

**BECAUSE SHE'S A WOMAN:
GENDER STEREOTYPES AND WOMEN'S
PARTICIPATION IN AUSTRALIAN POLITICS**

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Candidate Declaration

I certify that the thesis entitled *Because She's A Woman: Gender Stereotypes and Women's Participation in Australian Politics* and submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Politics is my own work. It is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and has not previously been submitted as part of the requirements for a higher degree to any institution other than Macquarie University. I declare that all information sources and literature used are appropriately acknowledged.

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Abstract

Politics has always been infused with gender: only the extent to which it is noticed, or emphasised, has changed over time. Julia Gillard's rise to Australian Prime Minister on 24 June 2010 heightened the public's awareness of gender in politics, and it was repeatedly foretold in the mainstream media that women would vote for Gillard 'because she's a woman'. Some commentators represented gendered voting as a predominantly female behaviour with questionable political legitimacy.

This critical discourse analysis focuses on the way women were stereotyped during a period in Australia's political history marked by the novelty of a woman prime minister. While examining dominant discourses and the establishment and perpetuation of stereotypes in the mainstream media, I also locate important counter-discourses in the online discussions of women, many of whom challenged negative representations of women in the media. As participants in this counter-discourse, however, women constituted a smaller proportion than men of those who revealed their gender in conversation, and I argue that this is one effect of negative discourses about women. Another effect I identify is that some men may have felt threatened by a potential for unity in women's vote decisions. As a result, I contend that despite often being overlooked in mainstream discourses on gendered voting, men did exhibit gendered behaviour, both in response to Gillard's leadership and the discourses surrounding that event.

Identifying contemporary gendered myths and stereotypes in attitudes towards women in Australia's past, I argue that attempts to discursively discipline women emerge when the public perceives women's actions to be challenging the gender status quo. I show how contemporary parallel discourses that uphold traditional gender roles also affect women's status in politics, and contribute to the power of the mainstream media and stakeholders in the gender status quo to portray powerful or political women as transgressing gender norms.

This study's insights into the political uses of gender can be deployed to enhance the environment for women's political participation, to increase political actors' repertoire of resources for resisting and responding to negative gender stereotyping, and thus to strengthen Australia's political culture.

Introduction

GENDER AND THE 2010 FEDERAL ELECTION

The Australian Federal Parliament is the locus of a seemingly endless series of controversies, taunts and accusations founded on the political use of gender. Toward the end of 2012, for example, Federal Opposition Leader Tony Abbott was accused of showing greater disrespect to Deputy Speaker Anna Burke when in the Speaker's Chair than to her (male) predecessors and a number of MPs expressed the view that Abbott had difficulty 'taking orders from women'. Following this, members of the opposition accused Labor of using gender in a 'smear campaign' directed at Abbott (Grattan 2012). Female Labor MPs including Attorney-General Nicola Roxon and Tanya Plibersek were later dubbed a 'handbag hit squad' (Jackson 2012). Controversial commentator Piers Akerman (2012) extended the analogy, describing Labor's senior female MPs as 'a sort of home-grown version of the celebrated virgin guards who were prepared to defend the late Libyan tyrant Muammar Gaddafi'.



Mark Knight, *Herald-Sun*, August 2012

The focus on gender in politics is not limited to parliamentarians' banter. In a press conference in 2012, Prime Minister Julia Gillard (2012) was unusually candid on the subject of gender, suggesting she was the target of 'misogynists and nut jobs on the

internet'. In the following week radio broadcaster Alan Jones opined women were 'destroying the joint,' adding former Victorian Police Commissioner Christine Nixon and Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore to his usual criticism of Gillard (Farr 2012). These are not isolated incidents, but emblematic of a widespread media and public fascination with women in political power. Gillard's 'misogyny speech' of October 2012 gained international attention and was widely applauded for challenging sexist elements of the media and political debate both before and during her leadership ('Motions' 2012).

Gender is an important issue in the Australian political landscape, even when commentators proclaim it to be irrelevant. As increasing numbers of women take up senior roles in the federal parliament, anxieties about gender also appear to be increasing. Gillard's historic rise to the office of prime minister on 24 June 2010 marked the beginning of a period of heightened public awareness of gender in politics. Public discussions revolved around Gillard as a woman, Abbott as a man, women as politicians and (sometimes) politicians as men. Also emerging in 2010 were discussions about women as voters, and extensive use of gendered language, myths and stereotypes.

The increased salience of gender stimulated by Gillard's elevation has provided a unique opportunity, and a rich vein of data not previously available, to examine some vital questions about the impact of public attitudes towards gender on the status of women in politics. In this introduction I describe the context and aims of this study, and provide an overview of the chapters that follow.

Research Context

The federal election campaign of 2010 was a contest between the new incumbent Julia Gillard, the first woman to hold the position of Australian Prime Minister, and the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, a charismatic (for some) and athletic man renowned for his socially conservative views and scanty beachwear. The seed for this study was planted in the immediate aftermath of that election when hours, and then days, of vote counting could not determine which party would form government. For me, this anxious wait raised a question. It was not the question of why Gillard's leadership did not secure a greater vote share for her party: the Australian Labor Party (ALP) had done little during the campaign to restore the confidence of Australians disillusioned by the party's swift but poorly explained leadership change. Rather, I was taken aback by the number of Australians who voted for an Abbott Liberal government, and I wondered how many of those voters were women. A brief sketch of Abbott's career and views may help explain why this particular question emerged in my mind.

A former Rhodes scholar and journalist, Abbott has a surprisingly blunt and sometimes blundering way with words. This is especially so in impromptu situations, which some people have interpreted as evidence of his honesty (Bolt 2010b). It may also account for his polarising effect: described by former Prime Minister John Howard as an 'effective performer with an endearing style,' Abbott has also been described by former Labor leader, Kim Beazley, as a 'bomb thrower' (Willacy 2000). Commentators on the left of the political divide dubbed Abbott the 'Mad Monk' due to his short-lived attempt to join the priesthood, his ongoing faith and his outspoken social conservatism (Maiden

2010b). This conservatism is evident in areas such as climate change, which he called ‘absolute crap’ (O’Brien, K. 2010); same sex marriage, which he suggested ‘challenges...orthodox notions of the right order of things’ (Johnston 2010), and refugees who, he contended, receive the ‘red carpet treatment,’ which is ‘the last thing the Government should be doing’ (Colvin 2010).

Abbott’s social conservatism also extends to women’s issues, which is noteworthy given his personal circumstances. He grew up with three sisters. Margie, his wife, works outside the home, and together they have three daughters. Abbott has a formidable female Chief of Staff, Peta Credlin, and a female Deputy Leader, Julie Bishop. By all accounts, Abbott is an attentive and understanding family man surrounded by modern, independent women. Yet he features so regularly in the ‘Ernies,’ an annual forum that ‘names and shames’ public figures for making sexist comments, that creator and organiser Meredith Burgmann suggested Abbott ‘was almost a category of his own’ (Herbert 2010). Examples include his retort, as Health Minister in 2002, to a question on paid maternity leave at a Liberal Party function in Victoria: ‘Compulsory paid maternity leave? Over this government’s dead body, frankly’ (Allard 2002).¹ He described abortion as the ‘easy way out’ in a 2004 speech to the Adelaide University Democratic Club, and went on to ask, ‘Why isn’t the fact that 100,000 women choose to end their pregnancies regarded as a national tragedy...?’ (Abbott 2004). In 2006, Abbott argued against the removal of the abortifacient drug RU486 from ministerial control (the relevant minister being Abbott himself), suggesting to parliament that:

¹ Abbott eventually reversed his position in relation to paid parental leave, proposing a generous but controversial scheme in a policy launch just prior to the 2010 election (Liberal Party 2010).

We have a bizarre double standard in this country where someone who kills a pregnant woman's baby is guilty of murder but a woman who aborts an unborn baby is simply exercising choice... Somehow, up to 100,000 abortions a year is accepted as a fact of life - almost by some as a badge of liberation from old oppressions (Australian Associated Press 2006).

In 2010 Abbott suggested, to the disbelief of many Australian women, that an awareness of energy consumption was 'what the housewives of Australia need to understand as they do the ironing' (AAP 2010a).

Abbott was Minister for Health and Ageing during the last four years of the Howard government, a position that brought him into the political spotlight on a regular basis. When he became Leader of the Opposition late in 2009, there was renewed public interest in Abbott's social conservatism; interest that intensified when Julia Gillard took over leadership of the Labor Government. Journalists commonly claimed that Abbott had a 'woman problem' – a difficulty connecting with women voters – and this speculation escalated after Gillard became prime minister (although it tended to be expressed by journalists and commentators as common sense rather than supported with research or statistics). Cowie (2010), for example, reported that the Liberal Party had engaged Splash Consulting, a company specialising in marketing to women, 'to build a stronger connection between the opposition leader and female voters.'

In the light of Abbott's background, then, the possibility that he could win the votes of a majority of Australian women seemed doubtful. The outcome of the 2010 federal election, however, painted a more complex picture. Abbott's party did indeed win the

votes of many women (37.8 per cent, according to the Australian Election Study; see McAllister et al. 2011), and overall the election results were so close as to have created a hung parliament. How is it possible that so many Australian women cast their vote in favour of the leadership of this man with this history? Was it a case of the ironers of Australia revolting against the ‘sisterhood,’ or was something else happening in Australian politics?

From the moment Gillard took over leadership of the ALP, and therefore the office of prime minister, there emerged a suggestion in the media that women would vote for Gillard simply ‘because she’s a woman.’ Despite being among the many Australians elated at the swearing in of ‘our first female prime minister,’ I found the media assumption that women’s votes would ‘naturally’ go to Labor irksome, if not insulting, because in many cases it seemed to imply either that women were incapable of independent political thought, or that voting on the grounds of gender was less legitimate than voting on other grounds. Browsing through lively internet discussions on voter responses to Gillard at the time, it appeared that many other Australians were similarly bothered by the presumption.

For decades, gender gap studies have attempted to determine the extent to which women’s voting behaviour differs from men’s: whether ‘women,’ as a distinct social group, vote in particular, predictable ways. Notably, Inglehart and Norris (2000) identified an early ‘traditional’ gender gap (according to which women voted more conservatively than men); this shifted in the 1980s and 1990s to a ‘modern’ gender gap (according to which women vote more progressively than men). There is merit in

research of that nature, as it encourages political elites to recognise women as a constituency to be taken seriously. There is also a drawback, however, in situating women as reactionaries, as deviants from the (male) norm of political behaviour. Simone de Beauvoir (2009 [1949], 16), in the mid-twentieth century, famously observed the tendency for women to be treated as ‘Other’ to men. I return to this theory in more detail in Chapter 2, but it is important to note here because in some political discussions of 2010 this ‘othering’ of women was apparent in press reports that focused on the influence Gillard would have on women—but not men. If men were mentioned in the mainstream discourse, it was to brush aside any notion that they might have a stereotypical, ‘gendered’ response. Ordinary citizens, apparently most often women, wondered on internet forums why there was no media focus on how men were influenced by a woman prime minister.²

It was in direct response to this turn in the political discourses of 2010 that I began asking questions which would lead to the development of this thesis. Over time, new layers of thought and enquiry were added to the research until an overarching research aim was developed. This aim is twofold – first, to understand how women were positioned, or more specifically stereotyped, in Australian political discourses preceding the 2010 election; and second, to examine the implications of this discursive positioning for women. Accordingly, this thesis has developed as a feminist analysis of the stereotyping of women in contemporary Australian politics. Specific research questions are discussed in Chapter 2 on page 48.

² While I use the phrase ‘ordinary citizens’ here, it is important to note that participation in online forums is limited by a number of factors including access to and knowledge about computers and the internet. I discuss this further in section 4.1, p. 113, in relation to the ‘digital divide’.

Overview

This study is comprised of this introduction, nine chapters of varying length, and a concluding discussion. Chapter 1 establishes the theoretical frameworks and scholarly literature on which this study both rests and builds. It outlines the importance of feminist understandings of the historical exclusion of women from the public sphere, and considers sociological and psychological approaches to stereotyping. Current approaches to studies of women and gender in political science and political psychology are also outlined in Chapter 1, which concludes with a discussion of the contributions of this study to existing knowledge. Chapter 2 outlines the methods of critical discourse analysis used in this study, and discusses the research journey that resulted from this methodological approach, as well as its scope and limitations.

The third chapter is titled ‘Our First Female Prime Minister,’ a reference both to the ownership the nation (via its public discourse) immediately claimed over Gillard’s history-making promotion, and the novelty and pride implicit in this oft-repeated phrase. A complex discourse also emerged at the time of Gillard’s leadership takeover, which referenced both positive and negative stereotypes about women as leaders and voters. An examination of that discourse, with attention to gendered language and myths is the chapter’s subject. It focuses on the ways gender was prominent in political reporting and commentary despite commonly being pronounced irrelevant, and thus provides an important context within which the narrower foci of subsequent chapters can be understood.

