

The Causes and Consequences of Male Over-Representation: A Research Agenda

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Abstract

While there are many studies on gender and politics, nearly all of them focus on women rather than men. And while there are many studies of male elites, almost none of them recognises that men, as well as women, are gendered subjects. We propose a new direction of research that focuses on a gendered analysis of male elites. We are interested in the ways in which male elites reproduce, and the mechanisms by which they wield and maintain power. We consider the networks, socialisation, culture, and patterns of behaviour that reinforce male dominance within politics. We are also interested in masculinity and the way that this manifests itself within the political realm. How does this masculinity influence working environments and cultures, the kind of people who can enter politics and the types of outcomes that might emerge as a result? Finally, we are interested in exploring the domain of men's interests, challenging the notion that these are met automatically in countries where men are over-represented within positions of political power. Examining politics through a gendered focus on men rather than women invites a raft of new questions that have yet to be explored systematically. Our paper proposes a research agenda for opening up a new field of study on men, masculinities and politics. We consider what causes and sustains male over-representation in politics, and what the consequences of male over-representation are for the performance and outcomes of politics.

In any legislature where men outnumber women (as is the case in almost all legislatures worldwide¹), women are under-represented and men are over-represented. Most scholarship pays scant attention to this fact. While most studies of parliaments, policy, governments and power are *de facto* studying men, they do so implicitly, without recognising the existence of gender gaps or the fact that the men within their studies are gendered subjects. And, while many studies of gender gaps in representation do exist, they have privileged the analysis of female under-representation over that of male over-representation. The large literature on female under-representation considers why fewer women enter politics, looking at problems of supply and demand (Krook 2010; Norris and Lovenduski 1995); the consequences of women's under-representation for the substantive representation of women's interests (Celis 2006; Reingold 2006; Swers 2005; Wängnerud 2009); the impact of women's under-representation for symbolic representation, political engagement and sense of inclusion (Beaman et al 2012; Franceschet et al 2012; Koning 2009); and studies of whether women are distinct from men in their legislative behaviour (Mateo Diaz 2005; Reingold 2008). We recognise the huge importance and interest of all of this scholarship. However, it is notable that the emphasis throughout is almost always on women. Our contention here is that the lack of focus on male over-representation is problematic and requires rectification.

There are many reasons why it is important also to study male over-representation. The first is that any explanation of gender gaps in representation is incomplete without considering how male elites reproduce, maintain power and exclude other groups from acceding to power. A focus on male homosocial capital (Bjarnegård 2013) illuminates how male insiders work together to preserve their privileged status. Any understanding of power imbalances requires a focus on how those with power wield it and hold onto it, rather than just looking at how those without power seek to obtain it. This leads to our second argument. An exclusive focus on female under-representation, rather than male over-representation,

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)

risks overstating women's responsibility for their own exclusion. While many studies of women's under-representation do clearly acknowledge male-imposed barriers to women's inclusion (for example, "demand-side" explanations of gender gaps focus on discrimination against women), there is also an emphasis on supply-side explanations that indicate that women might be left out of politics due to their own unwillingness to come forward. To the extent that such unwillingness exists (and it is seldom, if ever, the primary explanation), it is structured by societal messages that women should focus on activities other than politics, and by male-dominated institutions that do not welcome women. Shifting the emphasis towards understanding how these male elites reproduce makes it much more clear how the rules of the game are biased in favour of men, thus dispelling myths that women are excluded due to a lack of interest or merit.

A third reason for exploring male over-representation is to understand how male-dominated environments produce particular patterns of masculinity. All members of the institutional environment become caught up in the masculine norms of behaviour and conduct. Hence, both women and men find themselves compelled to conform to and perform a particular type of masculinity that might not be natural or comfortable for them. One consequence of this performance is that many people, both male and female, self-exclude from politics due to their distaste for this virile performance, or their own perceived inability to conform to the required social norms. The other, related, consequence is that male-dominated institutions may become constrained in their ability to represent issues adequately. The sizeable literature on the substantive representation of women already illustrates the difficulty in legislating effectively for women without their presence in the debate. We push this argument further and contend that all policies, including those most directly affecting men, will be constrained by the male-dominated environment within parliament. If all MPs are performing aggressive forms of masculinity, it will be more challenging to address policies requiring sensitivity, vulnerability and emotion. This will have negative repercussions for men as well as women.

