Articulations of Feminine Voices in Ghana's Parliament: A Study of the Hansard from 2010-2011

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Abstract

Women have both a right and an obligation to active participation in political deliberation. Yet, their participation in formal political processes, where decisions regarding the use of societal resources generated by both men and women are made, remains insignificant. Now researchers are looking beyond the number of women in parliament to focus on what they can do in terms of their contributions. This study, therefore investigates female parliamentarians' contributions during parliamentary proceedings, evaluates how gendered these issues were. To accomplish this task, a textual analysis of the Hansard was done using critical discourse analysis and theory of gender and power. The analysis revealed that although female MPs contribute to a range of issues, they are ardent promoters of pro-

women legislations such as issues on women, children and youth, health and education. Again, the study found out that a greater percentage of issues women contribute to are gendered and so reinforces the stereotypical roles given to women by society.

Key Words: hansard, Ghana, linguistic, parliament, text, women

Introduction

According to reports from the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) cited in Khan (2006), the subject of women's participation in politics has gained attention globally since the Beijing Conference on women in the 1990s. This conference and the preceding ones, including "the First Conference on Women in Mexico" in 1975, "the Second World Conference on Women in Denmark" in 1980 and "the World Summit for Social Development in Denmark" in 1995, among others brought to bear the issue of gender equality and rights. For instance, the UN has estimated that, based on the current rate of change, women would have to wait until the year 2490 to reach equal representation with men in the higher echelons of power (Seager,1997). The World Bank (2005) also indicated that gender inequality puts women at a disadvantage throughout their lives and stifles the development prospects of their societies. The under-representation of women in almost every policy making aspect of life is a global issue. Nowhere in the world are women represented in government in proportion to women population (Halder, 2004). The Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) report in 2008 revealed that today, women's participation and contribution are deemed necessary in modern democracy because adequate representation is regarded as essential for democratic government.

Background of the Study

According to Sossou (2011), the rate of women's advancement into decision-making positions has been very slow. In Africa, the situation as portrayed by Karam & Lovenduski (2005) on women's participation is worse and has remained bleak for more than a decade. Compared to economic opportunities, education and legal rights, Beaman, Duflo, Pande & Topalova (2006) citing Norris (1996) pointed out that political representation is the area in which the gap between men and women has narrowed the least between 1995 and 2000.

Figures in the 2010 national census of Ghana show that there are 12,633,978 females as against 12,024,845 males, implying that women constitute 51.2% and men 48.8% (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). From this figure, it can be deduced that in Ghana, women comprise more than half of the total population. Yet, according to Gyimah & Thompson (2008) the status of women is much lower than that of men in Ghana's political arena.

Figure 1: Percentage of women parliamentarians in Ghana from 1960-2012
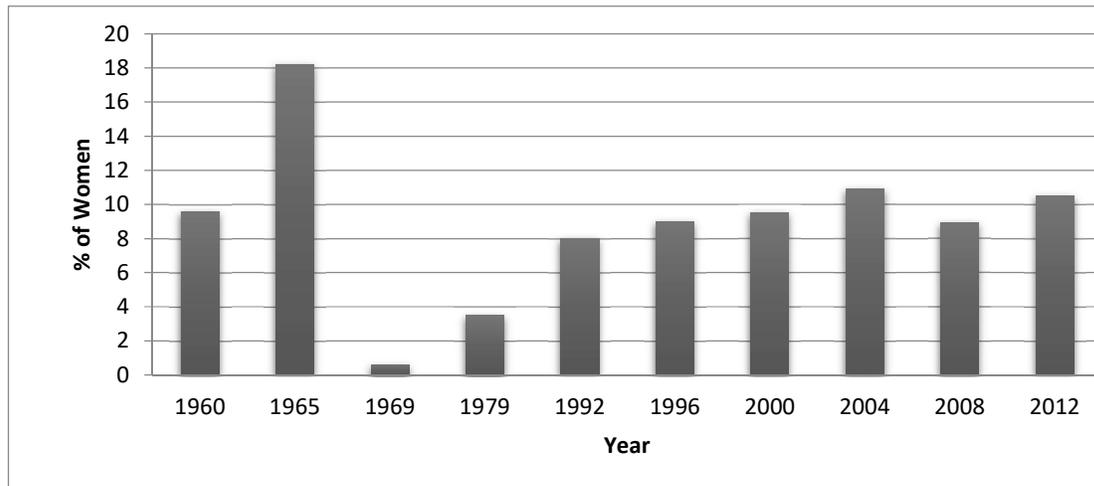
Source: Extracted from Allah-Mensah (2005) and IPU Report 2012

Tracing women participation in politics in Ghana as recorded by Parliamentary Chamber: Historical Perspective Archive (2012) and the IPU Report 2012, it is seen that comparatively, women are drastically under-represented in the Parliament of Ghana as against their male colleagues.

