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The Intersectional Limits to Feminist Democratic Representation in Deliberative Social Innovations

Abstract: Feminist critique of democracy leads to the articulation of numerous proposals to change its institutional mechanisms to be more inclusive and emancipatory. Increasing importance is attributed not only to quantitative representation but also to the quality of public debate. In the article, we demonstrate how recent efforts to transcend the distinction between descriptive and substantive representation of women can face criticism from the perspective of intersectional theory. By analyzing the example of the 'second-generation feminist institutional design,' a model proposed by Karen Celis and Sarah Childs, we assess the compatibility of these ideas with deliberative theory and its practice. Ultimately, we circle back to the challenge posed by the intersectional approach to power and equality, aiming to delineate the boundaries of the emancipatory and inclusive potential of deliberative practices. The critique presented by intersectionality under-

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scores that while such innovations might enhance equality in certain aspects, their inherent design will inadvertently perpetuate inequalities in other domains.

Keywords: political representation, deliberation, intersectionality, radical democracy, critical theory

Introduction

Since the emergence of feminist activism and literature in Modernity, their focus has extended beyond solely women's rights to encompass the exclusion of other social groups. However, it wasn't until 1989, with Kimberlé Crenshaw's influential article, that this concern was ultimately problematized within the theory of intersectionality. Intersectional theories acknowledge that discriminations based on class, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and disability are never isolated and they often overlap, exacerbating systemic inequalities. This theoretical turn has revealed the need to reconsider one of the fundamental issues within feminism – how women, their needs, and interests are politically represented. In their recent book, *Feminist Democratic Representation* (2020), Karen Celis and Sarah Childs discuss two prevailing approaches to representation that have dominated feminist theoretical discourse in the latter half of the 20th century. They argue that descriptive representation, often referred to as the "politics of presence," has faced criticism from the intersectional perspective, prompting a shift toward enhanced substantive representation. Therefore, the authors propose what they call a "second-generation feminist institutional design," a holistic approach that integrates these two approaches, enriching them with symbolic and affective representation concepts. Their institutional proposition is built upon contemporary parliamentary systems enhanced by a new form of representative body – Affected Representatives.

This article examines the compatibility of these ideas with deliberative theory and practical innovations. We highlight two pivotal stages in the theory's development: Iris Marion Young's feminist critique of its theoretical foundations, and the practical turn that centred deliberation around mini-publics. Although both these stages assume certain concepts of representation, they lack the critical approach present in Celis and Child's work and do not address the issues raised by intersectionality. However, a particular design of deliberative democracy and its attempted distancing from representation turn this theory into a fruitful field for stress-testing critical assumptions of intersectionality. We engage this feature to further reflect on the limitations of the proposition of Celis and Childs, which is – at its core – deliberative, although it stems from radically different roots.

If we approach the topic of representation discussed here more broadly, as an effort to adapt democratic practice to the insights from feminist critique, we should also highlight the various participatory mechanisms within this context. There is a broad spectrum of proposals for a "better version of democracy" put forth by the new social movements (Jackson, 2016; Nawrot-Adamczyk, 2021). Grassroots feminism engages in advocacy activities, creating safe spaces, or support networks, thus imagining and enacting alternative forms of democracy. In this respect, the idea of "participatory democracy," which feminism critically engaged with, should be considered as part of the debate on the crisis of democracy and as a potential program for its rejuvenation. While in the subsequent parts of this article we adopt a narrower perspective focusing on the intersection of theories of representation and deliberation, identifying this broader horizon is essential for emphasizing alternative visions of democracy that can potentially offer a response to our critique.

The article consists of four main parts. In the first part, we briefly outline the theoretical roots of the distinction between descriptive and substantive representation of women and how its validity has been questioned with the development of constructivist critique. In the next part, we present the theoretical proposition of Celis and Childs as an example of a new generation of feminist democratic design thinking, based on the idea of affected representatives. The third part is dedicated to a brief description of the idealistic formulations of deliberative democracy and its immediate evolution under the (feminist) critique, and in the fourth part, we discern how deliberation turns back to representation with the introduction of mini-publics. Finally, in the discussion, we revisit the main question, considering whether current attempts to develop new feminist theories of representation are truly radical enough and withstand the scrutiny of intersectional critique in their impact on deliberation processes.

Substantive and descriptive theory of women's representation

Judith Butler commences *Gender Trouble* by asserting that 'representation' is a controversial term because:

> On the one hand, representation serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects; on the other hand, representation is the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women (Butler, 1999, pp. 3–4).

