Do women need women MPs?

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Abstract

This paper analyses the relationship between representatives and represented by examining elite and mass attitudes to gender equality and women’s representation in Britain. In so doing, we move forward arguments in the feminist literature relating to women’s descriptive and substantive representation. Our general argument is that if men and women have different attitudes at the mass level and this is reproduced amongst political elites then the numerical under-representation of women will have negative implications for women’s substantive representation. The analysis is conducted on the British Election Study (BES) and the British Representation Study (BRS) series. Using factor analysis we identify two dimensions to gender equality. The first measures attitudes to the representation of women and the second traditional attitudes to gender equality (such as whether women should stay at home or whether they should be in paid employment). Our analysis demonstrates that, among the British electorate, younger cohorts of both sexes report attitudes that are more feminist than older cohorts. However, younger women are more feminist than younger men. Paradoxically, the greater feminism of younger cohorts occurs in conjunction with lower support for the descriptive political representation than is found in older female cohorts, albeit with younger men less supportive than younger women. Thus, in showing that women representatives and women at the mass level have different attitudes, in this case more feminist ones, we contend that bodies of our representatives do indeed matter: although women may not want women representatives they may well need them.
Introduction
This paper discusses the relationship between representatives and the represented by examining elite and mass attitudes to gender equality and women’s representation in Britain. There, as elsewhere, advocates of women’s political representation frequently claim there is a relationship between the presence of women in elected legislatures (descriptive or microcosmic representation) and the production of decisions or policies that take women’s interests into account (substantive representation). This relationship is contested both within and beyond feminist political theory. On one hand, most feminist (and other) political theorists accept that the argument from justice is sufficient to support claims for the equal political representation of women. But, on the other hand, fascination with the contested link between descriptive and substantive political representation continues to drive arguments in the study of gender and politics (Phillips 1995; Mansbridge 1999; Dovi 2002). Recently, scholars have revisited Pitkin’s concepts of surrogate and symbolic representation in an effort to retheorise complex socially determined and discursively constructed links between representatives and the represented (Pitkin 1967; Mansbridge 1999; Celis et al. 2007; Childs 2007; Saward Undated). This work underpins rather than contradicts the centrality of the concept of descriptive representation to women’s claims for presence by trying to establish that, one way or another, even if rather tenuously, descriptive representation leads to substantive or symbolic effects. Accordingly, we take issue with Hanna Pitkin (1967) to whom we owe the vocabulary of political representation that we use here. She was largely dismissive of substantive representation, seeing no good reason why we should want our representatives to look like us. In fact, the reason is contingent. If it is more likely that a representative who looks like us also thinks like us, then there is good reason to support descriptive representation.

In practice raising expectations that women representatives will represent women voters is part of the political process in which advocates argue for the numbers of women legislators to increase. True, there is a paradox between knowing that the justice argument is enough to support claims for presence, whilst wanting the additional weight of proof of changed outcomes. This paradox stems from a combination of natural desires and complicated understandings of differences between women and men and masculinity and femininity. Feminist advocates want...
women to do ‘better’ than men, but ultimately are forced to acknowledge that they cannot be sure that women will (Lovenduski 2005).

Arguably, determining the effects of increasing the presence of women in legislatures is a matter for empirical research. To date, such research on Britain has tended to concentrate on identifying the relationships between the characteristics and attitudes of representatives. Generally such research concludes that women legislators are more likely than their male counterparts to have feminist attitudes on a range of issues, subject to the standard controls of party, class, age etc. Empirical analysis of representative’s behaviour suggest a feminisation when women representatives are (Lovenduski and Norris 2003; Childs and Krook 2006). The problem is that, although there is considerable evidence to suggest that women politicians advocate for women, it is difficult to prove that their advocacy has a decisive effect on the outcome (Wängnerud 2000; Childs 2004; Lovenduski 2005). Changes in the number of women are normally part of wider social changes that affect all legislators, making it difficult to pinpoint causality with any confidence. Identifying causality in complex processes and organisations is a difficult problem in the social sciences and not one that we can solve here. However, we can move the arguments forward, to bring a new dimension to the understanding of the representation of women’s interests by analysing the relationships between the attitudes of women voters and women representatives to gender equality and women’s presence. In this paper we map and analyse attitudes to gender equality and to increasing the number of women legislators among British men and women voters and leaders. We are thus able to show how, if at all, different groups perceive the relationships between substantive and descriptive representation. By examining the fit or lack of fit between the concerns of the representatives and the represented, we can assess empirically the claim that, in terms of gender equality issues, women need women to represent them.

