Discursive Exit[*]

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Laura Montanaro
lmonta@essex.ac.uk
University of Essex
Wivenhoe Park, Colchester CO4 3SQ
United Kingdom

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Abstract: Some women did not participate in the Women's March, rejecting its claims of unity and solidarity because white women mobilize only in their self-interest. This is a form of exit with three features: (1) rejecting a political claim; (2) providing reasons to the power-wielder and the broader public; (3) demanding accountability both as sanction and as deliberation, which requires a discussion about the claim – in this case, the meaning of the group and the terms on which it understands itself. This combination of exit, voice, and deliberative accountability might accurately be called 'discursive exit.' Discursive exit addresses conceptual and normative limitations of standard accounts of exit, voice, and loyalty, in particular, when exit and voice are imperfect — because exit can be seen as disapproval of an entire cause — and morally problematic — because voice 'from within' implies that cause trumps disagreement, leaving people morally complicit in an unwelcome exercise of power.

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Introduction

Speak up or get out. These are the options available to a dissatisfied actor: use your voice or exit (Hirschman 1970). People use their voice by voting, protesting, writing letters to elected representatives, among other actions. When we exit, we quit an organization, change party affiliation, and in some cases, we even leave a country. We might combine these, to exit 'clamorously' (Hirschman 1970, 174) or 'noisily' (Dowding, John and Mergoupis, et al. 2000). This paper brings to our attention the existence, features, and importance, of a distinct and significant form of exit that I call 'discursive exit'. It describes the action of exiting from claims to speak for and about others, and giving reasons for doing so to hold power-wielders accountable. Distinct from standard accounts of exit and voice, and its combinations, discursive exit is supple and highlights the discursive element of accountability that is particularly useful to not only exit political claims but also, importantly, to challenge and reconstitute the claims themselves. These ideas are built up through close engagement with one recent and significant case, the Women's March on Washington.

On January 21st, 2017, the day after Donald Trump's inauguration, approximately 470,000 people marched on Washington, and between 3.6 and 4.6 million people participated in sister marches worldwide, on seven continents. The march was widely hailed for its multigenerational and multiracial character. But as *The New York Times Magazine* reports, 'Who didn't go to the Women's March Matters More Than Who Did' (Wortham 2017). American participants in the march were mostly white (Fisher, Dow and Ray 2017, Putnam and Skocpol 2018), with many women of color reportedly choosing not to participate. They opted out of the march, not because they agreed with Trump's election – Edison Research exit polls showed that among women who voted, 94% of Black women and 68% of Latino women voted for Clinton,

while roughly 53% of white women voted for Trump (Malone 2016) – but to sanction the organizers and participants calling for unity and solidarity when women of color regularly show up to defend women's rights and issues and yet do not receive reciprocal respect and attention. They reasonably argued that white women rarely protest in support of issues that disproportionately affect women of color, showing up only when issues threaten them. They exited, not as members of a political organization, or as customers of a company, dissatisfied with its operations. Instead, they exited an unwelcome political claim – in this case, a claim about 'women' that emphasized unity and solidarity while insensitive to intersectional marginalization – marking an important refusal to belong to or remain within a group as defined by the power-wielders. They also provided explanations which made their exit information-rich and called for the organizers of and participants in the Women's March to be accountable for the power they exercised in defining the terms of the group. This combination of exit and voice with its connection to deliberative accountability might accurately be called 'discursive exit.'

It is worth emphasizing here the general importance of group voice, advocacy, and representation in a democracy, and therefore of our need to exit from such claims. Tocqueville argued that successful democracies depend on robust associational life. Our institutions, properly designed, rely on and communicate with associations to buttress democracy and its legitimacy. Elections, for example, best provide direction for a polity when combined with public sphere venues for voice, deliberation, and argument. For those unequally and negatively affected by the distribution of power in states and markets, associations provide alternative means of resistance. Furthermore, when there is not a competitive market of associations and an organization instead holds an effective monopoly, we require discursive exit to both resist claims and forward an alternative.

To make the case for discursive exit as a meaningful concept – one that builds out democratic theory in the domain of public sphere activism – I proceed as follows. I begin by conceptualizing discursive exit, explaining its role in politics and illustrating its use in the Women's March. I then explain its contribution to standard accounts of exit, voice, and loyalty. Specifically, that discursive exit targets monopolies over claims to speak for others that arise temporarily because of organization and momentum. The third section elaborates on its connection to accountability, and particularly the deliberative elements of accountability that encourage groups to define the terms of their belonging. Finally, I discuss three ways discursive exit might strengthen democracy: the cost of discursive exit is low – and low-cost pathways of influence are essential given inequalities of social, economic, and political power; discursive exit is more voluntary than, say, exiting citizenship; and provided that there are other choices available, discursive exit can occur at any time the member chooses, unlike periodic elections.

The Concept of Discursive Exit

'Discursive exit' is a democratic empowerment combined with specific accountability. It is exercised when actors both reject political claims, such as a claim made about them and the group they purportedly belong to, and further articulates their reasons for doing so to hold power wielders accountable. Discursive exit is often exercised by subgroups within large, plural groups who wish to encourage accountability, particularly as it relates to a discussion of the terms of the group itself. It is a useful alternative when exit and voice are imperfect – because exit can be seen as disapproval of an entire cause – and morally problematic – because voice 'from within' implies that cause trumps disagreement, when there may be no reasonable alternatives.

