OUT LGBT POLITICIANS IN CANADA:
A Descriptive Representation Profile*

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A phenomenon that has been growing in Canada, and elsewhere in the Western world, in recent years is the election to political office of out lesbian, gay, bisexual, and Trans* (LGBT) people. According to Andrew Reynolds (2015a), in 2015 there were “132 out LGBTQ MPs in office in 30 countries” (https://lgbtqrightsrep.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/canadalgbtmpcoct14.pdf, accessed 6 May 2017). The British House of Commons shows a particularly high proportion of LGBT members: of the 650 parliamentarians elected in the May 2015 general election, 32 (4.9 percent) declared themselves to be not heterosexuals (Reynolds 2015b; see also Reynolds and Magni 2017). The numbers were less impressive in Canada: following the October 2015 federal election, six (1.8 percent) of the 338 seats in the House of Commons were occupied by out lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) members. Since the 1960s, about 50 out LGB1 politicians have sat in Canada’s federal Parliament or in one of the country’s thirteen provincial and territorial legislative assemblies. Yet, we know very little about these representatives.

That out LGB representatives sit in the House of Commons and the provincial and territorial legislatures raises several questions about the meaning and the scope of their representational roles. What are their sociodemographic profiles? Where and when were they elected? How were they elected – or, in other words, did they face specific obstacles as out candidates (such as LGBTQ-phobia) when running or, on the contrary, did their “outness” deliver some unexpected electoral benefits? What and/or who do they represent – notably, do they claim to speak and act on behalf of “LGBTQ interests”? As a group, do they differ from their straight counterparts – and, if so, in what respects? And what about lesbians and gays in particular: do the former suffer both sexism and lesbophobia and the latter enjoy the privileges attached to being men in a patriarchal society? How do LGB politicians explain their decision to come out of the closet, and what meanings do they confer on the fact that they are out in politics? Do they see themselves as role models for young (and not-so-young) LGBTQ people? Theories of political representation provide some insights to address these questions.

My objective in this paper is to paint a gendered profile of out LGB people elected to legislative office in Canada up to June 2017. More specifically, drawing on a descriptive conception of political representation, I will analyze some of the sociodemographic traits and

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1 In Canada, transsexual or transgender individuals have not yet been elected to Parliament or to the provincial/territorial legislatures – hence the use of the acronym “LGB.”
partisan/political features of out LGB members of legislative assemblies (MLAs) and Parliament (MPs) with an emphasis on gender; in this perspective, gender is not one of numerous independent variables (such as age, education, and occupation) but a substantive variable that cuts across the entire analysis. In the first section of this paper, I will review theories of political representation and present some research results on the descriptive representation of out LGBT politicians. Second, I will briefly describe the methodology that I used to collect and analyze the data. Third, I will present the results of the analysis. As I will show, there is every reason to believe that, like their straight counterparts, LGB politicians constitute an elite and that lesbians/bisexual women and gays/bisexual men differ in several respects. In conclusion, I will consider the scope and the limitations of this study and suggest some directions for future research.

Theories of Political Representation and Demographics of LGBT Representatives

It is a truism to say that representation is a basic tenet of politics. And yet, political representation is a multilayered phenomenon whose components, far from being exclusive or contradictory, are integrated and complementary (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005). When it comes to political representation, a compelling starting point is Hanna F. Pitkin’s *The Concept of Representation*. Pitkin (1967) identifies two broad forms of political representation, “acting for” and “standing for.” The former focuses on the activity of representation (“doing”) and the latter on its embodiment (“being”).

In the “acting for” conception of representation, the representative’s actions and/or opinions “must correspond to or be in accord with the wishes, or needs, or interests, of those for whom he [sic] acts, that he [sic] must put himself [sic] in their place, take their part, act as they would act” (Pitkin 1967: 114). In other words, “acting for” representation “means acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them” (Pitkin 1967: 209). It implies that

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2 Pitkin (1967: 38–59) also distinguishes “formalistic” representation, which refers to a set of institutions, rules, and behaviours under which the people are represented: the rights to vote and to run for office, electoral law, the voting system, political parties, and so on. I do not discuss this idea here.
representatives make decisions in what they perceive to be the interests of the population (or a given constituency, such as a region or a cause).  

The “standing for” conception of representation is based on presence and encompasses two variants, symbolic and descriptive. “Standing for” representation is symbolic when it embodies an idea or entity (human or not). In electoral and legislative politics, symbolic representation has been discussed mostly in terms of its role model functions, such as the effectiveness and legitimacy of electoral and political institutions, identity, and affinity between LGBT politicians and LGBT people/communities. The descriptive variant involves both individual and collective dimensions. In the collective sense, descriptive representation suggests that the demographic makeup of representatives as a group should mirror that of the represented; in other words, a political assembly is conceived of as the microcosm of the society out of which it arises. On the individual level, descriptive representation focuses on persons – essentially, their identity as defined by gender, ethnicity/race, language, religion, and other components. This reading postulates that presence counts: black people are best to represent black people, women to represent women, and lesbians and gays to represent lesbians and gays. But why is this so? Several responses have been suggested. Mansbridge (1999) argues that in certain situations, historically marginalized groups will benefit from being represented by those similar to them with whom they share experiences. Young (2000: 123, 143–44) concurs: “Being similarly positioned in the social field generates a social perspective the inclusion of which in public discussion processes of group representation can facilitate. . . . To the extent that what distinguishes social groups is structural relations, particularly structural relations of privilege and disadvantage, and to the extent that persons are positioned similarly in those structures, then they have similar perspectives both on their own situation and on other positions in the society.” Similarly, Williams (1998: 164–175) sustains that those who are socially excluded have more trust in people who resemble them to represent them, not only because of a shared identity that history (or memory) has shaped as Other, but also because of shared interests and their affects:

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3 It is beyond the scope of this paper to develop a critique of this reading of political representation, but suffice it to say that expressions such as “in the interest of the represented” and “in a manner responsive to them” are far from being clear (and Pitkin recognized this in her work).
... why members of marginalized groups are justified in believing that members of their own groups, on average, are likely to be more trustworthy representatives than are non-members. Not only are group members more likely to understand group members’ interests . . . , but because they are group members the legislation they help to frame and pass will likely affect them just as it affects their constituents. As in the Madisonian model, marginalized group representatives’ own interests as citizens bind them to the interests of their constituents. (Williams 1998: 173; italics in original)4

Williams suggests that conceptions of political representation are not isolated from each other, but overlap and interact. For instance, descriptive representation has a strong symbolic dimension: “The symbolic value of elite social characteristics has long been recognized. Contemporary research has confirmed the traditional view that people feel better if they see authority figures with social characteristics similar to their own” (Ogmundson 2005: 316). The descriptive and substantive forms of representation are intimately linked in such a way that the former is conducive to the latter: “Higher LGBT representation in state legislatures leads to greater substantive representation” (Haider-Markel 2007: 107).

Since Pitkin’s book was published, other conceptions of political representation have been developed, such as Emanuela Lombardo and Petra Meier’s (2014) “symbolic representation of gender,” Jane Mansbridge’s (2003) “surrogate representation,” Andrew Rehfeld’s (2006) “representation as audience’s recognition,” Michael Saward’s (2010) “representative claim,” and Judith Squires’s (2008) “constitutive representation.” Saward’s conceptualization of representation is particularly refreshing; he views it “as a series of contested claims to stand, speak, or act for another” (71). That said, this paper explores the identity of out LGB legislative representatives elected in Canada and, as such, is anchored in the descriptive/individual conception of political representation. What do studies tell us about the identity of out LGBT elected representatives?

4 Again, it is beyond the scope of this paper to critique this argument, but it could be counter-argued that the interests of representatives of marginalized groups are defined less by their initial belonging to a deprived group than by the elite status that they later acquire.
Little information is available on the demographics of LGBT representatives. However, there is no doubt that out LGBT representatives are overwhelmingly male. In his analysis of legislators in some 100 national parliaments between 1976 and 2011, Reynolds (2013) identifies 151 out LGBT MPs in 27 countries, including 32 lesbians, 111 gays, 5 bisexuals and 3 transgender persons, a gender balance of about one female to three males. These numbers support de la Dehesa’s (2010: 124) comment about the relative invisibility within LGBT electoral activism in Brazil of the “L” and the “T” to the benefit of the “G”: “While lesbian and more recently some trans activists have certainly played a significant role in legislative activism in Brazil since the movement’s resurgence in the 1990s, the public face of the LGBT movement in these efforts . . . is, tellingly, still predominantly G” (emphasis in original). That said, more lesbians than ever before are involved in politics as both candidates (Smith and Haider-Markel 2002: 196) and officeholders (Haider-Markel and Moore Bright 2014). Reynolds (2013) also notes, unsurprisingly, that a very small proportion of out LGBT MPs belong to an ethnic minority. More surprisingly, however, he observes that about a third of the LGBT representatives elected in single-member districts represent an urban and liberal constituency; in other words, an overwhelming majority were elected in predominantly rural or suburban ridings. In their study of out LGB candidates in the 2015 UK election, Reynolds and Magni (2017: 27–29) also note their good performance in rural districts. This finding contradicts the conventional wisdom that urban ridings offer the most suitable setting for the election of LGBT candidates. For instance, in their analysis of 101 American cities and 25 counties that have antidiscrimination laws to protect LGBT people, Button, Wald, and Rienzo (1999: 204) conclude that LGBT candidates have a better chance of being elected “in large, diverse communities with sizable gay populations.” Yet, Everitt and Camp (2014) offer a more nuanced picture of the impact that the nature of a constituency can have on electoral success of out LGBT would-be politicians. Analyzing the factors that shaped the electoral success (or lack thereof) of all out LGBT candidates in a federal, provincial, or territorial legislative election in Canada prior to November 2013, they note that first-time LGBT candidates have a better chance of being elected in urban ridings but that this advantage is less significant for candidates who are not “rookies.” Another element that adds to

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5 Even in the most comprehensive study on LGBT elected officials to date, Haider-Markel (2010) does not analyze their demographics.
the complexity of this picture is that LGBT people aspiring to be elected officials are, according to Haider-Markel (2010, 150), “quality candidates,” meaning that they held a local political position or worked for a politician in the past (see also Smith and Haider-Markel 2002: 196).

Not only is information on the demographics of out LGBT politicians sparse, but the analyses available are gender-blind – that is, they consider LGBT elected officials as a whole, whereas in reality this group is dominated by gay men (see above quotation by de la Dehesa 2010). Among the consequences of this analytical blindness are that observations made mainly about gays are inferred to lesbians, bisexual women and men, and Trans* people, and, in turn, “LBT” people and their specificities are rendered invisible. Thus, for example, lesbophobia is subsumed under the now sanitized and politically correct notion of “homophobia,” thus evacuating from the analysis the fact that lesbians experience specific phobia based on their sex, gender, and sexual preferences. Because I am irritated by this subtle discrimination in research, but also because I am a feminist, I will place gender at the forefront of my analysis.

