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Representation of women: Meaning and make-believe

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Under-representation of women is an inherently ambiguous slogan with a number of layers of meaning. When we seek to increase the presence of women in parliaments it is not only for reasons of justice or recognition; we are also usually seeking to make parliaments more responsive to women in the community. Elected women, however, confront many conflicting pressures and loyalties. In this context, what structures serve to strengthen the responsiveness of parliamentarians to women in the community? This paper explores strategies available for moving the issue of representation beyond numbers to accountability for policy, drawing on evidence from Australia and a number of other countries.

In the 1990s the ‘under-representation of women’ became a slogan of great discursive power, resulting in policy initiatives at every level of the political system, whether sub-national, national, regional or international. It is interesting that this occurred at the same time as post-modern questioning of the usefulness of the category ‘woman’ and an increased emphasis on the contingent nature of gender and other identities. It also happened at the same time as the increased sway of public choice discourse in the English-speaking democracies and the repositioning of equality-seeking groups as rent-seeking ‘special interests’. As I have argued elsewhere the slogan of ‘under-representation’ gains its power from the multiple levels of meaning that are wrapped up in it, encompassing the representation of interests, the representativeness of the legislature and the equal right to act as a representative. I reiterate here some of the meanings and arguments that give resonance to the slogan of under-representation.

Justice

Justice arguments about women's equal right to participate in public decision-making are the easy ones as Anne Phillips has observed, and they are the ones enshrined in international instruments. The right of women to participate in public life on an equal basis with men is inscribed in Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This argument does not rely on women representing women or on women making a difference to public life. It simply assumes, like all equal opportunity arguments, that talent is not confined to one gender and that the absence of women from parliamentary positions is a consequence of direct or indirect discrimination. Such discrimination may include factors such as the electoral system or the structures of political work and political careers, particularly the failure to accommodate family responsibilities or the privileging of gladiatorial styles of politics. It may also include a shortage of mentors, given the added complexities of cross-sex mentoring and the importance of social trust, often based on sameness, in such relationships.

Utility

While the equal opportunity argument has immediate appeal to those who may be the objects of group-based discrimination, justice arguments by themselves rarely convert power-holders. To become politically convincing, justice arguments need to be supplemented by utility arguments. These may be in terms of doubling the pool of talent from which legislators are recruited or in terms of partisan utility – increasing the electoral appeal of parties. Women can provide a ‘new look’ for parties beset by scandal or associated with harsh economic policies. Electoral competition may be brought into play where one party has already significantly increased its female parliamentary representation. Arguments about the supposed utility of increasing the number of women in parliament also slide quickly into ‘making a difference’ arguments about the improvement of standards of parliamentary behaviour and responsiveness to women in the community.

Symbolic arguments

Justice arguments also turn quickly into symbolic arguments. These are themselves of several

different kinds – one stressing effects of the presence of women inside parliament on the status of women outside, another stressing the significance of representativeness for the legitimacy of political institutions and yet another highlighting the cultural significance of the public performance of gender.

The first symbolic argument is that the presence of women in parliament increases respect for women in society and is a form of recognition of the equal status of women, whether or not this is associated with recognition of ‘difference’. Conversely the absence of women may convey the social meaning that women are unable to or unfit to rule. This symbolic argument is also associated with a motivational or role model argument – that the visible presence of women in public life serves to raise the aspirations of other women, the ‘girls can do anything’ effect. Some have suggested this is one of the most important functions that women legislators can perform. The symbolic function of the role model needs to be distinguished from the more active role of the mentor referred to above.

The second and very different symbolic argument that is also wrapped up in the slogan of under-representation is that of institutional legitimacy – the idea that the legitimacy of political institutions will be undermined if significant sections of the community appear to be locked out of them. It assumes political mobilisation of a group identity, in this case gender identity, and a refusal to acknowledge the authority of an institution that does not represent this identity.

