

Defining and Measuring Men's Interests

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Abstract

There is a wide literature examining and measuring the representation of “women’s interests”. These interests are usually defined as policy areas of particular importance to women, based on biological difference, socially constructed needs and/or areas of shared gender oppression. The study of “women’s interests” is complicated by the diversity of women, and the risk of essentialising women by trying to make any generalisations that can be applied to women collectively as a group. Intersectional identities and diverse perspectives serve to underscore the heterogeneity of women.

In contrast, men’s interests traditionally receive almost no attention. It is assumed that men do not suffer from gender oppression, and have their interests well met given their over-representation within positions of power. However, these assumptions neglect the fact that men are also heterogeneous and subject to great diversity of identities and interests. This diversity is seldom reflected within male elites, who tend to be drawn from much more narrow sectors of society, indicating that some male interests may be overlooked. Furthermore, there are a number of policy areas that have a distinctive gendered impact on men and which merit greater analysis from a gendered perspective. These include health, education, war, crime, paternity and employment.

This paper outlines a research agenda for identifying and studying men’s interests. It establishes the need to develop research in this area, arguing that this is an important dimension of representation that has remained overlooked. I identify potential “men’s interests” within the policy arena and outline a methodology for identifying further interests that have previously been neglected. I then indicate how it might be possible to test whether these interests are being represented adequately within male-dominated legislatures, and to consider whether more diverse legislatures might enhance the representation of men as well as women.

This paper is among the first ever to address the issue of “men’s interests”. The virtual absence of any literature on men’s interests is a curiosity, given that there is widespread discussion of “women’s interests” within both scholarly and public debate. Why have women’s interests been so painstakingly analysed while men’s interests have been ignored? The answer lies in the origins of curiosity about women’s interests, which arose in a context of women’s severe descriptive under-representation. If women were not themselves present within politics, was it possible to ensure that their interests were represented? Debates about substantive representation, the intersection between identities and interests, presence and power, have all been driven by the dilemma posed by absence.

It is widely assumed that no such dilemma exists for men. Men enjoy descriptive over-representation in almost every legislature in the world¹, so they have ample opportunity to defend their interests. The large numbers of men in politics should allow for more diversity among male representatives, thus avoiding the scenario faced by under-represented groups whereby a small handful of people are tasked with representing the entirety of their social group. Men also enjoy privileged status in society as a whole, so they do not have interests pertaining to endemic discrimination, marginalisation or disadvantage. For all these reasons, there has been almost no uptake of research on men’s interests.

¹ The only exceptions are Rwanda and Bolivia, where women outnumber men, and Andorra, where both sexes share equal representation (www.ipu.org, accessed 11 March 2015)

In this paper, I argue that the assumptions outlined above are flawed, and that men's interests are an important and legitimate area of study that should not be overlooked. While men undoubtedly enjoy a numerical advantage relative to women, it is erroneous to believe that men enjoy descriptive representation. Full descriptive representation entails the representation not only of men per se, but of the full diversity of men, as a mirror of society. Yet we know that this is not the case. The men who wield political power are disproportionately drawn from elite, affluent, ethnic majority backgrounds, and many categories of men remain under-represented, including ethnic minority men, non-heterosexual men, disabled men, men from less privileged social backgrounds, and men who do not feel able to conform to the dominant models of masculinity that prevail within politics (LeBlanc 2009). I label these men the "*minority within the majority*", or "minority men". Existing research does not consider the gendered impact of this under-representation on men. Yet the literature on female under-representation acknowledges the gendered impact of intersectional identities and recognises that the needs and interests of rich women differ from those of poor women, just as those of white women differ from those of women of colour, and so on. If gender intersects with other identities for women, there is no reason to believe that the same is not true for men.

A related problem is the failure to recognise that men, too, are gendered subjects (Collinson and Hearn 1994; Hearn and Collinson 2006). I argue that it is fallacious to view patriarchy as a zero sum game whereby men win and women lose. In many ways, men too are victims of patriarchy, and their interests are not always best served by existing gender roles, even when these roles afford more power to men than to women. Gender stereotypes can be limiting for both sexes, and expectations of masculinity can exclude men and circumvent the free discussion of men's interests. Men are directly affected by their gender, in ways that are not always advantageous, and gender shapes their needs and interests. The perception that all men enjoy advantages based on their gender and the failure to recognise men as gendered subjects may, perversely, serve to hinder the representation of a variety of men's interests, especially those of minority men.

This paper addresses this dilemma by acknowledging and identifying men's interests, as well as proposing a new agenda for researching these interests. I begin by reviewing the literature on (women's) gendered interests, building on existing concepts of representation to illustrate how these might also apply to men. I then develop the notion of men as gendered subjects with gendered interests. I offer an initial overview of policy areas where men have distinctive representational needs as men, and then consider why these needs might not be met adequately despite a seemingly favourable context of male over-representation. I then propose avenues for developing this research and testing empirically the theories outlined in this paper.

