Group Representation, Deliberation and the Displacement of Dichotomies

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Introduction
The emergence of a model of deliberative democracy is perhaps one of the most significant recent innovations in democratic theory. Yet this deliberative model of democratic theory has received an ambivalent reception amongst feminist political theorists. Although it appears to some to offer invaluable theoretical resources for engaging with central feminist concerns regarding democratic inclusion, it generates amongst others a profound scepticism concerning its ability to recognise difference. The relation between deliberative democracy and feminist theory is ambivalent then, not least because feminist theory is itself a contested terrain.

If one focuses on the feminist literature itself it becomes apparent that the most significant innovation regarding democratic theory here is the emergence of arguments for group representation. The feminist theorist who has come to be most closely associated with such arguments in perhaps Iris Marion Young. Significantly, Young is also a cautious advocate of a modified model of deliberative democracy. I propose to explore the detail of Young’s attempt to negotiate a form of deliberative democracy modified by group representation, taking her project as indicative of the more general issues surrounding the attempt to synthesise two distinct, and at times antithetical, bodies of thought. I hope to explain why Young is critical of deliberative democracy but nonetheless endorses a (modified) form of it. The explanation, I suggest, arises from the particular form of feminist theoretical frame that she adopts, which I label a strategy of displacement.

Young tells us that ‘… a politics that aims to do justice through public discussion and decision making must theorize and aim to practice a third alternative to both a private interest competition and one that denies the reality of difference in public discussions of the common good. This third way consists in a process of public discussion and decision making that includes and affirms all particular social group perspectives in the society and draws on their situated knowledge as a resources for enlarging the understanding of everyone and moving them beyond their own parochial interests.’ (Young 1997:399) Is this third way convincing? Do the concepts of social groups and objective judgement that she develops offer a compelling displacement of the dichotomies between interests and identities and between impartiality and particularity? And, if so, does this offer a way of integrating feminist arguments for group representation with deliberative accounts of democracy?

Fractious Feminist Frames
I shall be using a typology of ‘inclusion’, ‘reversal’ and ‘displacement’ to map out three importantly distinct approaches to feminist political theory. Those pursuing a strategy of inclusion aim to include women in a political from which they are currently excluded. They usually aspire to impartiality, conceive of people as autonomous and espouse an equality politics. They are often labelled liberal feminists. Those pursuing a
strategy of reversal aim to reconfigure the political as currently conceived such that it becomes more open
to their gendered specificity. They usually adopt an interpretative methodology, talk of ‘Woman’ or
‘women’ and espouse a difference politics. They are often labelled radical, maternal or cultural feminists.
Those pursuing a strategy of displacement aim to destabilise the apparent opposition between the strategies
of inclusion and reversal. They usually adopt a genealogical methodology, speak of subject positions and
of gendering (as a verb) rather than gender (as a noun) and espouse a diversity politics. They are often
labelled postmodern or post-structuralist feminists. The strategy of inclusion seeks gender-neutrality; the
strategy of reversal seeks recognition for a specifically female gendered identity; and strategy of
displacement seeks to deconstruct those discursive regimes that engender the subject.

Kathy Ferguson neatly summarises the distinction between the three archetypal strategies. In the first, she
argues, women’s exclusion is problematized, in the second, men are problematized, and in the third ‘the
gendered world itself becomes a problem.’ (Ferguson 1993:3) Christine Di Stefano offers a similar
tripartite distinction (which she labels rationalist, anti-rationalist and post-rationalist respectively). In the
first frame ‘she dissolves into he as gender differences are collapsed into the (masculine) figure of the
Everyman’. In the second, ‘she is preserved at the expense of her transformation and liberation from the
conventions of femininity’. In the third, ‘she dissolves into a perplexing plurality of difference, none of
which can be theoretically or politically privileged over others.’ (Di Stefano 1990:77)

This last strategy of displacement has had profound implications for the nature of debate within gender
theory. Prior to its impact it was common to find feminist theory characterised by a clear opposition
between those who would endorse and extend dominant values to all irrespective of gender, and those who
would challenge and reverse dominant values from a specifically female perspective. The advocate of
displacement, by contrast, argues that whether gender justice was thought to entail the extension or reversal
of dominant norms it actually manifest a tendency to echo that which it sought to oppose. Both operate, in
different ways, within a dichotomous framework generated by established power networks. The truly
radical project is here understood to entail recasting rather than sustaining or rejecting masculinist binary

The normative task for the theorist aiming at inclusion is to argue that gender ought to be non-pertinent to
politics. The normative task for the theorist aiming at reversal is to argue that politics ought to be
reconstructed to manifest the distinctive perspective of non-hegemonic gender identities (usually female).
The normative task for the theorist aiming at displacement is to reveal the extent to which gendered
identities are themselves products of particular political discourses (although – it should be noted – there is
some uncertainty as to whether this is actually a normative project at all). Understanding the nature of, and
interplay between, these three strategies is vital to understanding current debates about feminist democratic
theory. Between them, they map the current preoccupations of feminist theorists.
The second general claim that I would make about recent feminist theory is that there has been a tendency in recent years to focus on questions of subjectivity rather than on issues regarding normative political proposals. If we adopt Taylor’s distinction between ontological and advocacy issues, we can see that much feminist theory has been preoccupied with the former. Ontological issues are concerned with the question of what ‘you recognise as the factors you will invoke to account for social life’; advocacy issues concern ‘the moral stand or policy one adopts.’ (Taylor 1989:159) As Taylor argues (in relation to communitarian theses about identity), whilst such debates are purely ontological, they do not amount to an advocacy of anything. ‘What they do purport to do, like any good ontological thesis, is to structure the field of possibilities in a more perspicuous way. But this precisely leaves us with choices, which we need some normative, deliberative, arguments to resolve.’ (Taylor 1989:161) The ‘turn to culture’ and the shift from the social sciences to the humanities in feminist theorising has meant that these normative, deliberative arguments have been somewhat marginalised of late.

