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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, elected conservative women representatives speaking *as, for, and to* women (or at least claiming to) have been increasingly documented (Reingold 2000; Cramer Walsh 2002; Shreiber 2008; Willarty 2010; Childs and Webb 2012). Yet, with the relationship between feminism and conservatism frequently regarded as at best uneasy, (Bryson and Heppell 2010; Fraser 2009; O'Regan 2000, Bashevkin 1994; Dolan 1997), gender and politics scholars have often seemed rather unsure about what to do with these representative claims (Celis and Childs 2012). In Anglo-American and established European democracies, feminists - academic and activist - contend that conservative politics is detrimental to women. State retrenchment, the shrinking of the welfare state, and fewer or weak equality policies, are frequently and negatively linked to the material situation of, and equal opportunities for, women (Outshoorn and Kantola 2007).<sup>1</sup> Thus, even as studies establish that conservative governments' anti-feminism has in the recent past been mediated and constrained (Bashevkin 1994; McBride and Mazur 2010),<sup>2</sup> the charge is nonetheless that they have done harm to women, and by implication, to the cause of gender equality. Against such a theoretical and empirical backdrop, the veracity of contemporary conservative representative claims 'for women' come under suspicion for being 'wolves in sheep's clothing'; representatives claiming to act for women, but adjudged ultimately, to harm women's interests.

Documenting and evaluating the claims of elected conservative representatives to substantively represent women undoubtedly presents gender and politics scholars with a new empirical research agenda: what do conservative representatives claim, and do, for women? But we contend that it also constitutes a more profound conceptual and normative puzzle. One implication of taking seriously conservative claims to represent women (Author reference) is, in our view, to raise the possibility that the dominant framework for analysing

substantive representation has proven to be limited. Extant theories of women's substantive representation frequently elide this with *feminist* substantive representation (Author reference). So, what to make of conservative representatives who make representative claims for women, but only sometimes act like, and with, their feminist sisters?

By working through these contemporary representational problematics this article develops a new, empirically-grounded, account of women's substantive representation. It is based on a critical re-reading of the empirical literature on conservatism and gendered representation, and directly engages with recent creative theories of representation (Saward 2006; Squires 2008). We survey a wide range of generic studies on women and politics, as well as specific case studies of gender and conservative parties, and develop further our own research on conservatism and women's substantive representation (Author ref; Erzeel et al 2014). In our subsequent reworking, we reconsider the 'what' and especially the 'how' of women's substantive representation. We contend that traditional accounts of feminist substantive representation frequently point to a universal set of women's issues and women's interests, either existing or imaginable, and which require a representative process marked by commonality and solidarity. In everyday terms, to 'count' as good substantive representation, women representatives act *together* in a *feminist* fashion. To do otherwise, representatives are 'outwith' the substantive representation of women.

Saward's (2006) 'economy of claims' approach has been much employed by gender and politics scholars in recent years because it offers an account of substantive representation in which a multiplicity of claims makers is recognized. It moreover suggests that instead of any simple aggregation of interests, what is in the interest of women 'emerges' out of contestation amongst claims makers, and amongst claims-makers and those they claim to represent. We

are concerned, however, that an uncritical or crude adoption of the ‘economy of claims’ approach implies that all representatives’ claims are equally valid; that ‘anything goes’ (Dodson 2006). Hence, we lay out three initial conditions - of congruency, representational praxis and ‘fit’ - that establish whether particular claims and representatives should be legitimately considered ‘for women’. But we also do more than this. We propose a shift away from a content model of women’s substantive representation and advocate a process model, albeit one embedded in wider democratic polities.<sup>3</sup> In the final part of the article, we outline a process of representation that is characterized by three core principles: responsiveness, inclusiveness and egalitarianism. These are introduced to ensure that deliberations amongst claims makers within our representative institutions: to reflect claims that are substantively ‘for’ women; to ensure the collective constitution of women’s interests through the presence of diverse representatives (Weldon 2002); and to practice ethical deliberation (Young 2002). Together, we contend this adds a feminist quality control to our process model of representation and, in turn, to outcomes (not least by ruling out anti-democratic and anti-women representative claims), even as we admit it cannot privilege particular feminist outcomes (Dovi cited in author ref).