Gendered interests

Although there is very little literature available on men's interests, the insights provided by the sizeable literature on women's interests offer a valuable starting point. Many of the lessons to be learned from this literature have application for a study of men's interests, even if no explicit connection is made in the original writings.

The first lesson to be learned is that interests are not, and cannot be, universal to a single sex group (Sapiro 1981). Assuming that all members of one sex share the same common interest in a way that is distinct from members of the other sex is essentialist and reductionist (Mansbridge 1999). The reason for this is that sex is only one cleavage out of many that define us politically. Women are not only women in isolation; they are rich or poor women, white, black, Asian or Latina women, straight, bisexual or lesbian women, right wing or left wing women, and so on. Women's needs, priorities and preferences all vary in accordance with their other traits. It could be argued that the experience of gender oppression is the one common denominator that unites all women under a shared interest (Chappell and Hill 2006; Diamond and Hartsock 1981). Yet, wealthy straight white women might experience gender oppression in a different way to women for whom gender oppression intersects with other forms of discrimination or disadvantage (Crenshaw 1989). Hence, there is no straightforward definition of "women's interests", and the heterogeneity of women means that a wide variety of women must be present within politics in order to ensure the representation of women; a large body of homogenous women will not suffice.

All of these arguments could also hold true for men. While it is less obvious that men share a common experience of gender oppression, given that most gender imbalances favour men, the argument developed below is that patriarchy disserves men as well as women. More important here is the concept of heterogeneity. If men do not share common interests *as men* but rather as sub-categories of men, based on the intersection of their gender with other traits, then a large body of homogenous men will also not suffice for the full representation of men and men's interests. And if men do indeed have interests pertaining to their gender (and it is argued here that they do) then the gendered interests of minority men will be neglected in any democracy where those men are under-represented, no matter how many majority men might hold power.

Second, and relatedly, the interests of some women may be privileged at the expense of others. As Dovi notes, "improving the representation of some women can come at a cost to other women" (2007: 302). Not only are women's interests not universal but they may be competing; advancing some interests may hinder the interests of others. This is particularly the case when the *majority within the minority* are able to define the minority's interests. In other words, elite members from within under-represented groups – such as wealthy ethnic majority women – have the opportunity to define the interests of their group (women) to the exclusion of minority members of that group (such as ethnic minority women) (Young 2000). The *minority within the minority* – namely, those who experience intersectional disadvantage that extends beyond being women – may suffer from "secondary marginalisation" (Cohen 1999: 70) due to the appearance of representation of their interests when this is not in fact the case.

In theory, this scenario also applies to men. The *majority within the majority* – the elite men who do not experience any form of structural disadvantage – are best placed to define men's interests and to promote their own preferences as those of their sex². Just as men may be unaware of women's interests (the "overlooked interests" argument (Dovi 2007; Phillips 1998)), so majority men may be ignorant of minority men's interests. As a result, not

² See Messner and Solomon (2007) for an example of how this happens in the world of sport.

only are the needs of the *minority within the majority* overlooked, but this phenomenon remains invisible. Minority men may appear to be represented by other members of their sex, and their distinct gendered needs might therefore be neglected.

The third lesson from the literature on women's interests is that descriptive representation is particularly important in the context of uncrystallised interests. Interests may be uncrystallised if they are new, and/or if parties and candidates have not yet taken a stance on them (Mansbridge 1999). Men's interests may not be new, but many have not yet been articulated or incorporated into political mobilisation. While men enjoy dominant status in society, there is a risk that their gendered interests have been neglected due to complacency. Women have fought to identify and assert their interests because their interests risked being neglected due to their descriptive under-representation. Men have not fought any such battles, and the gendered dimension of their interests is often overlooked. As a result, some men's interests may remain uncrystallised even though there has been ample opportunity to represent them politically.

On a related note, scholarship has demonstrated that the substantive representation of interests bears, at best, an imperfect relationship to descriptive representation. A small but highly mobilised group of representatives may be more effective than a larger but less dynamic group (Childs and Krook 2008). A smaller group might be more gender conscious, might feel a greater imperative to represent the interests of its sex, and might be less subject to backlash and opposition from other groups (ibid). Conversely, men, as a majority group, might not demonstrate gender consciousness, and might not perceive any need to mobilise as critical actors in defence of other men. Hence, men's majority status might actually serve as a barrier to the articulation and promotion of men's interests.