The third symbolic argument is less an argument for increasing the number of women in parliament and more an argument for increasing the public representation of different ways of performing gender. It is suggested that the representation of such alternatives in top-level politics increases the cultural choices available to women. They may see that female identity does not have to be bound up with domesticity and that women do not have to emphasise the priority of wife/mother identities, although they may choose to do so. The newly-elected Finnish President, Tarja Halonen, rejoiced when told the day after her election that in her new home, the presidential palace, she would be able to ‘concentrate on her duties’ because all the cooking and cleaning would be done for her.

Representation of values, perspectives, experiences

As we have noted it is common for the equal opportunity argument to be buttressed by the suggestion that the election of women will 'make a difference'. This makes the argument much more appealing, in the context of widespread disenchantment with parliamentary institutions. It is suggested that women's socialisation and family roles will translate into an approach to politics based more on consultation and consensus seeking and less on power-broking and head kicking. Gender is seen as relevant to the way representative roles are likely to be performed and it is expected that the presence of women will reduce the level of aggression found in Westminster parliaments. Women's family roles are also thought to make them more sensitive to the human impact of policy.

It is not just that the electorate expects women to make this difference – interview-based studies consistently show that women MPs themselves would like to have this effect, to replace masculine parliamentary culture with a more consensus-based politics. However the very norms of parliamentary conduct that have resulted in such disenchantment make it difficult for women to perform effectively and make the hoped-for difference. On 19 June 2000, a Labor frontbencher in the Australian federal parliament, Cheryl Kernot MP, made a speech during a condolence debate calling for an end to the masculine culture and ritual stag fights of parliament. Two days later she was herself removed from the chamber for continuing to interject after being warned by the Speaker. The privileging of confrontational politics by the electronic media exacerbates the difficulty of challenging existing norms. One advantage of proportional representation (PR), apart from increasing the representation of women and minorities, is that it shifts parliamentary configurations from two-party shouting matches to multi-party bargaining, supposedly closer to the consensual style of politics with which women feel more comfortable.

Representation of interests

Another part of the argument that women will make a difference relates to the representation of 'women's interests'. I am not concerned here with the theoretical debates over whether the subordination of women gives rise to sufficient commonality to merit the term 'women's interests'.

Rather I am interested in the way this concept operates within broader arguments about 'under-representation'. As the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action phrases it: 'Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account' (§ 181). Arguments for increased representation of women do not invariably include representation of women's interests, and indeed initiatives to increase women's presence in parliaments are sometimes explicitly disassociated from such an objective. In France parity legislation was introduced in 2000, under which parties that do not present equal numbers of men and women candidates will have their campaign funding reduced. It was couched in terms of republican arguments about the equal right to represent the interests of the nation, explicitly rejecting the idea of representing social or cultural difference. In Belgium, the Minister responsible for equal opportunity policy (including the statutory quotas for political representation) told the Senate committee on equal opportunity in November 1999 that parity was about equal status not about the representation of women's interests: 'Elected women do not represent women, but, like men, they represent all citizens'.

Nonetheless, there are general expectations that women politicians will share the concerns of women in the community. The electorate expects greater responsiveness from those who share their social characteristics and women and women's non-government organisations tend to look first to women MPs for support. This contact may itself have consciousness-raising effects. It is women politicians who belong or have belonged to women's organisations who are more aware of gender and gender-related issues. They are also more likely to share or help secure resources to assist women's groups to represent themselves, thus addressing the dilemmas involved in 'representing' the diversity of women.

A recent Inter-Parliamentary Union survey of 200 women parliamentarians in 65 countries found that 89% of them believed they had a special responsibility to represent the needs and interests of women and a common theme was the need to maintain linkages with women's groups for information sharing and support. Only a minority were offended by the suggestion they might be seen as a representative