This observation unveils a broader philosophical horizon in which a significant segment of feminist theory on political representation is situated. The context can be defined as the 'discursive turn,' which has dominated cultural studies since the 1970s, manifesting mostly in the paradigms of postmodernism and poststructuralism but also in the work of French feminists like Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva (Coleman, 2014, p. 33). The rejection of essentialism in a critical interpretation of "what is assumed to be true about the category of women" echoes the renowned statements of Simone de Beauvoir, who asserted that "one is not born, but becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 283). In the light of this intellectual legacy, the attempt to demythologize the cultural-linguistic representation of women, shedding light on the constitutive play of meanings inherent in this representation, necessitated only a shift in the lexicon, not a modification in the "substance" of feminist critique, as it was already "deeply affected by the «crisis» of rationality, and of the system of values that sustained it since the seventeenth century" (Braidotti, 1991, pp. 209–211).

The increasing awareness of the concept of gender as a product of ideological oppression aligns with the discourse of deconstruction, where sexual difference emerges as, to some extent, the supreme difference (Felski, 1997, p. 3). Initially rooted in philosophy and literary studies, this discourse has progressively expanded into all facets of life, leaving no realm untouched, including politics. In this milieu, Anne Phillips contends that "democracy cannot stand above sexual difference, but has to be reconceptualized with difference firmly in mind" (1991, p. 149; see also Zielińska, 2012). Consequently, the concept of political representation had to undergo a parallel process of reconstruction. The discursive landscape of this transformation was shaped by the debate that took place in the late '80s between advocates of substantial and descriptive theories of representation. This debate delineated crucial theoretical distinctions that contemporary feminist thought is presently endeavoring to transcend.

In the late 1960s, the highly influential American scholar Hanna Pitkin formulated a theory of political representation that dominated political science in that era. Its pinnacle was the resolution of the dispute between advocates of the trustee and delegate models of representation. In the quest for an undisputed foundation, Pitkin asserted that in representation, the crucial element is "acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them" (1972, p. 209). This shift redirected the focus of representation theory from questions about its form to considerations of what representation seems to provide substantially. Ironically, this seemingly uncontroversial perspective became the subject of criticism from many feminists who aligned with the descriptive theory of representation.

The basis of their opposition, as highlighted by Phillips, revolves around the differentiation between the "politics of ideas" and the "politics of presence" (1995, pp. 1–26). From the perspective of political ideas, the identity of representatives embodying specific values and ensuing interests may not be of great consequence, as long as they produce substantive results "in a manner responsive to [their audience]". However, in accordance with the principles of the politics of presence, the very embodiment of representation – the representative's persona

– assumes paramount significance. This critique emanates from the flawed epistemic assumptions inherent in Pitkin's theory, especially concerning groups susceptible to social exclusion. Representation, particularly for these groups, cannot simply involve the straightforward aggregation of existing interests. As clarified by Iris Marion Young, it is crucial to initially establish institutional mechanisms that enable the

> self-organization of group members so that they achieve collective empowerment and a reflective understanding of their collective experience and interests in the context of society (Young, 1990, p. 184; emphasis added).

According to some theorists, especially those in black feminism (Collins, 1996; hooks, 2014), the perspective of group representation reveals the depth of systemic forms of oppression imposed on marginalized groups. These groups lack an authoritative language recognized as a source of knowledge about their needs within institutionalized power mechanisms. Their direct presence at every stage of the representation process is crucial, although the answer to the question of whether there is a "critical mass" – "a threshold number which, once surpassed, has a transformative impact upon legislatures and serves to produce policy change" (Beckwith, 2007, p. 28) – is not obvious. As Melissa Williams asserts, "[t]he mere presence of members of marginalized groups in legislatures is not sufficient for the fair representation of citizens from those groups, even though it is often necessary" (Williams, 1998, p. 6). Therefore, it is crucial to deepen our understanding of the concept of descriptive representation: it is not about reflecting in political representation the physical or demographic characteristics of the electoral group. Instead, it involves establishing representation as a profound political relationship among individuals who share a "linked fate" (Dovi, 2007, pp. 155–161).

Theoretical discussions have materialized into tangible changes in democratic practices worldwide, introducing new representative mechanisms such as reserved seats, party-list quotas, and group vetoes (Krook, 2010; see also Malinowska, 2000). However, while effectively challenging the myth that women are indifferent to who represents them as long as their interests are met (Dovi, 2002), theories and practices of descriptive representation have inadvertently created a new myth. As Monique Wittig critically emphasizes: "not only is there no natural group «women» (we lesbians are living proof of it), but as individuals, we question «woman», which, for us, as for Simone de Beauvoir, is only a myth" (Wittig, 2013, p. 246). Essentially, if descriptive representation, in practice, is intended to imply group representation of women, it relies on the hidden assumption of a shared identity among all women. This assumption is challenging to prove without reducing the essence of femininity to its biological characteristics. Instead of highlighting differences, such an approach conceals them, albeit on a different level of discourse. By failing to acknowledge the heterogeneity of women's experiences stemming from diverse cultural backgrounds, financial capacities, skin color, and, as Wittig rightly points out, sexual preferences, the idea of descriptive representation perpetuates the myth of substantial representation of women's needs.