Finally, it is instructive to consider which policy areas typically considered to be "women's issues" might also have gendered implications for men. This will help to inform the initial assessment, later in the paper, of what men's interests might be. It can be argued that almost every policy area affects both sexes, and that it is therefore perspectives rather than issues that are gendered (Celis 2009). For example, we should not assume that domestic responsibilities are a "women's interest" because they should rightly also be a concern of men. Yet we must also acknowledge that the domestic sphere is the source of many social inequalities between women and men, and women might therefore have a particular interest in addressing these inequalities even if the issue ought to concern both sexes. Sapiro suggests "limit[ing] the conception of [women's] interest[s] to the expansion of rights, liberties, and opportunities for women where these have been denied or inhibited in comparison with those of men" (1981: 705). Hence, women do not necessarily have an inherently greater interest in those areas defined as "women's interests"; rather, it is structures of gender discrimination that make these issues particularly relevant to women. On this view, "men's interests" might concern those policy areas where men experience some form of disadvantage or specific gendered need.

On the issue of abortion, for example, it could be argued that the interests of the father are subordinated to those of the mother (McCulley 1998). A "woman's right to choose" neglects the fact that men are parents too. Arguably, a more egalitarian culture that promotes greater involvement of fathers in their children's lives should also accord fathers more of a say in whether or not to continue a pregnancy. However, while fathers might wish for an

equal role as parents, biology precludes them from taking an equal role in bearing children. It is ethically questionable whether a woman should be allowed to terminate a pregnancy without the father's consent, but it is even more questionable whether a man should be allowed to force a woman to continue with a pregnancy against her wishes (Diggins 1989; Jackson 1999). (Similarly, one could question whether it is fair to expect a man to play a full and involved part in the life of a child that the mother insisted on carrying to term when he was in favour of termination (Evans 2005; McCulley 1998).) While abortion legislation is often framed as a juxtaposition of the rights of the mother against the rights of the foetus, with male politicians, judges and religious leaders often privileging the latter over the former, it is more rare for the debate to consider the rights of the father (Evans 2005). Lack of access to abortion infringes upon women's rights, but free access to abortion can neglect fathers' rights. Finding an equitable solution that respects the needs and wishes of both sexes is not easy. Furthermore, abortion is perhaps the most classic example of an issue which, while identified with women, is in no way associated with a homogenous gendered perspective. Both men and women demonstrate a very wide spectrum of opinions on abortion, ranging from full support to complete opposition, and these opinions are influenced by religion and ideology at least as much as by gender. Abortion thus highlights the complexity of an area where men and women both have distinct gendered interests, even though the issue is only sometimes debated on gendered lines (and then usually as a "women's issue").

Parenthood more broadly is an area where interests are gendered both for women and men. Women are responsible for an excessive share of parenting responsibilities, with corresponding impacts on women's opportunities to engage with public and political life. While parenthood is very time consuming and offers no material reward, and is therefore often framed as a burden upon women, it can also be a very rewarding and joyous experience. Parental leave policies and social expectations of male breadwinners make it difficult for men to be the primary caregiver. While this can be a significant disadvantage for women, who become more burdened as a result, it can also be a disadvantage for men, for whom the choice between going out to work and caring for their children is more constrained. Women and men thus have a mutual interest in changing social norms and policies such that both parents have more freedom to choose how best to balance their working and domestic lives.

Violence against women, including sexual violence, is almost always perpetrated by men. Women, on average, are physically weaker than men and more vulnerable to violent attacks. Even this issue, however, can also be described as a men's interest. Although domestic violence is normally assumed to be inflicted by men upon women, 40% of the victims of domestic violence incidents in the UK were actually men (ONS 2013). Very few resources exist to protect and support men in such circumstances, and social norms also make it difficult for men to defend themselves. Male victims do not necessarily wish to fight back³, but are ridiculed and emasculated if they are seen to "allow" a woman to attack them. Attacks by women on men are portrayed in popular culture as less shocking and morally unacceptable than attacks by men on women; they may even be seen as funny. Videos using

³ Some do, leading COMAB (2009) to argue that addressing female-on-male violence is also a way of reducing male-on-female violence.

actors revealed that when a man attacked a woman in public, people rallied to help her, whereas when a woman attacked a man, bystanders walked on by or merely laughed (*Telegraph*, 26 May 2014; www.mankind.org.uk; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LIFAd4YdQks>). Protecting and defending victims of domestic abuse, and challenging cultural attitudes that find this form of violence acceptable, is clearly an interest for both sexes, albeit in different ways.

