

**'When women support women...'
EMILY's List and the substantive
representation of women in Australia**

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Introduction

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 and ensure women's interests were represented. Nonetheless, it was recognised that the presence of women in legislatures did not necessarily result in increased attention to issues of special concern to women – the substantive representation of women. 'Standing for' is not the same as 'acting for' and indeed the presence of women may be an alibi for policies that are far from women-friendly. This was brought home in Australia when an increase in women in the federal parliament in 1996 coincided with substantial cuts to the Office of the Status of Women, to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and to childcare funding.

Internationally, researchers have examined the circumstances in which women legislators do act as advocates for women as a group (Tremblay 1998; Grey 2002; Mackay 2004). They have identified factors such as party ideology, the relative proportion of women in legislatures ('critical mass'), self-identification of legislators as feminists, existence of women's caucuses within parliamentary parties or within parliament, membership of and association with women's movement organisations, and, more generally, the level of women's movement activity outside parliament.

One issue that has been identified in relation to the substantive representation of women is the lack of accountability of individual women MPs for achieving outcomes of specific concern to women as a group (Phillips 1995; Sawer 2000). This paper 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)¹ 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

¹ 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 US in 1985.

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. International research has suggested that membership of women's movement organisations helps women parliamentarians maintain collective identity and awareness of gender implications of policy (Carroll 2003; Weldon 2002). EL is an example of a women's movement organisation that provides woman-centred policy space and opportunity for feminist discourse but which is also specifically adapted to an era of professionalised party politics

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 where Labor is in office and has the advantage of a better search engine.² A comparable study is yet to be undertaken elsewhere. The research was conducted on the electronic Hansard of the House of Representatives and the Senate for the two federal parliaments elected before EL was created and the subsequent two parliaments.³ The full version of Parlinfo, available to federal parliamentarians, provides the number of documents in which the search term appears, and can provide breakdowns by party or member's name but not, unfortunately, by gender. It should be noted that there may be repeated references to the term within any given document, whether it is a speech or parliamentary question, but what is recorded in this analysis is simply the number of documents in which the term appears.

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

The particular issues selected were those of paid maternity leave, domestic violence / violence against women and unpaid work. As explained in greater detail further on, these terms were selected because of their significance to the substantive representation of women, variously understood. That is, this

² The full version of Parlinfo has advantages over any of the search engines attached to State or Territory Hansards, including the facility to search by party. Commonwealth Hansard has also been on-line at least 10 years longer than any of the others.

³ The parliaments involved are the 37th and 38th parliaments of 1993-96 and 1996-98 and the 39th and 40th parliaments of 1998-2001 and 2001-04. My thanks to Senator Kate Lundy for providing access to the full client version of Parlinfo for the purpose of this analysis, to Janet Wilson, Karen Mow for generous advice, to Peter Brent for editing and to anonymous referees for helpful comments.

study explores whether the presence in parliament of a bloc of women supported by and belonging to a feminist organisation helped raise the salience of issues identified as significant by women in the community as well as by the organisation itself. The use of gender-inclusive language was also analysed for these parliaments. In the case of one issue, that of violence against women, the earliest parliament for which electronic data was available was added to the study, to highlight the changes brought about by increased numbers of women. Aside from the analysis of parliamentary discourse the paper looks briefly at the research and advocacy role of EL in relation to gender equity issues and its impact on party policy.

Origins and attitudes of EMILY's List

Feminists within the Australian Labor Party had campaigned energetically from the 1970s to make the party less of a male bastion and more woman-friendly. The results of a voluntary affirmative action policy adopted in 1981 had been patchy to say the least. In 1994 the party adopted a new target that women should constitute 35 per cent of all parliamentary Labor parties by 2002. This time the sanction of national intervention in preselections was to be applied if the target was not achieved.

Meanwhile, the defeat of the federal Labor government in 1996 led to two distinct outcomes, both of which contributed to the creation of EL. On the one hand the proportion of women among federal Labor MPs fell from 13 to 8 percent, a function of the marginality of their seats. On the other hand an anti-feminist backlash emerged, with prominent Labor identities blaming feminists and other 'special interests' for the defeat. The new conservative government promised to end the era of political correctness.

