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**Strategic Intersectionality:
Gender, Ethnicity, and Political Incorporation**

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Abstract

We examine whether Latina elected officials, relative to their co-ethnic male counterparts, are more effective advocates for working class communities of color. Building upon the literature on political incorporation, gender politics, and ethnic politics, we hypothesize that Latina legislators are better positioned to be such advocates due to their unique capacity to leverage three primary resources: substantive policy focus, a multiple identity advantage, and a gender inclusive advantage. We refer to the combination of these three factors as *strategic intersectionality*. We test our model of strategic intersectionality using the National Latina/o State Legislator Survey (NLSLS), an original data set of thirty-minute telephone interviews with over half of all Latinos and Latinas who served in state legislatures during 2004. We find evidence for the presence of strategic intersectionality. However, its presence is not the same in all policy contexts. We conclude that strategic intersectionality is comprised of complex, multi-layered patterns of advocacy, representation, and policy influence.

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Strategic Intersectionality: Gender, Ethnicity, and Political Incorporation

Since the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, the number of elected officials of color has increased at all levels of government. Interestingly, since the 1990s, very significant increases also have occurred in the number of women of color elected to office. One of the least understood aspects of this recent change in American politics is the role that women elected officials of color play in pursuing policies to promote the well being of working class communities of color.

In this essay we examine whether Latina elected officials, relative to their co-ethnic male counterparts, are more effective advocates for working class communities of color. Building upon the literature on political incorporation, gender politics, and ethnic politics, we hypothesize that Latina legislators are positioned to be the most effective advocates on behalf of working class communities of color. We expect this to be the case for three primary reasons:

- As women, Latina legislators have a propensity to be more focused on the substance of policy of particular interest to working class communities. Among the issue areas that are of greatest interest to them are education, health care, and jobs. We refer to this as the *substantive policy focus*.
- As ethnic women, their multiple identities better position them to build cross-group coalitions that are more likely to attain threshold levels of legislative support. We refer to this as the *multiple identity advantage*.
- As women, they have more opportunities to “soften” their ethnicity by posturing themselves as women, mothers, and community advocates in ways that limit race-based white backlash. We refer to this as the *gender inclusive advantage*.

We argue that the combination of the substantive policy focus, the multiple identity advantage, and the gender inclusive advantage results in *strategic intersectionality*. Latina elected officials are uniquely positioned to leverage the intersectionality of their ethnicity and gender in ways that are of strategic

benefit in the legislative process. As such, they are positioned to be the most effective long term advocates on behalf of working class communities of color thus facilitating their political incorporation in American society.

Political Incorporation, Gender, and Ethnicity in Legislatures

Political incorporation can be defined as “the extent to which self-identified group interests are articulated, represented, and met in public policy making” (Fraga and Ramírez 2003: 304). These authors suggest that political incorporation is most comprehensively understood as occurring along three dimensions: electoral influence, representation, and policy benefit. It is important to note that gains can occur along one dimension without necessarily accruing along the other two. They suggest that considerable analytical purchase is gained by understanding the simultaneous clustering of the experiences of historically underrepresented groups along each of these dimensions. Most significantly, in this conceptual framework the end result of the policy process, policy benefit, is placed as a co-equal to participation and representation in determining how fully a group is a part of American politics.

This linkage of electoral influence, representation, and policy benefit is consistent with Mansbridge’s (1999; 2003) arguments regarding the potential benefits to historically underrepresented groups and to the larger political system of effective mechanisms for increasing the voice of distinct interest communities in the larger political process. Political systems that enhance simultaneous gains in electoral influence, representation, and policy benefit are likely to be more robust in the quality of political deliberation, broadening the benefits of social policy to marginalized groups, and even contributing to enhanced legitimacy of the system to members of both majority and minority groups (Mansbridge 1999).

This characterization of political incorporation is useful for understanding some of the most important empirical findings regarding the role of women elected officials in affecting the American political process. Among the most consistent findings in studies of the role of women public officials is that they can bring distinct perspectives, policy interests, and commitments to the legislative process. Research conducted on women in the 1970s, when many women were first elected to office in sizeable

numbers, found that they spent more time on constituency service than men, paid more attention to the details of public policy, and were more “problem solvers” than “brokers” (Diamond, 1977; Thomas 1994). Kathlene (1989) finds that distinct socialization processes led women to see themselves more as part of communities and also see issues embedded within larger sets of causal relationships, than did men. Carroll (1991) found that women were three times more likely than men to list women oriented policies among a top concern as compared to men. Reingold found that women legislators were more likely than their male counterparts to see themselves as representatives of women and to identify women as an important “constituency group” (1992: 509). Thomas’ original research on the policy priorities of women legislators in the 1980s found that unlike their male counterparts the “policy priorities” of women were more focused on “women, and children and families.” (Thomas 1994: 79). Interestingly, a number of these authors find variation across states with some women in some states more likely to articulate interests distinct from those of male legislators. Swers study of women members in the 103rd and 104th Congress found that among both Democrats and Republicans, women were “more committed to the pursuit of women’s interests” especially in the arena of bill sponsorship (2002: 127).

