Threat Number One

Chivalry will die. Men, in other words, would no longer stand up in trains or buses and give women their seats. They would no longer open carriage doors for her or let her go first through a doorway. The following quotes show what the suffragists thought of this argument:

I say that not the most chivalrous deference or the most constant attention from man to woman should usurp the place of truth and justice.

Ann 9 Low, speaking at the Melbourne Town Hall in 1896

What did chivalry do for our defenceless factory girls?

A writer to the Woman's Voice, a NSW magazine, in 1895

Threat Number Two

Women with independent opinions about politics will lose their femininity and cease to be 'real women'. The men who made the following statements seemed to think that the 'real woman' should be stupid and have no convictions of her own.

If there is one thing more detestable than another... it is an absolutely logical woman. Why, one of the charms of woman is her utter unreasonableness... who, I ask, would kiss a political woman?

A Victorian Member of Parliament, 1895

I have never found any desire for the franchise on the part of women—I mean real women. I have met he-women—who ought to have been born men, but nature made a mistake—who were in favour...

A Member of the Victorian Parliament, 1894

They must certainly face all the possibilities of change, and he feared that as women approached nearer to the male type, she would lose some of the affectionate weaknesses which are her strength.

A Member of the South Australian Parliament, 1889

Threat Number Three

Going to the polling booth is not a ladylike thing for a woman to do. Polling booths could be rowdy places at the time and so it was claimed that women who belittled themselves by joining the crowds would no longer be attractive to men. Rose Scott reported what women thought of this argument. Rose was known for her fashionable dressing and particularly, in that age of ornate decoration, for her hats. She was also noted for her courteous and ladylike behaviour, so it was particularly apt that she should be the one to pour scorn on this argument.

A speaker dwelt for some time, amid much laughter, on the enormous strain the effort to record a vote would place upon the delicate nervous system of a woman... [he did not] speak about the delicate nervous system of the woman who often worked at cooking and washing and all sorts of laborious work, for fourteen hours a day.

Rose Scott, reporting a meeting in Sydney

We want to be more, not less womanly than we are, [but still] enjoy freedom of thought and action...

A Victorian WCTU leaflet, 1895

Men who try to frighten us with the bogie of a fear that we shall fail to charm and please them any more when we have in some not to be comprehended way defiled our womanhood by registering ourselves as voters...

Serena Lake, a South Australian WCTU suffragist, describing men who were using this argument