ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AND SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN:  
A Comparison of Australia, Canada and New Zealand

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Abstract: The primary objective of this study is to assess the psychological effects of the voting systems on the substantive representation of women. The central hypothesis is that voting systems influence the perception that female politicians have of their role as political representatives of women and, in particular, that women elected by PR systems are more likely than those elected by majority systems to feel they have a responsibility to represent women. Interviews conducted with 110 female MPs in Australia, Canada and New Zealand between 2001 and 2004-5 do not support this assumption. The conclusion explores how the concept of surrogate representation may improve our understanding of the psychological effects of the voting system on the substantive representation of women.

Introduction

The third wave of democratisation seen in the 1990s re-animated the issue of political representation. Not only were the political communities formed after the fall of the Berlin Wall faced with the task of devising electoral systems, some long-established representative democracies also made major changes in their voting procedures (Italy, Japan and New Zealand, for instance). This surge of electoral re-engineering was driven by various concerns, including the perceived need to curb corruption, a desire to reinvigorate parliamentary assemblies seen as lacking legitimacy, and the principle of ensuring representation of minorities within multicultural political communities. This was the context in which the objective of improving women’s parliamentary representation was articulated. This objective was, moreover, promoted by supra-national organisations and enshrined in international instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the Amsterdam Treaty (1997).

One result of this renewed emphasis on the representation of women has been an explosion of studies examining the impact of voting systems on the feminization of parliaments. According to these studies, a women-friendly electoral system is characterised by proportional representation (PR), with party lists, high district and party magnitudes, and gender quotas (implying placement rules and penalties for non-compliance) (see among others: Htun &

1 In this paper, the terms ‘electoral system’ and ‘voting system’ are used interchangeably.

While a rich literature has explored the effect of voting systems on women’s presence in parliaments, research has completely ignored the impact of these electoral procedures on female politicians’ understandings of political representation. However, as Gallagher and Mitchell (2005a) and Klingemann and Wessels (2001) argue, the electoral system can influence the orientation political actors take to their roles as representatives. Nothing suggests that female politicians’ understandings of their representation of women would escape such an influence.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of electoral systems in shaping women’s political representation. Specifically, it assesses the psychological effects of the voting system on how women elected in three Commonwealth countries conceive of their roles in the substantive representation of women. In other words, do voting systems influence the perception female politicians have of their role as political representatives of women and, in particular, are women elected by PR systems more likely than those elected by majority systems to feel they have a responsibility to represent women? It appears that a clear majority of Australian, Canadian and New Zealand female parliamentarians see themselves as representatives of women, regardless of the nature of the voting system by which they were elected. Contradicting conventional expectations about the impact of the voting system on women’s substantive representation, this result supports the conclusion reached by Bogdanor more than two decades ago: ‘The electoral system is not a fundamental cause of variations in the focus of representation’ (1985: 299). I suggest that the notion of surrogate representation offers promising heuristic potential for explaining this consensus among women MPs.

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2 This relationship also exists in the opposite sense: the understandings that political actors form of representation generate a specific kind of electoral system. There are many recent examples of this in the establishment of electoral systems in multi-ethnic countries, where the aim of ensuring inclusive representation has been important (such as in South Africa; see Lijphart 2004, Reynolds, 1999).
According to Mansbridge (2003: 522), ‘[s]urrogate representation is representation by a representative with whom one has no electoral relationship.’ It implies that a representative ‘acts for the interests of voters beyond the boundaries of the representative’s district’ (Carroll, 2002: 51). This model evokes Burke’s notion of virtual representation: ‘Virtual representation is that in which there is a communion of interests and a sympathy in feelings and desires between those who act in the name of any description of people and the people in whose name they act, though the trustees are not actually chosen by them’ (Burke, quoted in Williams, 1998: 35).

The discussion begins with an overview of research on the substantive representation of women. The second section presents the study’s theoretical framework and methodology. This is followed by an empirical analysis of the results. The conclusion explores how the concept of surrogate representation may improve our understanding of the psychological effects of the voting system on the substantive representation of women.

**Literature Review**

Several studies have demonstrated that a significant number of female legislators think they have a responsibility to substantively represent women. The United States has produced an abundant literature in this field since the early 1980s (Carroll, 2002; Dodson, 1998; Gertzog, 1995: 162; Reingold, 2000: 247-251; Swers, 2002a: 132-134; Thomas, 1997; Thompson, 1980). The fact that American women politicians embrace the role of representing women with such enthusiasm can perhaps be explained by certain features of politics in the United States. First, the financing of electoral campaigns requires the political class to maintain close relations with various socio-economic groups, the representation of whose interests is permitted and even encouraged. In other words, the rules of the political and electoral ‘game’ make it possible to represent women as a defined interest group. Second, since the mid-1980s,
American women have effectively organised themselves as a major interest group in electoral politics. The most obvious examples of this are Emily’s List and the WISH List, political action committees (PACs) that promote the election of women to Congress by financially supporting their election campaigns. Although versions of Emily’s List have been formed in other countries (such as Australia and Great Britain), these have not attained the size or influence of their American counterpart. Finally, American political parties are typically unable to exercise strong party discipline, compared with the strict discipline imposed by parties in other countries. As party discipline constitutes a major obstacle to the substantive representation of women (Broughton & Zetlin, 1996; Childs, 2004: 98-102; McLeay, 2006; Trimble & Arscott, 2003: 137-146), a context where such party discipline is relaxed might be expected to make it easier for female politicians to represent women.