The aim of Chapter 4 is to examine more closely the positioning of women in the discourses discussed in Chapter 3. It identifies some of the stereotypes specific to 2010 federal election discourse and examines women's responses to their use, thus exploring women's positioning by some elements of the mainstream media, contrasted with women's own self-positioning. Titled 'Gender Lunacy? Gendered Voting in Media Reports of the Australian 2010 Federal Election Campaign,' the chapter analyses online comments posted by Australian women in response to articles that discuss gendered voting. This chapter provides an insight into the array of opinions women expressed concerning negative media commentary, revealing first, that women are not the monolithic group as they were positioned by some commentators, and second, that many objected to the popular contention that women would make their vote decision on the basis of the leaders' genders, thus creating an alternative discursive positioning to that in the mainstream.

Chapters 5 and 6 take a social-psychological turn, as I expand my analyses of women as participants in online discussions. First I examine whether there is a difference in women's online participation between what I define as 'political' and 'non-political' news, focusing on the extent to which women make comments or use names that reveal their gender. Accordingly Chapter 5 builds on an understanding of how women represent or position themselves in relation to mainstream discourses.

In Chapter 6 I introduce the concept of stereotype threat in order to tease out some of the implications for women of the 2010 political discourses. Again considering

women's responses to the media claim that women would vote for the ALP because it was led by a female, I suggest that women generally disagreed with the view. I also discuss the tactics women adopted to overcome or reduce the stereotype's potency, and argue that a general sense of threat may have influenced women's participation in online discourses, and possibly even their vote choice.

Chapter 7, 'Double the Votes and Double the Trouble': Women Voters in Australian Political History, 1902 and 2010 explores the historical bases of the stereotyping of women. I identify a period of similar gender anxiety in political discourses concerning the women's suffrage movement. My discourse analysis focuses on the Second Reading of the Commonwealth Franchise Bill, in which a public airing of attitudes towards female voters took place. The chapter's title is derived from the words of G.B. Edwards, Member for South Sydney in 1902, who explained to the new federal parliament that extending the vote to women would produce twice as much work for the same electoral outcomes, as it was assumed by many at the time that women would vote the same way as their husbands (Commonwealth Franchise Bill 1902a, 11951). I identify similarities between attitudes towards women voters in 1902 and those expressed in media reports of the 2010 federal election campaign. Implications for women of these historical stereotypes are identified, most notably being that stereotypical attitudes towards women must be publicly challenged if their power to affect women is to be reduced in the future. This is an important idea that I return to in Chapter 9.

In Chapter 8, 'Unnamed and Unexamined': Framing the Gender Gap in Australia's 2010 Federal Election, I examine some Australian post-election analysis on women's

voting behaviour, shedding further light on the way women are positioned in political discourses—but here the focus is on a different element of the political discourse: academic analyses. Curiously, while much media discussion before the August 21 election was concerned with issues of gender and how women would vote, post-election media analyses rarely addressed them. The reverse, however, is evident in the academic discourse: some research conducted in the wake of the election appeared actively to look for evidence of a ‘female vote’. The chapter argues a disproportionate amount of attention was paid to women’s voting patterns in those studies, while men’s voting behaviour was overlooked, leading to problematic findings. It concludes with an alternative view of voter behaviour in 2010 based on data sourced from the Australian Election Study, and suggests gendered voting was roughly symmetrical rather than skewed by women’s votes.

Like the two previous chapters, Chapter 9, ‘Politics as War: Women and Leadership into the Future,’ addresses a distinct aspect of contemporary political discourse: namely, the use of war metaphor. The analysis is conducted in three stages: I examine public attitudes towards women in war, finding persistent beliefs that women do not ‘belong’ in combat. I then detail the prevalence of war metaphor in contemporary political discourses. In the third section, prompted by Foucault’s (1997, 15) claim that ‘politics is war continued by other means,’ the chapter considers the ramifications of widespread public negativity towards women in war for women in positions of political power.

A summary of the chapter findings and a discussion of the social and political implications of the research complete the study. General conclusions are drawn, and suggestions for further research are offered.

PART ONE

INTERDISCIPLINARY

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

AND METHODOLOGY

Chapter 1

WOMEN AND POLITICS: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

A lively field of feminist political science exists in Australia, although it is not large. Much scope exists in this field to explore the relationship between institutional politics and women, a relationship that was forever changed by the elevation of Julia Gillard to the office of prime minister in June 2010. While the lasting effects of Gillard's term remain to be seen, this study is a first step towards understanding the impact a woman prime minister has had on gender relations in the broader Australian society. This chapter sets out the key theories informing this study, and is divided into two parts. In the first I outline the theoretical framework for this thesis – a feminist interdisciplinary interpretive framework informed by political-psychological theories of stereotypes and their effects. In the second I discuss the importance of this study and the ways it contributes to existing knowledge.

1.1 Interdisciplinary research frameworks

The interdisciplinary nature of this research requires drawing on three distinct research fields, which lends structure to this section. As explained in this thesis's introduction (p. 8), at its core this study is a feminist analysis of the stereotyping of women in contemporary politics. Accordingly, in section 1.1.1, I introduce

the theoretical environment of political science, especially in the context of feminist contributions concerning gender. Next I introduce stereotype theories, focusing specifically on the social positioning of women through the work of feminist critics of the public/private divide, which underwrites most if not all gender stereotypes. In the third section I explain social and political psychological literature and its contribution to gender role theory. These theories contribute to my understanding of why gender stereotypes persist and how women respond to them and help frame the research questions of this thesis, which appear in Chapter 2 (p. 48).

1.1.1 The feminist study of politics and gender

In its feminist analysis, this thesis is both informed by and signifies a departure from the classic political science treatment of gender. According to a recent historian of Australian political science, R.A.W. Rhodes (2009, 4-6), the study of politics in Australia had a ‘bifurcated’ development, with influences in the post-war period deriving from British humanities traditions including history and philosophy, and a later turn, from the 1970s, to American empiricism. The tension Rhodes identified in the field between quantitative and qualitative approaches has been negotiated in this study by incorporating elements of each in different chapters. The political science literature that has guided this study is set out in this section.

The subject of gender in Australian politics is addressed by a substantial field of research, spearheaded by a relatively small number of feminist scholars that inform my analysis here. Unfortunately, the broader discipline of political science has been slow to absorb the theoretical developments of feminist and queer studies: according to Sawyer (2004, 563), feminist perspectives remain ‘additive rather than transformative’ (see also Cowden et al. 2012); while Louise Chappell and Deborah Brennan (2009, 346) have explained that feminist ‘engagement with mainstream debates continues to be mostly one-sided.’ A continuing gap is evident, therefore, between a smaller body of feminist political science research and a larger output of what might best be described as androcentric political science. Androcentrism, according to Linda Lindsey (2011, 241) is the recognition that ‘books, research, law, history, and literature that did not mention women were about men’. Quantitative fields such as the voting gender gap remain dominated in Australia by scholars who tend to draw on simplified understandings of sex, rather than the complexities of gender that guide feminist or gender studies research. So, for example, the differences among women, such as class, race, religion and culture are often overlooked in this research, even though such differences can be greater than those between women and men (Gidengil 2007; Huddy, Cassese and Lizotte 2008, 48; Krook and Childs 2010, 9; Whitaker 2008, 1).

Approaches to women in political research fall into two broad categories, although these often overlap. The first considers women as political actors, as candidates, politicians and voters. The second approach considers women as recipients or beneficiaries of political outcomes. With respect to the former, women in active political roles, research has both acknowledged the progress women have made in representative politics since achieving the right to stand for parliaments around the world, and identified an array of challenges to the continuation of that progress. One of those challenges derives from the hegemonic masculinity on which federal politics and the parliament thrives (Crawford and Pini 2011; Gleeson and Johnson 2012). Another relates to party policies (or lack thereof) concerning the pre-selection of women to safe seats (Sawer and Simms 1993); a third is the need for institutional structures within which women can effectively act (Curtin 2008), and there are many more.

Qualitative research is more common in this area than in other political science traditions. Women's individual experiences as candidates and elected representatives are often explored in detail, as what contributes to one woman's success may provide clues that would aid the success of other women. One reason for the predominance of this qualitative approach is the scarcity of women who hold positions of political power: women's numbers in many Western governments have moved beyond token levels, yet there is only a handful of women in leadership.

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2015a), as at February 2015 only 22.1 per cent of representatives in national parliaments worldwide were women. In the same year, Australia was ranked equal 43rd (with Lesotho) out of 190 countries, with 26.7 per cent women in its national legislature (IPU, 2015b). This comparative scarcity compared to male representatives means researchers often study women among the political elite in terms of their individual experiences rather than as a collective.

Research on women as political actors also focuses on women as voters, most often in the form of voter behaviour studies (Leithner 1997; Inglehart and Norris 2000; Hill 2003; Goodyear-Grant and Croskill 2011). In these studies women are often interpreted as a bloc with little variation between women acknowledged. While such research informs my own interpretive framework, gaps in contemporary understandings of women's political involvement therefore exist: the idea that voters are also individuals. Hence in this work where I aim to consider the implications of the discursive, stereotypical positioning of women, I expose some of the diversity and different levels of political engagement among Australian women. I achieve this through the examination of readers' online comments, among other means, and address this research method later in section 2.4 (p. 62).

The second category of research on women in politics concerns women as relatively inactive ‘recipients’ of political outcomes. Louise Chappell and Deborah Brennan (2009, 346), for example, identify a ‘need to incorporate both national and international perspectives in order to understand *the influence of political decisions on women* and on gender outcomes’ (emphasis added). This field of enquiry addresses important issues such as gendered policy outcomes and the effectiveness of women’s representation. The concept of women’s representation is itself contentious, as distinctions have been drawn in the literature between ‘descriptive,’ ‘substantive’ and ‘symbolic’ representation (Pitkin 1967; Sawer 2002b). Descriptive representation is a statistical consideration, and can be understood as describing ‘a representative body [that] is distinguished by an accurate correspondence or resemblance to what it represents’ (Pitkin 1967, 60). Thus, according to this view, the numbers of male and female members of parliament ideally should reflect the proportion of men and women in the society they represent. The substantive representation of women refers to the ways in which the needs and concerns of women, as a group, are represented in parliament: how women are ‘acted for’, whether by male or female representatives (Pitkin 1967, 114). This is an important distinction, and has led some scholars to argue for an increased presence in politics not just of women, but of *feminist* women, who may promote women’s interests with greater vigour than non-feminist representatives (Tremblay 1998).

Symbolic representation relates to the broader cultural impacts of women's presence in politics (Sawer 2002b, 6-7). This symbolism manifests in a number of ways. One is that democracy may appear to be failing when it does not adequately include a group it claims to represent. Another is that women's equal presence in legislatures provides an alternative vision of femininity that is not associated with the private sphere. A third, of particular interest to my study, is that the symbolism of an equal number of women and men politicians is critical for social change beyond parliamentary politics (Tremblay 1998, 435). That is, the increasing visibility and acceptance of female politicians has the potential corollary of increasing respect for women in broader society. It signals the equal status of women, counters stereotypes that women are politically inept or uninterested, and potentially raises the aspirations of women and girls with the provision of role models (Sawer 2002b, 6-7). The significance of the symbolic representation of women is examined in this thesis: the cultural attitudes towards women that manifest in the stereotypes I identify may be attributable to women's inadequate symbolic representation. To shed further light on the relationship between these cultural attitudes and institutional politics, I turn next to feminist scholarship on gender stereotypes and the public/private divide.

1.1.2 Stereotype theories and the social positioning of women

I have noted above that there exist many differences among women. As Virginia Sapiro (1981, 703) has argued, it is possible to understand women, in some contexts, as an interest group having ‘a distinct position and a shared set of problems that characterize a special interest.’ As my discussion of feminist theory over the next few pages suggests, the political stereotyping of women, regardless of the geographical borders within which it occurs, constitutes one such shared set of problems.

The meaning of the word *stereotype* is derived from the Greek *stereós*, meaning ‘solid’, and *type*. It emerged as *stéréotype* in French in the late eighteenth century to refer to a printing process, ‘in which a solid plate of type-metal, cast from a papier-mâché or plaster mould taken from the surface of a forme of type, is used for printing from instead of the forme itself’ (OED Online 2012). The figurative use of the word stereotype was first noted in Walter Lippman’s 1922 work, *Public Opinion*, where it accords with contemporary definitions:

A preconceived and oversimplified idea of the characteristics which typify a person, situation, etc.; an attitude based on such a preconception. Also, a person who appears to conform closely to the idea of a type (OED Online 2012).

Despite the short life of this contemporary definition, stereotyping as a practice has a long history. To explain the gender stereotypes of the present, I have examined some historical conceptions of women that have been brought to light by a number of feminist theories. While these theories may not explicitly be focused on stereotypes, they do reveal the ways women have been characterised, or stigmatised, in different time periods. They also, importantly, allow for the identification of continuities in those stereotypical characterisations, where they exist. Undoubtedly, the historical exclusion of women from the public sphere underwrites most, if not all, popular stereotypes about women.

While gender stereotypes remain nestled amongst historical narratives, however, their continuing power and relevance is obscured. Indeed, scholars have observed that this is one of the characteristics of stereotypes that ensure their longevity. Anne Summers (1994 [1975], 2) noted in the introduction to the second edition of her classic *Damned Whores and God's Police*, 'if we constantly rewrite history to fit how we see things now, we forget how things used to be and, equally important to future scholars, how we used to see them.' There is a risk to the present, therefore, in failing to scrutinise the development and persistence of negative stereotypes in the past. The fundamental significance of the historical discussion of attitudes towards women,

then, is their ability to inform our understanding of contemporary stereotypes.