Herein lies our fourth argument in favour of studying male over-representation. At present, the substantive representation of men is taken for granted, given men's descriptive over-representation. However, if male over-representation produces cultures that exclude certain types of men and prevent frank discussion of certain policy areas, men's substantive representation may suffer. An analysis of men's descriptive over-representation should therefore consider whether the consequences for substantive representation are exclusively positive, or whether men might actually benefit from more gender-balanced legislatures.

In the remainder of this paper, we review existing literature, considering what lessons can be learned from the literature focusing on women, and exploring the existing literature that focuses on men. We provide an overview of what we perceive to be the gaps in this literature, the questions that remain unanswered (and, in some cases, unasked), and the agenda for future research in this area. We then consider how our central questions could be addressed and tackled: how do we research the causes and consequences of male over-representation? This research agenda illuminates the importance of looking afresh at the question of gender gaps in representation, and providing rich new answers through a focus on the male side of the coin. Turning questions around to focus on male over-representation instead of female under-representation brings with it methodological challenges as well as opportunities.

Contrasting approaches to gender gaps in representation

What do we already know from the existing literature on gendered representation? Most of the literature focuses on female under-representation, but these works still provide a number of insights that are of use when switching the focus to male over-representation. In

fact, one of the challenges for research in this field is to chisel out which of the identified causes and consequences of female underrepresentation are also causes and consequences of male over-representation. By starting to do this, we can also assess to what extent we need to look in entirely new directions in order to get the full picture. There also exists a (much more limited) literature looking directly at male over-representation that sets the initial parameters for future research.

Studies that explore barriers to women's participation in politics include some analysis of demand-side barriers, whereby male-dominated political parties do not select female candidates to run for office (Evans 2008; Franceschet 2005; Norris 1997). The exclusion of women is normally a consequence of the favouring of male candidates. This preference for men can result from male networks, the grooming of new male candidates to replace retiring male politicians, psychological associations of political success with maleness, and perceived discrimination against women candidates by the electorate (Norris and Lovenduski 1995).² This research thus offers a launch pad for research focusing more directly on these male networks and on the reproduction of male elites.

Another strand of research focuses on substantive and, increasingly, symbolic representation. One of the central questions to emerge in any study of the gendered representation of interests is which interests are gendered (Diamond and Hartsock 1981; Mansbridge 1999; Sapiro 1981)? It is difficult to think of any policy domain that does not affect both sexes, even though it is also the case that almost any policy area might affect men and women in different ways. Scholars have to be careful to avoid essentialising women and reproducing gender stereotypes by labelling certain issues, such as childcare, education, or reproductive rights, as "women's issues" (Celis et al 2008). The risk is that doing so reinforces the notion that these areas are women's prerogatives, thus denying men any responsibility for such things. Another way in which women might be essentialised is in the assumption that all women share the same perspective on any issue, by virtue of their identity as a woman. It is widely recognised within feminist scholarship that this is not the case: women are very heterogeneous and are defined by many cleavages, with gender being only a small part of their overall identity (Dovi 2007; Smooth 2011).

What is often missing from the above analysis is the fact that men, too, are gendered subjects (Hearn and Collinson 2006). Gender also shapes their identities and their interests. While women may have greater experience of gender discrimination than men, it is reductionist to assume that women have policy perspectives and preferences *as women* without acknowledging that the same is true for men. Similarly, if women need to be represented in all their diversity, so do men. The gendered needs of a working-class woman are not the same as those of a middle-class woman. Likewise, a working-class man might have gendered needs that differ from a middle-class man. Dress codes, leisure pursuits, work environments, relations with women, relations with other men, performance of masculinity - all are gendered, as well as being structured by social class. Gender intersects not only with class but also with age, religion, sexual orientation, race and any number of other identities, and this is true for men just as it is for women. Although it is necessary to acknowledge that by critically studying men we study a privileged group, it is also important to acknowledge the multitude of masculinities that exist. Research within the field of critical studies of men and masculinities often talks about hegemonic masculinities in order to point to the fact that there are masculine ideals that men may need to relate to but do not necessarily reach (e.g. Bird 1996; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), but Jeff Hearn (2004) has also pointed out that

