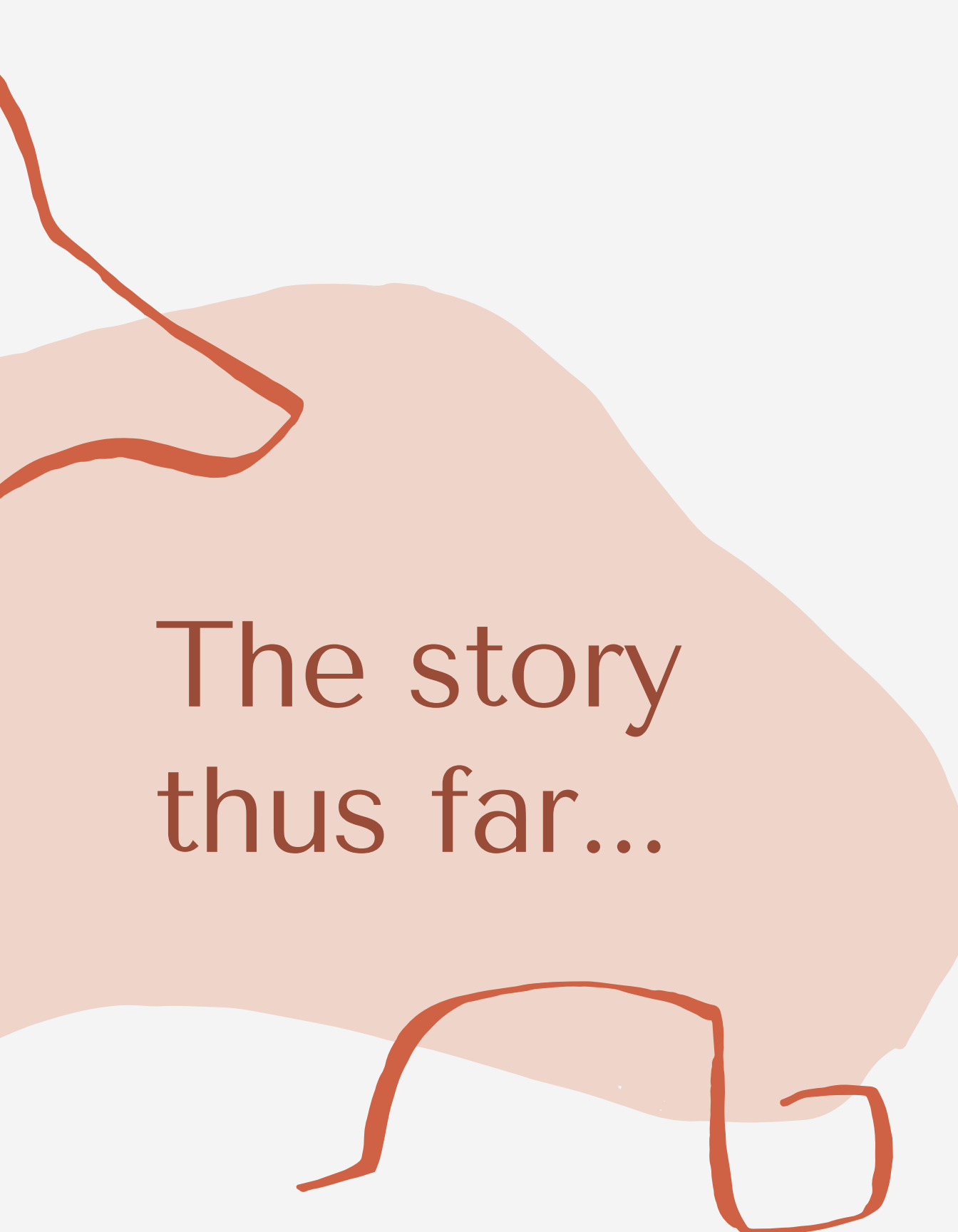




# Substantively Representing Women of Colour: Shifting from Symbolic and Descriptive Standards to Understanding Institutional Restrains

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The story  
thus far...

## EXISTING LITERATURE

- Most literature focuses only on women or only on racialized persons
- Dominant topics include: the number of descriptive representatives, the connection between descriptive and substantive representation, and the causes of underrepresentation

## WOMEN OF COLOUR IN THE CANADIAN HOUSE OF COMMONS

- The first woman of colour was elected to Canada's House of Commons in 1993, over seventy years after the first (white) woman was elected
- Since then, women of colour have never made up more than about 5% of the House



# Representation as Stages

## 1. Symbolic Representation

The meaning and significance attached to the presence of an individual or group of individuals within a political institution.

Ex. The first woman of colour elected to the House of Commons in 1993.

## 2. Descriptive Representation

The presence of a social group within a political institution in comparison to their proportion in the general population.

Ex. Racialized women make up 20% of the population but only 5% of the House of Commons.

## 3. Substantive Representation

The actions of representatives to the extent that they promote the perspectives, interests, and needs of a particular group of citizens.

Ex. Bill S-3 amended the Indian Act to alleviate gender discrimination in Indian Status for Indigenous women

# Symbolic Representation

- Party intentions
- Slow step to progress
- Everyday experiences
- Symbolic for who?



