



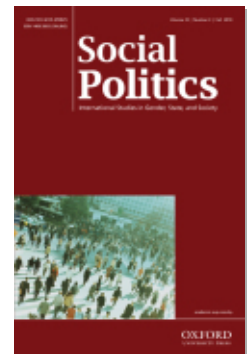
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Understanding Sexism and Sexual Harassment in Politics: A Comparison of Westminster Parliaments in Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada

Cheryl N. Collier*¹ and Tracey Raney²

The widespread problem of sexual harassment has made headlines around the world, including in political legislatures. Using public accounts of sexism and sexual harassment, we highlight the longstanding pervasiveness of these problems in three countries: Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Although sexual harassment is a global issue, our aim is to show how the shared rules, practices, and norms of these Westminster institutions perpetuate sexist cultures that produce unequal and unsafe work conditions for female politicians. The findings highlight some of the unique challenges female politicians face in their representational and policy-making roles across legislative settings.

Introduction

In the wake of sexual harassment and assault allegations against Donald Trump in 2016 and media mogul Harvey Weinstein in October 2017, women from all over the world have begun to speak out on social media and other public spaces, declaring #MeToo and #TimesUp on this issue. This collective voice comes from women from all sectors, including the technology and computer industry, film and television, the business world, and female politicians around the world. Part of the shock of these events is the sheer number of women who have spoken out—many for the first time—about their personal experiences of sexual harassment, abuse, and assault. Women's experiences of sexual harassment, particularly among racialized, lower-income women, have been historically dismissed and discounted.

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In this article, we focus on sexism and sexual harassment in the political sphere specifically. We do so by comparing women's experiences in three legislatures: Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada. These countries were selected not only because they have similar socio-cultural attitudes toward women but also because they are all Westminster systems of governance. This shared characteristic will allow us to establish the prevalence of sexist events and to assess how and whether institutional rules, practices, and norms particular to these countries might interact with, support, or reinforce patriarchal attitudes about power, politics, and gender. We argue that in order to make legislatures safer for women, cultural attitude changes toward women and gender are required. Additionally, the specific institutional rules and norms within which women work must be changed.

The recent international dialogue spurred on by the #MeToo movement has put the problems of sexism, sexual harassment, and sexual assault into the global spotlight, thus making it all the more urgent to seek out solutions to end them. Our article contributes to these discussions by establishing an historical pattern of sexism and sexual harassment across these national jurisdictions. Comparative analyses of this nature will help reinforce the message that women's collective experiences of violence in politics are not isolated events but rather, the result of historically entrenched patriarchal institutional rules and norms in politics. Understanding the causes of violence against women in politics will hopefully lead to improved conditions for women who work in politics. Finally, identifying solutions to this problem matters to democratic decision-making processes: as elected chambers, legislatures ought to reflect the composition and values of the people they purport to represent. When public policy decisions are made without sufficient input from women and minorities, they are likely to be less accepted, less effective, and less representative.

We focus on Westminster political systems in particular in this article and show how the institutional norms and rules of these systems perpetuate and reinforce sexism and sexual harassment in politics. These rules include the institutional norms of the myth of neutrality and male logic of appropriateness, adversarial politics, and daily debates in the lower houses, and the longstanding protections and rights under the practice of parliamentary privilege. Our analysis employs a feminist institutionalist (FI) lens to make linkages between these institutional norms and reports of sexual harassment and sexism over time. The article begins by explaining this framework and the use of the terms "sexism" and "sexual harassment." It then applies this analytical lens to the three Westminster cases and concludes with a look ahead to future research on this topic. In the end, we suggest that the institutional context within which female politicians work matters to their personal well-being as individuals and to their abilities to participate meaningfully and fully in democratic policymaking processes.

Women and Westminster Parliaments

Feminist political researchers have often turned to institutions to explain the absence of women in politics in a variety of contexts including political parties, legislatures, and political executives over time. Although women's representation in global politics has generally improved over the years, progress has been stubbornly slow and in many cases has stalled. Institutional inquiry offers a logical step in feminist social science¹ research in order to uncover the historical barriers to women's entry into politics and to understand how to change those arenas in order to make them more women-friendly.² In this article, we employ a feminist institutionalist approach, which allows us to examine gender inside of institutions as a rule instead of as an add-on to a new institutionalist lens. Lovenduski summarizes the strengths of the FI approach in the Foreword to Krook and Mackay's edited collection, exploring its scope and utility:

Gender may be defined simply as a scale of masculinity and femininity along which behaviour and attitudes may be ordered. This is evidenced by the presence of codes, norms, and behaviour that reflect accepted (but possibly changing) dimensions of masculinity and femininity. . . . When feminists adopt institutionalist research strategies that include gender, they seek to illuminate and change the status of women (2011, vii).

FI allows us to focus on the gendered norms, values, and rules that shape and constrain behaviors and power structures inside parliamentary legislatures, instead of the actions of individual members of those legislatures outside of institutional constructs. An institution is gendered because the "constructions of masculinity and femininity are intertwined in the daily culture or 'logic' of political institutions, rather than 'existing out in society or fixed within individuals which they then bring whole to the institution'" itself (Krook and Mackay 2011, 6).

The incremental rise of women's numeric representation inside parliamentary legislatures has created a challenge to the gendered norms of those legislatures that originally barred women from participating. Women's presence disrupts parliamentary norms of engagement and shines a light on "the extent of male control" alongside the "hidden expectations" inside parliamentary spaces (Chappell and Waylen 2013, 601). The mere presence of women, however, is not enough to change those norms. Either women legislators conform to these established behaviors or they are subject to reprisals for non-compliance.

