Julia Gillard: A Murderous Rage

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Abstract

This chapter charts the political career of Julia Gillard, Australia's first female Prime Minister (2010-2013), and argues that three intertwined discourses of gender shaped how she was perceived and represented in the political domain and in the media. First, Gillard was faced with the challenges such as the "double bind," by which female leaders are expected to demonstrate qualities stereotypically associated with masculinity, and at the same time to display qualities stereotypically associated with femininity. Second, Gillard faced sexist abuse in politics and media which labelled her an "unintelligible being." Third, in acts of "strategic essentialism," Gillard condemned the misogyny she endured, repositioning herself as a coherent political force and marking the re-emergence of feminism in Australian politics.
Keywords: normative discourses of gender, misogyny and sexism in media representation, double bind, strategic essentialism

Introduction

Julia Eileen Gillard served as Australia's first female Prime Minister for three years and three days. During her time in office, from 2010 to 2013, she introduced a raft of significant social reforms, including improvements in regard to workplace regulation, educational opportunity, and disability care. But it was, arguably, her lack of conformity with normative gender regimes that had the most significant deleterious effect on perceptions and evaluations of her performance as Prime Minister. This chapter charts Julia Gillard's political career, and argues that three specific discourses of gender shaped the ways in which she was perceived and represented in the political domain, in the media, and by the voting public.

Born in Wales in 1961, Gillard migrated with her family to Australia in 1966. She became an Australian citizen in 1974, was educated in the public school system, and graduated with degrees in arts and law from Melbourne University. After working for several years as a specialist in industrial law Gillard was elected, in 1998, to the House of Representatives in the Australian parliament. As a member of the (social democratic) Labor Party she was committed to social justice and had a special interest in education and workplace reform. With the Labor Party then in opposition, Gillard was recognised as a talented debater on the floor of the parliament and was seen by some as a potential future party leader. In 2006 she was elected as Deputy Leader of the Opposition under Kevin Rudd. In December 2007, Gillard became Australia's first ever female Deputy

Prime Minister when Labor won the general election and in this role was again recognised as a popular and consummate performer.

By mid 2010, a decline in Prime Minister Rudd's popularity in the opinion polls and dissatisfaction with his leadership style within the party led to his removal as Prime Minister. In an internal ballot amongst Labor Party parliamentarians, Gillard was elected unopposed as party leader and thus became Australia's first female Prime Minister in June 2010. Opinion polls at the time showed significant support for Gillard, particularly amongst women voters. In order to legitimise her position, Gillard called a general election which was held in August 2010. Despite her initial popularity, the internal and external campaigns against her – from within her own party, the Liberal Party, and the media – were effective in diminishing her overall support base. The 2010 election delivered an equal number of seats to both Labor and Liberal parties, but neither had sufficient numbers to form a government in their own right. However, Gillard was ultimately successful in negotiating an agreement for support from the Greens and Independents and so became the Prime Minister of a minority government. Over the succeeding years, Gillard continued to face significant opposition from various quarters: from an aggressive Abbott-led Liberal party; from a hostile, scandal-mongering media; and from a clique of embittered Rudd-supporters within her own party. As a consequence, her ratings in the polls declined, and defeat at the forthcoming 2013 general election looked certain. Fearing electoral disaster, the Labor Party once again moved to change its leadership: in an internal ballot, Gillard was defeated and Kevin Rudd was once again elected party leader in June 2013. The Labor Party under the leadership of Kevin Rudd lost the general election in September 2013, and Tony Abbott, as leader of the Liberal Party, became Australia's 28th Prime Minister.

The reasons behind Julia Gillard's rise and fall have been widely debated, with some critics pointing to failures of leadership, and others claiming that she had been subjected to a media crusade of sexism and misogyny previously unseen in Australian political history. In the following sections, I discuss elements of this unprecedented campaign.

Analytical approach

The data I discuss in this chapter come from my own collection of texts that appeared in the Australian media during the years of Gillard's term in office as a Member of Parliament and as Prime Minister. Most of these texts can be accessed electronically. They include newspaper and television reports (including reports of debates and speeches in parliament and press conferences), commentaries and images (photographs and cartoons), and radio broadcasts and interviews. Given that most of the voting population of Australian only "know" their parliamentary representatives through such mediated

texts, I am interested to understand the ways in which those representatives, and particularly in this case the Prime Minister, are constructed by the media as objects for public consumption. The texts have been analysed to identify recurring patterns and emergent discourses, the latter term used in the sense described below.