Taylor’s concern that ontologically disinterested theories tend to be blind to certain important questions is a concern fundamental to the motivation of feminist theory. It is the determination to rectify the resulting blindness regarding questions of gender that leads feminist theorists to focus on the ontological level of debate so keenly. The undeniable benefit of this focus has been the wealth of insight generated around issues of cultural politics and the creation of ‘a new political imaginary centred on notions of “identity”, “difference,” “cultural domination,” and “recognition”’ (Fraser 1997:11). The concern, frequently articulated by those engaged in these debates themselves, is that much recent feminist theorising has become overly entrenched and antagonistic regarding issues of ontology and worryingly sketchy and inattentive regarding issues of advocacy. As Fraser says, if the politics of the deconstructive theorists have at times been simplistic, it is probably because of the difficulty that arises from trying to deduce a normative politics of culture from an ontological conception of identity and difference.’ (Fraser 1997:183) Young’s attempt to use a strategy of displacement to negotiate a theory of democracy is clearly not simplistic in this way. But it does contain tensions which indicate that much more work needs to be done in this area.

Equality, Difference and Diversity

The debate that has most clearly and decisively shaped feminist theorising during the past two decades has been the equality/difference debate. Equality and difference - both rich, complex and contested terms in their own right - came to represent distinct and competing perspectives within feminist theory. The terms stand for two fundamentally antagonistic accounts of the nature of gender and of the feminist project. This equality/difference dualism provides a clear and compelling frame from which to understand the conflicts within feminist theory regarding discourses of democracy, if only because the current moment of feminist democratic theory is dominated by a determination to go ‘beyond equality and difference’.
Throughout its history,’ argue Bock and James ‘women’s liberation has been seen sometimes as the right to be equal, sometimes as the right to be different.’ (Bock and James 1992:4) The central tension between these two positions arises from a dispute as to whether a commitment to gender-neutrality can ever be achieved by pursuing a strategy of equality. Some feel that, in the context of a patriarchal society, the pursuit of equality might inevitably result in requiring everyone to assimilate to the dominant gender norm of masculinity. Those who believe the former to be possible fall within the ‘equality’ perspective; those who are sceptical adopt a ‘difference’ perspective. Put bluntly, women appear to be faced by a clear choice: in a society where the male is the norm, one can - as a woman - either seek assimilation or differentiation. One can aim to transcend one’s gendered particularity, or to affirm it: pursue ‘gender-neutrality’ or seek ‘gender-visibility’.

Those who approach democratic theory from an equality perspective firmly believe that gender ought to be politically irrelevant, or non-pertinent. The fact that men and women are commonly understood to be different is insufficient reason to treat them differently within the political sphere. The project of any polity truly committed to liberal principles of equality should be to transcend sexist presumptions about gender difference which have worked to discriminate against women, to grant women equal rights with men and enable women to participate equally with men in the public sphere. Gender difference is viewed as a manifestation of sexism, as a patriarchal creation used to rationalise the inequality between the sexes. The widespread presumption that women were not fully rational was repeatedly used as a justification for continuing to exclude them from full citizenship. The equality theorist’s argument that there is a manifest need to counter such myths is upheld in the face of all evidence which might appear to indicate that there actually are gender differences (such as differing educational aptitudes or vocational ambition). These, they argue, are but the results of generations of sexual inequality. If different gender characteristics exist, they are socially constructed in a sexist society to the benefit of men and the disadvantage of women.

Given that the equality theorist believes gender differences to be created and perpetuated in the interests of men, their project is to advocate the transcendence of gender differences. The idea that women ‘are different’ has been used to exclude women from valued and fulfilling social engagement. The notion that women might not be capable of the rational, abstract, universalising form of reasoning needed to engage in public arenas of work and politics needs to be countered with an assertion of women’s similarity to men. As Fraser notes, ‘(f)rom the equality perspective, then, gender difference appeared to be inextricable from sexism. The political task was thus clear: the goal of feminism was to throw off the shackles of ‘difference’ and establish equality, bringing men and women under a common measure.’ (Fraser 1997:100) From the equality perspective gender difference is synonymous with inferiority and is to be rejected in the name of a more genuinely inclusive democratic practice.

In contrast, difference theorists accept and even celebrate gender differences. Men and women are different
they argue, but difference should not be read as inferiority. Equality theorists argue that ‘gender difference’ is either a straightforward myth or a contingent result of social conditioning, but in either case needs to be transcended. Difference theorists, on the other hand, argue that ‘gender difference’ is either a biological given or a result of social conditioning, but in either case needs to be recognised and valued. Whereas the equality theorist argues for women’s integration into the existing democratic structures, the difference perspective seeks to reverse the order of things: to place at the centre that which is currently marginalised, to value that which is currently devalued, to privilege that which is currently subordinated. The nurturing, peace-loving, intuitive and emotional qualities of women are celebrated rather than subordinated. The individualistic, competitive, rational qualities of existing democratic structures are viewed with suspicion and hostility rather than admiration and longing. The aim is to lessen the power, not to join the ranks, of the male order. The political task here is the reversal of that proposed by the equality theorist. The goal of feminism is to make clear the fundamental difference between men and women and to enable women to gain a positive sense of their common identity as women. Once this is gained, women can then demand that their distinctive voice is heard and perspective valued. Ferguson succinctly summarises this approach.

‘The creation of women’s voice, or a feminist standpoint, or a gynocentric theory, entails immersion in a world divided between male and female experience in order to critique the power of the former and valorise the alternative residing in the latter. It is a theoretical project that opposes the identities and coherencies contained in patriarchal theory in the name of a different set of identities and coherencies, a different and better way of thinking and living.’ (Ferguson 1993:3-4) From the difference perspective the denial of gender difference represses women’s authentic nature. A genuinely inclusive just social order will necessarily recognise women’s specificity and embody female as well as (or perhaps instead of) male values.