A notable exception to this rule of “phantomization” of lesbians in research is Haider-Markel and Moore Bright’s (2014) paper “Lesbian Candidates and Officeholders.” Although this article does not analyze the demographics (age, education, occupation, religion, and so on) of lesbians in politics, it nonetheless provides some useful information on their partisan and political experiences. Haider-Markel and Moore Bright (2014) report that lesbian candidates run as Democrats and have no particular problem raising money for their election campaigns; most of them receive support from the LGBT community and benefit from positive media coverage – to such an extent that some lesbian candidates feel that, far from being a deficit to their electoral and political experiences, their same-sex sexual preference has been an asset. Indeed, Haider-Markel and Moore Bright (2014) note that lesbian candidates have “a relative advantage compared with their Democratic heterosexual counterparts” (266) and that they “are more politically experienced than the average state legislative candidate” (265). Unfortunately, Haider-Markel and Moore Bright (2014) do not systematically compare women and men, a shortfall that I would like to address in this paper.

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6 This erasure phenomenon is perhaps more evident for bi and Trans* people, whose identity and experiences are simply discounted from the field of political science knowledge. See “Symposium: The State of LGBT/Sexuality Studies in Political Science,” which appeared in *PS* in January 2011.
Methodology

In this paper, I provide a general profile of out LGB MLAs and MPs in Canada up to 2017. Officially, Svend Robinson was the first gay MLA or MP in Canada to come out of the closet (he was first elected in 1979 but stayed in the closet until 1988), but other LGB people were elected before him without their sexual preferences being publicly known (this information was disclosed after their political career ended). This was the case, for example, for Claude Charron, first elected to the Assemblée nationale du Québec in 1970; Richard Hatfield, elected to New Brunswick’s Legislative Assembly in 1961 – when “homosexuality” was a criminal act; Charles Lapointe, elected to the House of Commons in 1974; and Keith Norton, elected to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in 1975. Others were not influenced by Robinson’s revealing of his same-sex desires and practices and remained in the closet after they were elected, such as Dominic Agostino (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 1995–2004) and Ian Waddell (House of Commons, 1979–93, Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 1996–2001). In any event, this analysis ignores LGB MLAs and MPs who were not out of the closet during their legislative career. Why? The objective in drawing a portrait of LGB politicians is to know more about these lesbians/bisexual women and gays/bisexual men who have had the courage to take responsibility for who they were in the eyes of the world, and by so doing to become role models for LGBT people. Closeted LGB politicians pass as heterosexuals, and thus fail to represent LGBT people and communities descriptively and symbolically (that is, they cannot be role models).  

Two categories of variables have been used to paint a profile of Canadian out LGB MPs and MLAs: 1) sociodemographic traits, notably sex/gender, year of birth, ethnic/racial origin, parenthood, schooling and profession; 2) partisan and political features, notably political party, space of election (into the House of Commons or a provincial or territorial legislature, and which province or territory), age at the first election to a legislature, the nature (metropolitan/urban) of 

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7 Of course, closeted LGB politicians can substantively represent LGBT people and communities in the same way that heterosexual politicians do.

8 I use the expression “sex/gender” because I see “sex” as a descriptor for “female” and “male,” whereas “gender” refers to sociocultural processes involve in the manufacturing of “women” and “men.” In other words, “sex” is used to describe and “gender” to explain.
the constituency, LGBT presence in the constituency and whether the officeholder was out at first election, year, electoral status and margin of victory at the first election, length of legislative career, number of elections, and legislative and/or executive roles assumed when in politics. The data were collected from diverse sources, such as the websites of the Parliament of Canada and provincial/territorial legislative assemblies, Statistics Canada, newspapers (both LGBT [such as Daily Xtra] and straight [such as The Globe and Mail]), and specialized LGBTQ websites (such as QueerBio.com hosted by Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies, University College, University of Toronto). In addition, Internet searches under a specific name (for example Agnès Maltais or George Smitherman) were conducted.

The analysis is exploratory and descriptive. Basically, I conducted cross tabulations, means tests, and tests of significance. Possibly as a consequence of my training as a feminist researcher, my analysis breaks out results according to sex/gender.

Results of the Analysis
I will first present the results of analysis of sociodemographic characteristics, and then of partisan and political features.

Sociodemographic profile
As of this writing (May 20179), 47 MLAs and MPs have been identified as out LGB, among them 15 women; two (one woman and one man) are senators. Although the comparison must be performed with care, it appears that the proportion of lesbians and bisexual women among the population of 47 out LGB MLAs/MPs (31.9 percent, 15/47) is well above the proportion of women10 in the House of Commons between 1980 and 2016 (18.7 percent) and slightly above the proportion of women MLAs/MPs in Canada between 2013 and 2016 (27.3 percent; see tables 10 and 11 in Tremblay [forthcoming]). This result is both encouraging and discouraging. It is encouraging because it suggests that the electorate does not doubly discriminate against lesbians

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9 The analysis includes the British Columbia general election of May 2017.
10 It should be noted that this proportion of “women” includes out and closeted lesbians and bisexual women.
due to their gender and sexual preference, an observation that Haider-Markel and Moore Bright\textsuperscript{11} (2014) and Reynolds and Magni\textsuperscript{12} (2017: 27, 34) also support. It is discouraging because male privilege is in no way challenged (that is, gays/bisexual men numerically dominate the group of out LGB representatives), thus defying some LGBT people’s and communities’ claim to be more egalitarian than straight people due to a history of ostracism.