The approach to discourse analysis I adopt in this chapter refers to "discourses" in the Foucauldian sense to mean "practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 1972, 49).[1] Used in this critical theory tradition, "discourses" refers to the "finite range of things it is conventional or intelligible to say about any given concerns" (Cameron 2001, 15). When individuals – including politicians and media commentators – talk about a topic or a person, they draw from these shared resources, and through such talk, says Cameron, "reality is 'discursively constructed,' made and remade as people talk about things using the "discourses" they have access to" (2001, 15). Central to this form of discourse analysis is a concern with "how social phenomena are named and organized," through "relations of power, the governing of people and the production of subjects or forms of personhood" (Lee and Petersen 2011, 140). Hence, at the heart of my analysis is a concern with the ways in which Gillard was constituted (in politics and in the media) as a particular type of person through the deployment of normative discourses of gender and sexuality that circulate in Australian society.

My analysis also draws on understandings of gender as a "regulatory fiction," rather than a fixed, pre-given entity (Butler 1988, 528). Gender, in Butler's terms, is a "performative accomplishment," an object of "belief" that is "compelled by social sanction and taboo" (1988, 520). For individuals, a recognisable and conventional performance of gender is "a strategy of survival", and "those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished" (Butler 1988, 522). Based on these theoretical frameworks, my argument is that during her time as Prime Minister, normative discourses of gender and (hetero)sexuality were deployed in the political arena and in the media to characterize Gillard as a particular type of gendered subject: on the one hand, Gillard was initially hailed as the first "female" Prime Minister; on the other hand, she was repeatedly "punished" as one who had "failed" to "do [her] gender right."

The following discussion is organised into three sections in which discourses of gender come into play in specific ways. The first section focuses on the discursive dilemma that constitutes the "double bind" (Hall and Donaghue 2012) whereby female leaders are not only expected to demonstrate the toughness and authority stereotypically associated with the masculine domain of political power but also, as women, expected to behave in ways that are stereotypically associated with femininity, by demonstrating practices of caring, collaboration and consensus. The problem of the double bind is discussed through media representations of Gillard's ascension to the position of Prime Minister.

The second section focuses on the question of gender "intelligibility." As Butler (1990) observes, normative acts of gender serve to render a person "intelligible" as an individual in contemporary culture, and if one does not conform with the normative practices that define, govern and regulate gender (and sexuality), one risks becoming "unintelligible" as a person (p. 17), and thereby subject to the "punitive consequences" discussed above. My argument in the following analysis is that the political and media discourses that surrounded Julia Gillard constituted an application of these regulatory norms, and that the attacks directed at Gillard's private life served to render her as an unnatural, unintelligible being.

The third section focuses on the ways in which Gillard eventually adopted a practice of "strategic essentialism," demonstrated most forcefully in a key speech through which she performed as an intelligible gendered subject. The term strategic essentialism was first coined by Gayatri Spivak in the context of postcolonialism. In feminist philosophy, "essentialism" has been acknowledged as descriptively false, in that it denies the real diversity of women's lives and experiences by assuming that all women share a set of invariant biological and/or social characteristics. In this light, essentialism can be oppressive because it regulates what is and is not considered appropriate for women by privileging certain normative forms of femininity (Stone 2004, 137). However, acts of "strategic essentialism," whereby a speaker aligns with an identity category, have been recognized as a practical political tool that can encourage shared identification, and mobilise forces for transformation. My argument, in closing, is that the "murderous rage" Gillard expressed in response to the sexism and misogyny she had experienced served as a form of strategic essentialism, and reverberated with the various forms of everyday discrimination experienced by many women in contemporary Australia.

These three sections also reference three phases in the media representation of Gillard as Prime Minister. In the first phase are press reports of her ascension to the position of Prime Minister (June 24, 2010) and her subsequent attempt to secure electoral endorsement just two months later (August 21, 2010). In the second phase are the increasingly virulent attacks generated by or reported in the media throughout her term in office and directed at her gender "failings" (June 2010 – June 2013). The third phase marks a turning point in Gillard's own performance as a recognizable gendered being where, increasingly over the last year of her term in office, she voiced her outrage in response to sexist and misogynist attacks in the media. Throughout this analysis I have selected media reports that most clearly demonstrate the gendered discourses that circulated during Gillard's term as a Member of Parliament and as Prime Minister.