of their sex. In Sweden, the Parliament Studies of 1985, 1988 and 1994 have likewise shown in each case over 50% of women MPs regarded 'representing the interests/views of women' as very important to them personally, compared with 10% or less of men MPs. While women parliamentarians often articulate a desire to make a difference, both in terms of how politics is done and who is represented, the evidence concerning impact on political discourse is uneven. A recent study of the Australian Senate in the period between 1987 and 1999 found that women in the Australian Senate were five times as likely as their male colleagues to raise issues such as domestic violence and paid parental/maternity leave. There was, however, no simple correlation between the proportion of women in parliament and the amount of attention given to these issues. After the election of a conservative (Coalition) federal government in 1996, the number of interventions on issues of domestic violence and parental/maternity leave went down, although the number of women went up. There were strong partisan as well as gender differences. Over time, Labor women were twice as likely to raise the issues tested for as Coalition women Senators but, interestingly, both female and male Coalition Senators were more likely to raise these issues than male Labor Senators. (The study excluded Senators who intervened on these issues due to front-bench responsibilities).

Within these patterns of partisan and gender influence, the role of critical individuals can also be identified. In the Senate study, one woman outperformed all others over time in raising domestic violence and parental leave issues, although her period with ministerial responsibilities in these areas was excluded from the data set. The role of such critical individuals does not occur in isolation from the existence of structures and networks which validate their concerns. For example, feminist priorities may be reinforced by connections with non-government organisations, with women's agencies within government or with a women's caucus within the parliamentary party as well as by a strong party platform.

In principle, we would expect that in a Westminster system, that the character of parliamentary discourse would largely be determined by party ideology. While the total number of women may go up, they may, as in the Australian case, be from a party in which there is ideological opposition to

'feminism'. By the 1990s the Coalition parties in Australia were positioning themselves as 'governing for the mainstream', undistracted by 'special interests' such as women and other equality-seeking groups. In part this was a response to the rise of the politics of resentment, particularly amongst blue-collar voters who were major victims of economic restructuring. It has meant that Coalition women parliamentarians have been particularly anxious to avoid the career-threatening implications of being identified as an advocate for women or belonging to the sisterhood. Particularly in the absence of a strong community-based women's movement, demands to 'represent women' may be seen as an additional representational burden with few rewards.

Pressure to increase women's presence

In the 1990s, in the context of the rapid increase of the number of democracies in the world, the so-called 'democratic deficit' caused by the under-representation of women in public decision-making became a priority issue for many international bodies. This brought about a mutual reinforcement of national and international agendas, signalled in Australia by the formation (in 1992) of the non-government Women into Politics Coalition. A series of governmental and parliamentary inquiries followed, and a growing volume of action plans and strategies to remove gender imbalances in parliamentary representation. Suffrage centenaries in the 1990s provided additional momentum.

Increased mobilisation around the issue of women's representation was accompanied by a significant upswing in the presence of women in Australian parliaments. From 1972, when women constituted only 2% of Australia's parliamentarians, there had been a gradual increase for two decades. This accelerated in the 1990s, although by 2000 the average representation in Australia's 15 houses of parliament was still just under 25%. As we have noted, the increase has not necessarily been associated with shifts in policy discourse, let alone increased expenditure in areas such as childcare or paid parental leave. As Lisa Young has observed in relation to North America, it may be that the drive to promote women has gained momentum as the drive to further feminist policy agendas has faded.

Australian political parties have had a similar pattern of response to the pressure for increased representation to that found in other countries. In general, parties of the Left have adopted quotas, while those of the Right have preferred more individualist strategies such as training and mentoring programs. The 'contagion' effect, whereby an increase in women candidates by one major party will tend to be matched by the other, is also evident. Outside the mainstream, minor post-materialist parties have not adopted quotas but have by far the highest proportion of women in their parliamentary parties. On the other hand, recent populist parties such as Pauline Hanson's One Nation, have the smallest proportion of women amongst their parliamentary candidates, reflecting their preponderantly male electoral support and policy agendas that include opposition to gun control and advocacy of fathers' rights.

The most complex response to pressure for increased women's representation has come from the Australian Labor Party. In 1994 the Labor Party adopted a target whereby women would constitute 35% of all its parliamentary parties by 2002. Labor women had mobilised to achieve this goal using justice slogans, including the argument often put by former Premier Carmen Lawrence that justice would be achieved when mediocre women had just as much chance of sitting in parliament as mediocre men. The Labor Prime Minister, on the other hand, used a utility argument to justify his support for the target. Unsurprisingly, he referred to the need to harness the talents of all people in the community, rather than to the principle of equal opportunity for mediocre men and women.