## THE CONSERVATIVE PUZZLE

In established European and North American democracies most of the women representatives who have been elected to legislatures over the last few decades have come predominantly from left, or centrist, political parties (Norris 1996; O’Brien 2017). Sympathetic for the most part to (some kind of) feminist politics, these representatives have been the main focus of gender and politics scholarship on women’s substantive representation (Reingold 2000; Kittilson 2006; Swers 2002; Childs 2008). However, conservative women’s participation in electoral politics is increasing, whether as party members, candidates for elected office,

elected representatives, or as members of parliamentary committees on gender equality (O'Brien 2017; Childs and Webb 2012; Kürschner 2011; Reingold and Swers 2011; Willarty 2010; Beckwith and Cowell-Meyers 2007; Young 2000; Rowe and Bird 2011; Kantola and Saari 2011; Agustín 2012).<sup>4</sup>

Improvements in conservative women's descriptive representation owe much to contagion from left parties, as well as the use of sex quotas which have provided new openings for women to enter parties and legislatures (Kittilson 2006; Krook 2010). The emergence of greater numbers of conservative women on the formal political stage might on first blush seem paradoxical, if not contradictory. Conservative women's very presence in politics departs from conventional conservative expectations about women's roles in society and, more specifically, about who acts in politics (Schreiber 2014). Conservatism historically limited women to the private and not the political sphere, even as it may have permitted a gendered role for them in the public sphere. Nevertheless, conservative women representatives are increasingly demanding and achieving a place at the elected political table (Willarty and Gaunder 2014; Agustín 2012; for countries beyond Western Europe and North America see Rashkova and Zankini 2014; Curtin 2014). Once present in legislatures, inter-party competition, wider electoral incentives, and women's movement lobbying, might very well engender a dynamic for conservative women representatives to address women's concerns (Childs and Webb 2012).

With conservative representatives increasingly on the political stage, and arguably making gendered representative claims, questions about extant conceptions of women's substantive representation are left begging: can conservative women representatives act for women? According to the classic theory of women's substantive representation of women the answer

would be yes, but only when they act in a particular way, as we go on to show. The classic theory of women's substantive representation goes like this: the greater presence of women representatives in our political institutions will engender, even as it cannot guarantee, the greater substantive representation of women (Phillips 1995; Mansbridge 1999; Young 2000); women representatives, on the basis of their gender identity and gendered experiences, are considered more likely than male representatives to 'act for' women.<sup>5</sup> The once dominant 'critical mass theory' further adds that politics will be re-gendered once a 'tipping point' has been met, normally taken to be somewhere between 15-30 percent female representation (Childs and Krook 2006; Dahlerup 1988). Notwithstanding the recognition that simply counting the numbers of women present in an elected institution is too simplistic - that gendered institutions mediate representatives' behaviour, that critical actors are more important than numbers, and that representation can take place beyond political institutions (Childs and Krook 2006; Lovenduski 2005; Krook and Mackay 2010; Franceschet and Piscopo 2008) - there is still an expectation, and much empirical data, to suggest that the presence of elected women representatives makes some kind of gendered difference to our political institutions (Celis et al 2008; Lovenduski and Guadagnini 2010; Dovi 2002, 2007, 2010; Weldon 2002). The 'difference' that women representatives are widely expected to make in much of the literature is most often assumed to be feminist.<sup>6</sup>

The 'what' of representation is, then, frequently understood in these classic renditions of substantive representation in terms of the demands of second wave women's movements, most notably issues of violence against women, childcare, reproductive rights, equal pay, and equal rights. There is some empirical evidence to show that conservative women representatives have acted in line with this conception of substantive representation.<sup>7</sup> Thus, whilst empirical studies of legislatures frequently show the importance of party differences in

representatives' attitudes and legislative behaviour (see for example, Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Childs and Webb 2012 for the UK case; Reingold 2000, Swers 2002a/b/c, 2016 for the US case) conservative women legislators have also been found to be more supportive of women's issues and gender equality than conservative men (e.g. Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Campbell et al. 2010; Swers 2002a). There are also cases where Conservative women legislators have come together and acted with women representatives from other parties in support of women's and feminist bills (Childs and Evans 2012 again for the UK case). That said, it is also the case that conservative women representatives sometimes privilege different women's issues, and adopt a different conceptualization of what constitutes women's interests when they address the same issue as other (left/feminist) women representatives (as identified below, see also Childs and Webb 2012). In acting on different issues, and or articulating different conceptions of what is in the interests of women, conservative women representatives challenge and change public discourse about women's interests (Schreiber 2010).

