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FEMM Committee as Feminalist Space: Gendered Legislative Styles in the European Parliament

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**FEMM Committee as Feminist Space: Gendered Legislative Styles in the
European Parliament**

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Abstract

This paper argues that the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality within the European Parliament is a micro-institution that promotes feminalist legislative styles regardless of the member's gender. Interviews were conducted with two members of the committee, one male and one female to reach this conclusion. Feminalist legislative styles such as collaboration, lack of hierarchy, cooperation among parties, listening to constituents, and 'power to' motivations were employed by both interviewees. Furthermore, an understanding of the FEMM Committee as an institution within the European Parliament clarifies that it is a unique space whose political climate allows for feminalist legislative styles.

Introduction

As more women are slowly making their way into politics, scholars in gender and politics are beginning to investigate what sort of difference they make both in the legislatures themselves, as well as in their countries. Scholars also focus on the sort of characteristics and governing styles employed by women.

A problem that has been widely debated among scholars is whether or not female politicians should take on masculine characteristics in order to be seen as serious. Research has mostly been done on political campaigns, and whether appearing masculine is an effective strategy for female candidates. Kim Fridkin Kahn argued that, “given the greater importance assigned to ‘male’ traits relative to ‘female’ traits, it is probably worthwhile for both men and women candidates to emphasize ‘male’ traits in their campaign appeals. Men can highlight their stereotypical strengths, while women will want to eradicate stereotypes by stressing ‘male’ traits in their own campaign appeals,” (1996, p.38). This suggestion, however, is quite controversial and reflects the debates between liberal and radical feminists. Should women have to act like men, or should feminine traits be given greater value in society?

This research considers how certain political institutions allow for politicians to exhibit more feminine traits. I specifically focus on the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM Committee) in the European Parliament (EP) because it is a committee made up almost entirely of women, and has a focus on gender policies. My primary research question is: *to what extent do current members of the European Parliament’s Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality practice feminist legislation strategies?*

To answer this question, this paper begins by exploring the current literature on the subject. Specifically, I use Duerst-Lahti's conception of gender ideology as a scale from feminalism to masculinism as a theoretical framework. The terms 'feminalism' and 'masculinism' will be defined in the literature review. Second, I explain the methodology used to answer my research question. Finally I present my results from interviews conducted with members of the FEMM Committee, and discuss the significance of those findings in answering my research question.

Based on the literature on the subject and the interviews conducted, I find that the FEMM Committee is a unique space in which feminalist legislative styles are employed and valued. In other words, the FEMM Committee as an institution allows for individual members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to practice feminalist styles.

Literature Review

A great deal of the previous scholarship on gender and legislation explores the ways in which men and women legislate differently in terms of their voting behavior and policy preferences, (Mateo Diaz, 2005; Tamerius, 2010). Thus, in asking whether more women in office makes a difference, the focus is on the legislative output (i.e. the laws that get passed). Significantly less research has examined the difference women make *inside* legislatures by changing the rules, norms, and legislative styles. To understand this question, one must first understand the foundational framework of gender ideology. Second, it is important to recognize the gendered legislative styles and the practices associated with women and femininity versus those associated with men and masculinity. Third, I will provide an explanation of how legislatures are in and of themselves gendered institutions. Finally, I will discern the relationship between the legislative institution and the individual legislators through a description and critique of the critical mass theory.

The Framework: Gender Ideology

This research uses the gender ideology framework put forth by Georgia Duerst-Lahti. She defines gender ideologies as, “structured beliefs and ideas about ways power should be arranged according to social constructs associated with sexed bodies. It is ideas about how gender and power should be put into action,” (Duerst-Lahti, 2008, p.160). In other words, it is not only the way in which sexed bodies are socialized, but also the placement of value on those bodies and those socializations.

Gender ideology can be understood as a continuum between feminalism and masculinism - terms that emerged from and are more frequently referred to as feminism

and patriarchy. Feminism, according to Duerst-Lahti, is defined as, “an ideology that begins from, and generally prefers, that which is associated with femininity, the female and females,” (2002, p.31). Masculinism is the opposing ideology, which is associated with masculinity, the masculine, and males. Of course, masculinism is the dominant ideology, especially in realms such as politics where women have historically been excluded. Masculinist thinking can manifest in many different ways, such as rhetoric that conveys women as outsiders in politics or institutional norms such as seniority that maintain male dominance.

Importantly, while gender ideology is usually represented as a binary, in practice ideologies lie somewhere in between the two opposing poles, much like how sexed bodies tend to fall more in the grey area than fitting perfectly into the definition of ‘male’ or ‘female,’ (Duerst-Lahti, 2008). Furthermore, while feminism, for example, is associated with females, it does not mean that all women lie towards the feminist side of the spectrum, nor that men cannot prefer feminism. These nuances are important for this research in particular, as will become evident later.

Gendered Legislative Styles

As aforementioned, gender ideology can manifest in many different ways because the social construct of gender permeates every aspect of life. However, for the purpose of this study I will focus specifically on how gender ideology translates into legislative styles and strategies. By legislative styles and strategies I am referring to the behavior of legislators, including their relationship to one another and their staff, the ways in which they promote their agendas, the amount to which they listen to constituents, etc.

