

## **Part II**

# **The substantive representation of women**

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## 6 When women support women...

### EMILY's List and the substantive representation of women in Australia

*Marian Sawer*

In the 1990s the issue of the parliamentary representation of women became the focus of much international and national attention. The arguments for increasing women's representation often went beyond basic justice arguments to suggest that women would make a difference to politics. In particular, it was often suggested that the presence of women was essential to ensure that women's interests were represented. Nevertheless, and leaving aside the vexed notion of 'women's interests', it was soon recognised that the presence of women in legislatures does not *necessarily* result in increased attention to issues of special concern to women in the community. 'Standing for' is not the same as 'acting for' and there is a difference between the descriptive representation of women and what is termed the substantive representation of women. Indeed, the presence of women may provide an alibi for policies that are far from women-friendly.

Internationally, researchers have examined the circumstances in which women legislators do act as advocates for women as a group.<sup>1</sup> They have identified the importance of belief systems such as party ideology and whether the ideology of the party is compatible with promoting equality for women. They have also looked at whether legislators self-identify as feminists and at what follows from such identification in terms of feminist advocacy. Some have tested the importance of structural factors such as presence or absence of women's caucuses within parliamentary parties or within parliament.<sup>2</sup> It has long been argued that women's institution-building inside powerful institutions is necessary to maintain feminist identities and perspectives in the context of conflicting organisational cultures and loyalties. Others have examined the effects of membership of, and association with, women's movement organisations outside parliament.<sup>3</sup> A related factor is the level of women's movement activity in society at large – which may affect the propensity of politicians to identify as feminist as well as their propensity to take up women's movement issues.

Apart from the question of what prompts women to act as advocates for other women there is also the issue of accountability for this form of representation. Voters may always vote out a representative held responsible for not stopping a new flight path over a geographical electorate. In

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what ways can representatives be held to account for performance in achieving outcomes of specific concern to women as a group?<sup>4</sup> I have previously drawn attention to one light-hearted accountability tool invented in Australia in 1993 by a feminist who is now the presiding officer of the New South Wales (NSW) Legislative Council. This form of accountability involves an annual dinner at the NSW Parliament where 400 women judges decide – on the basis of the volume of booing – on awards for various categories of sexist behaviour. Prime Minister John Howard won the award, for example, for vetoing an anti-domestic violence campaign as being ‘too anti-male’. There is also an ‘Elaine’ award, for the woman whose comments or behaviour have been least helpful to the sisterhood. The Ernies attract wide media coverage, combining as they do plenty of humour with accountability.

This chapter takes a somewhat more serious approach to the issue of accountability for the substantive representation of women. It examines the role of one extra-parliamentary feminist organisation in increasing the number of women in parliament with a feminist group perspective, in promoting the representation of issues of concern to women in the community and in providing some form of accountability. EMILY’s List (EL)<sup>5</sup> was established in Australia in 1996 by prominent Labor women and uses the slogan ‘When women support women, women win’. Its goals were first to ensure that more Labor women were elected to Australian parliaments and second that these women were committed to pro-choice positions on abortion and to gender equity issues more generally.

By April 2004 EL claimed to have helped 91 new Labor women – including Australia’s first Indigenous women parliamentarians – to enter Australian parliaments. The descriptive representation of women in Australian parliaments had reached an all-time high, at 30 per cent of all parliamentarians and 35 per cent of Labor parliamentarians. EL-supported women were playing a significant role in government, with Labor holding office in all six states and both territories and being in opposition only at the federal level. Apart from its financial and mentoring support for candidates, EL played a broader role in advocating internal party reform and in achieving the renewal of commitment to quotas in 2002.

The question of the substantive representation of issues of particular concern to women is a more difficult one to track. The approach of this research is to assess substantive representation *via* the incidence in parliamentary debate of issues of particular concern to women. The hypothesis was that the significant group of EL-supported women in Australian parliaments would have some effect in ensuring such issues were represented in parliamentary debate. As noted earlier, international research suggests that membership of women’s movement organisations helps women parliamentarians maintain collective identity and awareness of gender implications of policy. EL is an example of a women’s movement organisation that provides woman-centred policy space and

1 opportunity for feminist discourse but which is also specifically adapted to  
2 an era of professionalised party politics.

3 The research covered the two federal parliaments elected before EL  
4 was created and the subsequent two parliaments.<sup>6</sup> It disaggregates  
5 between the House of Representatives and the Senate, as the chambers  
6 are elected by different electoral systems and have a differing partisan and  
7 gender composition. The full version of Parlinfo, available to federal  
8 parliamentarians and used here, provides the number of documents in  
9 which the search term appears, and can provide breakdowns by party or  
10 member's name but not, unfortunately, by gender. It should be noted that  
11 there may be repeated references to the term within any given document,  
12 whether it is a speech or a parliamentary question, but what is recorded in  
13 this analysis is simply the number of documents in which the term  
14 appears.

