

Chapter #: Out of the Shadows: Non-profit Governance

Research from Democratic and Critical Perspectives

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INTRODUCTION

Recent years have witnessed an exciting, generative escalation in research from different theoretical perspectives on non-profit governance in general, and on non-profit boards in particular. While researchers have made inroads into developing promising avenues of research in this field of study, research on corporate governance (with its reliance on positivistic approaches and assumptions of rationality and meritocracy) strongly influence studies of non-profit governance. The dominant theoretical approaches that underpin much of the non-profit governance literature, for example, include agency theory (Fama and Jenson 1983) and resource dependency theory (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). Their contributions notwithstanding, these theoretical perspectives inadequately reveal the embedded power dynamics that influence who is allowed access to governance, whose voices are at the table, whose perspectives are represented by others, and to what degree. Moreover, extant studies tend to focus rather narrowly and non-critically on organizational and board-level characteristics, and often fail to establish the links between the governance of non-profit organizations and the interests of the broader public (Stone and Ostrower 2007).

In addition, some important theoretical perspectives remain largely in the shadows, having received less attention within the dominant framing of the field. In particular, democratic and critical perspectives which focus our attention on representation, participation, and power in governance practices, and help us to understand how these dynamics affect non-profit organizations. Paradoxically, these topics and perspectives have deep roots in the earliest

traditions of the field, but are frequently overlooked or marginalized in newer research and theorizing.

Thus, the first goal of this chapter is to review theoretical developments in the study of non-profit governance from the perspectives of critical and democratic theories. Critical perspectives shed light on social inequities, oppression, and systemic inequality (Brookfield 2005), as well as on the operation, of privilege, exclusion, and discrimination (Bradshaw et al. 1998). Following the participatory and deliberative traditions of democratic theory (Habermas 1984; Pateman 1970; Tocqueville 1956), the democratic perspectives address the key concepts of representation and participation and raise questions about constituent interests and citizen involvement in shaping the organization's strategies and directions. The second goal of this chapter is to deconstruct the silences in the reviewed literatures, to reveal what has been kept in the shadows, and then identify research that might address these gaps. Consistent with critical and post-modern traditions, we start the chapter by declaring our commitment to democracy, inclusion, and power sharing.

In the next section, we review and synthesize the democratic perspectives on the study of non-profit governance, with a focus on theories of representation and participation. We then turn to the literature from various critical perspectives, and explore the roles that these perspectives play in illuminating often-neglected or overlooked aspects of non-profit governance. We conclude with recommendations for a research agenda, and a discussion of how this agenda could inform the development of more participatory, inclusive, and change-oriented governance practices.

DEMOCRATIC PERSPECTIVES

Democratic perspectives locate the study of non-profit governance within the larger context of democracy, and for purposes of this chapter we draw on democratic traditions with American roots. The roots of democratic perspectives on non-profit governance can be traced back to Alexis de Tocqueville (1956), who studied Jacksonian America in the nineteenth century and posited a link between American democracy and Americans' high rates of joining voluntary associations. He perceived the contribution of voluntary associations to American democracy at two levels. At the organizational level, he felt that associations served as schools for democracy. And at the institutional level, he saw associations as representatives of citizen interests, and as counterbalances to state and corporate power (Tocqueville 1956; Bucholtz 1998). Following this de Tocquevillian tradition, two schools of thought have influenced the development of a democratic perspective on non-profit governance: theories of representation, and of participation. Next, we review the key contributions of both these schools to the study of non-profit governance, and we document their convergence.

The Representation School

The concept of representation has a long history in the political science literature (see Pitkin (1967) and Birch (1971) for overviews of the literature). In her now classic work *The Concept of Representation*, Hanna Pitkin (1967) defines representation as a multi-dimensional concept and identifies four important dimensions: formal representation (how organizational leaders are selected by constituents), descriptive representation (how organizational leaders mirror the politically relevant characteristics of constituents), symbolic representation (how an organization becomes trusted by constituents as a legitimate

representative), and substantive representation (how organizations act in the interest of constituents, and in a manner responsive to them).

