

Question

Analyse the public knowledge and perception of female parliamentarians, carried out by the use of questionnaires in the Grimsby, Cleethorpes and surrounding areas. Also, the portrayal of scandals, regarding male and female MPs, within the media, by comparing tabloid and broadsheet newspapers.

Introduction

The issue of female Members of Parliament is one which has sparked controversy, not only among MPs, but the general public, and media alike. Some commentators and MPs, for example, Theresa May, argue there should be more females within Parliament, while others state they should only be put forward for election if they are adequately furnished with the necessary skills.

With this in mind, the main aim of this report is to ascertain how female parliamentarians are viewed by members of the public, living in the Grimsby, Cleethorpes and surrounding areas, conducted through the use of a questionnaire. This is in the hope of discovering if female parliamentarians are viewed in a different light to their male counterparts and if they are taken as seriously. Some of the factors which will be addressed are; if gender, age, professional status and whether the interviewee voted at the last General Election, play a defining role. An interesting aspect to consider is, if there is correlation between, if the public think there should be more women MPs and if they are well represented within the media. In order for the data to be of value, it is necessary to include questions relating not only to female MPs but also males, this is so there can be a logical comparison of information. There would be no relevance asking questions regarding females, if the interviewee has no knowledge or perception of parliamentarians of either gender.

The second aspect to be addressed concerns a comparison of how male and female MPs, involved in scandals, are portrayed by the media. Are there any similarities or differences in how they are treated by tabloid and broadsheet newspapers? A related idea is how these scandals are presented within the tabloid domain, for example *The Sun* and *The Daily Mirror* and the broadsheet, *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*. Are they dealt with in the same manner or does it depend on the newspaper's stance towards the subject matter.

For this analysis to be of any relevance it will be necessary to compare cases involving both a male and a female MP. The main aim of this type of text analysis, is to see if the tones used in the articles to describe the scandals, are similar or is there a vast difference, for example, is there more factual evidence in one case, in comparison to the other. Another factor is whether female MPs are taken as seriously as men insofar as are they mocked more in newspaper articles.

When this information has been collated and analysed it will hopefully be possible to draw conclusions on all the above aims.

Methodology

Methods of collecting information

Originally it was hoped to have the questionnaire (appendix 1) designed before Christmas 2005, in order to collect responses during the first two weeks in January, 2006. However, the questionnaire took longer to design than anticipated. This period ran into the end of January and responses could not be collected until February. The weather further hindered the collection of information, due to very cold temperatures and snow.

The questionnaires were completed by random sampling, surveying every sixth person that passed, on St Peter's Avenue, Cleethorpes. This is a seaside resort, which

is fairly quiet during winter months, It was necessary to survey on four occasions rather than three as first predicted. It was noticed many of the people surveyed were over sixty and retired as many people in employment would be at work and college. This was rectified by surveying on different days and at different times in Freshney Place, Grimsby, providing a much wider range of ages and occupations.

The second half of the original question was “*Analysing media coverage of the 2005 Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat Conferences, by comparing tabloid and broadsheet newspapers.*” Problems were encountered as on attempting to collect the newspaper articles, it was found that very few existed, in *The Sun*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*. In response to this, it was necessary to act swiftly and introduce a new aspect to the research question. This was to involve collecting newspaper articles (appendix 3) via the internet, regarding the David Blunkett and Ruth Kelly scandals, from both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers. The decision was taken as it was seen as a link between the two aspects of the question.

Methods of analysing information

Once members of the public had been surveyed, it was necessary to code (appendix 2) and enter the responses onto the computer package SPSS. This enabled the information to be analysed in various ways, by creating frequency tables, finding the mean of certain results, and finally conducting cross-tabulations between the variables, for example gender and age.