The concept draws on Hirschman's (1970) analysis of exit, voice, and loyalty (EVL) and connects it to literature on and practices of accountability in the public sphere. In his seminal

work, Hirschman argues that we have two ways of responding when organizations, both economic and political, disappoint us: vote with our feet (exit) or stay put and speak up/out (voice). Hirschman's EVL framework has been widely used in political science to describe political behavior, including voting, party switching, and collective action. Scholars of accountability, too, draw on Hirschman to suggest that exit accountability derives from market-based consequences of members leaving organizations and not paying membership dues (Grant and Keohane 2005). Voice accountability derives from the consequences of public disagreement, in particular, harm to public reputation (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008). By using the term 'discursive,' I draw on Keck (2003, 45) and Dryzek and Niemeyer (2008), who describe political agents in the public sphere who, though lacking both a mandate to speak for others and the power to make binding agreements, nevertheless represent positions and ideas about groups. These agents do not represent citizens in electoral districts and constituencies, these authors argue, but as 'discursive representatives' are able to construct people 'in a particular kind of way' (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008, 481). The discursive power to frame the terms of political discourse and engagement, even in the public sphere, is significant enough to warrant some measure of accountability appropriate to its powers (Montanaro 2012, 2018). 'Discursive exit', then, is a means to exit from claims made for and about us, and in doing so, provides a means not only to challenge but also, importantly, to reconstitute those claims, including dominant terms of political discourse. Though activists may not explicitly use the economic theory and language of EVL, we see exit and voice employed in decisions to sign petitions, stage walkouts, and boycotts. And its elements are seen in the practices that hold organizations accountable, including cancelling membership in organizations. Ideally, discursive exit, which combines communication with sanction, produces responsiveness from representatives and other power-

wielders.

Consider the case of the Women’s March. The idea for the march on Washington began on Facebook in the days immediately after the election and quickly took hold. Teresa Shook, a retired white attorney in Hawaii, and Bob Bland, a white New York fashion designer, independently invited people to march on Washington. Word spread, and they soon merged their events. One of the early organizers, Vanessa Wruble, wrote to Shook and Bland, suggesting that women of color needed to be centered, ‘or it will be a bunch of white women marching on Washington’ – particularly problematic given the turnout of white women voters for Trump (Felsenthal 2017). The organizers responded by inviting a diverse group to the team, including Linda Sarsour, Tamika D. Mallory, and Carmen Perez, experienced organizers all. The original name for the march, the Million Woman March, was previously used in Philadelphia in 1997, at a protest for African American women, and before that in the 1995 Million Man March, a D.C. rally for African American men. Many criticized the thoughtless appropriation of a name used for marches organized by and for African Americans. The new name, Women’s March on Washington, more thoughtfully and purposefully invoked Black activism. And the March offered a mission that affirmed intersectional feminist politics:

> We must create a society in which women – including Black women, Native women, poor women, immigrant women, disabled women, Muslim women, lesbian queer and trans women – are free and able to care for and nurture their families, however they are formed, in safe and healthy environments free from structural impediments. (Women's March n.d.)

Still, ‘tensions remained as participants and observers debated whether cisgender white women and their concerns had been centered at the expense of the March’s intersectional ideal’ (Camiscioli and Quataert 2017, 7).

Many people noted that white women mobilize only in their self-interest, without

offering reciprocal support to the Black Lives Matter movement, or to the protestors of the Dakota Access pipeline at Standing Rock, two recent examples of activism from which white women were largely absent. Women of color pointed out that white women voted for a President and then wanted those who did not vote for him to protest his administration. As Roxane Gay put it, 'they were more interested in protecting whiteness than womanhood.' Gay further wrote about both how meaningful the march was and her misgivings.

> Like many black women and other women of color, I had complicated feelings about the march, how it began, and how this newfound solidarity was so long in coming. It took something as drastic as the election of a white supremacist to motivate women, en masse, to march in such a powerful demonstration of unity and repudiation. Somehow, the mass incarceration of black men, the state-sanctioned murders of black men and women by law enforcement, the pay gap between white women and women of color, the health care disparities between white women and women of color, and so many other issues were not drastic enough to inspire the kind of outrage seen in the months up to and during the Women's March. That was and is disheartening. (Gay 2018)

In her poem, civil rights activist Johnetta Elzie (2017), pointedly asks, 'We've been marching for years – where the hell have all of you been?' In another example of exclusion, though the March referenced disabled women in its mission, for a time this was its only direct reference to women with disabilities. It otherwise referenced disabilities only by emphasizing women who bear 'the burden of care' for those with disabilities – a concern indeed as duties of care often fall to women, but one that both excluded, and insulted the dignity of, women who themselves have disabilities. And of course, a march is difficult or impossible for some bodies.[1]

These critiques raised in the online spaces of the Women's March, in newspapers and

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[1] According to the Women's March, it was the largest assembly of people with disabilities in the history of the United States. Some people participated virtually, using social media and '#disabilitymarch' to share their demands and reasons for supporting the March.