Several factors and reasons have been given by different critics all over the world as to why there is gender inequality in Parliament. Deku (2005) said that it is because women are identified with domestic life while politics is viewed as a male-dominated public activity that is typically masculine in nature. Adhiambo-Oduol (2003) identified socio-cultural beliefs, attitudes, biases and stereotypes as major barriers. Another formidable barrier is the institutional framework guiding gender division of labour, recruitment, and vertical mobility.

Allah-Mensah (2005) also asserted that the customary practices of many contemporary societies are biased by subjugating women to men and undermining their self-esteem. These socially constructed norms and stereotype roles make women overplay their 'feminity' by accepting that they are 'weaker sexes', overemphasizing the dainty nature of their sex and regarding exceptional achievement as masculine.

With time, it has now been established that without ensuring women development in any given society, nations' development cannot be achieved. Women's equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. It is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but also a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved (FWCW, 1995). For Ilie (2006), systematic integration of women augments the democracy basis and the efficiency and the

quality of activities of government. If government is to meet the needs of both women and men, it must build on the experiences of both women and men; through the issues they are concerned about (Nzomo, 1994).

Problem Statement

One element of representative democracy is that all citizens, regardless of gender, have equal opportunities to participate in politics which is a matter of justice and equity (Halder, 2004). In any democratic polity, control is achieved by persons and groups, irrespective of gender, through a recognized legitimate process to the pinnacle of power (Ifamose, 2000). There is wide acceptance that women constitute a significant percentage of the total world population and have been making tremendous contributions in all facets of social life (Afolabi, 2003) cited in Agbalajobi, 2010). But, when it comes to political participation, Kasomo (2005) indicated that women are seen merely as "shuttle", to be seen and not to be heard. In their public and private lives, women have to struggle to articulate their desires and to find their own voices. For a long time, women have been seen as extensions of men; as people who cannot politically stand on their own, but have to be propped by men. Forgetting that every human being has the right to participate in decisions that define their life. In the context of human rights, it is argued that since women know their situation better, they should participate equally with men to have their perspective effectively incorporated at all levels of decision-making, from the private to the public spheres of their lives and also, from the local to the global (Markham, 2012).

This study is innovative and different from the above stated works because it will not only investigate what issues women parliamentarians contribute to but will move a step further by using CDA and the Hansard in examining the gendered nature of their contributions.

Thus, it is now critical to look beyond the numbers to focus on what they can actually do while in parliament even with their few numbers– how they can make an impact, whatever their numbers may be.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The overall aim of the study is to investigate spoken texts of women parliamentarians in order to understand the construction of women's interests in politics. An analysis of these texts will show how women articulate their socio-political ideas. Wodak (2001) maintains that texts are the products of linguistic actions and that talk produces texts. The linguistic choices people make in the texts they produce give an indication of people's positions and values.

The study sets out specifically to do the following:

1. Investigate the voices of women parliamentarians during parliamentary sessions within the period stated.

2. Evaluate how gendered these issues are.

Significance of the Study

Allah-Mensah (2005) indicated that there have been clamour for information on the position and contributions of women in key positions in Ghana. This research seeks to fill that gap by drawing political parties' attention, informing all and sundry, including, parliamentarians, media practitioners, gender activist, educational institutions, development partners and other civil society groups to equip and empower women to contribute to total development.

This research will play a critical role in encouraging and preparing women for parliamentary positions in national politics. It will ultimately help in the realization of their contributions as women parliamentarians. This will in turn help the world appreciate what they do as women which ultimately will help in the realization of their vision of gender parity in national development.

