

# Feminism, Masculinity, and Active Representation: A Gender Analysis of Representative Bureaucracy

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## Abstract

Representative bureaucracy examines how identity impacts bureaucratic decision-making. Under certain circumstances, identity congruence between government officials and citizens will result in positive outcomes. This article explores how representative bureaucracy literature studies the effects of gender identity and matching. Although studies demonstrate that context and organizational environment impact identity, scholars don't systematically analyze how outcomes are affected by gender, rely predominantly on binary gender variables, seldom acknowledge organizations as masculine spaces, and don't problematize masculinity. Using critical gender theory, we offer new proposals for how to expand our understanding of institutionalized gender norms as they relate to public sector decisions.

## Keywords

representative bureaucracy, gender, masculinity, outcomes

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The study of representative bureaucracy is the normative theory that individuals in society will more likely have their needs met if public servants share their demographics, beliefs, or values. Hannah Pitkin (1967) defined passive or descriptive representation as “being something rather than doing something” (p. 209). She later argued that representation should not end at shared demographic identity but should extend to doing something in the interest of represented groups. In representative bureaucracy literature, gender identity is a significant determinant of client outcomes. However, primarily due to the quantitative analytical nature of most research on representative bureaucracy, the meaning and impact of gender is underexplored. Instead, demographic information collected through surveys and censuses are used as proxies to determine whether bureaucrats and their clients who share gender characteristics create positive outcomes for the represented group. Although studies have acknowledged that context and organizational environment impact identity (Meier, 2018), representative bureaucracy scholars have not systematically analyzed how outcomes are affected by gender, have relied predominantly on quantitative methods that use binary gender variables, have seldom acknowledged that organizations and institutions are masculine spaces, and have not problematized masculinity in organizations.

While the questions explored by critical gender theory and representative bureaucracy studies are not the same—representative bureaucracy deals with representation by bureaucrats, whereas critical gender theory explores how gender is institutionalized in society—when studying gender representation, public administration scholars can benefit from critical gender literature. By aligning representative bureaucracy conditions with critical gender theory, this article offers a way to unlock some of the contextual pressures surrounding the gendered nature of citizens, bureaucrats, organizations, policies, and program areas.

In this article, we assess the application of representative bureaucracy studies through the lens of critical gender theory at societal, organizational, and individual levels. First, we theoretically ground our understanding of sex and gender in an acknowledgment of the pervasiveness of masculinity in society. Second, we discuss how most public organizations are gendered institutions, molded based on a “masculine ethic” (Connell, 2006; Duerst-Lahti & Kelly, 1995). Third, we assess how current literature in representative bureaucracy explores identity within different contexts including policy areas, geographies, and demographic identities. We demonstrate how conditions in which representative bureaucracy create positive outcomes for individuals, such as identity salience, discretion, critical mass, and environmental pressures, are effectively understood through the use of critical gender theory.

Finally, we make recommendations for examining gender in representative bureaucracy studies by presenting four proposals to inform future research. Our proposals argue for the expansion of the representative bureaucracy field from asking whether or not gender congruence affects bureaucratic decision-making to examining how the pervasiveness of masculinity in organizations affects bureaucratic behavior.

## Literature Review

Since the 1970s, feminist scholars have studied the effects of masculinity. Due in part to the historical dominance of men in the home, public and private sectors, and academia, cultural values have been based on masculinity that is still pervasive today. This section explores in what ways masculinity impacts societal, organizational, and individual values and decisions.

### *Masculinity and Men in Society*

Men and masculinity refer to gender, not sex or sexuality. While sociologists debate whether sex, sexuality, and gender are concepts that can be individually examined (Ekins & King, 2006; Kessler & McKenna, 1978), this article follows Ekins and King's (2006) guidance to differentiate between the three to better understand how a society that constructs a sex binary (male and female) creates a "bi-polar gender system" and thus a "gender divide" (p. 223). Sex is the biological and anatomical difference between male, female, and at least three sexes that are neither male nor female (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Garfinkel's (1963) study belies the immutability of even biological sex determinants by following the journey of Agnes, who by convincing medical professionals that she was intersexed, thereby reconstructing her biological sex to match her sociological gender, successfully physically transitioned from a male to a transgender female. Sexuality is defined by the sexual and romantic desires of individuals. Like biological sex, sexuality influences and is influenced by gender (Ekins and King, 2006).

The concept most relevant to representative bureaucracy theory is gender. Pulling from social contract theory, gender is a "series of social relations" (Walby, 1990, p. 20) that differentiate between and create a hierarchy of power wherein men receive social, economic, and political benefits. Gender dictates that biological males should adopt masculine traits, whereas biological females are expected to adopt feminine traits (Bem, 1981). Such traits can be physical, mental, or behavioral. For example, men are associated with strength, virility, aggression, violence, and loyalty. Males who do not fit within the acceptable mold of masculinity and cannot pass as women are often ostracized

by society and subjected to violence (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Pascoe, 2007).

Women, too, experience the pressures of masculinity. The male gaze sets forth demands for women to give “visual pleasure” (Mulvey, 1975). For example, female (and White) sex traits, such as being “busty,” having long hair, or being thin, are celebrated by an American masculine society. Women are expected to possess feminine traits including sensitivity, passivity, patience, and kindness. Trained from birth to adopt appropriate gender behaviors and traits, psychologists find that people who more closely associate with their own gender think in more gendered terms, even remembering gendered items such as guns and bikinis more easily than those who do not associate as closely with their gender (Bem, 1981). It is through this “gender schema” that every aspect of social life is filtered, like a tinted lens that cannot ever be entirely removed (Bem, 1981). This schema is complicated by race, ethnicity, nationality, and origin, all of which combine to impact the lives of public servants in culture, domestic life, and bureaucracies (Walby et al., 2012).

