Women Parliamentarians Perceptions of Political Influence in the South African Parliament

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Abstract

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In this study, I examine how women Parliamentarians understand their political influence within the South African Parliament and what environmental factors contribute to this understanding. Currently, South Africa is a global leader for the amount of women in Parliament and has been since the 1994 democratic transition. This study examines the formal and informal factors that South African women parliamentarians discuss as helping and hindering their political effectiveness.

Aside from the work of Hassim (2003) and Pandor (1999), little academic research explores the experiences of women within South Africa's Parliament. Considering this lack of research regarding women's experiences within government, I selected a research method that would allow an open space for communication: semi-structured interviews with a qualitative feminist analysis. This study explores the opportunities and obstacles that the women perceived as affecting their political influence.

The participant's responses indicate that they perceive a high level of political influence, with some reservations. Four themes emerged as the leading environmental factors in contributing to the participant's political efficacy: the 1994 democratic transition, the Parliament structure (formal and informal), the political party, and the role of gender.

The informal structures of Parliament, such as socializing spaces, and gender stereotypes, such as the responsibility of women Parliamentarians for 'women's issues', were discussed as the primary obstacles that hinder the women Parliamentarian's political influence.

The participants felt that the attitudes of political parties regarding women's role in Parliament was critical in facilitating their influence on the political agenda. The women Parliamentarians credited primarily the African National Congress (ANC) political party for framing and developing an atmosphere that mandated women's strong participation in government and their positive perceptions of political influence.

January 2006

Declaration

I declare that *Women Parliamentarians Perceptions of Political Influence* is my own work, that it has not been submitted before any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quotes have been indicated and acknowledges as complete references.

Sara Angevine   **January 2006**

Signed: _____

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INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in significant numbers in government, as either elected or appointed leaders, is one of the largest shifts recorded in current global governance. This shift will be examined in relation to the experiences of women parliamentarians in South Africa, although this will be examined in relation to a larger body of research. This study aims to examine how, once inside government, women perceive their ability to influence the political agenda. In order to promote gender equality and gender equity within legislative bodies, one must assess the factors that contribute to and hinder women's full participation. This research study can begin by asking female legislators in South Africa about their understandings of their politically-related experiences.

Public governance is an arena dominated throughout the world by men. International mandates aimed at gender equality, such as the Beijing Platform of Action, have presented challenges to governments by requesting that women constitute 30% of the seats in government. Rosabeth Kanter's study, which focused on the climate for women within corporations, found that when women are in numbers of less than 15%, they are perceived as tokens, and tend to be ineffective in challenging institutional norms. A 'critical mass' was determined to be when the numbers are between 15% and 30%; this is when women " have potential allies among each other, can form coalitions, and can affect the culture of the group" (Kanter 1977:209). Kanter's study has strengthened arguments for women's 'critical mass' within government.

South Africa is considered a global leader in terms of the numbers of women in Parliament and in terms of the prioritization of gender equality. Few countries have accomplished this level of gender equality inside the public domain of government. South Africa was also the first country inside of Africa with a 'critical mass 'of female members in Parliament

(Reynolds 1998). It is a continental and global leader of gender equality within governance. The situation of the female Parliamentarians inside the South African Parliament needs to be analyzed.

Women parliamentarians and their perceptions of their political influence is a critical topic in reference to the continuing development of gender equality. Women's movements around the world work towards increasing the numbers of women in political office, but now that women are beginning to move into positions of political power in larger numbers, to what extent do they feel able to influence the political agenda? In order to strengthen arguments that ask for greater numbers of women in political office, one must assess how the internal government atmosphere and environment facilitates and/or hinders women's political efficacy.

In South Africa, women have held close to 30% of the Parliament seats since 1994 and have thus held the supposed 'critical mass' for a decade. Although the numbers are looking good for South Africa, do women Parliamentarians feel they are able to create the political change they want? What are the obstacles that the female Parliamentarians face when trying to influence the political agenda? What methods have not worked? Do these women attribute the problems that they have faced to their gender? What role does the political party play in shaping women's influence in Parliament? How do they view the various structures inside government that are aimed at gender equality? These are some of the questions that would be important in attempting to assess women Parliamentarians' perceptions of their political influence.

In reviewing the academic literature, there is significant emphasis on the broader political relationship between women and the nation. Research regarding women within governments tends to explore topics such as methods of getting more women into public office, the relationship between women and the 'state,' the bureaucratic development of offices dedicated to

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'women's issues,' and the impact women that have had on public policy and democratic transformation. Other literature that is focused on organizational or communication theory and gender is also relevant to the study, as it encompasses the situations for women within male-dominated structures and atmospheres.

Some of this research has supported the idea that involvement in the public sphere creates a paradoxical problem for women (Boyd 1997). The argument has been presented that the public/private divide is dominantly a Western problem (Buss 1997). 'Western' in terms of historical British Victorian notions of masculinity and femininity that associate masculinity as belonging in the public sphere (i.e. government, land ownership, financial responsibilities) and femininity as belonging in the private sphere (i.e. home, children, domestic responsibilities). But research within African countries, such as South Africa and Uganda, has also suggested that women in government face this predicament (Boezak 1999, Tamale 2000) of the public/private divide along gender lines. Women are sociologically placed within the private sphere, such as in the home and family, while the public sphere, which involves government, trade, and societal concerns, has been associated with masculinity (Boyd 1997). Women in African parliaments also confront this gendered role conflict between being a woman (belonging in the private sphere) and a government legislator (belonging in the public sphere), with potential ramifications in terms of their political efficacy.

As women are only recently beginning to gain significant numbers of seats in these public governing bodies, there is a limited amount of academic research focused on the experiences of women parliamentarians. There are helpful studies (Hassim 2003 and Pandor 1999) that look specifically at the situation of South African women parliamentarians, but they are few in number. In terms of research aimed at how these women perceive their effectiveness

and ability to influence the political agenda, the literature is rather scarce. There is a great deal of research surrounding methods of increasing women's numbers in public office and the electoral politics surrounding quotas and campaigning, yet a research gap remains regarding the environment for women once they are inside these governing structures. By environment, this study looks at the physical and metaphysical infrastructures that the women Parliamentarians identify as important in relation to their political effectiveness. This could range from the pictures hanging on the walls of the President's office to the words spoken inside closed door meetings. The academic research often stops once women have attained these public governance positions but what happens next for these elected women? How, who, what, and where does the public governance environment help or hinder their political efficacy and agency? This study hopes to contribute to filling this research gap.

In order to best assess the perceptions of women who are involved in politics in terms of their political influence, I searched for a research method and methodology that would best allow the women to articulate their perceptions in their own words. I opted for a feminist research methodology, not only because it aims at balancing the power differentials between researcher and participant, but it also prioritizes the ability of participants to describe their explanations in their own words. Although prior research has set a basic frame for the obstacles and opportunities that these women Parliamentarians face when attempting to influence the political agenda, there also needs to be space for new issues and new understandings of the atmosphere for female Parliamentarians in South Africa.

In this study, I interviewed six South African women Parliamentarians regarding their perceptions of influence on the political agenda. I selected a semi-structured face-to-face interview format. A face-to-face interview has been indicated as one of the best styles of

developing a good rapport between the researcher and the research participant (Anderson, et. al. 1990). The semi-structured interview approach ensured a balance between allowing my participants to discuss their own perceptions (May 1993) and keeping the interview focused on the aims of my research question.

Arranging the interviews proved to be a difficult task, as these women were very busy and their time was often in high demand. But I was able to meet my objectives through a bit of flexibility, persistence, and patience. I interviewed six women Parliamentarians of differing political parties, races, and seniority or political rank. Each of these interviews lasted for roughly an hour and they were tape-recorded.

The transcriptions of these interviews provide the principle 'data' for my analysis. Using a qualitative thematic approach, I searched for patterns and repeated concerns that the women raised in relation to their political influence. I was looking specifically for locations and approaches that the women offered as spaces and methods for influencing the political agenda. Through several readings, edits, and comparative analyses, I am now able to offer some potential answers to my original research question, what environmental factors contribute towards how women parliamentarians perceive their ability to influence the political agenda?

If the current trend of women gaining greater numeric representation continues, then the impact of these women on government structures and institutions needs to be examined. Feminist research needs to be action-oriented, as well as to contribute to the greater movement towards gender equality. If the global women's movement continues to push for increasing the numbers of women in government, as suggested by the Beijing Platform of Action, then feminist academic research needs to analyze how women Parliamentarians understand their ability to be politically influential once inside government, even when there is a 'critical mass' of women.

In this thesis, the literature review explores the ways in which my study fits into the academic conversation involving women and governance by considering studies that focus on the various relationships between women, government, organization, power, and communication. The second chapter describes the research methods and methodology used in the study and the rationale for their selection. Then, the following chapter discusses the themes emerging from the interviews. This chapter outlines what my participants thought were the important factors in shaping their ability to influence the political agenda. The concluding chapter presents an overview of the results, a summary of the analysis, and recommendations for further research.

This study will, hopefully, contribute to the research surrounding the issue of women inside of governments, as well as help organizations to work towards advancing the representation of women in governing bodies. In attempting to gain a better understanding of where female Members of Parliament feel successful and frustrated, this research represents a feminist project contributing to the objective of building governing bodies that provide an environment that is gender equitable, and a space where women perceive a strong ability to influence the political agenda.
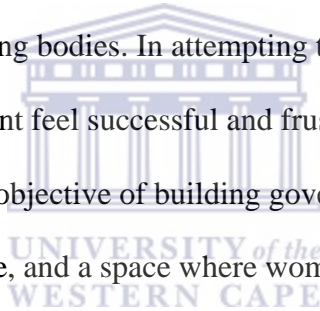
LITERATURE REVIEW

Since 1994, women within the South African Parliament have been operating in a context in which they have held over twenty-five percent of the seats (Lowe-Morna 1999). The numbers of women in Parliament have changed dramatically in recent years. Before the 1994 democratic elections in South Africa, women held only 2.7 percent of the seats in Parliament (www.eisa.org.za/PDF/Conference_DRC_Jure.eng.PDF). By 2004, this percentage had jumped to 32.8 percent. Despite these dramatic changes, there is only a small amount of research focusing on women Parliamentarians in South Africa. Exploring women's experiences within the South African Parliament is, thus, timely and relevant to understanding their perceptions of their political influence since 1994.

Research, internationally, regarding women and government has generally focused on methods by which women can effectively reach governance positions. This research will explore how a specific group of South African women perceive their political influence once inside Parliament. A review of relevant material that helps contextualize and inform this study yields literature from a variety of international sources regarding women's experiences in government, some relevant studies within the continent of Africa, and a few studies from academia and various governance organizations regarding women's experiences within South Africa's Parliament.

INTERNATIONAL

In surveying existing research, little information addresses women's experiences in government. The majority of the international research relating to women's role within government, internationally, has fallen into three major categories: one set of authors discussed the 'public' and 'private' conflict (Bochel and Bochel 2000, Boyd 1997, Buss 1997, Strivers

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1993); another group considered the concept of state and/or nation and gender (Brown 1988, West 1997, Stetson and Mazur 1995, Mangaliso 1997, Yuval-Davis 1997), while a third set of writers explored the structures, such as commissions, committees, and offices, aimed at women and gender issues (Rodgers 1993, Carroll 1992, Nicolsen 1996, Strivers 1993, Sawer 1995, Yuval-Davis 1997, Bochel and Bochel 2000). The majority of the academic research that does address women's experiences inside government has come from the United States and Europe.

When looking at the international literature surrounding structures aimed at women inside governments, the discussions focus primarily on assessing effective methods of increasing women's participation (Norris 1994, Clark 1994, Duerst-Lahti 1998, Cook 1998, Burrell 1998). These studies have been directed at outsiders' perceptions of women politicians in relation to government structures.

This research, in contrast, is directed at women politicians' *own* perceptions of their influence on the political agenda once *inside* the government structure upon self-reflection. In other words, how do these women view themselves as 'insiders' and how do they perceive their political influence? Do they consider themselves successful in achieving their policy priorities and impacting the political agenda?

Review of gender structures and government

When examining how women in parliaments perceive their ability to influence the political agenda, prior research indicates that gendered organizations and structures inside and outside of government contribute to the perceptions of their political effectiveness and agency. In this study, gender structures are considered to be established agencies, offices, commissions, groups, etc. aimed at women or gender concerns in government, as well as actual physical structures, such as bathrooms, office spaces, meeting spaces, etc. These formal and informal

gender structures contribute to the environment created for women Parliamentarians, which is critical in attempting to place the environmental factors discussed in this study within a broader body of academic research.

Prior research indicates that these kinds of gender structures affect women's political agency within government (Sawer 1995, Carrol 1992). Thus, when looking at women parliamentarians' experiences, it is important to be grounded in research regarding the role and potential influence of these structures. This relationship between women office holders, government agencies, and gender structures aimed at women is one of the major international themes of research regarding women inside institutions of governance.

Silvia Rogers (1993) looks at the amount of physical space allocated for women Parliamentarians inside the British House of Commons. She writes that the space allocated for women Members of Parliament (MP) is relatively small. Rogers suggests that when women enter the political stage, they are treated, in a variety of ways, as 'men.' Rogers mentions problems such as the fact that lavatories marked 'Members Only' are male lavatories and that bringing small children into the House of Commons was deemed inappropriate. She notes the offensive reclassification of women MPs with male and masculine pronoun references, specifically references to Margaret Thatcher with male pronouns by the male MPs in Britain.

Other research focuses on the relationships between gender structures and women office holders. Susan Carrol (1992) looks at the relationships between women, legislators, and women's organizations in the United States. Carrol concludes that outside women's organizations help women legislators express 'women's culture' and 'women's issues' inside government. Her research raises concerns as to how South African women Parliamentarians experience the contributions of women's organizations that are based outside of Parliament.

Women's organizations, according to Carrol, especially feminist groups, provide affirmation and sustenance for women office holders; they also function as a conscience for these women, providing sometimes subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, reminders that they have a responsibility to represent women's interests within the institutions which they serve (Carrol 1992: 39). Carrol defines women's interests as policies and governmental programs that are aimed at benefiting women. She offers as examples legislation intended to protect welfare provisions, women's health initiatives, and the protection of reproductive freedoms.