A similar method was used when conducting the press analysis, whereby the tones employed within the articles were given codes (appendix 4) and entered onto the same computer package and the results analysed. It was found, that each article was written containing more than one tone and it would not be viable to code with an overall tone, instead each paragraph had to be separately coded. When analysing the information,

using cross-tabulation, it became clear there was not a way to view whether the tabloid and the broadsheet newspapers treated male and female MPs in a different way. However, by using the initial data, this became possible, although on a primitive scale.

Analysis

Questionnaires

When all the research had been collated, it was possible to break it down into various groups and analyse the data. The first area to consider was the frequency tables (appendix 5). It can be seen from these that most respondents can name their local MP, only 12.4% cannot. This was interesting to note as 62.1% of those interviewed knew if the local area has a female MP and 58.6% of the sample could name her or any other local female MPs.

When looking at how many other MPs could be named, 65.1% could name between one and five, however, 62.1% could not name a single female MP. This trend continues when analysing if there is an awareness of the work women MPs undertake, only 41.4% can name it. When asked to state what work is carried out, 33 respondents out of 69 people who could state, replied it is the same work as men. However, does this mean that when asked, could this population name what work men do?

It can be seen that 60.9% either strongly agree or agree there should be more female MPs, giving rise to the thought that women are not well represented within Parliament. 41.4% either strongly disagree or disagree that women MPs are well represented in the media, leading to an overall impression of dissatisfaction.

Looking at the figures as a whole 65.1% can name one to five MPs being involved in scandals, however, 25.4% cannot name any. When looking at how many female MPs

can be named, 67.5% cannot name one, which is a 42.1% increase from those that cannot name any. This is not necessarily a problem linked only to women MPs as the highest proportion, 28.4%, cannot name a male MP either.

The results show an overwhelming majority of interviewees, 92.9%, believe there are more male MPs than female. On a similar note 65.7% state that male MPs are either very high or high profile in comparison to women.

When analysing the mean frequency of the data (appendix 6), which is a measure of the average score, this reinforces the above results. On average interviewees can name 2.02 MPs, however, when breaking this figure down into male and female MPs, they can name 2.65 males and 0.67 females, which is less than one, which proves how low profile women are. The same can be seen when analysing MPs involved in scandals. The interviewees can name an average of 2.16 MPs, which reduces to 1.85 male MPs and decreases even further to 0.45 for females.

When examining if there should be more female MPs, average shows that the respondent agrees, and is satisfied with how females are represented in the media. Again, these figures show there are more male MPs and agree they are more high profile than females.

The next stage of the analysis is to Cross-tabulate the data, which means basically to discover if there is a relationship between two or more variables. The categories used are if the interviewee voted at the last General Election, their gender, age and occupation..

Firstly, if the interviewee voted and if there is an awareness of who the local MP is (appendix 7), by far an overwhelming majority of those interviewed could name who their MPs are, 87.6%. However, it does become clear that those who had not voted, had the largest majority who could not name their local MP, 69%, which indicates this

variable has a bearing. In comparison, when looking if gender has a bearing (appendix 8), it would seem it does not, due mainly to the fact that an almost equal number of respondents could name their local MP, male – 47.3% and female – 52.7%. In the same vein, those who voted in the election could name the most national MPs (appendix 9), 72.2% could name at least one MP. However, 50% of those who had not voted could not name even one MP, which is quite a shocking figure, on the other hand, 44.7% could name between 1-5 MPs. When looking if gender affects this, it seems there is a greater percentage of women that can name 1-5 MPs, 71.9% (appendix 10) while men can name more MPs from the categories naming larger amounts, for example 6.3% of males compared with 2.2% of females. While looking at the age criteria, it can be seen that the results are dispersed quite evenly between them, the age group which had respondents who could not name any MPs 31-40 with 24.2% compared with 9.1% of 15-20 year olds who could not name any (appendix 11). When taking into account the occupation of the respondent, those who were least likely to name any MPs were the manual workers 27.3%, while the professionals were more likely to name a larger proportion of MPs naming 25.4% (appendix 12).

