

College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University

DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU

---

All College Thesis Program, 2016-present

Honors Program

---

4-2018

## Nevertheless, She Legislated: A Study of Women Representing Women in Congress

Meghan Mullon  
mkmullon@csbsju.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/honors\\_thesis](https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/honors_thesis)



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Mullon, Meghan, "Nevertheless, She Legislated: A Study of Women Representing Women in Congress" (2018). *All College Thesis Program, 2016-present*. 49.  
[https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/honors\\_thesis/49](https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/honors_thesis/49)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All College Thesis Program, 2016-present by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@csbsju.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@csbsju.edu).

Nevertheless, She Legislated: A Study of Women Representing Women in Congress

An All College Thesis

College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University

By

Meghan K. Mullon

April 2018

PROJECT TITLE:

Nevertheless, She Legislated: A Study of Women Representing Women in Congress

By Meghan Mullon

Approved by:

CLAIRE HAEG

---

Claire Haeg, Professor of Political Science

PHILLIP KRONEBUSCH

---

Phillip Kronebusch, Professor of Political Science

SHEILA NELSON

---

Sheila Nelson, Associate Professor of Sociology

CLAIRE HAEG

---

Claire Haeg, Chair, Political Science Department

JIM PARSONS

---

Jim Parsons, Director, All College Thesis Program

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I must thank my thesis advisor, Claire Haeg. Her guidance and friendship over the course of my academic career has been essential for my formation into a confident, civic-minded woman. I would also like to thank my readers, Phil Kronebusch and Sheila Nelson, for their patience and contribution to my project. This project would also not have been possible without the women in my life who have inspired me with their strength and courage: my mother, Kim, my sister, Cara, my grandmothers, my aunts, and my best friends, Kathryn, Maria, Breana, Sydney, Emily, and Meghan. I also want to thank Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell for uttering the words that inspired the title of my project and for sparking a new wave of feminist engagement in political life. Finally, thank you to all of the women legislators who, nevertheless, persist.

## **Abstract**

Though women make up only a small fraction of the nation's legislature, they are often stronger legislators than their male colleagues. Scholars have also found that, over time, these women pay more attention to issues considered more salient to women voters than their male counterparts do. But do women legislators provide better substantive representation to women in the electorate in comparison to men? This study utilizes methodology outlined by Frisch and Kelly (2003) to determine patterns in congresswomen's committee assignments, and methodology utilized by Michele Swers (2002b) to determine whether women serving in the 111<sup>th</sup>, 113<sup>th</sup>, and 114<sup>th</sup> Congresses were more likely to sponsor women-salient legislation than men were. From there, I aimed to discover whether women serving in Congress have a greater representative responsibility than their male counterparts. I hypothesize that on the whole, men are more likely than women to achieve assignments to prestigious committees while women are more likely to be assigned to committees whose issue jurisdictions are considered more women-salient. I also hypothesize that women are more likely to sponsor women-salient legislation than their male counterparts are. These hypotheses are mostly supported by the data gathered, but the results also show that party control and issue saliency have a great influence over how women choose to provide substantive representation and what structural obstacles stand in the way of them doing so. The data generally points to the conclusion that women in Congress, who often view themselves as representatives of both their constituencies and their entire gender, have a greater representative responsibility than their male colleagues.

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Background</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Literature Review</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<i>The Theory of Representation</i> .....	7
<u>Substantive Representation</u> .....	8
<u>Surrogate Representation</u> .....	10
<u>Descriptive Representation</u> .....	11
<i>Critical Mass Theory</i> .....	12
<i>The Committee Assignment Process</i> .....	14
<i>Electoral/ Reelection Incentives</i> .....	17
<i>Gender Bias/ Gender Perceptions</i> .....	18
<i>Intersectionality</i> .....	20
<u>Black Women</u> .....	21
<u>Other Identities and Intersectional Impact</u> .....	22
<b>Methodology</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>Hypotheses</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>Data and Analysis</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<i>General Information</i> .....	27
<i>Committee Assignments</i> .....	28
<u>Prestige Committees</u> .....	28
<u>Women-Salient Committees</u> .....	32
<i>Bill Sponsorship</i> .....	36
<u>Women’s Health (Salient Issue)</u> .....	36
<u>Preschool Education (Non-Salient Issue)</u> .....	39
<b>Discussion</b> .....	<b>40</b>
<i>Committee Assignments</i> .....	40
<i>Bill Sponsorship</i> .....	43
<b>Improvements for Future Study</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>47</b>

## Table of Figures

Figure 1: Party ID of Women Serving During the 111th, 113th, and 114th Congresses .....	27
Figure 2: Prestige Committee Assignments by Gender.....	29
Figure 3: Prestige Committee Assignments by Gender and Party ID (%) .....	31
Figure 4: Women-Salient Committee Assignments by Gender.....	33
Figure 5: Women-Salient Committees by Gender and Party ID (%) .....	35
Figure 6: Sponsorships of Women's Health Legislation (Expansive) .....	36
Figure 7: Sponsorships of Women's Health Legislation (Restrictive).....	37
Figure 8: Women's Health (Expansive) Sponsorships by Gender and Party ID (%) .....	38
Figure 9: Sponsorships of Preschool Education Legislation .....	39
Figure 10: Preschool Education Sponsorships by Gender and Party ID (%) .....	40

## Introduction

The day is January 26, 2016. Over the weekend, the Washington, D.C. metro area was hit with an intense snowstorm that effectively shuttered all federal government proceedings. East Capitol Street is buried under piles of snow measuring two feet tall, as bulldozers emerge from all corners of the city to exhume the paths intertwining the nation's most treasured monuments. Federal workers and their families are either tucked away in their homes or enjoying the unusual weather by sledding down the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Members of Congress find themselves grounded in their home states, and the halls of the United States Capitol Building stand eerily silent. Not a single footfall dares disturb the peace of the abandoned tunnels leading to the Senate floor. The Rotunda's quiet is vigilantly supervised by Brumidi's rendition of George Washington, gazing solemnly from the ceiling upon his own reflection in a pool of clean marble. Suddenly: a sharp *click*. Then, another. And another. It becomes a rhythm, an echoing crescendo of metal meeting stone as the sound grows ever nearer. It is a sound that is often drowned out in the bustling halls of the Senate office buildings on normal business days. In isolation, however, there is no mistaking its source – high heels on marble.

The only people who showed up to work in Congress on January 26, 2016, were women. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Susan Collins (R-ME) were the only two senators present for the procedural session that day, and they were joined by an all-woman administrative staff – this included all of the parliamentarians, the floor managers, and even the Senate pages. Murkowski's comments while on the floor summed up the uniqueness of the situation: "This was not orchestrated in any way, shape, or form, we came in and looked around and thought that... something is genuinely different, and I think it's genuinely fabulous," she said. "Perhaps it

speaks to the hardiness of women. That [you] put on your boots and put your hat on and get out an slog through the mess that's out there” (Edelman, *NY Daily News*).

## **Background**

The history of women in the United States Congress is a brief one, with the elections of congresswomen relatively few and far between. Prior to the 2016 elections, women held 104 of 535 seats, or 19.4% of available seats, in the national legislature (CAWP 2017). Despite the excitement that revolved around the success of women in the general election that year, the number of women in Congress stubbornly remained at 104. The number of women in the House went from 84 to 83, and the Senate went from 20 to 21 (CAWP 2017). However, the results of this election still display progress for congresswomen from an intersectional standpoint – women of color dominated the freshman picks. According to Amber Phillips of the *Washington Post*, in January of 2017, a record number of women of color (38) started their first terms in the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress (Phillips, *The Washington Post*). While this is an unprecedented number, rejoicing over women gaining such a small percentage of seats in Congress makes the lack of women holding elected office painfully obvious, especially since the most recent general election comes exactly one hundred years after the first congresswoman, Jeannette Rankin, was elected in 1916.

The slow growth of the number of women in Congress is something of a conundrum. With women representatives widely outnumbered by their male counterparts, there arises the concern that women are not being fairly and adequately represented in the national legislature. Do congresswomen have an obligation to represent both their constituencies and women as a whole? If they do, then how do they fulfill that obligation? That is where the impact of substantive representation becomes clear. *Substantive representation* by women for women, the



most poignant form of representation for the purposes of this study, refers to “the ability of representatives to *act* for women constituents as women constituents would act for themselves if they could” (Dodson 2006). Substantive representation is intrinsically connected to how congresswomen view their roles as representatives, as opposed to how the electorate views their roles. This type of representation is integral to the function of other forms of representation, particularly *surrogate representation* and *descriptive representation*. None of these forms preclude the others; in fact, they tend to go hand-in-hand. Substantive representation is often a result of both surrogate and descriptive representation, especially when the representative belongs to a minority group, as is the case with women serving in Congress.<sup>1</sup>

## Literature Review

### *The Theory of Representation*

The essence of what it means to undertake the duty of “representation” is most thoroughly theorized by Hanna Pitkin’s *The Concept of Representation*. At its core, representation is the paradoxical notion of “making present... something that is nevertheless not literally present” (Pitkin 1967, 144). Pitkin posits that representation is trapped in a conflict with the perceived roles that representatives may take on while in office. This conflict is known as the mandate-independence controversy. This controversy manifests thusly: a representative should not be expected to imitate the decisions that his or her constituents would make, as the

---

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this study, the general definition of *women’s issues* includes women’s reproductive health, healthcare, family, domestic violence, gender equality, sex abuse and trafficking, and other issues considered highly salient for women in particular. In addition, *intersectionality* is defined as how differing group-based identities (i.e. race, gender, ethnicity) come together to form one complex personal experience within the greater socio-economic power structure (Crenshaw 1991). During the time period studied, there are two Independent members of the United States Senate. Since they caucused with the Democrats, they will be counted as Democrats wherever relevant when calculating the representation outcomes. During the discussion of bill sponsorship, the importance of *issue saliency* cannot be ignored. For the purposes of this study, let *issue saliency* refer to a “cross-disciplinary concept that refers to the importance of an issue for a given party in a particular election” (Helbling and Tresch 2011; Chaney 2014). Finally, while common vernacular lends the term *congresswomen* or *congresswoman* to women serving only in the House of Representatives, let those variations serve as terms that encompass both women members of the House of Representatives and women members of the U.S. Senate.

constituents are often not adequately informed to make policy decisions. That only leaves one alternative: that the representative must act in a way that is independent of what his or her constituents may desire, but is believed to be the course of action that will be in the best interests of those constituents (Pitkin 1967). So the question is this: is a representative mandated to act on the wishes of their constituents, or to be independent from them in order to further the welfare of said constituents? Pitkin provides no clear answer. “The conceptual principle sets the limit of representation”, she says, “of what we are willing to recognize as representing (or a representative) and what no longer qualifies. If a state of affairs deviates too much in one direction or another, we shall say that it is no longer representation at all (he is simply an oligarch; he is simply a tool)” (Pitkin 1967,166). Thus, there are several types of representation that aim to postulate what makes a representative.