The fundamental disagreement between equality and difference theorists centres on the question of neutrality. Equality theorists accept the basic claim underpinning most liberal political theory and its democratic institutions, that the liberal ideal of equality is itself neutral vis-à-vis gender. If women are in practice not equal with men, this is as a result of contingent distortions of the ideal of neutrality. The appropriate response to the inequality between the sexes is for women to pursue the ideal of neutrality more rigorously: to hold liberal democracy accountable to its own professed ideals. Difference theorists on the other hand see the ideal of neutrality as itself partial. Rather than perceiving the liberal commitment to gender-neutrality and equality as an inspiring, if sadly unfulfilled, ideal, difference theorists argue that what appears neutral is actually androcentric or male-defined. Appeals to gender-neutrality are therefore complicit with the structures that denigrate the feminine. If there is then no genuinely neutral position to adopt with regard to gender, one is forced to choose between assimilation to the dominant male norm, or celebration and revaluation of the subordinate female other.

In relation to debates about democracy, this equality/difference debate has meant that calls to extend the
ideal of liberal democracy to encompass women have been tempered by the insistence that women’s political engagement be differentiated from that of men. As Ruth Lister comments, ‘the most fundamental either/or choice that has faced feminist theorists and activists pressing women’s claims as citizens is whether our aim is a genuinely gender-neutral conception of citizenship or a gender-differentiated conception. The former would accord women equal citizenship rights with men and enable them to participate as their equals in the public sphere; the latter would recognise women’s particular concerns and contribution and value their responsibilities in the private sphere.’ (Lister 1997:92-3) This second gender-differentiated approach frequently draws on the symbol of motherhood to emphasise the distinctiveness of women’s possible contribution. The practice of motherhood cultivates, it is claimed, a form of maternal thinking centred around ‘attentive love’ (Ruddick 1983:227). The central issue regarding gender and democracy should not be viewed, difference theorists argue, as a question of how to help women to leave this role and to transcend this form of thinking in order to engage in democratic practices. Rather, the issue is how to develop a conception of democracy that might incorporate maternal thinking. Gender-neutral theorists, by contrast, are concerned both that this project reinforces existing stereotypes of women and that it aims to introduce into the public arena values and relationships that are not properly political (Dietz 1998:390-4).

The existence of these two distinct strategies within feminism is not new, nor is the ambivalence about their relative merits. Indeed, the ambivalence regarding equality and difference perspectives recurs throughout the history of feminist writings. Pateman labels this simultaneous demand for both gender-neutral and gender-differentiated citizenship ‘Wollstonecraft’s dilemma’ (Pateman 1989:196-7). The source of the dilemma emanates from the mutual incompatibility of the two options given the dominant tendency to view a patriarchal model of citizenship as a neutral model. Joan Scott makes a very similar point. ‘When equality and difference are paired dichotomously’, she argues, ‘they structure an impossible choice. If one opts for equality, one is forced to accept the notion that difference is antithetical to it. If one opts for difference, one admits that equality is unattainable.’ (Scott 1997:765) Recognition of the negative affects of this dilemma upon feminist theory and practice has motivated many to attempt to negotiate a path beyond the dichotomy. Given this feminist theory has largely distanced itself from both those competing projects which seek inclusion or reverse existing norms, and has embraced the deconstruction of binary oppositions as a central theoretical, and political, task.

The diversity perspective is not located on either side of the equality/difference divide, but rather gains its definition from its commitment to deconstructing the division itself. Grosz articulates the contrast between difference and diversity perspectives. Whereas the difference theorist is concerned to reverse the privileged terms in oppositional pairs, the issue for diversity theorists ‘is not to privilege one term at the expense of the other, but to explore the cost of their maintenance.’ (Grosz 1994:32) If a difference approach aims to ‘put women in the center’, this diversity approach in contrast aims to ‘deconstruct centres’. Both are
transformative projects: both seek to problematise the very foundations of political theory in the light of taking gender seriously. Both recognise - in a way that an equality approach does not - that dominant modes of political theorising have been founded upon patriarchal gender priorities. As such both are analytically distinct from an equality approach which merely seeks to ‘add women’ in to the existing schema: they are transformative rather than integrative. And, in this respect it is their shared rejection of equality politics that unites them. Yet it is the dissimilarity between the difference and diversity forms of gender politics that has increasingly preoccupied gender theorists. The distinction between these two approaches manifests itself in the contrast between the sort of transformation envisaged. ‘In the first stance,’ Ferguson states, ‘men - male power, male identities, masculinity as a set of practices - are problematized; in the second, the gendered world itself becomes a problem.’ (Ferguson 1993:3) This distinction, at heart, is between those who would reverse patriarchal gender priorities and those who would displace them. Rather than recentre political theory around a female as opposed to a male gendered perspective, the diversity approach seeks to de-centre political theory with respect to gender altogether.

Diversity theorists point to the weaknesses of both the equality perspective, which fails to recognise the socially constructed and patriarchal nature of the criteria of evaluation deemed pertinent to social inclusion, and the difference perspective, which fails to theorise the extent to which ‘maleness’ and ‘femaleness’ are themselves socially constructed and underplays the plurality of other forms of difference. As Scott usefully
summarises: ‘In effect, the duality this opposition creates draws one line of difference, invests it with biological explanations, and then treats each side of the opposition as a unitary phenomenon. Everything in each category (male/female) is assumed to be the same; hence, differences within either category are suppressed.’ (Scott 1997:766)

Having mapped out a tripartite schema of equality, difference and diversity, I now need to complicate it slightly by introducing the concept of identity. Identity politics is frequently confused with the diversity perspective as I have defined it. But this is, on my schema, a mistaken reading. Identity politics is better understood as a pluralised form of a difference perspective, and underpins a qualitatively distinct form of democratic theory to that which emerges from a pure diversity perspective. This is worth elaborating in relation to the work of Young because many critics have taken her to be an advocate of identity politics and understood her proposed modifications of deliberative democracy as an attempt to introduce not diversity, but identity politics.