Women legislators have pursued a variety of strategies to realize these distinct perspectives and interests in the legislative process. Kelly, Saint-Germain, and Horn were among the first to argue that women legislators could be distinguished as constituting at least four types of policy advocates: the “traditional politician” who was broadly humanistic in her approach and focused on building consensus, the “caring humanist” who was also broadly humanistic but was comfortable promoting conflict within political institutions, the “traditional liberal feminist” also sought consensus, and the “change-oriented feminist” who often challenged the political system in fundamental ways (1991: 84). Relatedly, Thomas distinguishes between those women legislators who may simply be trying to “augment legislative agendas,” that is trying to marginally change mainstream agendas, as compared to those who are trying to “reformulate[e] legislative agendas” in ways that are attempting to shift important elements of the usual interests and issues that dominate a legislative agenda (1994: 113). These strategic goals are later characterized as differences between “policy goals and procedural ones, group-based or individual goals”

(Thomas 1994: 154). Walsh argues that women legislators pursue strategies that contribute to “broadening the range of public interests” considered in legislative debate (2002: 373). She notes three distinct mechanisms through which this influence can be exercised: contributing distinct perspectives in issue framing, enlarging the consideration of which constituents are likely to be affected by a specific policy, and providing personal testimony that includes perspectives distinct from those provided by male legislators.

It is the case, however, that a number of studies have found that despite the increased presence of women in state legislatures and despite the growing diversity of strategies that they pursue, there can be major limits to the substantive policy gains that they are able to achieve. Acker argues that formal institutions can be so gendered to the disadvantage of women that institutional leaders take this disadvantage for granted and understand traditional procedures and practices as “neutral” (1990: 142; 1992). Kathlene finds that as women become an increasingly significant percentage of a legislative body, “men [can] become more verbally aggressive and controlling of the [legislative] hearing” to the disadvantage of women (1994: 560). Kenney argues that despite the increases in the numbers of women in major institutions and organizations of power in American society, masculine domination can still be defended, gender can be “reinscribed,” and “institutions [can] try to contain progressive change” (1996: 461). Rosenthal’s study of state legislators revealed that there is little “adaptation (and indeed some resistance) on the part of male [legislative committee] chairs when women hold greater institutional power (2000: 41). However, Jeydel and Taylor found that women members to the 103rd to 105th House were not any less able to get legislation passed than their male counterparts (2003). Legislative effectiveness, they argue was the product of “seniority, preferences, and membership in important House institutions” for both groups (2003: 19). Thomas and Welch argue that two factors that lead to women having success in state legislatures are increasing numbers and increasing cohesion such as through the establishment of a women’s caucus, allowing them to work together on consensual goals (2001).

Previous research has examined the policy experiences and successes of legislators of color, and some has specifically examined female legislators of color. Hedge, Button and Spear found that African

American legislators who were male and with greater seniority, represented more affluent predominantly white districts, were outside the Deep South, and reported better race relations in their states generally viewed their “black legislative experience more positively” (1996: 82). Bratton and Haynie (1999) found that women were as likely to get legislation passed as men, but that African American women legislators were significantly less likely to do so. Haynie (2001) finds that African American state legislators are not perceived by their white colleagues as being particularly influential in the legislative process, even when they possess characteristics such as seniority, powerful committee appointments, and policy expertise. He states, “These findings indicate that African American representatives are not viewed by their colleagues as equal participants in the deliberation and debate over matters of public policy” (2001: 104).

The research conducted on African American women legislators reaches similar conclusions regarding their limited influence in being major players in the legislative process. Prestage (1977) was among the first to examine this group specifically. She found that African American female state legislators tended to be elected from states where African American males were also elected. In the 1970s, most were elected from urban districts outside of the South. Barrett (1995) looked specifically at the policy priorities of African American women state legislators and found that, when compared to their African American male counterparts and to white female legislators, they have a clear and consistent consensus on policy issues of greatest importance. The issues were “education, health care, economic development, and employment” (1995: 223). Darling’s analysis of African American female state legislators reveals that despite a high degree of unity on the policy issues of greatest importance to African Americans, they report confronting the dual challenges of “white racism” and “paternalism” that can serve as barriers to the attainment of their legislative goals (1997: 162). Hawkesworth (2003) provides a very insightful analysis of the experiences of African American female members of Congress during the deliberation that led to the passage of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, commonly known as the “Welfare Reform Act.” Using a unique data set of extended open-ended interviews with members of Congress she finds that “racing-gendering” (2003: 548) to the disadvantage of Congresswomen of color contributed to the enactment of policies that were perceived to

disserve the interests of working class communities of color. What each of these studies finds is that the intersectionality of race and gender most often serves as a dual disadvantage to African American female state legislators in the process of public policy making.