² Claims of voter discrimination are not borne out by the evidence (Black and Erickson 2003; Murray et al 2012). It is unclear whether such claims stem from prejudicial beliefs about the viability of women candidates, or whether they are just used as an excuse to prioritise a "favoured son" (Norris and Lovenduski 1995).

while hegemonic masculinities may be a useful concept, we must not forget that we are simultaneously studying the hegemony of men.

In terms of symbolic representation, it is difficult to argue that men as a collective group could feel excluded from politics due to a lack of visible representation. Nonetheless, subgroups of men might suffer from a lack of symbolic representation if they cannot identify with the men in politics. This risks being the case when male politicians are drawn from a narrow, elite subset of the men within wider society. When this happens, politicians are representative neither of women, nor of most men. The feminisation of politics is often expected to bring with it greater diversity; sometimes this diversity is manifested through gender alone, and sometimes through the combination of gender and other characteristics such as race. Even in the latter case, this diversity may not help minority men much, especially if diversity becomes concentrated in women. For example, in France, the Netherlands and Belgium (Celis et al 2014; Murray forthcoming), ethnic diversity has been paired with feminisation, such that the majority of ethnic minority politicians are female. The diversity among female politicians is to be welcomed, but it should come alongside rather than at the expense of diversity for men. Otherwise, men who belong to a racial, sexual or other minority might feel even more excluded, despite belonging to the majority sex within politics.

An additional area of feminist research is the life and culture of political institutions. For example, working hours and practices within legislatures can explain why some parliaments are perceived as unattractive to women candidates (Sawer et al 2006). A male-focused study could explore how these practices are sustained and whether they benefit (all) men. It could also consider whether a macho culture of late sittings, hard drinking and aggressive debate is conducive to the physical and mental health of legislators, and to effective policy-making.

It is clear that many of the principles underpinning scholarship on women in politics are also valid when applied to men in politics. Research on power, resources, access and networks has often already touched on the subject of male domination, and reinforcing this angle helps us better to understand gender imbalances in politics. Research on different types of representation has focused more exclusively on women, but the principles used are equally applicable to men, especially to men who do not belong to the social elites who dominate political life. Scholarship on political environments and cultures has considered how they serve to exclude women; it would be instructive to consider how they also exclude some men and how they impact on the effectiveness of policy-making.

Alongside these insights from studies of women in politics, we can also draw on existing research studying male over-representation, although work in this area is much more sparse. Some studies have examined the quality of male and female representatives to test whether a surplus of male representatives has had a detrimental effect on the quality of representation (Baltrunaite et al 2012; Besley et al 2012; Júlio and Tavares 2010). Murray (2014a) explores this theme further, examining how male over-representation negatively affects the quality of representation for both men and women. She also raises the question of men's interests, a neglected theme within the political science literature that has only briefly been touched upon by Bob Pease (2002). The ability to represent men effectively is linked to institutional cultures, a topic where male dominance has received greater attention, albeit in research by sociologists, gender studies scholars, economists and scholars of business and management. These studies have also pointed to the importance of homosociality and networking for maintaining power and for reproducing male dominance in a number of spheres – but not in the political sphere (e.g. Cockburn 1991; Collinson and Hearn 2005; Holgersson 2013; Ibarra 1992, 1997; Kanter 1977; Kvande and Rasmussen; Lipman-Blumen 1976). Meanwhile, Bjarnegård (2013) offers a rare study looking at the causes of male

dominance in politics, with a particular focus on how clientelist networks help to maintain male rule in developing democracies such as Thailand. Bjarnegård's work builds on earlier studies by scholars such as Robin LeBlanc (2009) which illustrate the pressures on men to conform and perform certain types of masculinity within heavily male-dominated environments.

