

Latinas in Congress and the Racial-Gendered Context of Their Bill
Co-Sponsorship

“The woman of color life is the crossroad, where no aspect of our identity is wholly dismissed from our consciousness, even as we navigate a daily shifting political landscape.”

Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa in *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981)

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Brief Overview

This paper suggests that Latina congresswomen are more likely to co-sponsor bills that enhance the interest of Latino constituents than those of women. While scholarship exists on the value of legislative representation, there is substantial amount of literature that suggests that there is a link to be studied between constituents who are members of marginalized minority groups and their Congressional representatives who are also members of said groups. However, what does a member of Congress do if they are members of both a racially and gendered marginalized group? How does she choose to represent her constituents or herself? This “double-disadvantage,” under feminist theory, also affects women in office and the decisions they make towards co-sponsoring legislative interests of their racial and gendered groups.

Abstract

This paper examines legislative dynamics related to the co-sponsorship of Latinx¹ and women’s interest bills in Congress by Latina representatives. By employing an original data set that includes all bills co-sponsored by Latina representatives since 1989, I test the hypothesis that Latina representatives are more active co-sponsors of Latino interest bills than women’s interest bills. This is because women of color, that referring to all groups of women who share the attribute of being non-white, are influenced by cultural and gender norms that set rules and expectations of their behaviors and thoughts, which are also cause of influence towards their legislative behavior. I argue that Latina representatives are less likely to co-sponsor a bill of interest to women because of the expectation set upon them by their Latino constituents that cultural membership comes before gendered membership.

The salient issues that I will be using to determine and analyze the representative’s behavior will be immigration and labor for Latino interests, and the wage-gap and reproductive rights for women’s interests. The results will indicate that Latina representatives are more likely to support their Latino constituency at a higher rate and offer an evaluation to their lack of legislative responsiveness of women’s interests.

Keywords: Latino politics, legislative behavior, intersectionality, U.S. Congress, women in politics, Latina studies.

¹ Throughout the paper, I will be using the term *Latinx* instead of Latino to talk about the community as a whole. Only when talking specifically about Latinx women will I use *Latina*, or when quoting from scholarship. *Latinx* is defined as “relating to people from Latin American origin or descent (used as a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino or Latina)” (Mora, 2018).

INTRODUCTION

The 116th Congress makes history with the highest number of women, African-American and Latino members sworn into office. A record 127 women serve in Congress, with 106 Democrats and 21 Republicans - roughly 24% of all the seats (CAWP 2019). Democrats took back control of the House, led by Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi of California, who reclaimed the speaker of the House seat and remains the first and only female speaker. Some of the notable newcomers include New York Democrat Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who will be the youngest member of Congress, and the first Latinas to represent Texas in Congress, Democrats Veronica Escobar and Sylvia Garcia. Unfortunately, Congress is losing some strong Latino voices, including Democratic Rep. Michelle Lujan Grisham of New Mexico, who was elected Governor, and Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the first Latina elected to Congress, who is retiring after 30 years of service.

As the number of women and racial minorities winning seats in the U.S. Congress continues to increase, scholars have continued to explore the impact of gender, race, and ethnicity on the legislative behavior of elected officials. Although some scholars argue that elected officials are able to fairly represent citizens across the lines of social class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and religion (Dodson and Carroll 1992; Swain 1993; Swers 2002, 2005; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997), the vast majority of empirical evidence accumulated in the last decade reveals that female and Black legislators are most consistent advocates of the dominant interests of women and African Americans (Canon 1999; Dolan, Deckman and Swers 2016; Mansbridge 1999, 2003; Lawless and Fox 2005; Lublin 1997; Swers 2005; Tate 2003; Thomas and Welch 1991; Whitby 1997). In other words, a considerable amount of research on descriptive representation has demonstrated that there is a strong link between descriptive and substantive representation, suggesting that minority legislators' political activity is substantially different from their white counterparts (Gonzalez Juenke and Preuhs 2012; Minta 2009).

When it comes to studying legislative voting behavior, scholars have begun to branch out to non-roll call activity like co-sponsorship of bills (Minta 2011; Rocca and Sanchez 2008). Most of the work in this topic has also just focused on African American legislators or all women as if there is a consideration that either of these groups are a monolith for their respective community. Latino representation is a particularly understudied subject in the context of the U.S. Congress. Scholars that study this subject are often rebutted with the obvious - our subject is too small. And while that may be true, it is important to remind ourselves that given the demographic shifts in our country, the Latino population is growing to become the largest minority group in the United States. As of 2018, Latinos make up 18.1% (58.9 million) of the United States population (US Census 2018). But while the community continues to grow, seldom does their representation in Congress. Which is why it is important to examine whether legislators are responsive to issues important to the community.

Within political science, but also in society at large, it is generally accepted that substantive representation - the representation of citizens' interests, views, needs, and perspectives - is the crucial aspect for political representation (Dolan et al. 2016; Marin 2001; Lawless and Fox 2005; Pitkin 1967). But even when representatives are elected, democratic representation is considered

problematic when there is no solid relationship between what politicians do and decide and what citizens want and need. Citizens need to believe that their representatives are indeed representing them in who they are, what they stand for, and what they do on their behalf (symbolic representation). Representative's responsiveness to citizens - and citizen's belief in their responsiveness - makes for "good" representation.

