



Julia Gillard, the Media and Young Women

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Executive Summary

Research Question

This report will first contextualize negative media representations of former Prime Minister Julia Gillard and then, using this contextual information, will identify the extent to which these have negatively impacted the stated political interests and leadership engagement of a representative group of young Australian women. Finally, the opinions and feelings of the latter will be analysed in order to understand the specific ways in which the negative portrayal of Gillard has affected young women, with the goal of establishing a definite course of action for reversing its detrimental effects.

Two principal methods were used in pursuing these aims. First, an extensive review of relevant literature was conducted to evaluate the state of current research, and to identify those aspects of the subject which have arguably been overlooked or neglected. In addition to this, an online survey, written from and intended to engage a feminist standpoint perspective, was also conducted.

The results of this survey indicate that women, especially those over the age of 31, have been greatly affected by the negative portrayal of Julia Gillard throughout her term as Prime Minister. Above all, media representations greatly affected the participants' aspirations to enter politics, yet also significantly affected their leadership aspirations in general. Furthermore, a large majority of participants asserted that Julia Gillard's treatment by the mainstream media was extremely unfair and biased, and that a male politician in the same position would never have been comparably portrayed.

Recommendations:

1. YWCA Adelaide should increase their media profile through a magazine that focuses on female leaders and other positive female role models. YWCA Adelaide can also educate women about how to react to and how to 'call out' sexism in their SHE Leads program. The YWCA could collaborate with Universities or other youth-focused organisations to work out how they can get a better representation of leadership aspirations that focus on all young women.

2. Mainstream media could have a complementary regulation in place that prevents gender-biased news coverage, could showcase positive female leaders and politicians, and could place more emphasis on policies rather than politicians.
3. Education institutions could do more to inform people from a young age about gender equality, encourage all students – both male and female – to become leaders in their own lives, and include more Gender Studies and Political Science courses – especially secondary schools.
4. We could all do more to promote, encourage and respect positive female role models and leaders in all areas of society.
5. Finally, we could use our powers of choice, commercially, politically, and socially, to lobby the media and politicians for a change in our society.

Project Summary

Research Question

The treatment of former Prime Minister Julia Gillard in the media has, for many, been one of vitriol and sexism. Has this portrayal of Gillard affected young women's engagement with politics? What needs to happen in order to regain their interest?

For the last few decades women have been slowly gaining more leadership positions in both businesses and in parliament. Despite this shift, however, men still outnumber women in leadership positions overall and women leaders, on the whole, are treated as if they do not belong and often have to fight to prove their legitimacy. One of the most notorious examples of this in recent years is the election of Australia's first female Prime Minister Julia Gillard, who was systematically treated in an unfair and biased manner by mainstream media due to her gender. The media has a wide impact on broader socio-cultural perspectives, both personally and politically, and such sexist and biased views can significantly affect the opinions and sense of self-worth of those who are exposed to them.

In the current literature that focuses on women in politics, leadership, and the gender-biased media treatment of women, however, there is a distinct lack of focus on the negative treatment of female leaders and politicians, and the impact that this can have on women's view of themselves and the world around them, that needs to be addressed. This research report is intended as an initial step toward greater discussion of this issue, and explores whether media treatment of Gillard has had an impact on women's – especially young women's – political and personal leadership aspirations and, if it has, how the YWCA, the media itself and the Australian public can rectify this situation.

Chapter One analyses current scholarly discussions of the power and effects of the media, of parliament as a gendered sphere, of women in leadership, and of media representation of female politicians. This literature indicates that the media has a significant impact on people's perceptions and opinions of politics and, more visibly, on voting patterns, reinforcing dominant

norms, ideologies and practices which contribute to stereotyping. Furthermore, social analysts have shown that women in parliament and other leadership positions are criticized for acting too “male” or too “female” and are often compelled to prove their legitimacy to their (male) peers. Lastly, it has been repeatedly shown that the media treat men and women differently, focusing more on women’s gender and constantly reducing them to their bodies by giving emphasis to, and vilifying their fashion, body-shape, and parental and marital status. Chapter Two presents and explains the methodologies used throughout this report. Chapter Three focuses on the survey results and the implications of these for determining whether media treatment of Gillard has had an impact on women’s political and leadership aspirations. Finally, Chapter Four concludes the report and offers recommendations for change.

