

**Let Her Finish: The Gendered Nature of Interruptions and Deliberative Participation in  
Australian Senate Estimates Hearings (2006-2015)**

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**Abstract**

In theory, all those elected to Parliament enter office with equal legitimacy and authority. In a modern democracy this should guarantee all citizens have their interest represented equally. However, an inability to transform descriptive representation into substantive representation has been demonstrated throughout a number of countries. This study focuses on authoritative representation, that is, the space in between winning a seat and making a difference where components of communication and interaction affect the authority of the person speaking. This study combines a Discourse Analysis of the official Hansard transcripts from the Senate Estimates Committee hearings, over a 10 year period between 2006 and 2015, with a linguistic ethnography of the Australian Senate to complement results. Results show that, although women are certainly in the room, they are not afforded equal authority. Women's access to the speech floor (Edelsky 2008) in the Senate is limited; they given proportionally less time to speak, and interruption, gatekeeping tactics, and the designation of questions significantly different in nature to those directed to men all work to limit women participation in the political domain.

## **Let Her Finish: The Gendered Nature of Interruptions and Deliberative Participation in Australian Senate Estimates Hearings (2006-2015)**

Julia Gillard's tumultuous time as Prime Minister prompted a surge of interest in the relationship between women and the political system in Australia. The treatment of women politicians by the media generated academic interest, most likely due to the vilification of Gillard while she was in office. There was also a renewed interest in the candidacy and election of women. That said, little research has been conducted on the obstacles which women face *within* the Australian Parliament. We certainly need a greater understanding of both the obstacles which face women trying to enter politics and those which constrain their progress in politics. There is work of this sort on other systems (Wantchekon 2011; Humphreys, Masters, and Sandbu, 2006; Karpowitz 2006; Walsh 2007; Devine et al. 2001; Gastil et al. 2010), much of which undermines the assumption that a woman in a position of power can substantively represent women as a group, given that her authority is likely to be weak to begin with, or later undermined (Beckwith 2007; Childs and Krook 2006; Dahlerup 2006; Dolan, 1996; Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008; Grey 2006; Htun and Power 2006; Mansbridge, 1999 & 2005; Reingold 2000; Schwindt-Bayer 2006; Thomas, 1994; Tremblay and Pelletier 2000; Trimble, 2006; Vincent 2004; Weldon, 2002; Yoder, 1991). In large part, this is due to a lack of 'authoritative representation'.

The term authoritative representation, was coined by Mendelberg, Karpowitz and Oliphant (2000). It is the essential link between descriptive, representation, which focuses upon physical and numerical presence, and substantive representation, which covers the interests values and concerns of a group and refers to the authority awarded to an actor within a particular setting. Authoritative representation is focused upon how communication and interaction affect the authority of a speaker in a deliberative setting. Authority, in this sense, refers specifically to the expected and accepted influence of a speaker. Like symbolic representation, the belief that someone can fulfil the requirements of a position effectively, authoritative representation relates to the group's perception of the abilities of a speaker. However, authoritative representation is constructed *during* deliberation or interaction by decision makers, not based upon the perceived merits of an individual. Descriptive representation is determined before an interaction, authoritative representation during an interaction, and sub-

stantive (and symbolic) representation following an interaction. As such, each type of representation influences the next.

In my view, interaction and communication are the processes which connect the numbers involved in descriptive representation to the outcomes of substantive representation. No matter how large the number of women in a legislature, they will not have influence, if they are not given power and authority by the institution within which they operate. In contrast, small numbers of women can succeed if the institution values them. Institutions attribute this power through discourse, which can either construct or destroy authority. My understanding is rooted in the ideas of Karpowitz, Mendleberg and Oliphant (2012), particularly, their suggestion that women's speech has less authority due to gendered roles and expectations. As such, women are disadvantaged in any kind of discursive event as their voices are not valued equally with men. Furthermore, Karpowitz, Mendleberg and Oliphant (2012) argue that, because women use a style which is viewed as contextually abnormal, they are less likely to be listened to, or regarded as authoritative contributors to discussion. In addition, the use of language in political discourse can serve to prolong the unequal status of women in a group, as well as their authority-deficit in discussion, both because forms of communication within parliament are normatively masculine, and men have greater ability to use interactional functions as tools to control discussion. Finally, this synthesis acknowledges that both interactional rules and the gender composition of a group will affect the elevation or reduction of women authority.