Most of the existing studies on representation in non-profit organizations have used Pitkin's conceptualization as the general analytical framework (e.g. Cnaan 1991; Guo and Musso 2007; Regab et al. 1981). Within non-profit governance studies, the representation school of thought regards governance questions as issues of representation, that is, as questions of how well the views of constituents and the larger community are represented within the organization (Berry 1994; Crotty 1994; Guo, 2007). Accordingly, the board of directors embodies and represents community interests (Smith and Lipsky 1993) and functions to 'resolve or choose between the interests of different groups, and to set the overall policy of the organization' (Cornforth 2004: 14; Cornforth and Edwards 1999).

Among the various representational dimensions delineated by Pitkin, descriptive representation in board governance has perhaps received the most theoretical and empirical attention. For instance, Austin and Woolever (1992) argue that the efficacy of the external representational function of non-profit organizations depends on the extent to which the composition of the board of directors reflects the actual populations of their constituents and the larger community. Guo (2007) proposes a typology of non-profit governance that incorporates both descriptive representation and board strength (relative to the chief executive). In terms of board composition, a board may be characterized by having either strong or weak community representation. In terms of power distribution, a board may be a strong one that dominates the chief executive, or a weak one. The resulting typology reveals four patterns of governance structure: strong community board; weak community board;

strong non-community board; and weak non-community board. In a recent study of non-profit service organizations, LeRoux (2009a) finds a positive association between descriptive representation and the civic 'intermediary' activities (activities that help link citizens to governing systems and to political processes) of non-profits. In particular, her findings show that when organizational leadership is more racially reflective of the clientele served, non-profits display increased efforts to engage in political representation, education, mobilization, and assimilation activities.

Formal representation in board governance has also received some scholarly attention, especially among studies of non-profit membership organizations such as cooperatives and mutual associations. Formal representation rests upon elections and other formal arrangements, such as recall of officials or term limits. From a normative and legal point of view, many observers argue that non-profit organizations whose boards of directors are elected by their members are not only more representative of constituent interests, but also more capable of building social capital and teaching civic skills (Reiser 2003). Evidence shows that cooperatives and other membership associations commonly use the one member-one vote method of electing directors (Reynolds, 2000). Yet there is also evidence that for many organizations, formal representation is basically limited to the act of voting. Although most organizations allow members to vote for leadership position candidates, very few organizations allow members to nominate the candidates (Barakso and Schaffner 2008). Research also shows that low turnout rates and lack of democracy tend to characterize elections (Cnaan 1991; Spear 2004), and that the general membership is often marginalized in relation to the board and staff (Lansley 1996; Spear 2004).

The Participation School

This stream of research emphasizes the internal developmental effects of citizen participation in non-profit organizations. On several grounds, scholars have argued that participation in non-profit organizations is central to democracy because it shapes political behaviour and attitudes (Almond and Verba 1963), and it develops civic skills and democratic values (Brady et al. 1995). In other words, non-profit organizations function as a ‘school of democracy’ (Tocqueville 1956). Within the context of non-profit governance, participation scholars go beyond the ‘school of democracy’ argument. They assert that to provide an accurate voice for their constituents, organizations must first establish governance mechanisms permitting the constituents to participate in the shaping of the organization’s mission, vision, and strategies (Guo and Saxton 2010; McCambridge 2004).

Much of the early empirical evidence has shown that levels of constituent participation in organizational governance vary, and are often low among non-profit organizations. Knoke’s (1990) national associations study finds that, on a four-point scale ranging from ‘never’ to ‘regularly,’ average internal participation is closest to ‘rarely’. Most association members are not active on the set of internal issues emphasized by their leaders. Cnaan (1991) similarly indicates a trend of minimal constituent participation in neighbourhood associations, which seemingly fall prey to Robert Michels’ (1962) famous ‘iron law of oligarchy’. More recently, LeRoux (2009b) uses survey data from non-profit social service agencies in Michigan to examine how non-profits provide opportunities for constituent participation, and identifies factors that contribute to these participatory governance practices. Freiwirth (2011) proposes an expanded approach to non-profit governance that moves beyond the board of directors. Labelled ‘community-engagement governance’ and built on participatory principles, this

framework emphasizes that responsibility for governance needs to be shared across the organization, including its constituents and community, staff, and the board (see also Freund and Freiwirth, Chapter ?? of this book). Moreover, information and communication technology has begun to unleash new opportunities for participatory governance based upon direct, unmediated communication and interaction between constituents and organizations (Saxton et al. 2007).

