

Are U.S. Women State Legislators Accountable to Women?
The Complementary Roles of Feminist Identity and Women's Organizations

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Numerous scholars have argued that the increased numerical representation of women among legislators is likely to lead to increased substantive representation of women, and a number of studies have presented evidence suggesting a strong relationship between the presence of women legislators and attention to women's issues within legislative bodies (e.g., Dodson and Carroll 1991; Thomas 1994; Carroll 1994; Carroll 2001; Saint-Germain 1989). While we have considerable evidence that women legislators give greater priority to women's issues than their male colleagues, we know less about *why* they do so. What is the process underlying the substantive representation of women by women legislators? Why does the representation of women by women legislators happen? This paper examines these questions with particular attention to the role of women's organizations and networks.

Anne Phillips has argued that the most troubling question surrounding the political representation of women is the question of accountability (1995, 56). Observing that "Representation depends on the continuing relationship between representatives and the represented" (1995, 82), Phillips concludes "there is no obvious way of establishing strict accountability to women as a group" (1995, 83). Thus, for Phillips, "Changing the gender composition of elected assemblies is largely an enabling condition... but it cannot present itself as a guarantee [of greater substantive representation for women]" (1995, 83).

While Phillips' observations are astute, I would argue that a weak form of accountability is both possible and operative for women who serve in legislatures as I will attempt to demonstrate in this paper. Through the dual and complementary mechanisms of feminist identity and women's organizations, a level of accountability is achieved between women legislators and women in the electorate (at least those women who wish to see improvements in women's status).

Feminism, Women Legislators, and Legislative Institutions

In a recent article S. Laurel Weldon has reminded us that the perspective of a group such as women is a "*collective*" product "created when individual members of the group interact with other members of the group to define their priorities" (2002, 1156). And she insists that "significantly improving substantive representation for groups requires that representatives be able to articulate the *group* perspective" (2002, 1157-8).

Although she offers these important observations, Weldon has little confidence that women legislators can contribute much in the way of substantive representation of women largely because she characterizes, mistakenly in my view, most empirical scholars and even theorists, on occasion, as arguing that individual women legislators draw only upon their own experiences and opinions in representing women. Rejecting what she sees as the widespread assumption "that a group perspective resides complete in any individual from the group" (2002, 1155), she argues that women's policy agencies and women's movements "give women a stronger voice in the policy-making process than does the presence of women in the legislature" (2002, 1154).

Whereas Weldon tends to see women legislators as isolated individuals relying on their own opinions and experiences, I want to allow and test for the empirical possibility that many women legislators, even most, are closely connected to networks that provide access to the very group perspective that Weldon assumes they lack. Building on the work and insights of Mary Katzenstein, I would expect to find considerable evidence of activity and organizing by women on behalf of women within legislative institutions as well as linkages to feminist organizing outside legislative institutions.

Partially in response to Robert Putman's view that Americans associate less than in the past, Katzenstein argues that, in the case of women, "If the profusion of unobtrusive feminist networks, caucuses, associations..., both inside and outside institutions, is any indication, civic associationalism not only is present but can provide a breeding ground for a form of protest politics that operates within both arterial and capillary corridors of society and of the state" (1998, 12). Katzenstein shows us that feminism now exists inside as well as outside of male-dominated institutions. Feminist protest, which was so evident in the 1970s, has not so much diminished as it has changed forms and locations. While there may be fewer street

demonstrations, the women inside the major institutions of our society have found new strategies, tailored to their institutional contexts, to press forward with feminist demands. As Katzenstein has explained:

For the protester of today, it is as if the handbook of Chairman Mao has been supplanted by the essential writings of Michel Foucault. Most feminists of the second wave live their lives inside institutions.... They have learned that the linkages connecting those on the inside to those on the outside are multilayered: language, money, and organizational networks work in complex fashion to link the inside and the outside (1998, 41).

Although Katzenstein focuses on feminism inside the institutions of the military and the Catholic church, one could easily extend her arguments and her analysis to legislative bodies, such as Congress and state legislatures, and expect to find feminism and feminist protest inside these institutions of the state as well. Following Katzenstein, one would also expect to find multilayered linkages between feminists inside and outside legislative institutions.