The core objective of this study is to examine the differences in access to political discussion experienced by both men and women, in order to elucidate whether, or not, women are at a linguistic disadvantage in the Australian Parliament. To do so, I will examine the hypotheses generated in existing international studies of gender participation in a political setting, in order to assess the access and effectiveness of women in the Australian Senate during Estimates hearings.

Previous international studies have used similar methods to analyse gender representation in a legislative setting. In England, Sylvia Shaw's (2000) study combined transcript analysis, with an ethnographic evaluation of the House of Commons. Previously, Lyn Kathlene's (1994) analysis of the communication patterns of men and women in Colorado legislative

committees focused on turn-taking to garner insight into the dynamics of gendered behaviour in political institutions. Outside of this Kathlene's study, there have been limited studies on discourse in politics.

The most comprehensive study of gender and power in a legislative setting was carried out by Laura Winsky Mattei (1998) who conducted an in-depth analysis of women witnesses' testimony before the all-men Senate Judiciary Committee on the nomination of David Souter to the Supreme Court.

As no similar research has been conducted in Australia, the interactional patterns between men and women in a legislative setting are unknown. It is impossible to assume realities based on studies conducted in culturally similar countries; members of the English House of Commons appear to adhere more closely to formal codes of conduct than their Australian counterparts. The studies conducted in the United States look specifically at witnesses appearing before an all-men panel. Here, my aim is to uncover patterns of gendered interaction in the Australian Senate, looking at both women and men who are Chairs, senators or witness. The concept of the 'speech floor' is central to both Mattei's study and my own.

Given the adversarial nature of politics, winning and retaining the floor is of critical importance. The essential objective of this study is to use a series of measures to test hypothesis regarding the access men and women have to political discourse. These measures are drawn from previous studies, most notably Laura Mattei's (1998) study of the judicial nomination hearings in the United States. Explaining women's participation in political bodies provides a snapshot of their current and potential impact in government. The literature on gender, power and communication suggests, three specific, testable hypotheses regarding the linguistic behaviours used to access the speech floor in Senate Estimates Committee Hearings.

First, it is hypothesised that men as Senators will hold the floor longer than any other group during a hearing. Moreover, research regarding gendered patterns in discourse suggests that, by and large, witnesses who are men will speak for a longer time than witnesses who are women.

Second, it is hypothesised that men as Senators will interrupt more than all other groups. I suggest that Senators as a group will interrupt more than witnesses. In regard to interruptions by witnesses, it is predicted that witnesses who are men interrupt more than those who are women. Finally, the most interruptions are expected to be from men as Chairs.

Third, it is hypothesised that women will experience higher levels of hostility in hearings where they account for more than 30% of the participants. Parliament is historically a masculine domain, which gives men who are members of the community an advantage, particularly when it comes to discourse. Holmes (1992: 144) states 'there is no obvious incentive for adult males to give up highly valued talking time in public contexts'. Indeed, Walsh notes that increasing the numbers of women in some institutions can serve to 'strengthen fraternal networks' (2000: 301) among men. This phenomenon has also been described by Yoder (1991) as the 'intrusiveness effect' whereby highly masculinised occupations become more, not less, resistant to rapidly increasing numbers of women. The concept that women engage in a more cooperative style of interaction, as opposed to the more competitive style of men, is integral in the context of parliament. In the highly masculinised environments of the House of Representatives and the Senate, where interaction is fundamentally adversarial, it is questionable whether there is scope for the incorporation of more consensual or co-operative styles of interaction. Therefore, if women and men do favour different interactional styles, the success of interaction will be predicated on a complex collusion of conditions.

If a woman's participation in legislative bodies of discourse, such as the House of Representatives or the Senate, is limited, so to will be her influence on policy.

## **Data and Methods**

This research combines an ethnographic design with a discourse analysis to examine the relationships between gender and discourse within the Australian Senate. This mixed methods approach has been chosen due to the complex nature of gender relations and the highly formalised and rules based nature of parliamentary discourse. Similar approaches have been used previously in analysis of the British, Irish, Swedish, and American Parliament. (Shaw, 2000; Christie, 2002; Catalano, 2009; Ilie, 2013; Shaw, 2013; Mattei, 1999).