The label conservative of course refers to a broad range of actors and parties on the (centre-) right position on the ideological scale (Celis and Childs 2012). Within a single country, conservative representatives and parties may hold different views. One might, for example, contrast Christian Democrat rightist parties with those where religion plays a much lesser role (see for example, Piccio 2014; Guerrina 2014; Schreiber 2014); and there may well be parties and organizations that emphasize social conservatism rather than neo-liberal views (Schreiber 2008; Bashevkin 1994; Childs and Webb 2012). In the context of contemporary western European and US politics one would also be faced with populist radical right parties and organizations (De Lange and Mugge 2015; Towns et al 2014; Akkerman 2015; Spierings et al 2015; Celis and Childs 2016).

A careful re-reading of existing empirical studies of women's representational activities - pulling out the differences as well as emphasising the similarities between the claims and actions undertaken by representatives from different parties and ideological positions - establishes that when they do address women's issues, conservative women's substantive representation is frequently rooted in particular conservative accounts of gender relations (Schreiber 2008, 211-2; Kantola and Saari 2014; Piccio 2014; Piscopo 2014; Murray and Sénac 2014; Skjeie, 1991; Kantola 2006; Celis 2006; Childs and Webb 2012). Particular conservative representative claims and acts for women might stem from personal perceptions and experiences: with women representatives valuing their own mothering and caring roles, or reflecting their own experiences of school, workplace and societal (in)equality (Childs and Webb 2012).

Perceptions of women's collective experiences might also inform representatives' claims. Conservative elected representatives might, for example, be members of, active in, or associated with, conservative women's organizations (Schreiber 2008) which valorise women's difference or see women's public role as a manifestation of their private one (Carroll 1992). Conservative ideological and gendered assumptions might also play out in beliefs about the gender blindness of the market; resistance to the necessity of, and/or fairness of, positive discrimination; and/or the rejection of inequality as a structural feature of society, as opposed to the consequence of localized and unfortunate individual acts (Erzeel et al. 2014; Childs and Webb 2012; Bryson and Heppell 2010; Campbell 1987; Wiliarty 2010). For religious conservatives adhering to theological views of gender or views inspired by religious values about gender relations will inform their representative claims.<sup>8</sup> Conservative substantive representation of women might furthermore stem from alternative *feminist*

accounts of women's position in society and gender relations. Relational (Offen 2000) or maternalist feminism emphasizes women's distinctiveness, complementarity, equal worth and partnership with men.<sup>9</sup> Here, notions of natural sex differences, separate spheres, and care might underpin a preference for policies that support mothers to stay home and look after children through state financial subsidy over policies that would support women's participation in the paid workforce.

In reviewing the existing empirical literature, we further identify a series of conditions under which conservative women have substantively represented women, with particular political issues, party and institutional contexts, mediating these acts. To illustrate: looking at the US, feminist attitudes and behaviour on behalf of Republican elected representatives are likely reduced when the political costs are higher, notably, when party cohesion and partisan politics are more salient (Dodson 2006; Swers 2002a). Swers found, for example, that during the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress Republican Congresswomen shifted their attention to women's welfare rather than reproductive issues. The former was felt not to upset their male colleagues in the same way (Swers 2000a/b/c). The 'type' of conservatism is also significant. Bashevkin's (1994) comparative study of the UK, US and Canada shows that social conservatism is more likely to favour less feminist and anti-feminist positions compared to neo-liberalism, which may be more comfortable with some (liberal) feminist perspectives. Third, the nature of the conservative party's organization and structure matters. Studies of the German CDU suggests that 'corporatist catch-all parties', oriented toward internal compromise and guaranteed internal representation of women, generate greater possibilities for the party's women's sections to shape policy (Wiliarty 2010; Wiliarty and Gaunder 2014). Finally, is the role played by critical actors.<sup>10</sup> In the UK case (Childs and Webb 2012), the then Home Secretary, and now UK Prime Minister, Theresa May, was key to the Coalition government's greater

attention - relative to previous Conservative governments - to violence against women and girls in the period 2010-2015 (Campbell and Childs 2015a/b).

