

Today, I have an agenda. A woman's agenda.

As a young woman I am continually disturbed to find the apparent sexism present in our fine country's politics, media, and general population.

When I was 10 years old, my life dream was decimated. Destroyed. Obliterated. My dream was to be Australia's first female Prime Minister, and when Julia Gillard challenged Kevin Rudd for the position of Prime Minister and won, that was over. At first, ten year old Charlotte was really angry. But eventually I thought about it and realised that if I can't be Australia's first female Prime Minister, I was going to support the woman who was.

And from that point on, Julia Gillard has been one of my role models.

Of course over her tenure as Prime Minister, there were some occasions that I disagreed with her decisions, but I still respected her as a person and woman of integrity.

Though that wasn't always everyone's thoughts.

In 2011, protesters at an anti-carbon tax rally held signs with slogans like: "Ditch the Witch" and "Liar Bob Browns' B\*\*ch". And who was standing with these protesters, being photographed in front of these derogatory and misogynistic signs?

Our late Prime Minister, Tony Abbott. The fact that this utter sexism and misogyny was being used to attack the leader of Australia using insults based around her gender, was something that really shocked 11 year old me. Looking at these dreadful protesters on ABC News, with the opposition leader standing among them really concerned me. I was so confused about how someone who was supposed to be a representative of the people of Australia could use the fact that his political opponent was a woman, in order to undermine her. Surely the policies and the way in which she governs would be the correct way to attack his opponent?? Not her gender.

Because the Australia I know wouldn't use my gender as a weapon against me. Would it?

Julia Gillard herself later spoke out about this saying that she "really doesn't know why this wasn't a career-ending moment for Tony Abbott... sexism is no better than racism". I completely agree that this should have been such a moment for Abbott, alas, it wasn't. And that's because as a country we do not take sexist attitudes as seriously as they need to be taken.

Part of being a politician is facing scrutiny from the media, however men in parliament don't have to worry about being attacked for their gender, women do. When I discovered that 70% of parliamentarians in both state and federal government are male, I realized exactly how many obstacles Ms Gillard would have had to face even before she become the leader of this country.

In doing research for this speech, I was reading through the Parliament of Australia website and I came across what was strangely the funniest thing I had seen in the whole process of creating this speech.

The site reads "there are currently more women parliamentarians in the Senate than at any other time since Federation"

Mmm... that's great! But you better hope that there are more women in Australian Parliaments in 2016 than there were in 1901. Especially considering when on the most recent update on representation of women, the website reads: "women first entered the Commonwealth Parliament in 1943 and female representation remained at less than 5 percent until 1980."

So perhaps it wasn't just Julia Gillard who had come between me and my dream. Perhaps it was the entrenched sexism present in society that would have made it harder for me to accomplish the dreams I hold, compared to those of my older brother.

Of course there are a lot of issues in Australian society. Discrimination based on race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, age, and socio-economic status. The issue of misrepresentation in parliament runs far deeper. Australia has never had a Prime Minister who wasn't white.

I think that by focusing on making change in one area it will make a lot of a difference. A way of creating change is simply by educating yourself and the wider community about an issue, and working to create understanding of the various ways that something like sexism can effect both men and women, or racism can affect every member of our society.

On October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012 a speech was delivered. A speech so great that it sits among the ranks of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, and Martin Luther King's Dream. 9<sup>th</sup> of October 2012 was the date of Julia Gillard's famous misogyny speech. This was a speech that spoke of the underlying frustrations that she must have been feeling after years of dealing with sexism every day, not just from Tony Abbott but from the media, and at times most of our country.

On the 26 June 2013 I was on a plane to Europe. Sitting amongst my siblings in economy, the revolting smell of airplane food wafting up my nose, my legs pressed up to my chest. I was peacefully dozing off, until there was an announcement over the PA. The pilot announced that Australia now had a new prime minister... Kevin Rudd. I was devastated to say the least, but soon my brother so kindly reminded me that we would still have 12 hours until we would reach our destination.

Being in year 10, sometimes feels like I'm back on that plane. I feel dejected, like I have years left before I can go anywhere. Before I can finally do something to make a difference in my community. But then I remember Julia Gillard. I think of the years that she had to wait on the sidelines. I think of how she managed to push through, and what she managed to achieve.

She was the first female prime minister of this country. That has to mean something.

Thinking about this, to be honest, makes me optimistic for what my future may hold.

*Charlotte Ainsworth*

*Year 10*