Invisible Forces: Gender, Race, and Congressional Staff

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INTRODUCTION

Forty years ago, Harrison Fox and Susan Hammond published a seminal book on congressional staff, calling staffers "the invisible force in American lawmaking." They were not the first observers of congressional dynamics to note the often unseen and under-investigated role of professional staff on Capitol Hill, nor have they been the last. Just two years later, Michael Malbin (1980) published *Unelected Representatives: Congressional Staff and the Future of Representative Government,* seeking to make visible what he perceived as an underappreciated level of staff influence on the policy process. By the mid-1990s, however, Herbert and Karen Foerstel (1996) still characterized congressional staff as representing "the large and influential Capitol Hill infrastructure" that is "invisible to most of the public" (145). Staff remained largely invisible to scholars as well, central to only a handful of book-length publications over the past four decades (Fox and Hammond 1977; Malbin 1980; Pierce 2014; Jones 2017a).

The dearth of research on congressional professionals stands in stark contrast to the increased professionalization of the nation's top legislative institution. The "ever-increasing complexity of governing," as the national policy agenda has become larger and more complicated, has required members of Congress to hire specialists able to assist them in navigating the new political realities of effective representation (Romzek and Utter 1997, 1251; see also Polsby 1969). The Legislative Reorganization Acts of 1946 and 1970 both increased manpower and encouraged specialization among staff and members, helping them to meet mounting legislative demands. By 1995, the average personal staff was between 12 and 18 in the House and 30 and 50 in the Senate (CMF 1995). Today, committee and personal staff in the House and Senate represent a workforce of over 13,000 individuals, outnumbering members by a ratio of 26 to 1 (Brookings 2017).[1] Moreover, staff qualifications have increased as the complexity of the legislative agenda and process has grown (Romzek 2000).

Despite the growth in staff size and potential for influence, Fox and Hammond's (1977) conclusion that "Scholarly interest in Congress has most generally focused on the central actors in the legislative drama, the Senators and Representatives, or on case studies of a particular piece of legislation or an issue," remains true (5-6). They add, "We are left with a somewhat surprising situation of a major congressional group whose numbers and influence are increasing but of whose characteristics and activities little description or analysis is available" (Fox and Hammond 1977, 6).

Even fewer publications have examined the gendered or raced patterns of employment, access, and advancement among congressional staff (for exceptions, see Foerstel and Foerstel 1996; Bell and Rosenthal 2003; Fox and Hammond 1977; Wilson and Carlos 2014; Tabakman 2009; Friedman and Nakamura 1991; Johannes 1984). Jones' (2017a) dissertation is one of the few large-scale investigations into how the racial power dynamics on Capitol Hill affect the experiences of staffers. There is only slightly more scholarship that investigates gender and congressional staff. Early investigations analyzed gender differences in professional representation with limited analysis of institutional implications (Hammond 1973; Tabakman 2009; Friedman and Nakamura 1991; Johannes 1984). Even recent work from Wilson and Carlos (2014) focuses on the presence of women on congressional staffs, finding a positive relationship between women members and hiring women staff.

In their 1996 book on women in Congress, Herbert and Karen Foerstel dedicate a chapter to women congressional staff, providing one of the few historical overviews of women's presence, power, and influence at the professional level. Nearly twenty years after Foerstel and Foerstel (1996) published their chapter, Rachel Pierce (2014) completed a dissertation that took a more in-depth look at the history of women and feminism on Capitol Hill. While her work focuses on the period between 1960s and 1980s, Pierce's work provides some of the first documented insights into women's staff roles, advancement, and even activism during a time of significant institutional – and

cultural – change. Like Jones (2017a), Pierce (2014) relies on first-person insights from women staff, as well as archival evidence that had largely been untapped in scholarship until this point.

Before Pierce (2014), Bell and Rosenthal (2003) conducted one of the only studies that moved beyond analyzing women's descriptive representation on congressional staffs to identify the contexts under which their passive, or descriptive, representation translates into active, or substantive representation of women through their professional behavior and influence. They demonstrate that women staff, as political professionals who experience and navigate the gendered institution of Congress, have the capacity for substantive representation that varies from their male counterparts (Bell and Rosenthal 2003). This capacity for active representation is captured in Pierce's (2014) findings about feminist activism among congressional staffers, as well as in some of the interviews discussed below.

In this paper, I present an intersectional framework by which to make visible and evaluate gender, race, and congressional staff as key forces in the function and outcomes of legislative institutions. Only by making these forces visible can scholars effectively illuminate the concurrent privileging of masculinity and whiteness in congressional structures, operations, and distributions of power, as well as analyze the role of staff diversity in both reflecting and affecting institutional gender and race dynamics.

Specifically, I analyze and problematize two layers of invisibility in congressional research. First, while congressional staff often make themselves invisible by design, there exists significant evidence of their influence on legislative processes and policies, as well as institutional structures and functions. Ignoring the intervening role of staff in congressional representation perpetuates incomplete analyses and partial understanding of how Congress works. Making staff visible requires recognition of congressional staffers as key institutional actors, actors whose distinctive experiences, perspectives, and identities are not muted by expectations of deference to legislative principles. The

second layer of invisibility I seek to expose here, then, is that which masks the influence of gender and race as forces shaping the experiences, power, and influence of congressional staff. Drawing upon research that specifically investigates the distinct realities and contributions of women – and women of color – staffers, I make the case for more nuanced interrogations of staff as complex institutional actors. Together, making congressional staff – and the diversity among them – visible in political science research will complicate, enrich, and refine existing research on legislative institutions, processes, and representation.

METHODOLOGY

In this paper, I rely on two sets of congressional practitioner interviews. First, to provide insights on congressional staff autonomy and influence, as well as specific insights into how their identities might shape policy discussions in Capitol Hill offices, I rely on interviews from the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) Study of Women in the 114th Congress (2015-2017), a project completed with financial support from Political Parity (the Hunt Alternatives Fund). The CAWP Study includes 129 semi-structured interviews with women members of the 114th Congress, their congressional staff, and interest group representatives on issues of focus to the larger project: education, human trafficking, abortion, sexual assault, immigration, and criminal justice reform.[2]

The bulk of my analyses from the perspective of women congressional staffers come from a second set of interviews that I conducted in 2017 with 64 high-level women congressional staffers who worked on Capitol Hill in various roles from as early as 1974 until 2018.[3] Selecting interview subjects at high levels of congressional leadership constrains the pool, as well as the racial and partisan diversity of that pool; the majority of my interviews were with women working in Democratic offices (44) and 49 of my interview subjects were White. Sadly, this racial representation is representative of the dearth of women of color in high levels of congressional leadership in the past four decades. Semi-structured interviews ranged from 26 to 90 minutes, with an average length

of 56 minutes per interview. The interviews were generally separated into three areas of focus: staffers' path to Capitol Hill and general experiences and trajectory as a congressional staffer; their experiences *as women* and *as women of color* on Capitol Hill and the influence of staff diversity on office environment and outcomes; and women staffers' perceptions of institutional change, including changes in the role orientation and autonomy of congressional staff. The findings reported below focus on my questions that asked specifically about gender and race dynamics on Capitol Hill.[4]

THEORY & FINDINGS

Invisibility by Design: Staff Deference as a Hurdle to Research

Much legislative literature describes the principal-agent relationship between members and staff as one characterized most explicitly by staff loyalty and deference to their member (Bell and Rosenthal 2003; Finer 1978; DeGregorio 1988; 1994; Hammond 1996; Malbin 1980; Romzek 2000). Romzek and Utter (1997) write, "Loyalty to one's member is an essential, paramount norm of congressional staff work" (1265). They add that staff also adhere to a norm of deference "to all members at all times" in matters of status and policy (Romzek and Utter 1997, 1267), evoking images of staff as individuals who "walk in the shadows" of legislators (Bisnow 1990, 23). Characterizing staff's potential to shape member behavior, Kingdon (1989) suggests, "It might be more fruitful to conceive staff not as an influence on a member, but rather as an extension of a member" (207-208).