Adoption of quotas did not put an end to resistance to women within the party nor to the loss of women MPs on the electoral tide because of their disproportionate presence in marginal rather than safe seats. Historic barriers to women in a trade-union dominated party are today compounded by the strength of formal factions. Women are divided by factional loyalties, the key to advancement within the party, as well as often being sacrificed to deals brokered between male faction leaders. Those rewarded for factional loyalty are not necessarily those most responsive to women in the community. Continuing concerns of this kind led in two different directions: on the one hand to exit and on the other to renewed efforts to achieve voice. The most conspicuous example of exit was the

departure in 1995 of a number of women from the Queensland Branch of the Labor Party to create the Australian Women's Party. Such women's parties have appeared from time to time in Australia's political history; they have had more success in highlighting the issue of women's representation and in bringing pressure on existing parties than in attracting significant electoral support.

Those who opted for voice continued the struggle from within the Labor Party, but using a new organisational strategy. Led by two former women Premiers they set about creating a body independent of party and factional control to provide financial and moral support to endorsed women candidates who met certain criteria. This was modelled on the US EMILY's List set up to raise campaign funds for pro-choice Democrat women candidates. The Australian version of EMILY's List was designed both to assist entry of feminist women into parliament and to hold them accountable for upholding equity commitments. In 1997 it began endorsing Labor women candidates who were able to demonstrate commitment to equity and pro-choice goals to an interviewing panel of senior feminists. Candidates were asked what policies they would advocate to help people balance work and family responsibilities and in what ways they would support other women. Before receiving funding and campaign support, candidates also had to sign a separate questionnaire/declaration relating to abortion. EMILY's List has certainly reinforced an inflow of Labor women into Australian parliaments beyond what would occur with the electoral tide, as can be seen in Figure 1. To what extent it has provided a structure of accountability for feminist commitments is yet to be really tested.

Institution-building activity such as EMILY's List helps provide a forum within professionalised party politics where gender perspectives can be identified and promoted. Women's caucuses within parliamentary parties serve a similar function. For example, the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party Status of Women Committee was created in 1981 and meets weekly when parliament is sitting. It reinforces femocrat monitoring of gender impact of policy. A similar women's caucus exists within the New Zealand Labour Party. Recent Canadian studies have argued the importance of such structures in reinforcing collective identity and aspirations, finding that even feminist

parliamentarians with a commitment to making a difference get isolated from each other by the competing pressures of government.

1. Party affiliation of women in Australian parliaments* 1972-2000

* Combined data for Federal, State and Territory parliaments.

Pressure to increase accountability to women

Both EMILY's List and the Australian Women's Party are examples of the kind of separate institution-building (now often referred to as creation of alternative public spheres) in which political women have engaged since at least the nineteenth century. Such institution-building serves to promote collective identity and to generate alternative discourses as well as to crystallise interests and exert leverage on mainstream institutions. It is the means by which women become collective political actors. It may include women's wings of political parties, women's non-government organisations, women's caucuses within parliaments, women's committees in trade unions and women's units and women's services. It plays an important role in the accountability nexus.

In the post-suffrage period, Australia, like other countries, had a plethora of non-party women's organisations dedicated to women's active citizenship. The continuance of separate associations was justified in the following terms by Laura Bogue Luffman: 'We maintain the principle of Woman's Associations - acting *with*, but not *under*, the men - Associations free to make their own laws, think their own thoughts and work out their own political salvation'. In attempting to increase feminist influence on policy, these organisations tended to emphasise the power of the vote rather than seats in parliament. They believed that if women candidates were shaky on equal opportunity issues or in their understanding of the lives of women as wives, mothers and workers, they would do the cause more harm than good. While the non-party women's organisations could be relied on for messages of support for women candidates or parliamentarians, this involved monitoring and accountability for representation, rather than a *carte blanche*.