15 The search was limited to debate on the floor of the chambers and  
16 does not extend to parliamentary committees. While some would argue  
17 that women parliamentarians are at their most effective in the less adver-  
18 sarial forums of parliamentary committees, or in behind-the-scenes lobby-  
19 ing in their own parties, it remains valid to examine the extent to which  
20 the representation of women is refracted through the most public form of  
21 parliamentary discourse.

22 The particular issues selected for the purposes of this chapter were  
23 those of paid maternity leave and domestic violence/violence against  
24 women.<sup>7</sup> As explained in greater detail further on, the terms were selected  
25 because of their significance to the substantive representation of women,  
26 variously understood. That is, this study explores whether the presence in  
27 parliament of a bloc of women supported by and belonging to a feminist  
28 organisation helped raise the salience of issues identified as significant by  
29 women in the community as well as by the organisation itself. The use of  
30 gender-inclusive language was also analysed for these parliaments.

### 31 32 **Origins and attitudes of EMILY's List**

34 Feminists within the Australian Labor Party had campaigned energetically  
35 from the 1970s to make the party less of a male bastion and more woman-  
36 friendly. The results of a voluntary affirmative action policy adopted in  
37 1981 had been patchy and in 1994 the party adopted a new target that  
38 women should be 35 per cent of all those representing Labor in winnable  
39 seats by 2002. This time the sanction of national intervention in pre-selec-  
40 tions was to be applied if the target was not achieved.

41 Meanwhile, the defeat of the federal Labor government in 1996 led to  
42 two distinct outcomes, both of which contributed to the creation of EL.  
43 On the one hand the proportion of women among federal Labor MPs fell  
44 from 13 per cent to 8 per cent, a function of the marginality of their seats.  
45 On the other hand an anti-feminist backlash emerged, with prominent

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Labor identities blaming feminists and other 'special interests' for the defeat. The new conservative government, which included a significant influx of conservative women MPs, promised to end the era of political correctness and proceeded to impose heavy funding cuts in areas such as the status of women, human rights and child care.

The founding of EL involved a prolonged struggle with the National Executive of the party over issues of control. Those setting up the new organisation, led by former state premier Joan Kirner, argued that EL could never hope to attract financial and other support from women in the community if it were perceived to be under the thumb of the men in the party. The question of whether the National Executive would control the new body was related to the issue of how it fitted into the formal factional structure of the party. While EL aspired to be a non-factional body, the dominant right faction saw it as a tool of the left and largely prevented its members joining. More generally, the need to make commitments on abortion presented difficulties for the Catholic-based right.

Hostility by party power-brokers towards EL was expressed in a number of ways, including a decision in 1997 to create a rival Labor Women's Network under the control of the National Executive.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile EL had been launched around Australia in 1996 with its independence intact. By 2004 it had around 2,000 members. Although EL is regarded by the Australian Electoral Commission as an 'associated entity' of the ALP in terms of disclosure requirements, its membership is by no means confined to the party. Over 40 per cent of its members are not party members, although some (about 13 per cent) are ex-members. It has a 'corporate' look and draws on a constituency of high-earning feminist women supportive of putting more feminists into parliament as well as on the experience of former parliamentarians.

To become eligible for EL funding, candidates need both to be endorsed Labor candidates and to demonstrate their commitment to women's rights. They have to satisfy an interview panel on issues such as child care, equal pay and abortion. In return for support they are expected to advocate 'EL principles' when elected.

Data from the Australian Candidate Study of 2001 shows a significant difference between the attitudes of EL and other federal women candidates on a range of issues. Not only was there a 20 point difference on the right to choose, but also a 20 point difference in strongly favouring social spending over cuts in taxation, and a 14 per cent difference in believing Aboriginal land rights had not gone 'nearly far enough'. On the central question of equal opportunities for women, EL-supported candidates were almost twice as likely as other women candidates to believe that equal opportunities had not gone 'nearly far enough'.<sup>9</sup> In other words, EL candidates exhibited consistent attitudes towards equal opportunity and the macro-economic policy needed to support it.

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## **Persuading Labor to target women voters**

During its first year of operation EL also embarked on research and advocacy on the electoral advantages of targeting women voters and brought over US Democrat pollster Celinda Lake for this purpose. Lake achieved saturation media coverage for a National Press Club address on how President Clinton's re-election had been achieved. Democrat gender gap strategists had found that women voters were more likely than male voters to perceive themselves as economically and socially vulnerable and could be mobilised to vote against the 'small government' policies of the Republicans.

Lake pointed out that the ALP was failing to target those juggling work and family responsibilities and suggested it was the only social democratic party in the Western world to be supported more by men than by women. The Australian Election Study in the 1990s showed a persistent if fluctuating shortfall in female support for Labor of between two and six points. By contrast in New Zealand women were nine points more likely to support Labor than men by the end of the decade. While party research showed that Australian women also placed more importance on government intervention than did men, particularly in areas such as health, unemployment and child care, the ALP had not mobilised support from women on this basis.<sup>10</sup>

EL proceeded to commission gender-gap research for use in the 1998 federal campaign, as it has done for subsequent campaigns.<sup>11</sup> It was particularly pleased with the outcomes of gender-gap research undertaken for a Victorian state election in 2002. As a result of the research the Labor Party's election platform emphasised work-life-family balance and made a number of specific commitments, including the highly popular \$1,000 're-entry to the work force' grants to help women with retraining and updating of skills.