Workplace discrimination is another “women’s issue”. Women face both horizontal and vertical segregation, with women experiencing a multitude of disadvantages including glass ceilings, gender pay gaps, and harassment in the workplace. While men appear to be advantaged in comparison, it would be erroneous to assume that men have no gendered needs and interests within the workplace. Work by David Collinson and Jeff Hearn has demonstrated how the construction of masculinities within working environments can be damaging to men (Collinson and Hearn 2005; Hearn and Collinson 2006). Men also suffer from harassment and discrimination when trying to access professions that are traditionally female-dominated, such as childcare and nursing (Allison et al 2004).

It becomes difficult to identify any women’s issue that does not also have gendered repercussions for men. Where an issue is gendered, it affects both sexes even if the needs and perspectives of each sex are different. Moreover, we cannot assume that furthering women’s rights automatically entails a negative outcome for men. To the contrary, the pursuit of gender equality for women must go hand in hand with equality for men. Giving women more opportunity to “act like men” (for example, pursuing intensive careers in male-dominated areas) cannot work unless men also have the opportunity to “act like women” (for example, by becoming more invested in the domestic sphere)⁴. Men’s greater implication in female-dominated aspects of life is as essential for overcoming patriarchy as women’s access to male-dominated aspects. Far from being a zero sum game where women’s rights come at the expense of male privilege, advancing gender equality can offer advantages for both sexes (Bennett 2006; Holter 2014). Levelling the playing field is mutually beneficial when it affords men the opportunity to access roles that have previously been seen as women’s turf. It would be overly optimistic to assume that all, or even most, men are keen to step into women’s shoes⁵, although this may change as the stigma of men doing “women’s work” disappears. But breaking down entrenched gender roles can be advantageous when it affords men the opportunity to engage in activities which can be very rewarding.

It is therefore unfortunate that such public advocacy for men’s rights as does exist is often framed in deeply anti-feminist terms. Organisations lobbying for men’s rights are often symbols of backlash against advances in women’s rights that are seen to be detrimental to men’s privileged status (for example, The Rights of Man (UK), Justice for Men and Boys (UK), A Voice for Men (USA) or the National Coalition for Men (USA); see also Adams

⁴ The concept of “acting like a (wo)man” is, of course, the product of sexist stereotypes. The aim here is to dispel rather than perpetuate these stereotypes.

⁵ While this is a figurative phrase, it can also be interpreted literally. It is far more socially acceptable for a woman to wear trousers than it is for a man to wear dresses and skirts. This stems from a patriarchal conception that anything associated with women must be inferior, such that it is stigmatised for men to adopt anything – including clothing – associated with women. While this inferiorisation of women is undoubtedly most harmful to women, it also places unnecessary limitations on men, especially those men who do not conform to traditional expectations of masculinity.

2013; Buchanan 2012). Such organisations may be openly misogynistic in their agendas, positing a false dichotomy between female and male emancipation and blaming feminism for all of men's woes. While it is therefore tempting to dismiss claims for men's rights as nothing more than a rejection of women's rights, there are two reasons why such organisations should be taken seriously. The first is that not all men's rights activists are motivated by anti-feminist backlash; indeed, some are at the forefront of advocacy for true gender equality (see Ruxton and van der Gaag 2013 for examples). Second, even organisations that are anti-feminist in nature are often born out of frustration with situations where advocacy for women's rights has inadvertently subverted or neglected the legitimate rights of men. Dismissing these claims, even when they are framed in ways that are very negative or antagonising towards feminists, is too simplistic.

We have already identified that many of the areas associated with women's interests are also important for men, albeit in different ways. The next section offers a more systematic (though not exhaustive) exploration of areas that might legitimately be labelled "men's interests".

Men's interests

One of the few existing works to address men's interests directly is by Bob Pease (2002), but he looks at men's motivations to engage with feminism rather than considering men's representational needs. Messner (2004) also considers men's interests, and acknowledges that they are diverse and not always best served by patriarchy, but his focus is on sport. To the best of my knowledge there is no existing work that offers a definition of men's interests that is equivalent to the scholarship on women's interests. Creating such a definition involves drawing on two alternative sources of literature. First, we can draw on scholarship in other disciplines such as legal, sociological and medical studies, as well as studies explicitly on men and masculinities, that illustrate the particular gendered needs of men. Second, men's rights movements (both pro- and anti-feminist) have sought to identify areas where men are perceived to be disadvantaged by their gender. Bringing all of these ideas together is an enormous undertaking and the definition offered here is very much a first attempt that will require much greater research and refinement, hopefully through a funded project.

Paternity and fatherhood

The role of fathers is distinct from that of mothers, both in biological and legal terms. Fathers cannot bear children or lactate, resulting in huge disparities in the provision of maternity and paternity leave. Women need time to recover from birth and to breastfeed an infant, so it is understandable that parental leave has prioritised the mother. However, the role of fathers in the raising of children has received increased recognition in recent years, and a growing number of countries are now increasing the provision of paternity leave in order to provide fathers opportunities to bond with their children, to reduce disparities in career progression between men and women, and to eliminate structural disincentives to hire women. Fathers' role in their children's upbringing is increasingly acknowledged and encouraged.