A number have scholars have theorized about the difference between feminist (or feminine) legislative styles as opposed to masculinist (or masculine) ones. Figure 1 illustrates some of the opposing feminist and masculinist characteristics.

Figure 1: Characteristics of Feminist vs. Masculinist Legislative Styles

Feminist	Masculinist
Connection	Individuation
Relationship-focused	Rule-focused
Collaborate	Dominant
Power to	Power over
Cooperation	Competition
Web-center	Hierarchy
Listening	Speaking
Integrative	Aggregative
General welfare	Self-interest
Negotiation	Confrontation
Future-focused	Present-focused
Facilitation-style leadership	Control-style leadership
Honesty	Manipulation
Process-oriented	Power-oriented

(Duerst-Lahti, 2002; Reingold, 2000; Reingold and Cammisa, 2004)

The differences presented here are a result of centuries of socialization based on gender whereby women have typically been confined to the home-sphere and men to the public-sphere. Thus, feminist styles are associated with maternal characteristics such as nurturing and caregiving. One example of how these characteristics manifest in practice is the notion that female legislators tend to be more responsive to constituents because of their relationship-focused, connective style, (Reingold, 2000).

Because female bodies are socialized to perform femininity, women are more likely, or at least more expected to exhibit the characteristics on the left-hand side. Of course, this is not always the case. There are two main theories which complicate this notion. First, women in fields such as politics have been shown to exhibit more masculinist characteristics. As Reingold explains, “[p]olitical leaders, the vast majority of whom have always been male, interact within institutional cultures that uphold masculinity as the norm and treat as deviant anything female, feminine, or feminist [...] To be successful, perhaps even to survive, female politicians must therefore act like men,” (2000, p.4). Women legislators will often take on more aggregative, dominating, competitive characteristics in order to appear like an insider and be taken seriously by their male colleagues and the greater public. The common recognition of the ‘Iron Maiden’ trope illustrates just how often this practice occurs, (Stead and Elliott, 2009).

Another theory that has materialized is that more feminist legislative styles are becoming more popular among both men and women. A major reason for this is the increasing number of women in government and other leadership positions, which Dahlerup argues will, “in itself change some of the social conventions of politics as a workplace, because most of these women, not all of them, bring into the political

institutions traits of women's culture as it manifests itself today....," (2010, p.229).

However, the reality is that men tend to benefit from adopting more feminist legislative styles, whereas women are still penalized for appearing too feminine. As Stead and Elliott explain, "[g]reater social value is attached to an individual male's ability to develop and utilise feminine qualities," (2009, p.94). Because feminism is already associated with women, it is not surprising when a woman appears feminine like it is for men.

Legislatures as Gendered Institutions

Duerst-Lahti in her chapter in the book *Women Transforming Congress* argues that in theorizing gender in Congress, we must first recognize that Congress is in and of itself a gendered institution. She claims that, "...gender ethos is shaped by an institution's history, its founding members, characteristics of the early and prominent leadership, and purposes and functions originally and over time," and if those founding members and characteristics favored masculinism it would persist until substantial reform, (Duerst-Lahti, 2002, p. 37). Furthermore, the way in which the gender ideology of institutions persists is through formal and informal rules and norms, (Duerst-Lahti, 2002).

Of course, Duerst-Lahti was concerned with the United States Congress, not the European Parliament, which had a rather different founding. For one, it was founded about two centuries later at a time when women were slowly making their way into the political realm. Despite the fact that all the Founding Fathers of the EU were men, women entered into the European Parliament soon after the founding, with the first woman MEP joining as early as 1952, (EP Historical Archives, 2014). Thus, while

women were not a part of the initial foundation, they did become important players early on, and were present during many of the constitutional reforms such as the Single European Act, the Schengen Agreement, and the Amsterdam Treaty, (Abels and Mushaben, 2012).

The effect of women's role in these constitutional reforms is evident in the commitment to gender mainstreaming. According to the Council of Europe, gender mainstreaming is the, "(re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policymaking," (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2013). In other words, all policies, regardless of whether they are socially or economically based, must include some consideration to gender equality. While this policy tool was acknowledged in the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty, it was not formally embedded until the 2008 Lisbon Treaty (Abels and Mushaben, 2012). Thus, while it is a rather recent development, it illustrates how constitutional redress can alter institutional norms to favor feminalist ideology by placing gender equality in the forefront of the policy-making process.

It is therefore difficult to pinpoint exactly where the European Parliament lies on the gender ideology continuum. There are, as explained above, many ways in which feminalism appears to be more accepted. However, because masculinism is the dominant ideology of society as a whole, it can be assumed that the feminalist ideology is still in the minority.

