

TOPIC AREA: WOMEN'S ISSUES

POSSIBLE TOPICS:

Junior Topics

- That girls today have genuinely equal opportunities.
- That the media ignores women.
- That girls have it tough.
- That we need more women in federal parliament.
- That female role models in the entertainment arena are too limited.
- That school sport should be compulsory for girls.
- That the media provides bad female role models.
- The next governor-general should be a woman.
- That Australian companies should be required to have women in half the chairs in the board room.
- That young women need better role models.

Intermediate Topics

- That modern families still hold women back.
- That equality between the sexes is only an ideal.
- That mothers should be paid for their work.
- That there should be equality in the military.
- That Barbie should be banned.
- That women's sport deserves a better deal.
- That the media should increase its coverage of women's sport.
- That mothers should be more highly valued.
- That today's women are expected to do it all.

Senior Topics

- That the patriarchy is on the way out in the First world.
- That the Federal Government has failed women.
- That feminism will not achieve equality.
- That we should introduce paid maternity leave.
- That Feminism has achieved its aims.
- That we need more women leaders.
- That affirmative action policies are no longer needed.
- That feminism has failed women.
- That the tax and welfare system should enable all mothers to stay at home.
- That it's time for a woman in the White House.
- That women's liberation is a misnomer.
- That the glass ceiling no longer exists.
- That women should be allowed to serve in combat roles in the armed forces.

EXAMPLES OF RELEVANT ISSUES:

a) Women in combat roles

General Context/Information

- The advance of equal opportunities laws and cultural change have opened many jobs to women which used to be closed to them - the military is now one of the very few parts of society to formally discriminate against women in some way.
- While women have gradually been allowed any number of roles within the military behind the front line of combat—including highly demanding jobs such as being a pilot of a refueling

aircraft—there remains a cultural taboo in western militaries about a woman infantryman, tank crew member or combat pilot. The debate about whether women should be allowed to serve in combat roles has been active for over a decade now.

For and Against

FOR	AGAINST
<p>This position upholds equality between the sexes. As long as an applicant is qualified for a position, one's gender is arbitrary. In fact, critics often mention that women cannot meet the performance targets set for their positions. This is rank hypocrisy. In the American army, for example, performance targets are regularly calibrated for age and position. A forty year-old senior non-commissioned officer faces a much easier set of targets than his 20 year-old subordinate, yet both are deployed in an active combat role. The twenty-year old woman will outperform her NCO in physical tests: it is easy to recruit and deploy women who are in better shape than many men we send into combat. In any case, the modern high technology battlefield increasingly means that technical expertise and decision-making skills are more valuable than simple brute strength.</p>	<p>Women are equal to men in the armed forces, but they are not the same as men. While the vast proportion of jobs in the armed forces are open equally to men and women, there are some to which women are just not physically suited. While some women are able to meet the absolute physical requirements for front-line combat such as carrying a wounded soldier, throwing grenades or digging a trench in hard terrain, most are not. While integration of women into combat is possible for those qualified, the small number versus the additional logistical, regulatory and disciplinary costs associated with integration do not make it a worthwhile move.</p>
<p>Allowing a mixed gender force keeps the military strong. The all-volunteer forces are severely troubled by falling retention and recruitment rates. Widening the applicant pool for all jobs guarantees more willing recruits. Not only does it help military readiness, it forestalls the calamity of a military draft. Without the possibility of active combat duty, many patriotic women will be put off enlisting, as they know they will be regarded as second-class soldiers. And as combat duty is usually regarded as necessary for promotion to senior officer positions, denying female personnel this experience ensures that very few will ever reach the highest reaches of the military and so further entrenches sexism.</p>	<p>Men, especially those likely to enlist, maintain traditional gender roles. On the one hand, men are likely to act foolishly to protect women in their combat units. On the other, this will take the form of harassment and resentment of women's presence in a heavily masculine military subculture. As more women enter the armed services, abuse incidents rise. These problems make create tensions and affect morale, and so weaken the military in combat situations.</p>
<p>Women, some studies have shown, can perform as well as, if not better than men. In active combat, several Soviet women distinguished themselves as fighter aces—the elite of combat aviators. The Israelis make frequent use of women as snipers and sniper-trainers.</p>	<p>Much has been made on integration's effect on morale and readiness. While the kind of widespread infighting caused by 'competition for female affection' claimed by alarmists is unlikely in the face of military discipline, the maintenance of active combat relationships does weaken the will to fight. In addition to the regular masculine plague of drug use and violence, women already serving in the navy and air force often end up pregnant. Up to 10% of active duty women personnel in the US armed forces are unavailable for call-up and duty due to pregnancy. The British Royal Navy has also found this a problem since allowing women to serve equally on warships.</p>
<p>Of the more than twenty nations who have expanded their roles for women to positions where they might see combat, none of them have repealed their orders. Regardless of the issues about whether women are as well-suited to combat as men, they are clearly good enough that many countries rely on their services.</p>	<p>The threat of increased abuse of women prisoners is a serious one. Male prisoners also contend with the threat of torture and rape, but it is quite possible that misogynistic societies will be more willing to abuse woman prisoners. The threat of female prisoners of war being misused in this way may adversely affect the way in which their captured male comrades react to interrogation. And in a media age the use of captured female</p>