Expected Outcomes

This report contributes to a wide range of scholarly discussion that is currently circulating following Julia Gillard’s conclusion of her tenure as Prime Minister and subsequent exit from politics. It also contributes to current understanding of the extent to which the media can affect us, especially in its reinforcement of stereotypically gendered roles. The expected outcomes of these aims are: greater awareness of the media’s effects on women; greater awareness of the effects that negative portrayals of female political leaders, such as Julia Gillard, have on women’s political and leadership aspirations; and, finally, what needs to change and what can be done to rectify these problems. For YWCA Adelaide specifically, this report primarily offers a means to increase current knowledge of the effects that the media can have on popular conceptions of gender, and of the notion that politics is a highly gendered space, as well as advising what can be done to change this problem. Secondly, as this report will be circulated through the YWCA Adelaide’s webpage as well as through interested parties affiliated with the researcher, this report could be beneficial to the greater public by further educating and raising awareness of the problem that is the media portrayal of female leaders and politicians and how their treatment is gendered. Through this, society as a whole can start changing and healing so all people can have a fair and equitable chance to succeed to leadership.

Chapter One: Literature Review

In order to analyse whether media treatment of Australia's first female Prime Minister Julia Gillard has had a negative effect on young women's engagement with politics and, if so, what needs to be done to rectify this, it is necessary to identify available academic literature. There is an abundance of theoretical perspectives from which to examine the relationship between mainstream news media and the way that women politicians are treated in our society and culture. Though the literature to explain this relationship is vast, for the current purposes it can be organised into three areas of study. The first is comprised of those texts which analyse the power of media and the ways in which it influences social and ideological patterns. The second group of texts focus more specifically on parliament as a gendered (male) space and on the need felt by many women politicians to behave and dress in a 'gender acceptable' manner. A third category of research addresses the lack of women in leadership globally and the reasons for this. Finally, the fourth category focuses on the gendered representation of women politicians in mainstream media. Though all four of these groupings primarily address the way in which the media affects public perception of women politicians and leaders, the innovation of this paper is to shift focus to the effects that media representations of the latter can have on young women's political interests.

Section 1: The power of Media

In contemporary Western society, mainstream media are extremely influential and pervasive. One significant media theorist who will be drawn upon frequently in this report, Karen Ross (2010), theorises that news media "regularly and routinely perform an affirmatory function" which reinforces dominant norms, ideologies and values. In *Gendered Media* (2010) she highlights the impact that news media have on society and the ways in which they reinforce a hegemonic view of male dominance which sends a vital message to the "public about women's place, women's roles, and women's lives" (Ross 2010: 90-91). Despite the news media insisting that what they represent is the "*real* [sic] world", Bob Franklin (1997), David Croteau and William Hoynes (2001), Karin Sanders (2003), and Brian McNair (2006) have all revealed the constructed nature of the 'realities' presented by news media and an accompanying move from factual news toward fictional, or semi-fictional 'infotainment'.

Additionally, multiple studies have explored the impact of news media on popular ideological perspectives and have identified the significant degree of influence which they exercise over public political perspectives. One important study of great relevance for this report, conducted by Sanders and Norris (1997), found that after “sustained and prolonged exposure” to specific messages broadcast by news media that challenge their beliefs, a select group of participants showed a considerable shift in political viewpoint. Ross (2002) concurs with this, arguing that the media affects voters’ political opinions and thus has the ability to shift a political party’s position depending on which way they are portrayed (Ross 2002: 145). On the other hand, Sanders and Norris argue that whilst positive representations invoked positive voter responses to a specified political party, negative portrayals caused only “inconsistent responses” (Sanders and Norris 1997). This process, however, as many studies have shown (Kenmar 1986; Hayes and Makkai 1996,) remains deeply gendered as it seems that men are affected more than women. Ross concludes that news media do shape voter opinions and attitudes towards political parties and leaders and that this is a deliberate and consciously employed strategy (Ross, 2002: 145).

Section 2: Parliament as a Gendered Sphere

Space

Paralleling the gendered representation of politicians in mainstream media, another central theme underlying this paper is the revelation of parliament, too, as a gendered sphere. A large amount of scholarly research has been published regarding the contemporary position of women in the once predominantly male sphere of parliament. Australian gender theorist Elizabeth van Acker asserts in *Different Voices* (1999) that, despite many decades of feminism, women remain second-class citizens due to their lack of personal political power and, “until different groups are equally represented in politics, many women will continue to occupy a secondary position” (5). Although much has changed since the publication of this text, what Acker has to offer is extremely resonant with the current argument, as there remains a general perception of parliament as gendered and the latter still arguably appears to value women as second-class citizens. Similarly, Mary Crawford and Barbara Pini (2010) observe that parliament has been regarded as a “degendered institution” for too long and that, because parliament has always been considered the domain of an “elite group of white men”, anything Other “causes

confusion and disturbance” (Crawford and Pini, 2010: 94). Crawford and Pini further state that the “trespassing” of women on traditionally male parliamentary space is only tolerated if a large majority of this space is still occupied by men. This is a trend that is global, as Canadian political scientist Jill Vickers comments that “like race, disability and sexual orientation, sex and gender were considered irrelevant to the study of politics and government” (Curtin 2006: 402), which further iterates the questionable notion that parliament is not gendered.