## **Substantive representation of women in parliamentary debate**

By April 2004 there were 23 EL supported women in the federal parliament and they constituted 71 per cent of Labor women. The increased presence of women in the federal parliament in the period since 1996, and changing partisan composition, can be seen in Figures 6.1 and 6.2.

To test whether the EL women in the federal parliament made a difference to the substantive representation of Australian women I explored parliamentary debate for the incidence of key terms. The terms analysed here are 'paid maternity leave' and 'domestic violence/violence against women'. These have been major issues for the women's movement and have been selected because of their differing political connotations and constituencies. 'Paid maternity leave' is generally regarded as central to

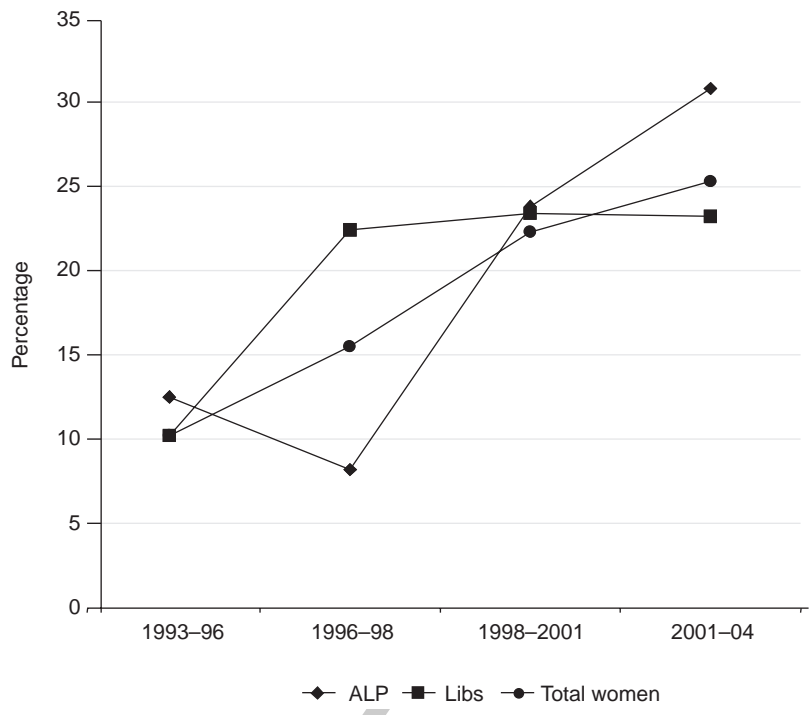


Figure 6.1 Percentage of women members of the House of Representatives.

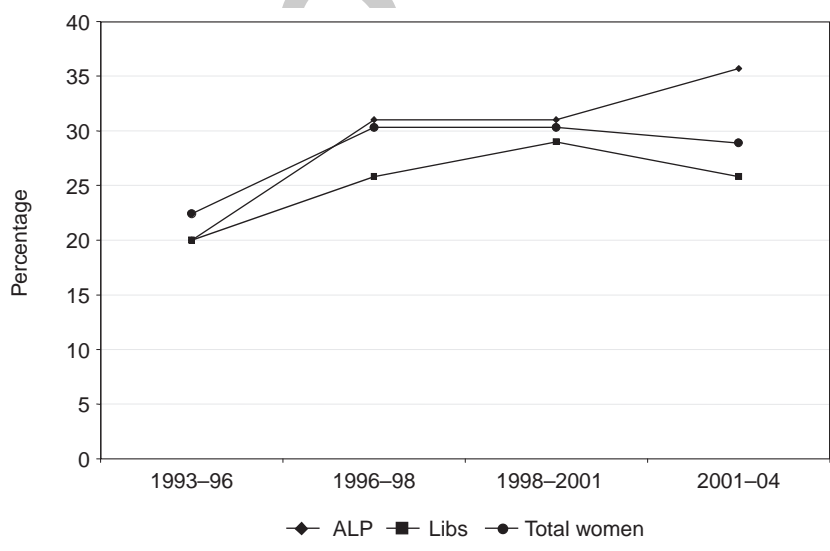


Figure 6.2 Percentage of women in the Senate.

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1 equal opportunity for women, to the combining of work and family and to  
2 maternal and infant health. For all these reasons it is the kind of issue we  
3 would expect to form part of the 'substantive representation' of women.  
4 But it is also a redistributive issue, particularly in the context of a non-  
5 contributory social security system such as that in Australia. This means it  
6 is less likely to be supported by conservative or free-market politicians.  
7 Another possible issue of this type would have been equal pay or pay  
8 equity.