Mechanisms of Accountability

While Katzenstein's work would lead one to expect to find feminism present in legislatures, specifically among women legislators, as well as linkages between feminists inside and outside the legislature, I want to examine more than the presence of feminists in legislatures and their links to feminists outside of legislatures. I also want to examine whether the linkages between women legislators and women's organizations are sufficiently strong and sufficiently related to their policy-related actions to constitute a weak form of accountability.

Jane Mansbridge's work is very helpful in thinking about the mechanisms that might underlie and bring about such accountability. Mansbridge argues that identity plays an important role in creating accountability and that most feminists feel "internally accountable" to the women's movement. Moreover, the movement to which feminists feel accountable, Mansbridge argues, is "neither an aggregation of organizations nor an aggregation of individual members," but rather a "discourse," which she defines as "a set of changing, contested aspirations and understandings that provide conscious goals, cognitive backing, and emotional support for each individual's evolving feminist identity" (1995, 27). Feminists are held accountable to this movement/discourse in large part through internalization. This "accountability through identity" differs from descriptive representation. Descriptive representatives, who resemble their constituents, take actions consistent with those their constituents would prefer merely by acting in their own self-interest or according to their own beliefs. In contrast, according to Mansbridge, "Accountability through identity... requires thinking of the collective as a worthy entity and oneself as part of that entity" (1995, 29).¹ In other words, accountability through identity involves thinking in terms of the "group perspective" that Weldon views as so critical to substantive representation.

While the feminist movement to which individuals feel accountable is, in Mansbridge's view, a discursive one and not one consisting of a series of organizations, nevertheless organizations have a role to play both in helping to shape the discourse and in providing support for individuals. Mansbridge explains:

[Feminist] actions are supported by ongoing feminist discourse, and that discourse in turn is supported by organizations—often within mainstream organizational forms (Katzenstein 1990)—that bring feminists together, allowing them to articulate face to face their evolving thoughts, conflicts, and commonalities and to give shape to their actions. Just as organizations shape discourse and discourse shapes organizations, so feminists take support from the ongoing feminist movement, as embodied in organizations and in discourse, and, through what they say and do, give support back. The relation between individuals, organizations, and discourse is mutually reinforcing (1995, 31).

Thus, when women legislators are connected to women's groups and networks, their relationships with these organizations can provide legislators with ongoing access to a larger group perspective. Women's organizations can play an important role in reinforcing feminist identity and encouraging and supporting women legislators' policy-related actions on behalf of women.

Mapping the Potential Organizational Terrain for Women Legislators

There are a variety of organizations outside and inside the legislature that can play such a reinforcing and supporting role for women legislators. First there are the various membership organizations that have developed as part of the contemporary feminist movement; these groups aim to end the inequities women face in American society. Perhaps the most relevant for women public officials is the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC), which was explicitly founded with the goal of increasing the number of women in elective and appointive office (Young 2000, 32-33). The National Organization for Women (NOW), although less centrally focused on electing women to office, has also at times throughout its history been very active in electoral politics, spearheading the campaign to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment and endorsing the Democratic presidential ticket in 1984 (McGlen et al. 2002).

Second, there are the more traditional public service-oriented, membership organizations like the League of Women Voters and the American Association of University Women. Naomi Black argues that some of these traditional women's organizations, and the League of Women Voters in particular, represent a point of view she labels "social feminism ... whose most important characteristic is a focus on values and experience identified with women" (1989, 1). Organizations such as the League of Women Voters "share ... a view of women as valuable because different" and "derive a public role for women from the private role of women" (1989, 3). In recent years these organizations have increasingly worked in coalition with more explicitly feminist organizations, such as NWPC, NOW, and the Fund for the Feminist Majority, and have adopted feminist policy positions (McGlen et al. 2002, 57-58; Baer 2003), resulting in, what Denise Baer describes as a "convergence of 'traditional' and 'feminist' organizations" (2003, 120).