Treating gender as a social construct implies that it represents different issues in various cultural contexts, contributing to a better comprehension of the ideological diversity of women's political voices. However, this perspective does not alter the fact that more nuanced forms of institutionalized representation are necessary. According to Karen Celis and Sarah Childs, the awareness of this necessity is intensified by the criticism of intersectional theory, which

> no longer aims to map individual bodies as if they correspond straightforwardly with particular identities, whether single or multiple. Instead, it seeks to identify the overall prevalence of particular identities within a political institution (Celis, Childs, 2020, pp. 61–62).

According to the mentioned authors, this entails the need for the development of "second-generation feminist institutional design," ensuring the quality of representation processes by considering overlapping structures of various forms of exclusion. Consequently, feminist theory advances to a stage where it seeks to move beyond the discursive turn and the typical divisions and models associated with the first generation of proposed institutional solutions. The unique model proposed by the aforementioned researchers serves as an interesting illustration of this transition.

Feminist democratic design thinking

Celis and Childs ground their model in a diagnosis of the problem they generally define as "women's poverty of political representation" (2020, p. 19). Based on their work, two reasons for the continued underrepresentation of women in politics can be discerned. Firstly, it stems from persistent epistemic injustice: politicians remain either unable or unwilling to comprehend a significant portion of voices and interests, especially those of women from marginalized groups (see also Haraway, 1988, pp. 289–290). Secondly, the fault lies with the feminist movement itself, wherein "we fantasize about a feminist future in which all political decisions are good for women" (Celis, Childs, 2020, p. 21). According to them, this situation can, in a caricatured manner, be boiled down to a belief in an "enlightened feminist despot or guardian," which, as they rightly point out, "is, and must remain, [again] a mythical figure" (Celis, Childs, 2020, p. 21).

To confront the diversity of women's perspectives and the challenges of intersectionality, they propose a shift in the theoretical foundation that appears to be constructivist in nature. As they point out:

> Our approach to women's group representation in politics is feminist not because it brings into our parliaments feminist women who deliver on a feminist program, as in first-generation design. Through new parliamentary practices, affected representatives of women will directly engage with elected representatives in a manner that paints parliaments less as receptacles for fixed views of women's interests, and more as places for women's interest formation (Celis, Childs, 2020, p. 49).

Their theory is not only normative, presenting representation "as it should be", but it also seeks to integrate elements of descriptive, substantive, and, importantly, symbolic representation. But above all, they strive to be pragmatic, asserting that feminism must distinctly indicate the path to changing existing power procedures. To accomplish this, they introduce a new category into the theory of representation: affected representatives of women.

The new type of political representative is tasked with "standing and acting for differently affected groups of women when our political institutions address issues and interests that affect women" (Celis, Childs, 2020, p. 43). As emphasized by Celis and Childs, these representatives are not additional decision-makers, but they are not mere parliamentary guests either. They represent women in their diversity, originating from civil society, and do not replace or undermine the political importance of elected women representatives. Furthermore, by being associated with emotions, the term "affected" underscores the significance attached to the affective and symbolic aspects in politics.

According to the mentioned authors, the distinction between affected and elected representatives represents a significant development from previous feminist institutional designs, at least in the scope of how they sought to change the composition of our parliaments. In addition to the vertical axis leading from elections (authorization and reevaluation of power) to deliberation (decision-making), a new horizontal axis is envisioned. This horizontal axis connects the "twin parliamentary" moments of group advocacy and account-giving, in which affected representatives are supposed to be engaged.

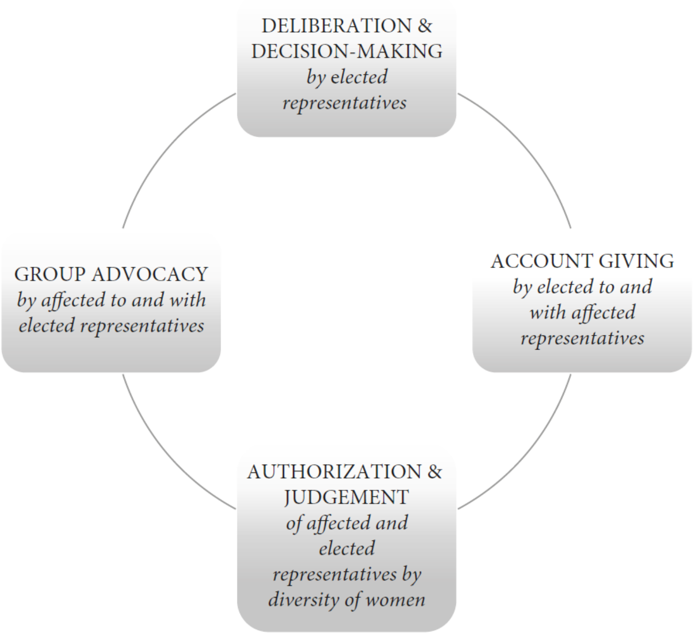
DELIBERATION & DECISION-MAKING
by elected representatives
ACCOUNT GIVING
by elected to and with affected representatives
AUTHORIZATION & JUDGEMENT
of affected and elected representatives by diversity of women
GROUP ADVOCACY
by affected to and with elected representatives

Figure 1. The process of feminist democratic representation

Source: K. Celis, S. Childs, Feminist Democratic Representation, New York: Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 124.

