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The Grit in the Oyster?

Women's Parliamentary Organizations & the Substantive Representation of Women

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Abstract

This article addresses a foundational question of political representation: how representatives act for those they represent. In a shift away from analyses of individual representatives' attitudes and behaviour, we identify women's parliamentary organizations (WPOs) as potential critical sites and critical actors for women's substantive representation. Offering one of the most in depth studies to-date, our illustrative case is the longstanding UK Parliamentary Labour Party's Women's Committee (WPLP). With a unique data set, and using both quantitative and qualitative methods, we systematically examine the WPLP's efforts to substantively represent women over more than a decade. We find that the WPLP sustains its focus on a small number of women's issues interacts with party leadership to advance women's interests in a feminist direction. Our findings capture processes of political change, a frequently under-explored stage in studies of substantive representation. We close by identifying the potential for comparative research in this area.

Key words: Women's substantive representation; critical mass; critical actors; political change; gender and politics; feminizing; women's parliamentary organizations

Introduction

The simple contention that substantive representation flows from descriptive representation has underpinned much gender and politics research over the last two decades. Here, we rethink this classic question by shifting attention away from the behaviour of individual women legislators to analyse Women's Parliamentary Organizations (WPOs), an umbrella term for various types of women's committees, caucuses, and more informal groups (Sawer and Turner 2016; Piscopo 2014; Celis et al 2016). We contend that WPOs constitute a 'missing link' that can bring the relationship between women's descriptive and substantive representation into better focus (Harder 2017).

Key questions relating to substantive representation are revisited via a case study of the UK Parliamentary Labour Party's Women's Committee (WPLP). Specifically, we systematically identify (i) the actors of women's substantive representation (which women legislators are members of, and active in, the WPO) (ii) the content of women's substantive representation (how the WPLP defines women's issues and women's interests), and crucially (iii) the processes by which the group seeks to act for women (how and upon whom the WPLP seeks to have a re-gendering effect). Leveraging original qualitative and quantitative data we are able to demonstrate: the existence of a set of women MPs who over time constitute the WPLP's core membership and fortify the Committee's work; the WPLP's on-going focus on a small number of women's issues over more than a decade; and the

Committee's capacity to interact directly with and - in their view - hold to account the Labour party leadership *vis a vis* what the Committee defines as women's interests. Our analysis suggests that the WPLP is exemplary of the way in which a self-identified feminist organization can engender political change, even in a highly constrained masculinised context.[1]

We begin with a brief review of established theoretical claims linking descriptive and substantive representation, along with a summary of associated criticisms. We then justify our turn to parliamentary organizations 'for' women, contending that these have neither in general, nor in the case of the WPLP in particular, been subjected to systematic empirical analysis in respect of substantive representation, with the exception of Harder's (2017) recent study of a Danish committee. Rejecting a categorical distinction between women's legislative committees and women's caucuses, we outline a set of generalisable research questions through which WPOs can be empirically analysed. Our original and unique data and mixed-method methodological approach are then outlined before the presentation of our empirical findings, which are organized to speak to the substantive representation literature's 'agreed' research framework (Childs and Lovenduski 2013). Overall, we claim that it makes most sense to see WPOs as both sites of, and potential critical actors in, women's substantive representation within masculinized legislatures. We close with a reflection on how our approach could be exported to comparative or other single-country case studies.

Rehearsing Women's Substantive Representation

In the 'politics of presence' literature, a re-gendering of the content of politics is said to be one likely, albeit not guaranteed, consequence of the changed composition of our elected institutions (Phillips 1995; Mansbridge 1999; Williams 1998). The standard account goes like this: women representatives act for women because they are feminist or at least gender conscious, act in a feminist direction, but do so in institutions that are largely gender-insensitive (Celis and Childs 2018). A plethora of global empirical research finds much that is positive in this purported relationship (see Childs and Lovenduski 2013), even as it reveals that processes and outcomes are more complex, contingent, and contested than this optimistic account suggests (Celis et al 2008; Weldon 2012).

In simple terms, critical mass theory roughly contends that substantive representation will come about as a result of there being a 'critical mass' of women in a legislature. Only as their numbers increase - usually taken to be 30% (Dahlerup 1988) - will women be able to work more effectively together to promote

women-friendly policy change and to influence their male colleagues to accept

and approve legislation promoting women's concerns (Childs and Krook 2008).

In recent years, this approach has been criticized for a naivety deriving from the concept's heritage in physics (Childs and Krook 2008). Unlike science there is no magic in numbers in politics (Beckwith 2007). The likelihood of women representatives 'acting for women' and delivering women's substantive representation is mediated by a myriad of factors, including their newness, party identity, and institutional marginalization (see Childs and Lovenduski 2012). The political contexts within which women act, not least their gendered parliaments, are

less passive backdrops and more constitutive of, women's substantive representation. Critical mass theory also suggests a theoretically troubling essentialism that assumes women are all the same and stands accused of privileging a universal and feminist definition of women's interests (Celis and Childs 2012). Nor can it include acts for women undertaken by male representatives (Celis et al 2014) for its claims rest on increases in the numbers and percentages of women. The preferable concept of critical actors (Childs and Krook 2008) leaves open the identity of those who act for women, defining them in terms of what they do rather than who they are. Male or female, these representatives initiate policy proposals on their own and often – but not necessarily – embolden others to take steps to promote policies for women, regardless of the number of female representatives present in a particular institution (Childs and Krook 2008, 734). The tendency to focus on the actions of individual elected women representatives, albeit at the aggregate level, has also been called into question. This critique comes from scholarship on women's movements (Weldon 2002; Beckwith 2013), gender mainstreaming and femocrats (McBride and Mazur 2012), women and executives (Annesley and Gains 2010; Gains and Lowndes 2014), and non-elected actors within processes of representation (Saward 2010). Based on such studies the actors of women's substantive representation are frequently agreed to be multiple and collective, acting within and outside legislatures, and to be both elected and non-elected.

In this context, contemporary scholars of women's substantive representation are guided to answer eight, linked questions: (i) why should women be represented? (ii) who are the representatives of women? (iii) which women are represented (iv)

where does the representation occur? (v) how is the representation done? (vi) when does it take place? (vii) to whom are representatives accountable? and (viii) how effective is the (claimed) representation? (Childs and Lovenduski 2013 citing Celis et al. 2008; Lovenduski and Gaudagnini 2010; Dovi 2007, 2010) This framework informs our analysis as we turn now to consideration of women's parliamentary organisations as potential sites of, and actors in, women's substantive representation.

Women's Parliamentary Organizations & Women's Substantive Representation

Women's Parliamentary Organizations (WPOs) refer to groups also known as women's parliamentary bodies or 'women specific legislative initiatives' (Piscopo 2014). Two types are usually identified in the practitioner and academic literature: (i) legislative committees – formal groupings that play regular legislative or policy roles addressing women or gender, and (ii) women's caucuses – groups of women legislators acting together across party (Piscopo 2014). These are not, however, mutually exclusive: a legislature may have one or both, or even something that matches neither definition, even as it is recognizable or self-identifies as a WPO (Celis et al 2016).[2]

The establishment of a WPO tends to follow an influx of women representatives in to a legislature, and their presence has become a core criterion when identifying 'Gender Sensitive Parliaments' (Sawer and Turner 2016, 765; www.ipu.org, Childs 2016). Their creation can be a study of institutional re-gendering (Challender and Childs 2018), but our enquiry here is narrower, focusing less on how WPOs come about, and more about their role in 'acting for 'women. As

Mette Marie Staehr Harder puts it (2017, 437 emphasis added): WPOs constitute '*new arenas* for problems, solutions and choice opportunities for actors devoted to this type of representation'. To this we add, WPOs have the potential to constitute themselves as *actors* in the process of women's substantive representation when they seek to act collectively.[3]

We do not see it as necessary to accept the above distinction between women's committees and caucuses when studying women's substantive representation (Piscopo 2014; Mitchell-Mahoney 2013). Even as we accept that not all women's caucuses explicitly include, or should include, a policy or legislative dimension, most do (www.ipu.org; Mitchell-Mahoney 2013; Oliver 2005).[4] And in this, they are seeking the substantive representation of women (Piscopo 2014). Moreover, many caucuses are, like committees, formal, with written rules, well-defined structures, clear membership, 'public allegiances identifiable' to members and non-members, and official sanctions (Piscopo 2014, 7). Reasons for participation might very well be the same too (cf Piscopo 2014, 15). Nor do we assume a priori that committees are inherently more effective than caucuses at delivering substantive representation. This is an empirical question, and likely to reflect criteria other than their formal designation (see Piscopo 2014). Harder's (2017) analysis of the Danish Committee on Gender Equality establishes, for example, that even whilst the Committee did not seek to 'add' gender to legislation (Holli & Harder 2016) nor increase 'parliamentary specialization', it was able to ensure 'parliamentary control' of the executive, and 'interaction between parliament and civil society' (Harder 2017, 453, 441-2).[5] Alongside this, we note Mitchell-Mahoney's observation (2013, 9-10)

that 'women who meet with other women are slightly more likely to work on women's issues bills than those who do not'. The IPU also suggest that caucuses are 'particularly effective in changing legislation and policies from a gender perspective and raising awareness about gender equality' (IPU). Moreover, Sue Carroll's (1991) study of US state legislatures, designed to examine the impact of critical mass, established more than two decades ago a relationship between the presence of a women's legislative caucus and the passage of legislation dealing with women, children and the family.