Most out LGB MLAs and MPs (72.1 percent, 31/43) were born before 1969 – that is, in a social context in which same-sex sex was criminalized. In Canada, homosexuality came out of the closet in 1969, and the gay liberation movement took off soon after, with lesbians and gays developing their identities and communities and taking to the street to demand equality and protection against discrimination. By contrast, about a quarter (27.9 percent) of out LGB MLAs/MPs came of age in a society in which same-sex sex was not criminal (which does not mean it was accepted), and the youngest of them matured at a time when LGBT rights had progressed dramatically (from the mid-1980s on). The good news is that the number of out LGB MLAs and MPs who grew up in an allegedly queer-friendly society can only increase in the future, and they will eventually strengthen both the descriptive and the substantive representation of LGBT communities.

It is no surprise that a clear majority (63.8 percent, 30/47) of out LGB MLAs/MPs are of Anglo-Saxon origin, this observation being true for both lesbians/bisexual women (73.3 percent, 11/15) and gays/bisexual men (59.4 percent, 19/32). Although 6 out of 47 (12.8 percent) LGB MLAs and MPs are of other origins,\textsuperscript{13} none is Aboriginal. In both cases, these ethnic/racial groups are underrepresented among LGB MLAs and MPs in comparison with their demographic weight in the population.\textsuperscript{14} But they are not the only ones underrepresented. Indeed, an intriguing

\textsuperscript{11} It would be of interest to see if bisexual women suffer triple discrimination—as women, as (perceived) lesbians, and as bisexual women. In turn, the question arises as to whether they benefit from the privileges accompanying heterosexuality.

\textsuperscript{12} Reynolds and Magni (2017: 33) even found that lesbians/bisexual women Labour candidates in the 2015 UK election increased their party’s vote share by about 1 percent on average.

\textsuperscript{13} The “other origins” category includes, for example, Asian and Latin American.

\textsuperscript{14} For instance, in 2011 foreign-born people represented 20.6 percent of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada 2013a: 4) and Aboriginal people 4.3 percent (Statistics Canada 2013b: 4).
statistic is the low number of lesbians/bisexual women among the subgroup of LGB MLAs and MPs with French ancestry (or French speaking): there are only two lesbians/bisexual women\textsuperscript{15} out of the 11 Francophone LGB MLAs and MPs (18.2 percent), whereas lesbians/bisexual women represent about a third of both the Anglo-Saxon and “other origins” subgroups. It is a bit of a mystery why the gender balance in the Francophone subgroup differs so greatly from that within both the Anglo-Saxon and the “other origins” subgroups. Future research shall address this enigma.

Findings regarding whether these MLAs and MPs have children\textsuperscript{16} are both not surprising and fascinating. Lesbians/bisexual women are much more likely than their male counterparts to have offspring: 81.1 percent (9/11) of lesbians/bisexual women for whom the information was available have one or more children, whereas 35 percent (7/20) of gays/bisexual men are fathers (this gender gap is significant at $P \leq 0.05$). This result is not surprising given the pervasiveness of the ideology of gender\textsuperscript{17} in Canadian society, but it is fascinating in light of the discourse of some 1970s lesbian feminist critics, who framed motherhood as a kind of patriarchal appropriation and exploitation of women’s bodies, and lesbianism as a strategy to escape the slavery of maternity and mothering – to escape the gender system\textsuperscript{18}.

\textsuperscript{15} The two lesbians are currently sitting in the Assemblée nationale du Québec: Agnès Maltais for the Parti québécois and Manon Massé for Québec Solidaire. No Francophone out lesbians/bisexual women have been elected to the House of Commons or to the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick, both legislative spaces with French as an official language.

\textsuperscript{16} It was not easy to find this information, as evidenced by the high proportion of missing data (16 out of 47). Two types of analysis were conducted: one excluding missing data entirely and the other treating a missing value as an absence of children. The latter perspective assumes that LGB politicians now have no reason to withhold knowledge of their offspring because they are under strong pressure homonormalize and because parenthood could be a resource to boost a political career (Stalsburg 2010; more generally, see Thomas and Bittner 2017). The approach used does not change the result.

\textsuperscript{17} A pillar of this ideology is that womanhood and motherhood are constitutive of each other, and goes so far as to posit that women without children are a threat to society (for a short discussion, see Braqué et al. 2017).

\textsuperscript{18} See Wittig 1992.
As a group, out LGB politicians are well educated: 77.8 percent (35/45) hold a university degree – 66.7 percent of lesbians/bisexual women and 83.3 percent of gays/bisexual men. Furthermore, 11 out LGB MLAs/MPs have a master’s degree (26.7 percent of lesbians/bisexual women and 23.3 percent of gays/bisexual men) and 5 (one lesbian/bisexual woman and 4 gays/bisexual men) have a PhD (data not shown). Numerous studies have underlined that people elected in Canadian legislative politics are highly educated (Bourbeau and Émond 1996; House of Commons 2010: 2), and out LGB politicians follow this general tendency.

Higher education paves the way to elite occupation, a trend that emerges among out LGB MLAs and MPs: a substantial majority of them (80.9 percent, 38/47) were employed in a managerial or professional job before they entered legislative politics. However, there is a weak (though statistically significant) gender gap: lesbians/bisexual women are less likely than gays/bisexual men to have held a managerial or professional job before their first election (66.7 percent vs 87.5 percent, P≤0.10). This gap reflects numbers in the general population: although women are as likely as men to practise a liberal profession, they are much less likely to occupy a senior management position (Ferrao 2010, see Table 12). In terms of occupational credentials, out LGB politicians are in tune with their straight political colleagues but positioned professionally well above the standard job occupied by “ordinary” women and men in Canada. In other words, when it comes to education and occupation out LGB MLAs and MPs are no more descriptively representative of LGBT people than straight politicians can claim to be representative of the straight population.

