahn (1993); Kahn (1996); Sapiro et al. (2011)), and the interaction between gender and partisanship (Brians (2005); Reingold and Harrell (2010)). Most relevant for this project, however, are studies that examine the link between descriptive representation and substantive representation, usually in the form of policy outputs.

Previous research shows that women legislators seem to view women as a distinct part of their constituencies, which leads them to emphasize different priorities when it comes to their policy agendas (Swers (1998); Swers (2001)), and to bring a different "voice" to the House floor (Walsh (2002)). Studying women office holders in local context, some studies find that women will perceive the presence of other women as positively influencing the way the population views women office holders (MacManus (1981)), and experience a sense of connectedness with other women (Flamang (1985)), leading them to feel more confident emphasizing different priorities and issues than their male colleagues.

However, there is also reason to believe that women in office stress other issues and emphasize different aspects not because they have different priorities than men, but rather because of the large impact of (liberal/feminist) women’s organizations on the recruitment of female candidates (Lawless and Fox (2010)). Partisanship may also play a large, mitigating effect (Schaffner (2005)), indicating that liberal and conservative female office holders have different views and approaches to what is generally defined as "women’s issues" by many scholars. Other studies come up with decidedly mixed results (Cowell-Meyers and Langbein...
taken together, the picture that emerges from these empirical studies is that women legislators tend to see themselves as representing women, but this may partially be due to the way a large number of them are recruited as well as to different conceptions of what "women’s issues” are. Institutional and societal contexts, partisanship, and issue area are thought to play a strong mediating role, but very few (if any) studies have attempted to explore systematically how they matter. The existing scholarship also focuses exclusively on female elected officials and their attempts at representing women, without looking at representative claims or actions coming from male officials or candidates.

As can be seen from the above, there appears to be a disconnect between the theoretical and the empirical part of the existing literature on women and representation. More than that, the theoretical literature, though aware of problems and potential weaknesses, has, to this point, not addressed them satisfactorily. While theoretical work has pointed out the problems when talking about women or women’s interests (see for example Celis and Childs (2012) and Celis et al. (2008) for an elaborate explanation of the problems associated with generalizing about what "women’s interests” are, and thus what the representation of women looks like), empirical work still focuses on broad categories.

Studies, like, for example, the one by Swers (1998) look at the behavior of "female legislators” in Congress, and treat this group as more or less homogenous. Differences like partisanship and ideology are used as control variables, but this does not change the fact that we expect liberal and conservative women to represent women in the same way. The dependent variable, policy outcomes, is pre-defined by the researchers, according to a standard set by academics. Oftentimes, they are feminist interests, which is conflated with women’s interests overall. This assumes two homogenous groups: the group of female legislators, who
are all held to the same standard, and the group of women in the electorate, who are all thought to feel represented by the same policies. An exception is a recent article (Celis and Erzeel (2015)), in which the authors find that, in the British context, representative claims on behalf of women are sometimes made by non-liberal/non-feminist male representatives - findings that further strengthen the theoretical underpinnings of this study - as well as recent empirical work trying to disentangle women’s descriptive and substantive representation in the Swiss context (Lloren (2015)).

The same assumption underlies the study by Cowell-Meyers and Langbein (2009), for example, where the authors define women-friendly policies, and then test whether the presence of a higher number of female legislators, this time on the level of US states, leads to more or less of these policies. Again, this implies that all women hold the same preferences on these issues, or that the women who do not are not aware of what their true interests are. It also holds all female legislators to the same standard, regardless of contextual factors or individual characteristics.

Two other aspects complicate this relationship even further. Firstly, a majority of women legislators, especially in the 1990s and early 2000s, were a group heavily supported and recruited by liberal women’s groups (Lawless and Fox (2010)). This, in turn, implies that this group constitutes a subsample of who could theoretically represent women in the political arena. While research overall asserts that women, on average, are more liberal (or at least more likely to vote Democratic) than men, this group of legislators, who are the population studied by a lot of researchers, may be an especially liberal group. Many studies do not take this into account.

Secondly, women legislators tend to claim that they are speaking ”for women” (Carroll (2000)). Upon further investigation, however, it becomes clear that they by no means refer to the same thing. ”Representing women” means different things to different legislators (Smooth (2011)). This could be due to several causes: Women legislators could have fundamentally different notions of what women’s interests are, and which women they represent.
They might be, just like researchers, universalizing "their" group of women to an abstract constituency of "women" in general. Alternatively, they might feel an obligation to say they represent women specifically because they perceive that to be the expectation. Women legislators might think that they need to state their intention to represent "women’s interests", because they fear negative consequences if they do not. Lastly, women legislators may be "forced" into that role not by public expectations, but because of the expectations of their fellow legislators (Carroll (2000)). So-called "women’s issues" might almost automatically become their responsibility, which would in turn change their legislative behavior as well as, presumably, their likelihood to claim representation of women as a group: if you are to fulfill a role, you might as well embrace it.

All these additional considerations are not captured in empirical studies trying to assess how "women legislators" in a number of contexts represent "women’s interests". This might, in part, explain the mixed results that several studies produce, not only in the area of women and substantive representation, but also when it comes to campaigning on the part of candidates, or feelings of efficacy on the part of the population. Of course, as seen above, the theoretical literature has acknowledged all of these complications. However, their solutions, if they propose any, tend to be partial and ignore important aspects of the situation.

The articles by Celis and Childs (2012) and Celis et al. (2008), for example, criticize the existing scholarship for generalizing and universalizing, both with regards to the category "women" as well as to their presumed interests. However, to remedy these problems, they propose essentially to move away from the study of descriptive representation altogether. Instead of focusing on women representatives and their influence, they suggest that researchers should instead focus on all legislators that claim to act for women, and should attempt to investigate how this act of representing takes place (Celis et al. (2008)). Not only does this leave it up to representatives and interest groups to define "women’s interests" (albeit admittedly in a broader sense than in much of the previous work), but it also moves us away from investigating the relationship between substantive and descriptive representation, essentially
abandoning descriptive representation altogether.