Obtaining greater access to parental leave is only a small part of the story, however. Ethical and legal issues pertaining to abortion were raised above, with fathers having fewer options than mothers, even when they were misled about the mother's fertility or use of contraception (Evans 2005). Men's groups such as Fathers4Justice protest against the fact that custody agreements more often favour the mother, even though such decisions are based primarily on the needs of the child. There are fewer resources available for fathers who do choose to become primary carers; many playgroups aimed at young children are labelled as "mother and baby" or "mother and tots" groups, and baby change facilities are sometimes located within women's toilets. Stay-at-home fathers can find themselves isolated and socially stigmatised for taking on what is traditionally seen as a woman's role. Men also have more difficulty negotiating flexible working with their employers in order to organise their working lives around childcare arrangements. There are therefore numerous structural barriers that prevent men from being fully involved in their children's lives (Dowd 2010). These barriers reinforce the emphasis on women as primary carers, to the potential detriment of both parents.⁶

The Male Breadwinner Model

The main expectation of fathers is to support a household financially. In some respects, this expectation is an advantage; for example, the perceived greater importance of male incomes is one of the explanations for ongoing gender wage gaps and lower career advancement for women. However, this expectation also places a burden on men. It makes it harder for men to exit the labour market voluntarily in order to focus on a domestic role while their partner becomes the breadwinner. It also diminishes the social standing of men who are unable to work due to disability or chronic unemployment. While women also suffer from being out of work – not least due to the financial repercussions – the social and psychological repercussions can be even more severe for men. The expectation to support a family financially can also exacerbate gender gaps in employment patterns, with men taking on longer working hours to offset the loss of income when a female partner ceases or reduces her employment in order to focus on childcare responsibilities. Men who wish to be more involved in childcare can be prevented from doing so by the demands of long working hours.

Mental health

Mental health disorders (MHDs) affect both sexes, but their effects can be more devastating for men. Rutz and Zimmer note that "men commit suicide 3-10 times more often than women in spite of being only half or less frequently diagnosed as depressive than women" (2009: 249). While women are socialised to be communicative about their feelings, men are taught to suppress their emotions. Men are expected to conceal any sign of "weakness" or vulnerability that contradicts societal expectations of masculinity as being tough and self-possessed (Ruxton and van der Gaag 2013). Children are taught that "boys don't cry", and the free expression of feelings is associated with sexist notions of female inferiority. The consequence is that men lack appropriate outlets for the expression of

⁶ Some men's rights groups also campaign for compulsory paternity tests to prevent women from deceiving men into helping raise children that are not biologically their own, but these arguments are motivated more by misogyny than by a crisis of cuckolding.

negative feelings. It is harder for them to confide in friends, family, partners and doctors (ibid). They are more likely to resort to alcohol and substance abuse, feeding into a negative spiral that can culminate in suicide (Wålinder and Rutz 2001). Mental health requires much greater research, resources and political attention to reduce the stigma attached to having MHDs. Furthermore, the gender roles and stereotypes that dispossess men of the tools needed to deal with emotional problems need to be addressed early in life through education. Mental health is also an example of how men's gender intersects with other identities. Deprivation is positively correlated with suicide rates. Black men are more vulnerable to MHDs due to greater exposure to risk factors such as deprivation and discrimination, and are often unaware of support services or unwilling to acknowledge their condition in public (COMAB 2009). Young gay men are disproportionately likely to attempt suicide (and to succeed) as a result of homophobic bullying (ibid). These intersectional differences are important, because the wealthy white heterosexual men who dominate most parliaments are less affected by MHDs and suicide than many other groups of men.

Physical Health and Life Expectancy

Life expectancy is several years lower for men than women in most countries worldwide (<http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.688>). In some countries this is linked to combat (see below), but it is mostly linked to health and lifestyle. Men are more likely than women to be overweight (COMAB 2009), perhaps as a result of greater pressure on women to diet and lose weight. Men are also more likely than women to smoke and to drink in excess (Men's Health Forum 2014). Men are significantly more likely than women to die from certain conditions such as cancer, with lifestyle factors, reluctance to discuss problems with a doctor, and relatively little attention to prostate and testicular cancer (as opposed to breast and cervical cancer) all being part of the explanation. Finally, risk-taking behaviours are more prevalent in men – another product of culture and socialisation – with men feeling pressure to demonstrate their masculinity and therefore being more likely to drink heavily, ingest harmful substances, drive recklessly and partake in dangerous activities (COMAB 2009).