magazines, led to accusations of divisiveness. White women reacted with accusations of 'sniping' and disparaged the criticism as 'competing victimhood narratives...jostling for most oppressed status' (Symons 2017). Jennifer Willis cancelled her trip to join the March explaining that, 'We're supposed to be allies in equal pay, marriage, adoption. Why is it now about, "White women don't understand black women"?' (Stockman 2017). Candice Huber, who stepped down from her position to make room for minority women to occupy leadership positions, claims that she was accused of alienating white women (Stockman 2017). Zeba Blay (2017), a Senior Culture Writer for *Huffington Post*, explained that the reactions of white women – what DiAngelo (2011, 54) calls 'white fragility', in which white women respond to racial tension defensively and strategically, with outward displays of emotions such as crying, anger, silence, and indeed, exit – contributed to her ambivalence about participating in the march. Black women are entitled to their anger, Blay argues – consider disparities in health care, including the disproportionate rates of pregnancy-related deaths (Tucker, et al. 2007), income inequality with ethnicity pay gaps disproportionately affecting ethnic minority women (Longhi and Brynin 2017), and overrepresentation in incarceration rates (Gross 2015) – but white women made clear that critique is unwelcome and somehow troublesome. In an interview, Angela Peoples said, 'When we're speaking about our pain, when we're asking you to show up, then it's divisive, then it's somehow detrimental to the broader cause' (Obie 2017).

In doubt that white women were committed to its goals and values, particularly following the reactions and responses to criticism, some women of color, and the organization Black Lives Cincinnati (BLMC, since renamed Mass Action for Black Liberation), chose not to attend the Women's March. In a statement on its website, the then-BLMC provided two reasons for its discursive exit: the 'Hear Our Vote' theme was exclusive of the disenfranchised, including some

immigrants and those subject to voter suppression, and that the March and its sister events 'have pushed aside the concerns of women of color from its inception'. This exclusion began with the inaugural March, they continued, revealing that 'ignoring and silencing people of color is not a rookie mistake, but a code of conduct' (Mass Action for Black Liberation 2018). In March 2018, BLMC and other local organizations gathered in Cincinnati to celebrate International Women's Day. The event included representatives from the American Indian Movement, Planned Parenthood – which highlighted that women of color are disproportionately affected by Medicaid cuts – and the Cincinnati Revolutionary Students, who urged an embrace of transwomen, who are often victims of sexual violence leading to murder.

Some people of color participated in the march – a participation recently called a 'pragmatic utopianism' (Lopez Bunyasi and Watts Smith 2018) – while highlighting the hypocrisy of its claim of solidarity. Amir Talai, an American comedian and actor, carried a sign that read, 'I'll See You Nice White Ladies at the Next #BlackLivesMatter March, Right?' Another photo from the march resonated across social media. In it, Peoples held a sign that read, 'Don't Forget: White Women Voted for Trump.'

> In the photo, [Peoples] stands nonchalantly, casually sucking on a lollipop with a jaded look in her eyes that suggests her familiarity with the ritual of protest, of demonstrating for civil liberties. Behind her stand three white women, all wearing the pink knitted 'pussyhats' that the march made famous. Two are on their phones, pleased grins beaming from their faces. One appears to be taking a triumphant selfie. (Wortham 2017)

Women of color were asking white women to recognize that they benefit from white supremacy and patriarchy. Blay (2017) recognized the need for unity against an administration that poses a threat to the rights of many women, but felt conflicted about where she, as a black immigrant woman, fit in. Chloe Sargeant expressed the same mix of feelings, both agreeing with the march's concerns about Trump's presidency while struggling 'to identify with the Women's

March, specifically because of its exclusionary nature.' Sargeant noted the cis-centric slogans on participants' signs: 'NO UTERUS, NO OPINION,' and 'We are not ovary-acting', as examples. And of course, the ubiquitous pink 'pussy hats' all of which equate 'vagina/uterus/menstruation' with 'woman' (Sargeant 2018).

Among those who participated in 2017, some refused to return for the 2018 anniversary. Jade Byard Peek, a black and Mi'kmaw transgender woman, co-organized 'Walking the Talk,' an alternative protest that purposefully walked through the Halifax Women's March anniversary event to show what an intersectional and inclusive women's march looks like (Patil 2018). In an interview, Peek reported that 'she and others felt uncomfortable and under attack at last year's women's march. When she shared her experiences with march organizers, she said she received "near death threats" and was called an "angry black man" on social media' (Bresge 2018). In a speech to the crowd at an anniversary event in Halifax, Canada, poet laureate El Jones said, 'We're here, but there's women who aren't, and we have to ask where. Transwomen who don't feel welcome or safe. Women who face threats when they come into this space. We haven't arrived until all women are with us, right here' (Bresge 2018). S.T. Holloway writes that she attended the march in 2017 with a sign that read, 'NOT My President. Sincerely, A Nasty Woman and member of "The African Americans"' – as she put it, 'a snarky reference to Trump's misogynistic and ignorant comments while on the campaign trail' (Holloway 2018). She noticed that white women who paid attention to her sign focused mostly on the 'Nasty Women' statement. And though the crowds enthusiastically chanted, *'Say It Loud, Say It Clear, Immigrants Are Welcome Here,' 'My Body, My Choice,' 'Show Me What Democracy Looks Like. This Is What Democracy Looks Like,'* among others, when she and a friend started a *'Black Lives Matter'* chant, she called it a 'comparatively pathetic' response. For Holloway, these

incidents 'represented the continued neglect, dismissal and disregard of the issues affecting black women and other women of color.' Holloway decided that until issues that disproportionately affect black women are taken up as central to women's issues, she will not participate. As she writes, 'I cannot continue to lend my voice, my strength and my power to a movement or a brand of feminism that seeks to end the oppression of some of its members, while some of its members continue to aid in the oppression of others' (Holloway 2018).

