RESEARCH and EVALUATION

Women's local government representation in Auckland – does size matter?

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Abstract

The article examines women's local government representation following amalgamation to form a super-sized city authority, Auckland, which covers a third of New Zealand's population. Using a gender perspective, it analyses the promise implicit in amalgamation rhetoric that democratic gaps in representation, including the gender gap, would diminish. It examines the question of whether size has made a difference. Prior to local government amalgamation, women's representation had not significantly increased over a period of seven election cycles. Women's descriptive and substantive representation are examined at national and city levels and the gendered implications of local government reform are considered from the perspectives of female elected representatives at councillor and local board levels. Evidence shows that local government reform has yet to be the catalyst for improving women's descriptive and substantive representation, although there are tentative signs of entry-level improvement at community board level which raise the prospect of a pipeline effect. Interviews with elected female representatives after amalgamation show that while they do not identify themselves as speaking for women, they see themselves as women speaking for their communities and doing it better than men. The results suggest the influence of gender backlash politics and also confirm the need to think about the performance of elected women as more than 'articulated' representation.

Keywords: Amalgamation, descriptive representation, local government, substantive representation, women

Introduction

Gender analysis (Warren 2007) of local government is an evolving field of scholarship that complements the previous emphasis on women in national politics (Pini and McDonald 2011). It reveals differences between men and women in opportunities and processes, and acknowledges that gender itself is a structure embedded in society (Risman 2004). Gender analysis is a particularly relevant theoretical approach for New Zealand research given the country's status as the first nation state to grant women's suffrage in 1893, and its recent global leadership in women's elite national political representation, for a short period of time.

The paper examines gender representation in the context of Auckland's emergence as a super-sized city authority, covering a third of New Zealand's population following local government amalgamation. It locates female representation and gender equality within the context of the international human rights framework. Women's perspectives and experiences of local government representation are specifically focused on to contribute to the substantive literature on local government which has been described as *"overwhelmingly gender blind"* (Pini and McDonald 2011, p. 12).

Stevens (2007) notes that the arguments for increasing the representation of women are complex and controversial. She says they *"can broadly be categorised as stemming from considerations of justice, of symbolism and legitimacy, of the need to improve deliberation within democracy and of the need for women to act to protect their interests"* (p. 97). Despite the complexity of the debate, Saward (2008) observes that research into the under-representation of women has, for some years, been one of the most *"progressive and innovative sources of fresh thinking about political representation – what it is, where it can happen, and how we ought to study it"* (p. 97).

Scholarship has focused traditionally on whether an increase in the number of female representatives, often called descriptive representation, results in an increase in attention to women's policy concerns, referred to as substantive representation in the literature (Celis et al. 2008; Saward 2008). Research on substantive representation of women explores who represents women; and where, why and how substantive representation of women exists (Celis et al. 2008). Closely allied with the concept of substantive representation of women is the concept of a critical mass of 35% or more at which women's representation reaches a 'tipping point' (Childs and Krook 2008; Lewis and Simpson 2012), which can be traced back to work by Kanter (1977). To address the paucity of research relating to women in local government, these questions have been applied to a local context in New Zealand in this study.

The paper first examines the local government reform context. It then establishes the theoretical and normative underpinning of the research against notions of 'descriptive' and 'substantive' women's political representation. This is followed by the methodology used and the research findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data. The paper ends with concluding observations.

The findings show that local government amalgamation and size have not yet resulted in an increased number of women as elected councillors and only a tiny increase in local board representatives more recently. Those that have been elected do not necessarily see their representation as 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman 1987). The article concludes with the observation that the notion of substantive representation of women in Auckland could be re-conceptualised, as women speaking not for women, but for community, of which women are an integral part.

Local government reform

Auckland's radical local governance reforms have been described as *"enormously important, not just for Auckland but also for local government across the whole of New Zealand and will be of interest internationally as various countries grapple with the challenge of designing institutional arrangements for metropolitan governance"* (Cheyne and Hambleton 2011, p. 227). Mouat and Dodson (2013) recognise there has been modest scholarly evaluation of the distinctive Auckland Council model of governance, whether against pragmatic or more theoretically founded criteria. This is surprising, given that *"supersizing Auckland created a city-state with global ambitions"* (Mouat and Dodson 2013, p. 141) including the aspiration to be the *"world's most liveable city"* (Auckland Council 2012, p. 2).