Behaviour

Just as parliamentary space is gendered, the behaviour of politicians also adheres to gendered expectations. Crawford and Pini (2010) argue that male Australian politicians are seen as “uncompromising, combative and strong” when using “colourful language,” however, according to their study, male politicians believe that it would be “‘unbecoming’ for a woman to adopt such an interactive approach” (Crawford and Pini, 2010: 96). In concurrence with this, Marian Sawyer (2010) and Acker (1999) both state that there are male traits and female traits in politics and that “double standards are often applied to women” who display the former. Traits described as ‘male’ are usually those associated with leadership, such as authority, strength, determination and decisiveness, whereas passivity, a nurturing disposition and an ability to negotiate are generally perceived as ‘female’. One set of traits offer an obvious advantage in the political world, leaving women perceived as either disadvantaged if ‘female’ or “strident and overly ambitious” if perceived to display more ‘male’ traits. (Sawyer 2010: 2). Julia Baird concurs, arguing that women who enact male traits and behaviours “tend to become objects of scorn and curiosity”. Rather than being tough and stoic they are seen as “hard, cold and tough when, politically at least, their behaviour has been normal” (Baird 2010: 1). Due to this, Baird states, female politicians have been forced to “highlight, debate, defend or dodge the question of their novelty and their gender” (Baird 2010: 1).

Section 3: Women in Leadership

Although women are currently in more leadership positions globally than they have been in any other decade, there are still too few at the top whether in business or politics. According to the US Bureau of Labour Statistics (2005), of the wealthiest Fortune 500 company executives, occupying statuses such as chairman, president, CEO and chief operating officer, only 6 percent

are women (US Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2005). Furthermore, women comprise only 2 percent of CEOs and 15 percent of Board Directors. For Alice Eagly and Linda Carli (2008), this is not a trend isolated to the United States of America as women only make up 11 percent of the top executives and 4 percent of the CEOs and heads of boards in the largest fifty publicly traded corporations in the European Union (Eagly and Carli, 2008: 1). To further their argument that women are misrepresented in leadership worldwide, they quote Wall Street Journal's Carol Hymowitz and Timothy Schellhardt who, in 1986, stated that "even those few women who rose steadily through the ranks eventually crashed into an invisible barrier. The executive suite seemed within their grasp, but they just couldn't break through the glass ceiling" (Eagly and Carli, 2008: 1). The term "glass ceiling" describes "an absolute barrier at a specific high level in organisations" and seemed very relevant in the 1980s and 1990s but, for Eagly and Carli, is now obsolete due to the depiction of a "single, unvarying obstacle ... [which] fails to incorporate the complexity and variety of challenges that women can face in their leadership journeys" (Eagly and Carli, 2003: 814). A better metaphor for the challenge that women face in their professional careers is, in their view, that of a complex and interminable "labyrinth" (Eagly and Carli, 2008: 2).

Once again, there is currently an abundance of literature addressing the possible reasons underlying this "labyrinth" which women face in their professional careers, as well as the lack of women in leadership positions more generally. Many studies (Ridgeway 1986; Langford & MacKinnon 2000; Wigboldus, Dijksterhuis & van Knippenberg 2003; etc.) have affirmed that people associate certain traits with men and women, tending to link men more with those traits that connote leadership. Kristyan Scott and Douglas Brown (2006) argue that women are associated with "communal qualities" which include "being especially affectionate, helpful, friendly, kind and sympathetic ... interpersonally sensitive, gentle, and soft-spoken," whereas men are associated with "agentic qualities" which are associated with assertion and control, "being especially aggressive, ambitious, dominant, self-confident ... forceful ... self-reliant and individualistic" (Scott and Brown, 2006: 233). Furthermore, both Scott and Brown as well as Eagly and Carli agree that the "agentic traits" are the ones people associate with effective leadership (Eagly and Carli, 2008: 3; Scott and Brown, 2006: 234). This leads to women finding

themselves in a “double bind” as, if they perform highly “communal qualities,” they may be criticized for not being “agentic enough” and, if they perform highly “agentic qualities,” they may be criticized for lacking a properly collaborative ethos (Eagly and Carli, 2008: 3). In addition, women may also be vilified for acting too “male” or too aggressive, labelled “control freaks,” whereas men who act in the same manner are more often than not called “passionate” (Scott and Brown, 2006: 233).