Studies, internationally, have explored the impact of governmental structures that are focused specifically on gender and women's issues. Marion Sawer (1995) discusses a case study of the Office on the Status of Women in Australia which found that female government office workers were perceived by outsiders in the women's movements as 'sellouts' to the bureaucracy. Sawer's research concludes that an institutionalized feminist presence helps remind policy makers to develop gender equitable policies.

Various authors have researched the effects of gender structures within government. These structures are sometimes referred to as 'gender machinery.' The Stetson and Mazur (1995) collection compares the effectiveness of various 'gender machineries' through case studies across the globe. One of the research objectives of the collection was to question the influence of 'gender machinery' on policy formation. Given Sawer's (1995) work connecting the 'gender machinery' to the effectiveness of women officeholders, this literature is relevant to the assessment of women's political influence in legislative bodies.

Language is a critical and important informal environmental structure that must be taken into account when exploring women's political effectiveness within government. Communication theories examining gendered language usage are also relevant to this research

study. U.S. professor of speech communication Julia Wood (1994) characterizes women's speech as communication that works towards fostering connections, support, closeness, and understanding. Men's speech, Wood notes, revolves around the goals of exerting control, preserving independence, or enhancing one's status (Wood 1994). Organizations or structures (such as government) that, says Wood, have "historically been designed by and for men... include language and behavior that men find familiar and comfortable, but women may not" (Wood 1994). Wood concludes that differing speech patterns can lead to problems in communication and effectiveness. This clearly impacts the ability of women to influence proceedings inside governing structures.

Review of research addressing the 'public/ private' conflict

The contested notion of the 'public' space for men and the 'private' space for women in a society has been raised in prior research aimed at women in government. Authors (Strivers 1993, Boyd 1997, Bochel and Bochel 2000) describe how women in government face particular difficulties when entering the 'public' space of government. The concept of these two separate gendered spheres has been contested and debated within academia (Buss 1997, Boyd 1997). Despite this, a number of analyses still find the concept useful, and researchers are still looking at the specific obstacles that women face when entering the 'public' sphere. These studies tend to concentrate within the United States (Strivers 1993, Boyd 1997, Bochel and Bochel 2000).

The 'private' sphere as a space for women primarily stems from Western notions of femininity (Boyd 1997). According to Boyd (1997), women are socialized into the 'private' sphere. Boyd's 'private' sphere consists of what she considers 'domestic' responsibilities: the home, the family, and sexuality. Men are responsible for the public sphere, such as working outside the home, public affairs, and economic decision-making (Boyd 1997). Camilla Strivers

(1993) discusses this 'public/private' role conflict and its effect on women leaders in public agencies. Her research tries to access the impact of public roles in terms of women's self-definition:

> If they [women leaders] strive to display expected characteristics, they risk being seen as masculine (inappropriately so, of course) and depending on their individual personalities may feel a certain amount of dissonance between their sense of themselves as women and what is expected of them as leaders. If, on the other hand, they attempt to embody and reflect a different image of leadership than the conventional one, they risk being viewed as unequal to the leadership role-as indecisive, soft, not assertive enough (Strivers 1993: 67).

Conducting an extensive review of international literature regarding women in government, Bochel and Bochel (2000) found various studies indicating women had conflicts entering local government. Many of the conflicts stemmed from the private sphere expectations, such as family responsibilities and commitments, individual circumstances, and what are perceived as qualifications that leaders must possess. They conclude that these "factors which mitigate against a greater role for women continue to have a significant impact" (Bochel and Bochel 2000, 49). The impact is primarily manifested as stresses upon time and resources for the women who are in government.

Other studies examine conflicts between certain notions of femininity and women who are in leadership roles. Nicolsen (1996) researches the relationship between gender, power, and organizations in a Western context. She also finds that women in male-dominated organizations feel that they need to distance themselves from stereotypical femininity in order to gain power and status. Women in government, Nicolsen notes, face a historically male-dominated organization. Nicolsen argues that, to be effective, women must adapt to masculine culture norms when working within male dominated organizations.

Boyd (1997) also critiques how race, class, mental ability, community, and sexuality challenge the concept of these separate spheres. "Whereas white, heterosexual, middle-or upper class families may be relatively insulated from public scrutiny, families that deviate from this norm for reasons of class, race, or sexual identity are regulated precisely because of their divergence from this norm" (Boyd 1997; 14). Although she argues the idea that the 'private' arena is the woman's sphere and that 'public' life is the sphere for men, Boyd points to the frequent intersections of these multiple layers of identity and the complications they create, particularly for women in government.

Research supports the notion that involvement in the 'public' sphere-while maintaining 'private' sphere responsibilities-creates problems for women in government (Bochel and Bochel 2000). Prior research has critiqued the idea of a 'public/private' divide as a predominantly Western problem (Buss 1997). But research in Africa suggests that women in government do face obstacles related to gendered 'public/private' spaces paralleling those of their Western counterparts (Boezal 1999). According to Boyd (1997), women are sociologically placed within the 'private' sphere, such as the home and family. The 'public' sphere of government, trade, and societal concerns, historically, has been associated with men and notions of masculinity (Boyd 1997).

Review of women in political theory research:

In reviewing the international literature that is focused on women in government, an emphasis on the broader political relationship between women and the concept of nation is found. This theme examines the ramifications of women's presence within historically male-dominated governing structures. My study will explore women's perceptions of their *own* roles and their ability to influence the political agenda; an example of that is how they frame

legislation and construct government's objectives. But in order to adequately assess and understand the unique situation of women in legislative bodies, this background research regarding how political theorists conceptualize women's roles in government and the nation/state is essential.

Political theorist Wendy Brown (1988) examines the relationship between concepts of masculinity and political theory. Her research links the historical development of governance and political institutions to Western philosophical notions of masculinity in her 1988 book, *Manhood and Politics*. She argues that:

> More than any other kind of human activity, politics has historically borne an explicitly masculine identity. It has been more exclusively limited to men than any other realm of endeavor and has been more intensely, self-consciously masculine than most other social practices (Brown 1988: 4).

Brown's 1988 analysis examines gender and political theory that is primarily rooted in political philosophy, government, and policies.

Political theorist Yuval-Davis (1997) looks at the intersections between women and various understandings of the nation/state on a global scale. She discusses the role and influence of gender and culture on constructions of governance. Yuval-Davis critiques the idea of a 'universal woman' that is in opposition to the government and points to the various circumstances in which women work with the state, as integral components of "reproducing the nation." Yuval-Davis (1997) discusses how women can contribute to transforming notions of governance and she highlights their influence in post-colonial contexts. Her arguments regarding destabilizing the 'universal woman' in relation to government help to inform my research in my attempt to avoid 'Eurocentric' assumptions.

In developing a picture of influences and variables that may affect women's perceptions of their political influence, an understanding of the intersections of feminist theory and the

concept of the nation/state is also required. How does a national women's movement contribute to women's political efficacy in South Africa? How does the state interact with feminism and respond to 'women's voices' ?

West (1997) conducts a comparative analysis of 'feminist nationalism' within international literature similar to the Stetson and Mazur (1995) collection. West argues that "patriarchical nationalism was disseminated through colonialism"(6). West's collection examines theoretical conceptions of feminism and gender relations through the lens of differing nation/states. West argues that, when looking at nationalism, one must undertake a gender analysis: "we can define feminism as the social movement activities that seek women's rights, but examination of gender's relationship to nationalism reveals that feminism is integral to it" (22). West's collection explores the contributions of feminist nationalism to some of the current methods and practices that encourage and promote women's representation within governments.

Review of women in parliament found in texts

As this review demonstrates, international academic research focused on women in government tends to focus on three central themes: the relationship between gender structures and women officeholders, the contested notion of the gendered 'public/private' spheres, and the intersections between feminist nationalism, gender, and the nation/state. None of these works speak directly to the research question embedded in this study. There are, however, two texts that look specifically at the experiences of women inside parliaments, and these were much more useful. These texts explore the specific problems that the women parliamentarians identified when working as policymakers. In these texts, women parliamentarians were able to voice their *own* opinions as to their political efficacy.

The first of these is the report by the Fifth International Conference on Women Presiding

over Parliaments, which presents methods of transforming parliaments in order to accommodate women and ensure their effectiveness. The text includes a report touching on the three themes of the conference: transforming parliaments to accommodate women, establishing a gender lens, and the allocation of resources for transformation. The first section examines the specific environmental factors that transform parliament structures in order to accommodate and encourage women's political participation and is a critical contribution to the research objectives of this study.

The text summarizes a conference session in which panelists and participants highlighted the specific changes that would be required to create governance structures that would accommodate the needs of women parliamentarians. Panelists and discussants were women holding national office in countries throughout the world. Concerns were expressed regarding the working hours of their parliaments being based on what suited male members. The panelists criticized some parliamentary cultures where women felt disrespected because of activities such as heckling, jokes, or their voices and opinions being ignored. Such cultures foster a supportive atmosphere for male members, but not for the women members. This may influence how female members of parliaments perceive their political effectiveness.

> The symbolism, the traditions, the architecture, the provision of facilities, such as toilets and recreational facilities, the use of language indeed the whole ethos of the institutions in Parliament 'exude maleness' as one conference delegate put it, (Transforming Parliaments 1998: 11).
> .
> The report mentions problems such as the invisibility of women in parliaments, gender

bias in budgeting and resource allocation, sexism within political parties, perceptions of 'women's politics,' the turnover of women in politics, the role of the media, and the general difficulties of transformation. Solutions to the problem of these barriers and the opportunities for creating a gender-equitable parliament were also discussed. This text is exceedingly helpful in

developing an understanding of the tactical obstacles that women face in parliaments, as well as the solutions that have been developed in transforming parliaments to accommodate women's needs.

In discussing how parliaments need to transform to accommodate women, the 'invisibility' of women in parliamentary debate is considered a serious problem by many of the panelists. They explain how women parliamentarians "felt that the lack of research and administrative backup undermined their ability to prepare for debates and inhibited their participation, thereby contributing to their invisibility" (Transforming Parliaments 1998: 12). Panelists noted the role of political parties in creating the speaking lists and how, often, women were boxed into 'women's issues' debates, as other examples of the sidelining the women.

The text discusses patterns that discriminate against women in terms of budgeting. For example, the panelists highlighted how parliamentary disbursements for male-oriented arenas, such as pubs and poolrooms, are considered traditions and legitimate expenses for the state. The panelists argued that there is a gender bias in disbursements for these male physical spaces in parliaments, with little or no monetary support for a female-oriented arena, such as childcare for the elected officials. The women parliamentarians also expressed concerns that these types of expenditures also deplete financial resources that could potentially enhance the efficiency of parliaments.

Another obstacle discussed at this conference, raised by the text, is the lack of women in positions of political party leadership. Women parliamentarians view this as a result of two factors: women's lack of 'experience' and a negative backlash against women who aspire to reach these positions. Panelists mention how when "senior women did aspire to political leadership, they faced and had to overcome the negative connotations associated with women

who were ambitious" (Transforming Parliaments 1998: 13). These concerns echo the arguments

raised earlier by Strivers (1993), Boyd (1997), and Bochel and Bochel (2000) in reference to

women in the 'public' sphere.

Panelists and participants did recommend methods to adjust parliaments in order to better

facilitate the participation of women parliamentarians. The conference proceedings suggest

reorganizing working hours to accommodate responsibilities at home, integrating gender equity

in the speaking lists of debates and in delegations, building a 'critical mass' of women,

increasing the profile and public perceptions of women in parliaments, and enhanced training in

parliamentary procedures as tactics for improving female parliamentarians' effectiveness. The

text strongly recommends that legislative bodies need to find ways to alleviate the negative

impacts on family life for female members.

The second text, Karam's (1998) edited collection is, of all those reviewed for this study,

the most helpful text. This text analyzes women's experiences in reference to trying to influence

the political agendas in a number of parliaments, internationally. Her text includes statements

from Frene Ginwala, Speaker of the Parliament in South Africa. Published primarily as a guide

to help women in parliaments to be more effective, the book explores relationships between

gender and democracy, the obstacles to women's effective participation in parliaments, and ways

to enhance their political participation, such as using quotas. The book also considers the ways in

which women make a difference in parliament, and the experiences of inter-parliamentary

unions. It concludes with a consideration of how to move beyond token representation of women

in government.

Research by Nadezda Shvedova (1998) contained in this collection points to the obstacles

regarding women's general experiences in parliaments. Shvedova categorizes the obstacles as

political, socio-economic, ideological, and psychological. Shvedova argues, like Nicolsen, that "political life is organized to male norms and values, and in some cases, even male lifestyles" (Shvedova 1998; 22) and that this is reflected in the working patterns of the parliaments she considered. Lack of party support, difficult relationships with women's organizations, the type of electoral system involved, and a lack of education and training in politics were the principal obstacles confronting women in government. Her arguments echo points raised in earlier research, which she identified, regarding conflicts for women in government.

Shvedova discusses how the feminization of poverty and the dual burden of domestic work restrict women's participation in legislative bodies. The specific ideological and psychological problems that she raises are women's lack of confidence, perceptions of politics as "dirty," and the lack of mass media political coverage supporting women. Shvedova also demonstrates a correlation between a country's political transparency and how many women are in the parliament of that country. She points to a strong correlation in governments-the more transparent, the higher proportion of women in a parliament; the less transparent, the fewer women in a parliament.

Karam and Lovenduski's chapter in Karam's (1998) collection examines how women make a difference in parliament. Their discussion is extremely relevant to my study. They raised questions surrounding the influence of critical mass, the importance of learning institutional and procedural rules, and of using and changing these rules. They asked critical question-similar to the questions of this study-what strategies are most useful in increasing women's effectiveness? They emphasized the need for significant numbers of women in parliaments.

> While the presence of even one woman can make a difference long-term, significant change will largely be realized when there is a sufficient number of women in Parliament who are motivated to represent women's concerns. This need for a significant minority of

women to affect political change has been referred to by feminist political scientists as 'critical mass'," (Karam and Lovenduski 1998; 128).

Other strategies discussed by Karam and Lovenduski (1998) highlight the importance of learning the rules in terms of women's political effectiveness. They mention how the networks of women parliamentarians and programs geared toward training in specific areas (such as public speaking) empowered women parliamentarians. They offer ideas for nomination processes, committee work, debates, and ministries for women's affairs for that are geared toward the development of greater effectiveness. They conclude by suggesting ways of changing the rules of parliaments to accommodate women.