Arguably, the same applies for the political representation of women: substantive representation needs to be responsive to women's interests, while women in society need to agree with what representatives' claim is in their interests. Women, however, are not a homogenous group. This statement has been brought to the forefront by the new focus on the study of intersectionality - where women's multifaceted identities formed by the intersections of, for instance, class, ethnicity/race, age, sexuality, religion (Crenshaw 1991). The plurality of women's issues and the existence of conflicting views on what constitutes women's interests begs to question which women's issues and interests need to be considered and how the quality of women's substantive representation should be assessed (Geerts and Van der Tuin 2013; Tate 2003; Thomas 1994).

This analysis doesn't just focus on the means in which to assess women's issues, it dives into an introduction of the intersection one of the most understudied coalitions of women in politics - Latina women.

By employing an original data set that includes all bills co-sponsored by Latina representatives since 1989, I test the hypothesis that Latina representatives are more active co-sponsors of Latino interest bills than women interest bills. This is because women of color, that referring to all groups of women who share the attribute of being non-white, are influenced by cultural norms that set rules and expectations of their behaviors and thoughts, which are also cause of influence towards their legislative behavior. I argue that Latina representatives are less likely to co-sponsor a bill of interest to women because of the expectation set upon them by their Latino constituents that cultural membership comes before gendered membership.

The salient issues that I will be using to determine and analyze the representative's behavior will be immigration and labor for Latino interests, and the wage-gap and reproductive rights for women's interests - holding women's interests as a constant for comparison with other women of color. The results indicate that Latina representatives are more likely to support their Latino constituency at a higher rate and offer an evaluation to their lack of legislative responsiveness of women's interests.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Latinas occupy multiple spaces simultaneously as women, mothers, workers, partners, and potential agents of social change has begun to surge in the area of multicultural and gender studies, as well as political science (Fraga, Garcia, Hero, Jones-Correa, Martinez-Ebers, and Segura 2012; Fraga, Martinez-Ebers, Ramirez and Lopez 2001). And because identities influence political behavior and help determine the distribution of power and resources, identities are particularly important in societies like the United States. Asserted ethnic identities are responses to discrimination and exclusion, but they are also political constructions, the result of a process where practical interests, political beliefs, and moral values are brought into the political sphere (Marquez 2003) The content of ethnic identities is also an important indicator of discontent and group solidarity. Although substantial literature has emerged on the role Latino ethnic identity has played in community mobilization and individual behavior, much work remains in unpacking the values and goals underlying identity-based politics when it comes to women of color, like Latinas.

What constitutes the Latino political identity? What constitutes a woman's political identity? What happens when you are a member of both? Finally, how and under what conditions do ethnic identities influence political behavior? It is essential that we understand the political content of Latino identities as well as the conditions under which they emerge. Additionally, that we understand the political content of women of color identities, like Latinas, as well as the conditions under which they emerge.

John Garcia (2003) wrote that a growing Latino population, combined with its common language, political interest, and similar culture, bodes well for the formation of a common political identity. Garcia believes that political activists can help with the formation of a common political identity - just like Black activists did during the Civil Rights movement. In other words, this means that political activists can help forge their shared characteristics into a working imagined community to deal more effectively with the problems most members of the marginalized community, like Latinos, have in common. Considering members of Congress activists, that working community should be the elected representatives in Congress.

Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Representation

The political activists and political scientists who call for the election of more women to Congress all share the assumption that electing more women will lead to better representation for women's interests. Hanna Pitkin (1967) describes this relationship as the belief that increasing "descriptive representation" will lead to better "substantive representation." Thus, representatives who share a common social identity, such as gender or race/ethnicity, will be more likely to act for the interests of their group (Lublin 1997; Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995, 1999). Additionally, this connection based on shared experiences improves the deliberative quality of the legislature by allowing for the expression of different perspectives on and solutions to policy problems. However, on what grounds can we argue that women are entitled to representation as members of a group rather than as individuals? Women do not share a monolithic opinion on all issues. Yet, evidence from the history of women's political participation, studies of gender-role socialization,

and research on women as voters and candidates all demonstrate that women may bring unique experiences and viewpoints to the policy debate and different issues to the legislative agenda.

Mary Hawkesworth (2003) argued that simply by bringing into the legislative body their unique status as minority women, women of color directly “alter the conditions of work and the conditions of life for women of color in subtle and not so subtle ways.” Through her in-depth interviews with minority women serving in the 103rd and 104th Congress, Hawkesworth found that many of the women had been treated “less than equal” - some had been ignored by their colleagues, others had experiences demeaning exchanges. She also questioned the effectiveness of a small group of women of color legislators. Hawkesworth was about to point out how, in the 104th Congress, a number of women of color representatives denounced how Republicans were characterizing welfare recipients in a debate over welfare reform. The voices of women of color in the U.S. Congress promoted alternative bills that were continuously ignored; conservative welfare reform legislation that was supported by President Bill Clinton won 98% of the Republican House votes and 59% of the Democratic and white votes. All of the women of color, including Republican Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), voted against welfare reform in the 104th Congress.

Hawkesworth's (2003) findings that women of color legislators are marginalized as actors in the legislative process should not be misunderstood. Her work, much like Tate (2003) revealed that although women possess formal authority and power, this in theory, places them as equals alongside their male and white female counterparts. Clearly, important structural obstacles remain in Congress - obstacles that continue to hinder the ability of women of color to be as effective as they can be (Bratton and Hayne 1999; Dolan, Deckman and Swers 2016; Phillips 1995, 1999; Lawless and Fox 2005). Sue Thomas's (1994) study finds that although women state legislators played a critical role on the way legislative business was handled in the state governments, they adapted to, as opposed to challenged, the dominant legislative norms and procedures.