A mixed-methods approach is better suited to this research, as the ethnographic approach provides flexibility, whereas linguistic analysis provides structure. 'Floor' is frequently invoked in the colloquial sense of getting a turn at speech; the floor is bid for, taken, held, negotiated, controlled, managed, vied for, turned over to someone else, etc. This sense derives from an earlier meaning of the word 'floor' to refer to 'the part of a legislative chamber or meeting hall where members are seated and from which they speak;' There is an agreement in scholarship that the speech floor is essentially a 'linguistic economy' (Cenoz, J and Gorter, D, 2009: 57) in which 'turns are valued, sought or avoided'. This is particularly relevant when analysing the strictly regulated floors of parliamentary discourse, where turns are highly contested in order to achieve political gain.

The turn-taking model created by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) will be used to identify interactional norms in the Senate. Turn taking is defined by Denny (1985: 43) as 'a jointly determined, socially constituted behaviour.' The seminal 'no gap, no overlap' model for turn taking was developed by Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974). In this model, one person speaks at a time and participants take turns at speaking to prevent dialogue from transforming into monologue (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974). Whoever is speaking indicates when their turn is up with various cues, and a change in speaker is typically accomplished with few gaps or overlaps (Dabbs, Ruback, and Evans 1985). Sacks et al. (1974) consider this to be the 'ideal' form of debate as it has 'fixed the [...] parameters that conversations allow to vary' (Sacks et al.1974:731). While there are set rules, they can be violated, changing the nature of the event from one where there are no inequalities to 'an event in which prior inequalities (e.g. Gender, age, ethnicity) can be re-enacted' (Edelsky and Adams, 1990: 171). Indeed, speakers are likely to break these rules in order to promote their interactional goals and bar those of another.

### *Data*

Apart from formalities and opening statements, interaction within Senate hearings largely involves dialogue. Senate Estimate hearings were chosen as the subject of study because of their largely dialogical nature, but also because of the formal rules covering proceedings, which include: limits on the length of talk-time for each member of the hearing; strict turn-taking rules; clear expectations in regard to interaction and behavior; and formalities sur-

rounding floor ownership. The Chair is responsible for ensuring that these rules are adhered to correctly.

Senate Estimates hearings are significantly different from normal Senate proceedings. Regular Senate proceedings involve Senators from different political parties participating in adversarial interactions with, or more aptly against, one another. In contrast, Senate Estimates hearings involve six Senators (three from government, two from opposition, and one either from a minority party or an independent member) sitting alongside one another as a committee. While the political allegiance of Senators is still noticeable, the main goal of these hearings is not adversarial. This makes estimates hearings more suitable for analysis, given interruptions do not simply result from political opposition, because it benefits the committee to work together. The presence of Ministers and Senior Executive Staff from the Australian Public Service in Estimates hearings is an additional reason for the sample choice. The addition of senior executive level officials, who serve, and report to, the Government, allows for the exploration of the effect of status on discourse. This is important, as the willingness of an official of lesser status to interrupt a Senator of higher status and the nature of these interruptions will elucidate interesting power relationships.

The data corpus consists of ten sets of the official Hansard transcripts of proceedings, and the related audio-visual recording. Each analysed extract was approximately 3 hours long. These specific debates were selected for a number of reasons, they: took place over a long period of time; were sourced from different portfolios; focused on different topics; and had Chairs of both genders of the varied. Given that the topic, date and gender composition of the Committees varied, that gives more validity to more general claims based upon the research.

## **Methods**

### *Floor Apportionment*

In order to measure the apportionment of the floor during the deliberative segments of Senate Estimates, the contributions of the Senators and witnesses were coded manually by the author. A coding frame constructed by the author, but influenced by frames used in previous studies (Mattei, 1999), was used to analyse one sentence at a time. Each line of the coding sheet records the number of words spoken in each sentence, and the time elapsed. To effec-

tively code access, the number of words spoken was then divided by the number of interruptions experienced by each speaker. On this basis, I produce percentages reflecting the amount of time each speaker occupied the floor, as well as details of the rate of interruption to which each speaker was subject.