These rules could change in three arenas, according to Karam and Lovenduski (1998). These arenas are the institutional/procedural, representational, and the arena of impact/influence on output. They suggest the establishment of a women's whip, quota systems, mechanisms to monitor gender equity, changing the distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' issues, and developing methods to encourage women to speak. They refer to South Africa as an effective example of how changing the institutional/procedural rules helps women in Parliament.

> At a minimum, parliamentary timetables, places of meeting, childcare provisions, working hours and travel arrangements may be changed to make these more suitable to women. One of the most significant changes we have noted is the networking of women across party lines (Karam and Lovenduski 1998; 146).

In addition, Karam and Lovenduski (1998) focus on the atmosphere for women once they are inside a parliament, and they offer practical solutions to increase their effectiveness. Although it is difficult to make generalizations and recommendations for women in parliaments across the world, their writings provide an excellent glimpse into the space for women inside structures of parliament, and provide a very useful survey that provides a framework for the beginning of this research.

AFRICAN BASED RESEARCH

Thus far, this review has primarily concentrated on Western studies of women and governance. The next section of the literature review will focus on research by African or African-based researchers focusing on African governments. The final section explores specifically South African studies. Research on women in government in Africa exists, but is scarce. Most of the research has been conducted through government groups (particularly the Inter-Parliamentary Union) and by non-governmental organizations, rather than through universities. These studies frequently discuss the role of development and colonialism in women's political effectiveness within African governments.

Sylvia Tamale (2000) focuses on the experiences of women parliamentarians in Uganda. She proves that women parliamentarians have been framed as breaking tradition by stepping out of the private sphere, and are sometimes confronted by sexual harassment from male colleagues who do not understand how to relate to these professional women. Tamale concludes that the impact of women in Uganda's government "resulted in a shifting of political sites and a relocation of power" (13). Even so, a number of barriers involving sexism, poverty, and gender role conflicts remain.

> My research suggests that the right of women to participate in politics as autonomous actors is still greatly curtailed in both overt and covert ways. Inequality between women and men, together with the poverty that is the result of Uganda's under-developed economy, constrains the performance of women legislators (Tamale 2000; 14).

Tamale highlights the strong role that colonialism has played in the construction of African state governments and how movements for independence in Uganda led to formal rights for women. She argues that it was affirmative action programs, those that reserved seats for women in parliaments, which brought women onto Uganda's political stage.

Abduela (2000) examines the absence of women in politics and leadership in Cameroon. Her research echoes the international research regarding the gender role conflicts that women leaders face. She found that many women wanted to be involved in politics, but felt that men would block them. Abduela points to the influences of militaristic rule and community attitudes on the perception of a woman's role in Cameroon. Her research thus focused on methods to empower women and encourage women to stand for governmental positions.

Longwe (2000) examines the absence of women in politics in Zambia. She raises issues regarding the male-dominated party structure, the 'dirty tricks' that she says are played on women in leadership, and the lack of implementation of 'women's policies' as obstacles which prevent women's access to political leadership. Longwe, like other researchers, mentions the role of South Africa as a leader in the advancement of women leaders. She concludes that it is not a lack of training and education that prevents women from political leadership, but rather institutional patriarchy.

Cracks in the Edifice (DAWN 1999) is another highly useful text that explores issues related to this study. Composed of a collection of papers presented at a conference focusing on critical African feminist perspectives on women and governance, the papers examine political restructuring and social transformation frameworks in Africa; the text discusses politics and power, the institutionalization of women's politics, and the relationships between feminist movements and the state in African countries. The report focuses particularly on the role of international financial institutions in dictating a country's political agenda. Concerns connected to colonial influences on gender relations in African society are also raised. Panelists discuss the absence of women in public affairs in modern African states, despite their strong presence in liberation struggles.

To understand gender relations within African governments, one must also examine the varying gender relations within the context of traditional African cultures. Amina Mama (1997), like Yuval-Davis (1997), points to masculine influences within African nationalist ideology and the framing of women as either 'Mama Africa' or as the 'New Woman' in new democracies or new forms of government.

In an earlier text, Mama (1995) discusses what she calls 'state feminism' and democratization, using Nigeria as an example. She points to the "femocracy" built around the First Lady phenomenon, where women in high positions of power developed bureucratic institutions in the name of helping all women but, in actuality these offices did very little to advance the rights and position of ordinary women in Nigeria. Her research concludes that these 'femocracies' do not necessarily develop substantive changes for the general population of women, and are dominated by a small group of powerful elite. Mama's writing emphasizes the role of class in looking at women within governments in Africa.

Reynolds' (1998) survey of women in governments in Africa attempts to identify the most effective methods for increasing women's representation. Although his research is rather limited from the perspective of this study, he explores methods aimed at increasing the numbers of women in government, rather than examining how such women perceive their influence on the political agenda. Reynolds concludes that:

> In sum,. . . what primarily determines the number of women in African legislatures is not the level of democracy, not the previous length of experience with multi-partyism and women in politics, nor the socio-economic position of women in society. Rather, women are elected in significant numbers when the national culture and religion are not overly hostile to women in positions of power, there are a small number of political parties which dominate elections, and the electoral system does not provide undue barriers against women candidates being elected (Reynolds 1998: 24).

Overall, research within Africa regarding women in government has identified various obstacles that these women face such as 'dirty tricks,' sexual harassment, structural barriers, African masculinities, party policies, and various economic determinants. At the same time, this research also makes clear how women are changing parliaments in a variety of ways, such as challenging the hours, the policy agendas, and the concepts of nationalism. Although there are studies examining the methods of developing a stronger representation of women in governments, there is little research investigating the impact of these numbers for the women *inside*, which is the focus of my study.

SOUTH AFRICAN BASED RESEARCH

According to Mangaliso (1997), South African women activists played a very critical role in organizing against apartheid in the 1980s. The Federation of South African Women (FSAW) was established early on within the African National Congress to address gender equity in political leadership (Mangaliso 1997). Mangaliso (1997) argues that the current large percentage of women in Parliament in South Africa primarily results from the African National Congress's quota policy that states that for every two seats held by a man, one seat will be held by a woman. This policy was highly contested at the time, but has since been accepted and implemented without a great deal of resistance. The results of the quota policy set the context for my study and for the work of others in terms of analyzing the South African political atmosphere.

South African research examining women in government tends to look at the role of the women's movement in the late nineteen eighties and early nineties in relation to the creation of the new democracy in 1994, the impact and role of the 'gender machinery,' and the impact o f women in defining the new democracy. Other research on women's experiences in the South African government focuses on their responsibilities in the private sphere, such as the home, and

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the way that this intersects with their participation in governmental structures (Lowe-Morna 1999, Strivers 1993, Boyd 1997, Shvedova 1998).

Gouws (1996) looks into tensions raised in reference to gender issues between women's activist groups and people working within government structures. She argues that within South Africa, there is a rise of 'femocrats' whom she defines as essentially female bureaucrats who work on women's and gender issues within government. Gouws illustrates how women's activist groups question the effectiveness of 'femocrats,' while still recognizing the importance of their presence. Mama (1995) also refers to this pattern of women's activist groups pressuring the Nigerian 'femocracy' to do more for women in general. Gouws's research shows how femocrats, the individuals, are viewed as highly significant in forming a critical mass to influence legislative reform and policy making (Gouws 1996: 33).

Mtsinso (1999), on the other hand, addresses the importance of 'gender specific institutions' on the effectiveness of women in South Africa's government. These gender institutions, or 'gender machinery' as Gouws (1996) would phrase it, have influence over the political agenda. According to Mtsinso:

> The setting up of gender specific institutions like the CGE [Commission on Gender Equality], the Joint Committee for the Improvement of the Quality of Life and Status of Women; the Parliamentary Women's Group, the Woman's Empowerment Unit and the ANC [African National Congress] Women's Caucus were at the behest of women. These institutional changes not only contributed to the participation of women in Parliament but were also critical for the legislative transformation that took place (Mtsinso 1999: 43).

Future research needs to further analyze how women Members of Parliament in South Africa currently perceive the specific role of the gender machinery in their experiences in attempting to influence the political agenda.

As mentioned earlier by Mama (1997) and Tamale (2000), the governance systems in Africa tend to be based on imported European systems. Ginwala (1998), speaking with authority

from her position as speaker of the South African Parliament, made a similar observation about the South African system:

> Is it simply coincidence that the opening times of political debates matched the closing times of financial and commercial institutions in the City of London? Could the late-night sessions and club atmosphere possibly derive from the fact that those who initially sat in the House of Lords and the House of Commons did not need to look after children or provide meals and care for families? (Ginwala 1998: 9).

She points to the gender-biases within the historic structure of the South African Parliament, arguing that these institutional patterns need to change if there is to be gender equity inside of Parliament. Ginwala's argument echoes concerns raised by authors cited earlier, regarding the gendered division between 'public' (the government sphere as masculine) and 'private' (the domestic sphere as feminine).

In a publication by the Commission on Gender Equality in South Africa, Colleen Lowe-Morna showed that many South African women parliamentarians were concerned about balancing their home/domestic responsibilities against their public obligations (Lowe-Morna 1999). Women in male-dominated structures frequently cite difficulties in balancing private responsibilities with the expectations of the organization (Nicolsen 1996).

Recently, there have been several publications geared towards African women in politics and policy making. In No Shortcuts to Power, Shireen Hassim and Anne Goetz (2003) examine the history and role of women in government within Uganda and South Africa. Hassim (2003) discusses the various feminist challenges to representative democracy in South Africa. Hassim looks at how women gained their current voice in government through the political activism of the ANC and other groups that opposed apartheid. She also discusses the difficulties that female parliamentarians face in trying to be effective. Hassim concludes that loyalty to political party,

like the ANC, is a stronger force than loyalty to 'women's issues.' She highlights the fact that not all women parliamentarians support feminist ideals of gender equity.

Hassim's (2003) chapter discusses women's leverage in parliament, raising concerns regarding the impact or lack of impact of the various gender structures in South Africa. She sees the Parliamentary Women's Caucus as relatively ineffective, but argues that the ANC Women's Caucus is a "key pressure point within Parliament, even within the multi-party Joint Standing Committee on the Improvement of the Life and Status of Women" (Hassim 2003; 101). She looks specifically at how feminists can access political representation and concludes that political parties and state organization need to facilitate a relationship between women representatives and the women's movement to enhance the gap between descriptive representation and substantive representation.

As significant numbers of women have only recently held positions inside South Africa's Parliament, Redefining Politics: South African Women and Democracy (1999) was published through the Commission on Gender Equality to document their impressions and experiences. Printed five years after the arrival of the new democracy, it is an extensive review and analysis of the women in South Africa's Parliament at that time. This research was conducted through a variety of organizations and commissions that interviewed women Parliamentarians. The authors point to the challenges and obstacles facing women who wanted to influence legislatures. Most relevant to this study is the section containing transcripts of interviews with the women Parliamentarians.

In a chapter discussing some of the challenges to women's ability to influence legislatures, Naledi Pandor (1999) suggests that parliament was an institution shaped by men and that this affects women's experiences. The organizational arrangements around working hours,

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childcare, bathroom facilities, and social events are based on the needs of men, according to Pandor. She points to various changes, such as new working hours and having a crèche (a childcare facility) for children and other attempts to make the institution woman-friendly. But she highlights the gaps, as well, such as the lack of sexual harassment policy and employment equity within parliaments. Pandor also discusses issues relating to women's concerns regarding their role in debates, particularly in terms of speaking lists. According to Pandor, South African women Parliamentarians want to see how their presence makes a difference in the lives of women, assessing their legislative impact and presence.

Another valuable contribution from the point of view of this study comes from Suzanne Vos (1999), who gives her personal perspective as a woman Parliamentarian. Vos raises her concerns regarding the lack of unity in the South African Parliament on women's issues. She emphasizes that 'culture' and 'race' often determine the divisions between women. Identifying herself as a feminist, Vos asserts that 'feminist ideas' are rejected in Parliament as 'un-African.' Vos states that, "the key to power has been and will always be access to power. Connections are the name of the game. And men are the game, they control the game" (Vos 1999; 109).

Redefining Politics is an excellent source for this study because it provides an opportunity for South African women to speak and describe their experiences in Parliament. In some ways, this research study serves as a follow-up to assessing the concerns and questions the women Parliamentarians raised in 1999. As time goes by, how have these obstacles shifted, if at all? What remains? How do women now perceive their influence on the political agenda?

A variety of studies abroad and closer to home explore women's role within governments. These studies indicate that women's policy machinery, such as gender offices, women's commissions, and non-governmental organizations encouraging women's participation

in government, support and provide infrastructure for women in public office (Sawer 1995, Carroll 1992) which contributes to creating an atmosphere where women have greater effectiveness in governing structures.

Prior research examines how women are perceived once inside government, particularly in terms of conceptualizing the nation/state. The literature coming from governmental and non-governmental organizations often integrates the direct voices of women legislators. This literature (Pandor 1999, Vos 1999, Ginwala 1998) describes parliaments as structures built around masculine norms in terms of hours, childcare, and socializing. Research also points to the hostile climate that women in parliaments perceive, particularly involving issues of sexual harassment.

Overall though, apart from the few texts mentioned in this review, there is little research on how women perceive their ability to influence the political agenda once inside governmental structures. There is a great deal of research addressing ideas to engage more women into governance, electoral politics surrounding quotas, campaigning, and the impact of critical mass. Yet there still remains a gap in the literature regarding contemporary explorations of South African women's experiences of political efficacy and political influence within Parliament.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses my methodology and methods, and is divided into these two main

sections. I shall begin by identifying my methodology as qualitative feminist and my research

method as face-to-face semi-structured interviews. First, I shall explain my rationale for

choosing a qualitative research methodology over a quantitative, followed by a critique of

objectivity. Then I will move on to discuss some of the principal components of feminist

research, such as self-reflexivity and acknowledging power differentials with attempts to

highlight women's experiences. Later on in the methods section, I discuss my initial planning for

the project and what actually happened in terms of arranging my interviews, the interviews

themselves, the problems that I encountered, and finally, the steps I took to overcome them.

Methodology: Qualitative verses Quantitative

"Quantitative measurements provide numerical precision about such properties as amount and size, whereas qualitative measurements provide useful information about people's perceptions" (Frey, Botan, and Kreps, 2000; 84).