The new metropolitan Auckland Council is a unitary authority governing one third of New Zealand's population. It was born of *"bold ambition and complex legacy"* (Mouat and Dodson 2013, p. 145). The reforms represent a significant structural change, driven by the growing dissatisfaction within government and political circles with the performance of the Auckland metropolitan area, the perceived lack of effective regional leadership, and concern that the Auckland economy was under-performing (Royal Commission on Auckland Governance 2007). Local government expert Mike Reid (2013, p. 145) states: *"The councils had a reputation (not necessarily deserved) for parochialism, and the government had found it increasingly difficult to work with a region without a single voice."*

The Royal Commission on Auckland that preceded the reorganisation prompted over 3,500 written and 550 oral submissions, with the vast majority proposing some form of change (Salmon et al. 2009). The suggestions were wide-ranging, and related to the number and sizes of councils, mayoral powers, representation and participation arrangements, council administration, urban design, social and environmental responsibilities, and the role of council entities (Salmon et al. 2009). The issues of Maori and ethnic diversity representation on council were raised in submissions made about municipal representation to the Royal Commission; however there was no reference to gender or women's representation (Salmon et al. 2009).

The eight Auckland local authorities – comprising one regional council and seven territorial authorities which encompassed 30 community boards, but these had little mandate – were dis-established and a 'supercity' formed with strengthened local governance bodies. The Local Government Act (Auckland

Council) 2009, Section 14, prescribes a two-tier shared governance model comprising the governing body and 21 local boards, and allocates responsibilities between the levels of local government. Local boards are responsible for 'local place-making'; determining 'local' wishes and priorities; adopting a local board plan following a triennial election; and developing and delivering a local board agreement to the governing body.

This paper queries whether amalgamation has influenced descriptive and/or substantive representation of women and it explores the perspectives of women elected to the 'supercity'. The role of elected women is potentially instructive given the emphasis in the reform process on consultation and engagement with, and for, communities and their well-being (McKinley 2011). The study examines quantitative data that locates women's descriptive representation in local government nationally and then in the Auckland area, following amalgamation. The perceptions and experiences of Auckland female elected representatives drawn from qualitative interviews complement the quantitative data.

Normative and theoretical frameworks

The paper uses the concept of equality, which is at the heart of the human rights framework, as its normative framework. Gender equality is referred to in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and in the ensuing international United Nations human rights treaties which emphasise women's political representation and involvement in decision-making at all levels. Gender equality links to conceptions of descriptive and substantive representation to provide a theoretical underpinning for this article.

Explicit and detailed recognition of the concept of gender equality forms the basis of the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (United Nations General Assembly 1979). Article 7 of CEDAW strongly emphasises the principle of equal opportunities in public life:

> *States should take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right to… be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies… and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government.*

Women's political representation has been regarded as a consistent and continuing indicator of gender equality. New Zealand has reported seven times to the United Nations CEDAW Committee on the progress it is making to improve women's human rights and gender equality (McGregor et al. 2015). Political representation and women's participation in decision-making has been a traditional area of concern for the CEDAW Committee. For example, in 2006-7 New Zealand reported in its sixth report on a cohort of senior elite women in powerful national political positions, comprising Prime Minister the Hon. Helen Clark; Governor General Dame Silvia Cartwright; Attorney General the Hon. Margaret Wilson and Chief Justice Dame Sian Elias. The Committee responded with:

> *While welcoming the recent ascension of women to the highest constitutional positions in New Zealand, the Committee is concerned that the number of women in local government*

> *and political decision-making positions is actually declining, and that women remain under-represented in local government…* (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 2007, para 30)

The Committee requested that New Zealand take concrete action and establish goals and time frames to increase the number of women in decision-making positions at the local level (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 2007, para 31). This has still to be implemented and does not feature as a current government priority.

Women's early representation in municipal politics is part of New Zealand's well-nourished self- regard as a gender equality leader, along with the fact it was the first nation state to grant women's suffrage. In 1893, Elizabeth Yates, a strong supporter of women's suffrage, defeated a male draper to become mayor of the Borough of Onehunga and the first woman mayor in the British Empire. Yates received congratulations from Queen Victoria as well as Premier Richard Seddon and her election prompted comment throughout the world (Mogford 2012).

These historic 'firsts' over 122 years ago have not translated, however, into a continuing pattern of higher female representation in elective political institutions nationally or locally. The multiplicity of changes to electoral systems, to the structure of local government and to underpinning legislation relating to municipal governance, have not significantly altered women's dramatic under-representation in local government. Nor has New Zealand been immune from the backlash against feminism experienced by many liberal democracies in the past decade (Grey 2008). A distinctive feature of backlash politics was explicit negativity about the number of women in high political and constitutional positions with the media using the metaphor of 'nanny state' (Davison 2013) to symbolise a female-led country. The backlash has also influenced the way some young women in New Zealand politics identify with feminist issues, including some young women not using the word 'feminist' (Olds 2015). In the context of women in national politics, Curtin (2008) identifies that when there is a 'silence' around women's issues with a more general constituency interest being championed instead, this could be masking a feminist representative claim (Saward 2008) and responding to a backlash against *"a broader feminist mafia"* (Curtin 2008, p. 501).