Measuring Representation

Minta (2009) examined oversight behavior via congressional committee hearings and found that minority legislators, including Latino members, are more likely to participate in racial and social welfare hearings than white legislators. This mirrors similar findings of Lublin (1997) and the committees that African American legislators sat on. Rouse (2013) also examined the committee process and finds that Latino state legislators in some states are more active on Latino interests being deliberated. Rocca and Sanchez (2008) found that minority legislators on average introduce and co-sponsor less legislation than their white counterparts, though this effect is mostly conditional given the party in control of Congress.

The assertion that the scholarly work in this area leads to conflicting conclusion when it comes to Latinx representatives, especially Latina women, is because the literature lacks a clear answer about whether such representatives in Congress offer strong substantive representation to Latinos and women across issues and different types of legislative behavior. The work examining bills introduced and co-sponsored often aggregate the total number of actions when inferring the level of representation, rather than take into account the substantive actions, or examining issues

highly salient in the Latinx community. Wilson (2011) focused primarily on bills that directly mentioned or affected the minority group, in terms of Latino or African American interests in the language of the bill, without considering issues that may be salient to Latinos. We should not limit the boundaries of what should count as representation based only on what is theoretically important and significant, or what is frequently used as a method of analyzing representation. While roll call votes in the U.S. Congress are accessible to the public, or ideological ratings such as Poole and Rosenthal's NOMINATE score (1996) have created a breakthrough within congressional studies, this still limits our evaluation of the said institution.

Areas of legislative activity that have increasingly garnered more scholarly attention today are those of bill introduction, bill co-sponsorship, and committee behavior in Congress (Hall 1996; Minta 2011; Rocca and Sanchez 2008; Swers 2003, 2006; Wallace 2014). This literature is valuable for our study because they examine legislative behavior within the decision-making process that is often overlooked. While bill co-sponsorship is not as politically costly a form of behavior in terms of time investment compared with bill introduction, it still serves many of the same signaling functions and provides much of the needed support to a bill (Kessler and Krehbiel 1996; Krehbiel 1998). Bills that receive a larger number of co-sponsors are more likely to move quickly through the committee process and come up for a floor vote because of the perceived salience among members (Adler and Wilkerson 2005; Mayhew 1974). While a frequent criticism of non-roll call activity is that we cannot know if a given bill will become an actual law, that assertion is merely symbolic. This critique only becomes relevant to this paper if minority legislators were less effective than non-minority members. However, recent work by Rocca and Sanchez (2011) has indicated that minority legislators are just as likely than non-minority representatives to pass bills into public law, and just as likely to have their bills pass at the committee stage and through the House. Given the small percentage of minority legislators currently residing within the legislature, this should demonstrate that the member of Congress (MC)² is interacting with the institution at the same rate as someone who has larger representation within the branch.

When examining the political behavior of women of color, our analysis should always be intersectional. That means that we should aim to illuminate the related and interdependent phenomena of women of color in office. The first of our concerns in this approach should be that of *identity politics*. For scholars who employ intersectional analysis to the Latinx demographic, this means acknowledging the heterogeneity within the community (or any other marginal group) as a way to challenge monolithic and essentialist representation, while also accounting for the strategic, coalitional, collective, and transformational affiliations that members of such disenfranchised groups often adopt for social justice (Alemán 2018; Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013; McCall 2005). Such as Garcia (2003) mentioned, members of marginalized groups often adopt the “social activist” label in order to better represent their community. The second phenomenon that should be examined by scholars is that of separating the experience of privilege and oppression that result from the complex and interconnected domains of power dynamics within

² I will be using MC throughout the paper to represent “Member of Congress”

which those subjectivities are placed (Cho et al., 2013; Collins and Bilge 2016). Specifically, because conditions of power negatively and positively constitute and affect the lives and identities of Latinxs, an intersectional analysis places the myriad of Latinx subjectivities within larger systems of privilege and oppression, contending that these complex, contingent, and interlocking relationships must be made visible and analyzed primarily to alter the structural and institutional inequalities that continue to disenfranchise Latinxs.

HYPOTHESIS

This paper tests several hypotheses concerning the intersectionality of race and ethnicity, the gender of the legislator, as well as the issue area they choose to support. I theorize that Latina MCs are more likely to co-sponsor bills that are of interest to the Latinx community because Latina MC's are more likely to connect to the needs of their Latinx constituents due to similar ideals of group consciousness and linked-fate given the evidence presented that Latinos do possess strong feelings of shared group identity and consciousness (Celis 2013; Fraga et al. 2001; Masuoka 2008; Sanchez 2006). The context in which Latinas are choosing to demonstrate their political presence in Congress should motivate us to continue to study the effect of race and gender on policymaking because these feelings also serve to motivate a strong desire for descriptive representatives to substantively represent their constituents (Millet 1971; Pitkin 1967; Wallace 2014; Witting 1992). I present these first two hypotheses to evaluate the strength of my claims:

Hypothesis 1: Latina MCs are more likely to co-sponsor a Latinx agenda item than an issue of salience in the women's agenda.

