The personal political: identity and representative claims in local government in Amsterdam

Master thesis by Anne Louise Schotel

Research Master Public Administration and Organisational Science

Utrecht University

August 2017

First reader: Noortje van Amsterdam

Second reader: Ank Michels

Abstract

The question *who* can represent others is fundamental in order to understand how representative democracies function. Thus, the concept of identity is inherently connected to political representation. However, previous studies have not recognized the complexity of identity and its relevance to representation. This article moves beyond existing literature by studying identity and representation through the lens of claim-making. Based on in-depth interviews with local councillors in Amsterdam, this study provides a new empirical basis for theory on claim-making to explore how representatives perform their identity in practice. This study finds that representatives employ different aspects of their identity strategically, depending on the context. More importantly, the data also reveals a tension in the claims councillors make: between a recognition of the importance of descriptive and symbolic representation and a desire to avoid being labelled on the basis of identity.

The image on the front cover is created by an artist named John Clang and is part of a series on identity and diversity. I choose this image because it represents the fluidity and multifaceted nature of identity to me. The image and artist's work can be found here: http://johnclang.com/

Introduction

The motto "*The personal is political"* was first coined by Carol Hanisch in her 1967 essay bearing the same title. Not long after its publication, the motto became one of the central tenets of second wave feminism. In her essay, Hanisch pointed to the exclusionary effect of dismissing the experiences and identities of women as 'personal', and therefore not belonging in the public domain or political arena (Hanisch, 1967; Meijer, 1996). Instead, Hanisch argued for inclusion of these underrepresented identities into politics. The concept of identity is inherently connected to political representation. Political theorist Linda Alcoff describes this connection as follows: "where one speaks from affects the meaning and truth of what one says" (1991, p. 4). The place a representative speaks from, meaning his or her identity, inextricably influences the legitimacy of the claims they make. Therefore, Hanisch and other second wave feminists argued that women should be present in politics. They argue that the unique experiences of women can only be properly and legitimately spoken for by female representatives. However, the importance and complexity of identity has largely been overlooked in research on representation. Pitkin's canonical and still dominant framework for studying representation emphasizes how representatives act, and not who they are. Building on Pitkin's model, exploring how and under what conditions representatives act has been a core focus for political scientists. These mostly normative studies have argued for the inclusion of traditionally underrepresented groups, such as women and ethnic minorities into government. In doing so, they fail to address the complexity of identity, by studying identity groups as homogenous entities with essentialist characteristics.

This essentialist approach to representation started to receive criticism recently, mostly by scholars arguing for an intersectional approach. Intersectionality challenges scholars to move beyond rigid categories of identity to understand representation. This study builds on this challenge and argues that identities are not static, but instead are "(…) the individual and collective narratives we construct that answer the question who am I/who are we" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 197). Identities are not built around a single axis – e.g. gender or ethnic background - but instead intersect and are constructed into a unique whole. Identities are also constantly in flux: certain identity characteristics can be evoked depending on various contexts. This perception of identity complicates the study of representation. Per Pitkin's model, representation requires a top-down relationship between representative and represented. Following this approach therefore means drawing essentialist boundaries around identity. In this view, who can represent who is based on shared identity

characteristics (Mansbridge, 1999; Pitkin, 1972). To understand the relationship between identity and representation, this study moves beyond these categories by studying how identity is constructed or performed by representatives. To do this, I build on the work of Saward on representation as claim-making. Saward sees representation as a performance of individual claims, as a series of acts in which representatives perform their identity. A representative's role is directly influenced by the way they construct, perform and project their identity. Identity can be strategically evoked by representatives: by emphasizing certain characteristics of their identity and aligning themselves with different constituencies, depending on the political context, their goals and their audience (Saward, 2006). The research question of this study is *how identity is performed by representatives through claim-making*. By answering this question, this article contributes to studies of representation in three ways. Firstly, it makes a theoretical contribution by explicitly investigating the role of identity in representation. Secondly, it moves beyond existing essentialists studies of identity by approaching identity intersectionally. Finally, this study contributes to studies of representation as claim-making by investigating how claim-making works in practice. It provides a new empirical basis to existing theory by using a case study of local councillors in Amsterdam to explore how they engage with and perform their identity. Combining theory with empirical investigation in this way will broaden the understanding of the relationship between representation and how identities are performed politically.

Theoretical framework

The following section describes existing research on identity, representation and the link between them. It addresses how this study uses these insights to understand how representatives perform their identity. This article argues that identity is fluid and that it can be constructed and performed by individuals. Representation is seen as a process of claim-making, based on the work of Michael Saward (2006, 2010), through which identity is performed and can be strategically evoked by representatives.

Identity

Identity is complex concept, and research on identity and its relation to representation has been lacking in political science. Huddy (2001) notes that especially empirical studies on identity are lacking in this field. Studies on identity have mostly taken place within sociology and anthropology, and address the question whether identity is fixed or fluid. Theories on the fluidity of identity argue that identities are not fixed, but constructed. Sociologist Stuart Hall states for example that identities are "are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions" (1996: p. 4). This means that the identities of individuals can change and evolve, depending on the context or position they take. Contrastingly, theories that view identity as fixed take an essentialist standpoint, and argue that members of certain groups have an essential identity that all members of that group share (Mansbridge, 1999). Studies on the descriptive representation of identity groups usually take such an essentialist stand-point, which I will explain in the next section.

I argue that seeing identity as a fixed concept is problematic. Gutmann explains this problem by stating that essentialist portrayals of identity neglect the agency of an individual to position their identity:

> When people are identified as black or white, male, female, Irish or Arabic, Catholic or Jewish, deaf or mute, they are stereotyped by race, gender, ethnicity, religion and disability and denied a certain individuality that comes from their own distinctive character and the freedom to affiliate themselves with identity characteristics as they themselves see fit (Gutmann, 2004, p. 1).

I argue that representatives use their identity to position themselves, by highlighting certain aspects of their identity in certain contexts, i.e. by making claims about themselves. Judith Butler (2011) links identity and performance in this way, and argues that identity is a

performative process; not something that inherently is, but something that actors perform through a repetition of acts through time. What these acts look like depends on the current political context, audience and goals of a representative.

To understand the relationship between identity and representation, I argue to go beyond rigid categorizations of identity. People can identify with multiple groups to varying degrees and groups do not necessarily share interests because they have a similar trait such as gender, sexuality or ethnic background. This study therefore takes an intersectional approach to identity. Intersectionality is an analytic sensibility, a way of thinking about identity. Intersectional thinking emerged from interdisciplinary black feminist scholarship in the 1990s. Kimberly Crenshaw coined the term in her study into the various ways gender and race intersect to shape multiple dimensions of experiences of black women (1993). Intersectionality thus refers to the idea that experiences of inclusion and exclusion are not solely gendered, but intersect with a range of other identity markers such as race, ethnicity, social class, and ability (Crenshaw, 1991; Hancock, 2007). No single marker of identity or even all group identities taken together make up a whole of a person (Guttman, 2004). An intersectional approach to identity allows space to study the way in which representatives use aspects of their identity in their representative roles.

This section argued that identity is intersectional, fluid and performative, instead of fixed and determined by essentialist characteristics. The next section will discuss what this performative conception of identity means for the study of representation.