Separating sex and sexuality from gender reveals that masculinity and femininity are nonbinary, existing along a spectrum. Males and females alike can hold attributes such as aggressiveness, loyalty, and strength, as well as sensitivity, passivity, and kindness (Duerst-Lahti & Kelly, 1995). As the feminist movement demonstrates, females can perform roles that were traditionally reserved for men, and the transgender movement shows that males can live their lives almost exclusively as women and vice versa (Ekins & King, 2006). Most men and women live in a space between the masculine and feminine extremes, “performing” gender in response to the expectations and intentions of their social reality (Butler, 1990). It is in this space that women enter bureaucracies that are almost exclusively dominated by people performing masculinity.

### *Organizations as Masculine Spaces*

Masculinity is institutionalized as the correct way for men and women to act within public organizations. Historically, in the United States, work outside of the home was a masculine (and White)-dominated space. Therefore, the office adopted societal perceptions of acceptable masculine traits (Collinson & Hearn, 1996). This was infused into early organization and management theory, in addition to being taught within business and public administration schools, whose students were predominantly wealthy White men (Kanter, 1975). Therefore, a “masculine ethic” was born which celebrates traits such as men being tough on problems, analytical, unemotional, impersonal, and smarter or better problem solvers than women (Kanter, 1975).

Kanter's (1975) understanding of gender was folded into institutional theory by Joan Acker. Acker (2012) categorizes gender integration in the workforce into four gender substructures including organizing processes, organizational culture, interactions on the job, and gendered identities. Gender substructures are "an often invisible process in the ordinary lives of organizations in which gendered assumptions about women and men, femininity and masculinity, are embedded and reproduced, and gender inequalities perpetuated" (p. 215). Organizing processes are gendered in how wages are determined, who makes decisions and has power, how the workplace is designed, and in what ways organizational rules favor men. Organizational culture speaks to acceptable beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors, emphasized by gender differences, images of masculinity, and a denial that inequality exists between men and women. On-the-job interactions are gendered when women are excluded or belittled and when men are given deference, especially within man-dominated industries.

Gendered experiences of women as managers are deeply embedded in social role perceptions that ascribe leadership and managerial roles to men and those that demonstrate masculine traits (Sabharwal, 2015; Schein, 1975, 2001). Eagly and Karau (2002) and Schein and Muller (1992) apply gender congruity theory to explain sex stereotyping that women encounter as they perform in traditionally male-dominated roles. Essentially, role incongruity arises when women act in positions that are socially accepted as fitting for men. This incongruity creates barriers to women in organizations where they must prove their ability to overcome their femininity before they can be judged for their competence (Koenig & Eagly, 2005; Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Finally, gendered identities created by societal beliefs about how men and women should act, and strengthened through organizational processes, determine how men and women are perceived differently based on their behavior. For example, women who "manage like a man" may be seen as too aggressive, controlling, or "bitchy" while managing like a woman may be perceived as too complacent or ineffective (p. 216).

Thus, in historically masculine spaces, such as the office, the "gender-neutral, abstract worker" embodies expectations associated with historically masculine experiences and socially constructed masculine characteristics including a worker who is unencumbered by life outside the office (p. 218).

### *Masculinity in Government*

Institutionalized masculinity and gender has, to some extent, also been studied by public administration scholars (Bishu & Alkadry, 2017; D'Agostino & Rubin, 2018; Gooden & Portillo, 2011; Guy & Newman, 2004; Heckler,

2019; Rubin & Bartle, 2005; Stivers, 1993, 2002). Stivers's (1993) *Gender Images in Public Administration* was a response to the lack of feminist work in public administration and the need to justify the administrative state through the principles of representative democracy. Stivers argues that public administration as a field has been dominated by men and therefore is filled with masculine values and images of experience, knowledge, leadership, and virtue, all of which are biased toward men. Furthermore, because men hold positions of power and are decision makers, they are likely to gain more from political and economic policies than women. This systemic masculinity is supported through power dynamics within society and has repercussions for more feminine genders when resources or opportunities are allocated. These masculine biases mean that women in public administration have to change who they are and the way they work to fit in or they will be marginalized (Stivers, 2002). Beyond the obvious sexist and unethical implications related to a gender-biased public administration, an enormous amount of knowledge and experience is lost when doors are closed to women in government.

As described by Stivers (2000), masculine domination in government faced a fundamental change during the Progressive Era in which government reform was divided by gender. In attempting to transform corrupt municipal government, men worked for the New York Bureau of Municipal Research and women worked predominantly in settlement houses. Because of the culture of the times, and the distinction between masculine and feminine roles in the family, men were deemed more suited to businesslike and scientific efficiency, both of which were socially constructed as masculine traits. Using a scientific approach and choosing "efficiency over caring" allowed men to focus on benevolent activities considered womanly, while maintaining their masculinity (p. 125). Therefore, in the face of government corruption and waste, the bureau men looked to objective reasoning to understand the problems of government and prescribed systematic budgets, neutral political-administrative relationships, and a centralized government led by experts. Citizens were considered clients, but as most were uneducated, were not included in making decisions (p. 16).

Alternatively, Stivers (2000) argues that women naturally fit into "municipal housekeeping" work (p. 48). Because morality was considered a natural female trait, women's work focused on cleaning up the city, feeding and caring for the poor or infirmed, and making neighborhoods a better place in which to live. The traditional idea of women being the keepers of the house and the defenders of children and family justified the settlement women's argument for the suffrage movement and involvement in public administration. Their view of science was one of connection and experience. They visited people's homes and interviewed them to understand what the problems

of the city were and how they could help. Their recommendations included humanizing processes, networking and cooperation between agencies and people, and making decisions on a case-by-case basis. Unlike bureau men, settlement women believed that politics and administration were not neutral but affected each other. Their role in the movement was one of citizen, and not expert, and they viewed other citizens as participants in government and not merely as clients or customers.