9 The issues of domestic violence and violence against women were also  
10 issues put on the public agenda by the women's movement. However they  
11 are issues that conservative governments have generally been more com-  
12 fortable with than directly redistributive issues, in part because of their  
13 congruence with law-and-order themes. Hence we might expect that  
14 conservative governments wishing to demonstrate credentials in relation  
15 to the status of women would place considerable emphasis on this issue  
16 area.

17 Apart from examining the incidence of these substantive issues I  
18 decided to explore the use of inclusive language in parliamentary debate,  
19 as indicating awareness of the gendered nature of the electorate. Sensitiv-  
20 ity to the impact of language and the effects of linguistically erasing  
21 women had been strongly promoted by feminists inside and outside  
22 government in the 1970s and 1980s. The use of the terms 'woman' or  
23 'women' by politicians appeared to be a useful indicator of awareness of  
24 such issues. It could not be assumed that women would be 'represented'  
25 in parliamentary debate even at this level.

### 26 27 **Paid maternity leave**

28  
29 Australia is one of only two OECD countries that do not provide paid  
30 maternity leave on a comprehensive basis and this has been a long-stand-  
31 ing issue for the women's movement. When the Whitlam government  
32 introduced paid maternity leave for public servants in 1973 it was  
33 intended to be the first step in its extension to all women workers. One  
34 problem was that, like New Zealand, Australia does not have a contribu-  
35 tory social insurance system. Moreover women workers are very unevenly  
36 spread across industries and it would have discriminated against employ-  
37 ers of women for them to be obliged to pay maternity leave. So unlike  
38 other conditions included in industrial awards, such as paid sick leave, it  
39 was clear from early on that maternity leave would need to be funded out  
40 of general revenue. There never seemed to be a good time to do this,  
41 particularly for belt-tightening governments. As an issue it barely featured  
42 in parliamentary debate. For example, it was mentioned only once in the  
43 thirty-second parliament (1980–83) – by a feminist senator asking how far  
44 it had been made available in statutory authorities.

45 Even when a new Labor government was elected in 1983 and Australia

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ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), it did so with a reservation on the provision of paid maternity leave. While most public-sector employees had gained access to paid maternity leave, the majority in the private sector had not, particularly lower-paid workers. Organisations such as Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) and the National Women's Consultative Council continued to raise the issue under the Labor government, but it barely registered on the public agenda.

Instead three months' paid maternity leave was finally included in an 'Accord' negotiated between the Keating Labor government and Australia's peak union body, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), before the 1993 federal election. The ACTU president, however, was happy for it to be dropped two years later when budget savings were required, seeing it as an example of 'middle-class welfare'. Instead a much smaller baby bonus was introduced, means-tested on 'family' income. Despite these raised and dashed expectations, paid maternity leave was still barely visible in parliamentary debate (Table 6.1).

The arrival of the first women ACTU presidents in the second half of the 1990s was to change the attitude of the peak union body. Paid maternity leave became more clearly seen as a core industrial issue. The two-year review of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention on Maternity Protection, leading to the adoption of the new Convention 183 in 2000, was also a significant international influence. The new standard included 14 weeks' paid leave and guaranteed right of return with

*Table 6.1* Documents mentioning paid maternity leave in the thirty-seventh and thirty-eight Parliaments (1993–98) and the thirty-ninth and fortieth Parliaments (1998–2004<sup>a</sup>)

<i>Party</i>	<i>House</i>	<i>AD</i>	<i>ALP</i>	<i>GRN</i>	<i>Lib/CLP</i>	<i>NP/Nat</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
Parliament	37/38							
	Senate	4	10	1	1	0	1	17
	HofRep	n.a.	12	n.a.	2	0	0	14
	Total	4	22	1	3	0	1	31
Parliament	39/40							
	Senate	26	50	4	16	0	20 <sup>b</sup>	116
	HofRep	n.a.	85	1	15	3	3	107
	Total	26	135	5	31	3	23	223

**Notes**

AD Australian Democrats, ALP Australian Labor Party, Grn Western Australian Greens and Australian Greens, Lib/CLP Liberal Party of Australia/Country Liberal Party, NP/Nat National Party of Australia/Nationals, HofRep House of Representatives.

a In Tables 6.1–6.3 the record for the fortieth Parliament concludes 23 April 2004, so is incomplete.

b Includes many 'procedural' documents relating to the Democrats' private member's Bill on paid maternity leave.

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1 reduced hours or breaks for breastfeeding. ACTU president Sharan  
2 Burrow announced that signing up to the ILO convention and the  
3 removal of Australia's reservation to the CEDAW Convention would be  
4 priority issues for the union movement.

5 Paid maternity leave finally began to feature in a substantial way on the  
6 parliamentary agenda in the fortieth parliament. This was in part because  
7 the Clark Labour government in New Zealand moved on the issue in  
8 2001, leaving Australia as an outrider along with the United States. It  
9 should be noted that in New Zealand it was a minor party (the Alliance)  
10 that put paid parental leave on the parliamentary agenda. Laila Harré had  
11 promoted paid parental leave since her election in 1996 and introduced a  
12 private member's Bill on the subject. The Alliance joined the Labour  
13 Party in a coalition government in 1999 and Harré introduced paid  
14 parental leave legislation as a government minister in 2001.