Future research avenues

The existing literature on gender and politics offers some important and valuable insights, but many questions remain unanswered (and some have yet to be asked). Here, we indicate some of the many avenues of future research that could fruitfully be explored by pursuing a new research agenda focused on male over-representation.

Firstly, there is a need for much more research on how men have managed to maintain their privileged position in politics. One area to consider is the role of male networks, both for accessing and for wielding political power. These networks allow men to create, learn, and reinforce the unwritten rules of the game (informal institutions) that are so important for determining success within political life (Bjarnegård 2013; Kenny 2014). Networks can be used to share information and advantages, recruit men for privileged positions, and train male successors. Networks often go hand in hand with clientelism, nepotism and sexism. All of these mechanisms may serve to exclude women and reinforce male privilege.

If men do benefit from advantages such as networks, insider knowledge, clientelism and similar, it could be argued that they have a head start both when seeking elected office and when working as representatives. When this advantage is invisible to voters, it may lead to the impression that men are better candidates or more effective politicians than women, when in fact they are simply in a more privileged position. There is a risk that this advantage will compensate for any weaknesses that male candidates might have, thus enabling them to succeed in politics where they might otherwise not have been competitive. If stronger candidates are excluded from the political process due to their difficulty competing on an uneven playing field where insider men enjoy an unfair advantage, the result may be to lower the quality of representation for all. Initial studies looking at the quality of politicians, and questioning the impact of gender quotas, found that helping more women overcome male-imposed barriers to politics actually resulted in a net rise in the quality of politicians, indicating that current selection procedures are unmeritocratic and disadvantageous not only to women but also to voters (Baltrunaite et al 2012; Besley et al 2012; Júlio and Tavares 2010).

Research addressing the consequences of male advantage in politics needs to consider not only how this impacts on entry into politics but also how it affects parliamentary work and legislative careers. For example, men with insider knowledge are more strategic in accessing choice committee assignments (Murray 2014b). It would be valuable to know whether male networks are instrumental in other areas, such as getting legislation sponsored and passed, assisting men in accessing positions of power and responsibility, and affording men greater visibility in the public eye. It would be naive to assume that men consciously and consistently work together as a united group against women; men are divided along many lines, not least of which is partisanship, and many men do not purposefully exclude women. Nonetheless, existing work on male homosociality indicates that men do work together to their mutual advantage and to the exclusion of women, whether this happens deliberately or unconsciously (Bjarnegård 2013).

We might therefore conjecture that factors facilitating and constraining legislative careers may be different for men and women, although more research in this area is necessary to confirm this hypothesis. This might contribute to understanding why men's political careers tend to last longer and enjoy more success at the higher echelons. For this reason,

men might understandably be resistant to any attempts to feminise politics and encroach upon their privileged position. There is some research already exploring male resistance to greater numbers of women in politics. For example, Sanbonmatsu (2008) identified the risk of male backlash against women once their numbers were high enough to be deemed a threat to male supremacy. Meanwhile, Puwar (2004) found that men felt threatened by female “space invaders” and therefore felt compelled to close ranks against the new arrivals. Men might feel even greater pressure to perform certain types of masculinity in order to assert their identities in the presence of outsiders. However, it is possible that not all men will react negatively to a feminisation of politics. Some men might welcome the opportunity to change organisational practices and cultures to make them less masculinised and more gender neutral. For example, feminisation might prompt more congenial working hours, more civil working relationships, and less pressure to perform certain types of masculinity. Men might be grateful for the opportunity to tone down and modify their behaviour, especially if they had felt constrained by the cultures of masculinity that thrive within male-dominated institutions. Understanding whether changes in gender gaps prompt men to reinforce patterns of male behaviour, or embrace change, is an area ripe for future research.