The organization's claimed commitment to intersectional feminist politics also came under criticism when members of the leadership expressed support of Minister Louis Farrakhan – a support that is offered as one possible reason for lower march turnouts in 2019. Mallory, in particular, was criticized after attending a Nation of Islam (NOI) event and posting to Instagram a photo with Farrakhan, captioned 'the GOAT' ('greatest of all time'). Critics pointed out that Farrakhan is designed an extremist by the Southern Poverty Law Center because of his anti-Semitic and anti-LBGTQIA statements, and his organization, the NOI, a hate group (SPLC n.d.). Mallory explained to various outlets that she did not support his anti-Semitism but recognizes his work in black communities. Sarsour also responded to the criticism by pointing out that women should not be held accountable for a man's words. But Wruble, who is white and Jewish, told TIME that she believes her Jewish identity was the reason she was pushed out of the organization (Vesoulis 2019), and accusations – since denied – circulated of anti-Semitic comments made at early meetings. Critics argue that neither Mallory nor the Women's March sufficiently rebuked Farrakhan. Shook has since called for Bland, Mallory, Perez, and Sarsour to step down. To date, they have not done so, but several state chapters have separated from the national organization, including Houston, Washington D.C., Alabama, Illinois, among others (McSweeney and Siegel 2018).

The example of the Women's March reveals a conceptual distinction between exit and discursive exit: women are not exiting, in the usual sense, the group, 'women' – and if that is possible, nor should they have to (Appiah 2005). This distinct form is an exit from a claim that defines 'women' in a given way – that is, 'women' as white, privileged, and exclusive. Some women chose not to march and so exited its online membership space and its physical spaces – but it does not make sense to understand women of color as somehow choosing to exit 'women' or even as using their voice from within or outside the group 'women.' Instead, women discursively exited a claim formed in the idea of the March that called for unity and solidarity in the face of a history of exclusion in the women's movement and despite evidence that many women continue to be excluded. This claim made the march an exercise of power not only against Trump but also over women who are asking for recognition of intersectional marginalization (Crenshaw 1989, 1991). These were indeed accompanied by recognizable practices of organizational exit, in which members exit an organization, relinquishing membership rights and obligations, and exit from physical spaces, as well as voice from those who participated in the march. But the conceptual distinction reveals that how we feel about political questions and issues is related to how it is framed – not just what is being done, but how and with whom and by whom. Many black women and indigenous women questioned not the need for unity and solidarity, but its timing, by whom and for whom. Because we should recognize exit from a claim to speak for and about people with which they disagree, discursive exit considers what it means to reject, not organizations or businesses, but political claims, including claims of representation, about us and the supposed 'groups' to which we belong – a strategy that makes sense within the context of episodic monopolies of voice, representation, and framing.

Discursive exit combines an empowerment with discursive precision. When women exercised discursive exit, they exited a claim made by some women on behalf of all women, and publicly communicated their reasons for doing so to encourage the deliberative accountability of the power-wielders who claimed to speak for and about them. They demanded that the definition and shared understanding of women, and of feminism, be reconstituted. They are calling for an intersectional feminism that is diverse and inclusive of women of color, lesbians, and those with disabilities, as examples (Crenshaw 1989, 1991), and that understands the oppression that occurs when one is, for example, both a woman and African American – and to understand that these cannot be separated, somehow, as if one can choose to prioritize one over the other. In circumstances where people are not loyal to a movement and yet have a stake in it – or are included in one dimension but excluded in another – discursive exit proved a viable option.

We can generalize three elements of discursive exit from this example: one, rejecting a political claim; two, voicing reasons to the power-wielder and to a broader public; and three, in doing so, encouraging the accountability of the power-wielders, and particularly deliberative accountability as it relates to the definition of the group or constituency itself.

Standard Accounts of Exit, Voice, and Loyalty and their Limits

We can now better situate discursive exit in relation to standard accounts of EVL. Hirschman explained that customers exit, removing support and resources, and ideally relocating them elsewhere, to punish an economic or political actor responsible for a decline in quality of product or service. Those who are not loyal to a business or organization and who feel they are better off taking a loss or changing loyalties because the costs of remaining are too high, exit. Though Hirschman saw exit more closely aligned with consumer decision-making and voice with political contestation and public action, he later acknowledged that this is not necessarily so.

Citizens and politicians can exit political parties, for example. Exit is more powerful in the presence of services or products to exit to. These options support the choice to exit and remain exited and encourage organizations to be responsive to their customers. Monopolies, then, reduce the effectiveness of exit because power-wielders feel less compelled to amend their behavior.