We define a WPO in an inclusive fashion: *a regularized but not necessarily formal association of legislators formed to sustain women's presence in the political institution, and, or to engender women's representation, descriptive, substantive, and symbolic*. We take from Leah Oliver (2005) some of the different characteristics, forms, resources, and activities that help identify the ways in which, and extent to which, WPO might be positioned to act for women (Table 1).

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Drawing on emergent research, Table 2 sets out a set of core research questions for the study of WPOs. These permit study of their role in the oft-hidden processes that link women's descriptive and substantive representation[6], and in so doing, should address the aforementioned '8 question' substantive representation research framework.[7]

At the outset it is useful to determine *how a WPO conceives of itself fitting with, and acting within, a legislature*. In other words, how is the WPO alert to the masculinized tendencies of the institution in which it sits? Is it seeking to support women representatives as they act as representatives (in the face of institutional sexism)? And/or is the WPO seeking to articulate a particularly gendered issue agenda that it perceives to be otherwise missing? Of course, we should also acknowledge that both a WPO's motive and focus may change over time.

Membership speaks to the politics of women-only spaces, intra-party cohesion, and inter-party competition. In gender unequal parliaments, the appeal of women only-spaces may seem self-evident to many women legislators (Childs 2004). These undoubtedly permit the generation of group perspectives (Sawer and Turner 2016, 767); can engender 'collaborative relationships' between women (Barnes 2016, 48; Childs 2013); and enhance women's participation in the policy-making process. But such a choice risks attendant marginalization, lesser effectiveness, and can limit who has the opportunity to serve as a critical actor (more of which later).[8]

Distinctions between members relating to *participation levels* are necessary to more precisely document the work of the WPO; whether some members 'do' more than others. There are also issues of *sustainability*. For example, are women's regular meetings over dinner merely social, or might they play important roles in creating and reinforcing the bonds that underpin actions more directly related to the women's substantive representation and the ongoing health of the WPO?[9]

How does the WPO decide upon its *policy agenda* (where it has one)? This speaks once again to membership, but also to political ideology and democracy, and

of which women are substantively represented by the WPO. *Cross-party women's membership* might look most attractive: increasing the overall size of a WPO brings symbolic gains, potentially making the WPO the recognised voice of 'all' women. Yet, this may give rise to a narrowing in the range of issues acted upon, given the likely need for partisan consensus. It might also render the WPO less effective, substantively speaking, as it prioritises issues that are not necessarily the most salient but rather those where the distance of partisan difference is most easily overcome. In contrast, where membership is party specific, there is likely to be greater internal cohesion regarding both what constitutes women's issues and in respect of what is agreed to be 'in the interests of women'.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

We might also expect WPOs to adopt different *modes of activity* depending on their form (e.g. intra- or cross-party, women only or mixed). But WPO action is likely linked also to questions of resources and capacity and legitimacy and power, not least the relationship of the WPO to the party (or parties) of government. We might hypothesize a well-resourced and highly institutionalized women's organization to be better positioned to deliver substantive representation than one that is poorly funded, relies on the capacity and political capital of individuals, and which finds itself marginalized within the institution. Yet, Petra Ahrens' (2016) analysis of the European Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee (FEMM) shows how members negotiated its status, particularly its voluntary membership, to their

advantage. Arguably WPOs, regardless of whether they have a formal legislative or scrutiny remit (Holli and Harder 2016), will need to work with and through those who occupy positions of power within masculinised legislatures. This in turn, raises substantive and theoretical questions about *who gets to be regarded as the 'critical actors'* for women. Without examining the groundwork, or even ground-softening, put in by a WPO, our understanding of how substantive representation comes about is much diminished.

We might also anticipate a WPO acting differently - presenting a different 'face' - depending on the actors or audience it is addressing, internally as well as externally, if, indeed, it is addressing external audiences. This begs questions of the WPO's *relationship with those they claim to represent*: a WPO open to women beyond the legislature might be considered more responsive and accountable, and hence feminist (Celis et al 2016; Sawer 2015). Finally, in a more general sense, a WPO's strategy for pursuing women's substantive representation is likely be conditioned by wider political contexts: the health of the economy, for example, or other kinds of fundamental shifts in the lived experience of women in society.

Data and Case Study

The WPLP is a feminist, women-only parliamentary body. When it was established in 1982, its founder Harriet Harman MP pointedly sought both the election of more Labour women MPs *and* the prioritization of women's issues and feminist perspectives as part of the party's policy agenda (Lovenduski 2005). Previous mainstream and gender research has had little to say about the WPLP. Interviews

with Labour women MPs in the 1990s and 2000s suggested that it constituted an important site for women's substantive representation and work on new Labour women MPs' friendships suggested this was part of the story of women's participation in the WPLP (Childs 2004, 2013). Until now, these claims have not been subject to further empirical analysis.

We draw on three original sources of data and, like Harder (2017), we see the value in combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods.[10] First, is extensive qualitative interview data comprising over 40 semi-structured interviews conducted between 2013 and 2015 with individuals associated with the WPLP. Thirteen held executive office; 20 held government office; and the rest were ordinary members, including 'good', 'fair' and 'poor' attendees.[11] Most interviews lasted around 45 minutes, were recorded at Westminster (2013-14) and fully transcribed. 2015 interviews included a few Ministers – male and female - identified in the first round of interviews as particularly responsive to the WPLP.

Second is an individual-level dataset registering members' attendance patterns generated from the meetings of WPLP meetings between 2001 and 2015. Attendance is coded on a meeting-by-meeting basis for each person. This permits the computation of overall patterns of attendance as well as limited analysis of predictors of attendance.

Third is a text corpus generated from the minutes of WPLP meetings between 2001 and 2015, though owing to extensive missing or limited data from both 2001 and 2015, we only analyse data from the years 2002-14 inclusive.[12] Above and beyond facilitating the construction of the individual-level dataset described above,

the minutes permit further disaggregation of attendance by internal and external attendees, the identification of WPLP issue priorities, linkages within and outside of the WPLP, and a general sense of WPLP activities over the period.

Patterns of Attendance

The WPLP is open to all Labour women MPs and Peers, some 224 potential attendees in the period under study. Reviewing our data, attendance was never a majority activity among Labour women MPs and Peers, numbers of which ranged from 81 to 99 and from 52 to 66 throughout the period, respectively, as shown in Figure 1.[13] Overall attendance ranged from a high of 44 (June 2005) to a low of 2 (July 2012), variation which might mirror the changes in the overall number of possible members shown in Figure 1.[14] There were 180 meetings during this period, three of which we were unable to determine attendance numbers for.[15] Outside of these cases the average number of attendees at meetings (2002-2014) was 15. Attendance varies only slightly based on the presence of external visiting speakers from the Labour frontbench (a mean of 16 attendees compared to 14).

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

The question of whose attendance underpins the WPLP can be examined by analysing raw attendance count data. Looking at this for each entry cohort of MPs, MPs elected prior to 1997 (*n*=27) attended an average of 20 meetings, MPs elected in 1997 (*n*=61) an average of 23 meetings, 2001 (*n*=4) an average of 45 meetings, 2005

(*n*=27) 21 meetings, and 2010 (*n*=27) 9 meetings. This data suggests that, during our period of study, all cohorts played a relatively equal role, barring the outlier of 2001 which is owing to the uncommonly high rate of attendance of one MP who entered the Commons at that election.

Turning to individual patterns of attendance, for each MP or Peer we calculate the number of meetings they attended as percentage of those that they were eligible to attend. The number of eligible meetings varies by individual, based on their parliamentary tenure and dates of entry and exit. As such, this percentage figure offers a more accurate measure for comparing attendance patterns than a raw individual count. Figure 2 presents a histogram of the distribution of attendance patterns using this percentage figure. The mean percentage of eligible meetings attended by MPs or Peers is 17%, or just under one out of every five. This ranges from members who attended zero eligible meetings to those who attended 77%, or almost four out of every five.