Representation and identity

Research on representation has mostly built upon the classical and still dominant framework developed by Pitkin (1967). Pitkin states that representation means making present what or whom is absent (Pitkin, 1972) and, for many, this definition continues to be the most useful. At the heart of representation is the notion that the role is about “making citizens’ voices, opinions, and perspectives ‘present’ in the public policymaking processes” (Dovi, 2007, p. 300). Pitkin’s framework for studying representation distinguishes four related spheres of representation consisting of formal, descriptive, symbolic and substantive representation. Formal representation refers to the institutional rules and procedures through which representatives are chosen. Descriptive representation refers to the compositional similarity between representatives and represented. Substantive representation refers to the congruence between representatives’ actions and the interests of the represented and finally, symbolic representation refers to the represented’s feelings of being fairly and effectively represented (Pitkin 1967, 97). The axes of descriptive and symbolic representation both

address the question of who representatives are rather than what they do. Therefore, they are most useful for understanding the role of identity in representation. Research on the relationship between identity and representation has also mostly been focused on these two axes of representation. However, I argue that both descriptive and symbolic representation are problematic approaches to understanding identity and representation.
Descriptive representation refers to the extent to which representatives share characteristics, such as gender or ethnicity, with their constituency. Studies on descriptive representation have argued for political representation of traditionally underrepresented groups, such as women and ethnic minorities. Young describes the importance of descriptive representation as follows: “A democratic public ought to be fully inclusive of all social groups because the plurality of perspectives they offer to the public helps to disclose the reality and objectivity of the world in which they dwell together” (2000, p. 112). These theories of ‘politics of presence’ (Philips, 1995) employ a normative perspective and focus on questions concerning what groups ought to be politically represented, why their representation is important and what obstacles to they face in getting there. Theories on descriptive representation have had to rely on an essentialist approach to identity, defining identity groups using rigid boundaries and focusing for example on the descriptive representation of women as a group (for example Lovenduski, 1986; Tolley, 2007) and to a lesser extent on the representation of ethnic minority groups and race (for example Togeby, 2008; Rocha et al, 2010).

However, recent research has also shown that identity is more complex: sharing a characteristic of identity such as gender or race does not ensure a representative will substantively act for that group. An example of this is provided by Celis and Erzeel (2013), who find that male members of parliament speak out on behalf of women too. Smooth (2011) also criticises Pitkin’s approach to descriptive representation since it seems to hold female legislators accountable for “showing up” on behalf of all women, ignoring the within-group diversity of women. She challenges scholars on representation with the critical question: “standing for women? Which women?” (Smooth 2011, p.432) Studying representation by counting the presence of structurally underrepresented groups, such as women in this case, becomes useless if a clear rationale for why their presence matters is lacking (Rosenburger & Stöckl, 2016; Mügge & Celis, 2017). As argued above, the concept of identity is more complex than this descriptive approach to representation allows for. Young therefore concludes that: "having relation of identity or similarity with constituents says nothing about what the representative does" (1997, p. 354). By constructing essentialist identity categories in this way, the axis of descriptiveness does not provide a deeper understanding of the way identity is performed by representatives. Symbolic representation also incorporates the identity of a representative into the process of representation, but not by focussing on who a

representative is, but on how they are perceived by the public (Pitkin, 1967). The focus lies on whether the audience feels connected to a representative, regardless of their acts. For example, Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler (2005) find that even if female representatives do not speak out a female constituency, their presence still increases feelings of political trust among women.

I have argued in the previous section that a narrow focus on essential characteristics of identity fails to recognize its complexity. However, markers of identity do create expectations about how members of a group should act and appear (Gutmann, 2004). Visible characteristics of identity create social expectations in this way. Studies on symbolic representation have shown that the visible aspects of identity influence the ways that certain types of identities are emphasised, constructed, assigned and performed by actors. Puwar (2004) argues that the visibility of bodies makes representatives from minority groups instantly defined by their descriptive characteristics. Representatives then run the risk of being reduced to a token or a symbolic representation of their social category (Kanter, 1977). Celis and Wauters (2010) confirm this and find that members of parliament that descriptively fit minority groups struggle with them being associated with 'just' representing that group. Only representing a minority group one belongs to can be perceived illegitimate. The desire for authentic political representation leads representatives to emphasize certain aspects of their identity in different contexts, according to Celis and Wauters. Seeing identity as fluid and something that can be performed, suggests that individuals have agency over the way they position their identity. However, the fact that identity roles can also be involuntarily ascribed to minority representatives limits this agency. This makes the question of how they perform their identity even more relevant.

Representation as claim-making

Identity is seen in this study as fluid and as a practice or performance that can be employed strategically by representatives in different contexts. As argued above, Pitkin's frames of descriptive and symbolic representation are not equipped to fully comprehend the role of identity in representation. Seeing identity as practice or performance allows this study to understand the complexity and contextuality of representation of identity. To investigate how representatives perform their identity, this study builds on the work of Michael Saward (2006, 2010). This framework is ideally suited to study the relationship between identity and representation. In Saward's work, representation is seen as a performance of individual claims, "in which the constituency in whose interests the representative claims to speak is constructed within the framework of the claim" (2010, p. 7). The claims representatives make are directly influenced by the way they construct, perform and strategize identity (Saward

2006, 2010). Representatives construct claims of the people they represent and frame what their interests are. Just as identity is not a stable construct that 'just is', so do representations of the self and others in politics not just happen. According to Saward, people construct representations, "put them forward, make claims for them - make them" (2006, p. 299). Through these claims, groups of citizens with shared characteristics of identity and their interests are created. Representation is a two-way street according to Saward: the represented choose representatives and representatives 'choose' their constituents, portraying them or framing them in contestable ways. Claim-making by a representative thus requires the creation of shared characteristics with a constituency. This process builds an implicit relationship between representative and represented. In a representative claim, a maker of the claim takes the following steps:

(1) he or she creates an audience or constituency;
(2) linking interests to this constituency;
(3) creating a match between identity characteristics of the constituency and themselves.

By establishing a connection between identity characteristics of a constituency and themselves in this third step, representatives can create a basis of legitimacy for their claims. This is reflected in the way Alcoff (1991, p. 9) describes the link between identity and representation: "where one speaks from affects the meaning and truth of what one says". This study will therefore investigate if and how claim-making and identity are linked.

Claim-making is a relatively new approach to representation. Most studies on claim-making have been limited to theoretical contributions on a conceptual level (see for example de Wilde, 2013; Severs, 2010; Celis et al, 2008). These studies agree that Saward's model provides a way out of the impasse of Pitkin's framework, with its static notion of interests as entities that exist 'out there', ready to be brought into representation (Celis et al, 2008). Severs (2010) analyses Saward's approach most carefully and warns scholars wanting to adopt the claim-making perspective not to overlook whether the claims made are accepted by the represented. A narrow focus on the act of making claims by representatives, she argues, can overlook whether these claims are perceived by a constituency as being made in their interest. However, this warning does not apply here, since this study does not take an evaluative approach to representative claims. I am not interested in judging the quality or authenticity of these claims, or in assessing whether they lead to 'good' or 'bad' democratic representation. Instead, the focus lies on the way representatives perform their identity through claims. Empirical data on how representatives do this in practice has mostly been lacking. Van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard (2017) provide an exception: they do study claim-

making in practice on the local level. Their study underlines the possibilities of Saward's dynamic approach to representation. However, their focus lies with claims made by non-electoral actors and identity is not part of the research.

The role of identity in representation has previously been absent in studies on claim-making. Herein lies the most important contribution of this study. The framework of representation as performative claim-making allows space for thinking through the intersectionality and fluidity of identity. Seeing representation in this way takes the complexity of identity and representation into account: it prevents it from being understood as a linear process between representatives and represented with fixed identities and stable interests. The previous paragraphs have illustrated that research on representation and identity has treated the relationship between these concepts as rather linear and straightforward. However, by incorporating intersectional and constructivist challenges, this study will be able to answer the question of how representatives perform their identity. To better understand the relationship between identity and representation this study asks how local councillors perform identity. It approaches representation through representative claims, as formulated by Saward (2010). This approach divides the research question into three parts:

(1) **Question**: How do representatives claim a constituency? Who do they claim to represent? How do they formulate their goals and motivation for doing this?

(2) **Question**: How do representatives position their own identity? As described above, the intersectional perspective this study takes means that representatives are not seen as defined by a singular identity; there are multiple groups that people form allegiances and attachments to, some voluntary and some ascriptively, through the actions of others (Gutmann, 2004). What aspects of or labels of identity do representatives refute or emphasize? And do they apply these labels to themselves or are they ascribed to them?

(3) **Question**: How do representatives connect themselves with those they represent? Do they claim a connection based on shared identity characteristics? Or do representatives employ other strategies to position themselves as representing their constituency?