Table 1 A Selected Profile of Out LGB MLAs/MPs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(missing values [mv] or excluded values [ev])</th>
<th>Total (N)</th>
<th>Women (N)</th>
<th>Men (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociodemographic Traits</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex/gender (0 mv)</td>
<td>100.0 (47/47)</td>
<td>31.9 (15/47)</td>
<td>68.1 (32/47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of birth – after 1969 (4 mv)</td>
<td>27.9 (12/43)</td>
<td>27.3 (3/11)</td>
<td>28.1 (9/32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origin – Anglo-Saxon (0 mv)</td>
<td>63.8 (30/47)</td>
<td>73.3 (11/15)</td>
<td>59.4 (19/32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children** (16 mv)</td>
<td>51.6 (16/31)</td>
<td>81.9 (9/11)</td>
<td>35.0 (7/20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University degree (2 mv)</td>
<td>77.8 (35/45)</td>
<td>66.7 (10/15)</td>
<td>83.3 (25/30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management or professional job* (0 mv)</td>
<td>80.9 (38/47)</td>
<td>66.7 (10/15)</td>
<td>87.5 (28/32)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Partisan and Political Features**

| Political party – left-leaning* (0 mv) | 59.6 (28/47) | 73.3 (11/15) | 53.1 (17/32) |
| Legislature – federal (0 mv) | 36.2 (17/47) | 20.0 (3/15) | 43.8 (14/32) |
| Average age (years) when first elected (6 mv) | 42.6 (41) | 47.0 (9) | 41.4 (32) |
| Constituency – metropolitan/urban (2 ev) | 77.8 (35/45) | 85.7 (12/14) | 74.2 (23/31) |
| LGBT presence in the constituency (2 ev) | 44.4 (20/45) | 42.9 (6/14) | 45.2 (14/31) |
| Year of first election – after 2005** (0 mv) | 59.6 (28/47) | 80.0 (12/15) | 50.0 (16/32) |
| Not out when first elected – before 2005 (28 ev) | 47.4 (9/19) | 66.7 (2/3) | 43.8 (7/16) |
| Electoral status at first election – challenger (2 ev) | 33.3 (15/45) | 42.9 (6/14) | 29.0 (9/31) |
| Margin of victory** (2 ev) | 12.0 (45) | 10.7 (14) | 12.5 (31) |
| Legislative career – number of years (24 mv) | 8.83 years (23) | 9.33 y. (3) | 8.75 y. (20) |
| Number of elections – three or more (2 ev) | 44.4 (20/45) | 35.7 (5/14) | 48.4 (15/31) |
| Legislative or executive role (0 mv) | 40.4 (19/47) | 40.0 (6/15) | 40.6 (13/32) |

Level of significance of differences between women and men: *: P≤0.10; **: P≤0.05.

a “Excluded values” means that senators were excluded when the variable was not relevant to them (for example, the variables “electoral status at first election” and “number of elections”).

**Partisan and political features**

As Table 1 shows, out LGB MLAs and MPs as a group are skewed toward the left-hand side of the Canadian political ideological spectrum: about three out of five out LGB MLAs and MPs were elected for a left-leaning political party, notably the federal and provincial New Democrats and, in Quebec, the Parti québécois¹⁹ and Québec Solidaire. This observation is no surprise, as

¹⁹ Historically, the Parti québécois has been associated with progressive rights for LGBT people. For instance, PQ-formed governments amended the Québec Charter of Human Rights in 1977 to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation (Tremblay 2015a), and adopted the Act to Amend Various Legislative Provisions Concerning de Facto Spouses in 1999 and the Act Instituting Civil Unions and Establishing New Rules of Filiation in 2002 which recognized same-sex de facto union and strengthened the rights of homoparental families (Tremblay 2015b). In addition, four out of the six openly lesbians and
historically the New Democratic Party has been an ally of LGBT people and communities\textsuperscript{20} (Everitt 2015; Everitt and Camp 2014). In addition, for years the federal New Democratic Party has enjoyed solid electoral support among LGBT people (Perrella, Brown, and Kay 2012, under review). Nor is it a surprise that significantly more lesbians/bisexual women than gays/bisexual men (73.3 percent vs 53.1 percent) are elected for left-leaning parties. Indeed, the openness of left-wing parties to social minorities (among them LGBT people and women) is well documented (for Canada, see Everitt 2015; for the United States, see Haider-Markel 2010: 66–83; for the international level, see Reynolds 2013). That said, liberal parties at the federal and provincial levels have elected 14 out of 47 (29.8 percent) openly LGB MLAs/MPs. In Canada the “Liberal Party” label groups fairly disparate ideological entities: the “Liberal” parties in British Columbia and Quebec\textsuperscript{21} are quite socially conservative, whereas in Ontario and at the federal level they appear to be more LGBT-friendly. This perception is strengthened by the fact that the leader of the Ontario Liberal Party (and current premier of the province), Kathleen Wynne, is an out lesbian, and the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada (and current prime minister) Justin Trudeau never misses an opportunity to portray himself (and he is perceived) as a strong straight ally of LGBT people/communities. Finally, 2 out of 47 (4.3 percent) openly LGB politicians were Conservatives.\textsuperscript{22} However, one (Scott Brison) was first elected as a Conservative but switched to the Liberal Party later in his career, and the other (Nancy Ruth) was a senator and thus enjoyed a certain amount of freedom of thought and action in relation to her party. The invisibility of out LGB people within the Conservative Party of Canada contrasts dramatically with their visibility
gays elected to the Assemblée nationale du Québec are PQ members; the other two represent the Parti libéral and Québec Solidaire, respectively.