The Findings of this study are expected to help build on the literature available and add knowledge on the contributions of women parliamentarians in political participation in Ghana. The study aims to fill the gaps in the contemporary literature by enlightening researchers on not just the issues women parliamentarians contribute to but to move a step a further to look at the power relations embedded and the gendered nature of these issues. This study will add new information to the existing literature for academic purposes. There is always the need to also update, challenge and refocus issues to reflect prevailing trends and that is what exactly this work seeks to achieve.

Theoretical Framework

The study drew primarily on Discourse Analysis and the Theory of Gender and Power by Fairclough and Connell respectively. Both theories nonetheless, have the ultimate aim of revealing issues of gender (Fairclough, 2002; Connell 1987).

1. Discourse Analysis (DA)

Schiffrin, Tannen & Hamilton (2003) elucidated that discourse analysis is a cross-disciplinary field of research that has emerged since the 1960s in virtually all disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. Although initially developed in linguistics, literary studies and anthropology, it has spread to sociology, psychology, communication and more recently politics and history. They further clarified that there are many subsections of discourse analysis within the social tradition, including critical discourse analysis, speech act theory, genre theory, intertextuality, discursive formations, conversation analysis, narrative analysis, discursive psychology, ethnography of communication, multi-modal analysis and others. According to Sunderland and Litosseliti (2002), we can define the trends under DA by their goals rather than by their techniques and tools of analysis.

Van Dijk (1998) explain the discourse analysis as the 'analysis of discourse structures with an account of their cognitive, social, political, historical and cultural functions and contexts'.

2. Theory of Gender and Power

According to the theory of gender and power as explained by Wingood & DiClemente (2000), Robert W. Connell, an Australian sociologist began examining the available theories on gender and power in search of an integrative theory that would reassemble the existing theories. Connell identified the critical

components of these existing theories and developed an integrative theory of gender and power. In 1987, developed by Robert Connell, the theory of gender and power is a social structural theory based on existing philosophical writings of sexual inequality and gender and power imbalance (Maharaj, 1995). Wingood and DiClemente (2000) stipulated that there are three major social structures that characterize the gendered relationships between men and women: the sexual division of labor, the sexual division of power, and the structure of cathexis. Both the sexual division of labor and the sexual division of power had been identified from previous research as two fundamental structures that partially explain gender relations. According to them, Connell devised the third structure, the structure of cathexis, to address the affective component of relationships. These three overlapping but distinct structures serve to explain the cultural bond gender roles assumed by men and women. She emphasized that none of the three structures is or can be independent from the others. Neither is there one structure from which the others are descended.

Connell (1990) also noted that these three structures (the structure of labor, the structure of power, and the structure of cathexis) exist at two different levels: the societal and the institutional. The uppermost level in which the three social structures are embedded is the societal level. The three structures are rooted in society through numerous abstracts, historical, and sociopolitical forces that consistently segregate power and ascribe social norms on the basis of gender-determined roles. As society slowly changes, these structures remain largely intact at the societal level over a long period of time (Connell, 1995). To Wingood and DiClemente (2000), Connell additionally specified that the three social structures are also evident at a lower level, the institutional level. Social institutions include, but are not limited to, schools, worksites/industries, families, relationships, religious institutions, government institutions, the medical system, and the media. She further noted that the three social structures are maintained within institutions through social mechanisms such as unequal pay for comparable work, discriminatory practices at school and work, the imbalance of control within relationships and at work sites, and the stereotypical and degrading roles.

Methodology

Research Approach

The qualitative research approach was used in this study and it was appropriate and timely because the research under study had an objective of investigating what women parliamentarians say in parliament and assess their contributions in relation to gender and power. This qualitative research used the critical approach. Critical approach as explained by Lindlof and Taylor (2002) has its root in the critical theory.

Research Design

Textual analysis

This study was based on the discourse analysis approach, out of which came the critical discourse analysis which underlies the analysis of the work. This approach is appropriate since it is concerned with the socially and culturally situated construction of meaning which can be applied to investigate power and inequality in human interactions (Jewitt, 2010). With this approach the Hansard which is the text under study was analysed and interpreted to reveal opaque as well as a transparent relationship of

dominance and power as manifested in the issues women parliamentarians contribute to in parliament. Hence, the critical discourse analysis as an aspect of textual analysis was geared towards locating issues that are gendered.