Phillips (1995) argues for a "politics of presence", arguing for descriptive representation on the basis of justice as well as interest representation, but modifying the claim to state that women are more likely to share experiences with other women, and thus more likely to represent their interests. In that way, Phillips is able to retain, in her argument, the value of descriptive representation, but she does not succeed (or even attempt to) account for different groups and subpopulations of women and their respective differing preferences and priorities. In other words, while Phillips acknowledges the fact that women representatives may not share the exact experiences and preferences of those women they seek or claim to represent, she believes that women, as a group, are better able to represent women than men.

Taken together, the following picture emerges from the literature on women’s substantive and descriptive representation: empirical scholars, while usually aware of the simplification they are employing, have thus far not attempted to create or use a more nuanced conceptualization of representation in both its descriptive and its substantive forms. Theorists, on the other hand, have focused their energies either on the aspect of descriptive representation (such as Phillips) or substantive representation (such as Celis et al.), in turn neglecting the other respective area. Therefore, the picture political science has been able to paint about the connection between descriptive and substantive representation of women has to this day been blurry and unclear. This study is designed to reconcile these two literatures and traditions by broadening our idea of women’s interests, and including all representatives who claim to speak for women, while at the same time retaining the descriptive component of representation.

By looking at all those who claim to speak for women, substantive representation is moved to the center, and the concept of women’s interests is opened up to include alternative definitions. By investigating who actually makes representative claims, and who follows them up with actions, it should be possible to figure out whether women are actually more likely
to represent women as a group, and whether their conception of representation is different from that of their male colleagues who make comparable claims. By comparing states with different levels of descriptive representation, it should become possible to assess whether the presence of women in elected office makes other representatives more likely to focus specifically on this group of constituents, and whether it influences their notion of what women’s interests are.

3 Theory & Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical and empirical findings presented above, it seems reasonable to expect women’s representation and women’s interests to be anything but clear-cut. In other words, some legislators and candidates should be more likely to talk about women and women’s representation than others. Partisanship as well as gender seem like obvious places to start when it comes to looking for nuances regarding women’s representation.

Based on what we know about women’s interests and Congress, Democrats should be more likely to talk about women’s interests than Republicans, and women should be more likely to do so than men. Therefore, one would expect Democratic women to be most active on behalf of women and their interests, and Republican men to be least active.

By the same logic, the types of representational claims should differ between the subgroups of legislators. To put it differently, if Michele Bachmann (R-MN) talks about women’s interests, she will most likely do so in a very different manner than Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), and the kinds of issues she associates with women’s interests will certainly not be identical with the ones Baldwin has in mind. Consequently, this study will set out out test the following set of hypotheses:

\[ H1: \text{Women are more likely than men to engage in representational activity specifically targeted at women} \]

\[ H2: \text{Democrats are more likely than Republicans to engage in representational} \]
activity specifically targeted at women

H3: The types of representational activities engaged in are going to differ significantly, depending on whether they are made by men and women, or Democrats and Republicans, respectively.

Of course, these hypotheses represent only a first cut, a still-broad attempt at untangling the nuances and contextual factors that influence the process of political representation. Other factors that are likely to affect if and how an individual talks about women are, for example, whether or not a legislator identifies him- or herself with subsets within his or her party. Affinity for the tea party movement, for example, should influence Republican legislators. My argument is that they will not necessarily be talking about women less, but that they will be talking about them differently.

The likelihood and manner in which members of Congress engage in representational claims/actions on behalf of women could also depend on the specific context within their home state. There are enormous differences between the states when it comes to how many women have been elected to political office, either on the state or national level. Arizona, for example, has had a total of four women serving as governor, whereas almost half of the states have never had a female governor. Contextual factors like this, which I will call ”Level of Descriptive Representation” or ”Receptiveness to Women in Political Office”, could very well influence whether a member of Congress talks about women specifically, and in which manner that member does so. If more women have been elected to political office in a state in the past, candidates and legislators will most likely be aware of that, and might thus be more likely themselves to emphasize women and women’s interests, because the environment in which, and with which, they interact seems more receptive to women in political positions and thus explicitly to women and their interests.

Interactions between all these contextual and demographic factors will most likely make for a nuanced, multi-layered web of representational claims and actions on behalf of women, and this study will hopefully be a first step in disentangling its different layers and interac-


4 Research Design

4.1 Data

For this study, I collected data from several sources in order to capture both representational claims as well as representational actions by candidates for and members of Congress. I scraped the website of the Congressional Record for floor speeches, with the word ”women” as the search term, for the 111th, 112th, and 113th Congress. Subsequently, I excluded speeches in which women were mentioned ”by accident”, for example when the speaker talked about ”men and women”, ”servicemen and -women”, or ”minorities, women, children, and disabled veterans”. The logic behind the exclusion of these speeches was to analyze only instances in which the speaker made a deliberate and conscious choice to speak on behalf of women, however he or she may define that group.

Of course there is a chance that, by using the term ”women” as the main search term, some speeches were in fact excluded where individuals talked about women without ever mentioning the specific term. However, with women being among the broadest terms, chances are very high that in cases where women’s interests are the focus of attention, the word women will be mentioned at least once. Even this singular instance would lead to the speech being included in the data. I also excluded speeches dealing with maternity/pregnancy in cases where the speech focused exclusively on the health of the child, without mentioning maternal well-being or health. Symbolic gestures, such as the naming of a post office after a specific women, were also dropped from the data set. However, if the symbolism is used to highlight a specific policy implication, or draw attention to progress that has been made on behalf of women, or present a particular individual as a role model for (young) women, the speech was included.

I similarly scraped the Congressional Record’s website for bills focusing on women and
women’s interests, using the same guidelines to include and exclude bills as I described above for floor speeches. The bills represent a proxy for actions on behalf of women, while the floor speeches, as well as the campaign ads (described below) stand for representational claims.

The third element consists of campaign ads. At the time of the completion of this manuscript, the 2008 and 2010 data was available, with 2012 to be added when it becomes available. The campaign ads were obtained through the WiscAds Project for the 2008 data and the Wesleyan Media Project for the 2010 data. For both 2008 and 2010, the data made available include ads aired in most media markets, which covers the majority of all political ads aired in congressional, presidential, and gubernatorial races. In addition to a data set, the individual ads are available as story boards for 2008 and video files for 2010. I analyzed the story boards for House and Senate elections in 2008, and the video files for the 2010 House elections (with the Senate to be added for the next version of the manuscript).