Methods and approaches

The argument of this paper is built upon an elite mass comparison of men’s and women’s attitudes to gender equality and women’s political representation. The comparison of elite and mass political attitudes is an established area of political science (Converse 1964; Fleishman 1988). There is debate about the existence of ideological consistency in the attitudes and beliefs at the mass level and also about whether these map onto those evident among political elites. There is now considerable evidence of internal consistency within the left-right and liberal-authoritarian attitudes (Evans, Heath and Lalljee 1996). However, we know rather less about the attitudes of the British public to gender equality. Moreover, there are few studies that either focus on Britain (Davis and Robinson 1991; Banaszak and Plutzer 1993; Banaszak and Plutzer 1993) or include it in comparative analyses. Britain is not among
the main cases that Norris and Inglehart analyse in their study of gender equality and cultural change around the world (Inglehart and Norris 2003). A few authors have looked at aspects of elite or mass attitudes to gender equality in Britain. Bernadette Hayes tested whether feminist orientations amongst the electorate predicted Labour party votes at the 1992 general election (Hayes 1997). She found that ‘just over half of the male respondents…… claimed that equal opportunities for women in Britain had not gone far enough [compared with] 60 per cent of women [who] endorsed this position’. (ibid, 207) Using data from the 1997 general election Rosie Campbell established that women born after 1944 have more feminist orientations than either men or older women (Campbell 2004; Campbell 2006). But there remains a lack of research that looks at the change in attitudes over time. At the elite level, research by Joni Lovenduski and Pippa Norris demonstrated that women candidates and MPs are more likely than men candidates and MPs to support equality rhetoric, equality promotion and equality guarantees (Lovenduski and Norris 2003; Lovenduski 2005) However, elite and mass attitudes on these issues have not been compared together a single British study.¹

### Data and Methods

In this paper mass attitudes are measured using the British Election Study (BES)² series and elite attitudes are measured using the British Representation Study series (BRS).³ The BES has asked different questions about gender equality over time and it is therefore not possible to trace attitude change precisely election after election. The question that is asked most frequently throughout the series asks how respondents feel about ‘attempts to give equality opportunities for women in Britain’ and was included in the 1974 (October), 1979, 1987, 1992 & 1997 BESs. We conduct an initial analysis on this question to assess differences between age-cohorts and change over time. We also consider the small number of other gender related questions that are asked twice in the BES survey series, in the 2001 and 2005 BESs. Factor analysis is conducted on these questions to establish whether all of the items are best explained by the same underlying phenomena. After the factor analysis the scores for any important underlying factors are saved as variables and used as dependent variables in subsequent analysis. We start by exploring the relationship between attitudes to gender equality and background characteristics such as sex and birth-cohort. The analysis of mass attitudes is concluded by conducting an OLS regression to attempt to identify

² The British Election Study (BES) was conducted by Professor David Sanders, Professor Paul Whiteley, Professor Harold Clarke and Professor Marianne Stewart and was funded by the ESRC.
³ The BRS 2005 was conducted by Professor Joni Lovenduski, Dr Sarah Childs and Dr Rosie Campbell and was funded by Nuffield Foundation (SGS/01180/G). The 1992, 1997 & 2001 BRS were conducted by Professor Joni Lovenduski and Professor Pippa Norris.
explanations for variations in support for gender equality. The process described above is then repeated for the elite attitudes using the British Representation Studies 2001 and 2005.\textsuperscript{4} The BRS is a series that surveys all candidates and sitting MPs at each general election. The series does not include exactly the same questions or wording for all of the items used in the BES analysis but many similar measures are included, hence comparison is appropriate.