Gender equality included in the international treaties and United Nations recommendations to New Zealand, therefore, provides a conceptual underpinning and research rationale for research concerned with the under-representation of women in local politics in a period of change and reform. International and domestic scholarship on the concepts of descriptive and substantive representation and the barriers to, and opportunities for, women's local government representation intersect with notions of gender equality.

Electoral representation was first described as descriptive or substantive representation by Hanna Pitkin (1967). Descriptive representation depends on an individual's characteristics, *"on what he (she) is or is*

like, on being something rather than doing something" (Pitkin 1967, p. 61); the representative does not act for others, she/he stands for them. Descriptive representation suggests that local government is unrepresentative because it tends to be drawn from elites. Stevens (2007, p. 68) states, *"What representatives are seen as is crucial, because only those who actually belong to the groups they represent can truly know what their key interests are and be trusted to pursue them."* Women's descriptive representation is associated with the concept of critical mass (Celis et al. 2008; Lewis and Simpson 2012; Kanter 1977), which suggests that there needs to be a certain proportion of women in decision-making before it ceases to be tokenistic. As their ratio increases – Kanter suggested 35% (a ratio of 65:35) – women can form coalitions, support each other and begin to influence the wider group (Celis et al. 2008; Stichman et al. 2010; Anderson 2012). At this level, women were seen as differentiated from each other rather than members of a stereotypical group. Perhaps in response to this theory, quotas, whether legislative or set by political parties, have recently featured in the literature as a short-term affirmative action measure aimed at ensuring a critical mass (Dahlerup 2006).

Women's representation is often seen in the context, too, of diversity as well as equality. Minta (2012) argued for collaboration between groups advocating for the interests of women and minorities on the grounds of diversity of demands. Both social justice and business case arguments have also been used. Smith-Ruig et al. (2015) describe the social justice approach as being grounded in the principles of equity and difference; and the business case as contributing to organisational performance by including wider perspectives. Biles and Tolley (2004) argued for numerical representation based on values, efficacy and self-interest, and systemic legitimacy. Representative decision-making boards were acknowledged to be more efficient and they provided for a range of approaches and perspectives to naturally enter deliberations.

The concept of substantive representation, on the other hand, emphasises action rather than characteristics. Pitkin (1967, p. 144) emphasised that it *"relates to representatives acting to ensure that the key interests of any individual or group find a voice"*. What representatives do is what matters, more than who they are. As Norris (2007, p. 179) states:

> *Feminist theories suggest that the presence of women leaders facilitates the articulation of different perspectives on political issues where elected representatives are not just 'standing as' women but also 'acting for' women as a group.*

Understanding the low levels of women's participation in politics requires a consideration of research exploring a multitude of barriers and constraints common across western liberal democracies such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, elsewhere in Western and Northern Europe, , Australia (Pini and McDonald 2011; Conroy 2011) and New Zealand (Drage and Tremaine 2011). Stevens (2007, p. 65) argues that *"with rather few exceptions, women are disproportionately under-represented in institutions of representative democracy"*. There is a parallel aspirational theme in the literature relating to the potential and promise of women's elected representation. For example, a Finnish study suggests

that women's presence had improved decision-making practices in several ways: greater transparency and better communications along with increased attention to policy and administration (Holli 2011). Henig and Henig (2001) suggest that in many countries women's increased local body representation has been accompanied by an increased quality and quantity of childcare facilities offered by local councils and that equal opportunities policies have been more vigorously pursued. However, these scholars also suggest more scholarship is needed on whether women make a difference.

Internationally, sexism and discrimination are prevalent in local government and this has been described as both a *"cause and effect of the lack of women councillors"* (Fawcett Society 2014). Sexism and discrimination have been noted as emerging through the allocation of women to committees dealing stereotypically with 'feminine' concerns, such as education, social services and welfare committees (Henig and Henig 2001). In the New Zealand context, sexism has been a historical feature from the time of the first female mayor. The election of Elizabeth Yates provoked considerable male backlash, with four councillors and the town clerk resigning immediately. Three other councillors then mounted an orchestrated campaign leading to her eventual first-term defeat (Mogford 2012).

As late as the 1970s in New Zealand, *"the archetypal councillor was middle-aged, middle-class and male, with the dominant idea being that women's natural province was the domestic sphere, while men alone were suited to the hurly-burly of politics and public life"* (Drage and Tremaine 2011, p. 184). Women representatives have been marginalised, ignored and discredited by the exclusionary practices of their male colleagues. Tremaine (2000) and Conroy (2011) found the 'old boys' network' to be a significant obstacle faced by women local government representatives in New Zealand and Australia. Sector reforms, such as newly organised districts and legislation requiring greater accountability and long-term planning*, "may have damaged the all-pervading nature of the old boys' network and male cronyism. Nevertheless, the old boys' network has an amazing ability to survive"* (Tremaine 2000).