When breaking down the category into males and females, of how many other MPs people can name, by far the largest number of individual responses fall into being able to name three male MPs (appendix 13), which is again in the yes the interviewee voted category, 23.8%. However, the closest figure of those who had not voted and the amount of male MPs they could name was 19 responses in being able to name zero MPs. When looking at the female aspect (appendix 14) of this category the opposite was true. Of those who answered the survey, 93.3% could not name any female MPs and two thirds of these had voted, this indicates a lack of knowledge regarding females. When breaking this down even further it would appear gender

does not seem to have a great bearing on how many male MPs can be named (appendix 15). The same also seems to be true of female MPs (appendix 16). As was the case with gender, the same situation has arisen with age (appendix 17), the results are dispersed evenly throughout the sample, however, the most popular result is zero MPs, 24.3%. Another comparison is that of occupation, which again shows the section, with the highest total, was not being able to name any male MPs, 24.3% (appendix 18). The situation looks even worse for female MPs when comparing looking if age has an impact, a combined total of 62.1% for all age ranges (appendix 19) cannot name any and this is exactly the same situation when cross-tabbing occupation and number of female MPs, 62.1% (appendix 20).

The same situation arises when looking at scandals (appendix 21, 22 and 23). The majority of those who voted could name between 1-5 scandals, 78.2%, while most of those who did not vote could not name any scandals at all, 44.2%. Moving on to male scandal, most people who did vote could name one scandal, 22.1%, which is closely followed by 21.3%, not being able to name any scandals, the figures decreasing the more MPs there are. It is the same for those who did not vote, although 50% could not name any scandals, followed by 21.1% being able to name 1 MP and decreased accordingly. Following on female scandals, by far the largest majority of people could not name one female scandal, in either those who did vote or did not vote, 64.8% and 78.9%. However, when looking at the gender of the interviewee it would seem that, again, the figures are very similar, the only obvious difference is that more females cannot name any scandals in comparison to men (appendix 24), 32.6% against 17.5%. It is the same situation when naming males that have been involved in scandals, women 37.1% and men 18.8% cannot name any at all (appendix 25). This changes when looking at how many female scandals can be named, gender appears to

have no bearing, 66.3% of men and 68.5% of women cannot name any (appendix 26). The most popular category for all age groups when linking age and scandals is the 1-5 bracket (appendix 27). However, is truer for the 41-50 with 22.7%. In comparison a total of 25.4% of those surveyed did not know any scandals. When breaking scandals down into male and female, again the highest figure is being unable to name any male MPs 28.4% (appendix 28), closely followed by one MP at 23.1%. It would seem the highest category by a large margin is all age groups not being able to name any female MPs being involved in scandals, 67.5%. The next highest category is to name one MP, which is a dramatic drop to 24.3% (appendix 29). When referring to occupation there is a turn of events, with the highest category being able to name 1-5 MPs involved in scandals, 65.1% (appendix 30), with the professional category being the highest at 23.6%. The next category, being unable to name any scandals at 25.4%. When relating purely to male MPs the highest category yet again is being unable to name any, 28.4% (appendix 31), which is closely followed by one MP, 23.1%. It can be seen the category involving the female MPs shows a very high percentage cannot name any MPs, 67.5% (appendix 32) which drops dramatically to one MP at 24.3%. Again it would seem that the professional sphere is the highest for not being able to name any scandals involving female MPs.

When looking if the interviewee knows if there are any female MPs in the local area (appendix 33), most people do know that there are some, 62.1%, however, 27.8% do not, but 10.7% of those who do not know did vote at the last election. Of those who could name local female MPs 58.6% could name 1-2 MPs, there were very few people who could name any more, 2.4% (appendix 34). Gender once again appears to have no affect as to whether the interviewee can name local female MPs (appendix 35). The same can be said for the amount of local female MPs which can be named

for example men – 61.3% and female – 56.2%, which is data taken from 1-2 MPs category and this is again the most popular (appendix 36).