Hypothesis 1-B: Latina MCs are less likely to co-sponsor a bill that supports the women's agenda than are other women of color.

With that being said, I would like to present a working theory (Appendix I, Figure 1) that introduces us to the gender-racial conflict women of color face when choosing to heighten their legislative behavior in office with the following hypothesis:

H2: Women of color are more likely to co-sponsor a bill that relates to their racial and ethnic background than they are to support an agenda item in the women's agenda due to their low-ID with their gender.

There is a divide between the category of 'women' being problematic for political reasons (Bach 2012; Benhabib 1992; Mikkola 2007; Young 1997). For example, Young (1997) holds that women of color being categorized to just 'women' reduces their experiences as individuals. Black women differ from white women, but members of both groups also differ from one another with respect to nationality, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and economic position; that is, wealthy Latina women differ from working-class Latinas due to their economic and class position. These sub-groups are themselves diverse. Which leads to a problem when the articulation of 'women's issues,' in an effort to be inclusive to women, instead divides them. Feminist political literature

has emerged that aims to better conceptualize women as a group or collective (Alcoff 1998, 2006; Frye 1996; Haslanger 2000; Stoljar 1995, 2011; Young 1997; Zack 2005), and so has the literature about women in politics (Dolan, Deckman and Swers 2016; Lawless and Fox 2005; Phillips 1995, 1999). As Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa wrote in *A Bridge Called My Back*, the woman of color is “caught at a crossroad where race of gender and the gender of race can no longer be overlooked.” Such dichotomy is experienced by both men and women (not proportionally, but mutually). Women of color see being politically engaged as necessary for the liberation of their community; however, it would be safe to assume that it is hard to do so within the political institution they inhabit without finding some political repercussion from their fellow members or counterparts.

METHODS AND DATA

To determine if Latina MCs represent the interests of their respective racial-ethnic community more actively than other women of color, I created a new data set of the co-sponsorship behavior of Latina MCs since 1989. The reason I began the data entry from 1989 is because that is the year the first Latina MC, Ileana Ros-Liethen (R-FL) was elected to office. I employed the use of legislative and public opinion reports from *Latino Decisions* and the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (NHLEA) to find the issues of importance for the Latinx community. For women’s legislative interests, I employed the legislative reports from groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the Women’s Congressional Policy Institute (also known as *Women’s Policy Inc.* or the *Congressional Caucus for Women’s Issues*) - both bipartisan but liberal-leaning organizations devoted to the promotion of women’s, children’s, and family issues.

I reviewed hundreds of bill synopses per Congress since 1989 which describe the bills co-sponsored by the Latina MCs. While I was concerned that this method would not have enough of a sample to make an exploratory analysis, an introduction on how to study the intersectionality of legislative decision-making when it comes to women of color, especially women of color in office, is a way in which we can further progress legislative studies. This may be able to help us understand the role women of color take when they are sworn into office. This analysis also introduces the sociocultural conflict women in power face when they choose to assimilate to the institution they cohabit, while being an active speaker for the marginalized community they represent. It is not uncommon to assimilate to the rules of an institution, especially a political one. Canonical literature from Fenno (1978), Mayhew (1974), Krehbiel (1998), and Lee (2016) all demonstrate that men and women struggle to maintain power within the legislative branch. Now, should we come to understand how legislators face levels of descriptive oppression and conflict when they try to substantively support a bill that relates to their social identity? I argue that we should because as we continue the study of intersectional politics, there is a level of oppression that a minority legislator will face when advancing within the branch.

The salient issues that I will be using to determine and analyze the Latina MCs behavior will be immigration, and labor and job opportunities for Latinx interests. For the women’s interest bills, I have chosen the gender wage-gap and reproductive rights. These issues are considered

salient for all women in the United States today according to NOW and the Women’s Congressional Policy Institute. For Black MCs, I have chosen the issues of civil liberties, and economy and public finance to represent the Black agenda. According to the Congressional Black Caucus (2018), the following issues are at the top of their legislative agenda for all Black MCs. To evaluate Black MCs support for women’s issues, I have kept the issues constant to find the strength of support towards their own unique racial and ethnic agenda.

I gathered and evaluated the number of bills each MC co-sponsored through the use of *Govtrack.us*, an independent online repository that publishes the status of federal legislation, information about U.S. representatives and senators in Congress including voting records, and original research on legislation. Choosing from only bills that were introduced into the House in the respective years Latina or Black women MCs served in Congress, I explored the issues of immigration, labor, civil rights, and economic and public finance specifically for the racial and ethnic agendas. For the women’s agenda items, the column *health* has bills on reproductive rights and access to social welfare programs due to its direct impact on women’s health and livelihood. The second salient issue on the women’s agenda is that of gender equity pay.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In Table I, we can see the number of bills that were introduced from the 101st session of Congress until the 115th session that relate to topics of salience to Latinxs. A total of 13,063 bills were introduced in a span of two decades.

Table I: Latinx Issue Bill Introductions from the 101st-115th Congress

Session	Immigration	Labor	Total
101	135	180	315
102	98	190	288
103	183	533	716
104	186	1,008	1194
105	270	1,096	1366
106	314	1,171	1485
107	324	1,196	1520
108	338	1,190	1528
109	372	1,215	1587
110	371	1,088	1459
111	125	136	261
112	126	142	268
113	128	166	294
114	196	158	354
115	241	187	428
TOTAL (N)	3,407	9,656	13,063

Source: *Govtrack.us* (2019)

In Table II, I demonstrate the number of bills each Latina MC co-sponsored per topic. Latina MC’s co-sponsored a total of 34.9% (4,564) of bills that directly affected the Latinx agenda.