The repertoire of action of the non-party women's organisations included the rating of candidates on their record or commitments, a technique first introduced by the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in the late nineteenth century. Candidate questionnaires, ratings and form guides were produced before elections. Another great wave of separate institution-building was inspired by the women's liberation movement. In Australasia the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), a non-party lobby group created in Australia in 1972 and later in New Zealand, was most directly oriented to exerting external pressure on parliamentary politics. Like its predecessors, WEL rated parties and candidates on their knowledge of, and commitment to, issues of particular concern to women. Despite the apparent continuity in techniques of social action, WEL was more immediately inspired by the rating of US presidential candidates reported in the pilot issue of *Ms Magazine*. Ratings were strikingly successful in the 1972 Australian election where WEL used them to place new issues on the policy agenda and obtained rapid implementation after the election of a reform government.

As in other countries with strong party systems, most Australian parliamentarians have little scope to vote other than with their party. Hence influencing, monitoring and rating party policies, particularly at election time, is a first priority for advocacy groups. However there is a decreasing trend for party leaders to feel closely bound by an election platform, and an increase in the number of policy decisions that are taken 'on the run', independent of platform commitments. In this context, monitoring and rating of parliamentary interventions is still important in maintaining an accountability nexus between women's movement organisations and the politicians they hope will represent their issues in parliament. Ratings can be particularly important if they move beyond 'women's issues' to analysis of gender impact of policy platforms as a whole. One more light-hearted but highly news-worthy form of accountability was invented in 1993 by a Labor feminist who is now president of the Legislative Council of New South Wales. Every year hundreds of women descend on Parliament House for the Ernie Awards for Sexist Behaviour, decided by volume of booing.

Redesigning political institutions

In relation to parliament itself, feminists have set about doing two things, which they hope will end up

as one. The first is to unpick the masculine bias of parliamentary institutions so that women can perform more effectively in them; the second is to create structures to make parliaments more sensitive to gender concerns.

We have already noted that PR not only facilitates the election of women but creates conditions for more effective performance, in so far as it is associated with consensual bargaining and consensus seeking rather than a gladiatorial political culture. PR has been introduced for most of Australia's upper houses and has other important consequence in terms of representation. It facilitates the presence of minor post-materialist parties, which are feminised in terms of membership, electoral support, leadership, and policy orientations. It also affects the way in which major party parliamentarians perform their representative functions. Under PR these functions are less tied to serving a geographical constituency and dealing with local issues and there is more scope for representing broader issues that cross geographical boundaries, such as equal opportunity. On the other hand, women often believe that looking after constituencies (sometimes seen as akin to social work) is one of their particular strengths as MPs.

Moving on to parliament itself, we need to consider the way in which women have been differentially incorporated as citizens, meaning that their primary obligations as citizens have been construed as being in the private rather than the public realm. It is only in the last 25 years that there has been real discussion, let alone action, on how public life might be changed to accommodate family responsibilities. Prior to this, women's family responsibilities were construed as insuperable barriers to equal participation in public life.

Parliamentary arrangements have assumed that parliamentary representatives are not at the same time primary carers for family members. Indeed political careers have been regarded in the past as typically a two-person career, where the 'incorporated wife' not only takes over full responsibility for the care of the family but also stands in for the representative, particularly in constituency roles.

Today, recommendations for childcare centres, family-friendly sitting hours, parliamentary sessions

aligned with school terms and increased travel for family members have become standard in proposals to reduce the pressure on parliamentarians with family responsibilities. While the Scandinavian and German parliaments have creches, this is uncommon in the English-speaking democracies. In Australia late-night sittings were limited in the federal parliament in 1994, but the parliament became less family-friendly again after a change of government in 1996. While it can be argued that late-night sittings shorten the parliamentary week and enable parliamentarians to return to their families inter-state, perhaps over 2000 miles away, it does not have the same benefit for the families of Canberra-based parliamentary and political staff. In 1999 the Tasmanian Premier limited that State's parliamentary sitting times to 6pm, saying that later sitting hours were discriminating against women with young families.