The rise of ‘identity politics’ in the 1980s placed both the difference and the equality perspectives under intense critical scrutiny and severe strain. But it is the difference perspective that has been most significantly weakened. For identity politics movements adopted the same general approach to cultural differences per se that the difference perspective adopted with respect to gender alone. They extended the difference analysis to a wider range of cultural differences, meaning that the gender issue no longer held the centrality that its advocates had once claimed. The idea that there might be a single ‘woman’s perspective’ to be opposed to the dominant ‘male perspective’ was undermined by the protests of those women found themselves silenced by such a claim. This ‘difference’ approach was itself experienced as assimilatory by those women who did not conform to the norm of female identity proposed by those claiming to speak for ‘the women’s movement’. The conception of ‘woman’ being affirmed was in reality a particular conception of white, heterosexual, middle-class, educated, western women. To claim that the experiences of these particular women could be used to define the nature of woman per se was not only inappropriate, but also harmful to the vast majority of women whose experiences were quite other. The response of those excluded by this discourse of ‘woman’ was to assert the specificity of their own experiences and demand recognition for the particularity of their own identities. The identifications of sexuality, race and class were all highlighted as central to the personal experiences and political identity of most women. The whole debate shifted from an exclusive focus on gender difference to an exploration of differences among women.

What this pluralised discourse of identity differences shares with the singular discourse of gender difference is the commitment to making political activity an expression of one’s identity and political ambition the recognition of one’s identity. Identity politics, Grosz argues, ‘is about establishing a viable identity for its
constituency, of claiming social recognition and value on the basis of shared common characteristics’ which are attributed to the particular social group of an identity. (Grosz 1994:31) Its project is to establish for its members the rights, recognition and privileges that dominant groups have attempted to keep for themselves. As such, identity politics are a pluralised form of difference politics: this perspective adopts the same advocacy project and employs the same strategies. The focus is still upon the recognition of difference, but now the differences in question are multiple rather than binary: the differences emphasised exist among women as well as between women and men. Identity politics represents an approach that is politically, but not methodologically, distinct from a difference perspective. Whilst the deconstructive diversity stance is openly critical of both the politics and the methodological approach of the difference theorists, this identity politics approach adopts the basic methodological commitments of the difference theorists and uses them to undermine their political claims.

This is a fairly schematic survey of the extensive debate within recent feminist theory concerning issues of subjectivity. Let us now turn to debates which focus on democratic theory, reflecting on the extent to which the latter are shaped by the former. The most significant innovation in democratic theory within the feminist literature seems to me to be the concentration on issues of group representation. One can argue for group representation from each of the three frames detailed above, but the detail of one’s proposals and the justification given for them will vary according to whether one is adopts a strategy of inclusion, reversal or displacement. Young argues for group representation as a strategy of displacement. Before focusing on the details of her proposals, let us briefly survey arguments for group representation made from other perspectives.

**Interests, Identities and Group Representation**

Most forms of feminist activism during the 1990s have asserted an explicit claim for an increased presence of women in decision-making structures. These demands are often based on a presumption that women have interests that are best represented by women. Yet as Lovenduski notes, ‘that understanding has been fiercely contested by feminists, their sympathisers and their opponents in a continuing and sometimes acrimonious debate.’ (Lovenduski and Norris 1996:1) Given that women, even those claiming the title feminist, currently articulate such distinct political positions, it is hard to judge what might be an accurate representation of their interests.

Sapiro explores the claim that women share particular experiences and have common ‘representable interests’ (Sapiro 1998:164). To assess whether women are an ‘interest group’ and, if so, what interests they have, Sapiro claims that one needs to consider both women’s ‘objective situation’ and their consciousness of their own interests. For saying ‘that women are in a different social position from that of men and therefore have interests to be represented is not the same as saying that women are conscious of these differences, that they define themselves as having special interests requiring representation, or that
men and women as groups now disagree on policy issues on which women might have a special interest.’ (Sapiro 1998:167)

This is politically significant because, contrary to the Burkean notion of paternalistic representation of the interests of others, political systems are - Sapiro notes - not likely to represent previously underrepresented groups ‘until those groups develop a sense of their own interests and place demands upon the system.’ (Sapiro 1998:167) Moreover, if the interests in question are not clear and pre-formed, but are still in the process of being uncovered via processes of consciousness-raising, it will then be more difficult to distinguish between the represented and the representative. In these circumstances women would seem to be best placed to advocate the interests of women. This argument for group representation is motivated by a strategy of inclusion.

And yet, beyond these divergent perspectives as to whether women will best represent the interests of women, there lies a fundamental critique of this entire approach. Diamond and Hartsock argue against casting women as simply another interest group among many, and against arguing that fairness requires that women promote their interests within the existing political system equally with all other such interest group. For this, they claim, underplays the distinctive and radical challenge posed by the recognition of women’s experiences and political ambitions. It also overlooks the new political and methodological questions raised by their position: ‘if the inclusion of women into politics threatens the most basic structures of society, one cannot fit their concerns into the framework of interests.’ (Diamond and Hartsock 1998:193) They propose, adopting a strategy of reversal, that in order to understand the interests that women have in common one must develop a systematic analysis of the sexual division of labour. They use Chodorow’s theory to claim profoundly different social understanding between men and women. Attention to the sexual division of labour ‘calls into question the appropriateness of the language of interests for understanding political life.’ (Diamond and Hartsock 1998: 196)