Michael Pickering and others have elaborated this point in work on stereotypes. Pickering (2001, 8) noted that stereotype research is generally focused on the use and operation of stereotypes in the present day. He argued, however, that it is the ‘historical accretions and sedimentations of meaning and value’ that contribute to the resilience of stereotypes (Pickering 2001, 8). This enduring resilience helps to explain why seemingly dormant and forgotten stereotypes may suddenly re-enter the public imagination and discourse ‘with little of their former strength diminished, and be powerfully applied in new social situations and contexts’ (Pickering 2001, 8). This is a proposition I examine in this thesis, rendering a shift away from the ‘obsessively present-centred orientation’ of research necessary. The excavation of prominent political gender stereotypes from the safety of their historical hideout is one of the aims of this thesis, most explicitly in Chapter 7.

Stereotypes not only denigrate and marginalise a group, but also validate the dominant group and distance it from the marginal (Pickering 2001, 5; Cook and Cusack 2010, 15). This dual operation is ‘integral to the ways in which stereotypes function as a form of social control’ (Pickering 2001, 5). Thus, the past and present stereotyping of women can be seen as attempts to discipline or shape women’s behaviour. Therefore, in

addition to examining the extent to which negative stereotypes about women in the public sphere continue to linger among contemporary attitudes, I also explore the literature's proposition of the use of gender stereotypes as a mechanism for the enforcement of gender norms and the control of women's behaviour in both past and present.

One of the most pervasive stereotypes historically pertaining to women is a 'natural' suitedness to domestic life or, put another way, unsuitedness for public life. In an examination of the absence of women in the Western philosophical tradition from Plato to Mill – a tradition Australia inherited as a British colony – Susan Moller Okin (1979, 274-75) found that:

the existence of a distinct sphere of private, family life, separated off from the realm of public life, leads to the exaggeration of women's biological differences from men, to the perception of women as primarily suited to fulfill special 'female' functions within the home, and consequently to the justification of the monopoly by men of the whole outside world.

This gendered division of the public and private spheres has been, and remains, at the centre of feminist struggles for gender equality: according to Carole Pateman (1989, 118), 'the dichotomy between the private and the public is central to almost two centuries of feminist writing and political struggle; it is, ultimately, what the feminist movement is about.'

The 'natural' or 'biological' understandings of sex have shaped understandings of women in most historical periods (Garlick, Dixon and Allen, 1992). At its most basic level, this has resulted in entrenched beliefs that women, as the species' childbearers, have a greater, or 'natural', aptitude for the care of children compared with men. Thus, the historical confinement of women to the private sphere, to raise children and tend to the household, was also justified as 'natural'.

Further to this, men's inability (or unwillingness) to understand the female body has underwritten a range of flawed conclusions that contributed to the ongoing exclusion of women from public life. Patricia Crawford (2001, 81) identified the prevalence of hysteria as one significant example of this phenomenon when she explained that 'learned men' of the eighteenth century commonly pronounced the female body as 'subject to emotional disorders, such as hysteria, rendering them *unfit for the duties of citizenship which required reason*' (emphasis added). The relationship between femininity and hysteria was granted legitimacy through its medicalisation, as Susan Bordo (2004, 169) explained:

Doctors described what came to be known as the hysterical personality as 'impressionable, suggestible, and narcissistic; highly labile, their moods changing suddenly, dramatically, and seemingly for inconsequential reasons...egocentric in the extreme...essentially

asexual and not uncommonly frigid' - all characteristics normative of femininity in this era.

Thus, stereotyped as irrational and hysterical, women have historically been excluded from the public realm. Serious critique of the restriction of women to the domestic sphere began in the eighteenth century by writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft in England and Judith Sargent Murray in America. Recognising that women are as much a product of society as nature, Wollstonecraft (1972 [1792], 15) argued women are 'confined...in cages like the feathered race, they have nothing to do but to plume themselves, and stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch.' This confinement, she continued, inhibited women's social capacities and was detrimental to women's 'health, liberty, and virtue.' Across the Atlantic, Murray pointed to the hypocrisy of a society that confined women to domesticity and simultaneously perceived women as small-minded. In a poem prefacing an article she published in the *Massachusetts Magazine*, Murray (1995 [1790], 4) wrote:

And in past times some men have *sunk* so *low*,
That female records nothing *less* can show.
But imbecility is still confin'd,
And by the lordly sex to us consign'd;
They rob us of the power t'improve,
And then declare we only trifles love.

Murray (1995, 11) also revealed the fundamental stake men have in the proper functioning of the home, and argued that men as well as women enjoy an ordered house and well-behaved children. Friedrich Engels would expand on this idea almost a century later, theorising an economic basis to the historic domination of women by men. 'The modern individual family,' Engels (1972 [1884], 200) suggested, 'is founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife, and modern society is a mass composed of these individual families as its molecules.' Virginia Woolf (1972 [1929], 355) famously argued that economic independence and 'a room of one's own' – privacy away from the demands of husbands and children – were critical if women were to engage with 'the world of reality.'

With the 'first wave' push for suffrage real change was effected, as women in most western nations gradually gained the right to vote and stand for parliament. It was a change that many Australians in particular reflect on with pride, as Australian women were among the first to gain national suffrage. The right to vote, however, did not dismantle the public/private divide, nor wholly eradicate negative stereotypes about women's political aptitudes. Women continued to push for changes throughout the twentieth century: coordinated campaigns for equal pay developed in the late 1930s and early 1940s, for example, as women joined the labour force in support of the war effort (Johnson, 1986). The period in which women activists unified and were known as the second

wave was particularly change-inducing (Hughes 1997; Ford 2011, 4). Critiques of the gendered public/private divide gathered momentum from the mid-twentieth century, beginning with Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (2009 [1949]) which 'marks the place in history where an enlightenment begins' (Thurman 2009, x). One of de Beauvoir's (2009, 16) best known observations establishes the historical 'othering' of women:

Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him...She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other.

Yet de Beauvoir (2009, 10) also suggested women were complicit in the unequal distribution of power between the sexes, and explained:

woman makes no claim for herself as subject because she lacks the concrete means, because she senses the necessary link connecting her to man without positing its reciprocity, and because she often derives satisfaction from her role as *Other*.

Understandings of women's agency were therefore expanding. Betty Friedan (1963, 348) encouraged women to seek work that enabled:

an able woman to realize her abilities fully, to achieve identity in society...the kind that was forbidden by the feminine mystique; the lifelong commitment to an art or science, to politics or professions.

In the wake of the successes of second wave feminism, however, understandings of the status of women in the public sphere became more complicated, as critiques of the aims and achievements of feminism emerged. In Australia, Helen Garner's book, *The First Stone* (1995) and later Virginia Haussegger's book *Wonder Woman* (2005) were amongst a raft of works that prompted heated discussions in the pages of broadsheet newspapers on the 'failings' of feminism (Campo, 2005). Underlying these critiques was the sense that the feminist goal of equality for women in the public sphere, particularly in the workplace, had been detrimental for women. Natasha Campo (2005, 63) examined these discussions in the Australian broadsheet media, and found feminism was regularly dismissed as 'a movement that held out promises that could never be kept'. She argued, however, the conception of feminism as promising women they could 'have it all' – career, marriage and children – was flawed: 'the fact that the feminist critique was premised on the belief that women could not 'have it all', and indeed identified overwork as a key factor in women's oppression, had been forgotten' (Campo 2005, 65). Divisions between women on opposing sides of the debate, often represented as a generational divide, were exploited by the reporting practices of the mass media.

The recognition of women as active participants in the creation of society continues to expand. Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007, 9) explain: ‘a post-structuralist account of gender relations suggests that we cannot simply read off social behaviour from a pre-existing male-female oppositional binary structure of “victims” and “oppressors.”’ In the increasingly complex understandings of society, and the recognition that gender relations are not simply about victims and oppressors, it is important not to overlook the fact that a power imbalance does persist between men and women as groups. Thus, while the public and private spheres are now recognised as blurred, rather than mutually exclusive in people’s lived experiences (Rogers 1998, 304), the legacy of centuries of women’s exclusion from the public arena is a key area of examination in this thesis.

Considering these critiques of the gendered public/private divide together with the findings of stereotype research discussed earlier, helps to explain why, despite significant changes to domestic and social life, stereotypes continue to re-emerge in moments of gender anxiety, often aroused by women (or men) who challenge norms of femininity (or masculinity). This may occur, according to Lynne E. Ford (2011, 4), when women ‘demand autonomy and work toward acquiring the rights and privileges that flow from eliminating the distinction between the public and private spheres.’ Such destabilising of the gender status quo leads to broad social repercussions, described by Long (2001, 89-90) as

the ‘wrath of the patriarchy.’ Both the ways that women have challenged the gender status quo at certain moments in Australia’s political history, and the ‘wrath’ this behaviour has incurred, are explored in this thesis. Despite the contemporary popular conception of women as equal, this cycle of destabilisation and backlash continues to affect current positions of women in society (Faludi 1991; Frith 2001).

Tali Mendelberg (2001) identified norms of racial equality as crucially important to the effectiveness of political rhetoric. She argued implicit references to race are politically effective as they do not challenge the conception most Americans have of themselves as believing in, and adhering to, norms of racial equality:

Whites do not simply pay lip service to equality and continue to derogate blacks in private. Almost all whites genuinely disavow the sentiments that have come to be most closely associated with the ideology of white supremacy—the immutable inferiority of blacks, the desirability of segregation, and the just nature of discrimination in favor of whites. In this sense, nearly every white person today has a genuine commitment to basic racial equality in the public sphere (Mendelberg 2001, 19).

Mendelberg’s study of implicit communication in politics, which revolved around appeals to white voters using representations of Willie Horton, a black criminal, pointed to the importance of symbolic and visual cues. Symbolic racial resentments, fears and stereotypes, she found, could communicate a political message to white Americans

without invoking in (white) people a sense that racial equality norms are being challenged.

A similar trait, I suggest, is discernible in the Australian public with respect to gender equality. John Hirst (2007, 149-166) has documented how notions of a 'fair go' have formed part of the Australian national character since the early colonial period. Due to this national mythology, Australians think of themselves as an egalitarian people living in an egalitarian society. The past two decades have seen this expanded for women, who, according to the mythology, have equal opportunities in the workplace, education, family and other aspects of life. The prevalence of this belief, however, does not mean that sexism has been eradicated from Australian society, or gender equality achieved. Nonetheless, underwriting the mythology are the individual attitudes of most Australians who conceive of themselves as believing in and adhering to norms of gender equality.

Such contemporary attitudes towards women are influenced by at least two 'common sense' ideas. The first is that women have reached equality with men (in some cases extending to the idea that women are now advantaged compared to men; see, for example, Doyle 2006). The second, arising out of the first, is that feminism is not only outdated and unnecessary, but that women who continue to hold feminist ideals are radical man-haters. Thus, researchers who focus on inequalities between

men and women do so in the face of ongoing scepticism of feminism's relevance. Further, evidence that challenges these common sense understandings of gender equality is often uncomfortable for this sceptical segment of the public. The tendency for people to refuse to recognise a social problem in spite of persistent evidence of such a problem has been addressed in social and political psychological research (Jost and Banaji 1994; Jost, Banaji and Nosek 2004; Kay et al. 2009), which is the subject of the next section.

1.1.3. Social and political psychological frameworks

According to Jon A. Krosnick, Penny S. Visser and Joshua Hardel (2010, 1289), research in political psychology emphasises the 'unobservable psychological processes unfolding in the minds of political actors and on the nature of social interaction among them.' While 'thriving' in the United States, political psychology has a negligible presence in Australia (Krosnick, Visser and Hardel 2010; Walter and 't Hart 2009). As is the case with political studies in general, not all the US field is relevant to the Australian context: research on why people choose to vote, for example, is less useful in Australia where voting is compulsory. Yet significant areas may inform our understanding of Australian voters, including investigations into the similarities and differences between men and women.

Kay et al. (2009, 422) explained that feelings of ‘anxiety and threat’ often emerge from a person’s realisation ‘that one is forced to conform to the rules, norms, and conventions of a system that is illegitimate, unfair, and undesirable.’ When it appears unlikely that such unfairness can be changed, a person will ‘be motivated to justify their system in an attempt to view it in a more legitimate, fair, and desirable light’ (Kay et al. 2009, 422). This justification may occur, according to Jost and Banaji (1994, 2), even when the unfairness adversely impacts upon a person’s self or group interest.

System justification theory helps explain why, even in the face of ongoing gender inequality, the status quo persists to the detriment of half the population. Thus, as scholars have previously noted, it is not enough simply to introduce quotas for women in parliament, or introduce greater flexibility into workplaces to encourage mothers to maintain careers (although changes such as these have been critical). It is crucial also to change public attitudes towards gender roles, norms and stereotypes that underwrite ongoing inequalities between men and women. Kay et al. (2009, 421-22) similarly concluded:

to gain equality in society, disadvantaged groups will have to do more than simply overcome the obstacles inherent in how the current social system is structured; they will also have to alter how people think it should be structured.