15 In Australia it was also a minor party, the Australian Democrats, that  
16 played an agenda-setting role. The leader of the Australian Democrats,  
17 Senator Natasha Stott Despoja, campaigned on paid maternity leave in the  
18 2001 federal election and introduced a private senator's Bill on the subject  
19 the following year. In 2002 the ALP also announced a new commitment to  
20 paid maternity leave, although as we shall see it was to be short-lived.

21 Even more important in terms of the public agenda was the campaign  
22 undertaken by the Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Pru  
23 Goward. This came as a surprise to many, as Goward was previously known  
24 as a close friend and biographer of the Prime Minister and as a conservat-  
25 ive appointment to head the federal Office of the Status of Women. After  
26 taking up her new position as Sex Discrimination Commissioner in 2001  
27 she turned her considerable media skills to the cause of paid maternity  
28 leave. She issued a final report, 'A Time to Value', in December 2002 and  
29 took to the airwaves, with strong support from the ACTU and women's  
30 organisations. She adopted an effective discursive strategy, focusing on the  
31 bodily welfare of women, and physical after-effects of giving birth, to ward  
32 off claims of discrimination against men in the work-force.<sup>12</sup> At the Com-  
33 monwealth/State Ministers' Council on the Status of Women in August  
34 2003, five of the six states and both territories called on the Common-  
35 wealth government to introduce paid maternity leave fully funded by the  
36 Commonwealth.

37 The Hansard data clearly show that the issue did not become salient in  
38 parliamentary debate until after the 2001 election and the initial catalyst  
39 was Stott Despoja's Workplace Relations Amendment (Paid Maternity  
40 Leave) Bill 2002. The Bill was investigated by the relevant Senate commit-  
41 tee, which provided opportunities for public input from a range of  
42 women's organisations and unions as well as employer organisations. The  
43 Bill returned to the Senate in March 2004 for second-reading speeches  
44 and attracted cross-party support from Labor and Greens, similar to the  
45 cross-party support attracted by Harré in New Zealand.

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In terms of parliamentary debate, the Australian Democrats, reduced to seven senators in the fortieth Parliament, raised the issue of paid maternity leave at twice the rate as the ALP with their 28 senators. Senator Stott Despoja raised the subject most often (19 times). Apart from her legislative activity she launched a national petition on paid maternity leave, in conjunction with WEL and other women's groups, and followed it up with a postcard campaign.

In terms of attention to the issue Stott Despoja was followed by Labor senator Trish Crossin, who made eight parliamentary interventions on the subject. Senator Crossin was Convenor of the Status of Women Committee of the Parliamentary Labor Party as well as a member of the National Committee of EL. She commissioned her own research on paid maternity leave in 2002 for the use of the Status of Women Committee. The next highest number of interventions (five) was by another EL member, Senator Sue Mackay.

Of the Labor references to paid maternity leave in the Senate, 72 per cent were made by women, although they averaged only 39 per cent of Labor senators in the fortieth parliament. In the House of Representatives 55.5 per cent of the Labor references to the subject were made by women, who constituted 31 per cent of Labor MPs. In the House the debate tended to be dominated by frontbench members, of who Jenny Macklin, the deputy leader, had the largest number of references (eight). Green parliamentarians, whose numbers rose to three in 2002, took a position similar to the Australian Democrats in seeking at least the ILO standard of paid maternity leave with associated right of return and reduced hours to accommodate breast-feeding.

The issue never became salient for the rural-based National Party, while in general the Liberal-National Party Coalition made only hostile references to the subject. Paid maternity leave was described as a 'one size fits all' statutory solution that ran contrary to the flexible labour market policies favoured by the Coalition, whereby individual workers could negotiate such conditions with employers. Coalition members also said the key issue was choice rather than workplace entitlements, and that paid maternity leave would advantage one group of women over another. The one exception to this hostility was Liberal senator Judith Troeth, who spoke in support of the Sex Discrimination Commissioner's Report, *A Time to Value*.

The Prime Minister maintained his stance that paid maternity leave would discriminate against women in the home. Despite the momentum that had built up for paid maternity leave, in the end both government and opposition abandoned it in favour of a payment for new mothers regardless of their workforce status. As the Sex Discrimination Commissioner pointed out, this was not paid maternity leave in the accepted sense of income replacement for working women for a mandatory period of leave, with associated guarantees of return to work and other conditions. So while the issue had achieved considerable salience, the willingness of

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the government to depict it as a form of discrimination against women in the home encouraged Labor to abandon it (again).