\textsuperscript{20} For a critical analysis of this statement, see DeGagne (under review).

\textsuperscript{21} The Parti libéral du Québec (PLQ) certainly lies to the right in the Quebec political landscape (with the Coalition Avenir Québec) in comparison to the Parti québécois and, especially, Québec Solidaire. That said, the PLQ is not overtly hostile to LGBT people/communities, as the Conservative Party of Canada was under the leadership of Stephen Harper from 2004 to 2015.

\textsuperscript{22} It may be worth noting that three (Progressive) Conservative LGB politicians (Phil Gillies and Keith Norton in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and Richard Hatfield in the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick) were not out during their legislative careers. It seems that (Progressive) Conservative and out gay/bisexual man are irreconcilable identities.
within the Conservative Party of Great Britain. Indeed, following the 2015 general elections the UK House of Commons included 12 Conservative out LGB MPs (the Labour Party had 13 and the Scottish National Party [SNP] 7, for a total of 32; Shariatmadari 2015); this number subsequently increased to 15 (and a total of 37, with 14 Labour and 8 SNP; see Carey 2016: 51).

A little more than one-third of all out LGB legislators in Canada have been elected to the House of Commons (or appointed to the Senate). Interestingly, although this gender gap is not statistically significant, proportionately more than two times fewer lesbians/bisexual women than gays/bisexual men were elected to Parliament; in other words, 4 out of 5 lesbians/bisexual women holding office are MLAs, compared to 4 out of 7 gays/bisexual men. There may be several explanations for this: for instance, provincial or territorial politics is less competitive than federal politics, and thus more winnable by lesbians/bisexual women; or, a legislative career at the provincial or territorial level poses less conflict with family responsibilities. Indeed, as mentioned above, lesbians/bisexual women are more likely than gays/bisexual men to have children. In addition, lesbians/bisexual women are first elected at an older age than are gays/bisexual men: 47 vs. 41 years. Thus, it might be that, like entering politics at a more advanced age, being elected at the provincial or territorial level is a strategy used by lesbians/bisexual women to try to achieve a balance between political ambition and family responsibilities. And yet, this strategy may not suffice, as MLA Jennifer Howard noted to explain her withdrawal from Manitoba politics in 2016: “In 2011, when I ran, I had no children. Now I have two.”

As suggested above, the gender system has a very strong grip on women – even lesbians/bisexual women.

At first glance, that a greater number of out LGB politicians have been elected to provincial or territorial legislatures is no surprise, as these legislatures together have a much higher total number of seats than does the House of Commons. Yet, LGB MLAs are unequally distributed among provincial and territorial legislatures, with three provinces leading the way: British Columbia with 9 out LGB MLAs ever elected (3 lesbians/bisexual women and 6 gays/bisexual men), Quebec with 6 (2 lesbians/bisexual women and 4 gays/bisexual men) and

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23 Probably due to the low numbers of lesbians/bisexual women.

Ontario with 5 (2 lesbians/bisexual women and 3 gays/bisexual men). Alberta had its first three out MLAs elected with the unexpected victory of the New Democratic Party in the 2015 general election, and Manitoba had 2 out LGB MLAs. Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, the Northwest Territories, and the Yukon each had one out LGB MLA. New Brunswick, Nunavut, and Saskatchewan have never had an out LGB member in their respective legislative assemblies. Once again, these results are no surprise: Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, and Alberta are the most populous provinces in Canada and have the highest proportion of urbanized population (Statistics Canada 2011). Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia are home to metropolitan cities known for their vivid LGBT life: Toronto’s Church and Wellesley Gay Village, Montreal’s Le Village gai, and Vancouver’s Davie Village.\footnote{I thank Miriam Smith for this information.} Even though running in a metropolitan or urban-dominated constituency is not a prerequisite for success for out LGB candidates on election day,\footnote{Everitt and Camp (2014) show that the impact of the nature (urban or not) of the riding on electoral success varies depending on variables such as whether or not a candidate is out and whether it is her or his first electoral campaign. Reynolds and Magni (2017) found that the rural electorate is more supportive of out LGBT candidates than are urban voters, a surprising result that they attribute to the fact that “in rural areas families can be more cohesive and the community close knit” (39), thus willing to back one of their own.} clearly it is where most of them are elected: more than 3 out of 4 openly LGB MLAs and MPs represent a metropolitan/urban constituency, this proportion being higher for lesbians/bisexual women than for gays/bisexual men (although this gender gap is not statistically significant). That said, although a clear majority of LGB MLAs and MPs represent metropolitan/urban areas, they are not necessarily elected in constituencies that could be described as “LGBT meccas”; indeed, 3 out of 7 out LGB MLAs and MPs represent a constituency containing identifiable and active LGBT communities.\footnote{Defining “identifiable and active LGBT communities” is a contentious process. The challenge does not arise for large cities such as Calgary, Edmonton, Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, where LGBT communities are well established, but for small cities and towns where such communities are barely identifiable and active. As a consequence, in the present study all constituencies not located in one of the large Canadian cities were considered not to have identifiable and active LGBT communities. Further research should refine this definition.}
observation is that although LGBT candidates are elected mainly in metropolitan/urban constituencies, their election is not conditional on the support of LGBT communities (although this support is certainly welcome). More research needs to be conducted on the contextual factors conducive to the election of LGBT candidates.