The majority of respondents did not have any idea of the work carried out by women MPs 59.2%. Of those who did vote 66% did not know what work women conduct, this, therefore, implies that voting does not have an impact on this particular factor (appendix 37). Most other people stated that this is the same as men, again being inconclusive. On the issue of gender, once more this does not have any impact at all on the results as equal numbers of males and females know what work is carried out as do not (appendix 38). Linking in with this gender does not appear to play a part in the knowledge of what work is carried out by females. One point that should be highlighted is the fact that 15.7% of females and only 8.8% of males named government position as the work undertaken by women MPs (appendix 39). When looking if age and occupation has any bearing on whether people are aware of the work female MPs undertake, every age group except 41-50 has a higher percentage of those who do not know than do, 70 responses marked against 99. Again, when looking at occupation of the interviewee, it corresponds with the age group (appendix 40 and 41), with only the professional occupation showing more people do know the work undertaken, 35.7% against 18.2%.

When analysing if the public think there are more male MPs than female (appendix 42), there is a totally unequivocal answer, in reference as to whether they voted or not, 92.9% believe there are. This is the same when looking at the age and occupation categories, 92.9%, (appendix 43 and 44). To be included in this is if male MPs are more high profile than female (appendix 45) and regardless of voting credentials most people believe that males are either very high or high profile, a combined total of

65.7%. This can also be applied to age and occupation, the majority of male MPs are either very high profile or high profile, (appendix 46 and 47).

It must be noted the too young to vote and not willing to say sub-sections in the voting category were not significant enough to affect the overall results, so there was no need to mention them in the above analysis.

An interesting fact to be aware of is that more females strongly agree that there should be more female MPs, 30.3% and 13.8% while 2.5% of men strongly disagree with having more female representation (appendix 48). When analysing the age and occupation factors there is a similar amount of people who either agree there should be more female MPs 38.5% or are satisfied with the way things are 33.1% (appendix 49 and 50). In the media neither males or females strongly agree women are represented well, but 44.9% of women and 27.5% of men disagree with the statement (appendix 51). Once again it appears that the interviewees age and occupation has no bearing on whether women are well represented in the media, in both cases the majority are satisfied, 42.6% or disagree, 36.7% (appendix 52 and 53).

Newspaper Articles

For this analysis it was necessary to compare *The Sun* and *The Daily Mirror*, tabloid newspapers with *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*, broadsheet newspapers and the way they portray a male and a female MP embroiled in scandal, in order to discover any similarities and differences. This analysis has been conducted using tones, which appear in the articles. The most interesting point to note when examining the frequency tables (appendix 54) is that on the whole the tone used the most often is factual, giving rise to the impression most articles try to make the public as aware of the facts as possible. However, it would seem, that the authors of the articles try to influence through their own opinion. Another fact to point out is the newspapers

appear to make their articles believable and honest, by presenting the reader with comments by the MP involved, those who know the facts of the situation and by the Opposition in Parliament.

When looking at the mean of the statistics (appendix 55), some interesting figures come to light, the most surprising fact to learn is that mocking, insulting and scathing tones and very rarely used in the sample of articles. Once again by far fact has been used the most as this has the highest average, 6.84.

Regarding standard deviation (appendix 56), it would seem there is a lot of movement within the factual category, 5.799. This shows in the articles there is either very little factual evidence employed or there is a large amount. This is also true of opinion, however, not to the same extent, 3.789, while, scathing comments are used to approximately the same amount in the articles, 0.961.

When looking at which MP has aroused most facts being employed in articles, it is Ruth Kelly, 7.5% of David Blunkett's articles had no factual comments whatsoever (appendix 57). One of the most interesting, but maybe the most obvious point to make is the fact *The Times* did not have any articles, of the ones sampled, which did not have factual evidence used in them (appendix 58). However, a more shocking result was that *The Daily Telegraph*, took 50% of the share of having no facts in their articles, although, there were only four articles out of the 80 sampled that did not have any facts. *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* both had 20% of their articles falling into the category 8 facts, while *The Sun* and *The Daily Mirror* had their figures dispersed over a wider area. When looking at the data that has been input the figures appear to be equal between the two MPs there is 25 factual comments from *The Sun* for Ruth Kelly, there is 27 for David Blunkett (appendix 59).