A qualitative research methodology is considered the most appropriate for this study

because it provides space for women parliamentarians to articulate their experiences on their

own terms. I felt that it is only through a qualitative analysis that these women's understandings

of their experiences can best be explored. A qualitative analysis places women's interpretations

and explanations in the foreground rather than erasing their individualism through quantitative

numerical clumps. I believe that more information would and could be shared regarding their

perceptions of political influence through a qualitative research method.

I decided against a quantitative approach for this study for several reasons. A quantitative

approach often builds in unnoticed assumptions regarding gender and culture (DeVault 1999).

These types of assumptions can potentially overlook and ignore aspects of the research

connected to the study. Hence, results may be skewed to fit certain expectations, particularly

along gender and culture lines.

Language used in surveys and structured interviews often restricts a participant's involvement by framing issues and questions, thereby running a strong risk of defining the boundaries of possible answers. Other critiques argue that quantitative research can be simple and superficial (Jayartne and Stewart 1991).

Quantitative approaches are also critiqued for their positivistic approach to research (Jayaratne and Stewart 1991). A positivist paradigm views reality as singular, with only one version of events-one 'truth,' and that the researcher has no influence in the study, and is independent. "Proponents of the positivistic paradigm believe that research can be value-free and unbiased" (Frey, Botan, and Kreps, 2000; 19). People interpret situations differently and these differences need to be included, rather than excluded from the research. When the methodology restricts the various informants to 'one reality,' there is little space for interpretation, differences, and contradiction.

This type of paradigm can lead to overgeneralization, "the ungrounded and undifferentiated 'view from nowhere' fostered by many positivistic approaches" (DeVault 1999: 33). Quantitative methods have also been criticized for their illusion of 'objectivity' and will be discussed further in the section critiquing 'objectivity.'

For the purposes of this research, a qualitative approach seemed more suitable because the participants would be able to articulate their concerns in their own words. This helps 'preserve women's speech' in order to ensure an equitable environment for discussion. The qualitative approach aims at developing a stronger collaborative rather than a hierarchical relationship, following feminist aims of minimizing power differentials in research. Qualitative methods that facilitate input from the 'researched' are important because they permit women's own voices, interpretations, and opinions that help create knowledge, build the thematic

categories, and construct the meanings and conclusions of the research.

> According to my understanding, however, this term [experience] denotes more than specific, momentary, individual involvement. It denotes the sum of processes which individuals or groups have gone through in the production of their lives; it denotes their reality; their history (Mies 1991: 66).

Considering the lack of academic research regarding women's experiences inside parliaments, it is imperative that the perspectives of women parliamentarians be highlighted (Jayartne and Stewart 1991). The unique, specific experiences of these women expressed in their own words are critical in this feminist study. Through lengthy one-on-one semi-structured interviews, a qualitative analysis works towards letting the participants' responses be the foundation of the research. Inside these interview transcripts, patterns and themes emerge. Qualitative research does not rely on statistical validation for 'one reality,' but, rather, allows multiple contextual realities.

Although qualitative methods have been criticized for excessive specificity, ensuring that these women's voices are heard is best accomplished through the use of a methodology that is the most responsible to the participants. It is through a qualitative analysis of individual experiences that participants can offer their understandings and perceptions of the atmosphere. It is these perceptions that are the foundations of my research results.

Methodology: Critique of 'objectivity'

The 'objective' researcher and the 'willing' subject are ideals of academia that have been criticized frequently and challenged as the scientific research method towards assessing 'truth.' Feminist and social science researchers have problematized the assumptions and values that prevent neutrality and objectivity (Fox Keller 1990, Westkott 1990, Mies 1991). Few would argue against the fact that the frequent assumptions and ideologies underpinning power differentials influence 'data' collected. Hence, the 'data' implicitly contains biases and

prejudices of the individual collecting the data, and this must affect the following analysis, results, and conclusion. Yet the idea of 'objective' research remains one of the pillars of general academic research, particularly in the 'hard' sciences. Quantitative methods have been frequently criticized for their illusion of 'objectivity.'

I felt that a methodology that attempts to take into account these power differentials and biases is the most appropriate in order to question the neutral researcher's assumptions. Beginning with Kuhn's 1962 book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* the concepts of objectivity and neutrality were questioned. Kuhn's arguments, as summarized by Nielsen (1990), are that 'data or observations are theory laden...that theories are paradigm-laden...and that paradigms are culture-laden' (p13). Thus, research cannot avoid some degree of subjectivity.

The feminist research methodology utilized by my study provides a platform for women parliamentarians to raise their concerns through the medium of my research paper, without the pretense that their concerns-as outlined by myself-are in some way 'universal' and the 'truth.'

> The categories and concepts we use for reflecting upon and evaluating ourselves come from a cultural context, one that has historically demeaned and controlled women's activities. So an exploration leads to an awareness of the social forces and ideas affecting them (Anderson et. al. 1990; 103).

Methodology: Feminist Theory and Qualitative Research

Within feminist theory, there are various debates regarding the root causes of power differentials between men and women and how to prioritize the role of gender in socialized identities. Questions around power lie at the heart of feminist theorizing and acknowledging and problematizing power relationships lies at the heart of feminist research. Given the multiple power imbalances inherent in this study-along racial and gender divisions, as well as ethnicity, class, language, nationality, and gender, a qualitative feminist research methodology is the best method to address the multiple power hierarchies, particularly in regard to gender and race, that

women in South Africa's Parliament may experience. South Africa has a history of systemic

racism through the apartheid regime. Although apartheid as a structure has dissolved, 'race' is

still an important category in reference to people's constructed identities. But while there are a

wide variety of feminist theoretical positions, most, if not all, critique patriarchic patterns of

power, and they place women's experiences (or the experiences of those historically

disempowered) as the priority.

The principal concept of feminism (the goal of ending oppression, minimizing power

differentials, and promoting gender equality) still remains integral when defining a method as

feminist. Some of the orthodox tenets of qualitative feminist research are that the research is

about and with women, that it empowers participants, and is directed towards social change

(Mies 1991, Kelly, Burton, and Regan 1994). The active role that academic research plays in

meeting these objectives has been raised by many feminist researchers and activists (Edwards

1990, Kelly et al 1994, Maynard 1994).

Critique of Power

A feminist methodological framework is important, as it critiques the power differentials

between the researcher and the participant. It points out that power differentials have been

connected to any research for the 'truth' in a world of subjectivities. Although I am aware of the

power differentials that work sometimes for and sometimes against me in terms of this study, and

will outline these later, I hope that a feminist research method will be a more adequate approach

to address these imbalances than other research methods that place participants as objects with

little power or stake in the project.

In taking a feminist approach to research, the power differential between researcher and

participants needs to be minimal. Banister, Bowman, and Taylor (1994) have identified several

points that they suggest assist the move towards a more equitable balance of power inside of academic research. One needs to obtain consent from a potential research participant in order for the person to be a part of the study. This consent must provide information regarding the purpose of the study, as well as inform the participant of his or her rights within the study. Banister et. al (1994) argue that, once consent has been given, "respondents or participants are not passive parties to the question-answer interviewing structure" and that "they can assume a range of strategies to resist that positioning" (68). Participants should feel that they can comment on and question the research process. Banister, Bowman, and Taylor conclude that, in an attempt to equalize power, the research participants should "achieve both joint and separate goals through their participation in the research" (Banister, Bowman, & Taylor 1994: 66). In other words, the participants in the research must also gain something from participating, with the goal of establishing a collaborative relationship, rather than an authoritative.

Another tenet of feminist research is that research does not exist within an academic vacuum; it connects experiences to understandings (Mies 1991). Within a feminist research framework, it is important that the research is also action-oriented and connects to the greater goals of feminism, that of gender equity and ending oppression of all kinds. As Mies (1991) summarizes:

> The integration of research into emancipatory processes also calls, naturally, for theory work, for work in libraries and archives, and also for the study of history. However, in contrast to dominant science, this theory work is not an end in itself but remains linked with the social movement for the liberation of women (Mies 1991: 68).

Feminist research specifically addresses one of the most pervasive assumptions throughout academic culture, male bias. In a historically patriarchic global context, women's experiences, lives, and needs have often been glossed over as encompassed by the experiences, lives, and needs of men. Feminist research methodology also acknowledges other historical power differentials, predicated on race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation in a variety of ways.

Feminist research methodology does not claim to be *the answer* to solve the multiple hierarchies of power. In fact, although it denies that there is or is likely to be just one answer, a feminist research methodology does offer ways to attempt to maintain and build a better balance between the researcher and the participant.

Role of Reflexivity

Self-reflexivity is also an important component of feminist research. The researcher is not an objective, separate, superior person without identity or personal bias, but the researcher is also a component of the research process (Edwards 1990). Although I will try to be as value-free and open-minded as possible, I cannot ever be entirely neutral. My own history is biased in terms of privilege and access to power. As a white, upper middle-class, Western-educated US American woman, I anticipate that my participants may not feel comfortable discussing certain aspects of their experiences with me. However, as an outsider, there are certain advantages to my position. These women might also feel more comfortable describing their experiences in government to a stranger (Naples 1996).

Here are just a few examples of my personal context that must shape and influence this research. I am writing this text in English, all my letters of correspondence are in English, and the secondary texts that I used for building academic and social context are in English. The academic world privileges English-speakers and excludes many others, and, having English as my mother tongue, I have benefited from this. However, I am also an American citizen studying in a South African university. I may, therefore, find it easier or more difficult to obtain access to the Parliamentarians than if I were based in the United States and conducting research in South Africa. However, I am doing the study through UWC, an institution with close connections to some of the anti-apartheid activists who currently work in South Africa's government. This may make it easier for me to access potential participants.

Race is a critical issue, as well, given the specific history of apartheid, resulting in racial discrimination and categorization within South Africa. By being white, I may be trusted more readily by other whites in South Africa than I would be by people of color. At the same time, I

may be treated with suspicion by members of the 'black,' 'coloured,' and 'Indian' populations of South Africa. All of these factors may affect my research, and it is my responsibility to attempt to take them into account.

Methods

Plan

When determining exactly how to explore the influence that female Members of Parliament (MP) have in South Africa's Parliament, various methods came to mind; tracking specific legislation, a statistical analysis of women's historic representation in Parliament, or a short quantitative survey of women Parliamentarians would be less time consuming than other methods. But these methods would not allow the opportunities for the women Parliamentarians to express themselves in their own words that the method that I chose would allow.

Having decided upon a qualitative feminist methodology, I then evaluated which method of interviewing to employ. I decided that face-to face semi-structured interviews, within a qualitative framework, would be the most effective way to research how these women perceive their ability to influence the political agenda. This type of interview would provide the space for clarification and understanding between the participant and myself: "The oral interview not only allows women to articulate their own experiences but also reflect upon the meanings of those experiences to them. It provides a picture of how a woman understands herself in her world, where and how she places value, and what particular meanings she attaches to her actions and locations in her world" (Anderson, et al 1990; 103).

The semi-structured interview facilitates a strong rapport and empathy between those involved, allows greater flexibility of coverage, and enables the interview to enter new areas of discussion. According to Smith (1995), it also tends to produce richer data. Semi-structured interviews have also been characterized and critiqued as a helpful method to address the inter-subjectivity and non-hierarchical relationships between researchers and participants (Kelly et al.1994).

May (1993) suggests that semi-structured interviews allow people to answer, on their own terms, better than the fully structured interviews. The semi-structured interview still provides more structure for results comparability then what May calls the 'focused' interview, essentially an interview with no structure and just a central theme focus. I felt that the semi-structured interview method would be the best way for the women Parliamentarians to discuss their perceptions of political influence. Within this framework, the participants have space to raise their own ideas without the limitations of detailed questions and yet the responses can still be compared to one another along the line of thematic concerns raised.

One of the benefits of a semi-structured interview is the rich information that is offered. In using the semi-structured interview framework, the questions that I asked were general and open-ended so that the interviewee could take the discussion to the issues that she felt were relevant, thus crafting a conversation with a purpose. It was for these reasons that I chose the semi-structured face-to-face interview as the best research method for women Parliamentarians to articulate their own understandings of their influences on the political agenda.

Often within interviews, answers revolve around 'facts,' such as occurrences, tangible actions, and results of actions; these provide the 'text' of the story. But, as feminist historian Kathryn Anderson points out (Anderson et. al. 1990: 98), very little attention is given to emotions and individual experiences that surround the activities and resulting actions. It is only through qualitative analysis that these subjective contexts can be taken into account as part of the data. In my study, the participants may discuss issues affecting all women Parliamentarians, as well as issues that affect them personally, as women in Parliament.

When examining the interview transcripts, I plan to follow a qualitative thematic analysis. Following thematic guidelines offered by Jayaratne and Stewart (1991), I will first read and reread the transcripts, noting recurring themes and subjects. Through these, I will develop a picture of these women's understandings of their own experiences within Parliament. In the second stage, I plan to group the themes, topics, and subjects that they raise into broad analytic categories. I will attempt "to describe the relationship among the various categories in order to

identify the 'pattern' or 'structure' of the experiences" (Jayartne and Stewart 1991: 93). This method of analysis will help to ensure that women's own voices and perspectives come through and, as far as possible, are fairly represented in my study.

Action

The Appointment

One of my principal concerns regarding this research was my ability to access women parliamentarians. As these women have many time commitments, I felt that sending a letter explaining the project would be the best way to initially approach potential research participants. In this way, each potential participant could read the letter at her leisure. I then planned to wait a week before I would begin my first round of follow-up phone calls. In this way, each woman would have time to review the letter and reflect on whether or not she would be willing to participate. I decided to send the letters to their offices in Parliament, believing that this was the best way to ensure that the potential participants would receive them.

There were primarily two methods of communication in terms of connecting with the Parliamentarians, the initial letter and follow-up correspondence. In selecting my potential participants, I attempted to balance proportional representation with regard to race, political party, and prominence. I selected eight women from the African National Congress, the largest political party in Parliament, two women from the Inkatha Freedom Party, two women from the Democratic Alliance, and one woman from the Independent Democrats. I selected the names from the Parliament web page for South Africa under the heading 'Women Members of Parliament.'

Although I view race as a social construct (as 'coloured' in one community may be 'black' or 'white' in another and vice versa), given South Africa's history of institutional racial segregation, I felt that it was an important variable to take into account when building a sample. I attempted to build a representative sample. Among my potential participants, four of the women were 'white,' five were 'coloured,' five were 'black,' and one was an 'Indian' woman. After

controlling for gender, party, and race, the majority of the women whom I selected had constituencies around the Western Cape because I felt they would be more likely to be available, geographically speaking, when Parliament was not sitting. The Parliament buildings are located within the city of Cape Town, which is in the Western Cape Province.