The Convergence of the Two Schools

The representation and participation schools of thought are inherently interconnected in the context of non-profit governance. First, in light of the limited seats available on a non-profit board and the limited capacity of any governance structures and processes, only some *representatives* of constituents can actually participate in organizational governance. Second, constituent representation and constituent participation in governance might be mutually reinforcing, in that non-profit boards might serve as a better vehicle for citizen participation if they are more truly representative of the community (Zimmermann 1994), or vice versa. In view of the mutually-reinforcing relationship between the two schools, Saxton (2005) notes that an important challenge for non-profit governance is to increase the breadth, or ‘representativeness,’ of the constituents involved in organizational decision-making beyond the board and executive management, and to increase the ‘depth’ of constituent participation in the sense of having significant control over decision-making.

In a more explicit effort to bridge the two schools of thought, Guo and Musso (2007) extend Pitkin’s conceptualization of representation by adding a fifth dimension—of participatory

representation, which entails direct participatory relationships between organizational leaders and their constituents, and which highlights the importance of maintaining a variety of channels of communication with constituents. The existence of certain inclusive organizational and governance practices in an organization (Brown, 2002) can indicate the prevalence of this dimension. Some general inclusive practices include communicating decisions to the people they affect, obtaining statistical information about constituents and the larger community, as well as inviting stakeholder input through user forums, advisory and consultative groups.

In the context of charitable organizations, where formal representation (e.g., elections and recall of leaders) is often absent, constituent participation in the decision-making process offers stronger control over the directions of these organizations. Furthermore, constituent participation might also complement and enhance descriptive representation. For instance, research indicates that even when racially and ethnically diverse individuals are appointed to non-profit boards, they are often not included as full and equal board members (e.g., see Walker and Davidson 2010; Fredette and Bradshaw, n.d.). This suggests that it is simply not enough for diverse board members to have a place at the board table: they ‘must [also] be welcomed, have their voices heard and opinions valued, and play leadership roles’ (Metelsky, 2010: 493).

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

Critical perspectives frame non-profit governance research in terms of power relations, and focus governance research on issues of privilege and oppression. The use of critical

perspectives leads us to consider how economic and social systems, culture, history, and organizational structures influence power dynamics in non-profit governance practices. These perspectives also help us to understand how traditional governance practices can oppress people from historically marginalized groups. Critical perspectives call upon governance scholars to do more than create new understandings of such oppressive relationships and practices; they challenge us to reveal, name, and deconstruct them.

Our review focuses on three critical perspectives; class hegemony theory, feminist critical perspectives, and critical race theory. These three perspectives, which are largely absent from the current discourses on non-profit governance, can help governance scholars to illuminate the operation of privilege and power in and around non-profit boardrooms. We begin our discussion with an introduction to class hegemony theory.

Class Hegemony Theory

Class hegemony theory is a sociological theory which is generally Marxist in origin (Stiles and Taylor 2001). It was predominantly used to examine non-profit governance when such scholarship was in its infancy (Hough et al. 2005). Class hegemony theory contends that the upper class dominates key societal institutions through the participation of business elites in the governance of institutions (Useem 1979, 1980). This theory argues that power is shared by a cohesive upper class of corporate elites who hold a similar worldview (Stiles and Taylor 2001), and who have shared interests and common purposes (Useem 1979, 1980). Upper class ideology and influence is developed and spread through the social networks of elites, and interlocking directorates (i.e., networks of individuals who serve on multiple corporate

boards) strengthen upper class control (Useem 1979). In the context of non-profit governance, business elites further their control through the appointment of owners, officers, and directors of major corporations to non-profit boards (Useem 1979, 1980).

Our literature review uncovered several research themes, including: (a) the power that accrues to elites through non-profit board memberships, (b) the influence that elite board members have on resource allocation, (c) the influence elites have on arts and cultural non-profits, (d) the motivations of elites for non-profit board service, and (e) the benefits that accrue to non-profits through elite board members. A discussion of representative studies follows.