Standard accounts would argue that women have the option to exit and to create a new organisation or movement with a different view of feminism. But exit is not a palliative for oppression (Okin 2002). Even if we understand the group 'women' as something from which people can exit, women deserve fair and equal standing within the group. People want, and should have the right, to be treated fairly within their group, and to suggest otherwise often places the burden of responsibility on already beleaguered individuals (Appiah 2005, Shachar 1998, Shachar 2000). The case of The Women's March reveals that women of colour may be reluctant to exit not out of loyalty but despite a deteriorating relationship because of the high cost to not belonging. The Women's March did not receive anywhere near the same level of policing as Black Lives Matter protests: one was met with high fives from police officers, the other with state troopers in riot gear (Sharman 2017). This is emblematic of deep structural inequalities that place unfair and unequal burdens on some women and not others. Put simply, the formal right to exit does not mean that one *can* exit (Deveaux 2006, Okin 2002, Phillips 2009). Faced with the reality of inequalities among women, such exit creates a moral dilemma. It is therefore useful to understand discursive exit, with its connection to deliberative accountability, as a distinct form of exit.

If exit is not an option, because of monopolies and unequal opportunity, voice is the remaining means by which to express discontent. Voice encompasses everything from 'faint grumbling to violent protest' (Hirschman 1970, 16), and is defined as, 'any attempt at all to

change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs,' either by individual or group (1970, 30). Voice, rather than exit, is used by those more invested in and loyal to the movement, and who feel they would be better off agitating for change, calculating that it would result in improvements in quality greater than the costs associated with exercising it. It is for this reason that voice can imply that the cause trumps disagreement, leaving dissenters morally complicit in a flawed framing or structure. Hirschman was clearly partial to voice, which he described as 'the ultimate justification of human existence' (Hirschman 1981, 215). He thought voice made the public realm possible - it shares information, encourages reciprocity and loyalty. And he took issue with economists, including Friedman, who subscribed to a 'cult of exit': their focus on exit to the exclusion of voice ignored that exit and voice can reinforce each other.

Standard accounts would suggest that women could voice their objections. But 'voice' may be too broad as a category, and too narrow in its relationship to accountability. I am interested in propositionally specific voice that elicits propositionally specific responses from those who make claims for and about others. Specifically, standard accounts have a thin relationship to accountability in representative relationships. Some portrayals of voice and exit used to express discontent, preferences, and to get what we want, have little to do with accountability. When accountability is intended, the censuring or sanctioning element of accountability is prioritized, and its deliberative quality is often ignored entirely. As Shotter (1989) explains, through public reasoning, justification, and explanation to others, accountability is not merely sanctioning or monitoring but helps us understand the sense we have of ourselves, of our identities. Many women resisted being represented in a certain way, in an effort to encourage proper attention to intersectionality.

The concept of discursive exit hints at a complex interplay between exit and voice, to which important attention has been paid. Barry (1974), for example, emphasizes that the stark presentation of the option to exit or speak up collapses the combinations implicit between them, which he names: silent exit, non-exiting voice, silent non-exit, and exit plus voice. 'Silent exit' is closest to the pure practice of exit. We presume dissatisfaction but without real explanation. 'Non-exiting voice' is closest to the pure practice of voice. An actor does not exit and need not even threaten exit: in competitive markets, power-wielders know that a customer has options and so behave as if under a threat of exit, responding quickly to the complaints of their clients. In this situation, exit supports voice. 'Silent non-exit,' on the other hand, shows that exit can undermine voice, particularly because those who exit leave behind 'the inert' who suffer in silence (Hirschman 1970, 13). Finally, 'exit plus voice' is exit with an explanation – what Dowding et al (2000) call 'noisy exit.' This could be an angry last encounter, spurred by a conviction that the power-wielder is wrong, using voice to publicize one's decision to exit. Here, exit means, 'to resign under protest and, in general, to denounce and fight the organization from without instead of working for change from within. In other words, the alternative is now not so much between voice and exit as between voice from within and voice from without (after exit)' (Hirschman 1970, 105). This literature revealed that the act of exit does not preclude an actor from also voicing discontent. Sometimes, we not only sanction or exit; we signal why we are upset in hopes of correction and restitution. Indeed, as Kirkpatrick (2017, 2018) argues, noisy exit can itself help to influence politics, by disrupting, interrupting, and even unseating those in power (see also Dowding and John 2012).

Discursive exit, too, straddles the options of exit and voice to address conceptual and normative limitations of these accounts. One, the literature does not precisely address the

conceptual possibility of exiting claims that speak for and about others in the public sphere. This oversight is most obvious in literature concerned with the equal distribution of power represented by vote-based democracy in the domain of a (monopoly) state. Birch (1975, 81), for example, tells us that we rarely engage in politics, mostly voting in national elections and acquiescing to the decisions of the ruling regime. Clark, Golder and Golder (2017) offer a broad application of EVL to politics but are specifically interested in citizen reactions to policy choices of incumbent governments. But voting is not the only pathway for influence in open democracies: we also exercise public influence through voice. It is not only governments but also associations in the public sphere that make claims that speak for and about us. If we understand this, we see that among the options available to people to influence the course of democratic politics is that of exiting claims. EVL can help us to capture the structural logic of influence in the public sphere, which can be a domain of competing claims to speak for and about others.