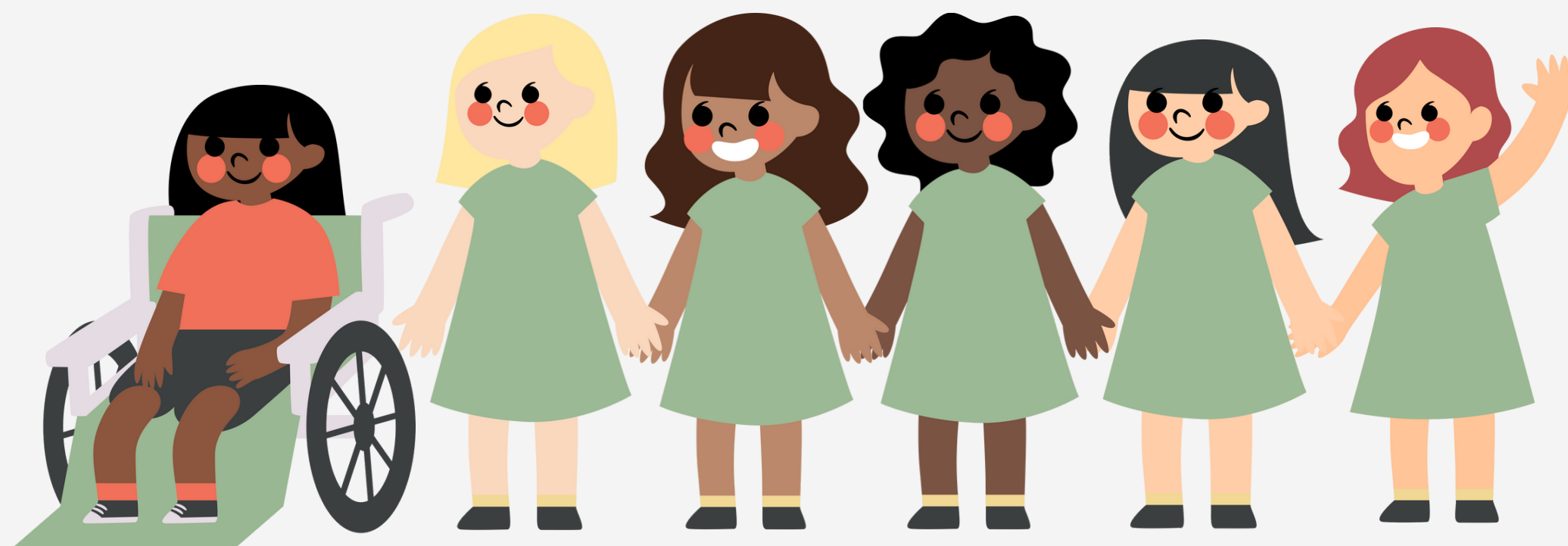
# Descriptive Representation

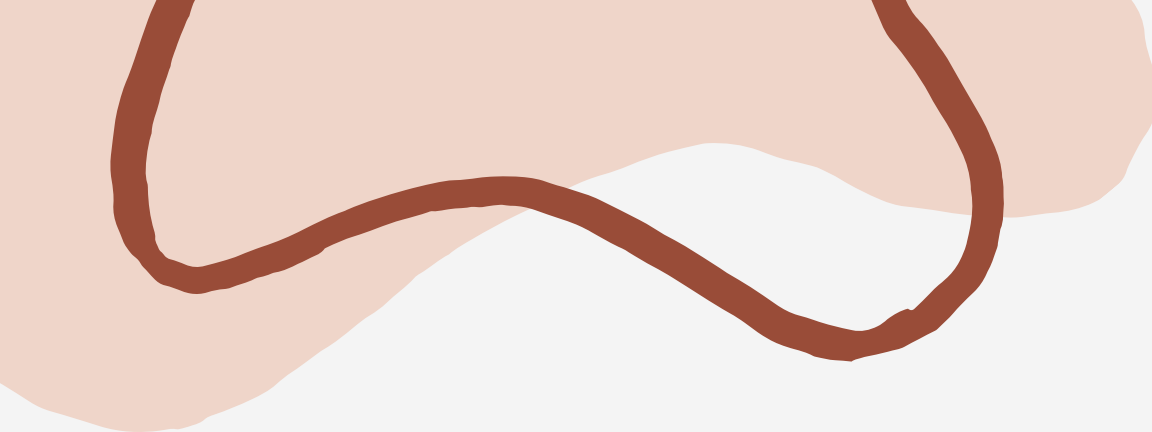


- Fragile gains
- Power at the top
- Essentializing roles
- Correlation with substantive representation
- Nested quotas and ceilings

# Substantive Representation

- Norms of party discipline
- Implicit (and explicit) biases





**Symbolic  
Representation**



**Descriptive  
Representation**



**Substantive  
Representation**

# Conclusion

- Future research should focus on the substantive representation of intersectional groups such as women of colour:
  - Institutional and structural restraints to substantive representation
  - What substantive representation looks like in practice for intersectional groups
  - How intersectional groups make a difference in substantive representation

# Resources

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# Thank you

I'd love to hear your thoughts, we can chat  
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