Smooth (2001) provides one of the most nuanced analyses of African American women state legislators in her study of legislators in Georgia, Maryland, and Mississippi. She finds that under certain conditions, African American women state legislators can be influential. They hold some positions of influence, although not the most significant ones such as party leaders or speakers of the house. They participate in all aspects of legislative activity, and enact as much as 40% of the laws they propose (2001: 281-282). However, that influence is limited to “specific policy areas in which they have developed some expertise” and “few white legislators consider any African American legislators as influential” (2001: 284). Moreover, it is in professionalized legislatures where the policy expertise of African American women legislators can give them greater influence. Less professionalized legislatures, by contrast, tend to operate more according to “norms reflecting gender and race-based preferences” to the disadvantage of female African American legislators (2001: 287). She speculates that it may be in less professionalized legislatures where formalized caucuses will serve as important agents promoting the further influence of African American female state legislators (2001: 292-293).

Even fewer studies have examined Latina and Latino state legislators. Mindiola and Gutierrez (1988) studied legislation introduced by Chicano legislators in the 1981 legislative session in Texas. They found that Chicano legislators were not as successful as their Anglo counterparts in getting legislation enacted. Moreover, most of the legislation introduced by these members did not address issues specific to racial and ethnic groups and that the more the legislation had “major relevance for minorities” or “address[ed] a Chicano concern” the less likely it was to ever be enacted (1988: 357). Vega (1997) provides a longitudinal analysis of the legislative focus and success of women, African American, and Hispanic legislators in the Texas legislature for the period 1975 to 1995. He found that female legislators introduced gender related bills at 2.2 times higher than one would expect given their numbers in the legislature. Interestingly he also finds that there were no significant differences in the propensity of male

and female Hispanic legislators to introduce Hispanic-related legislation; there were also no such differences between African American male and female legislators in introducing African American-related legislation. Lastly, he finds that increases in the number of both women and African American state legislators led to each group having greater success in getting group-related legislation enacted. This, however, was not the case for Hispanics.

Conceptualizing Strategic Intersectionality

We hypothesize that it is possible for Latina legislators to utilize their intersectionality in ways that are likely to provide them with strategic advantages in the process of public policy making. We in no way mean to minimize the extent to which Latinas can experience the double disadvantage that several authors above note for African American women. As Hurtado notes, women of color, including Latinas, can experience “race, class, and gender subordination...simultaneously...not only by members of their own group but also by whites of both genders” (1996: 7; See also Crenshaw 1989; 1997). What we are suggesting, however, is that the intersection of gender and ethnicity might position Latina legislators to have a richer set of strategic options, relative to Latino male legislators, from which to choose as they negotiate the larger policy making process and try to serve the multiplicity of constituencies that depend upon them for representation.

As stated above, women representatives tend to bring distinct policy interests to agenda setting in legislatures. African American female representatives have an even greater focus on issues of interest than do African American men. Do Latina legislators, relative to Latino men, replicate the same intense focus on an identifiable set of issues? If so, what are they? If they do, this issue focus sets clear strategic parameters that they can use to devise strategies to maximize policy benefit. For example, do the committee choices and leadership positions held by Latina legislators match the policy foci that they identify? In sum, relative to Latino male legislators, do Latina legislators have a clearer and more consistent *substantive policy focus*?

The multiple identities at the heart of intersectionality can serve as a disadvantage by allowing multiple targeting of female legislators of color by those who choose to restrict their gains in the policy

making process. However, the key to legislative success in the policy making process is the building of minimum winning coalitions, often a bare majority on subcommittees, committees, and on the floor. Might not the multiple identities of Latinas, relative to the more narrow range of identities of Latino men, provide Latina legislators with a greater set of potential coalition partners to support legislation that they prefer? It seems possible that Latinas can speak as authentic representatives to their fellow partisans, women, ethnic and racial minorities, mothers, community leaders, and policy experts. Are Latina legislators asked for their advice by a broader set of potential coalition partners than are Latino men? Do Latinas attempt to build more cross-group coalitions among their fellow legislators than do Latino men? We refer to this potential resource grounded in the multiple identities that Latinas have as the *multiple identity advantage*.

Lastly, we hypothesize that the multiple identities noted above not only provide a richer set of options to build cross group coalitions for Latina legislators relative to Latino men, but also provide them with more choices as to how they position themselves on specific issues. How similarly do Latino and Latina representatives understand their primary constituencies? When confronted with choices where the Women's Caucus has taken a position on an issue in opposition to the position of the Latino Caucus, do Latina and Latino representatives resolve this conflict in the same way? In having a greater set of choices from which to position oneself on an issue, do Latina representatives have a greater capacity to soften the extent to which they are seen as primarily ethnic representatives? If they do, can this lead to a limiting of white backlash by fellow legislators increasing the chances that a specific legislative proposal will be enacted? We refer to this greater scope of posturing on the part of Latina representatives as the *gender inclusive advantage*.