In contrast, Robert Vecchio (2002) argues that, because the proportion of women in leadership positions has “tripled during the last three decades of the 20th century,” it is they who in fact have a bias against men (Vecchio, 2002: 643). He labels this the “feminine advantage”. Vecchio contends that “women are more skilled at inclusiveness, interpersonal relations, power sharing, and the nurturing of followers” and are therefore “superior leaders” (Vecchio, 2002: 643). Vecchio believes that the “gender advantage position” is due to assumptions that “strong polarities exist and that specific poles are to be valued” (Vecchio, 2002: 647). In stark opposition to this, Eagly responded by stating that “Vecchio has simplified our analysis as arguing for female advantage. Instead, we contended that, on the average, [although] contemporary female managers manifest a small advantage in leadership style,” they also face disadvantage from “prejudicial evaluation” of their leadership competency, “especially in male-dominated leadership roles” (Eagly, 2003: 853). Mary Hogue and Robert Lord (2007) agree, arguing that even when women reach leadership positions they are constantly monitored by their peers and “face obstacles in terms of being recognized as legitimate leaders”, whereas men are usually instantly recognized as being ‘natural’ leaders (Hogue and Lord, 2007: 370).

A majority of current literature is focused on the United States of America and Europe, however, Australia also experiences a lack of women in leadership positions, both in business and in parliament. After the 2013 Federal Elections, women make up 26 percent of the seats in the Lower House and 37 percent in the Upper House (APH, 2013). Furthermore, the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency’s (EOWA) “2010 Australia Census of Women in Leadership” finds that 8.4 percent of Board of Directors are women and, more shockingly, 54

percent of ASX200 companies had no female Board Directors. This is a worldwide trend that needs to be fixed.

More women need to reach leadership positions worldwide, yet there are many barriers obstructing this goal. Eagly and Carli (2008) as well as Scott and Brown (2006) argue that if we completely overhaul the way that current business, professional and government and parliament workplaces run, then both women and men can have equal opportunity to fulfil their leadership aspirations (Eagly and Carli, 2008: 6-8; Scott and Brown, 2006: 232).

Section 4: Media Representation of Female Politicians

The Sartorial Spotlight

Central to this report is an analysis of the gendered representation of political women in mainstream news media. Many studies (Norris 1997; Lemis and Drob 2002; Ross 2002; Atkeson 2009) have argued that female politicians are treated differently in the media in comparison to their male counterparts and that, above all, it is their body which attracts most criticism. Ross (2010) contends that women are constantly belittled for their “private lives, domestic arrangements, and sartorial style,” and are repeatedly undermined by a focus on their age, fashion, and appearance (Ross 2010: 98). Furthermore, both Ross (2002) and Acker (1999) state that many women politicians are frustrated by the media’s fascination with, and constant representation of “their personal sartorial style ... and the spurious link made between outward appearance and ability to do the job” (Ross, 2010: 89). For United Kingdom Labor Member of Parliament Dawn Primaralo (as quoted in Ross 2002),

women are never the right age. We’re too young, we’re too old. We’re too thin, we’re too fat. We wear too much make-up, we don’t wear enough. We’re too flashy in our dress, we don’t take enough care. There isn’t a thing we can do that’s right (Ross, 2002: 90).

Baird suggests that, to further add to the unfair treatment of female politicians, the male-dominated media avoid writing about men’s appearances and “assume that men are more stable and more able to conduct business”. Furthermore, whilst women are vilified in the media

for acting as a 'ruthless' leader, male politicians aspiring to be Prime Minister are not "tear[ed] down" (Baird, 2004: 6).

Anna Goldsworthy (2013) theorises that this heavy focus on female bodies and appearance is a deliberate tactic intended to silence women politicians, the constant reiteration of such concerns and, more precisely, of how female politicians' bodies are never adequate is "misogyny's standard fare: *you have a female body, shame! Back in your box!*" (Goldsworthy, 2013: 22) For those represented, it becomes a constant reminder that the politician is indeed a woman and that a woman is the Other and not the norm in politics. Women must be attractive or they are seen as invisible and thus inaudible (Goldsworthy, 2013: 24) - a politician who is inaudible will inevitably fail.