Relationship Between the Institution and the Individual

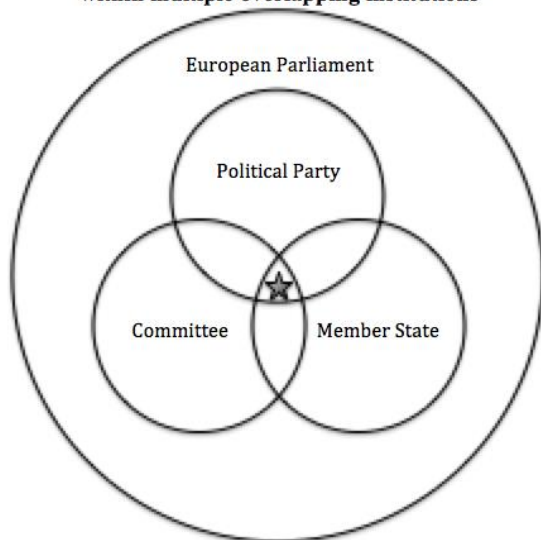
With a basic knowledge of how gender ideology manifests in individual behavior as well as in institutions, it is essential to understand how the two interact. Constructivist theories argue that institutions always shape individuals, and individuals always shape institutions. In attempting to answer my research question, the question at this point becomes, to what extent do individuals have the ability to change institutions? There are many theories regarding this, but the most popular and contested theory is that of the *critical mass*.

Dahlerup is known to have advanced this theory, explaining that the term ‘critical mass’ implies that, “the size of the minority is crucial, and that to women in politics a fundamental change may happen long before they reach the 50 (or maybe 60) percent of the seats,” (2010, p.225). She argues that women can make a difference when the percentage of women in legislatures surpasses 15 percent and are no longer a skewed, token minority that is still controlled by the dominant majority (Dahlerup, 2010).

Other scholars, however, have been critical of the apparent rigidity of this theory. Most argue that, among other things, the theory assumes that individual legislators have complete autonomy, which is not the case. Mateo Diaz insists that, “...when studying legislative assemblies, one needs to consider two nested institutions: political parties working within the parliamentary umbrella,” (2005, p.120). In other words, the assumed autonomy of Dahlerup’s theory ignores that legislators are also closely tied to their political party, as well as the masculinist norms of the legislature. I would also include committee assignments as significant in how legislators act within legislatures. In the case of the European Parliament in particular, MEPs are also dependent of their member

state. Figure 2 illustrates how the individual MEP is an agent within these overlapping institutions.

Figure 2: Member of Parliament as an actor within multiple overlapping institutions



As this graphic demonstrates, it is not enough to theorize simply the individual MEPs and their gender ideology. One must also take into account the greater institution of the EP, as well as its micro-institutions because they all have varying political climates and may promote opposing gender ideologies. As Reingold urges, “I question whether *all* institutional norms and traditions in *every* political setting and situation are uniformly masculine and antithetical to women, femininity, and feminism,” (2000, p.5). In fact, some settings may be more beneficial to women or advocate feminist legislative styles. For example, the fact that the Committee on Women’s Right and Gender Equality consists of less than 15 percent men is significant to understanding why the MEPs on that committee act the way they do.

Methodology

The primary method I used in this research was interviews. The target research group was members of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality in the European Parliament. Unfortunately, because of the limited number and busy schedules of this target research group, I was only able to conduct two interviews. Having only two interviews is a serious limitation to this research. I knew going into this research that the small size and inaccessibility of the research group would be a problem, and I realized too late that doing a comparison between the FEMM Committee and other committees would not only be an effective method, but would provide me with a larger research group to target.

I recruited interviewees by sending emails to every member and substitute member of the FEMM Committee at the end of March. I sent two additional emails in the following weeks to those who did not respond.

The two interviews took place on April 20th in the interviewees' respective offices in the EP building in Brussels. For the purpose of privacy and anonymity, the names of the interviewees were changed. The first interviewee, Jose, hails from Spain where he was previously a mayor, writer, and journalist. He was only elected to the European Parliament in 2014 and is a member of the Green Party. The second interviewee, Alva, is from Sweden and a member of the Socialist and Democratic Party. She has served on the FEMM Committee for twelve years, and was previously a children's nurse, youth recreational leader, and policy advisor.

Luckily I was able to get one interview with a man and one with a woman so that I could analyze the difference between the two based on gender. It is also important to note that they are from different countries, so they have been socialized in different ways and have different values based on their nationality. I do wish I would have gotten interviews with members from right-wing parties so see how their masculinism or feminism manifested based on their governing ideology, because it has been theorized by Duerst-Lahti that there is a correlation between the two (2008).

Another limitation to this research is that both of my interviewees spoke English as a second language, and the language barrier seemed a little obstructive at times. There were moments when they didn't fully understand what I was asking, and it is possible that they said things the wrong way because of the language barrier.

The potential bias in my research stems from the fact that my primary source of literature is Georgia Duerst-Lahti, who is my professor, advisor, and mentor at Beloit College. Because I have a relationship with her, I may feel obligated to prove her research. I attempted to counteract this bias by using her research only as a framework from which to analyze. In other words, I am using her definitions and concepts, but not the results from her research.

Another point of bias is that I consider myself more of a feminist in that I prefer that which is associated with women and femininity. Because of this, my research may be swayed to advocate for this gender ideology. I tried to remove my bias by allowing my interviewees to speak for themselves, not trying to pry a specific answer out of them, and not expecting their response to prove one thing or another. I also tried to use as much of their quotes from the interview as possible so as to not just pull what I wanted them to say.