### *Interruptions*

Interruptions do not have a uniform meaning. There are positive and negative interruptions, which impact differently upon a speaker's access to the floor. Stromer-Galley, like Mendleberg, Karpowitz and Oliphant (2014), defines positive interruptions as those which occur in support of, or in agreement with, the first speaker. Positive interruptions look to enhance the authority of the speaker's statement, and do not aim to co-opt the floor. As such, a positive interruption will be coded when a second speaker overlaps with the first speaker to express solidarity, affection or support. Moreover, if an interruption continues the line of thought of the first speaker without contradiction, it will also be coded as positive. Statements beginning with "yeah" or "I agree" usually signify a positive interruption.

In contrast, negative interruptions are distinct power plays. Negative interruptions represent an attempt by a secondary speaker to seize the floor in order to express disagreement or criticism. They can disagree, object, or change the topic entirely. Often, negative interruptions can be identified through the use of phrases and words such as "well," "but," "I disagree," "I don't know," or "I'm not sure about that". That said, it is important to note that negative interruptions do not have to contain a negative comment, nor do they need to display explicit disagreement. If a speaker interrupts and changes the topic of discussion without acknowledging the content of the previous statement, whether it be through the use of an acknowledgement cue, or direct mention, then this is coded as a negative interruption. Therefore, ignoring the possession of the floor by another, or the arguments being made by another speaker prior to interruption, will also be coded as a negative interruption.

This study develops the understanding of interruption further, to include the category of defensive interruptions. Defensive interruptions occur when more powerful members of the particular community interrupt on behalf of less powerful members, who have had their access or effectiveness negatively impacted by other members of the community. There are many instances in Senate Estimates hearings where Senators call on the Chair to restore order. Us-



ing the existing definitions, these would have normally been coded as negative interruptions; a coding which would have led to spurious results. In response, I created a defensive interruption category to combat the possible misinterpretation of data. Defensive interruptions can often be identified by an initial call to the chair, or phrases such as “point of order,” or “let her/him finish.”

Hearings were analysed, with interruptions categorised using the above coding frame. The time of the interruption was noted on the transcript, as were any relevant accompanying speech. Examples of interruptions within the transcript were coded by their type, as well as the gender of the actors, the position of the actors, and the affect it had on the broader discourse. The frequency of interruptions was noted and any emerging patterns were recorded for further analysis. An interruption was coded as such in any circumstance where two speakers overlap after the first speaker has spoken at least one word. To be clear, for an interruption to be recorded, one speaker must clearly hold the floor and another must make an attempt to take it (inadvertently or explicitly).

Comparisons were made between women Senators, men Senators, women witnesses, men witnesses and the Chair. In order to examine the access which different groups have to the floor, each speaker’s turn within the selected hearings was coded in terms of the number of words and number of interruptions and their type. Interruptions were coded under three classifications: negative; positive; and defensive. The word counts of each speaker were divided by the number of negative interruptions in order to calculate a rate of access.

## **Findings**

*Hypothesis 1: Senators who are men will hold the floor longer than all other groups.*

The first hypothesis posits that Senators who are men will dominate floor time. Data shows that Senators who are men only dominated the floor in 2009 and 2011. Apportionment was calculated based on words spoken. The groups which primarily occupied the floor varied. Women witnesses primarily occupied the floor in 2006, 2013 and 2014. This result was not predicted, however the hearings in which women witnesses dominated comprised mostly women. In the 2006 and 2013 hearings 65% of the witnesses were women; in 2014, 52%

were women. It is interesting to note that overall in the hearings examined women witnesses spoke the most, with women Senators the next most voluble group. Notwithstanding these results, men as witnesses dominated in 2007, 2008, 2010 and 2012, meaning that men still controlled a majority of hearings.

While only evidence from 2009 and 2011 supports original expectations regarding gender, men as a whole were the most voluble women. Overall, witnesses who were men spoke the most, totalling 112,586 words over 10 hearings. This was 24,031 more words than women. That said, the overall evidence regarding floor apportionment was mixed; the average women witness across all hearings spoke 1884 words, compared with 1705 by the average man.