While EL women undoubtedly played a significant role in the adoption of the policy in 2002, and in ensuring it was prominent in parliamentary debate, they were not able to prevent the dumping of the policy two years later. On the other hand, the issue had achieved enough salience to push a conservative government to commit to a payment of \$4,000 (from 2005) to all new mothers.<sup>13</sup>

### Domestic violence/violence against women

The second term used for the search are 'domestic violence' and 'violence against women'. The violence issue illustrates very well the impact of women entering parliament and bringing women's movement discourses with them. Most of the early debate on domestic violence in the federal parliament was contributed by feminist Labor senators who had been active in WEL before entering parliament.

If we go back to the thirty-second parliament (1980–83), the earliest for which an electronic Hansard is available, we find only 12 documents in total (Table 6.2) on violence against women. The issue was barely registering in parliamentary debate, despite women refuge workers being camped

Table 6.2 Documents mentioning domestic violence/violence against women in the thirty-second parliament (1980–83), the thirty-seventh and thirty-eighth Parliaments (1993–98) and the thirty-ninth and fortieth Parliaments (1998–2004a)

Party	House	AD	ALP	GRN	Lib/CLP	NP/Nat	Other	Total
Parliament	32							
	Senate	0	7	n.a.	2	0	0	9
	HofRep	n.a.	3	n.a.	0	0	n.a.	3
	Total	0	10	0	2	0	0	12
Parliament	37/38							
	Senate	28	62	5	71	7	17	190
	HofRep	n.a.	113	n.a.	81	14	15	223
	Total	28	175	5	152	21	32	413
Parliament	39/40							
	Senate	41	77	16	85	1	41	261
	HofRep	n.a.	158	0	76	12	8	254
	Total	41	235	16	161	13	49	515

#### Notes

Electronic Hansard dates only from 1981, so some data may be missing from this table.

a Some 46 of these documents relate to the domestic violence clause in the Constitution, i.e. defence against internal threats.

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outside Parliament House in protest against the devolution of federal funds for refuges, rape crisis centres and women's health centres to unsympathetic or downright hostile state governments.

Once established on the policy agenda, however, the issue of violence against women tends to attract conservative support. While paid maternity leave is a redistributive issue, likely to be favoured more by parties on the left than on the right of politics, the issue of violence against women can mesh well with conservative law-and-order themes. When conservative governments have been elected in Australia, whether at state, territory or federal level, they have generally changed the priorities of women's units to play down redistributive issues such as equal pay and to refocus on issues such as entrepreneurship. Violence against women has, however, been an issue that conservative governments have in the past been comfortable to maintain as a policy priority. The assumption that violence against women would be an issue with which conservative parties would be relatively comfortable appears to be borne out by the data from Hansard, with Liberal senators raising the issue more often than Labor senators. For most of the time since 1996 the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women has been located in the Senate, which would affect these figures.

The Howard government significantly raised budget allocations for domestic violence projects, allocating \$50 million to 'Partnerships against Domestic Violence' pilot projects. During the fortieth parliament, however, the inroads into conservative politics of the men's rights movement were becoming increasingly evident. The men's rights movement, which was receiving increased operational funding from the federal government, contested all approaches to domestic violence not based on the presumption that women were equally as violent as men. In 2003 a \$13 million community awareness and prevention programme called 'No respect, no relationship' was cancelled ten days before it was due to start, after an adverse report from a government committee. Groups such as the Men's Rights Agency had vociferously opposed the portrayal of men as the perpetrators in this advertising.<sup>14</sup> This incident came on top of an earlier decision to divert \$10 million from the government's Partnerships against Domestic Violence programme to pay for anti-terrorism fridge magnets telling householders to 'Be alert not alarmed'. These became issues eagerly pursued by Labor frontbenchers, as reflected in the figures for the House of Representatives.

Violence against women is also an issue raised disproportionately by Australian Democrat senators, who have raised the issue twice as often as the Liberals, taking into account relative numbers. Interestingly about half of the Democrat interventions on the subject are made by male senators. Like men representing other post-materialist parties such as the Greens, male Democrat senators have challenged gender norms in a variety of ways. While one male senator was famous for knitting in the chamber

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during Wool Week, other activities have included wearing the ribbons of Men Against Sexual Assault.

On the whole, the issue of violence against women has risen in salience since 1998, particularly for Labor members of the House of Representatives pursuing government slip-ups. In the Senate, women were responsible for 47 per cent of the Labor references to the subject, while they averaged 35 per cent of Labor senators over the two parliaments. As with paid maternity leave, it is Senator Trish Crossin who raises the issue with the most frequency (nine times), but other EL-supported senators have also played a prominent role. Senators Sue Mackay and Kate Lundy both raised the issue seven times.

### Gender-inclusive language

Has the increase in feminist-identified women in the Australian parliament resulted in more gender-inclusive language? Since 1998 the discourse of Coalition (Liberal and National) MPs has actually tended to become less gender-inclusive in both houses, while Labor discourse in the Senate has become more gender-inclusive (Table 6.3). During this period conservative discourse has become more inflected by populist themes of 'governing for the mainstream' and disparaging the claims of elites and special interests (for example, women, Indigenous Australians and ethnic minorities). The same populist pull within the Labor Party has encountered greater resistance.