Methods

Case selection

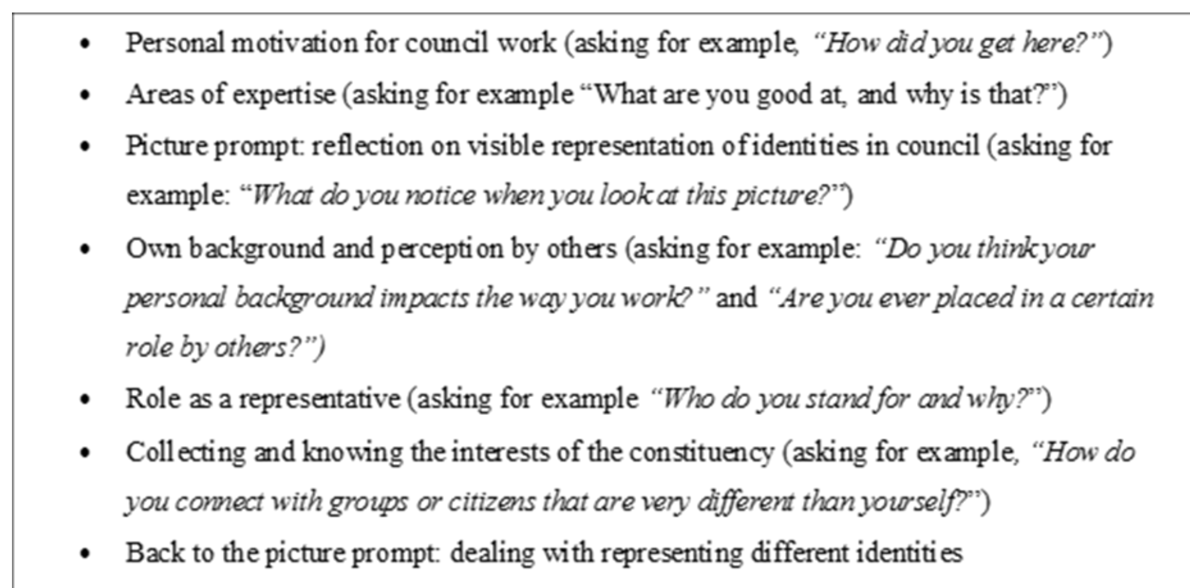
Research on representative claim-making has been mostly theoretical, and not grounded in empirical data. One of the main contributions of this study is that it provides a new empirical basis for understanding how representative claims and identity relate in practice. Eighteen in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with local elected councillors in the municipality of Amsterdam. The district councils of Amsterdam provide a unique opportunity to study local representation. Amsterdam is a majority-minority city with citizens of more than 180 nationalities. Furthermore, even though the seven districts are part of the same city, each has the size of an average Dutch municipality and a strong sense of identity with specific issues and interests that do not necessarily coincide with those of other districts. Since representatives in each district must represent a diverse constituency, this local level offers the possibility to study the different ways in which representatives perform their identity through representative claims and as such affiliate themselves with different constituencies, depending on the context. Furthermore, local representatives are usually the first, and often the only politicians that most citizens ever get in touch with. Thus, they play a crucial role in the process of representation (Boles, 2001; Briggs, 2000; Michon, 2011). I did not select councillors based on characteristics of identity, such as gender or ethnicity, but instead approached all. As described above, identity is seen as fluid and intersectional in this study. To understand how representatives evoke and strategically use different aspects of their identity in different situations, it is essential to avoid focussing on a priori defined group characteristics. Instead, representatives' identity is approached as an open, empirical question. Therefore, all members of the district councils were approached to take part in the interviews.

Data collection

Interviews

For this study, I undertook semi-structured in-depth interviews lasting one hour on average with eighteen councillors, with at least one councillor from each district. The interviews took place between October 2016 until February 2017. To ensure the privacy of the participants all data were anonymized. In reporting the results in the following section, I will therefore where possible refer to the interviewees in gender-neutral terms (by using the plural form 'they/them') and omit names of places, streets or districts. The interviews were held in Dutch and the transcripts were later translated to English. In-depth interviewing suits the purpose of this study. Several researchers suggest this way of interviewing can create a free and private

space for a representative to discuss their identity in a reflexive way (Childs, 2001; Boeije, 2010). This semi-structured approach also allowed me to elaborate on any additional topics brought forward by the interviewees. Open-ended questions allow respondents to answer from their own perspectives, increasing validity (Adcock & Collier, 2001). However, using open-ended questions does make coding more difficult due to the greater variation in answers (Boeije, 2010). The aim of the interviews was to uncover how local councillors perform their identity through the claims they make: how they think, feel and how they position their identity. The interview questions therefore explored the claims representatives made in the three steps identified above, claiming a constituency, defining their interest and positioning identity. An overview of interview topics is provided in figure 1. The interviews were recorded and transcribed digitally. To increase validity, the verbatim transcripts of the interviews were sent to the participants after the interview and they were asked to reflect on and review their answers. Besides avoiding errors and increasing validity, interviewee transcript review can also provide additional data (Mero-Jaffe, 2001). All interviewees felt the transcript reflected the interview. Some interviewees also provided additional examples of their experiences or explained a statement further upon my request.



- Personal motivation for council work (asking for example, *"How did you get here?"*)
- Areas of expertise (asking for example "What are you good at, and why is that?")
- Picture prompt: reflection on visible representation of identities in council (asking for example: "*What do you notice when you look at this picture?*")
- Own background and perception by others (asking for example: *"Do you think your personal background impacts the way you work?"* and *"Are you ever placed in a certain role by others?")*
- Role as a representative (asking for example *"Who do you stand for and why?"*)
- Collecting and knowing the interests of the constituency (asking for example, *"How do you connect with groups or citizens that are very different than yourself?"*)
- Back to the picture prompt: dealing with representing different identities

Figure 1. Outtake of interview structure used in this study.

Visibility

A useful tool in helping participants reflect on their identity and its visibility is photo elicitation or the picture prompt (Harper, 2002). As argued in the previous section on representation and identity, the visibility of certain descriptive characteristics can create social expectations of how representatives should act (Gutmann, 2004). Therefore, I am interested in the way representatives see themselves and how they deal with labels of identity that may be applied

to them. Gauntlett (2007) suggests that introducing a visual element to the process of data collection by photo elicitation can provide a way to understand and explore an interviewee's identity. Furthermore, Mannay (2010) argues that the presence of the photographs provides an opportunity to explore previously 'taken for-granted' understandings held by both researcher and participants. This makes this method highly useful, since identity is such a complex concept to grasp.

Figure 2. Example of the pictures of the councils, shown to the interviewees. None of the individuals depicted in this picture are part of this study. Retrieved from: https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/bestuurscommissies/ (31-06-2017).

At the start and at the end of the interview, the participants were shown a photograph of their council (including themselves), retrieved from the websites of the district councils. Figure 2 provides an example of such a picture. In the beginning of the interview, the participants were asked what they noticed about the picture without any further instruction. At the end of the interview, we returned to it to discuss what role they played and what part(s) of their identity was visible. The participants were then asked to link this visibility to their role as a representative. The discussion of the picture at the beginning of the interview usually led to a description by the interviewee about the visible identity characteristics of their colleagues, pointing them out in the photograph. I then explicitly asked interviewees at the end of the interview if they felt the presence or lack of certain visible identity characteristics among councilmembers matters for the district, de facto discussing the importance of descriptive and symbolic representation without defining this as such in the conversation. Having discussed their colleagues' identities, at the end of the interview, most interviewees felt

comfortable enough to talk about their own visible and invisible identity characteristics and the influence of identity on their council work when I reintroduced the picture.