The very language of interests, they argue, emerges with and then perpetuates, the division of labour that creates the ideal of rational economic men seeking to maximise their satisfactions. They propose that it be replaced by more encompassing categories of analysis which more adequately capture the range of human emotions, such as needs. Their basic resistance to Sapiro’s focus on interests is that it implies that the issue of women’s fair representation is an issue of inclusion: that women are seeking to catch up with men (Diamond and Hartsock 1998:197). In direct contrast, what they seek is a strategy of reversal: recognition that female experience inverts that of the male and forms a basis on which to expose masculine values as fundamentally flawed (Diamond and Hartsock 1998:195). Women’s demands cannot simply be integrated into the system. Including questions of reproduction and sexuality into the political process will transform the very concept of the political, eroding the public/private distinction and, presumably (though they do not state this directly), undermining the current system of representative democracy in favour of a more
participatory one. Nonetheless, within the confines of the current representative system they are clear that ‘only women can “act for” women in identifying “invisible” problems affecting the lives of large numbers of women.’ (Diamond and Hartsock 1998:198) In short, they reject Sapiro’s strategy of inclusion in favour of a strategy of reversal. They too argue for group representation, but the group in question is conceived as an identity not an interest group.

This debate between strategies of inclusion and reversal (between the more effective representation of women’s interests within interest-group pluralism and the transformation of the representative system itself) is now subject to various feminist strategies of displacement. Of these Young’s is the clearest defence of group representation as a strategy of displacement. Before turning to her proposals, let us look briefly at Phillips’ influential work. She adopts an integrative position, synthesising the interest-based and identity-based approaches in a manner that she claims offers a less problematic basis for arguing for the group representation of women. In other words, rather than proposing a principled displacement of the strategies of inclusion and reversal, she advocates a pragmatic synthesis of the two.

Phillips’ ‘rather commonsensical’ solution is to use both the terms ‘interests’ and ‘needs’ together (Phillips 1995:73). There is a long history to this tension, as Phillips notes (Phillips 1995:72). Both positions, she claims, have their strengths and weaknesses. ‘Interests can sound rather grasping and competitive, but it does at least serve to remind us that there may be conflicts between different groups. Need has more obvious moral resonance, but it originates from a paternalist discourse which lends itself more readily to decision by experts on behalf of the need group.’ (Phillips 1995:73) Considered in the context of the debates about equality and difference, one can see that this insight echoes the widely-held perceptions about the relative merits of these two positions: the first may be overly individualistic but there are contrasting worries that the second may be overly assimilatory. In an attempt to synthesise the best of these approaches and provide a firmer normative basis from which to consider the arguments for the increased representation of women, Phillips proposes a negotiation of a different pair of categories: the politics of ideas and the politics of presence.

A politics of ideas is Phillips’ term for a politics that focuses on policies and a representation that focuses on people’s beliefs and interests. Fair representation is, on this ideas-based model of politics, realised in the ongoing responsiveness of representatives to those they are representing. The accountability of representatives to their electorate is therefore paramount. As long as they are responsive, it matters little who the representatives are: ‘the messages will vary, but it hardly matters if the messengers are the same.’ (Phillips 1995:6) A politics of presence, on the other hand, is Phillips’ term for a politics that focuses on the messengers themselves, and a representation that concentrates on people’s identities. Fair representation, on this conception of politics, requires that the overly cerebral concentration on beliefs and interests be extended to recognise the normative and political significance of the identity of the
representatives. The descriptive similarity of the representatives in relation to their electorate is vital. It is the degree of shared experience that indicates representativeness on this identity-based politics.

Where a politics of ideas privileges accountability as the central measure of representativeness, a politics of presence privileges authenticity. Fair representation, from the perspective of a politics of presence, regards the gender (and any other social identity deemed politically significant) of the representative to be ‘an important part of what makes them representative...’ (Phillips 1995:13) In other words, where a politics of ideas invokes a notion of ideological or functional representation, a politics of presence invokes a notion of social representation. The interest-based and identity-based arguments for group representation are different versions of a politics of presence. They offer different bases for the claim that the presence of women in the decision-making bodies is significant, but share a sense that the identity of the messenger matters.

These endorsements of a politics of presence are controversial. Phillips lists three central objections. The first two originate from within the interest-based model of politics and the third from the participatory democracy model of politics (there being internal divisions within these camps as to whether group representation is the best way forward). Firstly there is the argument that such a politics poses a threat to national unity and leads to a ‘balkanisation’ of the polity, or a politics of the enclave, in that it encourages intransigence rather than cohesion. Secondly there is a concern that it undermines the basis for political accountability in that it is much harder to clearly define what a social group, as opposed to an interest group, really wants (what its interests are and whether they are being pursued). The third objection, made not by advocates of interest-based politics but by civic republicans and deliberative democrats, is that this is yet another capitulation to representative politics (albeit group-based rather than individualistic), which detracts from the pursuit of a truly inclusive and participatory politics of the common good (Phillips 1995:21-4). We could also add a fourth objection, which arises from a more deconstructive concern that any institutionalisation of group identity will work to reify and normalise identities in a manner that might then be used to re-subordinate the group in question.

It is the second concern about accountability that Phillips takes to be the most serious in relation to debates about the political representation of women. As accountability ‘is best understood in relation to the politics of ideas’ it is essential that a politics of ideas is not jettisoned altogether in any move towards a politics of presence (Phillips 1995:56). Accordingly, she argues that: ‘It is in the relationship between ideas and presence that we can best hope to find a fairer system of representation, not in a false opposition between one or the other.’ (Phillips 1995:25) She also takes the third concern about participatory democracy seriously, and argues that arguments for group representation are at their strongest when placed in the context of wider arguments for participatory democracy (Phillips 1995:145-65). The fourth objection, arising from the deconstructive approach to gender issues is one that Phillips does not consider in detail.
What Phillips proposes is a particular synthesis of the politics of ideas and presence as the basis for arguing for ‘active intervention to include members of groups currently under-represented in politics...’ (Phillips 1995:167) She distinguishes such arguments from the more reductive interest-based and identity-based arguments for group representation. For although she argues that changing the composition of the legislature in terms of presence will make a difference, she also wants to avoid a simple endorsement of a politics of presence which proposes group representation on the basis of the representation of either women’s interests or their identities. ‘The politics of presence is not about locking people into pre-given, essentialized identities; nor is it about just a new way of defining the interest groups that should jostle for attention.’ (Phillips 1995:167) The project is to enable those currently excluded from politics to engage in political debate and decision-making.