The power accrued to elites through non-profit board membership has been a major focus of research. Several studies that use network analysis provide evidence that elites strengthen their relationships and build class cohesion through non-profit board service. These studies also indicate that elite status predicts non-profit board involvement (Middleton, 1987). Other research demonstrates that elites tend to serve on the boards of prominent non-profits (Babchuk et al. 1960; DiMaggio and Useem 1982; Zald 1967).

The influence of elites on funds distributed through federated fundraising organizations is another subject of study. Findings by Wilensky and Lebeaux (1955) suggest that when making allocation decisions, elite board members may privilege the socio-economic power of a grantee's board and clients over the value of the grantee's services. Furthermore, corporate

elites gain ‘enduring policy, program, and ideological control’ from structural relationships among non-profit funders (Ratcliff et al. 1979, as cited in Middleton 1987: 147)

Another research focus is the involvement of elites in non-profit arts and cultural organizations. Hall (1975, 1982) found that non-profit cultural institutions ‘socialize their [elite] sons to the civic values necessary for sustaining economic autonomy’ and also ‘mediate the relations between new and old money’ (Middleton 1987: 145). Ostrower’s notable work on elites and arts non-profits (1995, 1998, 2002) found clear evidence of elites’ influence on these non-profits, as well ‘the role of the arts in class cohesion among elites’ (Ostrower 1998: 43).

The aforementioned studies affirm that non-profit board service reinforces the power and privilege of elites. Other studies suggest, however, that elites’ involvement in non-profit governance is not so straightforward. The reasons elites serve on non-profit boards include both personal (Auerback 1961; Useem 1979) and career motivations (McSweeney 1978; Useem 1979). Their motivations also reflect corporate expectations (Fenn 1971; Pellegrin & Coates 1956; Ross 1954; Zald 1967). On the other hand, some elites’ motives are altruistic in nature (Fenn 1971), and there are many examples of elites who are committed to social justice (Hough et al. 2005). These findings suggest that the upper class is not a coherent social group with entirely common and exclusively self-serving interests (Hough et al. 2005).

Other studies suggest that non-profits receive a range of benefits from elite board members. For example, elites influence non-profits' abilities to raise and retain resources, and to develop a high-status board (Zald 1967; Pfeffer 1973; Provan 1980).

These and other findings have led some scholars to suggest that the applicability of class hegemony theory 'has decreased over time' (Hough et al. 2005: 37). Rationales for this include: (a) the representation of elites on non-profit boards has decreased (see Abzug 1996); (b) the dominance of elites has declined because of increased demand for board members and increased government support (DiMaggio and Anheier 1990); (c) elite influence is reduced due to changes in non-profits' external and internal environments (DiMaggio and Anheier 1990); and, (d) there is an increased commitment to broad stakeholder participation in the governance process (Hough et al. 2005).

Recent evidence, however, demonstrates that elites remain a powerful force on non-profit boards. Ostrower's nationally representative study on non-profit governance in the US (2007) found evidence of class disparity in board composition. She also found that larger, wealthier non-profits draw their board members more heavily from members of elite groups. Furthermore, Ostrower found that almost one-third of board members from the smallest non-profits also serve on corporate boards. The percentage increases to 80% for the largest non-profits.

In addition, we suggest that changes in the economic environment may influence elites' roles in non-profit governance. U.S. wealth distribution has historically been disproportionately

concentrated in the top net worth households, but recently income inequality has increased dramatically (Domhoff 2010). Furthermore, while DiMaggio and Anheier (1990) suggest that the corporate elites' domination of non-profit organizations has decreased in part because of increased government support to non-profits, this trend is reversing. Challenging economic times may also lead non-profits to increase elite representation on boards in order to capitalize on the resources and power they can bring to their governance work. Therefore, we suggest that governance scholars revisit class hegemony theory.

Next, we turn to a review of feminist critical perspectives.

