

for the better. She watches debates in Parliament; they are dominated by men. She joins the local branch of her chosen party; it is dominated by men. She makes it on to a shortlist of candidates to stand for Parliament; this, too, is dominated by men. None the less, she is selected, and goes on to be elected an MP. On her first day, full of idealistic fervour, she walks into the chamber of the House of Commons ... to see the green benches covered by overwhelmingly male bottoms.²⁰ How many women would give up - do give up - before they even get this far?²¹

Imagine, now, a world where it was guaranteed by law that 50% of MPs would be women, and that every citizen would be represented by both a male MP and a female MP. A world where female participation in politics was taken for granted. A world where it would not so much as enter a young woman's head that she should not enter politics because of her gender.²²

So, our measure would have a significant benefit in encouraging and empowering women to enter politics.

I will now go on to show how greater female participation in politics will benefit us all.²³

Parliament currently resembles nothing so much as a boys' public school. The outdated Victorian architecture, setting one side against the other; the unfamily-friendly working hours, starting late and regularly going on till 10 or 11 at night; the jeering and baying that goes on at Prime Minister's Questions, like an out of control class. This toxic atmosphere must surely impact the quality of decision making.²⁴ Imagine, though, if it turned from being a boys' school that has reluctantly accepted a few girls into a fully co-educational school, with equal numbers of women. Women's tendency to work in a collaborative, consensual way and their desire for a better work-life balance could transform the culture of Parliament and thereby the quality of decision making.²⁵

DEPUTY LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

On a point of information.²⁶

PRIME MINISTER

Yes please.

DEPUTY LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

Isn't it an absurd generalisation to assume that women are never confrontational, and that men are incapable of being collaborative?²⁷ Aren't there, in any case, many situations in which

20 Here the Prime Minister is using enargia, painting an imaginary picture, showing us 'Now' and what is wrong with it. This has the advantage of making her point more vivid, while avoiding logical fallacy #3 (see Chapter 7), argument by anecdote, because it refers to a generic 'young woman', rather than one individual. She is also using (again) epistrophe, with her repetition of 'dominated by men'. The mention of 'bottoms' at the end might get a snigger or two. Humour can be an effective way of disarming your opponents. It's harder to disagree with someone when they're making you laugh.

21 Erotema (rhetorical question), doing the job of reminding us of one of the things that's wrong with 'Now'. Also metanoia - interrupting yourself with a qualification to show that things are even worse than you first thought.

22 Anaphora, repeating 'a world where ...' fixing this notion of a better future in our mind. Also, enargia, this time painting a picture of a better 'Then'.

23 After the rhetorical flourishes of her story of the idealistic young woman, the Prime Minister now sums up her first point crisply and clearly, and links neatly to her next point.

24 Setting up the 'Now' of parliamentary culture and what's wrong with it. However, the 'must surely' reveals a certain insecurity about the link between current parliamentary practices and the quality of decision making; she hasn't proved that this culture inevitably leads to bad decision making. Nor has she given any examples of bad decision making.

25 Now she gives us the 'Then' of how things would be different in her proposed future. Again, though, she doesn't do much to show the link between 50% female MPs and improved decision making.

26 A good time for the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to pounce, as the Prime Minister has deployed weak arguments

27 This is a model POI, as it identifies very crisply and concisely the weakness in the argument; both the 'Now' and the 'Then' are unconvincing scenarios, as they assume too much without satisfactory proof. Phrasing it as a rhetorical question puts responsibility for dealing with the issue back to the Prime Minister.

injustice, incompetence or even just inefficiency²⁸ demand a confrontational approach?²⁹

PRIME MINISTER

Of course women can and should be confrontational on occasion.³⁰ My point is rather that the reset of parliament provided by the introduction of equal representation would greatly improve its culture.³¹

(CHAIR knocks for four minutes)

Now to the way in which equal representation would ensure justice for women.³² The tampon tax; period poverty; inadequate provision for maternity leave; the gender pay gap; sexual harassment; domestic violence; the appallingly low rates of conviction for rape.³³ These are all injustices³⁴ which affect women exclusively, and all injustices which changes in the law could address. Isn't the fact that so many of these injustices are still unaddressed at least in part because of the inequality of representation in Parliament? Wouldn't these injustices, blighting the lives of millions of women, be better addressed by an equal Parliament?³⁵

So, I have shown you that our current situation of unequal representation deters women from entering politics, creates a toxic culture in Parliament, and leaves injustices affecting women unaddressed.³⁶ Our proposal, ensuring equal representation for women in Parliament while maintaining the right of both constituency parties and voters to select their own candidates and their own MPs, will make Parliament both fairer and more effective, and will also make women's lives better.³⁷

(CHAIR knocks for five minutes)³⁸

28 A reversed tricolon (see Chapter 11). Normally tricolons are crescendos, building up to a climax. This one, however, is a diminuendo, starting with the solemn accusation of 'injustice' and going down to the less serious 'inefficiency'. This is a way of showing that the confrontational approach has value in both great and small situations, and therefore has universal scope.

29 Hitting your opponent with two different objections is the equivalent of following up a jab with a hook in boxing. The first weakens her; the second might floor her.

30 The Prime Minister has been forced to concede the Deputy Leader of the Opposition's point. Sometimes you have to accept a small defeat when confronted with a point you can't deny; although conceding an opponent's point may be a setback, to deny the strength of the point in the teeth of the evidence would look worse.

31 There's no doubt that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition won this particular exchange. The rather vague term 'reset' does not provide a clear route to 'Then', and the no less vague 'greatly improve its culture', similarly does not provide a clear picture of an improved 'Then'.

32 The Prime Minister recovers herself, and crisply introduces her third point.

33 This is a very powerful sentence. It uses asyndeton (see Chapter 11) to great effect, accumulating examples of injustice that women suffer, and builds to a crescendo, moving from economic inequalities suffered by women (maternity leave, tax on tampons) up to assaults on their physical safety (domestic violence, rape).

34 Language choice again. A weaker speaker might have used the word 'issues', which suggests something neutral, while 'injustices' describes something that is clearly wrong.

35 Erotema again; two rhetorical questions, using the doubling 'jab / hook' move; if you don't accept the first one, you might at least accept the second one.

36 Good signposting (see Chapter 3), summing up her arguments crisply in one sentence.

37 A crescendo tricolon to finish. Good to end on 'women's lives'. What happens in Parliament can (even though MPs make laws which affect all of us) seem a bit niche; but 'women's lives' encompasses 50% of the population.

38 In terms of timing, signposting and structure, the Prime Minister's speech is exemplary. It's less certain when it comes to argumentation. Her first and third arguments are strong, but her second is weak and underdeveloped, and quickly picked off by an effective POI. She wins one POI and loses the other.

It's early to say who is ahead at this stage (when we haven't yet heard any of the other side's speeches); however, I'd say that two out of three strong arguments and a strong response to the first POI from the Opposition Whip for the Prime Minister balanced against a weak second argument demolished by a devastating POI from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition makes it about 50 / 50 between Proposition and Opposition. Remember, though, that the contest in BP is not between Proposition and Opposition but between the four different teams. The judge will be noting how POIs are used as well as how speeches are given; the Leader of the Opposition / Deputy Leader of the Opposition team are ahead of the Member of the Opposition / Opposition Whip team on this measure.