Table II: Co-Sponsorships of Latinx Interest Bills by Latina MC's

MC	Immigration	Labor	Total
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen	173	314	487
Lucille Roybal-Allard	238	645	883
Nydia Velazquez	172	500	672
Loretta Sanchez,	95	428	523
Grace Napolitano	162	522	684
Hilda Solis	131	454	585
Linda Sanchez	136	393	529
Jamie Herrera Beutler	7	8	15
Gloria Negrete McLeod	4	0	4
Michelle Lujan Grisham	39	52	91
Norma Torres	31	17	48
Nanette Barragan	28	15	43
TOTAL (Cumulative %)	1,216 (35.7%)	3,348 (34.7%)	4,564 (34.9%)

Source: Govtrack.us (2019). Note: Latina MCs are in order of being sworn into Congress (see Appendix I, Table A for more information).

I followed these same steps to evaluate Latina MCs support for the women's agenda. Out of a total of 26,461 bills that relate directly to women's issues, Latina MCs co-sponsored 30.8% (8,140) of them (Tables III-IV).

Table III: Women's Issues Bill Introductions from the 101st-115th Congress

Session	Health	Gender Wage Gap	Total
101	577	126	703
102	675	238	913
103	768	719	1,487
104	752	1,307	2,059
105	934	1,434	2,368
106	1,249	1,637	2,886
107	1,229	1,754	2,983
108	1,240	1,708	2,948
109	1,358	1,866	3,224
110	1,309	1,822	3,131
111	714	84	798
112	511	115	626
113	603	132	735
114	713	85	798
115	741	61	802
TOTAL (N)	13,373	13,088	26,461

Source: Govtrack.us (2019); Note: To find the bill co-sponsorships for 'Gender Wage Gap' I searched through the topics of 'civil liberties and minority rights' and 'economy and public finance' on govtrack.us.

Table IV: Co-Sponsorships of Women’s Interest Bills by Latina MC’s

MC	Health	Gender Wage Gap	Total
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen	587	423	1,010
Lucille Roybal-Allard	292	654	946
Nydia Velazquez	648	561	1,209
Loretta Sanchez,	530	467	997
Grace Napolitano	836	586	1,422
Hilda Solis	575	606	1,181
Linda Sanchez	499	401	900
Jamie Herrera Beutler	119	2	121
Gloria Negrete McLeod	42	3	45
Michelle Lujan Grisham	200	14	214
Norma Torres	62	2	64
Nanette Barragan	31	0	31
TOTAL (Cumulative %)	4,421 (33%)	3,719 (27.8%)	8,140 (30.8%)

Source: Govtrack.us (2019)

The same cumulative analysis was done for Black women MCs. From a total of 35,453 issues of salience within the Black agenda that were introduced from the 101st-115th Congress (Table III), Black women MCs co-sponsored 15,189 (42.8%) of them. Once again, holding constant the women’s agenda items, Black women MCs co-sponsored 76.5% (20,241) of the agenda expanding two decades (Table VI).

Table V: Black Agenda Item Bill Introductions from the 101st-115th Congress

Session	Civil Liberties	Economy	Total
101	52	292	344
102	78	485	563
103	290	1104	1394
104	478	2170	2648
105	513	2431	2944
106	596	2685	3281
107	561	2754	3315
108	605	11296	11901
109	675	2874	3549
110	550	2665	3215
111	160	336	496
112	142	262	404
113	145	298	443
114	177	299	476
115	195	285	480
TOTAL (N)	5,217	30,236	35,453

Source: Govtrack.us (2019)

Table VI: Co-Sponsorships of Black Agenda Interest Bills by Black women MCs

MC	Civil Liberties	Economy	Total
Barbara-Rose Collins	36	62	98
Eva M. Clayton	158	436	594
Carrie Meek	197	439	636
Denise Majette	30	71	101
Cynthia McKinney	317	742	1059
Corrine Brown	325	837	1162
Juanita Millender-McDonald	285	767	1052
Julia Carson	380	941	1321
Stephanie Tubbs Jones	291	734	1025
Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick	347	750	1097
Diane Watson	184	452	636
Laura Richardson	18	30	48
Donna Edwards	16	11	27
Mia Love	5	8	13
Alma Adams	10	3	13
Karen Bass	15	9	24
Joyce Beatty	18	8	26
Yvette Clarke	73	142	215
Val Demings	6	1	7
Marcia Fudge	21	9	30
Eddie Bernice Johnson	348	775	1123
Brenda Jones	13	1	14
Robin L. Kelly	10	7	17
Brenda Lawrence	538	1145	1683
Barbara Lee	524	1220	1744
Sheila Jackson Lee	117	203	320
Gwen Moore	14	12	26
Terri Sewell	349	581	930
Maxine Waters	12	4	16
Bonnie Watson Coleman	23	11	34
Frederica Wilson	36	62	98
Total (Cumulative %)	4,716 (90.4%)	10,473 (34.6%)	15,189 (42.8%)

Source: Govtrack.us (2019) Note: Black women MCs are in order of being sworn into Congress (see Appendix I, Table B for more information).