Over the years, Canadians have become increasingly supportive of equal rights for LGBT people (Langstaff 2011), a transformation boosted by favourable court decisions, as the opening of civil marriage to same-sex couples illustrates (Matthews 2005). Indeed, the capacity for lesbian and gay couples to unite in civil marriage is emblematic of a liberal approach of equal citizenship for LGBT people.  

However, not only did the doors of civil marriage open in the mid-2000s, but so did those of politics: 60 percent (28/47) of all LGB MLAs and MPs have been elected since 2005. Indeed, when data are broken down by gender, a significant gap (at 5 percent) appears: 80 percent of lesbians/bisexual women have accessed politics since the mid-2000s while this proportion is 50 percent of gays/bisexual men. It could be suggested that, in some ways, the late entrance of lesbians/bisexual women mirrors the delayed access of heterosexual women to legislative politics in Canada (which began to accelerate in the mid-1980s). As well, it should be remembered that, even though they have been historically ostracized due to their non-heterosexuality, gay men have always enjoyed the privileges attached to being male – including political representation. An indication of the unequal status of women and men in politics may be seen in the fact that among LGB people elected before 2005, lesbians/bisexual women were more likely than gays/bisexual men to be closeted. To come out of the closet requires feeling safe – although, ironically, coming out confers self-confidence and power.

That said, it is not possible to argue that the legislative careers of lesbians/bisexual women are systematically weaker than those of gays/bisexual men – there are ups and downs. On the down side, lesbians/bisexual women are proportionately more likely to run their first electoral campaign as “challenger” candidates (42.9 percent vs. 29 percent), whereas gays/bisexual men are proportionately more likely to run as “open seat” candidates (21.4 percent vs 35.5 percent;  

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28 The capacity to marry prompted heated debates within LGBT communities between those for whom marriage was the ultimate proof of equal citizenship and those for whom it was a quintessential act of assimilation or homonormalization.

29 All LGB MLAs and MPs elected from 2005 onward were out of the closet when first elected.
data not shown).\textsuperscript{30} Of course, these gaps are not statistically significant, but they nevertheless give the impression that lesbians/bisexual women are discriminated against when they seek election. In fact, this perception may not been totally false: lesbians/bisexual women win with a smaller margin of victory than do gays/bisexual men (10.7 vs. 12.5; gap significant at 5 percent), a disadvantage attributed largely to the fact that when they run as challengers they win with an average margin of victory of 8.7 percent, whereas gays/bisexual men win with 13.2 percent (gap significant at 10 percent).\textsuperscript{31} On the up side, the duration of the legislative careers of lesbians/bisexual women are statistically the same as those of gays/bisexual men: 9.33 vs. 8.75 years. As well, the proportion of lesbians/bisexual women and gays/bisexual men who have been elected at least three times is statistically identical. Of course, about a third of lesbians/bisexual women find themselves in this situation compared with about half of gays/bisexual men, a gap (non-significant) that reflects the fact that 80 percent of lesbians/bisexual women were first elected quite recently (see above). Finally, lesbians/bisexual women are as likely as gays/bisexual men to undertake legislative (such as whip) or executive (such as minister) roles when elected.

**Conclusion**

My objective in this paper was to provide a general description of out LGB MLAs and MPs in Canada up to 2017, with a special emphasis on gender. There is little doubt that the profiles of LGB MLAs and MPs do not deviate from the fundamental fact, reported in studies on legislators’ profiles, that politicians constitute an elite. Reynolds and Magni (2017: 40) observe, for instance, that the group of out LGB MPs elected in the 2015 UK elections exhibits little diversity, with an overwhelming dominance of white gay men. This is also the case in Canada, where being male, white, a university graduate, and holding a managerial/professional position before entering politics are some of the salient features of all the out LGB MLAs and MPs ever elected. That

\textsuperscript{30}“Challenger” status means that a candidate faces an incumbent MLA or MP; “open seat” status means that the incumbent has stepped down and the candidate faces someone new running for the incumbent’s party (who is an “inheritor” candidate).

\textsuperscript{31}Gender gaps persist under the “inheritor” and “open seat” statuses, but they are not statistically significant: as “inheritors,” the margins of victory are 13.8 percent for lesbians/bisexual women and 17.3 percent for gays/bisexual men; as “open seat,” the margins are 9.5 percent and 7.1 percent, respectively.
said, out LGB MLAs and MPs have some distinctions from their straight colleagues; for instance, they disproportionately represent parties located on the left of the political spectrum and are concentrated in metropolitan/urban constituencies. I will not go further in this argument because I did not compare out LGB and straight MLAs and MPs. I did, however, pay special attention to gender by comparing lesbians/bisexual women and gays/bisexual men.

It comes as no surprise that lesbians/bisexual women and gays/bisexual men have similarities and differences. Among the characteristics that they share, most were born before same-sex sex was decriminalized in 1969, are of Anglo-Saxon origin, and hold a university degree. Most entered politics in their 40s and were elected in metropolitan/urban constituencies in which, for a substantial minority of them, there were identifiable and active LGBT communities. From a statistical point of view, their legislative careers are similar in terms of length, number of elections, and legislative or executive roles assumed.