In order to challenge and change social attitudes, however, particularly where stereotypes are involved, the origins and content of those social attitudes must first be established (as discussed in the previous section). Investigations into the views of the public, the media and scholars combine later in this study to create a snapshot of current attitudes towards women, as participants in the political process. This contemporary snapshot contributes to the exploration of Kay et al.'s observation that 'how people think' is of fundamental significance to the goal of equality between women and men.

In political psychology, stereotypes are typically explored by considering the impact of voters' projection of gender (and other) stereotypes onto candidates (Bligh et al. 2012; Anderson, Lewis and Baird 2011; Huddy and Capelos 2002). They are primarily, therefore, concerned with outcomes for political elites. Alice H. Eagly and Steven J. Karau (2002) have examined women's scarcity in leadership by looking beyond the 'glass ceiling' or 'pipeline problem' to a cognitive explanation they described as *role congruity theory*.

The theory has two components: the first is gender role theory, according to which 'perceivers infer that there is correspondence between the types of actions people engage in and their inner dispositions' (Eagly and Karau 2002, 574). Thus, one gender becomes associated with a particular social role to a greater extent than the other: this has led, for example, to

the widespread gendered division of labour in the home. The second component is gender stereotyping: women are perceived stereotypically as *communal*, that is, concerned with the welfare of others and ‘affectionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic, interpersonally sensitive, nurturant, and gentle’ (Eagly and Karau 2002, 574).³ Men are thought stereotypically to be *agentic*; they are perceived to be assertive and described as ‘aggressive, ambitious, dominant, forceful, independent, self-sufficient, self-confident, and prone to act as a leader’ (Eagly and Karau 2002, 574). As some social roles come to be popularly associated with, or are seen to require, the abilities or traits associated with one sex, an instance of the role being performed by a member of the opposite sex will appear discordant, or incongruent.

Critical insights for this study are gained from the application of this theory to women in political leadership. Eagly and Karau (2002, 588) found that women leaders suffer two types of disadvantage. First, stereotyped as communal, women are perceived as less suited to leadership; and second, the (stereotypically masculine) behaviour required of women leaders ‘violates the female gender role.’ Both types of disadvantage produce prejudice against women, which, Eagly and Karau (2002) suggested, helps to explain three key gendered difficulties: negative attitudes towards women leaders; the greater difficulty faced by women in achieving leadership positions and the lower levels of

³ While not referenced in the social psychological literature, ideas about women as ‘communal’ and men as ‘agentic’ owe much to Carol Gilligan’s (1982) theory of women’s ‘different moral voice.’

recognition women receive compared to men in such roles. Thus, despite the achievements to date in breaking down gendered public and private divisions, social and political psychologists have demonstrated the continuing prevalence of these stereotypes in contemporary society. Lauren J. Hall and Ngaire Donaghue (2013) found, for example, that stereotypically masculine aspects of leadership, such as ambition, are valued in candidates for high-level office. According to Tyler G. Okimoto and Victoria L. Brescoll (2010), however, when observed in women candidates, these traits may induce a 'backlash;' a reduced likelihood that voters will cast a ballot in their favour. Robin Lakoff (2003, 175-6) observed this phenomenon when she found some Americans claimed to dislike Hillary Rodham Clinton because she was ambitious. Unsurprisingly, there is much correspondence between these theories and the feminist critiques of the gendered public/private divide discussed in section 1.1.2.

Recently, leadership studies have recognised the existence of more than one style of leadership and suggested that women leaders tend towards 'transformational' rather than more traditional, 'transactional' leadership. Mary Crawford and Marian Simms (2010) argued that a number of advantages align with transformational leadership styles, although they demonstrated both Gillard and (then) Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Julie Bishop, display transactional leadership qualities. Whether this shifting understanding of leadership is apparent enough in the public

mind to break down the stereotypes Eagly and Karau (2002) identified is at this stage unclear. What is clear, however, is that role congruity theory may explain some of the prejudice women experience entering the public domain in Australia.

Michelle C. Bligh and colleagues (2012) considered the implications of role congruity theory in their research on the media coverage of women politicians in the US. They found that one aspect of the media's power stems from its ability to portray women as either congruent or incongruent with gender roles. Certainly, the Australian media has at times depicted Gillard in ways that are incongruent with gender norms, and this may have had some influence on the way she was perceived by the public.



Bill Leak cartoon, *Australian*, 24 June 2011.

I argue in Chapter 4, however, that gender stereotyping was not limited to candidates during the 2010 election campaign. What also emerged in the media was a number of stereotypes about Australian women as voters. Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity theory therefore goes

part of the way in explaining the public's response to Gillard, and this is explored throughout this thesis, most explicitly in Chapter 7. My examination of stereotypical media representations of women voters may add to this understanding.

1.2 Importance and Contribution

Political studies have not examined the history of the stereotyping of women as voters in any depth. This might account for Mac an Ghaill and Haywood's (2007, 6) contention that there is something 'new' about:

the intense public anxiety in which changing sexual behaviour, emerging gender/sexual identities and fragmenting femininities and masculinities are explicitly linked to 'debates about the current shape and desirable future of society.'

Research conducted in this study, however, is informed by the theory that sexuality and gender roles have been connected to popular conceptions of the 'appropriate' social order throughout Australia's white history. Women's campaigns for greater access to and participation in the public sphere, since at least the late nineteenth century and in some cases earlier, have regularly challenged the gender status quo (as it manifested in various periods). With each success, women have been stereotyped as threatening to the social order, to families, to labour, to the 'very moral fabric' of society (Agostino 1998, 61; Sawer and Simms 1993, 2). I therefore conceive of stereotypes as cultural

constraints to women's full political participation. For such constraints to be overcome, and for women to continue towards equality in political representation and participation, the history and potency of negative gender stereotypes needs to be understood so they can be confronted and dismantled.

Informed by stereotyping theory, this study differs from more traditional and even feminist understandings of women's voting behaviour, such as voting gender gap studies. My study invites both an advance on stereotyping theory and the study of gender in political science through a new interpretation of the role of stereotypes in politics. By focusing on women as voters, it expands the research field in relation to Westminster studies in general and Australian studies more specifically. Further, this alternative theory of the intersection of gender and politics has potential application to the intersection of politics and other groups, such as ethnic minorities.

Stereotyping is one of the many outcomes of gendered myths that persist in the modern Western world. According to Ridgeway (2011, 16), 'the social practices that constitute males and females as different and unequal' involve processes at the institutional, social-relational and individual levels. Similarly, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003, 17) have explained 'most of our interactions are colored by our performance of our own gender, and by our attribution of gender to others.' Thus, conceiving of society in gendered dualisms shapes human self-identities and relationships in both limiting and enabling ways. This means that while there is no doubt gender inequalities persist, particular opportunities also

align with gender. Often, for example, greater social acceptance, and therefore opportunity, is granted to women to stay home and care for children (Ridgeway 2011, 5). It should be noted here that class and cultural factors might also influence whether a woman staying at home to care for children feels, or is viewed as, privileged, burdened or liberated. The complexity of gender as an individual and social process with both positive and negative potential is recognised in contemporary theory. In light of the prevalence of stereotypes in the 2010 federal political discourse, however, a renewed need to focus on this aspect of gendered social practice has emerged. Accordingly, this study seeks to determine some of the social and political ramifications of stereotypes that are newly salient as a result of the contemporary political climate.

The different perspectives with which I approach stereotypical attitudes toward women add to the existing literature described above in a number of ways. The understanding of stereotypes as historical phenomena that re-emerge in times of social anxiety is important, particularly in light of the finding (Chapter 4) that even when popular beliefs hold women to have ‘reached’ equality, negative gender stereotypes pervade public discussions and work against gender equality by negatively shaping attitudes towards women. As well as exploring the historical impacts of stereotyping, then, this study clarifies the powerful influence of stereotypes, as ‘consensual knowledge,’ on popular perceptions of women (Ridgeway 2011, 62). Gillard may have ‘smashed’ the glass ceiling by becoming Australia’s first female prime minister; attention to contemporary public discourses surrounding women in politics, however, suggests this event

has not significantly altered public attitudes towards gender roles. Underlying this apparent resistance to change is an understanding of stereotypes as ‘cultural instructions or *rules* for enacting gender’ (Ridgeway 2011, 57). By examining the historical thread of popular stereotypes into the present, then, this study adds to current knowledge of the prescriptive power of stereotypes, with the ultimate goal of assisting in their unmaking.

One of the original contributions this thesis makes to the study of women in politics lies in its conception of ordinary women as political players, or actors. Where women as voters have been studied in the past, it has been as a quantitative variable, or as catalysts for behavioural impacts on the political elite. By contrast, in this study I have attempted to understand how political discourses, including those of the political elite, influence women’s voting behaviour and their political participation more generally. Broadening current research approaches to women in politics in this way highlights the diversity and strength of women, and reveals the extent to which women are politically engaged and knowledgeable. These are important contributions to a field in which women have been perceived to have levels of political engagement, interest and knowledge that are lower than men’s (McGlone, Aronson and Kobryniewicz 2006; Dolan 2011). Further, finding women to be actively engaged in political counter-discourses problematises the very stereotypes with which this study is concerned, and in so doing introduces another dimension to existing feminist scholarship’s challenge to the gender-blind approach of mainstream political science research.

The method of sourcing data on public attitudes from the internet, discussed in detail in the next chapter, has produced its own contribution to knowledge. My approach to discourse as ‘natural language use’ (p. 53), has enabled this study to foreground women’s views and responses, which may traditionally have been overlooked. Importantly, this study has located resistance to the dominant political discourse in women’s online expressions. This highlights the value of online comments as a data source for the study of political opinion, and raises critical questions about the media’s efficacy in representing the views of women. My examination of the proportion of men and women who choose to reveal their gender in internet communications, while still in early stages, demonstrates more complexity in the opportunity for online anonymity than is suggested by its conventional interpretation as fostering widespread deceptive or unreliable behaviour.

Implications emerge from this study for a number of groups. For women politicians it sheds light on the operation of a powerful ‘divide and conquer’ strategy targeted at women voters. This strategy is often obscured by the advantage women candidates are believed to have in a presumed ‘common sense’ appeal to women voters. Understanding the operation and effects of stereotypes in the media, and in the hands of women’s political opponents, may help female candidates devise counter-strategies to such common sense myths.

For women as citizens this study is significant, as it suggests recent discourses have been characterised by negative stereotypes that cast doubt over women's political aptitudes. The understanding this study offers of the sources and effects of those negative discourses may be used to inform the public of the historical foundations of negative stereotypes, and their lingering effects. This in turn could encourage women and men to counter negative stereotypes in their personal and public conversations, and possibly contribute to a shift in public attitudes that results in more positive conceptions of women as political leaders, representatives and voters.

Important policy implications also emerge from this study, for while it is desirable to reach a point where women's participation in politics is unremarkable, Australia is not yet there. Members of the lay public can only do so much in countering negative stereotypes about women in politics. The role of the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, currently Elizabeth Broderick, is as important as ever, as are NGOs including EMILY's List and Women's Electoral Lobby. This study may add to existing arguments in support of the continuation of government programs and policies that monitor and promote the progress of women in politics. It also reiterates the need to fill government and opposition benches with 50 per cent female representatives. The symbolism in the attainment of that goal is likely to have an important positive influence on public perceptions of women as political actors at all levels.

Finally, implications from this study also emerge for political scientists. My findings reiterate a need for greater acknowledgement within the discipline of the variation among women, and the gendered behaviour of men. Contemporary scholarship suggests the discipline is moving slowly in incorporating feminist theories (Cowden et al. 2012; Chappell and Brennan 2009, 346; Sawer 2004, 563). Building on existing critiques of political science's androcentrism, this study may prompt some scholars to adopt approaches to research that recognise the complexity of gender. Further, the original contribution of this study, in identifying the stereotyping of women voters, could expand current approaches to the field of voter studies not only in relation to gender but other groups that face stigmatisation in the political press.

Feminist theoretical approaches to politics and stereotypes based on the public/private divide provide the foundational framework of this study. They establish a need for research that traces political stereotypes about women in Australia's history into the present. I have designed the historical aspects of my approach to increase current understandings of the power of stereotypes to periodically re-emerge and shape public attitudes towards women. The contemporary material I discuss in my discourse analysis recognises both the diversity and political capacity of Australian women, particularly through attention to counter-discourses by incorporating public viewpoints expressed online. This approach importantly provides useful avenues for the examination of women as political actors.

Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY

In the previous chapter, I outlined the theoretical scholarship that has informed my interpretation of the discourses surrounding the federal election of 2010. This was divided into three fields: political science approaches to issues of gender; gender stereotype theories specifically relating to the social positioning of women; and political and social psychological theories on gender and politics. Making clear these theoretical influences is important to an approach guided by post-structuralist principles, which understands all knowledge as constructed. Indeed, this understanding underpins the methodology of this study, which is set out in this chapter.