**Mass attitudes to gender equality**

The first step in the analysis is to assess changes in attitudes to gender equality over time. As explained above the most frequently available gender related question in the BES series was asked in the 1974 (October), 1979, 1987, 1992 and 1997 studies and asks how respondents feel about ‘attempts to give equality opportunities for women in Britain’.\textsuperscript{5} The datasets for these years were combined to create a new dataset with 14745 valid responses to this ‘gone too far’ question.\textsuperscript{6} The amalgamated dataset allows us to look at change across time and birth cohorts.

**FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE**

The pattern evident in Figure 1 is of a small emerging sex difference. Men and women respondents born before 1945 felt roughly similar about gender equality, except in the oldest cohort where women were slightly more likely than men to feel that gender equality had gone too far. In contrast in the later cohorts women were slightly more likely than men to say that gender equality has not gone far enough.\textsuperscript{7} Respondents feelings about ‘attempts to give equality opportunities for women in Britain’, shows no perfect linear trend but overall the number of respondents reporting that equality between the sexes had gone too far reduced from 19.2 percent in 1974 to 9.2 percent in 1997. The number of respondents who felt it had not gone far enough grew from 35 percent in 1974 to 41 percent in 1997. Further analysis shows that the members of the older cohorts remained more conservative in the views about

\textsuperscript{4} The BRS series contains a panel of repeated sampling of a small number of MPs and candidates who have completed more than one survey for the same seat. There will also be a small number of candidates who are difficult to identify who have completed the survey several times when standing for election in different constituencies. The final group of respondents are those who have completed the survey only once. In order to create a large pooled dataset we would need to isolate the respondents who have completed only one survey and disregard the rest. This is technically rather complicated and would involve removing some of the MPs who are a valuable element of the sample.

\textsuperscript{5} The 1983 BES contains a similar question but the coding is not in keeping with the other years. Responses for the other years range from gone much too far, gone a little too far, about right, not quite far enough and not nearly far enough.

\textsuperscript{6} The BESIS website was used for question searches and amalgamating the data. \url{www.besis.org.uk}

Many thanks to Professor Richard Topf for all of his help with this.

\textsuperscript{7} The difference appears to be a cohort effect rather than a function of particular points in time because a similar pattern is evident within individual surveys.
equality for women even in the later election years. Thus, we see three patterns: 1) younger generations are more likely to feel that equal opportunities for women have not gone far enough than older generations; 2) the electorate has become slightly more likely to think that equal opportunities have not gone far enough over time; and 3) there is a divergence between men and women in younger cohorts; where women are now more likely than men to say that equal opportunities have not gone far enough.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

In order to test the robustness of these three patterns we undertake simple regression analysis as presented in Table 1. It shows that, even after controlling for a number of other background factors, women were more likely than men to think that equality between the sexes had not gone far enough. Birth cohort and election year both had a significant independent effect with older respondents and respondents in later elections more likely to think that equality for women had not gone far enough. In terms of education, throughout the surveys respondents with degrees were more favourable to gender equality. People looking after the home (in earlier surveys these people were described as housewives and were exclusively women), people who regularly attend religious services and Conservative party voters were all more conservative about equal opportunities than other respondents. This analysis shows us that, overall, women are more likely than men to think that equal opportunities for women have not gone far enough and that the difference is greatest amongst younger generations.

Having used the ‘gone too far’ question to assess change over time we can use the battery of items that are available in the 2001 and 2005 BES to examine attitudes to gender equality in more detail. Simple descriptive analysis is presented for each of the items before conducting a factor analysis to establish whether responses are best explained by one underlying phenomenon.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Examination of the first row of Table 2 shows that men were just 1 percent more likely than women to agree or agree strongly with the statement ‘husbands earn money, wives look after the home.’ Men were 5 percent more likely than women to disagree with the