Under the Coalition government, women's policy machinery within government, intended to analyse gender-specific impacts of policy, has largely been dismantled. There has been an erosion of previous policies directing family assistance to primary carers rather than primary

*Table 6.3* Mentions of a woman<sup>a</sup> or women in the thirty-seventh and thirty-eight Parliaments and the thirty-ninth and fortieth Parliaments

<i>Party</i>	<i>House</i>	<i>AD</i>	<i>ALP</i>	<i>GRN</i>	<i>Lib/CLP</i>	<i>NP/Nat</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
Parliament	37/38							
	Senate	425	1,127	115	1,348	135	496	3,646
	HofRep	n.a.	1,664	n.a.	1,346	274	309	3,593
	Total	425	2,791	115	2,694	409	805	7,239
Parliament	39/40							
	Senate	519	1,665	163	1,200	58	390	3,995
	HofRep	n.a.	1,698	17	1,268	205	482	3,670
	Total	519	3,363	180	2,468	263	872	7,665

Note

a Includes many 'procedural' documents relating to the Democrats' private member's Bill on paid maternity leave.

breadwinners and new policies have been promoted to 'strengthen' traditional families. These trends may account for the decreasing inclination on the part of conservative politicians to specify women as the objects of government policy, rather than directing appeals to families or taxpayers. It is not only in Australia that developments of this kind have been taking place in conservative parties. A survey of state legislators in the United States showed that between 1988 and 2001 the proportion of Republican women Representatives who identified themselves as feminist reduced by half.<sup>15</sup>

### Conclusion

Can we say that EL has contributed to the substantive representation of women in the Australian parliament as well as to their increased presence? The evidence from parliamentary debate is inconclusive on its own, although it raises a number of interesting questions. The issue of paid maternity leave did take off in the fortieth parliament but its appearance on the parliamentary agenda was due to the initiative of the then leader of the Australian Democrats. Exogenous factors such as the high-profile campaign by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner were also important. EL women pursued the issue energetically, but in the end their party bowed to the populist agenda-setting of the government – that framed paid maternity leave as 'special treatment' for working women.

The issue of violence against women was even more complex, with the Coalition government at first talking up the issue, but with Labor then making the running on government failures. Labor also made commitments to wresting the issue away from the men's rights groups, whose impact was largely responsible for government policy failures. The capacity of women's services for effective advocacy was to be restored with the funding of a new peak body. At the level of the nature of parliamentary language, the increased presence of feminist women on one side of politics was having detectable partisan effects. The increased use of gender-inclusive language by Labor, particularly in the Senate, stood out in the context of the retreat from such gender-inclusive language by the Coalition.

In general Labor women, regardless of whether they are supported by EL, have to contend with historic suspicion of feminism within the party, as well as more recent populist currents and the pervasive demands of factional loyalty. This has led one leading feminist author and former Democrat to describe Labor women as 'political eunuchs' who fail to be outspoken in defence of their sex. She alleges that while EL has been able to exert some pressure on the women it supports, it is not enough to 'galvanise the women once they are elected'<sup>16</sup> (Summers 2003: 214–15). The more recent post-materialist minor parties present fewer obstacles to the articulation of feminist discourse, and as we have seen, this has been true

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1 of both women and men, including the two senators who are the only  
2 openly gay men in the parliament.

3 On the other hand, bodies such as EL have an important role in main-  
4 taining some form of feminist collectivity. In the federal parliament, EL  
5 has worked closely with the Status of Women Committee of the  
6 Parliamentary Labor Party in performing this role. Twenty years ago many  
7 of the Labor women politicians entering Australian parliaments came  
8 straight from a background in the women's movement, most notably  
9 WEL. They introduced new discourses into parliament, as we can see from  
10 their first speeches. Today new women entering parliament are more  
11 likely to come from backgrounds similar to those of their male colleagues,  
12 often having legal qualifications and a background in electorate offices or  
13 as ministerial staffers. This means that having structures connected with  
14 their professional political careers, but providing them with a mandate to  
15 work collectively with other women, becomes potentially more important  
16 to the articulation of a group perspective.

17 The Status of Women Committee of the federal Parliamentary Labor  
18 Party was established in 1981 and its convenors have worked hard to focus  
19 attention on the gender impact of day-to-day public policy issues, whether  
20 in government or in opposition. It has been unusual in bringing women  
21 together across factional barriers. Its post-budget breakfast briefings in  
22 Parliament House, bringing representatives of women's organisations  
23 together with Labor women parliamentarians and shadow ministers, have  
24 been remarkably successful. Detailed critiques are provided at these events  
25 of the gender impact of budget initiatives and other government policy,  
26 such as tax cuts in 2004 pitched above the level of women's earnings.