Ads were coded as being ”about women” when the speaker specifically mentioned women (or a sub-group of women, such as mothers) or when the (main or only) narrator of the ad or person shown on screen was a woman (except in cases where this happened to be the candidate). The reason for this was the assumption that the deliberate choice to show a woman or let a woman narrate the story was intended to send a message to women, or to constituents in general, about the role of women in the candidate’s campaign. Opponents’ ads were included as well (this will be explained in greater detail below) and they were treated according to the same set of coding rules. Only ads sponsored by the candidate, the opponent(s), or the candidate’s/opponents’ party were included.

For the years 2009 through 2013, this produced a data set of 4162 floor speeches, 732 bills, and 372 campaign ads dealing with women and women’s interests in some form. In order to complete the data set, additional information was collected on all members of Congress for the 111th, 112th, and 113th Congress. These variables, and the variables created based on the data described above, will be explained in the following section.
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<th>Variable</th>
<th>Obs.</th>
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### 4.2 Variables

The data set includes all members of Congress (House and Senate) who served during the years 2009-2013. Each observation is one individual, though members who served, for example, in the House in the 111th Congress and in the Senate in the 112th Congress are counted twice, as the data set is later broken into two separate sets, one comprising the House and one comprising the Senate. For each individual, I collected data on each individual’s gender (*Gender*), partisanship (*Party*), state (*State*), the year they were first elected (*Year First Elected*), and whether or not they affiliate with the tea party, either by being a member of the tea party caucus or by expressing affinity to the tea party but stating explicitly their refusal to join the caucus\(^1\) (*Tea Party*).

**Descriptive Representation Level**: To measure the contextual aspect of descriptive representation in each state, I used an indicator I developed based on previous levels of descriptive representation in the state’s legislative and executive offices\(^2\). I used data I had collected on the number of female governors (*Governor*) the state had; the average percentage of women elected to the state’s legislature between 1995 and 2000 (*State Legislature 1995-2000*); and the number of state executive positions filled by women in 2002 (apart from governors) (*Executive*)

1. Some tea party members consider an organized tea party caucus as being contrary to the ideals of the tea party movement (http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0810/40528.html)
2. This indicator has been used and described previously in my paper "Dissent on U.S. State Supreme Courts: Measuring the Direct and Indirect Effects of Descriptive Representation" (2014, unpublished)
ecutive (Not Governor)). These were standardized from 0 to 1 (total number of women in executive positions in a state divided by highest number of women in such positions in any state). Some of these measures (such as the Governor variable) tap the state’s entire political history up to the present, and some are snapshots of different times prior to the period under study. Taken together, this should give us a useful picture of any given state’s overall receptiveness to women in elected office.

I used exploratory factor analysis\(^3\) to measure whether these independent indicators tapped the same dimension, and constructed a variable. I used this variable to divide the states into five groups of ten states each\(^4\), thus establishing a measure of distinct levels of descriptive representation, with 1 being the highest, and 5 being the lowest possible score (Descriptive Representation Level)\(^5\). The division into five groups was made for utility purposes. Both measures behaved in essentially identical ways in the model.

Finally, I used the data I described above to create four additional variables capturing each individual MOC’s claims and actions on behalf of women. Percent Floor Speeches Mentioning Women is the number of floor speeches coded as being about women, divided by the individual’s total number of floor speeches in the time period under study. I am using percentages rather than raw number of representational floor speeches to account for the fact that some members may be inclined to talk more in general. Because of this, they may consequently be talking more about women as well. Thus, a member who gives only two floor speeches during the entire period under study, one of which is devoted to women’s interests, is most likely more invested or interested in the topic than an individual who mentions women in 20 speeches, but gives a total of 200.

By the same logic Percent Bills Mentioning Women is the percentage of all bills sponsored by a member of Congress that has been classified as dealing with women’s interests in

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\(^3\)Factor analysis data is available from author

\(^4\)Alternatively, a division into three levels has also been used; the two indicators perform essentially identically

\(^5\)List of states available upon request; the results were checked to make sure this indicator is not simply a proxy for some other variable; states do not group according to party ID, urban/rural, size of the economy, political culture or other, similarly likely, attributes, suggesting that this indicator taps a different dimension
one form or another\textsuperscript{6}, and \textit{Percent Campaign Ads Mentioning Women} does the same for campaign ads sponsored either by the candidate or the candidate’s party. \textit{Current Percent Mentioning Women} is an overall measure, expressing each individual office holder’s average percentage of talking about/acting for women, in the form of floor speeches, bill sponsorship, and campaign ads.

Lastly, \textit{Number Opponents’ Ads Mentioning Women} is a control variable counting the total number of ads aired by each MOC’s opponent(s). This variable is the only one not expressed as a percentage. It is a composite measure of all the women-focused ads of the candidate’s opponents - and they may have more than one opponent over the course of the election - and it is intended to capture the overall importance given to women’s interests in the race.

4.3 Model

4.3.1 Regression

I ran a total of twenty-four different linear regression models\textsuperscript{7}, all of which are displayed in the two tables under the \textit{Results} section. The Senate and the House were analyzed separately. For each chamber, a regression was run for each of the four variables capturing claims/actions on behalf of women (\textit{Percent Bills Mentioning Women}, \textit{Percent Floor Speeches Mentioning Women}, \textit{Percent Campaign Ads Mentioning Women}, \textit{Current Percent Mentioning Women}). The reason for this is twofold: Firstly, I am interested in finding out how representative claims and actions are influenced by the individual’s gender and partisanship. In other words, are women really more likely to speak and/or act on behalf of women? Are Republicans really less likely to talk about women’s interests than Democrats? By looking at each type of representational claim/action separately, it will be possible to pick up nuances and

\textsuperscript{6}Only sponsorship of bills was counted; co-sponsors were not taken into account

\textsuperscript{7}I also ran a negative binomial regression, using the count of representational claims as a dependent variable and controlling for total number of speeches/bills/campaign ads, as well as a state fixed-effects version, and the results remained basically the same with these alternate specifications
differences between different kinds of representational activities. By looking at the average representative activity on behalf of women, it will be possible to detect overall patterns and compare office holders who may be engaging in different activities and to different extents.