Population

The targeted population of the study is all Hansards within the Fifth Parliament of Ghana which began from 2009 to 2013.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The purposive sample was employed in the study. In this case, the existing texts as stated earlier were selected from the official reports or Hansards recorded from 2009-2013.This period was within the Fifth Parliament. The researcher chose Hansards from 2010-2011 because that parliament had a good female representation in recent times. Also, it was within this era that Ghana had a woman as the first female speaker of parliament, thus making it interesting to investigate whether with her presence as the leader in parliament, women will be encouraged to contribute more on the floor of the house as indicated by Hancock, Ockleford & Windridge (2009). The researcher obtained two-hundred and eighty (276) volumes within the two-year period.

Using purposive sampling the researcher went through all the Hansards and purposively selected only those ones that had the contributions of women. This was done because as suggested by Sekaran (2003) the purposive sampling technique is used when the researcher needs specific information from a specific group of people. Here, the researcher was interested in finding out issues only women parliamentarians contribute to and so needed to purposively take out any contributions which came from men. Again, the choice of any sampling technique according to Punch (1998) is to reflect the type of research questions which can help to achieve the objective or purpose of the study. In this study, thus the hub was on women parliamentarians in Ghana.

The purposive or non-random sampling approach used in this study resulted in the eventual sample size containing one hundred and seventy-two (172) Hansards which had either statements, questions, motions or deliberations as contributions from women parliamentarians.

Data Collection Procedure

In this study, the Hansard becomes the main document which was used to study the contributions women make in parliament and then critically analyzed to reveal gendered as it pertains to the text. The choice of data from the Hansards was based on the fact that the Hansards bear verbatim record of deliberations in the house with all interruptions captured such as noise and uproar so will give a true picture of the proceedings as it occurred. Secondly, being an official record, the Hansards can be easily obtained for verification and substantiation of the data collected. To support this reason, Baxter and Jack (2008) declared that an advantage of using document for any study is that raw data retrieved from these sources are available for independent inspection anytime by anyone.

Data Analysis

In order to do a detailed and deeper analysis of the contributions of women in the Ghana parliament, the study used textual analysis. However, this work specifically adopted critical discourse analysis to analyze the Hansards.

Themes/Thematic Categorization

The researcher developed several themes from the contributions of women parliamentarians in the Hansard. However, upon several readings and analysis, the researcher put together issues that belong to same or similar ideas in the form of one theme. Then finally arrived at the themes below as issues women put priority on in parliament. However, it must be noted that issues may overlap across themes.

Validity and Reliability

Patton (2001) stated that validity and reliability are two factors which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about, while designing a study, analyzing results and judging the quality of the study. This study used two of the verification procedures; triangulation and rich thick description.

Analysis and Discussion

What issues do women parliamentarians contribute to during proceedings?

Contributions made by women MPs were highlighted and then read severally before categorizing them into themes. Research question one addresses all the general issues that women parliamentarians contribute to on the floor of parliament within the 5th Parliament of the 4th republic of Ghana.

Table 1: Cumulative frequency distribution of women contributions in Ghana's Parliament

Issues	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Women	82	17.9%
Youth and Children	70	15.3%
Health, water and sanitation	68	14.8%
Education and sports	61	13.3%
Social Welfare and Disabled	59	12.8%
Culture and Religion	30	6.5%
Economy and international affairs	27	5.9%
Energy	24	5.2%
Legal and Security	23	5.0%
Sci., Tech. and Telecom.	15	3.3%
Total	**459**	**100**

Women

Issues on women had the highest number of occurrences in the data with a frequency of 82 indicating 17.9% of all the issues identified in this study. This is because most of the women MPs digress almost every issue to include women.

Youth and Children

Youth and children related issues ranked second out of 10 dominant themes representing contributions made by female MPs in Ghana's parliament with a frequency of 70 representing 15.3%. Similarly, issues of youth and children just like issues of women overlapped with a lot of the other issues identified.

Health, Water and Sanitation

Health, water and sanitation being the third most important priority of interest to women in parliament is represented with a frequency of 68 constituting 14.8% out of all the other themes.

Education and sports

Issues in education and sports placed 4th with a frequency of 61 expressing 13.3% among the ten issues developed. Educational issues as realized from the analysis overshadowed issues in sport, although they have been merged as one theme.