Education

Boys obtain lower educational outcomes than girls, and the trend is widening. Boys are more likely to leave school without qualifications and less likely to go to university (Times Higher Education 2015). The attainment gap does not appear to be linked to inherent ability, but rather to the ways that boys are taught and socialised. A recent OECD study (OECD 2015) found numerous explanations for male underachievement. These include lower expectations of boys by teachers and teacher bias against boys; social stigmatisation of boys who are studious; a greater preference amongst boys for playing computer games over doing homework; and more negative attitudes towards school among boys. The internalisation of norms of masculinity as boys approach adolescence results in greater levels of disdain for authority and feigned indifference towards study, which is seen as “uncool” (ibid). Boys also lack role models at school, with the majority of teachers being female, especially in primary schools (COMAB 2009). Significant variations in gendered attainment across time and space reinforce the message that these differences are socially constructed

rather than innate, but their consequences for boys are significant and growing. They are again linked to intersectional differences, with boys dominating in both the lowest and highest achieving groups, indicating that privileged social status can make an enormous difference to rates of success.

Violence and crime

The vast majority of violent acts are committed by men, with both male and female victims (COMAB 2009). Masculinities are socially constructed in ways that instil a sense of entitlement in men, encourage them to act tough and defend their turf, and portray women as inferior. Internalising these social lessons may be the foundation of violent acts as men resist any challenges to their status (ibid). Violence is used to assert masculinity and is frequently targeted at perceived threats, including women, ethnic minorities and homosexuals. Ethnic minority groups are also more likely to be prosecuted and sentenced for violent crime, even though a study found that white respondents were more likely to self-report having committed a crime (COMAB 2009; Ministry of Justice 2013). According to the NAACP, African Americans are incarcerated at nearly six times the rate of Whites, and African Americans and Hispanics together comprise 58% of prisoners in the US but only 25% of the US population (NAACP 2015). There is a stark gendered dimension here; one in six black men has been incarcerated, compared to one in a hundred black women (ibid).

As well as perpetrators, men are also often the victims of violence. It can be particularly stigmatising for a man to admit that he has been a victim of domestic violence, rape or sexual assault. According to COMAB (2009), women internalise blame whereas men externalise it, making them more likely to respond to violence with anger and more violence, creating a negative spiral. Men are more likely to be involved in gangs and in violence linked to group identity, such as football hooliganism. Most notably, men comprise the majority of those involved in armed conflict. In some countries only men are allowed to take up arms, and in some countries military conscription is compulsory for men but voluntary or prohibited for women. The association of military service with civic duty and the responsibilities of citizenship has prompted attempts to deny women the rights of citizenship (ie voting) if they do not bear arms⁷. While this interpretation may seem outdated, sexist notions about women's role in state-endorsed violence remain prevalent; in 2013, both Austria and Switzerland rejected referendums proposing to replace compulsory male conscription with voluntary military service for both sexes (Bågenholm et al 2014). Even in a country like the USA, where both sexes can join the military and there is no compulsory conscription for either sex, more than 85% of the armed forces are male (Hylden et al 2014). With women less likely to be placed on the frontline, the sex gap in casualties is even higher: 97.6% of deaths and 98.1% of all casualties in the US military were men (ibid).

Homelessness

Homeless women are arguably more vulnerable than men to violence, especially sexual violence, and one reason why there are fewer homeless women than men is that women go to greater lengths to avoid homelessness because of its many dangers, even when

⁷ Need reference here.

this means entering or staying in an abusive relationships (Gaetz et al 2013). This notwithstanding, the significant majority of people who are homeless or “hidden homeless” are men (84% in the UK, according to Reeve 2011). The causes and consequences of homelessness are too complex to go into here, but it is clear that this is a problem that particularly affects men.

All of the topics indicated above indicate that there are many important areas where men have distinct gendered needs and interests. The list is certainly not exhaustive and requires further development, but it does indicate that not all of men’s needs are being met adequately despite the abundance of male representatives in power. The following section considers why men are not sufficiently represented, before exploring how this could be researched further.

Why aren’t men’s interests already represented?

There are three core explanations for the deficit in the representation of men’s substantive interests: the political culture, the lack of diversity among men, and complacency regarding men’s representational needs.