The entire concept is designed to form a systemic solution that the authors term the "gendered economy of claims" (Celis, Childs, 2020, p. 128), referencing the influential theory of Michael Saward (2006). Such an institutional design aims not only to reflect the existing interests of diverse groups of women but also to actively shape them during new "parliamentary moments". The economy of claims also presupposes the emergence of diverse, often conflicted representative claims, revealing the diversity and intersectionality of women's standpoints. This is intended to allow for greater inclusion of the voices of marginalized groups: reflecting alternative perspectives should ensure greater epistemic justice in decision-making processes and uncover the "structure of conflict" among groups too often lumped together under the umbrella of the feminist movement.

To achieve this aim, the advocacy moment, where the affected representatives articulate the positions of diverse groups on proposed regulations, and the accountability moment, where they can assess the outcomes of work on the mentioned legal regulations, must be structured according to specific rules. The authors advocate for this based on three feminist principles:

- Inclusiveness determines the extent to which women's heterogeneous interests are present among the claims "for women" that circulate in sites, or a particular site, of representation, including within elected political institutions by members of parliament.
- Responsiveness is met when the gendered economy of claims connects with women in society, defined as when women broadly agree with what is being claimed in their name.

Egalitarianism points to the relative status of diverse voices and different women's interests and asks whether some are privileged, and others marginalized (Celis, Childs, 2020, p. 89).

The ultimate goal is to change the process of representation, transforming it into a form of "representative relationships" that operates inside and outside formal electoral institutions, where women's interests are actively "read in" rather than passively "read off" (2020, p. 114). The new moments in the process of representation are designed to emphasize that representation should be "experienced, believed in, and felt," drawing on approaches developed, especially within the newer affective literature. This is intended to ultimately impact the parliamentary decision-making process, making it more transparent and ensuring a more dialogical character in its proceedings.

The weakness of the proposed solution seems to lie in "the economy of claims metaphor," regarding which the authors themselves note that it might fail "to capture the reality that not all claims-makers and claims start as equals" (see also Severs, 2010; Celis, Childs, 2020, p. 72). Despite this, "market mechanisms" – the grassroots, unbridled activity of women – are expected to spontaneously produce their affected representatives. Celis and Childs only vaguely emphasize that:

> How they do this would reflect the process of authorization specific to subgroups of women. Women maintain "ownership" not only over who speaks for them regarding specific topics but also over who represents them. This is what prevents misrepresentation by affected representatives (Celis, Childs, 2020, p. 170).

The emphasis on the symbolic "ownership" of representation makes it challenging to conclusively assess how the new (parliamentary) institutions of representation can impact the quality of parliamentary "deliberation moment" (2020, p. 170). Their constructivist approach rightly maintains that representation is an active, creative process, but it does not answer the question posed by more radical theorists: ok, but who and why can or should be excluded from this process? The hope that affected representatives will be an all-inclusive institution seems to be just another (this time liberal) myth. To address these doubts in a more comprehensive way we turn to the theory of deliberation and the critique of intersectionality.

Deliberation – alternative to representation and its feminist critique

We believe that the model reviewed above paradoxically ceases to be a model of feminist democratic representation at a certain point and becomes rather a model of feminist deliberation. This highlights how a thin line separates these two areas of practices and theories. However, even though the moment of feminizing deliberation is embedded in the work of Celis and Childs, it should be noted from the outset that deliberation already has feminist roots guiding its key historic transformations.

Deliberative democracy, when first emerged within democratic theory in the 1980s, was presented as an alternative to dysfunctional institutions of liberal democracy, guided by capitalist marketization and bureaucratic alienation of the public sphere (Dryzek, 1990, p. 20; see also: Habermas, 1987). Instead of representation, deliberative democrats seek the legitimacy of decisions based on consensus and direct participation of all in purely rational argumentation. It can be summed up in two core principles of discourse ethics enlisted by Jurgen Habermas, which are worth revisiting in light of the “feminist principles” mentioned above:

> [Discourse principle:] only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as participants in a practical discourse. (…) [And Universalization principle:] for a norm to be valid, the consequences and side effects of its general observance for the satisfaction of each person’s particular interests must be acceptable to all (Habermas, 1990, p. 197).