### **Figure 1**

Although Senators have a higher status, witnesses are required to provide testimony, which helps explain the unforeseen result. Given that witnesses must wait to be called by Senators, or ask to be called to speak during a hearing, Senators still have some control over how much witnesses get to speak.

*Hypothesis 2: Senators who are men will interrupt more than all other groups. Interruptions will be negative more often than positive, aimed at obstructing other speakers' interactional goals.*

Apportionment results do not realistically represent access alone. If we include interruption measures, we get a clearer idea of the extent to which each group holds the floor. While two groups may speak approximately the same number of words in a hearing, if one group is interrupted a multitude of times and another is not interrupted at all, their access and their ability to participate fully in the hearing is markedly different.

Ideal parliamentary discourse is constructed so that interaction and participation is as fair as possible for all members, allowing speakers the opportunity to contribute and to express themselves fully, without interruption. In committee hearings, Senators have pre-allocated questioning periods where they are formally awarded the floor. A Senator is required to ask leave of the Chair to take the floor out of order. Within these periods, Senators may call on a

witness to answer questions about their relevant portfolios. However, the upholding of these rules in the Australian Senate is somewhat relaxed compared to international chambers, such as the House of Commons in England (Shaw, 2001).

As rules are not strictly adhered to in these debates, hearings are reduced to an 'event in which prior inequalities (e.g. gender, age, and ethnicity) can be re-enacted' (Edelsky and Adams 1990: 171). Violations of the ideal execution of parliamentary debate, such as interruptions, allow Senators and witnesses to promote their own interactional goals, or weaken the impact of another speaker.

Over the 10 hearings, women Senators were interrupted more than any other group, interjecting 226 times. Women witnesses also interrupted more than men witnesses, with 126 interjections compared to 113 by men. This result contradicts the hypothesis which suggests that Senators who are men would interrupt more than any other group. That said, only 37% of these interruptions were negative, meaning that they were not an attempt to take the floor or undermine the status of another speaker. Comparatively, out of the 133 interjections from men, 100 were negative, meaning that 75% of interruptions by men were used to gain the floor or obstruct another speaker. This pattern was replicated in the witnesses; while witnesses who were women interrupted more than their men equivalents, only 17% of their interruptions were negative. Comparatively, interjections by witnesses who were men were 38% negative.

## **Figure 2**

Previous research has demonstrated that men are more likely to interject in a confrontational or adversarial manner, and that women are more likely to intervene in a supportive manner (Coates 1989; Edelsky 1981). The results of this analysis support previous findings, with 70% of all interruptions being positive or defensive.

## **Figure 3**

The analysis of interruptions in the 10 senate estimates hearings shows that of 457, 176 were directed towards men. Women Senators received more negative interruptions, meaning they

were obstructed more than any other group. Interruptions of women witnesses were 70% negative, whereas interruptions of men as witnesses were only 52% negative. Women executed fewer negative interruptions than men, but experienced more negative interruptions. If negative interruptions are a powerful resource which women are utilising less than men, then women are disadvantaged.

Women may not be using this tool because interruptions are viewed differently if they come from men or women. While interruption by men are rarely policed, interruptions by women are met with disapproval, because such behaviour is seen as incongruent with behavioural expectations of women (Edelsky, 1981; Ilie, 2012; Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014). As masculine behaviour is viewed as inherently competitive and confrontational, it is compatible with interruption. Even when men from a lower status position interrupt men in a higher status position, they are rarely met with any hostility.

### *Defensive Interruptions*

Interruptions aimed at defending the speaking or procedural rights of a member of a hearing were coded as defensive. These interruptions are not wholly positive, in that they do not strengthen or support the interrupted speaker. However, defensive interruptions are not essentially negative as their purpose is to protect, not obstruct. These interruptions can occur in defence of oneself, or on behalf of another. Defensive interruptions subvert the use of interruptions as a power play, allowing both members the committee and the witness panel to refuse acquiescence. That said, not all defensive interruptions are effective in protecting, or promoting, a speaker's interactional goals. Defensive interruptions account for 32% of all interruptions by women

The highest incidences of defensive interruptions occur in hearings where women make up over 30% of participants. There are two possible explanations. The higher number of women members may have encouraged women's participation, making women feel more comfortable to contribute and defend themselves and others. Alternatively, the higher levels of women representation could have resulted in increased hostility towards women, evidenced by the fact that 62% of negative interruptions took place in the hearing with close to equal representation of men and women.