A final area that would benefit from significant further development is the question of the substantive representation of men. At present there is very little work in this area, perhaps due to the assumption that descriptive over-representation ensures adequate substantive representation. Indeed, men’s privileged position within society indicates that they are the beneficiaries of favourable political outcomes that cater very well for their interests.

However, such an assumption could be accused of the same essentialism that has dogged many debates on women’s interests – namely, that there are few interests that belong uniquely to one sex, and even fewer where all members of that sex share the same perspective.³ Given the heterogeneity of interests and perspectives among women, it is reasonable to assume that men too are diverse in their interests and preferences. For men’s interests to be met adequately, this diversity would need to be reflected within the cohort of male representatives. In most countries, as noted above, this is presently not the case.

In order to know with more accuracy whether the full range of men’s interests are currently being met, we firstly require research to determine what men’s interests actually are. Adding the concept of men’s interests to the debate on women’s interests would be a conceptual contribution that would make it easier to talk about gendered interests in general, and that would force us to consider the question of when it is relevant to talk about issues as pertaining to a particular group. Determining what constitutes men’s interests would require identifying which policy areas might particularly affect men, as well as identifying men’s gender-specific interests within the full range of policy areas. For example, girls in many countries are now outperforming boys in terms of educational attainment, so it could be argued that men have distinct gendered interests pertaining to education. Secondly, we require research to assess the extent to which men’s interests are represented adequately within masculinised legislatures. If certain groups of men are excluded, certain male interests are uncrystallised, and the masculinised culture within parliaments keeps certain sensitive topics off the agenda, it may well be the case that many men’s interests are not fully represented by male-dominated legislatures.

This then raises the possibility that men, as well as women, might benefit from more diverse and inclusive parliaments. Increasing the internal diversity amongst male representatives would help, as would breaking the cultures of masculinity that make it hard

³ For women, it could be argued that violence (including sexual violence) against women is a valence issue in the sense that all women can agree that it is undesirable and should be stopped. There are few other issues that attract a consensus.

for certain topics to reach the parliamentary agenda. One fruitful avenue of research in this area could explore whether men's interests are better represented in parliaments where representation is gender-balanced rather than skewed towards male dominance.

Methods for Researching Causes and Consequences of Male Over-Representation

How should research on the causes and consequences of male over-representation be conducted? Are there methods or research designs that have proven to be particularly useful for analysing privileged groups in general and the manner in which they have accessed power and the consequences of their power in particular? While this field, as any field, is likely to benefit from a diversity of methods and approaches, there are certain issues that potentially become particularly important when male power is studied. Here, we will outline some of the main challenges ahead as well as exploring promising avenues.

Starting with approaches, much can be gained by a simple rephrasing of the relevant question. The naming of men and male over-representation is important from a linguistic point of view. It changes the way in which research problems are defined and it challenges norms and assumptions existing in research at large, but often also in the researcher her/himself. Naming men as men distinguishes the research undertaken from mainstream research on men, where the power of men is taken for granted, rather than problematized. It also distinguishes itself from research on women, where the relational power-struggle inherent in any gain or loss of power usually serves as a backdrop rather than an object of study. Studying male over-representation implies specifying "the problematic nature of the obvious" (Acker 1990: 140). Duerst-Lahti (2008) claims that we need to "develop the conceptual tools to analyze masculine power advantages, and to recognize the consequences of masculine beliefs and preferences in politics". Naming men as men is thus a way of breaking linguistic barriers in research as well as a necessary step in learning more about how to interrogate the norm. But it is more than semantics; it also leads us in new directions and towards the investigation of different causes and consequences than the ones put forward in research on the representation of women. For instance, while research on the representation of women has often focused on enabling factors such as strong women's movements or efficient quota policies, research on the representation of men is instead likely to zoom in on factors like informal networks or male-biased criteria for recruitment – factors that are usually constraining for women, but enabling for men (Bjarnegård 2013).

