

BOOK REVIEW

**Gendering the Everyday in the UK House of Commons. By
Cherry Miller. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan,
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What is worth studying in political science? Many lists would certainly feature parliaments, as democratic institutions. But who would or should be the central object of study therein? Cherry Miller's recent book *Gendering the Everyday in the UK House of Commons* opens up a broader world that looks beyond Members of Parliament (MPs) and studies the gendering nature of arrangements within parliaments by means of ethnography.

In *Gendering the Everyday in the UK House of Commons*, Miller asks: what is worth studying in the study of parliaments? In place of prevailing approaches, Miller argues for a less ceremonial focus, centering the everyday experiences of parliamentary actors and how the parliament works in practice. She proposes studying the “gendering of the everyday” or, as the subtitle of the book suggests, looking “beneath the spectacle.” Central to this analysis is Miller's combination of practice—especially noteworthy is the ethnographic fieldwork—and theory, in particular feminist discursive institutionalism and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity.

Miller's book can be seen in the broader light of a more feminist political science—with more attention to the everyday and the personal, as well as special attention to issues of gender. The book is also part of a growing body of work within and outside parliamentary studies that is more explicit about parliaments not just as democratic and representative institutions but, ultimately, as workplaces. This recognition is especially important when we look through a gender lens, where parliaments are still male-dominated and change has been slow, both in terms of parliamentary culture and percentages of (a diversity of) women participating.

An everyday approach potentially makes both scrutiny and change easier. At the same time, *how* to study the everyday is not obvious. To this question, Miller offers ample response. Miller's “everyday approach” uses feminist discursive institutionalism and focuses on the reproduction of gender regimes. In this

attention to dailiness, Miller also looks beyond MPs, because she argues that these individuals should not be the presumptive center of analysis in the study of parliaments (3). In order to analyze the broader *gendering* nature of arrangement within the House of Commons (3), Miller includes three so-called working worlds: the MPs, the House Service, and members' staff. The House Service is a politically impartial service available to all MPs to support them in their duties. The members' staff provides regular research and administrative assistance to politicians and, importantly, is usually seen as a "pipeline" toward becoming an MP.

Miller organizes her research in terms of three discursive institutions, meaning "the broad pushes and pulls that structure and frame parliamentary life" (54): the career cycle (the everyday performance of workplace duties and processes), citizenship (inward-looking activity performed on the estate), and public service ("other-regarding" activity) (105). Miller elaborates on these three institutions by showing how rules (both rules-in-use and rules-in-form) govern them. The wide range of topics covered across these three discursive institutions include, but are not limited to, pregnancy leave, the job descriptions of MPs (or the lack thereof), (informal) staff recruitment processes, as well as committee leadership elections.

A good example of the depth of Miller's analysis of gender regimes is her reading of the Workplace Equality Networks (200–207). At first sight, these networks might be seen as well-intentioned steps toward equality for parliamentary staff. However, Miller shows how this is part of the wider discursive institution of "citizenship," as well as an example "gendered actors working with the rules." Questions about how such networks are organized, and how they are supported by legal frameworks, financed, and communicated, erode these good intentions. Miller's deep engagement with ethnography and feminist discursive institutionalism makes rich contributions to our understanding of the reality of such networks and the lived experiences of the actors involved.

Where do we go from here? The world has undeniably changed since Miller's ethnographic fieldwork in the 2010–2015 UK parliament, and one wonders what especially #MeToo and COVID-19 may portend for the everyday gendering of the House of Commons now and into the future. Further, Miller recognizes that this research was not done "intersectionally" (87), and I join her in calling for more work on this front to further uncover how intersections of race, ability, and class, among other factors, play out in the everyday gendering of parliaments. Finally, parliamentary workplaces beyond the United Kingdom merit their own studies using Miller's framework, both to identify contextual features as well as to facilitate cross-national comparisons. Miller has laid much of the groundwork for these and other research directions, showing us that the parliamentary is, in fact, personal.