First normative formulations of deliberative democracy were idealistic and – following Kant – treated as regulative ideals, later dubbed “type I deliberations”, therefore very quickly they provoked reformulations towards more practical propositions, called “type II deliberations” (Bachtiger et al., 2010). And even though the question of representation has not been a key issue for deliberative democratic theory – as we show later in this paper, it entered the picture only after these fundamental debates had been “solved” – certain arguments resemble the debate between proponents of “substantial” and “descriptive” approaches outlined in previous sections.

Initially, a purely rational argumentation was believed to be independent of the particular speaker, and a consensually made decision – given that the procedure was held to the high standards of deliberation – deemed legitimacy and “truthfulness” to the best interest of all. This has best been epitomized by John Rawls’ thought experiment with the original position and the “veil of ignorance” (Rawls, 1971), where interlocutors were supposed to not know their future position and social capacities, as well as their preferred norms and values. This claim

– alongside Habermas' attachment to consensus – was criticized by several postmodern and poststructuralist theorists, especially Chantal Mouffe (1991, 1999) for being hegemonic and, in consequence, exclusive of non-normative positions, thus prone to reproducing social hierarchies. But while the Belgian author rejected the deliberative theory, numerous authors aimed at integrating this criticism into the deliberative theory, thus proposing a new framework that will be more inclusive and open for disagreement (Gutmann, Thompson, 1996; Young, 2000, 1996; Dryzek, 2000; Niemeyer, Dryzek, 2007). In a way, the deliberation theory has "blended" with the discursive turn from which the mentioned distinction between substantive and descriptive representation emerges.

It is the same Iris Marion Young who urged representation to go beyond simple aggregation of interests to provide opportunities for empowerment, who also made key theoretical contributions to deliberative theory in these regards. She offers a profound critique of deliberation, focusing mainly on its unitary approach to communication and its limitations in terms of inclusiveness and pluralism. She first questions consensual unity as a goal of deliberation, arguing that the deliberative democracy model should instead promote pluralism and accommodate a diversity of perspectives and interests. Young stresses that pursuing the common good and transcending differences in search of unity often ignores deep-seated differences between individuals and social groups (1996, pp. 126–128). Her model of communicative democracy is based on transforming the preferences and knowledge of the participants in the process, promoting solutions that specifically take into account the perspectives of previously excluded groups, without necessarily following the generally accepted idea of the common good.

Young's criticism also relates to the strict requirements for rational speech in deliberation, which often favour a specific social group – white, educated middle- or upper-class men. She points out that such a model of communication not only excludes other social groups but is also agonistic in nature, where those who best find their way through the competition and use logical, formal speech win (1996, pp. 122–124). In response to this, Young proposes three additional forms of speech: greetings, rhetoric, and narrative, which are designed to build relationships and better accommodate the diversity of participants' cultural and linguistic contexts (2000, pp. 56–61). Especially rhetoric, so often disregarded as manipulative and irrational, is praised by her for being not only helpful in allowing for a better understanding of arguments and communication of reasons but also seems to be inseparable from any rational speech (2000, pp. 63–69). Given these arguments, she distances herself from the idea of pure rationality in deliberation, noting the need to take into account the emotions, history, and cultural contexts of the participants. In her view, emotions are inseparable from rationality and should be recognized as an integral part of the communication process. Further criticism concerns socially exclusive conditions that favour certain individuals and competencies, leading to the marginalization of other voices in the deliberation process. Young points out that even when introducing diverse forms of communication into deliberation, they can still be fraught with problems of exclusivity if they are not adapted to the cultural and linguistic diversity of the participants.

At first, these arguments have not been accepted by all deliberative democrats. For example, Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, while defending the positive role that rhetoric can play in the deliberative process, still clearly distinguished it – as well as emotions – from rational speech. Their suggestion for excluded groups is to select the most competent and educated representatives to voice their concerns in a rational way (Gutmann, Thompson, 1996, pp. 132–133). Even today Young's position seems controversial: theorists of the so-called "epistemic turn" in deliberative democracy argue that such a "diluted" argumentation loses its epistemic – and therefore democratic – value (Landemore, 2017), and one Polish philosopher even downplays such a need, claiming that educational reforms and support programs have eradicated such cultural differences, making Young's argumentation "archaic" (Juchacz, 2015, p. 189). Nonetheless, in today's mainstream theoretical and practical formulations of deliberation, the acknowledgment of other forms of speech that secures inclusion and fosters the process of argumentation and mutual recognition of participants is not only accepted but welcomed and actively encouraged.

