

These essays demonstrate some of the ways in which a focus on men *as men* can take concepts developed within the literature on women and politics and offer new and important insights that have not yet been explored. Themes that we explore include feminist institutionalism; political recruitment; descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation; and intersectionality. Alongside our illustration of the theoretical contributions that a focus on men can offer in all these areas, we include an essay highlighting the distinctive methodological challenges presented by critically studying men and masculinities, especially for women.

Collectively, these essays illuminate a burgeoning new research agenda on men and masculinities in politics, illustrating some of the many ways in which the current emphasis on women within gender and politics research could be expanded fruitfully to include critical research on men.

## Revisiting Forms of Representation by Critically Examining Men

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Research on gender and politics has made use of Pitkin's (1967) distinction between descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation to conceptualize and understand the different facets of women's underrepresentation and misrepresentation. The corresponding overrepresentation of men has seldom been explicitly recognized in this literature. We explore what the critical study of men and masculinities could contribute to the study of different forms of representation. Researching the descriptive overrepresentation of men implies recognizing male dominance and turning our attention from the factors that constrain women from entering politics to the factors that enable and reproduce men's presence. Researching the substantive representation of men also implies investigating *how* men represent men and identifying whether hegemonic masculinities privilege the representation of some men while neglecting others. Finally, a study of

the symbolic representation of men implies identifying and describing the masculine signals and symbols that permeate political life but remain largely invisible because they constitute the political norm. Naming them as “masculine” will facilitate a gendered analysis of political institutions, practices, and discourses that are seldom questioned. We also consider the symbolic representation of men who do not conform to hegemonic masculine ideals and are not represented descriptively.

## DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION OF MEN

Descriptive representation denotes that different groups are represented politically in similar proportions to their share of the population. We know that men and women make up approximately half of electorates, but most representative political bodies comprise a majority of men and a corresponding minority of women. The literature has discussed this mostly as a problem of women’s underrepresentation rather than men’s overrepresentation, although they are two sides of the same coin. It could be argued that shifting the focus to men’s overrepresentation is merely a linguistic twist, but we argue that language matters, and the constant focus on women’s underrepresentation reinforces the view of men in politics being the norm and women being deviations from that norm. Moreover, in line with Bacchi (2009), we are convinced that problem descriptions matter for how research is designed and conducted as well as for policy solutions.

The historical problem description framed around women’s political underrepresentation has been crucial for investigating everything from women’s suffrage to the introduction of quotas for women. When searching for causes of women’s underrepresentation, research has increasingly zoomed in on political parties and the manner in which they select candidates (e.g., Bjarnegård 2013; Hinojosa 2012; Kenny 2013; Kittilson 2006; Lovenduski and Norris 1993; Murray 2010). This reasoning has also opened up discussions about why male-dominated parties strive to preserve the status quo — in other words, what explains the persistent descriptive overrepresentation of men?

With such a problematic description, research also starts framing research questions in different ways, leading researchers to look in different places and come up with new answers. For instance, Bjarnegård has demonstrated how informal networks operate to protect

those already in power. People selected into such networks usually must possess homosocial capital: they are individuals who already have access to power and resources, and they are perceived to be similar to others in the network (Bjarnegård 2013). In the Japanese context, LeBlanc (2010) calls this unconscious trust in and preference for (a certain type of) male politicians “the art of the gut.” These networks also favor some men over others, meaning that male overrepresentation still does not translate into the descriptive representation of all men.

Moreover, Murray has demonstrated how the rephrasing of the problem can actually lead to new arguments and different policy implications. If we take into account research that demonstrates how men’s selection is facilitated by their sex because their qualifications are often taken for granted (e.g., Besley et al. 2017), it makes sense to scrutinize men’s merits by introducing quotas for men rather than for women (Murray 2014).

## SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF MEN

Substantive representation refers to the representation of interests. Descriptive representation is not a prerequisite for substantive representation to occur (Childs and Krook 2009 note that some men, and not all women, will serve as “critical actors” to advance women’s interests). Nonetheless, there are numerous studies indicating that higher levels of descriptive representation facilitate better substantive representation, given that lived experience heightens people’s awareness of problems and motivation to resolve them (e.g., Cowell-Meyers and Langbein 2009; Swers 2005).