Before elaborating on methodology, it is necessary to establish the research questions motivating this study. The first federal leadership contest between a man and a woman raised many interesting new questions about voter behaviour that have not previously been addressed in political studies literature. Out of the context of the 2010 election (which is described in some detail in Chapter 3), this study has grown into an examination of the contemporary political stereotyping of women, particularly as voters, and the impacts such stereotypes may have on women's political participation. The general objective of this thesis is *to analyse the interplay between gender stereotypes and the status of women in Australia's political culture, and to examine the*

hypothesis that there was a specific relationship between the way gender stereotypes were used in media discourses and the ways some women participated in the political environment of 2010. I aim to show the ways in which the continued – or in the case of 2010, possibly escalated – stereotyping of women may have compounded a number of gender inequalities that still exist in the political sphere.

Specifically, my research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What stereotypical representations of women featured in Australia's political discourses in the period between Gillard's leadership takeover (24 June 2010) and the subsequent federal election (21 August 2010)?
2. What factors contributed to the perpetuation of these stereotypes?
3. How did women respond?
4. Were these gender stereotypes new discursive features, or did they have historical foundations?
5. Finally, what are the implications of these political stereotypes for women, and broader Australian society?

These questions merit study as they address stereotypes as one of the most pervasive yet covert methods by which inequality between men and women is perpetuated in the political sphere. Questions 1, 2 and 3 relate to the literature on politics, gender and stereotypes addressed in the previous chapter. Specifically, these questions address the propositions in the literature that stereotypes continue to be used to enforce gender norms (as I discussed on page 25). By examining the 2010 political discourses to

identify what stereotypes about women were predominant at this time, I seek to determine the extent to which these stereotypes can be seen as part of an ongoing legacy of women's historical exclusion from the public sphere (as I discussed on page 31), which in contemporary social psychological theory is associated with role congruity (discussed on page 39). Question 4 seeks to address the contention made in stereotype literature, specifically as discussed on page 24, that stereotypes have enduring power. By asking this question I seek to determine whether the contemporary political stereotyping of women is novel—emerging in response to the leadership of Australia's first female prime minister—or whether the discursive focus on women at the time of Gillard's rise to leadership breathed new life into a set of already well-worn stereotypes.

With Question 5, I aim to address some of the more 'big picture', or cultural, elements of the relationship between politics and gender inequality. Two main propositions from the literature discussed in the previous chapter have driven this question. The first is how the symbolic representation of women in politics relates to the overall equality of women in Australian society (see my discussion on page 21). The second is the significance of social attitudes towards women in the attainment of gender equality (discussed on page 36). While for some Australians Gillard's accession proves women can achieve anything—for what remains for women to achieve beyond securing the prime ministership—the examination of 'everyday' social attitudes in this thesis aims to examine the relationship between women's political activity and interest, and the way women are both discussed and addressed in public discourses. Thus, while addressing critical propositions raised by relevant literature, these research questions also address gaps in the literature: how are women as voters represented and discussed in political

discourses; how do women themselves participate in and respond to these discourses, and how do such instances of symbolic representation affect public perceptions of women's participation in politics, and broader society?

In response to these questions, I hypothesise that the political discourses of 2010 contained a number of well-worn negative gender stereotypes that were used to undermine women's political competencies and may have affected the way some women participated in the federal political environment. Motivating these research questions, then, is concern with women's continued political underrepresentation and stigmatisation, both as politicians and participants in Australia's political culture.

Women's equal representation in parliaments is important for many reasons, including the symbolism that it 'increases respect for women in society and is a form of recognition of the equal status of women' (Sawer, Tremblay and Trimble 2006, 17). I propose that a parallel symbolism exists in the discursive construction of women as political participants. While women are certainly accepted and active in the democratic process today, it is still not uncommon for representations of women participating in politics—including voting, lobbying, voicing opinions and campaigning—to be pejorative. Thus, one important outcome of asking and answering the above research questions may be to unearth some of the deeply buried ideas that continue to negatively impact on women's political participation and interest. My analysis of negative political stereotypes may indicate that in addition to women's equal representation in parliament, women's representation as equals in political media and discourses is crucial for increasing respect for women in society, and recognising their equal status. By building

on existing understandings of the stereotypical representation of women this study contributes to fields of work, including those discussed in the previous chapter, which aim to improve women's engagement with and inclusion in Australia's political culture specifically, and broader society in general.

The use of the secret ballot, introduced - indeed pioneered - in Australia in 1856, means it is impossible to determine how women and men actually voted on 21 August 2010 (Sawer 2001; Brent 2006). Limited survey data is available from the Australian Election Study (McAllister et al. 2011) and I have drawn on that data throughout this study to explain and challenge ideas about gendered voting behaviour. As discussed in Chapter 1, quantitative political research does not typically facilitate analyses that are sensitive to the complexities of gender, however, and for this reason I have founded much of my research in discourse analysis. Numerous approaches to the study of politics and gender exist: Sawer (2012), for example, analysed the ways gender affected the 2010 campaign using pre-election polling, policies and parliamentary statistics. Yet Johnson (2002, 1) has argued that the study of 'Australian political science is best served by a complex, plural identity' of which discourse analysis is a crucial element.

One advantage discourse analysis can bring to the study of Australian politics is a sense of the fluid and often-difficult relationship between the voting public and political institutions. As part of a careful and considered approach, discourse analysis allows the voices of ordinary voters – supporters, dissenters and the uninterested – to be heard alongside polished political rhetoric and the crafted offerings of media commentators. Thus, although the interpretation of politics based on statistics and policies is

unquestionably important, examining political discourses, in all their untidiness and discord, adds depth to our understanding of the political significance of gender.

2.1 An Introduction to Discourse

Discourse analysis is first and foremost concerned with language use, specifically texts, whether spoken or in print (Barker and Galasiński 2001, 62). The term ‘discourse analysis’ has become an umbrella term, with sociolinguistics, transcript notation, conversation analysis, narrative analysis, semiotic analysis, critical discourse analysis and others, all falling within its bounds (Wodak 1997; Jaworski and Coupland 2006). According to prominent discourse scholar, Norman Fairclough (2010, 225), methodology is ‘a theoretical process which constructs an *object of research* (a researchable object, a set of research questions) for the research topic by bringing to bear on it relevant theoretical perspectives and frameworks.’ For the reasons set out below, this study’s methodology is guided by the principles and program of critical discourse analysis (‘CDA’).

It is important here to note the requirement of self-reflexivity in conducting discourse analysis, a feature particularly acknowledged by the CDA school. ‘Analysis is interpretive,’ state Barker and Galasiński (2001, 64), and ‘the process is laden with researchers’ attitudes and beliefs as well as the assumption that there is no ultimately “correct” interpretation of texts’. The language use examined in this study might be approached from other perspectives, inviting

different conclusions. However, as a feminist researcher interested in building on current knowledge about discursive power and the inequalities arising from social constructions of gender (established in my discussion of feminist theoretical frameworks in Chapter 1), CDA is not only a methodological, but also an ideological fit.

2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourse studies in general can be traced back through prominent thinkers including Michel Foucault (1926-1984) and Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) to a focus on the art of rhetoric in Classical Greece (Kennedy 1999). The roots of CDA, however, lie in an increasing focus on discourse across many disciplines from the late 1960s (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 2-3), with a distinct CDA field beginning in the early 1980s in the work of scholars including Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak and Teun van Dijk (Fairclough 2010, 1-2). Coming together at a symposium in 1991, Fairclough, Wodak and van Dijk, together with Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, began to articulate some of the common characteristics of their respective approaches that set them slightly apart from previously established discourse analytical approaches. In time, rather than coalescing into a strictly defined and structured approach to research, CDA has developed more as a loose framework, guided by a fundamental belief in the power of discourse to shape society and the importance of analyzing and critiquing such power. Despite the varied theoretical approaches that fall within

the framework of CDA, it is considered an ‘established paradigm’ by its practitioners and constitutes a growing field with a number of scholarly journals, conferences and networks of scholars aligned with the program (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 4).

Recent overviews of CDA by some of its founding scholars have identified some of the commonalities, or foundational ideas, that underpin most critical discourse analyses. Wodak and Meyer (2009, 10) describe the approach in the following way: ‘CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, legitimized, and so on, by language use (or in discourse)’. Fairclough (2010), Wodak and Meyer (2009) and van Dijk (2011) have all recently published work that is both interpretative and instructional. Key features of CDA that have guided this study are drawn from those works and discussed below, beginning with a deeper consideration of discourse.

While different approaches may focus on different elements of discourse, there are a number of features recognized as important by those working in CDA. While the following discussion is not exhaustive, it identifies four elements of discourse that are key to understanding the concept, drawn from contemporary CDA scholars and the work of Michel Foucault, who is acknowledged by Wodak and Meyer (2009, 10) as ‘one of the theoretical ‘godfathers’ of CDA’. Foucault’s ideas on discourse permeated his entire corpus, but are perhaps laid out most explicitly in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972). The work of Foucault’s followers and critics are also drawn on in my discussion below.

First, discourse is ‘natural’ language use. This may appear doubtful at first when one considers, for example, the speeches of a national leader that may have numerous contributing authors, a number of rewrites and significant editing in order to create a highly polished persuasive text – little about such a process would appear ‘natural’. However, the study of discourse involves the study of how ‘real language users’ use language, as opposed to hypothetical examples or abstract language systems (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 2). All of the discursive statements examined in this study are examples, then, of ‘natural’ language use; they are derived from real-life users of discourse whether in speech or writing, in print or online. The authenticity or veracity of the statements used in this study, however, is a separate issue and is addressed in section 2.6 (p. 79).

Second, discourse is contextually situated (van Dijk 2011, 3). As Foucault (1971 [1961]; 1976; 1977 [1975]; 1989 [1973]) discussed in relation to fields as diverse as medicine, mental health, punishment and sexuality, the way topics are discussed, and what can be said about them, are contingent on both time and place. Thus context plays an integral role in the understanding of any discursive construction. As this study is focused on Australian political discourses, predominantly from June to August in 2010, there is a very specific context in which the discourse exists. This context is set out in Chapter 3, and I have been careful to maintain the focus of this thesis on this period.

A third understanding of discourse views it not just as linguistic expression, but language as practice. For Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak (2011, 357),

this implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and all the diverse elements of the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it...the discursive event is shaped by situations, institutions and social structures, but it also shapes them.

Discourse studies, then, necessarily include studies of social action and interaction (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 2; van Dijk 2011, 3). Preceding Foucault, Saussure identified language as crucial to any understanding of the world, as not only do we speak in language, but we *think* in language. Over time this idea has expanded: in contemporary work, for example, discourse scholar Margaret Wetherell (2001, 16) explains discourse in active terms:

Language is constructive. It is constitutive of social life. Discourse builds objects, worlds, minds and social relations. It doesn't just reflect them... [Texts] are complex cultural and psychological products, constructed in ways which make things happen and which bring social worlds into being.

As Stuart Hall (2001, 72) elaborated, 'since all social practices entail *meaning*, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect.' Federal Opposition Leader Tony Abbott's 'no sleep' promise at the end of the 2010 election campaign is a good example of this. During the final 36 hours of his campaign, Abbott announced that he would not sleep but spend every moment trying, through this act of personal sacrifice, to

prove to the Australian electorate that he was serious about his commitment to the nation (Harmsen 2010). The impact of this ‘stunt,’ as it was referred to by some, was not made by what Abbott had to say, but his manipulation of every moment leading up to election day to produce a message. Images of Abbott playing late-night tennis and drinking a shandy with supporters at midnight were intended to convey meaning to the Australian public: that he was committed and would not rest in service to the Australian people.

Thus, language and practice in discourse are two inextricable components of a crucial process of meaning making. Drawing on Foucault’s ideas, Hall (2001, 72) explained that discourse ‘governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others.’ Thus discourse has both regulatory and productive power; as will be seen throughout this study, this enables negative media stereotypes to discipline women’s behaviour.

An understanding of discourse as a form of power and domination is the fourth characteristic to be discussed (van Dijk 2011, 3). Foucault (1977, 198) is well known for his explanation of modern power as ‘the penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life,’ which he described as the ‘capillary functioning of power.’ In this conception, power does not only operate in a ‘top-down’ and repressive fashion as traditionally understood, but at all levels of social interaction. It is in this light that feminists claimed ‘the personal

is political’, and argued that ‘politics is about power in the broadest sense from government to everyday life’ (Johnson 2002, 2).

The constitutive power of discourse, then, operates ‘both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it’ (Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak 2011, 358). This study’s examination of power is not only focused on the highly influential texts emanating from Australia’s political elite (although these are considered). It also considers the power of ‘ordinary’ Australians to participate in discourse—and thereby contribute to the constitutive power of language in practice. Such a focus aligns with the critical aim of CDA which is, according to Wodak and Meyer (2009, 8), concerned with ‘the more hidden and latent type of everyday beliefs, which often appear disguised as conceptual metaphors and analogies’. As well as ideologies, however, Foucault also suggested that power produces resistance. Discourse is a valuable source for examining sites of power and resistance as, particularly with the rise of internet media and widespread online participation, both dominant and marginal(ised) voices are accessible sites of study. Wodak and Meyer (2009, 10) note ‘texts are often sites of struggle in that they show traces of differing discourses and ideologies contending and struggling for dominance’. The dissenting online comments discussed in later chapters are interpreted in this study as an important form of resistance to the dominant discourse formations.