### Substantive Representation

Pitkin’s idea of representation, as it pertains to substantive representation, is strongly rooted in what most people view as conventional representation when it comes to politics. She notes that, “substantive acting for others...[suggests] that the represented thing or person is present in action rather than in the characteristics of the actor, or how he is regarded, or the formal arrangements which precede or follow the action” (Pitkin 1967, 144). Her concept of substantive representation is the base level of the modern definition, founded in action rather than description. The ability of representatives to act on behalf of a group stems from other, more surface-level types of representation suggested by other scholars, which will be further discussed.

The existing research on how congresswomen substantively represent women in the electorate is extensive and thorough. Much of the literature suggests that gender plays a large

role in how congresswomen shape their legislative agendas. Michele Swers further claims that this is apparent in patterns of bill sponsorship. “Gender differences,” Swers states, “are particularly pronounced on the women’s rights policies that can be directly connected to consequences for women as a group” (Swers 2014, 163). Scholars have also found that over time, women who represented the same districts as men sponsored significantly more legislation pertaining to women’s issues than the men who served the same constituency (Swers 2014). Case studies in varying policy areas also yield similar results; Debra Dodson (2006) found that women members of the legislature play an important role in putting issues such as domestic violence and women’s health on the congressional agenda. It is for this reason that key pieces of legislation such as the Violence Against Women Act and a comprehensive research bill allocating funding for women’s health that further created the Office of Women’s Health, were created. They also worked to persuade their colleagues to bring legislation out of committee and onto the floor (Dodson 2006; Swers 2014).

This holds constant among members of other minority groups serving in Congress, as evidence has shown that “officeholders from underrepresented groups tend to introduce new issues to the agenda and affect the political engagement and participation of citizens” (Dolan and Sanbonmatsu 2009, 409). But the question still remains: how do women stand up to the test of substantive representation in comparison to their male counterparts? In short, the scholarship points to the notion that “women legislators tend, more often than men, to make priorities of issues important to women and to introduce and successfully usher those priorities through the legislative process” (MacDonald and O'Brien 2011, 472).

## Surrogate Representation

There are two other types of representation that come together to facilitate a congresswomen's ability to legislate substantively on behalf of other women. The first, while more loosely tied to substantive representation in existing literature than its counterpart, is *surrogate representation*. Jane Mansbridge (2003) defines this as "representation by a representative with whom one has no electoral connection— that is, a representative in another district" (Mansbridge 2003, 522). This stems from a perceived greater responsibility to womankind rather than representation for the purposes of electoral obligation or electoral gain. As more women and members of other minority groups have been elected to Congress, the legislative agenda has greatly expanded to better address the needs of women and minorities (Swers 2002a). Prior research suggests that women members of Congress tend to act as surrogates for all American women, even those living outside of their constituencies (Angevine 2017; Htun 2014; Swers 2002a). Whether this is a result of a perceived obligation to their marginalized group or due to personal interests is up for debate. There are many possible motives for surrogate representation, including a perceived overall moral good stemming from objective interests that look to forward the interests of the country as a whole (Mansbridge 2003). Whatever its motivations, there is much to suggest that surrogate and substantive representation are inherently related; as Mansbridge further states, "In the United States today, individuals and interest groups representing individuals often turn to surrogate representatives to help advance their substantive interests, including their ideal-regarding interests" (Mansbridge 2003, 522). An example of this would be the breaking of Senators Lisa Murkowski and Susan Collins from their party's ranks to block the Republican Party's attempt to repeal the Affordable Care Act in July of 2017. Both disagreed with the new plan's provision to cut funding to Planned Parenthood, with

Collins saying, “Let me be clear that this is not about abortion...this is about interfering with the ability of a woman to choose the health care provider who is right for her. This harmful provision should have no place in legislation that purports to be about restoring patient choices and freedom” (Office of Senator Susan Collins, July 27, 2017).

### Descriptive Representation

As surrogate representation feeds into substantive representation, so does *descriptive representation* into both of its precursors. Many members of marginalized groups may prefer to be represented by “descriptive representatives” or “individuals who in their own backgrounds mirror some of the more frequent experiences and outward manifestations of belonging to the group” (Mansbridge 1999, 628). Descriptive representation refers to both shared physical characteristics and shared experiences between constituent and representative. Mansbridge further concludes that that there are at least four contexts in which members of these groups may prefer to be represented descriptively, two of which are related to improved substantive representation. First, they provide clear communication and identification in contexts of mistrust; and second, they provide innovative thinking in contexts of unarticulated interests (Mansbridge 1999). That is, the descriptive representatives improve dialogue and deliberation of diverse interests both between constituent and representative, and amongst representatives. In contexts of mistrust, it is typical that there is a dichotomous relationship involving a historically dominant group and a historically subordinated one. This relationship is defined by feelings of inattention bordering on arrogance from members of the dominant group and deep distrust on the part of the subordinate group (Mansbridge 1999). This impairs communication and keeps substantive action from being taken on the part of the subordinate group. Descriptive representatives enhance this dialogue by removing the barrier of mistrust from the policy-making context. In the context of

women substantively representing other women, some scholars claim that it is more likely that those who “stand for” women are also more inclined to act on behalf of women (Pitkin 1967; Reingold and Haynie 2014), and descriptive representatives are perceived as having loyalty to their descriptive groups and their interests (Mansbridge 1999; Reingold and Haynie 2014). In addition, descriptive representatives tend to provide clarity when issues on the national docket are new and uncrystalized. As issues arise unexpectedly, a constituent can expect their descriptive representative to react more or less how the constituent would react to those issues. Mansbridge explains: “When interests are uncrystalized, the best way to have one's most important substantive interests represented is often to choose a representative whose descriptive characteristics match one's own on the issues one expects to emerge. One might want to elect a representative from one's own geographical territory, class, or ethnicity” (Mansbridge 1999, 644).

### *Critical Mass Theory*

Some studies suggest that the number of women in a legislative body has a large impact on how those women legislate. *Critical mass* refers to the number of women needed in a given legislative body to gain visibility and to create a unified group so “their attitudes and behaviors will permeate the mainstream” (Gelb 2002, 431-32). The exact number of women needed in a legislative body to achieve critical mass is largely subjective. Sue Thomas (1998), who helped conceptualize the idea of critical mass, suggests that the minimum percentage needed to achieve critical mass is about 20 percent. Since women serving in legislatures is a fairly new phenomenon (particularly in the United States), critical mass can determine how congresswomen legislate, because, as Gelb further explains, “with lower numbers women may feel intimidated and reluctant to maintain a high profile on women’s issues” (Gelb 2002, 432). For example, in a

trend that persisted from the 101<sup>st</sup> to the 103<sup>rd</sup> Congress’, a surge in issue saliency surrounding women’s health – galvanized by the lack of gender equity in federally funded clinical trials that could lead to cures to diseases such as breast cancer – led to a bipartisan effort, headed mainly by women representatives, to pass the Women’s Health Equity Act of 1990. Dodson (2006) claims, “women members overcame to some extent both a lack of power and anti-earmarking norms (and the masculinist values protected by them) when pressures from women inside ... and outside (as activists and voters) converged... by the 102<sup>nd</sup> Congress, breast cancer had graduated to ‘highest priority’ and created momentum that seemed to carry other women’s health concerns as well” (158). However, this is not always the case. In some instances, even a legislature that has reached a critical mass of women representatives does not produce women-friendly policy outcomes (Childs and Krook 2008).

Critics of the critical mass idea maintain that taking the theory of critical mass at face value (that is, assuming that achieving a critical mass is the solution to greater gendered institutional issues) is flawed. According to Sarah Childs and Mona Lena Krook (2008), “[many] studies assume that the percentage of women in the institution is the key determinant of their behaviour. As such, they reflect a ‘politics of optimism’ that gender differences can be eliminated and, especially, that women’s progress can proceed on a non-conflictual basis, provoking little or no reaction from men as a group” (732). This study does not take into account other restrictions that keep women from furthering their substantive legislative goals, such as committee membership, institutional norms, and the external political environment, including electoral incentives and disincentives (Childs and Krook 2008, 733).

Other scholars find that reaching critical mass in a legislature actually causes women legislators to become less active on women’s issues. Kathleen Bratton (2005), after applying the

idea of critical mass to several state legislatures, finds that “gender differences in agenda-setting behavior in some states narrow as the percentage of women in the legislature increases” (121). She further discovers that women are more likely to legislate on women’s issues when they maintain their token status and are sometimes advantaged in doing so. In the cases of the California state legislature and the Illinois state legislature, women who remained tokens actually fared better than their male counterparts in achieving the passage of bills they sponsored (Bratton 2005). Jocelyn Crowley (2004) in turn finds that women legislators become less effective at passing child support laws the closer the legislature comes to reaching a critical mass, and that tokens do not necessarily form coalitions to forward policy goals, but rather operate as individual actors. She concludes that regardless of their token status, or perhaps because of it, women still have a substantial impact on shaping policy outcomes. These findings may serve as ammunition for those who take issue with the integrity of critical mass theory.

#### *The Committee Assignment Process*

A structural factor that may influence how congresswomen are able to legislate is the committee assignment process. For any member of Congress, their assignment to various committees serves as a marker of status and power in the legislature, as it is through committee positions that members of Congress can begin to exercise their legislative agenda (Fenno 1973). Research shows that over the course of the committee assignment process, gendered patterns emerge in both committee requests and request satisfaction. Scott Frisch and Sean Kelly (2003) yield some significant findings on these patterns; first, they looked at requests made for membership on more stereotypically feminine committees. When looking at Education and Labor, they found that slightly more Democratic women placed this as a first choice than Democratic men while no Republican members did (Frisch and Kelly 2003). In terms of



requesting “power” committees, or those viewed as more prestigious, on the whole, first term and incumbent women from both parties were more likely than men to request positions on the top four most prestigious committees (Ways and Means, Appropriations, Budget, and Rules) as well as the committees with the largest policy jurisdiction, Energy and Commerce (Frisch and Kelly 2003). As for request satisfaction, Frisch notes, “Among Democrats, first term women House members seemed to be at a disadvantage in receiving a preferred committee assignment relative to their male counterparts. More than half of first term men received their first committee request while only 40% of first term women received their first committee request...[in turn,] Republican women seemed to be at a greater disadvantage relative to their Democratic counterparts. As first term members, Republican women had only a one-in-four chance of receiving the first committee requested” (Frisch and Kelly 2003, 9). Some of these patterns seem to arise across party lines, while others (such as powerful assignment requests), are more split across gender lines. Swers finds that women are more likely to become active on social welfare issues if they are in the majority party, but more recently Republican women shifted away from feminist issues as they advanced to the majority for fear of alienating their socially conservative base (Swers 2002a).

Sally Friedman further examines the ability of women and minority members to attain positions on prestigious committees and their desires to do so. She notes that while, in theory, minority members should expect equal opportunities for advancement, “literature on women and minorities begins from the perspective of barriers to equal treatment: an old boy network, stereotyping about capabilities and interests, a lack of knowledge about the political process, and outright discrimination” (Friedman 1996, 73). Her study, which uses committee assignment data ranging from 1965-1994, finds that “equity has characterized the assignments of recent decades,

but projections into the future hinge on external and internal conditions. If women and minorities wish to continue to improve their positions, they must maintain the type of effort that brought about the 1970s gains or the 1993 gains for women” (Friedman 1996, 79).