The struggle to set up EL, led by former state Premier Joan Kirner, was a prolonged one. It was a struggle with the National Executive of the Party and revolved around issues of control. Those setting up the new organisation pointed out that it 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 male structures of the party. The question of whether the male-dominated 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.⁴ Meanwhile EL was launched around Australia in 1996 with its independence intact. By 2004 it had around 2000 members. Although EL is regarded by the Australian Electoral Commission

⁴ Some of these organisational tensions were defused in 2002 by party reforms that increased internal party democracy.

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 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 childcare, 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.'⁵ In other words, EL candidates exhibited consistent attitudes towards equal opportunity and the macro-economic policy needed to support it.

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.

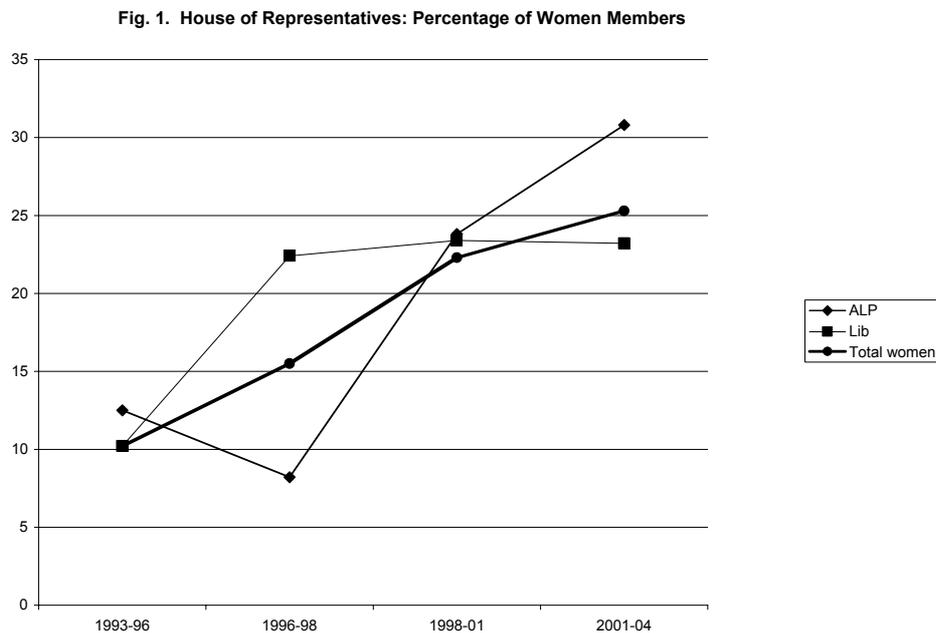
Lake pointed out that the ALP was failing to target those juggling work and family responsibilities and suggested it was the only social democratic party in the western world to be supported more by men than by women. The Australian Election Study in the 1990s showed a persistent if fluctuating shortfall 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 childcare, the ALP had not mobilised support from women on this basis (Lawrence 1997: 20-21).

⁵ Australian Candidate Study 2001, held in the Australian Social Science Data Archive, Australian National University. My thanks to Ian McAllister for commissioning the runs showing the difference in attitudes between EL and non-EL women candidates.

EL proceeded to commission gender-gap research for use in the 1998 federal campaign, as it has done for subsequent campaigns.⁶ 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 \$1000 're-entry to the workforce' grants to help women with retraining and updating of skills. The 2004 gender-gap research was again useful in shaping campaign messages on health, education and childcare.

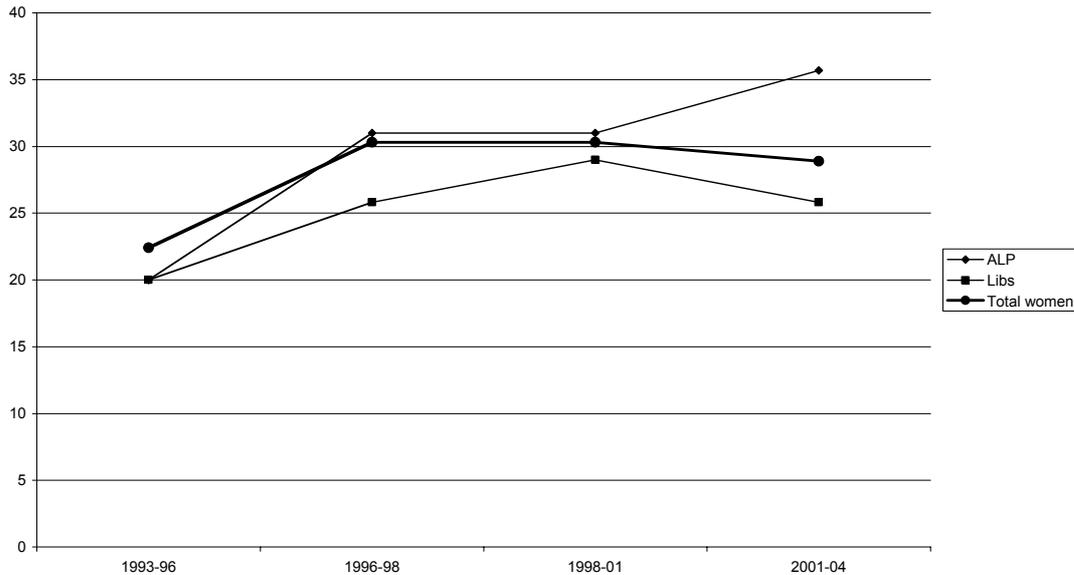
Substantive representation of women in parliamentary debate