If studies of women's substantive representation only look to identify (i) when conservative representatives act on the same issues as feminist representatives, (ii) act in the same feminist way on these issues, and (iii) when they act in concert with other women to achieve these particular feminist ends, gender and politics scholars risk missing some of the gendered representative claims and acts undertaken by conservative representatives on the ground in contemporary democratic politics (Celis and Childs 2012; Curtin 2014; Piscopo 2014; Murray and Sénac 2014). Whilst there is empirical evidence that some conservative representatives make feminist representative claims for women (as noted above) other conservative women representatives - or even the same ones on other occasions - make claims and act in ways which might readily be considered to be less or even anti-feminist. Conservative women representatives are frequently found to be attitudinally and behaviourally less feminist (see for an early study, Carroll 1984).<sup>11</sup> Republican women were for instance found to be less likely than Democrats to join organizations that espouse feminist beliefs, publicly advocate measures consistent with these beliefs, or develop legislation or projects as an extension of these beliefs (Carroll 1984: 312-313). Conservatives are often the most fervent anti-feminist (Grey 2002; Swers 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Trimble 1997).

## EVALUATING CONSERVATIVE CLAIMS

Why does all this matter? It matters precisely because conservative representatives making claims to, and acting for, women in ways distinct from left/feminist representatives in many western democracies, challenges the presumption of a universal and feminist set of women's

interests which lies at the heart of the existing conceptual framework for understanding the substantive representation of women.<sup>12</sup> In so far as it might have once been thought that there was a singular group of women's interests to be represented, this is no longer, and arguably never was, the case. As is widely appreciated, women (including in many instances, feminists) disagree over key women's issues, including abortion/reproductive rights, prostitution/sex work, pornography/censorship, face veils, positive discrimination, the status and financial benefits of marriage, and sexuality and trans rights (see for example, *Politics & Gender* Special issue 2012; Celis et al 2014).

In such contexts, we contend that gender and politics scholars require something more than a claim that women's substantive representation occurs when women representatives act in a 'feminist' fashion. Once we admit that women are a heterogeneous category, any assumed universality of women's issues and interests must consequently be considered only a potentiality (Celis et al 2008), as the possibility of contestation amongst women, and even amongst feminists, is ever present.<sup>13</sup> Yet, even if the substantive representation of women can no longer be measured by whether representatives act in an assumed feminist fashion on women's issues – it remains important to be able to determine what counts as the substantive representation of women.<sup>14</sup> To do otherwise is to imply a relativist 'anything goes' (Dodson 2006) perspective where all claims and actions for women are accorded the same value. This is something we find distinctly unattractive; as gender and politics scholars we wish to hold conservative representatives to account for their claims to represent, and substantive actions, for women.

We could assume *a priori* that conservative representatives are but ‘wolf in sheep’s clothing’ (and we should look for evidence of this). And/or, we could assume that conservative women (the represented) are ‘falsely consciousness’ of what is in their interests (author ref) (again, we should examine this possibility in empirical research, minded of Pitkin’s concerns relating to symbolic representation and creative theories of representation). Instead, we advance three conditions by which to evaluate the quality of conservative representative claims for women (author ref).<sup>15</sup> The first is *congruency*; congruency with conservative women’s attitudes and a responsive relationship to conservative women in society (Saward 2010; Bird 2011; Severs 2012; 2012), alongside evidence of good representational relationships between conservative women and conservative representatives (Dovi 2002).<sup>16</sup> This criterion measures the quality of relationships: both between mass/elite attitudes and policy preferences, and reciprocal relationships between representatives and those they claim to represent (Dovi 2002). Classic responsiveness is met when conservative representatives echo the concerns of conservative women in society, but representatives can also be considered responsive when the represented accept the claims made for them (Saward 2006; Severs 2012; Mateo Diaz 2005; Campbell and Childs 2015c). We should also be mindful of how representatives can ‘propagate’ particular views of the represented (Saward 2006).<sup>17</sup> Most existing studies appear not to have empirically investigated relations between conservative representatives and non-party conservative women’s organizations. However, mass/elite comparisons based on survey data suggest that conservative parties in both the UK and Belgium may not as yet be sufficiently responsive to women. British conservative women voters and elites are more in favour of gender equality than men, and hence the party overall (Campbell et al 2010; Campbell and Childs 2014).<sup>18</sup>