Furthermore, as the breadth of committee assignments for women increases in variety, so does their ability to act substantively. “Since the entry of the 1992 class, a woman’s voice has been heard across a much larger portion of the legislative agenda... such representation has the substantive benefit of representing women on the agenda setting stage, as well as the possibility of incorporating a female point of view into a wide range of issues, even those not traditionally categorized as ‘women’s issues’” (Arnold and King 2002, 309). While this holds true, committee appointments with high institutional value, such as on the “Big Four” Senate Committees (Finance, Foreign Relations, Appropriations, and Armed Services) still elude women. Finance, the Senate’s most powerful committee, has been particularly lacking in women’s voices. The 107<sup>th</sup> Congress saw the first time women were appointed to this committee with the concurrent appointments of Blanche Lambert Lincoln and Olympia Snowe. The absence of women on Finance prior to this meant that women had no voice in legislation pertaining to Social Security, taxation, trade, and tax-related health care proposals (Arnold and King 2002).

Gendered patterns also appear as researchers look into how women behave in committee. Michele Swers (2002a) notes that when women are in the minority on a committee, they may feel responsible for bringing women’s issues forward in that committee. Swers interviewed one Democratic congresswomen who maintained that ““as the only woman on the – Committee for many years, I was the only one thinking from a woman’s point of view, so I had to be responsible for bringing women and family issues to the table on top of everything else”” (Swers 2002a, 74). Some research finds that women’s leadership styles on committees differ drastically

from those of their male colleagues. On the state level, women on committees exhibit a more collegial leadership style and create an inclusive working environment by including peers in committee activities (Rosenthal in Swers 2002a). Swers runs a number of scenarios and finds that “congresswomen are more likely to use their committee positions to advocate for women’s issues... in addition, both Republican and Democratic women are more likely to offer feminist amendments than are their male colleagues...however, the importance of gender to the decision to sponsor social welfare amendments is largely overwhelmed by party affiliation, district characteristics, and committee position” (Swers 2002a, 96-97).

### *Electoral/ Reelection Incentives*

One factor that scholars concur has a substantial influence on how representatives act is the approval of the electorate. David Mayhew (1974) posits that members of Congress are rational actors who value reelection above all else. He notes that while some representative assemblies have higher turnover rates than others, America’s national legislature has a uniquely high level of member retention. Mayhew also approaches the question of the electoral incentive as an isolated one. While noting that this does some injustice to the factual nature of representation as a whole, he attempts to control for outstanding factors such as policy preferences and party loyalty. However, he is not in a temporal position to control for gender determinants of legislative behavior. Despite Mayhew’s drawbacks, other scholars have since adopted aspects of his view of members of Congress as purely rational actors; Dennis Simon and Barbara Palmer (2010), for instance, claim that members’ voting records are a product not only of ideology and party — or even gender — but of differences in the constituencies they represent. This view incorporates electoral incentives as one of many variables that dictate legislative activity.

However, when Mayhew's theory is actually applied to the case of women as a group, the parameters of electoral incentives change slightly. Some scholars claim that the assumption made that electoral incentives outweigh gendered incentives is a fallacy. "It is a long-standing canon of rational choice congressional research that the need to secure reelection guarantees that all legislators will adhere to the demands of the constituency," Swers states, "[but] this premise suggests that social identities such as gender are largely irrelevant to the shape of policy outcomes" (Swers 2002b, 262). Additionally, Anouk Lloren (2015) finds that women legislators respond more to feminist issues than to the electoral preferences of women, and that gender does have an impact on how women legislate. While reelection incentives are still highly important to women policymakers, it is also necessary to recognize that women may be elected by and serve inherently different constituencies than their male colleagues. Swers continues: "Research suggests that the same geographical constituency can support many different reelection constituencies... thus, a female candidate may be more likely to attract supporters who are concerned with women's issues" (Swers 2002b, 262). Thus, women's desires to follow a largely women-friendly policy agenda may not conflict with their electoral needs in the first place.

#### *Gender Bias/ Gender Perceptions*

Another theory that may explain how women act (or are able to act) in Congress is based on the notion that there is a gender bias in the electorate against women. When assessing the traits necessary for leadership, the final evaluations on the part of voters come down to the foundations of psychological processes of interpersonal perception, interpretation, and judgments. Michele Paludi (2016) notes that since gender can be viewed as a set of expectations about how one should act, it is fair to assume that a member of the electorate will make their decision about a women candidate based on how that candidate's actions conform to female

gender roles (Paludi 2016). The traits of quality leaders are typically associated with masculine sorted traits such as dominance, agency, and competitiveness, while women are expected to exhibit nurturance, compassion, and sensitivity – in essence, women should be interpersonally oriented and interpersonally skilled (Paludi 2016). Thus, many women who seek public office are forced to navigate the “double bind”, or the “catch-22 that female leaders confront... [when] women who enter politics and other leadership positions are faced with the dilemma to prove themselves as both feminine and competent as if the two were mutually exclusive” (Jones 2016, 627). While navigating the challenges that come with running for elected office, such as financing a campaign and mobilizing voters, women candidates must simultaneously overcome the added restrictions of the double bind.

This societal barrier can both be responsible for which women choose to run and how they act after their elections. Sarah Anzia and Christopher Berry (2011) suggest that “selection into office is different for women than it is for men, resulting in important differences in the performance of male and female legislators once they are elected” (Anzia and Berry 2011, 478). Using regression models, these authors attempt to prove the idea of sex-based selection, positing that the electorate already has a negative view of women who run for elected office because the traits needed to be a successful politician and those that are inherently feminine seem to voters to be contradictory. Sarah Fulton (2012) finds that “although the scholarship on stereotypes uncovers strong evidence of the use of sex-based cues at the individual level, empirical evidence of bias at the aggregate level has been suppressed by the omission of an intervening variable in the causal model linking gender to election outcomes” (Fulton 2012, 310), and that when that variable is included, “relative to men, women have to work harder at developing greater political quality to be equally competitive” (Fulton 2012, 311). Furthermore, she notes a study of an

ANES data series by Kathleen Dolan and Kira Sanbonmatsu (2009), which concluded that the average voter prefers that men occupy 60 percent of political offices, whereas only 10 percent of respondents preferred that government be composed mostly of women. Fulton goes on to claim that sex stereotypes on issue competence, personality traits, and ideology are linked to voter trends, even though aggregate results suggest gender parity and the absence of bias in the voting population (Fulton 2012).

In addition to gendered differences in how the electorate perceives candidates, men and women view their qualifications differently. As Anzia and Berry (2011) point out, “it does not matter whether women are elected to public office at lower rates than men because they perceive their own qualifications differently or because bias against women in the electorate produces a barrier to entry for them. The central implication of sex-based political selection is that the women we observe in office will, on average, outperform the men” (489). That is, because women often view themselves as less qualified than their male counterparts and have more obstacles to overcome in order to achieve elected office, only the most educated, most qualified, and most determined women will become legislators.

### *Intersectionality*

Another factor that pervades legislative choice is intersectionality. This term, though it ties directly in to the idea of descriptive representation, merits its own discussion due to the increasing gravity of identity in modern American politics. As the issues encompassed by identity politics increase in saliency, so does the interplay between socially constructed identities and the impact of how those identities are assigned niches in the socio-political hierarchy. As of late, this topic has become one of great interest for some scholars. Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) first coined the term “intersectionality” as a way to reconcile how people within the same

marginalized or privileged group experience differing levels of discrimination or privilege based on other how their identities interact. As those identities meet in real time, congresswomen must reconcile their gender with other traits that shape their experiences while acting as substantive representatives.

### Black Women

Marianne Githens and Jewel Prestage (1977) note that politics in America is, at its core, a white man's business. It is the exact inverse of these two identities that suffer the greatest levels of discrimination in the nation's legislature. While the political environment has been seldom hospitable to women in general, women of color are at the greatest disadvantage when it comes to representation in both the upper and lower chambers. Since women were able to enter the political arena, there has been a "pervasive and persistent underrepresentation of women of color in elective offices" (Hawkesworth 2010, 251). Black women, in turn, have been doubly excluded from full participation in political and professional life by the sexual discrimination that restricts all women, and the racial discrimination that restricts all black people (Bryce and Warrick 1977).

Over time, research has been conducted on the impact of gender and race on political representation. However, seldom have authors investigated how race and gender combine to influence representation. Kathleen Bratton, Kerry Haynie, and Beth Reingold (2006) conducted research on the state level that points to black women responding to both women interests and to black interests. Since black women make up the largest group of people who are members of both a gendered minority group and a racial minority group in Congress, they operate uniquely within the realm of political representation. Bratton, Haynie, and Reingold maintain that this means they are more influenced by their institutional surroundings than their intersectional

identities. Others, such as Byron Orey et al. (2006) find that black women are more likely to produce progressive legislation, thus positing that their combined identities affect how they legislate more than their institutional surroundings. In short, black women's unique position in the realm of American politics, whether it stems from suffering sexism and racism simultaneously, or from their comparatively recent entry into the political realm, means that their responsibility to provide substantive representation is greater while the obstacles in their path are more numerous.

### Other Identities and Intersectional Impact

The research on Latina representation specifically is fairly sparse, but Wallace (2014) finds that Latinx legislators as a whole are typically only more active on salient issues when compared to their non-Latinx counterparts. In addition, while an analysis of LGBT women legislators would be ideal for the purposes of this study, there is not an adequate number in the national legislature to create an accurate data set and there is very little literature on this specific topic. However, there is some evidence to suggest that in advanced democratic institutions, parties have often courted LGBT voters and candidates for office in “a reductive and limited manner” (Chaney 2013, 115). This conclusion points to possible institutional homophobia that restricts open members of the LGBT community from full political participation. Although there are very few LGBT members of Congress, members of Congress have done better at representing members of the LGBT community over time. However, their willingness to provide symbolic representation to LGBT people – that is, the way that a representative stands for the LGBT community – depends largely on public opinion (Pitkin 1967; Hansen and Treul 2015).

Intersectional identities cannot be ignored when assessing women's attempts to provide representation to women in the electorate, as there are complex components of a person's



identity that also influence how that individual provides and receives representation. In the broader realm of intersectional identities influencing legislative activity, scholars find that as the national legislature increases in racial, ethnic, and gender diversity, the issue docket of Congress also diversifies, thus providing evidence that identity components have significant impact on shaping a legislative body (Minta and Sinclair-Chapman 2013; Dolan and Sanbonmatsu 2009; Swers 2014).

## **Methodology**

This research replicated two existing studies in order to provide updated data on both committee assignments for women legislators and their bill sponsorship activities. Two time periods were selected in an attempt to control for periods of party leadership. The 111<sup>th</sup> Congress is the most recent Congress under complete Democratic control, the 113<sup>th</sup> is the most recent split Congress (the House in Republican control and the Senate in Democratic control), and the 114<sup>th</sup> is the most recent Congress under complete Republican control. The 115<sup>th</sup> will not be included because it is not yet a full Congress.