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

There is some variation in attendance dependent on factors including entry cohort, which House the member sits in and, in the case of MPs, whether they were selected and elected via an all-woman shortlist (AWS). MPs elected for the first time before 1997 (*n*=27) attended an average of 18% of eligible meetings, while those MPs elected in 1997 (*n*=61) went to an average of 22% of eligible meetings.[16] Looking at the other

two cohorts with significant numbers of new women MPs elected, 2005 and 2010, MPs elected at these elections attended an average of 21% and 16% of eligible meetings, respectively. The four women MPs elected for the first time in 2001 attended an average of 30% of eligible meetings. Suggestive of a small quota effect (Childs and Krook 2012), women elected via Labour's All Women Shortlist party quota (n=33) attended 22% of eligible meetings on average, this in comparison to the 16% attended by their colleagues elected via open lists or who were appointed to the House of Lords (n=189).

MPs (n=147) attended almost twice as many eligible meetings than Peers (n=75), 20% and 11% respectively. Attendance by frontbench members comes up against the issue of time pressure although the WPLP members are sympathetic to such constraints and the differences are fairly small: the mean percentage of eligible meetings attended by MPs or Peers who served in either the Cabinet or Shadow Cabinet during the period of study (n=33) is 16% compared to 17% for those who did not hold such positions. In Appendix C, we present regression models of individual-level variation in WPLP meeting attendance that confirm many of these patterns, although our ability to model individual-level attendance extensively is limited by sample size concerns. In terms of the top ten attendees (Table 3), we see evidence of membership of the Executive Committee (our knowledge of which is detailed in Appendix B) driving these: Julie Morgan, Fiona Mactaggart, Sheila Gilmore, Barbara Keeley, Joan Ruddock, Lorna Fitzsimons, and Barbara Follett all held Executive Committee positions and comprise a significant portion of the top ten attendees.

Member Motivations to 'Act for Women'

The make-up of the WPLP is best understood in terms of a shared gendered identity and a consciousness of gendered interests.[17] Attendees had been active in other women's organisations within the party; wanted to 'promote women in the party'; and were 'carrying the fire for women's issues'. There was an overwhelming sense that members were feminists.[18] The most popular configuration of reasons for participation is captured by the following MP:

> [it was] pretty automatic for me…[it] reflected my interests… a natural thing to do, to meet together with other women members of the PLP…I also knew other women who were going.

That attendance was simply the obvious or natural thing to do was mentioned by 11 interviewees. This was closely followed by prior interest or activism on women's issues, and then an invocation of it being akin to some kind of duty to attend - both being mentioned by 10 interviewees. Other MPs stated that they attended with their cohort. The relative consistency in attendance rates across the cohorts included in the study, discussed above, offers empirical support for this claim. Interviewees used a number of adjectives and sentiments to describe the WPLP's atmosphere, style or tone: safe (5 members); informal (5 members); supportive (3 members); comfortable

(3 members); and private or trusting (3 members). The WPLP was said to contrast to the tone of the meetings of the full Parliamentary Labour Party.

For its members, the WPLP was also a '*political* coming-together'; a party women's caucus where the women could identify their collective perspectives and policy agenda. This perception evidently underpins the first role of the WPLP: inserting women's perspectives, issues and interests onto the Party's and, given they were in power for much of the time, the Government's agenda. This goal was itself two-fold: first, it is about the ways in which the WPLP would introduce 'a woman's angle'. MPs talk about 'a feminist approach to politics and policy making that we have got to get across the whole gamut of policy'. Secondly, it is about articulating particular women's issues, 'things that only women bother about', and issues that were high in the priority list of women'. The starting point was a shared perception that in the absence of 'reminding the guys' - male Ministers, young male advisors, and the civil service - to feminize their policies, 'things' will get neglected. In their words, the group was 'breaking new ground', 'pushing new boundaries'.

Women's Issues and the Interests of Women

Of interest is whether the WPLP focused on particular women's issues during the period of study. Beginning with our interview data, we find that members explicitly invoke a number of issues under the rubric of 'women's issues': childcare, violence, pensions, the institution of Parliament itself, and caring. All were mentioned multiple times. These issues were said to be 'bottom up' - stemming from the

'greater contact' women MPs felt they had with women and women's voluntary groups. That said, three critics of the Group suggested these concerns reflected a metropolitan feminism, and or group members' self-interest.

Building on this qualitative analysis, we leverage the unique text data included in the WPLP minutes and use structural topic models (STM) to computationally estimate the topics discussed by the group.[19] STM offers a more objective purchase than qualitative analysis alone, specifically giving tools to (i) identify the topics of discussion at the meetings over the period of study, (ii) consider how topic prevalence varies conditional on time and/or the individuals present at a meeting, and (iii) see the extent to which individual politicians are associated with given topics. The primary purpose of using STM is to identify the issues the WPLP discuss in meetings – in other words, the 'topics' of the aforementioned topic model. To do this, we estimate an STM with a covariate for the year in which the meeting took place, taking into account the fact that we would expect certain topics of discussion to vary in prevalence across the period of study. Based on the initial simple model, which analyses minutes from meetings between 2002 and 2014, four topics of discussion are identified. We compared models with varying numbers of identified topics (see Appendix A) and, based on the diagnostic values for each, settled on four as the optimal number.

We then generated word clouds (top 10 most frequent words for each topic) for the topics in order to explore two of our research questions: what the topics are and who, if anyone, appears to be associated with them.[20]

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

As shown in Figure 3, topic 1 is the procedural topic and is associated with WPLP's internal workings. Terms relating to meetings, such as 'held', 'record', 'contribute', and 'raise' are prevalent. Topic 2 is concerned with violence against women and women's bodily integrity. Terms such as 'violence', 'equal', 'campaign', 'consult', and 'debate' indicate the activities of the WPLP in this particular issue area. Topic 3 focuses on issues around care and caring. Terms like 'care', 'childcare', and 'older' are prevalent. Finally, Topic 4 focuses on the question of pensions and the wider gendered nature of the economy. Key terms in this topic include 'pensions', (former Chancellor and Prime Minister) 'Gordon Brown', and 'bill'. When reviewing the topics in light of the qualitative findings above, we considered them to be plausible portrayals of the overall activities of the group and the identification of these topics via STM allows us to address our research question regarding the content of substantive representation undertaken by the WPLP.

FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

Of interest following topic identification is the extent to which these topics are consistent in their prevalence across the period of study. In Figure 4, we examine the relative prevalence of each topic in the period 2002-2005 and 2010-2014 and find that although some topics are seen marginally more in one period than the other, there are no statistically significant differences in the prevalence of any topic between the two periods. This suggests that the issue focus of the WPLP was largely consistent throughout the period of study. This is notable given the two periods compared here are quite distinct: between 2002-5, Labour formed a strong second-term government in a time of economic growth whereas between 2010-4, Labour were in opposition following a devastating economic crash and recession. As such, the fact that we do not see significant shifts in topic prevalence across these two time-periods is indicative of a strong and continuing preoccupation with the issues in question on the part of the WPLP.

Representative Acts

In promoting women's issues and interests, the WPLP is claimed by many of its members to have successfully re-gendered the Party's and Government's agenda. MPs use a range of metaphors and analogous descriptions: the 'grit in the oyster', 'sleeping dragon', 'bending the ears' of Ministers, 'sharp heels and sharp elbows', and as a 'solid, nice glowing core presence'. WPLP members considered that they effected change in a centrifugal fashion, bolstered by a sense of collective identity. For a large number of women MPs this was also about supportive relationships with women Ministers who attended the group.[21] Not only did this secure some vertical

accountability, it was also claimed to empower the Ministers. According to one Minister:

> Without the WPLP … I would have been a minnow, at the bottom of an anonymous department…nothing would have happened…How do you get…[legislation] into the Queen's speech? …the WPLP committee was a reason – *a side within a side*. (emphasis added)

Nonetheless, a group of women Ministers who claimed to attend the WPLP whilst they were in office did not feel that the group was determining of their ministerial work, even as they felt 'of the group' and shared its ends. For Labour's official Ministers for Women the relationship was said to be more direct. The attendance figures discussed earlier confirm that Ministers (and Shadow Ministers) continued to attend the WPLP at a similar rate to non-Ministers.

There are also invited speakers - broadly defined as anyone addressing the group as a whole - at 91% of WPLP meetings. At 60% of meetings, this involves a representative of the Labour frontbench (either Cabinet or Shadow Cabinet); at 25% a member of party staff, usually from Millbank (the party's headquarters); and at 26% of meetings there is also a further speaker external to both the parliamentary party and party headquarters. Often, this is a representative from a woman's advocacy group such as the Fawcett Society or Labour Women Councillors Association, or a guest academic or expert speaker.