27 Meanwhile, the role of EL in supporting the increased entry of Labor  
28 women to parliament has been duly acknowledged in the first speeches  
29 recorded in Hansard:

30  
31 I acknowledge the support and solidarity I have experienced from EL.  
32 This organisation, formed by strong women with experience in the  
33 political system and personified by Joan Kirner, has given many of us  
34 practical help when making the decision to be involved, and guidance  
35 when taking office, in the system that our sisters organising for  
36 suffrage knew was rightfully ours.<sup>17</sup>  
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38 Evidence of EL's role in maintaining pressure for the preselection of  
39 women candidates also comes from the media. Between February 2000  
40 and 23 April 2004 EL's advocacy activity was written up in 106 press arti-  
41 cles captured by Parlinfo. In particular its success in achieving renewed  
42 ALP commitment to quotas in 2002 received wide attention.

43 The role of EL in providing a form of accountability is more difficult,  
44 and an issue with which the organisation has been grappling. As we have  
45 seen, candidates are interviewed as to their track record and commitments

on gender equity before EL endorsement is provided and are reinterviewed prior to endorsement or support for a subsequent term of office. So far, there has not been any dedicated accountability measure for their parliamentary performance. In 2004 a proposal was being developed to have a mid-term review of EL parliamentarians with an instrument for self-assessment of activity and outcomes that would capture some quantitative data for an EL data base.<sup>18</sup>

There is also the 'weak' form of accountability about which Susan J. Carroll has written in the US context.<sup>19</sup> This is provided by regular meetings between EL and its parliamentarians, where progress of parliamentary work on EL issues is discussed. Such contact means continued exposure to group expectations and reminders of feminist values. This is important in the context of competing pressures of constituency, party, faction, government, parliament and personal priorities. It is particularly important in the context of the pull of populist discourse within Australian politics from the 1990s and the shift away from the equal opportunity agendas of the preceding decades.

EL is an adaptation of the separate institution-building long engaged in by feminists to new circumstances – the professionalisation of political careers. In other words, it provides an institutional base for feminism within professionalised party politics. This includes selective benefits for those who can demonstrate a track record and commitment to gender equity, as well as exposure to women-centred policy perspectives and a degree of accountability for performance.

## Notes

My thanks to Senator Kate Lundy for providing access to the full client version of Parlinfo, to Janet Wilson and Karen Mow for generous advice, to Peter Brent for editing and to Manon Tremblay and Linda Trimble for helpful comments.

- 1 For an overview, including the theory of 'critical mass', see Chapter 1 of this volume.
- 2 For example, Burt *et al.*, Horton and Martin, 'Women in the Ontario New Democratic Government'; Steele, 'The Liberal Women's Caucus'.
- 3 Carroll, 'Are US Women State Legislators Accountable to Women?'; Weldon, 'Beyond Bodies'.
- 4 Phillips, *The Politics of Presence*, Sawer, 'The Representation of Women in Australia'.
- 5 EMILY is an acronym for Early Money Is Like Yeast (it makes the dough rise). The original EMILY's List was established as a fund-raising vehicle for pro-choice Democrat women candidates in the United States in 1985.
- 6 I decided to conduct the research on the federal parliament because the federal Hansard has been on-line for much longer than those of the state and territory parliaments and has the advantage of a better search engine. A comparable study is yet to be undertaken elsewhere. The parliaments involved are the thirty-seventh and thirty-eight parliaments of 1993–96 and 1996–98 and the thirty-ninth and fortieth parliaments of 1998–2001 and 2001–04.
- 7 The original study on which this chapter is based also analysed the incidence of

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- 1 the term 'unpaid work', a term taken up by organisations representing women  
2 in the home as well as by other groups. This part of the study is not included  
3 here, for reasons of space.
- 4 8 Some of these organisational tensions were defused in 2002 by party reforms  
5 that increased internal party democracy.
- 6 9 Australian Candidate Study 2001, held in the Australian Social Science Data  
7 Archive, Australian National University. My thanks to Ian McAllister for com-  
8 missioning the runs showing the difference in attitudes between EL and non-  
9 EL women candidates.
- 10 10 Lawrence, 'The Gender Gap in Political Behaviour', 20–1.
- 11 11 This research has been provided at discounted rates of \$40,000 for each study.
- 12 12 See Curtin, 'Representing the "Interests" of Women in the Paid Maternity  
13 Leave Debate'.
- 14 13 Labor adopted a similar scheme but proposed means-testing it on 'family'  
15 income.
- 16 14 *MRA* (Men's Rights Agency) *News*, March 2004. Subsequently the government  
17 released a modified campaign with an accompanying hot line. No women's ser-  
18 vices were permitted to tender for the hot line, despite operating domestic viol-  
19 ence referral services in all states and territories.
- 20 15 Carroll, 'Are US Women State Legislators Accountable to Women?', 11.
- 21 16 Summers, *The End of Equality?*, 214–5.
- 22 17 Moore, First Speech, Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates,  
23 Senate, 3805.
- 24 18 Interview with Joan Kirner, Canberra, 21 April 2004.
- 25 19 See Carroll, 'Are US Women State Legislators Accountable to Women?'.
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