The second condition for evaluating a representative's claim for women draws a distinction between what Dodson (2006) terms 'walking the walk' and 'talking the talk' on women's issues. It is not sufficient for conservative representatives to make claims for women, they need also (or at least to seek) to deliver on them (Şahin-Mencütek 2014; Rashkova and Zankina 2014).<sup>19</sup> Importantly, studies have already found that it has often been much harder to effect change than activists and some gender and politics scholars once thought (Lovenduski 2005). It is for this reason, especially for conservative representatives operating within political parties that are seemingly less amenable to gender equality on ideological grounds,<sup>20</sup> that researchers need to investigate failed, or less successful attempts, to enact claims, as well as to document successful acts for women. To do otherwise is to risk deducing representational acts from representational talk. It is for future empirical research to determine whether conservative representatives do more of the former than the latter, and if so, why.

The third condition considers how a particular claim 'fits' with others claims made at the same time by the same actor (or closely related actors), most likely the representative themselves and their party and/or government (see Childs and Webb 2012). This broadens the scope of the enquiry into women's substantive representation beyond a sole focus on 'women's issues' in order to capture relationships between claims for women and wider political claims that might compete with or 'trump' claims for women. For example, it is easy to imagine women's claims that appear parallel, or compatible with other conservative claims at the level of rhetoric, but which in practice see the former negated or marginalized (Childs and Webb 2012; Piccio 2014). In the UK for example, the language of 'choice' has been deployed by the Conservatives party, and adjudged to suggest that the party is agnostic between mothers participating in the paid labour market or staying at home. Critics will

suggest, however, that this choice is mediated at best, circumscribed more often, by the availability of affordable childcare. Critics will also add that this ‘choice’ is less freely available to women who are dependent upon the state and who will be expected to engage in paid work when their children reach a certain age. The married/partnered woman with children faces no such requirement or expectation. If we turn to recent gender and politics analysis of popular radical right parties in Europe we might also evaluate representative claims that remain at the rhetorical level (see Akkerman 2015; Author reference) or where, rhetoric about gender equality in the context of discussions about multiculturalism and immigration, co-exists with little practical concern for gender equality in other contexts, namely paid work, childcare, abortion and marriage (Towns et al 2014; Akkerman 2015).

#### WOMEN’S SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION: A PROCESS APPROACH

In contexts of women’s heterogeneity, a cacophony of gendered representative claims is to be expected (Dodson 2006), and arguably welcomed, with an array of elected and nonelected representatives articulating different views about what is in the interests of women. This raises the aforementioned question of what to do with these competing claims. Recent developments in political representation theory are useful here: in Michael Saward’s (2006, 2010) ‘economy of claims’ approach, multiple actors make different kinds of claims to act for the represented, just as Dodson suggests.<sup>21</sup> The general form of the representative claim is as follows (Saward 2006, 36): ‘A maker of representations (‘M’) puts forward a subject (‘S’) which stands for an object (‘O’) that is related to a referent (‘R’) and is offered to an audience (‘A’). This newer understanding of representation has been well received by a number of gender and politics scholars. Applied to the representation of women by women representatives, this would imply – in its simplest form - that women representatives put forward a subject (themselves), to stand for an object (the interests of women), that is related

to a referent (some women in society), and is offered to an audience (again, women in society, and perhaps others too).

In the first instance, the economy of claims approach draws attention to the limitations of a uni-directional understanding of representation. The latter posits women's interests as known to the represented, and knowable to the representative who can 'pick' them up, take them into political institutions, and act upon them. The former not only offers the attraction of (rightly) moving beyond a singular focus on elected representatives, it also and as previously noted, no longer considers the represented 'prior to' the representational process, as in most Pitkin (1967) inspired accounts. Rather, the represented are constituted as part of the processes of representation (Saward 2006; Squires 2008). In our view, working with creative theories of representation, and informed by insights from the more empirical gender and politics literature, offers fertile ground for better theorizing the 'what' and especially the 'how' of representation.