Women at the Top

Ross (2002) reminds us that, while few women have yet been elected to "the top political job" – that is, Prime Minister or President – and thus had the opportunity to prove their capabilities, the media continues to cast doubt on their ability to lead the country (Ross, 2002: 99). Despite many women having years of political experience, their "competence and suitability for the job" are persistently questioned (Ross 2002: 99). For Ross a woman politician has a fight on her hands to prevent the constant display of her sex as she is "always described as a *woman* [their emphasis] politician ... [it is] always the primary descriptor" (Ross 2010: 101). Ross furthers her argument, asserting that a female politician is "defined by what she is *not* [their emphasis]" – a "typical politician who allegedly bears no gendered descriptor but who is clearly marked *male* [their emphasis]" (Ross 2010: 101). For van Acker, the Australian media portray female politicians as secondary, even if they are prime minister, and continue to ignore their "accomplishments, abilities and contributions to society" (van Acker 1999: 146), preferring to focus on traditional stereotypes of womanly duties such as photographing her with her family, doing household duties, cooking, etc. (van Acker, 1999: 148). Goldsworthy cites Hilary Clinton, who "no longer fight[s] it [the sexist media treatment]. I no longer complain about it. It's just what you have to live with," (Goldsworthy 2013: 22) thus reinforcing the ubiquity of this kind of treatment. Acker, Goldsworthy and Ross all agree that this double-standard of gendered media

representation is similarly unfair to the public, who are subjected only to the appearances rather than the policies of female politicians.

The Emphatic Effects

Whilst a great deal of research has been published theorizing media representations of women politicians, little has yet focused on the severe effects that these may have on society as a whole and, in particular, on young women. An essential theorist for this report, Julia Baird (2010), posits that negative and sexist media coverage of women politicians can be a “serious disincentive” for more women to join politics (Baird 2010: 129). Additionally, Goldsworthy (2013) argues that if women complain of sexism or sexist treatment from the media then they are often perceived as a “*bad sport* [their emphasis]” and are “*not playing fair* [their emphasis]”, thus conveying to aspiring female politicians that their femininity is a weakness and that they will never be able to escape the mark of having a female body (Goldsworthy 2013: 15-16). To emphasise her point, Goldsworthy quotes current health minister Tanya Plibersek –

the thing that disturbs me about it on occasion is I never want a young woman to look at the treatment that the prime minister receives and think, I don’t want to do that job, because if I’m going to be a target like that, I don’t want to let myself in for it (Goldsworthy 2013: 16).

Conclusion

Whilst much attention has been focused on the influence of media, women in parliament and media portrayals of women politicians, there is a gap concerning the effects that this kind of representation has on young women and, if there is an effect on young women’s interests, what society can do in order to change this situation. This report, therefore, attempts to explore this uncharted area of analysis in order to find out what needs to be done in Australian society.

Chapter Two: Methodology

Upon examining the current academic literature a number of gaps were noticeable. Whilst many texts mention how media portrayal of female politicians has a significant impact on public opinion, there has been relatively little discussion of how it can influence young women's political interests and aspirations. As a preliminary step toward addressing this lacuna, a survey was conducted for this research report examining a representative group of women's opinions on the media treatment of Gillard.

Research Approach

This project is inherently feminist and thus feminist methodologies and ideologies have been used throughout. The founding assumptions are that gender equality in all spheres of life, especially in the political domain, is both positive and necessary. Australian feminist discourse and, in particular, Australian political feminists such as Ann Summers, will be a focus and are drawn on throughout this report.

Methods

A thirty-question survey, including a range of multiple-choice and open-ended questions, was used to ensure that the frequently unheard voices and opinions of women in our community were captured as it is important to listen to women's voices on this topic. Women's opinions are crucial as they are often overlooked and overshadowed and through their voices, important change in Australia can occur.

The first part of the survey was designed to record the demographics, age, annual income, education and voting patterns of the participants, and to give an understanding of the kind of media that participants across these categories access to learn about news and current affairs. This section was followed by a range of questions asking participants to give their opinions of Australia's first female Prime Minister; whether the media treats male and female politicians equally; and how they felt about the media's treatment of Gillard during her term of office. Sequentially, the next section explored whether participants had any leadership or political aspirations before and after Gillard became Prime Minister, and whether her election affected these goals.

The survey included two speculative questions: firstly, participants were asked if they thought that they would ever witness another female Prime Minister during their lifetime; secondly, they were then asked whether media treatment of Gillard negatively impacted their personal leadership aspirations. The final section consisted of four similarly open-ended questions that asked participants if they thought there was anything that they themselves, the YWCA, the media and the public overall could do to change the way in which female politicians are represented in the media. Lastly, participants were asked if there was anything more that they would like to say on this issue in general. Using open-ended questions gave participants freedom to respond to issues raised, to discuss additional issues that were important to them, and above all to further empower their sense of active political and socio-cultural agency.