Another aspect of masculine institutional bias is the kind of confrontational politics encouraged by Westminster two-party systems, exacerbated by the physical configuration of the chamber so that the rival teams line up against each other. Few women perceive themselves as doing well in such adversarial chamber politics where they have to contend with both psychological and physical intimidation, such as the hostile wall of sound from the benches on the other side. Chambers where parliamentarians are seated by region, as in Sweden, or by lot, as in Iceland, may mitigate the pressure towards aggressive confrontation. Women parliamentarians tend to feel more 'at home' in more intimate forums such as provided by parliamentary committees, in which members from different parties sit next to each other rather than shouting at each other from opposite sides of the chamber. One recent South Australian inquiry into the effects of parliamentary procedure and practice on women's parliamentary participation suggested that a way to both facilitate women's participation and improve the quality of legislative debate was to enhance the role of parliamentary committees in the legislative process.

The Australian Senate has a strong committee system, with standing committees functioning as both legislation and references committees. When functioning as references committees (and any matter may be referred by the Senate, including current legislation) they have a non-government majority

and non-government chair. Such chairs come from both the Opposition and from the minor party that holds the balance of power, and women have dominated the chairing of, for example, community affairs legislation and references committees. However parliamentary committee work is often 'low profile' for the very reason that, at its best, it does not offer the confrontational images on which the electronic media thrive.

Committees are not only a forum for effective performance by women parliamentarians, they may also serve the responsiveness aim by providing a structural focus on gender issues. In Australia, the women's budget process introduced in 1984 required all portfolios to provide gender-disaggregated information on outlays for the purposes of a special budget document. Senate Estimates Committees could then use this data to pursue issues of the gender impact of Budget decisions. Unfortunately the women's budget process was finally abolished with the election of a conservative government in 1996 and much less gender-disaggregated budgetary information is now being provided by government; committees usually have to make special requests for it.

Subject-specific standing committees may also help raise awareness of gender issues - for example, committees on women's rights in the Irish, Spanish and European parliaments and on equal opportunities for men and women in the Belgian and Luxembourg parliaments. Such committees have varying mandates, including in the case of the Belgian Senate looking inwards at the working of the parliament and issues such as family-friendly sitting hours and the gender balance of expert witnesses. There is now a conference that brings together parliamentary committees responsible for equal opportunities for women and men in European Union member states. Apart from such specialist committees, a general requirement may be introduced, as in Sweden, that all parliamentary committees take gender impact into account when examining legislative proposals.

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Considerations of how to make parliaments more women-friendly must also extend to how to facilitate access by women in the community to the parliamentary process. In Australia federal parliamentary committees hold hearings around the country. When a Senate Committee inquired in

1995 into outworking in the garment industry, where most employees are women from non-English speaking backgrounds, advertisements were broadcast on ethnic radio stations and submissions were taken through the telephone interpreter service. In addition, committee enquiries are advertised and submissions taken through the internet and there are live webcasts of hearings. Evidence and discussion papers are also published electronically to stimulate community dialogue. One Canadian practice that has been proposed in Australia but not implemented, is the funding of community groups to prepare their submissions to parliamentary inquiries – a way of strengthening weak voices in the deliberative process.

In 1989-1992 a benchmark parliamentary inquiry was held into equal opportunity for women by the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee of the Australian House of Representatives. As well as holding hearings around the country and taking evidence from many witnesses, the Committee entered into partnerships with bodies with gender expertise to ensure its terms of reference were fully explored. These bodies included one non-government organisation, and three women's agencies within government, which co-sponsored public seminars with the Committee. Considerable efforts were made to ensure that a cross-section of women in the community were able to participate in these seminars. For example, after speakers such as equal opportunity commissioners and barristers explained difficulties caused by existing definitions of indirect discrimination, the audience broke up into syndicate groups to come up with creative solutions. The sense of ownership created by this process (together with the government's shortfall in women's votes) played an important role in the eventual acceptance by government of most of the Committee's recommendations for strengthening equal opportunity legislation.