In the past three decades a number of political action committees (PACs) have been established at both national and state levels to provide financial assistance to women candidates. As of 2001, the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) was able to identify 46 PACs and donor networks that gave money predominantly to women candidates and/or had a predominantly female donor base (Center for American Women and Politics 2001). While some of these PACs are partisan, many give money to women of both parties. CAWP identified 11 national PACs, including PACs affiliated with both NOW and NWPC. Perhaps the best known of these PACs is EMILY's List, a donor network that supports pro-choice Democratic women candidates for mostly federal and statewide offices. The Republican counterpart to EMILY's List is WISH List, which supports pro-choice Republican women. And, of course, the grandmother of these PACs is the nonpartisan Women's Campaign Fund, founded in 1974 as the first national PAC supporting (pro-choice) women candidates at all levels of office. The newest of the national PACs, founded in 2002, is The Future PAC, founded to support progressive African American women candidates for state and federal public offices. In addition to the national PACs, the Center for American Women and Politics identified 35 state and local PACs in 18 states that support women candidates within their states (Center for American Women and Politics 2001).

At least three national organizations exist specifically for women state legislators -- the National Order of Women Legislators (NOWL), the National Organization of Black Elected Legislative Women (NOBEL/Women), and the Women's Legislative Network of the National Conference of State Legislatures. These organizations all meet once or more a year and bring women legislators together around shared concerns. NOWL has a membership of more than 1600 current and former state legislators. All African American women state legislators are members of NOBEL/Women. Similarly, all women legislators are members of the Women's Network by virtue of their state's membership in the National Conference of State

Legislators. NOWL “provides an atmosphere for women to examine issues in a ‘safe environment.’ Women legislators have an opportunity to share information on issues such as balancing family and elected office” (www.womenlegislators.org/nowl). The Women’s Legislative Network has as its purpose to “promote the participation, empowerment, and leadership of women legislators” and among other activities, works to strengthen caucuses, informal gatherings, and other ways for women legislators to network both within and across states (www.ncsl.org/programs/wln).

In addition to the many women's organizations that exist outside the state legislature, women in a significant number of states have also organized inside their legislatures. Women’s caucuses exist in several state legislatures although their numbers are difficult to track because caucuses come and go over time in response to shifts in the political environment. As an alternative to formally organized caucuses, women legislators in a number of states have found ways to organize informally, sometimes along and sometimes across party lines.

Description of the Data Sets

In the summer of 2001 under a grant from the Barbara Lee Foundation, the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) conducted a nationwide survey of women and men serving as state legislators. Four samples of legislators were drawn: (1) the population of all women state senators (n=396); (2) a systematic sample of one-half of women state representatives (n=718); (3) a systematic sample of male state senators, stratified by state and sampled in proportion to the number of women from each state in our sample of women state senators (n=396); and (4) a systematic sample of male state representatives, stratified by state and sampled in proportion to the number of women from each state in our sample of women state senators (n=718).²

A telephone interview of approximately one-half hour in duration was attempted with each legislator, resulting in the following response rates: 56% for female senators; 58% for female representatives; 40% for male senators; and 49% for male representatives. Respondents did not differ significantly from all the legislators selected for any of the four samples in their party affiliation, the one variable for which we have data for all legislators.

While the analysis in this paper relies most centrally on data from the 2001 study, data from a 1988 CAWP study of women legislators are sometimes reported as well. To allow for over-time comparisons, the 2001 study was designed to be very similar to a study CAWP had conducted in the summer of 1988 under a grant from the Charles H. Revson Foundation. The 1988 study also was based on a nationwide survey of women and men serving as state legislators, employed the same sampling procedure as in 2001, and asked many of the same questions. For the 1988 study, the following four samples of legislators were drawn: (1) the population of women state senators (N=228); (2) a systematic sample of one-half of women state representatives (N=474); (3) a systematic sample of male state senators, stratified by state and sampled in proportion to the number of women from each state in our sample of women state senators (N=228); and (4) a systematic sample of male state representatives, stratified by state and sampled in proportion to the number of women from each state in our sample of women state senators (N=474).

Response rates for the 1988 study were: 86% for female senators; 87% for female representatives; 60% for male senators; and 73% for male representatives.³ As in 2001, respondents did not differ significantly from all the legislators selected for any of the four samples in their party affiliation, the one variable for which we have data for all legislators.

Like the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives, state senates and state houses are very different political institutions. The lower houses of state legislatures vary considerably in size and influence across the states while state senates tend to be smaller and show less variation. In addition, senate seats are generally considered more prestigious and thus recruitment to state senates may differ from recruitment to state houses. Because of these differences, state senators and state representatives are analyzed separately throughout this paper.