Conceiving staff in this way makes it incredibly difficult to parse the distinct motivations, priorities, and perspectives of staff from those of their boss. In research, the "staff-member partnership" described by multiple congressional scholars challenges attempts to identify the degree to which member decisions and behavior are influenced by individual members of their staff (Hammond 1996, 547). If staff "serve at the pleasure" of their members, as is reaffirmed by the significant discretion in employment decisions given to each congressional office, it is not surprising

that scholars have found that staffers' impact on public policy is made "with the tacit approval of their legislative bosses" (DeGregorio 1995, 266). These professional norms and processes place constraints on staff entrepreneurialism. As Fox and Hammond (1977) wrote four decades ago, "Staff adhere to the norms of courtesy and loyalty much more than the apprenticeship norms that characterize most bureaucracies." Those norms persist today.

This culture of deference not only makes isolating staff influence difficult in objective measures like bill sponsorship, member votes, or office policies and processes; the deep-seated culture of loyalty on Capitol Hill makes staff reluctant to take credit for any policy achievements or institutional changes. In my interviews with former staff, this loyalty persisted. When I asked about their proudest achievements on Capitol Hill, many former staffers prefaced that their achievements were not their own – that they were proud to work on a policy or process change *with* or *for* their bosses. For example, one Senate staffer prefaced her response by saying, "I say this with the strict caveat [that] I could've been there and done everything I did, but if you didn't have [the Senator] backing you up it wouldn't have happened anyway." She added, "You have to acknowledge that what I was able to accomplish is because he enabled me to accomplish it." Staff's comfort with and allegiance to their professional invisibility is an initial hurdle to better understanding the important roles they play in legislative institutions.

Invisible but Influential: The Danger of Ignoring Staff in Legislative Research

In his 1980 book, Malbin accurately characterizes the paradox inherent in congressional staffing: "Members of Congress go out of their way to hire people who are both bright and ambitious and let them exercise power in an environment in which they are constantly made aware of their lack of independence" (21). Accepting staff invisibility without further interrogation of their ambition and potential for influence and independence – even if constrained – misses opportunities for a fuller understanding of the diversity of actors engaged in the legislative process.

Some scholars describe the potential for staff influence and leadership that adheres to prevailing norms of deference, describing staff as "influence extenders" for officeholders (DeGregorio 1988) whose autonomy increases with seniority and trust from the member (Hammond 1996; Romzek 2000). But Bell and Rosenthal (2003) go further to argue that "control by principals may be less than certain" in Congress, citing the demands on member time as a cause for increased delegation (67). Members' time constraints also contribute to decreased accountability and potentially greater autonomy among staff members, especially committee staff that are further removed from individual members and report to multiple principals (Bell and Rosenthal 2003; Romzek 2000; Romzek and Utter 1997). Moreover, member reliance on staff for information and expertise fosters opportunities for influence (Hammond 1996; Sabatier and Whiteman 1985; Whiteman 1995). As one staffer reported to Romzek (2000), "We're basically entrepreneurs. …[Our] member tells us where they want to go, but lets us do the driving" (429). Thus, while there is a tension between staff members' autonomy and deference to their member (Romzek and Utter 1996; 1997), their capacity to meet member goals and make distinct contributions are not mutually exclusive. More accurately, congressional staff have the potential for "delegated autonomy," whereby their independent influence is "substantial but qualified" (Romzek and Utter 1997, 1251). Romzek and Utter (1997) describe this potential for "delegated autonomy" as greatest where members accept their positions and/or have limited interest (1260).

In interviews with women members of the 114th Congress, my colleagues and I provide some insights into the influence of congressional staff from the perspective of those who act as the delegators to staff of power and autonomy.[5] Representative Brenda Lawrence (D-MI) described the role of staff as "comprehensive," adding, "No member of Congress can stand alone." Representative Jackie Walorksi (R-IN) told us that staff are "critical," and elaborated,

> I don't know of a member here that isn't leaning on staff just to help with scheduling [and] stuff like that. You literally have got to be a delegator in Congress. You have to be able to come in and deal with the schedule and everything that you are doing with five, six people briefing you and being able to literally hand it off, as you would a football, and watch it walk out the door as the next one comes in.

Walorski emphasized that the nature of the institution of Congress *requires* an active role of staff. She explained, "if you are going to be successful, [you need] to have good staff." Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) spoke in stark terms about the necessity of staff: "It is physically impossible for me to be in every meeting and doing everything I need to do, reading everything I need to read." As a result, she said, "Part of my success has been fortunately having around me really bright, conscientious, hard-working people." In a Congress placing ever-increasing demands on its members, then, the role of professional staff makes it possible to keep up. As Representative Nita Lowey (D-NY) explained, "You couldn't work on as many issues as I do without having a very effective, hardworking, talented staff."

Process

This role of staff – to "expand the capacity of Congress to legislate by freeing members from purely administrative tasks and providing assistance on technical matters" – is one of two specific types of staff influence outlined by Madonna and Ostrander (2014) (4). Staff allow greater productivity in Congress and help to maintain adherence to formal rules and procedures. Tasked with navigating these rules and procedures, staff might also suggest changes to them or strategies that take greatest advantage of the procedures at play. This role cannot be understated in its potential for shaping outcomes, particularly in moving policy ideas from a member's agenda to legislative passage.

When asked if and how her staff influence her legislative strategies and priorities, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) responded, "All the time. All the time." She elaborated on *how* and *where*

her staff shapes her legislative work: "They all help me figure out strategies about how to get legislation pushed across the finish line. And sometimes they will say, 'That idea is not a good idea,' or that if [I] write the bill that way it's not going to work because of this and this." Representative Niki Tsongas (D-MA) agreed, "One thing I've really learned here is your staff is very important to how well you're able to navigate here, whether it's around understanding the legislation that's coming up, …developing policy, or putting together legislation." Some members, like Representatives Tsongas and Yvette Clarke (D-NY), provided specific examples of staff devising successful strategies to move policy change forward in their offices, from packaging legislation and finding bipartisan support to seeking administrative avenues to addressing issues affecting their constituents.