Table VII: Co-Sponsorships of Women's Interest Bills by Black women MCs

MC	Health	Gender Wage Gap	Total
Barbara-Rose Collins	98	38	136
Eva M. Clayton	413	332	745
Carrie Meek	404	338	742
Denise Majette	53	44	97
Cynthia McKinney	661	511	1172
Corrine Brown	819	652	1471
Juanita Millender-McDonald	624	563	1187
Julia Carson	845	704	1549

Stephanie Tubbs Jones	588	550	1138
Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick	751	589	1340
Diane Watson	370	21	391
Laura Richardson	141	42	183
Donna Edwards	144	35	179
Mia Love	25	2	27
Alma Adams	51	10	61
Karen Bass	118	26	144
Joyce Beatty	201	29	230
Yvette Clarke	409	141	550
Val Demings	23	5	28
Marcia Fudge	152	34	186
Eddie Bernice Johnson	882	576	1458
Brenda Jones	120	13	133
Robin L. Kelly	83	18	101
Brenda Lawrence	1320	851	2171
Barbara Lee	1218	943	2161
Sheila Jackson Lee	502	199	701
Gwen Moore	127	13	140
Terri Sewell	638	435	1073
Maxine Waters	91	21	112
Bonnie Watson Coleman	167	38	205
Frederica Wilson	98	332	430
Total (Cumulative %)	12,136 (90.7%)	8,105 (61.9%)	20,241 (76.5%)

Source: Govtrack.us (2019).

To show the legislative impact women of color have within their community's racial and ethnic agenda, I use the cumulative percentages gathered from tables II, IV, VI, and VII. As we can see from table VIII, compared to the rest of Congress, Latina MCs co-sponsor an average of 34.9% of the bills introduced to the House that relates to the Latinx agenda. Black women MCs co-sponsor an average of 42.8% of bills introduced to the House that relates to the Black agenda. When it comes to issues towards gender equity and reproductive health, Latina MC's on average co-sponsored 30.8% of all bills introduced from the 101st-155th Congressional session. Black women MCs co-sponsored 76.5% of all bills introduced within the women's agenda. Compared to the rest of Congress, Latina MCs are 32.8% more likely to support substantive issues that impact the racial and gender agenda of the constituents they descriptively represent. On the other hand, Black women MCs co-sponsor 59.6% of bills that have a substantive impact the racial and gender agenda of their constituents they descriptively represent.

Table VIII: Percentage of WOC MC’s Bill Co-Sponsorship Aggregates from 1989-2015

Latina MC		Black Women MC	
Latinx Agenda	Women’s Agenda	Black Agenda	Women’s Agenda
34.9% (26,461)	30.8% (8,140)	42.8% (15,189)	76.5% (20,241)

Note: Govtrack.us (2019).

When are “the people” – with all its different identities – fairly represented? It seems to be commonly accepted that democratic representation implies that no significant parts of the population are excluded from being represented within or governing institutions in the United States. But what should our standard of judging democratic quality of substantive representation be? According to Pitkin (1967), this standard is the representatives’ responsiveness: substantive representation is “acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them.” In which order, responsiveness turns what the representatives do into substantive representation of those being governed. Therefore, the criterion for democratic representation, in a way, is the accountability and the connection the MC has to their descriptive representativeness – will ensure responsiveness.

There are several important contributions that can come from the intersectional analysis reviewed here. The literature should have revealed important focal points of the interconnectedness of the conflict the woman of color face when supporting a bill of any kind that may assume her preference over one of her social identities. Second, the introduction of these findings should divert our attention to focus on the lack of representation of women of color in political office such as Congress. The growth in the number of female Latina and Black legislators is a relatively recent phenomenon. Whereas women in 1989 made up about 7% of Congress, today 37%, or 47 out of the 127 women serving in the 116th Congress are women of color. In addition, a Black woman, a Latina, an Asian Pacific Islander, and a Caribbean American woman serve as Delegates to the House from Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Virgin Islands respectively (CAWP 2019). Among major findings from the Center of American Women in Politics, women in Congress are committed first and foremost to representing their districts or states, including constituents that did not vote for them. Many Latina and Black congresswomen see representing Latinx and Black communities as an important component of their jobs as representatives. And it is the personal experiences and identities – including professional and occupational experiences; adult life experiences outside the workplace; experiences growing up; and racial, ethnic, and sexual identities – that influence congresswomen’s legislative priorities and representational responsibilities. Recent scholarship by Dittmar, Sanbonmatsu and Carroll (2018) has found that women MCs bring to the congressional agenda new issues related to women’s lives, seek prioritization of them, and are persistent in their work to keep them on the agenda. Almost all of them believe women also bring different perspectives than men to their work in Congress because of their life experiences. They bring to bear a “gender lens” on various issues, not just issues that might commonly be considered women’s issues.

Women bring perspectives, priorities, and agendas that would be missing if women were not there to represent women and give voice to those who are too often left out of policymaking spaces. Not only women's differences from men, but also the diversity that exists among women – in experience, activism, perspective, and position – points to the need for having more women in Congress. The value of racial, ethnic and co-sponsorship behavior illustrated in the data above reaffirms that representativeness among women of color requires attention and efforts to promote diversity among women candidates and officeholders. Furthermore, scholars within the fields of political science and gender studies should promote the study of women of color in office. It is worth it and necessary for the continuation of our intellectual standing to continue to identify the challenges women of color face when getting into office, the hurdles they confront when in office, and the glass ceiling and glass wall they must breakdown in order to dismantle legislative representation and gridlock.