This pragmatic defence of group-representation, which draws on both a politics of presence and ideas, modifies the mechanisms of representative democracy in order to secure a greater parity of presence for women moves ‘in close parallel with arguments for more participatory democracy.’ (Phillips 1995:190) Theorists grounded in a tradition of deliberative and participatory democracy are, Phillips feels, best placed to develop arguments for a politics of presence and for group representation, which avoid the pitfalls of the overly narrow arguments for group representation based on the traditions of interest-group pluralism or identity-based politics. Notably, Phillips thinks that Young’s particular vision of group representation ‘avoids most of the pitfalls in appealing to shared experience as an automatic guarantee... it makes no claims to essential unities or characteristics; it recognises the potential diversity and disagreement within any social group; and it provides some basis for the accountability of representatives to those they might claim to represent.’ (Phillips 1995:54) This endorsement of Young by Phillips is interesting, and I think somewhat misplaced according to her own frame of reference. Phillips attempts to go beyond the equality/difference debate by appealing to pragmatic synthesis. Young, on the other hand, adopts a clear methodological commitment to a strategy of displacement, which aims to deconstruct binary dualisms.

Social Groups
Young advocates a form of democratic theory that is based on a ‘politics of difference’. Confusingly, a ‘politics of difference’ is here used to describe what I am defining as a diversity, and not a difference, perspective. In an unhelpful confusion of terminology the attempt to explode the dichotomy between ‘equality and difference’ is frequently referred to as a ‘politics of difference’. This leads to a situation in which we find, within a group of theorists adopting the same methodological frame and proposing the same advocacy project, some criticising a ‘difference perspective’ in the name of ‘diversity’ (Scott 1997), and others criticising an ‘identity perspective’ in the name of ‘difference’ (Grosz 1994). In proposing the category ‘diversity’ in place of ‘difference’ I depart from the normal terminology. I also depart from Young’s terminology, for she chooses to ‘reclaim the meaning of difference’, ‘offering an emancipatory
meaning of difference to replace the old exclusionary meaning.’ (Young 1990:168) Nonetheless, I find it useful to distinguish between the essentialist and relational conceptions of difference by labelling the latter ‘diversity’ as this may help to reveal why many of the concerns about a ‘politics of difference’ raised by deliberative democrats are misplaced, because appropriate to difference or identity, and not diversity, politics. The location of Young as a diversity theorist is significant because it helps to explain both Young’s appeal to deliberative democracy and her anxiety about it. Or, put the other way around, it provides one reason why Young is so clearly critical of many of the central features of deliberative democracy, and yet nonetheless ends up endorsing it, albeit it in modified form.

Young claims that existing electoral and legislative processes are ‘unrepresentative’ in the sense that they fail to reflect the diversity of the population, leading her to demand that a certain number of seats in the legislature be reserved for the members of marginalised groups. This call is made on the assumption that under-representation can be overcome only by resorting to guaranteed representation and that representing difference requires constitutional guarantees of group participation within the parliamentary system. Groups who have suffered oppression need guaranteed representation in order that their distinct voice can be heard.

Her claim is that a just polity requires the participation and inclusion of all groups, only secured by differential treatment for oppressed groups. This rejection of the assimilationist ideal is based in a belief that attachment to specific traditions, practices, language and other culturally specific forms is a crucial aspect of social existence. Young argues that ‘a democratic public should provide mechanisms for the effective recognition and representation of the distinct voices and perspectives of those of its constituent groups that are oppressed or disadvantaged.’ (Young 1990:184) These mechanisms will involve three distinct features. Firstly, the provision of public resources, which will be used to support the self-organisation of group members, ‘so that they achieve collective empowerment and a reflective understanding of their collective experiences and interests in the context of the society’ (Young 1990:184). Secondly, the provision of public resources to enable the group to analyse and generate policy proposals in institutionalised contexts, and the formal requirement that decision-makers show that they have taken these perspectives into account. Thirdly, group veto power regarding specific policies that affect a group directly, ‘..such as reproductive rights for women’ (Young 1990:184).

Rather than transcending particularity Young proposes that ‘… attention to social group differentiation is an important resource for democratic communication.’ (Young 1997:385) but social groups are not to be confused with interest groups. Young is keen to point out that these groups should be understood in relational, not essentialist, terms. The social groups she would positively recognise in her vision of differentiated citizenship are products of social relations and are therefore fluid and intersecting. Young employs a relational interpretation of difference. ‘… the social positioning of group differentiation gives to
individuals some shared *perspectives* on social life.' (Young 1997:385). Social groups are neither ‘any aggregate or association of persons who seek a particular goal, or desire the same policy...’ nor ‘a collective of persons with shared political beliefs.’ (Young 1990:186)