Secondly, I am interested in whether and how one type of representational activity is connected to another. By using the three separate expressions of representational activity (floor speeches, bill sponsorship, and campaign ads) as, in turn, dependent and independent variables, it will become possible to disentangle if and how these activities interrelate. This means that separate regressions were run, for each type of activity (floor speeches, bill sponsorship, and campaign ads) as well for the *Current Percent Mentioning Women* variable. When the dependent variable is *Percent Floor Speeches Mentioning Women*, for example, *Percent Bills Mentioning Women* and *Percent Campaign Ads Mentioning Women* are included as explanatory variables in the model, and vice versa. None of the three representational types is included as an independent variable in regressions with *Current Percent Mentioning Women* as the dependent variable, however, since this indicator is made up of exactly those three types of activities, so including them would not tell us anything meaningful.

In addition to this, I also ran each of the regressions for a subsample of each chamber, looking at only men and only women, respectively. This breakdown enables us to see in greater detail if there are differences between the representative claims/actions taken by men and women in Congress, and what these differences look like if they do exist. Non-linear relationships between *Gender* and representational activity (cases where men and women are both influenced, but in different ways) might not be picked up in the overall regression results\(^8\).

\(^8\)The Senate subsample of women is too small to make any definite statements about statistical significance. Results are included nonetheless, to allow a first glimpse of which patterns might show up once more observations have been added
4.3.2 Content Analysis

The second part of the analysis deals with exploring the "types" of women’s representation and how they might be connected to gender and partisanship, as well as contextual factors (such as those captured by Descriptive Representation Level). In order to explore whether different office holders in fact talk about and act on behalf of women and women’s interests in different ways, a random subsample of 200 floor speeches about women was hand-coded in order to create a typology of women’s interests. The hand-coding produced both a list of representational types\(^9\) as well as a dictionary of terms that characterize each type.

"Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count - LIWC"\(^{10}\) was used to analyze the remaining population of floor speeches and bills/resolutions and determine the extent to which they fall into the discovered categories. LIWC’s output consists of a table in which, for each text (each floor speech or bill/resolution, in this case), the percentage of words that belong to each dictionary category are listed. I used this information to determine the dominant "type" of representational claims for each individual MOC\(^{11}\) in the data set\(^{12}\). The break-down into different types then made it possible to explore the relationship between type of representational claim, gender, partisanship, and level of descriptive representation as a contextual factor.

\(^{9}\)24 separate categories were discovered; they are Violence Against Women/Domestic Violence/Stalking, Honor Killings, Cancer, Pregnancy/Maternal Care, Abortion/Pro-Choice, Aborting/Pro-Life, Health Care Reform/Pro, Health Care Reform/Con, Health/Other, Job Discrimination, Educational/Athletic Discrimination, Health Discrimination, Veteran Care, Military Sexual Assault, Foreign Policy/Political Rights, Foreign Policy/Health, Role Models, Progress, Economy/Poverty, Economic Opportunity, Families/Care, Families/Economic Support, National Security/Borders, National Security/Other

\(^{10}\)http://www.liwc.net

\(^{11}\)each MOC could be a different "type" for floor speeches and bills, respectively

\(^{12}\)During the analysis, it became clear that MOC talking about abortion/pro-life, and making an argument that is about women (as opposed to one that is centered on the rights of the unborn child) tend to use language that is similar to that used by those talking about violence against women. This caused the two scores to be more closely related in the first run than they actually are; I attempted to resolve this issue by including phrases in both the Violence Against Women and the Abortion/Pro-Life categories that are unique to each category, in order to avoid artificially high pro-life scores for those concerned with violence against women and vice versa; however, this methodological difficulty also gives us an important insight into the nature of representational claims on behalf of women
5 Results

As a first step, I will look at each representational activity and the factors affecting each one individually, before moving on to drawing connections and highlighting the similarities and differences between them. The results for the regressions underlying this discussion can be seen in Tables 1&2. The dependent variables are expressed as percentages, ranging from 0 to 1.

Campaign ads are a very distinct kind of representational activity. They occur in the context of an election, so it is clear that the candidate is speaking to a clearly defined audience, namely his or her electorate. Ads are unique among the representational activities studied here, precisely for these reasons: the timeframe in which they are used is explicitly confined, and the audience much more easily identified than for floor speeches or bills.

When it comes to representing women and women’s interests, ads are not influenced by gender or party. Both men and women, and both Democrats and Republicans, use (or refrain from using) campaign ads targeted at women with indistinguishable likelihood.

However, even though there is no detectable difference between men and women when it comes to employing ads targeted at women, men and women (at least in the House) appear to be influenced in their decision to produce and create such an ad by different factors. Women in the House are more likely to have aired ads focused on women if they have served in Congress longer. In other words, the statistically detectable influences on female representatives appear to be demographic or contextual. If we want to predict what makes them more (or less) likely to air an add specifically speaking (or implicitly appealing) to their female constituents, we need to look at who they are or which contexts they operate in.

The year these women were first elected to Congress could be interpreted in a seniority- or cohort-oriented manner, or it could be used to argue that, for lack of a better term, only a certain "kind" of woman ran for (and won) congressional office the further we go back in time - and since a significant number of women were elected to Congress either during the heyday
of second-wave feminism, or during the so-called "Year of the Woman" in the early 90s, it is possible to see how this might increase the likelihood that these women openly target some of their campaign ads at women, specifically. Thus, these women may be influenced by the contextual factors of the time and place in which they first ran for office, or they may become more secure (and thus more likely to specifically target their ads at women without fear of being stereotyped) as their standing in Congress grows firmer over time.

Male members of the House, on the other hand, seem to be more influenced by activities, rather than characteristics and context. Men appear more inclined to invest in women-focused ads if their opponent does so, and if they are also inclined to talk about women in their floor speeches. Of course, the chronological order of floor speeches and ads is at least partially reversed, as the advertising data includes the 2008 election, and the floor speech data is from the following two congresses. Therefore, the positive relationship between ads and floor speeches seems to be indicative of an underlying inclination or propensity to focus on women in representational activity. Interestingly, this propensity does not seem to be picked up by variables measuring context and characteristics, such as party/tea party affiliation, time of first election, or receptiveness to women in elected office of the legislator’s home state.