The return of representation into deliberative imaginary

If we are correct that the Celis and Childs model demonstrates how fluid the transition is between the theory of representation and deliberation, it seems that the experience of deliberation should also address their fundamental question: how to identify affected representatives? In fact, after making deliberation more viable by softening the strict requirements of reaching full consensus based on exclusively rational argumentation, the next step towards the practical implementation of deliberative practices required its downscaling, a different institutional design. Initial formulations by Habermas or Cohen required that all people potentially implicated by the decision at the stake of deliberation should be eligible to take part in the process. Of course, this leads to significant logistical and organizational problems. In practice, even at the local level, this would require the participation of thousands of people for a countless time, and the problem is compounded at the national level (targeted by Celis and Childs), where the number of participants could reach millions. Nevertheless, the original assumption of "departicularisation" of the debate that is based solely on evidence, expertise, and logical argumentation (however contradictory with Young's assumptions of exclusivity of pure, hegemonic rationality) allows us to conclude that in proper conditions, descriptive representation is not necessary, as decisions arrived at by participants will 'substantially' transcend all personal interests by reference to the common good.

In an attempt to solve this dilemma, deliberative practice limits the number of participants to a much more feasible number, creating the so-called mini-publics (Fung, 2007, 2003; Smith, 2012), usually limited to 20–25 participants or – in larger processes – a multiplication of this number divided into sub-groups. It is assumed that such a number allows for an equally diverse and efficient process of deliberation. Selection of mini-public participants is based on various methods, with random selection from "ordinary" citizens, reflecting the demographics of the population (sortition) being the most popular one. In rare cases structuring of volunteers, or an invitation-based process is involved, especially when participants of deliberation are required to have more specific expert knowledge, e.g. in the so-called consensus conferences (Smith, 2009, p. 78; Stegenga, 2016). These groups can serve a variety of roles, from civic education to counselling or solving specific problems, or even becoming permanent institutions of democratic governance.

The popularity of sortition is based on the assumption that "all citizens are equally capable of political judgment and equally responsible for the public good" (Jacquet, 2017, p. 641), therefore random selection of participants provides the basis of a fair process, but should not impact the substantial outcome of the process. Perhaps to some extent, this ideal can also be applied in a more limited scope within groups particularly vulnerable to exclusion. Fair sortition has been the focus of several stakeholders actively engaged in organizing assemblies, such as the Sortition Foundation (Flanigan et al., 2021) or the MosaicLab ("Recruitment in focus," 2023). It has even entered guidelines and recommendations of influential international organizations, such as the OECD or European Commission (European Commission. Joint Research Centre et al., 2019, p. 56; see also: OECD, 2020). While problems occurring from mistakes conducted during the recruitment process are well recognized and discussed within the practice-oriented community, no discussion even remotely resembling the one presented in the first part of this paper – or even critically engaging with Young's later writings – tackles the issue of representation and its coercive and problematic nature.

From the academic perspective, sortition is defended as a normative ideal shielding from the selection of forces that could compromise deliberation (e.g. malevolent populists) and provide the basis for a descriptive representation of participants (Farrell, Stone, 2020), or a technical problem to be solved by analysing various details of the sortition methods and employed indicators (Gąsiorowska, 2023; Griffin et al., 2015), "ticking boxes" of including representatives of minorities and vulnerable groups (see: Valeriani et al., 2021, p. 10), or engaging proper facilitation methods (Wojciechowska, 2019). On the rare occasions where sortition methods are criticized, it is also usually a debate on how to solve or account for 'technical' problems, such as the small sample size exacerbated by the lack of accurate citizen data (Peixoto, Spada, 2023), or a general reluctance to participate, especially in a more demanding forms of deliberation (Jacquet, 2017). The particular problem of representation usually enters the debate when the results of mini-publics are expected to be transmitted to its political environment, shaped – at least to some extent – by representative institutions (Mansbridge et al., 2012). One article seems particularly indicative of this issue when Nino Junius discusses how mini-publics are themselves represented to institutions of representative democracy (2023). Even Authors who are well aware of the challenges of representation and seem to be aware of the limitations of mini-publics are all too eager to accept their lack of authorisation and accountability, as well as limited responsiveness to society, turning to their reflectivity as a well-enough source of representativeness and legitimacy to cover for the same shortcomings of representative institutions (Deligiaouri, Suiter, 2023, pp. 144–145).