The effects of the division between the bureau and settlement are still felt today. While there are now more women staff and leaders in public administration than ever before, the field is still highly gendered, and women continue to feel marginalized and struggle with balancing work and family responsibilities (Stivers, 2010). Stivers (2010) writes

... to enter the public sphere as currently given, women must leave behind part of themselves—as, indeed, must men. The transformation suggested by feminist thought is the opportunity to become whole in the process of writing what has not yet been written. (p. 223)

Masculinity is now the dominant and invisible ideology of public administration. Duerst-Lahti and Kelly (1995) argue that some “may be surprised to learn that men have gender just as much as women have gender” (p. 1). This invisibility of masculinity is no mere accident but rather part of an ideology that protects and advocates for men just as feminism sometimes appears to protect and advocate for women (Duerst-Lahti & Kelly, 1995; Linstead, 2000). This invisibility guards masculinity from strong theorization by rendering its mere observation ideological and therefore biased. Rather than the norm being unbiased, Newman (1994) exposes the masculinity inherent in public administration theory by revealing the masculine assumptions at the core of Lowi’s (1972) typology of government agencies. Newman (1994) empirically demonstrates that redistributive agencies are the most conflictual and simultaneously the most likely to employ women. This and a myriad of other examples documented by authors including Duerst-Lahti and Kelly (1995), Stivers (1993), and others reveal the hidden gender assumptions that guide public administration research and theory, including representative bureaucracy theory.

## **Gender in Representative Bureaucracy**

Work in representative bureaucracy can be traced to Kingsley’s (1944) criticism of the British civil service for not representing the public whom they serve. Levitan (1946) and Long (1952) explored the theory within the context

of the United States associating it with accountability, effectiveness, and policy decision-making. Pitkin (1967) argued that passive representation, or when public servants possess demographic similarities to their constituents, was an act of being rather than doing and called for a bolder type of representation in which individuals acted to support those they represent. She also introduced symbolic representation, which focuses on citizen perception of government legitimacy and performance.

Mosher (1968) extended the theory by distinguishing passive representation with active representation, thus linking demographics of individuals to values and decisions. Active representation occurs when bureaucrats who share demographic characteristics (race, gender, etc.) with those they serve (passive representation) make policy decisions that positively impact those citizens (Meier & Nigro, 1976; Mosher, 1968).

Work in representative bureaucracy can be divided into three waves. Early research and articles published in the 1970s and 1990s focus solely on passive representation (Bishu & Kennedy, 2019). This is followed by studies from the last 20 years that test under what conditions passive representation leads to active representation. Although Pitkin (1967) spoke of symbolic representation in the 1960s, the third wave of representative bureaucracy studies which developed in earnest in the 21st century explores the link between passive representation and symbolic representation.

Throughout the 80+ years of theory development and empirical literature, representative bureaucracy has mainly been tested within the boundaries of the United States, although additional work has examined the effects of passive and active representation internationally. The majority of work is focused within two policy areas, education and criminal justice, analyzing race and gender matching between government officials and the public at varying managerial levels (street level, manager level, and administrator level) and different levels of government (local, regional, state, and federal).

When exploring the links between passive and active representation, the results have culminated in a handful of conditions or assumptions in which representative bureaucracy works, or that passive representation (demographic matching) translates to active representation (positive policy and program outputs and outcomes for citizens). For example, Bradbury and Kellough (2011), through an examination of active representation literature, found strong evidence for representative bureaucracy within law enforcement in supporting people of color and women.

In a recent paper, Meier (2018) categorizes conditions linked to representative bureaucracy by those that are necessary for a “bare bone’s theory of representation” and those that are contextual (pp. 3–4). Bare bones conditions include a bureaucrat’s identity salience and his or her or their level of discretion. As both



identity salience and level of discretion increase, a bureaucrat is more likely to make decisions that represent members of the public who share their identity (Meier, 2018; Meier & Bohte, 2001). Contextual conditions can be added to bare bones conditions and will either improve or hinder representation. These include organizational stratification (Ricucci & Saidel, 1997), critical mass (Stevens, 2009), organizational pressures to conform (Wilkins & Williams, 2008), and if a policy area is gendered (Keiser et al., 2002).

Thus, contextual variables impact identity which impacts representational outcomes. But, what is identity? The majority of representative bureaucracy literature classifies identity in broad demographic terms including race and gender. In this literature, gender is expressed as binary gender variables and only includes men and women leaving out transgender individuals. Furthermore, as the predominant literature on representative bureaucracy uses quantitative data and techniques, research has been limited to survey and census data in which individuals check off boxes identifying them by sex (male or female). This information is used as a way to match bureaucrats to the public through demographic, and salient, identities, thus leading to shared experiences, values, opinions, and desires.

Quantitative research and large-*n* studies resulted in the development of a strong representative bureaucracy framework with normative implications at the aggregate level (Meier, 2018). It has demonstrated that diversity and inclusion can have important and positive impacts for underrepresented and marginalized populations and that bureaucratic attitude congruence and advocacy roles are important (Bradbury & Kellough, 2008). It has also shown how strong organizational culture can mold its workers to make decisions that put organizational values over individual ones (Wilkins & Williams, 2008).

However, gaps exist in our understanding of how decisions and representation work at an individual level (Meier, 2018). Furthermore, passive representation is more likely to become active representation when individuals share more than demographics. For example, in exploring how bureaucrats of color exercise representation, Lim (2006) identifies multiple indirect ways that bureaucrats substantively represent minoritized groups with whom they share demographic identities. Lim reports that bureaucrats of color can influence their nonminoritized counterparts through attitude check, action restraint, and transformation of beliefs and values. Lim also argues that *checks* can further result in White bureaucrats exercising restraint on acting biased. In the long term, Lim finds that bureaucrats of color's presence can influence not only the behaviors of White bureaucrats but also their values and beliefs systems.