As for the Senate, the differences between men and women that could be observed in the House appear to be non-existent. Of course, breaking the Senate sample into two groups reduces the sample size, especially for women, to a level that makes it hard to be confident in any results, so the division is much less useful for that chamber. The main factor influencing the likelihood of a Senator to devote an ad to women specifically seems to be driven primarily by actions of the opponent. While it is, of course, impossible to say whether the Senator’s (or Representative’s, for that matter) decision to produce an add targeted at women influenced his or her opponent to do so as well, or whether the opponent’s action came first, we can see that there is a connection. In other words, the chronology, and therefore the direction of the causal arrow, is impossible to disentangle, but it is possible to say that something about the
dynamic of the individual race influences candidates’ likelihood to talk about women. The next step I plan to do in order to possibly be able to, in fact, make a causal claim regarding who is the first to make these representational claims (the member of congress/future member of congress or his or her opponent) is to go back and get the dates of the first airing for the ads in question. That way, it will be possible to say something about who influences whom, and one could then even learn more about specific factors unique to the race, the candidate, and the opponent that makes it more likely for one or the other to engage in this kind of representational activity on behalf of women.

Floor speeches, as pointed out before, are a very different kind of representational activity. They appear in a different context than ads, and the audience is arguably different as well. One could argue that floor speeches are not at all focused on constituents. Legislators may be speaking to party elites, interest groups, or their peers in Congress, but very few ”people on the street” will be paying attention to floor speeches. Of course, an exception could be a candidate’s use of a particular floor speech during their campaign, in order to further stress the work they have done with respect to a specific issue, but it is safe to assume that only a very small percentage of floor speeches is given with that explicit goal in mind.
As opposed to what was observed with respect to campaign ads, floor speech activity does seem to depend on a member of congress’ party affiliation and gender. As one might expect, being a Democrat makes one more likely to deliver a floor speech on behalf of women, and so does being a woman. It is noteworthy that both of these factors work in the same way for both the House as well as the Senate, though only gender achieves significance in the Senate. Furthermore, both gender and party did not matter at all when it came to campaign ads, but they do here. The direction of the relationship between both gender and party and
women-focused floor speeches is in line with the findings of a good part of previous research
on the topic, and clearly supports H1 and H2.

The correlation between male members of the House’s propensity to speak on behalf
of women and to air ads focused at women, which was observed above with respect to
campaign ads, makes another appearance, which is not much of a surprise. Additionally,
there is a strong relationship between floor speeches and bill sponsorship when it comes
to the representation of women. For both men and women in the House, as well as male
Senators, bills and floor speeches are strongly correlated. Since these activities are both
intra-congressional, it makes sense that they are connected. That is to say, legislators might
be talking about the bills they sponsored (which are aimed at women and meant to represent
women), thus their likelihood to give speeches on the floor that explicitly discuss women and
their interests is likely to originate from a previous activity, such as a bill they sponsored.

On the other hand, even though this might not seem like an unexpected finding, it is, in
my opinion, noteworthy that representational claims and representational actions appear to
go together, at least when it comes to those occurring within the congressional context. From
the data at hand, it is, at this point, not possible to deduce with certainty that these floor
speeches are indeed about specific bills previously sponsored by the member of congress in
question, but there undoubtedly appears a clear connection between the likelihood to engage
in one of these activities, and the likelihood to engage in the other. Since I have data on the
bills mentioned in the floor speeches, as well as the date on which a specific speech was given,
it might be possible in the future to investigate whether bills or speeches come first, and
whether speeches are focused on bills the legislators themselves introduced. Even without
this information the clear link between the two activities tells us something important about
representational activity: those who make claims are also more likely to act - or conversely,
those who act are also more likely to speak.
A contextual factor that seems to play a role, at least in the context of the House, is the level of descriptive representation, or, in other words, a state’s receptiveness to women in political office. One noteworthy factor is the reverse relationship between descriptive representation and floor speeches as compared to descriptive representation and bills. Floor speeches on behalf of women become more likely, at least for male members of the House, when the receptiveness of their state’s environment to women increases. This could be because of the way this variable is coded, a negative coefficient actually signifies a positive relationship.
explained by a legislator’s expectation that his or her public statement specifically targeted at women will be received more warmly by constituents (if they happen to hear about it) in a state that is more accustomed to women in the public sphere. Men who are more used to working with female colleagues might also be more likely to think of women’s interests than their colleagues from states where this is less common.

However, bills and resolutions specifically mentioning women decrease in frequency, again in the context of the House, when the legislator’s state is more receptive to women in elected office, as measured by the descriptive representation variable. This indicates, even if it cannot be stated with certainty, that different factors and mechanisms are at work for different kinds of representational activity. Differences between men and women, between ads and speeches, and between members of the House and members of Senate indicate a rather complex pattern of factors coming into play when it comes to representational activities.

Bill sponsorship shares certain characteristics with floor speeches, such as the intra-congressional nature of the activity, and this assumption of similarity seems to be justified when we take a look at the factors influencing each activity. Similar to what was observed above, bill sponsorship appears to be correlated with gender and party. Again, Democrats are more likely to sponsor bills specifically aimed at the representation of women’s interests, but here, men are more likely than their female colleagues to engage in this kind of representational activity. For partisanship, this is true for both chambers, while gender only plays a significant role for the House. This is noteworthy, because it suggests a pattern opposite to that suggested by the floor speech results. For speeches, gender seemed to play a bigger role in the Senate than party did. Conversely, party is a lot more influential when it comes to bills, at least in the senatorial context. This (at least suggested) reversal further supports the claim that representation is a multi-dimensional and multi-faceted activity.

The other main factors predicting bill sponsorship, especially in the House, are floor speeches and, to a lesser extent, descriptive representation. The relationship between speeches and bills was discussed above, and it again proves to be a solid correlation. The connection
between bill sponsorship and descriptive representation was briefly mentioned above, but deserves a more thorough examination. While the data at hand cannot tell us much about the causes of this negative relationship (bills sponsored on behalf of women go down as a state’s receptiveness to women in public office goes up), it is possible that legislators from "low receptiveness"-states see more of a need for woman-focused legislation, and are thus more likely to sponsor this kind of bills or resolutions. Legislators from states where many women have been elected to public office might see less of a need to specifically further women’s interests in their legislative agendas.