This attempt to displace the dichotomy between interest groups and identity groups is telling. It is indicative of her commitment to the strategy of displacement. It is not always clear however, that she succeeds in distinguishing her preferred concept of social groups from the interest and identity groups she rejects. Some commentators have confused her position with identity politics (Elshtain 1995), and others feel that she moves too close to an interest-based form of equality politics. For example the embrace of group-based representation leads Mouffe to argue that Young’s vision is actually nothing more than a rearticulation of interest-group pluralism (Mouffe 1992:369-85). But these are both charges that Young rejects. She rejects identity groups, insisting that what makes a group is not internal to the attributes and self-understanding of its members but relation in which it stands to others (Young 1997:389). Elshtain, she claims, mistakenly interprets the politics of difference as identity politics, the pluralised form of the difference perspective, which is a strategy of reversal not of displacement. It is identity politics that encourages people to give primary loyalty to identity groups rigidly opposed to one another, producing backlash and retribalization. But, Young states: ‘... I argue against the identification of a politics of difference with a politics of identity.’ (Young 1997:385) Much of the writings about a politics of difference has itself explored ‘problems with a politics of difference as the positive assertion of group identity, and has often itself argued against a politics of identity.’ (Young 1997:397) On the other hand she claims that her vision of group representation is fundamentally different from interest-group pluralism in that it promotes public discussion and decision-making rather than the pursuit of pre-defined interests (Young 1990:186-190). In other words, she avoids the problems of essentialism and unaccountability of an identity-group politics only to be charged with adopting a form of interest-group pluralism that is itself problematic. Her attempts to distinguish her position from interest-group pluralism then propel her to invoke norms of just deliberation that arise from a deliberative democracy framework which she has, on other occasions, criticised for being overly universalistic.

Her argument is that interest groups simply promote their own interests in a political marketplace, with no reference to a conception of social justice or the common good. The social groups argued by Young to require special representation are, on the other hand, defined with reference to a specific vision of justice which generates criteria for assessing social oppression and hence criteria for establishing which groups require such representative guarantees. This vision of justice offers guidance not only as to which groups require special representation rights, but also as to how they should act in the political realm. A distinction is made between demands stemming from self-interest and those stemming from justice: ‘the test of whether a claim upon the public is just or merely an expression of self-interest is best made when those making it must confront the opinion of others who have explicitly different, though not necessarily conflicting,
experiences, priorities and needs.’ (Young 1990:186) In other words, the engagement in deliberation with other social groups marks a just political dialogue as opposed to a simple expression of instrumental interest.

So, in her attempt to defend a model of group representation as a strategy of displacement rather than inclusion or reversal, Young develops a notion of social groups. In order to do so she needs to appeal to a conception of justice which privileges deliberation. But this presents a problem. The model of deliberative democracy that she invokes assumes an ideal of impartiality that she has vocally rejected. In order to get around this paradox, she appeals to a notion of objective judgement. Where the concept of social groups displaces the apparent dichotomy between interest groups and identity groups the concept of objective judgement displaces the apparent dichotomy between impartiality and particularity. The concept of social groups considered above is much more fully developed than that of objective judgement, which we will consider next. But, I argue, the former is not viable without a fully articulated defence of the latter.

**Objective Judgement**

Young is openly hostile to the ideal of impartiality, which she depicts as offering a conception of the self as ‘dispassionate, abstracting from feelings, desires, interest, and commitments that he or she may have regarding the situation...’ (Young 1990:100). She claims that it denies difference in three ways. It denies the particularity of the situation. It seeks to ‘eliminate heterogeneity in the form of feeling.’ It reduces ‘the plurality of moral subjects to one subjectivity’ (Young 1990:100). On the other hand, the ideal of community or shared subjectivity also denies difference. On this conception people become fused, mutually sympathetic, understanding one another as they understand themselves. This, she claims, denies difference in the sense of the basic asymmetry of subjects. Neither option is adequate. Both are generated by an ideal of impartiality, which dichotomises reason and feeling.

Young claims that the ‘modern’ or ‘Enlightenment’ ideal of impartiality seeks to reduce differences to unity ‘by abstracting from the particularities of situation, feeling, affiliation, and point of view.’ (Young 1990:97) The ideal entails a vision of the public realm as attaining the universality of a general will by jettisoning all particularity to the private sphere. In practice, this was achieved by the exclusion from the public realm of those groups perceived to embody particularity ‘especially women, Blacks, American Indians, and Jews.’ (Young 1990:97) In the pursuit of a single, universal set of principles to govern the public realm, complex difference is necessarily repressed, paradoxically creating dichotomy instead of unity. If the citizen is understood to be a ‘universal reasoner’, detached and impartial, he or she must abstract from the ‘partiality of affiliation, of social or group perspective, that constitutes concrete subjects.’ (Young 1990:100) The result is that members of minority social groups are either excluded from citizenship or included only to the extent to which they are able to repress the particularity of their identity. Given that the universalist ideal
continues to threaten the exclusion of some,’ argues Young, ‘the meaning of “public” should be transformed to exhibit the positivity of group difference, passion and play’ (Young 1990:97).

Young finds both the liberal and the civic republican traditions equally guilty of projecting ‘an ideal of universal citizenship’ (Young 1998:401). She, like Habermas, warns against simply replacing an impoverished conception of liberal citizenship with a civic republican conception, which provides the notion of the general will (Habermas 1996). The civic republican tradition may stand in ‘critical tension’ with individualistic contract theory, but shares a common commitment to universalism. And this commitment necessarily entails the exclusion of all groups that threaten to explode the unity of the polity (Young 1998:404-5).

One would expect a diversity theorist to argue that Habermas’s politics, formulated in the name of critical theory and an emancipatory project, excludes otherness and thereby particularly affects groups who are associated with it, or who forge their identities and life forms along these lines: groups marginalized by pre-discursive processes. Habermas is overtly hostile to the school of thought, which he labels postmodern or ‘young conservative’, that has its origins in Nietzsche and which privileges the difference that Young is concerned to recognise. Advocates of postmodernism are accused by Habermas of making mystical appeal to something prior to reason and immune to it yet retrievable through transgressive experiences which would extinguish the rational subject. He characterises them as equating alterity with some prediscursive referent that precedes reason. Alterity, suggests Habermas is viewed as ‘some unspeakable and undifferentiated excitement which, he remarks, is now fashionably labelled feminine.’ (Coole 1996: 223)

Coole rightly points out that for Habermas, the effects of alterity are resolutely non-emancipatory. He argues that in modernity the pre-discursive, mystical forces of alterity have been contained within religion and art, which are dismissed as apolitical. Coole is more sympathetic to Derrida’s position. For Derrida recognition of alterity is not some mystical Other, but exists in the fault-lines and ruptures which structure language itself. And if this is the case, the project of discourse ethics is undermined. To allow that even the most rational discourses will remain charged with alterity implies that to deny such alterity is to engage in a ‘violent metaphysical project’. This would seem to be the obvious response to deliberative democracy from someone adopting a strategy of displacement. But is is not one that Young adopts.