An additional observation is that while research on the causes and consequences of the under-representation of women emphasizes the empirical variation in the representation of women in parliaments, this variation is not as emphasized for men in parliaments. Despite the fact that the variation in representation of men directly corresponds to the variation in representation of women, the research tools used are adapted to the study of differences in women's representation, whether it be across time or space. Research has focused on explaining even small differences in the representation of women, deeming levels of representation of women at, for instance, 30%, as relatively high as compared to countries with 15% women in parliament. However, the corresponding numbers of male parliamentary dominance, 70 % and 85%, both seem to signify a consistent male dominance, rather than an empirically interesting difference. Once a country or region has significantly increased its representation of women, the causes for this increase immediately become objects of study (see e.g. Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005; Jaquette 1997; Powley 2005). Likewise, studies of potential effects of increased representation of women are increasingly common, in particular in countries that have seen a rapid increase due to the introduction of gender quotas (see e.g. Franceschet and Piscopo 2008; Zetterberg 2008; Clayton et al 2014). Research should strive to find ways of studying the causes of *both* the persistence of male dominance as well as the

differences between parliaments. Likewise, finding ways to approach consequences of the long-term status quo of male political dominance is important, but we also need to study the impact of a sudden loss of male power. The study of gender is by necessity relational, and the increased political power of women directly signifies a loss of power for some men (Carrigan et al 1987).

Studying causes and consequences of male over-representation may, arguably, be more straightforward methodologically when it concerns change, rather than status quo. First, it is more of a challenge to identify and specify the norm as an object of study. Second, it is difficult to know where to begin if we want to really tackle the causes and consequences of the persistence of male political dominance. Such a focus easily ends up in historical or evolutionary explorations of the origin of patriarchy at large. It may be more useful to focus on understanding how male dominance, today, is maintained and protected as well as explicitly studying the issue focus and policy priorities of male politicians. When designing studies that focus on the causes and consequences of the present persistence of male dominance, the present increasing political inclusion of women can be used instrumentally. While it is inherently difficult to study the norm, simply because it is difficult to pinpoint and define, the challenge of the norm more easily lends itself to scrutiny. The increasing political inclusion of women worldwide poses a challenge to the male norm in politics. Whenever a norm is challenged, it also needs to be defended. When defense becomes manifest, it also becomes possible to study. A status quo that no one challenges hardly needs to be upheld. Finding ways of studying its causes and consequences therefore becomes a tricky game of defining the norm in the first place. When power is challenged, however, actors step up to defend it both in language and in actions that can serve as objects of study (see e.g. Sanbonmatsu 2008; Puwar 2004). Instead of solely focusing on change, one suggested way forward for the field is to try to identify cases where status quo can be studied through manifest resistance. Bergqvist et al (2013) suggest a case selection strategy for focusing on failed cases of gender equality policy adoption that could also be used as inspiration for ways in which to study status quo more broadly.

Male over-representation can and should be studied with quantitative as well as qualitative methods, just as is the case with studies of the representation of women. Both types of studies have often included men in their analyses, but have usually not highlighted this fact as an advantage of the design nor emphasized it in their results. Certainly, any statistical study that uses the proportion of women in parliament as either the independent or dependent variable naturally also – even if implicitly - takes the proportion of men in parliament into account (see e.g. Caul 1999; Matland 1998; Paxton 1997; Rule 1987; Studlar and MacAllister 2002; Wängnerud 2009; Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005). The very simplest way of studying male parliamentary dominance in a statistical study is probably to merely exchange the variable “percentage of women in parliament” with the corresponding percentage of men. It is a very simple thing to do, but nevertheless a replacement that necessitates a different interpretation of results and a language that speaks in terms of male over-representation rather than female under-representation (see Bjarnegård 2013). Quantitative studies are important in order to illustrate trends and to get hard data on the political consequences of being a man instead of a woman: in terms of how men are recruited to politics, what actions they take once they are represented, and what attitudes they have as compared to their female counterparts. Certainly, equipped with new types of questions, future statistical analyses conducted will test for new causal directions, include new variables of interest and highlight the difference of men as well as women.