Along these lines, Pitkin (1967) highlights that studies that explore transition from passive to active representation should not only emphasize demographic matching but should also examine shared attitudes and behaviors between bureaucrats and citizens. She argues that American civil service “should be an exact portrait, in miniature, of the people at large, as it should think, feel, reason and act like them” (p. 60; Naff & Capers, 2014). Despite early recognition of the importance of shared values and beliefs to the manifestation of active representation, very few researchers have adopted this condition and instead rely on demographic congruencies. However, in a male-dominated environment like the office, organizational and institutional values and beliefs can have real repercussions on individuals whose gender performance does not fit within the “masculine ethic” (Connell, 2006; Kanter, 1975).

## **Gendered Representative Bureaucracy: Analytical Methods, Conditions, and Contexts**

This section describes the methods used to conduct a content analysis of existing representative bureaucracy studies. By referencing critical gender literature, we then discuss the conditions and context by which gender is studied in representative bureaucracy research.

### *Analytical Methods*

To assess the conceptual application and development of representative bureaucracy theory, we conducted a content analysis of 96 peer-reviewed journal articles (Bishu & Kennedy, 2019). Content analysis is a “set of methods for analyzing the symbolic content of any communication . . . to reduce the total content of communication . . . to a set of categories that represent some characteristic of research interest” (Singleton & Straits, 2010, p. 420). We used multiple strategies to select articles for review. First, we started from references included in the “Representative Bureaucracy Database” which is made available by the Project for Equity, Representation and Governance. Second, we went through the references of each article listed in the Database to select additional relevant papers. Then, we used keywords to search online for articles that applied the theory. At the end of this process, we identified 227 papers (both published and working papers), 33 book chapters, and four dissertations that applied the theory of representative bureaucracy.

Of these papers, book chapters, and dissertations, we decided to only include empirical and theoretical papers published in peer-reviewed journals. In addition, we included only those that directly applied the theory of representative bureaucracy, excluding papers published in political science journals. In the

end, we were left with 96 peer-reviewed journal articles that directly applied the theory. A list of these articles can be found in the authors' meta-review (Bishu & Kennedy, 2019).

Once we finalized our list of articles, we created a coding procedure with categories of the different emerging themes such as which form of representative bureaucracy is observed, what type of identity matching is tested, which methodology is used, and the policy area or geographical context in which representative bureaucracy manifests, among others (Bishu & Kennedy, 2019). We then read through each of the articles, coded them independently, and compared our coding to determine reliability. Any differences were discussed and a decision was made to how a phrase should be coded for this analysis.

For this article, we reexamined the data and focused on representative bureaucracy literature that operationalizes gender. Gender effects of representative bureaucracy have been addressed by about 40 studies (e.g., Andrews et al., 2014; Andrews & Miller, 2013; Atkins & Wilkins, 2013; Grissom et al., 2012; Keiser et al., 2002; Kim, 2003; Riccucci & Saidel, 1997; Thielemann & Stewart, 1996). Of these studies, only a few clearly differentiate between sex and gender, exploring gendered conditions to interpret when and how active representation occurs (e.g., Atkins & Wilkins, 2013; Keiser et al., 2002; Meier & Nicholson-Crotty, 2006).

Previous studies of how representative bureaucracy is impacted by gender matching can be organized into three categories. The first group, which measures passive representation, examines proportions of women who have been recruited, employed, and/or promoted to various levels of management within government organizations. The second category includes research focused on when passive representation and symbolic representation become active representation. These studies look at the effects of women's presence within organizations and how their gender impacts policy and program decisions for women citizens. The final category examines in what ways passive representation may become active representation without measuring outcomes.

Our content analysis shows that the majority of the studies that investigate representative bureaucracy in public organizations use quantitative analytical methods. Often, studies apply inferential statistics to investigate substantive gender representation outcomes (Atkins & Wilkins, 2013; Meier & Nicholson-Crotty, 2006) or explore moderating factors that facilitate the transformation of passive representation into active representation (Keiser et al., 2002). Studies also apply descriptive statistics to present a summary of gender representation at senior administrative positions in federal, state, and local governments (Dometrius, 1984; Dometrius & Sigelman, 1984; Naff & Capers, 2014).

Although some studies use qualitative and mixed methods to examine representative bureaucracy across race and gender (Atkins & Wilkins, 2013; Kennedy, 2013; Rehfuss, 1986; Watkins-Hayes, 2011), overall, qualitative analytical techniques or mixed methods are underutilized in the examination of gender influences on representative bureaucracy (Bishu & Kennedy, 2019; Kennedy, 2014). Thus, work on representative bureaucracy should take into account a more complete theory of gender including using diverse methods and asking research questions that acknowledge gender as nonbinary. The next section describes in more detail the conditions under which gender is studied in representative bureaucracy literature.

### *Gendered Conditions*

Prior to 2002, gender and sex were used interchangeably within representative bureaucracy studies. Keiser et al.'s (2002) paper was the first to distinguish sex and gender and to explicitly use feminist theory to articulate institutional and society pressures faced by women in the workplace. For example, when examining improved test scores for girl students who are taught by women math teachers, Keiser et al. (2002) include a discussion of feminist theory to differentiate gender from sex and to interpret their empirical results. The authors justify using sex as a proxy for gender when analyzing quantitative data if specific gender conditions are met. They argue that

researchers can make data tell a more complex story about gender even when they are limited by the binaries of their data; and we suggest that a large part of that project is entailed in the process of interpreting the data or, more precisely, interpreting data in light of the larger institutional features that shape the circumstances in which bureaucrats exercise discretion and act to affect policy outcomes, in other words, in the ways that female bureaucrats identify as women and translate passive into active representation. (p. 555)

By incorporating feminist and neoinstitutional theory, Keiser et al. (2002) and those who have studied gender after their article was written (Atkins & Wilkins, 2013; Meier & Nicholson-Crotty, 2006) use gendered conditions by which passive representation becomes active representation, thus supporting positive outcomes for women including acting within gendered policies (Keiser et al., 2002). Representative bureaucracy scholars define gendered policies as those that directly affect women or that are identified as women's issues through some sort of political process. In addition, if the gender of the bureaucrat affects how she, he, or they interact with the public, the program or policy area in which she, he, or they work may become gendered.