Social Welfare and Disability

This is made evident with the frequency of 59 representing 12.8% of the contributions female MPs make during proceedings.

Economy and International Affairs

Discourse on the economy and international affairs consist of issues of labor, finance, agriculture, land, housing, transportation and foreign affairs. It ranked seventh position with a frequency of 27 representing 5.9% among the ten themes developed.

Energy

Energy issues comprise issues on electricity, fire, oil, gas, petroleum and mining. Out of ten themes, issues on energy took the 8th position with a percentage of 5.2.

Legal and Security

This category being the last but one among ten themes came out with a frequency of 23 constituting 5.0 % of the total score. Contributions by women from the percentage was very low as compared to the other themes.

Science and Technology

According to Schwartz (2005), science and technological issues have been the domain and interest area of men over the years. Science and technology being the least issue women MPs show interest in is represented by a frequency of 15 out of a total frequency of 459 symbolizing 3.3%.

Atanga (2009) in her study of Cameroonian parliament suggests that female legislators or women as political decision makers make different choices based on their experiences as women and it goes to confirm my findings in Ghana's parliament. This she claims is because women have different policy agendas and priorities compared to men. However, there are apparently varying opinions on whether women and men relate to politics differently or not (Phillips, 1995).

RQ.2 How gendered are the contributions presented by women during parliamentary proceedings?

According to Connell (1995) a gendered analysis argues that the social phenomenon of issues women MPs contribute to can only and properly be understood by considering its history, context, meanings, impact and consequences through the lens of gender division of labour. Connell (1987) argued that gender order is produced through three components: labour (domestic and in the market), power (physical and through sites of authority) and cathexis (intimate relationships including parenting). As indicated earlier, although these are separate components, they cross cut and interrelate to produce a gender hierarchy.

Several terms have been given by varying writers to differentiate this distinctive interest that women and men portray in their contributions. "Women interest and men interest", "private sphere and public sphere", liberal and strong", "formal/official and informal domain", "political and apolitical", "soft and hard issues" and many others. This study will adopt Leijenaar (2008) and Lovenduski & Norris (1996) term "hard" and "soft" issues to describe and differentiate issues that women contribute to as against those seen as men domain. From table 1, the following groupings were made based on literature.

Table 2 Soft Issues and Hard Issues

Soft Issues	Freq. (%)	Hard Issues	Freq. (%)
Women	82(17.9%)	Economy and Int. Affairs	27(5.9%)
Youth and children	70(15.3%)	Energy	24(5.2%)
Health, water and sanitation	68(14.8%)	Legal and security	23(5.0%)
Education and sports	61(13.3%)	Sci. and Tech.	15(3.3%)
Social welfare and disability	59(12.8%)		
Culture and religion	30(6.5%)		
Total	**370 (80.6%)**		**89(19.4%)**

Okumu (2008) citing Kamau (2003) described the society in general as always being in two main domains. The female occupied the private domain, also understood to be the domestic realm, which in most cases is also perceived as a realm of reproduction that oversees "soft issues". To add to the above, Devlin and Elgie (2008) explain that as a corollary to this idea the public domain is said to be official and associated to "hard issues".

Figure 2: Contributions of women MPs on "soft" and "hard" issues
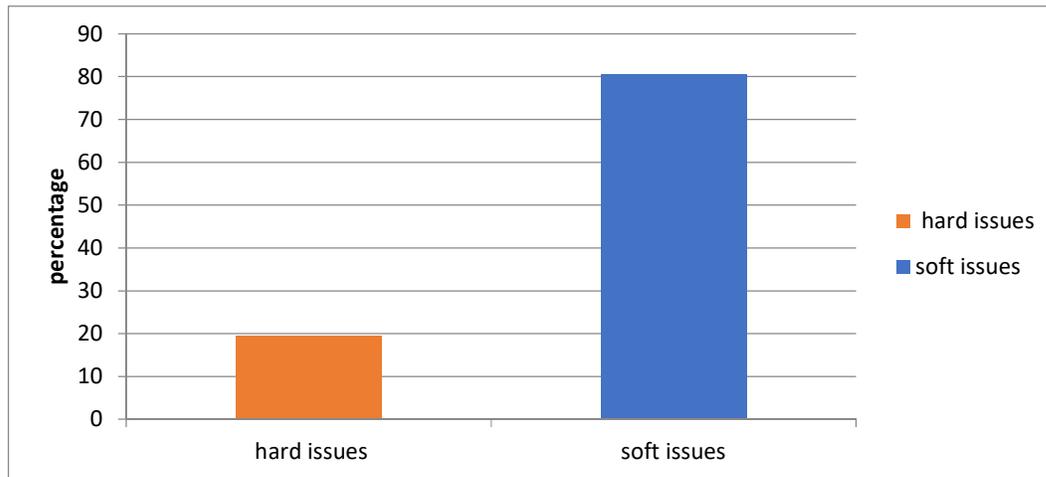
Soft Issues