Feminist Identity

The CAWP studies included a measure of feminist identity which can be used to approximate the proportion of women legislators who might hold themselves “internally accountable” to the women’s movement in the manner suggested by Jane Mansbridge. Legislators were presented with a series of “labels that some people reject, but others used to describe themselves” and asked whether they did or did not identify with each label. One of the labels included on both the 2001 and 1988 surveys was the term “feminist.”

In 2001, 50.9% of women state senators (N=216) and 40.2% of women state representatives (N=366) described themselves as a “feminist.” These figures represented a slight increase in feminist identification among state senators and a slight decrease in feminist identification among state representatives from 1988 when 46.3% of women senators (N=190) and 44.5% of women representatives (N=398) identified themselves as feminists.

There were very striking party differences on this measure. A majority of Democratic women called themselves feminists in both state senates (66.2% in 2001 and 62.5% in 1988) and state houses (54.7 % in 2001 and 56.7% in 1988). Not surprisingly, Republican women were much less likely than Democratic women to identify themselves as feminists in both years. Only 20.8% of Republican state senators and 13.8% of Republican state representatives embraced the feminist label in 2001, down somewhat from the 26.9% of Republican women senators and 27.5% of Republican women representatives who self-identified as feminists in 1988.

Of course, the word “feminist” carries considerable baggage, and many women who otherwise support the women’s movement reject the feminist label. Consequently, these figures probably understate somewhat the degree of identification with the goals of the women’s movement among women state legislators.

Ties Between Women Legislators and Women's Organizations

Given the wide range and large number of women's organizations with which women legislators could potentially be involved, one might expect to find strong patterns of connection between women legislators and women's organizations. Indeed, this is the case. A majority of the women legislators in the CAWP studies had close ties to women's organizations both outside and inside the legislature.

We asked women legislators in both 2001 and 1988 whether they were members of two specific feminist organizations (National Organization for Women and National Women's Political Caucus), whether they were members of any other feminist organization, and whether they belonged to three major, but more traditional, women's organizations (League of Women Voters, American Association of University Women, and Business and Professional Women). In 2001, a large majority – 68.5% of women state senators (N=219) and 64.2% of women state representatives (N=372) – were members of at least one of these various women's groups. Similarly, in 2001, a narrow majority – 51.1% of women state senators (N=219) and 50.3% of women state representatives (N=372) – reported membership in an explicitly feminist organization (NOW, NWPC, or another feminist group).

Table 1: Proportions of Women State Legislators Who Reported Membership in Various Women’s Organizations, 2001 and 1988

	Women Senators		Women Representatives	
	2001 %	1988 %	2001 %	1988 %
League of Women Voters (LVW)	35.0	43.2	27.8	39.2
American Association of University Women (AAUW)	17.4	20.7	11.7	20.9
Business and Professional Women (BPW)	17.5	39.4	17.8	27.9
National Organization for Women (NOW)	28.2	22.1	26.1	22.6
Women’s Political Caucus (WPC)	32.5	31.6	33.5	29.5
Feminist Organization Other Than NOW or WPC	22.9	24.7	20.5	24.4

The League of Women Voters (LWV) was the organization with the largest proportions of women state senators as members in 2001 followed closely by the Women’s Political Caucus (WPC); about one-third of women state senators reported that they belonged to each of these organizations. Among women state representatives in 2001, the WPC had the largest proportion of memberships, 33.5%, followed by the LWV and the National Organization for Women (NOW) with just over a quarter of all representatives belonging to each (Table 1). However, all the women's groups fared well with proportions ranging from about one-sixth to one-third of women legislators reporting membership in each of the specific groups.

Moreover, the proportions of 2001 legislators belonging to feminist organizations, such as the National Organization for Women and the National Women's Political Caucus, were higher than the proportions belonging to more traditional organizations, such as the American Association of University Women and Business and Professional Women (Table 1). The LWV was the only traditional women’s organization with membership levels comparable to the more explicitly feminist organizations.