A relevant question is whether the WPLP spoke about their core issues, identified previously via STM, in a different way when frontbench representatives of the Party were present at meetings. In Figure 5, we analyse the within-topic prevalence of words conditional on whether a frontbench representative was present at a meeting. In the figure, the presence of a frontbench representative is indicated by '1' and the absence of any such figure by a '0'. Figure 5 can be interpreted as follows: if a word is strongly to the right, in the section of the figure labelled '1', it can be considered to be a term that is more prevalent within the topic in the minutes of meetings where a frontbench representative was present as a speaker. An example of this would be 'older' within Topic 3 in Figure 5. The more that words collect in the centre of the figure, the more we can interpret them as being equally likely to arise within a topic whether a frontbench representative was present or not. As such, topics having fewer words in the centre in the figure can be seen as indicative of greater differentiation in the way the WPLP talked about that topic conditional on the presence of frontbench speakers. In Figure 5, Topic 4 can be seen as an example of this, whereby the terms used to discuss pensions and the gendered nature of the economy differ reasonably markedly depending on the presence of a frontbench speaker. Conversely, Topic 1 seems to be largely discussed in similar terms regardless of this, something that is perhaps to be expected given its general content. Overall, though, Figure 5 offers some evidence that the WPLP shifts the way in

which it discusses key issues of interest when frontbench members are present. This is perhaps indicative of a deliberate strategy on the part of members who seek to communicate with these higher profile individuals in the most striking and effective way possible. Returning to the word clouds presented in Figure 3, this might include speaking about pension reform to Gordon Brown in his capacity as either Chancellor or Prime Minister in a different way to how one would discuss this with a fellow backbencher.

What of other Ministers formally invited to come before the WPLP? Such invitations are considered central to the group's actions and the potential to effect substantive representation. Of course, Ministers might seek out opportunities to present at the WPLP. Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine the relative prominence of either approach from the data. There was, notwithstanding, a strong sense that invited Ministers would almost always attend. The WPLP was regarded by the party (at least as perceived by its members) as the legitimate voice of women in the parliamentary party. It was not a group to 'piss off'. One member put it more prosaically:

> They would sooner be caught running around the tea room with their pants down than they would be caught saying anything wrong…insulting or disparaging about the WPLP …but in the back of their minds – now I am totally putting thoughts into their heads – they are probably thinking, 'what are they up to?'

A Minister concurred: 'I wouldn't dare not to go'. Such statements unfortunately cannot tell us whether attendance is for substantive (honourable) or symbolic/tokenistic (dishonourable) reasons. The more engaged male ministers were claimed to be feminist men, younger ones 'married to younger generations of women' or 'feminists'. The interaction was considered 'top down' by six interviewees, 'bottom up dialogue' by five, and 'questioning Ministers' by four. The WPLP was, then, far from a passive group – something supported by the evidence in Figure 5 indicating a shift in focus by the WPLP when frontbench speakers were present.

Claims of political change by the WPLP are broad: influence is claimed in the areas of pensions; welfare reform; 'Surestart' and childcare; maternity and paternity leave and pay; domestic violence, rape, prostitution and trafficking; sex and relationships; women's, heath, social care; education; employment; international development; single women; and the economy and the budget. Broader still, were claims to have influenced general election Manifestos, and the minutes show that Labour party officials and MPs responsible for drawing up the manifesto routinely attended the group. Once again, there was a shared perception that in the absence of women's integration in the PLP proper, a sufficiently powerful women's officer, and when 'time is short', overwhelmingly male Ministers and advisors, just 'forget that there was a female perspective'.

The difficulty, if not impossibility, of fully quantifying the WPLP's impact is acknowledged by its members. One measure is the perception of the WPLP's standing. We have already noted the assumption that Ministers would not dare to

avoid the Group. On a negative to positive continuum, the most widely held perception amongst the interviewees, albeit in small numbers, is that amongst men and older women at Parliament there are critical views of the WPLP. That said, there is clearly disagreement amongst the women about whether it is accorded legitimacy, faces antipathy from male MPs and Peers, and/or whether it is publicly acknowledged but privately problematized, as in the quotation above.[22]

Critical Actors

The concept of critical actors was conceived as a counterpoint to the assumptions of critical mass theory that women's substantive representation would magically occur when sufficient numbers of women are elected to our parliaments (Childs and Krook 2006, 2008). It appears however to have since become something of a 'catch all' term; used in ways that suggest that anything any representative does in the implementation of a policy 'for women' 'turns them into a, if not 'the' critical actor. We are sceptical of this usage: the original conceptualization was intended to specify particular actors who acted in conditions where women's issues, perspectives, and interests were marginal, and unlikely to be well received (Childs and Krook 2009). The effort and risk that a particular representative might need to expend was explicitly recognized in the development of the concept. Accordingly, we are sceptical that the 'final' individual who 'flicks the switch' on a gender policy should be automatically be considered a critical actor. Our approach here ensures we do not fall into the trap of making this assumption, offering more modest conclusions about who might constitute the critical actors within the workings of the WPLP. Strong

conclusions about who constitutes the critical actor requires a substantial process-tracing of a particular policy outcome.[23]

Our text data generated from the WPLP minutes permits us to identify the extent to which named individuals are associated with given topics, albeit with the caveat that identification at this stage is not necessarily associated with future activity, successful activity, or indeed anything other than speaking about the issue within WPLP meetings. That said, the combination of data and method that we employ allows us to identify potential critical actors at this stage of the process in a way that avoids having to reverse-engineer accounts of their activities in a *post-hoc* fashion.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

In Table 4 we offer a full summary of the topic model that is useful when attempting to identify potential critical actors. Looking at the work on violence against women (Topic 2), we can see the role of two stakeholder organisations – the All Party Parliamentary Group on Violence Against Women, and the Labour Women Councillor's Association, both of whom liaised with the WPLP in their work. Similarly, on care (Topic 3), we observe that Sheila Gilmore MP played a substantial role in discussions. Finally, on pensions (Topic 4), we see the role played by a range of MPs as well as the then Chancellor and, later, Prime Minister (PM) Gordon Brown and the public opinion pollster Deborah Mattinson. Again, although we are unwilling to identify these individuals as critical actors solely on the basis of these

models, we are able to say that they were present, active, and influential in these discussions. Intriguingly they point to different types of actors – individual women MPs, collective organizations of cross-party MPs united around a shared political interest, and individuals and organizations linked with Labour – participating and seemingly leading on women's substantive representation. As noted above, such findings open the door for more focused process-tracing qualitative research guided by statistical findings, not just researcher intuition.

Critical Sites

The potential for WPOs to act as sites for the substantive representation of women is clear; for some it is their raison d'etre. That said, this potential is not always realized nor can easily be inferred from their form. Institutionalization may not be as important for the likely effectiveness of WPOs as might be first assumed (Ahrens 2017). Members of the WPLP agree. As an organization, the WPLP's informality was considered to be an asset, enabling it to sustain itself over time, not least because, as one Member noted, this is why 'so many women from such a wide range of places in the party' 'come along'. Indeed, one former Executive member and Minister recalled having informal chats with Brown in a swimming pool. That said, if the Group's reputation was mostly felt to be sufficient without more formal rules, one Member recalled how there had been an agreement that documents would be read by the WPLP before publication, but that this had not happened. Another considered that it would be a 'sign of success if it automatically got shown [draft policies]' or 'if

somebody said, "you know we are trying to get this policy, can we come and talk to the women's group"'.

Discussions of the groups interactions with Labour's two Prime Ministers across the period revealed further how members identified gender as often a marginal concern for both. Neither would have women's issues at the 'central core of their thinking', even if both were 'respectful'. Brown is regarded as more receptive. Amongst those who discussed this, two critical comments were assigned to both, but Brown received nine positive comments (these bearing on women's substantive representation), with even one critical comment implying that pressure from the WPLP had influenced him, citing flexible working policies. Brown was said to trust and worry about Harriet Harman, presumably in her role as 'big sister' of the WPLP; attending and engaging with the WPLP to mobilize support on particular issues, and in taking them 'dead serious'. As one member put it: 'I don't think it was just, "oh god, it's those bloody women again, let's keep them on board"'.

Conclusion

Our contention that existing empirical studies of women's substantive representation are limited was rooted in a consideration of what was hidden in the everyday assumption that change in politics follows the same laws as physics. The contribution we have made in returning to the classic question of the relationship between women's descriptive and substantive representation lies in our focus on *collective* rather than individual acts of representation, specifically the role played by WPOs in acting for women. The study of WPOs remains nascent in the gender and

politics sub-field, and analyses of their role in respect of substantive representation are few (see Harder 2017; Ahrens 2016). In this article, we have made what we consider to be a significant step forward in this regard.