Experimental studies have been used in many other fields to demonstrate the invisible and unconscious gender bias that exists among recruiters. For instance, Moss-Racusin et al

(2012) conducted an experiment where almost identical CVs were distributed to recruiters who needed a laboratory assistant. The only difference between the CVs was that the name of the applicant was “Jennifer” on some of them and “John” on the others. “John” was consistently considered to be a more suitable candidate than “Jennifer”, despite having the exact same qualifications. Experimental studies have also been used to investigate gendered voter bias and different candidate images (Sapiro 1981; Matland 1994; Matland and Tezcür 2011), thus demonstrating how maleness is often unconsciously confused with competence. Experimental research has also been fruitful in studying the substantive representation of women, not least in India, where randomly chosen seats have been reserved for women, thus making natural experiments possible. Bhavnani (2009) demonstrated that the experience of having had women in politics made it easier for women to stay in politics, because parties had learnt that women can win elections. Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) studied the impact of women’s leadership in village councils on policy decisions and showed that leaders tended to invest in the type of infrastructure relevant to the needs of their own gender. This type of experimental research could also be designed to specifically investigate causes and consequences of male representation.

There are, however, a large number of questions concerning male over-representation that need to be addressed with qualitative research methods: interviews, focus groups, textual analyses, and ethnographic work, to name but a few possibilities (see also Hearn 2013). One challenge of qualitative research is to find ways of unveiling invisible bias that respondents themselves may not even be aware of and that they certainly do not wish to acknowledge. Asking questions about actual behavior and choices, and leaving the analyses of the gendered consequences of the behavior to the researcher is one possible approach. It may, however, be time-consuming because it requires a large number of interviews in order to reveal regularized patterns of behavior. Bjarnegård (2013) interviewed over 100 male members of clientelist networks and found that although few politicians were aware of their recruitment practices having gendered consequences, they could all give very clear explanations as to why they recruited the people they did. Their own rationales could be summarized as two important considerations: they wanted to cooperate with someone whose behavior they perceived that they could trust and predict, and they needed to cooperate with people who had access to important resources. These considerations are highly rational in a clientelist electoral game, but it is only when specifically looking at the high male dominance of these networks and scrutinizing the consequences of these considerations that their gendered impact is evident: people tend to trust members of their own sex to a greater extent than members of the opposite sex and people with access to resources were, in the context that Bjarnegård studied, more often male than female. The homosocial capital needed for electoral success only became visible when the researcher assessed the gendered consequences of seemingly non-gendered – and perfectly reasonable – selection criteria.

While it is important to unveil invisible gendered consequences, it is equally important to start interrogating men as gendered subjects. As of yet, our knowledge of how male politicians view their own mandate and to what extent they feel that they are representing men is limited. Do many male politicians feel that they embody the norm, in that they do not have to represent a certain group of people, or do they feel that they act politically as men? Can male politicians help us identify certain interests that pertain specifically to men? In order to find answers to these questions, we need to start interviewing male politicians about these issues, in order to match the huge number of interviews on similar topics that researchers have conducted with female parliamentarians worldwide. There seems to be a general tendency that the study of the most privileged and powerful often takes place from a distance, due to the perceived difficulties of access and social distance between the researcher and the potential interviewee. Sebastián Madrid has conducted life-history

interviews with what he calls “ruling-class men” and notes a number of differences as compared to other interviews, mainly relating to the fact that the power balance that is often said to be in favor of the interviewer is often reversed. For instance, according to Madrid the ruling-class men he interviewed often started off by interviewing him about his background and upbringing as well as the purpose of his research. The interviewees also intervened and evaluated the ongoing interview. The control of time and space is also, as in much elite interviewing, solely with the interviewee who may be delayed, may not turn up or suddenly have to leave for an unscheduled meeting (Madrid 2013).