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8 Sue Tolleson Rinehart found a similar pattern in the US electorate where housewives were the least feminist in their attitudes Tolleson Rinhart, Sue (1992). *Gender Consciousness and Politics*. London, Routledge.
statement, but women were 9 percent more likely than men to disagree strongly. Overall, there is a weak but statistically significant relationship between sex and responses to the statement. The largest sex difference occurs with strength of feeling. The second row of table 2 shows that women were 5 percent less likely than men to agree or agree strongly with the statement ‘men are better suited for politics’; men were 5 percent more likely than women to neither agree nor disagree with the statement; and women were 10 percent more likely than men to disagree or disagree strongly with the statement. The moderate sex differences were statistically significant and overall women were more likely than men to disagree. The analysis presented the third row of Table 2 demonstrates that women were 12 percent more likely than men to agree or agree strongly with the statement that ‘women should be more involved in politics’; men were 6 percent more likely than women to neither agree nor disagree with the statement; and men were 5 percent more likely than women to disagree or disagree strongly with the statement. The difference between the sexes was statistically significant and women were more likely than men to agree that women should be involved in politics. The final row of Table 2 illustrates a statistically significant, but very small percentage difference, between the sex’s responses to the statement ‘women MPs better represent women’. Overall, women were marginally more likely to agree strongly and slightly less likely to disagree.

The small but statistically significant differences between the sexes in responses to the statements about gender equality asked in the 2001 and 2005 BES mask a different pattern that is evident between gender and birth cohort. To check for such differences we recoded responses to the four statements so that all of the items ran in the same direction. A feminist response was given the higher value. An exploratory factor analysis was then undertaken to examine the relationships between the variables (Kim and Mueller 1978). The analysis produced two factors with eigenvalues over 1. The rotated solution suggested that the first factor was best explained by the two items that measured traditional attitudes towards gender roles; ‘husbands should earn the money while the wife looks after the home’ and ‘men are better suited to politics.’ The second factor was better explained by the items that referred to the other two items ‘women should be more involved in politics’ and ‘women MPs better represent women’. We use this factor to describe ‘attitudes toward the descriptive

9 Factor analysis should be conducted upon interval data. However, Kim and Mueller (1978b 74-5) argue that factor analysis can be used on ordinal data if there is no reason to think that the ordinal values do not seriously distort the true underlying interval scaling.
10 The SPSS output is available from http://www.bbk.ac.uk/polsoc/research/british-representation-study
representation of women’ because the two measures related directly to women in politics.\textsuperscript{11} The factor scores were saved and used as dependent variables in further analysis.

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

The factor scores presented in Figure 2 move from non-feminist to feminist attitudes. We see a sharp increase in feminist attitudes across the earlier generations that levels off at a relatively pro-feminist average among the later generations. Throughout the different birth cohorts women are slightly more pro-feminist than men and this difference is most pronounced in the younger generations. Thus, we see further evidence of a divergence between younger men and women with younger women becoming more feminist in their attitudes than younger men.

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

Figure 3 shows the relationship between attitudes to the descriptive representation of women by sex and birth cohort. Overall members of older generations are more likely to think that women MPs represent women and that women should be more involved in politics. Younger generations are less likely to hold these views. However, in the younger generations the support of men for the descriptive representation of women is lower than that of women. Hence the pattern is of emerging sex difference, with younger women more pro-feminist than younger men.

Paradoxically, there is a negative correlation between liberal attitudes to gender equality and support for the descriptive representation of women. As generations have come to believe more strongly in equality between the sexes their support for descriptive representation has declined. Although they are more pro-feminist than younger men, younger women are less likely than older women to think that women need women MPs.

In order to understand the causes of the relationship between sex and attitudes to gender equality further regression analysis was conducted using the factor scores for traditional values toward gender equality and attitudes toward the descriptive representation of women as dependent variables. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3 below. The regressions were conducted using the 2005 BES only. The 2005 BES includes a number

\textsuperscript{11} There was no measure of respondents’ attitudes to equality guarantees or gender quotas, instead we only have access to the vaguer notion of desirability without reference to mechanisms that might bring about more women MPs.
of measures of local difference generated using census and other data. Thus, there is a measure of urban/rural location that Lee Ann Banaszak and Eric Plutzer use as an important predictor of feminist attitudes (Banaszak and Plutzer 1993).