"Soft issues" as elucidated by Lovenduski and Norris (1996) and Leijenaar (1996) included all areas that are "particularly salient to women – either because they primarily, more directly, or disproportionately concern or affect women in particular or because they reflect the more 'traditional' concerns (or interests) that women presumably have about others" (p. 431). These issues as shown in table 2 include issues on women, children and youth, health, water and sanitation, education and sports, social welfare and disability, culture and religion constituted 80.6% out of a total of 100%.

The Table and Figure above is indicative of the fact that women MPs in Ghana are highly interested in issues that have been termed as soft issues than the hard issues. This is because women politicians in trying to enter into a perceived male realm become the mouthpieces of women, children, youth and the vulnerable in the society. Evidently from the Hansard, women MPs also consciously or unconsciously believe that they must perform their "natural" roles which are areas that have been allocated to them by society such as taking care of the children, cooking, washing etc. In their quest to achieve this they tend to remain there. Sunderland and Litosseliti (2002) stipulated that traditions (socialization and roles) have been a great influence as it usually placed the woman in the private sphere and the man in the public sphere.

This assertion is elaborated by Duncan (2010) cited in Evans (2012) which shows that women lawmakers tend to see "women's issues" more broadly as social issues, possibly as a result of the role that women have traditionally played as mothers and caregivers in their communities, and that more women see government as a tool to help serve underrepresented or minority groups. Women lawmakers therefore have often been perceived as more sensitive to community concerns and more responsive to constituency needs.

In support of this findings, Swers (2001) and Taylor-Robin & Heath (2003) also noted that studies carried out among US women in local government positions in the late 1970s and 1980s show that women legislators were warm to feminism and clear supporters of women's issues; that is those that affect women more than men, such as reproductive health rights, child care or family policy. They elaborate further on these issues that have been of concern to female leaders in government as those specifically dealing with pregnancy, abortion, rape, prostitution, marriage, divorce, domestic violence, pornography, children, nurturance, childcare, family welfare, public health and the education of children.

Bauer (2004) contrary to the popular perception that women politicians focus on 'soft issues', stated in her study that most women MPs contribute to all issues irrespective of their gender especially in cases where they have gained experience in the house. However, this was not the case in Ghana.

Hard Issues

"Hard issues" as a term is used in this study to describe areas that have been marked as a masculine domain by society and accepted as the norm. This work provides evidence to show that women MPs to a very low extent contribute to the hard issues such as economy, energy, legal and security and science and technology. This is represented with a frequency of 89 indicating 19.4% out of a total of 100%. Based on the analysis in this study, the primary reason recognized was that the few women who enter into the "hard issues" do so based on their interest in particular academic background and professional background. For example, women MPs who contributed to issues in the area of legal and security were mostly practicing lawyers or studied law.

Geisler (1995) discovered that although female legislators around the world appear to be concerned with social policy, such as the well-being of women and children, they also place a high priority on issues traditionally thought to be in men's domain, such as economic, fiscal, and foreign policy. This may arise from personal interests, from a commitment to representing all of their constituents and party affiliations (Geisler, 1995).

Analysis from the Hansard also revealed that the few contributions made by female MPs in the area of hard issues concentrated on the involvement or representation of women, children, youth, disabled and other vulnerable groups as well as their gender role as women. This is depicted clearly in Table 3 below.

Table 3   Percentage of types of issue women parliamentarians contribute to in Ghana.