The ascension to leadership and the "double bind"

When Julia Gillard assumed the role of Australian Prime Minister in December 2007 it was indeed an historic moment: not only was Gillard the first female in this role, she was also unmarried (and in a *de facto* relationship), childless, and an atheist, all conditions that were almost unheard of amongst Australian political leaders. Her rise to power was all the more remarkable for the people of my home town of Sydney, because for the first time we had a female leader at every level of government. Clover Moore was Mayor of Sydney; Kristina Keneally was the first female State Premier of New South Wales; Marie Bashir was the Governor of New South Wales; Quentin Bryce was the first female Governor General of Australia; and now Julia Gillard was the Prime Minister. The sense of celebration surrounding this achievement was palpable, especially amongst women, and was reflected in the greater number of women voters who shifted their allegiance to the Labor Party, led by Julia Gillard, in the subsequent 2010 national election, where a clear gender differential in voting behavior was evident (Tranter 2011).

This unique constellation of female leadership in Australian politics ran counter to the pattern of gender inequality in politics, business, and the workforce more broadly. In the years leading up to Gillard's appointment, the gender pay gap was 17% and widening, and the representation of women in politics and on corporate boards in Australia remained at dismally low levels. Although Australia was the second country in the world to grant women the right to vote (in 1902), women still held less than 25% of seats in the lower house of parliament. In the overall workforce, the difficulty of combining family and work responsibilities continues to remain a significant problem for Australian women in a way that it never has been for Australian men. For women with children, the expectations of attentive motherhood and the lack of affordable childcare has been a major barrier to workforce participation, yet women who have forged a career and – like Gillard – "neglected" to have children are "alternately castigated and pitied" (Summers 2013a, 4). Moreover, the entrenched discursive stereotypes attached to gender and leadership have been primary factors in limiting women's career progression (Whelan and Wood 2012).

Barriers to women's participation in Australian politics are numerous and deep-seated. Australia's national government is based on the Westminster parliamentary system, which has been described by Talbot (2010) as a masculinist Community of Practice, evolved over centuries, dominated by men, and characterized by long irregular working hours and a highly combative debating style. Practices of masculinist communities, Talbot observes, have "become naturalized as simply professional practices" (2010, 196), and the appearance and performance of women in leadership positions is seen as both remarkable, and even unnatural. When women do appear as

participants or leaders in these male-dominated communities, gender is made salient, and gender stereotypes inevitably surface. In such circumstances, women find themselves in a double bind: on the one hand, in order to garner support and respect, they must exhibit leadership qualities of strength, authority and decisiveness, traits that are traditionally perceived as masculine; on the other hand, they must contend with the prescriptive female gender stereotypes which demand that women should demonstrate characteristics of warmth, nurturance, sensitivity and self-effacement. If a female leader demonstrates behavioral characteristics of strength, agency, and authority – which Gillard clearly did – she risks being seen as insufficiently feminine; and if she demonstrates characteristics of a softer femininity, she risks being perceived as lacking the qualities of toughness required to be a good political leader. The incongruence between cultural stereotypes of women and politicians usually means that women in leadership positions have to work much harder to manage their gendered performance (Hall and Donaghue 2012, 3).

The efforts to manage discourses of gender were evident on both sides of parliament in the political campaign of 2010, during which Gillard sought an electoral endorsement for her position as Prime Minister. From the outset, Gillard's popularity amongst female voters contrasted sharply with women's lack of enthusiasm for the leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, whose patriarchal stance on issues affecting women posed problems for his attractiveness to female voters (Denmark, War and Bean 2012). Known as a "hyper-masculine opposition leader and ironman triathlete," Abbott had habitually projected the persona of "an "action man" always ready to don lycra and a helmet for some strenuous sporting activity" (Sawer 2010, para. 2). In line with this persona, the Liberal party's 2010 campaign slogan was "Real action." Abbott's hypermasculinity inevitably cast Gillard in a contrasting role, and emphasized her performance as a *female* politician. Her task, then, was to manage the problem of the "double bind" that afflicts women in leadership positions, potentially positioning them as less capable of tough political decisions and, at the same time, insufficiently feminine.