Taken together, we refer to the three above described dimensions of the unique position that Latina legislators may occupy, relative to Latino males, as *strategic intersectionality*. It is, of course, necessary to acknowledge that the presence and utility of strategic intersectionality should vary by institutional context. Whether or not Latina and Latino legislators are members of the majority or minority party, the presence and power of gender, ethnic, and racial caucuses, the ethnic, racial, and class

diversity of district constituencies, the percent women in the legislature, the percent African American, Latina/o, and Asian American in the legislature, are among the important parameters that are likely to structure how strategic intersectionality will be utilized by Latina legislators.

National Latina/o State Legislator Survey (NLSLS)

We address the above questions and related hypotheses regarding strategic intersectionality with data from a survey of Latina and Latino state legislators who served in the 2004 legislative year. The survey was entitled the National Latina/o State Legislator Survey (NLSLS) and was cosponsored by the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO). A list of Latinas and Latinos who served in state legislatures was secured from NALEO. This list was further verified with a list of Latino legislators from the National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL). State legislative websites were also reviewed to verify the status of each legislator. Additionally, the office of each legislator was called to verify that the member served during 2004 and that they self-identified as a Latina/o. Offices were also asked with which Latino subgroup the respondent most identified. From June 2004 through January 2005, legislators were called to schedule an appointment to conduct the interview. As many as eight phone calls were made to schedule interviews. All interviews were conducted during this time period. All interviews were conducted with the actual legislator. Legislators were told that their comments would never be attributed to them. Each legislator was given the opportunity to refuse to answer any question she or he wished.

A total of 222 Latina and Latino legislators were identified as having served in 2004: 62 Latinas, 27.9% of all Latina and Latino legislators, and 159 Latino men, 71.6%. Of these, 35 Latina legislators were interviewed producing a response rate of 56.5%; 88 Latino male legislators were interviewed for a response rate of 55.4%. These response rates are well above the norm in published literature on state legislators. At least one legislator was interviewed from 27 of the 32 states in which Latinas and Latinos served. See Table 1 for the distribution of Latina and Latino legislators who both served and who were interviewed.

The interview consisted of a total of fifty-five questions in four distinct groupings:

- Involvement in the legislature
- Legislative experiences in 2004
- Legislative environment in the state
- Background demographics

Interview responses were coded and analyzed using SPSS.

Findings

Dissimilar to one of the most consistent conclusions in much research on women and politics, we find that there are not meaningful differences in the policy priorities of Latina and Latino legislators. As revealed in Table 2, both groups identify education as the most important issue of concern to them; 54.8% of Latina legislators rated education as their top priority as compared to 52.4% of Latino legislators. The issue area that received the second highest percentage of first place rankings was health care; 19.4% of Latinas rated it first as did 19.5% of Latino men. The two largest percentage differences between Latinas and Latinos are in the areas of the environment and the budget. Of Latinas, 9.7% rated the environment as their number one issue, whereas only 2.4% of Latino men did. No Latina legislators listed the state budget as their number one policy priority, yet 7.3% of Latino men did.

In the fashion similar to Barrett (1995) we grouped the top three issues together to see if an overall pattern of top priorities and resulting substantive policy focus might exist to a noticeably greater extent for Latina legislators as compared to Latino men. Some differences do appear. Economic development and jobs comprise 16.7% of responses from Latino legislators whereas this category only received 2.9% of responses from Latina legislators. The environment and family/child assistance were each noted in 8.3% of the top three responses by Latina legislators; Latino legislators listed these at only 3.7% and 3.3% respectively. These differences, however, are overshadowed by the similarity among Latina and Latino legislators. Education was mentioned most often by Latina legislators; these responses comprised 34.5% of the responses to the top three issues of concern. Education comprised 31.3% of the top three responses from Latino men. Both Latinas and Latinos also had health care as their second

largest grouping among the top three responses. Health care comprised 25.0% of the responses of Latinas and 21.7% of the responses of Latino legislators. These data reveal that a greater substantive policy focus does not characterize the policy priorities of Latina legislators as compared to those of Latino men. There are more similarities in their priorities than there are differences.

We also examined differences in policy priorities as measured by committee membership. Committee membership has often been a primary way in which legislators position themselves to better address their policy priorities. Differences do appear between Latina and Latino legislators. The greatest percentage differences that appear in membership are in committees dealing with education and health and human services, as indicated in Table 3. Almost one quarter, 24.2% of all Latinas served on education committees whereas only 11.2% of Latinos did. Over one third of Latina legislators, 36.3% serve on health and human services committees, when only 22.4% of Latino legislators did. This is consistent with much of the literature on women and committee membership. The only other area where there was a noticeable difference in committee membership was in natural resources. 11.2% of Latinos served on such committees, whereas only 3.0% of Latinas did. However, unlike previous research, there was no major difference in the likelihood of Latinas to serve on appropriations and finance committees. Although 17.9% of Latino male legislators served on appropriations committees, a very similar 15.9% of Latina legislators also served on such committees. 12.2% of Latinos served on finance committees, and yet 9.0% of Latinos also served on them. It is possible that a greater substantive policy focus exists for Latina legislators in influencing legislation affecting women, families, and children given their greater presence on education and health and human services committees. In 2004, however, this greater focus did not come at the expense of limited participation on appropriations and finance committees, traditionally considered among the most powerful committees in any state legislature.¹