Studies of substantive representation have always focused on the conundrum of how to defend the interests of underrepresented groups, such as women. For groups whose presence is disproportionately high, such as men, there is no perceived need to worry about substantive representation; it is taken as a given. Men’s interests are often conflated with universal interests, reflecting the numerical dominance of men and the lack of critical reflection on how men’s preferences are also shaped by their gender. Indeed, there is almost no work exploring the concept of “men’s interests” and how these might be distinct from women’s or universal human interests.

Furthermore, just as women are heterogeneous in their needs and preferences, so, too, are men. Hegemonic masculinities privilege some men over others, with wealthy, able-bodied, heterosexual, ethnic-majority men enjoying numerous advantages over other groups of men. Men who do not conform to the expectations of hegemonic masculinity may find themselves excluded altogether from the political process (Le Blanc 2010) or marginalized within it. The overrepresentation of men is therefore better understood as the overrepresentation of *privileged* men, thus providing an even greater imbalance between politicians and the people they are charged with representing. For the many men who cannot meet the masculine ideal, a dual problem emerges: they do not necessarily benefit from the advantages associated with their sex, but they are seldom recognized as being disadvantaged by their gender.

A critical focus on men allows us to distinguish between the representation of all citizens, the representation of men as a collective group, and the substantive representation of different subgroups of men. Recognizing gender hierarchies within groups of men, as well as between men and women, allows us better to understand the multifaceted dimensions of men's substantive representation.

## SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION OF MEN

Symbolic representation has, again, mainly been studied with regard to women. It has been argued that seeing women in power sends an important signal to other women that politics concerns them and is a career that women can pursue; that is, women representatives become symbolic role models. Another vein of research on the symbolic representation of women demonstrates how pervasive stereotypical reporting and portrayal of women is — and how women politicians have to adapt to this stereotypical portrayal despite its irrelevance (Kahn 1996; Lawless 2004).

Symbolic representation is also likely to work in the reverse, but because men in politics are the norm, we seldom notice the signals that are constantly sent to men that they are suitable for political office. Reporting and portrayal of male politicians may also be stereotypical, or it may be the case that masculinity is conflated with the political, so that male politicians are portrayed simply as politicians. Looking more closely at constructions and manifestations of masculinity, however, we may see that they are closely connected to manifestations of power and strength. Analyses of President Nicolas Sarkozy in France and Vladimir Putin in

Russia have pointed to specific and explicit performances of masculinity conveying physical strength and heterosexuality (Achin and Dorlin 2008; Achin, Dorlin, and Rennes 2008; Sperling 2015).

The entrance of women into the political sphere can serve as a contrast that makes symbolic manifestations of masculinity more visible. Lovenduski has argued that political parties have been male-dominated institutions since their inception and that they are full of informal rules, practices, and symbols made by and for men (Lovenduski 2005). Puwar has written about “bodies out of place” — women and minorities entering spaces where men have historically been considered entitled to power. She demonstrates that the experiences of newcomers can uncover the hidden masculine symbols and processes that favor men and work to the disadvantage — or at least the discomfort — of female bodies in politics.

## CONCLUSION

This essay has revisited Pitkin’s classical and influential distinction between descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation from the perspective of the critical study of men and masculinities. We set out to explore the relevance of these three concepts for the study of the political overrepresentation of men. Rather than accepting the norm of male dominance, this inquiry is firmly embedded in feminist scholarship on the representation of women, critically examining male power in terms of numbers, direct policy influence, and indirect signals.

The study of the descriptive representation of men contributes with a stronger focus on understanding the factors that facilitate the persistent recruitment of (certain privileged) men. The study of the substantive representation of men demonstrates how the political preferences of men are also shaped by gender. Therefore, we can understand seemingly neutral policy outcomes as gender biased while recognizing that preferences and policy are disproportionately influenced by privileged men. Finally, the study of the symbolic representation of men brings to light the unspoken expectations, the media bias in reporting, and the political discourses and practices that, while usually considered “political” rather than “masculine,” evoke the message that male bodies belong in the political sphere, whereas female bodies do not.

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