The relative lack of party discipline might support the substantive representation of women in the United States, but even in Westminster parliamentary regimes, where strong party discipline prevails, female politicians state that they represent women. In her groundbreaking work *Women in the House*, Vallance (1979: 83; see also Currell, 1974: 87-88) establishes that a large number of women who sat in the British House of Commons from 1917 to 1979 were conscious of being symbols for other women and thus felt a responsibility to represent them. Vallance also observes, however, that there is no consensus among female MPs on the specific nature of this responsibility in relation to women. Childs reports that, in her inaugural speech in 1919, Nancy Astor, the first woman to sit in the British House of Commons, expressed her feeling of particular responsibility to ‘speak for hundreds of women and children throughout the country who cannot speak for themselves’ (Astor, quoted in Childs, 2004: 6) More recently, Childs (2001a) interviewed 34 of the 65 new female Labour MPs elected during the 1997 British election. Seventy-three (73) per cent of these new Labour women MPs identified themselves as feminists. Though we may be tempted to interpret this
as an indicator that these politicians are attitudinally predisposed to substantively represent women, only two of them explicitly stated that representing women was part of their mandate at Westminster (Childs, 2001b). In her most recent work, *Feminizing Politics*, Lovenduski (2005: 47-50, 145-149) insists on the importance of institutional framework in understanding how political actors behave: in this argument, the British Parliament is submerged in a culture of masculinity that inhibits female MPs’ abilities to represent women. Similarly, in the conclusion of *New Labour’s Women MPs*, Childs (2004: 200) cautions that ‘acting for women might be dependent upon acting like men.’ In addition, she does not observe a greater propensity to substantively represent women among female MPs selected from Labour All-Women Shortlists (AWS) in 1997 than among those who were not selected from AWS (Childs, 2004: 83-84).³ More research is needed to better understand the as-yet largely unstudied question of the impact that affirmative action measures and quotas have on women’s substantive representation.

In the first half of the 1980s, a majority of the Australian women parliamentarians felt that raising women’s issues (such as daycare and abortion) was part of their mandate (Sawer, 1986). Whip (1991) studied women elected to the Australian federal parliament and the state legislatures between 1921 and 1981. She observed that although 42 per cent of female parliamentarians elected before 1977 explicitly included women in their conception of political representation, this percentage increases to 55 per cent for those elected after that year. The marked increase at this point suggests that the representation of women in legislative assemblies—be it descriptive or substantive—relies on a women’s movement mobilised on the issue of electoral politics. Sawer (2006) takes this hypothesis further. Examining the role of EMILY’s List in the Australian legislative sphere, she demonstrates

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³ In her survey conducted among the 80 female and male members of the Rwandan Chamber of Deputies, Schwartz (2005) comes to the conclusion that “women elected on quota are slightly more eager to represent women’s interests than those elected on party lists [i.e. without quotas]” (p. 61). However, Schwartz cautions that this observation cannot be generalized to all countries where quotas exist in various forms.
that not only has this extra-parliamentary feminist organisation helped to increase the number of women in Australian parliaments, but it has also helped enable women parliamentarians to include representation of women in their political agendas.

In Canada, Tremblay (1993; 1996; see also Tremblay & Pelletier, 2000; 2003) has explored the conceptions held by political women on the question of women’s representation in politics. A conclusion that clearly emerges from her research is that a majority of female politicians believe they have a responsibility to represent women. However, what this responsibility to represent women actually means can vary greatly from one female official to the next, as political women operate with diverse ideological frameworks and their life experiences differ significantly. This is why Trimble and Arscott (2003: 127) argue that ‘the wide-ranging interests, ideas, and legislative goals held by women and men can only be fully represented by electing legislators with a diversity of backgrounds and ideologies.’

In the case of New Zealand, McCallum (1993: ix) notes that female representatives between 1933 and 1990 supported the idea that they represented a larger constituency than that of their electorate—that is to say, they represented women. In her study on women elected to New Zealand’s House of Representatives between 1975 and 1999, Grey (2002: 25) found that, ‘[f]rom 1988 there was also an increase in [female MPs] claiming to represent women as a group, with 13 of the 16 references that acknowledged women as a constituency after 1988. Women politicians all made such comments after 1988.’ However, she suggests that the capability of women members of the House of Representatives to represent women may be jeopardised in the future by growing popular support for political leaders who decry any form of ‘special rights’ for groups (Grey 2006).

In sum, the literature review shows that a large proportion of women MPs in three Commonwealth countries with strong party discipline (Australian, Canada and New Zealand)
believe they have a responsibility to represent women. This pattern appears consistent, regardless of the political context. However, voting systems present several incentives that could influence how women politicians see their role of representing women.

**Theoretical Framework**

While there is, as mentioned, a rich literature on the subject of the mechanical and psychological effects of electoral systems on the descriptive representation of women in parliaments, these effects on women’s substantive representation have, for the most part, been neglected.