Some interesting changes are evident over time. Overall, somewhat fewer women legislators belonged to at least one major women’s organization in 2001 than in 1988.⁴ This drop-off seems largely concentrated among the traditional women’s organizations. As Table 1 shows, there was a notable decrease between 1988 and 2001 in the proportions of women legislators who belonged to the more traditional women’s groups—LWV, AAUW, and BPW. This decline in membership is not evident among feminist organizations, which maintained comparable levels of membership or even increased their memberships slightly between 1988 and 2001. While all these women’s organizations have struggled to attract members in recent years and thus have suffered from some of the decline in civic activism noted by Robert Putnam (2000), the finding that feminist organizations such as WPC and NOW have maintained their levels of membership among women legislators may reflect their more explicitly political focus as well as the fact that they have formed PACs that give money to candidates.

However, the ties between women legislators and women's organizations external to the legislature extend beyond mere membership, and there is evidence that the ties run in both directions -- from legislators to organizations and from organizations back to legislators. In order to measure a level of commitment that went beyond simple membership in women's organizations, CAWP asked legislators if they donated any money (other than dues) to women's groups during the past year. A clear majority, 61.6%, of women state senators (N=211) and almost exactly half, 49.9%, of women state representatives (N=367) reported that they made a financial contribution to at least one women's organization. However, as was the case with memberships in traditional women's organizations, there is some evidence that the ties between women legislators and women's organizations were not as strong in 2001 as in 1988. In 1988 a slightly larger proportion, 67.0%, of women state senators (N=188), and a substantially larger proportion, 60.2%, of women state representatives (N=394) donated money to at least one women's organization.

Just as most women legislators contribute to women's organizations, most also receive campaign assistance from women's groups. Proportions of 2001 women legislators larger than the proportions reporting that they gave money to women's groups -- 76.7% of women senators (N=219) and 61.6% of women state representatives (N=372) -- received either "formal or informal support" from one or more women's organizations during their most recent election. About one-third of women state senators and about one-fourth of women state representatives reported that they received assistance from the National Organization for Women (Table 2). Virtually equal proportions of women legislators received support from the Women's Political Caucus, the other major feminist organization that is very active in electoral politics. In addition, two-thirds of state senators and about one-half of state representatives reported receiving campaign support from a women's organization other than NOW or WPC. Unlike the pattern for legislators' donations to women's groups which decreased from 1988 to 2001, women legislators were as likely to receive campaign support from women's organizations in 2001 as they were in 1988 (Table 2).

Table 2: Proportions of Women State Legislators Who Received Campaign Support from Various Women's Organizations, 2001 and 1988

	Women Senators		Women Representatives	
	2001	1988	2001	1988
	%	%	%	%
National Organization for Women (NOW)	32.7	32.8	24.2	22.8
Women's Political Caucus (WPC)	31.6	32.6	25.4	29.2
Women's Organization Other Than NOW or WPC	68.4	55.9	53.0	50.0

Women legislators have close ties to women's groups inside as well as outside the legislature. At the time of CAWP's 2001 survey, 45.6% of women state senators (N=217) and 57.0% of women state representatives (N=370) reported that a formal women's caucus existed in their legislature. Of those who reported the existence of a caucus in their state, about three-fourths -- 73.5% of the state senators (N=98) and 77.0% of the state representatives (N=209) -- said that they attended meetings of the caucus. These proportions are comparable to proportions for legislators in CAWP's 1988 study.

Many of the women who were in legislatures where there was no formal women's caucus nevertheless reported that women in their legislatures met together informally. Sometimes these informal meetings included women of both parties; sometimes they were partisan in nature. When asked about informal as well as formal ways of getting together, very large majorities -- 77.2% of women senators (N= 219) and 84.1% of women representatives (N=372) -- reported that women in their legislatures met together. Most of the women legislators who were aware of these gatherings were also participants in them; 81.1% of the state senators (N=169) and 83.1% (N=313) of the state representatives who reported that women in their legislature met together also reported that they themselves attended the meetings.⁵

Feminist Identity, Involvement in Women’s Organizations, and Legislative Efforts on Behalf of Women

In CAWP’s 2001 study as in earlier research by CAWP and others, women legislators are found to be quite active in promoting women’s rights legislation and much more active than their male colleagues. The CAWP study included two primary measures of legislative efforts on behalf of women.