Policy Influence

While they caution that staff do not dictate policy outcomes, Madonna and Ostrander (2014) suggest that staff also shape the character and content of legislation. This aligns with Hammond's (1996) observation across studies that staff are "policy-influencing actors" who help to define the terms of debate, play key roles in communication and deliberation, and engage in bargaining and negotiation to shape policy outcomes (547). Cited by Malbin (1980), former Senator Dick Clark (D-IA) concisely outlines this agenda-setting function of staff: "In all legislation, they're the ones that lay out the options" (5). Price (1971) goes further to characterize certain congressional staffers as "policy entrepreneurs" whose issue expertise allows them to present policy alternatives to principals that might not have otherwise been considered in legislative debates. He argues that loyalty and entrepreneurship are not mutually exclusive, however, as staffers' policy interventions are still motivated by the potential of expanding their member's power and success.

In our interviews with congresswomen, we inquired about two particular sites of staff influence – on members' legislative priorities and strategies, in line with Madonna and Ostrander's (2014) dual

sites for staff influence. While she was careful to tell us that she "leads the choir" in her office, Senator Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND) responded by noting, "The one thing that has surprised me here [in Congress]…is how, in many offices, how much control staff has." Representative Brenda Lawrence (D-MI), was similarly surprised at the influential role of congressional staff. She explained, "I had no idea because, as a mayor, I kind of drove the agenda. I never had to be as, I won't say dependent, but having my staff to be positioned, knowledgeable, to advise me; I never had to be advised so much." Representative Jackie Speier (D-CA) told us that as a former legislative staffer, she appreciates the "great skills" staffers bring and "brain trust" they provide. She described her own staff as "a very strong component of the decision-making" in her office.

Further elaborating on the function of staff as a sounding board on which legislators can test ideas, priorities, and messages, Representative Terri Sewell (D-AL) told us, "I get my best ideas from bouncing ideas off of my staff, and so I encourage that kinetic exchange and interplay." Representative Debbie Dingell (D-MI) spoke of the environment in her office where, "I encourage everybody to tell me what they think." That includes the good *and* the bad, according to multiple members whose comments illuminated not only the ability, but the importance, of staff to express independent thoughts and recommendations. Senator McCaskill (D-MO) noted this as a point of pride, telling us, "I'm really proud that I think all of my staff is really comfortable pushing me and talking back and trying to convince me I'm wrong when they believe I'm wrong." She added, "I think I'm a better Senator when I have people that are around me that are smart enough to tell me when I'm full of it." Similarly, Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) explained, "I don't hire people who just say yes. I hire people who help me think. I have just a great group of people that I can bounce things off of and hear ideas from and incorporate them into what I do."

Representation

Another staff function that is under-interrogated in congressional literature is that of representation. As Malbin (1980) referenced when he called congressional staff "unelected representatives," staff perform representative functions in policy deliberation and navigation of the legislative process. In their work on women congressional staff, Bell and Rosenthal (2003) urge scholars to consider congressional representation as "an activity mediated by staff" (68). These studies affirm that staff should be part of our conversations about the representativeness of Congress in the demographic diversity, distinct perspectives, and unique experiences that they bring to their work.

Our interviews with congresswomen offer some specific examples of this representative influence of staff. Explaining that her staff "absolutely" influences her legislative strategies and priorities, Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) elaborated,

> First of all, they tend to come up with ideas and we bounce them back and forth. But also, in some cases, their personal experience has influenced my choice of focusing on issue. An example is youth homelessness. One of my staffers… was a runaway youth and lived in a shelter, and [her] life was saved really by this shelter who kept her safe from being trafficked, but she was a homeless youth. And it was hearing her story that made me really interested in delving more deeply into this. And then I started looking at the statistics and saw the spike. So that's an issue, but for the personal experience of a staffer, I'm not sure I would have had my awareness heightened to the point where I've made it a priority. And we put forty million dollars in a very tight budget year into the appropriations bills to focus on doing a better job for young people, for teenagers who are homeless.

Representative Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) provided a similar illustration of how the personal experiences of staff can translate into policy influence:

> I had a staff member that had gone to a crisis pregnancy center and she had been misled. She thought she was at a Planned Parenthood center. And then they started showing her dead fetuses and putting a lot of pressure on her not to have an abortion. And we put in a bill on crisis centers that they had to have truth in advertising and, you know, a lot of them fly the colors of Planned Parenthood and misled people …and we've had some bills to try to stop that. That came from staff.

Representative Lois Capps (D-CA) said, "Everybody brings their own life experiences to work," pointing, for example, to a young mother in her office who could bring that perspective to policy

discussions. Together, these examples provide evidence that there is space for – and even encouragement of - staff autonomy and influence in some offices, including that which stems from personal experiences that may be distinct by gender, race, or other points of situatedness in American society. I will elaborate on this below.

Invisibility by Identity: Gender and Race Disparities in Numbers and Power

In 1971, Price's characterization of congressional staff as "staff men" was both pervasive and seemingly unconscious. In Malbin's (1980) book, it is not until page 39 that a woman staffer's name is mentioned. Johannes (1984) notes that Fox and Hammond's (1977) text – which she calls the "most authoritative study of congressional staffs" to date – has just seven entries for women in its index. This inattention to women in existing studies of congressional staff has further entrenched the invisibility of women congressional staff at the highest levels of power and prestige. Notably, women have been present among staff from the earliest congresses, taking on the majority of secretarial roles that made up the bulk of staff positions until the 1960s. With greater professionalization came greater role segregation on Capitol Hill, where newly defined policy or "professional" positions were allocated to men. Research and insights from women staffers throughout the 1960s-1980s reveal the ceiling that women staffers hit in seeking staff positions with significant policy and strategic influence (Johannes 1994; Pierce 2014; Dittmar 2018). Even by 1987, when insiders observed gender progress on Capitol Hill, 81% of clerical positions on Senate committee staffs were held by women and women occupied just 19% of "top positions" – staff director, minority staff director, chief clerk, or assistant to chair (Friedman and Nakamura (1991, 414). These data and insights demonstrate how the historic invisibility of women on Capitol Hill is not fully due to their lack of presence, but instead exacerbated by their lack of power, in congressional chambers.

It was not until the early 1990s that the Congressional Management Foundation provided some of the first comprehensive data on women's representation among congressional staff. They found that women held over three-quarters of clerical positions, 43.7% of policy positions, and 41.7% of leadership positions in the U.S. House in 1992; and 74.5% of clerical positions, 40.6% of policy positions, and one-third of leadership positions in the U.S. Senate in 1993 (CMF 1993, 1994). Foerstel and Foerstel (1996) calculate that, in 1993, women represented 59.7% and 60.5% of personal office staffers in the U.S. Senate and House, respectively (145).

Over two decades later, a Legistorm analysis of 15,700 DC congressional staff showed that women were just about half of all personal office staffers in both the House and Senate (Stamm 2015). The only position in which women held majority representation was among staff assistants – the most clerical role included, and women were least represented among House (33.3%) and Senate (26.9%) chiefs of staff in 2013. Numbers have not shifted much since then, with an analysis of 2016 staff directories revealing that women comprised about 45% of House staff in personal offices (Burgat 2017). Consistent with previous findings, strong majorities of schedulers (83%) and office managers (95%) were women, while women represented just about one-third of House chiefs of staff or legislative directors (Burgat 2017).