The surveys were conducted using internet based survey program *Survey Monkey*, which allowed for quick and effective construction, distribution and analysis. Using an internet-based survey provider also meant that more participants had instant access to the survey, which is necessary in this age of internet technology. The surveys were distributed through the researcher's personal Facebook page, the YWCA Adelaide's Facebook page, as well as through the latter's membership mailing-lists.

Limitations

Whilst distributing the surveys through the YWCA garnered impressive and fast results (112 respondents in under a week), it meant that participants may have been biased as the YWCA are an inherently feminist organization. The majority of women who support the YWCA have a keen interest in politics and women's equality. This may have impacted on the nature of the results as it could be skewed towards a certain type of response.

Furthermore, the majority of participants were tertiary educated, which could also affect the nature of results. In order to gather a wider range of results, the survey could be distributed through other websites that have a less biased focus. However the limited time frame for this project prevented this approach. The author intends to undertake further exploration of this as part of an Honours thesis.

Additionally, an internet based survey, although very efficient and quick, is only available to those who have access to the internet, and thus the results could a general bias against those who might not have access to the internet. If more time was available surveys could have been distributed by hand, garnering a wider range of responses.

In an ideal world, with an abundance of time, money and resources, this survey would have been conducted differently. It would have been distributed to women of all classes and education by handing out a hard-copy of the survey at shopping-centres or other public places. A group interview or one-on-one interviews where the participants are shown examples of Gillard's media representation would also have been useful to understand a wider range of women's opinions of this media treatment and the effects that it may have had on them. Despite the lack of time, money and resources, the survey that was used was successful due to the abundance of participants and the level of description and useful data that was obtained.

Chapter Three: Results & Discussion

Respondents

The survey received 112 responses with exactly 36.04 percent (40 participants) aged 18-21 and 36.04 percent (40 participants) aged 31 and over (Appendix A, Q1). A majority of the respondents (66.96 percent) are tertiary educated (Appendix A, Q2) and half of the participants (50.89 percent) earn under \$30,000 annually before-tax (Appendix A, Q3). This indicates that, although a large majority of participants are tertiary educated, they nevertheless do not receive a high income - this could also be due, however, to the fact that a large proportion of respondents are still currently studying.

72.07 percent of respondents stated that they have voted before the September 2013 election, while for one quarter of participants the latter was their first opportunity to vote (Appendix A, Q5). The Australian Labor Party received the highest percentage of participant votes (38.39 percent) with the Greens coming in second (32.14 percent), yet only 10 participants aligned with the Coalition (8.93 percent) (Appendix A, Q6). Seventeen participants (15.18 percent) considered themselves “swinging voters” whilst six said that they voted independent (0.98 percent) or Other (4.46 percent). The high amount of Labour and Greens votes could be due to the fact that the survey was distributed through a progressive young women’s organisation that promotes equality and rejects outdated notions of sexism. It could also be due to the survey being distributed through the researcher’s personal Facebook page where “friends” are predominantly young, politically interested and “left-wing”.

The Media

As has been previously explored in the first chapter, many feminist theorists have argued that the media treats female and male politicians differently (Norris 1997; Lemis and Drob 2002; Ross 2002; Atkeson 2009). Mainstream media often focus on female politicians’ bodies and personal lives rather than on their policies and actions, whereas male politicians are usually spared from such treatment (Ross 2010: 98). The results of the survey conducted as part of this study concur with these studies: nearly 9 in 10 participants (88.29 percent) answered “no” to the question “do you think the media treats male and female politicians in the same way”. Furthermore, almost 8

in 10 respondents (77.48 percent) described the media treatment of Gillard as “more demeaning than other politicians,” with over 6 in 10 participants (66.16 percent) describing it as “unfair and unbalanced” (Appendix A, Q9). When asked how the participants felt about this treatment of Gillard, 74.77 percent said they felt “angry at the media” with two-thirds (65.42 percent) feeling “disappointed” and just over half of the participants feeling “angry at other politicians” (Appendix A, Q10). For this question the participants were given the option to answer in their own words, prompting one respondent to state that she felt “shock, horror and dismay” and was outraged that “our society excuses and legitimizes the unfair and discriminatory treatment of women” (Participants, Appendix B, Q 10).