In critical studies of gender, Britton (2000) identifies the different ways that one can investigate the gendered nature of organizations. She argues gendered processes can manifest in how bureaucracies are arranged, interact, and produce outcomes. Along with Acker (2006), Britton's (2000) argument mainly emphasizes the ways in which organizational processes produce gendered outcomes. Outcomes involve allocation of power and monetary and material benefits. Manifestations of gendered processes in organizations are located at different levels, including at extra-, intra-, and within organizational interactions (Acker, 2006). Extra-organizational interaction, that is the geographic and social context within which organizations are located, shapes their practice of gender and the ways in which gendered processes manifest and perpetuate in the daily life of organizations.

Within organizations, Acker (2006) argues gender processes are institutionalized by the policies and rules that are practiced daily (p. 196). At intra-organizational levels, gender processes impact organizational culture and affect how organizations interact with one another and with citizens through public service outcomes. Organizational studies that apply the gender lens to examine organizational outcomes report that gendered social norms, biases, and perceptions shape men and women's expectations and interactions in the workforce (Acker, 2006; Kanter, 1975). In addition, Acker (2006) specifically highlights that individual-level interactions between men and women in an organization are influenced by established social arrangements.

Except for the few studies that take into account gendered policy areas (Keiser et al., 2002) and gendered issues (Meier & Funk, 2017), the existing representative bureaucracy literature could be strengthened by investigating how gendered social and organizational contexts shape outcomes. Accounting for the ways in which individual-level interactions and performances of masculinity and femininity impact active representation generates a more accurate and objective analysis of how outcomes can be improved for girls and women.

Existing representative bureaucracy studies operationalize representation in terms of descriptive representation (i.e., the percentage of women in management or leadership positions), or in studies that apply active representation, by looking at gender matching between bureaucrats and citizens. For example, Keiser et al. (2002) use the proportion of women math teachers as an independent variable as a proxy for understanding how those women math teachers are enacting masculine and feminine gender performances in their jobs. It may be that it is the deconstruction of gender norms that benefit girl math students, or it may be that those teachers are folding math into the performance of femininity and symbolically changing what it means to be a girl

math student. Both of these possible mechanisms are only comprehensible with the assumption of nonbinary gender.

The primary assumptions of these representative bureaucracy studies are twofold. First, they assume that when critical mass is achieved at management levels, organizations are able to produce outcomes that benefit women (Keiser et al., 2002). Second, these studies assume that gender matching between bureaucrats and citizens yields outcomes that benefit women (Guul, 2018; Keiser et al., 2002). The primary assumption in the latter proposal is that women bureaucrats act in ways that benefit women clients or citizens and women clients are likely to respond positively to women bureaucrats' actions. Gendered perceptions are constantly maintained during repeated interactions between bureaucrats and citizens. While these assumptions are central to our understanding of the ways in which active representation manifests in public organizations, they fail to take into account how gendered social and organizational processes shape outcomes of representation.

Other conditions studied within representative bureaucracy papers may influence how gender impacts outcomes. Stratification of employment has been linked to gender representation especially in studies that examine the proportion of women who hold administrative positions (Dometrius, 1984; Kanter, 1975). Organizational pressure and its impact on women's decisions touches on the nature of gendered institutions and masculine spaces without explicitly understanding how such pressures operate in the workplace (Stivers, 1993).

Intersectionality has been only briefly examined in representative bureaucracy literature and generally it is focused around gender and race combinations. For example, Atkins and Wilkins (2013) examine the impact of having Black women teachers decreases high school pregnancy rates for Black girl students. In this study, as in other studies that examine more than one demographic identity, the goal is to understand when a public servant makes decisions based on one identity over another, that is, when individuals choose gender over race (Meier, 2018). Another form of identity that is not specifically discussed but is alluded to is the impact of organizational pressures on professions. In the study of gender, in masculine spaces, such as law enforcement, women are potentially more likely to pick values that benefit the organizations in which they work (or masculine values) than make decisions that positively impact women. For the most part, though, intersectionality has not been studied and generally speaking throughout the literature certain identities have been ignored. To date, there are no studies that examine how religion, disability, sexuality, and transgender identity impact outcomes.

## *Gendered Contexts*

Acker (2006) argues that the meaning of gender in society is shaped by historical, organizational, and societal processes. These processes define how gendered perceptions shape individual, organizational, and social outcomes. Taking into consideration the gendered nature of organizational processes, Keiser et al. (2002) identify factors that facilitate active representation. Among these factors are institutional and political contexts. Studies that examine representative bureaucracy within the context of gender (and those that examine other demographic identities including race) begin with a status quo of an organization. While some papers identify organizations as masculine spaces such as emergency services (Andrews et al., 2014; Meier & Nicholson-Crotty, 2006; Riccucci et al., 2014) or female-dominated organizations such as child support services (Wilkins, 2007; Wilkins & Keiser, 2006), most literature on representative bureaucracy does not address the gendered nature of organizations.

Within representative bureaucracy literature, women dominated spaces include public schools (Atkins & Wilkins, 2013; Dee, 2005, 2007; Grissom et al., 2012). Women's issues include teen pregnancy (Atkins & Wilkins, 2013), school performance (Dee, 2005, 2007), sexual assault (Meier & Nicholson-Crotty, 2006), domestic violence (Andrews & Miller, 2013; Riccucci et al., 2014), and child support services (Wilkins, 2007; Wilkins & Keiser, 2006). In addition, women's representation in masculine spaces includes fire rescue service in the United Kingdom (Andrews et al., 2014), in leadership positions at various levels of government (Bowling et al., 2006; Brudney et al., 2000; Burns, 1980; Dolan, 2002; Dometrius, 1984; Grissom et al., 2012), and in law enforcement (Meier & Nicholson-Crotty, 2006; Riccucci et al., 2014).