Data analysis

Critical frame analysis and coding

The interview transcripts were analysed using critical frame analysis. Critical frame analysis is a useful tool to map how politicians construct groups and the problems they attach to them, since it moves beyond individual specific usages of wording and language (Meier, 2008). Instead, it uncovers frames or interpretations in the ways things are discussed (Bacchi, 1999; Rein and Schön, 1993). The core of critical frame analysis is a set of so-called 'sensitizing questions'. Sensitizing questions identify: who voices an issue, the different representations that actors give to a specific problem and its solutions (Verloo and Lombardo, 2007). This makes critical frame analysis a highly useful approach to uncover representative claims in the data. Answers to these sensitizing questions are given in the form of codes. The first step in coding was to read texts closely to identify representative claims. An initial coding scheme was developed based on the three sub questions formulated in the previous section: how representatives frame their constituency or audience and their interests and how they position their own identity. Any additional issues brought up by the participants were coded as well to remain as open as possible to new topics emerging from the data. In coding, I remained as close as possible to the wording used by the interviewees, often using literal translations This resulted in different levels of abstractions in the codes. Sometimes interviewees described themselves or their constituency specifically, for example as 'Surinamese'. However, often the respondents used more general terms, describing themselves as 'religious' and not for example 'Christian'. Since the goal of this study is to investigate the link between identity and claim-making, I chose to stick to the terms interviewees used to describe their own experiences.

Results

The following section will examine the results of this study. Appendix I provides an overview of all applied codes. I will discuss the results according to the structure of the representative claim, as described in the previous section on operationalization. Firstly, I will address who representatives claim as their constituency, secondly how representatives construct their own identity and finally connect these two parts by analysing how representatives link themselves to their constituency.

Claiming a constituency

The first part of the analysis focussed on who representatives feel they represent. As Saward (2006; 2010) argues, for representative claims to be successful, they need to target an audience. Figure 3 provides an overview of all constituencies the councillors claimed to represent in the interviews. The word constituency does not strictly refer to a representatives' electorate here, since most interviewees said they wanted to represent groups or individuals that did not vote for them or their party. The terms used to describe the codes originated from the data. Most local councillors stated they wanted to stand for or represent their district as a whole. One local councillor stated: "The topics I work on are important for the entire district, so I want to be there and work on these issues for the entire district too".

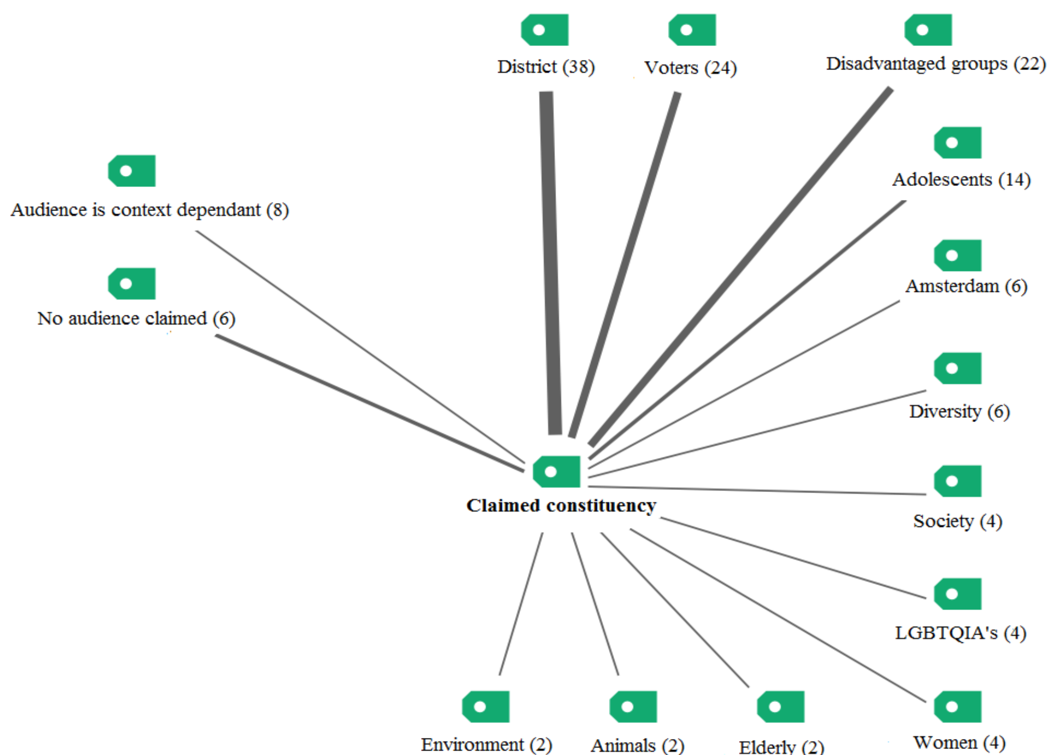


Figure 3. Overview of the constituencies representatives claim to represent and the number of times these claims were made (LGBTQIA stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual). A thicker line indicates a stronger relationship.

However, the claim to stand for an entire district also revealed a tension with the second most mentioned constituency; the electorate or the voters for each individual representative or their fellow elected party members. One councillor said: “I want to stand for those who agree with me and our party positions”. Contrastingly, another mentioned: “I am here especially for those who did not vote. Those who do not have a voice need someone to stand up for them”. The formulations of these constituencies did not stand alone, they also reflected their perspective on the role of a representative. Councillors who limited their constituency to their voters (be it individual votes or votes for the party) also approached their constituencies in a top-down manner: using contact with citizens in the district mainly to inform them about the representative’s standpoints and decisions and discuss possible implications of these decisions. Those who did not limit their constituency to voters described contact with citizens in the district as a way of discovering their needs and visions and discussing possible solutions. Most of these councillors conceived of representation as a task given by their voters and wanted to prove to them, as one interviewee said: “that I am representing their interests best”. This lines up with Saward’s conception of representative claims, through which “representatives argue or imply that they are the best representatives of the constituency” (2006, p. 302).

What is striking about these results is that even though a third of the councillors has a minority background, none claimed to represent any minority groups in their district. Instead, the councillors described their constituencies in general terms, such as the district, the electorate or the city. No claims were made to represent traditionally underrepresented groups in the district, such as Turks or Moroccans. Standing for or representing women in the district was only mentioned by one (female) councillor. These claims fit with recent conceptual criticisms on the framework of descriptive representation as formulated by Pitkin (1967, 1972), which revolves around compositional similarity between represented and representative as the basis for legitimate claims. Mügge and Celis (2017) and Smooth (2011) are also critical of this frame and argue for example that women and ethnic minorities do not necessarily represent their respective groups.

Many representatives did claim to represent disadvantaged groups in their district in general, but did not want to explicate or define this disadvantage. Instead, the councillors described their constituencies as “those who have less” or “those who are one step behind in society”. Although all councillors saw value in equal descriptive and symbolic representation as defined by Pitkin (1967) in general, no one actively took up the role of group representative in the interviews. I will discuss this in more detail in the following section on claiming identity and the rejection of ascribed identity roles.

The claims councillors made in the interviews about representing certain constituencies often overlapped or were contradictory. Six interviewees stated not wanting to represent any specific groups, not even their district or electorate, but described their role in terms of the content of the job: reading all required documents thoroughly, engaging in informed debates and implementing party policy. However, all councillors did mention certain constituencies they wanted to represent later in our conversation, for example feeling a duty to represent disadvantaged groups or contributing to improving the city in general. Claims of overlapping or contradictory constituencies show that these local councillors do not conceive of their constituency as a neatly defined group. Councillors even explicitly mentioned that their constituency changes, depending on certain political goals at a certain time. A councillor described this as follows: “Who I represent, whose side I choose, differs from time to time, I have to consider each time: whose interests carry more weight, what do I think is most important”. This fluidity in who councillors claim to represent can be explained for a large part by the fact that they operate on a local level. Political and ideological divides are less relevant since councillors often are dealing with practical local issues: deciding whether to remove a bus stop on a certain street, or whether to chop down a tree to make room for a broader sidewalk. One councillor formulated this as: “You can only get so political about a lamppost”. This means that councillors often claim to represent a certain constituency on a one-issue-basis, adjusting their representative role in different contexts. This makes Saward’s (2006) model of claim-making especially relevant on the local level. As one councillor described above, a changing audience also requires making decisions on whose interests matter most given a certain issue. This raises the question of how these local councillors connect with these different constituencies. I will discuss this in the final part of the analysis on linking identity and constituency.