Although Gillard studiously avoided gender issues in the 2010 election policies (Sawer 2010; 2013), the gendered double bind nevertheless played a key role in several campaign events that attracted a great deal of media attention. First, the way that Gillard had replaced her predecessor, Kevin Rudd, in a party room ballot on June 24, 2010 was presented in much of the popular press as evidence of her cold, ruthless ambition, a trait that was implicitly inconsistent with stereotypical feminine qualities of warmth, collaboration, and self-effacement. Two days after she assumed the position of Prime Minister *The Courier Mail,* for example, noted that "the ambitious Gillard did not hesitate to take up the knife and plant it in Rudd's back" (L. Oakes 2010). Using the same metaphor, *The Age* pointed out that since "nice girls don't carry knives," Gillard would "have to be persuasive in

explaining how she came to plunge one into Kevin's neck" (Grattan 2010). On the same day, Summers observed

> a lot of people [had] expected a more genteel transition for Australia's first female Prime Minister. … But Gillard would not be Prime Minister if she had not been willing to demonstrate the toughness the job require. (*The Age,* June 26, 2010)

In media reports such as these, accounts of Gillard's ambition were "set closely within the context of expectations based on her gender," and typically presented ambition as problematic for a woman (Hall and Donaghue 2012, 9).

Two months later, during the course of the August 2010 electoral campaign in which she subsequently sought popular endorsement, a series of leaks about Gillard's actions in relation to earlier government decisions also highlighted her apparent failure to conform with expected feminine norms. In these leaks, reported by mainstream media (see for example Hartcher 2010) and exploited by the Liberal Party, Gillard was said to have queried the cost of age pension increases and a parental leave program, thereby implying that she lacked "empathy with groups that 'real' women care for" (Johnson 2013, 22). Gillard countered these reports by asserting that she was "not going to be a soft touch" but would, instead, be "asking the hard questions" (Kenny 2010). Her response illustrated the dilemma she faced as a female Prime Minister, to be both compassionate and tough, but not so tough as to appear unfeminine. In Gillard's case, displays of ambition, authority and decisiveness – qualities appropriate for political leadership – were quickly relabeled in the media as inappropriately aggressive and, ultimately, seen as evidence of her failure to meet the normative expectations attached to the category of "*female* leader."

An unintelligible being

While the negative effects of the double bind clearly shaped reports of Gillard's public performance as a political leader, representations of her personal appearance and her private life produced across a range of sites and circulated by the media proved even more damaging. Because the private/domestic domain is historically the place where "proper" women perform their primary roles as gendered beings (Cameron 2006), it is also the place where "improper" women can be represented as failing. With the media regularly refocusing on her private life during her time in parliament, and particularly during her time as Prime Minister, Gillard's private life was subjected to an extraordinary degree of scrutiny, and she became the target of an "unrelenting campaign of vilification and vitriolic sexist abuse by a loose coalition of shock jocks, bloggers and newspaper columnists" (Sawer 2013).

These attacks again centered on Gillard's supposed failure to conform to appropriate norms of femininity.

In common with other female politicians, Gillard's physical appearance – her hairstyle, her (red) hair colour, her clothes, her body shape, her voice – were the topic of much public discussion, consternation and criticism. Women leaders, as Summers (2013b, 4) notes, invariably have to deal with personal issues that are "never raised with their male counterparts" and, under a regime of continual scrutiny, their physical appearance is "more often than not found to be wanting." Yet it was more than Gillard's physical appearance that became the object of derision. As Summers explains, her situation "pushes all the buttons that get conservatives exercised: she is not a mother; she is not married, she lives 'in sin'; she is an atheist" (2013b, 4), and her former partners, invariably referred to as a series of "boyfriends," were often named in reports of her rise to power. Gillard's private relationships clearly failed to comply with the most favored form of heterosexuality, which is marked by monogamy (signalled through marriage), reproduction (signalled by children), and conventional, hierarchical gender roles (Cameron and Kulick 2006). Various aspects of this critique circulated from the earliest days of Gillard's parliamentary career, and established a discursive construction that cast her as an unnatural being who had refused "conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility" (Butler 1990, 16).

Much of the media criticism directed at Gillard concerned her purported "failure" in the domestic sphere, the domain where a woman might best perform according to traditional gender norms. During an earlier period of Labor leadership speculation, prior to Gillard's promotion to Labor Deputy Leader, an infamous photograph published in a major newspaper in 2005 (*The Sun-Herald,* January 23) set the scene of a woman with aspirations for leadership. As is typical in the Australian media representation of female politicians, Gillard was shown in the kitchen of her suburban home, in a scene that was described the following day in *The Sydney Morning Herald* as "lifeless," with "bare walls," "stark benchtops" and, most notoriously, an "empty fruit bowl" (Hornery 2005). According to the reporter, this was an image that sent a "chill wind through readers," and it became an iconic sign that Gillard was incapable of domesticity and, by implication, proper femininity. In a similarly well publicised interview in *The Bulletin* (May 2, 2007) a senior Liberal politician, Senator Bill Heffernan, repeated claims made the previous year that then Labor Deputy Leader Gillard was "not qualified to lead the country" because she was "deliberately barren." Justifying his remarks, Heffernan went on to explain that

If you're a leader, you've got to understand your

community. One of the great understandings in a community is family, and the relationship between mum, dads and a bucket of nappies (Harrison 2007).