Fifteen years ago, Frisch and Kelly (2003) published “A Place at the Table: Women’s Committee Requests and Women’s Committee Assignments in the U.S. House” in *Women & Politics*, which uses various archival sources containing committee preference data from the 86<sup>th</sup> to 103<sup>rd</sup> Congresses. This study intended to update these models using assignment data through information obtained from the Congressional Research Service via publicly released reports on member committee assignments, as well as other archival sources and Congressional publications. Since committee request data was not available, Frisch and Kelly’s methodology was applied to a different data set that encompasses actual committee assignments rather than requested assignments. This data was then converted into raw percentages that indicate

gender/party bloc assignments, or the percentage of each gender within in a given party, either Republican or Democrat (i.e. “X% of Democratic women, X% of Republican men”). Two prestige committees in each chamber (Ways and Means and Appropriations in the House, and Appropriations and Rules and Administration in the Senate) and two women-salient committees in each chamber (Education and the Workforce and Energy and Commerce in the House, and Health, Education, Labor and Pensions and Environment and Public Works in the Senate) were selected for membership analysis throughout the 111<sup>th</sup>, 113<sup>th</sup>, and 114<sup>th</sup> Congresses in order to measure emerging gendered patterns in the committee assignment process.

The second avenue taken in order to measure the representative responsibility of congresswomen was through their bill sponsorship. Using sponsorship data available on Congress.gov and methodology similar to that used by Michele Swers (2002b), this study categorized legislation sponsored by members of Congress throughout the same time period into an “expansive”, and a “restrictive” category. To do this, the sponsorships of legislation surrounding the women-salient issue category of women’s health were examined. The study then compared how often women sponsor women-salient legislation in comparison to their male counterparts over the 111<sup>th</sup>, 113<sup>th</sup> and 114<sup>th</sup> Congresses. Since healthcare was generally salient during the time periods studied, legislation on a non-salient issue (preschool-level education) was also measured to determine how issue saliency impacts women’s substantive representation. Through this information, it was possible to ascertain the intent of congresswomen to provide substantive representation to women in the electorate and their institutional ability to do so. Delegates and other non-voting members were not included in these data sets, as their ability to vote on legislation is restricted outside of committee and they cannot provide substantive representation to their constituents to the extent that their colleagues can. In addition, only

legislation that (if passed) will carry the force of the law was included in the data sets – this included bills and joint resolutions, and excluded simple resolutions, concurrent resolutions, and amendments.

## **Hypotheses**

Based on the prior literature on the topic, this thesis generally hypothesizes that congresswomen's actions indicate that they have a greater representative responsibility than their male counterparts. Because women make up a disproportionately small percentage of the national legislature in comparison to the proportion women who are present in the national electorate, they must carry both the interests of their respective constituencies and women as a whole with them to Washington. Without the added attention that congresswomen pay to issues that most directly affect their gender, Congress would overlook many women salient policy issues such as access to abortions and birth control, medical research on breast cancer, and domestic violence.

**Hypothesis 1:** *Congresswomen tend to substantively represent other women through both their committee assignments and legislative activities.*

The background on women's committee assignments suggests that women have had to overcome gendered obstacles in order to gain appointments to the most powerful committees in Congress, but that there are also gendered patterns across other committee assignments (Frisch and Kelly 2003; Swers 2002a; Friedman 1996; Arnold and King 2002). As the basis of descriptive representation maintains, members of the same minority group often share similar experiences that influence how their decision-making procedures develop over time. It follows that the legislative agendas of congresswomen are more inclined to provide substantive representation to women in the electorate through their committee assignments.

**Hypothesis 2a:** *Women are more likely to be assigned to “women-salient” committees and less likely to be assigned to “prestige” committees than men are.*

The literature maintains that women have historically been absent from the membership of the most powerful committees in Congress (Arnold and King 2002). While this has changed somewhat with the passage of time, the obstacles that women face when seeking prestigious positions in Congress have not disappeared entirely. Another aspect that may affect how women are assigned to committees is seniority. Women are largely new players in the political arena, so many male incumbents are more senior than their women counterparts. Thus, they have had the opportunity to participate in the institutional mobility characteristic of achieving powerful positions and committee assignments. In addition, since men have historically made up a greater portion of party leadership over the studied time period, it is possible that the committee assignment process has produced gendered outcomes based on the biases held by those in charge of the process itself.

**Hypothesis 2b:** *The pattern of bill sponsorship amongst women legislators indicates that women typically sponsor more legislation that revolves around “women-salient” issues than men do.*

The background on women’s representation is firmly rooted in measurements of bill sponsorship, and much of the literature on descriptive, surrogate, and substantive representation suggests that women draw from personal needs and experiences when shaping their legislative agendas. The study by Swers (2002b) that I am replicating suggests as much, so I expect that while the amount of sponsorships over time may be influenced by party control and issue saliency, on the whole, women are more likely to introduce legislation that is meant to directly benefit women than men are.

## Data and Analysis

### *General Information*

Over the time periods studied, the total number of women serving in the United States Congress increased steadily, but this varied slightly based on party ID. Figure 1 indicates that Democratic women far outnumbered Republican women consistently for each Congress, but that Republican women have also been gaining ground; between the 113<sup>th</sup> and 114<sup>th</sup> Congresses, Democratic women lost two Senate seats that ultimately went to Republican women, while Republican women gained three House seats to the Democrats' one. On the whole, women continued to gain seats as time went on; in the two full Congresses between the 111<sup>th</sup> and 113<sup>th</sup>, women gained ten seats between both chambers, and they gained four seats between the 113<sup>th</sup> and 114<sup>th</sup> Congresses.

	Senate - D	House - D	Senate - R	House - R	Total
111th Congress	13	56	4	17	90
113th Congress	16	61	4	19	100
114th Congress	16	62	6	22	100

**Figure 1: Party ID of Women Serving During the 111th, 113th, and 114th Congresses**

\*Note: This table does not include women who resigned within a year into each Congress or the Democratic delegates from Guam, the Virgin Islands, or Washington, D.C. Does include vacancy appointments and special election winners. Data provided by CAWP.

While the steady increases in the number of sitting Congresswomen are promising, the raw percentages provide a stark contrast between the representative power and responsibility of men and women in Congress. During these three Congresses, women occupied a total of 16.8%, 18.7%, and 19.4% of available seats respectively. This data and prior research does seem to suggest that party power has an influence in how women are able to provide substantive representation (such as Republican women's restraint on women's issues after their party took the majority), but it also shows that time and issue saliency play an important role. As time progressed, women gained seats, but their proportion by party showed an interesting trend across

the time periods studied. Over the 111<sup>th</sup>, 113<sup>th</sup>, and 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, women made up 22%, 30%, and 33% of Democrats and about 10%, 8%, and 9% of Republicans respectively. As the percentage of Democratic congresswomen serving in Congress consistently rose with each Congress regardless of the party in power, the percentage of Republican congresswomen experienced a downward swing that correlated with their party's rise to power in the House and the Democrats' loss of seats in the Senate.

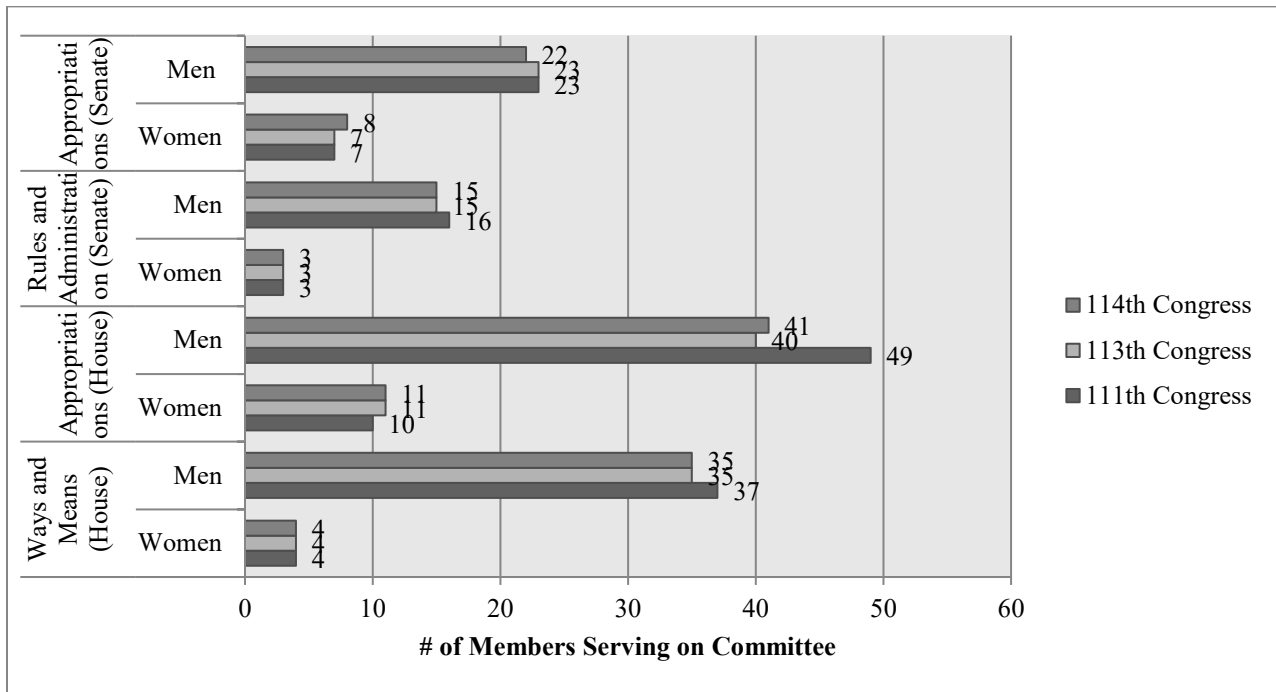
### *Committee Assignments*

#### Prestige Committees

The raw numbers yielded after examining Congressional committee assignments over the 111<sup>th</sup>, 113<sup>th</sup>, and 114<sup>th</sup> Congresses are largely unsurprising. Figure 2 shows that each committee studied had significantly more men serving on them. The Senate Committee on Appropriations had the largest proportion of women in its membership during this period. Of the 30 seats available, women held 7 of them during the 111<sup>th</sup> and 113<sup>th</sup> Congresses, and 8 of them 114<sup>th</sup> Congress. As a percentage, they made up between 23% and 27% of the full committee membership respectively. The committee with the smallest proportion of women serving on it during the periods studied was the House Committee on Ways and Means, with women making up between 9% and 10% of the full committee membership. Women gained one seat on Senate Appropriations while men lost one in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress. In the meantime, the number of women serving on Ways and Means did not change, while men lost two seats after the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress.

With the exception of the membership of men on the House Appropriations Committee in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, the number of available seats on each of these four committees stayed largely the same, and the seats lost or picked up by both men and women never deviated more than one or two seats for either gender. The overall mobility on these committees was fairly stagnant and

there does not seem to be a significant difference in the number of women serving on prestige committees across changes in party power. It is worth noting that women gained one seat on both the Senate and House Appropriations Committees when Republicans were in control of those chambers.