Two, the EVL model tends to assume a competitive market with associated effectiveness of voluntary joining and exiting. But associations can have a temporary strategic monopoly over voice, which dampens the 'join/exit' mode of responsiveness: The Women's March, because of its visibility, had an effective, if temporary, monopoly on speaking for and about women, and so silent exit – and even 'noisy exit' – will not have the impact that it has in a fully voluntary, competitive environment. Voluntary (movement) organization is also low on internal discourse, simply because the mechanism of responsiveness is joining/exiting the organization. These kinds of strategic concerns exist with episodic, movement-like organizations in a way that does not mirror either an environment of competitive voluntary organizations, or the equal distribution of power represented by vote-based democracy in the domain of a (monopoly) state.

The importance of discursive exit – and the improvement to the EVL model – is that it

targets monopolies over claim-making/representation that arise temporarily because of organization and momentum. In a democracy, these kinds of monopolies will occur episodically because of organization, issue framing and focus, and momentum. Ideally, discursive exit nudges this kind of monopoly toward better and more responsive claim-making and representation than is available in the join/exit model of responsiveness typical of voluntary organizations. It is a form of accountability that is propositionally-specific, enabling specific and measured forms of exit combined with incentives for representative responsiveness. Discursive exit is valuable because it contains a complementary relationship between exit, voice, and deliberative accountability, the latter to which I now turn my attention more fully.

Deliberative Accountability

Accountability involves both deliberation (to give an account, to explain and justify one's behavior to others), and the possibility of control (to be held accountable, to be sanctioned in some way) (Savage and Weale 2009, 69). Mansbridge (2009) terms the former narrative or deliberative accountability and highlights that the sanctioning aspect has long crowded out the deliberative in many definitions of accountability offered in principal-agent theory. In political science, for example, the ability to sanction one's representative is often emphasized as essential in many accounts of good representation. Though we emphasize the punitive aspect of accountability, 'to answer for' has narrative or deliberative overtones (Mansbridge 2009, 384). Whether a power-wielder is being held accountable for the unauthorized or illegitimate exercise of power or for decisions that are judged unwise or unjust (Grant and Keohane 2005), it is, as Dunsire argues, 'the coupling of information with its evaluation and application of sanctions that gives "accountability" or "answerability" or "responsibility" their full sense in ordinary usage' (1978, 41).

Deliberative accountability describes a relationship between representative and constituent in which 'the representative explains the reasons for her actions and even (ideally) engages in two-way communication with constituents, particularly when deviating from the constituents' preferences' (Mansbridge 2009, 370). Two-way communication requires that both principal and agent ask questions and give answers on whether or not they remain mutually aligned or how their alignment might have changed (Mansbridge 2009, 384). Such communicative links are doubtlessly skewed towards power-wielders, and Mansbridge notes that few large-scale representative systems provide the context for principals to provide full explanations in interaction with constituents (Mansbridge 2009, 385), though smaller groups in different formats and contexts may do better on this.

Discursive exit highlights that accountability is not only censure but also involves explanation and justification between parties. By making their discontent common knowledge, the consequential loss of support and reputational damage to the Women's March counted as censure. But discursive exit also helps satisfy the deliberative requirements of accountability. Many women communicated objections to the Women's March – its purpose for existence, its original organization, and its exclusive practices – to challenge the meaning of the group and the terms on which it understands itself. Social theorists have long argued that language is not just the representation of things in the world but creates and sustains social orders (Mills 1940, Shotter 1989, Wittgenstein 1953). Because some women disagreed with how the group was represented, they raised the issue of the representation of the group itself.

Because discursive exit involves public explanation, it is not only a means of resistance; it can be a catalyst for change. Everyone has a capacity to resist (Salazar 2016), to a greater or lesser degree, to be sure, and there is always resistance to power (Foucault 1978), even if it is of

the symbolic nature described by Scott (1985, 1990) in the forms of slander, gossip, and character assassinations. Literature on social movements and protests shows us that participants are not engaged in 'mere resistance to the directives of state power,' but do so 'for the purpose of creating the world in terms other than what it is' (Aslam 2016, 10). Beyond resistance, and beyond censure, women of color want to engage the meaning of the group itself, and the terms on which the people who belong to it understand themselves. It is therefore an effort to secure improvement, even in the context of monopoly, with the potential to accept a differently represented association.

Conceiving discursive exit as a distinctive concept addresses Hirschman's own concerns about exit: that its effects were unlikely to be as lofty as voice because it was often a private, silent decision, and largely impersonal. Pfaff and Kim (2003, 414) underscore Hirschman's concerns, showing that the size or degree of exit matters: at too large a level, exit erodes the networks among those left behind. When those with knowledge and energy leave, the remaining group – the inert – is subject to its most conservative tendencies. Reformers have the right, will, and opportunity to exit but the inert have only the formal right, are generally passive, and have little real opportunity to exit. Moreover, the effectiveness of exit in eliciting a response from a firm actually requires that some people are unable to exit. Without a combination of the alert and inert, as Dowding et al (2000) explain, mass exit could bankrupt a firm before it has a chance to respond. But those who are less able to exit tend to have lower income and wealth and so the unfair exercise of power might continue unchecked and unduly exercised over those with fewer options (Hirschman 1970, 95-6). Okin (2002, 207) explains that, 'exit is inherently problematic: those most likely to need it are those least likely to be able to employ it. Neither may they see it as a desirable or even an imaginable option'. While it could be effective, Hirschman was

concerned that exit is passive; a consumer who stops purchasing a product or service does not necessarily confront a representative from the company or firm when doing so (Hirschman 1970, 15, 34). At best, it is a silent protest, which is too easy. Hirschman thought that to exercise voice, in the face of doubt and fear, was courage. Further, loyalty prevents exit but does not necessarily encourage voice. Indeed, it might prevent us from speaking out altogether. Out of loyalty, some of us suffer, silently.[2]