The exclusion of racial and ethnic minorities from staff roles, as well as from scholarly analyses, has been more persistent across congressional history. Less than two centuries ago, Black people were banned from even entering congressional grounds unless they were employed by Congress in some way (Green 1967). That employment was typically relegated to service roles, including chauffers, cooks and waiters, barbers, or cleaning staff (Jones 2017, 27). Even when the first Black legislative staff were hired in Congress, their presence in offices of almost exclusively Black members limited their numbers overall. Moreover, as Jones (2017) details, a formal racial hierarchy lasted in Congress until at least the 1950s. In addition to White lawmakers' rejection of

anti-discrimination efforts in the federal workforce (King 2007), Black legislative staff faced daily reminders of their marginalization. For example, Black staffers had to eat in their own cafeteria, segregated from White staffers, well into the 20th century (Jones 2017, 9).

It was a Black woman staffer, Christine McCreary, who was among the first to challenge the by-then unofficial racial segregation in the Senate staff cafeteria in 1953. She described her experience in an oral history:

> There were problems. I'd come out of the restaurant and all of the black people that worked in the Senate were people who worked on the custodial staff and were mail carriers. They were all lined up in the hall out there just to see me. Well, I felt like two cents, because I wasn't used to that. I didn't know what to say or do. And then of course there were some snide remarks, and all that kind of foolishness. I would just keep on going. I wouldn't even bother to stop and answer that. But you get through that too. It was just a lonesome time. (11)

McCreary was one of the first Black women to work for a White member of Congress. In 1947, Juanita Barbee became the first Black woman hired to work for a White member of the U.S. House – Representative Helen Gahagan Douglas (D-CA) (Pierce 2014, 27). According to Pierce (2014), just two other Black secretaries were employed in the House before her and both worked for black legislators (27). In the Senate, the first Black woman was hired as a secretary in 1949 by Senator Paul Douglas (D-IL).[6] Describing the period before and through the 1950s, Pierce (2014) writes, "Most persons of color were concentrated in basements and behind closed doors, virtually invisible to most White employees and legislators" (30).

There is hardly any record-keeping available on the number of Black staffers on Capitol Hill, or the racial/ethnic make-up of staff more comprehensively, throughout the 20th century. According to a 1974 article in *Ebony,* at that point just 15 of 900 Senate staffers were Black (qtd. in Pierce 2014, 27). In 1977, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that Black employees were under seven percent of the House workforce (Hume 1977). By the 1970s, Muriel Morisey – a senior legislative assistant for Representative Shirley Chisholm (D-NY), described the difference in her perceptions of racial versus

gender progress on the Hill: "I've had the experience as a Black person going into many environments and looking around the room and thinking, 'I'm the only Black person here.' I don't remember getting to work on the Hill and looking around and thinking, aren't there any other women here? There were" (14-15). It would have been even rarer for Morisey to see other women of color, especially in legislative positions and particularly working for White members, at that time – and the numbers remain low today. In my interview with Nichole Francis, she recalled being just one of two Black women serving as a chief of staff in a non-minority House member office as recently as 2010. It was not until 2002 when Joyce Brayboy became the first woman of color and the first African American to head the House Chiefs of Staff Association. This relatively recent history and persistent disparity in power for women of color necessitates an analysis of women's experiences on Capitol Hill with an intersectional lens, which is what I begin here.

Illuminating the dearth of intersectional research on congressional staff, hardly any counts of congressional staff attempted to measure *both* race and gender. In fact, the data on racial and ethnic representation among congressional staff is itself incredibly sparse. Just last year, in June 2017, the Senate Democrats released their first public report on staff diversity. It found that 32% of Democratic staffers in the U.S. Senate identify as "non-Caucasian" (O'Keefe 2017); 13% of Senate Democratic staffers identified as African American, 10% identified as Latino, 8% identified as Asian-Pacific Islander; 4% identified as Native American, and 3% identified as being of Middle Eastern/North African descent.[7] Two years earlier, a study by the Joint Center for Political Economic Studies found just 24 people of color among the 336 Senate staff positions (7.1%) they analyzed across parties – chief of staff, legislative director, communications director, and committee staff director (Joint Center 2017). Broader surveys of House staff in 2009 show higher levels of representation for Black and Hispanic staff, but similar disparities at the highest levels of staff leadership.[8] Perhaps even more importantly, the numbers in the House mask the concentration of

staffers of color, especially in top leadership roles, in member of color offices. Jones (2017c) accuses Congress of practicing a double standard in their inattention to congressional staff diversity. Specifically, he writes that despite Congress' establishment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in 1964 to remove racial and gender barriers from the American workplace, the institution has imposed no specific rules or procedures on Capitol Hill to both monitor and/or promote the racial and gender diversity of its staff.

As Cindy Simon Rosenthal (2000) writes, "Our understanding of institutions is inextricably bound to the dominant individuals who populate them" (41). Revealing the numeric underrepresentation of women and minorities on congressional staffs is the first step to making visible institutional realities and dynamics that are less bound to the White men who have held the greatest amount of institutional power.

Invisible Forces: Gender, Race, and Intersectional Influences on Congressional Staff Experience and Behavior

Many of the high-level women staffers that I interviewed referenced their numeric underrepresentation, as detailed above, as shaping others' expectations and their experiences within congressional walls. For example, many women staffers described the regularity with which they were the first or only women in a position, at a decision-making table, or in particular meeting rooms on Capitol Hill. They were conscious of their singularity, but frequently referenced their ability to move beyond it. As former House chief of staff Rochelle Dornatt told me, "I was never afraid of putting myself out there and trying for the next level, but I was always cognizant that the men around me were very tight. …I was outside of the loop." Michelle Jawando, former Chief Counsel to Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), told me, "Nine times out of ten the person that you're gonna interact with is a White male. It's not gonna be someone who looks like me and I think you're acutely aware of it." When asked about the challenges of being a Black woman staffer in

Congress, Nichole Francis told me of the institution, "I definitely felt that it was this was a system that was not open to us," but added, "I was not going to be deterred."

Francis' comment provides an important reminder that the gender and racial disparities in Congress are not found in numbers alone. Congress is a system – or an institution – whose power dynamics have long privileged masculinity and whiteness. As such, race and gender shape the behavior and experiences of all congressional actors, staff included. Research on women officeholders and gendered institutions has revealed the ways in which women, in particular, are expected to adhere to "mutually exclusive scripts" of their gender and masculinized legislative roles, "managing" their femininity in the process to avoid the "collision of scripts" that brings unwanted attention to and concern about their "other"-ness (Puwar 2004, 93-97).