**Figure 2: Prestige Committee Assignments by Gender**

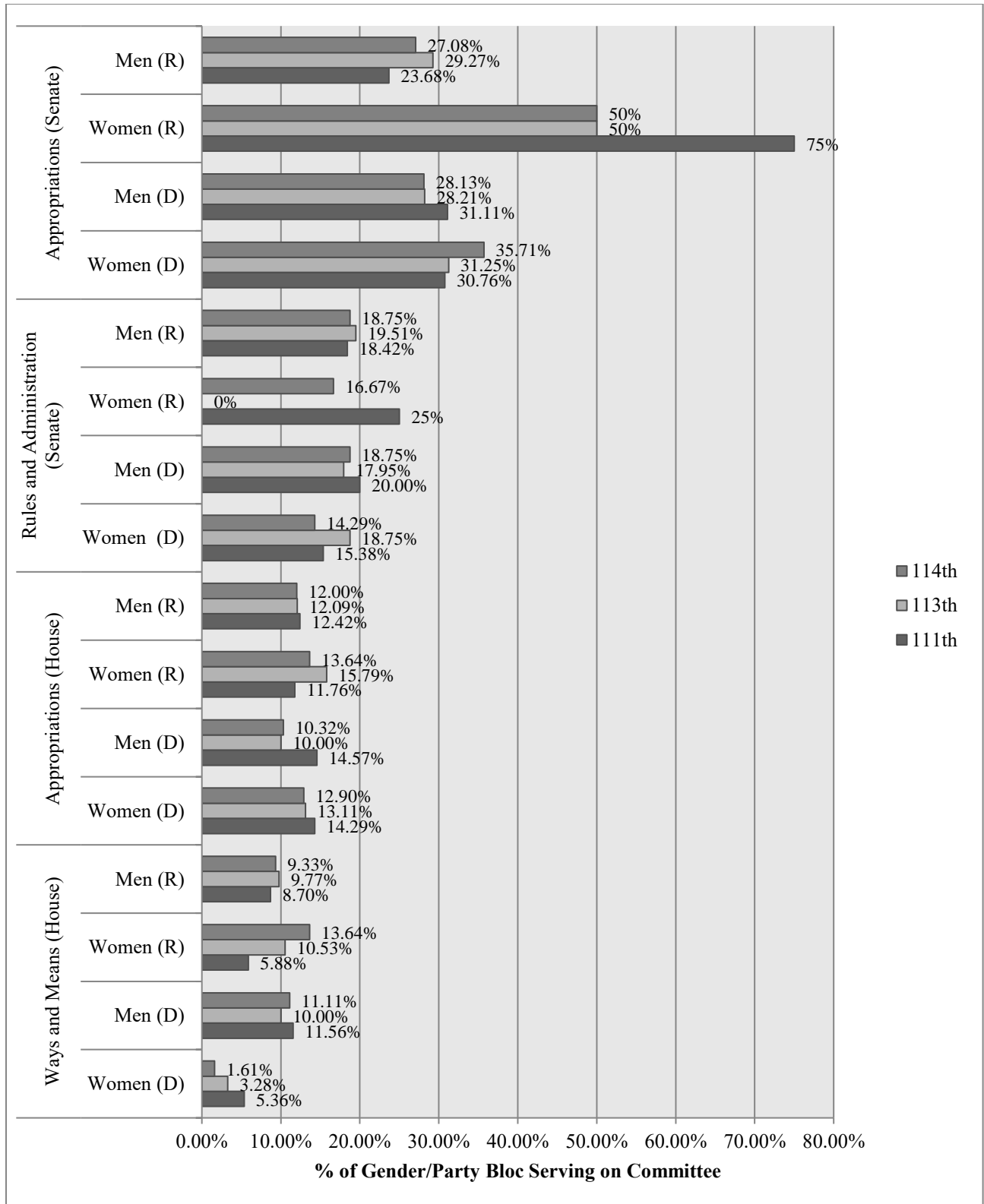
\*Committee assignment data compiled by author via information available on various committee websites and Congressional Research Service Report on 111<sup>th</sup> Congressional membership.

While the number of women serving on committees is a useful indicator of power shifts over time, it does little to showcase congresswomen’s likelihood of being assigned to certain committees in comparison to their male counterparts. Figure 3 shows the percentage of each gender/party bloc serving on each committee. Converting the sheer numbers of committee membership into percentages in this manner serves as an equalizer across gender and party, thus providing a more accurate measurement of assignment likelihood. This produced results that contradicted some of the hypotheses. The obvious outlier present in this data set is that during the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, 75% of Republican women served on the Senate Appropriations Committee.

This is because, as Figures 1 and 2 show, of the 4 Republican women serving in the United States Senate during that Congress, 3 of them sat on the Senate Appropriations Committee. During the 113<sup>th</sup> and 114<sup>th</sup> Congresses, 75% dropped to 50% because Republican women serving on Senate Appropriations dropped from 3 to 2 in the 113<sup>th</sup> and then jumped from 2 to 3 in the 114<sup>th</sup>, the same Congress that the total number of Republican women in the Senate went from 4 to 6. While Republican women were the most likely to be assigned to Senate Appropriations, Democratic women were also slightly more likely than both Democratic and Republican men to gain assignment to Senate Appropriations for all three Congresses. Membership on the House Committee on Appropriations showed a similar trend; on the whole, women were more likely than men to be assigned to this committee during the 113<sup>th</sup> and 114<sup>th</sup> Congresses, and were only slightly less likely to be assigned to this committee than their male colleagues were during the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress (0.94% less likely, to be exact). Democratic women were more likely to be assigned to House Appropriations than Republican women during the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress when their party was in control of the chamber, while Republican women were more likely to be assigned to this committee during 113<sup>th</sup> and 114<sup>th</sup> when the Republicans took control.

The gender breakdown of the House Committee on Ways and Means and the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration members yielded extremely different results. Democratic women were overwhelmingly less likely to be assigned to Ways and Means than their Republican counterparts or their male counterparts during every Congress studied, and their chances only decreased when their party lost control of the chamber. Republican women were less likely to be assigned to Ways and Means than both Democratic and Republican men only during the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, but were more likely to gain assignment to this committee than men





**Figure 3: Prestige Committee Assignments by Gender and Party ID (%)**

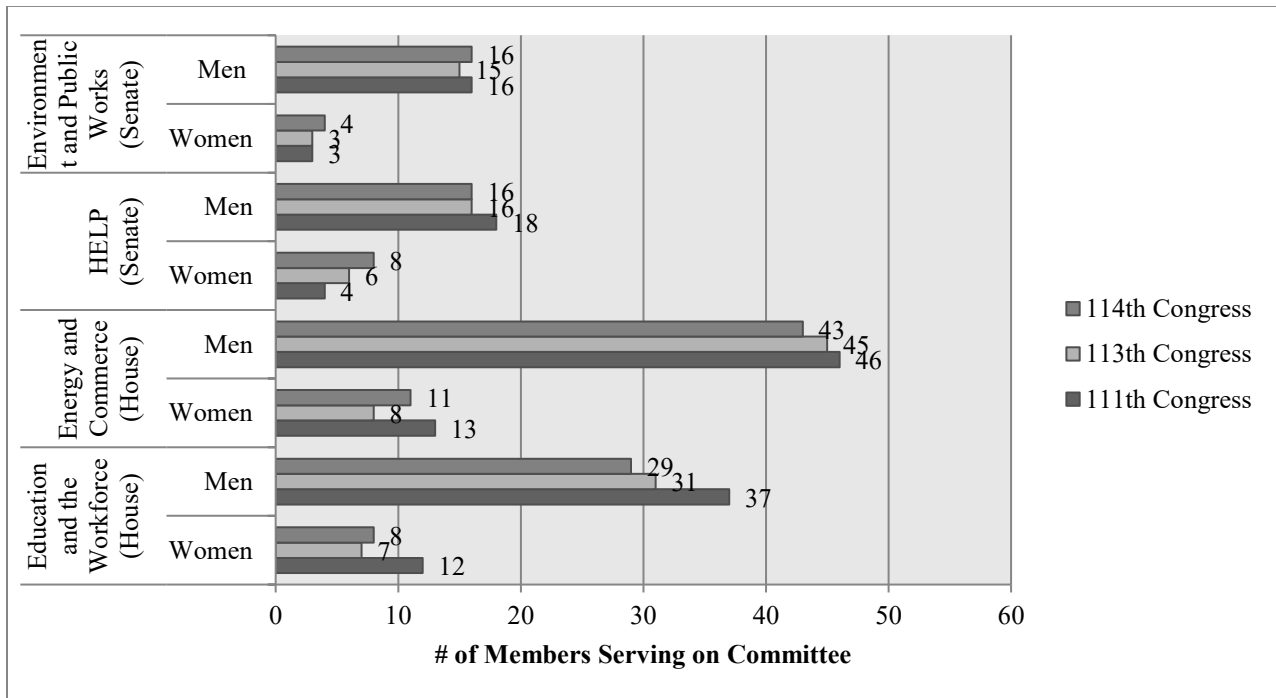
\*Committee assignment data compiled by author via information available on various committee websites and Congressional Research Service Report on 111<sup>th</sup> Congressional membership.

of both parties during the 113<sup>th</sup> and 114<sup>th</sup> Congresses. Membership on the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration varied widely across all three Congresses. During the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, Republican women were technically the most likely to gain membership, but this is because one Republican woman out of the four in the Senate served on that committee at the time, meaning that their membership was inflated to 25%. Democratic women were less likely to serve on Rules than men of both parties during the 111<sup>th</sup>, but equally as likely as Democratic men during the 113<sup>th</sup>. Democratic women then went back to being less likely than all other gender/party blocs to serve on Rules during the 114<sup>th</sup>. During the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, no Republican women served on Rules and Administration.

#### Women-Salient Committees

As expected, these committees showed more variance in membership makeup than prestige committees did across both gender and party. Figure 4 shows that the number of women serving on these committees was more sensitive to party control in the House than in the Senate. When the Republicans took control of the House during the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, the number of women serving on both the House Committee on Education and the Workforce and on the House Committee on Energy and Commerce dropped significantly. Though this does correlate with a decrease in available seats on both committees, women lost 5 seats on Energy and Commerce alone during the 113<sup>th</sup> while men lost only 1 seat on the same committee. Women regained a collective 4 seats that they lost during the 113<sup>th</sup> on both committees during the 114<sup>th</sup> while men lost 5 seats. In addition, women fared slightly better in getting assigned to Education and the Workforce, making up between 18% and 25% of the Committee throughout all three Congresses, while also making up between 15% and 22% of Energy and Commerce during the same time period.

On the Senate side, the number of women on the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) uniformly increased over all three Congresses. During the 113<sup>th</sup>, men lost two seats on HELP while women gained two, and the 114<sup>th</sup> see men retained the same amount of seats while women gain 2 again. The membership of women on HELP jumped drastically in this time period, from 18% of the committee’s total membership in the 111<sup>th</sup> to 33% in the 114<sup>th</sup>. The membership on the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works stayed largely the same, with women making up between 18% and 20% of the committee over the course of the three Congresses. Environment and Public Works gained one woman during the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, but otherwise the number of women on the committee did not change at all.