Recent research highlights the extent to which the mere presence of women in legislatures can incite backlash and violence against them. In 2016, the Inter-Parliamentary Union published a preliminary report on the topic. It found that 81.8 percent of female politicians globally had been psychologically abused, while 44.4 percent had received death, rape, beating, or abduction threats (IPU 2016). Although only drawing on a small sample, this

international report identifies the importance of this problem globally and highlights the need for further comparative research.³ Literature on the topic of violence against women in politics (VAW-P) is growing and draws our attention to the ways in which violence against women in politics is both similar to and unique from other forms of gendered violence (e.g. Krook 2017).⁴ VAW-P is defined as violence that specifically targets women *as women* with the intent of intimidating or silencing them, and/or pressuring them to: “step down as candidates or resign a particular political office” (Krook and Restrepo Sanin 2016; NDI 2016, 13). Krook and Restrepo Sanin (2016) further emphasize the multidimensionality of VAW-P and argue that it includes physical, psychological, economic, and symbolic aspects. Physical violence includes acts which affect the physical integrity of a woman and/or her family members. Psychological violence refers to trauma on the mental state of individuals. Economic violence seeks to control women’s access to resources in the political realm, such as the withholding of salary indemnities, office budgets, or staffing needs. Finally, symbolic violence seeks to diminish/erase women’s presences in political office, such as the distribution of highly sexualized and/or violent images on social media. While violence in politics is usually directed at a specific person, its implications extend beyond, serving to frighten and deter other politically active women from engaging in politics. It also communicates to the broader society that women generally do not belong in public life (NDI 2016, 13).

Drawing the insights of VAW-P and FI scholarship together, we situate sexism and sexual harassment on the spectrum of violence that is inflicted against women who choose a career in politics. Further, as unique workplaces, FI tells us that legislatures have their own institutional culture, rules, and norms that are gendered. Any understanding of VAW-P and potential remedies for change needs to take into account the institutional norms and rules that can encourage or discourage these behaviors. For Lovenduski, sexism in particular is institutionalized in parliamentary spaces and the increased numbers of women in legislatures has served to draw more attention to this reality:

These are “gendered institutions” in which power, process and behavior operate to favour the men who created them and were their sole occupants for so long. When women enter legislatures they enter masculine territory. They may or may not face hostile men, but they do face institutions that are constructed to exclude women (Lovenduski 2014b, 16–17).

Sexism, or the discrimination or stereotyping of a person based on their sex, is further interrelated with sexual harassment, which occurs because of the presence of sexist attitudes and norms. We draw on human rights definitions of sexual harassment as:

[a]ny unwanted or unwelcome sexual behaviour, which makes a person feel offended, humiliated or intimidated. Sexual harassment is not

interaction, flirtation or friendship which is mutual or consensual. Sexual harassment is a type of sex discrimination (Australian Human Rights Commission 2016, 1).

The Ontario Human Rights Commission adds that “behaviour against someone due to their sex may also constitute sexual harassment, even if the behaviour is not explicitly sexual” including “vexatious comments directed towards women due to their sex or sexuality” (OHRC 2013, 1). Sexual harassment is most often experienced by women, although it can also be experienced by men.⁵ Speaking about the phenomenon of workplace sexual harassment more generally, Russell and Trigg argue that gendered power imbalances can facilitate sexual harassment:

Individuals high in social dominance tend to endorse sexist ideologies and gender role stereotypes. Research has shown that gender role stereotyping and dominance play a key role in sexual harassment. . . . [M]en who identify women as out-group members or embrace sexist opinions are more likely to harbor hostility toward women, thinking that women are inferior (Russell and Trigg 2004, 566).

In order to preserve the natural order of social dominance where men and masculinity are the norm, women are often subject to ridicule and belittlement, and are viewed as “foreign interlopers”. Parliamentary institutions thus embrace “a traditional gendered division of labour, shaped over centuries of women’s absence” and fit the model of a space tailor-made for sexism (Lovenduski 2014b, 18). In order to gather together a complete picture of VAW-P we must therefore attend to the institutional rules, procedures and norms that perpetuate violence against women in politics, as well as the cultural factors that reinforce them.

Following this line of inquiry, we consider how and whether the characteristics of Westminster-style governance contribute to, encourage, and/or promote sexism and sexual harassment in three countries: Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada. We focus on these countries because of their shared political similarities for women, where most women received the national franchise (roughly) around the same timeframe (Australia in 1902, Canada and the United Kingdom in 1918) and because they have followed similar representational trajectories of women in their lower houses. Figure 1 displays the percentages of women in each lower house since 1940, and shows how the pace of women’s entry into politics has been glacial in all three countries until the 1980s, when more women began to arrive in each legislature. Similarly, the rate of increase has also stalled in more recent years, particularly in Australia and Canada. Additionally, none of these legislatures has achieved gender parity, and only recently has one come close to having one-third of its seats occupied by women (the United Kingdom). At the time of writing, Australia is ranked fiftieth out of one hundred and ninety-three countries on

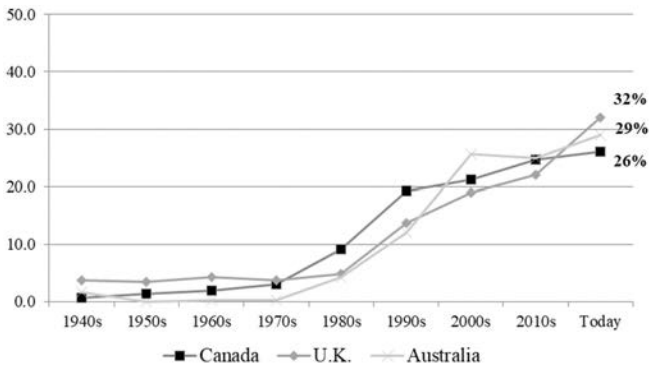


Figure 1 Percentage of Women in Lower Houses: 1940–2018.

the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s rankings of women in national lower houses, falling between the United Kingdom at thirty-ninth and Canada at sixty-fourth (www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm).