Claiming identity

The second part of the analysis focused on how representatives position their own identity in the claims they make. The way a representative performs their identity impacts the claims they are able to make and the constituencies they are able to represent: "where one speaks from affects the truth of what one says" (Alcoff, 1991). Figure 4 provides an overview of how councillors construct their own identity in descriptive terms and how they evaluate the impact of their identity on their representative role.

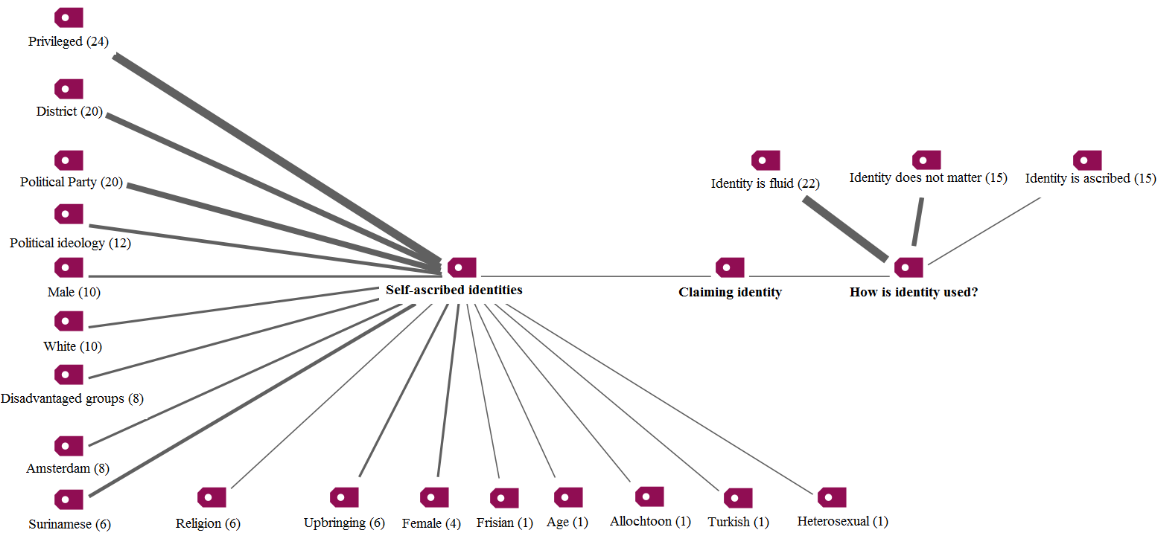


Figure 4. Overview of applied codes of self-ascribed identities by representatives and the ways in which identity is used by representatives. A thicker line indicates a stronger relationship.

As argued above, identity is fluid and can be adjusted to different contexts (Yuval-Davis, 2006). This implies a certain level of agency: a representative can choose what aspect of their identity they put forward to increase the legitimacy of their claim (Saward, 2010). However, previous research also suggests that identity labels can be applied to representatives by others, impacting on the legitimacy of their claims (Puwar, 2004; Celis & Wauters, 2003). Therefore, I will discuss two different aspects of how councillors make claims about their own identity: the way they describe themselves and the way they are described by others.

Discussing identity in a reflexive manner is not easy to accomplish in a one-hour conversation with a stranger. To encourage this reflexivity, I used a photograph of the district council to talk about the composition of the council in general (asking, 'what do you see

here?" and 'what do you think is remarkable about this picture?') before moving on to the identity of the interviewees themselves. The picture was used to discuss what value the interviewee adhered to descriptive and symbolic representation of their district council. When asked what they noticed about the photograph, all representatives denied that their council was a mirror image of the district in descriptive terms, although one councillor pointed proudly to a councilmember in a wheelchair. Especially underrepresentation of younger people, women, ethnic minorities and ethnic minority women were mentioned; a councillor described the composition of their council as consisting of "mostly old white men". One councillor with a minority background described visiting the iftar in their district:

> They asked us at the iftar who was born and raised in Amsterdam. I stood up, a girl wearing a hijab stood up and a Hindu-looking guy stood up. No one else. That is important, also when you look at the council.

Although some interviewees argued that visible descriptive characteristics of identity do not affect the quality of the work a representative does, all thought that it would improve the image or the level of symbolic representation of the council in general, if more representatives with a minority background were included. One interviewee gave the following argument: "I am not sure if you would have to sail the Mediterranean in a plastic boat in order to work on immigration policy, but it sure would be good for the image". The next section will show that even though councillors did adhere value to descriptive and symbolic representation, this does not translate unproblematically to the performance of their own identity.

Describing identity

After discussing the composition of the council in general, the interviews turned towards discussing the labels of identity councillors applied to themselves. The goal was to see what aspects of or labels of identity representatives emphasize or refute. Firstly, most councillors confirm the importance of identity in representation. One councillor stated for example that "your political perspective and who you identify with is determined by who you are and where you are from". As figure 4 shows, many identity roles were mentioned by the councillors and each applied at least two of these roles to themselves. Interestingly, the roles that the councillors mentioned most can be seen as 'politically correct' or neutral: having a privileged position, being part of the district or city and being a member of their political party. The most emphasized characteristic was having a privileged position in society. This position of privilege was described in terms of being part of the majority in society, being white and being highly educated. A councillor, when asked to describe himself, said for example: "I

have a very privileged role, I am a white male and I know my way around society". Most councillors however emphasized the fluidity and multifaceted nature of their identity as a representative. The following quote illustrates this fluidity:

> I am an *Amsterdammer*. I am from [District Name]. I come from a politically left family, and from a large Surinamese family. You seem to suggest that my Surinamese roots influence my identity. That does not happen in a stable way. People ask me which parts of me are Dutch and which parts of me are Surinamese. As if you could separate the two.

These findings fit with the perspective on identity as fluid and constructed, as Gutmann described: no single marker of identity makes up the whole of a person (2004). Another councillor also describes the contextuality of performing their identity: "When I visit my Moroccan kickbox group, I play a different role than when I go to a concert or the theatre". This switching in the performance of identity roles in different contexts has important implications for representation. Through their claims, councillors can emphasize certain identity characteristics over others, adjusting to the political situation or strategy at hand. Almost all councillors describe evoking aspects of their identity strategically. One councillor describes attending the council meeting on the day of Keti Koti[1]:

> I use my Surinamese background sometimes. In my own way. (…) The first time that we had a meeting, it was also Keti Koti. I kept my angisa[2] on and sat in the council chamber like that. That was kind of a statement.

Another councillor describes strategically using her female identity in the council. They say:

> Sexism is there. But I can use that, to be honest. The men can be sensitive to women. I can use that in several ways. Sometimes it can be annoying, but sometimes I think that if I look a colleague a little deeper in the eyes, we will agree more easily.

These examples show not only the fluidity of identity in representative roles but also its contextuality: depending on who the audience is, councillors perform certain aspects of identity. This contextuality underlines the importance of what Saward (2006, 2010) calls

[1] Sranantongo for "the chains are cut", Keti Koti is a day remembering the abolition of slavery in Suriname
[2] Traditional Surinamese headdress for women

‘reading-back’ by the audience of a representative claim. Claims only work if audiences interact, accept or reject them. The next section shows that even if representative claims are not meant to address certain constituencies, they can still be perceived as such based on shared identity characteristics.