Asked whether or not she felt the need to adapt her behavior to the male-dominated settings in which she was working, Sheila Burke, former Secretary of the Senate and Senate chief of staff, responded, "Absolutely. You can't be the only woman in the room and not at times feel that people are questioning why you're in the room." In one of her first jobs on Capitol Hill in the 1980s, Rochelle Dornatt felt, "I had to work twice as hard to be [viewed as] just as good as the guys." She said, "I really did feel… like I always had to prove myself," and added, "I didn't want the guys to have any reason to point to me as a failure or assume that because I was a woman that I didn't get it right." She was not alone. Betsy Hawkings, who came to Congress in 1988 and stayed through 2015, told me, "I never felt that I was going to get ahead if I worked less hard than anybody else." She went on to say, "I never thought it would be handed to me," spurring her to do good work that her boss could not ignore. Hawkings added, "I do think that that is still a dynamic among the women leaders that I know on the Hill. You know, they are among the most dynamic people you will ever meet and they do more and they know more and they know more people and they push themselves harder." Other women I spoke with, including those with more recent tenures on Capitol Hill,

backed up this claim and described their own efforts to prove themselves as qualified and capable of congressional staff leadership.

Hawkesworth's (2003) influential work on the "race-gendering" of Congress illustrates how "the production of difference, political asymmetries, and social hierarchies that simultaneously create the dominant and the subordinate" occurs in Congress and shapes the experiences and behaviors of women of color members in distinct ways (531).[9] Jones (2017b) applies this framework to the study of congressional staff, demonstrating that race and gender power dynamics of congressional institutions also inform the orientations and actions of legislative professionals. He offers a theory of Congress as a raced political institution, characterizing it as an institution "organized for the purposes of government, in which race is embedded in the organizational structure, is a determining factor of how labor and space is organized on the formal level" (Jones 2017b, 5). Describing the "racial ethos" of Congress as rooted in "a spirit of past discrimination and current inequality," Jones (2017b) writes, "Race is a constitutive element of the national legislature, and …two centuries of racial segregation and stratification are reflected in its workforce" (37).

As Black women, Michelle Jawando and Nichole Francis were distinctly aware that they navigated white and male-dominated spaces. Jawando explained, "Most people don't see people who look like me - Black women - in the most senior legal role for a member of the Senate." That meant that the power she had – or, as she described, the "rarified air" she breathed in a leadership role – was often not assumed by those with whom she interacted, shaping not only her experiences, but also the strategies she had to employ to assert that power. Latina House chief of staff Gloria Montaño Greene shared a similar experience, noting, "Sometimes I would go into the meeting and be the only Latina or person of color and they would be like, 'Are you in the right place?'" She learned to lead with her title to heed off these doubts, something that would not have otherwise been her approach.

Moreover, the women of color I interviewed described the pressure felt distinct at the intersection of raced and gendered perceptions of who was best equipped for leadership roles. In her senior role in the U.S. Senate, Michelle Jawando explained, "I knew every single day I had to outwork almost everybody on my team." Recognizing that those with who she was engaging were unaccustomed to seeing a woman of color in her role, she knew then and knows now that "I don't have the ability to walk in and not be prepared." Maria Meier, who mentored diversity candidates for staff positions, agreed. She described her advice to minority applicants: "I was really blunt with people and I said…they didn't have to be good at the first meeting; [these] candidates had to actually be better." Nichole Francis, a Black woman and former chief of staff, said, "There's a concern about our competency level and whether we can truly hit the ground running and be a successful in those senior roles." When I asked whether she believed those concerns were rooted in racial or gender biases, she answered, "I think it's both." A Latina staffer expressed feeling "tested" and "undermined" and frequently being mistaken for an intern, an indicator of underestimation and biased perceptions that was consistent in my interviews across generations and races of women staffers. To be sure she was taken seriously, Jawando described the consciousness – which she noted was a dual consciousness of both raced and gendered assumptions – with which she made decisions about "what I wore, how I presented myself, [and] even how I wore my hair." She explained, "It seems so silly, but these are the calculations that you make."

Racialized Professionalism

The raced and gendered power differentials in Congress can also shape other types of calculations and behaviors by congressional staff. In one clear illustration of how the distinct experiences of Black congressional staffers can inform behavior, Jones (2017b) analyzes the "Black nod" between Black staffers, describing it this way:

> If African Americans are socially invisible in Congress, then the nod acts as a way to affirm their social presence. In one third of interviews with Black respondents who knew about the nod, they described the nod as meaning 'I see you' (Jones 2017b, 24).

Jones' (2017b) observation of the Black nod reveals one way in which staffers' racial identity shapes behavior within an institution in which experiences, opportunities, and expectations have long been informed by race.

Beyond the Black nod, Watkins-Hayes' (2009) intersectional concept of "racialized professionalism" offers an important framework by which to examine how the forces of race and ethnicity shape staffers' navigation of congressional work.[10] She writes,

> At the heart of the notion of racialized professionalism is the assertion that social identities such as race, class, and gender inform professional identity, one's interpretation of one's assigned professional role. These individuals read institutional cues that address their occupational purpose and objectives and then infuse their own meanings, goals, and commitments to create day-to-day capacities for action. (Watkins-Hayes 2009, 129)

Watkins-Hayes (2009) identifies the ways in which street-level welfare bureaucrats "interpret and operationalize their roles" within the context of perceived group interests, illuminating the danger of making invisible the very forces that complicate how these professionals both do and experience their jobs. She elaborates on the scholarly inattention to these dynamics, writing that "we know a great deal about how blackness and other minority statuses are perceived by employers and co-workers," but know far less about how workers, "determine for themselves what significance they believe their racial backgrounds should play in how they understand their work and its functions" (Watkins-Hayes 2009, 128).

The conceptual framework that Watkins-Hayes (2009) offers is also intersectional, addressing "how interlocking social locations of bureaucrats of color inform questions of access, accountability, opportunity, support, and regulation in this institutional context" (129). For women of color in particular, she highlights how these forces work to simultaneously advantage and disadvantage government professionals. Replete with this nuance, the concept of racialized

professionalism is one who's application to the analysis of congressional staff will help to make invisible forces visible in not only the experience of congressional staff, but the ways in which those experiences translate into staff behavior.

Gendered Professionalism

In this project, I ask if a similar role orientation and influence is evident among legislative professionals to reveal a gendered and racialized professionalism among women staffers that "includes injecting not only personal experiences but also political beliefs around race [and gender] into the reading of their work" (Watkins-Hayes 2009, 140). This exploration allows for intersectional understanding of women's experiences and approach to congressional staff work.

In previous work (Dittmar 2015a, 2015b), I have argued that women congressional staff have many qualities that may predict what Chappell (2006) describes as gender equity entrepreneurship, efforts by institutional actors to leverage their access to influence inside of institutional power structures to disrupt established gender norms (230). This idea aligns with Bell and Rosenthal's (2003) argument that the shift from passive to active representation among women staff evidences their ability to become "empowered advocates" who are "predisposed to act as policy entrepreneurs," particularly on issues important to women (69-70).[11]

In this project, I integrate the concept of gender equity entrepreneurialism into a theory of gendered professionalism. As Watkins-Hayes (2009) points out, "Perceived group interests are key drivers of racialized professionalism" (152). Similarly, group interests underly gender equity entrepreneurship among women political professionals. But gendered professionalism encompasses gender-informed behavior with intentions beyond gender equity and with recognition of the intersections of gender and race, among other interlocking forces. As Watkins-Hayes (2009) describes, "Regardless of background, individuals operating in raced, gendered, and classed work environment must locate themselves within institutional hierarchies and make choices about how

they will explicitly or implicitly leverage, challenge, downplay, or disavow these categories in order to pursue certain goals" (129). These decisions are those worthy of targeted study in a more robust approach to understanding the locatedness, experiences, and influence of women congressional staff.