In addition, all three lower houses share similar features and characteristics drawn from Westminster parliamentary traditions. These include the fact that a number of important rules are not written or enshrined in either their constitutions or parliamentary rules of order (i.e. Standing Orders). These include, for example, the conventions of responsible government (wherein the political executive, or “government” must be held accountable to the opposition parties in the legislature) and party discipline (where members of parties are encouraged by their party “whips” to vote collectively as a bloc). Despite their unwritten status, however, these and other conventions remain highly important to legislative daily functions, and therefore can be thought of as potentially important in setting a broader context within which VAW-P might occur. For our purposes, we focus on three key characteristics of Westminster systems: the myth of neutrality, a foundation built on adversarial political debate, and the embrace of parliamentary privilege. While all three of these norms are intertwined and work together to reinforce sexism and sexual harassment in legislative spaces, we briefly discuss and delineate each separately below.

Myth of Neutrality

Members of parliament are assumed to be representatives of their constituents irrespective of their gender or other social characteristics. But Chappell argues that this assumed gender neutrality is a *myth* that conceals a “gendered logic of appropriateness” inside legislatures. Instead, the reality is that “embedded assumptions about appropriate forms of behavior in the public

service are, in fact, masculine” (Chappell 2006, 227). As Chappell and Waylen argue:

Men, operating within a hegemonic normative code, have been thought to possess the appropriate skills, knowledge, and temperament to design and maintain the institutions of the state, while most women—assumed to be irrational, fragile, and dependent—have tended to be relegated to supporting roles . . . (Chappell and Waylen 2013, 602)

The naturalization of these gendered norms exists within legislative spaces as well, and helps to further embed masculine (and other) forms of privilege within the supposedly “neutral” workings of parliaments. The myth of neutrality, then, serves to further entrench the norms of hegemonic masculinity that dominate legislative spaces. Anyone who comes up against them runs the risk of being branded as “deviants and punished through acts of censure, ridicule, or harassment” (Chappell and Waylen 2013, 603). As the norms are naturalized through subtle and unconscious practices inside of legislatures, it is very difficult for women (and some men) to identify and combat them.

Adversarial Politics

Representative democracy, or more specifically responsible government, is practiced in parliamentary systems when government MPs propose and then defend legislation during Question Period to the opposition parties. The adversarial system gives opposition members the opportunity to hold the government to account and exposes voters to governing alternatives during Question Period while the legislature is sitting. FI research shows, however, how the adversarial nature of parliamentary systems favors masculinity over femininity and further reinforces the “macho” logic of appropriateness inside legislatures to the detriment of female actors (Crewe 2014, 677). According to Lovenduski, Westminster legislatures embrace “intransigence or bullying, for example, which can often characterise political debate”; such behavior “sends the message that politics is an activity for men” (Lovenduski 2014b, 18). In order to be taken seriously during debates, women also participate in this “bullying culture.” British Treasury Minister Amber Rudd recently recalled occasions when female MPs freely participated in the name-calling and belittling of opposition members. “It’s not just men that bully, it’s women too. It’s the culture of the place that’s got to change” (quoted in Rigby 2015, 3). Arguably this atmosphere does more to facilitate sexism and sexual harassment than to curb it.

Parliamentary Privilege

Parliamentary privilege is granted to MPs in parliamentary houses to allow them freedom to exercise their parliamentary duties. As such, MPs are allowed freedom of speech inside parliamentary chambers without worry of being sued for defamation, libel, prosecution or criminal charges. This privilege has

longstanding roots in Westminster systems and has been said to be “essential” to the proper operation of parliament (Wright 2007, 3). The existence of this privilege can exacerbate sexist norms and language inside of parliamentary debates. In fact, Canadian MPs who served on the Subcommittee on the Code of Conduct for Members in 2015 raised the issue of parliamentary privilege surrounding protections of freedom of speech when discussing how to combat sexual harassment in the Canadian House. During its February 2015 meeting, Deputy Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, Richard Denis, argued that the necessity of protecting MPs’ free speech and privilege was one of the main obstacles to creating any new policy or code of conduct to combat harassment between members of the House (Parliament of Canada 2015).

These three broad-based, unwritten characteristics of Westminster parliaments work in tandem to arguably permit and perpetuate sexism and sexual harassment in these legislatures. The myth of neutrality hides the privileging and prevalence of male norms of behavior and demonizes and “others” female characteristics and norms. Those female characteristics and norms are used in derogatory ways to humiliate and delegitimize women during adversarial debates in parliamentary question periods and inside of party caucuses where bullying and name calling are assumed to be “normal” politics. Parliamentary privilege arguably facilitates these practices and protects perpetrators from reprisals we might more regularly see in other public workplaces. Heightened partisanship also reinforces these characteristics and helps to silence women who dare to speak out against sexism and sexual harassment.

We now turn to an examination of reported incidents of sexism and sexual harassment inside Westminster federal lower houses⁶ in Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada, showing both how prevalent they are and how they are perpetuated and reinforced by the institutional blueprint of Westminster systems. Because institutional rules and norms are often mutually reinforcing, we also see combinations and permutations of these norms demonstrated in the accounts below. We collect our data using public accounts of sexism and sexual harassment of women only, using media searches of major newspaper outlets in each country. Not surprisingly, knowledge of these incidents has grown alongside the slow growth of women MPs in each country and with the emergence of the #MeToo movement as more women have felt safer to speak publicly about their experiences of sexism and sexual harassment in politics, but we also see evidence of these claims dating back to the first entry of women into these legislatures, highlighting the long history and prevalence of these behaviors in each case.