Despite the optimism voiced almost unanimously by the proponents of deliberation, mini-publics are often anti-egalitarian and politically partisan, which favour existing power relations and limit rather than facilitate their transformative potential (Asenbaum, 2022; Böker, 2017; Machin, 2023). Empirical evidence also elucidates differences in perceptions of legitimacy between participants and outsiders (Hendriks et al., 2007; Karpowitz et al., 2009), highlighting the lack of communication between mini-publics and the broader community. Thus it is crucial to recognise that mini-public based institutions, although they can claim the right to actively participate in the decision-making process as legislators, face challenges to the democratic nature of their practices. A key issue is ensuring that the deliberative group is adequately representative and politically accountable to society as a whole. This requires going beyond the careful selection of members and consideration of the various factors that influence the shape and effectiveness of deliberation. While certain elements of the feminist critique of representation presented in previous sections seem to be integrated within the theory of deliberative democracy, the ultimate reliance on the universalising force of rational argumentation and consensus seems to integrate – although without much reflection – descriptive, substantial, and symbolic representation within a well-designed, inclusive and empowering political body, emanating these values on the rest of the political system. With these regards, deliberative theory resembles the institutional design offered by Celis and Childs, with the main difference lying in the understanding of affects – while the original proposition of "affective" representatives see their role as mediators within the more traditional, parliament-based decision-making process, deliberative democrats see affects only as supportive mediators of rational argumentation (and, of course, justify it only as long as it supports "reasonable" politics).

Discussion: intersectionality as a challenge for deliberative and representative inclusion

Ultimately, it seems that the differences, diversity of identities, and interests often hidden beneath an "empty signifier" of the name of a group or identity constitute a shared challenge for deliberation and representation theories. This is, of course, problematic, but it also offers hope for finding a common solution.

Regarding the selection of affected representatives, it is worth noting that Celis and Childs oppose the solution they label as a "random lot," arguing that a simple division between women and men is not a sufficient resolution when addressing the complex political reality where some groups are more affected (by certain issues) than others. Most importantly, however, they assert that

> random lot does not necessarily guarantee the 'good' representative because who becomes present could, by definition, just as easily be randomly bad or mediocre. Furthermore, we question whether a lottery really results in 'representation' – those being represented have no say over who stands and acts for them (Celis, Childs, 2020, p. 151).

It seems that especially the latter part of this opinion results from incorporating the elements of intersectional critique, which convincingly discourages the use of the sortition method in the construction of mini-publics, whether at the local or parliamentary level.

Intersectionality, a term coined by Crenshaw (1989), refers to the complex and cumulative way different forms of discrimination like racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, and classism overlap and affect individuals, particularly within marginalized groups. It's a lens through which one can understand the varied and nuanced experiences of individuals who belong to multiple marginalized groups, acknowledging that the convergence of different identities contributes to unique experiences of oppression and privilege. This approach builds strongly on previous works of black and lesbian feminists, who recognized disparities between their interests and struggles, and the ones presented by mainstream, liberal, or socialist feminism (Davis, 1983; hooks, 1981).

When applied to deliberative democracy, the concept of intersectionality presents a critical framework for understanding the multifaceted challenges inherent in creating truly inclusive and representative deliberative processes. Young's critique is a foundational point for this discussion, but it also reveals how insufficient it was in the face of complex challenges posed by intersectionality. This paves the way for a deeper exploration of how the ends of deliberative democracy face structural and conceptual challenges.

One of the significant challenges intersectionality brings to deliberation is the exacerbation of representation issues within mini-publics. These bodies are often designed to be microcosms of the larger society, yet they can struggle to represent the complex, layered identities of individuals who face multiple forms of marginalization. Vulnerable groups might be invisible in official documents, or they might be reluctant to participate in public forums due to a history of marginalization and exclusion. This invisibility and reluctance make it exceedingly difficult to ensure their perspectives are included and adequately represented in deliberative processes, especially in the scenarios referring to the small-scale deliberation, engaging between 15–25 participants. The intersectional critique also asks us to reconsider the limitations of empowering facilitation. In the end, moderators are usually recruited from more privileged groups of the society and while they might actively work to "positively discriminate" certain people and voices, they might be at the same time omitting other exclusions which they unconsciously perpetuate.

From a philosophical standpoint, a more profound question arises: does the concept of intersectionality even allow for equality and inclusion within deliberative processes? Deliberative democracy aims for rational discourse among equals, but intersectionality highlights that individuals are never 'equal' in a straightforward sense due to the various dimensions of their identities. Intersectional theories recognise that systemic inequality is exacerbated when discriminations based on class, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and disability overlap. It is not unusual that efforts to eliminate or reduce discrimination in one dimension might lead to jeopardizing empowering efforts in another dimension, e.g. the anti-racial campaign aimed at eradication of the hypersexualized stereotype of Black men had been found to impede Black women's efforts to make domestic violence a more recognized social problem, often overlooking them as rape victims (Davis, 1981). These systemic exclusions reproduce inequalities in deliberative democratic spaces. Participants are treated as equivalent in these practices but often arrive with unacknowledged experiences of intersectional exclusion. This recognition challenges the very foundations of deliberative democracy, pushing scholars and practitioners to rethink how equality and inclusion are understood and operationalized within deliberative forums.