**Figure 4: Women-Salient Committee Assignments by Gender**

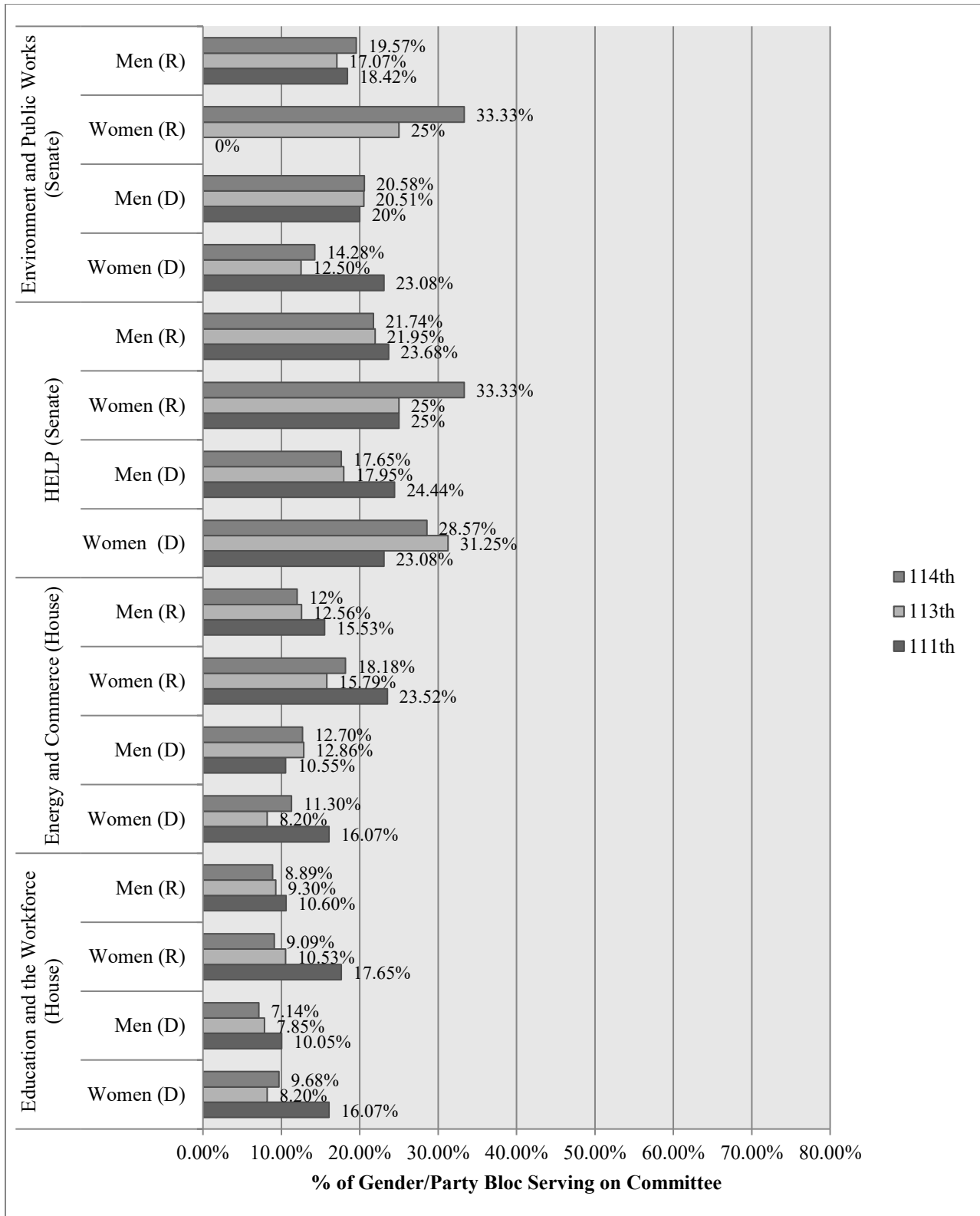
\*Committee assignment data compiled by author via information available on various committee websites and Congressional Research Service Report on 111<sup>th</sup> Congressional membership

Looking past the numbers of women-salient committee memberships to the proportionality of the gender/party blocs, Figure 5 shows that during the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress both

Republican and Democratic women were more likely than men to be assigned to Education and the Workforce in the House, while Republican women fared slightly better than Democratic women. Membership on this committee then fluctuated drastically; In the 113<sup>th</sup>, Democratic men became the most likely to be assigned to this committee, followed very closely by Republican men, and then by Republican women, with Democratic women being the least likely. The 114<sup>th</sup> then saw Democratic women become the most likely to be assigned to Education and the Workforce, with Republican women following close behind.

Democratic women were generally less likely to be assigned to House Committee on Energy and Commerce during the 113<sup>th</sup> and 114<sup>th</sup> Congresses when Republicans had control of the chamber, while Republican women were consistently more likely than any other gender/party combination to be assigned to Energy and Commerce over all three Congresses. The proportional membership on the Senate HELP Committee was almost evenly split between each of the four combinations of gender/party during the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, but after that women were more likely than their male colleagues in both parties to be assigned to Senate HELP, with Democratic women being more likely than Republican women to serve on HELP during the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress and less likely than Republican women during the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Finally, women were the more likely than men to serve on the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works in every Congress. During the 111<sup>th</sup>, Democratic women were the most likely to serve on Environment and Public Works, but their bloc's membership on this committee dropped sharply during the 113<sup>th</sup> and 114<sup>th</sup>. No Republican women served on Environment and Public works during the 111<sup>th</sup>, but they became more likely than men from both parties and Democratic women to serve on this committee during the 113<sup>th</sup> and 114<sup>th</sup>



**Figure 5: Women-Salient Committees by Gender and Party ID (%)**

\*Committee assignment data compiled by author via information available on various committee websites and Congressional Research Service Report on 111<sup>th</sup> Congressional membership.

Congresses. The proportion of both Democratic and Republican men on Environment and Public Works stayed fairly stagnant throughout the time periods studied.

*Bill Sponsorship*

Women’s Health (Salient Issue)

The raw numbers gathered for patterns of bill sponsorship on women’s health issues during the 111<sup>th</sup>, 113<sup>th</sup>, and 114<sup>th</sup> Congresses essentially corroborates the original findings of Michele Swers (2002b). Most of the sponsorships (regardless of party or gender) were for bills that expanded opportunities and access to women’s healthcare. These bills dealt with a variety of issues, including increasing access to family planning and cancer screenings. There were also several bills introduced to increase access to contraceptives and abortion, including some seeking to provide federal funding to Planned Parenthood. Democratic women were the most active on these women-salient health issues during the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, while Republican women were most active on these issues during the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress. In general, this shows that women tended to be more active on women’s issues when their party was in power (see Figure 6). Democratic men provided the most total sponsorships for expansive women’s health legislation over all three Congresses, sponsoring 95 pieces of legislation to Democratic women’s 92, Republican men’s 52, and Republican women’s 12.

	111 <sup>th</sup> Congress	113 <sup>th</sup> Congress	114 <sup>th</sup> Congress
Men (D)	48	22	25
Women (D)	35	26	31
Men (R)	16	13	23
Women (R)	2	2	8
<b>Total Sponsorships</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>87</b>

**Figure 6: Sponsorships of Women's Health Legislation (Expansive)**

\*Bill sponsorship data compiled by author via an Advanced Search of women’s health legislation on Congress.gov.

The total number of sponsorships also changed as party power shifted. The largest output of expansive women’s health legislation sponsorships occurred during the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress when Democrats controlled both chambers, while the smallest output of sponsorships occurred during the 113<sup>th</sup>, when Republicans held the House and Democrats held the Senate. Democrats consistently introduced more bills, with Democratic men introducing the most during the 111<sup>th</sup> and Democratic women introducing the most during the 113<sup>th</sup> and 114<sup>th</sup> Congresses.

Women’s activity on both expansive and restrictive women’s health issues hinged largely on whether or not their party was in power. There were very few restrictive women’s health bills introduced over the course of the three Congresses studied, but those that were had to do with restricting access to contraceptives, defunding Planned Parenthood, or putting more stringent controls on abortions. While no Democratic women or Democratic men sponsored any legislation restrictive to women’s health over the course of the three Congresses, Republican women became more active on legislation meant to restrict women’s health as their party came to power. The group to sponsor the largest amount of restrictive women’s health legislation during every Congress studied was Republican men.

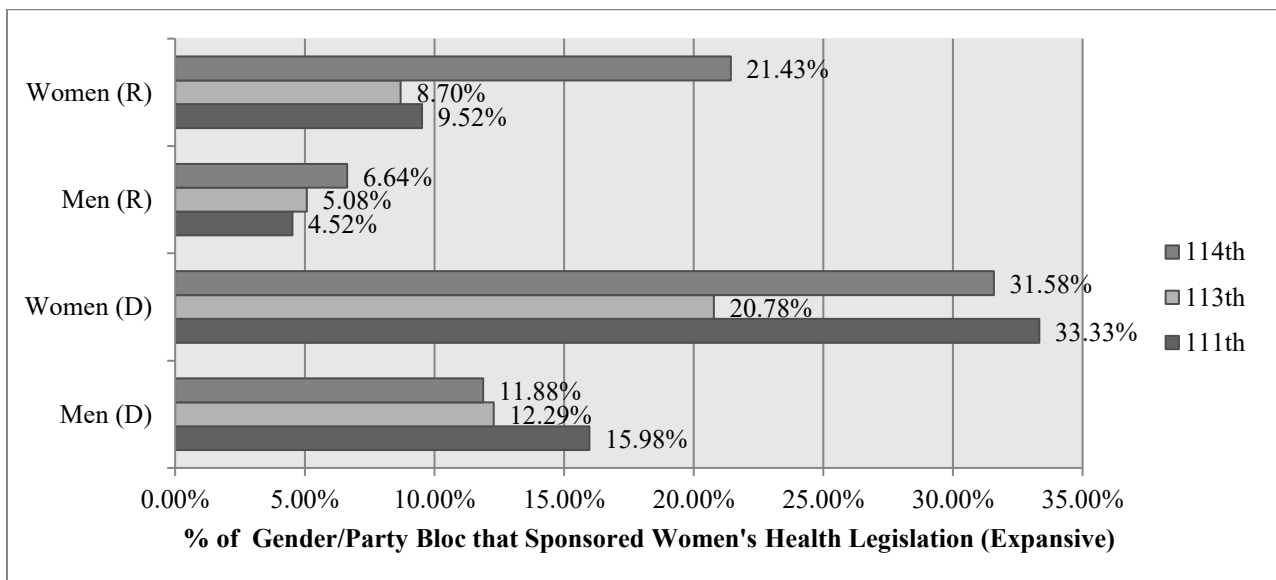
	111 <sup>th</sup> Congress	113 <sup>th</sup> Congress	114 <sup>th</sup> Congress
Men (D)	0	0	0
Women (D)	0	0	0
Men (R)	7	2	5
Women (R)	0	1	3
<b>Total Sponsorships</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>

**Figure 7: Sponsorships of Women's Health Legislation (Restrictive)**

\*Bill sponsorship data compiled by author via an Advanced Search of women’s health legislation on Congress.gov.

