

Women MPs bullied and abused in Commons

Level 2 | Intermediate

1 Key Vocabulary

Match the words with their meanings:

survey	frank	sexist	sack (vb)
humiliation	astonished	furious	promotion

1. very, very surprised.
2. showing prejudice against the opposite sex.
3. to remove someone from their job.
4. honest and open.
5. the process of getting a better job within an organisation.
6. very, very angry.
7. a report based on a range of facts and figures.
8. a feeling of shame.

2 Find the information

Look in the text and find the answers to these questions as quickly as possible:

1. How many MPs were interviewed in the survey?
2. What are the names of the 3 political parties mentioned?
3. What is another name for Conservative in British politics?
4. How many women MPs arrived in Parliament in 1997?
5. Which subjects are regarded as 'women's issues'?
6. Which two successful policies of women MPs are mentioned in the article?

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Jackie Ashley

A recent survey of women MPs in the British Parliament shows that many male MPs have very old-fashioned views about women. The survey was based on interviews with 83 current and recent MPs and it contains some frank comments about certain male MPs making sexist remarks and gestures as women try to speak in the House of Commons, the lower chamber of the British Parliament.

The study is called *Whose Secretary Are You, Minister?*. It was prepared by Professor Joni Lovenduski of Birkbeck College, London, and Margaret Moran MP. They collected more than 100 hours of taped interviews, which will be placed in the British Library.

When Gillian Shephard arrived in the House of Commons as a new Tory (Conservative) MP in 1987 she was confused when she and her fellow women MPs were called Betty. "There was a Conservative MP who called us all Betty," she says, "and when I said, 'Look, you know my name isn't Betty', he said, 'Ah, but you're all the same, so I call you all Betty, it's easier'."

Barbara Follett says: "I remember some Conservatives making sexist comments and gestures every time a Labour woman got up to speak." When a large number of female MPs - 120 in all - arrived in the House of Commons after Tony Blair's election victory in 1997, Labour's Claire Curtis-Thomas thought that the red ribbons tied to coat hangers were for Aids day. Later she learnt they were for MPs to hang up their swords.

Another new MP, Yvette Cooper, found it hard to make Commons officials believe that she was not a researcher or a secretary. Jackie Ballard, a Liberal Democrat who left parliament at the last election, remembers a well-known Tory MP who constantly made sexist remarks, "maybe about someone's legs or someone being a lesbian . . . if he worked for me he'd probably be sacked". The same MP once said, while drunk in the House of Commons, that he'd like to "make love to" a nearby woman.

The interviews show how even after the arrival of the "Blair babes", female MPs were expected to concentrate on "women's issues", such as health and

education. Several complain of the humiliation they experienced when they entered traditionally male territory. When Labour's Dari Taylor resigned from the defence committee - one of only two women on it - the chairman, Bruce George, stood up and said: "Well, I have to make this announcement: one down, one to go."

Many women MPs were astonished by the negative reactions of their male colleagues. Even male MPs who publicly supported sexual equality were furious when they saw women getting promotion. One current member of the government was asked, when she was promoted: "Oh, you've had a very fast rise, who have you been sleeping with?" Male MPs and officials seemed unwilling to accept the new Labour women, many of them in their 30s and 40s. Some simply could not believe that such young women could be members of parliament.

Many female MPs say that things have improved since the introduction of "family friendly" hours. The old male drinking culture is gradually disappearing. But it isn't perfect yet. Sarah Teather, the new Liberal Democrat MP, says: "Lots of people say it's similar to an old boys' club. I've always said, to me it feels rather more like a teenage public school* -- you know, a public school full of teenage boys."

The thing that makes women MPs furious is that their achievements are not recognised. They say that they have brought a new feminised agenda to British politics, in particular, the fact that childcare is now at the top of the domestic agenda. They mention several other successful policies too, in particular parental leave.

The Guardian Weekly 2004-12-10, page 11

* *Note: In the UK, so-called 'public' schools are not public at all. They are private schools for the children of rich parents.*

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3 Comprehension check

Are these sentences True or False according to the information in the text?

1. All British male MPs have old-fashioned views about women.
2. All the male MPs call the women MPs 'Betty'.
3. The red ribbons were to mark Aids day.
4. Commons officials thought one woman MP was a secretary or a researcher.
5. Health and education are traditional male territory.
6. Many male MPs reacted negatively when women got promotion.
7. The old male drinking culture is rapidly disappearing.
8. Many women MPs feel their achievements are not recognised.

4 Vocabulary development - collocations

Which prepositions follow these words?

- | | |
|----------------|-------|
| 1. based | _____ |
| 2. full | _____ |
| 3. concentrate | _____ |
| 4. resign | _____ |
| 5. arrive | _____ |
| 6. top | _____ |
| 7. views | _____ |
| 8. similar | _____ |

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5 Word building

Complete the table

	Verb	Noun
1.	achieve	_____
2.	promote	_____
3.	arrive	_____
4.	confuse	_____
5.	resign	_____
6.	support	_____
7.	react	_____
8.	improve	_____

6 Grammar focus

There are a number of different tenses in this text. Find or underline examples of the following:

1. present simple
2. past simple
3. present continuous
4. present perfect
5. present perfect continuous
6. present simple passive
7. past simple passive
8. future simple passive

7 Discussion

Are there many women MPs in your parliament?

Are there more male or female MPs?

Should women stay at home and look after children or go to work?

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KEY

1 Key Words

- | | | | |
|---------------|------------|-------------|----------------|
| 1. astonished | 2. sexist | 3. to sack | 4. frank |
| 5. promotion | 6. furious | 7. a survey | 8. humiliation |

2 Find the information

1. 83
2. Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat
3. Tory
4. 120
5. Health and education
6. Childcare and parental leave

3 Comprehension Check

- | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|
| 1. F | 2. F | 3. F | 4. T |
| 5. F | 6. T | 7. F | 8. T |

4 Vocabulary Development Collocations

- | | | | |
|-------------------|------------|---------------------|----------------|
| 1. based on | 2. full of | 3. concentrate on | 4. resign from |
| 5. arrive in (at) | 6. top of | 7. views about (on) | 8. similar to |

5 Word Building

- | | | | |
|----------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|
| 1. achievement | 2. promotion | 3. arrival | 4. confusion |
| 5. resignation | 6. support | 7. reaction | 8. improvement |

6 Grammar Focus Mixed Tenses

1. the survey shows
2. when she arrived
3. the drinking culture is disappearing
4. things have improved
5. who have you been sleeping with?
6. the study is called
7. the survey was based
8. the interviews will be placed