Moreover, when participants were asked “why did you feel like this?” many answered that they thought Gillard’s media portrayal was unfair and that no Australian male politician or Prime Minister has ever been treated in this way. One participant felt that the media “‘ganged up’ on JG [sic] and relentlessly criticized her leadership, never backing off. No other politician [sic] in the history of Australian politics has been” treated this way (Appendix B, Q 11). Another participant felt that “she had to answer for things no male politician would ever have to answer for. She was disrespected and treated as a joke”, whether it was for her “big arse”, red hair or nasal voice – all of which, Goldworthy explains, accords to “misogyny’s standard fare: *you have a female body, shame! Back in your box!*” (2013: 22). One participant’s thoughts correlated with Goldworthy’s and Ross’s theory:

I understand that women experience structural discrimination, as well as the fact that attitudes towards women make it difficult for a woman to do ANYTHING [sic] without it being something to do with her being a woman! (e.g. if she is stern or strong she is a ‘bitch’ or ‘ball breaker’ but if she shows emotion she is weak or unable to lead) ... I also noticed the language the media was using towards Gillard was very gendered, and has much more of a disempowering effect in society/politics than gendered language towards men does (Appendix B, Q 11).

These results indicate that the media’s portrayal of Julia Gillard during her time as Prime Minister was overtly sexist and biased, and that women can clearly perceive this underlying message.

However, the study conducted was too limited to be generalizable to the population of Australian women, as participants were all quite politically focused and “left” leaning. More research needs to be conducted to test whether women from all backgrounds, as well as men, garner the same results.

Many other participants responded in similar ways, stating that Gillard was “being continually, selectively silenced” and “unfairly criticized ... too often” about her clothing or bodily features. Despite or perhaps because of this, however, some women felt empowered and even more determined to make a difference. One participant said that she felt that this treatment “encouraged women to speak up ... [through] this I know I am not alone – a shocking yet confidence building realization” (Appendix B, Q 11). However, the large majority of participants felt that it was emblematic of the sexism that is still all too prevalent in Australia and it discouraged them from aspiring toward leadership positions.

Let’s Talk Politics and Leadership

Gender and political theorists, such as Julia Baird, posit that negative media portrayal of female politicians can be a “serious disincentive” for women to join politics (Baird 2010: 129). Out of 112 participants, thirty-two (30.77 percent) said that they have had aspirations to enter politics at a local, state or federal level (Appendix A, Q 18). When asked if “the media treatment of Julia Gillard while Prime Minister made” participants less or more likely to stand for election, two-thirds of those previously interested in politics stated that they were less likely to be interested in standing for election again in the future. Women over the age of thirty-one were more affected by this, with 8 out of 10 participants in this category confiding that they were less likely to stand at a local, state or federal level after witnessing negative media treatment of Gillard. Women between the ages of 18-21, on the other hand, were not as affected – only 57.1 percent said they were less likely to stand at a local, state or federal level, while 42.86 percent asserted that it did not affect their decision at all.

There are many possible reasons for this age-based disparity. Older women might identify with Julia Gillard more than younger women, who may disassociate themselves from older female politicians whilst simultaneously believing that by the time they enter politics, parliament and

the media will be more gender equal and less biased. Another reason could be that older women might consume messages from more traditional forms of media that happen to be conservative and less “left-wing” than other media sources such as internet blogs, generally preferred by younger participants.

Furthermore, results from the survey show that media portrayals of Gillard also affect participants’ leadership aspirations within their own life. When asked “has the media’s treatment of Julia Gillard while Prime Minister made” participants less or more interested in leadership for themselves, one-third (33.9 percent) of those previously interested in leadership answered that they were now less interested. Again, older women (31+) were more affected as 31.8 percent were less interested in comparison to the 27.8 percent of women aged 18-21.

These findings correspond to a considerable amount of current scholarly discussion concerning the effect that the media can have on people’s patterns of thinking and voting. However, as noted above there is a large gap in this literature regarding the impact of the media for women’s own personal aspirations. The survey conducted for this research indicates that the media play a much larger role in this respect than previously thought, influencing not only women’s political aspirations but also their private leadership goals. Could this negative portrayal of Gillard and other female politicians have a much larger and more emphatic effect on women’s lives and their views of themselves and other women? More research needs to be done in order to examine the extent to which media really does effect society and societal beliefs, though the survey indicates that there is a serious problem here that needs to be addressed.

Chapter Four: Conclusion and Recommendations

Women of all ages, and maybe also men, are negatively affected by the media treatment of Gillard during her time as Prime Minister. Whilst this treatment may leave a minority more determined to enter politics or other forms of leadership in their own lives it has drastically affected a large majority of women in a decidedly negative manner. This calls for drastic action and drastic change. There are several things that need to be done, separated here into three specific areas of potential improvement, aimed at five specific organisations, groups or communities.