Our overall research question was simple: 'what was going on' as one WPO sought to act for women over a lengthy period of time? The following statement by one of the WPLP members encapsulates our considered conclusion: 'We have *laid siege* to this institution, *but we are not yet in it*'. Nor, we would add, 'of' it. The UK Parliament remains unquestionably gender unequal (Childs 2016). Those seeking to act for women will find themselves facing and negotiating much that recent feminist institutionalist analyses have documented in this and other masculinized institutions (Mackay 2011; 2014; Mackay & Waylen 2009; Waylen 2014; Childs 2016). As they remind us, the institutional tendency is resistance to change. But political actors can and do seek to exploit institutional tensions. Whilst WPOs should not be thought of as a 'magic button' (Harder 2017, 453), our research illuminates some of these ways in which the WPLP - as an enactor of political change - sought to re-gender the party's and government's political agenda.[24]

Our empirical observations enable us to develop an explanatory account of the acts and processes that engender substantive representation by WPOs nested within masculinized legislatures. We also offer a systematic account of the actions of a WPO that is explicitly seeking to act in what it considers a feminist fashion. In this, we have moreover sought to speak as directly as we can to the eight, linked questions that frame contemporary studies of women's substantive representation (Childs and Lovenduski 2013). We contend on the basis of our data that the WPLP

was both a *critical site* and a *critical actor* in the 'ripening' of the party and Labour government (Mansbridge 2016).

With our unique quantitative and qualitative data, we have been able to we better answer why some of Labour's women MPs participated in the WPO and why many did so over many years. In the face of gender inequality, WPLP members wanted to act 'for women' by influencing the party and the government, and did so because they identified as feminists. In terms of the content of women's substantive representation – 'what is in the interests of women' - the qualitative and quantitative data reinforce one other. There was a broad and consistent set of women's issues over time that constituted the group's main agenda for change. This was defined in an unapologetic feminist direction by Labour's women. From this agenda of women's issues, and from how the WPLP conceived of what is in the interests of women, it is possible, albeit indirectly, to discern 'which women' the WPLP considered that they were acting for.

The data additionally provide important ways of understanding how the WPLP was experienced by members – as an individual and collective resource – and how it was perceived by non-member legislators and Ministers. In addition to offering resistance to, and the means by which to better negotiate and challenge, masculinized practices and culture, the WPLP is acclaimed as an important site for instigating processes of SRW. It is where women's issues are discussed and what is in the interests of women constituted. Claims to its effectiveness were held to be (positively) determined by the WPLP's reputation as the legitimate 'voice' of women in the party. This is an insight objectively recorded in the listing of senior party

figures attending the meeting, and yet is also something that could only be fully captured in concert with qualitative methods. The WPLP's reputation is evidently much greater than overall attendance of WPLP meetings suggests, as documented by our quantitative data. Neither was there undue concern regarding the group's institutionalization within the Parliamentary party, a position that would be missed if one merely looked at the WPLP's formal status, capacity, and powers.

Our approach could be exported to the study of WPOs either comparatively or in other countries, with likely variation across the features outlined in Table 1 within different political systems. We might expect WPOs to adopt distinct strategies, and to strike a different balance between being either a site of SRW or an actor in it, depending on the exigencies of a given political structure. We also might anticipate the location of executive power, and therefore policymaking clout, within a polity to affect how a WPO operated in pursuit of its goals. Similarly, the extent to which gender equality is a political issue of prominent concern might affect the ways in which the demands of a WPO are framed, possibly as either more or less explicitly feminist, or indeed couched in the language of more mainstream political debate, depending on how members anticipate their wider reception. Overall, exploring how WPOs function in differing institutional and extra-institutional contexts should be the basis an exciting and important research agenda that will both enhance and challenge existing knowledge on gender, politics, and representation. Here, we have made an initial contribution to this endeavour.

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[1] We do not intend to define feminism beyond a general commitment to gender equality; feminists as well as non-feminists contest what constitutes feminism.

[2] In the UK Parliament there are informal groupings of MPs and Peers known as All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPG) (Celis et al 2014).

³ In this we acknowledge that the status of women's networks as actors or institutions is debated (Waylen 2017; Franceshet 2017; Piscopo 2017).

⁴ The traditional literature makes this a point of definition (Hammond et al. 1985, p.583 cited in Mitchell-Mahoney 2013, 6): parliamentary caucuses are 'voluntary associations…which seek to have a role in the policy process'.

⁵ Extraneous variables within and beyond the legislature were controlled for (Harder 2017).

⁶ See Holli and Harder's (2016, 798) comparative analysis of Danish and Finnish gender equality committees which whilst they do not consider the substantive representation literature, lift 'transfer process characteristics (interactions) to explanatory factors instead of treating them as impacts, i.e. dependent variables'.

⁷ This section draws on the Special Issue of *Parliamentary Affairs*, 2016.

⁸ Whether women-only WPOs are more or less effective, irrespective of whether men's inclusion/exclusion is for strategic and, or ideological reasons, is ultimately an empirical question.

⁹ See Sawer and Turner (2016).

¹⁰ We had hoped to do this for the entire period of the Labour Government, 1997-2010, and subsequent first term of opposition (2010-15). Unfortunately, the hardcopy of the minutes could not be located by the Party; instead we received the 2010-15 minutes, which gives us an insight into the period after Labour lost office.

¹¹ Five, nine and five interviewees respectively.

[12] These minutes were provided to us on the proviso that they would not be shared in full. This means we are unable to freely provide replication materials for the text analyses.

[13] Attendance counts include eligible MPs and Peers only. Figures for other Labour party groups are not known; Childs was an adviser to the Women in Politics APPG in 2013/14: Labour women MPs were far fewer in its attendance, at best a handful.

[14] This data counts parliamentarians only, not external speakers visiting the group.

[15] July 2 2013, September 10 2013, and November 18 2014. For all, attendees are either minuted as being lost or as incomplete.

[16] Only MPs' cohorts are coded. If an MP has been elected more than once, their most recent entry cohort is included. MPs elected at by-elections are coded as part of the cohort most recently preceding their election.

[17] 3 interviewees.

[18] 6 interviewees.

[19] See Appendix for further details.

[20] The words are included in the word cloud on the basis of the probability that they are associated with a given topic as part of the generated model. A maximum of ten words are included in each word cloud.

[21] One Minister who had been critical in terms of its feminism, and had been mostly a non-attender, maintained that it remained 'useful to know that the women's committee was behind you'.

[22] Legitimate (2), lip-service (4), misguided (1), ignorant 4, anti-pathetic 3, critical (by older women 2), Critical 'the sisters', (by men, 5).

23 For a discussion of the removal of VAT from sanitary products, see Childs and Withey 2006.

24 To fully grasp how WPOs engender women's substantive representation, we need to know much more about how institutional change occurs, and hence a great deal more about the ways in which WPOs are nested within (Mackay 2014) highly masculinized Parliaments (Sawer and Turner 2016, 766). This lies beyond the remit of this article.

Figures

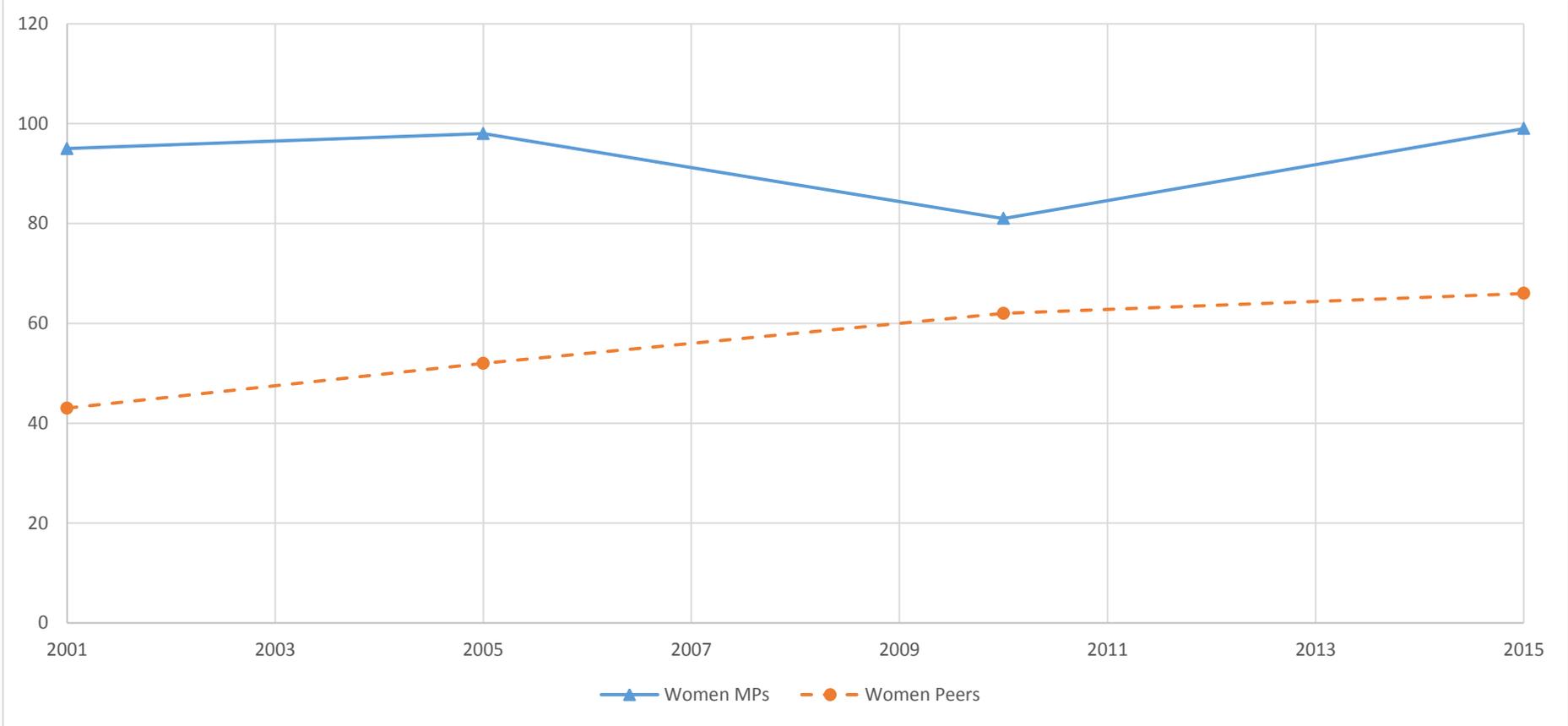**Figure 1 - Women MPs and Peers from the Labour Party 2001-2015.**