Results

Perception of the Committee

I first asked the interviewees about their perceptions of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality to understand how the committee works as a unique micro-institution within Parliament. They both expressed a difference between the FEMM Committee and others they have served on in terms of the hierarchical structure and the atmosphere in committee meetings. For example, Jose compared the FEMM Committee to the Committee on Agriculture, on which he also serves:

I think the hierarchy is not so evident than in other committees. I am a member of the Agriculture Committee, this is a very powerful committee because we have legislative capacity because we have a lot of European budget to decide where it is going. And it's very different with the president and the representatives of each party (Jose, Personal Communication, 2016).

I think it's because we are not exactly a powerful committee, I think the atmosphere inside the [FEMM] committee is very friendly (Jose, Personal Communication, 2016).

Here, Jose expressed that the lack of legislative capacity in the FEMM Committee - meaning not being able to write bills, but simply suggest and recommend amendments - is an important factor in the difference between the atmospheres of the FEMM Committee and the other committees with legislative power. This demonstrates that the formal rules and functions of an institution impact the way in which that institution is run, as Duerst-Lahti suggests (2002). In other words, the lack of legislative function in the FEMM Committee differentiates it from the other committees in Parliament in a way that allows it to be less hierarchical, friendlier, and, presumably more feminist. Furthermore, this suggests that there is a positive relationship between the power of a committee and its masculine function.

One way of understanding hierarchy within parliamentary committees is to focus on the Chair and how they perform in committee meetings and when working with other members. Jose expressed admiration for the Chair, and claimed that:

...Our Chair who is also Spanish is very friendly and we have a lot of possibilities when we are discussing some resolutions (Jose, Personal Communication, 2016).

Alva, on the other hand, found that previous Chairs in the committee had been even friendlier and less hierarchical:

I have been in the committee with [...] four different chairs, and before I have used to work with Swedish chairs, and now it's a Spanish chair. And the Swedish chair is more open and we are doing this together and not so hierarchy because we are not used to working in hierarchy in the politics in Sweden, so it has been very good when we had Swedish chairs. But now with the Spanish chair, she's very...she do this by herself and she will do everything good, she cannot say 'oh Alva can you take this for me,' and she want to be the front and the person (Alva, Personal Communication, 2016).

Of course Jose has only been in Parliament and the committee long enough to work with one Chair, so he had nothing from which to compare. Despite the difference in perception of the current Chair, they both claimed that there have been Chairs that work in a more feminist way such as being less hierarchical, friendlier, and more collaborative. Importantly, both interviewees expressed a preference to the more feminist style of leadership.

Another way to examine the gendered function of committees is to focus on the party divisions. I asked Alva whether she thought the party divide within the FEMM Committee was more or less evident than in other committees she has served on:

I think less. Yeah, because it's not legislation. But if it should be, maybe. Because you can see a left side and a right side [...] For example, the right side they think that the member states should decide by themselves what they will do and how they should work with gender equality [...] but a lot of the legislation is about people and about work together and so on, so it is very important that we have the gender equality on legislation and we are a group, we are working together, and we have common legislation, then it's also important to talk about gender equality because it's in the legislation (Alva, Personal Communication, 2016).

Jose also mentioned the party division within the FEMM Committee when he said:

For example [...] we are trying to launch a declaration about sexism in publicity, in advertisements and these kinds of things, so we have a start with two different groups, my group, the Green Group, and the conservatives, which are supposed to be in the very opposite side, just to show that in some issues we have a lot of things in common, we agree that it is time to fight against that (Jose, Personal Communication, 2016).

Here, both Alva and Jose express that there is a party divide in the committee, but there is more of a willingness to cross party lines in order to pass important legislation on gender equality. This quality can be associated with the more integrative, feminist style of legislation because it stresses cooperation.

Since Alva had served on the FEMM Committee for over a decade, she offered some insight into how the committee had changed, and especially how others perceived it:

In the beginning, when I began here for twelve years ago, I think that the FEMM Committee was nothing, and that people say 'oh FEMM committee it's only women sitting there, blah blah blah,' but then after the Lisbon treaty that was writing in gender equality I think people are listening to us more, but still the FEMM committee is the smallest committee, we don't have anything to say, so you can really feel it (Alva, Personal Communication, 2016).

Alva expressed that the Lisbon treaty and its commitment to gender mainstreaming within the EP changed the way in which the FEMM Committee was perceived. She claimed that, at least to some extent, MEPs became more willing to talk about gender equality and treat it as a priority, not just a special issue. This is one way in which changes such as constitutional reforms can have an impact on the type of dominant gender ideology present, as Duerst-Lahti suggests (2002). The fact that there is more of a willingness to discuss gender in the EP implies that gender is becoming more salient in the institution.