	soldiers in propaganda broadcasts may have a different effect on the television audience back home, perhaps weakening the nation's determination and commitment to the war effort.
Women are vitally needed for Low-intensity conflicts. LICs require tasks to "win hearts and minds" such as intelligence gathering, medical assistance, policing, and mediation, as well as the ability to kill an opponent in close combat. Cultural differences and demographics mean that woman will be vastly more effective in some circumstances than men. Allowing women to serve also doubles the talent pool for delicate and sensitive jobs that require interpersonal skills not every soldier has. Having a wider personnel base allows militaries to have the best and most diplomatic soldiers working to end conflict quickly.	The presence of women on the battlefield can increase the odds of physical abuse and sexual trauma as well. A prevalent theme in many nationalist conflicts is to extinguish the bloodlines of the enemy culture, and to proclaim that the enemy is trying to do the same to them. This manifests itself, especially in the different Balkan conflicts, as mass murder of the men of the village and a systematic rape of the women. It is unlikely that women from a third intervening power in this situation will be treated any differently if that kind of fearsome mentality has already set into the minds of combatants.

Research links:

- [Australian parliamentary report on the role of women in the armed forces - http://www.aph.gov.au/library/intguide/fad/women_armed.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/library/intguide/fad/women_armed.htm)
- [Academic essays and debates on women in the military – http://www.militarywoman.org/academic.htm](http://www.militarywoman.org/academic.htm)
- [Australian Department of Defence Equity Organisation – http://www.defence.gov.au/fr/](http://www.defence.gov.au/fr/)

b) Women in politics and parliament

General context/information

- Women are vastly underrepresented in most democratic legislatures. Those who support this proposition are in favour of applying one form of 'affirmative action' or 'positive/reverse discrimination' to argue that female politicians should be preferred over male ones in order that parliaments will reflect the gender balance of their electorate.
- This may be done either via targets (e.g. the aim to get a certain percentage of female candidates): a flexible but easily bypassed system; or by quotas (the necessity to get a certain number of women politicians) which are legally enforceable but inflexible. Possible methods would include all women shortlists of from which parties would select their candidate, two member constituencies (one male, one female), or alternating male/female politicians on party lists. For example, in Belgium from 2000 no more than two thirds of election candidates may be of the same sex; whilst Norway and Germany have imposed quotas of up to 40%.
- Essentially, what the affirmative is arguing for is equality of outcome; the negative counters with equality of opportunity.