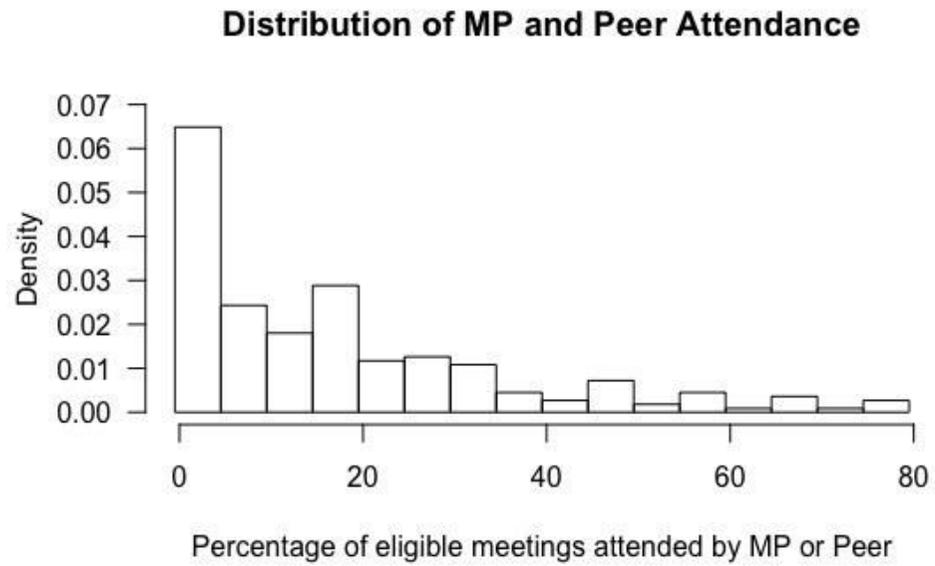**Figure 2 – Histogram of distribution of MP and Peer attendance at WPLP meetings 2002-15.**

Distribution of MP and Peer Attendance

Figure 3 – Word clouds for each topic.

offic
place
select
minist
rais
held also
contribut
barbara
record

Topic 1 – Procedure

suggest
govern
debat
mps day
equal
consult
campaign
violenc
labour

Topic 2 – Violence against women

polici
older
childcar
year
will
care
make
parti issu
labour

Topic 3 – Care

contribut
gordon brown
bns
bill
end
margaret
pension
opportun
place

Topic 4 – Pensions and the economy

Figure 4 – Comparison of topic prevalence in 2002-5 and 2010-14 meeting minutes.

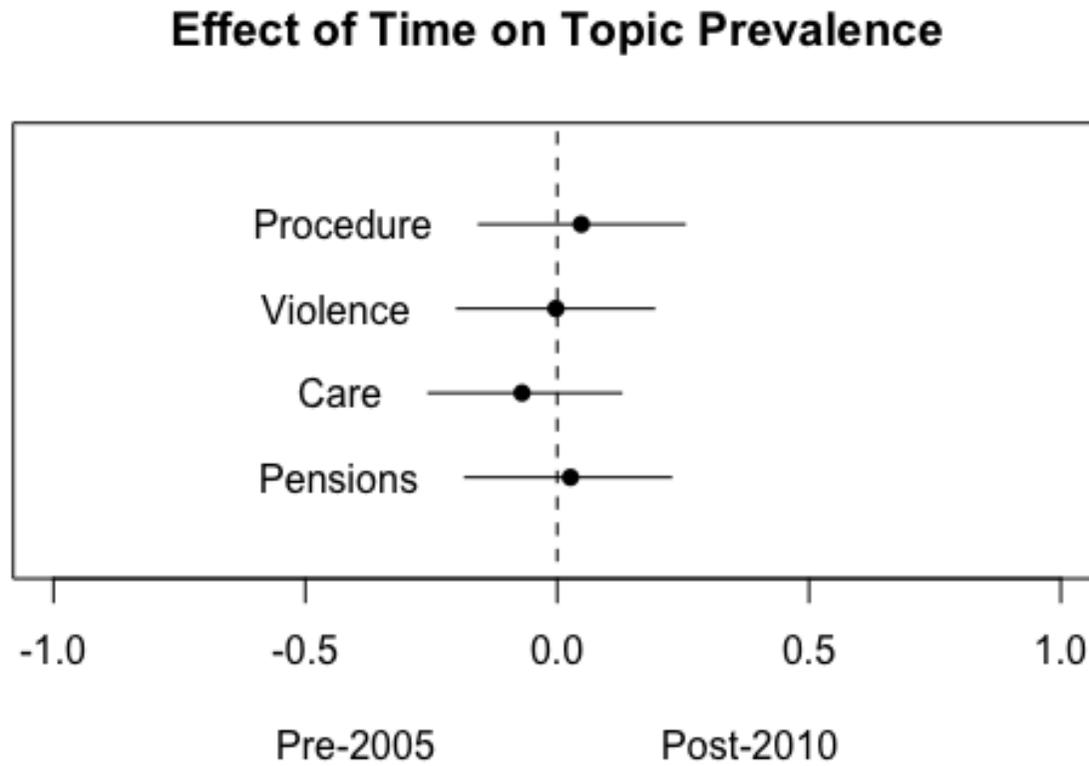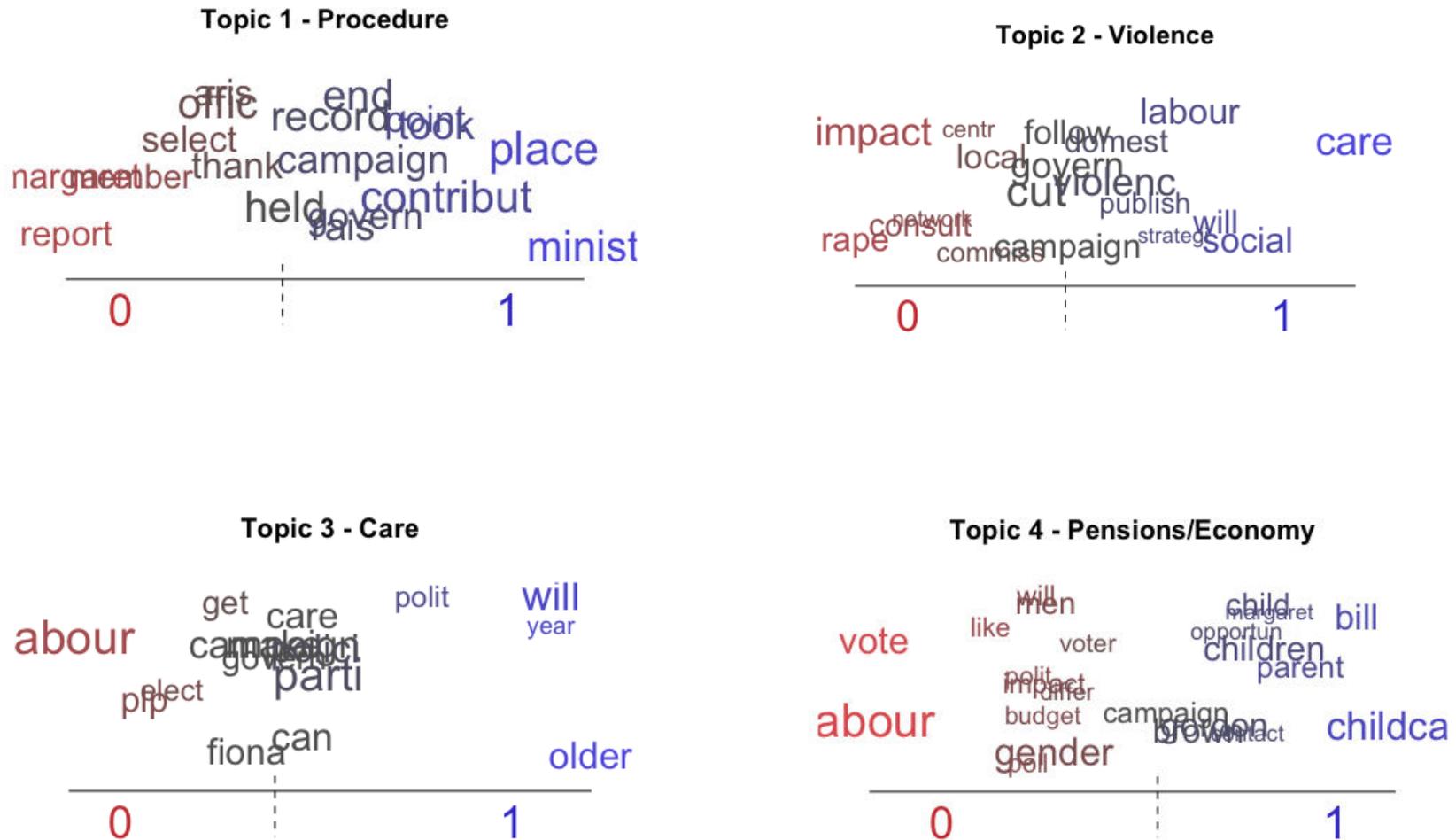**Figure 5 – Comparison of intra-topic prevalence conditional on presence of frontbench representative**