Feminist Critical Perspectives

Within non-profit studies, some early and important work has relied on and drawn from feminist traditions. In this section, we briefly highlight this work and more recent scholarship, as well as identify gaps in this body of work. For example, there is literature that examines feminist organizations within the non-profit sector (Beres and Wilson, 1997; Bordt, 1997; English, 2006; English and Peters, 2011; Meinhard and Foster, 2003; Minkoff, 2002; Schwartz, Gollesman and Perlmutter, 1988). The new directions of work within this tradition include studies of women and international NGOs (e.g., Bracken, 2007; Handy, Kassman, Feeney, and Ranade, 2006; Nazeen & Sultan, 2009). Other recent research looks particularly at feminist organizing and activism (e.g., Bracken, 2011; Hartman, 1998; Kenney, 2005). From a more historical perspective, we have scholars such as Boylan (2002) who looks at the origins of women's activism in the voluntary sector, and Sklar (1998) who similarly brings women's history to the field. This work, along with that of Ostrander (1984) and McCarthy

(1990, 1994), brings an appreciation for the ways that gender and class intersect in the activities of women as participants in the voluntary sector. Women as leaders has also been a research focus with Daniels (1988), including a chapter in her book on women's philanthropic careers and their participation on boards. Shaiko (1997), McKillop and colleagues (2003), Bradshaw et al. (1996), and more recently Prouteau & Tabariés (2010) all look at women's participation (and often their exclusion) from boards and board committees. These studies have started to statistically examine the impact of women's involvement in governance and leadership. Moore and Whitt (2000) apply a network approach to reveal gender inequality in access to and participation in networks of trustees, and to reveal how men occupy the most influential positions in these networks. Gittell (1990) highlights, and names the dynamic of *token representation* for women on foundation boards. From a more interpretive feminist perspective, Hoeber (2007) looks at the meanings of gender equity in a sport organization, and Kosny and MacEachen (2010) examines how work is gendered, and how women's roles are invisible in non-profit social agencies. Harris (2001) models a self-reflexive approach to scholarship on the 'third sector', and acknowledges that her work has its roots in feminist critiques.

This brief literature review highlights several things. One observation is that much of this work has long roots and begins during the early days of the women's movement or with the development of feminist scholarship across most disciplines (or even earlier with the work of Babchuk et al. 1960). Also, it is surprising to see how little work there is on governance that relies on feminist perspectives, and how much of this work is descriptive rather than critical in tone and approach. Gender and feminist perspectives still seems to be largely absent from the discourses of non-profit governance. A notable exception is the work of English (2006), who does interviews with board members and executive directors and through a Foucauldian

poststructuralist reading of learning in feminist organizations, and reveals practices of resistance that women engage in to destabilize the status quo. Such gendered analysis of governance has great potential in identifying power relationships. There is such a long and fertile history of feminist scholarship in other fields, and the opportunity to import some of these traditions seems evident to us, especially in work investigating how board work is gendered. Another observation is that while there is not yet a great deal of research and writing from feminist and critical feminist perspectives, what has been done is extremely important to build on. This is work that reveals the simultaneous operation of gender, power, and class/social position in boards. It also reveals the historical roots of gender-based inequality and privilege, or what Odendahl and Youmans (1994) point out as a paradox of combined power and marginalization for women in governance.

Furthermore, we conclude that while the intersections of gender and class have been examined, the whiteness of the women on these boards is relatively ignored. And while calls have been made to include examinations of race and ethnicity along with those of gender and class (e.g., as early as the work of Odendahl and Youmans (1994), Scott (1990) and Carson (1993)) this project remains to be undertaken. Similarly, with a few emerging exceptions, scholarship from a feminist perspective that focuses on women and women's organizing in the developing world is missing from the discourse. Finally, we suggest that feminist perspectives are important because they also provide a platform for the development of other critical perspectives, including critical race theory, which we discuss next.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a derivative of critical theory, which has racism as its major construct (Closson 2010a). CRT views racism as a socio-political phenomenon, which is embedded in society (Peterson and Brookfield 2007). CRT assumes that racism is a normal, rather than a deviant element of society (Delgado 2000).

CRT builds on two earlier movements; i.e., critical legal studies (CLS) and radical feminism. CRT borrowed the concept of legal indeterminacy from CLS, and its understandings of the relationships between power and socially constructed roles were borrowed from radical feminism (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). Today, CRT helps us to understand the complex ‘relationships among race, racism, power, privilege, and oppression’ (Ianinska et al. 2003: 176). This radical perspective challenges us to transform these relationships (Closson 2010a, 2010b; Delgado and Stefancic 2001; Ianinska et al, 2003).