Type of issue	Freq.	Percentage
Gendered issues	412	89.8%
Non-gendered issues	47	10.2%
Total	459	100

Gendered and Non-Gendered Issues

Taking Hadjis (2013) explanation of the term gendered and non-gendered issues, gendered issues in this study refer to issues that women parliamentarians contribute to in relation to their gender role or what Connell (1992) referred to as gender division of labour, power and cathexis. Whereas non-gendered issues look beyond the gender role assigned to women.

Several reasons as seen below account for the reasons why women contributions are perceived to be gendered. First and foremost, women have tended to support gendered legislation, particularly that which seeks to create a more inclusive society for a fair representation of all. This may be a result of the fact that in many ways, women have been marginalized and under-privileged in communities all over the world (IPU, 2007). Having been on the receiving end of discrimination based on their sex, women who get into positions of leadership are more likely to support initiatives that seek to end or at least lessen it, than their male colleagues who traditionally have been the beneficiaries of such marginalization. That women are socialized to be nurturers and caregivers may also help to explain this tendency to empathize with the under-privileged and the desire to bring everybody on board (Tannen, 1994**).**

Figure 3: Percentage of types of issue women parliamentarians contribute to in Ghana
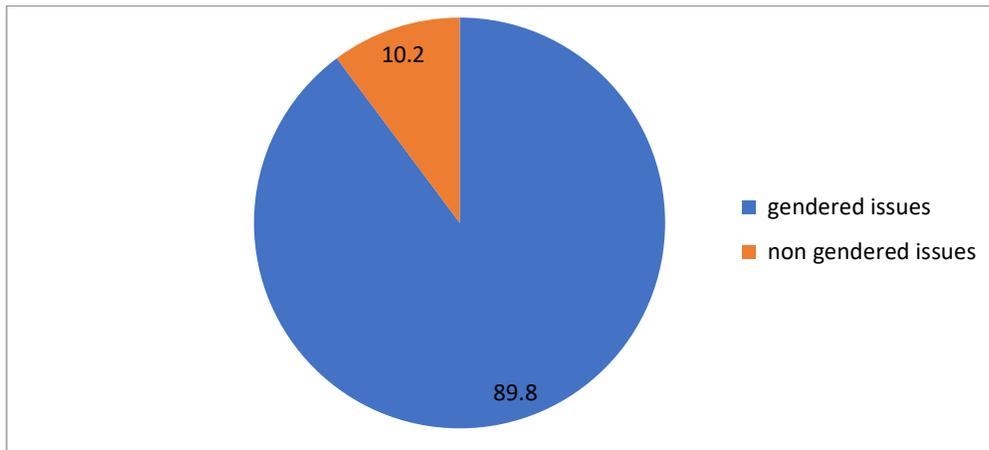
 Solidarity

Azar (1999) illustrated that the word/pronoun "we" represents the in-group members and using it consistently emphasizes collective responsibility and expresses solidarity. Thus, it means that people in that forum, the speaker and the audience are involved together in fighting the issue raised.

Conclusion

The findings of the study prove the assertion that when women get into politics, they bring a different perspective of political leadership, especially in their contributions and issues they prioritized (Svaleryd, 2002). These differences between men and women preferences in the realm of politics are explained

here by two interrelated factors: the clear inequality between the sexes in their access to power resources, and perceptible inherent gender differences (Philips, 1998).

We also established that women do seem to specialize in a particular subset of issue areas, most of which comport with conventional definitions of women's issues. We therefore conclude that women parliamentarians are greatly influenced by their gender roles assigned to them by society and this reflect on most of their contributions on the floor of parliament. Thus, in doing that they reinforce the stereotypes given to women by society.

Although women MPs are not a homogenous group, there is strong evidence that women parliamentarians have certain shared experiences and concerns.

Women great absence in the area of hard issues means that their inputs and perspective in determining financial priorities and shaping the national agenda on other issues is lost.

The findings of the study show that women develop their vision of leadership from experiences they go through as young girls growing up in a society with major gender inequalities. When they get into politics, women's priorities are guided by their vision to see a world where all people get equal opportunities in life. For instance, women give first priority to their families, not because they lack commitment to professional growth but because they have been socialized that a good woman thinks of her family first (Tannen,1990). Similarly, women MPs see their representation in parliament as an opportunity to represent women, children and youth and the vulnerable in the country and an opportunity to correct this longstanding social anomaly.

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