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

The significant coefficient for sex in model 1 of Table 3 shows that sex has an impact upon traditional attitudes to gender equality. However, when a dummy variable indicating women born since 1945 is included in models 2 & 3 the overall sex difference disappears. Thus, the sex difference in model 1 is explained by the relative pro-feminist stance of younger women. The regression analysis was repeated and the independent variables were included one at a time in an attempt to isolate which particular factors reduced the sex/generation difference. This is not a precise procedure but helps to indicate which variables can begin to explain the sex difference. A number of factors reduced the coefficient for ‘women born since 1945’. The addition of socialist/laissez-faire position reduces the standardised beta coefficient for women born since 1945 from 0.145 to 0.127, this small difference is consistent with Norris and Inglehart’s discovery that women in younger generations are moving to the left of men (Inglehart and Norris 2000). The inclusion of respondent’s Goldthorpe/Heath class also reduces the coefficient from 0.199 to 0.141. We see therefore that the younger women are more feminist across the board but that left-leaning women and professional women are more feminist than left-leaning and professional men.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

Table 4 confirms that the relationship between sex and attitudes to the descriptive representation of women differs from that of sex and traditional values toward gender equality. The gender difference found in traditional values toward gender equality is best explained by the fact that younger women, particularly left-leaning and professional younger women, were more pro-feminist than younger men. When we consider attitudes to the descriptive representation of women we find that the inclusion of a range of control variables does not eliminate the overall effect of sex that is identified in model 1, which is still evident in models 2 and 3. Overall older people and women remain more in favour of the descriptive representation of women than younger people or men. There is a weaker but statistically significant relationship between attitudes to the descriptive representation of women and

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12 Thanks to Ron Johnston his help with providing, and explaining how to use, this data.
urban/rural location, with respondents from more densely populated areas most in favour.\textsuperscript{13} The combination of these two trends means that there is a further divergence between the opinions of younger women and men with support for the descriptive representation of women falling less sharply across generations of women than men.

The analysis presented so far shows emerging divergence between men’s and women’s feminist orientations in the mass public. Younger women are more likely to have pro-feminist values than younger men. However, there are also differences among women. Younger women are less likely than older women to be concerned about the descriptive representation of women, even though they remain more likely to support it than younger men.

**Elite attitudes**

In the analysis of mass attitudes to gender we find potential for the misrepresentation of women’s views on gender equality. If political representatives are disproportionately men (and older men), and if their attitudes reflect those of men in the mass public, then the attitudes to gender equality voiced in our political institutions are likely to be biased in favour of traditional values that have less support among women voters. In that case women would need women representatives to act for them in respect of gender equality even if some women say they do not want them. In order to assess whether this holds we must now consider the attitudes to gender equality that are evident within political elites.

We can use the British Representation Study (BRS) to establish whether the sex/gender difference evident within the British mass public is also evident within the British political elite. Unlike the BES the BRS series cannot be simply combined to create a larger dataset (see footnote 5) and instead this analysis is conducted upon each survey separately.

**TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE**

**TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE**

Examination of Tables 5 and 6 demonstrate that there are large and statistically significant differences between the attitudes of men and women members of the political elite relating to the descriptive representation of women. We can see from Table 5 that in both 2001 and 2005 women are considerably more likely than men to think that Parliament should have many more women MPs, with approximately 20 percent more women wanting many more women MPs than men in 2001 and 2005. The measures of attitudes to the

\textsuperscript{13} Census ward level data of population density was used here.
representation of women available in the BRS series range from the normative ‘should Parliament have more women MPs’ to the more practical questions about what mechanisms should be employed. Thus, we have a more complete range of measures in the BRS series than was available in the BES.