Women Senators on the committee interrupted defensively on behalf of other Senators and witnesses regularly. This was usually on behalf of other women, as most negative interruptions were directed against women. It is important to note that of the 126 interruptions by women witnesses, 102 were coded as defensive, meaning that more than 80% of interruptions by women witnesses were in defence of their, or others', procedural rights.

An unexpected result was the frequency of interruptions of Senators by witnesses. Although unexpected, other studies have had similar findings. A study conducted in a work setting by Woods (1989) on patterns of interruption in groups of men and women of different ranks focused on the relative influences of gender and status. It concluded that gender outweighed any variables relating to status or authority. This could explain the high levels of interruptions experienced by Senators in this study.

Another justification for status being less influential as a variable is the fact that parliamentarians are often witnesses. Given that Senators on the committee and parliamentarians on the witness panel are of equal standing outside of the hearing, parliamentary witnesses seemed more willing to interrupt members of the committee. These witnesses were also more likely to interrupt defensively on behalf of their colleagues. In the four hearings with near equal gender representation, three of the Senators or officials of equivalent standing who appeared as witnesses were women, which may have influenced the number of defensive interruptions of witnesses who were women. Be that as it may, men as witnesses were also willing to interrupt in order to protect their colleagues.

*Hypothesis 3: Women will experience higher levels of hostility when they make up more than 30% of a hearing*

While the popular belief is that more descriptive representation will lead to the better treatment of women, much research has concluded the opposite (Beckwith and Cowell-Meyers 2007; Bratton 2005; Childs and Krook 2006; Crowley 2004; Dahlerup 2006; Devlin and Elgie 2008; Grey, 2006; Kanthak and Krause 2010; Kittilson 2008; Lovenduski and Karam 2005). The results of this analysis confirm that, once women make up more than 30% of a discourse they will be treated with increasing hostility.

The average interruptions experienced by hearing participants compared to the average interruptions experienced by women clearly exemplifies this point. Comparative volubility (calculated by dividing the number of words spoken by a speaker with the number of interruptions they received) further confirms this hypothesis. Data illustrates that, in hearings dominated by either gender, women were interrupted less than the average rate of interruption and spoke more than the average volubility rate. Women were interrupted more in hearings where women represented more than 30% of the members, with the exception of the 2015 hearing. Women had the highest levels of access in hearings dominated by men (2008, 2010, 2011, and 2012). In hearings where women were in the majority, women and men had similar access.

#### ***Figure 4***

This can be explained by Yoder's (1991) intrusiveness effect, which suggests that highly masculinised professional domains, such as politics, will become increasingly resistant to rapid increases in women's participation. As tokens, women do not threaten the masculinity of a domain and, as such are treated unremarkably. However, once women make up more than 30% of a group, they are seen as a threat to the culture of an institution, and are treated with hostility. Yoder theorised that negative behaviour by a majority group was due to the interpretation of growing minority as an intrusion or a threat. The majority feels threatened and, as a result, will work to limit access and any further gains by the minority. Interestingly, Yoder's work found that token men, and groups of men reaching a critical mass, do not experience the same negative treatment and consequences. This suggests that the inequalities women experience are more to do with sexism than group size. Initiatives looking to improve conditions for women in politics must look beyond descriptive representation, As Zimmer (1988: 72) argues: 'It does not seem that scarcity alone can explain the reactions of men to women co-workers; nor is there any evidence to suggest that women's occupational problems can be alleviated by achieving numerical equality'.

#### ***Positional Power - The Influence of the Chair***

A gender-neutral institution ought to ensure all committee Chairs have the ability to facilitate hearing and prescribe an agenda. However, previous studies have demonstrated that women in the position of Chair do not garner the same levels of respect, or exercise the same amount of influence in a committee hearing, as men. Moreover, other research has established that women regard and utilise positions of power differently to men (Blair and Stanley 1991; Dodson and Carroll 1991; Duerst-Lahti and Johnson 1991).