Having outlined the understandings of discourse that have guided this study, I next address what makes critical discourse studies *critical*. While the initial aim of CDA may be to examine the conduct and operation of discourse in relation to a particular field, its ultimate goal is emancipatory: CDA ‘should be oriented towards critiquing and changing society, in contrast to traditional theory oriented solely to understanding or explaining it’ (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 6). As discursive practices may shape and be shaped by ideologies, ‘they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic groups, through the ways in which they represent things’ (Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak 2011, 358). By demystifying the discursive production of such inequalities CDA hopes to challenge the status quo and reduce social inequalities. In addition, for its practitioners the critical character of CDA means it ‘openly and explicitly positions itself on the side of dominated and oppressed groups and against dominating groups’ (Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak 2011, 358).

One final element of CDA should be noted: it is *transdisciplinary*. As problem-oriented analyses of social relations, CDA ‘cuts across conventional boundaries between disciplines (linguistics, politics, sociology and so forth)’ (Fairclough 2010, 4). This transdisciplinary character has enabled this study to draw on a number of scholarly fields in search of answers to the research questions posed above. The ability to draw on current research from political science, political psychology, gender studies and history has both influenced and enriched this study’s development and conclusions.

Given its critical, problem-oriented and transdisciplinary approach, there is no one fixed theory or method associated with CDA. Rather, one of its proponents, Fairclough (2010, 235) argues in favour a series of ‘stages’, which tend to shape the research process and lead a scholar to appropriate research methods. These are:

Stage 1: Focus upon a social wrong, in its semiotic aspect.

Stage 2: Identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong.

Stage 3: Consider whether the social order ‘needs’ the social wrong.

Stage 4: Identify possible ways past the obstacles.

The social wrong examined in this study is the continuing political inequality between men and women. An obstacle to righting this wrong is the negative stereotyping in Australian political discourses of women as political actors and agents. Prior research demonstrates the social order does not ‘need’ the social wrong; in fact, as identified in Chapter 1, gender inequality in a democratic country such as Australia has been found to have many negative impacts for both men and women. Finally, this study identifies more gender inclusive analyses of quantitative electoral data, and the use of alternative discourses by women themselves to challenge mainstream discourses, as ways past the obstacle.

In accordance with CDA’s problem-oriented approach, the methods of research drawn on in each chapter of this study have arisen out of the questions shaping

that chapter, rather than any necessarily ‘fixed structure’ approach. One result of this is that I analyse different discursive elements in different chapters. In Chapter 3 I take a broad approach, examining political press reports, editorials, letters to the editor, polling data and social media. I narrow my scope in later chapters, and focus on press reports (Chapter 4), online discussion board comments (Chapters 5 and 6), a historical parliamentary debate (Chapter 7), academic contributions to the discourse (Chapter 8) and a combination of press reports and online comments concerning gender and war (Chapter 9). My use of these varied data sources therefore demonstrates the range of fields which contribute to discourses about women voters. The common thread throughout this thesis, however, is my analysis of the discussion and stereotyping of women by the political press. My methodology concerning the political press is explained in the next section.

2.3 Discourse: the political press

As mentioned above, numerous sources contribute to the political discourses of 2010: parliamentary debates, for example, and political speeches, election promises and party publications. I have chosen, however, to predominantly focus on the mainstream media (particularly the print media) as it is a key discursive site that forms a nexus for discussion between those writing the news (journalists and commentators), those featured in the news (politicians and other key stakeholders), and those reading the news (the audience). As Bridget

Griffen-Foley (2004, 545) has demonstrated, audience involvement in such a nexus is not new, as ‘media producers have been blurring the notion of the passive media consumer for more than a century.’ This is especially significant for CDA researchers as the media, explain Tommaso M. Milani and Sally Johnson (2009, 5), gives ‘a public voice to a variety of social actors who compete with each other in staking various claims regarding what counts as legitimate knowledge in the domain of language’ (Milani and Johnson 2009, 5). Accordingly, the views of a broad cross-section of the public may be obtained by examining media sources; especially as the development of internet technologies has enhanced this producer-audience nexus (Turnbull 2014, 63).

Prior approaches to the media and internet have been useful to the discourse analysis in this study. Feminist media studies have revealed the unequal representation by the press of women in politics compared with men (Baird 2004; Jenkins, C. 2006; Kittilson and Fridkin 2008; Adcock 2010), and identified the role of the media in perpetuating gender stereotypes. Research on computer-mediated communication including internet-based media outlets is growing as quickly as the technology it concerns. The internet was initially held up as one of the great modern levellers, as it was seen to eradicate the social impacts of physical or cultural difference. Colin Sparks (2001, 80) argued that online anonymity ‘serves to disguise many of those social markers (age, gender, ethnic origin, accent, and so on) that in practice serve to either validate or disqualify the opinions of speakers in direct social interaction.’ As knowledge about patterns of internet use, access and effects became more sophisticated,

however, scholars recognised that the online world often reflects the social hierarchy of the 'real' world.

Another field of enquiry important to this study concerns the potential of widespread internet access to broaden the public sphere and strengthen democracy. Sandra Lilburn (1999, 2) suggested, 'media space has become the quintessential political space as our experience of citizenship has become increasingly mediated.' Peter Dahlgren (2001, 48) drew similar conclusions about the internet which, he argued, can 'expand the political margins of the public sphere.' Roderick P. Hart (2001, 427) argued of 'letter to the editor' writers that, because they 'often diverge from elite political thought, they stand traditional political understandings on their heads, thereby forcing us to ask questions heretofore deferred or dismissed.' I suggest a similar interpretation applies to online comments: indeed, there is no other medium in which it is so easy or fast to express dissent from (or support for) the opinion of a politician, journalist or opinion writer. This prompted W. Lance Bennett and Robert M. Entman (2001, 6) to argue that the internet expands 'the ways in which members of the public engage with and communicate their reactions to political messages they have received from the media.' There is truth to this claim, as any casual reader of online opinion will have observed: online public responses to any news item, regardless of its subject matter, will include a proportion of comments in which someone expresses disagreement with whatever view or angle is adopted in the article. Yet my primary approach to understanding and critiquing Australian political discourses rests not on identifying a particular overarching attitude, but

on the very multitude of opinions evident in online comments. In this way I am able to reveal the differences among women that challenge dominant stereotypes.

2.4 Method overview

Although drawing on numerous sources, the methods of data collection and analysis of mass media employed in this thesis accord with the CDA approach and are geared towards gaining an understanding of mainstream discourses and public sentiment. Most Australians' source of political information is the news media: often a combination of news and current affairs television programs, newspapers, radio and, increasingly, news websites and blogs (Macnamara 2011). The media, combined with political parties' own direct communications with the public (websites, publications and community consultations) and public interaction via 'comments' (online and talkback) and 'letters' (print), constitute a vast discourse. All of these sources fall within the realm of discourse analysis, and in this research are analysed to determine how public attitudes towards politics, and politicians, are shaped. Importantly, these sources form 'real-world data' – not invented, edited or 'sanitised' under experimental conditions – enabling their examination in the context in which they appear (Barker and Galasiński 2001, 63).

As the purpose of Chapter 3 is to establish the context of the 2010 political discourses in accordance with a CDA approach, however, and to define as many

of the contours of public discussion around Gillard, female voters and gender stereotypes as possible, I include in that chapter both press reports and some social media responses to Gillard – specifically Facebook and Twitter. Social media is now firmly enmeshed in politics, as not only journalists and the tech-savvy, but increasingly since 2009, Australian politicians also engage with the public through online profiles and discussions (Jericho 2012). While these social media discussions do not feature in the remainder of my thesis, they are important signposts to the significance and potential influence of social media forums on the broader public discussion about Gillard, women and Australian politics. Thus, Chapter 3 foregrounds the important role of the public in political discourses, before the focus of my analysis turns to online comments in Chapter 4.

To discover how women were positioned or stereotyped in the 2010 political discourses, I searched for press reports (using the Factiva database) that discussed both Australian federal politics and gender. In all cases I limited my searching to materials published in Australia (in English), and due to my focus on a particular period in Australian politics, I further narrowed findings to press reports published between 24 June (the day Gillard was appointed ALP leader and therefore prime minister), and 21 August 2010 (the date of the subsequent federal election). The results, 53 press reports referring to politics, women and voters, are used as indicated throughout the thesis in my discussions of press reports.

As one of the key assumptions being challenged in this study is that women would vote for Gillard's party 'because she's a woman', it makes sense to explore how women responded to that assumption. The primary source I have drawn on to obtain those responses is a sample of online reader comments posted during the period under analysis. Thus, while I have included the opinions of female journalists and professional commentators throughout this study, I have also expanded my initial analysis of Chapters 3 and 4 to capture the views of 'ordinary' Australian women as expressed in online news comment boards, which form part of the discourse as 'natural language use.' I use the word 'ordinary' less to denote a particular status (or lack of status) to female discussion board participants, than to recognise that women using online discussion boards generally do so in a non-professional capacity. Julia Gillard herself could access the *Sydney Morning Herald's* website and comment on a news item under the guise of a pseudonym; such anonymity, however, would remove the status attached to her name and subject position, rendering her comment 'ordinary'.

Two scenarios complicate this definition. It is possible that some online participants are political or industry hacks, who post comments deliberately to influence public opinion. Occasionally, too, social commentators and public intellectuals—Jane Caro or Leslie Cannold, for example—post comments using their own name, which may have some influence on other participants. The context of a discussion board can be a leveller, however; particularly when comments are copious in number, reducing a professional commentator's (or

party hack's) comment to one among fifty or a hundred others. While the word 'commenter' is ungainly, therefore, I maintain its use throughout this study as it enables the necessary distinction to be made between professional journalists and commentators, and online contributions by generally lay members of the public.

To analyse the responses of women to political press reports, I used the Google database to locate each of the 53 press reports' online version (where one exists). This process revealed which online articles had a discussion board on which readers could respond to or comment on the news. The individual comments that readers made in response to online press reports were the data I examined in order to (a) discover how some women (and some men) responded to gendered discussions in the 2010 political discourses, and (b) explore the differences in participation between men and women in online forums. A list of all online articles yielding online comments that were analysed in this thesis is provided in the following table.

Chapter	Article details	No. of comments
3	Arndt (2010)	549
4, 5, 6	Albrechtsen (2010a)	40
4, 5, 6	Hartcher (2010b)	142
4, 5, 6	Grattan (2010c)	56
4, 5, 6	Stott Despoja (2010)	54
4, 5, 6	Albrechtsen (2010b)	66
4, 5, 6	Devine (2010)	99
4, 5, 6	Grattan (2010d)	55
4, 5, 6	Sheehan (2010)	325
5	Benson and Farr (2010)	98
5	Murphy (2010)	66
5	Hartcher (2010c)	455

5	Grattan (2010e)	63
5	Balogh (2010)	120
5	Gettler (2010)	112
5	Grattan (2010f)	29
5	Karvelas (2010)	40
5	Perry (2010)	84
5	Burnside (2010)	92
5	Farid (2010)	87
5	Marr (2010)	142
5	Minas (2010)	66
5	Packham (2010)	28
5, 9	Sheridan (2011)	71
5, 9	Hamilton (2011)	278
5, 9	Shepherd (2011)	343
Total	26 articles	3,560

Table 1: Articles yielding online comments included in analysis.

My analysis of the articles and comments listed in Table 1 consisted, first, of examining the article and situating it in the broader context of the 2010 political discourses. Following this, I engaged in a close reading of all comments made in response to each article, manually identifying commenter names and noting prominent themes and debates as they emerged.

A detailed discussion of relevant literature and methods of analysing online comments occurs in the chapter-specific methods section, next.

2.5 Chapter-specific methods - current discourses

Answers to the first research question begin to take shape in Chapter 3, which chronicles some key features of the 2010 political discourses. The chapter is also important as an examination of context which, as discussed above, is an essential component of CDA. It identifies a number of gendered themes that

were prevalent in print and online political reporting between 24 June and 21 August 2010. This time period was selected deliberately: as the discourses surrounding Gillard's elevation to Prime Minister and the subsequent 2010 election were catalysts for this study, I collected my data from major news and social media websites published in the eight week period between the day Gillard first rose to the leadership of the ALP (24 June), and the day of the subsequent federal election (21 August). My examination of the political reporting and other data discussed in Chapter 3 was founded on two main questions: how were women represented or discussed in the media during that time, and were those representations or discussions different to those concerning men?

This second data source – online comments – raised new questions about women's engagement and participation in politics, and in the spirit of CDA's problem-centred approach led to an unexpected line of enquiry. My examinations of news discussion boards suggested that journalists' or commentators' discussions of women as voters elicited many strong responses from both female and male readers, which were posted as online reader comments. Thus, a new research question was formulated: how did women respond to media stereotypes? This question is addressed in Chapter 4. To develop a meaningful answer, it was essential to access the opinion of women themselves. Having already encountered women's responses in my early online searches, I developed research methods in two directions, which I detail next in sub-sections 2.5.1 and 2.5.2.

2.5.1 Online comments as data source

The first direction of research in Chapter 4 was to establish the legitimacy and limitations of using online anonymised comments as a data source. As scholars have come to recognise that the online world often reflects the social hierarchy of the ‘real’ world, there is a real need for research that increases our understanding of this immensely popular, ‘everyday’ virtual space. While some traditional research methods may rule out online comments as an unreliable data source, as part of a CDA project with an interest in online gender relations and inequalities, they provide a fascinating, fruitful and indeed crucial field of enquiry.