These complementary frames offer multiple axes by which to evaluate women congressional staffers' motivations for congressional service and behavior, as well as the implications for institutional underrepresentation and imbalances of power along racial and gendered lines. Applying the concept of gendered and racialized professionalism to congressional staff will address the invisibility of gender and race analyses in existing studies of the U.S. Congress.

Evidence of Racialized and Gendered Professionalism Among Congressional Staff

Pierce (2014) dedicates a full volume to the important role that women congressional staff played as feminist activists in the 1960s and 1970s, detailing through archival work and interviews how the "nameless sisterhood" helped to shape policy agendas as well as alter institutional rules to combat sexism and discrimination within Congress. Ironically, she demonstrates how these women often used their invisibility – or at least under-visibility – to their advantage, pushing for change without too much attention or fanfare. But their efforts did not always fly under the radar; in the release of formal reports on institutional inequality or participation in Women's Strike Days, feminist staffers leveraged visibility to enact pressure for change (Pierce 2014). More recently, Congress has seen Black congressional staffers use visual demonstrations to advocate for group interests – most notably, racial equity. In 2014, for example, Black staffers and members staged a walkout to protest the grand jury decisions in two notable cases of police brutality against Black men – Eric Garner and Michael Brown (Mak 2014). Two years earlier, close to 300 Black congressional staffers stood on the Capitol steps in hoodies to make a statement in support of Trayvon Martin, a Black teen who was killed on his way home from a convenience store. These examples reveal the more explicit types of

equity entrepreneurialism suggested by Chappell (2006); congressional staff used their positional power to push forward conversations and/or policies that would promote – in their view – greater gender or racial equity inside or outside of legislative institutions.

But this type of activist approach to congressional staff work should not be the sole measure by which to measure the distinct influence or impact of greater gender and racial diversity and empowerment among staffers. First, not all women or minority staffers are equally motivated to change the institution or its outcomes to align with activist standards of equality. Additionally, and relatedly, disparities in institutional power allocated to staff shape the degree to which their advocacy is either possible or risky. The opportunities for making change are arguably greater among my interview subjects – high-level women congressional staff – than congressional staffers in less powerful positions. However, the risk for advocacy is not necessarily less in high-level positions, as the loss of power looms more imminent. Still, with recognition of these potential constraints on explicit gender and racial equity efforts, I found multiple examples of ways in which congressional staffers' consciousness, experiences, perspectives, and priorities *as women* and *as women of color* appeared to shape their professional behaviors on Capitol Hill.

Offering Multi-layered Perspectives

In interviews with both staffers and advocates for CAWP's Study of Women in the 114th Congress, they pointed to the different lenses through which women view policy discussions as evidence of their distinct influence in Congress. A Republican woman staffer working on drug addiction issues, for example, believes that "there is a little bit more compassion" in women's legislative work on the issue. She said of her own approach, "I tend to focus on the families affected," adding that "empathy and a desire to help…comes natural for me" and is more common among the women staffers and members she observes. An advocate working on criminal justice reform appeared to agree with this staffer, saying of women staffers, "You know they have more

compassion and are motivated differently…than men." She went on to caution that there are certainly more hard-line women staff on the issue. Another Democratic woman staffer emphasized, "We're…pragmatic, we listen, [and] we care a lot." Similarly, an interest group representative told us, "My guess is that overall and in general women staffers are more familiar with issues that impact real people in their lives and more responsive to those types of priorities."

Other interview subjects identified that gender identity and gender-based experiences do offer something distinct to the perspectives and priorities that women staff bring to congressional work. A Democratic woman staffer said, "I do think that we bring a unique perspective on certain issues." She continued, "I hate the term women's issues because every issue is a woman's issue, right? …But when you're talking about something like a child tax credit or an income tax credit and how that is going to impact a family, if you have a bunch of men talking about it …they might not think about it in a way that a woman would." Similarly, an interest group representative called women's presence among legislative staffers "critical," arguing that women staff "often will notice something or flag something or bring the perspective to bear that may be missing in a room full of all male staffers." An advocate on immigration reform described the benefit of working with a top woman staffer on the issue: "She understood. We didn't even have to explain why the gender lens was important, right? …There [are] some conversation[s] that you don't have to explain or educate [women] on in a way that allows us to make much more progress in a quicker way." A pro-choice lobbyist said that women staffers also help in educating male staffers on her issue. "I think that their experiences of being women also help their male counterparts understand how to get us the wins on the policies that they are making," she explained, adding, "It is invaluable, really."

Asked about the difference it makes to have women staff in Congress, a Democratic woman staffer told us, "Having women and staff who are parents, who think about childcare, who think about healthcare for women, who think about maternity leave, who think about sexual assault - all of

these things are useful." She continued, "Staff are incredibly influential on their bosses and provide that context when their bosses may not have it."

Three women I interviewed in my study of high-level women congressional staff were lead staffers during debates over and passage of the *Family and Medical Leave Act*, which passed in 1993. Notably, each of them was pregnant at some point during the legislative deliberations. One Senate staffer told me, "I was exhibit A" for the need of this policy as she sat in meetings over FMLA passage. Another Republican staffer described her success in convincing a conservative senator to support the bill, in part due to his observation of her successful management of a flexible post-birth work plan in his committee office. On two other health-focused debates – the fight for women's inclusion in National Institutes of Health research in the early 1990s and efforts to maintain preventive care benefits for women in the Affordable Care Act passed in 2010 - multiple women pointed to the role of women staff in holding the line on provisions that would recognize the distinct health realities and needs of women. These intimate connections between women's life experiences and distinct perspectives is a central tenet to theoretical claims about, and empirical evidence of, the relationship between women's passive and active representation (Bell and Rosenthal 2003).

The distinct positionality of women of color also shaped their behavior and influence as staff, according to women I interviewed. Senate staffer Michelle Jawando pointed to one instance of raising awareness in her office as a professional highlight. Informing her boss's understanding and approach to policy discussions over racial profiling, Jawando shared a personal story about being pulled over with her husband for no reason other than their race. Referring to her husband, she elaborated:

> They all know him and we've been to Christmas parties and holiday parties and birthday parties, so they know him, and so being able to say, 'Listen, this is the indignity of that moment. This is what it feels like. This is why this is such a problem.' And being able to have that conversation with my boss and her hearing that… [I felt] like she made a stronger statement and moved to be

more of a devil's advocate about why racial profiling is not good and how it harms families and personal dignity and I know that it was influenced by the conversation I had with her.

Jawando noted the importance of her own access as a senior staffer to even have that conversation, as well as her comfort with injecting personal experience due to the close relationships she had developed in her office. Summarizing the importance of increasing these opportunities for diverse experiences and viewpoints to be heard on Capitol Hill, Jawando told me, "The reason why you do this is so that you get better outcomes."

