

sizable minority population—and often necessary to make an opportunity realistic—tends to be less robust than that of co-racial men.

These national and local constraints are overlapping and interactive, resulting in systemic *absences* of opportunities for descriptive representation for certain groups, most acutely Latinas and Asian American women. Importantly, my book emphasizes that this dearth of representation opportunities is not occurring in a vacuum. Rather, it is driven in part by the abundance of electoral opportunities facing white men in particular because they comprise most of the incumbents and are relatively unrestricted by race in their access to realistic district opportunities.

In another project with Paru Shah, we are applying a similar intersectional approach to a series of analyses of the substantive representation of immigrant communities by legislators who are members of those groups. As such, we are studying the representation practices of these legislators as processes of immigrant incorporation. Immigrant incorporation typically has been a topic for scholars of mass publics; however, we contend that using this framework to understand the behavior of elites in legislatures allows a more accurate picture of the race-gendered (Hawkesworth 2003) dynamics and power relationships across and within groups to emerge.

During 2019, we conducted 44 in-depth interviews with Asian American women and men and Latina and Latino state legislators at national gatherings and assembled a new database of almost four million observations of state legislative bill sponsorship. Our preliminary analyses of these data indicate that similarities between women and men in these racial groups on topics contained in sponsored bills may be obscuring as much as they reveal. The qualitative data we gathered point to distinctions in legislators' understandings of the underlying issues driving policy choices and "race-gendered" (Brown 2014; Hawkesworth 2003; Smooth 2006) inequalities in access to legislative processes.

I mention this second project because across both parts of my scholarship on representation in state legislatures, I find that the women and men who carry out this work are constantly facing a complex mix of questions about their opportunities and limitations. Is there a real chance I can win where I live? Is the legislature a place where a person like me can actually get important and urgent things done? Particularly for the Latinas and Asian American women I interviewed, the latter question is daunting. Many view themselves as representatives who are embedded in their community and who must make the most of the rare opportunity to have someone "in the room" who looks like them and has lived as they have lived.

Against the backdrop of powerful mass political movements in recent years—immigrant-rights actions, Black Lives Matter protests, #MeToo activism, and others—a salient question for scholars of representation is whether women of color who are passionate about these issues will have less reason to try to advance their work through legislative officeholding. As one Latina legislator I interviewed stated, state legislatures "were built for other people" and have been slow to change.

Perhaps the most significant regular opportunity to enact change in legislatures is close at hand: US Census-based redistricting. Our understanding of the consequences of these district-drawing processes on representation must move beyond single-dimensional identity categories. Instead, I propose that we strengthen the study of representation by using frameworks centered on simple concepts that are complex in their

ramifications for democratic processes: that is, individuals are simultaneously members of more than one social group, and their opportunities for political leadership are shaped by processes and institutions both large and small. ■

#### NOTE

1. Of the almost 60,000 state legislative general elections in the gender, race, and communities dataset that I developed, 2% were won by nonwhite candidates running in majority-white population districts.

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#### AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATION

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During the past three decades, political science research has uncovered substantial evidence that race and gender influence representation in the United States. Historically, various institutionalized race and gender biases have worked not only to limit the number of women and minorities running for office but also to channel and confine their opportunities to certain majority-minority or "women-friendly" jurisdictions (Arceneaux 2001; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994; Davidson and Grofman 1994; Lublin 1997; Lublin et al. 2009; Palmer and Simon 2012; Preuhs and Juenke 2011; Sanbonmatsu 2006). Once in public office, African Americans are more likely than others to focus on

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interests and issues particularly relevant to African Americans and Latinx legislators are more likely to do the same on behalf of Latinx interests; similarly, women are generally more likely than men to focus their representational activity on women's interests and issues (Bratton and Haynie 1999; Canon 1999; Casellas 2011; Griffin and Newman 2008; Grose 2011; Haynie 2001; Minta 2011;

accomplishments are most likely to be neglected and obscured by dominant single-axis approaches. In this way, our analysis often questions whether what we know about "minority" or "women's" representation is reflective of only the dominant categories within—namely, men of color and white women. Centering women of color means privileging and building on what little

## What exactly does an intersectional approach like ours entail?

Osborn 2012; Reingold 2000; Rouse 2013; Swers 2002, 2013; Thomas 1994; Wilson 2017). Yet, it is still the case that little research has examined whether and how race *and* gender together simultaneously influence who our elected officials are (i.e., "descriptive representation") and what they do in office (i.e., "substantive representation") (Pitkin 1967).

When studying race, gender, and representation, political scientists often assume that there are no gender differences among minority representatives and no racial differences among female representatives. More often than not, attention has been given only to what factors influence the descriptive and substantive representation of women *or* to what factors influence the descriptive and substantive representation of African Americans and/or Latinxs. These one-at-a-time, "single-axis" approaches (Crenshaw 1989) to the study of representation are clearly overly simplistic. As Hawkesworth (2003) and others implore, we must think about and study representation as not only raced and not only gendered but as "raced-gendered" (Brown 2014; Fraga et al. 2008; Hardy-Fanta et al. 2016; Reingold 2008; Smooth 2006, 2011).