A final way in which we examined potential differences in the substantive policy focus between Latina and Latino legislators was through a detailed specification of the ranking of representational

¹ We also examined differences in committee chairmanships. We found no major differences in the propensities of Latinas and Latinos to serve as committee chairs. We also found no significant differences in the types of committees on which they served as chairs.

duties. Each legislator was asked to rank possible duties that included elements of constituency service, governmental oversight, conflict resolution, and interest advocacy on a scale from 1=not important to 5=extremely important. Mean responses and the full listing of thirteen representational duties are displayed in Table 4. Our analysis of their ranking of these duties distinguishes between those representatives from districts with majority Latino populations and those from districts with non-Latino majorities. Although some differences appear, what is most clear is that there is no discernable difference in the ranking of representational duties between Latina and Latino legislators. No differences reach levels of statistical significance. Surprisingly, this is even the case for the representation of women's interests and the representation of Latino interests. All representatives list "smoothing out conflicts and effecting compromise with other representatives" as lowest on their ranking of representational duties. These data suggest that in terms of representational duties there is much more unity than distinctiveness across gender lines between Latina and Latino legislators. This is even the case controlling for whether or not Latinos comprise a majority of the district's population. As measured by ranking of representational duties, no greater substantive policy focus appears for Latina legislators as compared to Latino men.

We use two distinct measures to determine if Latina state legislators utilize a multiple identity advantage to better position themselves to influence public policy making. Table 5 displays how often Latina as compared to Latino legislators report being asked for advice from grouping of their colleagues ranging from co-ethnics to party leaders. It also displays the reported frequency with which Latina and Latino legislators form coalitions with groups of fellow legislators. Relative to Latino legislators, Latina legislators are asked for advice from African American male legislators and Asian American female legislators at higher rates that are statistically significant. It is possible that Latinas are therefore better positioned to form coalitions with these groups than are Latino men. Latino legislators, by contrast do not report being asked for advice at higher rates than Latinas from any of the subgroups specified. We expected to find that fellow Latinas would be more likely to ask advice from each other. Bonds of solidarity based upon ethnicity and gender seem plausible given the raced and gendered hierarchies that predominate in state legislatures. We also expected that Latina legislators would report being asked for

advice more frequently from fellow Caucasian and African American female legislators. We did not find any such differences that attained statistical significance.

Frequency of building coalition partners did reveal some interesting differences between Latinas and Latinos. Latina legislators reported building coalitions more frequently with Asian American males than did Latinos. These higher rates also attained levels of statistical significance. Latino male legislators reported building coalitions more frequently with African American females, the Governor, and the Lieutenant Governor. These differences attained levels of statistical significance.

What these data reveal is that a multiple identity advantage of Latina legislators exists. In half of the six instances where differences between Latinas and Latinos attained statistical significance, these differences worked to the advantage of Latinas. However, this advantage did not fall into a consistent pattern based upon either Latino ethnicity or gender identity.

Finally, we examine whether Latina legislators position themselves on controversial issues in ways that are distinct from those of Latino legislators to build upon what we earlier termed as a gender inclusive advantage. If Latina legislators do position themselves in distinct ways, are these positions ones which limit the extent to which they can be pegged as being ethnic representatives and build upon their gender identity? We identify the patterns of issue posturing through three hypothetical scenarios where legislators are given very clear signals as to the preferences of their district constituency, the Latino Caucus, and the Women's Caucus.² In each scenario, the interests of one group are in direct opposition to the position of another. Given the significance of district constituency interests in the first two scenarios, we report the results by whether or not Latinos are a majority of the population in a legislator's district.

Table 6 reveals that there is no difference between Latina and Latino legislators when forced to choose between constituency interests and those of the Latino Caucus. To similar degrees, both Latina

² We well recognize that not all states have a Latino Caucus or a Women's Caucus. In those states where respondents indicated that no such caucus existed, we asked them to consider the scenario under conditions where a clear majority of either Latino or Women legislators have preferences consistent with the scenario. In cases where there are so few Latina and Latino legislators that no such grouping of preferences is possible, we did not pose this scenario to the respondent.

and Latino legislators reported they were more likely to vote with their constituency *against* the preferences of the Latino Caucus. Further examination of Table 6 indicates that Latina representatives, by contrast, are more likely to vote in favor of a bill that is supported by the Women's Caucus and opposed by their constituents, than are Latino legislators. This occurs, however, only in cases where the Latinas represent non-Latino majority districts. This difference is statistically significant. There is no statistically significant difference between Latinas and Latinos in this scenario when they both represent majority Latino districts. In majority Latino districts, constituency preferences dominate. Lastly, a statistically significant difference between Latino and Latina legislators was also found when the scenario required legislators to decide between supporting the preferences of the Latino Caucus or the Women's Caucus. Latina legislators, although still tending to vote in favor of the bill supported by the Latino Caucus and opposed by the Women's Caucus, reported rates of such voting that were noticeably lower than those of Latino legislators. This was the case when Latina legislators represented either majority Latino districts or non-Latino majority districts. Latina legislators were more supportive of the position of the Women's Caucus than were Latino legislators.