Reconciliation of family duties with work and political activity has presented a significant challenge for women representatives (Pini and McDonald 2011; Conroy 2011; Henig and Henig 2001; Stevens 2007). The claim that local government is more family-friendly than national politics because of a proximity between home and workplace and greater flexibility for women to fulfil their domestic responsibilities is highly contested (Drage and Tremaine 2011; Conroy 2011; Pini and McDonald 2011; Pini and McDonald 2004). In the United States, women were seven times more likely than men to be responsible for household tasks, childcare and eldercare (Stevens 2007). Australian women elected members were found to face a disproportionate burden of family responsibilities and to find the non-standard work hours difficult to accommodate without family support (Conroy 2011).

The literature on this topic highlighted gender differences in the organisation of political life. Men 'compartmentalised' their paid employment and domestic duties, while women balanced their roles with little separation between them, taking the major responsibility in domestic tasks (Ryan et al. 2005).

Community leadership has been the route through which many New Zealand women have been drawn into standing for council (Drage and Tremaine 2011). While historically women have played an important role in voluntary welfare organisations, this experience has not always been recognised as relevant to local government. Addressing the lack of women role models was recognised as crucial to encourage more women to participate (Conroy 2011).

A number of strategies enhancing the opportunities for women's representation at the national government level are evident in the literature, but are not necessarily observed in local government. These include quotas for women, women's political networks, women's ministries or other similar state mechanisms and formal training for women candidates (Henig and Henig 2001; Pini and McDonald 2011; Matland 2004, 1996). The percentage of women on city councils was observed to be a significant and positive predictor of the descriptive representation of women mayors in subsequent years, suggesting a pipeline effect.

Contrary to research on multi-member national electoral systems (Matland 2004, 1996), women's representation has not traditionally increased with local body amalgamation (Pini and McDonald 2011), and democratic 'gaps' arising from enlarged ward boundaries have been identified (Mouat and Dodson 2013). Following the 2007 amalgamations in Queensland, Australia, local councils were reduced from 157 to 73 (Grant et al. 2015, p. 489). Fewer councils means fewer councillors, reducing women's chances of electoral success. According to Conroy (2011) fewer women stood for amalgamated councils, likely in part due to the electorate size, which increased the campaign cost of a local election by at least ten times. Researchers have questioned women's motivation to stand in New Zealand and Australia as the size and complexity of municipalities increases (Drage and Tremaine 2011).

Methodology

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to gather data. The first involved a quantitative analysis of local government nationally and in relation to Auckland. Election statistics compiled by Local Government New Zealand and the Department of Internal Affairs were complemented by new data compiled from Auckland Council candidate booklets and websites. The information was analysed to determine the descriptive representation of women in New Zealand and Auckland.

The second involved thematic content analysis of 14 semi-structured interviews with women elected either as city councillors or local board chairs in the 2010 (first) and 2013 (second) amalgamated Auckland Council elections. Of the 14 women, interviewed, ten were re-elected to Auckland Council in the 2013 elections. One interviewee was a newly elected candidate in 2013, and three others lost their seats in the 2013 elections. Interview questions focused on the participants' views of women's representation, their experiences and perceptions of being a woman at the council table, and the obstacles or difficulties they encountered as candidates or elected representatives in local government.

The study focused solely on women to address the concern that the *"dearth of research on the specific subject of women's representation in local government is rarely acknowledged"* (Pini and McDonald, 2011, p. 1).

The interviews were audio-taped with participant consent, and transcribed. A summary document was sent to participants to verify the accuracy of the data prior to analysis and to enhance credibility (Cresswell and Plano Clark 2011). Two levels of analysis were carried out. The semi-structured interview questions guided a descriptive content analysis. Themes were identified within the transcripts (Krippendorf 2004). Codes were developed to create categories of shared meaning from the data using a conventional content analysis method (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). Second, the gender equality framework referred to earlier was referenced to interpret the women's perspectives.

Quantitative data on the status of women's descriptive representation in New Zealand's local government representation generally, and Auckland's amalgamation specifically, can usefully be used to examine gender in local politics.

Women's representation at the national level

New Zealand local government comprises 78 territorial authorities: 11 regional councils, 12 city councils (which are largely urban), 54 district councils and Auckland Council (created from an amalgamation of eight former councils on 1 November 2010). New Zealand has 116 regional councillors, 11 regional chairs, 707 territorial authority councillors, 149 Auckland local board members and 67 mayors.