In *Race, Gender, and Political Representation*, Kerry Haynie, Kirsten Widner, and I take up that call and examine how and to what extent political representation is simultaneously raced and gendered—in the context of late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century US state legislatures (Reingold, Haynie, and Widner 2021). Instead of investigating which conditions are conducive for "minority" representation or for "women's" representation and rather than ponder whether "women" and "minorities" in office are more likely to advocate on behalf of other women and minorities, respectively, we ask: How do gender and race interact to affect the election, behavior, and impact of all individuals—raced women and gendered minorities alike? Addressing this question, we argue, requires a more intersectional approach to the study of legislative representation. Indeed, our analysis demonstrates the power of intersectionality—as a critical research paradigm—for understanding the many complex ways that race and gender together shape democratic institutions and the representational opportunities and challenges they present.

What exactly does an intersectional approach like ours entail? Much of the work of intersectionality is accomplished by simply classifying legislators in terms of their race *and* gender identity and comparing their election, behavior, and impact in office. Most of our data analysis, for example, examines the presence, behavior, and impact of Black women, Latinas, white women, Black men, Latinos, and white men in state legislatures. But an intersectional approach is much more than that.

Importantly, our intersectional approach places women of color at the center of the analysis—precisely because they (and others who stand at the intersections of multiple systems of disadvantage) are the ones whose experiences and

existing research there is about them, especially as candidates and public officials. However, an intersectional approach also requires us to critically reread the single-axis literature in both race and ethnic politics and gender politics. As we reread, we look not only for the similarities and differences revealed but also for the intersectional, race-gender implications we can infer. This rereading provides a wealth of both single-axis and intersectional theories about descriptive and substantive representation to test, but it also prompts us to critically reexamine how we test those theories. Most notably, our intersectional approach to the study of representation closely examines issues of measurement, particularly how we define and operationalize key theoretical concepts such as group interests. Throughout the design and implementation of our research, intersectionality also compels us to critically evaluate our own analytic categories, checking to see whether the generalizations we make about women and men of color, for example, are valid.

By using this intersectional approach, we can learn much more about the complexities of race, gender, and representation in state legislatures. Our extensive analysis of bill sponsorship as a form of policy leadership and substantive representation (Reingold, Haynie, and Widner, ch. 3 and 4) illustrates our approach to intersectionality and its empirical utility especially well. We began by reexamining foundational, single-axis conceptions of marginalized-group interests and issues that lie at the heart of any analysis of legislative activity on behalf of women and/or minorities. To gauge the links between descriptive and substantive representation, political scientists have used various definitions of group interests, often distinguishing between more narrowly defined "racial" or "women-specific" issues and broader issues, such as health and education, that also are salient but less explicitly or directly tied to gender, race, or ethnicity alone. To what extent, then, do our definitions of group interests affect who is or appears to be more or less willing to act for African Americans, Latinxs, and women?

Intersectionality cautions against generalizing about representation across differences in race and gender, suggesting that any single-axis conception of marginalized-group interests risks concealing or distorting the representational advocacy provided by women of color while privileging that which is provided by white women and men of color. The more narrow and single-group specific definitions of women's/Black/Latinx issues may be particularly problematic, especially compared to broader issue areas such as health and education, which are salient to women, African Americans, and Latinxs alike (Smooth 2011).

To test this proposition, we examined the agenda-setting policy leadership (i.e., bill sponsorship) of Democratic (and, to a lesser extent, Republican) state legislators in 15 state houses, in 1997 and 2005, across multiple definitions of group issues and

interests.<sup>1</sup> We found that no matter which definition of group interests we used, Democratic women of color never appear any less committed to providing substantive representation than anyone else. They sponsor as many women-specific bills as their white female colleagues, as many Black- and/or Latinx-specific bills as their minority male colleagues, and more health and education bills than anyone else. Among Democrats and Republicans, women of color are the leading sponsors of health and education bills targeted to address the interests of women or racial and ethnic minorities in particular. Thus, we concluded that research that relies only on narrowly defined, group-specific conceptions of policy interests will overlook and underestimate the truly distinct representational leadership of women of color—especially as they work to shape healthcare and education policy to address the interests of women and people of color.

Next, we looked beyond single-axis conceptions of group interests and substantive representation to explore what we call “race-gender policy leadership.” To what extent and how do representatives address both race and gender in their policy-making initiatives? Who is more or less likely to do so? Recognizing that various group interests (i.e., Black, Latinx, and women’s) can be—or at least appear to be—distinct, overlapping, or intersecting (Brown and Banks 2014; Minta and Brown 2014), we distinguished and measured multiple approaches to race-gender policy leadership among the same set of Democratic (and Republican) lawmakers serving in 15 US state houses in 1997 and 2005. Specifically, we tested hypotheses that legislative women of color are more likely than others (including white women and men of color) to sponsor (1) both narrowly targeted, group-specific women-interest and minority-interest bills, one-at-a-time; (2) bills that simultaneously address multiple group-specific interests (e.g., standard antidiscrimination and affirmative-action measures); and (3) bills that address the particular interests of disadvantaged subgroups of women and/or minorities, such as poor women of color (Strolovitch 2007).