When observing the proportions of the gender/party blocs that sponsored expansive women’s health legislation, the data indicates that women consistently sponsored more women-salient legislation than their male counterparts did. Figure 8 shows that Democratic women were most likely to sponsor expansive women’s health legislation for every Congress studied

regardless of party control. However, the total percentage of that gender/party bloc that introduced this kind of legislation did depend on which party was the majority; the percentage of Democratic women that sponsored expansive women’s legislation was lowest during the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress when Republicans had control of the House. This percentage grew during the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress when Republicans had control of both chambers. The pattern of Republican women’s sponsorship shows that they, like Democratic women, were more active on women’s health legislation when their party was the majority in both chambers. Both Democratic and Republican women experienced a drop in sponsorship on expansive women’s health legislation when party control was split between the two chambers during the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, and both Republican and Democratic women were more likely than their male counterparts of the same party to sponsor expansive women’s health legislation for every Congress. The men of both parties were most likely to sponsor expansive women’s health legislation when their party was in full control of Congress and least likely to sponsor this kind of legislation when their party was the minority in both chambers.



**Figure 8: Women's Health (Expansive) Sponsorships by Gender and Party ID (%)**

\*Bill sponsorship data compiled by author via an Advanced Search of women’s health legislation on Congress.gov.



### Preschool Education (Non-Salient Issue)

Legislative activity on women’s health indicates some differences in women’s versus men’s activity on women-salient issues. However, it is important to note that healthcare in general was a highly salient issue during the time period studied (2009-2010, 2013-2016). During the years studied, Congress saw the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, a landmark piece of healthcare legislation that reshaped the landscape of the national healthcare market. This legislation also changed how women-specific healthcare measures are addressed and implemented. Thus, legislation surrounding women’s health saw an increase in activity for reasons outside of gender (e.g. electoral incentives). Because of this, it is important to stand the data on women’s health legislation next to data on a generally non-salient issue that is often framed as a women-salient issue. From a gender congruent standpoint, preschool-level education works well as a tool for measurement.

	111 <sup>th</sup> Congress	113 <sup>th</sup> Congress	114 <sup>th</sup> Congress
Men (D)	33	32	27
Women (D)	8	9	12
Men (R)	2	7	9
Women (R)	1	3	1
<b>Total Sponsorships</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>49</b>

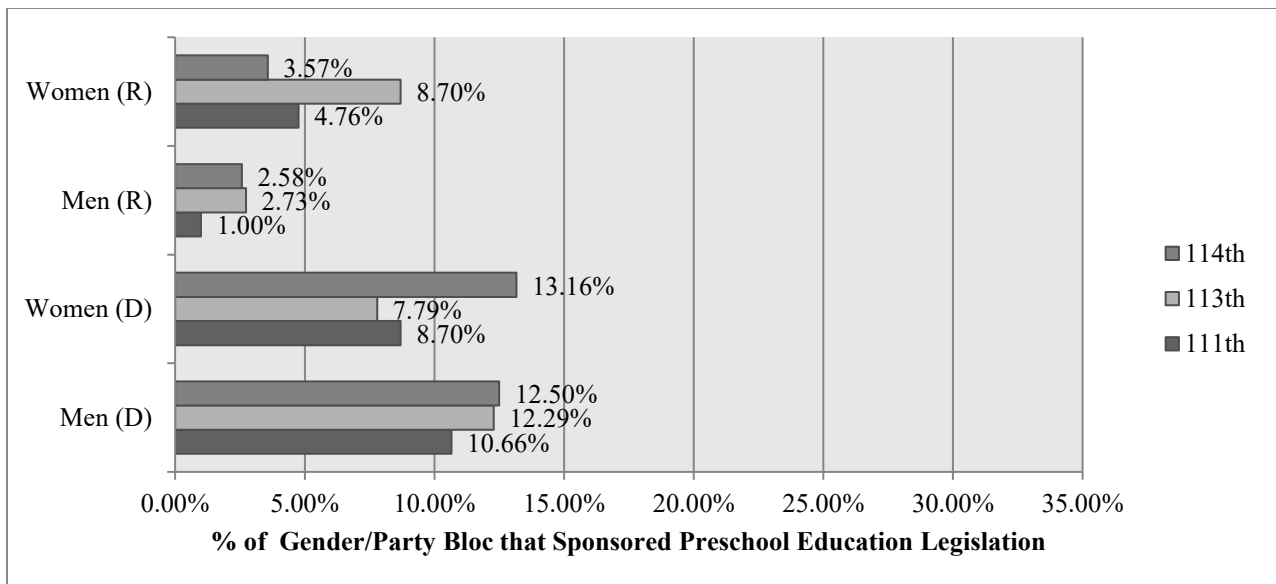
**Figure 9: Sponsorships of Preschool Education Legislation**

\*Bill sponsorship data compiled by author via an Advanced Search of preschool education legislation on Congress.gov.

Figure 9 shows that the most obvious difference between women’s health legislation and preschool education legislation is that far fewer bills were introduced on preschool education. This is hardly surprising, as with non-salient issues there is simply less attention paid to them because there is less to gain from sponsoring legislation on these issues. But who was most likely to sponsor this kind of legislation? Figure 10 shows that the patterns of bill sponsorship on preschool education yielded fewer obvious patterns than those apparent in women’s health

legislation. For one, the scale is very different. For any of the Congresses studied, no more than 13.16% of any gender/partly bloc sponsored legislation surrounding the issue of preschool education.

Republican men were overwhelmingly less likely to sponsor legislation on this issue for every Congress studied (they never surpassed 3%). The pattern of sponsorships for Republican women is a bit puzzling – on the whole, they were least likely to legislate on this issue when their party was in control of both chambers, and most likely to do so when party control was split between chambers. Democratic men were increasingly more likely to legislate on this non-salient issue as their party lost control of both chambers, and Democratic women were also most likely to legislate on this issue when their party was not in control of either chamber.



**Figure 10: Preschool Education Sponsorships by Gender and Party ID (%)**

\*Bill sponsorship data compiled by author via an Advanced Search of preschool education legislation on Congress.gov.

## Discussion

### *Committee Assignments*

Generally, the data shows that women were more likely to be assigned to prestige

committees when their party is in control of the chamber. The membership numbers on these committees remained fairly stagnant over the time periods studied, which is unsurprising, since seniority is a common marker of membership on these committees. Theoretically, this could have been a disadvantage to women in Congress, as women are fairly new political players, but this was not always true. On some prestige committees, such as both Senate and House Appropriations, women were more likely to gain membership than men regardless of party control. This does not support my prior hypothesis that women are less likely to be assigned to prestige committees than their male colleagues, but rather suggests that party control is a more important factor than gender when it comes to assignments on some of these committees. One possible explanation for this is Anzia and Berry's (2011) idea that women are superior legislators because they have to accomplish twice as much to be considered equally as competent as their male counterparts. This means that their institutional mobility could be expedited because they are more engaged in the legislative process than male legislators. Another possible reason is that as women's issues become more salient on the national level, party leadership is finding it increasingly necessary to include women legislators in their most powerful circles.

It is worth noting that over time, the Senate Appropriations Committee has significantly declined in power and is perhaps the least influential committee of all the prestige committees measured (Fenno 1973; Arnold and King 2002). However, since the Appropriations Committee in both chambers hold the largely coveted Congressional "power of the purse", they still have greater influence than other standing committees. It is also important to note that the data provided on Republican women is less significant because their low numbers are not enough to draw strong conclusions from, especially for Republican women in the Senate. Because of this, their percentages within the gender/party bloc, while accurate, are highly inflated. The most

powerful committees studied were House Ways and Means, which sorely lacked women members over the periods studied, and Senate Rules and Administration, whose women membership fluctuated greatly. In this sense, it seems that Hypothesis 2a was only partially proven; while women are more likely than their male colleagues to gain membership to some prestige committees, membership to the most powerful of the already prestigious committees is still largely reserved men (i.e. mostly male membership on House Ways and Means). This means that a conclusion on women's ability to provide substantive representation by participating in the most powerful legislative circles in Congress depends largely on which committees are being studied. Women have a voice on some of these committees but are absent from others.

Patterns of women's membership on women-salient committees observed over the time periods studied are less conclusive, but did yield some relevant results. It seems once again that the gender breakdown of committee membership was highly sensitive to party control. On the whole, women were either more likely than men or equally likely to men to be assigned to all of these committees during the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, while membership during the 113<sup>th</sup> varied based on the committee. House Education and the Workforce showed a fairly even likelihood across all gender/party blocs, while House Energy Commerce leaned heavily in favor of Republican women and heavily against Democratic women during the 113<sup>th</sup>. The membership on Senate HELP was either fairly equal for men and women or favored women during all three Congresses, while the proportion of women on Senate Environment and Public Works followed patterns of party power for all three Congresses, with women more likely to gain membership than men only when their party was in power of the chamber. These patterns indicate that women are more likely than men to serve on women-salient committees when their party is in power. This may be because the party in power wants only women of their own party to have a voice on women-

salient issues, because these issues (such as reproductive health) tend to be more polarized. This may also be because many of these committees have larger policy jurisdictions, and thus encompass women-salient issues as well as issues that concern general social welfare. House Energy and Commerce, in fact, has the single largest policy jurisdiction of any standing Congressional committee.

### *Bill Sponsorship*

The results on bill sponsorship affirm that women were more likely to sponsor women-salient legislation than their male counterparts were during the entire time period studied, which supports the hypothesis that congresswomen strive to provide substantive representation to other women through their bill sponsorships. Men sponsored women-salient legislation more often when their party was in power, but were never more likely than women of the same party to sponsor such legislation. It is worth noting that women's health is a highly polarizing issue, considering that it encompasses access to abortion and contraceptives. Both of these policy issues are salient with members of both parties for opposing reasons, so it is not surprising that there are discrepancies in Republican and Democratic sponsorships.

Issue saliency also prevailed as an important indicator of legislative activity. However, the influence of issue saliency is not exclusive to men or women legislators – in general, all members of Congress tend to focus more on salient issues when their party is in full control of Congress, and non-salient issues when their party is *not* in control of either chamber. Republican men stood as the exception to this, but their percentages on preschool-level education legislation were so minuscule, that they cannot be counted as statistically significant. This is to be expected, as there is little political capital to be gained from legislating on issues that voters do not understand or care much about in a given election cycle. However, when one's party is in the

minority and does not have control over the legislative agenda, it behooves a legislator to produce as much legislation as possible to bring home to their constituencies. One tactic to make this happen is to sponsor as much non-controversial legislation as possible. This helps them in protecting their incumbency and in promoting the relevancy of their party in a Congress otherwise characterized by intense polarization and gridlock.