The study of reader comments is not entirely new, although neither is it widespread. One area of research has been to explore the relationship between online and ‘offline’ worlds. Brian Goss (2007, 368) has posited that online comments are a form of ‘sociological propaganda’, or a vehicle for the perpetuation of dominant social norms: ‘the participatory and unrehearsed format of the threads enact horizontal diffusion in which citizens encircle and nudge each other toward consensus, without filters or direct cues from the leader(s).’ Jack Rosenberry (2010) has found that while participation on news discussion boards leads participants to feel that they better understand local (geographical) community issues, it

does not necessarily lead those online participants to greater engagement with their local communities.

Patrick Weber (2014) has explored the influence of ‘newsworthiness’ on readers’ participation in online discussion, finding that news content influences both the number of discussion participants and their level of interactivity. Interviewing journalists, however, Carolyn E. Nielsen (2014, 484) suggests that this influence is not reciprocated: as ‘journalists felt anonymous online comments were primarily a forum for readers to interact with other readers,’ online participation in news discussion boards was not found to ‘shape’ the news.

The ethics of anonymous online participation and its relationship to free speech have also been the subject of scholarly research. Laura Hlavach and William H. Freivogel (2011, 35), for example, have argued that there is an inappropriate dissonance between the ethical standards news organisations impose on their journalists, editors and even letters to the editor, and the ‘boys-will-be-boys attitude’ those same organisations adopt in allowing anonymous, and often uninformed, disrespectful and divisive online comments to be posted on their websites. Yet Bill Reader (2012) found discord between the desire of some journalists to prevent their readers from posting anonymous online comments, and the views of online commenters themselves, who often support anonymity. While acknowledging that anonymity may enable posts that shock and offend,

Reader (2012, 507) suggests that such posts are usually considered extreme. Where offensive or inflammatory posts do occur, they are viewed by discussion participants as a ‘taint’ on the conversation, contributed by ‘monsters,’ suggesting such posts are not a normal or accepted discussion feature.

Matthew W. Hughey and Jessie Daniels (2013) have examined the prevalence of racism in online comments. They found that racism is prevalent in online news discussions, even when news organisations stipulate that hate speech and discriminatory or offensive comments will not be tolerated. As a result, Hughey and Daniels (2013, 344) suggest that:

Rather than engendering a focus on interfacing with racist discourse in a meaningful way, these news sites simply attempt to ban the problem, frame the offenders as rogue commenters, and then bury their head in the sand—hoping not to encounter more racism.

Whether anonymity is a cause or symptom of incivility, however, remains unclear. What is clear is that it is undeniably important to research online discussion boards, as they represent significant, contemporary sites for the airing and expression of public views about news of social import. Indeed, ignoring online comments as a potential data source seems to risk overlooking an important vein of public sentiment.

This study, then, has approached online comments as the next generation of ‘letters to the editor,’ despite differences in the ‘gatekeeping’ practices of each mode of participation. According to Hart (2001, 409), letters to the editor ‘can indeed provide an accurate gauge of popular sentiment.’ Many of the useful characteristics he observes of letters to the editor are applicable to online comments, namely that they ‘represent the only (1) lay, (2) reflective, and (3) not-unrepresentative database about American politics still (4) extant’ (Hart 2001, 409). Thus, while letters to the editor remain a useful data source for political research (indeed, I have included a sample of letters in Chapters 4 and 7), the ubiquity of online comments, their ease of access for researchers and the glimpse they offer into public opinion on a wide array of issues adds to their value as a data source. Context remains an important consideration, however, as Anthea Taylor (2004, 87) noted: ‘reader-writers and the meanings generated by their contributions are both constrained and enabled by the historically specific context of the framing event.’ Thus it is again important to explore the interaction between the social and political landscape and letters to the editor or online comments. Accordingly, both the broader context of Gillard’s leadership and the method of her accession, and the narrower context of where and when online comments were posted, are detailed in relevant sections in this research.

2.5.2 Stereotypes and self-representations

The second direction of research in Chapter 4 is to conduct a formally delineated search that analyses both political press reporting and online responses. I conducted searches for press reports containing all terms ‘Gillard,’ ‘women,’ ‘vote’ and ‘gender,’ using the Factiva database. I also conducted a second search for press reports containing all terms ‘Abbott,’ ‘men,’ ‘vote’ and ‘gender.’ Both searches were limited to the time period under examination, being the 58 days from Gillard’s accession (4 June 2010) to the election (21 August). The results of these searches revealed 224 and 112 results respectively. I then made the decision to confine my analysis to articles from the three major Australian broadsheets,⁴ the *Australian*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age*, which left a total of 53 articles. This decision was based on the perceived quality differences between Australia’s broadsheets (which are seen to cater to middle class audiences) and tabloids (which are seen to be more ‘sensationalist’) (Cunningham and Turnbull 2014, 38). I wanted to avoid sensationalist reporting, as I was concerned it may skew the opinions, and therefore the comments, readers may post in response to that reporting.

⁴ On 4 March 2013, Fairfax Media changed the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age* to ‘compact’ size, meaning these newspapers are now the same size as Australia’s tabloid newspapers. I maintain the distinction between broadsheet and tabloid in this thesis, however, because during the period under examination, the *Australian*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age* were all broadsheets in size.

A second reason for the decision to exclude from my analysis articles from tabloid newspapers was the small divide that appears to exist in Australia in the perceived credibility between the broadsheets and tabloids, according to the papers' own readers. This divide is demonstrated in the *Report of the Independent Inquiry into the Media and Media Regulation*, by Roy Finkelstein (2012). In that report, survey data establishes that the three broadsheets are regarded with higher levels of trust by their (self-professed) readers – the *Age* (23 percent trust 'a lot'), the *Sydney Morning Herald* (20 percent) and the *Australian* (16 percent) – than three of the nation's major tabloids, the *Courier Mail* (9 percent), the *Daily Telegraph* (7 percent), and the *Herald-Sun* (7 percent) (Finkelstein 2012, 380). The level of trust readers have in their newspaper of choice may influence the likelihood or tone of their comment. The scope does not exist in this thesis to consider whether a higher level of trust in a paper's journalism necessarily translates into higher participation rates or a more robust engagement by its readers on discussion boards, but the question could be a direction for future research.

Returning to my searches, which I had narrowed down to 53 articles, I was unable to determine via Factiva whether any of these press reports had been published online, or opened to readers for comment. I therefore conducted another search for an online version of each of these reports using the search engine Google, and found that all but one had been

published online with open access (that is, users were not required to pay for access to the articles). Examining all articles online revealed that ten were also open for public comment. A review of those articles found two to be problematic in terms of the research question: the online edition of one article omitted the reference to gendered voting made in its print version, and another was a series of letters to the editor rather than a press report per se. Both of these were omitted from my examination of online responses, leaving eight online articles with reader comments.

Online comment data I obtained from these final eight articles are summarised in the following Table 2:

Date (2010)	Headline	Publication	Total Comments
25 June	OK, let's take a reality check (Albrechtsen 2010a)	<i>Australian</i>	40
26 July	Abbott, a man with a gripe and a mantra (Hartcher 2010b)	<i>SMH</i>	142
27 July	Abbott brings in big gun to woo women (Grattan 2010c)	<i>Age</i>	56
28 July	Worm may turn on PM (Stott Despoja 2010)	<i>Age</i>	54
28 July	Let's be honest about Julia's free gender leg-up (Albrechtsen 2010b)	<i>Australian</i>	66
29 July	Impressive, but not a good look (Devine 2010)	<i>SMH</i>	99
11 August	The election battle just got meatier (Grattan 2010d)	<i>Age</i>	55
16 August	Gillard's pork pies hard to resist (Sheehan 2010)	<i>SMH</i>	325
Total			837

Table 2: List of articles with online comments analysed in Chapter 4.

As can be seen from Table 2, my analysis in Chapter 4 focused on 837 reader comments. In all eight articles, readers were required to provide a name when leaving a comment. There is no requirement that the name published alongside a reader's comment be their *real* name, however. This is a key challenge to working with online comments as data: the identity of the online commenter is unverifiable. In the light, however, of my conclusions in sub-section 2.4.1 (p. 69) that online comments are an important vein of public sentiment, I proceeded on the following basis. Names that appeared male, or comments made by readers who identified themselves as male, I took at face value as being comments made by men. Examples of commenters I placed in this category include 'Ronald Ferguson of Cairns' (Albrechtsen 2010a), 'Old Clive' (Hartcher 2010b), 'Bob' (Grattan 2010d) and 'treeman' (Sheehan 2010). Examples of commenters I placed in the female category are 'Zilla' who commented 'As to females (of which I am one)...' (Sheehan 2010), 'Mandy of Brisbane' (Albrechtsen 2010a), 'Jan' (Hartcher 2010b) and 'Pippa' (Devine 2010). Examples of commenters whose gender I categorised as unidentified include 'KC' (Devine 2010), 'Melbournian' (Albrechtsen 2010b), 'TBear' (Stott Despoja 2010) and 'ambulocetus' (Grattan 2010c).

The same methods of research were engaged in part 3 of the study, which aims to qualify and explain the findings of part 2. Having focused on women's participation in *political* discourses in part 2, the question arose: was the pattern of women's participation found in my early research typical of women's engagement in online news discussions, or was it anomalous—like the

unprecedented political events of that period? In order to address this question, in Chapter 5 I analysed women's participation in online discussions on both political and 'non-political' news items.

A discussion of these terms begins that chapter, in which I align 'political' news with press reports explicitly concerned with institutional politics or parliamentary processes. Following this discussion, a quantitative examination is conducted of four articles, again from major Australian broadsheets, each with an online presence. The method involved identifying (where possible) the gender of online participants ('commenters'), either by commenter name or reference as explained above, and then using that data to determine the difference in participation rates for men and women for all four articles and then repeat this process in relation to three further issues. I conclude that there are indeed differences in women's online participation—with women twice as likely to engage in non-political news discussions than explicitly political discussions. I turn in Chapter 6, therefore, to ask why this might be the case.

As outlined in my discussion in section 2.2, CDA is generally 'positioned' in relation to its research topic—and this study is no exception. Finding that women appear to engage less in political discussions online, I started looking for an explanation. Much of what I found, particularly in social-psychological research, is outlined in Chapter 6 and pointed to women's 'lesser knowledge' and 'reduced interest' in institutional politics. Having personally participated in many political discussions with women, read many women's opinions and even

observed political conversations between female students where I teach, this seemingly traditional explanation appeared questionable. In the light of earlier chapters which suggest women were often negatively stereotyped in the 2010 political discourses, I turned to academic explanations of the effects of negative stereotypes. I began to work through Steele and Aronson's (1995) conception of *stereotype threat* to see if it may have been a factor in women's qualitative responses to the 2010 discourses. This involved examining my online comment data (previously outlined) to see if it contained any evidence of women employing the coping strategies identified by Steele and Aronson (1995). My method in Chapter 6 of analysing online comments as qualitative data accords with the practice of CDA, as an examination of the power of language to sustain the status quo. It also, however, adds depth to the discourse analysis and lends weight to theories that counter the 'reduced knowledge and interest' argument of prior research.

2.6 Chapter-specific methods - historical discourses

Having a woman sworn in as Australian prime minister in 2010 was historically unprecedented. Evidence in my research points to elevated levels of media and public attention to the issue of gender in politics. Indeed, as I show in Chapter 4, in some segments of the media in 2010 it appeared that women were being portrayed as a flock of sheep who would vote for Gillard because she is a woman. Rather than viewing such a focus on the female vote as a long-overdue empowerment of women, some public commentators—and many private

commenters—used this idea to suggest women are politically incompetent. This element of the 2010 discourses raised a number of questions, not least being whether such negative characterisations of women’s political aptitudes were new, arising side by side with the new female prime minister, or whether they were just the most recent in a string of negative discourses about female voters. Thus an essential part of this study is also to examine the historical representation of women in political discourses.

In order to address this question, I conducted a qualitative examination of the Hansard record of the Second Reading of the Commonwealth Franchise Bill, 1902, in the Senate and House of Representatives. In this Second Reading, (male) Members of Parliament debated the public good—or ill—of female suffrage, revealing a wide range of beliefs about women’s political capabilities. It thus represents a useful distillation of the long-running public suffrage debates, and provides a useful comparison to the press reports of 2010, as the Second Reading largely entailed Members of Parliament articulating what they perceived to be the views of their constituents. Thus, there is a correspondence between the 2010 press reports and the parliamentarians of 1902 as both can be seen as influenced by, but also influencing public attitudes.

2.7 Chapter-specific methods - challenging and re-visioning future discourses

In clear alignment with the goals of CDA, the methods I have adopted in the final section of this study aim to challenge the 2010 stereotypical representations

of women. I undertake this process in two chapters. First, I unpack and critique some quantitative analyses of gendered voting in 2010. In particular, I challenge the academic focus on the fluctuation in *women's* voting habits, as opposed to an equal focus on both women and men. The method I use to counter this focus is to draw on Australian Electoral Survey data to examine gendered voting trends in recent elections in similar ways to other contemporary studies, but placing equal emphasis on male and female patterns.