Women in Congress do not seem to be undeterred by the challenges they confront. The racial and gendered context of their legislative behavior demonstrates that they are substantively more likely to represent communities they strongly descriptively identify with. Further analysis as to which challenges these MCs confront due to their sociocultural identification is the basis for my second hypothesis introduced within this paper. Findings from the set of intersectional analyses that examine the larger network of power dynamics results in a more precise understanding of the interlaced forces (Alemán 2018).

CONCLUSION

While some scholars agree that we must reject too strong a focus on descriptive representation since that diverts attention from substantive representation, I do believe that descriptive political representation has merit when women of color act as activists for the marginalized identities they represent. This is a challenge by feminist research on political representation, which argues that there is great importance to the descriptive representation of women (Beckwith 2007; Haslanger 2000; McCall 2005; Rosenthal 1995; Young 1997). Feminist scholars have done so for many reasons – democratic values such as inclusion, equity, and legitimacy – but also to further the substantive representation of all women. Our understanding of women's representation would benefit from shifting the attention from the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation toward substantive representation as such: how it is done, who is implied, where it happens, and for what reasons. This very much follows Celis' (2009, 2013) earlier argument that to understand women's political representation, we must suggest a plural, possibly contradictory interests and perspectives are at the base of democratic representation. Since women are not a homogenous group and should be expected to have diverging views, responsiveness increased when differing views are included into the representation process. The legislative behavior that the representatives respond therefore contributes to the extent in which differing views are argued for and are sustained.

Given the small number of women of color – a total of 78 that have ever served in Congress – measuring their collective impact is methodologically problematic. The presence of women of

color in the U.S. Congress is transforming the institution, as they battle stereotypes of minority women and shape the public policy debate on issues pertaining to both racial minority groups and women. The “double bind” for women of color becomes a “triple bind” when we include into our studies the oppressive culture women face within the “all boys club” of institutions such as Congress. One could theorize that there is an indelible effect that cannot be ignored.

Latinas remain significantly underrepresented in the U.S. Congress. Only seventeen Latinas have ever served in Congress, and only nine remain in it as of the 116th congressional session. Given the fact that most of these representatives of color have been elected as a result of majority-minority districts, it is unlikely that legislative women of color will decrease significantly in the future. Something to look forward to in the next two decades should be that Latinas have been quite successful in being elected when they run for office. Stories like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s (D-NY) remind us that women’s growing presence in the legislature bodes well for the future presence of these women as representatives at the national level. The women of color who have served and are serving in Congress have had important effects on the institution itself and on its policy direction, particularly within the Democratic party. Regardless of the outcome of the 2016 Presidential election, those effects cannot be erased. Women in Congress appear to situate themselves and their representation of women within their specific and distinct experiences across racial and ethnic backgrounds, ideological and partisan affiliations, and professional and private life stories. It is important for future research to affirm that the presence of women of color is important for representing women’s interests in Congress, but also to highlight the complexities and multiplicities of the identities that women of color identify with. It is just as pertinent that as scholars, we understand that gender and race combined often shapes how MCs approach their legislative behavior. Regardless of our stance on political representation, women of color have a cross to bear – *who* do they represent?

Appendix I:

Table A: List of All Latinas Ever Elected to the U.S. House of Representatives

P-State	Latina MC	National Origin	Years Served
R-FL	Ileana Ros-Lehtinen	Cuba	1989-Present
D-CA	Lucille Roybal-Allard	Mexico	1993-Present
D-NY	Nydia Velazquez	Puerto Rico	1993-Present
D-CA	Loretta Sanchez	Mexico	1997-2017
D-CA	Grace Napolitano	Mexico	1999-Present
D-CA	Hilda Solis	Mexico-Nicaragua	2001-2009
D-CA	Linda Sanchez	Mexico	2003-Present
R-WA	Jamie Herrera Beutler	Mexico	2011-Present
D-CA	Gloria Negrete McLeod	Mexico	2013-2015
D-NM	Michelle Lujan Grisham	Mexico	2013-2018
D-CA	Norma Torres	Guatemala	2015-Present
D-CA	Nanette Barragan	Puerto Rico	2017-Present
D-TX	Veronica Escobar**	Mexico	2019-Present
D-TX	Sylvia Garcia,**	Mexico	2019-Present
D-FL	Debbie Mucarsel-Powell**	Ecuador	2019-Present
D-NY	Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez**	Puerto Rico	2019-Present
D-NM	Xochitl Torres Small,**	Mexico	2019-Present

*Source: History.house.gov (2019) and CAWP (2019). Note: those MC's with (**) have been omitted from the analysis.*