First, the 2001 CAWP survey asked each legislator to describe the one bill that had been her or his own personal top priority for the current legislative session. Legislators’ top priority bills were then coded into sixteen different categories, one of which was women’s rights issues. Those legislative initiatives coded as “women’s rights bills” were judged to be feminist in intent; their purpose appeared to be to expand women's opportunities or to protect their rights.⁶

Table 3: Gender Differences in Proportions of Legislators Who Had Women’s Rights Bill as Top Legislative Priority and Who Worked on Women’s Rights Bill, 2001

	Senate		House	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
	%	%	%	%
Women’s Rights Bill as Top Priority	4.7	2.7	11.0	4.1
tau _b =	.05		.13***	
N=	213	146	356	292
Worked on Women’s Rights Bill	54.8	41.6	57.5	35.1
tau _b =	.13*		.22***	
N=	219	154	372	308

*** p<.001 ** p<.01 *p<.05

Gender differences among state senators were small, and fewer than one in every 20 women had a women’s rights bill as her top legislative priority (Table 3). However, women representatives were significantly more likely than their male colleagues to report that a bill focusing on women was their top legislative priority, and more than one-tenth of the women in state houses gave top priority to legislation on issues such as domestic violence, child care, equal rights, abortion, teen pregnancy, and parental leave (Table 3).

Of course, an analysis of legislators' top priority bills for a single session is likely to underestimate the extent to which legislators are involved with legislation affecting women since a legislative session is a mere snapshot in time, and legislators' top priorities may well vary from session to session. Over the course of several legislative sessions, one would expect to find much larger proportions of legislators giving priority to legislation focusing on women. Moreover, a legislator may devote time and energy to a variety of bills in addition to her or his top priority bill during the course of one legislative session.

Consequently, to develop a fuller assessment of the extent to which women legislators are involved with women's rights legislation, CAWP also asked each legislator whether she or he had worked on *any* legislation during the current session where the bill itself or specific provisions of the bill were intended to help women in particular. When a legislator replied affirmatively, she or he was then asked to describe in one sentence what specifically the bill did for women. To develop a measure of activity on women's rights bills, any legislator who did not answer affirmatively, who described an anti-feminist bill,⁷ or who could not describe the bill in an open-ended follow-up question was considered *not* to have worked on a women's rights bill.

In both houses of the legislature, majorities of the women, and significantly larger proportions of the women than the men, worked on legislation to benefit women (Table 3). Based on this second measure of legislative efforts on behalf of women that covers all of a senator's or representative's work during a session, sizable proportions of women legislators can be considered to be advocates on behalf of women.

If feminist identity and connections to women's organizations are both important in stimulating and supporting women legislators' actions on behalf of women, then one would expect women legislators who self-identify as feminists to be more likely than other legislators to have a women's rights bill as their top legislative priority and to have worked on women's rights bills. One would also expect this to be true for women legislators who have close connections to women's organizations.

Feminist self-identification is moderately and significantly related to working on women's rights bills for women senators ($\tau_b = .20, p < .01$) and to both working on women's rights bills ($\tau_b = .15, p < .01$) and having a women's rights bill as a top legislative priority ($\tau_b = .13, p < .05$) for women representatives. Among state senators who called themselves feminists, 64.5% worked on a women's rights bill.⁸ Similarly, among state representatives who self-identified as feminists, 66.0% worked on a women's rights bill, and 15.8% had a women's rights bill as their top legislative priority for the ongoing legislative session.

Table 4: Proportions of Women Legislators Who Had Women's Rights Bill as Top Legislative Priority For Various Connections to Women's Organizations, 2001

	Women Senators		Women Representatives	
	%	τ_b	%	τ_b
Belong to Major Women's Organization	6.8	.15***	11.7	.03
Belong to Feminist Organization	7.3	.13	14.1	.11*
Donate Money to Women's Group	7.9	.18***	13.3	.07
Receive Campaign Support from Women's Group	6.1	.12**	12.1	.05
Attend Meetings of Women Legislators	6.7	.12*	12.0	.05

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

The evidence is somewhat mixed as to whether women legislators with connections to women's organizations were more likely than other women to have had a women's rights bill as their top priority

legislation (Table 4). Women state senators who were members of one of six major women’s organizations, who donated money to a women's group, who received campaign support from a women's organization, or who attended meetings of women legislators within their legislatures were significantly more likely than other women senators to have a women's issue as their top legislative priority (Table 4). Nevertheless, the proportions of women senators with a women’s rights issue as their top priority for the current session were small even among those with connections to women’s groups. And among women state representatives, the only connection to women’s groups that seemed to enhance significantly a representative’s likelihood of having a women’s rights bill as her top priority was her membership in an explicitly feminist organization (Table 4).