So parliamentary committees are one important avenue to making parliaments more women friendly, and initiatives can include specialised standing committees on gender equality, as well as requiring all committees routinely to examine the gender impact of proposals and to hear from both male and female witnesses. Another issue worthy of consideration is the treatment of parliamentary petitions. In most Western democracies petitions are a form of political participation in which women are more

likely to engage than men, and this is true also of Australia. The Australian Senate has, since 1997, allowed the tabling of electronic petitions, as long as a Senator will vouch that the full text was visible to those who added their names on-line. The largest electronic petition tabled so far was initiated by women protesting against the imposition of a GST on tampons. (The petitions, with some 23,000 signatories were tabled in the Senate in February and June 2000.)

In the Australian House of Representatives a new procedure was adopted in 1999 of tabling an annual report detailing petitions and ministerial responses to them, signalling increased responsiveness to this form of political action. Similar reforms have also taken place in the Legislative Council of Western Australia, where the Constitutional Affairs Committee is tasked with calling for submissions and organising hearings on petitions. While this may be seen as increased responsiveness to a form of political action often engaged in by women, it is a two-edged sword, as it is also popular with anti-abortion and men's rights groups seeking changes to family law and child support formulae.

To return to the norms of parliamentary behaviour, we have noted it is very difficult even for determined women to shift established norms of adversarial behaviour in Westminster systems. What about the case when determined women help design a new parliamentary system, as in the campaign for a Scottish parliament? When women are centrally involved in creating new political institutions, are they able to ensure features, which will promote more consensual and inclusive forms of political behaviour?

Alice Brown has provided a compelling account of how Scottish women campaigned both for greater parliamentary representation of women and for new ways of conducting parliamentary politics. The Scottish parliament not only adopted 'family-friendly hours of operation' but also established a standing Equal Opportunities Committee with a mandate directed both inwards and outwards, requiring it 'to consider and report on matters relating to equal opportunities and upon the observance of equal opportunities within the parliament'. In general the Scottish parliament established a much stronger committee system than that found at Westminster, and as we have seen parliamentary

committees provide a forum both for effective performance by women MPs and for outreach to women in the community.

One of the most striking ways in which the Scottish parliament tried to distinguish itself from Westminster was through the adoption of a European-style horseshoe-shaped seating system instead of the traditional opposing benches. This was a logical accompaniment of a new electoral system that fostered a multiparty system, but it was also seen as a symbolic break with the adversarial ways of Westminster. The ritual warfare of Westminster both disadvantages women and feeds into community disenchantment with politics.

Conclusion

My argument has been that to increase the number of women in parliament, or even to increase the number of feminists in parliament, is insufficient to ensure that 'women' are better represented. This point is often obscured by politically persuasive but ambiguous slogans such as 'the under-representation of women'. What is needed, if public decision-making is to become more women friendly, are structures that mandate a focus on the gender impact of policy, and that facilitate the representation of women's concerns in the policy process. It is important to institutionalise consideration of gender impact at all levels of the policy process, rather than relying on the presence of women alone to have this effect.

The question of accountability for the gender outcomes of public decision-making is equally important. All politicians should be held accountable for their contribution to improving gender equity. This is the principle applied in the gender audit of government programs and in international reporting, where 'mainstreaming' of gender accountability is regarded as a fundamental principle. Just as gender equity in government cannot be made the responsibility of women's units alone, so responsibility for representing women's interests in parliament cannot be borne solely by women.

For over a hundred years women's non-government organisations have played an important role in

the accountability process, through monitoring and rating the performance of parliamentarians and parliamentary candidates, as well as rating party policies and policy outcomes. While women's organisations have provided support for women candidates, this support has been tied to monitoring performance – that burden of expectations that women candidates often find somewhat onerous. Nonetheless, this is part of the web of institutional support and accountability processes that is required if parliaments are to better represent women, rather than simply be more representative.