I sent the letter to thirteen women in South Africa's 2003 Parliament and emailed a letter to two female MPs who had left in the past few years, totaling fifteen letters in all. My objective was to interview six to eight women Parliamentarians. I mailed the letters soon after my research proposal was approved, in order to allow a long enough time period for me to be able to arrange the interviews and develop correspondence.

The letter described who I was, the program at the University of Western Cape, and the aims of my research. I provided my contact information, as well as the contact details for my UWC advisor. The letter highlighted the participant's anonymity in the study. I tried to be clear regarding my intentions for the research and its purpose. I hand-delivered the letters to the central mail delivery office inside of Parliament.

After sending out the initial letter, I followed up with phone calls to each office to confirm receipt of the letter. When I asked about setting a potential interview date and time, I was generally informed that the request had been filed and that a commitment could not be made immediately. In certain cases, I also wrote follow-up letters as reminders.

Arranging each interview proved to be challenging, and having prior training in journalism proved to be useful. Persistence without push was the method that I found most effective. On average, I called the offices of the potential participants once a week for several weeks, frequently leaving messages. I was also given several cell phone numbers for the women Parliamentarians. But these numbers usually connected me directly to their voice mailboxes.

Although one potential participant was immediately responsive and agreed to participate, obtaining interviews with the other potential participants was quite a struggle. Geographic location became a large issue. When Parliament was in session, the Parliamentarians were in Cape Town, but very busy and when Parliament was not in session, potential participants were

back in their constituencies throughout the country. As a result, the potential participants whose constituencies rested outside the immediate Cape Town area were difficult to connect with.

When a Parliamentarian did agree to participate, the participant's assistant, who also usually maintained all general correspondence, typically arranged the interview appointment. The interviews were often held inside Parliament, usually within the office of the participant. A few interviews were held in more social spaces, such as the Parliament cafeteria and one woman's home. The interviews always started a bit later than planned. Sometimes the participants were unaware that I was coming at the time that I arrived, although their assistants had confirmed the interview.

Over a period of months, I continued to call the potential participants' offices, as well as the two former Members of Parliament. I was very interested in getting perspectives regarding the atmosphere in Parliament from someone who had been inside the structure and was no longer there. The two women whom I thought would be fairly accessible as they worked in the private sector were actually the least available and I was unable to arrange their interviews because they were frequently out of the country.

There were various reasons that Parliamentarians offered as to why they were unable to participate. One assistant simply informed me that the Parliamentarian would not like to take part. Another woman phoned me directly to inform me that she would not be available until later that year. Another female MP was in hospital due to exhaustion; other potential participants' assistants discussed the amount of pressure that MPs had on their time. The language of the letter being in English and my name sounding non-African may have also deterred some potential participants.

Cancellations also proved to be problematic. Women canceled for a variety of reasons, such as party commitments, missed airplane flights, and overloaded schedules. Some of the potential participants never returned my phone calls. These women were very busy and I was asking a great deal of them in terms of taking time out from their days for interviews for a mini-

thesis study, so I am extremely grateful to those who were able to reorganize their lives to find the time to grant me interviews.

The Interview

On average, my interviews were arranged a month apart, and I had to adjust my expectations regarding obtaining them. For instance, in the last two months of my study, I had five cancellations. But with multiple time extensions, I was eventually able to obtain five face-to-face interviews. The sixth and final interview was conducted over the phone, as the participant was at her constituency residence in the Eastern Cape. Although it did not completely follow my original methodology, the interview went smoothly and I was grateful that she had allowed the time for me.

The majority of these interviews took place within the offices in Parliament in Cape Town, while a few took place in other spaces, such as the Parliament cafeteria or, in one case, in the home of the participant. When interviewing at Parliament, entering the Parliamentary buildings required a great deal of security clearance. Accessing buildings required an electronic visitor's pass and photo identification. A secure environment was developed though these protocols for the participants and myself. These parliamentary offices, while offering some advantages, were not ideal. Since the offices are located within the institution which I was asking the participants to critique, the women may have felt apprehensive and may have been more comfortable in an external environment. There was also a problem involving frequent work interruptions.

At the beginning of each of these conversations, I summarized the aims of my study and handed over the informed consent form. While each participant read it over, I summarized her rights as an interview participant and emphasized the protection afforded her through anonymity. The participant sometimes offered her rationale for agreeing to participate, such as it being part of her responsibility as a Parliamentarian and as a female role model.

We each signed the informed consent form and then began the conversations. With the permission of the participant, I tape recorded her interview. In order to build up a rapport, I

usually began by asking about her path to Parliament-how she became involved and the issues regarding policy about which she felt passionate. These are women who are respected highly in their communities and who have been selected to lead at a high level of government. I was often a bit nervous in the first few minutes of each interview.

I usually sat across from the participant, and maintained a great deal of eye contact during the interview. This helped facilitate rapport and enhanced my awareness of (mis)understandings. I brought in a list of about ten open-ended questions connected to my research aims. My questions generally fell along the lines of how women work together and how women wield political influence.

Following Banister, Bowman, & Taylor's principles of minimizing power differentials, I encouraged each participant to ask questions regarding who I am, my interest in the topic, and what I plan to do with the information gathered. Typically, near the end of the interview, the Parliamentarian asked me a question or two regarding the United States or I would offer the reasons why I feel South Africa is important to the global community. One woman asked to see the results of the research and suggested that the research be disseminated into the broader community of women in Parliament. I plan on making my research findings readily available, once the study and paper are completed.

I interviewed each participant for roughly forty-five minutes to an hour. The interviews went fairly smoothly, but there were some interruptions. Most commonly, the assistant had to check something or the participant's cell phone rang. But the participant did not always take the call. When she and I were in a misunderstanding, as we perceived it, we asked each other immediately for clarification, sometimes rephrasing the words to suit conversational flow. Overall, the interviews were highly engaging and informative. I transcribed each interview in the corresponding week that followed. Aside from the occasional disruption, the recordings were clear. To look at the words without the body language that was part of the conversation, some of the participant's intent is lost. I tried to reiterate the participant's emphasis and tone in the transcripts, as best as I could.

The Analysis

Within the context of a qualitative analysis, I attempted to reflect on the depth and variety of each participant's responses. Using transcripts of the interviews, I looked for themes and patterns and compared the findings to prior research on female politicians internationally, in Africa, and with earlier work on South African female members of Parliament.

Through analyses our conversations, I attempted to assess how these women perceive their ability to influence the South African political agenda. I also looked at the content of what they said; I was alert for contradictions and patterns of description. I wrote down explanations and themes that recurred in the transcripts.

During the interviews, the participants frequently brought up new issues regarding women in Parliament that were not part of my original scope. These are issues that may have been excluded through other research methods and they amplified the importance of using a semi-structured format. I did not silence these new concerns, but, rather, asked the participants to elaborate on these topics, i.e. why they felt this was important, etc.

After each interview, I made notes regarding the main topics discussed. Reading through the transcripts, I grouped the reoccurring themes and developed subheadings. Under each of these subheadings, I looked at the various statements connected to that topic. Upon reading and rereading the transcripts, certain clear patterns developed. When, for instance, I asked about the way women work together in Parliament, responses related to structures, such as the Women's Caucus, were brought up. When we talked about their perceptions of the political atmosphere in Parliament, issues surrounding sexual harassment kept emerging. Given these patterns, initially I opted to split the analysis into two main subsections; the first deals with what my participants mentioned as the opportunities or positive factors and the second connected obstacles or negative factors that limit their effectiveness. But through further analysis, four major categories emerged in relation to women's perceptions of political influence: the 1994 democratic transition, Parliamentary structure, women's 'issues' and unity, and political parties.

Despite the difficulties in obtaining interviews, I was able to meet with six women Parliamentarians and discuss their experiences within the South African Parliament. The research participants represent differing races, differing political parties, and differing levels of prominence. These women's voices and their perceptions of influence on the political agenda in South Africa provide the text and the 'data' for my research study.

ANALYSIS

The primary research objective of this study was to explore women Parliamentarians' perceptions of their ability to influence the political agenda in South Africa. Overall, the female members of Parliament who participated in this study perceive themselves and each other to have strong influence on the political agenda. Participants discussed issues that they felt affected their ability to influence the political agenda. These issues fell under four principal categories: the 1994 democratic transition and the new Constitution, the formal and informal structure of Parliament, the role and policies of political parties, and perceptions of women's unity and the role of gender. The following chapter outlines these factors perceived by my participants as important in terms of shaping their effectiveness in the South African Parliament.

The women Parliamentarians are generally positive about their ability to impact the political agenda. As one Member put it, "[t]he women I work with in this Parliament, across party lines-they definitely influence the line of thought, the decision and the debate." Others agreed, and when questioned about women's ability to influence the political agenda specifically, all of my respondents replied affirmatively. "Absolutely," MP Beck stated emphatically. "We get our issues on the agenda," according to MP Van Steer. MP Kinnear responded, "I think so.... We have been able to do it in this institution." Another specified how "in terms of legislation, in terms of machinery, in terms of organizations of structures, I think we have done tremendously . . .women are in a much better place now then they were ten years ago." MP Robertson echoed, "If you look at what, what we've put in place, not only in Parliament but that OSW (Office on the Status of Women] and right down all the departments."

1994 DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

Background

In the middle of the twentieth century, a white supremacist nationalist political regime gained political control of South Africa and began consolidating earlier legislation around race into the project that was to become known as apartheid. The second half of the twentieth century saw resentment against this system of racial oppression grow and the consolidation of an opposition led by the African National Congress and Nelson Mandela. In 1994, South Africa had a tremendous change in political regime and began democratic majority rule. The first democratic elections were held and the African National Congress (ANC) was elected as the new majority political party. A new constitution was drafted by the democratically elected Parliament, banning all forms of discrimination and oppression.

The Parliament of South Africa is a national governing body for the entire country of South Africa. Democratic elections have been held every five years since the 1994 democratic transition. South African citizens vote for the political party they support. The leader of the political party that receives the majority of the popular vote in the national election is elected President of the country. Seats in Parliament are determined by the percentage of votes that a political party receives. For example, if the African National Congress receives seventy-five percent of the votes, then seventy-five percent of the seats in Parliament will be reserved for members of the ANC. The people who fill these seats come through the political party lists and, hence, become Members of Parliament or Parliamentarians.

Transition of Parliament

South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994 was broader than just adding members differing in race, class, ethnicity, and gender to Parliament, and it created some significant

difficulties for the women Parliamentarians. I asked the women how these transitions affected their current perceptions of their political influence. "Before 1994- it [Parliament] was chauvinism at its best," according to MP Beck. She continued, "The difficult part is the departments or civil service. You know, there are an awful lot [of people] left over from the past... transformation is not an easy thing." MP Robertson pointed that "we inherited an institution that consisted previously of mostly middle aged males, white males…but we did transform that." In reference to traditional African food, dress, and mannerisms: "All of those kinds of things obviously had a huge transformation in this institution and [we] had to change that unfriendliness," stated MP Kinnear.

Beck noted that in the transition to democracy in 1994, "suddenly a bunch of people who had never been anywhere near a Parliament-many of them came from forbidden structures [anti-apartheid organizations] so there was never the normal preparation for people." Recognizing this as a problem, a number of training programs and workshops were held, aimed at familiarizing new MPs with parliamentary procedures and structures. These training sessions and orientations were mentioned in a few of the interviews. The training helped to prepare women, especially those new to public life, on how the system of Parliament is supposed to function and how to effectively legislate. Van Steer thought that these training sessions were important, describing their effect as very positive and "a process of growing and empowering... Identifying them [women] and training them, in a sense-empowering them because so often men came from the bottom and rose to the top." Van Steer continued about how "often even the bottom level was not open to women."

The women Parliamentarians mentioned that, despite this Parliament training, the lack of experienced women in these formal public structures still functioned as an obstacle. "[O]ften you

don't have enough women that have the experience of public life," noted Van Steer. Women's own attitudes may be an obstacle in their effectiveness, according to Rhodes, "I think there are two words that I hate that women must take out of their vocabulary, and that is 'I CAN'T.' You know there are too many times; 'I can't do this, I cannot do this.'" These words hinder women Parliamentarians' ability to ensure that their political objectives are heard.

The rules of Parliament that guide decorum and participation also play a critical role in facilitating the effectiveness of female Members, according to my respondents. MP Rhodes felt that "the reason women are doing better is because they are smarter. They know how to manipulate the rules to suit them, but are not seeking some sort of a protection." The rules were described as a space where women Parliamentarians gained political voice and influence. "I think it was important to change the rules of Parliament to make sure that a lot of things that affect women are being corrected in the system of Parliament," mentioned Kinnear. Rhodes also emphasized, on a personal note, that "I see myself being, participating, at Parliament by following the rules of politicians."

Some of my research participants also referred to the role of international politics in ensuring women's representation in governing structures. Describing South Africa's transition, Van Steer observed, "The focus of the world also changed then…the world was calling out for women to be more acknowledged and the glass ceiling [regarding women's absence in the upper ranks of government]." Rhodes also pointed to the importance of international politics in terms of engaging women. In reference to a UN Women's global conference, Rhodes discussed how "In Beijing1995, Parliament South Africa was represented. I was one of the women when we finally drew up a Beijing Platform of Action... There is also the United Nations.... CEDAW" [Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women].

The women Parliamentarians highlighted how the transformation of the infrastructure and norms of Parliament helped build an atmosphere where women Parliamentarians can be effective. The three primary methods of transforming the infrastructure in Parliament that were mentioned were the integration of women's bathrooms, the shifting of the hours, and the development of a crèche.

The participants mentioned the importance of adding material structures, things as basic as ladies' toilets, to make the institution more gender friendly. "[M]any of the male toilets had to be converted to female toilets. So [prior to 1994] Parliament had catered to men only," reflected Kinnear. Others agreed. "This Parliament was totally un-women friendly when we arrived. All the toilets said 'Men Only.' They made no provision.... we literally were running in circles. We actually got a lot of ladies [bathroom signs] nailed up everywhere," mentioned Beck.