Case One: The Australian Federal Parliament

Australia has often been lauded as a “pioneer” of women’s political rights due to the fact that it was the first democratic legislature to grant women the

right to vote and to stand for office in 1902. Despite this achievement, it took forty-one years until the first woman MP was elected in 1943 and women remained largely absent from the federal House for the next three and a half decades. Even by 1990, Australian women only comprised 6 percent of the legislature, well behind the pace of other Westminster parliaments in the United Kingdom and Canada. Today, 29 percent of the seats in the House are held by female MPs which surpasses the high-water mark of 27 percent reached in 2007 (see figure 1). This constitutes a fairly steady yet stalled rate at about a quarter of the House obtained at the turn of the millennium.

Perhaps not surprisingly, women's experiences in the Australian federal legislature have been less than ideal. Many Australian feminist political researchers have characterized the legislature as being rampant with sexism and in some cases, outright misogynistic (Sawer 2013). When women finally began to increase their representation in the early 1980s, public knowledge of incidents of sexism grew with female politicians suffering from unsolicited and offensive attention. Campaigning was particularly troublesome for women candidates in the 1980s, as women candidates were encouraged by political parties to employ a "male escort (preferably a campaign manager) to fend off drunks [and] provide general protection from unwanted attention" (Sawer and Simms 1984, 102).

Inside the House, Jennifer Adamson, Minister of Health between 1979 and 1982, spearheaded a campaign to include sexual harassment in anti-discrimination or equal opportunity legislation after being "pinched in the bottom" twice in the parliamentary dining room by another male MP. MP Roslyn Kelly was "made the butt of sexual jokes" for holding the Minister for Capital Territory to account in the House during debates in the early 1980s. The Minister dismissed her questions by intimating that Kelly was smitten with him (ibid). Examples of sexual harassment inside of Australian parliaments, both at the federal and state-levels and in all major political parties, continued into the 2000s. More recently, Liberal Minister of Cities Jamie Briggs was forced to resign his position after sexually harassing a female Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade staff member in November of 2015. Briggs initially denied the incident and was then forced to resign by Prime Minister Turnbull after the victim came forward with an official complaint. Despite Turnbull's willingness to force Briggs' resignation, a number of cabinet colleagues tweeted support for him and tried to downplay the incident, demonstrating a wider trend toward victim blaming (Bourke 2015). It was later revealed that Briggs had a history of questionable actions around female staffers, much of which had not been formally reported. In all of the above instances, we see evidence of male norms of behavior being reinforced and a lack of concern for reprisals in debate owing in part to parliamentary privilege. Female attention to equality issues is dismissed as unimportant. We also see men closing ranks to protect their own partisan colleagues and to silence women who draw attention to the bullying tactic of sexual harassment.

The extent to which the institutional norms of Australian politics facilitate and encourage sexism is further revealed when we consider how women at all levels are subjected to sexist attacks. In 2012, Australia's first woman Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, stood in the House of Representatives and gave a blistering speech denouncing this treatment of women politicians, particularly herself, by the Leader of the Opposition, among others. This included the following excerpt from her speech:

I was very offended personally when the Leader of the Opposition, as Minister of Health, said, and I quote, "Abortion is the easy way out." I was very personally offended by those comments. You said that in March 2004, I suggest you check the records.

I was also very offended on behalf of the women of Australia when in the course of this carbon pricing campaign, the Leader of the Opposition said "What the housewives of Australia need to understand as they do the ironing. . . ." Thank you for that painting of women's roles in modern Australia.

And then of course, I was offended too by the sexism, by the misogyny of the Leader of the Opposition catcalling across this table at me as I sit here as Prime Minister, "If the Prime Minister wants to, politically speaking, make an honest woman of herself . . .", something that would never have been said to any man sitting in this chair. I was offended when the Leader of the Opposition went outside in the front of Parliament and stood next to a sign that said "Ditch the witch."

I was offended when the Leader of the Opposition stood next to a sign that described me as a man's bitch. I was offended by those things. Misogyny, sexism, every day from this Leader of the Opposition. Every day in every way, across the time the Leader of the Opposition has sat in that chair and I've sat in this chair, that is all we have heard from him.⁷

Gillard's on-going personal experiences of sexism lay bare the gendered hierarchy embedded within Australia's lower house that is reinforced and protected during parliamentary debates. Despite ascending to the highest political office, her experiences expose the false assumption that politics is "gender-neutral", showing that even women who have reached the top of the political ladder are working within an institution that privileges masculinity.

The centrality of masculine norms to Australian politics is also evident in the responses to Gillard's speech from within and outside the legislature. Reaction to the speech was couched as a hysterical "overreaction" by some, while others dismissed it as a strategic attack rooted in partisan politics (Wright and Holland 2014). For Sawyer, Gillard's speech highlighted "the institutional and attitudinal resistance to change in, and the gendered nature of, Australian politics" (Sawyer 2013, 114). Further, responses to the speech

demonstrate the general permissiveness of sexism in Australian politics and the extent to which parliamentarians (even the PM) will be punished for speaking out against it. Minimizing and dismissing Gillard's speech thus serves a dual purpose: it stereotypes her as a "hysterical/hyper-feminine" woman (and therefore unfit to lead) while at the same time it reinforces the pretense that Australia's lower house is gender-neutral and that claims to the contrary are unfounded.

Interestingly, these gendered norms were so ingrained that often fellow women MPs were slow to recognize sexism or would turn a blind eye to it instead of rocking the boat. The myth of neutrality was thus regularly accepted by all members of the legislature, including women. For example, before Gillard's (2012) passionate speech, she herself was accused of downplaying the existence of sexism in order to further her own career by vigorously defending federal Speaker Peter Slipper against charges of sexual harassment in 2011.⁸ Although Gillard denounced the sexism itself, she argued that the courts should decide his fate instead of parliament, thus reinforcing the myth of gender neutrality inside of Parliament and privileging partisanship and adversarial politics over equitable treatment for both genders. A year later, Gillard evidently saw things very differently (The Economist 2012).