Lastly, one should look at each legislator’s overall propensity to speak or act on behalf of women, so the variable of interest is Overall Percentage, which expresses each legislator’s average percentage, by adding their percentages for ads, speeches, and bills directed at women and dividing this composite percentage by three, thus effectively indexing representative behavior overall. Since this variable is made up of the three types of activities discussed above, it makes sense that factors influencing each one individually might also affect the composite indicator. Indeed, gender, party, opponents’ ads, and, to a lesser degree, year of first election impact overall representational activity for both chambers.

For the House, we can again observe a division between men and women. While the propensity of male representatives to engage in representational activity on behalf of women seems to be dependent on their partisanship as well as, again, the number of ads aired by their opponents that were aimed specifically at women, women’s activities, again, appear to be driven more by the year in which they were elected. This relationship is negative, so those elected earlier are more likely to engage in representational activity on behalf of women. This correlation could be framed as one of seniority or one of cohort. A cohort-oriented argument like the one presented above seems more intuitive, with those elected earlier acting according to the mindset and culture of the time in and circumstances under which they were elected.

To summarize the results, representational activity on behalf of women appears to be influenced by other types of women-focused representational activity, as well as by demo-
graphic, contextual, and institutional factors. Men and women, Democrats and Republicans, Representatives and Senators all speak or act for women, but they choose different kinds of representational actions.

Figure 1: Who Speaks for Women?

Figure 1 shows the frequency of representational activity (in this case floor speeches and bills/resolutions) for male Democrats, female Democrats, male Republicans, and female Republicans, respectively. The bars are based on the mean score each group received on a dichotomous indicator variable expressing whether (1) or not (0) a legislator engaged in these kinds of representational activity. The graph clearly shows support for $H1$ and $H2$, with Democrats focusing on women’s interests more than their Republican counterparts, and women being more likely to do so than men. However, while the difference between Democratic and Republican men is quite significant, that between the women of both parties is almost non-existent. Gender therefore seems to have a more profound impact on representational claims on behalf of women than partisanship does, and gender and partisanship also appear to interact, with the inter-party difference for men being quite noticeable, and the difference between genders being fairly large within both parties.

Of course, at this point, we cannot say anything about the content of these representa-
tional claims and actions. In other words, we know that being a woman and a Democrat makes one more likely to speak/act on behalf of women, but when male Republicans do mention women in their speeches and bills, do they conceptualize women and their interests in the same way as their Democratic, female colleagues? If they do not, what are the differences between the way men and women (or Democrats and Republicans) understand (and represent) women’s interests? The results of the content analysis presented below will be useful in beginning to untangle these relationships.

Figure 2 focuses on one group of representational types uncovered by the content analysis.
of the floor speech data. These three types are all focused on pregnancy, maternity, and reproductive rights in some form. *Pregnancy* emerged as a category dealing with everything reproduction-related that is not abortion. Therefore, it includes speeches on topics such as pre-natal care, health services available to pregnant women, and the like. *Abortion-Pro Life* is centered around abortion, with a pro-life emphasis. However, it should be noted that these speeches present the pro-life arguments in a manner that is focused on women rather than unborn children. *Abortion-Pro Choice* finally is characterized by arguments centered on a woman’s right to choose.

Looking at Panel (a), the patterns support what was to be expected: Women talk more about abortion (in a context that is focused on women’s interests, rather than the interests of the unborn), and there is a clear party division when it comes to pro-choice and pro-life arguments. While members of both parties talk about *Pregnancy* (though not very often), it is Democrats who talk *Choice* and Republicans who talk *Life* in the House.

However, Panel (b) muddies the waters a bit, as these divisions appear not nearly as clear-cut in the context of the Senate. Most strikingly, Republican women in the Senate do not talk about abortion at all. To put it differently, while Senators are overall not (or rarely) talking about *Pregnancy*, it is now Democrats who engage in a *Abortion*-discourse (with a *Pro-Choice*-angle) to a much greater extent, and Republican men who dominate the *Pro-Life* side. In other words, a gender division has been replaced by a party division, with Democrats and Republicans not only approaching the topic differently (which was already visible with the *Pro-Choice/Pro-Life* division in the House), but also differing in their likelihood to talk about abortion *at all*.

Panel (c) looks at Congress as a whole, rather than dividing by chamber. The composite picture of both chambers supports what became observable above: there is a party- and a gender-division when it comes to *Pro-Choice* versus *Pro-Life* arguments, with women of both parties equally likely to discuss the topic of abortion (and MUCH more likely than their male counterparts), and Democrats firmly on the *Pro-Choice*- and Republicans firmly on the *Pro-Life*-side.
on the Pro-Life-side.

Panel (d) finally simply divides Republicans by affiliation with the tea party. What is striking about this break-down into intra-Republican factions is the fact that the Republican discourse about abortion, overall, is both female and tea party-affiliated. One common feature of all four panels is that women talk considerably more about abortion than men, and this is true for both chambers and both parties. Republican women, however, seem to be spilt into two camps, one made up of moderate Senators, and one consisting of much more conservative (or tea-party-leaning) Representatives. This split seems to be a lot neater for female Republicans than for their male colleagues, a split that again becomes obvious when looking at bill sponsorship, as seen below in Figure 3, which again focuses on the same three types of frames used to discuss pregnancy-related issues.
A few striking similarities and differences emerge between these two types of representational activity. First of all, *Pregnancy* now shows up as a much more prevalent category among both Republicans as well as Democrats in both chambers. Secondly, female Republican senators *do* sponsor bills relating to pregnancy and maternal health - though not relating to abortion. In panel (d), we can clearly see the difference between tea party- and non-tea party affiliated Republican women when it comes to the introduction of legislation, and it appears that the split between tea party-affiliates and moderates, at least for women, neatly coincides with the chamber division.
It is also noteworthy that, while the claims and actions of Democratic men and women of both chambers look very similar, Republicans differ greatly when comparing floor speeches and bill sponsorship on issues of pregnancy and reproduction. The Pro-Life-angle, at least in the time period under study, is much more characterized by claims and less by legislative action, though in both cases the group of legislators most active on the Pro-Life-side are tea party-identifying women.