In her seminal work, *The Concept of Representation*, Pitkin (1967) distinguishes four interpretations of political representation: symbolic representation, which embodies an idea or an entity (for example, a flag); formal representation, which refers to institutional rules and procedures according to which representatives are designated; descriptive representation, which refers to the similarities and differences between representatives and the represented; and substantive representation, which calls forth the activities of representation. Work on women and politics have primarily studied the last two interpretations. In terms of descriptive representation, a legislative assembly is said to be representative if its make-up constitutes a miniaturised model or a microcosm of society. This interpretation of representation has been adopted and advanced by supra-national organisations and women’s movements in order to demand more women in parliaments. Substantive representation emphasizes what an elected individual thinks and does rather than underlining who the person is. In fact, substantive representation refers to what Eulau and Karps (1977) call policy responsiveness. While descriptive representation functions somewhat by default (because there are women in parliament, women are therefore said to be represented), substantive representation requires consciousness and deliberate actions: a woman MP must speak and act in favour of the
expectations, needs and interests of women. Again, to do this she must conceive of and orient her role of political representation in this perspective. In sum, to borrow Phillips’ words (1995), while descriptive representation refers to presence, substantive representation refers to ideas.

The mechanical effects of electoral systems concern the conversion of votes into seats. Greater proportionality, for example, favours the election of women (Farrell, 2001: 65-66). Matland (1998) specifies that high district and high party magnitudes contribute to feminising parliaments: the more seats there are to fill and the more seats a party can hope to win, the greater the number of women likely to be elected because the number of eligible positions is likely to extend far enough down the list to encompass women. Party closed-lists consisting of alternating female and male candidates offer even higher chances of increasing the number of women parliamentarians (Gray, 2003; Htun & Jones, 2002; Matland & Montgomery, 2003).

Psychological effects refer to the perceptions that political actors (such as the electorate or the party elites) have of the gains and losses offered by electoral competition. The concept of psychological effects has been extensively used to explain strategic voting, for example, but has not been applied to the political representation of women. Psychological effects could, however, help to explain important factors in the election of women to parliaments, such as the selection process for candidates. As Matland and Montgomery (2003) explain, whether by majority systems or by PR, ‘[t]he electoral system directly effects [sic] female legislative representation, because it shapes the recruitment strategies of party gatekeepers at the nomination phase’ (pp. 31-32). In majority systems, selectorates’ perceptions of the profile of a winning candidate are a considerable obstacle for women who want to be elected to parliament (see, among others, Norris & Lovenduski, 1989; Reynolds, Reilly & Ellis, 2005: 37, 61). In PR, these same perceptions encourage the formation of lists that are attractive to the electorate, in other words, that reflect the social diversity and therefore must include
women (Matland, 2003). Of course, the distinction between mechanical effects and psychological effects of voting systems is not always clear; and it can be expected that these effects interact with one another in influencing the proportion of women in parliaments.

The mechanical and psychological effects of electoral systems on the substantive representation of women remain much less known. A recent study by Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler (2005), which focuses on mechanical effects, is an innovative step in this direction. Using structural equation methods to test the validity of the multidimensional conception of representation, they found that the proportionality of voting systems maintains an indirect link with the substantive representation of women in that this relationship is entirely mediated through descriptive representation: PR systems tend to elect more women and, in greater number, these female lawmakers are better at enacting women’s legislation—all other things being equal.

The psychological effects of voting methods on the substantive representation of women remain a terra incognita in research. However, many studies have shown that voting methods can influence the orientation political actors bring to their roles of representation, though conclusions are not always unanimous. For example, preferential voting encourages candidates to be in touch with the population to develop a personal vote, while PR closed-list systems do not require such solicitation (Bowley & Farrell, 1993; Carey & Shugart, 1995; Farrell & Scully, 2003; Norris, 2004: 260-261; but see Kulisheck & Crisp, 2000). Furthermore, Bowler, Farrell and McAllister (1996) have shown that in constituency-based parliamentary systems (like in Australia and Canada) where the local district organisation exerts a firm control on the candidate selection process for legislative elections, elected officials seem more concerned with giving their role an orientation that will satisfy the expectations of their party than the needs of their constituents (Mitchell [2000] observed the same phenomenon in the PR closed-list systems as well as the preferential voting systems, in
which the rank order of candidates is very difficult to modify). Studies have shown that, generally, in mixed-member systems district MPs devote much more effort to local duties than their list counterparts (Ilonski, 1999; Lundberg, 2002; Stratmann & Baur, 2002). However, researchers do not reach consensus on this observation (Barker et al., 2000; Reed & Thies, 2000).