Denise Desiderio, staffer on the Senate Committee on Tribal Affairs, agreed, pointing to the ability of tribal staffers to educate members and other staffers about the tribal norms and realities, including regional differences and inter-tribal issues. She reminded me that there was "heavy reliance on staff for opinions and background" because there are no tribal members of the U.S. Senate. Describing how tribal staffers have a "shortcut to understanding" many of the issues to come before the committee, Desiderio characterized as undeniable the value-added of tribal staffers' direct expertise. As a tribal woman, Desiderio offered examples of her distinct perspective on certain issues. For example, she noted the value of having tribal women staff at the table when the Congress was debating reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 2013, which sought cover Native women on reservations for the first time. She explained, "You can learn issues. You can read about issues. [But] …the experience factor of living in a community that you are representing, of being a female when you are taking about violence against women, it adds an extra layer to the conversation."

Esther Olavarria described the multiple layers of insight that she brought to her work on immigration in the U.S. Senate. Asked about advantages of being a Latina to doing her work, she responded, "I think definitely as a Latina and as someone with my life experience, …I could offer different perspectives in the work that I was doing. Coming from that community – an immigrant refugee background – I knew the struggle with the people we were working for had gone through."

She provided one example in the way in which she, as both an immigrant and former immigrant advocate, could make the abstract policy of immigration real for her fellow staffers, "walking them through the problems, the obstacles, the challenges that people would be facing" in navigating the immigration process. Another staffer raised the issue of language access in her office's constituent outreach materials as a value she emphasized as someone with a parent for whom English was a second language. She noted how personal and community experience "shapes your approach" to policies and processes like this.

The intimate connection that staff bring as a product of their distinct life experiences and histories is not constrained to their unique demographic identities, but can foster empathy with similarly marginalized or underrepresented groups. Describing her experience in strategic policy discussions around the Defense of Marriage Act, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, and hate crimes legislation in the mid-1990s – which included debates about what might be sacrificed in seeking some policy wins, a senior Black woman staffer told me, "I remember listening and all of a sudden it hit me that 30 years before people had been having that same conversation about me as a woman and as an African American and the work on the Civil Rights Act." She continued, "I'm not saying that people in the room didn't care as much as I did about the civil rights of gays and lesbians, but what I am saying is that my personal experience as an African American woman animated my thinking I think in a particular way."

Challenging Institutional Biases

Beyond the policies and perspectives that these women championed for populations outside of Congress, women staffers I interviewed discussed their advocacy for policy changes that would benefit women and people of color inside congressional walls. In this work, they made clear – even if unintentionally – the biases of the institution and pushed for structural changes to address them. They were not alone. As mentioned above, Pierce (2014) provides examples of the ways in which

women staff altered the congressional rules and structures to better accommodate women in her historical look at the role of feminist staffers on Capitol Hill. But my interviews demonstrate that the institutional change spurred by the presence and perspectives of diverse personnel has not been constrained to those who organized at one time or those who adopted an explicitly feminist – or even activist – identity.

Many women talked about the distinct challenges that women staff have confronted – and continue to face – while trying to balance the demands of a staff role with those of parenting or caregiving. But, especially as high-level staff and managers in their offices, multiple women I interviewed created and put in place maternity, parental, or family leave policies within their own offices. Michele Jawando crafted a generous policy for Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and described her disappointment to learn that so many other Senate offices had not even thought about the need for one. She explained, "This is a blind spot, [but] at some point…you have to say it's intentional. They are making the choice where they are not recognizing that you're a woman of a certain age and you have a family there are going to be different challenges that you have." Without the distinct perspectives of women, policies like these may not have been changed. In other cases, policies may have been imposed that were detrimental to women. According to one woman staffer, after Senator Bob Packwood's abuse of women staff and interns was revealed in the early 1990s, some congressmen discussed imposing a policy that forbade any male member of Congress being alone with a female staff member.[12] While the intention was to protect both the woman and the member, the woman staffer told her boss, "You've just sentenced every female who works in this office or any office on the Hill or government to a life of being a secretary, or being at the front desk…and that is not what you're about. You are about empowering women and this absolutely defangs us." The policy did not move forward.

Women staffers discussed other ways in which they promoted women's hiring and advancement. Though some women said they paid little special attention to gender or race in hiring, others emphasized they prioritized inclusion of all types. Melody Barnes, who served as chief counsel on the Senate Judiciary Committee, talked about how her committee staff became more representative of the constituents it was meant to serve. "I made it a mission of mine to create that kind of diversity along with the level of excellence and I was quite proud of that and what we were able to achieve," she told me. She added, "People would tell me, 'You just didn't have diversity. You had boutique level diversity.'"

Women chiefs of staff in both the House and Senate have also created affinity groups to support and promote each other. One former member of the women chiefs group in the Senate, Laurie Rubiner, described a mission of that group: "We make sure [a new woman chief has] everything she needs and we kind of prop her up and …we want to make sure that she is successful." Other organizations have been created for mothers on Capitol Hill or for women of color. Former chief of staff Joyce Brayboy started a network of African American Women on the Hill, which provides a space for Black women to share and confide in issues that might be distinct to their experiences as Black women staff in Congress. Michelle Jawando discussed the need for these groups historically and until present day on Capitol Hill: "You know, we have to create these systems and these networks because [Congress] is, for many people, still a hostile environment and they have to figure out how you navigate that."

Finally, many of the women I interviewed pointed to their often-unexpected ability to inspire other women to pursue staff leadership roles as a special reward of their congressional service. Clare Coleman said, "I think seeing women operating at a high level of competence in any job makes a difference and causes a reckoning." Judy Lemons, who ended over two decades of work in Congress as Nancy Pelosi's (D-CA) chief of staff, explained,

> It goes back to what Nancy [Pelosi] always said: "You can't be what you can't see." So we need to increase our numbers, we need to be out there, we need to do good work, and we need to promote other women. Barbara Boxer used to have me come over every quarter and just have a conversation with her interns and…that was the most fun. I love that. … I always say, "Here is my email. If you think I can help you, you get in touch with me."

Norma Jane Sabiston, who served as Senator Mary Landrieu's (D-LA) chief of staff from 1996 until 2007, told me, "I think…the few of us that were there [as women chiefs]…helped open doors for young women who were on Capitol Hill. …I think that they saw that there was a way for them to…or they wanted to find that path to be the chief of staff."

Finding that path was different for women who also wanted to be mothers, according to some of the women I interviewed. Betsy Hawkings described how she has come to see herself as a role model (she said that while she was on the Hill "I didn't appreciate I was a role model to a lot of women"), noting of younger women staffers, "They saw that [if] I could be a good mom and be a chief then maybe they could too." Another House staffer described this as *the* thing she is most proud of from her time on Capitol Hill:

> Although I'm certainly proud of being a part of Obamacare …[I'm proud that] when I left, I had numerous women come to me and say that I was a role model for them. That I had kids and was in and remained in for some time in a senior level position and that I gave them the belief that they could pursue a career and not just have it be sort of at the lower or middle level, but take it as far as they want to take it and still have a family. So that made me feel really good.