![Figure 4: Violence Against Women](image)

Looking at another category, Violence Against Women, another party/gender/chamber-split emerges: Figure 4 shows that in the House, Republican women seem to be most inclined to talk about women’s interests in this context, while for the Senate, the same is true for Democratic men.

While the pattern in the Violence group (Honor Killings showed up as a violence-related representational type, but was hardly ever the dominant type for legislators; Violence Against Women encompasses domestic violence, dating violence, stalking and other related topics; speeches in this category oftentimes revolve around the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act) differs noticeably from that characterizing the Pregnancy group, both display nuances and support the argument that if and how a legislator talks about women’s interests will be conditioned by demographic and contextual factors, such as gender, partisanship, and
the institutional environment. Representational activity on behalf of women is indeed patterned, but the patterns are not as simple and straightforward as some previous scholarship has assumed.

So far, we have looked at what happens within representational types, and in which way men, women, Republicans, and Democrats approach these issues. Below (Figure 5), we will take a slightly different approach, and look at which types of representational claims display the greatest differences.

(a) Health Care Reform (House)  
(b) Cancer & Other Health Issues (House)

Figure 5: Men vs. Women?

Interestingly, and perhaps unexpectedly, men (Democrats and Republicans) are the exclusive sponsors of House bills/resolutions focusing on reforms to the health care system with a focus on women 14. Though overall, this is rarely the dominant frame regarding women’s representation, it is an exclusively male one. On the other hand, House bills concerning cancer and other health issues 15 are predominantly introduced by women. While there is a party difference, with Democrats being more active in this regard than Republicans, the intra-party differences between men and women are much more pronounced.

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14 This category includes resolutions in favor the ACA, as well as those calling for a reform of the health care system in ways other than the approach taken by “Obama Care”

15 The Other category includes all health related issues that are not already contained in either the Cancer-, Reform-, or Pregnancy-discourses.
One way to explain these differences is by relating them to arguments about men’s and women’s differing cultures, for lack of a better word, when it comes to conflict and consensus. One could categorize the Reform argument as much more controversial, and the Cancer group as much more consensus-inspiring. In other words, any discussion about health care reform, no matter which side is taken, will lead to a considerable amount of disagreement, while bills introduced to, for example, fund the search for cures for cancer are much more likely to be supported on both sides of the aisle. While there may very well be differences between the parties when it comes to how exactly such policies should be implemented, the goal (a cure for cancer) is almost certainly universally supported.

This assumption is far from true when it comes to health care reform, where not only the specifics of reform, but also the necessity of any sort of reform of the health care system, remain contested. When it comes to bill sponsorship in the House, clear gender differences emerge with respect to which kinds of women’s interests are promoted, and women seem less willing to take controversial approaches than their male counterparts, at least when it comes to non-pregnancy related health issues. This could be seen as a consequence of what has been termed the "female style of leadership" (Kathlene (1994)), with its greater emphasis on cooperation and consensus.

Another way to conceptualize these different emphases is by observing that men seem to focus more on what could be called "big picture"-issues, such as overhauling the entire health care system, while the bills introduced by their female colleagues address much more specific issues, an explanation that does not contradict, but rather add to, arguments about different leadership styles.

Indeed, when looking at another "type" of representational activity, this time focused on foreign policy, a clear division along gender/party lines emerges when it comes to different kinds of representational activity within the same policy area.

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16Foreign Policy - Political Rights consists of claims focused on democratization, the promotion of girl’s education, and the fight against terrorism, while Foreign Policy - Health centers on maternal health, contraception, and the prevention of forced sterilizations.
Figure 6 compares foreign policy-focused speeches and bills in the House, and it becomes clear that, while floor speeches in this context are dominated by Democratic men, Republican women are the most active when it comes to the introduction of bills. Indeed, men of both parties are more likely to make speeches about women in a foreign policy-related manner, while women of both parties are more likely than their male co-partisans to introduce bills, though the difference is more pronounced for Democrats when it comes to speeches and for Republicans when it comes to sponsorship. Again, this exemplifies the different dynamics at work when comparing different kinds of representational activity.

A closer look at the dynamics within the parties reveals even more nuanced divisions. Figure 7, Panel (a) shows National Security-focused speeches for both chambers and both parties\textsuperscript{17}. The national security discourse appears both entirely male, and predominantly Republican, with women of both parties remaining completely silent on these matters, at least in the time period under study.

\textsuperscript{17}The National Security - Border category is centered around issues of border security and immigration, as well as smuggling and sex trafficking, while National Security - Other focuses on issues such as conflict prevention, non-proliferation, the promotion of democracy, and specific policies, such as the SMART Security Platform.
Panel (b) zeroes in on just the Republican party. Here, a clear split within the party emerges: non-tea party Republicans talk about *National Security - Other* (and they are the only ones to do so), while tea party-Republican men conceptualize national security discourse, even the one focused on women, in purely border security- and immigration-centered terms.
Finally, we will add another contextual factor into the mix: *Descriptive Representation Level*. Figure 8, Panel (a) displays the percentage of bills/resolutions focusing on women’s interests per legislator, divided by gender. As the level of descriptive representation increases, women of both chambers and parties become less likely to introduce bills/resolutions on behalf of women, specifically \(^{18}\). This result is consistent with the regression discussed earlier, where bill sponsorship for women was negatively impacted by an increase in receptiveness to women in public office, to a statistically significant degree. Again, this result is somewhat unexpected, but could be explained by the female legislator’s perception that legislation on behalf of women is of greater necessity in low-receptiveness states. It might also be connected to the demographic characteristics of the female legislators involved, so it would be interesting, in a further step, to explore whether the women elected in one group of states differ, with respect to partisanship, ideology, background, seniority, or other similar factors, from those elected in another group of states.

As far as male legislators are concerned, the relationship between bill sponsorship and receptiveness to women in the political sphere is less pronounced, and does likewise not follow a linear trajectory, with those from states in the middle category most likely to sponsor bills/resolutions targeted at women. Again, one can see that the contextual factors, such as the environment’s receptiveness to women in public office, do not affect all legislators equally, and that looking at demographic characteristics and their interaction with contextual factors will help us understand the process of representation in a more nuanced fashion.