While the sector has undergone significant reforms in the past 25 years, nationally the proportion of women elected to local government in New Zealand has remained static at around 30%, a figure that has moved only a few percentage points, either up or down, over the past seven election cycles (Department of Internal Affairs 2013). The percentage of female mayors across New Zealand was over 30% (31%) for the first time in 2013, but only 17% of district council mayors were women. Women comprised 33% of elected city councillors, down from 39% in 2001, four election cycles ago, and there was also slight movement downwards in the percentage of women elected as regional councillors, at 21% in 2013 compared with 27% in 2007. Community board[1] representation by women was traditionally higher, having moved past the 30% threshold in 1992. It was at its highest level (37%) in

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[1] Community boards, created by the local government reforms in 1989, carry out functions and exercise those powers delegated to them by their councils, including: acting as an advocate for their community interests; maintaining an overview of services provided by their council within the community; and communicating with community organisations and special interest groups. There are 110 community boards throughout New Zealand, each with between four and 12 members (Local Government New Zealand 2017. Community boards. Retrieved 23 May 2017 from http://www.lgnz.co.nz/nzs-local-government/community-boards/).

the 2013 election. Community boards tend to have greater proportions of women standing compared to other municipal positions.

*Table 1: The proportion of women elected to New Zealand local government at the 2013 local elections*

2013		
Local government type	**Women candidates**	**Women elected**
Regional councils	22%	21%
District councils	29%	30%
District mayors	20%	17%
City councils	29%	33%
City mayors	15%	31%
Community boards	36%	37%

Source: Department of Internal Affairs (2013). Local authority election statistics 2013

It is a feature of women's local government representation in New Zealand that generally, female candidates are more successful at being elected, with a greater proportion of women who stand being elected than of men who stand. So while female city mayoral candidates dropped to 15% in the 2013 elections, a much higher percentage – 31% – were elected. The pattern of women's success proportionate to candidature is evident in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Pattern of women's representation in New Zealand since 1989
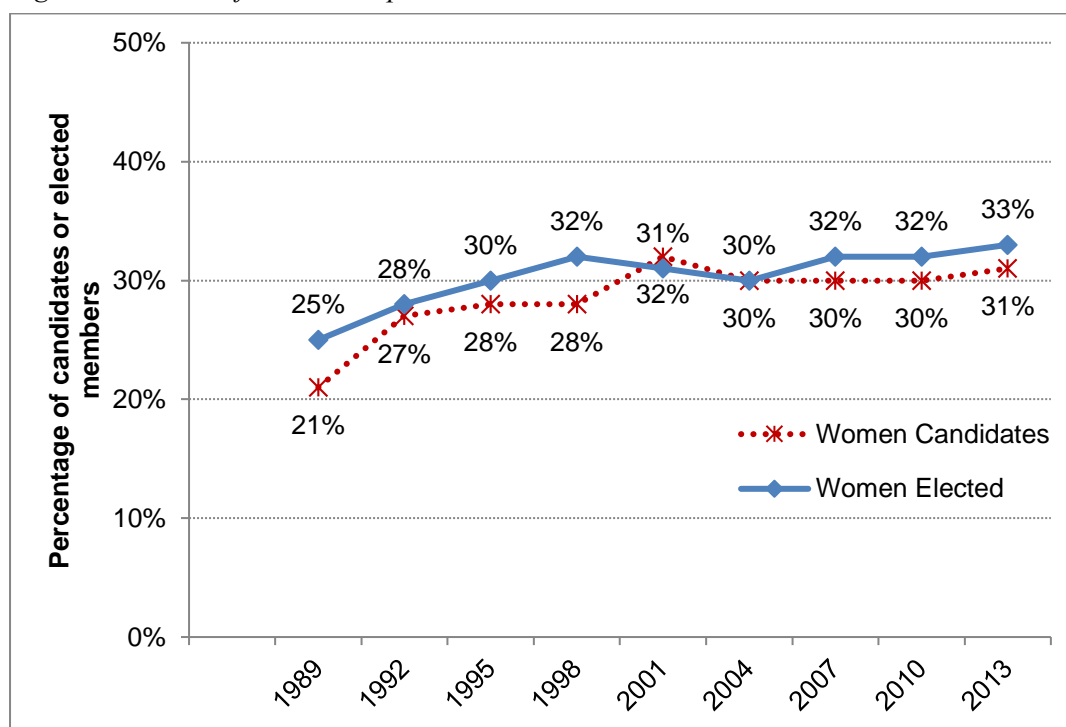
Source: Department of Internal Affairs (2013). Local authority election statistics 2013

While the Auckland Council reforms were significant, gender analysis of demographic representation of two cycles of elections (2010 and 2013) shows a relatively consistent picture, and one that is not necessarily different from the rest of New Zealand's metropolitan cities, which are not super-sized in

structure. The figures in Table 2 show there is little change in the proportion of women elected at the level of mayor and councillors before and after reforms, and only a slight improvement at local board level since the reforms.