The women Parliamentarians raised the issue regarding the working hours of Parliament and the difficulties that this initially created for women MPs. "In terms of making it possible and easier for women members of Parliament specifically," things have changed "tremendously," according to Rhodes: "the sitting times-we will not sit after 6 o'clock, not unless it's a real emergency. ... You know women that have commitments like children and so on, they are able to leave by 6 o'clock." Kinnear noted the amendment which changed the standard so that "Parliament will only be for so many hours." She saw that "the hours of Parliament catered for men. It wasn't catered for women [by] saying you got to stop at a particular time." As Van Steer justified, "there are more women now, and they feel their children need them. We try and not sit longer than six o'clock now."

The introduction of a crèche on the Parliamentary grounds was also considered to be important. This was added soon after 1994. "We did transform that because, for one, the people

that came in were not only women, but also young men with responsibilities of child caring, and little children and so on," described Robertson. Beck asked, "[W]hat do Parliamentarians, women Parliamentarians, do when they have babies? What do they do with their preschool children?" Beck also mentioned that there was "a nursery school right on the premises." And "those kinds of issues" were now being "treated with great sympathy." Robertson, though, still felt that for "all women in power positions, it's very difficult for them to cope and keep the families intact." Robertson questioned, "how can I be all over the place and still struggle with the fact of being a single parent?" and she suggested that there are "a lot of women like that."

The Parliamentarians also mentioned the importance of schools for older children in the Parliamentary village, where the Members of Parliament have housing. "[L]ots of changes," Kinnear noted, "there is a crèche for the smaller ones, and obviously, the Parliamentary village has a school up to grade seven." Kinnear continued that, "if you look at the [Parliamentary] villages, there are schools in there. Some of the MPs take their children there, others don't. All of them have their own plans."

The kind of changes described so far suggest that the institutional structures of Parliament have changed in a variety of ways to make the institution more 'women-friendly.' First, training was offered to the women (and men) with little or no experience of the practices and procedures embedded in the machinery of government. In addition, some of these procedures and practices have, themselves, been questioned, with the resulting changes in the Parliament structure.

Apart from the basic facilities, such as the provision of women's toilets and more accessible child care arrangements, for instance, changes have also been made to the hours that Parliament actually sits, in recognition of the fact that it is generally women who are allocated

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(and who take on) the tasks of child raising and home making. While these important changes have helped to contribute to my participants' perceptions of their political effectiveness, there are several other factors regarding the 1994 democratic transition that they considered important in shaping their ability to influence the political agenda, primarily the laws established in the new South African constitution.

New Constitution

During the transition from the apartheid political regime to the current representative democracy, the South African constitution was rewritten to reflect the objectives, ethics, and laws structuring the new government. As participants noted, constitutional provisions regarding gender equality laid an important foundation for the effectiveness of women Parliamentarians. The "constitution," said Kinnear, gives "you rights to make sure that gender sensitivity [is] being taken care of." Van Steer also noted that the South African constitution "talks about a non-racist and non-sexist society." Robertson illustrated issues of enforcement regarding constitutional provisions. Rhodes mentioned the political agency that the constitution provided: "I was looking at the rights of the constitution. I mean I can be like any other person and go form a political party and I have done it." Under the provisions of the constitution, gender should not be a barrier to any political activity.

The South African constitution was frequently mentioned by participants as contributing to their political influence in parliament. As Rhodes said, "[t]he rights are there. It's in the constitution...Go claim it, just go and take it. It's ours." Robertson echoed this claim, by stating, "What we have is a foundation. We have our policies, and we have the constitution.... Everyone is bound by the constitution." Others agreed. Van Steer also mentioned how "everyone is bound by the constitution." Some, however, pointed to the limitations of the constitution. "We have

written the constitution, but when it comes to *what* constitutes sexist practices or sexist behaviors, I mean… what do you do?" asked Robertson.

In addition to the constitution, participants mentioned how changes in terminology in the development of policy and the framing of new legislation further demonstrate how women have been able to influence the political agenda. Rhodes described how "most of the legislation in the past used to refer to him, ... we have been able to... go back into old legislation and be sure to include him or her." When questioned about her opinion of the gender sensitivity of Parliament, Kinnear also saw this type of policy transformation as a benchmark. "We have mastered sufficient policies through this institution and sufficient legislation through this institution...We have gone in the right direction." The participants were confident in their achievement of this objective.

PARLIAMENTARY STRUCTURES

Formal

Apart from personalities and particular individual experiences, the women indicated that the structure and organization of Parliament itself is important and described various formal organizational structures that helped them influence the political agenda, such as the Constitution, party policies, and the "gender machinery." The participants discussed political influences inside the formal structure of Parliament through the various forms of committees, groups, and institutionalized gender equality platforms.

The participants mentioned the portfolio committees of Parliament as important places to potentially influence legislation and political priorities. "The portfolio committee... is where they [Parliamentarians] make sure that the legislation-or any other briefing and oversight- that it was gender sensitive," mentioned Kinnear. Kinnear reiterated the importance of women's issues in

the portfolio committee, saying, "You raise the issue when they [Parliamentarians] come and make a presentation on the portfolio committee.... Basically, we are legislators so we sit on our portfolios and in meetings dealing basically with legislation and the policy that drives the legislative process...Women certainly have always made their marks there."

The participants highlighted the three arms of the 'gender machinery' that inform Parliament. 'Gender machinery' refers to the politically institutionalized presence of three political arms that work towards gender equality and women's rights: The Commission on Gender Equality (CGE)-an arm of public employees, the Office on the Status of Women (OSW)-an arm of the President's office, and the Joint Committee on Quality of Life and Status of Women (Committee) - which is the arm consisting of Members of Parliament.

Robertson mentioned that the gender policies "we've put in place, not only in Parliament but that Office on Status of Women and right down all the [Parliamentary] departments." Beck framed the Commission on Gender Equality as a "structure" that needed to be "in place" to address women's needs. But Rhodes questioned the cost of the CGE: "we also have got a gender equality commission- which is very costly."

Participants mentioned the Joint Committee on the Quality of Life and Status of Women (JCQLSW) as the largest contributor of political influence for women's issues in Parliament within the 'gender machinery.' Robertson raised the JCQLSW's specific influence on the "laws on domestic violence and the Maintenance Act as well as other legislation." Robertson gave an example of the Committee's influence on "the arms control bill which dealt with safety and security. They [JCQLSW] made submissions to that portfolio committee to include a clause that if a man has been served a protection order, that keeps such a man from getting a license for a

firearm." Kinnear described the JCQLSW as a "committee that was put together to take care of legislation in Parliament.... I think they have done wonderful work in that committee."

But in terms of support for women *inside* Parliament, Robertson didn't feel "that our committee for status of women [JCQLSW] is, you know, providing any kind of support" in reference to the women in Parliament. The committee works on legislative issues affecting women. It, seemingly, does not provide strong support for the women Parliamentarians, themselves. The JCQLSW is a form of support for women Parliamentarians working towards influencing the political agenda to improve the lives of women specifically, but it does not provide, according to Robertson, a structural support for the women in Parliament.

Participants described legislative committees within Parliament as important spaces, providing opportunities for influencing the political agenda and raising gender issues. "In each and every committee," said Robertson, "we pick up on gender issues." As MP Kinnear noted, "the committee did very well to highlight those points [protecting women's safety] in those two bills for example." According to Kinnear, committees were tools that "we must use in order to make sure that these things [political objectives] do find their way [to legislation] sufficiently." Van Steer emphasized the "stand in the committees we take on an Act" as a primary site for influence. Kinnear described the budget as one of your "main tools" in Parliament, and she felt that there had been "lots of discussion and lots of research and lots of assistance on how to bring gender sensitivity into the budget."

According to Robertson, committees are the primary spaces where women Parliamentarians can raise issues: "we are in ... those committees and we push for those things [gender equality and equity] ... it's when there's a problem-and it is not happening-that we [women Parliamentarians] are likely to raise it."

But other participants brought up concerns regarding the lack of gender consciousness among women Parliamentarians. Robertson saw that "There are various levels of gender consciousness, so part of the training that we give needs to be gender awareness and not only to the men." Kinnear felt more could be done in the "portfolio committee" to "make sure that we do everything with a gender sensitive eye. I do not think that we always do."

The women Parliamentarians highlighted the role of small, informal groups as places for developing political influence. Study or strategy groups are small groups in which Parliamentarians come together to discuss specific political issues in order to develop positions on these issues. The groups are important, according to Kinnear: "You have study groups where it's the parties themselves. So it is in the study group level where women have to give the political direction to the committee to say that that should be. I mean that's the one tool that they have at their disposal." Strategizing also takes place in small groups. In regard to "making statements in Parliament that will come through women or men, it will come through to the strategy groups," summarized Robertson. The statements are often predetermined and it is in the strategy groups, according to Robertson, that one gains political influence in the writing of the statement's goals and objectives.

All Members of Parliament have general committee responsibilities. But, since the JCQLSW is an additional committee beyond the general committee responsibilities, Kinnear expressed doubt in women Parliamentarians' ability to be effective, given the time constraints. Kinnear questioned whether there was "sufficient time in their own committee meetings to deal with [the] legislation, programs of departments, and have their own program, by the way, as a committee [JCQLSW]. I think that they are not going to be able to do it."

The lack of supporting formal structures in Parliament was also criticized by some of the women as presenting an obstacle to their effectiveness. When questioned about the role of the Joint Committee on the Quality of Life and Status of Women and the Women's Caucuses, Robertson replied that she didn't think "that the support is enough just because there is so much pressure, you know, on women." Rhodes agreed, pointing to weak infrastructure, "We have to struggle. We don't even have secretaries, we don't even have support bases [referring to the women's movement grassroots support]." Rhodes described her concerns regarding support amongst women Parliamentarians, saying "I still struggle today, just in terms of support for women members of Parliament. It is pathetic."

Participants discussed the importance of having women in formal leadership positions. The women Ministers inside the President's cabinet have been understood to be particularly influential in setting South Africa's political agenda. Beck noted that, "[T]he top structure of Parliament, that's female. So it must have an influence.... Look at the ministerial situation and look how many ministers are female." Others agreed. The "Cabinet is well represented by women. So there are certain resolutions that go through Cabinet, as well, and those are taken through. At the moment, the President of the [ANC] Women's League Nationally is in Cabinet, yeah, and that is how everything is communicated," illustrated Robertson. "Our cabinet is just the most outstanding cabinet one can proudly speak of.... The Minister of Minerals and Energy [is a woman in a]... totally male dominated industry, and she has done marvelous work to chart through transformation in that industry" Kinnear highlighted.

Women currently hold several South African political leadership positions, such as Speaker and Deputy Speaker of Parliament and the chair of the National Council of Provinces [NCOP]. Although some participants mentioned positive impacts on gender awareness by having

women in leadership positions, others criticized the behavior of these leaders. Rhodes felt these women did little to support the other women in Parliament: "We have got two women leaders in Parliament.... Go into their offices.... lots of money being spent on the two women because they have got status." But Beck noted that having these women in leadership positions is an indication of the strength of women in Parliament, stating, in response to a question regarding women's political influence, "Look, the speaker is female and deputy speaker is female." According to Robertson, "The speaker [Dr. Frene Ginwala] is quite a feminist...So is the deputy speaker and the chairperson of the NCOP, for that matter. They are all quite highly trained when it comes to gender awareness."

Informal

The participants discussed certain aspects of the informal Parliamentary structure in discussing their perceptions of political effectiveness. The overall atmosphere in Parliament, men's attitudes and social behaviors, and sexual harassment were the three key themes repeatedly highlighted by my participants. Several MPs described the importance of men's awareness, within the walls of Parliament, to gender issues and sexism. Van Steer brought up that "there is an awareness, a much more acute awareness by the men-sensitive, sensitized men." She mentioned it later as a point of success, saying "I think we have managed to get the male population so sensitive or sensitized." Rhodes noted that sexist humor is no longer funny in Parliament. Robertson stated that, "people don't use sexist language and if they do, they get corrected along the way."

But the participants felt that Parliament remains a place where men dominate overall, especially in the informal social spaces where many political discussions can take place. Van Steer felt that the "pubs are open to us, but, obviously, you must be a woman with quite a bit of

confidence to just walk in there and be part of it-the scene." Rhodes observed, "in terms of socializing, I think the male members of Parliament are socializing a lot more. You go down to the pubs at night and most of the time I am the only woman there.... males come together across political party-almost like a Brotny [brotherhood] thing." These spaces tend to reinforce the brotherhood of Parliament, "men's work of government," which may place women as outsiders, and potentially limit their opportunities to engage in these informal political discussions.

The women Parliamentarians felt that some of the obstacles to achieving their political aims stemmed from men's attitudes and behaviors within Parliament. "The men in powerful positions, again politics, not business, they take ages to make a decision," commented MP Van Steer. "Men don't seem to want to take chances. You know there was a long list as to why we couldn't do something," noted Beck. Beck lamented how "in Parliament, the unfortunate thing is that there's nothing that any of us can do, which, in many ways, is really sad because everything is perfectly controlled." This static control may limit women's ability to create changes in the political agenda.

Robertson observed that, "Men are very good at positioning themselves. The minute they see that X is top, then they go and position themselves. They pop in and out of the chief whip's office, um…expressing their needs, and so on." These methods have helped men to influence the political agenda. Women, according to MP Robertson, have not positioned themselves in these kinds of ways and, thus, lessened their political efficacy. In reference to a situation where there was a woman as the chief whip, Robertson described, "when she was the chief whip and the men came with their usual, you know, chance to position [for leadership status].... And she would try and get a system going to stop people from doing that." Robertson concluded, she "probably felt harassed."

One participant felt that women were too sensitive regarding sexual harassment in Parliament, but the others felt that it was a serious issue. Van Steer felt that "these smaller things... I really think we are bedeviling our cause by being too sensitive about sexual harassment, really. It's a human interaction. If you can't take it, leave the kitchen.... you won't do it with me, but you may do it with some women. They feel, 'It's my boss; I can't do it [resist]." Van Steer made a distinction between "smaller things" and that of rape. Her comments reflect a survivalist mentality, an acceptance that this is the way of "human interaction" within society.

In terms of the atmosphere within Parliament, the other participants felt that the topic of sex and sexuality was not openly discussed in the policies of Parliament. "Men, for example, don't easily acknowledge or don't have a developed understanding of sexual harassment," according to Robertson. "The word sex. You know there are sorts of words in African society you can't use," stated Beck. Rhodes echoed this point regarding silence around sex and sexuality, saying, "another stereotype is that women don't talk about these things [sexual harassment] because they feel shame on themselves. They feel they have sinned or done something wrong." Rhodes elaborated that she knew "about sexual harassment cases here. But it's never come through to the committee because women have decided 'I don't want to go through that.'" An atmosphere that allows sexual harassment is an atmosphere that permits women to be viewed as sexual objects, legislators, as well as staff. This type of sexual objectification reduces women's political ability and classifies them as subjects.

