

# Women's Rights and Women's Empowerment in the Americas

## Research Paper

Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women in the Latin Americas have gained a broad range of economic and political rights so that in most countries men and women now have equal rights before the law. HOWEVER, there continues to be a significant gap between formal and real equality. (So, too, in the United States.) During our study abroad trip and with your work on your research paper, you will be able to think more deeply about the meaning of equality and empowerment for women both at home and in Brazil.

**Remember:** Based on our spring workshops, our study stems from thinking about -  
"Women's Empowerment": What does it mean? And how can we study it?

From "Guidelines on Women's Empowerment for the UN resident Coordinator System"  
<http://www.un.org/popin/unfpa/taskforce/guide/iatfwemp.gdl.html>:

### **WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: A DEFINITION**

Women's empowerment has five components: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

**Remember:** During our spring workshops, we targeted our study of women's equality and empowerment in part using "Gender Indicators" as a means to study the empowerment of women in comparative perspective.

(From: World Economic Forum. 2013. The Global Gender Gap Report 2013. Geneva: WEF.  
<http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2013>;

## **GLOBAL GENDER INDEX: THE FOUR PILLARS**

*The Global Gender Gap Index examines the gap between men and women in four fundamental categories: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment...*

### *Economic participation and opportunity*

*This area is captured through three concepts: the participation gap, the remuneration gap and the advancement gap. The participation gap is captured through the difference in labour force participation rates. The remuneration gap is captured through a hard data indicator (ratio of estimated female-to-male earned income) and a qualitative variable calculated through the World Economic Forum's Executive Opinion Survey (wage equality for similar work). Finally, the gap between the advancement of women and men is captured through two hard data statistics (the ratio of women to men among legislators, senior officials and managers, and the ratio of women to men among technical and professional workers).*

### *Educational attainment*

*In this category, the gap between women's and men's current access to education is captured through ratios of women to men in primary-, secondary- and tertiary-level education. A longer-term view of the country's ability to educate women and men in equal numbers is captured through the ratio of the female literacy rate to the male literacy rate.*

### *Health and survival*

*This category attempts to provide an overview of the differences between women's and men's health. To do this, we use two variables. The first variable included in this sub index is the sex ratio at birth. This variable aims specifically to capture the phenomenon of "missing women" prevalent in many countries with a strong son preference. Second, we use the gap between women's and men's healthy life expectancy, calculated by the World Health Organization. This measure provides an estimate of the number of years that women and men can expect to live in good health by taking into account the years lost to violence, disease, malnutrition or other relevant factors.*

### *Political empowerment*

*This category includes mainly measures of the gap between men and women in political decision-making at the highest levels. This concept is captured through the ratio of women to men in minister-level positions and the ratio of women to men in parliamentary positions. In addition, we include the ratio of women to men in terms of years in executive office (prime minister or president) in the last 50 years. A clear drawback in this category is the absence of any variables capturing differences between the participation of women and men at local levels of government. Should such data become available at a global level in future years, they will be considered for inclusion in the Global Gender Gap Index.*

## **Research Paper Guidelines:**

The assignment is an analytical 14-16 page paper

In this research paper you will:

- Choose an issue of women's empowerment and equality – you will craft a literature review over your specific issue. You want to introduce the issue and answer: Why is this issue an 'empowerment issue'? You want to discuss the issue globally and in the United States. (6 pages)
- Situate the issue in Brazil. (2 pages)
- Carry out participant observation in Brazil to assess the true situation and implications. (4-6 pages)

NOTE: You will prepare for this piece of the research project before we go – as much as possible. Your first submission will include a brainstorm sheet to serve as a baseline of: what you expect to see, what you hope to observe, and what questions you ideally would like to ask. (2 pages)

- Draw comparative conclusions between the U.S. and Brazil to consider how we might make better progress on your chosen issue of women's empowerment and equality. (2 pages)

## **Important Dates:**

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Research Topic: March 28<sup>th</sup>

Submission I: Friday, May 19<sup>th</sup>

Submission II: Friday, June 30<sup>th</sup>

\* Send your papers for the archive by email to Professors Mary Ellen Lennon AND Holly Gastineau-Grimes\*

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