According to Zamudio et al. (2011), there are several central assumptions of CRT. These include that race matters (i.e., race is a central societal structure), history matters (i.e., creating social divisions based on race is a historical process), voice matters (i.e., voices in opposition to the dominant narrative illuminate ‘the structures, processes and practices that contribute to continued racial inequality’ (2011: 5), interpretation matters (i.e., we need diverse academic disciplines and diverse racial backgrounds and experiences to produce and interpret knowledge), and last, praxis matters (i.e., knowledge production must be dedicated to the fight for social justice). CRT has three chief goals; to present storytelling and narratives as legitimate ways to study race and racism, to fight for the eradication of racial oppression while at the same time recognizing that race is a socially defined construct, and to reveal

important relationships between racism and other forms of oppression (Parker and Lynn 2002).

Few governance studies explicitly use CRT as a theoretical frame. However, the body of research on board racial/ethnic diversity and inclusion provides evidence of inequities and oppression. Abzug and Galaskiewicz (2001), for example, examined the composition of 15 types of non-profit boards in six American cities for 1931, 1961, and 1991. They found consistent underrepresentation of people of colour. Recent research suggests that this trend continues today. For example, Ostrower (2007) found that the number of people of colour serving on non-profit boards is very low, and does not reflect U.S. demographics. Canadian studies demonstrate that this situation is not unique to U.S. non-profits (e.g., Bradshaw et al. 2009; Bugg and Dallhoff 2006).

A small number of studies draw on the tenets of CRT without explicitly claiming its use as a framework. Widmer (1987), for example, demonstrates how a critical race perspective can inform our understanding of race and racism in non-profit governance. Her qualitative study poignantly portrays the experiences of racially diverse board members. The study uncovers tokenism, hostility, silencing, invisibility, and other manifestations of racism experienced by many board members of colour.

Several recent doctoral studies explicitly use CRT as a framework. Wolfe (2010), for example, uses CRT to examine the race/culture divide in a non-profit human services organization. This dissertation includes findings from Wolfe's participant observation of

board meetings and interviews with board members. Buras (2011) uses CRT to study race and charter schools in New Orleans. Her study includes a minor focus on charter school governance. Metelsky's forthcoming dissertation uses CRT to support theory building concerning the paradoxical influence of board social capital on generative governance in non-profits.

Having reviewed the democratic and critical perspectives literatures, we now turn to a discussion of our recommendations for future research.

Future Research Directions

In light of the inherently political and paradoxical nature of non-profit governance (Bradshaw and Fredette 2009), we concur with Cornforth (2004) that one promising approach would be to combine multiple theoretical perspectives to capture the tensions and ambiguities that boards experience. In particular, we advocate the incorporation of insights offered by democratic and critical perspectives into such a paradoxical approach, and their systematic application as a set of perspectives to enhance our understanding of the complex dynamics of governance. In the next section, we identify a number of important areas for future research.

Democratic Perspectives

In line with the theory of representation, one area for future research is to further examine the prevalence of various representational dimensions in non-profit governance, along with the key contingencies associated with the prevalence of these dimensions. For instance, are

different representational dimensions substitutes for each other or complements? Does the presence of formal representation (e.g., elections, recall of leadership) encourage or inhibit descriptive representation? How does the prevalence of a particular representational dimension differ across organizational types and structures? One example of research along this line of inquiry is Barakso and Schaffner's (2008) study of the governance of membership-based interest groups, which shows that groups with higher barriers to exit (e.g., professional associations and unions) have higher levels of formal representation than those from which exit is less costly. More research is needed to illuminate how and under what circumstances each representational dimension, individually or collectively, leads to better board and organizational outcomes.

Similarly, drawing on insights from the theory of participation, future research should further examine the practices and effects of constituent participation in governance, both through and beyond the board. This line of work would help link non-profit governance to their capacities to contribute to democracy (e.g., Guo 2007; Smith and Lipsky 1993). Research might investigate how and to what extent constituent participation in organizational governance leads to better organizational outcomes in service delivery and advocacy. Guo and Saxton (2010) make such an effort. With data from a large-scale mail survey of non-profit organizations in Arizona, USA, they find evidence that non-profit advocacy efforts are enhanced as organizations solicit constituent inputs indirectly through board appointments and directly through communicating with constituents and involving them in organizational decision-making processes.