During her three-year term as Prime Minister, Gillard was routinely demonized for being childless with opponents—using the veil of parliamentary privilege in the House—calling her "barren" and incompetent, "a lying cow" and a "bitch," among other epithets rarely if ever used to describe male heads of state (Sawer 2013, 112–113). The treatment of Gillard in particular prompted Summers to suggest that if Gillard was the CEO of a large company (fictitiously called the "Australia Pty Ltd.") she would have been able to file a claim of sexual harassment:

What are the prime minister's rights at work? I think it is reasonable to ask whether the prime minister is being treated in ways that are actually unlawful or even illegal under federal legislation designed to protect the rights of workers. But . . . politicians (and therefore prime ministers) do not generally speaking enjoy these rights (Summers 2012, 118).

She concludes that the lack of respect for Australia's first woman Prime Minister, and indeed all women MPs, would discourage women from running for office. "Why would anyone want to step up for such treatment?" (ibid, 124).

Despite this history and continuing revelations of sexism and sexual harassment of politicians, staffers, and female journalists,⁹ Australia has not yet had its "Weinstein moment" in the political sphere where federal and provincial parliamentarians are moved to act en masse to address these institutional problems. In the United Kingdom and Canada, we see similar patterns of sexism and sexual harassment of female politicians but these have been accompanied by early moves to ameliorate them in turn.

Case Two: The British House of Commons

Similar to Australia and Canada, the Palace of Westminster has been male-dominated throughout its history. Since 1918, a total of four hundred and fifty women have held a seat in the British House of Commons, fewer than the number of men that currently sit in Parliament (four hundred and fifty-nine) (Keen 2015). Over time, British women's political representation in the lower house has increased incrementally, but it did not reach more than 10 percent until the mid-1990s, when one hundred and one female Labour MPs were elected in 1997 (18.2 percent of the seats).¹⁰ Although a slightly slower progression than in Canada, today 32 percent of the seats in the House are now occupied by women—the highest ever and higher than Canada and Australia (see figure 1). In addition to being male-dominated, the British Parliament is also a highly masculinized place with ample instances of sexism, prompting media observers to refer to it as the “Palace of Sexminster” (Meredith 2014).

The sexist treatment of female MPs began upon their first arrival. Nancy Astor, the first female MP to take her seat in the House of Commons in 1919, experienced hostility, embarrassment, and humiliation on a regular basis and she was frozen out of inner circles within her own party (Lovenduski 2014a, 19). Once women began to occupy more seats in the 1980s, blatant sexist language became more common. Newly elected in 1987, Conservative MP Gillian Shepard recounted how she and other female MPs were referred to as “Betty” by another Conservative MP. When she asked the MP about this, he stated: “Ah, but you're all the same, so I call you all Betty, it's easier” (Ashley 2004). Dubbed “Blair's babes” by tabloid presses, some female Labour MPs elected in the 1990s described their parliamentary experiences during this time period as “alien” (Childs 2004, 9). They recounted how male MPs would slide their hands under their seats as they were about to sit (Crewe 2015, 1055). It was also a common occurrence for male MPs to routinely gesture to female body parts, comment on physical appearance or weight; one female MP recalled being told by a Conservative male MP that “it was nice to have a better class of totty around” (Cooke 2007). All of these sexist instances underscore the dominance of masculine norms in the functioning of the British House of Commons throughout its history and the othering of females as interlopers in this supposedly gender-neutral workspace.

Importantly, the British Parliament also reinforces other forms of domination beyond sexism, including racism, classism, and ageism. For example, in 2008, the two only Black female House representatives (Dawn Butler and Diane Abbott) each spoke about the sexism and racism they have endured on the part of their fellow MPs. MP Butler was once asked by a white, male Conservative MP what she was doing when she tried to sit in a member's section on a parliamentary terrace. He then turned to a (male, white) colleague to say, “They're letting anybody in nowadays” (Moosa 2008, 33). Butler and

Abbott have also been mistaken for secretaries, cleaners, catering staff, or visitors to Westminster.

Adversarial norms and parliamentary privilege are both on display during the formal proceedings of the House, and especially during Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs). PMQs often feature masculine styles of communication, including shouting, braying, put-downs, jibes, heckles, and taunts on both sides of the House. In addition, more overt sexist statements have also been made during PMQs. In 2011, David Cameron told the Labour shadow chief secretary Angela Eagle to "calm down, dear", which was followed by laughter and further heckling from the government benches. In 2013, Secretary of State William Hague could be seen calling MP Cathy Jamieson a "stupid woman" twice during PMQs (Stevenson 2013). The need for parliamentarians to score political points against their rivals, combined with an informal acceptance of sexist language and behavior in the House, disproportionately disadvantages women. For Lovenduski, these highly ritualized displays of "public masculinity" send "a strong symbolic message to women that politicians are men who have repertoires of behavior that are not available to women (and some men)" (Lovenduski 2014b, 135). Some female MPs have recently stated that they find PMQs so adversarial and off-putting that they no longer attend (Mason and Edgington 2014). We see the three unwritten norms of myth of neutrality, adversarial politics, and parliamentary privilege working together to reinforce an accepted culture of behavior inside of PMQs that are mirrored in the Australian and Canadian cases—one where women's contributions are diminished and men's contributions are normalized.