Young does state that the ‘ideal of impartial moral reason corresponds to the Enlightenment ideal of the public realm of politics as attaining the universality of a general will that leaves difference, particularity and the body behind in the private realms of family and civil society.’ (Young 1990:97) Contra this ideal, she suggests that ‘the ideal of the civic public as expressing the general interest - the impartial point of view of reason - itself results in exclusion. By assuming that reason stands opposed to desire, affectivity and the body, this conception of the civic public excludes bodily and affective aspects of human existence.’ (Young,
Yet, intriguingly, Young does not reject discourse ethics altogether, as her critique of the ideal of impartiality might have indicated. We have seen that she needs it to sustain her definition of social groups.

She argues that even though Habermas ‘seems unwilling to abandon a standpoint of universal normative reason that transcends particularist perspectives’ he ‘has gone further than any other contemporary thinker in elaborating the project of a moral reason that recognised the plurality of subjects.’ (Young, 1990:106) Her critique of deliberative democracy clearly emerges from her rejection of the ideal of impartiality. But, as republican theorists have noted, the attempt to distance herself from the individualism and instrumentalism of interest-group pluralism actually propels Young towards an endorsement of a form of impartiality and deliberation that she finds unacceptable in republicanism (Miller 1993:16). Indeed, as Phillips notes (Phillips 1995:147), whereas Young’s initial formulation of her argument for group representation relied on heavily criticising deliberative democracy, she now uses this framework, in a slightly modified form that she labels communicative democracy, to defend her own vision of group representation (Young 1996:120-136). She recommends that the forms of communication considered significant in debates about justice be extended to include greeting, rhetoric and storytelling. Greeting entails non-linguistic gestures, such as smiles and handshakes, which bring bodies into communication. Rhetoric entails humour, wordplay, images and metaphors, which bring desire into communication. Storytelling entails narratives that exhibit subjective experience and evoke sympathy, which brings experience into communication (Young 1996:129-32). In short, her claim is that there is an alternative to moral theory founded on impartiality, which is communicative ethics.

Young is convinced that dialogue between social groups must take place. Such dialogue across difference serves three functions. Firstly, it motivates claimants to express their proposals as appeals to justice rather than expressions of mere self-interest. Secondly, confrontation with different perspectives teaches individuals the partiality of their own. Thirdly, expressing, questioning and challenging differently situated knowledge adds to social knowledge. ‘Public critical discussion that includes the expression of and exchange between all relevant differentiated social perspectives transforms the partial and parochial interests and ideas of each into more reflective and objective judgement… Judgement is objective in this sense when it situates one’s own particular perspectives in a wider context that takes other perspectives into account as well. Objectivity in this sense means only that judgement has taken account of the experience, knowledge, and interests of others. Such objectivity is possible only if those particular perspectives are expressed publicly to everyone.’ (Young 1997:402) There are, she allows, conditions required to reach a just decision (which Young declines to label a revised ideal of impartiality), but these are weaker than those proposed in discourse ethics. They are simply a recognition of significant interdependence, a commitment to equal respect for one another, and agreement on procedural rules of fair discussion and decision-making (Young 1996:126). These conditions are, she claims, much thinner than that of shared understanding. In
other words we find that by incorporating a conception of communicative ethics into her model of group representation, Young aims to distinguish her vision of democracy from both interest-group pluralism and universalist civic republicanism. To do so she develops the concepts of social groups and objective judgement. Whether this ideal of communicative ethics really stands in opposition to impartiality, or simply articulates a form of impartiality that attempts to be attentive to alterity is however worth considering.

For instance, Young’s response to the question of how interest-seekers will be transformed into citizens who attend to the claims of others is sketchy. She addresses the dilemma by quoting a passage from Pitkin, who argues that interest group competition draws us into politics because: ‘we are forced to find or create a common language of purposes and aspirations... we are forced to transform “I want” into “I am entitled to”, a claim that becomes negotiable by public standards.’ (Pitkin in Young, 1990: 107) Young then goes on to add: ‘In this move from an expression of desire to a claim of justice, dialogue participants do not bracket their particular situations or adopt a universal and shared standpoint. They only move from self-regarding need to recognition of the claim of others.’ (Young, 1990: 107 italics added). The crucial question of precisely how this transformation occurs, and whether it does not actually constitute an appeal to impartiality, is not directly considered.

Conclusion
I have argued that the most significant innovation in democratic theory to emerge from the recent feminist literature is the endorsement of group representation. Feminist arguments for group representation are made from three distinct frames: inclusion, reversal and displacement. Young adopts a strategy of displacement to argue for group representation. Her conception of a group is neither an interest nor an identity group. She displaces this dichotomy with appeal to a relational notion of social groups. She also seeks to displace the dichotomy between impartiality and particularity by introducing a notion of objective judgement. Significantly the former move is much more compelling than the latter. For it is in the area of ontological debate, rather than in advocacy issues, that feminist theory has developed the most useful critical resources. There is a wealth of literature that details what a diversity as opposed to an equality or difference perspective with regard to theories of gender entails. The literature on what objective judgement, as opposed to impartiality or particularity, might involve remains under-developed. If a feminist strategy of displacement is to engage fully with advocacy as opposed to simply ontological issues, this needs to be addressed.

Bibliography


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