Discursive exit shows that there is a form of exit that is not selfish, cowardly, or weak (Warren 2011). Though exit can mean shirking collective responsibilities, discursive exit shows that it does not have to. Discursive exit can be about interrupting relationships of domination, or mistaken, conflicted, and incomplete forms of representation, and so can be useful in contexts where there is a domineering ethnic or identity group. It is not necessarily used by those who fail to recognize common dependencies, who are excessively individualistic, and who free ride on the common contributions of others but can instead be used by those who have the right and opportunity to exit, and who do not merely leave the inert behind. When they cannot feasibly exit, they can reject political claims, including claims of representation, and so exit the proposed constitution of the group.

White feminists are mobilizing, and that can be good and bad. The most effective interest groups correlate with socioeconomic status (Dahl 2005, Hirschman 1981, Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). Whiteness is often overrepresented among those who have the time, skills,

[2] More positively, loyalty can strengthen our influence over power-wielders, as exemplified in the Pareto principle, also known as the 80/20 rule: 80 per cent of sales come from 20 percent of customers, making the loyalty of those 20 percent particularly worthy of acknowledgment.

knowledge, and resources needed to leverage a fight for equality. Indeed, Putnam and Skocpol (2018) recently reported that what pundits call 'the resistance' is composed mainly of college-educated suburban white women. When a white woman remains silent – white women often with more access, visibility, and authority than other women – her silence reveals a comfort in her privilege that harms women who are non-hegemonic. Those with fewer resources might have the power of the majority, aggregating their greater numbers into a sizable group less easy to ignore. Still, their access to voice and exit are not always equal. Though democracies should and often do ensure that people have multiple ways of expressing voice and exit at all levels of government from city to federal levels, and in different formats including town halls and formal elections, access to and the exercise of voice and exit varies across social groups. Any venue in which participants self-select will advantage those with resources for organization. But many white women either struggle to understand our relative privilege or simply refuse to see it.

But women of color have always been at the forefront of left progressive activism. For those who feel compromised by their participation, discursive exit is a viable option. They do not remain silent, but they do not merely voice from within, out of loyalty or inertia. They discursively exit, publicly challenging claims to speak for and about women, in an effort to improve conditions for others, and to encourage white women to differently understand 'women,' and to be accountable for their past and present behavior and privilege.

Does Discursive Exit Matter?

The Women's March is a non-elected, non-state actor, so it is worth pointing out that there are good reasons to think that holding such actors accountable matters and that non-electoral accountability matters. First, non-state actors work with and influence decision-makers, including governments (Betsill and Corell 2008). Indeed, some of the roles we traditionally

associate with government now involve or are even run by non-state actors, including nongovernmental organizations and civil society actors. They are included in policy making, for example, to improve representation and buttress legitimacy, or to give the appearance of doing so. We must therefore consider how to hold such actors accountable, particularly if we think that our elected representatives may be unwilling or unable to do so (Gates and Hill 1995).

Second, non-elected actors themselves wield accountability over decision-makers. Philanthropists and celebrity activists, as examples, sometimes call the reputation of states and state leaders into question, as a penalty. We value this capacity in certain circumstances: when decision-makers or the forums in which they operate are not clearly bound by the accountability of democratic representation with its checks and balances and the threat of removal from office; where non-elected actors behave as a proxy or surrogate, wielding accountability on behalf of those with fewer resources (Rubenstein 2007); and when they redress inequalities caused by the state prioritizing the interests of business and powerful socioeconomic groups at the expense of others. Still, given that many governments are subject to free and fair elections and that these actors are not, it is less clear why they should wield such accountability, and how we might hold them accountable in turn.

Third, power-wielders claim to speak for others, and sometimes for those with whom they do not have a clear relationship. Work has been done in recent years to describe and assess the role that non-elected actors play in representing others (Saward 2010, Montanaro 2012, 2018, Kuyper 2016). NGOs sometimes speak for those outside memberships, for example. The women's movement has long imposed claims of unity on a diverse group of women, whilst mostly serving cisgender white women. The Women's March seemed to some yet another example of the same exercises of power, making it important that discursive accountability

mechanisms, in addition to organizational ones, are available to sanction informal power-wielders.

For these reasons, the question of non-electoral accountability is an important topic and one that academics and practitioners have been creative in conceptualizing. In the contemporary literature, non-electoral accountability is of two kinds: organizational (Grant and Keohane 2005) and discursive (J. S. Dryzek 1999), which together encompass an extensive set of mechanisms. Organizational accountability (Grant and Keohane 2005) includes the hierarchical accountability that superiors wield on subordinates. State leaders, courts, supervisory boards, heads of organizations, funding agencies, and donors, are best suited to demand explanations and sanction actors. Sanctions include dismissals and reprimands, budget oversight and loss, criminal penalties, the loss of donations and membership as well as any associated fees, as well as hits to public reputation. But non-members need modes of accountability to demand explanations, and otherwise sanction the actor, particularly when claims are made that extend to people beyond membership. These claimed constituents may not have the resources required for membership – membership fees, for example – and may not be shareholders or sit on boards of directors. They require discursive mechanisms of accountability (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008), often defined as public expressions of disagreement, including naming and shaming, boycotts, petitions, and public protests. Bound up in such public expressions of disagreement is the reputation of the actor. Though more easily wielded by then average person than organizational mechanisms – one need not be a member of a board of directors to effectively protest – discursive accountability may still be biased towards those with more resources, including education, a heavy predictor of every kind of participation (Mayer 2011). Even the naming and shaming of public reputational accountability is more easily wielded by those with access to publicity, and whose own