The importance of interviewer effects and the importance of reflexivity is also highlighted by Madrid (2013). He claims that his identity as a heterosexual man who also had a background of going to the same elite schools as his respondents was important for initial access, but also for the accessibility of the respondent during the interview. Despite their busy schedule Madrid recounts how, after a brief interview, his respondent spent almost an hour talking to him about ‘masculine topics’. During the interviews some respondents tried to make connections because of his perceived similarity, saying ‘as you know’ or ‘like you and me’ instead of actually telling him what they had experienced. Madrid thus points to some challenges but mainly a sometimes disturbing advantage of similarity between interviewer and respondent. Davison (2007) has pointed to the importance of men interviewing other men to reflect upon the implicit knowledge and understanding they have, as men that may link them to their respondent. Some male researchers have also claimed that it may be more appropriate to keep a distance from their male respondents as opposed to the common advice to feminist researchers to interview women with “solidarity, empathy and friendship” (Pini and Pease 2013: 9).

Many interviewers instead have the opposite experience of clearly being an outsider. This, too, brings about certain advantages and other disadvantages. Being a foreign woman interviewing powerful men can sometimes result in interview situations in which the respondent takes for granted that the interviewer does not know the topic. This can be frustrating, but can also be used instrumentally. It gives the researcher the space to ask the respondent to describe basic issues in detail. Sometimes respondents are driven by an urge to ‘explain how things are done around here’ or to recount shocking anecdotes. As an outsider, the researcher generally does not pose a threat, which can allow respondents to share their experiences more freely. Clearly asserting that respondents are the experts who know the things you are interested in learning more about also entices powerful respondents to act as knowledgeable and experienced mentors (Bjarnegård 2013; Ortbals and Rincker 2009). On the other hand, there are plenty of examples of female researchers’ interviews with men where the power dynamic has been completely reversed in favor of the respondent, resulting in sexist comments or sexual harassment. Such examples thus contradict the proposition that the interviewers always wield more power than their respondents (see Pini and Pease 2013 for some examples). The possibilities of social desirability bias depending on whether a male or female researcher interviews the male respondents has been noted by some researchers (e.g. Williams and Heikes 1993), but has not been systematically studied in the context of interviews with elite men.

Concluding Discussion

The starting-point of this paper was to argue for the necessity of explicitly studying male over-representation in general, and its causes and consequences in particular. Research on the under-representation of women has burgeoned over recent decades and provides an important basis for investigations of male power. It is, however, surprising that so much research has been conducted on one side of a relational power dynamic, while the other side has been ignored or mainly accepted as ‘the normal state of things’. Male political power has been

internalized as a norm, even in the research field that studies gendered power in politics. We here propose a research agenda for how to study male over-representation in politics.

The most important point of the agenda is to convince researchers that men are gendered beings, and that they need to be interrogated as such. The political power of men can and should be problematized and investigated. One important first step is to determine to what extent the causes and consequences of male over-representation are merely the reverse of the causes and consequences identified by research on female under-representation. We show that many of the causes for women's under-representation also explain men's over-representation. For instance, when the male gender is constantly interpreted as competence it gives male politicians a head start, while such stereotypes generally harm women by not depicting them as the 'typical' or 'ideal' politician. Homosocial capital and informal networks often shut women out, while including men. Such practices of inclusion and exclusion may not be conscious, but nevertheless have clear gendered consequences. We know very little about the substantive representation of men, men's interests and to what extent male politicians themselves feel that they represent men, or whether they as representatives have embodied the seemingly gender-neutral norm.

Methodological challenges involve, first and foremost, how to study persistent power rather than change. One suggestion is to actively seek instances where the persistent power is challenged and where resistance is made manifest and researchable. A methodological pluralism is suggested in order to contribute to a full understanding of male over-representation. There are many methodological lessons to learn about interrogating elite men, both in quantitative analyses as well as in qualitative analyses. Some of the lessons learned by feminist researchers when it comes to interview techniques may not be as relevant in interviews with men. For instance, the field of gender and politics is dominated by female researchers, while the critical field of men and masculinities is dominated by male researchers and the impact of the gender of the researcher for the results remains an unanswered question, although there are many suggestions as to how gender matters in the research process. The merging of these two fields is necessary in a research task that aims to answer questions about men in politics.

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