These relatively large and statistically significant sex differences were also found in elite attitudes to traditional gender equality. In order to spare the reader a vast array of tables the differences are not presented here), but all are statistically significant at or above the 0.01 level. In order to investigate the differences further factor analysis is conducted upon all of the measures of feminist orientation available in the 2001 and 2005 BRS (earlier BRS do not contain all of these measures). In total fourteen items are included in the factor analysis:15

- Responses to the statement ‘Parliament should have more or fewer women MPs?’
- Attitudes toward party training programmes for women
- Attitudes toward all-women short-lists
- Attitudes toward quotas or compulsory minimum numbers of women
- Attitudes toward financial support for women candidates
- Attitudes toward reserved seats for women
- Responses to the statement ‘no more than 55% of either sex should be elected.’
- Attitudes toward women's role
- Attitudes toward attempts to give equal opportunities to women in Britain
- Responses to the statement ‘government should make sure that women have an equal chance to succeed.’
- Responses to the statement ‘most men are better suited emotionally to politics than most women.’
- Responses to the statement ‘all in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job.’
- Responses to the statement ‘being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay.’
- Responses to the statement ‘a husband's job is to earn money; a wife's job is to look after the home and family.’

In the 2001 sample there were two factors with eigenvalues above 1. These two factors are similar to those found within mass opinion in the 2001 and 2005 BES, even though the BRS does not contain exactly the same measures as the BES The first factor has higher loadings for items relating to the descriptive representation of women and the second has higher loadings for the items relating to traditional attitudes to gender equality. The elite level measure of attitudes toward the descriptive representation of women includes items that gauge attitudes to equality guarantees. These items do not form a distinct factor in the 2001 BRS and there is a correlation between wanting more women MPs and supporting equality.

14 [http://www.bbk.ac.uk/polsoc/research/british-representation-study/ecprhelsinki](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/polsoc/research/british-representation-study/ecprhelsinki). With the exception of responses to the statement ‘government should make sure that women have an equal chance to succeed’ where the differences between the sexes was not significant in 2005.
15 Each item was recoded so that a high value represented a feminist response.
guarantees that would provide them. Thus, within both the British elite and mass there is a
distinction between attitudes to gender equality more generally, and attitudes to the
descriptive representation of women. However, in the 2005 BRS there is a third factor which
has higher loadings for the items that are related to the descriptive representation of women
but fall short of support for equality guarantees. Thus, there may have been some
divergence in the elite level between wanting more women MPs and supporting equality
guarantees, more respondents may now want one without supporting the other. Factor scores
are saved and are presented by Birth cohort and sex in the Figures 4 to 7.

**FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE**
**FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE**

Figure 4 and 5 demonstrate that the relationship evident in the mass population where
older people are more in favour of the descriptive representation of women than younger
people is also evident within the political elite.

**FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE**
**FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE**

Figures 6 and 7 show that the fall in traditional attitudes to gender equality is evident
at the elite level among men but it is less evident among women. The difference here is
likely to result from the fact that women in the elite are not evenly drawn across birth cohorts.

The difference between the attitudes of men and women is present throughout the birth
cohorts.

Next we consider the third factor identified within the 2005 BRS that measures
attitudes to mechanisms that increase the representation of women. We contend that the
identification of this third factor suggests that support for equality rhetoric and promotion
may have increased without a corresponding increase in support for equality guarantees.
Equality rhetoric is the public acceptance of women's claims. It is found in party campaign
platforms and party political discourse and the speeches and writing of political leaders.
Equality rhetoric means words and arguments are spoken and written that may well impact on
attitudes and beliefs. Equality promotion attempts to bring women into political competition
by offering special training, financial assistance, setting targets of women's presence and
other measures to enable women to come forward. Equality guarantees are the measures taken

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16 The full details of the factor analysis are available from the website
http://www.bbk.ac.uk/polsoc/research/british-representation-study/ecprhelsinki
17 In the BRS 2001 and 2005 women were 8% more likely than men to have been born since 1945.
by parties and governments to secure places for women representatives by making their sex a
necessary qualification for office. Quotas, whereby places are reserved for women on
electoral slates and in representative bodies, are examples of equality guarantees (Lovenduski
2005).