As we have seen, by April 2004 EL claimed to have helped 91 new women enter Australian parliaments and there were 23 EMILY's List supported women in the federal parliament. The increased presence of women in the federal parliament in the period since 1996, particularly in the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party, can be seen in Figures 1 and 2. By 2004 women constituted 34 per cent of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party and of these Labor women 71 per cent were supported by EL.



⁶ This research has been provided at discounted rates of \$40 000 for each study.

Fig. 2. Senate: Percentage of Women



To test the extent to which the increased presence of committed women in the federal parliament made a difference to the substantive representation of Australian women I explored parliamentary debate for the incidence of some key terms. The terms are 'paid maternity leave'; 'unpaid work'; 'domestic violence/violence against women'. All of these have been major issues for the women's movement; they have been selected as a representative sample because of their differing political connotations and constituencies. 'Paid maternity leave' is generally regarded as central to equal opportunity for women, to the combining of work and family and to maternal and infant health. For all these reasons it is the kind of issue we would expect to form part of the 'substantive representation' of women. It is also a redistributive issue, particularly in the context of a non-contributory social security system such as we have in Australia. This means it is less likely to be supported by conservative or free-market politicians. Another possible issue of this type would have been equal pay or pay equity.

'Unpaid work' is a term that stems from feminist discourse. The older term 'domestic duties' had implied that the disproportionate share of unpaid work performed by women was part of a natural or God-given order of things. It was a private matter and less worthy of attention than the paid work performed by men. Hence the presence of the term in parliamentary discourse reflects the demand for greater recognition of the economic role of 'women's work'. Unlike paid maternity leave it is an issue that has been taken up by organisations representing women in the home, as well as by groups more oriented to women in the workforce.

The issues of domestic violence and violence against women were also issues put on the public agenda by the women's movement. However they are issues that conservative governments have

generally been more comfortable with than directly redistributive issues, in part because of their congruence with law and order themes. Hence we might expect that conservative governments wishing to demonstrate credentials in relation to the status of women would place considerable emphasis on this issue area.

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

Paid maternity leave

Australia is one of only two OECD countries that does not provide paid maternity leave on a comprehensive basis and this has been a long-standing issue for the women's movement. When the Whitlam government introduced paid maternity leave for public servants in 1973 this was intended to be the first step in its extension to all women workers. One problem (apart from the sacking of the Prime Minister by the Governor-General) was that, like New Zealand, Australia does not have a contributory social insurance system. Moreover women workers are very unevenly spread across industries and it would have discriminated against employers of women for them to be obliged to pay maternity leave. So unlike other conditions included in industrial awards, such as paid sick leave, it was clear from early on that maternity leave would need to be funded out of general revenue. There never seemed to be a good time to do this, particularly for belt-tightening governments. As an issue it barely featured in parliamentary debate. For example, it was mentioned only once in the 32nd parliament (1980-83) – by a feminist Senator asking how far it had been made available in statutory authorities.

Even when a new Labor government was elected in 1983 and Australia ratified the United Nations 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. While 65 per cent of managers and administrators in 2001 had access to paid maternity leave, only 18 per cent of those employed in clerical, sales and service positions and 38 per cent of women in the workforce as a whole did. 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, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Documents mentioning paid maternity leave in 37th and 38th Parliaments (1993–1998)

Party	AD	ALP	GRN	Lib/CLP	NP/Nat	Other	Total
Senate	4	10	1	1	0	1	17
H of R	N/A	12	N/A	2	0	0	14
Total	4	22	1	3	0	1	31

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

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 Convention 183 on the subject in 2000, was also a significant international influence. The new standard included 14 weeks paid leave and guaranteed right of return with reduced hours or breaks for breastfeeding. ACTU President Sharan Burrow announced that signing up to the ILO Convention and the removal of Australia's reservation to the CEDAW Convention would be priority issues for the union movement.