Ascribing identity

Using identity characteristics in strategic ways demonstrates a high level of agency in choosing and using identity. Representatives position themselves in certain ways to give legitimacy to their claims (Saward, 2006). However, when identity labels are ascribed to representatives by others, some of this agency and legitimacy may be lost. Based on recent literature, it is expected that representatives with a visible minority background may refute minority labels since standing for a minority constituency can be perceived as illegitimate (Celis & Wauters, 2010). The previously described results confirm this, since they showed that representatives mostly make claims about their constituency and their identity in neutral terms. Even if councillors do not make claims to represent themselves, they may still be seen as a symbolic representative for a minority group because of their shared identity characteristics. One interviewee described this as follows: “I have noticed that being in politics leads to you being made into an *allochtoon* or Moroccan by the outside world”. Another councillor stated that this ascription of identity labels influenced their position as a representative: “As soon as you position yourself on the domain of diversity, suddenly you are the go-to person to tell everyone how to reach a certain group of voters or tell them what the interests and issues of these voters are”. All councillors with a minority background that I interviewed expressed discomfort with or refuted the role of minority representative. A councillor stated: “I do not feel like I am acting explicitly for the Surinamese community. I don’t think I would even want that”. Councillors who described themselves as ‘privileged’, ‘part of the majority’, or ‘white’, wanted to shake these labels as well. One of these councillors describes an incident where she and two colleagues with a Moroccan background attended a meeting in the district in which none of the participants spoke Dutch very well. However, there was a translator present. The councillor describes this event as follows:

> One of my Moroccan colleagues addressed the organisers of the event and said since [Name councillor] is here, and they cannot understand a word, we will need to proceed in Dutch. I reacted to this by saying that it was no trouble at all since there was a translator present. I am just happy all the participants showed up and if the translator does his job, we can have a productive conversation. But my colleague said this in such a persistent way that I just felt eliminated by being Dutch.

The data draws attention to the importance of what Saward (2010; 2007) describes as the audience 'reading-back' claims. Even if a representative does not claim to do so, they can still be perceived or 'read-back' as a symbolic representative by a group based on their identity characteristics. Like Celis and Wauters (2010), I find that councillors refute such ascribed roles of acting for a minority constituency. In the case of the councillor wearing an angisa in the chamber, they positioned themselves visibly as a minority, against a mostly white and Dutch majority. The case of the councillor with a Dutch background, participating in an event with mostly Moroccan attendees, shows that in this context, being Dutch made them a minority in this case. Although this councillor was still part of the symbolic majority based descriptive characteristics, they refuted this contextual minority role.
This illustrates that being part of the majority or minority always depends on the other group; it is relative and context-dependent. The ascription of minority roles and the expectations that flow from it, show that councillors only have agency over the perception of their identity to a certain level. Wearing a symbol to represent a group seems to be a deliberate choice in this case, but being ascribed a minority role is not, as previously mentioned examples of being involuntarily labelled 'allochtoon' or 'diversity expert' illustrate. These majority and minority roles are always relational and relative: a minority can only exist in relation to a majority and vice versa (Eriksen, 2002, p. 122). The agency to perform identity does not lie only with the individual, but is also embedded in this frame of 'us' versus 'them', majority versus minority, in the outside world. The freedom representatives have to affiliate themselves with identity characteristics as they themselves see fit, as Gutmann (2004, p. 1) describes, is therefore not fully applicable in practice.

Finally, a tension is visible in the data between councillors wanting to speak for everyone and wanting to make legitimate claims. Interviewees mentioned refuting ascribed roles because they did not want to be perceived as acting only in the interests of the group with which they share descriptive characteristics. However, representing several constituencies or an entire district was also mentioned as problematic, not just because of constraints on resources and time ("you just can't be everywhere") but also out of concern for being authentic, i.e. approaching constituencies and representing their interests based on shared identity characteristics and experiences. So how do councillors claim to connect their identity and their constituencies while remaining authentic? The next section will elaborate on this link.

Linking identity and constituency

As mentioned above, the importance of symbolic representation is that it creates a connection of shared experience and identification between the representative and the represented (Saward, 2006, 2010). However, all interviewees moved beyond this strict conception by claiming it is possible to represent somebody with whom they do not share any identity characteristics. But how do they reach create this symbolic connection if they have little in common? How are they able to still make legitimate claims? This next section will analyse how the councillors dealt with linking their own identity to their constituency in their role as a representative. Figure 5 provides an overview of the strategies councillors used to connect their identity to their claimed constituencies.

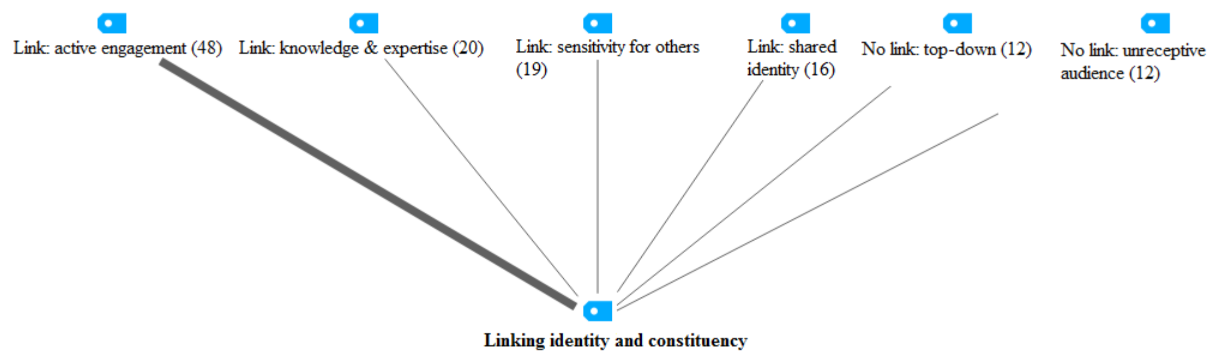


Figure 5. Overview of applied codes of strategies local councillors use to connect their identity and their claimed constituency.

The councillors in this study mentioned four strategies of connecting with their claimed constituencies: through shared identity characteristics, through active engagement, through their knowledge and expertise and by being sensitive to others. Four councillors did not express the goal of wanting to connect to their constituency, as described in the previous section on claiming identity. Instead they formulated strategies of communicating with their electorate in a top-down manner, informing them about decision-making instead of consulting them. These councillors also mentioned that strategies to connect with a constituency will fail if citizens do not want to be heard or are not motivated to participate. All six strategies will now be examined in more detail.

Strategies to connect

Six councillors mentioned being able to represent certain constituencies in a legitimate way because of shared identity characteristics. One councillor described this as follows: “You need similarities to be able to represent someone, to identify with them”. These similarities in identity do not have to be singular or neatly delineated (Hall, 1996). This fits with the results

mentioned above, that showed the councillors use and create their identity as a fluid construct and adjust it to different situations. A councillor stated:

> I am quite good at switching gears and establishing a connection with different groups. I think that is because I grew up in many different environments. I lived in this district but I attended school in a neighbouring district. I have Dutch family but I also have Turkish family, who differ in many ways. I went to university but I also attend dance festivals. This enables me to adjust my identity. How do I know when I am successful at this? Because people in the district feel connected, they see that I remain authentic in different roles.

This councillor describes switching between different identities to connect with others. Because of their experience in these different environments, they claim to connect with citizens that share one or more of these environments in an authentic way. As mentioned above, most the councillors I interviewed described themselves as part of the majority or as occupying a position of privilege. However, all councillors I interviewed claimed to be able represent constituencies with whom they do not share any identity characteristics, such as disadvantaged groups in general, or more specifically elderly citizens or LGBTQIA's. One councillor described themselves as being part of the majority, but did not find a lack of shared identity characteristics with citizens in their diverse district problematic. They explained as follows:

> I am not a representative of elderly Moroccan women in the district. But I also am not a representative of a group of white, highly educated men living in the district. We are all people and coincidentally, I have blonde hair and blue eyes. That is just the way it is. I think what matters is how you deal with your identity personally and how you approach others from your identity. That is the most important thing. You may be part of a certain group, but if you are an asshole you will accomplish nothing.

These examples challenge a linear conception of descriptive and symbolic representation: it is not necessarily shared identity characteristics that make a representative role authentic, but the way a representative approaches their constituency. However, the councillor quoted here may overestimate the agency representatives have over the performance of their identity, as the previous section on claiming identity showed.