Geographically, the majority of representative bureaucracy literature examining gender are studies within the context of the United States (Atkins & Wilkins, 2013; Dee, 2005), although additional studies explore representative bureaucracy within the context of the United Kingdom (Andrews et al., 2014), Romania (Meier & Funk, 2017), Hong Kong (Burns, 1980), Denmark (Guul, 2018), Canada (Gidengil & Vengroff, 1997), and the European Union (Stearns et al., 2016). Finally, gender effects on representative bureaucracy are analyzed at multiple levels of government with the majority focused on manager or administrative levels (Dometrius & Sigelman, 1984; Song, 2016). Some studies also examine the interaction between lower-level employees and administrators and others look at the demographics and decisions of street-level bureaucrats (Dee, 2007; Song, 2016; Wilkins & Keiser, 2006).

As discussed above, private and public places of work have historically been dominated by White men, and thus masculine values are expected and incorporated as the status quo of organizations. Research on representative bureaucracy questions this status quo without addressing it. This is achieved in two ways. First, the term “gender” is used interchangeably with “women.” Going back to Keiser et al. (2002), the title “Lipstick and Logarithms” implies that girls and women are the primary focus of the study, and indeed they generally are. The study could just as easily have asked how men math teachers impact girl math students and used the same data to conclude that men math teachers were doing something that hurt girl math students. Instead, the study placed the onus on women to solve the problem, whereas the outcome created by men math teachers is treated as the null condition. This is illustrative of the dominant gender forms in the United States, which are binary and include both men and women. Therefore, by using gender synonymously with “women,” we are missing out on understanding the effect of the other gender, or “man,” which is empirically the more dominant force within our society.

Second, when conducting quantitative analysis, sex is used as a proxy for gender. As stated above, this has been justified by examining sex within gendered contexts, or contexts where women’s issues are dominant (Keiser et al., 2002). However, through this analytical technique, scholars are using female as the independent variable to determine the impact of gender on outcomes for women. Thus, female is the test subject, or the “difference” as compared with the male sex which is examined as the status quo. This is problematic for a few reasons. First, it focuses gender effects solely on women’s spaces and women’s issues, thus leaving us with little understanding of what happens in masculine spaces which is the majority of organizations. Second, it assumes that men do not possess gender, or that the way in which men act is the norm to be compared with, thus otherizing women (Said, 1979). Third, as argued above, it places the onus on women to change the status quo. Finally, it assumes that men do not possess qualities or values held by women and thus are not able to authentically participate in gender equality efforts.

Only recently have the conditions of gender on representative bureaucracy outcomes been explicitly tested outside of a gendered policy area. In an examination of individuals’ feelings toward recycling and coproduction, Riccucci et al. (2015) demonstrate that

the policy area or mission of the agency need not be gendered for such representation effects to emerge. Nor is a shared identity with the agency a motivating factor in this case . . . Thus, we interpret this pattern of findings as



suggesting that greater gender diversity may in some cases produce positive effects for everyone in the society, which is significant given the general underrepresentation of women in government leadership positions. (p. 127)

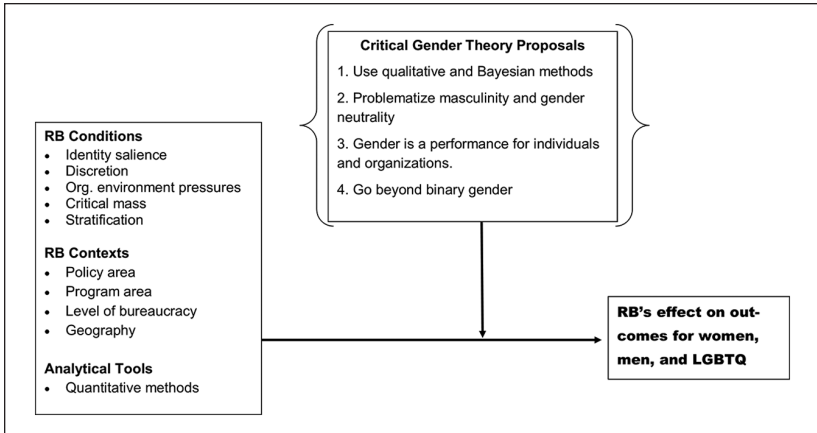
### *Limitations*

This article combines representative bureaucracy literature and critical gender theory to examine in what ways gender is discussed and operationalized within the literature. As discussed above, our analysis draws from a meta-review of representative bureaucracy papers conducted by Bishu and Kennedy (2019). The main limitation to this analysis is we drew from a limited sample of the literature on representative bureaucracy. The meta-review included peer-reviewed articles from a limited number of highly ranked public administration journals, including *Public Administration Review* and *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*. Therefore, it excluded literature that explores representative bureaucracy in other fields such as political science, psychology, or sociology such as Selden et al. (1998). In addition, other formats such as books (see Peters et al., 2015) and dissertations and any literature that was published after the original submission of the article (see Johnston & Houston, 2018) were not included in our review.

## **Summary and Conclusion: Proposals for Future Representative Bureaucracy Research Exploring Gender**

Based on the above analysis and review of the literature, this section presents four proposals derived from critical gender theory. As a research agenda, our proposals argue for the expansion of the theory of representative bureaucracy from asking whether or not gender matching affects bureaucratic behaviors to examine how the pervasiveness of masculinity in organizations affects bureaucratic decision-making. In other words, the question is not whether women are represented in the bureaucracy, but rather whether the masculinity dominant in the bureaucracy is being dismantled by the presence of women, organizational cultures and processes, and interpersonal interactions that support women (Acker, 2012). Figure 1 depicts how these proposals can enhance studies of representative bureaucracy going forward.

Proposal 1: Researchers studying the impact of gender on bureaucratic outcomes should incorporate qualitative and Bayesian analyses to best reflect the empirical reality of gender in representative bureaucracy.