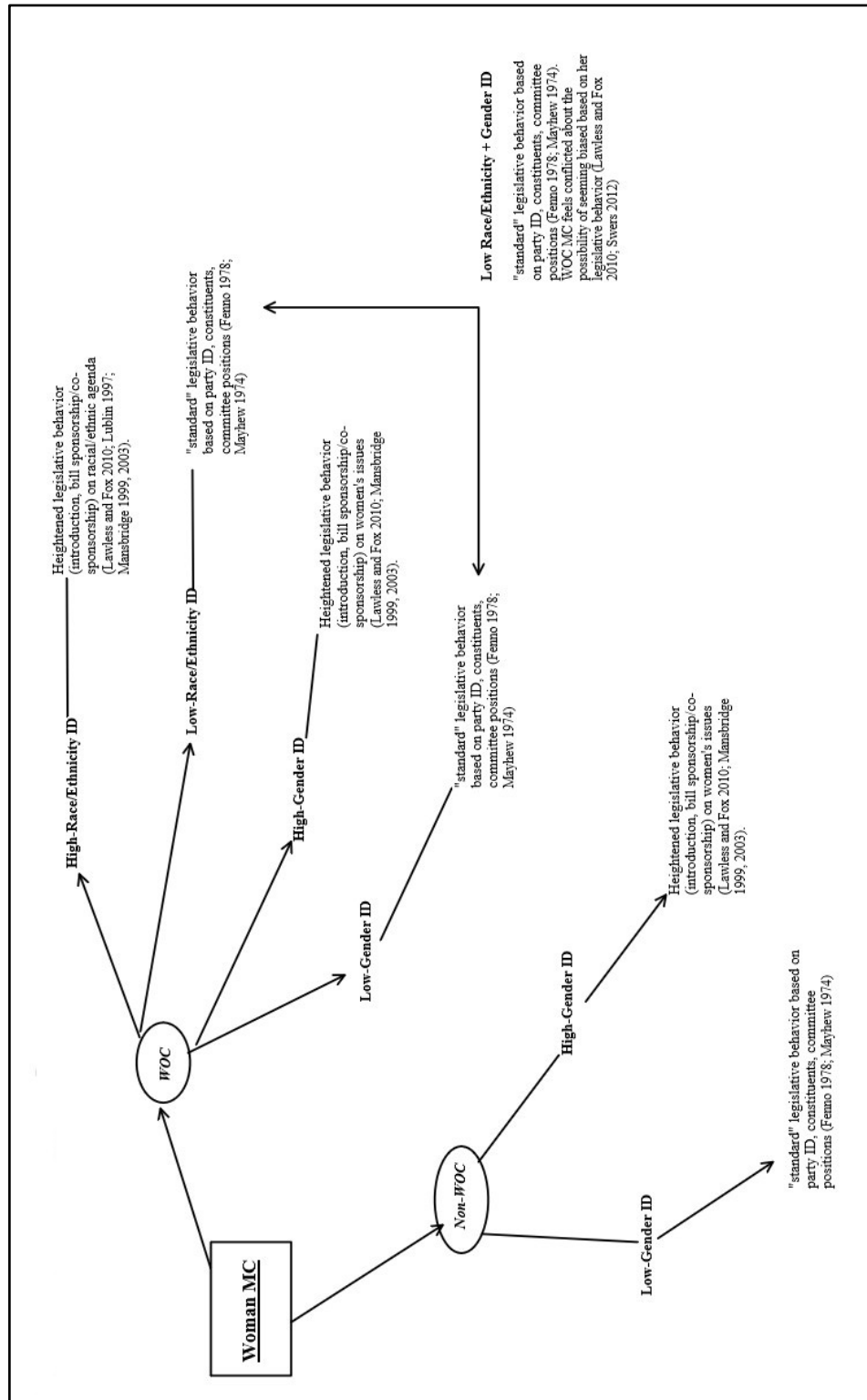
Table B: List of All Black Women Ever Elected to the U.S. House of Representatives

P-State	Name	Years Served
D-NY	Shirley Chisholm	1969-1983
D-CA	Yvonne Brathwaite Burke	1973-1979
D-TX	Barbara Jordan	1973-1979
D-IL	Cardiss Collins	1973-1997
D-IN	Katie Hall	1982-1985
D-MI	Barbara-Rose Collins	1991-1997
D-NC	Eva M. Clayton	1992-2003
D-FL	Carrie Meek	1993-2003
D-GA	Denise Majette	2003-2005
D-GA	Cynthia McKinney	1993-2003;2005-2007
D-FL	Corrine Brown	1993-2017
D-CA	Juanita Millender-McDonald	1996-2007
D-IN	Julia Carson	1996-2007
D-OH	Stephanie Tubbs Jones	1999-2008
D-MI	Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick	1997-2011
D-CA	Diane Watson	2001-2011
D-CA	Laura Richardson	2007-2013
D-MD	Donna Edwards	2008-2017
R-UT	Mia Love	2015-Present
D-NC	Alma Adams	2017-Present
D-CA	Karen Bass	2017-Present
D-OH	Joyce Beatty	2017-Present
D-NY	Yvette Clarke	2017-Present
D-FL	Val Demings	2017-Present

D-OH	Marcia Fudge	2017-Present
D-TX	Eddie Bernice Johnson	2017-Present
D-MI	Brenda Jones	2017-Present
D-IL	Robin L. Kelly	2017-Present
D-MI	Brenda Lawrence	2017-Present
D-CA	Barbara Lee	2017-Present
D-TX	Sheila Jackson Lee	2017-Present
D-WI	Gwen Moore	2017-Present
D-AL	Terri Sewell	2017-Present
D-CA	Maxine Waters	2017-Present
D-NJ	Bonnie Watson Coleman	2017-Present
D-FL	Frederica Wilson	2017-Present

Source: History.house.gov (2019) and CAWP (2019).

Figure I: A Theory Towards Understanding the Racial and Gendered Context of Being a Congresswoman of Color (Bolaños Perea, 2019)



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