It would seem that the newspapers used are opinionated or use opinion to report MPs to a similar degree, there is very little deviation (appendix 60), these results show very little difference between males and females. Again, the same can be stated for newspapers, they are all similar regarding the opinion aspect when reporting scandals (appendix 61). When looking if there is a difference in how they report between males and females, there is very little difference (appendix 59).

By far the most popular category for articles including mocking, insulting and scathing tones is one showing zero for both MPs, mocking (appendix 62) - 77.5% for Ruth Kelly and 75% for David Blunkett, insulting (appendix 64) – 77.5% Ruth Kelly and 85% David Blunkett, with a little difference for scathing showing a higher figure for David Blunkett – 90% in comparison to Ruth Kelly's 72.5% (appendix 66). In the same vein zero is also the most popular category for individual newspapers regarding the above (appendix 63, 65 and 67).

When looking at the inclusion of comment by MPs, people who are aware of the facts and by Parliamentary opposition the zero factor is always the highest, for Ruth Kelly and David Blunkett. However, excluding this there does appear to be some form of inclusion of comment, in most articles (appendix 68, 70 and 72). The zero factor yet again is the most common when looking at newspaper articles and official opinion, however, disregarding this, it appears that *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* uses the greatest amount of official opinion (appendix 71). Within this sample the largest amount of inclusion of official comment by the MPs is found in *The Sun* and the *Daily Mirror* (appendix 69). Finally, official comment by the Parliamentary opposition is seen most commonly in *The Daily Mirror*, which is 30% (appendix 73).

Conclusion

When consolidating the information that has come to light it can be seen that gender has a relatively low impact on most answers given. However, gender has much more impact on whether there are an adequate number of females in Parliament and they feel they are not satisfactorily represented in the media. Whereas a higher number of males thought there should not be more women and they are adequately represented.

In comparison to gender, age does not seem to have any great impact on the issues, what was noted was that the age group, 41-50 seemed to know slightly more than any other group. However, like all other variables, this did not affect what knowledge is known about the work carried out by females or regarding scandals, as very few people knew anything at all.

The interviewee's status did not have an impact on a grand scale, however, those in the professional category did appear to know a little more regarding females than any other group. Although there were more professionals that had been surveyed, so this may have a bearing.

Finally, those who voted at the last General Election seem to have a much better all round knowledge of MPs as a whole, and also females. The explanation for this could be the fact that because they want to vote and elect the person which will do them most good, they have to take an interest in current affairs.

Taking the figures as a whole it would seem that all categories of people, unequivocally agree that male MPs are much more high profile and there definitely are more male MPs. Very few people could name female MPs involved in scandals, this could be due to women only having just recently, in the last few decades, come to the fore in politics and therefore, not having time for a string of scandals to have taken place. However, the one that was named could have increased what was known as at

the time Ruth Kelly was involved in a scandal. What does appear to be blatantly obvious is the fact that the general public seem to know very little about who MPs, as a whole, are, what they do and what they are involved in. Therefore, it is not surprising to come to the conclusion there is very little knowledge of female MPs and people do not know enough about them.

In relation to the newspaper articles, what can be seen is; mocking, insulting and scathing language is used very rarely in all of the newspapers analysed. It is factual and comments from the MP who was involved in scandal that is most used, this is probably to gain credibility for what is being reported.

A point which does really need to be stressed is the fact that in this sample both males and females were treated the same, however, had more scandals been analysed this could have been a different matter. It would seem that both the tabloid and broadsheet newspaper treat the content in the same way, although they do have a different writing style and way of presenting the facts.

It would seem that the public have very little knowledge of female MPs and MPs as a whole and the newspapers do portray males and females in the same light, if they, have done something wrong. In the eyes of the newspapers they reported consistently.