Paid maternity leave finally began to feature in a substantial way on the parliamentary agenda in the 40th parliament (covered by Table 2). This was in part because the Clark Labour government in New Zealand moved on the issue in 2001, leaving Australia as an outrider along with the USA. It should be noted that in New Zealand it was a minor party (the Alliance) that put paid parental leave on the parliamentary agenda. Laila Harré had promoted paid parental leave since her election in 1996 and introduced a private member's bill on the subject. The Alliance joined the Labour Party in a coalition government in 1999 and Harré introduced paid parental leave legislation as a government minister in 2001.

In Australia it was also a minor party, the Australian Democrats, that was playing an agenda-setting role. The feminist leader of the Australian Democrats, Senator Natasha Stott Despoja, campaigned on

paid maternity leave in the 2001 federal election and introduced a private senator's bill on the subject the following year. In 2002 the ALP also announced a new commitment to paid maternity leave, although as we shall see this was to be short-lived.

Even more important in terms of the public agenda was the campaign undertaken by the Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Pru Goward. This came as a surprise to many as Goward was previously known as a close friend and biographer of the Prime Minister and as a conservative appointment to head the federal office of the Status of Women. After taking up her new position in 2001 she turned her considerable media skills to the cause of paid maternity leave. She issued a final report "A Time to Value" in December 2002 and took to the airwaves, with strong support from the ACTU and women's organisations. She adopted an effective discursive strategy, focusing on the bodily welfare of women, and physical after-effects of giving birth, to ward off claims of discrimination against men in the workforce (Curtin 2003). At the Commonwealth/State Ministers' Council on the Status of Women in August 2003, five of the six states and both territories called on the Commonwealth government to introduce paid maternity leave fully funded by the Commonwealth.

Table 2. Documents mentioning paid maternity leave in 39th and 40th Parliaments (1998–2004#)

Party	AD	ALP	GRN	Lib/CLP	NP/Nats	Other	Total
Senate	26	50	4	16	0	20*	116
H of R	N/A	85	1	15	3	3	107
Total	26	135	5	31	3	23	223

In all cases Hansard searches were conducted 23 April 2004, so the record for the 40th parliament is incomplete.
* Includes many 'procedural' documents relating to the Democrats' Private Member's Bill on paid maternity leave.

The Hansard data clearly shows that the issue did not become salient in parliamentary debate until after the 2001 election and the initial catalyst was Stott Despoja's Workplace Relations Amendment (Paid Maternity Leave) Bill 2002. The Bill was investigated by the relevant Senate legislation committee, which provided opportunities for public input from a range of women's organisations and unions as well as employer organisations. The Greens and ALP also made proposals for amendments. The Bill returned to the Senate in March 2004 for Second Reading speeches; the tone of speeches made by Labor and Greens congratulating Stott Despoja for her dedication to the issue was similar to the cross-party support attracted by Harré in New Zealand.

In terms of parliamentary debate, the Australian Democrats, reduced to seven Senators in the 40th 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 Women's Electoral Lobby 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 Chair 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 40th 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 which Jenny Macklin, the Deputy Leader, had the largest number of references (8). Greens 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 rights 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 saliency, the willingness of 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 saliency to push a

conservative government to commit to a payment to all new mothers, a payment not income tested on partner's income, unlike Labor's version.

Unpaid work

The second term examined in this study is that of 'unpaid work'. This term stems from feminist discourse and disrupts traditional assertions about gender roles. It replaces the term 'domestic duties' which had implied that household work performed by women was part of a natural order of things and not worthy of public attention. The term 'unpaid work' is associated with recognition that it is real work, often highly skilled and demanding, and vital to the functioning of the economy (Grey 2004). It also draws attention to the impact of unpaid work on workforce participation and its impact on female poverty.

Women's movements across the world have called for unpaid work to be recognised through inclusion in national accounts. This demand appears to have been first raised in the Australian Parliament by a feminist Labor Senator in 1982 (Giles 1982: 2830). It was included in the Forward Looking Strategies adopted at the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985 and enthusiastically endorsed by the Australian government of the day. It is an issue characteristically raised by women parliamentarians, who were responsible for more than half the references to it between 1993 and 1998, although they constituted only about a seventh of federal parliamentarians 1993-96 and a fifth 1996-98.