Within this broader culture of white male dominance, a number of high profile cases of sexual harassment and assault involving British politicians have occurred. In 2013, Channel 4 News broke allegations of sexual harassment dating back ten years against Lord Rennard, a former chief executive of the Liberal Democrat party and life peer in the House of Lords. In 2014, four female activists within the party came forward and accused Rennard of sexual misconduct and inappropriate behavior, including at a party event to encourage more women to run in politics (Wintour 2014). This scandal stirred up controversy for the Liberal Democrats when it emerged that the party leadership, including leader Nick Clegg, had known about the allegations since 2008 and done little in response. The party's efforts to keep the issue out of the limelight reveal how partisan interests are prioritized above gender equality in an adversarial-driven political setting, and how few (if any) institutional incentives currently exist to encourage parties to take issues of sexual harassment seriously. In 2014, these and other events prompted Channel 4 News to conduct a study on sexual harassment based on interviews with seventy British MPs representing all major political parties; it uncovered a deep-rooted "climate of sexual harassment" in the British Parliament. The April 2014 media report notes that one-third of political staffers interviewed had personally experienced sexual harassment, while one in five reported that they

had witnessed someone else being harassed (or had a friend confide in them) (Newman 2014). In response, Westminster established a twenty-four-hour, confidential “harassment hotline” for staff to report harassment and bullying. Several staff have reported that the hotline is inadequate as it does not provide any counselling or advice (Boycott-Owen 2017).

The rise of the #MeToo movement reached the corridors of Westminster in the fall of 2017, when a number of female politicians and staffers came forward with stories of sexual assault and harassment. In October, a list of approximately forty Conservative MPs and Ministers was circulated amongst MPs, staff and journalists that detailed “inappropriate” behaviors with female and male staff, and includes allegations against one Conservative minister, Mark Garnier, who asked a female staffer to purchase a sex toy for him and called her “sugar tits”; another former minister sent sexually suggestive messages to a nineteen-year-old woman who was hoping to work for him (Walker 2017).

In response, the Speaker of the House publicly denounced the “culture of sexual harassment” at Westminster (Burnett 2017). After a heated debate on the floor of the House in which several MPs recounted their own stories of abuse and harassment and those of staffers, a cross-party working group of MPs led by the Leader of the House, Andrea Leadsom, was convened to look into the sex abuse allegations. Its goal is to establish an independent grievance procedure that would protect individuals who speak out against sexual abuse and harassment. Moreover, it was reported in the media that MPs have long resisted attempts to protect staff from sexual harassment even as it was proposed by the Commissioner for Standards (Hughes 2017). These events clearly indicate the inadequacies of current protections for parliamentary staff and MPs and show that the culture of male appropriateness and willingness to protect adversarial partisan politics and parliamentary privilege have been substantial barriers to adequate workplace solutions.

Case Three: The Canadian House of Commons

Similar to the lower houses of Australia and the United Kingdom, the Canadian House of Commons has also been historically dominated by men. For the first fifty-two years of its life women were barred from sitting in the House until 1918 when most women were finally given the right to stand for office. Sexist attitudes and behaviors have been a part of the routines of Parliament since the first woman was elected federally in 1921. On her first day of arriving on Parliament Hill, Agnes Macphail was blocked from House of Commons and told “you can’t go in there, Miss!” (Trimble and Arcsott 2003, 104). When she finally arrived at her office for the first time, Macphail found flowers on her desk from a male MP who had lost a bet (to another MP) that she would not get elected—a clear indication of her interloper status in a male-dominated workspace (Crowley 1990, 57).

Between 1921 and 1979, the highest number of women in the Canadian House of Commons was ten (see figure 1), constituting 4 percent of the total number of seats (Young 2013). This time period was one in which the few female politicians who had won seats were often subject to criticism about their clothing, physical appearances and sex lives (Everitt and Gidengil 2003, 195). Similar to the Australian and British cases, the norms of aggressive and sexualized behavior have been on display during the formal routines of parliamentary debate. In 1982 when NDP MP Margaret Mitchell rose in the House to discuss domestic violence issues in Canada, she was laughed at and shouted down by some of her male colleagues, with one male MP overheard saying to another: "I don't beat my wife. Do you, George?" (Mitchell 2008, xii). In the same year, MP Gordon Taylor announced to the House that Cabinet Minister Judy Erola: "had a nice body . . . it's too bad it's connected to her mouth" (Sweetman 1982). These instances reinforce the masculinized style of debate that perpetuates sexism in the House (interrupting, loud yelling) and have the added effect of de-legitimizing "women's issues" as important policy issues worthy of debate.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Liberal Sheila Copps was frequently treated to sexist commentary. During a debate in 1985 she was told to "quiet down, baby" by Progressive Conservative MP John Crosbie. Reflecting on his time in Parliament in 1990, Crosbie went on to tell a fundraising dinner that Copps reminded him of the song lyric "Pass the tequila, Sheila, and lay down and love me again" (Robertson 2014). In 1991, Copps was called a "slut" by another Progressive Conservative MP William Kempling; Kempling has referred to other female MPs as "dear", "bitch", and "fishwife" (CBC Archives online 1991). In the same year, MP Barbara Greene and journalist Carol Goar reported that they had been assaulted in the poorly-lit House of Commons parking lot (Trimble and Arscott 2003, 118).