Table 2: Women's local government representation in Auckland before and after amalgamation

Representative	Auckland area Territorial Authorities 2007 (before amalgamation)	Auckland Council 2010 (after amalgamation)	Auckland Council 2013 (after amalgamation)
	% of women elected	% of women elected	% of women elected
Mayor	12.5%	0%	0%
Council	37%	40%	35%
Local boards	38%	39%	43%

Source: Data compiled from Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) and Auckland Council websites, and candidate booklets
Note: After amalgamation there was just one mayoral position, won by the same male candidate both elections.

While research on Australian local government reform shows that amalgamation had negatively impacted on women's involvement in local government (Conroy 2011; Grant et al. 2015; Smith-Ruig et al. 2015), it may be too early to come to a similar conclusion in New Zealand. It is difficult to disentangle the effects of amalgamation from the general picture of poor women's representation in the rest of local government. However, a glimmer of hope from the quantitative data for Auckland Council is the small improvement in women's local board representation, at 43%, up from 39% after the first election after amalgamation in 2010, and 38% in the last election before amalgamation (see Table 2). Further, in 2013 12 of the 21 local boards had women chairs, and 11 had female deputy chairs. At one level the increasing women's representation at the community level confounds earlier research by Drage and Tremaine (2011) that the new model may in fact erode the concept of community and reduce diversity as local government becomes more 'professional'. If female local board representation continues to improve this will be a countervailing trend, but a minimum of one more cycle of future election data is required for analysis. Whether a pipeline effect will be seen in subsequent elections remains unknown.

Women's perspectives of female representation in Auckland Council

This section draws on the views of the 14 Auckland elected women interviewees about women's local representation, their experiences and perceptions of being a woman at the council table, and the obstacles or difficulties encountered as candidates or elected representatives in local government. The interviewees have been identified in the text by number and status. The idea that descriptive representation has been disappointing because there is not enough of it fits the New Zealand experience, as it does other similar developed countries.

The question: 'Are there enough women in local government?' was answered negatively by all the female elected representatives. The quote below is representative:

> *No, it is still under 50%. I heard the Mayor mention that 'we've pretty much got balance now'. We haven't got balance in the governing body at all. It is very strongly dominated by men and there are a small number of women who are powerful. Most of the powerful committees are chaired by men* (1, female councillor).

This view is supported by the current statistics, showing that while women comprise 43% of local board members, they are only 35% of the governing body.

A revealing contribution from a female local body politician concerned her quest to find suitable women to stand in the local government elections. The idea that women are more cautious about committing to politics and only do so when there is a perfect alignment of work with family and life-course elements, including partner support, was identified by her as a difference between men and women. She asked 13 women before the 2011 election to run on the ticket, all of them good candidates. The ticket ended up with herself and five men. She had previously thought the problem of poor women's representation lay in political parties or coalitions not selecting enough women at the local level. However, she had changed her view:

> *But actually what I discovered for myself, having asked 13 women to run, was that it was primarily an attitude of 'that wouldn't work with my life, I don't see how I can make that work', whereas the men either put themselves forward or when we asked, one pretty well straight away said, 'Yes, I'll have to have a little think about it but I think so.' He didn't even have to check with his partner or think about his other commitments. The women had to feel a confidence that it would work before they agreed, and feel secure if they committed to it that things would fall into place or they'd have the support to make it work. I'm really aware that for a lot of men it is the women in their lives that do make it work* (2, female local board chair).

Several women were explicit about the long-hours culture of local government and the public nature of its representation. One said:

> *The thing that keeps coming up for women is that the number of hours that we have to put in are much, much larger than anyone ever imagined. I was a bit stunned when my partner said to me, 'Oh, you do about 50 or 60 hours a week.' A lot of it is in the evenings and the weekends because we're interacting with the community and that's when they're available. For women with family responsibilities that's a huge ask. Whether we like it or not there are still those entrenched attitudes that it is okay for guys to be away from home for long hours but not for women* (3, female councillor).

The so-called robust nature of politics was described by several interviewees as a disincentive to female participation. One woman said:

> *It's a life not a job… after a recent medical operation I came home and I had just started walking down to the letter box. I was in my dressing gown and had my bed hair on. Two people were walking past with their dog and recognised me and the husband launched into what was happening at the waterfront marina* (4, female councillor).

Another said:

> *Politics is a very hard job. It is a 24/7… we do a lot of stuff at the weekend, night and during the day. The governing body is a little easier with set times for meetings. Local board representation is a lot harder because you have to undertake more community interaction. Having the weekend free doesn't work in this game* (5, female councillor).

The idea of resilience required for local politics because of its public nature was also noted:

> *You do have to be a bit of a show pony. You have to be open to the public eye. You have to be open to public criticism of a fairly ruthless sort once you put your hand up for some sort of political role. You have to be really tough and not a lot of women want to do that* (6, long-standing female councillor).

