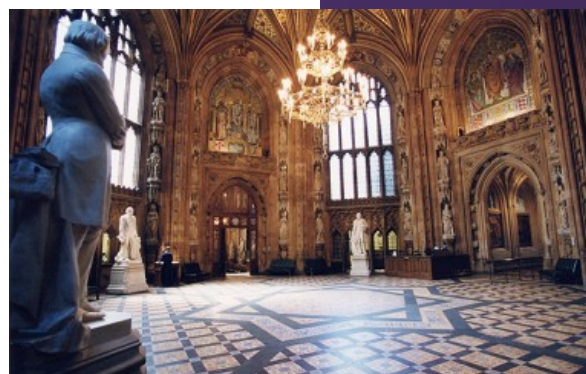


# Participant observation

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Participant observation through shadowing placements with MPs in the British Parliament – all of whom are known to be active on women's issues – provided a fast-paced and fascinating induction into the sometimes obscure, and always bustling, 'Westminster Village'. Pertinently described by Richard Fenno (1978) as 'soaking and poking – or just hanging around', my participant observation involved two-four week periods accompanying MPs in their normal working day: attending events in parliament and the constituency; watching their performances in



the Chamber and Committees; running to meetings with colleagues, visitors and constituents; and chatting between events and over lunches. Intermittently 'participating' as a parliamentary researcher and watching from the sidelines as an 'observer' provided an opportunity to watch MPs behaviour and activities; to see interaction between MPs, their colleagues and the people they

represent; and to learn the perspectives of MPs. Observation of taken-for-granted ways of behaving, and talking to people about how and why they behave as they do, provided insight into how MPs experience parliament. Shadowing MPs was an exciting, enjoyable and innovative way to increase understanding of the UK parliament.



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