The sexist culture of Canada's Parliament reached such a level in 1990 that several female MPs formed a cross-party women's parliamentary association, the Association of Women Parliamentarians (AWP). After Copps was called a "slut", the AWP approached the Speaker requesting that his powers be expanded in order to better discipline MPs who use un-parliamentary language that is sexist, homophobic, or racist in nature (Trimble and Arscott 2003, 118). While a government motion on respecting decorum and civility was brought before the House and debated three times, it was never voted upon (Marleau and Montpetit 2000). Additionally, a list of language considered "unparliamentary" and subject to censure in the House does not include any that would fall into the categories of sexist, homophobic, or racist (Thompson 2011). This again reinforces parliamentary privilege to continue "othering" those not in the majority in the House. More recently, in 2006 Conservative Cabinet Minister Peter MacKay referred to his former romantic partner, Liberal MP Belinda Stronach, as a dog.¹¹ On her first day on the Hill in 2008, NDP MP Megan Leslie (a relatively young MP) was told that she "had a fine

body” and reported that it is not uncommon for male colleagues to touch the women without invitation (Daro 2013). In May 2016, NDP MP Ruth Ellen Brousseau was aggressively elbowed in the chest by Prime Minister Trudeau on the House floor as he angrily attempted to usher the Conservative House leader back to his seat. Although inadvertent, Trudeau’s actions remind us how masculinized behaviors—aggression and physical intimidation—are normalized in the everyday life of Canadian parliament.

Set within this broader culture of institutionalized sexism, it is perhaps no surprise that Canada’s lower house is also a workplace where sexual harassment occurs. In the fall of 2014, a female NDP MP privately approached Liberal party leader Justin Trudeau, about being sexually harassed by a male Liberal MP. Shortly after, a second female NDP MP came forward about another male Liberal MP. Both women did not want to launch a formal investigation into the events, choosing instead to meet privately with the party whips for each party to seek an internal solution. In the midst of these allegations it became clear that the House had no process in place for MPs to report sexual harassment on the Hill and that it was up to the discretion of the parties to handle these incidents as they saw fit.

Since these events, additional female politicians have spoken publicly about their personal experiences of sexism and sexual harassment in Canadian politics. In 2014, former MP Sheila Copps revealed she had been raped by a male colleague while she was an MPP in the Ontario legislature in 1981 (Robertson 2014). NDP MP Megan Leslie spoke about the personal repercussions she has faced when she has talked about sexism on the Hill, stating:

In the years since my election, I’ve had many opportunities to speak about the everyday, almost relaxed sexism that darkens the Hill. But sometimes I don’t want to speak about it. Because invariably, like this week, I hear things like “does that mean I can’t flirt with you anymore?” And because sometimes I’d like to talk about other issues where I have expertise, like poverty or environment. (Bueckert 2015)

In 2014, the Canadian House of Commons made some progress toward recognizing and attempting to respond to the increased attention to these issues. It adopted a policy preventing the sexual harassment of political staff who work for MPs. The next year, it adopted a Code of Conduct prohibiting the sexual harassment of MPs by other MPs. Despite this recent initiative, research by Collier and Raney (2017) shows how the Code is limited and does not fully protect women in Canadian politics from violence in several ways (e.g. it does not include provisions on social media harassment and any discernible penalties for sexually harassing a colleague, are insufficient). Notably for the purposes of our argument here, the Codes do nothing to address the institutional norms that we argue help perpetuate and permit sexism and harassment in the first place—the myth of neutrality and male logic of

appropriateness of behavior, adversarial debate, and parliamentary privilege (the latter was specifically protected in the Code itself).

Further, since these institutional changes have been made, female MPs and political staff continue to report being sexually harassed (Rana 2017; Champion-Smith 2017). In 2016 Conservative MP Michelle Rempel penned a widely read opinion piece in the *National Post* chronicling the “everyday sexism” that she and other women in Ottawa experience on a regular basis. In it, Rempel admitted that sexism towards her—which included situations in which she was called a “bitch”, when she was told to “look a bit more cheerful” during Question Period, or when another MP told her that “[i]t turns me on when you’re direct”—grated on her. “It angers me, and makes me roll my eyes,” she admitted, “Sometimes, when it’s bad enough, it causes me to second guess myself” (Rempel 2016, 1).

Environment Minister Catherine McKenna was referred to as “Climate Barbie” by a Conservative male MP, and a right-wing media outlet used the name in its newspaper; shortly afterward she anonymously received a Barbie Doll in the mail (Paling 2017). One female parliamentarian was asked about the location of her stripper pole after her phone rang in a committee meeting, while another male MP made a comment about “threesomes” while posing for a photo with two female MPs (Champion-Smith 2017; Zimonjic 2017). These recent incidents reveal that despite the changes made to attempt to address sexual harassment in the Canadian House, these “rule” changes are not deep enough nor systemic enough to uproot the core norms of maleness, adversarial hyper-partisanship, and privilege.¹²

Discussion

Feminist institutionalism seeks to uncover the ways in which institutional rules, procedures, norms, and expectations are gendered. In this article, we have shown that not only are men privileged by their greater numbers in the lower chambers in Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada, but also how the “rules of the game” reinforce masculine privilege in the forms of sexism and sexual harassment. A comparison of these three countries allows us to identify the ways in which the rules and norms of Westminster systems reproduce and support a broader institutional culture of sexism. Despite having different actors, networks, and political party systems, the institutional logics in all three places appear to create spaces within which sexually demeaning words and actions have been similarly acceptable since the arrival of the first women in public office.

Our comparative analyses highlight the ways in which the norms embedded within Westminster systems work to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity. Operating under a number of formal and informal rules Westminster systems are thought to be gender-neutral, but the representative styles of parliamentarians in all three jurisdictions privilege masculine behavior and

penalize other styles of politics. Parliamentarians are permitted, if not expected, to shout, belittle, taunt, and occasionally bully each other from across the aisle as part of regular daily “democratic” debate. Sexist language and sexism are not discouraged during these debates, they are instead protected and, we argue, encouraged due to the logic of male appropriateness and particularly the presence of parliamentary privilege from legal reprisals. Compounding the problem is the need to maintain party discipline—a mainstay of Westminster systems—which privileges partisanship above other forms of identity like gender and race. As powerful actors within Westminster systems, parties have at their disposal a number of means to exert influence over their members, from the candidate nomination stage to parliamentary committee membership or a seat at the cabinet table (Kam 2009). In an effort to maintain party solidarity, leaders can and do use these tools to pressure their members—both male and female—to remain silent on matters that might hurt the party brand.