While there was near universal agreement among female 'supercity' politicians about poor descriptive representation, they were unanimously of the view that they were not speaking for women and that there was no caucusing of women for women influencing policy development. One said: *"I haven't been aware of any gender affiliations at all, to be honest"* (7, female councillor), while another said: *"Women did not caucus together… because there is politics involved and that divides us"* (8, female councillor). A senior female politician said, *"Caucus activity was based on politics, philosophy, issues and ideology and not gender"* (6).

One of the most experienced female politicians said in the time she had been in local government, over a decade, some women did take up social issues, but on the whole they did not: *"... talking about women's needs and transport, or public safety or housing, or women's needs in parks, just sort of doesn't come up. The gender perspective is absent"* (9, female councillor).

Only one younger female local board chair felt that women speaking for women about women's issues was desirable in the future as the new structure and processes were consolidated. She said:

> *I think there would be some value in actually getting together an explicit group of women who are feminist, who identify as feminist. So while we do tend to support each other quite a lot in the Chair's Forum, some believe [that] if they have made it, any woman can …* (2, female local board chair).

She also explicitly identified personal support from feminist friends for her public, political role:

> *I have a little group of friends who are almost entirely women, who are all feminist allies on Facebook that I have in a little tight confidential setting, and when I need some support or assistance I will write something and they will give it back to me* (2, female local board chair).

At one level, the absence of women speaking for women is an unambiguous and disappointing finding from the qualitative data. Elected females say they are not collectively working as women for women, the traditional conception of substantive representation. Nor do they necessarily see women working together for women as a benefit for women or indeed as the role of an elected female representative in local government. The notion that 'this is politics' and therefore it should be accepted as somehow genderless was prevalent.

However, the elected women also expressed repeatedly that it was their location and place in the community that defined the basis of their representation. Their self-understanding was of a closeness to community, an intuitive expression of the concept of subsidiarity that appeared to legitimise their representation. For example:

> *Maybe I am prejudiced but I do think women have a slightly better ability to have a broader perspective of things than men. It is in my view looking around the table at times that we have perhaps a closer affinity and understanding of communities than men do. Men probably have other merits…* (10, female councillor).

> *Women are more inclined to put more effort into interacting with the community… the community engagement is worth more than all of the other relationships…* (11, female councillor).

So while policy issues were not identified nor articulated by elected women as women's issues, this does not necessarily mean, as Curtin (2008) notes, that they are not 'acting for' women.

A study of female mayors in New Zealand (Tremaine 2000), revealed that women leaders believed they approached leadership differently from their male counterparts, with focus being on community not status. Webster's study (2009) highlighted three Māori (Indigenous) women participants who expressed a consciousness of the cultural difference they brought to the table, rather than a gender difference. They were there for their communities and expressed value in being 'in touch with their communities and knowing their values'. A later study, Tester (2015), suggested that the outcome orientation of women councillors she interviewed was that of community well-being and of being results-focused.

In this study, female councillors identified strongly with closeness to the community and conciliatory styles in meetings. Local government has a central impact on most women's lives and Auckland Council provides daily services for women as individuals, as mothers and in communities. The concept of substantive representation can be narrowly conceived as women speaking for women on women-related issues. But this may obscure and perhaps devalue the idea that women see themselves not as women apart but as women within, speaking for the community of which they are an integral part as women. Curtin (2008) states that we need to think about performance of elected women as more than 'articulated' representation.

It can be argued that the self-understanding of elected women spoken to in this research is of themselves as women of the community speaking for their communities. They also strongly suggested differences between their styles of working and those of men, gendered differences which they regarded as positive not negative attributes. In other words, female councillors and local board chairs not only 'do' local government differently, they also believe they do it better. The interviewees ascribed to themselves distinctive traits such as their attraction to consultation and consensus rather than to autonomous and authoritative decision-making styles.

One described it as the 'play centre' style of chairing and leading:

> *I just think women make very good local government people full stop. I think women are more intuitive than men. We are not as linear. I think we are able to pick up the vibes around the council table far more. I can be watching and sensing that some members aren't happy and that I should go right through the speaking order. We chair like we parent…*

> *I think women do local government well because we leave most of our ego and pre-conceived ideas at the door. We bring to the table a bit of focus on the job at hand and mostly a willingness to get around the table and get things done. It's kind of a play centre model… and mostly that's how women do local government* (12, female councillor).

This sense of difference mirrors the findings of Ryan et al. (2005) and confirms Tester's (2015) findings that the female councillors in her New Zealand study had different orientations to male councillors. Their people orientation saw women councillors as engaging, inclusive, caring, relational, accessible, connected, approachable and empathetic. Their preferred approach was one of co-operation and their role orientation was that of a collaborator and facilitator.

For example, one interviewee described her selection as board chair in exactly the collaborator role. She said it was:

> *… a negative as well as a positive vote. The male members exhibited a sense of entitlement to be the chair and there were sufficient numbers on the board who asked me to do it in preference because they thought I would provide a sort of conciliatory and collaborative approach. It was quite controversial and difficult at the time, to the point of people crying in shame when I was elected…* (13, female local board chair).