Although our conceptions of race-gender policy making are fairly inclusive, our data show that relatively few legislators engage in this type of leadership, even among Democrats. Nonetheless, women of color (in both parties) often assume important leading roles in addressing the policy needs of multiple and multiply disadvantaged groups. Depending on the measure of race-gender policy leadership, either Black women or Latinas stand out from their peers, sponsoring more race-gender legislation than their minority male or white female counterparts. Among Democrats, Latinas stand out as the most likely to sponsor at least one women-specific bill and one Latinx- and/or Black-specific bill. Black women are more likely than any other group of Democrats to sponsor at least one welfare/poverty bill addressing the interests of intersectionally disadvantaged subgroups of women and people of color. Among Republicans, Latinas are the most likely to do the same. The only type of race-gender policy leadership in which women of color do not stand out is the sponsorship of bills that simultaneously address multiple forms of discrimination and inequality. Black men are the leading sponsors of these measures (although not by wide margins), almost all of which offer traditional civil rights approaches to remedying discrimination on the basis of sex/gender, race/color, or national origin/ethnicity.

These are only a few of the race-gender similarities and differences evident in the experiences, activities, and accomplishments of the state legislators that we studied. Again and again, we saw how the continued shortage of elected women of color undermines the effective substantive representation of multiple and multiply disadvantaged groups—and how intersectionality matters. Few if any of our conclusions about race, gender, and representation would have been revealed had we not taken a more intersectional approach to examine a multitude of race-gender similarities and differences among minorities and women, as well as among women and men of color. Without intersectionality, we would be bereft of the critical race-gender questions that prompted our research and the race-gender analytic tools with which to address them.

Nonetheless, our study is only one of many “first steps” toward a more intersectional approach to the study of race, gender, and political representation. To claim otherwise—that our work should stand alone or be considered the final word—would undermine the integrity and power of intersectionality as a critical and productive research paradigm (Davis 2008). As scholars and citizens, we must continue to ask and pursue difficult, “messy” (Smooth 2006), and “unsettling” (May 2015) questions about complex intersections of multiple axes of identity and power as they relate to political representation *and* our ability to understand it. Intersectional research always must be (considered) provisional, tentative, and partial because we always can move toward a more—or different—intersectional approach (Carbado et al. 2013; May 2015, 251; McCall 2005). Race and gender, the central foci of our inquiry, are important, especially given the history of American politics and its study. They are a good starting point. However, there undoubtedly are multiple layers of intersectional complexity that warrant further investigation. ■

#### NOTE

1. The vast majority of legislators of color in our sample are Democrats.

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## IT'S ALL ABOUT THE MONEY: UNDERSTANDING HOW BLACK WOMEN FUND THEIR CAMPAIGNS

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It is no secret that the cost of elections continues to increase in each election cycle. Although we often think about the implications of the cost to run at the congressional level, these effects also have an impact in state-level elections. According to the National Institute on Money in Politics,<sup>1</sup> in 2018, state legislative candidates for lower and upper chambers collectively raised more than one billion dollars. Because state legislatures are the pipeline to congressional office (Palmer and Simon 2003), it is important to understand how and to whom the money flows for candidates to fund their campaigns.

It is important to understand how all state legislative candidates fund their campaigns; however, my research focuses particular attention on Black women. Given the ways in which this

**Table 1**  
**Model Estimates of Women's Total Campaign Contributions**

Predictors	Logged Total Receipts		
	Estimates	Standard Error	p
(Intercept)	9.97	0.27	<0.001
Asian American	0.54	0.49	0.275
Latina	0.32	0.30	0.289
Native American	-0.19	1.10	0.865
White	0.43	0.20	0.032
Challenger	-2.45	0.43	<0.001
Open Seat	-0.38	0.38	0.310
Independent	0.59	0.27	0.031
Republican	0.34	0.19	0.070
Recipient Campaign Finance Score	-0.20	0.09	0.029
Upper Chamber	0.57	0.11	<0.001
Percentage Women Legislators	0.03	0.01	0.002
Ranney Score	0.07	0.15	0.614
Moralistic State Culture	-1.78	0.11	<0.001
Traditional State Culture	-2.09	0.15	<0.001
Woman Governor	1.70	0.17	<0.001
Political Liberalism (Median)	-0.59	0.05	<0.001
Asian American x Challenger	-0.32	0.85	0.704
Latino x Challenger	0.31	0.62	0.613
Native American x Challenger	1.97	1.44	0.170
White x Challenger	1.26	0.45	0.005
Asian American x Open Seat	1.34	0.93	0.148
Latino x Open Seat	1.58	0.58	0.007
Native American x Open Seat	1.36	1.76	0.439
White x Open Seat	0.29	0.40	0.470
Observations	3,788		
R <sup>2</sup>	0.156		