Thus, the evidence for a relationship between involvement with women's organizations and legislative action on behalf of women as measured by legislators' top priority legislation is modest and not consistent. However, as noted above, legislators' top priorities may well vary from session to session, and over the course of several legislative sessions, one would surely find larger proportions of legislators giving priority to women’s rights issues and thus possibly a stronger, more consistent relationship between being involved in women's organizations and having a women’s rights issues as a top legislative priority.

Table 5: Proportions of Women Legislators Who Worked on Women’s Rights Bill For Various Connections to Women’s Organizations, 2001

	Women Senators		Women Representatives	
	%	tau _b	%	tau _b
Belong to Major Women’s Organization	59.3	.13*	61.9	.12*
Belong to Feminist Organization	58.9	.09	66.3	.18***
Donate Money to Women’s Group	61.5	.16*	64.5	.15**
Receive Campaign Support from Women’s Group	56.5	.06	62.4	.13*
Attend Meetings of Women Legislators	57.7	.08	61.9	.14**

*** p<.001 ** p<.01 *p<.05

Turning to the second measure of legislative efforts on behalf of women—i.e., whether legislators had worked on any legislation during the current session where the bill itself or specific provisions of the bill were intended to help women in particular, evidence for the importance of connections to women’s organizations is more compelling (Table 5). For women senators, only two of the measures of connections to women’s organizations are significantly related to their work on women’s rights bills; these are belonging to a major women’s organization and contributing money to a women’s group. However, for women representatives, the relationships are stronger and more consistent. For every measure of involvement with women's organizations included in Table 5, women representatives who were connected to women's organizations were more likely than other women legislators to have worked on legislation intended to help women. Women representatives who were members of one of six major women's organizations, who were members of explicitly feminist groups, who donated money to a women's organization, who received campaign support from a women's group, and who met with other women in their legislature were all significantly more likely than other women representatives to have worked on women’s rights bills.

Table 6: Proportions of Women Legislators with Varying Numbers of Different Types of Connections^a to Women’s Organizations Who Worked on Women’s Rights Bill, 2001

	Number of Connections to Women’s Organizations				tau _c =
	None	One	Two	Three	
	%	%	%	%	
State Senators	48.4	48.9	46.9	67.1	.17*
State Representatives	47.1	49.0	55.6	74.7	.23***

*** p<.001 ** p<.01 *p<.05

^aTypes of connections to women’s organizations are: belong to a feminist organization, donate money to a women’s group, and receive campaign support from a women’s organization.

The relationship between women legislators’ efforts on half of women and their connections to women’s groups is strongest in instances when legislators have multiple types of connections to women’s groups. Women legislators who belonged to a feminist organization, donated money to a women’s group, and received campaign support from a women’s organization (i.e., those legislators with all three types of connections to women’s groups) were compared with legislators who connected with women’s organizations in none, one, or two of these ways (Table 6). Women legislators who were connected to women’s organizations in all three ways were much more likely to work on women’s rights bills than those legislators with none, one, or even two connections. While the proportions who worked on women’s rights bills was 54.8% for all women senators and 57.5% for all women representatives (Table 3), among these women who were most strongly connected to women’s organizations, the corresponding proportions were 67.1% and 74.7%, respectively (Table 6). Clearly, then, the women legislators who are most strongly connected to women’s organizations are the most active on behalf of women.

Discussion and Conclusions

Over the past three decades, feminist organizations such as the NWPC and women’s PACs such as EMILY’s List and WISH List have advocated for the election of larger numbers of women to public office, arguing that our government does not sufficiently represent women's perspectives and concerns. Most organizations that support women candidates view the election of greater numbers of women as a *means* for social change and not merely an *end* in and of itself. These organizations assume that women officials more often than men will be conscious of and responsive to women's concerns and that women officials will work to insure that public policy adequately reflects these concerns.