Another female local board chair said:

> *I think I'm a good chair in that I'm a team player and I do what chairs are supposed to do which is to try and get input from everybody… at times you've got to crack the whip and say 'why are we waiting?'… then I usually ring others and say 'well, this is what I was thinking of doing' and they usually say 'absolutely fine, go for it'* (14, female local board chair).

A different style of working was identified by an experienced female councillor:

> *I know this is a very generalised statement but women are more conciliatory than men, who often have very strong views and are strong in the way they present them; whereas women will try to look across a sector of stakeholders* (6, female councillor).

Concluding observations

New Zealand's rhetorical commitment to gender equality expressed in its reporting to international human rights treaty bodies is not matched by the reality of progressive improvement in women's elected representation in local government.

A gender gap is evident from national data and Auckland Council statistics, indicating that size has not weakened the pervasive patterns of systemic gendered relations. Women's descriptive and substantive representation as traditionally defined are relatively static as a proportion. However, it can be argued

that there is a strong element of self-understanding by women of community representation. While the participants in this study did not identify themselves as speaking for women, they certainly identified themselves as speaking for community. This supports the call by Mackay (2008) for a 'thick' conception of substantive representation which is contextualised, inter-related and more holistic than one with a narrow focus on whether or not elected females act for women.

A revealing contribution from a female local body politician concerned her quest to find suitable women to stand in the local government elections. The long-hours culture emphasised by Drage and Tremaine (2011) was evident in the experiences of the women in this study. There was a sense that women are more cautious about committing to politics and only do so when there is a perfect alignment of work and family and life-course elements and this was identified as a male–female difference. It appears that this constellation of life-course elements may also require partner approval or at least acquiescence. Further research is warranted to examine whether this may be different for men, with a greater level of family support for male decision-making. Pini and McDonald (2011) also suggest that men and masculinities require more investigation in scholarship on gender in local government.

A cautiously optimistic view suggests that while the idea of women's local representation is open to contest, and while sexism and discrimination are still evident on a day-to-day basis, there may be a lessening of male dominance in Auckland governance. Marginalisation and discrediting of women, the exclusionary practices of the old boys' network (Conroy 2011; Tremaine 2000) and the allocation of women to stereotypically 'women's issues' portfolios (Henig and Henig 2001) may be waning, albeit more as a result of general economic and social changes at a societal level influencing local government organisations, than planned, positive cultural change.

Why women's representation appears to have stagnated is an intriguing question. Unlike the Scandinavian experience (Matland 2004) where women's representation at the national level was significantly influenced by party policies and the introduction of women's quotas, local government in New Zealand has traditionally been largely independent of national party politics. For example, a former Labour Party leader and sitting Mt Roskill Member of Parliament, Phil Goff, who announced his candidature for Auckland Council's mayoralty in 2015, was at pains to emphasise his independent, non-party status (Slade 2015). Nor does New Zealand have any affection for quotas in public debate. The New Zealand Human Rights Commission (2012, p. 7) noted that quotas cut across one of the nation's most cherished myths, *"that we are a country where a 'fair go' rules, both in aspiration and in practice"*.

The research has revealed an absence of institutional strategies to address democratic gaps within both the Auckland Council and more widely across local government in New Zealand. This leaves the way open for a coordinated approach by the sector organisation, Local Government New Zealand, to address the barriers to women's participation in local governance. How women's representation in local

government is facilitated, as well as how the constraints might be addressed, are critical questions. A national approach led by the sector group could first promote positive cultural reflections of the importance of local government in democratic life. Local Government New Zealand could then address the need for training of men and women to promote equality and to build women's skills in representation, political speaking, local campaign funding, and developing strategic alliances.

Given the wariness of New Zealand women in identifying as feminists for fear of backlash, it would be useful for future research to explore why and how female elected representatives have sublimated self-identification as women in concepts like subsidiarity and community instead of gender. Curtin (2008) suggests that for women in political leadership this 'masking' may be a necessity to advance women's substantive representation. Additionally, the expression of women's difference and even superiority inherent in their descriptions of approaches to working as elected representatives, and their specific areas of policy interest, would be complementary and fertile areas of future research. The importance of partner approval or at least acquiescence before standing for election, and the degree of preparedness for office could usefully form the basis of future comparative research between male and female candidates for office, to identify gender similarities and differences. Additional inquiry into whether a growing role for party politics in local government will galvanise greater interest in increasing the diversity of candidates in Auckland would also be potentially instructive. While gender is the focus of this research, it is only one marker of diversity of representation and the low number of Māori is of continuing concern (Sullivan 2003). Gender equality is, though, the specific focus of this study and is both significant and symbolically powerful in the first nation state to give women the vote. It remains elusive in local government representation.

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