The political culture in most countries is one dominated not only by men but also by masculinity. In the USA, masculinity dominates presidential elections to the exclusion not only of women but also of men who are not seen as macho enough (Duerst-Lahti 2007). In the UK, the testosterone-charged posturing on the floor of parliament is referred to by Childs (2004: 26) as “willy-jousting”. Masculinity dominates formal displays of political power, as well as informal practices such as drinking cultures, in areas as disparate as New Zealand, Latin America, and Japan (Grey 2002; Htun 2005; Le Blanc 2009). Heckling, jeering and harassment are common practices in parliaments including the UK and France. These cultures of masculinity are so deeply engrained that they are easily mistaken for the cultures of political institutions themselves. In other words, they set the norms of conduct within politics, and voters can come to expect and even demand that politicians adhere to these norms. This can make it very difficult for anyone, male or female, to deviate from these norms.

These norms determine not only the conduct of politicians, but also the parameters of political discussion. As noted above, hegemonic masculinities reject displays of vulnerability or weakness. In a culture of aggression, competition and heckling, it can be difficult to raise sensitive or embarrassing subjects. Attempts to invoke topics such as testicular cancer, mental health, parental leave or the like risks exposing a politician to ridicule, and this can hinder the substantive representation of men in these areas. Ruxton and van der Gaag found this in their research:

Anna Karamanou, former chairperson of the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality of the European Parliament, from Greece, argued that: ‘The expression of feelings is not allowed in this masculine model (‘Men don’t cry’). Men are scorned if they are interested in gender equality issues or if they are involved in housework’.

Interviewees said that traditional masculine attitudes can also make it

hard for men to recognise any problems which suggest vulnerability.
(Ruxton and van der Gaag 2013: 169)

Le Blanc illustrates how models of masculinity can hinder the representation of men: “if men, because they are men, find it difficult to practice certain kinds of important politics, then a political world in which few women participate is gravely distorted – not only because women’s voices are missing but also because gender expectations repress men’s ability to speak for the full diversity of political needs *men* have” (2009: 43, original emphasis). Ironically, these gender expectations can make it harder for men than women to represent men’s interests in these areas. Women have more leeway to deviate from expected patterns of masculinity, and may feel less personal embarrassment about raising such issues. Feminisation of parliaments would also contribute to disrupting and breaking down dominant cultures of masculinity (Murray 2014). If cultures of masculinity hinder the full representation of men, the paradoxical conclusion is that men may need *fewer* men representing them in parliament in order to have their interests better met.

The second barrier to the full representation of men’s interests is the lack of diversity amongst the men elected. As noted above, men are not represented descriptively; while the total number of men in politics is disproportionately high, many subgroups of men – the minorities within the majority - remain under-represented. Yet these groups have distinct, gendered interests. For example, there is an important intersection between ethnicity and gender. Black men face both race and gender discrimination, with lower expectations of attainment at school, higher rates of stop and search by police, more punitive sentencing and so on. Muslim men face negative stereotypes as primitive oppressors of women (Razack 2004). Many disabled men cannot achieve the idealised male physique that is associated with strength and power, and might also be unable to achieve the primary expectation of men within society (breadwinning), and may feel emasculated as a result. The pay gap between disabled and able-bodied employees is significantly wider for men than women (COMAB 2009), indicating that “weakness” is penalised more heavily for men. Non-heterosexual men have distinctive needs related to homophobia, masculinities, as well as issues such as AIDS (which, for a long time, was associated with gay men) and surrogacy (the main way for a man in a same-sex relationship to have a biological child). Meanwhile, expectations and performance of masculinity vary by social class. Men from working class backgrounds assert their masculinity through being tough (physically and emotionally), and denouncing weakness in themselves and others. Gender roles are reinforced through homophobia. In contrast, wealthy men are more likely to assert their masculinity through competitive behaviour, material success, and intellectual dominance, with physical strength being a lesser concern. Privileged men may have no concept of the difficulties faced by working class men who do not conform to their peers’ expectations of masculinity (Collinson 1988). In sum, minority men have specific gendered needs that intersect with their other identities and that therefore cannot be met either by majority men or by minority women.

Finally, male over-representation has led to complacency regarding men’s substantive representation. It is taken for granted that men are adequately represented, and there is scant mobilisation calling for change. The men’s rights movement has gained little traction; one reason is that its main target is feminism. The limitations of existing male elites have largely

escaped criticism in terms of their repercussions for male representation. Feminists focus their attention on women's interests, thus ignoring the consequences for men, and men's interests advocates focus their attention on feminism, thus ignoring the pivotal role played by male over-representation. Nearly all the "mainstream" research on politics focuses on men, but implicitly, without paying any attention to gender. As a result, men's interests have not even been problematised within political studies. The final section proposes a research agenda for addressing this gap in the literature and in public understanding.