Along similar lines, a former leader of her own Labor party, Mark Latham observed in an interview in *The Australian* (April 4, 2011) that Gillard's decision not to have children meant that "by definition you haven't got as much love in your life" and therefore have "no empathy" (Kelly 2011).

The raft of negative images and evaluations came together in the campaigns conducted by the opposition Liberal Party during the term of Gillard's Prime Ministership. The leader of the opposition, Tony Abbott, headed campaigns in which his earlier aggressive, hyper-masculine image was remodelled in order to project "a model of fatherly and husbandly protective masculinity" (Johnson 2013, 22) that would provide an implicit contrast with Gillard's personal circumstances. In doing so, Abbott developed and disseminated a "deeply gendered political subtext" (Gleeson and Johnson 2012) in which Gillard was implicitly positioned as a gender misfit. Abbott regularly referred to, and appeared with, his wife and three daughters, and opened the 2010 Election Leaders Debate at the National Press Club by declaring "my wife, Margie, and I know what it's like to raise a family, to wrestle with a big mortgage, with grocery bills and school fees" (Abbott and Gillard 2010). Over the coming years he presented himself as a man who – as a consequence of his family life – was utterly average, normal, and at one with the economic, social, and cultural experience of the community:

> My children are still in the education system, and Margie, my wife, works in community-based child care, so my family knows something of the financial pressures on nearly every Australian household (Abbott 2011).

In effect, Abbott's campaigns emphasized his appropriately masculine position as the head of a traditional nuclear family, and in doing so implicitly cast Gillard as an outsider who was not "normal" enough to empathize with the everyday domestic concerns of ordinary Australians. In this regard, Abbott's performance was a seamless act of essentialism – rather than *strategic* essentialism – in that it continued to project a normative stereotype that was biologically coherent, and consistent throughout his political career.

Even more pointed than the conservatives' political campaigning were the sexist discourses produced and circulated by the media after Gillard's appointment as Prime Minister. An abiding linguistic theme revolved around the word "Ju-LIAR," coined in an interview between Julia Gillard and 2GB shock jock Alan Jones (August 31, 2012) in which he referred to a campaign promise she had purportedly broken. The interview received wide media coverage (see

for example, Farr 2012; Kwek 2011), and the term "JuLIAR" entered the lexicon as a sign of anti-Gillard sentiment, and a signal that Gillard had failed to live up to the expectations of honesty associated with women in politics (Dolan 2014; Pew research Center 2008). In subsequent months explicitly sexist language was attached to this central sign when, in March 2011, media images pictured Tony Abbott at a protest rally in front of banners that featured the words "JuLIAR," "bitch" and "witch" (Wright 2011). In a parallel campaign, pornographic photoshopped images of Gillard's naked form, as well as cartoons of her wearing a giant dildo, were published on the internet and circulated to politicians and journalists (see Summers 2012). Through the circulation of these texts and related media commentary, Gillard became, in Sawer's (2013) words, "the victim of appalling levels of sexism not seen before in Australian public life."

Despite the emergence of a grass-roots anti-sexist movement during the latter part of 2012 (discussed in the following section), Gillard continued to be the target of gendered media and political commentary throughout the final year of her term as Prime Minister. The overlap between the discourses emerging from media and political organisations was illustrated when, in 2013, the press circulated reports of a menu at a Liberal Party fundraiser dinner which included one dish described as "Julia Gillard's Kentucky Fried Quail–Small Breasts, Huge Thighs, and a Big Red Box" (see for example, Overington 2013). It was shortly after the menu item was reported in the media, and near the end of her three year term, that a radio interview with Perth radio 6PR shock jock Howard Sattler was broadcast, once again bringing to the surface explicit questions about Gillard's sexuality. In the interview, reported by all major media, including *ABC News* (June 13, 2013) and *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Spooner 2013), Sattler confronted Gillard with questions regarding her marital status, asking why she wasn't she married, and whether her partner, Tim Mathieson, had proposed. Sattler then turned to the question of Mathieson's sexuality:

> HS: Myths, rumours, snide jokes and innuendoes, you've been the butt of them many times
> JG: Well I think that's probably right (laughs). We've certainly seen that this week [referring to the Liberal Party dinner menu]
> HS: Can I test a few out?
> JG: In what way?
> HS: Tim's *gay*
> JG: Well-
> HS: No, somebody's saying that- that's a myth
> JG: Well that's ab*surd*
> HS: But you *hear* it. He must be *gay*, he's a *hair*dresser
> JG: Oh well isn't that-
> HS: But you've *heard*- you've heard it

JG: But ah-

HS: It's not *me* saying it, it's what people say

JG: Well I mean Howard, I don't know if every ahsilly ah thing that get's said is going to be repeated to me now

HS: No no but-

JG: But ah, to all the hairdressers out there, including the men who are listening, I don't think, in life, one can actually look at a whole profession, full of different human beings and say 'gee, we know something about *every* one of those human beings.' I mean it's absurd, isn't it.

HS: You can confirm that he's not?

JG: Oh Howard don't be ridiculous-

HS: No but-

JG: Of course not

HS: Is it a hetero*sexual* re*la*tionship, that's all I'm asking

As with Alan Jones's interviews, a range of discursive practices is used in the Sattler interview to generate audience consent and solidarity. Perhaps the most salient in this extract is Sattler's adoption of the "people's tribune" role (Talbot 2010, 192), whereby he positions himself as speaking on behalf of wider community concerns about Tim's "true" identity. This elitist role, appropriated from the genre of serious investigative interviews, enables Sattler to engage in a form of aggressive, inquisitorial dialogue, characterized by repetition, interruption, and dogged grilling, in order to get to "the truth." In his public inquisitor role, the specific tactic Sattler employs is an ambiguous "double voicing" (Talbot 2010, 193), where he claims "It's not *me* saying it, it's what *people* say*"*: he separates himself from the opinions he expresses by merely acting as a "animator" of the "myths, rumours, snide jokes and innuendoes" that he insists are circulating in the public domain. This tactic of presenting the views of others is typically used to protect the journalist's guise of neutrality, but is also used, as in Sattler's case, to insult the interviewee while maintaining a neutral stance.

Despite Gillard's typically measured and rational responses, demonstrated in the interview by her calm explanation that warns against stereotyping any particular group (including, in this instance, hairdressers), Sattler was not deterred from his thinly veiled accusations. His relentless questioning points to an obvious, yet unspoken, problem: if Gillard's partner, Tim, was a hairdresser, he must be gay, and so she must be … what? Perhaps a lesbian? Most certainly living a lie, and definitely not fit to govern the country. Although Sattler was later suspended for this line of questioning the interview lived on, echoing across the nation and crystallizing the problem of Gillard's unnatural sexuality. As Cameron and Kulick (2006) point out, "compulsory heterosexuality" plays a crucial role in the construction of gender, and Sattler's interview illustrates how

normative regimes of both gender and sexuality were invoked to undermine Gillard's credibility. Together, the panoply of sexist "myths, rumours, snide jokes and innuendoes" referred to by Sattler worked to produce a particular discursive image of Gillard as an unnatural being: not only as a person unfit to lead the country, but also as a person unfit to be a recognized as a normal woman. Yet opposition to these attacks was building amongst progressive elements in the community and, in the year leading up to this interview, Gillard had also begun to articulate a different discursive practice that offered a firmer, feistier resistance to her foes.

Strategic essentialism: Doing gender

Having initially chosen not to focus explicitly on issues of gender, perhaps in fear of being cast as a victim and therefore too weak to govern, Gillard finally started, two years into her term as Prime Minister, making public references to the "very sexist smear campaign" circulating against her in the media (Gillard 2012a). By drawing attention to the media's sexist attacks, she began to express something of her "murderous rage" (Gillard and Summers 2013). In a widely reported press conference (August 23, 2012), Gillard not only rebutted specific allegations of past wrongdoing (involving a former "boyfriend"), but also named and condemned the "misogynists" and "nut jobs on the internet" who continued to produce and disseminate "vile and sexist" abuse aimed at discrediting her leadership (Gillard 2012a; Grattan 2012). This impassioned public address presented a dramatic contrast to the "sanitized, well-rehearsed" speeches that had been scripted by media minders and had been criticized as stilted and inauthentic (Hargreaves 2010), and recalled the discursive skill of her earlier, much-admired performances on the floor of parliament. More importantly, her performative approach signalled a turning point in the discursive rendering of Gillard as a "real," coherent being.