For and Against

FOR	AGAINST
In representative democracy it is vital that every part of the population be proportionately represented. The present lack of female voices in parliament symbolises the continuing unconscious male societal bias.	Representative democracy is there to represent the interests of every sector of the population, which may be done without MPs visibly being strictly representative. Why must women be represented but not every other sector of society -- and to ensure parliament exactly reflects demographic makeup is impossible.
Whilst it is possible for men to speak on women's issues, some topics of debate (e.g. on family issues) are still seen as less important than economics or foreign policy. Creating more female MPs would encourage more debates about social policy, and so do more to produce constructive legislation of relevance to real people's lives.	This argument is more patronising -- it suggests that female MPs are only interested in 'soft' issues rather than hard political, economic or military policies. Margaret Thatcher in the UK, and Madeleine Albright and Condoleezza Rice in the USA show female politicians do deal with stereotypically 'male' issues.
Parliaments, particularly in Britain, have a	The style of political debate in a country has more

<p>reputation for needless argument rather than cooperation. Bringing women into political life would encourage a more mature, consensual style of politics, and so more constructive, thoughtful policymaking.</p>	<p>to do with its customs and history than with the number of female politicians! The two-party, first-past-the-post structure of the electoral systems in the USA and UK encourages confrontational, negative campaigning. Countries with proportional representation and a tradition of coalition government may develop a different political culture. Furthermore, all-female election campaigns have shown that women are just as capable of arguments ad hominem as men are.</p>
<p>At present there is a vicious circle whereby women see no point in standing for parliament because it is viewed (however inaccurately) as a male-dominated institution. Positive discrimination would provide role models for future women MPs to follow; for that reason it need not be a permanent measure. Nor should it be seen as contrary to human rights legislation -- no one is preventing men from standing in elections. This measure would simply try to overcome the institutional sexism in the selection committees of the established political parties, which has for so long prevented a representative number of women from becoming candidates.</p>	<p>A true role model has to be admired. However, if people feel that a woman has been appointed simply for her gender rather than for her talents, then this will damage rather than enhance the status of female MPs. The Opposition are in favour of true meritocracy. The British Labour Party's policy in the 1990s of discriminating in favour of women in selecting candidates for parliament was rightly found to be in breach of the Human Rights Act, being against the European Convention because it was unfair to potential male candidates.</p>
<p>Positive discrimination compensates women for the many years that they were excluded and placed in the political wilderness. 'Meritocracy' only works when candidates are starting from equal positions.</p>	<p>Merely glossing 'positive' discrimination does not hide the fact that it is still discrimination. The leaders of nations should be the best on offer -- equality is enough to compensate for past unfairness. Furthermore, women in the past did not have the same educational opportunities as men -- it is only the generation coming to maturity that did; and the balance of women in politics and business is likely naturally to rectify itself.</p>
<p>Whilst women have been involved in campaigns in the past, they remain under-represented at the political centre to which most potential politicians aspire. Wrong as it may be to focus on central legislatures, that is still where most of the major decisions are made -- and made without women.</p>	<p>It is wrong to suggest that women can only enter politics via national parliaments. Throughout history, and at the present time, female agitation has proven effective through extra-parliamentary means: petitions, protests and campaigns.</p>

Research links

- National Democratic Institute for International Affairs; Women's Participation -
<http://www.ndi.org/globalp/women/women.asp>
- Parliament of NSW; Women in Parliament -
<http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/web/common.nsf/key/HistoryWomeninParliament>
- International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics-
<http://iknowpolitics.org/>

WOMEN'S ISSUES IN GENERAL; RESEARCH LINKS

- **Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; Office for Women**
<http://ofw.facs.gov.au/index2.htm>
- **Australian Government Information Relating to Women; the "Women's Portal"**
<http://www.women.gov.au/>
- **Women's Data Warehouse and Statistical Information on Women's Issues; "Window on Women"**
<http://windowonwomen.gov.au/superweb/index.jsp>