A strange phenomenon that appeared in the data that was not accounted for is that during the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress (when Congress's party control was split between the chambers), both Republican and Democratic women became less active on legislation aimed at expanding women's health than in either the preceding or succeeding Congress. This could be because during that time, neither party had full control over the legislative agenda, so congresswomen knew it was not likely that their legislation would pass the other chamber, and there was little chance to gain political capital from the legislation's defeat. When an opposing party is in control of the whole of Congress, legislators can still make political gestures through proposing legislation that they know will fail and spin it as petty obstructionism on the part of the opposing party. When Congress is split and it is more difficult to tell whether or not legislation will pass, it may not be worth the effort to put together throw-away legislation when there are other, more moderate measures that may pass safely through both chambers. Gaining concrete legislative results is always preferable to political grandstanding, both politically and practically.

### **Improvements for Future Study**

To increase the relevancy of this study, it would be advantageous to collect information on more than three Congresses. This would increase the available data points and thereby allow more patterns to emerge, particularly where committee assignments are concerned. In addition, while committee request data, such as that used by Frisch and Kelly (2003), would be an ideal

marker to show how congresswomen attempt to provide substantive representation, that data is not readily available. If that information were to become a part of public record, this study could be modified to better indicate congresswomen's intent to provide substantive representation rather than just their ability to do so. There are other factors, such as members' pre-legislative careers and constituency interests that were not controlled for in this study but may produce interesting findings in the future.

The study of bill sponsorship can also be improved both by expanding the time periods measured and the legislative issues studied. If other women-salient issues, such as domestic violence, families, and gender equality were included in the study, different patterns would likely emerge. Finally, breaking down the effect of intersectional identities such as race and sexuality on legislative styles would add a new element to the study that would deepen the implications of substantive representation across the greater identities of women as a whole.

## **Conclusion**

Congresswomen have distinct legislative styles that stem from belonging to the most concentrated minority group serving in Congress. Of the two aspects studied (committee assignments and bill sponsorship), congresswomen show a distinct intent to provide substantive representation to women in the electorate in the one process that they had control over. The patterns of their bill sponsorships show that women do a better job than men at providing substantive representation to their citizen sisters. Their committee assignments, which are largely determined by majority-male party leadership, show exclusion from some of the most powerful Congressional committees and a wide spread over women-salient committees, which further suggests that there are certain institutional obstacles that congresswomen face even as Congress enters into a more women-inclusive era of policymaking. This, in combination with their small

numbers, makes the representative responsibility of women in Congress a much greater burden than that of their male colleagues. This burden may be alleviated somewhat as more women are elected to Congress, but this is not a solution to greater gendered obstacles and stereotypes. The underrepresentation of women in Congress stems from greater societal problems that have yet to be solved, but that are eased everyday as more women attempt to enter the political fold and change the dialogue around women in positions of power.



## References

- Angevine, Sara. 2017. "Representing All Women: An Analysis of Congress, Foreign Policy, and the Boundaries of Women's Surrogate Representation." *Political Research Quarterly* 70 (1):98-110. doi: 10.1177/1065912916675737.
- Anzia, Sarah F., and Christopher R. Berry. 2011. "The Jackie (and Jill) Robinson Effect: Why Do Congresswomen Outperform Congressmen?" *American Journal of Political Science* 55 (3):478-493. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-5907.2011.00512.x.
- Arnold, Laura W., and Barbara M. King. 2002. "Women, Committees, and Institutional Change in the Senate." In *Women Transforming Congress*, edited by Cindy Simon Rosenthal, 284-315. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Bratton, Kathleen A., Kerry L. Haynie, and Beth Reingold. 2006. "Agenda setting and African American women in state legislatures." *Journal of Women Politics & Policy* 28 (3-4):71-96. doi: 10.1300/J501v28n03\_04.
- Bratton, Kathleen A. 2005. "Critical Mass Theory Revisited: The Behavior and Success of Token Women in State Legislatures." *Politics & Gender* 1 (1):97-125.
- Bryce, Herrington J., and Alan E. Warrick. 1977. "Black Women in Electoral Politics." In *A Portrait of Marginality: The Political Behavior of the American Woman*, edited by M. Githens and J.L. Prestage. New York: David McKay Company, Inc.
- Chaney, Paul. 2013. "Institutionally homophobic? Political parties and the substantive representation of LGBT people: Westminster and regional UK elections 1945- 2011." *Policy & Politics* 41 (1):101-21.
- Chaney, Paul. 2014. "The Substantive Representation of Women – Does Issue-Salience Matter? Party Politicization and UK Westminster Elections 1945-2010." *British Journal Of Politics & International Relations* 16(1): 96-116.
- Childs, Sarah, and Mona Lena Krook. 2008. "Critical Mass Theory and Women's Political Representation." *Political Studies* 56 (3):725-736. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00712.x.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6):1241-299. doi: 10.2307/1229039.
- Crowley, Jocelyn E. 2004. "When Tokens Matter." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 29 (1):109-36.
- Dodson, Debra. 2006. *The Impact of Women in Congress*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dolan, Kathleen, and Kira Sanbonmatsu. 2009. "Gender Stereotypes and Attitudes Toward Gender Balance in Government." *American Politics Research* 37 (3):409-428. doi: 10.1177/1532673x08322109.
- Edelman, Adam. "Only Female Lawmakers Show up at Senate following Blizzard," *NY Daily News*, January 27, 2016. Accessed April 10, 2018. <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/female-lawmakers-show-senate-blizzard-article-1.2511309>
- Fenno, Richard F. 1973. *Congressmen in Committees*. 1 ed, *The Study of Congress*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Friedman, Sally. 1996. "House committee assignments of women and minority newcomers, 1965- 1994." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 21 (1):73-81. doi: 10.2307/440159.

- Frisch, Scott A., and Sean Q. Kelly. 2003. "A place at the table: Women's committee requests and women's committee assignments in the US House." *Women & Politics* 25 (3):1-26. doi: 10.1300/J014v25n03\_01.
- Fulton, Sarah A. 2012. "Running Backwards and in High Heels: The Gendered Quality Gap and Incumbent Electoral Success." *Political Research Quarterly* 65 (2):303-314. doi: 10.1177/1065912911401419.
- Gelb, Joyce. 2002. "Representing Women in Britain and the United States." In *Women Transforming Congress*, edited by Cindy Simon Rosenthal. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Githens, Marianne, and Jewel L. Prestage. 1977. *A Portrait of Marginality: The Political Behavior of American Woman*. New York: David McKay Company, Inc.
- Hansen, Eric R., and Sarah A. Treul. 2015. "The Symbolic and Substantive Representation of LGB Americans in the US House." *Journal of Politics* 77 (4):955-67.
- Hawkesworth, Mary. 2010. "Congressional Enactments of Race-Gender: Toward a Theory of Race-Gendered Institutions." In *Women, Gender and Politics*, edited by Mona Lena Krook and Sarah Childs, 251-262. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Helbling, Marc, and Anke Tresch. 2011. "Measuring party positions and issue salience from media coverage: Discussing and cross-validating new indicators." *Electoral Studies*, 30 (1):174–192.
- Htun, Mala. 2014. "Political Inclusion and Representation of Afrodescendant Women in Latin America." In *Representation: The Case of Women*, edited by M.C. Escobar-Lemmon, Taylor-Robinson, M.M. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jones, Jennifer J. 2016. "Talk "Like a Man": The Linguistic Styles of Hillary Clinton, 1992-2013." *Perspectives on Politics* 14 (3):625-642. doi: 10.1017/s1537592716001092.
- Lloren, Anouk. 2015. "Women's Substantive Representation: Defending Feminist Interests or Women's Electoral Preferences?" *Journal of Legislative Studies* 21 (2):144-167. doi: 10.1080/13572334.2014.966643.
- MacDonald, Jason A., and Erin E. O'Brien. 2011. "Quasi-Experimental Design, Constituency, and Advancing Women's Interests: Reexamining the Influence of Gender on Substantive Representation." *Political Research Quarterly* 64 (2):472-486. doi: 10.1177/1065912909354703.
- Mansbridge, Jane. 1999. "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes!'" *Journal of Politics* 61 (3):628.
- Mansbridge, Jane. 2003. "Rethinking Representation." 97 (4):515-528.
- Mayhew, David R. 1974. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. 2 ed. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Minta, Michael D., and Valeria Sinclair-Chapman. 2013. "Diversity in Political Institutions and Congressional Responsiveness to Minority Interests." *Political Research Quarterly* 66 (1):127-140. doi: 10.1177/1065912911431245.
- Office of Senator Susan Collins. "Sen Collins' Statement on Health Care Vote." News release, July 27, 2017. *Senator Susan Collins: United States Senator for Maine*. Accessed on October 05, 2017. <https://www.collins.senate.gov/newsroom/sen-collins-statement-health-care-vote>
- Orey, Byron D., Wendy Smooth, Kimberly S. Adams, Kisha Harris-Clark, and Off Govt Accountability. 2006. "Race and gender matter: Refining models of legislative policy

- making in state legislatures." *Journal of Women Politics & Policy* 28 (3-4):97-119. doi: 10.1300/J501v28n03\_05.
- Paludi, Michele. 2016. "Introduction." In *Why Congress Needs Women: Bringing Sanity to the House and Senate*. Santa Barbara: Praeger.
- Phillips, Amber. "One Election Bright Spot for Democrats: Women of Color." *The Washington Post*, November 10, 2016. Accessed April 10, 2018.  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/11/10/one-election-bright-spot-for-democrats-women-of-color/?utm\\_term=.fd93913a6ef6](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/11/10/one-election-bright-spot-for-democrats-women-of-color/?utm_term=.fd93913a6ef6)
- Pitkin, Hanna. 1967. *The Concept of Representation*. Berkley: University of California Press.
- Reingold, Beth, and Kerry L. Haynie. 2014. "Representing Women's Interests and Intersections of Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in US State Legislatures." In *Representation: The Case of Women*, edited by M.C. Escobar-Lemmon, Taylor-Robinson, M.M., 184-204. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Simon, Dennis M., and Barbara Palmer. 2010. "The roll call behavior of men and women in the U.S. House of Representatives." *Politics & Gender* 6 (2):225-246. doi: <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.csbsju.edu/10.1017/S1743923X1000005X>
- Swers, Michele. 2002a. *The Difference Women Make: The Policy Impact of Women in Congress*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Swers, Michele. 2002b. "Transforming the Agenda: Analyzing Gender Differences in Women's Issue Bill Sponsorship." In *Women Transforming Congress*, edited by Cindy Simon Rosenthal, 260-283. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Swers, Michele. 2014. "Representing Women's Interests in a Polarized Congress." In *Women and Elective Office: Past, Present, and Future*, edited by Sue Thomas and Clyde Wilcox, 162-180. Oxford University Press.
- Thomas, Sue. 1998. "Introduction." In *Women and Elective Office: Past, Present, and Future*, edited by Sue Thomas and Clyde Wilcox. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wallace, Sophia J. 2014. "Representing Latinos: Examining Descriptive and Substantive Representation in Congress." *Political Research Quarterly* 67 (4):917-929. doi: 10.1177/1065912914541795.
- "Women in the U.S. Congress 2017." *Center for American Women and Politics*. Accessed October 05, 2017. <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/women-us-congress-2017>.