One of the seminal works on gendered leadership styles was a meta-analysis of experimental and organisational research performed by Eagly and Johnson (1990). It found that women were more likely to lead democratically, whereas men were more inclined to be autocratic. These results were mirrored in a legislative setting, where evidence indicated that women Chairs using their position to facilitate and moderate discussion, instead of controlling testimony, participating in discussion, and directing proceedings, like men Chairs (Kathlene, 1900, 1991). The suggestion that women use positions of power differently makes it difficult to assess the extent to which a woman occupying such a position favours other participating women.

The Chair of a committee has the most authority in a hearing. They have the power to encourage or silence discussion on any given topic. Research has previously concluded that women favoured supportive and cooperative interaction over competitive interaction, and felt more comfortable contributing hearings dominated by women, with a woman in the position of Chair (Coates 1988).

That said, other studies have found that even one participant who is a man may cause group dynamics to change towards a more competitive interaction style (Smith-Lovin and Brody 1989), and as such, a woman as Chair may not be enough to make other women feel comfortable. Furthermore, as women's leadership style is more democratic, its essential inclusivity facilitates all voices, not just the voices of women, and therefore the aggressive discursive behaviour of men may be even more effective under a woman Chair (Eagly and Johnson 1990).

The data shows that women Chairs interrupted less than men Chairs. Out of the 105 interruptions by Chairs, 67 were from men, with 42 from women. While men only chaired 4 out of

the 10 hearings sampled, they interrupted 50% more than women in the same position. Seventy-five per-cent of the interruptions by Chairmen were negative, demonstrating the tendency for men to take a more peremptory approach to the position. This is further evidenced by the 40 defensive interruptions directed at men as Chairs, which is notable given that women chairs did not face any defensive interruptions (see figure 6). The high number of defensive interruptions directed at the Chair in the analysed proceedings indicate a willingness of Chairmen to stray from procedural rules. Comparatively, Chairwomen almost exclusively used procedural or defensive turns, demonstrating their preference to act as facilitators.

### *Figure 5 & 6*

Chairs disallowed less than 10% of illegal interruptions, meaning that members could interrupt at will, without the prospect of being censured. Furthermore, it signifies that the distance between what is considered to be the ideal structure of debate (where there are no interruptions or all interruptions are impeded by the Chair) and actual debate in a legislative setting is considerable.

Evidence shows that men utilise positions of power in legislative hearings to exert control (Jones 1989). Analysis found that men as Chairs received an extraordinarily high level of defensive interruptions, which suggest they did not act in accordance with the formal rules governing the committee. Not only does the Chair moderate discussion, but the decision of the Chair's choice to intervene defines what rule-breaking behaviour will be tolerated in each individual hearing.

As well as seizing the floor from other speakers, men as Chairs also influence hearings by contributing substantive comments to the discussion significantly more than women. Of course, men as Chairs execute procedural turns, as is their duty, however they often offer personal opinions or overtly guide the question. In contrast, women Chairs are more likely to interject defensively on behalf of a witness or Senator. Out of the 42 interruptions by a Chairwoman, 57% were defensive. Chairwomen received no defensive interruptions, which suggests that they did not often engage in illegal or biased behaviour.



The influence of the Chair is unclear. Chairmen only received one negative interruption for every 23 interruptions they performed. Chairwomen, in comparison, received approximately one negative interruption for every interruption they executed. While the gender of the Chair may change the style of moderation, it is likely that, under a Chairwoman, the more aggressive verbal behaviour of men as Senators and witnesses is likely to be empowered not mitigated (Eagly and Johnson 1990).

## **Conclusion**

The key concern of this study is whether women are afforded equal access and authority to men in a legislative setting. Access to a legislative environment is influenced by the historical masculinity of political domains, gendered styles of communication and the unproven impact of numerical representation. Empirically, this research concludes that, while women are by no means silent (with witnesses who were women speaking slightly more than witnesses who were men on average), they do not have the same levels of access as men. As apportionment is not tantamount to access, the high frequency of interruptions experienced by women Senators and witnesses compared to men as Senators and witnesses, exposed the limitations on women access.

This study found that men as Senators did not hold the floor longer than any other group during a hearing, although men as witnesses did, due to the length of testimony required from them. That said, there was no clear explanation for the difference in volubility of men and womenwitnesses. While it was hypothesised that men as Senators would interrupt more than all other groups, women Senators interrupted the most. Crucially, a remarkably high proportion of these interruptions were defensive. Men were responsible for only one defensive interruption over 10 hearings. Over 75% of men interruptions were negative, to obstruct another speaker's interactional goals.