The adversarial nature of Westminster-style governance is particularly troublesome for women. Assumptions that politics is cut-throat and tough, and that politicians must have a “thick skin” in order to survive can be interpreted as code for women and racialized minorities to remain silent when they are treated unfairly or discriminated against. Certain masculine behaviors such as aggressiveness and sexual prowess continue to be markers of parliamentary competency, while “squealing” against your party or fellow MP for sexist behavior is perceived as a violation of the unwritten codes of acceptable conduct, worthy of punishment. Further, parliamentary privilege—an important legal protection for members of parliament—has not been modernized to outright prevent sexist language or behaviors from occurring. As a consequence, female parliamentarians continue to face violence within the workplaces to which they have been democratically elected.

Our study reveals other shared attributes of Westminster systems that are gendered. These include the relationship between the rise in the number of women and reported incidences of sexism and sexual harassment in all three legislatures throughout the 1980s. A feminist reading of these trends would view sexual harassment as a response to the increasing presence of women as interlopers in these masculinized spaces, and rooted in “a terror of numbers, a fear of being swamped . . .” (Puwar 2004, 49). In this view, sexism and sexual harassment serve to minimize and contain the threat that increasingly diverse legislatures pose to the “natural” (white, heterosexual, able-bodied, and masculine) order of Westminster systems. While similar processes of domination occur in other male-dominated spaces, their effects may be especially harmful in democratically elected legislative spaces. Future research might consider how and whether the increase in reported incidences of sexual harassment has contributed to the slow rate of women’s numerical representation in these legislatures in recent years, as other women may be turned off from considering running for office themselves.

Another shared characteristic of Westminster parliamentary systems is how resistant they are to change. This holds true in each of our cases, where female MPs have been speaking out about these issues publicly since at least the 1980s. When women (and some men) speak about the sexism or harassment they have witnessed or experienced, they are often ridiculed, subjected to further sexist treatment, or “othered” even more. Instead of being considered just a woman in a man’s game, women who speak out about sexism are considered as worse—a woman who refuses to play by the *rules* of the game. The reality that some of these gendered norms are embedded within parliamentary precedence and convention and are therefore not written down makes them, to borrow a term from Chappell and Waylen, particularly “sticky” and resistant to transformation (2013, 603). Institutions and institutional actors who benefit from pre-existing rules and arrangements are notoriously stubborn to change, and Westminster systems appear to be no exception to this rule.

Our study of sexism and sexual harassment in politics highlights how specific institutional rules, procedures, and norms can perpetuate violence against women in politics. Future studies might seek to explain how other Westminster norms are gendered, and whether newer parliamentary rules have been formally established to deal with the problems of sexism and sexual harassment. As a next phase in a broader research agenda, such analyses might seek to uncover why such policies are not more prevalent.¹³ The problem of violence against women in politics is clearly not confined to Westminster systems alone. As the events in the fall of 2017 show, claims of sexual harassment writ large are widespread and reveal the various failings of the United States Congress to address them historically. Future research might consider how the rules of presidential or mixed systems compare with or contrast to those of parliamentary systems, and consider ways in which their unique rules and norms can be changed to make women who work in these spaces safer as well.

Here we focus on how Westminster traditions in three jurisdictions appear to facilitate an institutional culture where violence against women in politics occurs. Understanding how institutions are structured in ways that facilitate violence against women in the workplace is an important step in combatting this issue. As women around the world continue to document their experiences of violence in political workplaces, multi-dimensional strategies will be required that can tackle patriarchal attitudes about women and gender relations socially, and the institutional contexts that reinforce the perception that women do not belong in male-dominated workplaces. The scope and scale of this global problem has yet to be fully revealed, and finding solutions is urgently needed.

Notes

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1. Sociologist Janet Acker developed the earlier notion of "gendered institutions" as a precursor to feminist institutionalism to draw attention to gendered 'processes, practices, images and ideologies, and distributions of power in various sectors of social life' (1992, 567). We use the FI lens to focus more specifically on political institutions and acknowledge Acker's important work leading to the more recent development of FI frames.
2. For more on this see Mackay and Waylen and Kenny in the critical perspectives section on *Research, Gender and Institutions in Politics & Gender* 2014 10 (4).
3. The response rate was fifty-five women parliamentarians, and highlights the need for future research in the area.
4. See also Dalton 2017 and Krook 2018.
5. For example, a 2008 Australian national telephone survey on sexual harassment in the workplace found that one in five women reported incidents of sexual harassment compared to one in twenty men (Australian Human Rights Commission (<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/guides/sexual-harassment>, accessed February 10, 2016).
6. We focus on the federal level, but note the widespread prevalence of sub-national sexual harassment of female MPs in Australia and Canada.
7. Transcript of Julia Gillard's speech published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* October 12, 2012.
8. Gillard appointed Slipper as speaker to "bolster the standing of her minority Labor government" despite evidence he had sent sexist text messages to a former staffer before the appointment. Gillard initially supported Slipper and voted against his dismissal after the texts were exposed—a response that could have been partially motivated by the highly partisan nature of Australia's Westminster system.
9. See for example Gilmore 2017.

10. Or 25 percent of all Labour MPs elected in 1997.
11. MacKay has denied making this statement but media reports and other MPs who were in the House at the time have reported that it was said. *Hansard*, the official transcript of parliamentary debates in the federal House, does not record heckling.
12. At time of writing, a Canadian parliamentary committee was in the process of reviewing the MP-to-MP Code of Conduct.
13. At time of writing, Canada was the only Westminster system in the world to enact such a code of conduct for its members.

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