Robertson described the "power relations" running along gender, where "'if you don't give me what I want, then I will use my power against you,' and so on. I think that's a very new field [sexual harassment]; that's why it becomes very difficult to prove things in court." Rhodes described how she "exposed someone here at Parliament. I call him the 'Sexpest'. When he

raped women here and should they speak out-they would lose their jobs. ...That was not amongst women of Parliament-that was amongst the staff. But still the same thing." These types of power relations along sexuality may hinder women Parliamentarians' ability to be politically effective, especially when there is little in place in terms of sexual harassment protocols and policies.

These types of sexual harassment cases are beginning to set legal precedents within the walls of the new South African Parliament. Robertson emphasized the importance of the approach in terms of how these policies were enacted, particularly when reviewing cases of sexual harassment:"[A]mongst women, we know that we must also protect ourselves. But it could be construed as a blaming the victim kind of approach." In general, Robertson felt that the policies regarding sexual harassment and sexual assault still need to be developed in Parliament, saying, "we are not there yet where we have a strict policy in the workplace."

Time Pressures

The participants discussed time constraints within Parliament as obstacles to their political agency. Kinnear noted that "yes, you can argue for having women represented but unless you take care of the other things that go with it, you are not going to have success-childcare responsibilities, responsibilities at home; you need to take care of all the other parts to make sure that women can be effective and participate." Robertson described how "It's very hard.... I also got divorced.... it's not only the hours, it's about the fact that the woman suddenly has a high powered job." Beck felt that "we [Parliamentarians] have trouble covering all the committees. We are forever chasing our own tails trying to get there...what it means, in real terms, is that you hardly ever get to your office." Beck's comment suggests that time pressures influence her ability to respond to constituent and office concerns, and, potentially, impacts her

ability to achieve her political objectives. Various role expectations place large pressures in regards to time for the women in Parliament.

The commute and its ramifications were mentioned as pressures on the participants' time: "[t]wo hours of my day just getting to work and back," mentioned Beck. "[T]here are many women in this Parliament who doesn't stay in Cape Town and they have got to come to Cape Town...weekends, recesses, and they have got to have this two home situation; ...there's a lot of.... social problems that go with that," noted Kinnear. "It's very difficult to maintain a family because it [being a Parliamentarian] is not a 9-to-5 job," stated Robertson. Van Steer refers to how women Parliamentarians "have got these various roles" that they must balance and manage. These exterior time commitments prevent women from engaging in these informal social activities where political objectives and positioning take place. Rhodes asks women Parliamentarians "why are you not coming to the pub? They say 'no, I have got to go pick up my children.'"

INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL PARTY

The ANC (African National Congress) is the political party that has held the majority of the seats within South Africa's Parliament since 1994. MP Van Steer, who worked within the government both before and after the 1994 democratic elections, noted that the ANC has played an important role in structuring change. When the ANC took over, "things changed dramatically," she said. "They are much more gender sensitive than either party." Similarly, Kinnear stated that "we are more driven by the policies of the ANC in relation to gender issues" and this support from the ANC has led to a "slight advantage [regarding gender sensitivity] where departments or governments have to implement particular legislation." "Everyone is really bound by ANC policy," mentioned Robertson. "Women know the policies of the ANC." These

responses indicate that party leadership plays an important role in shaping women's experiences within government.

A point repeatedly mentioned by the participants was the importance of the policies of the organization or party in shaping women's political influence. Robertson mentioned that the "policies of the ANC and the policies of the ANC Women's League, and the resolutions passed in conferences are taken through [to legislation]." Kinnear attributed a "gender-sensitive constitution" and "gender sensitive legislation" to the "policies of the organization." She and others participants described how these policies play an important role in shaping women's influence in government. "The ANC," said Van Steer, "has played a big role in credible women taking the reins that's in public life or in business." Rhodes echoed how, in her view, political parties are the mediums for change: "more women are coming to Parliament that are outspoken within their political parties."

Although participants mentioned the ANC party specifically, they also highlighted the importance of political parties, in general, for political influence. Beck, a non-ANC Parliamentarian, asserted how "in my party, the women's influence on political issues is great." Robertson mentioned that gender "runs through all the [political party] arguments of budgets and everything else."

Another location and space that the women cited as important for influencing the political priorities of the agenda were political party gatherings and caucuses. Within the ANC political party, there is a women's caucus that meets on occasion, examining issues and policies affecting women. Kinnear referenced how the party "will have a report on what comes from the women's caucus." Van Steer described the importance of "...influencing the way discussion goes in caucuses" in order to yield political influence. "I raise my problems in a general meeting," said

Robertson. "I won't go and position myself, whispering in the chief whip's ear," referring to an approach Robertson felt that others, mostly men, used to gain political influence. Another participant mentioned women's roles at party gatherings. "When the parties have their conferences- the role women play there- it's aggressive in the nice sense of the word," Van Steer suggested.

The power of political parties was mentioned earlier as an aid for women's political agency. But this power of the political party acts as enabling women to be more influential in shaping the policy agenda and as producing barriers to their political effectiveness, depending on party attitudes. Van Steer mentioned that there are "still a lot of chauvinists, and it depends a great deal on the attitude of your leader. ...Power still rests a lot with men. Although there are some women that's got the same voting power...We [are] too few to overrule."

The political parties are, in a sense, the gatekeepers of women's participation. Kinnear pointed to the power parties have over Parliamentarians: "...women in the opposition parties that would vote against the legislation that would have a positive effect on women ...they are completely unable to change around that situation...they would go back and vote with their party, [vote] on positions that they take." These women are prevented from having their own voices to influence the political agenda and must adopt the political party platform position.

Rhodes emphasized the importance of women's positions within political parties. Rhodes thought "the problem lies within the political parties. I mean, if they don't give the women the opportunities to speak, I mean look at all the National debates. Most national debates, it's mostly men speaking." Referring to women in other political parties, Beck felt that "they seem to have a sort of 'we have to ask that many questions, even if we don't really want to know.' And it seems to be rather structured as to what is expected of them.... They [non-ANC women MPs] must

prove themselves again and again." These examples from the participants illustrate how the political party has the power to either encourage, such as by placing women in high authority positions, or discourage, such as by ignoring the women Parliamentarians' voices in party meetings, women Parliamentarians' ability to influence the political agenda.

Party Quotas

In 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) adopted a quota system whereby for every two ANC Parliamentary seats held by men, one would be held by a woman. In the 2004 elections, the ANC took over 75% of the seats of Parliament. The majority of the participants recognized the gender quota policy of the ANC as contributing to their political influence. "In the ANC, because we have a policy of every third woman on the list, every third person must be a woman," Robertson explained. As Kinnear mentioned, the quota system "at least opened up the door to make sure that women would come into Parliament." Others agreed. Van Steer reflected that "thirty percent is a good call because it forces party leaders to really think of what we are.... it is the awareness of the strength that we can muster, if we really should use the number game." But there were also voices of dissent. Beck thought that the ANC policy was unnecessary, saying, "I didn't actually think they had to. I think it would happen quite naturally."

Women are represented at various levels of leadership within the South African Parliament. On three critical levels of political power, the Presidential cabinet, Members of Parliament, and leadership of Parliament, women are well represented. Women occupying positions of leadership was frequently cited by the participants as important in their perceptions of political agency. "[B]ecause to really make this work, this whole gender issue thing, you have to have women in powerful positions. Women have to be decision makers...the decisions to make to influence thought," according to Van Steer.

Participants mentioned the ANC Women's League initiative in 2000 to increase the quota from thirty to fifty percent. "I think it should be fifty percent; I mean, that is, the demographics. I mean that the mere fact that we still have to have that artificial correction shows you how far we still have to go, in terms of patriarchy," pointed out Robertson. "Why shouldn't it be 50/50? I think there is still space for many more," stated Van Steer. Other participants also supported the fifty percent quota as producing better representation of women in Parliament than there would otherwise be. The numbers of women in Parliament demonstrates the level of gender-friendliness within Parliament, according to Kinnear. "I don't think there is an argument to make the institution more gender friendly.... First of all it has a very high number [of women]... ANC, for example, has gone to its congress and said that we must have legislation that talks about,…ah fifty-fifty in the nomination process." But one research participant believed that the quota system did little for women if there was no 'mission' behind women's representation. Rhodes argued that "[t]his 50/50 campaign now.... it's actually an insult to the intelligence of women just to want to have more women for the dresses,"(sic).

Rhodes also pointed to the independence of political parties regarding how the quota system is implemented, stating, "Parliament can't force the party to say 'let fifty percent of the people that speak today be women. Parliament can't make that a rule for the political party to ensure that they get more women speakers." Robertson emphasized the collective power of the party over individual preferences regarding women's representation, saying, "There are no individuals in the party.... If you can't accept that there are no individuals in the party, then you are going to get totally messed up." Women Parliamentarians cannot be autonomous; they are under pressure to support their political party, and this may hinder their ability to influence the political agenda.

WOMEN'S ISSUES AND UNITY

'Women's issues'

Changing the conceptualization of 'women's issues' to everyone's issues, such as the motto 'Women's Rights are Human Rights,' was mentioned by the participants as an effective political approach in regard to policies connected to women. In reference to speaking on National Women's Day about the abuse of women, Rhodes felt that "It's everyone's issue. I went to the president of the organization [a political party] and I said you go and speak. I am not going to speak just because I am a woman." Robertson mentioned legislation aimed at "violence against women" and how support for these protective policies are "just accepted as a National Policy, so whether you are male or female-you are expected to act on that." "We want [female issues] to be seen as a human interest and not a female problem," mentioned Van Steer. Kinnear also referenced this movement against 'women's issues' being the responsibility for only women. "We have got to make it the responsibility of the organization [political parties] to make sure that they carry through [women's issues]. You have to make sure that you don't put the burden on women only."

In reference to votes regarding "women's issues" in Parliament, Van Steer stated, "We don't have a problem in getting anything voted through." Robertson discussed how "what comes through" such as prioritizing women's safety "in the speeches that are made" influences the political framing of issues. But others described the lack of concern regarding 'women's issues' in Parliament. Rhodes brought up her actions against the idea that only women are expected to speak on women's issues, saying, "[W]hen it came to Women's Day on the 9th of August ... it was like, automatically, I should speak and I refused. I refused. I will not go and speak." Rhodes argued that, whereas during the national debates mostly men would be speaking, with 'women's

issues' there would be only "one or two men speaking, one or two, because it's a women's thing and that, I think, should be the role of members of Parliament."

Women's unity

Participants mentioned that the overall structure of Parliament, with its separate political groupings, as sometimes functioning as an obstacle in their political effectiveness. The women considered various approaches to combat these problems, such as uniting together as women. For instance, while political party membership separates the women Parliamentarians, as Van Steer pointed out, when there is "an issue that really needs to be tackled, we go across party lines."

The women's multiparty parliamentary caucus was described by several of my participants as an important vehicle which enables women Parliamentarians to work together across party lines. Robertson stated that, "women come together in parties and there is also a multi party women's caucus that comes together from time to time." Kinnear stated that, "There is multi-party women's caucus also where all the women gather from the different parties. So that's, at the level of caucus, where the women strategize together-very importantly."

Other participants in the study did not see the women's parliamentary caucus as particularly effective in helping women Parliamentarians influence the political agenda or aid in the achievement of their goals. When Beck was asked how helpful the caucus was, she responded quite bluntly that, "It's not." Rhodes also questioned the effectiveness of the caucus, noting that it was a caucus of women "who don't implement anything!" Rhodes criticized the caucus's approaches. She felt they spent their time with "lots of trips overseas," stating that participants in "SADC [Southern Africa Development Council] travel." Rhodes felt that this money for travel could have been used to fund local grassroots organizations.

The ineffectiveness of the caucus seems to be attributed to the caucus's lack of official status. As Robertson noted, "it's not an official structure, it's not a portfolio. It's a caucus." It is, perhaps, this lack of official status that is the reason the Caucus meets at inconvenient times; Rhodes criticized the Caucus, saying, "... must be reduced to meeting only during their lunchtimes. Why can't it become another committee like a portfolio committee of Parliament? I'm not going to give up my lunchtime just to go... and listen to a women's caucus who don't implement anything!" The participants felt that the portfolio committees have more responsibility and status than caucuses within the South African Parliament.

The participants considered the weakness of the support of the grassroots women's movement as being an obstacle to their political effectiveness. During the initial transition of 1994, a strong grassroots women's movement had supported the new women Parliamentarians. Years later, the women now feel that this broad public network of support has deteriorated. Robertson stated that the "support structures that were there before are no longer there.... that mass democratic movement that they can come out to and who will [have] given them support" had declined.

The ANC Women's League has been cited as one of the strongest branches of the South African women's movement. The participants commented on the policies of the ruling political party, the ANC, and the strength of the Women's League within the ANC as contributing to their perceptions of political influence, women's representation, and strength. In terms of representation "[w]ithin the ANC... the people that come through the lists... the Women's League is well represented," mentioned Robertson. She also mentioned that "the Women's League today is much more gender conscious than before." Van Steer, from a different party, lamented, "The ANC is lucky because the Women's League is strong." This League is often credited with

crafting legislation and protocols that prioritize gender equality, such as the quota for women's representation, in Parliament. Although women critique the weakening women's grassroots infrastructure, the ANC Women's League's presence still represents a web of support, as well as a collective voting block within the ANC. It is aimed primarily at the women of only one political party, but this political party is the dominant party within South Africa's Parliament—which contributes to the ANC Women's League's strength.

But others hold differing opinions regarding the helpfulness of uniting women in political parties. Rhodes criticized the impact of women's wings within political parties and said that they will "never serve a purpose except to entrench that women are second class citizens." Robertson described an instance in which the ANC Women's League differed from the government's position regarding "a government paper saying that we were going to give special attention to pregnant mothers." Robertson described how she was "confronted by the... Women's League saying ...that is not our point of view...they were quite angry." In this situation, Robertson felt that the League was "protecting the Minister of Health," a woman in the Presidential Cabinet, but going against the needs of pregnant women in the country.