The findings of this study are limited by the scope of the data considered and additional legislative proceedings should be examined in order to further explore the agency of women in politics. It would be useful for future research to focus on other areas of Australian government, possibly in the general proceedings of the Senate or the House of Representatives, in order to provide a more comprehensive detailing of limitations faced by women.

That said, the available evidence is sufficient to arrive at some tentative conclusions.

Masculine styles of communication are more effective in Senate Estimates Committee hearings. Rules within this political community of practice were developed around masculine communication and, as such, benefit and complement the masculine voice. The men examined in this study were more likely to break the rules and, unlike women in the same role, were less likely to be punished for rule-breaking behaviour. Women act from the position of outsider, due to their differences in expression, reception and treatment (Kerber 1990).

An interesting component of this examination was the influence of the Chair, and the variation in moderation dependent on gender. Women chairs were more likely to interrupt defensively, but less inclined to guide contributions. Furthermore, women Chairs received almost no defensive interruptions, whereas a large majority of interruptions received by men Chairs were defensive. Men participants were often resistant to reprimand for rule breaking by a women chair.

Finally, in relation to descriptive representation, women witnesses and Senators will not experience better treatment in environments where genders are equally represented. Results from this study found that women experienced the best treatment in hearings numerically dominated by one gender, men or women. As tokens, women were subject to less hostility, and, as such, were more effective. Hearings that were close to equal in gender make-up demonstrated the highest levels of hostile and adversarial behaviour, with attacks coming from Senators and witnesses of both genders.

This research strongly suggests that the sexism which exists within the Australian Senate is extremely concerning. Bringing more women into politics will not translate directly into a proportionate amount of women power and influence. Instead, focus should be directed to cultural change in existing institutions to ensure that, when women enter, they do so with access and agency equal to men.

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## Figures

	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	TOTAL
M SENATOR	112	-	5119	16205	13105	14685	5629	1791	2196	4721	51758
F SENATOR	10012	9789	6965	-	4470	716	4770	12438	10425	15335	70348
M WITNESS	5429	13982	17225	1614	23666	7629	22007	7335	2836	11769	112580
F WITNESS	11287	7315	7554	7551	323	10291	117	14307	17082	12014	68555
CHAIR	156	372	1983	641	2048	1124	781	1216	569	6213	15513

Figure 1

### INTERRUPTIONS GIVEN

	Total Interruptions	Negative Interruptions	Defensive Interruptions	Positive Interruptions
Female Senators	226	85	67	74
Male Senators	133	100	1	32
Female Witnesses	126	22	37	67
Male Witnesses	113	48	16	49

Figure 2



**INTERRUPTIONS RECEIVED**

	Total Interruptions	Negative Interruptions	Defensive Interruptions	Positive Interruptions
Female Senators	166	82	7	77
Male Senators	176	46	61	52
Female Witnesses	43	30	3	10
Male Witnesses	72	38	2	32

Figure 3

	2006 F*	2007 F	2008 M	2009 E	2010 M	2011 M	2012 M	2013 E	2014 E	2015 E
<i>Interruptions</i>										
Average Interruptions	1.1	1.3	0.8	3.8	4.3	6.8	1.4	3.2	3.9	13.3
Average Fem. Interruptions	1.5	0.7	0.8	6.6	1.8	4.6	1.2	5.2	6.1	14
<i>Appointments</i>										
Average Rate**	522	363	728	668	441	250	729	344	347	182
Average E. Rate	523	363	537	298	585	359	1002	303	396	147

Figure 7 Figure 4

**INTERRUPTIONS GIVEN**

	Total Interruptions	Positive Interruptions	Negative Interruptions	Defensive Interruptions
Male Chair	63	15	47	1
Female Chair	42	6	12	24

Figure 5

**INTERRUPTIONS RECEIVED**

	Total Interruptions	Positive Interruptions	Negative Interruptions	Defensive Interruptions
Male Chair	46	4	2	40
Female Chair	11	2	9	0

*Figure 19**Figure 6*