In parallel with this move, an emerging grass-roots campaign, operating largely in social media, began challenging the gendered portrayals of Gillard and other women in leadership positions by appropriating the sexist language used in the mainstream media broadcasts. This social media campaign was ignited by radio 2GB broadcaster Alan Jones's claim on August 31, 2012 that Australian women in positions of political power were "destroying the joint." In a twitter response using the hashtag #destroyingthejoint, media commentator Jane Caro mused: "Got time on my hands tonight so thought I'd spend it coming up with new ways of "destroying the joint" being a woman & all. Ideas welcome" (see Caro 2012). The tweet elicited hundreds of humorous replies from women sharing how they were "destroying the joint" and prompted the formation of a popular "Destroy the Joint" Facebook community that was effective in countering various examples of sexist activities and comments in the media (see McLean and Maalsen 2013). By December 2012, following

Gillard's famous "misogyny speech," *The Sydney Morning Herald* could claim that Caro's "One tweet has grown into a wide and influential women's network" (S. Oakes 2012).

A month after the initial #destroyingthejoint tweet, on October 8, 2012, Gillard delivered an electrifying speech in parliament about sexism and misogyny (Gillard 2012b). Gillard's speech was initially framed as a response to Tony Abbott's accusations that she had hypocritically defended the sexist behaviour of the House Speaker, but was equally an opportunity to articulate her rage at the deep-seated misogyny she had endured:

> I say to the Leader of the Opposition *I* will *not* be lectured about *sexism* and *misogyny* by this *man*, *I* will *not*. And the Government will *not* be lectured about sexism and misogyny by this *man*. *Not* now, *not* ever.

> The Leader of the Opposition says that people who hold *sexist* views and who are *misogynists* are not appropriate for high office. Well I hope the Leader of the Opposition has got a piece of paper and he is writing out his resignation. Because if he wants to know what *misogyny* looks like in modern Australia, he doesn't need a motion in the House of Representatives, he needs a *mirror*. *That's* what he needs. Let's go through the Opposition Leader's *repulsive* double standards, *repulsive* double standards when it comes to *misogyny* and *sexism*.

Gillard then detailed Abbott's previous remarks about women's lesser appetite and aptitude for leadership. By turning attention to Abbott's words and behaviour, Gillard effectively refused the "object" position proffered by Abbott in his censure motion. In doing so, Gillard moved into the subject position, and made Abbott the object of scrutiny; her labelling of Abbott as a misogynist was strengthened by her sweeping gestures and pointing finger (see ABC News October 8, 2012). Gillard speech then turns to the ways in which Abbott's stated views had personally affected her. In so doing, Gillard identified with a political category defined by gender and, as a woman, situated herself in "a group with a distinctive, and distinctively oppressive, history – an ongoing history which is an appropriate target of social critique and political transformation" (Stone 2004, 137). In this pivotal speech, Gillard identified *as* a woman, and *with* women, but, at the same time, refused to conform to an oppressive gender regime that demands, amongst other behavioral norms, an essentialised, passive femininity:

> *I* was *very* offended personally when the Leader of the Opposition, as Minister of Health, said, and I quote, "Abortion is the easy way out." *I* was *very* personally offended by those comments. You said that in March 2004, I suggest you check the records. *I* was also very offended on behalf of the women of

Australia when in the course of this carbon pricing campaign, the Leader of the Opposition said "What the housewives of Australia need to do – what the housewives of Australia need understand *as they do the ironing*." Thank you for *that* painting of women's roles in modern Australia.

And then of course, *I* was offended too by the *sexism*, by the *misogyny* of the Leader of the Opposition catcalling across this table at me as I sit here as Prime Minister, "If the Prime Minister wants to, politically speaking, make an honest *woman* of herself," something that would *never* have been said to *any* man sitting in this chair. *I* was offended when the Leader of the Opposition went outside in the front of Parliament and stood next to a sign that said "Ditch the witch." *I* was offended when the Leader of the Opposition stood next to a sign that described me as a man's *bitch*. *I* was offended by those things. *Misogyny, sexism, every* day from this Leader of the Opposition. *Every* day in *every* way, across the time the Leader of the Opposition has sat in that chair and I've sat in this chair, that is all we have heard from him.

With rhetorical flair, Gillard repeats, with emphasis, the personal pronoun "I," and also explicitly aligns herself explicitly with "the women of Australia." The authority she adopts in this speaking position is not only the institutionalized authority invested in the discourse of leadership (through her position as Prime Minister, speaking in parliament), but also the authority – as a "woman" – to name and condemn the forces of sexist discrimination directed against her. In Butler's words, this subversive move demonstrates "the performative power of appropriating the very terms by which one has been abused in order to … derive an affirmation from that degradation … [and] revaluing affirmatively the category … of 'women' " (1997, 158).