The findings in Table 6 indicate that Latina legislators, in two distinct scenarios are more likely to support the position of the Women's Caucus than Latino men. In these two scenarios, one restricted to those Latinas representing non-Latino majority districts and the other in cases of representing both Latino majority and non-Latino majority districts, Latina legislators indicate a propensity to identify with gender more strongly than constituency or ethnicity. In these cases, Latina legislators build upon their multiple identities to support the Women's Caucus. Stated differently, Latina legislators are both committed constituency advocates and committed gender partisans. Latina legislators can pursue a gender inclusive advantage in choosing to position themselves in conflictual situations such that they are authentic representatives, focusing however on their gender authenticity and not as much on their ethnic authenticity.

The final way in which we examine the presence of a gender inclusive advantage is quite unique. If married, we asked the respondent to indicate the ethnic/racial background of their spouse. We did this

to determine if Latina representatives had a higher propensity than Latino men to marry Caucasians. We also wanted to see if such cross-racial marriages were related to the propensity to represent districts that were not majority Latino. Our results are reported in Table 7. Both Latina and Latino legislators tend to be married to co-ethnics; 73.9% of Latina legislators who are married, are married to other Latinos, as are 70.6% of Latino legislators. 21.7% of Latina legislators are married to Caucasians as are 27.9% of Latino men. However, 45.5% of Latinas who represent non-Latino majority districts are married to Caucasians whereas only 36.7% of Latino men who represent non-Latino majority districts are married to Caucasians. No Latinas who represent majority Latino districts are married to Caucasians; 91.7% are married to Latinos. By contrast 21.1% of Latino men who represent majority Latino districts are married to Caucasians and only 76.3% are married to Latina co-ethnics.

A higher percentage of Latina legislators who represent non-Latino majority districts are married to Caucasians than is the case for Latino men who represent such districts. However, Latina legislators who represent majority Latino districts tend to be married to Latino men at higher rates than Latino men who represent such districts are married to Latina women. These data reveal that if there is a gender inclusive advantage for Latinas to marry Caucasians, such as by making them more credible in non-Latino majority districts, it is an advantage that may be equally available to Latino men.

Strategic Intersectionality and Latina State Legislators

Building upon the literature on gender and politics, we developed a model of strategic intersectionality to outline how it is that Latina state legislators may bring unique perspectives, strategies, and opportunities to the legislative process that are distinct from those of Latino men legislators. We specified the three primary components of strategic intersectionality: substantive policy focus, multiple identity advantage, and gender inclusive advantage. We then tested our model with responses from a national survey of Latina and Latino legislators who served in the 2004 legislative year.

We find little evidence for the presence of a substantive policy focus among Latina state legislators, contrary to much previous research on the way in which gender-based identity contributes to a commitment by women legislators, including African American female legislators, to a specific set of

policy priorities distinct from their male counterparts. Our data demonstrate that both Latina and Latino state legislators focus on the same types of issues with education and health care being at the top of the list for both groups. We did find a modest difference in the types of committees on which Latinas and Latinos serve. Latina legislators have a greater propensity to serve on education and health and human services committees relative to Latino men. This finding is consistent with previous research. However, we also found that the propensity to serve on these committees did not come at the cost of lower rates of membership on appropriations and finance committees. Additionally, we find no significant difference in the rankings Latina legislators give an extensive set of representational duties and related interests. There is more unity than distinctiveness on substantive policy focus across gender lines.

We did find evidence consistent with our model that Latina legislators report being asked for advice and developing legislative coalition partners in ways that are consistent with a multiple identity advantage. Latino legislators indicate that some distinct subsets of fellow legislators may be especially useful to them as they pursue their work in the policy making process. Interesting, these subsets of legislators who seem especially prone to work with Latina legislators do not fall neatly along either Latino ethnic or gender lines. All potential coalition partners for Latinas, however, do come from historically underrepresented groups. Clearly, Latina legislators, as distinct from Latino men, are sought out by and develop relationships with co-ethnics at higher rates than Latino legislators, but not with Latino co-ethnics.