I also asked Alva about the committee's relationship with lobbyists to understand to what extent the committee employs 'power to' strategies versus 'power over.' She had this to say:

Yeah, we are working a lot with the umbrella organization European Women's Lobby because they have a broad network in the whole Europe, different organizations in every member states, so we are working with them. They are also helping us to [teach] members about gender equality work, and also learn stuff, and also working in the Parliament, and also when we are doing our members say to the committee what we are doing different legislations it's good to have a discussion with them also. So I think it's very good work together (Alva, Personal Communication, 2016).

Here, Alva stresses working together with the lobby organization European Women's Lobby (EWL) to promote gender equality in the EP. This is an example of 'power to' legislative strategies where the primary motivation is to pass important legislation as opposed to the 'power over' strategies, which focus on personal benefit. Importantly, Alva describes a sort of symbiotic relationship whereby the FEMM Committee and EWL both provide and gain help from each other, while sharing the goal of improving women's rights in Europe. EWL helps the FEMM Committee teach MEPs about gender equality and in turn the FEMM Committee helps pass legislation that EWL supports. There is no sense that they are working together in order to profit off of one another on a personal level.

Gendered Legislative Strategies

When asked about their personal legislative strategies and how they view their role as a member of the European Parliament, both Alva and Jose seemed to prefer feminist styles of legislation, including ‘power to’ strategies, listening to constituents, reaching across the aisle, and collaboration. As aforementioned, ‘power to’ styles focus on the actual process of legislation and being able to pass legislation that makes a difference. Both Alva and Jose expressed a fondness to this style when describing their personal motivations in the EP:

My role here is to change the way Europe is doing, is to change the way we are building Europe, because we have constructions in the European Parliament, and I would like that constructions stronger, but also that Europe was not only a project for business, but also a social business. I really believe we have to build a European citizenship, that we have to develop different tools for people to feel like Europeans, that the standards are the same for everybody all over Europe, and that Europe could be a project from a social point of view, not only an economic point of view (Jose, Personal Communication, 2016).

I have a lot of experience from the work in Sweden. We are a country that is in the front in the gender equality work, so I have a lot of experience and I think it's very important to give experience to others, and also to listen to other countries. So it's not just legislation, we can work together without legislation and learn from each other of course.

I don't know, I'm a usual person, I'm not so hard to understand, and it's important to be good in listening (Alva, Personal Communication, 2016).

Jose, for example, conveyed a passion for changing Europe for the better. He has a vision for how Europe should function, and believes that he can use his power as a member of the European Parliament to reify that vision. Alva, similarly, wishes to use her experience in Sweden to achieve gender equality on a European scale. She also understands that she can learn from her experience in the EP, so it is a mutual exchange. Neither interviewee expressed that their motivation for being MEP was to gain political power or money, but rather for the greater good.

'Power to' motivations tend to call for more feminist legislative strategies. For example, passing important legislation requires some extent of collaboration and compromise, which often means reaching across party aisles to reach a decision. Jose, for example, mentioned needing to gain support from every party:

We are actually working against violence against women, we have members of different parliamentary groups, so I am trying to make a net of different groups. So I know we have support in the GUE, the liberals, and now the socialists, but the main group is actually the popular party and they are absolutely against the idea to force the member states to have this European directive...(Jose, Personal Communication, 2016).

The word ‘net’ here signals the feminalist practice of groups being more web-centered as opposed to hierarchical (Duerst-Lahti, 2002). Jose is concerned with gaining a broad network of support for important legislation, and is willing to reach across party lines to achieve that. The strategy is more focused on cooperation as opposed to competition in terms of party differences. Alva agreed with this style of legislation when she said:

It [depends on] the kind of legislation it is, but I think it's very important to work together with each other with the rapporteurs. When you are a rapporteur it's very important to have every party on board, because it's so easy that if you don't open your door the other will be angry and say that you might not work together with them and then it's harder to have them on the legislation, so it's very different (Alva, Personal Communication, 2016).

This is one way in which the European Parliament is different than, for example, the US Congress. Whereas the two-party system in US Congress usually obstructs the possibility for bi-partisan support, the multi-party system in the European Parliament actually requires support from multiple parties in order to pass legislation. Of course, the divide between the left and right is still apparent, but it is less of an obstacle. Thus, it is possible that the feminalist practice of reaching across the aisle is more common in multi-party systems, and that the feminalist practice of collaboration and cooperation in general is more common there.

Collaboration extends beyond just MEPs, and can refer to collaboration between MEPs and their staff. Alva mentioned that she sees a difference in the way male MEPs treat their staff versus how female MEPs do:

...The men who are here are used to have secretary and people who are carrying paper to the place where they sit in the committee room, and pick up their coffee, and pick up their laundry, and you know do everything to them. And I think they also do a lot of extra work for the man, and the man can sit there and be at the committee meetings and say something and then he is a hero. And as a woman I have very hard to say to my people, because they are not my secretaries, they are not my assistants, they are my political advisors, so they should not carry my things and get my laundry or do something extra. We are working together, and that's the difference I think. Because I'm at the same level as [my assistants...] because if I didn't have them I shouldn't be here and if I wasn't here they shouldn't be here. So we are a team. And I'm not sitting on a high horse or something, we are equal and work together. It's just me who is the front figure. I think that's an important way to work (Alva, Personal Communication, 2016).