Our reasoning is that, in general, preferences for more women representatives are an
indicator of support for descriptive representation. However support for actual measures to
bring about increases in women’s political representation are a better indicator: the strength of
the preference can be measured by the strength of the mechanism that is supported. Equality
rhetoric is the weakest, equality guarantees or positive discrimination are the strongest, with
equality promotion or positive action in between. (Lovenduski 2005). In 2001 and 2005
women are at least 10 percent more likely than men to strongly approve of party training
programmes for women. In both election years women are about 15 percent more likely than
men to strongly approve of AWS. In 2001 women are approximately 20 percent more likely
to be strongly in favour of quotas for women and about 10 percent more likely than men to be
strongly in favour in 2005.

FIGURE 8 ABOUT HERE

It would appear from Figure 8 that younger women members of the political elite are
more in favour of equality rhetoric and promotion than elite younger men. The trend of
decreasing support for the descriptive representation of women among younger generations at
the mass level is not evident at elite level. Thus, we see that among the political elite, figures
4 and 5, and among the mass public, figure 3, younger generations are less in favour of the
descriptive representation of women but, at the elite level in 2005, when these attitudes are
uncoupled from equality guarantees the generational difference is not evident. We might
presume from this that among the younger generations there is more support for equality
rhetoric and promotion than equality guarantees, although these findings will need to be
tested with new survey questions in the mass public. Examination of figure 8 shows us that
again, we see a divergence between the feminist orientations of younger men and women,
which is evident in both the mass public and the political elite.

Party Effects

Hitherto, in this analysis, we have not controlled for party difference.18 Yet, because
women are not equally represented across the political parties it is important to do so,
otherwise, any difference between men and women at the elite level may result from party not
sex/gender differences. Unfortunately, sample size constraints mean that it is not possible to

18 Party membership is not used as a control in the mass study because party membership is a minority
occupation. However, we did control for ideological left-right position.
control for party and birth cohort simultaneously. When each BRS question is considered in turn there is clearly a relationship between sex, feminist orientation and party.

TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE

Table 7 shows that the sex difference in attitudes to the number of women in the House of Commons that was evident in the whole 2001 and 2005 BRS samples is also apparent in the two largest political parties. For the Liberal Democrats there is a difference only in the 2005 survey. In each party, women are more likely than men to feel strongly that there should be more women MPs.

In order, once again, to spare the reader not all tables are reported here.\(^\text{19}\) Instead only the measures that related to the descriptive representation of women are included in Table 8. The only statistically significant difference between the sexes in their attitudes to party training for women occurs in the Conservative party - women are more strongly in favour than men. There were, however, strong sex and party differences in attitudes to AWS, quotas and financial incentives.

TABLE 8 ABOUT HERE

In Table 8 we see that the difference between the parties was stronger than that between the sexes; with members of the Labour party considerably more likely to be in favour of quotas than members of the other parties. In addition to the strong party difference there are underlying sex differences with women candidates and MPs from all of the parties significantly more in favour than men in every group except for the Conservatives in 2001, where women were marginally rather than significantly more in favour. It is worth noting that not a single male Conservative respondent strongly approved of quotas or compulsory minimum numbers of women in either 2001 or 2005.

Having examined the items that measure attitudes to the representation of women in the BRS we now consider the items that measure attitudes to gender equality more generally. Again not all of the Tables are presented below.\(^\text{20}\) Across all of the parties women are significantly more likely to strongly disagree with the statement, “most men are better suited

\(^{19}\) The full range of tables are available from http://www.bbk.ac.uk/polsoc/research/british-representation-study/ecprhelsinki

\(^{20}\) www.bbk.ac.uk/polsoc/research/british-representation-study/ecprhelsinki
emotionally to politics than most women.’ Women across the parties are also more likely than men to disagree strongly with the statement, ‘all in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job,’ although these differences are not always statistically significant. Women are less likely to think that, ‘being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay’ in every group except for the Conservatives in 2001, where women are more likely to disagree with the statement but the difference was not statistically significant. Finally, women disagree more strongly with the statement, ‘a husband's job is to earn money; a wife's job is to look after the home and family’ across all of the parties and the differences between the sexes are statistically significant. Thus, throughout the analysis of political elite opinion in Britain using the 2001 and 2005 BRS women are more feminist oriented than men and this is evident across parties.