Finally, we found that Latina legislators, relative to their Latino male counterparts, do position themselves distinctly, pursuing a gender inclusive advantage, when forced to confront a set of hypothetical incompatibility scenarios. Although both Latinas and Latinos report a tendency to vote against legislation that is supported by the Latino Caucus and yet opposed by their constituents, the pattern is much more distinct when confronted with scenarios where the Women's Caucus supports legislation that is opposed by their constituents and a distinct scenario where the Women's Caucus opposes a piece of legislation supported by the Latino Caucus. Latina legislators who represent non-Latino majority districts are more likely to support the Women's Caucus inconsistent with the preferences

of their constituents, unlike Latino men legislators who represent such districts. All Latina legislators, regardless of whether they represent Latino majority or non-Latino majority districts support the position of the Women's Caucus noticeably more than do Latino men. We found no evidence of a potential gender inclusive advantage available to Latina legislators who married Caucasian men. Inter-racial Latino-Caucasian marriage did not characterize the types of districts from which Latina representatives were likely to be elected any more than such marriage seemed to benefit Latino men.

What our model of the strategic intersectionality of Latina legislators reveals is a complex, multi-layered pattern of advocacy, representation, and policy influence. The legislative lives of Latina state representatives and senators are both similar and different from those of their male counterparts. This finding is consistent with Thomas (1994: 158) regarding women generally and Barrett (1995; 2001) and Smooth (2001) regarding African American female state legislators. There is no singular experience of any female legislator.

Our subsequent analysis of the similarities and differences of Latina and Latino state legislators will systematically examine state context to see if the general patterns in the model of strategic intersectionality noted in this essay can be specified more precisely. Do state-based variations in legislatures by partisanship, number of women representatives, number of Latina/o, African American, and Asian American representatives, position of Latina and Latino representatives within the majority or minority party, and party affiliation of statewide elected officials set important parameters that affect the use of strategic intersectionality? Moreover, our analysis must be informed by the patterns of success that Latina and Latino legislators have in getting their policy priorities enacted into law. Fortunately, these analyses are well underway.

We are confident that our model of strategic intersectionality holds promise to better understand the ways in which the simultaneous growth in gender and ethnic-racial empowerment affect American politics. All indications are that such empowerment will only grow in the future. The course of progress that such empowerment will chart may well depend on how effective strategic intersectionality is in effecting change in many traditional patterns of American politics and policy making.

Table 1. Latina/o State Legislators, NLSLS Responses 2004

	<i>Latinas</i>	<i>Latinas Interviewed</i>	<i>Latinos</i>	<i>Latinos Interviewed</i>	<i>Totals</i>	<i>Interview Totals</i>
Arizona	4	3	11	5	15	8
California	12	6	15	4	27	10
Colorado	2	1	5	4	7	5
Connecticut	4	1	2	0	6	1
Delaware	0	0	1	0	1	0
Florida	1	1	16	9	17	10
Georgia	0	0	3	2	3	2
Hawaii	1	0	0	0	1	0
Idaho	0	0	1	0	1	0
Illinois	5	3	6	3	11	7
Indiana	0	0	1	1	1	1
Kansas	0	0	2	1	2	1
Maryland	1	1	3	1	4	2
Massachusetts	1	0	3	1	4	1
Michigan	0	0	1	1	1	1
Minnesota	0	0	1	1	1	1
Nebraska	0	0	1	1	1	1
Nevada	1	0	1	1	2	1
New Hampshire	0	0	1	1	1	1
New Jersey	2	0	3	1	5	1
New Mexico	13	10	31	24	44	34
New York	2	1	12	7	14	8
North Carolina	0	0	2	0	2	0
Oregon	0	0	2	2	2	2
Pennsylvania	0	0	1	1	1	1
Rhode Island	1	1	2	0	3	1
South Carolina	1	1	0	0	1	1
Tennessee	1	1	0	0	1	1
Texas	8	4	30	16	38	20
Washington	2	1	1	0	3	1
Wisconsin	0	0	1	0	1	0
Wyoming	0	0	1	1	1	1
Totals	62	35	160	88	222	123

Table 2. Most Important and Top Three Policy Issues Among Latina/o Legislators (%)

Policy Issue	Most Important Issue		Top Three Issues	
	Latinas	Latinos	Latinas	Latinos
Education	54.8	52.4	34.5	31.3
Health Care	19.4	19.5	25.0	21.7
Economic Development/ Jobs	3.2	4.9	2.9	16.7
Taxes	3.2	3.7	1.1	5.0
Environment	9.7	2.4	8.3	3.7
Family/Children Assistance	3.2	3.7	8.3	3.3
Budget	0.0	7.3	1.1	3.7
Crime/ Criminal Justice	3.2	2.9	4.7	5.0
Housing	0.0	0.0	2.3	1.6
Other Issues	3.2	3.7	5.9	7.5
Total Percentage	99.0	99.0	99.0	100.0
N	31	82	84	239

Question: Numerous public policy issues are of great concern to you as a legislator. Please rank the three issues that are of greatest concern to you. Which issue is: most important, second most important, third most important?