That said, it also appears that lesbians/bisexual women and gays/bisexual men diverge on several points and, more importantly, most of the differences put lesbians/bisexual women at a disadvantage. For instance, most lesbians/bisexual women entered politics since the mid-2000s (compared with half of gays/bisexual men) and they are much more likely than gays/bisexual men to have children. Yet, several studies have shown that parenthood poses more challenges to the political ambitions of women than to those of men. Lesbians/bisexual women are less likely than gays/bisexual men to hold a managerial or professional position before entering politics. Yet, again, several studies have shown that an elite occupation facilitates the sociopolitical networking so vital to a political career. Lesbians/bisexual women are more likely than gays/bisexual men to be elected for a left-identified party, which is no surprise given the historical openness of the left to social minorities. However, in Canada left-identified parties are certainly less likely to form a government\(^{32}\) than are centrist or right-leaning parties. Another gap between lesbians/bisexual women and gays/bisexual men concerns the margin of victory: among “challenger” candidates, the former win their first election with a smaller margin of victory than do the latter, suggesting that they may run in ridings where their party is weaker. More research needs to be done to better understand this gender gap.

\(^{32}\) For instance, the New Democratic Party of Canada has never formed the federal government, although occasionally New Democratic parties have led provincial governments (including in Alberta in 2015).
This research is the first conducted in Canada (and perhaps anywhere) to systematically compare lesbians/bisexual women and gays/bisexual men. Although Haider-Markel and Reynolds have done very important work, they do not adopt a systematic gender-sensitive approach to their analysis of the presence of LGBT people in politics. Of course, the state of knowledge in this field is so desperately poor that one should not criticize the existing studies! And yet, there is always room for improvement. More importantly, a gender-sensitive approach brings out of the shadows lesbians/bisexual women, who, most of the time, like their heterosexual counterparts, are simply assimilated with the “Law of the Male,” thus becoming phantoms of, and in, knowledge. What is presented as knowledge about LGBT people/communities is in fact knowledge about gays, whose identities and experiences are universalized while those of lesbians/bisexual women are made invisible. In addition, using a gender-sensitive approach makes it possible to shift the focus in order to fight prejudices that plague lesbians/bisexual women – for instance, regarding their parental capabilities. It has been shown that several lesbians/bisexual women in politics have children, and, like their heterosexual counterparts, they must develop strategies for balancing their political ambitions and family responsibilities. It is thus particularly malicious to openly demean their parenting skills, as Tory MPP Monte McNaughton did with regard to out lesbian Ontario premier Kathleen Wynne in February 2015: “It’s not the Premier of Ontario’s job, especially Kathleen Wynne, to tell parents what’s age-appropriate for their children [in terms of sex education]” (quoted in Morrow 2015; emphasis added). Wynne, mother of three, replied, “What is it that especially disqualifies me for the job that I’m doing? Is it that I’m a woman? Is it that I’m a mother? Is it that I have a master’s of education? Is it that I was a school council chair? Is it that I was the minister of education? . . . What is it exactly that the member opposite thinks disqualifies me from doing the job that I’m doing? What is that?”

The research presented here is not without shortcomings, which may, in turn, inspire future studies. First, the demographics of lesbians/bisexual women and heterosexual women elected in politics should be compared. Such a comparison would make it possible to establish whether the profiles of the former and the latter diverge, and, more importantly, whether there is what Fulton (2012) called a “quality gap” according to which lesbians/bisexual women would be more qualified than their straight counterparts as a strategy for compensating for potential
prejudices linked to their non-heterosexual desires and practices. It would also be possible to evaluate more accurately whether lesbians/bisexual women suffer double discrimination – that is, sexism and lesbophobia. Some preliminary results (see above and see also Haider-Markel and Moore Bright 2014) suggest that lesbians/bisexual women are not doubly targeted by sexist and lesbophobic prejudices, but in a study in progress in which I interview out lesbians/bisexual women politicians in Canada, several reported acts of sexism and lesbophobia against them. This issue needs further investigation, because should it be that lesbians/bisexual women are actually or perceived to be doubly discriminated against, would-be lesbians/bisexual women candidates might be severely deterred from running, thus maintaining their underrepresentation in politics.

Second, to encourage an increase in the number of out LGBT MLAs and MPs, further works should identify the electoral ecology associated with victory for out LGBT candidates. Haider-Markel (2010: 66‒83) observes that out LGBT candidates in the United States are not randomly distributed across ridings, but run where they can win (for instance, in urban districts and where the proportions of Africa Americans and Protestant fundamentalists are low). Reynolds and Magni (2017: 36) conclude their paper with the astonishing finding “that being a candidate who was openly lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender more likely increased one’s vote share than decreased it in the 2015 UK election.” They explain this result as follows:

Up until a decade ago, when law and society vilified homosexuality, a gay candidate signaled rebelliousness, deviance and being out of the mainstream: the very essence of abnormality. Thus, a “gay candidate” would attract votes if the voter, gay or straight, shared that otherness, that rebelliousness, a yearning not to be part of the mainstream. But by May 2015 British homosexuals [sic] were no longer deviants with diseases. They were embraced by the establishment and society. A gay candidate now signaled something new to the voter: a sense of progress and empathy – the underdog with a heartwarming story. (38; emphasis in original)

It should be noted, first, that historically it was male homosexuality that the law vilified (UK criminal law did not regulate lesbianism); second, that lesbians/bisexual women were not as present and visible in the public space as were gays/bisexual men (because they were poorer or
caught up with family responsibilities); third, that lesbians/bisexual women were not associated with “diseases” (such as HIV/AIDS); and finally, that very few lesbians/bisexual women (like straight women) have run for election. Therefore, the reasoning that this excerpt expresses is a magnificent example of the “universalizing-the-male/phantomizing-the-female” phenomenon discussed above. Definitely, more research is needed to document identities and experiences of lesbians/bisexual women in electoral politics.

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