If knowledge does not allow for an appreciation of the psychological effects of electoral systems on the orientations women politicians give to their role of representing women, several reasons encourage us to believe that these effects exist—at least in theory. First, if in PR systems representation goes through the expression and recognition of political pluralism, in majority systems it implies the incorporation of specificities and their restraint to a unified vision of political governance (Farrell, 2001: 4; Lijphart, 1999: 143; McLean, 1991). This rationale shapes the selection of political candidates: in PR systems, lists are created to reflect societal diversity while in majority representation political actors are presented as neutral and interchangeable (a vision crystallised in the abstract individual on which French republican universalism is based; Scott, 2005: 51-74). Consequently, in theory a woman elected in a PR system would be better equipped than her counterpart elected in a majority system to state that she represents women, not only because her gender played a role in her placement on the list (as for men) but also because the rationality underlying PR makes such an orientation of her representative role legitimate. Second, in multi-seat systems representation generally depends on districts that are larger than those in single-seat constituencies which divide up representation into a collection of small units. One may argue that the first responds better than the second to a basic fact of women’s political representation, that is, that women are not concentrated in only a few districts (as is often the case in ethnic or gay communities, for example) but rather are spread throughout the area. Strictly speaking, in New Zealand (where lists are national) a female list MP can declare that she represents women throughout the
country while her electorate colleague may be more justifies in claiming that she represents the women of her electoral district. Third, as Sawer (1998) explains, unlike majority and single-seat systems, PR does not involve responding to demands from a local electoral district (at least in theory\(^4\)) and, if need be, the management of such requests can be shared by a plurality of representatives. Thus, PR systems give MPs more time to represent nationwide interests (such as women’s issues) rather than having to concentrate on local interests. Fourth, the notion of critical mass suggests that the number of women in parliament may be a political opportunity that can more easily allow female MPs to orient their role of representation towards advancing women’s interests and policy preferences (Dahlerup, 1988). Because PR tends to create greater proportions of women in parliament than majority systems (Norris, 2000), political women elected by the former should feel they have more latitude than women elected by the latter to substantively represent women. Finally, majority systems allow the greatest number of people to impose its will on minorities while PR instead necessitates negotiation and agreement between majority and smaller partners (particularly if these hold the balance of power). However, there is a strong theme in studies on women and politics that suggests that female politicians have a contextual and holistic approach to public policies and that their governing style is humanist and empathetic (Gilligan, 1982; Kathlene, 1998; Lovenduski, 1997; Mackay, 2001; Swers, 2002b; Tamerius, 1995), traits that would all be better expressed in PR. For all these reasons, PR should offer female politicians conditions that facilitate their substantive representation of women.

**Method**

The primary objective of this study is to assess the psychological effects of the voting systems on the substantive representation of women. It examines three Commonwealth countries:

\(^4\) “In theory” because studies show that in practice list MPs are not entirely liberated from such requests (see chapters on countries using mixed-member systems in Gallagher & Mitchell, 2005b).
Australia, Canada and New Zealand. These countries have much in common, including an Anglo-European history and political culture and a British-inspired parliamentary system, in which parties impose a rather strict discipline on MPs. As already stated, party discipline is generally regarded as limiting female MPs ability to represent women—a perception that the present study will verify.

That being said, although all three countries have inherited the Westminster parliamentary tradition, they nevertheless possess diverse and differing electoral systems. Therein lies the first of this study’s strengths: the comparison of three countries that have much in common historically, culturally and politically, but that demonstrate a wide range of voting systems to elect members to their national parliaments (see Table 1). For the most part, Canada still used the electoral system it inherited from Great Britain at the time of its founding in 1867: the first-past-the-post system (FPTP).\textsuperscript{5} New Zealand used the FPTP until 1993, when it replaced it by the mixed-member proportional (MMP) system.\textsuperscript{6} Under this system, some of the members of the House of Representatives are elected by FPTP (electorate MPs) and some by the PR closed-list system (list MPs). The MMP is compensatory: proportional seats are allocated among the political parties on the basis of the number of votes received by each party nationally with the purpose of correcting disproportionality between votes and seats engendered by the FPTP. In Australia, members of the House of Representatives are elected according to the alternative vote (AV), a preferential voting system that, unlike the FPTP,

\textsuperscript{5} In Canada, despite activism by a few groups (such as Fair Vote Canada) and academics (see Milner, 1999; 2004), the question of electoral reform is not on the political agenda. Following Benoit’s reasoning, this may be explained in part by the fact that, in term of seats won in Parliament, an electoral reform does not benefit either of the two parties that traditionally alternate in power and have the wherewithal to bring about such change (Benoit, 2004). Under the Conservative government elected in 2006, the reform of legislative representation instead focuses on proposals to adopt an elected Senate and hold elections on fixed dates.

\textsuperscript{6} Several reasons explain this change, notably the desire to reduce the very strong majoritarian tendencies of the New Zealand FPTP system. In particular, under FPTP, a single party could gain a majority of seats in the House of Representatives, and then form a majority government, with fewer than half the valid votes; Vowles, 2005). Among other factors which created the opportunity to change the electoral system are the Report of the Royal Commission on the Electoral System (which recommended the adoption of the MMP), political elite errors and miscalculations, and two referendums (both of which supported changing the voting system; see Jackson & McRobie, 1998).
requires the candidate to obtain the absolute majority (if necessary, after the distribution of preferences) of valid votes cast in an electoral district in order to be elected. Australian senators, by contrast, are elected through a PR closed-list system. Unlike the New Zealand system in which the lists are national, those used for the Australian Senate elections are based on states (or territories) and do not have a compensatory aspect. Table 1 also presents the level of seat allocation, that is to say, whether constituencies are single or multi-member. As suggested above, it may be suggested that multi-seat districts favour substantive representation of women by offering more latitude to represent national rather than local interests.