Conflicts arise between women in Parliament involving issues of culture; culture can be viewed as either a strength or as a source of tension. Beck attributed women's African heritage as contributing to their effectiveness, saying, "[I]n African society, women were actually very strong.... Africa actually values women. Because women were recognized as being doers and competent people and that was it." On the other hand, Robertson emphasized the "conflicts of interest" between women holding "a more traditional African perspective" against what is often considered "more Western beliefs" regarding "a number of things." Robertson described a situation where the "Women's League felt quite strongly from a traditional point of view that a

TV program" that described how to practice safe sex should not be aired. Robertson said that the Women's League wanted "this program off the TV" and that the "women were expressing their opinion from a traditional point of view quite strongly." But their position on this issue conflicted with the ANC and, according to Robertson, "they didn't get any support generally in the ANC." The public television show aimed at safe sex practices eventually was broadcast in South Africa.

One participant felt that the lack of women's unity produced through the political party system inevitably creates spaces for competition. Robertson described how "the women do turn on each other, as well, and compete with each other on a class level.... And that may be one of the reasons why women leave [Parliament]." Robertson described a conflict where she was upset with "the males that have shifted me [into a competitive position within a committee]." Robertson was critical of their placement, saying, "I thought they were typically putting up one woman against another and I was not prepared to fight another woman over a position."

Rhodes believed that women should be united around a mission, such as lowering HIV/AIDS rates for women and children or providing clean water for women in rural areas. Rhodes criticized the internal bickering and felt women needed stronger direction in terms of political objectives. She felt that "you have to say we want more women in Parliament because these are the things we want to change and then you list them. So you go and make a call for more women with a mission."

The gendered individual

According to the participants, the gendered character of the individual woman Parliamentarian contributes to her political effectiveness. According to Beck, "I think the

characteristics and the experiences that each individual has, has a lot to do with it." In describing the women Parliamentarians, Beck mentioned that "they are extremely strong people ... challenge whatever needs to be challenged without any hesitation." Robertson mentioned the importance of "level of consciousness" and the "ability to debate... and to verbalize" for women Parliamentarians. Van Steer mentioned communication styles of women Parliamentarians in that "they speak well" and "they are thorough."

The women described their perceptions of 'voice' in Parliament as strong as well as weak. When discussing 'voice' in general, my participants had quite a positive impression. "It is much easier to be heard. They [male MPs] take much more notice of you," mentioned Van Steer. Robertson echoed this perception, saying, "I think women's voices are heard loud and clear in Parliament." Kinnear summarized women's effectiveness as "a combination of policy and the presence."

But when discussing specific instances, speaking and 'voice' in Parliament were mentioned as obstacles for women's political influence. Robertson described a personal situation in one of her committees: "[W]e had to ... speak in Parliament; then he would come as the whip and say, 'Now we have so many minutes. You know the Chair,' who was also a male, 'you get so many minutes' [to speak on the floor of Parliament] you know. 'And then all the heads of the subcommittees' [to speak on the floor], who all were male, 'I', of course, 'I will be the sweep [speaker]. And now we need to place the women.'" Women's voices were inserted throughout the speaking orders because they were not in any of the positions of leadership within the committee. Their voices, in this example, were practically supplemental to the business at hand.

Rhodes also described a personal experience where she felt women's voices were not being respected in Parliament. She was speaking on rape policies to the general assembly and described that "I couldn't hear myself." She detailed how "the men, they were walking up and down in Parliament. The Speaker shouted order and they didn't listen. When I came to speak, I said 'I am going to call you to order myself,' and I just called and said 'SHUT up!'" Beck described her perceptions regarding other women Parliamentarians' perception of 'voice.' She described how "I often feel that,…uh the white women in the DA [Democratic Alliance]…feel that 'if I am not heard, then nobody knows that I am here' sort of thing."

Kinnear mentioned gender as a limiting factor for women's 'voice.' "There is always this thing that if it is a women [speaking], then they won't listen much to what she has to say." If the women Parliamentarians perceive their voices as being ignored, political influence may be hindered.

How the women envision themselves and other women as Parliamentarians also contributed to their perception of influence on the political agenda. Van Steer mentioned that "femininity... is the best weapon we [women] have if we just use it right" and that "women's brains are multi-faceted so you take a lot more things into account.... women tend to involve more people before a decision is taken." One participant saw balancing of domestic responsibilities and Parliamentary responsibilities as contributing to women's ability as politicians. "A good [woman] politician or minister...learn[s] to work smarter because most of them have children and a husband, a household, a family," stated Van Steer.

Many of the obstacles that women feel they face in their political effectiveness and when influencing the political agenda, they attributed to gender stereotypes, according to Rhodes. She commented on the "assumption that all women are supposed to be loving and careful and caring

and care for the poor and care for other women" and the job of Parliamentarians is "to change society, the patriarchical society. It's to change the stereotypes about women in society."

Rhodes described a personal experience regarding how gender stereotypes restricted her political agency:

> Society itself judges women by different rules. And so those are the things we need to break down, you know, and you have to say so. For instance, when a woman speaks loud, and starts screaming and shouting. The response [from] society is likely-and its happened to me; I am speaking from personal experience: "Oh. Look how aggressive is that woman." That's actually how they will call it "aggressive is that woman," almost with contempt. But let a male counterpart do the same:"Oh, look how powerful" and that's society and that's wrong...But I believe that rules are made to be broken.... We are getting stereotyped."

The other research participants mentioned the influence of stereotypes on their decisions and how women's decisions are interpreted. Robertson mentioned that "as a woman, I am also facing the challenge: Do I stick with gender and education, the soft options, or do I do economics and public enterprises?" Beck discussed how the South African delegation to the African Union (AU) challenges gender stereotypes around female leadership within the AU, a coalition of countries in Africa working on continental governance, saying, "But if we are going to make the African Union work, then we must look at ...obstacles and we must try to address them.... Let's show them that women can lead anything they choose to lead."

Despite these obstacles for women's political agency, the South African Parliament is still considered a leader in gender equality for women in governance throughout Africa and the world. This study attempts to analyze how this leadership position actually translates to the women Members of Parliament's perceptions of political agency and their ability to influence the political agenda within South Africa's Parliament.

CONCLUSION

Women throughout the world are increasing their numeric representation within elected governments, Parliaments, and executive branches of government. But the situation for women Parliamentarians in South Africa is unique. During the transition from the former apartheid regime into the democratically elected government of 1994, there was a substantial increase in the numbers of women within the Parliament. Before the 1994 elections, women constituted 2.7% of the Members of Parliament in South Africa.[1] In contrast, the 2004 elections have resulted in women constituting 32.8% of the Members of Parliament.[2] This is quite an impressive accomplishment. Now, over ten years after the democratic transition, this study examines how these women in Parliament perceive their ability to influence the political agenda in South Africa.

As discussed in the literature review, several excellent studies have examined the role of women Parliamentarians in South Africa, and this study needs to be seen as contributing to the development of this conversation. Shireen Hassim's and Amy Goetz's (2003) text discussed the roles and challenges for women in Parliaments in Uganda and South Africa. Hassim, focusing primarily on South Africa, highlighted the importance of the African National Congress (ANC) political party. The ANC facilitated policies that ensured gender equality and, through the use of quotas, mandated a strong numeric representation of women in Parliament.

Naledi Pandor's (1999) work detailed the atmosphere and structures within South Africa's Parliament that are aimed at women. In her text, Pandor highlights how, by limiting the working hours of Parliament, introducing a child care facility, and even the introduction of additional women's bathrooms encourage women's participation within South Africa's

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[1] www.eisa.org.za/PDF/Conference_DRC_Jure.eng.PDF
[2] www.eisa.org.za

Parliament. Pandor points to the lack of a sexual harrassment policy and the position of women on speaking lists (for debates, hearings, and party gatherings) as obstacles limiting women's political influence in Parliament.

Research through supranational organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as IDEA (the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance) offered various tactical and structural suggestions to better facilitate the participation of women in parliaments or governing structures. The works by Karam and Lovenduski (1998) and Shvedova (1998) mention obstacles for women in parliaments, such as the lack of women's numeric presence, the hours during which the legislative body meets, the lack of preparation and political training, gender stereotyping of political issues, and a general atmosphere that is more supportive in reference to men than to women.

These texts, along with those of Pandor (1999) and Hassim and Goetz (2003), served as excellent resources in providing a framework that outlines the issues that samples of women parliamentarians thought were important, and provided a starting place from which to ask my own questions about women Parliamentarians' ability to influence the political agenda in South Africa.

Aside from Pandor (1999) and Hassim and Goetz (2003), I found that most academic literature regarding women inside parliaments examined broader topics, such as the relationship between nationalism and women, methods of increasing women's numeric representation in governing structures, negotiations between the 'public/private' gendered split, bureaucratization of women's activism into governing structures, and the various impacts of political transformations. Women, as formal representatives, have only recently entered these political spaces in significant numbers. Little academic research has focused on the internal dynamics

within these formal political spaces in terms of gender dynamics. This study hopes to be a step in this direction.

In my study, I was interested in gathering a picture of what legislative bodies are like behind closed doors, away from the public gaze. How do women politicians gain or lose legitimacy? How do they interpret the role of gender in these political negotiations? What are their tools for opportunity and where are their obstacles? When do they feel that they are influencing the political agenda? How?

In order to answer these open-ended questions, I used a feminist research methodology and method to ensure that my participants were able to answer these types of questions with their own terms and explanations (Mies 1991). I interviewed six women Parliamentarians of differing ages, races, political parties, and levels of seniority regarding their experiences within South Africa's Parliament. These conversations, though often held within the walls of Parliament, opened up this often 'private' space within the 'public' sphere. One limitation of my study is that the interviews were conducted in English and I did not have a translator. For the majority of my respondents, English was their second language. Although it provided a platform for us to communicate, it also determined the parameters, which I discussed in the methodology chapter.

Arranging the interviews with these busy women was quite a challenge, but the resulting interviews, averaging one hour in length, were quite rich and productive. I transcribed these interviews, compared the transcriptions to findings outlined in prior literature, and looked for various themes and explanations. Through several revisions, re-readings, and analyses, I can attempt to conclude what factors and spaces influenced my participants' perceptions of their political influence within the South African Parliament.

When the women Parliamentarians were asked specifically about their perceptions of political influence, they replied positively and with a sense of accomplishment. Although some obstacles for these women remain significant, the women Parliamentarians involved in this study perceive themselves as having a positive level of political efficacy and a strong ability to influence the political agenda. The four principal topics that the women discussed in relation to their political influence were the 1994 democratic transition, the ways in which 'women's issues' and unity were framed, the influence of formal and informal parliamentary structures, and the role of political party attitudes regarding women's issues.

Echoing Mangaliso's (1997) research pointing to the relationship between the role of South African women in the democratic transition and the influential role of women in South Africa's Parliament after the democratic transition, my participants offered several examples as to how the 1994 democratic transition facilitated their political effectiveness.

Participants cited several changes that occurred during the 1994 democratic transition that improved their political efficacy, such as the training programs for all new Members of Parliament, the new legislative frameworks mandating gender equality, and the appointment of women to high seniority and leadership positions. The introductions of women's bathrooms and childcare facilities as well as the time limits to the working day of Parliament were also mentioned as positive changes occurring during the transition. According to my participants, these changes to South Africa's Parliament during the 1994 democratic transition encouraged women's political participation.

The second set of reasons that my participants mentioned regarding their political influence was how they perceived gender relations and the role of themselves as women. Gender stereotypes were discussed as obstacles to their political effectiveness and their ability to

influence the political agenda. They perceived gender stereotyping problems occurring on the floor of Parliament, in committee assignment distribution, in media portrayals, as well as in their personal lives. Participants mentioned gender stereotypes such as the expectation that women Parliamentarians were responsible for 'women's issues,' ranging from education to domestic violence. One participant described her experience of being vocal in the media and being labeled as 'angry.' She felt that she had been labeled as angry, rather than strong, because she was a woman and she attributed this to gender stereotyping.

The women Parliamentarians felt that they rarely would unite as women across political party lines in order to gain political leverage. Spaces such as the Women's Caucus and the Joint Committee of the Quality of Life and the Status of Women are available for this purpose within Parliament, but my participants did not feel that these opportunities could substantially influence the political agenda.

Various aspects connected to the formal structure of Parliament were frequently mentioned as avenues for providing important political influence. Participants highlighted the portfolio committees, party gatherings, study groups, formal debates on the floor, and the institutionalized gender equality structures, such as the Commission on Gender Equality, as aiding in the augmentation of their political influence. But the informal structures and spaces within Parliament served as obstacles, according to my participants. The majority of the women pointed to issues of sexual harassment, a "Brotny" (brotherhood) atmosphere in Parliament social spaces, and gender stereotyping as obstacles limiting their political influence.

The participants suggested that within a multiparty parliamentary system, the political party is the heaviest power broker regarding women's ability to influence the political agenda. The political party is responsible for setting the party lists, often the speaking order, and the

overall policy and political agendas for the party. In South Africa, the African National Congress political party has dominated the past three national elections. ANC policies toward gender and women, therefore, have had a strong impact on women's role in government. Hassim (2003) and Mangaliso (1997) also felt that the political party is one of the most important determinants of women's political effectiveness in South Africa.

According to my participants, the ANC Women's League, the "women's" branch of the ANC, holds a great deal of clout within the ANC and provides a useful vehicle for ensuring women's political efficacy within Parliament. Female Parliamentarians who were members of other political parties felt less political influence. One participant stated that "although there are some women that's got the same voting power [as the men]...We [are] too few to overrule." The political party served as the most powerful topic regarding women's ability to influence the political agenda in South Africa, with the ANC being credited frequently for their success.

This study has shown that women's ability to influence the political agenda in Parliament is about more than just having greater numbers, although that still remains an important factor. Participants of this study have pointed to a variety of ways in which they feel that their effectiveness is limited. In many ways, these are linked to legacies of the past, during which government was primarily the space for men; two examples of this are the existence of only male toilets and the extended working hours that ignore domestic responsibilities. At the same time, however, participants also felt that change had been forthcoming, and that, while this was connected to their physical presence in government, it was also connected to wider attitudes towards women and issues of gender equality. Overall, the results of this study indicate that my participants perceive that it is the attitudes of political parties towards issues of gender equality that are the principal agents impacting their ability to influence the political agenda.

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