TABLE 9 ABOUT HERE

In order to ascertain the causes of attitudes to gender equality and attitudes to the descriptive representation of women in political elites regression analysis was conducted on the 2001 and 2005 BRS, using the factor scores as dependent variables. Table 9 demonstrates that sex remains a significant predictor of feminist attitudes among the political elite even after controlling for party, religiosity, generation, education and marriage. Women are consistently more in favour of measures to increase the representation of women than men were. However, examination of the standardised regression coefficients reveals that party is a more important predictor than sex in every instance: as you would expect party matters the most but sex is still important. Birth cohort has the same effect as was evident within the mass population: older generations are more supportive of measures to increase the representation of women but are more conservative in their attitudes to gender equality. By contrast, at the elite level having a degree and/or being married has no significant impact upon feminist attitudes, this was not the case within the mass public where having a degree is an important predictor of attitudes to gender equality.

Conclusion

If men and women have different attitudes at the mass level and this is reproduced amongst political elites then the numerical under-representation of women will have negative implications for women’s substantive representation. Among the British electorate, younger cohorts of both sexes report attitudes that are more feminist than older cohorts. However, younger women are more feminist than younger men. Paradoxically, the greater feminism of

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21 Not all of the controls from the mass study are used here because they are not available in the BRS.
younger cohorts occurs in conjunction with lower support for the descriptive political representation than is found in older female cohorts, albeit with younger men less supportive than younger women.

The two trends we have identified, declining support for descriptive representation across generations accompanied by an increase in support for gender equality among younger birth cohorts, are arguably moving in different directions. One might assume that greater feminism amongst younger women would be linked to greater support for women’s descriptive representation but this is not the case. However, men’s declining support for descriptive representation has shifted faster than women’s, and women’s support for gender equality has risen more quickly than men’s. Thus both trends point towards an increasing divergence between the feminist attitudes of younger men and younger women in Britain; with women more feminist than men. Furthermore, the same differences between the sexes are evident within the political elite, where women are more feminist than men both overall and within political parties.

The sex differences in attitudes that we report here take the argument about the relationship between the substantive and descriptive representation of women forward. In terms of attitudes to gender, the trends in elite and mass attitudes reveal both similarities and differences between voters and representatives. Both similarities and differences are important. Put simply, in terms of attitudes to gender equality, men and women differ and women representatives are more like women voters and male representatives are more like male voters. The differences between women in the electorate and male elites suggest that unsympathetic male legislators are obstacles to the substantive representation of women. Such differences diminish but continue when we control for age and party. Male representatives and would be representatives, do not share the preferences of women voters for gender equality, hence are less likely than women representatives to act for or otherwise represent women voters. In this specific sense the sex of representatives matters. It matters even though younger women are not as supportive as older women of equality guarantees. Indeed such diffidence may be mistaken. On first sight it might be surprising that younger women hold feminist attitudes to gender equality but are not concerned about women’s descriptive representation. On greater reflection, there are three potential explanations. First, younger women who believe in gender equality may not acknowledge the difficulties women face in political recruitment (Childs, Lovenduski and Campbell 2005). Secondly, younger

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22 Thus, we find evidence that the trends identified by Norris and Inglehart are at work in Britain Inglehart, Ronald and Pippa Norris (2003). Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
women may (mistakenly) believe that their feminist attitudes are shared with their male peers. Thirdly, younger women may not appreciate that their feminist beliefs are not shared, to the same extent, by men at the elite level, namely, the very men who are disproportionately present in our political institutions. In this way we challenge conceptions of representation that argue that the sex of the representative does not matter and that representation depends upon ideas and not bodies. In showing that women have different attitudes, in this case more feminist ones, we contend that although bodies do not matter in an essentialist sense, they signal major differences.
Bibliography


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