When councillors claimed to lack shared identity characteristics with certain groups, they formulated other strategies to engage with their constituencies, which I will discuss next. The most commonly mentioned strategy to connect to a constituency, without relying on similarities in identity characteristics, is through active engagement. Most interviewees emphasized the importance of going out into the district, visiting local meetings and talking with citizens to find out what their interests are. One councillor described: “I think it is arrogant to decide for others what they need. I also think it is arrogant to think we know best. So, I go out to meet them, to talk with them about what they want and what they need. I do not decide things from my own bubble”. Councillors emphasize the importance of getting to know the individual experiences of citizens in the district. They claim they can overcome a lack in shared identity by being truly interested, “you just have to really, really listen. The most important thing is to be yourself and to show sincere interest in people”. However, almost all interviewees also mentioned heavy time constraints in their work. One councilmember mentioned they would “love to go to all the events that are organised in the district, but I just don’t have the time”. The strong emphasis councilmembers placed on active engagement and reaching out to citizens seems contradictory with the daily realities of council work. One can therefore wonder how often this ideal is put into practice. The second most mentioned strategy is to use knowledge and expertise to connect to a dissimilar constituency. One councillor described this as follows: “When you personally are not able to get to them [a certain group of citizens], there are organisations who can. They have the knowledge that I lack about these groups”. Councillors claim to use the knowledge of local organisations or their own knowledge and expertise, for example acquired in previous work experiences, to collect the interests of their constituencies.

The councillors with a visible minority background mostly did not emphasize active engagement but another strategy which one of them defined as being sensitive to others. This councillor said: “Being ‘different’ myself, leads me to identify more easily with groups that are seen as ‘others’ by society. Even though I am not Moroccan, or I may not be in touch with the Moroccan community, I feel I can understand them better. Because I have experienced in a certain way what it means to be different”. One councillor describes an incident where the districts alderman was lacking this sensitivity: “We had a meeting at the mosque and she marched in with her shoes on. I cannot help but wonder, how on earth did you walk past all these shoes at the entrance without realizing you need to take yours off?”. Having experienced marginalization themselves, these councillors mentioned they feel they can connect with others who have experienced bias too in an authentic way, even if they share no other identity characteristics. What they did share was a mutual feeling of being described as a minority by others. However, all the councillors who mentioned being

sensitive to others as a strategy to connect, used very neutral terms in describing their representative role and were careful to emphasize that they did not want to solely represent marginalized or disadvantaged groups.

Finally, four councillors described not establishing a connection between themselves and their constituency at all, seemingly denying a representative role. These councillors mentioned two reasons for this lack of connection. Firstly, as mentioned in the section on claiming identity, some councillors describe a top-down approach to their role as a representative. One of them stated: “We will involve citizens in the way we want to. Some councillors think that the citizen should be the source of information. But I think citizens need explanations of why certain decisions were made and why they may have negative consequences for them. A politician should not follow, but lead”. Another reason for not establishing a connection between themselves and constituencies is explained by councillors as a lack of participation of citizens. “It is a shame, but some people just do not want to be heard”.

These findings fit with recent criticisms of Pitkin’s conception of descriptive and symbolic representation as a transparent and linear process (for example by Mugge & Celis, 2017; Celis and Erzeel, 2013 and Smooth, 2001). These results show that representation is more dynamic and goes beyond compositional similarity and symbolic roles based on essentialist identity characteristics. The claim-making approach revealed that councillors claim different aspects of their identity depending on their audience or constituency. However, their individual agency to perform parts of their identity as they themselves see fit, is limited by labels of identity that are ascribed to them by others, positioning them as minority representatives. Finally, these findings illustrate the complexity of the way in which representatives connect their own identity with their claimed constituencies to give legitimacy to their claims. However, even though all councillors described descriptive and symbolic representation as valuable goals, none made claims in the interviews to position themselves as representatives of minority groups.

Conclusion and discussion

This study analysed representation on the local level through the lens of claim-making and asked how identity is performed by representatives through these claims. I argued that a representative's role is directly influenced by the way they construct and perform their identity. By taking this approach, this study made three key contributions. Firstly, by explicitly studying the role of identity in representation, this study adds to the theory on representation. Previous research has built on the theory of 'politics of presence' but neglected the complexity of identity and its relevance to representation (e.g. Pitkin, 1972; Phillips, 1995; Mansbridge, 1999). By moving beyond essentialist studies of identity, this study offered a clearer understanding of how MPs understand and perform their own representative role in an interview setting. Secondly, empirical data on the performance of identity through representative claims had previously been lacking. This study showed that identity is strategically evoked by representatives: by emphasizing certain characteristics of their identity representatives align themselves with different constituencies. Finally, this study contributed to the field of representation, by providing empirical data on how claim-making and the performance of identity work in practice. Considering representation as a type of performance challenges linear conceptions of descriptive and symbolic representation. It prevents representation from being seen as a passive process between fixed positions of the 'representative' and the 'represented' (Celis & Erzeel, 2013; Celis & Mügge; 2017). It also avoids potentially problematic discussions around who should act as a representative for an identity group. This approach therefore opens our understanding of representation up to the fluidity of identity and contextuality of identity in representative claims.

The analysis of what constituencies are addressed in representative claims showed that the theory of claim-making (Saward, 2006; 2010) is especially relevant on the local level. Councillors often claimed to represent a certain constituency on a one-issue-basis, adjusting their representative role depending on the context. They described their constituencies mostly in neutral terms, such as the district or electorate, and stayed away from claims to represent traditionally underrepresented groups in the interviews. These findings place this study in line with recent constructivist and intersectional criticisms (for example by Smooth, 2001; Celis et al, 2008; Mugge & Celis; 2017) on the traditional frames of descriptive and symbolic representation as developed by Pitkin (1967, 1972). However, as the section on claiming identity showed, the agency to perform identity does not exist in a vacuum. Choosing to perform certain aspects of their identity shows a certain level of agency, but this agency was limited by labels of identity being ascribed to councillors by others. Even though

no claims were made in the interviews to represent minority groups, the visibility of characteristics of councillors with a minority background did result in them being perceived as such. This resonates with the studies by Puwar (2004) and Celis and Wauters (2003), who showed that the visibility of their bodies causes representatives from minority groups to be instantly perceived as token or symbolic representatives by their audiences. This data also uncovered a tension in the claims councillors make between a recognition of the importance of equal descriptive and symbolic representation and the contradictory desire to avoid being labelled on the basis of identity. While the interviewees did value descriptive and symbolic representation in the district in general, no explicit claims were made in the interviews to represent traditionally underrepresented groups. Even though they made no such claims, councillors stated they were still labelled as symbolic representatives by others.

To understand the link between identity and representative claims fully, research incorporating the represented audience is therefore necessary. This study underlined the importance of the audience or the represented in ‘reading-back’ representative claims and in ascribing labels of identity to representatives (cf. Saward, 2006; 2010). This resonates with the study by Severs (2012), warning to researchers not to forget the represented when assessing the quality of representation. The importance of contextuality, found in this study, shows that the represented or the audience are also important in an empirical approach to claim-making. Unfortunately, the scope of this study did not offer enough space to add an analysis of the claimed constituencies themselves. Additional research could be directed at the way representative claims change in different contexts, for example through comparative case studies with a larger sample. Public instances of claim-making besides interviews could then be added, for example by analysing claim-making in newspaper data or social media. Interviews provide a private setting for a representative to make claims and these claims may differ when they are made in a public context and subject to public scrutiny.

Nonetheless, this article provided a systematic and empirically based analysis of how claim-making works in practice and showed that the performance of identity is an essential part of studying representation. The personal really is political: the place a representative speaks from, influences the legitimacy of the claims they make. However, individual representatives are not fully free to take up a place to speak from: they are labelled as minority representatives by others. Looking at the way identity is performed through representative claims can therefore help us understand what equal representation means.