In respect to the 'what' of representation, the conceptual possibility of including claims makers and representative claims for women other than those usually regarded as representing women is now opened up. This would include representatives, including conservatives, who were previously not recognized to be representatives of women as they did not fulfil the criteria of feminist substantive representation. In this way Saward's approach is useful for our purposes precisely because it depicts representation as a process open to a variety of representative claims and claims makers. Second, it regards competition over what constitutes women's issues and women's interests as positive (Weldon 2002). This is again highly beneficial at a time when, as repeatedly emphasized, women are widely

acknowledged to be diverse and when women's issues and interests show no likelihood of becoming any less so (Hill Collins and Chepp 2013).

Such argumentation moreover points to a different conceptualisation of what counts as 'good' substantive representation - the criteria by which the quality of women's substantive representation can be assessed (Severs 2012; Celis and Childs 2015). It does this both by the inclusion of multiple representative actors and perspectives, and by reconsidering the form of representation. Rather than a model of representation that assumes representatives of women 'know' women's interests, which are then articulated within electoral institutions, and where decisions are made on the basis of the aggregation of interests, representation is regarded as a process within (and indeed outside of) formal political institutions, and where interests are advocated for and deliberated over (Williams 1998; Saward 2010; Urbinati 2000; Mansbridge et al 2010).

That said, gender and politics scholars should be attuned to the danger of presuming that the economy of claims analogy implies a consideration of representative claims that is fair, and that will automatically produce the 'best' outcome. In particular, we are concerned that this approach usually fails to sufficiently acknowledge the ongoing importance of elected political institutions as key sites for women's substantive representation (Williams 1999), which is our focus here. Nor is this approach as yet generating institutional design ideas. Lastly, it insufficiently addresses questions of power. In respect of the latter, it is important to note that Saward emphasizes that as representatives construct particular representations of the represented these may be 'read back', that is, contested by the represented. But recall concerns about how representatives may also 'propagate' particular views of the represented. In our case, conservative representatives may very well propagate anti-feminist

representations of women, which may be against women's interests. Furthermore, we want to foreground the likelihood that some representatives will be privileged and others marginalized within our elected institutions, and that this would likely have negative effects during deliberations and in respect of outcomes.<sup>22</sup> Inter alia, we would expect representatives with fewer resources, or unfamiliar with the norms and practices of particular institutions, and with less established relationships with the media or civil society, or with a smaller support base, to fare less well (see Young 2002).

Mindful of criticisms of process approaches to women's substantive representation (Dovi forthcoming), we (author reference) identify three principles to structure 'good' substantive representation: (i) responsiveness, (ii) inclusiveness and (iii) egalitarianism. In the traditional feminist account of substantive representation, *responsiveness* is presumed to be *from* feminist political elites *to* women in society; the representatives are judged by the extent to which they act in respect of the stated aims of actors from the feminist movement. In our framework, in contrast, responsiveness looks to representative relationships between representatives and women, in their diversity, thereby broadening the potential 'what' of women's substantive representation beyond the aims of a particular feminist movement. *Inclusion* asks whether all women have a voice in deliberations about what is in the interests of women – such a principle protects women and women's interests currently marginalized from politics, even as it does not presume in any simple way that these are necessarily more important or meritorious than others. *Egalitarianism* asks whether all claims are equally considered in the deliberations. In other words, is it recognized that some women's views – some representative claims for women – are likely to be marginalized or silenced. We contend that without the airing of these views, and without their claims being taken seriously as part of deliberations, this will likely limit what is ultimately constituted as women's

interests (Weldon 2002). It also risks reducing the legitimacy of democratic institutions, as some (no doubt more marginal) women's voices are excluded from, or accorded little weight in, discussions. This also risks having deleterious effects on women's affective representation.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A focus on conservatism and women's substantive representation can be simply an additive study; analysis of the representational claims and actions of relatively new actors present on the contemporary political scene. This has significant empirical value in and of itself. We can note, for example, the increased presence of conservative women representatives in our elected institutions, and acknowledge that this has given rise to an appreciation of greater ideological heterogeneity amongst women representatives. Empirical research has indeed established that whilst under specific conditions some conservative women representatives are found to act with, and like, their left/feminist colleagues, they sometimes articulate anti-feminist perspectives. In these interventions, conservative representatives may nevertheless make explicitly gendered claims; and claim to be speaking in the interests of women.