Here, Alva stresses that her staff is a crucial part of the legislative process, not just an indispensable benefit to working in a high office. This exemplifies the anti-hierarchal feminalist styles of leadership whereby those in lower positions actually contribute to work of those in higher positions. It is more of a web or network of workers as opposed to a ladder. This practice also exemplifies the ways in which feminalist

leadership styles counteract the masculinist structure of the institution. In this case, the hierarchy is embedded in the hierarchy of job assignments (Committee Chair → Vice Chair → MEP → Staff), but in practice it can be altered so that each position is putting in a relatively equal share of work.

Another characteristic of feminalist legislative strategies is listening to constituents and carrying out their concerns more often. Both interviewees mentioned their desire to work for their constituents, but Jose seemed more concerned with the constituents in his hometown, whereas Alva more with the people of Europe in general. She said:

I think it's important that we are working for the 500 millions people in Europe, and we are working for them so it's very important to have both votes on the floor, dare I say (Alva, Personal Communication, 2016).

It seemed that part of the reason she stressed working for the European people over her own was not only because she is of course a member of the *European* Parliament, but also related to what she had said before about Sweden being a leader in gender equality. Gender equality is less of a reality in some European countries than in those like Sweden, and she expressed wanting to extend the rights in Sweden to those other countries. Jose, on the other hand, really focused on his constituents in Spain:

First of all you have to not forget that you are a representative of your constituency. You have to speak to them all the time, you have to not cut the contact with the people who elected you. [...] And with that it's very important for me because I used to have regular contacts, especially in

the Agriculture committee with agriculture sectors, with farmers and different groups, some on the left, some on the right, I don't mind about that. So almost every 15 days I have contact with them, and also with women's organizations, because these are the two committees where I am working the most. [...] The most important thing to be an MEP is not to lose contact with real people (Jose, Personal Communication, 2016).

Jose really emphasized maintaining a strong relationship with his constituents back home and making sure their concerns were met at a European level. One of the reasons for this is that prior to being elected to the EP he was the mayor of his town. Because his political experience involved working directly for those people, his commitment to representing them carried over into the European Parliament. Jose also mentioned that one way he tries to connect with his constituents back home is through complete transparency in what his job entails:

I have an event I repeat every time I am back in Valencia or different places in Spain, which is 'Speak with your MEP.' So I start with my salary, I give all the people a lot of public information, and I explain which kind of work we are doing here. And I record every week a little video and I download it in the Facebook, just two or three minutes explaining what has been my work this week, and I used to work as a journalist so it's not difficult for me. I like to do the pedagogic work because most of the people they don't know what exactly we are doing here, and it's very complicated [...] They think that we are very well-

paid bureaucrats traveling in business-class every time, and this is not exactly true (Jose, Personal Communication, 2016).

Here Jose goes above and beyond simply reaching out to constituents to understand their concerns, and actually wants to gain their full and unwavering trust, as well as teach them about the policy process. He expressed in other points in the interview that his constituents tend to be cynical about the EP because they think politicians are just wealthy people who do not represent real people, which results in a low voter turnout. Jose wants to counteract this by proving that politicians can represent real people, and being an MEP is just another job. In this way, he engages with a rather caring, compassionate style of leadership by showing that he cares about real people and wants them to be involved in democracy.

Gendered Experiences in Parliament and on the Committee

One area in which Jose and Alva differed was their experiences being in the European Parliament based on their gender. For Jose, he noticed that being a man seemed to afford him with certain advantages that his female colleagues lacked. He said:

I have a special trait from my colleagues, because [...] sometimes I am the only man there. And I noticed that the older women in the committee, they treat me as an exotic element in the committee. But I have to guess that I use the male condition in the committee in a good way I think, because it's very easy for me to have different contacts in all the groups. You know, it's like you are the man in the group, you are the different one, so it's very easy for me to have contacts with the socialists, the

GUE, the liberals, the conservatives, the popular party. I have this consideration of being the only man there and because of that I try to have the most of this position and to use it for arriving to deals or to have the support of different groups. Sometimes in a diplomatic way, sometimes there is a discussion between the socialists and the popular party, for example, some matter that I can play the role of being the bridge between the two. I think it is easy for me because I am a man (Jose, Personal Communication, 2016).

The main advantage to being a man, he noted, was the ability to have relationships with more MEPs than the women. Of course, the way in which he used this advantage was rather feminist. Instead of using his privilege to gain more power (i.e. the ‘power over’ strategy), he used a ‘power to’ approach to be able to negotiate with different parties and reach compromises.

Alva, on the other hand, had a very different experience being a woman in the EP. She expressed that this experience has changed overtime, but she still feels disadvantaged as a woman. She reflected:

...Especially in the beginning I was 37 or something when I come in Parliament I think. And then I was very young, even if I was not it, and it was often like this, ‘oh, little girl, listen to this,’ and it was a lot of men over age 55 who thought they had the solution to everything in the world and still I feel that you have this [informal ways of diminishing

the way you speak and the way you act based on gender]¹, so it was a lot in the beginning, but once you have been here a couple of years and have shown what you are going for and that you accept those kinds of things, you have more respect (Alva, Personal Communication, 2016).