reputations are well known and serve as counterpoint to those they criticize. We hope that social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, acts as a leveler, at least insofar as enabling increased political engagement among those who may not otherwise have access. And certainly, it allows people to share ideas, report and announce events, and spread messages across borders – including, for example, videos of police brutality. But we also know that it creates polarization through 'echo chambers', and so its beneficial effects on democracy are mixed (Sunstein 2017).

We require additional ways to hold powerful actors accountable, both because not all power-wielders are organizations, and because not everyone has equal access to and capacity for the exercise of accountability. Social movements, including The Women's March, community representatives, self-appointed representatives, and various other actors, all exercise powers of influence and persuasion, advocacy, and representation – powers that should be held duly accountable. Discursive exit is one mechanism that we may find useful to conceptualize because of its potential significance for political influence in a new landscape of representation in which non-elected actors play a significant role.

And, arguably, women exercising discursive exit from The Women's March has had effects. The organizers of the original march have put together events in partnership with groups focused on racial justice, disability, and LGBTQ rights. The movement was involved in a convention that included training sessions on running for office and on confronting racism. And the organizers hosted an event for #PowerToThePolls, a nationwide voter registration initiative, that includes the co-founder of Black Lives Matter, Alicia Garza. These are the organization's efforts at recognizing several axes of oppression, including sexism, racism, and class oppression. And it is their effort at educating political neophytes to intersectional feminism. The March began with exclusions that were glaring, but women exercising discursive exit – women among

the millions who attended marches – helped it negotiate and renegotiate its meaning, which has tremendous effect on political action. Women have gone on to other campaigns, and to run for office themselves, with a remade House of Representatives, and an effective participation in and attention to the #MeToo movement (Traister 2019).

Discursive exit may not be as powerful as other forms of accountability, but it is not necessarily exercised in isolation from other mechanisms, and it can strengthen democracy in three ways. One, the cost of discursive exit can be low relative to the costs of exiting formal, organized politics. Informal, non-organizational contexts generally lack the structures that can make exit difficult or even insurmountable, and rarely are there monetary costs. Still, time and effort are expended in explanation, and there are further sunk costs in any continued involvement in discursive efforts at improving conditions for those left behind. One loses time through the act of voicing concerns and so one saves time if one does not. There are potentially psychological and emotional costs as well. If one feels loyalty to or is otherwise connected to a group, then there is a cost to discursive exit, in remaining connected even if in a critical position. As Dowding and John reveal, exit is less costly for the better off (2012), making low-cost pathways of influence essential, given inequalities of social, economic, and political power.

Two, discursive exit is voluntary, unlike, say, exiting citizenship. Though Hirschman (1970, 15) thought exit was binary – 'One either exits or one does not'– one can discursively exit and re-enter at will, leaving open the possibility for reentry upon an improved exercise of power. And three, it is highly flexible. One can exercise discursive exit at any time, unlike periodic elections, and does not necessarily require that other choices/power-wielders are available to exit to. But, worryingly, its flexibility may mean that power-wielders can more easily reject its demands to act or respond. Connected to this flexibility, it may perform as well as, and in some

respects better than, elections with respect to democratic outcomes precisely because it is not limited to people within districts and borders, and so can be exercised by those who are excluded from decision-making on the basis of residence and citizenship.

Within organizational contexts, people exit by withdrawing membership, perhaps with more effect than those who do not or cannot become members at all, though with arguably less effect than donors who have the option to withdraw donations and funding. People can express discontent with the agenda of their organization but do not necessarily influence or set the agenda in the first place. But organizational exit is not the best or only way to exercise exit and is available only to its own members, shareholders, and donors and not necessarily to those over whom they exercise power. Discursive exit enables those outside of organizations to express discontent and hold accountable those whose exercises of power profoundly affect them.

Conclusion

Discursive exit is a way to hold others accountable for the powers they wield, when actors dispute claims that affect them, and when options of organizational exit and voice are unavailable, undesirable, or inadequate. It is one way to both censure actors and contribute to the deliberative elements of accountability, perhaps particularly useful within large, plural groups from which exit makes little sense for subgroups who wish to encourage accountability, and particularly encourage a discussion of the terms of the group itself.

Looking forward, conceptualizing the practices and normative possibilities of discursive exit helps to focus the questions of what kinds of conditions lead to its uptake. Without the right conditions, discursive exit may face the same problems that other mechanisms of accountability face, namely, that some unfair quantity or quality of power is needed to exercise it effectively. Though statements about discursive exit began on the Facebook pages of The Women's March,

it was relatively well-resourced women who made it known to a broader public outside that group, including the poets and editors that I cited here. Knowledge of the conditions required for uptake can help us understand when and where discursive exit has the potential for the empowerment, accountability, and deliberation that we require of it.

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