Most women state legislators do work on legislation aimed at helping women, and proportionately more women than men legislators place top priority on legislation dealing with women's rights issues.

About two-fifths to one-half of women state legislators identify themselves as feminists, and consequently might be expected to hold themselves internally accountable to the women’s movement. Consistent with Jane Mansbridge’s ideas about feminist accountability, there is a clear relationship between feminist identity and work on women’s rights bills within the legislature. But internalized accountability to the women’s movement is not the only accountability mechanism at work connecting women legislators to the larger group perspective. Women’s organizations also connect women to a larger, more collective perspective.

Most women legislators are involved with women's organizations both external and internal to the legislature. Majorities or near-majorities of women legislators belong to women's organizations outside the legislature, donate money to women's organizations, and receive support from women's organizations when

they run for office. Most also meet with other women in their legislature whether on a formal or informal, partisan or bipartisan, basis. A sizeable minority of women legislators have close connections to feminist groups, in particular. They belong to organizations such as the National Organization for Women and the Women's Political Caucus, and they receive support from these groups when they campaign for office.

Moreover, several findings from this paper suggest that it is the women legislators who are involved with women's organizations who are most active in advocating on behalf of women in their legislative work. Although the evidence is somewhat inconsistent, in most cases women who are connected to women's organizations are more likely than other women to work on legislation aimed at helping women. Moreover, those women legislators who have multiple types of connections to women's organizations and thus are most closely connected are especially likely to be working on women's rights bills.

The findings presented in this paper suggest that one of the reasons women's organizations are so confident that women officeholders will represent women's concerns is that women's organizations help to make this true. Although not commonly recognized as such by political scientists, women's organizations seem to function as an important linkage mechanism in representation, connecting women officeholders to other women and to a more collective vision of women's interests, thus providing at least a weak form of accountability. In the absence of close ties to women's organizations, it seems likely that fewer women legislators would be active advocates on behalf of women. As the work of Estelle Freedman (1979) and Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977), among others, reminds us, the pressures toward assimilation and conformity with existing norms are great for women who enter male-dominated institutions. Women in male-dominated institutions are likely to be able to resist such pressures only if they have alternative arenas in which their identities as women can be validated. Women's organizations, especially feminist groups, provide affirmation and sustenance for women legislators; they also function as a conscience for these women, providing subtle, and perhaps sometimes not so subtle, reminders that they have a responsibility to represent women's interests within the institutions in which they serve.

Notes

1. It is this distinction between descriptive representation and accountability through identity that Weldon seems not to grasp, leading her seriously to underestimate the potential for women legislators to substantively represent women.
2. The men were sampled in this manner to insure that we actually compared women and men who served in similar political circumstances and not women and men from states with very different political and legislative environments.
3. There are a number of possible reasons for the higher response rates in 1988 than in 2001, including differences in the survey research firms which administered the study, the greater numbers of legislatures in session while we were conducting the survey in 2001, the increased proliferation of voice mail and answering machines making it more difficult to reach respondents, the increase in telemarketing, and the increased rate of turnover in legislatures with fewer legislators consequently aware of the Eagleton Institute of Politics (the parent organization of CAWP whom respondents were told was conducting the study). However, the major factor leading to lower response rates in 2001 seems to have been the sheer proliferation of surveys of legislators not only by academics, but also by other entities and organizations. Legislators reported that they were asked to participate in several other surveys concurrently with ours.
4. In 1988, 74.4% of women state senators (N=195) and 72.4% of women state representatives (N=410) were members of at least major women's group, somewhat smaller proportions than reported above for 2001.
5. Again, these proportions of women in 2001 reporting that meetings of women legislators took place and that they attended those meetings were very similar to the proportions from the 1988 survey.
6. Only a tiny minority of legislators, 1.7% of women and 0.4% of men, had as their top legislative priority a bill that focused on women but appeared anti-feminist in intent. These anti-feminist bills have been separated out and are not included in the category "women's rights bills."
7. Only 2.4 % of women legislators and 1.1% of men legislators described bills that were clearly anti-feminist.
8. Women senators who self-identified as feminists were also more likely than women senators who did not to have a women's rights bill as their top legislative priority ($\tau_b = .13$); this relationship just missed being significant at the .05 level.

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