The findings of an Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) pilot time-use survey of 1987 were widely promoted by the Office of the Status of Women, using cartoons by a feminist cartoonist to help get the message across. The first national time-use survey took place in 1992. Australia's time-use methodology was regarded as highly advanced in international terms, including the recording of simultaneous as well as primary activities in the 48-hour diaries distributed to members of some 3000 households across the nation over a 12-month period to capture seasonal variations.

The government was also committed to the preparation of satellite national accounts, incorporating the value contributed by unpaid work. Using the individual replacement function approach, the ABS calculated the value of unpaid work to be 58 per cent of GDP and that 65 per cent of this value was contributed by women (1994: 88). Such findings became part of the 'Sharing the Load' community education campaign, designed to raise awareness of the need to take unpaid work into account in the design of paid work and to enable men and women to share in it more equally. The time-use survey was designated as a 'core social survey' – one of those undertaken every five years. The comparative salience of the issue in this period is reflected in Table 3.

Table 3. Documents mentioning unpaid work in 37th / 38th and 39th/40th parliaments (both houses)

Party		AD	ALP	GRN	Lib/CLP	NP/Nat	Other	Total
Parlt	37/38	19	19	2	19	0	3	62
	39/40	5	21	3	5	0	8	42

The Second National Survey duly took place in 1997. By 2000, however, a decision was taken to downgrade the status of the survey and to postpone it. The rationale was that the policy applications of the data were limited and that it was not cost-effective. Of course without it there is no way to measure the value of informal care or of home production of goods and services. While organisations such the Women's Action Alliance, representing women as mothers, wives and homemakers took up the issue, the Office of the Status of Women under a very conservative federal government was no longer an effective advocate for it.

In parliament Senator Brian Harradine, a Catholic Independent, raised the issue of the cessation of the time-use surveys. He had been calling for the inclusion of unpaid work in the national accounts since the 33rd Parliament, an interesting example of how feminists and those with a conservative family ideology had a shared interest in increasing the visibility of women's household work. Labor politicians continued to raise the issue of unpaid work but, in general, it faded (see Table 3). The rural-based National Party members, particularly impervious to feminist discourse, had never mentioned it. It may seem paradoxical that a conservative government seeking to encourage voluntary work and traditional family values should cease collecting statistics on the incidence and value to the economy of unpaid work. The answer must be sought in the women's movement focus on the distribution of unpaid work and its effects. In 2004 the Prime Minister defended restricting tax cuts to those earning more than \$52,000; he said the government was rewarding those 'who want to better themselves and work harder'. The distribution of unpaid work makes it difficult for women to earn more than \$52,000 (the average earnings for women were \$30,000 at the time), regardless of how hard they are working.

Domestic violence/violence against women

The third terms 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 undertaken by feminist Labor Senators who had been active in WEL before entering parliament.

If we go back to the 32nd parliament (1980–83) we find only 12 documents in total, for both houses (Table 4), despite turbulence in this policy area. In 1981 women refuge workers were camping 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. As a result all women's services had been lost in the Northern Territory and refuges in Queensland and Western

Australia were struggling to survive. In separate incidents a federal minister had caused outrage by trying to obtain addresses of refugees in Victoria and over 60 women were arrested for protesting against rape in war at an ANZAC Day ceremony in Canberra. Despite all this, and the efforts of the first feminist Labor Senators, the issue barely registered in parliamentary debate.

Table 4. Documents mentioning domestic violence/violence against women in the 32nd parliament (1980–83)*

Party	AD	ALP	Lib/CLP	NP/Nat	Total
Senate	-	7	2	-	9
H of R	N/A	3	-	-	3
Total	-	10	2	-	12

* Electronic Hansard only dates from 1981 so there may be some missing data in this table.

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 levels 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 (Tables 5 and 6). 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.