**Figure 1.** Exploring representative bureaucracy through a critical gender lens.

Gender is often captured in surveys that are not specific in asking for sex, sexuality, or gender. Much of the data used by representative bureaucracy scholars include questions like in the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2016), “Are you: MALE/FEMALE.” It is unclear why the federal government would want to know the biological sex of their employees in a context that is entirely unrelated to health care provision. How is a transgender woman meant to answer this question? Should she answer with her sex phenotype after gender confirming surgery, or with her chromosomal sex? Survey questions that ask for gender and give possible answers that include male, female, and other are equally as unclear. These surveys capture proxies for gender only because of the likely correlation between a person performing masculinity by selecting “male” in a workplace survey, and that same person performing masculinity in other aspects of his or her work life.

In part, because they are guided by large-*n* data, many representative bureaucracy analyses of gender could be improved. The binary approach to gathering data on gender described above lends itself to quasi-experimental methods for hypothesis testing. The null hypothesis is generally the outcome that is associated with masculinity, whereas the alternative hypothesis is the outcome created when a woman performs the job task. Because gender is socially constructed, all public servants perform both masculinity and femininity (Butler, 1990; Stivers, 1993), which necessarily means that the binary captures gender poorly. In fact, women who perform gender like men have been found to have similar medical outcomes as men in that they have shorter

life spans than women who perform gender in a more feminine manner (Lippa et al., 2000). Similarly, women public servants have proved that they can perform masculinity as well as men in many circumstances, thereby creating similar outputs to men performing masculinity (Chan et al., 2010; Kanter, 1975). Because gender is empirically nonbinary and falls along or transcends a spectrum between masculine and feminine, analyses of gender are more theoretically sound when they capture gender gradients (Pini & Pease, 2013).

Bayesian and qualitative methods better reflect the empirical reality of gender than alternative hypothesis testing using the statistical methods most common in the representative bureaucracy literature. The empirical reality of the gender spectrum does not lend itself well to quasi-experiments that require distinct treatment and control groups (Pini & Pease, 2013). Instead, rich qualitative research is one promising alternative, where methods such as institutional ethnography (Smith, 1987) and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1963) document how gender is constructed, maintained, and adapted within organizational settings. From these perspectives, representative bureaucracy is not about the self-identification of employees, but instead about how workers perform their jobs which might conflict with how they conduct their private lives. While some in a masculine agency like a police force may be women at home, they may feel considerable pressures to be “one of the boys” at work, thereby doing their best to perform the job just as a man would (Stivers, 2000). This limits the effectiveness of their representative experiences as women, while their presence facilitates organizational actors to focus less energy and attention on gender equity and representing women clients (Heckler, 2019; Stivers, 2000).

When surveys are useful, Bayesian methods are better suited to analyze the gender spectrum as they capture likelihoods along sliding scales instead of simply rejecting or failing to reject alternative hypotheses (Kruschke, 2012). Like qualitative methods, Bayesian methods do not require the binary control and treatment groups of quasi-experimental inferential statistics, and so are better suited to the nonbinary reality of gender. Rather, Bayesian analysis derives a likely distribution within which the outcome is likely to fall. Bayesian hypothesis testing does not conclude with an acceptance or rejection of the null, but rather with a range of possibilities that may or may not include the null (Gill & Meier, 2000). Even when the range includes the null, the posterior results help make sense of the phenomenon being studied, enabling a better understanding of nonbinary phenomena such as gender and gender-related outcomes (Gill & Meier, 2000).

Although representative bureaucracy scholars have called for and even used Bayesian statistics (Gill & Meier, 2000), there remains an insistence in

public administration generally on the concise answers and more distinguishable results provided by *p* values and more traditional models. This kind of clarity cannot be provided by Bayesian analytics (Kruschke, 2012). Seen from a critical gender perspective, statistical significance seeks a clear delineation based on gender where no empirical delineation exists (Pini & Pease, 2013). Bayesian methods and rich qualitative observation provide alternative methodologies that more closely resemble the empirical reality of gender in representative bureaucracy.

Proposal 2: When examining representative bureaucracy within organizations, scholars should problematize institutionalized masculinity and gender neutrality.

Representative bureaucracy studies have documented empirical evidence that gender is impacting public administration, but by failing to deliberately select a gendered viewpoint, research has selected the default masculine viewpoint that dominates Western universities and government. It is no accident that masculinity is the default perspective. Collinson and Hearn (1996) argue that masculinity maintains power by remaining above comment which makes masculinity appear as the natural organizational default and men as the proper holders of power, prestige, and authority. Historically, the masculine default in Western universities and government can be traced to the elimination of women's indigenous knowledge through the witch burnings of the 16th and 17th centuries (Grosfuguel, 2013) and is carried on by the dominance of masculine systems and thinking (Stivers, 2000). To maintain this default requires only that gender remains unnoticed and uncommented upon (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Stivers, 2000).

Alternatively, understanding gender requires systematically identifying and highlighting the impact of femininity and masculinity on public administration. As Stivers (2000) argues, historical and contemporary public administration is gendered by the bureau man, that is to say masculinity. Similarly, Smith (1987) notes that the everyday world is gendered, but because it is so ordinary a researcher must make gender problematic to observe and analyze it. Masculinity researchers on organization point out that the world is gendered and that the dominant gendering frame in most organizations is masculinity (Collinson & Hearn, 1996; Heckler, 2019). Masculinity is as important to gender analyses in representative bureaucracy as femininity.