This connection is much less obvious for both floor speeches and campaign ads. In fact, as Panel (b) shows, when we look at all three types of representational actions (speeches, bills, and campaign ads) and at both chambers, Republican women seem to be the group who is most susceptible to a change in their state’s receptiveness to women in political office, which implies an interaction between gender and partisanship.

\(^{18}\)This measure is coded in such a way that ”1” is the highest and ”3” (on the three-point scale used here) or ”5” (on the five-point scale) is the lowest level, signifying states that have a history of few women in public office, compared to other states.
Lastly, it makes sense to analyze the impact of *Descriptive Representation Level*\(^{19}\) by party rather than gender. Panel (a) of Figure 9 gives an overview of the relationship between a legislator’s home state’s receptiveness to women in political office and his or her likelihood to deliver floor speeches/introduce bills or resolutions focused on women’s interests specifically. What becomes obvious is that Democrats are always more likely to speak/act targeted at women’s interests on the floor, regardless of the representational context they come from, and that Democrats fluctuate considerably more, while the percentage of Republicans speaking/acting on behalf of women remains much more stable across levels of descriptive representation.

Panel (b) zeroes in on a particular type of representational claim: Foreign Policy. The panel displays the distribution across levels of descriptive representation by party in the House. While the trend is less clear for Republicans, the Democrats seem more inclined to talk about women in a foreign policy context when the level of descriptive representation is low (with the exception of an increase for the very highest-ranked states). In fact, the frequency of foreign policy-focused representational claims made by Democrats on behalf of

\(^{19}\)Here, the categorial version of the variable is used; 1 signifies the highest level of descriptive representation, while 5 is the lowest.
women falls in a clear, linear fashion as receptiveness to women in political office increases (with the exception of an increase for the very highest-ranked states), while Republicans seem somewhat more likely to talk about foreign policy-focused representational claims in the middle categories, and more likely to do so when their state’s receptiveness to women in public office is either relatively high or relatively low. Breaking down the data by gender as well as by party further supports $H_3$, clearly indicating that the frequency as well as the nature of representational claims on behalf of women differs between subsets of legislators, and is furthermore influenced by contextual factors, such as institutional environment or presence of women in political offices.

6 Discussion

The picture that emerges from these results is both clear and complicated. It is clear, because the observed representational activities are obviously patterned, and it is possible to observe and interpret these patterns. Men and women go about representing women in different ways, and so do Republicans and Democrats. A typology of different kinds of "women’s representations” has clearly emerged from the data, and the different categories also behave in different ways. It is also clear, because some of the results support what has already been considered common knowledge, and what is to be expected based on party platforms. It is, for example, only logical that Democrats tend to be more pro-choice, and Republicans more pro-life, at least on average.

It is complicated, because many of the patterns seem to be caused by interactions of several factors. Republican women behave differently from Republican men as well as from Democratic women. Contextual factors, such as the level of descriptive representation in a legislator’s state, seem to influence different groups of officeholders to different degrees and in different ways. Democratic men talk most about women in a foreign policy context in the House, Republican women in the same chamber are most likely to introduce bills
on the subject. Representational activities of Republican women seem to be influenced by descriptive representation levels more than those of any other kind of legislator. These interactive patterns make the representational fabric much more interesting, but also makes it more complicated to disentangle the different threads and layers.

Of course, the results presented here are preliminary in many ways. First of all, they are limited to the 111th, 112th, and 113th Congress. Adding additional years would certainly strengthen the case for generalizability. Moreover, the typology of representational claims is thus far based only on the floor speech and bills/resolutions data. The next step for this study is to perform the same analysis on campaign ads and to add press release data, to see if the same categories show up, and if individual legislators focus on the same types of "representations" in all their representational activities. Based on the data analyzed for this study, it seems more than plausible to expect that the patterns and interactions observed here will hold up when more and different kinds of data are added, but a richer source of data and a longer timeframe will most certainly help to refine our understanding of observed patterns and connections. It is entirely possible that different patterns show up for different types of activities, even for the same individual.

In the same vein, I also want to compare bill and floor speech data to see which legislators display differences when it comes to the issues they focus on in their speeches and bill sponsorship, and to determine which patterns will help us understand these differences. While they can possibly be explained by referring to different audiences and different mechanisms at work when it comes to claims on the campaign trail, claims made in Congress, and substantive acts such as bill sponsorship, they also add an additional level of complexity to the emerging patterns. Additionally, the campaign ads data is so far limited to only two elections, that of 2008 and 2010 (and to only the 2008 data for the Senate). This is firstly a limited time frame, and secondly could be considered a highly unusual election. In future versions of this paper, this will be remedied by the addition of data for the 2010 elections for the Senate, and the 2012 data for both chambers.
Another difficulty to address in future versions is the overlap between the kinds of language used to talk about women in different types of "representations". As discussed earlier in the paper (see footnote 12), the way legislators talk about women in the context of domestic violence and the way they talk about them when discussing abortion in a woman-focused pro-life frame are so similar that this caused analytical problems at first. In both contexts, the dominant discourse focuses on the "woman as victim" - either as the victim of actual, physical violence or sexual assault, or as the victim of what proponents of the pro-life discourse call "abortion culture". The woman-centered pro-life legislators emphasize the harm done to women by not fully informing them about the costs and consequences of abortion. They talk about psychological and emotional harm, and declare that women suffer from life-long trauma after having had an abortion.

On one hand, this overlap of language makes it more difficult to differentiate different types of "representations", but on the other hand, it tells us something about the nature of women’s representation in Congress. It exemplifies how both pro-choice as well as pro-life proponents can be convinced that they are acting in the best interest of women, and it also serves to illuminate different conceptualizations of women. The same legislator can make a pro-choice argument, emphasizing women’s autonomy and their right to make their own choices, and a discrimination argument, emphasizing women’s systematic victimization. On the other hand, another legislator can make a pro-life argument, stressing women’s victimization, and an economic opportunity argument, stressing the individual’s responsibility for her own advancement. Any patterns and mechanisms discovered to be at work regarding the political representation of women can also serve to increase our understanding of representational activity on behalf of other subgroups of the electorate. If we better understand how women’s interests are represented in Congress, we can refine the way we study the political representation of ethnic and racial minorities, religious voters, working class voters, or any other subset of the electorate. It seems reasonable to assume that the observed complexity does not exist only in the context of women’s interests.
References