Most reporters in the Australian male-dominated parliamentary press gallery interpreted Gillard's speech as an act of political opportunism, missing the stronger emotional impact carried in Gillard's words and the significance of those words for a wider audience in tune with gender politics. The political editor of a major newspaper accused Gillard of failing to meet public expectations that she be a "flag bearer for women"; instead, he wrote, she had proved to be "just another politician" bent on retaining power at any expense (Hartcher 2012). Another columnist described the speech as a "bucket of bilgewater" (Sheehan 2012) and accused Gillard of revealing her "true nature" by "playing the gender card," a phrase that was to be taken up in a new round of criticism across the media. Writing for a daily newspaper owned by Rupert Murdoch, a female columnist opined that

> Playing the gender card is the pathetic last refuge of incompetents … It offends the Australian notion of the fair go. Australians who were delighted, regardless of politics and the way she got the job, that a strong seemingly capable woman was in The Lodge, have been sorely disappointed, to the point of cynicism and despair (Devine 2012).

In all, the conservative commentary suggested that Gillard had once again failed to perform appropriately "as a woman." More importantly, such commentary implied that it was wrong for a female in a country like Australia (that prides itself on egalitarianism yet has deep structural problems of gender inequality) to be naming and shaming the discourses of sexism and misogyny that continue to circulate in the public domain.

Yet the significance of the speech was recognized by a more progressive media within Australia and around the world. In Australia, *New Matilda* identified this as "the most important speech" of Gillard's Prime Ministership, and applauded the "re-emergence of feminism in public life," and (Eltham 2012). As Eltham observed, the sentiments expressed in the speech were recognizable by many Australian women who

> have experienced the dead hand of misogyny at close quarters, either through sexual harassment, routine sexual vilification in the workplace, or in the insidious "boys' club" mentality that still grips many Australian social environments.

In the USA, *Jezebel* cheered Gillard's impassioned "smackdown," and described her as "one badass motherfucker" (Morrissey 2012); *The New Yorker*, lauded Gillard's "genuine anger," and suggested that the "real problem" for the opposition was simply having a woman "running the country" (Lester, October 9, 2012). *The Guardian,* recognized that the event "was seen by many women as a defining moment for feminism in the country" (Rourke 2012). Although Gillard was deposed as Prime Minister within a year, the speech stands as a testimony to the power of language in politics.

Conclusion

This brief study has demonstrated a range of ways in which Julia Gillard, and her performance as Australia's first female Prime Minister, were represented by the Australian media through normative discourses of gender and sexuality. Gillard's rise to power was represented in the mainstream Australian media as an act of ruthless personal ambition that would disappoint those who expected a female leader to display behavior considered more appropriate to her gender. Her decisions in office were similarly judged according to binary gender norms, with the effect of bringing into question Gillard's

capacity to perform as a leader with both toughness and compassion. Her physical appearance was subjected to extraordinary scrutiny and scorn, while the decisions she had made to prioritize her career, to remain unmarried and childless, attracted intense criticism. Through the lens of gender normativity, she was portrayed as an unnatural, unintelligible being, and judged as implicitly unfit to govern the nation.

Gillard finally broke her silence on issues of gender discrimination with acts of strategic essentialism in which she named and condemned the discourses of sexism and misogyny that circulated in the media and in parliament. These acts, and particularly her "misogyny speech," continued to divide the media, with conservative commentary dismissing Gillard's powerful critique by accusing her of "playing the gender" card for personal political gain. Yet Gillard's misogyny speech also gave voice to the rage experienced by many women who have endured sexism in silence: it galvanized public support for gender equality amongst both women and men, and marked the re-emergence of feminism in the Australian political and cultural landscape.

In Australia, as in much of the developed world, it is clear that gender inequality can persist long after the introduction of legislation to remove discrimination on the basis of sex and marital status. Gillard made reference to this deep-seated inequality when, in her first formal interview after leaving the Prime Ministership, she observed that there is an "underside" of "really ugly, violent sexism in Australia" (Gillard and Summers 2013). The political abuse and media fury unleashed against Gillard during her years in office exposed this ugly underside, but Gillard's acts of defiance represented a cogent counter force and offered a point of departure for further acts of transformation towards greater gender awareness and equality.

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[1] See Pennycook (1994) for a comprehensive explanation of the links between Foucauldian 'discourses' as 'systems of power/knowledge within which we take up subject positions' (p. 128), and 'discourse' in the linguistic sense of a text, or 'language in use.'