One response to conservative representatives claiming to act for women is to recognize that there is a more varied and contested understanding of what constitutes women's issues and women's interests than that suggested by a rigid definition that reduces women's substantive representation to a particular feminist definition. We could choose simply to ignore or reject conservative claims to representation. Yet we suggest, rather than dismissing these claims and claims makers, it is more insightful to explore how conservative representatives, when making claims for women, *might* be participating in the substantive representation of women. In our view, they may be doing so when they act in ways that marry conservative women's

concerns in society; when they act and do not simply engage in rhetoric; and when their actions are not undercut by other acts, policies or outcomes unfavourable to women – the three conditions that we outlined in the earlier part of this article as a first means of determining whether a representative claim or sets of claims are ‘for women’, and not merely masking some other interest or group (Author ref). Note however, that this is only the beginning of the evaluation of representatives claims for women.

Alternatively, we could reject gendered representative claims made by conservative representatives as *without* women’s substantive representation. This is, in our view, unwise. And it is in this respect that our article addresses the conceptual puzzle thrown up by acknowledgement of conservative representatives: how to make theories of women’s substantive representation inclusive of the gendered representative claims of representatives who are not feminist (as usually understood). Judging all gendered representative claims against feminist ideological criteria – even a robust and context-specific definition of feminism – of course makes clear when claims and acts are feminist (according to that definition), but they risk limiting appreciation of what is going on as representatives act for women in practice. In contrast, we hold that it is more fruitful for scholars to acknowledge these additional claims, at least initially. In so doing, we move away from standard theoretical accounts of both the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of substantive representation. The former - a content approach – can no longer be about an agreed set of universal women’s issues, and a shared understanding of what is in the interests of women defined in a particular feminist fashion. We envisage, instead, a contestation between claims-makers for women in which what counts as women’s interests is not assumed in advance, but constituted through deliberation (deliberated over) rather than determined by any simple aggregation. To mitigate concerns about feminist outcomes in such an approach, we deploy the three principles of

responsiveness, inclusiveness and egalitarianism (author ref), which we suggest should structure deliberations so as to mitigate concerns about who is present, what interests are advocated for, and the nature of the interactions amongst representatives.

In shifting from a focus on the *actors* (women/feminists) and *content* (legislative and policy outcomes) of women's substantive representation to a focus on the *processes* of representation, we risk, as Suzanne Dovi has pointed out, the inability to privilege feminist outcomes (Author ref).<sup>23</sup> We are far from agnostic about outcomes. And we acknowledge that a feminist content approach to women's substantive representation is highly seductive. But in our view, a content approach takes us back to the place where we feel gender and politics scholars need to get away from: a subjective, *a priori* definition of women's interests. Nevertheless, there is something in Dovi's accusation: a process approach is risky. But we have sought to moderate that risk. Our approach is situated within an account of representational politics that is characterized by foundational democratic principles which should limit, even if it cannot negate, anti-feminist outcomes. Those who are 'not really' acting for women will likely be found out early on; and those who do not subscribe to our norms of deliberation will become apparent. Indeed, it might be said that our safeguards give rise to the potential for better substantive representation because of its commitment to being inclusive and constituting women's interests through deliberation (See for example Young 2002; Barnes 2017). Of course, our conceptualization will be contested by those who prefer to exclude (Dovi forthcoming) and it invites new empirical study. Subsequent research should determine whether conservatives are acting as 'good representatives' on the ground (Dovi 2002), and explore how representative processes and electoral institutions can be better designed to engender the 'good' substantive representation of women.

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<sup>1</sup> This critical judgement is due in no small part to women's greater tendency to be employed by the state, be in receipt of state benefits, and to use state services (Sainsbury 1999).

<sup>2</sup> By constitutional protections, supra-national bodies, and the presence of women's policy agencies and femocrats.

<sup>3</sup> This would rule out anti-democratic 'claims-makers', for example those who argue against women's fundamental political rights or deny women political equality.

<sup>4</sup> They are also increasing their participation as members of organized women's groups in civil society (Schreiber 2008; Agustin 2012).

<sup>5</sup> According to politics of presence arguments, the sex of our representative matters *precisely* because the outcomes of electoral politics are determined, at least in part, by who is present within our political institutions.