How to measure men's interests?⁸

The empirical measurement of men's interests presents numerous difficulties. The first is that the understanding and definition of what men's interests are is still nascent. It is important to tease out those specific areas that represent the *gendered* interests of men (as distinct from women), as opposed to the overall needs of men. Yet there has been so little consideration of men's gendered interests within the political realm that it is unlikely that politicians or voters act consciously on men's interests. Second, the heterogeneity of men's interests makes it harder to determine whether and when men's interests are being met. Third, the male dominance of parliament makes it harder to separate out the representation of men as gendered subjects from the representation of male perspectives more generally. Bearing these caveats in mind, I propose a research agenda for developing this field.

Interdisciplinary literature review

While there is a dearth of work on men's interests within the field of political science, there are many works in other disciplines that focus specifically on men's gendered needs. The emerging field on men and masculinities has its roots primarily in sociology and gender studies but also includes legal studies, business management, psychology, medical research, cultural studies, education research, sexuality studies and media studies⁹. Understanding the policy needs of men as gendered subjects requires a deeper understanding of the wide range of areas in which men have distinctive needs. This knowledge can then be incorporated into the existing political science literature on representation in order to offer a fully developed typology of men's interests equivalent to the existing research on women's interests.

Focus group research

Alongside a literature-based analysis of men's interests, it would be instructive to talk to a wide variety of men and obtain their perspectives directly. It is important to avoid subjective accounts of men's interests created by inadvertent researcher bias; a variety of men must be involved at all stages of the definition process. There may be important issues and/or perspectives requiring representation that would not occur to a researcher who is not directly affected by such issues. Similarly, researchers might place too great an emphasis on things that are of low salience to most men. To ensure that the definition of men's interests is as comprehensive and accurate as possible, a series of focus groups could be conducted with men from a variety of backgrounds – from sport clubs and charities to religious groups and

⁸ This section will be feeding into a grant proposal, so feedback here would be particularly welcome!

⁹ This list is almost certainly not exhaustive.

social networks. This approach presents significant challenges, including identifying a sufficiently diverse range of men and persuading them to take part in frank and open discussions. Nonetheless, it is important to ensure that the full range of viewpoints is considered.

Elite interviews

Interviews with politicians and policy-makers are another way of determining how men's interests are perceived (if indeed they are considered at all). MPs could be asked what they consider men's interests to be; how well those interests are represented; and, where interests are represented sub-optimally, why this might be the case.

Comparative survey research

Available comparative survey data, such as the European Social Survey, can be used to explore men's satisfaction with democracy (including by subgroup), and to look at the things men prioritise. Their perspectives on a variety of policy domains can also be gauged. An advantage of this quantitative focus is that it facilitates comparison over a range of democracies with different social and political cultures and institutional arrangements.

Comparative parliamentary study

A final way of testing the representation of men's interests would be to do a more in-depth study of a few countries with varying levels of male over-representation. The study could examine what legislation exists in areas defined as men's interests, as well as exploring parliamentary debates on relevant topics to see how well men are represented substantively as gendered subjects.

Conclusion

Just as women have distinct gendered needs, so do men. The descriptive under-representation of women has prompted much research on the substantive representation of their interests. In contrast, no such concern exists for men. The descriptive over-representation of men has fostered complacency about the substantive representation of men. As a result, no definition of "men's interests" has ever been offered, and there is no research exploring the political representation of men's gendered interests. Research on gender ignores men, and research on politics (which, for the most part, is research on men) ignores gender.

This study argues that men's descriptive over-representation is not sufficient to guarantee their substantive representation, for three reasons. First, the cultures of masculinity which flourish in male-dominated institutions make it difficult to address sensitive topics and acknowledge male vulnerability, even though it is vulnerable men who are often the most in need of representation. Second, the absence of full descriptive representation of men means that many types of men remain excluded from or under-represented within politics. The interests of minority men (who may in fact comprise the bulk of the male electorate) may be neglected and subjugated to the preferences of majority men. Third, the false impression that all men are well represented leads to complacency and a lack of mobilisation around men's interests.

Where organisations fighting for men's rights do exist, they are often associated with misogyny and anti-feminism. This is ironic given that the founding premise of feminism – gender equality – is entirely compatible with the principle of ensuring equitable outcomes for men. It is even more ironic given that an increase in women's representation (in order to achieve more gender balanced legislatures) might actually be the best way of ensuring that men are properly represented. Improving gender balances in parliament would help to overcome the cultures of masculinity that hinder free expression of the needs of men; it would provide more politicians who are not embarrassed to raise problems affecting men, especially those men who deviate for any reason from idealised notions of masculinity; it would shift the emphasis on women's interests towards recognising the gendered needs of both sexes; and it might promote recognition of the value of diversity within politics, thus potentially opening the door for the descriptive representation of a wider range of men. While feminising legislatures does not guarantee any of the above, it is clear that male over-representation is not in the best interests of either sex. Far from threatening men's interests, gender equality may be their best guarantor.

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