Table 3. Eight Most Frequently Cited Committee Assignments by Gender (%)

	Latinas	Latinos	Latinas & Latinos
Committee Assignments			
Appropriations	15.1	17.9	17.2
Education	24.2	11.2	14.7
Finance	9.0	12.2	11.4
Health and Human Services	36.3	22.4	26.2
Insurance	15.1	8.9	10.6
Judiciary	15.1	10.1	11.4
Natural Resources	3.0	11.2	10.6
Transportation	15.1	12.3	13.1
N	33	89	122

Question: On which committee do you serve?

Table 4. Interest Representation: Mean Scores of Legislators' Ranking of Representational Duties by Gender and Latino Majority Districts

	Latinas		Latinos	
	Latino Majority	Non-Latino Majority	Latino Majority	Non-Latino Majority
Helping people in the district who have personal problems with the government	4.61	4.81	4.89	4.77
Making sure that the district gets its fair share of government funds and projects	4.72	4.44	4.80	4.36
Keeping track of the way government agencies are carrying out laws passed by the legislature	4.33	4.13	4.28	4.00
Keeping in touch with the people about what the government is doing	4.44	4.69	4.67	4.57
Smoothing out conflicts and effecting compromise with other representatives	3.83	4.00	3.98	3.82
Working on legislation that benefits one's district	4.61	4.56	4.65	4.56
Working on legislation that benefits the broader interests of the state	4.72	4.50	4.48	4.44
Working on legislation that benefits women's interests	4.28	4.31	4.35	4.00
Working on legislation that benefits Latina/o interests	4.61	4.40	4.50	4.21
Working on legislation that benefits African American interests	4.28	4.33	4.30	3.82
Working on legislation that benefits Asian American interests	4.27	4.27	3.93	3.69
Working on legislation that benefits children's interests	4.83	4.69	4.78	4.62
Working on legislation that benefits immigrant's interests	4.67	4.12	4.39	3.92
N	18	16	46	39

Question: Here is a list of things people often think of as duties of a representative. Please evaluate the importance of each item to you where **1 is NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL AND 5 is EXTREMELY IMPORTANT.**

Table 5. Coalition Partners: Mean Propensity to Ask for Advice and Propensity to form Coalitions by Group

	Asked for Advice on Legislation		Frequency of Coalition Partners	
	Latinas	Latinos	Latinas	Latinos
Latinos	2.77	2.79	2.86	3.17
Latinas	2.60	2.52	2.72	3.04
African American Males	2.48*	2.13	2.38	2.69
African American Females	2.25	2.26	2.09	2.58*
Asian American Males	2.00	1.68	2.40*	2.00
Asian American Females	2.58*	1.61	2.50	1.76
Caucasian Males	2.21	2.36	2.21	2.46
Caucasian Females	2.41	2.35	2.27	2.38
Democratic Party Leaders	2.55	2.63	2.56	2.85
Republican Party Leaders	1.82	1.87	1.84	2.01
Legislative Leaders (e.g., Speaker)	2.52	2.37	2.65	2.62
Governor	1.59	1.77	1.79	2.07*
Lieutenant Governor	1.47	1.52	1.42	1.75*

* $p \leq .05$

Question: How many times in the last session did the following legislators ask for your advice? Never=1, Some of the time=2, Most of the time=3, Always=4

Question: Please indicate the frequency with which you have formed coalitions with the following legislators or leaders. Never=1, Some of the time=2, Most of the time=3, Always=4

Table 6. Conflict Resolution: Mean Scores for How Legislators Would Vote When Group Interests are Incompatible by Gender and Latino Majority Districts

	Latinas		Latinos	
	Latino Majority	Non-Latino Majority	Latino Majority	Non-Latino Majority
Constituency opposes/ Latino Caucus supports	-.33	-.16	-.02	-.42
Constituency opposes/ Women's Caucus supports	-.66	.33*	-.38	-.58
Latino Caucus supports/ Women's Caucus opposes	.33*	.40*	.76	.64
N	17	16	44	37

* $p \leq .05$

Scenarios:

1. Suppose that you were considering how to vote on a bill that your constituency *strongly opposed* but that the Latino Caucus had introduced and *strongly supported*. Is it more likely that you would...
2. Suppose that you were considering how to vote on a bill that your *constituency strongly opposed* but that the Women's Caucus had introduced and *strongly supported*. Is it more likely that you would...
3. Suppose that you were considering how to vote on a bill that the Latino Caucus *strongly supported* and that the Women's Caucus *strongly opposed*. Is it more likely that you would...

Responses to each of the above scenarios were coded as:

- 1 = vote in favor of the bill
- -1 = vote against the bill
- 0 = abstain from voting
- 9 = not applicable

Table 7. Race/Ethnicity of Legislator's Spouse by Gender and Latino Majority Districts (%)

Spouses' Race/Ethnicity	Latinas		Latinos	
	Latino Majority	Non-Latino Majority	Latino Majority	Non-Latino Majority
Latino	91.7	54.5	76.3	63.3
Non-Latino White	0	45.5	21.1	36.7
Other Race/Ethnicity	8.3	0	2.6	0
N	12	11	38	30

Question: If married, what is the ethnic/racial group with which our spouse identifies?

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