Here, Alva expresses experiencing general forms of sexism that occur in most jobs, but especially in fields such as politics that are usually dominated by men. Her experience is characterized by the sense that she was not taken seriously by her male colleagues and had to work twice as hard to gain respect. She went on to discuss how she attempted to do her job well despite discrimination:

...Sometimes you have to act like a man in the way you work. So sometimes I think I have to do some tricking to have the man understand. And sometimes I have to do things that if I want something, if it's a man rapporteur, and I want that he will take something in the report, I can work like it's his idea, that it was he who was thinking about it, you know what you have to do with men, so you have to be really tricky (Alva, Personal Communication, 2016).

Although Alva claims that she has to act like a man in her work, she actually describes a sort of feminist strategy in that it is a 'power to' approach. By tricking the male rapporteur into writing something down by making him think it was his idea, she is able to promote her ideas without reaping the personal benefit of recognition. In fact,

¹ Translation from her assistant

Reingold includes “let[ting] others get credit” in her list of ‘power to’ behaviors, (Reingold, 2000). This practice indicates that Alva’s motivations are not personal, but rather rooted in the collective greater good.

Whereas Alva expressed feeling like an outsider in the EP as a whole, her experience on the FEMM Committee fostered a sense of belonging. She described the committee more as a community or a family:

And in the FEMM Committee, often I feel, even if we [...] think different, we are all there because we think gender equality is important, so therefore I feel that we are sisters even if we don't have the same opinion on everything. So I felt like one of a lot of sisters who are working in different ways to have gender equality (Alva, Personal Communication, 2016).

The use of the term ‘sisters’ here signals the feminist practice of building strong relationships and cultivating a sense of community. Of course the term is in and of itself a gendered term, but it is also gendered in the way it ties back to the family which has historically been associated with women and femininity. Thus, Alva’s positive experience in the FEMM Committee can be attributed to the feminist atmosphere it promotes.

Perceptions of Gender in European Parliament

Finally, I asked the interviewees about their perceptions of gender differences in the EP, including whether they see different legislative styles between men and women, whether women have to be more masculine, and what the dominant style appears to be.

They both concurred that female MEPs tend to take on very masculine characteristics and dislike that it has to be that way. For example, Jose claimed:

And sometimes, even, women are harder and stronger than their colleagues. I guess it is a necessity to show that this idea and stereotype of women as more calm people, more friendly is not true. Perhaps because of this the most terrible discussions in the EP are between women, I think perhaps it's their will to show that they can be worse than the men, I don't know (Jose, Personal Communication, 2016).

He went on to discuss his preference for more feminine qualities and values:

Also I agree with the theory of the second feminists. The first one was supposed to get total equality between men and women. And the second was when we change society to make stereotypical feminine values like tenderness be accepted in our society. I agree that it's absolutely necessary to make this type acceptable. I think actually women are in this step of trying to show that they can be harder than men, and I think this second wave of feminism which is the idea of trying to feminize society is still far away, but I am for that. I think it is the only way to have better society (Jose, Personal Communication, 2016).

Here, Jose expressed his inclination towards radical feminism, which is meant to accept womanly qualities and aim for equity as opposed to equality. Even though he sees women in the EP taking on more masculine qualities, he wishes that the women, and presumably also the men, could be more feminine. He sees value in these stereotypical

feminine qualities like tenderness, so it is safe to say that he lies on the feminist side of the gender ideology scale.

Alva confirmed that female MEPs tend to adopt more masculine qualities as a way to be taken seriously, but that she prefers to maintain her more feminine attributes:

Yeah I see a lot of the women who are being very power-hungry and being like the men, and I'm not like that kind of person. Not at all, I think I do what I should and do the best I can, and if they don't want me, they don't want me. But I can see a lot of women who really fight. But I can also see that as a woman I have to work more than the man to show that I really can (Alva, Personal Communication, 2016).

...the women in the Parliament I feel that they are working harder and more than the men. And they do more than the men because they let their secretary to do that. They've always been like that, even in other work. So it's the same here (Alva, Personal Communication, 2016).

Here, while Alva communicated a preference to her feminine style in the EP, there was a sense that being feminine wasn't always enough for her. She argues that the only difference between men and women in the EP is that women have to work hard to really prove themselves worthy of their position. However, Alva's conception of what working harder entails may differ from other female MEPs' in that hers does not include working more like a man.

Discussion

There were five apparent themes in the interviews that suggested both the MEPs have an inclination towards feminalist legislative styles. These are collaboration, lack of hierarchy, cooperation among parties, listening to constituents, and ‘power to.’ Importantly, both interviewees expressed that their preference for feminalism was unique to the EP, and that the FEMM Committee was different than other committees.

Collaboration

The feminalist characteristic of collaboration was signaled by the phrase ‘work together.’ The phrase ‘working together,’ or ‘work together’ was said eight times between the two interviews, and referred to the MEPs working with lobby groups, with members of other parties, with their staff members, etc. These are qualities that women have been socialized to exhibit, as Stead and Elliott demonstrate: “Enacting postheroic leadership practices such as sharing power and developing environments that enable collective learning are [...] relational practices that are conflated with femininity and associated with the selflessness of mothering,” (2009, p.55).