Topic 1 - Procedure

Topic 2 - Violence

Topic 3 - Care

Topic 4 - Pensions/Economy

Tables

Table 1 - Features of Parliamentary Women's Organizations

Features	Manifestations
Remit	- Increasing descriptive representation of women in party - Increasing descriptive representation of women in the legislature - Influencing government policy - Influencing party policy platform
Ideology	- Self-defined/identified as feminist - Gendered - Feminist (as matched to demands of women's movement)
Membership	- Bipartisan versus partisan - Women-only versus men and women - Lower House only versus both Houses
Activities	- Regular meetings for members - Hearings for/with Ministers - Hearings for/with non-member MPs - Hearings for civil society - Policy development - Legislative initiation (proactive) - Legislative responsive (reactive) - Intra and inter party mobilization - Social events - Fundraising for recruitment of women candidates
Civil society links	- Outward-facing dimension - Formal versus informal links
Rules	- Formal versus informal - Minimal versus extensive - Presence/absence of sanctions
Resources	- Financial versus in-kind - High or low (relatively to other Parliamentary caucuses/bodies) - Funding source: self-funded by members versus parlia versus extra-parlia civil society versus extra parlia parties
Degree of Institutionalization	- Established (and protected) by institutional rules; degree of immovability; integration within larger institution - Professionalized versus amateur body – e.g. staffing situation - Frequency of meetings - Degree of formalization of procedures, records, and accounts - Stature/Standing

Source: drawing on Celis, Curtin and Childs 2014, Piscopo 2014.

Table 2 - Research Questions for studying Women's Substantive Representation via WPOs

1. Was the WPO established to (a) support the generalized capacity of women Members? (reactive, apparently non-policy oriented) and, or (b) to voice a gendered/feminist agenda (proactive, explicitly policy-oriented)?
2. How does the group conceive/define 'women's interests' vis a vis feminism, and is this (a) the product of its members (internal) or (b) the product of extra-parliamentary groups (co-production or externally produced and subsequently adopted)?
3. How is the WPO membership determined? Is it inclusive or exclusive in terms of sex and party?
4. What activities does it undertake? And how does it engage with those in positions of legislative and executive influence?
5. How extensive is the organization's capacity and professionalization (level of resources, formalized rules, degrees of institutionalization)
6. How do members sustain their organization?

Table 3 - Top Ten Attendees by Individual Percentage of Eligible Meetings Attended

Name	%
1. Helen Jackson MP	77
2. Kate Green MP (76%)	76
= Julie Morgan MP	76
3. Fiona Mactaggart	73
4. Sheila Gilmore	69
5. Sharon Hodgson MP	67
= Julia Drown MP	67
6. Barbara Keeley MP	65
7. Valerie Davey MP	62
8. Joan Ruddock MP	59

= Rachel Squire MP	59
9. Lorna Fitzsimons MP	58
= Baroness Whitaker	
10. Barbara Follett MP	56

Table 4 – Full summary of 4-topic STM

Topic 1 Top Words:
       Highest Prob: minist, offic, place, held, contribut, record, select
       FREX: report, barbara, held, prime, behalf, record, gould
       Lift: afghanistan, prosser, val, behalf, davey, deleg, follett
       Score: woman, jackson, aris, wednesday, behalf, respect, held

Topic 2 Top Words:
       Highest Prob: violenc, campaign, equal, govern, labour, day, mps
       FREX: consult, cut, group, violenc, march, visit, send
       Lift: appg, traffick, broadcast, councillor, onlin, aid, sex
       Score: traffick, cut, can, safeti, appg, team, happen

Topic 3 Top Words:
       Highest Prob: will, labour, care, older, polici, make, issu
       FREX: older, care, will, age, men, societi, better
       Lift: hit, meal, membership, travel, audit, drive, gilmor
       Score: older, membership, will, just, can, hit, care

Topic 4 Top Words:
       Highest Prob: brown, bill, gordon, end, opportun, pension, bns
       FREX: gordon, brown, bns, bill, sylvia, kelli, hodg
       Lift: gordon, kali, latest, mountford, kelli, whilst, supplement
       Score: latest, gordon, brown, sylvia, moran, kelli, Jackson

A topic model with 4 topics, 178 documents and an 813 word dictionary.

Online Appendix

Appendix A – Model description and comparison statistics generated in the STM package in R (Roberts et al. 2015)

A1 – Description of modelling approach

Structural topic models are a variant of Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) models that allow for the analysis to incorporate further information such as metadata about the documents whose text is included in the analysis (Roberts et al. 2014). Our analysis was undertaken using the STM package in R (Roberts et al. 2016). Prior to analysing the data, it was processed through the STM package via a pre-constructed spreadsheet. At this processing stage certain omissions were also made, primarily the removal of the sections of minutes detailing the list of attendees and MPs sending apologies. As we were primarily interested in the subjects of discussion and the individuals associated with these, we felt this was justified. We took further steps to limit the undue influence of extremely common terms in the minutes by restricting the parameters for words to be included in the analysis.

A1 References

Roberts, M.E., Stewart, B.M., Tingley, D., Lucas, C., Leder-Luis, J., Gadarian, S.K., Albertson, B. and Rand, D.G., 2014. Structural Topic Models for Open-Ended Survey Responses. *American Journal of Political Science*, *58*(4), pp.1064-1082.

Roberts, M.E., Stewart, B.M. and Tingley, D., 2016. STM: R package for structural topic models, 2014. *URL http://www. structuraltopicmodel. com. R package version*, *1*(8).

Figure A2 – Semantic coherence and exclusivity by number of topics
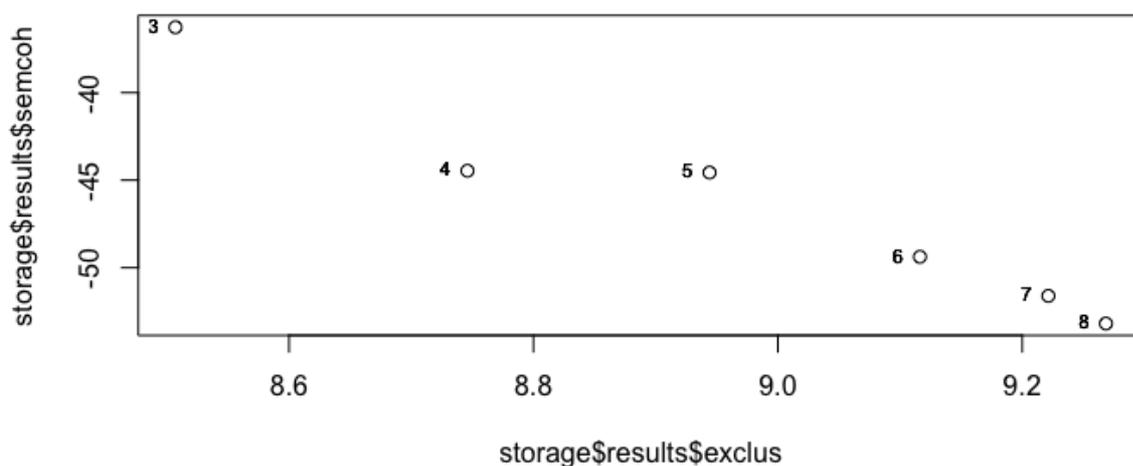
Figure A3 – Diagnostic values by number of topics