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Appendix I. Code list

Parent code	Subcode	Description
Identity		
	Ascribed identity	
	Rejecting minority-representative role	Applied when interviewees reject an identity characteristic associated with a minority group that is applied to them by their environment. Example: "I do not stand for the Surinamese community. I am not even sure if I would want that".
	Rejecting majority-representative role	Applied when interviewees reject an identity characteristic associated with the majority that is applied to them by their environment. Example: *"Because I am white, I am immediately eliminated in that debate. I think that is unfair".*
	Self-described identity	
	Upbringing	Applied when interviewees describe their identity as influenced by their relationship with their parents and their upbringing. Example: *"I grew up in a small village, which is something that shaped me".*
	Religious background	Applied when interviewees describe their identity as influenced by their religious background. Example: *"The village I grew up in is strictly religious, in the Bible belt, which caused some serious struggles for me".*

	Female	Applied when interviewees describe their identity as influenced by being a woman. Example: *“I am quite dominant but because I am also a woman, I am not taken seriously”.*
	Male	Applied when interviewees describe their identity as influenced by being a man. Example: *“I know that, as a guy, you are very privileged”.*
	Heterosexuality	Applied when interviewees describe their identity as influenced by being heterosexual. Example: *“I fit the majority, being a heterosexual, white, man”.*
	Frisian	Applied when interviewees describe their identity as influenced by being Frisian. Example: *“Growing up in Friesland has influenced me in many ways, for example by speaking two languages”.*
	City	Applied when interviewees describe their identity as influenced by living in or being born in Amsterdam. *“Of all my characteristics, I feel most like an Amsterdammer”.*
	District	Applied when interviewees describe their identity as influenced by living in or being born in their district. Example: *“I was born and raised in this district”.*
	Colour of skin/white	Applied when interviewees describe their identity as influenced by their race, by being white. Example: *“Yeah, I am first and foremost a white guy”.*
	Surinamese	Applied when interviewees describe their identity as influenced by having a Surinamese background. Example: *“That probably has to do with my Surinamese background”.*
	Turkish	Applied when interviewees describe their identity as influenced by having a Turkish background.
	Moroccan	Applied when interviewees describe their identity as influenced by having a Moroccan background.

	Indonesian	Applied when interviewees describe their identity as influenced by having an Indonesian background. Example: *"I have Indonesian roots".*
	Political party	Applied when interviewees describe their identity as influenced by being a member of their political party. Example: *"The PvdA is in my blood, my whole family is involved in the PvdA".*
	Political ideology	Applied when interviewees describe their identity as influenced by their political ideology. Example: *"I am a social democrat to the core".*
	Position of power/privileged	Applied when interviewees describe their identity as influenced by their privileged position. Example*: "I speak from a privileged place of course, I am a highly educated, white, male".*
	Position of disadvantage (class).	Applied when interviewees describe their identity as influenced by a position of disadvantage relating to social class or poverty. Example: *"Although I ended up on the right side of the track, I know what it is like to grow up poor".*
	Identity is fluid	Applied when interviewees describe their identity as changing or fluid. Example: *"My identity is not influenced by my Turkish roots in a straightforward way. That is not how that works, that relationship is not stable".*
	Identity is strategically evoked	Applied when interviewees describe using certain identity characteristics strategically. Example: *"I can use my femininity in several ways, if I please".*

	Identity does not matter	Applied when representatives deny the influence or importance of their identity on their work as a representative. Example: *“Your background, it does not matter. It is just the work you do”.*
Audience/constituency	**Procedural**	
	No audience	Applied when interviewees explicitly deny the existence of an audience or constituency they represent. Example: “*We are all more or less the same in the end, so I do not feel the need to represent a group or different groups”.*
	Electorate	Applied when interviewees describe those they represent as their electorate or their voters. Example: *“I am here on behalf of the voters”.*
	District	Applied when interviewees describe those they represent as the district. Example: *“I am really here for District, and what is good for District may not be good for Amsterdam”.*
	City	Applied when interviewees describe those they represent as the city of Amsterdam. Example: *“I am doing this for every Amsterdammer”.*
	Society	Applied when interviewees describe those they represent as society in general. Example*: “My duty as a representative is to contribute to society as a whole”.*
	Groups	

	Disadvantaged groups	Applied when interviewees describe those they represent as disadvantaged groups. Example: *"I want to represent those with a weaker position in society, since they need an extra boost".*
	Women	Applied when interviewees describe those they represent as women. Example: *"Standing for women is something I want to take head on"*.
	Adolescents/young people	Applied when interviewees describe those they represent as adolescents or young people. Example: *"Young people are often forgotten so I want to stand up for them".*
	Elderly	Applied when interviewees describe those they represent as the elderly. Example: *"I go and visit retirement homes, to see what this groups needs and wants are".*
	LGBTQIA	Applied when interviewees describe those they represent as LGBTQIA's. Example: *"Gays just don't have the same freedom in this district, so I feel I need to pay specific attention to them".*
	Animals	Applied when interviewees describe those they represent as animals. Example: *"I love animals. So every time that comes up [in council work] I am on it".*
	Diversity	Applied when interviewees describe those they represent as diverse, minority groups. Example: *"I feel and I hope that I am able to represent the diversity of people present in our district".*
	Environment	Applied when interviewees describe what they represent as the environment. Example: *"I find focussing on sustainability the most important part of my job as a representative".*

	Audience is context dependent	Applied when interviewees describe their audience or constituency as changing or unstable. Example: *"Sometimes I will advocate for the entrepreneurs, sometimes for the citizens."*.
Linking identity and audience		
	Authenticity	Applied when interviewees referred to being authentic in their role as a representative. Example: *"It is important that you can remain authentic when taking on different roles"*.
	Link: shared identity	Applied when interviewees claim a shared identity or several shared identity characteristics with their constituency or audience and claim to 'use' this to connect with, reach or link to their constituency or audience that shares this characteristic. Example: *"These women are very religious. But although we are from different generations, I also have a conservative background, so we are not that different"*.
	Link: knowledge and expertise	Applied when interviewees say they lack a shared identity with their constituency but bridge this gap through their knowledge and expertise. Example: *"Through my experience and previous work, I am able to tell their story"*.
	Link: active engagement	Applied when interviewees say they lack a shared identity with their constituency but bridge this gap through active engagement with their audience or constituency. Example: *"You just need to go out there and really listen"*.

	Link: sensitivity for others	Applied when interviewees recognize a mismatch in shared identity characteristics between themselves and their constituency, but bridge this gap through ‘awareness’ of this mismatch or through their ‘sensitivity to others’. Example: *“I do not represent a single group but feel more comfortable in a certain position of sensitivity to those who are deemed ‘the other’”.*
	No link: top-down	Applied when interviewees deny the importance of a shared identity to connect with, reach or link with their constituency or audience but instead claim to fulfil their representative role by educating, instructing or explaining previously made decisions to citizens. Example: *“We may listen to the constituency but in the end, firm decisions have to be made and we have to tell citizens how it is”.*
	No link: unreceptive audience	
Descriptive representation in council		
	Equal representation of women and men	Applied when interviewees describe their council as having an equal representation of men and women. Example: *“We have a pretty good proportion of men and women”.*
	Underrepresentation of women	Applied when interviewees describe their council as underrepresenting women. Example: *“We have far too few women, I have been irritated by that from the start”.*
	Underrepresentation of ethnic minorities	Applied when interviewees describe their council as underrepresenting ethnic minorities. Example: *“Almost everyone here has a Dutch background, it is the worst”.*

	Underrepresentation of ethnic minority women	Applied when interviewees describe their council as underrepresenting ethnic minority women. Example: *“We only have one woman with a minority background, so we are not doing well at all”.*
	Underrepresentation of class	Applied when interviewees describe their council as underrepresenting lower social classes. Example: *“This is not the mirror image of the district in terms of social mobility at all”.*
	Underrepresentation of younger generations	Applied when interviewees describe their council as underrepresenting younger generations. Example: *“Everyone is old and grey”.*
Symbolic Representation in council		Applied when interviewees describe the importance of visible identity characteristics in the council for framing, the image of the council or the recognition of the council by citizens. *“I am not sure if you would have to sail the Mediterranean in a plastic boat in order to do immigration policy, but it sure would be good for the image”.*