Australia, Canada and New Zealand are also different in terms of women’s political rights, women’s presence in parliament and activism in the electoral arena by women’s movements. Female New Zealanders (both Maori and non-Maori) were the first women in the world to gain, in 1893, the right to vote in national elections. Anglo-Australian women in acquired this right in 1902 and Anglo- and French-Canadian women in 1918. Several studies have shown a relationship between the year women obtained the right to vote in national elections and the percentage of female MPs (Mateo Diaz, 2005: 67; McAllister & Studlar, 2002; Norris, 2004: 186), a relationship that is quite reliably illustrated by the three countries presented here. The left-hand column of Table 1 also shows the percentage of women in each legislative assembly at the time interviews with female MPs were conducted. This percentage varies from 21.1% in the Canadian House of Commons to 28.9% in the Australian Senate. The proportions of women among the five groups of MPs can be separated into two categories: those that almost form a 30% critical mass (the Australian senators and the New Zealand electorate and list MPs) and those that remain relatively far from this threshold (the Australian representatives

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7 Australia used plurality electoral systems (single-member plurality and Block vote) for elections to the House of Representatives until 1918, when it adopted alternative (or preferential) voting. The introduction of AV by the Nationalist government was primarily for pragmatic reasons—that is, to limit the potential of vote splitting among the non-Labor candidates (Farrell & McAllister, 2005; 2006: 36-40; Reilly & Maley, 2000).
and the Canadian MPs). Put another way, apart from assessing the influence of voting systems on the orientation of women MPs to the role of representation, the present study will also allow us to evaluate the idea that a critical mass of women legislators favours the substantive representation of women.

The Australian and New Zealand women’s movements on one hand and the Canadian movement on the other have adopted very different relationships with electoral politics. Australian and New Zealander women (including some feminists) have always been highly involved in political parties and have endeavoured to influence electoral politics through organisations such as the Women’s Electoral Lobby (WEL), EMILY’s List and the Women’s Party. The Canadian women’s movement, however, has chosen to avoid electoral strategies, particularly after the second half of the 1980s (for Australia, see Sawer, 2006; Sawer & Simms, 1993: 244-247; for Canada, see Vickers, Rankin & Appelle, 1993: 132-154; Young, 2000: 54-81, 132-182; 2006; for New Zealand, see McLeay, 1993; 2006; Preddey, 2003).

These contrasting attitudes towards electoral politics might have a bearing on women MPs’ understanding of their representative role. For example, Carroll (1992) notes that US female lawmakers connected with women’s groups are more likely to feel responsible for representing women than do their colleagues without such a network.

Wondering whether women parliamentarians seek to substantively represent women, I asked them the following question: ‘Do you think that you have a specific responsibility to represent women?’

This question was submitted to 110 female MPs in Australia, Canada and New Zealand between 2001 and 2004-5. Therein lies another strength and the original goal of this study: interviews with more than one hundred women lawmakers in three different countries using one methodology. Between January and April 2001, 26 female representatives and 19

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8 I should mention that I did not discuss the specific topic of this paper—the psychological effects of voting systems on the substantive representation of women—with interviewees.
senators from the 39th Australian Parliament (1998-2001) were interviewed. This represents a response rate of 81.8 per cent. Twelve of the representatives were from the Australian Labor Party, 12 were from the Liberal Party of Australia and two were from the National Party of Australia. Of the senators, nine were from the Australian Labor Party, six from the Liberal Party of Australia and four from the Australian Democrats. Interviews were held in New Zealand in April and May 2003. Twenty-eight female members of the House of Representatives (16 electorate and 12 list MPs) were interviewed. The response rate was 82.3 per cent. Fifteen of the female MPs interviewed were Labour Party members (14 electorate MPs and one list MP), four MPs were from the National Party (two electorate and two list MPs), four were Green list MPs, three ACT list MPs, one was a New Zealand First list MP, and one a United Future list MP. Thirty seven female members from the Canadian Parliament were interviewed between October 2004 and February 2005. The response rate was 56.9 per cent. The breakdown of participants by party was as follows: eighteen Liberals, nine Bloc Québécois, six Conservatives, and four New Democrats. The interviews were face-to-face and semi-directed. Interviews were held in the offices of the parliamentarians, in Canberra, Wellington and Ottawa, and all were recorded.

**Analysis of the Results**

What effect do voting systems exert on women’s political representation? More specifically, what might be the psychological effects of voting systems on how women MPs conceive of their role in women’s substantive representation? As shown in Table 2, proportionately more women elected in a majority system (notably in the single-seat constituencies used in the

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9 Because this article focused on the impact of the electoral system on substantive representation of women, and because the members of the Senate are appointed and not elected, only women members of the House of Commons were interviewed.

10 The remarkably lower response rate in Canada can be explained by several factors. The minority status of the Liberal government in place may have incited several of this party’s deputies to refuse an interview on their perspective of political representation; in fact, nearly half of Liberal MPs refused. Moreover, some Australian and New Zealand political women may have felt as less threatened by granting an interview to a foreign (i.e. Canadian) researcher.
Australian House of Representatives, the Canadian House of Commons and for the New Zealand electorate MPs) than in a PR one (notably in multi-seat districts used for the election of the Australian senators and New Zealand list MPs) declare that they do not represent women: 23.1% (18/78) versus 16.7% (5/30). The gap is certainly small but it cannot be ignored as it supports, however tentatively, the idea that majority systems are less favourable than PR not only for the descriptive representation of women but also for their substantive representation. However, a clear majority of female MPs elected either by majority or PR systems believe they have a responsibility to represent women. This result concurs with the conclusions of other studies undertaken in countries that have adopted majority systems as well as those that use PR (for majority systems, see the aforementioned works in the Literature Review; for PR see: Freedman, 2002; Vallance & Davies, 1986: 65; Wängnerud, 2000). This pattern persists for political women elected in both single-seat constituencies and multi-seat districts.