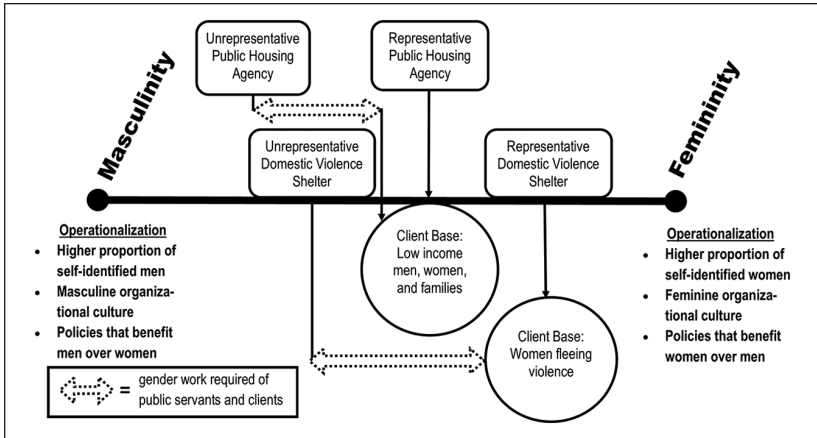
Representative bureaucracy studies on gender can unveil new mechanisms of representation by avoiding treating the default organizational setting as the neutral on which women have an impact. Keiser et al. (2002) formulate gender in one of the most complete ways of any representative bureaucracy

scholars in their studies. Yet, even they operationalize an issue as gendered only when it is gendered feminine. This leaves masculinity and men in public organizations virtually unexamined, thereby maintaining connotations of men with organizational authority (Collinson & Hearn, 1996; Heckler, 2019). Instead, masculinity should be theoretically understood as a phenomenon present in public organizations thereby explaining how the elimination of masculinity through the introduction of women public administrators creates more equitable and effective outcomes (Keiser et al., 2002; Riccucci et al., 2015). This masculinity should be treated as a problem to be managed, much like other forms of waste or sources of discrimination. Studies that ignore masculinity but argue that women create more equal outcomes for women and girls implicitly accuse men of bias and blame men for inequality (Heckler, 2019). By focusing on masculinity, men can be part of the solution, but only so long as gender is understood as a performance of organizations as well as individuals.

Proposal 3: To reveal how organizations can better create diverse and inclusive environments that lead to positive outcomes for women, researchers should recognize that gender is an ongoing performance in which both individuals and organizations engage.

Another way that critical gender research can contribute to representative bureaucracy theory is by identifying how organizations and entire fields can embody gender norms and practices. Ferguson (1984) argues that bureaucracies are gendered in a way that disadvantages women in society. Similarly, Stivers (1993) describes the image of public administrators as masculine, an image constructed in response to criticism that men public servants were undertaking the feminine role of municipal housekeeper. Because of this masculine image, women in public service take on masculine roles that conflict with their phenotypes, lived experiences, and embodiments of gender. This conflict creates gender dilemmas for women public servants because their individual experiences can never completely align with the gender expression of public organizations (Stivers, 1993). Acker (2006), Connell (2006), Smith (1987), and many others argue that organizations exist within gender contexts, to which organizations must conform or risk losing crucial resources.

From a representative bureaucracy perspective, the idea that organizations are performing in accordance with gender is both a fundamental challenge and an opportunity. If organizations perform gender that is related to, but not only a summary of the individuals within organizations, then gender is far more complex than any individual-level self-identified gender category can



**Figure 2.** A critical gender model of representative bureaucracy.

possibly capture. This complexity is also already placed in a racial context, and for many in public service, it is both masculine and White (Heckler, 2019). Organizational history, as well as forces from other partner and funding organizations, can substantially influence organizational gender (Stivers, 2000). This insight redefines the relationship between passive and active representation of women. Instead, most organizations are already actively representing masculinity and men's interests by default, and the introduction of women to the organization shifts active representation along the spectrum toward representing femininity.

In a critical understanding of representative bureaucracy, active representation is the alignment of the gender in the organization with the gendered nature of the problem the organization faces. As shown in Figure 2, when the client base is more feminine than the organization, clients and public servants must work to better align the organization with the problem they are attempting to solve. In a domestic violence shelter where clients are mostly women and children, but the organization is run by men, women frontline workers and domestic violence victims must code switch between the masculine organizational culture and policies and the femininity of the client base. This disadvantages women clients and employees.

Critical gender theory presents several possibilities for organizations to change policies, ideas, processes, and modes of thinking to better serve clients before enough women can be hired to change organizational cultures. If, as Stivers (2000), Connell (2006), Kanter (1977) and others find, women are limited in organizational power because of sexism, active representation is as

likely to cause passive representation as the other way around. As organizations come to value the perspectives and contributions of femininity, it will become easier to recruit, retain, and promote women in those organizations.

Proposal 4: To expand their understanding of the impact of gender on policy decisions, researchers should treat gender as fluid instead of binary.

The insight of critical gender theory that promises to have the biggest contribution to representative bureaucracy is the empirical fact proved every day by the millions of people around the world who are living their lives outside of the gender binary. Throughout human history, people have transgendered to make a living, protect their families, engage in revolution, or simply to be their authentic selves (Feinberg, 1996). This active participation in the gender spectrum reveals that most methods conform to the hegemonic, rather than the empirical reality. Similarly, it is this lack of binary that reveals masculinity as a gendered construct just as important for representative bureaucracy research as femininity (Collinson & Hearn, 1996). The lack of binary lays bare the gender pressures that organizations place on people, revealing organizations themselves to be just as important a part of the discussion of gender as individual identities (Connell, 2006). These four proposals derived from critical gender studies can lead representative bureaucracy scholars to new insights into masculinity as well as femininity in organizations, individuals, and societies, and therefore better reflect the gendered reality in which we live.

For the past 80 years, representative bureaucracy studies have examined how the demographic composition of public organizations impact decisions made by public officials and the consequences these decisions have on citizens. Through the dedicated work of public affairs scholars, we are at a stage where we can articulate some of the conditions and contexts that are more likely to create beneficial outcomes for marginalized populations. In the study of gender representation, we argue that a more theoretically grounded understanding of socially constructed identities and societal and organizational pressures and how they affect bureaucratic decision-making will move the field forward. Using critical gender theory, our article presents four proposals that we feel will improve the ways in which we examine the effect of gender on representative bureaucracy outcomes in future research.

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