



## THE ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON SEX EQUALITY

### Women MPs in the media

Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2014, Boothroyd Room, Portcullis House

**Co-Chairs:** Diane Abbott MP and Bernard Jenkin MP

**Speakers:** Mary Mcleod MP (currently chairing an APPG on Women in Parliament inquiry into improving parliament for women, Gaby Hinsliff (former political editor of the Observer), Deirdre O'Neill (Leeds University), Heather Savingy (Bournemouth University), Laura Bates (Everyday Sexism)

### Minutes

#### 1. Introduction: Bernard Jenkin MP and Diane Abbot MP (Co-Chairs):

- Men should be an integral part of equality
- Positive Action should be used to increase women's representation
- Media focuses too much on the appearance of female politicians
- We must work together to change the situation

#### 2. Mary Macleod MP:

- Media hugely impacts how we communicate and provides us with role models
- It is ok if they talk about women's shoes sometimes, but this should not outweigh serious political reporting
- MM successfully complained to the Sunday Times about a cartoon featuring a Angela Merkel breastfeeding– these may be small examples but are symbolic of society
- The APPG on Women's in Parliament's recent inquiry has called for the DCMS and the Independent Press Body to look at sexism in the media

#### 3. Gaby Hinsliff

- There have been positive changes in the last 17 years
- Men are also subject to scrutiny of their appearance
- It is becoming increasingly unacceptable in the media to use phrases like "Blair's babes"
- New media e.g. social media is an unfiltered medium causing a lot of damage

- There should be more women at the top of the press lobby – there is only one political editor in the major newspapers where there used to be four
- Political parties should be better at putting women forward for non-traditional media opportunities

**4. Deirdre O’Neill and Heather Savigny, joint authors of: *Female politicians in the British press: The exception to the ‘masculine’ norm?* [Their research found that:](#)**

- In 1992 and 2002 female politicians were over-represented in terms of media coverage, now they are now under represented
- In 1999, 20% of political quotes in the press were from women, compared with only 13% in 2012
- Female politicians are much more likely to get personal or negative coverage than their male counterparts in same party
- In the 2010 election coverage leaders’ wives got more coverage than female politicians
- Politicians are often given a script during media appearances which makes them seem less authentic
- Recommendations:
  - Must talk about it more
  - Must talk differently about women (avoid clichéd photo ops, put them forward to talk on non-traditional subjects)
  - Need longer term media monitoring
  - Need further academic research on intersectionality between race and gender and the impact coverage has on voters

**5. Laura Bates**

- Four main impacts of problematic media treatment of female politicians:
  - On the female MPs themselves
  - Political environment - it normalises sexism so sexism by other members of parliament becomes unremarkable
  - Opens the door to further online abuse
  - Impacts on voters - how female politicians are viewed has a particular influence on young women and their aspirations to enter into politics
- This is a global problem
- It is not enough to relegate this to the issue of press freedoms, we need proactive recommendations.

**Questions/Comments**

- Need a greater emphasis on *why* this is important - which is needing the best legislature possible
- The situation has improved and it’s not only just about needing the best legislature but creating an environment where women feel *entitled* to be Ministers

- Need more positive portrayals of female politicians in the media including fictional representations
- Important to understand the intersectionality of age and gender
- If we had a better balance in caring - mothers wouldn't be penalised
- LSE are documenting women's journeys in public life - their hurdles, the help, their successes
- We need to stop demanding women turn themselves into men
- We need to ask why men aren't in the room, why they aren't engaged in these issues and how we can engage them.

**The secretariat for the APPG on Sex Equality is jointly held by:**