The symbolic influence of their leadership was described by women of color as well, with recognition of the distinct ways in which they could disrupt race and gender expectations of who should or could achieve staff roles. One Black woman staffer described calls she from people whose daughters saw her on screen at the State of the Union and thought, "That's something I could do." That power of making women of color visible was described by Denise Desiderio as well. She shared that as a tribal woman, "There's nothing in my upbringing that would have allowed me to actually conceptualize of the career that I have." When school groups come to meet with her, she explains, it allows them to conceptualize their own career paths in ways she could not. She told me,

"The relatability of being a woman and an Indian in those positions, I think, was something that I was incredibly proud of…to let them know that it's something that they could do, too." Among many of these high-level women of color staffers, this role was both a privilege and a responsibility. As one Latina chief of staff said about her willingness to always meet with groups of young women, "I'd always make sure to go because they never had a person of color. …I would never turn that one down. I'd always make sure [to go] because if it would actually help grow the bench, how could I help?" That work did not go unnoticed, including by women who had blazed trails before them. In her oral history, Melody Barnes shared a story about an exchange she had with Coretta Scott King at an awards dinner for the Human Rights Campaign where King and Barnes' boss – Senator Ted Kennedy – were being honored. Barnes recounts,

> She pulled me aside just before they went out to receive their awards and speak. I think this was her reflecting her respect for him, but also her sense of history and what she had fought for. She told me how proud she was to see me in the position I was in, working for him, and that was really meaningful to me. [*voice cracks*]

Barnes described that as "a moment I won't forget," just as her leadership as a Black woman staffer will have lasting effects on the women who follow in her footsteps.

This type of representation – described in identity politics literature as symbolic representation – relies upon visibility as a mechanism for influence. If congressional staff are made invisible by design on Capitol Hill and by omission in congressional research, is their potential to inspire others diminished? As Liu and Banaszak (2017) write about this prerequisite for influence, arguing, "Women in political office are only likely to serve as role models or create a substantive effect that inspires action by others to the extent that they are visible enough to be noticed by ordinary citizens in the first place" (135). While far from the only role that women congressional staffers can play in reshaping the gendered and raced institution of Congress, enhancing their potential to inform and inspire others is a worthy task for scholars and practitioners, and one that begins with making the invisible visible.

CONCLUSION: Making the Invisible Visible in Congressional Research

In order to fully understand and interrogate Congress – and other legislative bodies – as gendered and raced institutions, scholarship needs to lift the veil on the ways in which gender and race dynamics affect and are affected by legislative staff. Relatedly, only by recognizing the integral roles of and potential for influence by congressional staff overall can these studies be done. Addressing these two sites of invisibility, as well as offering frameworks by which to interrogate them, is the focus of this paper. In future work, I will delve more deeply into the ways in which greater focus on staff – and the diversity among them – alters and enriches our understanding of the legislative process, representation, professionalism, and institutional norms and change. My research will also build upon these analyses to identify historical change in the distribution of power in Congress that has altered the roles, access, and influence of staff overall and along racial and gendered lines. Finally, the concepts illuminated in this work on congressional staff can be applied more broadly to other institutions and professional settings, both inside and outside of the U.S. Together, this research pushes us to take a more wholistic view of the institution of Congress, recognizing the importance of all actors – not just those elected to serve – to institutional structures and functions and the influence of gender and race dynamics therein.

NOTES

[1] This number is based on 2015 numbers, the latest reported in the Brookings Institute's report on *Vital Statistics on Congress*.

[2] While questions varied by interview subject type (member, staff, lobbyist), all interviews addressed representational goals; policy processes, priorities, and achievements; party polarization; and perceptions of gender and race dynamics within the 114th Congress. All interviews were conducted by one of a team of five interviewers, including the four principal investigators on this project (three Rutgers professors and CAWP's Director) and one senior graduate research assistant.

[3] The highest positions of my female interviewees were Chief of Staff (29), Staff Director (10), Deputy Chief of Staff or Staff Director (5), Senior Advisor/Aide/Counsel (6), Legislative Director (5), and Communications Director (3). The remaining six staffers ranged in positions from Secretary of the Senate to committee counsel, floor director, or floor assistant. Recognizing the seniority of positions that these women held is important to interpreting my findings, as the experiences and access to power is distinct for staffers across the hierarchy of staff positions in Congress. Importantly,

many of the women I interviewed held less senior positions during their tenure on Capitol Hill. The average tenure on the Hill among all of my interview subjects was 14 years.

[4] In addition to these two sets of interviews, I analyzed 54 oral histories from women congressional staffers collected from the Senate and House Historians' Offices, as well as oral history archives for individual U.S. Senators. Detailed analyses of these oral histories are not included in this paper, but provided important historical context to shape my understanding of shifts and stagnation in the forces of gender and race on Capitol Hill.

[5] All of the interviews referenced in this section come from the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) Study of Women in the 114th Congress (2015-2017), a project completed with financial support from Political Parity (the Hunt Alternatives Fund). The CAWP Study includes 129 semi-structured interviews with women members of the 114th Congress, their congressional staff, and interest group representatives on issues of focus to the larger project: education, human trafficking, abortion, sexual assault, immigration, and criminal justice reform. While questions varied by interview subject type (member, staff, lobbyist), all interviews addressed representational goals; policy processes, priorities, and achievements; party polarization; and perceptions of gender and race dynamics within the 114th Congress. All interviews were conducted by one of a team of five interviewers, including the four principal investigators on this project (three Rutgers professors and CAWP's Director) and one senior graduate research assistant.

[6] This fact is provided in the introduction to the U.S. Senate Historians' Office oral history with Christine McCreary (May 19, 1998). Available: https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/oral_history/Christine_McCreary.htm

[7] Staff respondents were able to choose more than one racial/ethnic category.

[8] See "House of Representatives Launches Diversity Initiative" (*SHRM Blog*): https://blog.shrm.org/workplace/house-of-representatives-launches-diversity-initiative; "Black Caucus Studies Racial Makeup of House Committee Staffs" (*New York Times*): https://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/07/09/black-caucus-studies-racial-makeup-of-house-committee-staffs/

[9] Dittmar, Carroll, and Sanbonmatsu (2018) report on the distinct perspectives, experiences, and influence of women of color in the 114th Congress, providing a more recent reminder of the simultaneous functioning of the U.S. Congress as a gendered and raced institution.

[10] In his work, Jones (2017b) offers an important application of Watkins-Hayes' theory to research on Black congressional staffers. I build upon this work here.

[11] Bell and Rosenthal (2003) include interest, expertise, motivation, status, and access to resources as necessary criteria for active representation among women congressional staffers, noting the importance of optimal external conditions (e.g. opportunities and demand for active representation, saliency of gender to the issue at hand) in shaping representational behavior (65, 77).

[12] In the early 1990s, Senator Bob Packwood (R-OR) faced multiple allegations of sexual harassment and misconduct. The Senate Ethics Committee concluded, "Senator Packwood engaged in a pattern of abuse of his position of power and authority as a United States Senator by repeatedly committing sexual misconduct, making at least 18 separate unwanted and unwelcome sexual advances between 1969 and 1990." A day before the full Senate was schedule to vote on his expulsion in 1995, Packwood resigned (Keith 2017).

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