The convergence of representation and participation in non-profit governance also suggest interesting possibilities for future research. Researchers could further explore the relationship between representation and participation by focusing on the notion of ‘participatory representation’. How do aspects of formal and descriptive representation mediate the relationship between constituent participation and organizational performance? Researchers could also examine the limits or bounds of representation and participation. Given size and capacity constraints, boards may be limited in their ability to represent all constituent groups or allow them participation. This suggests that non-profits may need to find other ways to involve users/beneficiaries and other stakeholders, for example through a range of participatory mechanisms such as consultative groups, advisory groups, and more consumerist measures such as surveys. Saidel (1998), who pioneered this line of inquiry, identifies advisory groups as a critical instrument of governance. Advisory groups supplement board governance by performing various important organizational activities, connecting the organization with key stakeholder groups, and strengthening collaborative ties with other community actors.

More broadly, future research should also recognize that non-profit governance, despite its role in furthering civil society, also has a ‘dark side’ (Smith, 1995). The ‘dark side’ refers not only to the dysfunction or misconduct of board of directors and executive directors, but it also concerns the contributions (or lack thereof) of non-profit organizations to democratic governance. In particular, the issue of a democratic deficit in non-profit governance deserves further attention: Is internal democracy a necessary attribute of non-profit organizations? To what extent can these organizations still make contributions to a democratic society if democratic elements are absent in their governance structure and processes? What are the negative consequences of the lack of internal democracy in non-profit governance?

Critical Perspectives

Future research that uses critical perspectives as a theoretical frame could advance our understanding of the dynamics of oppression in non-profit governance. It could also assist us in partnering with practitioners to transform governance structures, practices, and board relationships.

Our literature review has revealed significant gaps in our understanding of boards and governance. These gaps present opportunities for further research, and raise many questions. For example, what is the impact of including diverse individuals on board performance? What is the impact of appointing and including women and racial/ethnic minorities on boards and in other leadership positions of large and prestigious non-profits? There is an opportunity for additional research on social class, with a particular emphasis on the representation and inclusion of members of the working class and the poor. Additional research on race and ethnicity is called for (as in Ostrower and Stone, 2006) with some emphasis in the United States on the Latina(o) population, because studies indicate that the numbers of Latinas(os) on American non-profit boards have not kept pace with their rapidly increasing numbers in the general population (e.g., Ostrower 2007). The use of Latina and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) (a critical race perspective that focuses on the inadequacy of the Black-White paradigm to address Latina/o issues; Trucio-Hayes, 2001: 6) could inform such research. Research on the breadth of board racial-ethnic diversity is also needed in other countries (see Bradshaw et al. 2009), so that tracking of trends can be done comparatively. In addition to CRT and Latina and Latino Critical Race Theory, Asian American Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit) and Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) perspectives could enhance

our understanding of the dynamics of exclusions across cultures and international boundaries. Research on the intersections of gender, social class, and race-ethnicity is largely missing; feminist perspectives and CRT including Black Feminist Thought can be used to frame such research.

We believe that research on gender, social class, and race-ethnicity needs to move beyond descriptive studies. We need to understand more about the causes of social class and racial-ethnic disparities, and the implications of such disparities. We also call for more exploration of the lived experiences of diverse board members. Furthermore, we believe that examining board relationships, board dynamics, and board communication using critical perspectives will enhance our understanding of governance. Mixed-methods, qualitative approaches (e.g., critical ethnography, phenomenology, narrative, and critical hermeneutics), participatory approaches (e.g., critical participatory action research, feminist participatory research), and critical data analysis methods (e.g., critical discourse analysis and critical document analysis) could further our understanding.

Cross-fertilization of Democratic and Critical Perspectives

Future research could also combine and integrate theories from the democratic and critical perspectives, to explore how different theories complement each other and mutually enrich our understanding of non-profit governance. In particular, the synergy between the theory of representation and CRT might be helpful in resolving some of the contradictions and puzzles in prior research. For example, Gazley et al. (2010) examine the effect of board diversity, stakeholder representation, and inter-organizational relationships on organizational

performance. While these authors find a positive relationship between the diversity of stakeholder representatives and reported organizational accomplishments, they find no association between racial/ethnic diversity and performance. Evidence also shows that while some boards become more racially diverse, they may remain homogeneous in class representation (e.g., see Ostrower 1995, 2002 and Widmer 1987). These findings suggest that race and ethnicity alone might offer an incomplete picture of the structure and processes of engaging multiple stakeholders in governance.