<sup>6</sup> We do not supply a universal definition of feminism given that it is time and location specific (Beckwith 2013; Dhamoon 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Of course, some conservative representatives will reject gender as an organizing principle in society, and hence reject gendered accounts - feminist or not - of society and the relations between women and men. If this is the case, then they will by definition not be making representative claims that can be considered 'for women'. Later in the main text we outline what constitutes a representative claim 'for women'.

<sup>8</sup> Ronnee Scheiber (2008) and Sarah Williarty (2010) examine the role of Christianity in American and conservative women's activism and the German CDU political party respectively. For discussions of Islamic feminism as a means to challenge pre-Islamic patriarchal structures, reject secularism, and critique Islamist politics See Ahmed (1992 cited in Dalmaso and Cavatorta 2014; Badran 2009; Karam 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Maternalist feminism is frequently contrasted with accounts of second wave feminism that emphasize second wave feminists focus on women's individual rights, and equality as sameness (see Squires 2013). We fully appreciate that such accounts of the 'second wave' misrepresent the diverse views of feminists. As one of our reviewer's aptly put it: such representations contribute to 'class- and race-washing' of second wave feminism. See Evans 2016 for a critique of the wave narrative.

<sup>10</sup> Critical actors are those actors who "act individually or collectively to bring about women-friendly policy change. ... They initiate policy proposals on their own and/or embolden others to take steps to promote policies for women, regardless of the number of female representatives" (Childs & Krook 2009: 126-7, 138).

<sup>11</sup> For example, Republicans were for instance found to be less likely than Democrats to join organizations that espouse feminist beliefs, publicly advocate measures consistent with these beliefs, or develop legislation or projects as an extension of these beliefs (Carroll 1984: 312-313).

<sup>12</sup> This point should not be read as if empirical studies have not been for decades documenting differences between conservative and leftist/feminist legislators attitudes and acts. Rather, and at the risk of over egging the pudding, it is made to emphasize that the dominant conceptual framework that underpins work on substantive representation in parliaments and other elected political institutions presumes that there are women's interests out there to be represented by women representatives and that these are knowable, shared, and feminist.

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<sup>13</sup> The tension between, on the one hand, recognizing women as a diverse group with possibly different and conflicting interests and, on the other hand, the desire to delineate a set of women's interests that are common to all women and transcend such differences is well illustrated in the Critical Perspectives 'The Meaning and Measurement of Women's Interest' in the September 2011 issue of *Politics and Gender*. Reingold and Swers' contribution to the forum stresses the former, whereas Baldez' discussion of the CEDAW as identifying a comprehensive list of women's interests in equality that all women share, illustrates the latter (Baldez 2011).

<sup>14</sup> To reiterate, empirical studies have shown us for some time that women representatives do not always agree about what constitutes women issues (Celis et al 2014) nor do, as their actions reveal, agree about what is in women's interests. As one of our reviewers reminded us, studies in the US (and indeed in the UK too) have routinely noted over the last two decades differences in the behaviour of Democrat and Republican women representatives.

<sup>15</sup> These conditions can, and in our view should, be asked of all representative claims and acts for women. To presume that left/feminist women act for women smacks of complacency (Childs and Lovenduski 2013)

<sup>16</sup> Empirical research might investigate whether Dovi's (2002) criteria of 'preferable descriptive representatives' are fulfilled.

<sup>17</sup> We would like to thank one of our reviewers for this insight.

<sup>18</sup> One consequence of such a disjuncture is that conservative voters sympathetic to feminism may face a 'trade-off' whereby they have to choose between voting for parties that reflect their preferences regarding women's issues and interests, or for parties that reflect their overall ideological preference (Celis and Erzeel 2013, Erzeel et al. 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Acknowledging the constraining contexts that representatives may well act in, this is not the same thing as arguing that the failure to implement claims is sufficient proof that there was never any intention to deliver.

<sup>20</sup> Of course this is an empirical question. Leftist political parties may also be less than conducive contexts for acting for women, especially when gender equality is regarded as a deviation or distraction from achieving class equality or socialism.

<sup>21</sup> See Celis and Childs 2008a/b, special issues in *Parliamentary Affairs and Representation*, based on the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, 'What is going on in Political Representation? The Substantive Representation of Women', Helsinki 2007.

<sup>22</sup> A criticism of deliberation that is made widely, see for example Iris Marion Young 2002

<sup>23</sup> More specifically in this article, the deliberations amongst representatives in a gendered economy of claims.