This suggests one must be careful with the idea, discussed above, that multi-seat districts would favour the substantive representation of women by offering more latitude than single-seat constituencies to represent national rather than local issues. Moreover, if national lists favour the election of women more than regional lists (because the more seats there are the more women have the opportunity to occupy them; Matland, 1998), this reasoning cannot automatically be transferred to substantive representation. In fact, New Zealand list MPs (who are elected by a national list) are proportionately less likely than Australian senators (elected by a regional or state list) to consider themselves responsible for representing women. Of course, the relatively small numbers surveyed prohibit firm conclusions and are an even less adequate basis for generalisations. This trend is, however, an interesting one and warrants further research. Nonetheless, the fact that women elected in both single-seat and multi-seat districts believe they have a mandate to represent women adds credence to the aforementioned
statement by Bogdanor (1985: 299), that ‘[t]he electoral system is not a fundamental cause of variations in the focus of representation.’

The results shown in Table 2 do not allow us to definitively discredit majority systems in favour of PR in terms of their abilities to substantively represent women. Of course, the smaller proportion of positive responses obtained from Australian representatives could support the view that majority systems are less favourable to women’s substantive representation than PR systems are. However, the percentages recorded for Canadian MPs and particularly New Zealander electorate MPs require us to reject this hypothesis. The case of New Zealand is particularly troubling: proportionately, more electorate than list MPs (14/16 or 87.5% versus 9/12 or 75%) acknowledged having a responsibility to represent women. There are at least two explanations for this intriguing result. The first is that thirteen of the fourteen electorate MPs who endorse the responsibility to represent women were from the Labour Party, whereas only one of the nine list MPs was from that party. As it will be argued shortly, the left-wing parties provide an environment that is relatively conducive to the political representation of women. This highlights the primary role that party adherence plays in MPs’ ideas and behaviours in British-inspired parliamentary systems, despite differences between their voting systems. The second explanation concerns the relative novelty—and therefore the contested legitimacy—of list MPs in New Zealand: in a system historically characterised by locally-based representation, it may be that association with the representation of social identities that ignore territory is not considered by list MPs to be the best way to institute their legitimacy. Therein lies a hypothesis that remains to be tested. As for Australian female representatives, their reluctance to recognise a responsibility to represent women might be explained by the timing of the interviews—that is, during the 2001 pre-electoral period. This may have led some to be prudent in answering my questions.
How can we explain the fact that, in spite of differences between the electoral systems used to elect them, the majority of political women interviewed recognised a responsibility to represent women? The notion of critical mass is not a viable explanation. There is no convincing link between the proportion of female members of any given legislative assembly and the proportion who see themselves as representatives of women. These results contribute to the ever increasing number of studies that seriously question the relevance of critical mass in explaining substantive representation of women (Childs, 2004: 25-27; Grey, 2002; Studlar & McAllister, 2002; Towns, 2003; Tremblay, 2006; Weldon, 2002). We must admit that there is nothing magical about numbers, and that substantive representation of women is above all based on ideas. In this regard, political parties offer a richer explanatory avenue than that of critical mass.

In Westminster-based parliaments, political parties play a huge role in political representation. Their ideologies guide MPs’ opinions and behaviours, creating a framework that culminates in party discipline. In line with the hypothesis that centre and left-wing parties offer more fertile ground for the political representation of women than right-wing parties, it appears from this study that women who reject the mandate of representing women are more likely to be members of a right-wing party (in Canada, the Conservative Party; in Australia, the Liberal and National parties; in New Zealand, ACT NZ and the National Party), while those who support the opposite position tend to belong to parties more to the centre and left of the Australian, Canadian and New Zealand political arenas (most are members of the Australian Democrats, the Australian Labor Party, the Bloc Québécois, the Greens, the Liberal Party of Canada, the Labour Party of New Zealand, and the New Democratic Party of Canada). Moreover, several of those parties (especially the Australian Labor and the New Zealand Labour parties and, in Canada, the Bloc Québécois, the Liberals and the New Democrats) have caucuses of female MPs and/or have ties with women’s groups. These structures and
practices may encourage female MPs’ openness to the substantive representation of women. (The concept of surrogate representation enables a deeper understanding of MPs’ relationships with the women’s movement, as this concept embraces the non-geographical grounding and ideologically committed activities of women’s groups.)

If the electoral system does not influence whether female MPs do or do not recognise responsibility to represent women, do the arguments they put forth to justify their positions vary by electoral system? More precisely, how do women parliamentarians elected by a majority system with single-seat constituencies justify a responsibility that goes beyond the boundaries of their constituencies? Do they put forth the same arguments as female legislators who are elected by a PR system with multi-seat districts?