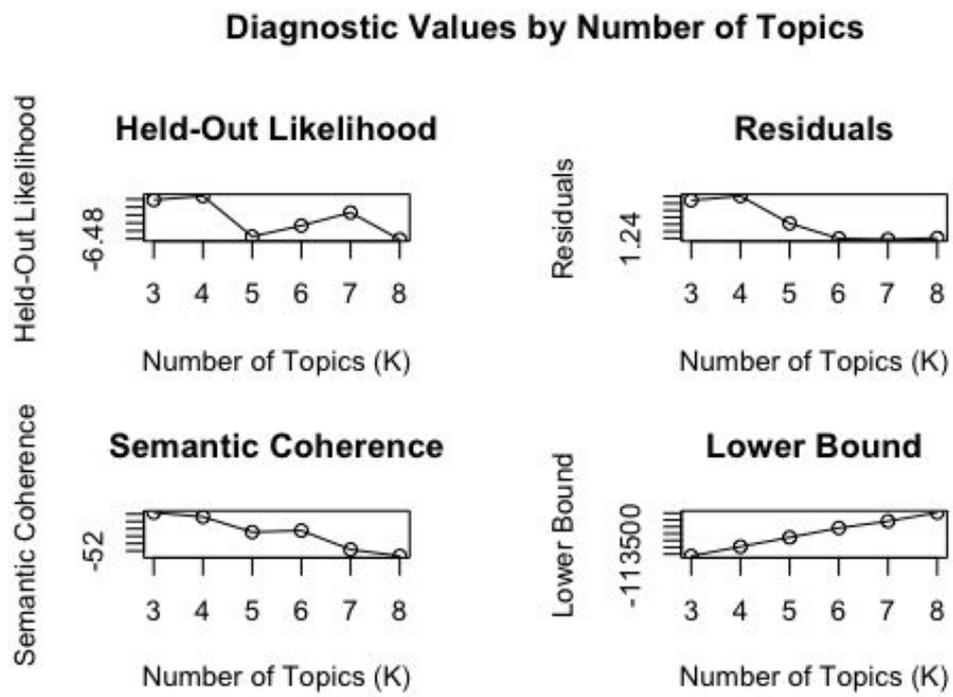**Diagnostic Values by Number of Topics**

Appendix B - PLPWC Leadership 2002-2014 based on AGM Minutes

N.B. – Data is incomplete and thus unclear in some cases indicated below.

2002 – Fiona Mactaggart (Chair), Lorna Fitzsimons (Vice Chair), Joyce Gould (Vice Chair), Barbara Follett (Vice Chair), Joan Ruddock (Honorary Secretary), Julie Morgan (Honorary Treasurer)

2003 – Meg Munn (Chair), Lorna Fitzsimons (Vice Chair), Joyce Gould (Vice Chair), Barbara Follett (Vice Chair), Joan Ruddock (Vice Chair), Vera Baird (Honorary Secretary), Julie Morgan (Honorary Treasurer)

2004 - Meg Munn (Chair), Lorna Fitzsimons (Vice Chair), Joyce Gould (Vice Chair), Barbara Follett (Vice Chair), Joan Ruddock (Vice Chair), Vera Baird (Honorary Secretary), Julie Morgan (Honorary Treasurer)

2005 – Barbara Follett (Chair), Claire Curtis-Thomas (Vice Chair), Joan Ruddock (Vice Chair), Phyllis Starkey (Vice Chair), Baroness Anita Gale (Vice Chair), Vera Baird (Honorary Secretary), Julie Morgan (Honorary Treasurer)

2006 - Barbara Follett (Chair), Joan Ruddock (Vice Chair), Baroness Anita Gale (Vice Chair), Barbara Keeley (Honorary Secretary), Julie Morgan (Honorary Treasurer), Fiona Mactaggart (Executive Member), Claire Curtis Thomas (Executive Member), Phyllis Starkey (Executive Member)

2007 - Barbara Keeley (Chair), Fiona Mactaggart (Vice Chair), Roberta Blackman-Woods (Secretary)

2008 – Barbara Keeley (Chair), Fiona Mactaggart (Vice Chair), Roberta Blackman-Woods (Secretary), Baroness Anita Gale (Vice Chair), Anita Gale (Treasurer), Lynda Waltho (Honorary Secretary)

2009 – Roberta Blackman-Woods (co-Chair), Fiona Mactaggart (co-Chair), Anita Gale (Vice Chair), Baroness Anita Gale (Treasurer), Lynda Waltho (Honorary Secretary)

2010 – Fiona Mactaggart (Chair), Roberta Blackman-Woods (Vice Chair), Baroness Anita Gale (Vice Chair), Rachel Reeves (Treasurer), Sheila Gilmore (Secretary)

2011 - Fiona Mactaggart (Chair), Meg Hillier (Vice Chair), Baroness Joyce Gould (Vice Chair), Rachel Reeves (Treasurer), Sheila Gilmore (Secretary)

2012 – unclear

2013 - Fiona Mactaggart (Chair), Yasmin Qureshi (Vice Chair), Baroness Joyce Gould (Vice Chair), Helen Goodman (acting Treasurer while Rachel Reeves is on maternity leave), Sheila Gilmore (Secretary)

2014 - Fiona Mactaggart (Chair), Yasmin Qureshi (Vice Chair), Baroness Joyce Gould (Vice Chair) Baroness Anita Gale (Vice Chair), Helen Goodman (Treasurer), Sheila Gilmore (Secretary)

Appendix C – Modelling individual-level variation in attendance at WPLP meetings

C1 – Model Choice and Specification

The number of times an MP attends a meeting of the WPLP is a count variable, and as such a count model such as a Poisson model would appear to be a suitable option in terms of model selection. However, the dependent variable (meeting attendance and participation) is overdispersed, with the variance far exceeding the mean (King 1989). That is, the variable contains far more individuals who never attended (and therefore never participated), and far more who attended and participated a lot, than a Poisson distribution would assume. Consequently, we instead adopt a negative binomial model which permits this overdispersion, accounting for it through the introduction of an unobserved heterogeneity term reflecting the heterogeneity in the likelihood of attendance across all cases (Long 1997).

We do not model the percentage of eligible meetings attended variable used in some of the descriptive analysis reported in the main text owing to the fact that the denominator is inconsistent across the entire sample. In theory, we could split the sample by electoral cohort, thereby standardizing the denominator, but this would result in extremely low numbers in certain iterations of the model. As such, we proceed on the basis of raw count only, acknowledging the limitations of this.

Owing to the high number of zeroes in our data seen in Figure 3 in the main text, indicating those occasions when an individual did not attend a meeting of the PLPWC, we need to adjust our model choice accordingly. Regular negative binomial models have been found to underestimate the incidence of zeroes in the data and existing research has suggested that there are in fact two data generation processes in action in these cases – one process that generating the count values and another generating the excess zeroes seen in the data. In other words, we are interested in predicting attendance, but also complete non-attendance (i.e. the zeroes). Consequently, we model these separately using a Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial (ZINB) model. We do using the 'pscl' package in R.

Interpreting ZINB models can be tricky. The coefficients from the first part of the model, estimating the count data, can be interpreted in the traditional way, with a positive value indicating an increase in the count, and vice versa. On the other hand,

the coefficients from the zero-inflated section of model must be interpreted as affecting the odds of belonging to the always-zero group. As such, a negative coefficient here can be interpreted as relating to a higher likelihood of being an 'always-zero' in terms of attendance.

C1 References

King, G., 1989. Variance specification in event count models: From restrictive assumptions to a generalized estimator. *American Journal of Political Science*, pp.762-784.

Scott Long, J., 1997. Regression models for categorical and limited dependent variables. *Advanced quantitative techniques in the social sciences*, 7, New York: Sage.

Table C2 – Zero-inflated negative binomial regression models of raw individual MP and Peer attendance counts at WPLP meetings

Variables	Model 1	Model 2
Count Model		
(Intercept)	2.28101***	1.790808***
House (Lords)	-0.16177	-0.363478
Elected from AWS	0.19784	0.154057
Years incumbent during study period	0.10157***	-
Member of Shadow Cabinet	-0.06542	0.369490
Age in 2002 by decade		0.436938***
Log (theta)	-0.04257	0.008552
Zero-inflation Model		
(Intercept)	-3.25300**	-3.4797**
House (Lords)	2.11970**	1.9651*
AWS	-15.49913	-14.2153
Years incumbent during study period	0.23357**	
Member of Shadow Cabinet	-1.68683	-2.0984
Age in 2002 by decade	-	-0.3523
Log likelihood	-817.4	-816.6
N	224	224

Significance indicators: *** - 0.001, ** - 0.01, * - 0.05.