Table 5. Documents mentioning domestic violence/violence against women in the 37th and 38th parliaments

Party	AD	ALP	GRN	Lib/CLP	NP/Nat	Other	Total
Senate	28	62	5	71	7	17	190
H of R	N/A	113	N/A	81	14	15	223
Total	28	175	5	152	21	32	413

The Howard government significantly raised Budget allocations for domestic violence projects, allocating \$50 million to 'Partnerships against Domestic Violence' pilot programs. During the 40th parliament, however, the inroads into conservative politics of the men's rights movement were becoming increasingly evident. In 2003 a \$13 million dollar community awareness and prevention program called 'No respect, no relationship' was planned, directed at young people. But ten days

before the television and magazine ads were due to start they were cancelled, as a result of an adverse report from the (all-male) Ministerial Committee on Government Communications. Groups such as the Men's Rights Agency had vociferously opposed the portrayal of men as the perpetrators in this advertising. Later the government also said it needed to set up a dedicated hot-line using one of its preferred service providers – women's services were excluded from the tendering process. This incident came on top of an earlier decision to divert \$10 million from the government's Partnerships against Domestic Violence program to pay for anti-terrorism fridge magnets telling all 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 Democrats Senators, who have raised the issue twice as often as the Liberals, taking into account relative numbers (Table 6). Interestingly about half of the Democrats interventions on the subject are made by male Senators, who have challenged gender norms in a variety of ways. While one male Democrat Senator was famous for knitting in the Chamber during Wool Week, other activities have included wearing the ribbons of Men Against Sexual Assault.

Table 6. Documents mentioning domestic violence*/violence against women in 39th and 40th parliaments

Party	AD	ALP	GRN	Lib/CLP	NP/Nat	Other	Total
Senate	41	77	16	85	1	41	261
H of R	N/A	158	0	76	12	8	254
Total	41	235	16	161	13	49	515

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

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? It can be seen from Tables 7 and 8 that 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. 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.

Table 7. Mentions of woman* or women* 37th and 38th parliaments

Party	AD	ALP	Greens	Lib/CLP	NP/Nat	Other	Total
Senate	425	1127	115	1348	135	496	3646
H of R	N/A	1664	N/A	1346	274	309	3593
Total	425	2791	115	2694	409	805	7239

Table 8. Mentions of woman* or women* 39th and 40th parliaments

Party	AD	ALP	Greens	Lib/CLP	NP/Nat	Other	Total
Senate	519	1665	163	1200	58	390	3995
H of R	N/A	1698	17	1268	205	482	3670
Total	519	3363	180	2468	263	872	7665

Under the Howard 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 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 these kinds of developments have been taking place in conservative parties. A recent survey of state legislators in the USA has shown that between 1988 and 2001 the proportion of Republican women Representatives who identified themselves as feminist has reduced by half (Carroll 2003: 11).

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 unpaid work tended to fade from parliamentary debate, despite a marginal increase in Labor mentions of the issue. The issue of paid maternity leave did take off in the 40th parliament but while EL women were working hard on this behind the scenes, 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. Labor women continued to pursue 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 contest 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 femocrat to describe them 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' (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 of both women and men, including the two Senators who are the only openly gay men in the parliament.

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

The Status of Women Committee of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party was established in 1981 and its convenors have worked hard to focus attention on the gender impact of day-to-day public policy issues, whether in government or Opposition. It has been notably effective in bringing women together across factional barriers. Its post-Budget breakfast briefings in Parliament House, bringing

representatives of women's organisations together with Labor women parliamentarians and shadow ministers, have been remarkably successful. The documentation accompanying these events has provided detailed critiques of the gender impact of Budget initiatives and other government policy, such as the tax cuts of 2004 pitched above the level of women's earnings.

Meanwhile, the role of EL in supporting the increased entry of Labor women to parliament has been duly acknowledged in the first speeches recorded in Hansard: 'I acknowledge the support and solidarity I have experienced from EL. This organisation, formed by strong women with experience in the political system and personified by Joan Kirner, has given many of us practical help when making the decision to be involved, and guidance when taking office, in the system that our sisters organising for suffrage knew was rightfully ours.' (Moore 2002: 3805).

Evidence of EL's role in maintaining pressure for the preselection of women candidates also comes from the media. Between February 2000 and 23 April 2004 EL's advocacy activity was written up in 106 press articles captured by Parlinfo. In particular its success in achieving renewed ALP commitment to quotas in 2002 received wide attention.

The role of EL in providing a form of accountability is more difficult, and an issue with which the organisation has been grappling. As we have 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. Currently (April 2004) there is a proposal to have a mid-term review of the achievements of EL parliamentarians with an instrument for self-assessment of activity and outcomes that would capture some quantitative data for an EL data base.⁷

There is also the 'weak' form of accountability of which Susan J Carroll has written in the US context (2003). 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.

⁷ Interview with Joan Kirner, Canberra, 21 April 2004.

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