Generally, there is no more division by electoral system among political women who reject the idea of a particular responsibility to represent women than among those who endorse such a proposition. Both employ the same arguments. The main rationale that Australian, Canadian and New Zealander political women use when they refuse a particular responsibility to represent women is reminiscent of French republican universalism in which representation is not divisible any more on the level of the representatives than it is on the level of the represented: women do not just represent women, and men do not just represent men. In other words, both genders have the same mandate to represent women and men. The universal political representation discourse is expressed by MPs in terms of a claim that they were elected to represent the whole population and not just women. Moreover, several political women argue that, in representing everyone, they are also representing women, as this Australian representative explains: ‘All parliamentarians should be there to speak up for all Australians. You know your whole constituency. If you are doing the right thing by any particular group, ultimately from then on you are (sic) got to be doing the right thing for everybody.’ This perspective echoes the ideas of philosopher and English MP Edmund Burke,
who said, in his famous 1774 address to his Bristol electorate: ‘Parliament is not a Congress of Ambassadors from different and hostile interests; which interests each must maintain, as an Agent and Advocate, against other Agents and Advocates; but Parliament is a deliberative Assembly of one Nation, with one Interest, that of the whole’ (Burke, 1996: 69; italics in original).

A division according to electoral system does, however, appear in that women elected by majority systems in single-seat constituencies say that they represent everyone in their district, while women elected by PR in multi-seat districts say that they represent everyone who voted for their political party, or even everyone associated with a special-interest community (e.g. environmentalists) or with social identities (notably the Maoris in New Zealand). Surprisingly, these MPs did not mention women as one such social identity. Childs (2001b) obtains a similar result: few of the new Labour women MPs elected in 1997 who she interviewed spontaneously mentioned representing women as part of their role in the House of Commons. If, in theory, PR systems favour representation of social identities, in practice such systems do not impose this mandate on politicians blind to such identities.

The arguments developed by women MPs who see themselves as representing women are not distinguishable according to the electoral system in which they were elected. Indeed, these female MPs select from a common pool of arguments, which can be summarised in terms of two basic rationalities. In one, women MPs represent women by default (and sometimes despite themselves). In other words, this responsibility is imposed against their will by forces external to them. In the other rationality, they represent women because of a conviction that stems from their consciousness of sex/gender relations and women’s experiences. The first rationality is closer to the descriptive concept of political representation, whereas the second clearly refers not only to the substantive conception of women’s representation but also to the notion of surrogate representation.
Looked at more closely, the representation of women by default reflects three views developed by female parliamentarians elected through both the majority and the PR systems. In the first, women represent women because of their inherent descriptive traits, particularly because they are women and/or because they are mothers. This form of representation is intrinsic to the body: because there are women and/or mothers in politics, women and/or mothers are represented. This discourse recalls the symbolic dimension of Pitkin’s descriptive representation. A second view is that representing women is only one responsibility among many parliamentary mandates, and, in fact, is the same as representing ethnic minorities, the handicapped people or even men. How does this position differ from that of female MPs who refuse to represent women on the pretext that they represent everyone? The first group expresses a universalist conception of representation that is sensitive to difference, whereas the universalism of this second group denies plurality and diversity. For the first group of politicians, universalism is recognition of difference, while for the second it stems from negation and a lack of sensitivity. A third view of women’s representation by default highlights men’s lack of interest in the representation of women: female parliamentarians must represent women simply because men do not. This discourse is perhaps the closest to the other main rationality used to justify the representation of women, a rationality that rests on a consciousness of sex/gender relations and women’s experiences.

This second rationality covers most women who accept a responsibility to represent women, regardless of the electoral system under which they were elected. To justify their bias in favour of representing women, these female legislators find support in feminist analysis. Thus, many political women consider that women are second-class citizens whose daily existence is marked by various injustices and discrimination that must be put to an end. Hence their mandate to represent women. For many female MPs, their consciousness of women as a social minority reflects their own past and present experiences with sexism. This finding
supports the suggestion of many researchers that women are sympathetic to women’s concerns and perspectives because of their own experience of discrimination (Dovi, 2002; Klein, 1984: 105-122; Sigel, 1996: 63-64). Others claim that they represent women in the name of equality of the sexes and the autonomy of women. Some female MPs base their choice to represent women on the argument that women have different needs, requests and interests from men, which would remain ignored by political governance if they did not take them up on the floor of the legislature. Moreover, the public decision-making process would be deficient without this representation, lacking the input of half the population. Here, it is not a question of simply saying that women represent women because men do not (an argument belonging to representation by default), but rather of recognising that women and men have different life experiences and that groups historically excluded from political governance are better represented by their own kind (Mansbridge, 1999; 2001; Williams, 1998; Young, 1989). Women also say that they represent women because they see themselves as mentors. This is different from the idea of role modelling, which may be seen as a form of default representation. By contrast, mentoring demands consciousness and a larger political vision. Margaret Thatcher may have been a role model for women and girls interested in politics; simply, her presence indicated that it was possible for a woman to be in politics. Yet, Thatcher certainly did not behave like a mentor to women interested in joining politics! Finally, several political women said that they represent women because they are feminists.

