

CARLETON UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY



WINTER 2026 *Colloquium*

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CARLETON UNIVERSITY

Descriptive Representatives as Aspirational Decision-makers

In this talk, I argue that descriptive representatives play a crucial role in politics as aspirational decision-makers. As I conceive this role, a descriptive representative should possess the three following features: 1) be a member of the affected group; 2) have a range of lived experiences that provide valuable insights into the political interests of the affected group; 3) create enabling conditions for democratic participation. In the context of public decision-making, descriptive representatives foster inclusive policies while counteracting those policies that perpetuate exclusion, enabling marginalized individuals to participate fully in political life. What informs the judgment of these representatives? To address this question, I draw on insights from feminist and decision theory, which emphasize how lived experience shapes the formation of subjective values that guide moral action (Ahmed, 2006; Paul, 2016; Harbin, 2016; Callard, 2018). I defend the value of descriptive representation, arguing that the presence of such representatives should be guaranteed within democratic spaces.

FRIDAY, MARCH 27

1:30 P.M.

RICHCRAFT HALL 2420R