We summarize our recommendations for research in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Conclusions

This chapter examines how democratic and critical perspectives have informed our current understanding of non-profit governance, and explores how the expanded use of these perspectives could further our understanding and enrich our theorizing. It is our hope that this literature review and synthesis, along with the recommendations for a future research agenda, will help bring these important theories ‘out of the shadows’. Practical questions arise about how to juggle multiple and seemingly conflicting governance functions such as fiduciary, strategic, and representational functions. For example, while board member selection is typically based on filling skills gaps on boards (e.g., legal and human resources skills), the challenge becomes broadened if questions of including marginalized groups or representativeness are added to the equation. Carter et al. (2003) find that larger corporate

boards tend to be more diverse. Perhaps larger boards are able to be more inclusive of different skill sets while also embracing people from more diverse communities, but these practical questions need more investigation. Similarly, boards struggle with questions of tokenism and how to formalize inclusive practices (Bradshaw and Fredette 2011) while dealing with the so called ‘business case for diversity’. Though we cannot address all the practice questions raised by this review, our hope is that in shedding light on the dynamics of exclusion, marginalization, and under-representation, we can help put these questions back on the agenda and encourage learning about how to create more democratic and inclusive governance contexts. We suspect that a contingency approach is important to consider, and that organizational factors such as mission, values, history, size, and leadership, as well as contextual factors such as the expectations of funders, the composition of communities, and legislative frameworks will impact how successful boards are in embracing more inclusive and representative practices and approaches. These dynamics will need to be examined.

We call on our colleagues to take up this challenge by asking different questions and by applying methods and theoretical perspectives that reveal how boards can meaningfully embody and represent community interests, and how they can become pathways to broadened citizen participation. In many cases presently, critical discussion of power dynamics is silenced. The denial of how various types of privilege still inform decision making, board recruitment and composition, fund raising, and other aspects of governance often renders these ongoing operations invisible. Living in the shadows, these practices are allowed to continue in ways that, we believe, exclude and marginalize others, perpetuate inequality, and stratify the allocation of opportunity.

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TABLE 1
Summary of Recommendations for Research

Recommendations	Directions	Examples
<i>Recommendation 1: Democratic Perspectives</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Representation:</i> Further examining the roles of various representational dimensions in improving board and organizational performance. • <i>Participation:</i> Investigating the effects of constituent participation in organizational governance. • <i>Convergence of Representation and Participation:</i> Further exploring the relationship between representation and participation in non-profit governance by focusing on the notion of ‘participatory representation’. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does descriptive representation matter in the governance of member-oriented organizations where formal representation (e.g., elections, recall of leadership) is present? • How and to what extent does constituent participation in non-profit governance lead to stronger board and organizational performance? • How do aspects of formal and descriptive representation mediate the relationship between constituent participation and organizational outcomes (e.g., advocacy, service delivery)?
<i>Recommendation 2: Critical Perspectives</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Feminist Theory:</i> Investigating the influence of gender and women’s participation on governance practices and outcomes • <i>Class Hegemony Theory:</i> Examining the influence of elites on the inclusion of non-elite board members. • <i>Critical Race Theory:</i> Understanding the influence of white privilege on the governance of non-profits that serve racially and ethnically diverse communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the gendering of boards impact the participation and power of women? Does a deconstruction of our silencing concerning these dynamics enable more inclusion and empowerment of all women? • What is the lived experience of working class individuals who participate in predominately middle and upper class boards? • What conditions influence the ability of racially and ethnically diverse board members to contribute as full and equal participants?
<i>Recommendation 3: Cross-fertilization of Democratic and Critical Perspectives</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Combination and Integration of Multiple Theories:</i> Exploring how different theories from the democratic and critical perspectives complement and mutually enrich each other in improving our understanding of non-profit governance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can the theory of representation and critical race theory be combined to understand the value, limitations, and barriers of a racially and ethnically diverse board in enhancing non-profit effectiveness?