YWCA Adelaide

The YWCA is an already active organization dedicated to empowering women and to inspiring and furthering their leadership aspirations. There are multiple things that YWCA Adelaide could do, however, using their current resources and membership base, which would help to reinforce their impact for South Australian women:

1. Create a magazine or a 'zine' that focuses on important positive things that women are currently doing, whether in politics, business, athletics, or any other area of achievement. The magazine could encourage women leadership as well as supporting those who are already leaders by discussing positive aspects of leadership. The YWCA Adelaide team could interview women leaders and ask them for advice for young women who aspire to lead in their own lives. Furthermore, the magazine could, to quote one survey participant, "call disrespect for what it really is" by analyzing sexist messages promoted in mainstream media. YWCA Adelaide could then increase its own media profile by circulating this magazine online through their webpage and Facebook group as well as distributing it through multiple Adelaide businesses, Universities, community centres and Unions;
2. Clearly inform women on how best to react to sexism and how to call out sexism in their 'SHE Leads' program. Through this education, participants can learn how to respect themselves as leaders as well as respecting other current women leaders, they could educate others on the negative sexist messages that are presented in mainstream media, and could learn to judge exactly how these messages are unfair and biased. This could

result in benefiting these women and their personal self-esteem as leaders while at the same time helping to educate their surrounding community as well.

3. Work on building partnerships with other local government/various other community organisations that have an interest in young people; collaborate with other groups and devise an education campaign that could be run in schools; guest lecture at Universities and TAFE; plan how the YWCA Adelaide can gather a wider representation of women's leadership aspirations that focus on all young women; and
4. Perhaps the YWCA and other partners could test messages with groups of young people (both men and women) to work out what messages about leadership and gender equity resound best with them and then use these messages consistently in a wide array of fora (e.g. blogging, meetings, tweeting, etc.)

Media

The Australian media is perhaps the most crucial group of organisations that needs to change in order to rectify the current state of female political representation, as they are the ones projecting these images onto the population of Australia. Whilst only four percent of survey participants named print media as a preferred source for news information, 45.5 percent revealed that they learn about news and current affairs from online news websites, many of which are administered by the same organisations (Appendix A, Q4). The media thus needs to change many things, including:

1. Show more positive women leaders and politicians;
2. Limit criticism to politics and policies rather than attacking the politician personally;
3. Be factual – not slanderous;
4. Ideally, there needs to be a regulation in place that states that the media cannot promote biased treatment of politicians or unfairly focus on their gender. Through this regulation, Australians would be able to access unbiased news media that does not treat women differently to men. This could have a great effect on Australian women in particular, perhaps altering how they see themselves and others as well as their ideas of gender equality in general. As much current scholarly literature has discussed, the media has a

great impact on society, so if the media portrays positive examples then it seems to follow that it could have a positive effect on society as a whole.

Society

In order to address the effects that the media portrayal of Gillard has had and will continue to have on Australians, society also needs to change. Much academic debate has deliberated over whether it is society that influences the media, or the media that influences society, but one thing is known – that there is a definite correlation between negative representations and negative attitudes. Therefore, in order for change to occur, both the media and society need to go through a transformation on two different levels: the community and the general population.

Community

The community needs to:

1. Educate people from a young age about gender equality but also about leadership aspirations for all genders;
2. Support awareness-raising campaigns that examine what is currently being promoted in mainstream media as well as encourage people to speak up and call out sexism for what it is;
3. Include more gender studies or political sciences courses in all secondary school curricula in order to educate a greater number of young people on gender issues as well as informing them about the Australian political system;
4. Encourage women to pursue leadership in all aspects of their lives; and
5. Promote more women leadership role models.

General Population

The general population needs to:

1. Lobby the media for a change in the portrayal of women leaders and politicians;
2. Become critical media consumers and use their buying power to support non-biased media;
3. Educate themselves and others;

4. More effectively exercise their right to vote– i.e., contribute toward the election of candidates who do not buy into sexism and gender bias;
5. Respect fellow women; and
6. Most importantly – speak up!

Analysing the data collected for this study clearly demonstrates that there is a problem in Australia of which a majority of Australian women of all ages are aware. This problem is so pervasive, however, that despite perceiving the injustices and biases against female leaders and politicians, women’s political and leadership aspirations are nevertheless drastically affected. In order for increased equity in both professional and private spheres, change needs to occur.

The above recommendations are only the beginning of the change that our society needs. With more funding and research we could further analyse the effect that the media has and additional recommendations could be made. For example, do negative portrayals of female politicians and leaders affect men? Are the effects similarly drastic and personal? Do men recognize that there is a problem? What do they believe needs to happen if they do? The answers to these questions could allow for a more thorough understanding of the effects that the media has on both women’s and men’s political and leadership aspirations and such research would allow for a greater societal change that includes every person of every gender. This report, however, is valuable as it is a starting step in the direction for change in Australia.

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