In response to these challenges, deliberation theorists and practitioners generally adopt one of two approaches. Some see intersectionality as a "technical" challenge, suggesting that more nuanced and sophisticated mechanisms are needed to address and include the multiple dimensions of exclusion. This approach focuses on actively identifying and dismantling the barriers to participation for individuals at the intersections of various forms of oppression. Alternatively, some view the challenges posed by intersectionality as indicative of a more detrimental and inherent problem within deliberative democracy itself. They argue that efforts to include certain voices in one space inevitably lead to the exclusion of others in different spaces. This perspective suggests that as long as deliberative processes are public and entangled with existing political systems, they will invariably reinforce the colonial, patriarchal, and classist prejudices embedded within those systems.

Most deliberative democrats tend to opt for the first approach, seeking to refine and improve the mechanisms of inclusion within deliberative spaces. Some, like Marta Wojciechowska, propose a "hybrid" approach, where public deliberations should be professionally facilitated to respond to as many exclusions and intersectional discriminations as possible, but at the same time she urges social movements and counterhegemonic forces to use deliberation to facilitate processes of dissensus (2019, pp. 908–909). However, a growing chorus of critics, drawing from decolonial, critical race theories (Banerjee, 2022; Drake, 2023), radical feminists (Majewska, 2021), and "difference democrats" (Derrida, 1978; Rancière, 2004), provide a more profound critique. They argue that deliberation is inherently, not accidentally, exclusive. As long as it is public and intertwined with the political systems, it will perpetuate the very colonial, patriarchal, and classist prejudices it seeks to dismantle. Whenever deliberative theory – or, in fact, any democratic theory – seeks to eradicate difference and claim legitimacy from "equality of all", it inevitably omits or disregards certain differences, spaces of exclusion, or undue hierarchies, rooted in social histories of structural exploitation and normative silencing. This deep-seated criticism challenges deliberative democrats to confront the uncomfortable reality that their well-intentioned efforts may be insufficient in the face of deeply entrenched systems of oppression.

In this light, it is worth seeing how Celis and Childs attempt to navigate this and what price they must pay in the name of defending the idea of equal deliberation. Firstly, the authors do not conceal the ideological basis of their work. They acknowledge the political nature of their position, which is an essential first step in all radical projects. They explicitly acknowledge that

> we had become frustrated by evaluations of substantive representation that tended to judge the woman MP (Member of Parliament) overwhelmingly from the perspective of leftist-feminist women's movement interests, gets to decide (Celis, Childs, 2020, p. 86).

In numerous passages, they also express sympathy with other authors who emphasize that in the current system of women's representation, neo-liberal discourse has "little room for gender or group identity" (Celis, Childs, 2020, p. 68). However, they argue that in defense of the principles of deliberation, they must be willing to sacrifice their convictions—refrain from embedding them in the institutional design of deliberation, even at the cost of departing from the foundational values of feminism. Responding to Suzanne Dovi's criticism, they assert:

> She is right to state that there can be no place for privileging feminist content in our approach; there can be no guarantee that our representative processes will deliver feminist outcomes. We are prepared to countenance that our approach might be too inclusive: some interests will be included that we will disagree with (Celis, Childs, 2020, p. 95).

However, is this the right solution? Should the price for saving the vision of fully inclusive deliberation be the sacrifice of radical feminist traditions and values? Or to restate this question from the perspective of deliberation, should liberal moderation and yearning for modernist, rational politics make us turn away from these exclusions and discriminations that in the particular process we find inconvenient or too disruptive?

Conclusions

Our research has illuminated the complex relationship between descriptive and substantive representation of women and other vulnerable groups or minorities, revealing how the design of democratic institutions significantly influences this dynamic. We have critically examined the normative assumptions underlying the category of interest and claim-making theories, challenging the notion of their neutrality. This exploration has uncovered new divisions within feminism, particularly through intersectional critiques, that reshapes our understanding of feminist theory.

By analysing a case model of new forms of political representation, our work underscores the validity and importance of substantive representation of women when it acknowledges the symbolic and affective dimensions of having representatives from marginalized groups in decision-making bodies. We have demonstrated that contemporary theoretical discourse must perceive representation as an interactive process, wherein the interests and identities of those involved are subject to continual evolution and redefinition.

Our findings also emphasize the critical need for deliberate and thoughtful design of democratic institutions, considering both deliberation and representation. This approach is vital for addressing previously overlooked challenges within deliberative democracy theory, particularly those highlighted by critical debates in representation theory. Moreover, we have identified the inherent limitations of democratic practices when they intersect with any form of representation and hierarchical political systems. Our analysis recognizes that while these practices may aim to address certain forms of exclusion, they often inadvertently perpetuate inequality or *différance* in other areas. This occurs by granting legitimacy to fundamentally exclusive forms of societal organization.

In conclusion, our study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricate mechanisms of representation and deliberation within democratic systems. It calls for a continuous critical examination and reimagining of these concepts to ensure they constantly actualize different ways they embody the principles of equality and inclusion, acknowledging that this can never be a finished process.

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