Lack of Hierarchy

Scholars argue that women are less inclined to engage with hierarchical approaches to leadership, and that feminist leadership appears like a web as opposed to a ladder. Reingold claims, “While ‘women [committee chairs] were more likely to act as facilitator of the hearing ... [m]en used their position of power to control hearings in ways that we commonly associate with the notion of positional power and leadership,’” (2000, p.190-191). Both MEPs expressed that the Chairs of the FEMM Committee have used the feminist approach that favors participation among all members and fosters a friendly atmosphere. Both interviewees also expressed a preference to this style of leadership.

Cooperation Among Parties

Reaching across party aisles is a primary way to signal cooperative legislative styles. Both MEPs explained their willingness to cooperate with different parties, even those on the right, in order to pass legislation. As aforementioned, the multi-party system of the EP is an example of an institutional structure that allows for this sort of cooperation to occur. Whereas two-party systems are more competitive and therefore promote masculinist styles, multi-party systems require a coalition of parties in order to function. Thus, the multi-party system is not only helpful for the FEMM Committee in allowing feminist legislative styles, but for the EP as a whole.

Listening to Constituents

Scholars have argued that while female legislators are expected to listen to their constituents and act as delegates more, that does not always happen in practice, (Reingold and Cammisa, 2004). This goes back to the idea that individual

legislators do not act independently, but rather act within multiple overlapping institutions such as their party or, in the EP, their member state. They may wish to act on their constituents concerns, but are unable to because their party has a different agenda. However, regardless of legislators' *ability* to act out their constituents concerns, their *willingness* to do so reflects their gender ideology. In this case, both MEPs expressed a willingness to use their power to help their constituents, whether it is the people of their hometown, or the 500 million people of Europe. This feminist characteristic represents a sort of selflessness on the part of the MEP, suggesting that their work is not for their own benefit, but for the good of others.

'Power To'

All of these characteristics are associated with 'power to' motivations. Duerst-Lahti defines 'power to' as the belief that "power [is] a capacity that enables – power to do some desired end," (2002, p.24). With this mindset, legislators do everything in their ability to achieve some goal, whether it is to pass progressive legislation, to help constituents, or otherwise. Conversely, 'power over' motivations are more focused on the relationship between the person in power and those below, and the former having the ability to control the latter. Both MEPs expressed their 'power to' motivations, and their strategies, which focused on collaboration, cooperation, and listening to constituents, reflected that.

If we return to Figure 2, which illustrates the relationship between the individual MEP and the overlapping institutions, it becomes apparent that the popularity of feminist legislative strategies is no coincidence, but rather a product of the institution of

the FEMM Committee inside the institution of the EP. For example, the fact that the FEMM Committee is nearly 100 percent women is significant when taking into account the critical mass argument, because the committee is in fact skewed in *favor* of women, (Dahlerup, 2010). Additionally, the constitutional amendment in the Lisbon Treaty that ensures gender mainstreaming is significant in that it brings the concept of and debates surrounding gender equality to the forefront of the political agenda (Abels and Mushaben, 2012). The lack of legislative capacity is another institutional factor that shapes how it is able to function because it is treated as a secondary committee whose purpose is not fully realized within the EP. Finally, the multi-party system allows for greater cooperation across party aisles because a coalition of party support is needed to pass legislation, so the environment becomes less competitive.

With these factors as well as others that may be not as apparent, it becomes obvious that the climate of the FEMM Committee is such that it promotes feminalist legislative styles in both the female and male members. In other words, the FEMM Committee is a feminalist space within the European Parliament.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality within the European Parliament is a micro-institution that promotes feminalist legislative styles regardless of the member's gender. Through interviews with two members of the committee, one male and one female, it became apparent that both members advocated for feminalist legislative strategies, and that the FEMM Committee is unique in this function.

This is a preliminary investigation into the research question and calls for further inquiry. Perhaps a comparison between the FEMM Committee and other committees, and more interviews with male and female MEPs would add to this research. It would be especially useful to investigate the correlation between gender ideology and party membership, or if there is a difference between MEPs from Western versus Eastern countries.

Regardless of the current gender ideology makeup within the EP, it can be argued that the feminalist approach is more democratic because of the 'power to' motivation.

The feminalist legislative style advocates for a commitment to the legislative output and making a difference through policy changes as opposed to the masculinist style, which focuses on individual power and glory. For example, the web-center approach fosters a more participatory environment where all MEPs are able to speak up and make a difference.

It does look promising for the future of feminalist politics. Not only are more women entering politics in general, but scholars argue that with this, norms are changing and leadership is becoming more feminalist. Duerst-Lahti claims that, at least on a state level, “state legislators are increasingly using ‘feminized’ styles regardless of whether the legislator is male or female,” (Duerst-Lahti, 2002, p.28). Of course, more institutional changes are necessary to further advance this shift towards feminalist leadership, but the FEMM Committee is a glimpse into how larger institutions such as the European Parliament and US Congress could function if they adopt more feminalist styles.

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