Conclusion and Discussion

What might be the psychological effects of voting systems on how women MPs conceive of their role in women’s substantive representation? At first, and contrary to the implications drawn from the theoretical framework, it seems that electoral systems do not influence the way female politicians see their role of representing women. A clear majority of female legislators in Australia, Canada and New Zealand believe they have a responsibility to
represent women, regardless of the majority or proportional nature of the electoral system in which they were elected. Carroll (2002) also points out the emerging significant trend in which political women conceive of their responsibility to represent women without regard for the traditionally recognised factors that give structure to the role of representation: ‘[w]ith a few exceptions, a commitment to representing women was widely shared by congresswomen regardless of their party, ideology, race or ethnicity, tenure in office, or institutional position.’ (p. 56) If, in theory, PR systems set up more latitude for female MPs to substantively represent women, in reality, female politicians elected by a majority system do not in any significant manner feel less responsible to represent women. Moreover, they all draw on essentially the same arguments in justifying their mandate as women’s representatives. In terms of the substantive representation of women, female MPs—whether they are elected by a majority or a PR system—put forth arguments that challenge theories on political representation and voting systems.

Two additional observations arising from this study also bring into question ideas that have so far been taken for granted in considering the substantive representation of women. The first is that the proportion of women in parliaments does not seem to determine the substantive representation of women: whether these women are close to or far from forming a critical mass, female politicians recognise a responsibility to represent women. The second observation is that party discipline is not an insurmountable barrier to substantive representation of women, though belonging to a party further to the right seems create more obstacles.

I suggest that the concept of surrogate representation helps to explain this strong tendency for women in politics to subscribe to the idea that they substantively represent women, despite the different rationales underlying their mandate of representation and regardless of the voting system by which they were elected. As mentioned briefly in the Introduction, surrogate
representation refers to a situation in which a political representative agrees to represent people who the electoral rules do not require her or him to represent since she or he does not maintain an electoral relationship with them (Mansbridge, 2003). This is, therefore, a model of representation that breaks with conventional electoral ties between a representative and a geographically defined electoral district (be it a constituency, region or country) to favour instead a representation based on ideological commitment. In terms of the substantive representation of women, surrogate representation at the very least requires a gender consciousness on the part of the representative (whether female or male)—that is to say, the representative must recognise that sex/gender differences are not neutral but in fact structure the social interactions between women and men. Although it is not necessary for a surrogate representative to be a descriptive representative, the resemblance inspires trust and thus may favour substantive representation (Mansbridge, 1999; Williams, 1998: 241-242).

In sum, surrogate representation not only emancipates political representation from its conventional geographical grounding, but it also encourages representation based on consciousness and social identities by strengthening the relationship between the presence and the ideas. The ideological commitment presumed by surrogate representation ruptures the traditional limits of representation so that all female MPs who wish to do so may characterise their role as one of representing women regardless of electoral system. Therefore, surrogate representation casts a serious doubt on the argument that women elected under a PR system would have more latitude to substantively represent women than would women elected in a majority system.

Future research should explore the dynamic between electoral systems, surrogate representation and the substantive representation of women. It will be important to identify the interactions between the mechanical and psychological effects of the voting systems on the orientation political women take to representing women. For example, is the election by
narrow margins of victory in majority system single-seat constituencies, a mechanical effect of voting systems that influences the orientation that elected officials bring to their roles of representing women (i.e. the psychological effects of voting procedures) in such a way that these legislators are reluctant to represent women substantively? Does preferential voting, which encourages candidates to develop a personal vote and thus to be in touch with organisations in civil society, such as women’s groups, facilitate women’s substantive representation? Do political women have the same room to go from words (i.e. women’s surrogate representation) to actions (i.e. women’s substantive representation) whether they were elected in majority or in proportional systems? What kinds of relationships do female surrogate representatives of women develop among themselves and how does this differ according to whether they were elected in majority or PR ballots? What similarities and differences are there in the connections that female MPs maintain with the women’s movement, according to the voting system that elected them? We can only hope that the increase in the number of women in parliaments and the diversification of electoral systems used in the past decades will stimulate future research on this field.
REFERENCES


(Eds) Gender and the Politics of Rights and Democracy in Latin America, pp. 32-56 (Houndmills: Palgrave).


Table 1. Some Features of the Australian, Canadian and New Zealand Electoral Systems, 2001-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(% of women)</th>
<th>Electoral system</th>
<th>Number of seats</th>
<th>Number of constituencies</th>
<th>Level of seat allocation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia (2001)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House of Rep. (23%)</td>
<td>Majority (alternative vote in SMCs)</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>Single-seat constituencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate (28.9%)</td>
<td>PR—single transferable vote</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>8 (6 States and 2 territories)</td>
<td>State and territory multiseat districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada (2004-5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House of Commons (21.1%)</td>
<td>Plurality system in SMCs</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>Single-seat constituencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand (2003)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House of Rep./Electorate MPs (28.4%)</td>
<td>MMP (Plurality system in SMCs)</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>60 elected SMC seats + 7 Maori districts</td>
<td>Single-seat constituencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House of Rep./List MPs (28.3%)</td>
<td>MMP (PR in one large MMC)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>National multiseat districts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Rose (2000).
Table 2. Responses to the question, ‘Do you think that you have a specific responsibility to represent women?’, from Australian, Canadian and New Zealand Female Parliamentarians, 2001-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
<th>(% of women)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Single-seat constituencies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian House of Representatives*</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian House of Commons</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand House of Representatives (Electorate MPs)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multi-seat districts</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Senate*</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand House of Representatives (List MPs)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* One Australian representative and one senator did not reply to this question.