In the final chapter, I extend my discourse analysis to explore how seemingly separate discourses interact with one another, and how this interaction renders discourse even more powerful in perpetuating stereotypical understandings of women and the gender status quo. First, I explain the relationship between politics, language and masculinity. I posit that in order to understand how war metaphor may function when it is used in political discourses, there is a need to understand public attitudes to war. I therefore examine 692 online comments to understand public attitudes to war and gender, drawn from responses to a sample of press reports that discuss the Australian government's legislative changes to allow women to serve in all areas of the Australian Defence Force (ADF). Following my examination of those public attitudes, I outline the prevalence of war metaphor in Australian political discourses, and discuss how attitudes to war may negatively influence the public's perception of women in politics.

2.8 Scope and Limitations

As the discourses surrounding Gillard's elevation to Prime Minister and the subsequent 2010 election were catalysts for this study, I collected most of my data from an eight week period between 24 June 2010, when Gillard first rose to the leadership of the ALP, and 21 August 2010, the day of the federal election. To render the scope of the discourse analysis manageable, the data collection was limited to the internet and print media. These sources offer the greatest potential for public interaction when compared, for example, to television or radio. Exceptions do exist, such as talkback radio and the banner of public tweets that appears during some television programs; however, as those forms of participation are more heavily moderated, and difficult to access, I have not included them in my analysis.

One of the 'third wave' critiques of earlier feminist research was that it failed to acknowledge the differences between women, such as class, religion or ethnic background. Unfortunately there has been limited space in this study to include any detailed considerations along these lines. Online anonymity, however, applies not only to gender but also to class, ethnic background, language and religion. The use of internet comments as a data source, then, potentially (though not inevitably) reduces the effects of 'double disadvantage.'

Further, I do not wish to suggest that gender stereotypes are limited to stereotypes about women. With the hypermasculine Abbott campaigning as the

alternative prime minister in 2010, masculinity was also subject to the gaze of the media. The high profile of Penny Wong (Minister for Finance at time of writing) and the contemporary salience of same-sex marriage brought gay and lesbian identities and stereotypes into the spotlight. At the core of this study, however, is a concern with the way women were stereotyped in political discourses after Gillard's rise to prime minister: women, it was proclaimed, would vote for Gillard because she is a woman. It was not widely contended, by contrast, that men would vote for Abbott just because he is a man. For this reason I have limited the scope of this study to stereotypes about women.

Finally, I acknowledge limitations to data sourced from the internet as, widespread though internet use may be, it is not universal. Scholars have noted that online participation requires access to computers and an internet connection, both of which have financial costs attached and may therefore limit the representativeness of the views found online. Further still, the data I have collected requires literacy, not only in the sense of being able to read and write (or type), but knowledge of how to access a news article online, and a desire to respond to it on a discussion board. Although mindful of these limitations, with no way of ascertaining the exact demographic of people who participate in online news discussion boards, I have taken the data at face value as instructed by the works of Goss (2007), Rosenberry (2010) and Weber (2014). Moreover, the methodology of CDA instructs that discourse be read as it is written—'natural language use'—and as representing and revealing prevailing norms and practices rather than exact demographics. In this way CDA may be less precise

than some other positivist, social scientific or political science methods; however, it nonetheless adds depth and texture to an understanding of the operation and function of political discourses through the inclusion of voices that would otherwise be silenced.

In this chapter I have outlined Critical Discourse Analysis as the methodology guiding this thesis. As a research-led approach, CDA has enabled the questions guiding this thesis to evolve organically, in the process of researching, thinking and reflecting. Beginning with a core hypothesis—that women were negatively stereotyped in the political discourses of 2010—this original research kernel has grown horizontally, into an examination of mainstream discourses (Chapters 3 and 5) and counter-discourses (Chapters 4 and 8). It has examined the issue of gendered political stereotypes from a social-psychological perspective (Chapter 6), has expanded backwards into a historical examination (Chapter 7), and has even attempted to consider how intersecting discourses may influence women's status and participation in politics into the future (Chapter 9).

This chapter has also made some important methodological explanations and qualifications concerning the inclusion of online comments in my analysis. While there are limitations with this data source, the use of online comments enables the development of a 'big picture' understanding of Australian political discourses. It also, importantly, enables a contrast between the perceived status and ability of women in the

Australian political sphere, and the ways women themselves understand that status and ability.

PART TWO

DISCOURSES AND COUNTER-DISCOURSES

Chapter 3

‘OUR FIRST FEMALE PRIME MINISTER’

What, then, is so perilous in the fact that people speak, and that their discourse proliferates to infinity? Where is the danger in that?

Michel Foucault (1972, 216).

How many women and men, standing at cardboard booths in school halls across Australia on 21 August 2010, would have heeded the significance of their first opportunity to vote for a major party led by a woman? Not many, according to Julia Baird (2010), who concluded:

Appropriately, and triumphantly, at the moment it mattered most, Julia Gillard’s gender was irrelevant...as votes were counted, graphs stacked, electorates toppled, and kegs nervously drained, the fact that this election was being contested by a woman - our first female prime minister, no less - was not really of any great concern.

This conclusion was perhaps made possible by the closeness of the election outcome: common sense suggests that had Gillard’s gender been relevant, women would have voted for the ALP in greater numbers, giving it a greater share of the vote than it actually received. It is my contention, however, that gender was relevant to the 2010

election, and may have contributed to the election outcome, although not in a ‘common sense’ fashion.

In Part One I established the theoretical frameworks and methodology shaping this research. This chapter has a predominantly contextual function. Its purpose is first, briefly to set out the circumstances of Gillard’s rise to the office of prime minister and the political context of the 2010 federal election. Second, it establishes the prevalence of gender in political discourses immediately following Gillard’s accession and in the weeks leading up to the August 21 election. The contextual and thematic functions of this chapter warrant a broader view of discourse than is adopted in later chapters, where I narrow in on mainstream press reports and online reader comments. In this chapter I deliberately draw on a wide variety of discursive sources, to give as much texture as possible to the political context. Therefore, while much of my focus is on political press reporting, I also include some social media discussions, polling data, internet-based audience responses/online comments, and a televised event. Specific excerpts and examples were selected for inclusion on the basis that they demonstrate the major themes concerning gender that emerged during this period. The current chapter, then, seeks to provide insights into the attitudes and approaches to gender found across a number of key sites of the 2010 political discourses. The setting out of these dominant themes in this chapter is foundational to the understanding of gender and politics that shapes the remainder of this study.

The methods I use to examine the discourse and identify these themes – CDA – were discussed in detail in Chapter 2. In accordance with that method, I analysed press

reports of the period, and other texts where indicated, as examples of ‘natural’ language use situated within the broader political context. Thus I was able to capture some of the ways gender issues were caught up and expressed in the atmosphere of 2010 politics. I examined these texts as examples of discursive *practice* – as a generally institutionalised mode of meaning-making – and a form of power and domination. This meant my focus was directed to the specific ways discourses were *positioning* women.

3.1 Political Context

At the time of the 2007 election, Gillard, as Deputy Labor Leader, was so popular that the studio audience attending the ABC’s election night coverage cheered when she arrived to be interviewed. ABC Journalist Cristen Tilley (2007) observed: ‘In the National Press Club, in the early hours of this morning, it was called the cult of Julia.’ It would be easy to consider Gillard’s career success and popularity in isolation, and attribute them to personal characteristics such as an aptitude for early mornings and a ‘legendary’ work ethic (Kent 2009). Many other factors contributed to her success, however, including her EMILY’s List endorsement and the amount of positive publicity she sought and received.

It is informative to reflect on the way Gillard’s and Abbott’s careers publicly intertwined: from early 2007 they appeared on a weekly segment on the Nine Network’s breakfast program, ‘Today,’ which was very popular with viewers, and even reinstituted for a brief period prior to the 2010 election. Barrister and

writer Moira Rayner (2010) admitted enjoying Gillard's 'debates with the hapless Abbott whose patrician, 1950s attitude to women she so easily tickles out of him. I love seeing Abbott feeling uncomfortable instead of making women feel uncomfortable.' As a salute to the long and competitive history between the two, upon entering the lower house as prime minister for the first time Gillard shook Abbott's hand (he became Liberal leader in December 2009) and challenged him: 'game on.' This relationship between Gillard and Abbott attracted much of the media's attention when Gillard first came to office as prime minister.

Gillard was elevated to prime minister in circumstances unusual for Australian federal politics.⁵ Former Labor Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, had been elected in 2007 enjoying an overwhelming popularity with Australian voters (Simms and Wanna 2012, 1). Following a series of unpopular policy backdowns (including reneging on his promise to act on climate change, which he had previously identified as 'the greatest moral, economic and social challenge of our times') and relentlessly negative media scrutiny, Rudd's popularity sharply declined (Simms 2012, 2). Late on 23 June, claiming a lack of confidence in their leader, some of Labor's 'factional warlords and party apparatchiks outside cabinet' moved against him (Wanna 2010, 634). Gillard announced she would stand for the party's leadership, and Rudd responded that he would contest. On the morning of 24 June, however, presumably having discovered he could not garner enough party support to win, Rudd chose not to contest the leadership

⁵ For a detailed overview of events during this period, see Wanna (2010).

(Wanna 2010, 637). Unopposed, Gillard became the ALP leader – and was commissioned by the Governor-General, Quentin Bryce, as the Prime Minister of Australia that afternoon. While public complaints that Gillard was not a ‘legitimate’ prime minister were inaccurate, the perceived Machiavellian character of Rudd’s removal and the speed with which it occurred meant the sentiment held weight with many Australians who felt robbed of the prime minister they had ‘elected’.

3.2 Early responses

With Gillard and Abbott both in the leaders’ spotlight, their political relationship was newly complicated by the press’s constant attention to issues of gender, perhaps first stimulated by widespread celebration of Gillard’s leadership as an Australian political landmark. It was heralded as a historic event, with commentators discussing Gillard’s rise in terms of national and personal significance. Those who rejoiced in the milestone for Australia as a nation included Fairfax journalist Josephine Tovey (2010) who argued:

This country, where our concepts of identity, heroism and even friendship have for so long been wrapped up in male stereotypes and male pursuits, is now being led by a woman who has eschewed marriage and children, and climbed a steady and determined path to the top of a party and a parliament traditionally dominated by blokes.

Social commentator Catherine Deveney (2010) wrote:

As my three little boys ate breakfast yesterday I said, 'Pizza for dinner if Australia has its first female PM by tonight!' Then I teared up. 'Guys, imagine. Julia Gillard! A *female* Prime Minister. A *woman* as Prime Minister of Australia.'

Numerous responses were made by women on the internet, via news discussion boards, discussing the significance of younger generations witnessing a woman's rise to prime minister, and the possibilities this could open up for future generations. The symbolic significance of Gillard's accession was exemplified by 'Lisa' who described feeling 'as though I can do more and be more. The importance of something like this and its effect on the way women see themselves can't be overstated. A great day!' (Isaacs 2010).

For some women, by contrast, the excitement of finally having a female prime minister was tempered with a range of concerns. Academic and social commentator Eva Cox (2010) was concerned, for example, that 'she won't get a fair go,' citing one of the risks for Gillard as 'widespread, still entrenched views that there is something unnatural about women in power.' Similarly, Shakira Hussein (2010) saw 'danger' in the potential for women to 'be told that the battle is won, that anyone who is still on the battlefield is just a whinger, that if a woman can become prime minister, then we have no further reason to complain.'

Unusually, however, one of the first gendered questions arising out of the political upheaval of 24 June 2010 was concerned with masculinity: how would Abbott fare against a woman prime minister? The issue was framed in the *Australian* as an advantage for Labor, the contention being that ‘it will be difficult for the men of the opposition to take her on without appearing to be bullying her’ (Trinca 2010). Discussions of this issue were present in media coverage of the leadership change for a number of days. Extracts from a lengthy article on the ‘female factor’ exemplify these discussions. Fairfax journalists Gary Tippet and Peter Munro (2010, 17) sought opinions from both Labor and Liberal party veterans on the impact of Gillard’s leadership on Abbott. They described ALP strategist Bruce Hawker’s opinion:

People ‘recoil’ at aggression towards the *fairer sex*, in particular, [Hawker] claims: ‘It’s probably people’s conditioning, but as a general proposition men can probably be a bit more physical in their interactions with each other than if they are interacting with women’ (Tippet and Munro 2010, 17).

Representing the views of conservative politics was former adviser to John Howard, Graeme Morris, who was quoted as follows:

‘Sometimes it’s harder for a conservative male to treat a Labor woman as he would a Labor man. The perception when watching this is that sometimes it’s sort of the chivalry thing; one shouldn’t attack a woman...Certainly it is a mood among many on the conservative side of politics that it is harder to attack a female opponent than a male one...because, probably, they had a proper upbringing.’ When challenged that such views today seem antiquated, almost

sexist, Morris replies simply: 'Welcome to society'⁶ (Tippet and Munro, 2010, 17).

Morris's comment reveals some of the ways classism intersects with sexism to reproduce conservative norms: a 'proper upbringing' is portrayed as a handicap for some Coalition men.

Another theme amongst responses to Gillard was articulated by many who felt Gillard's gender should be irrelevant. In the words of political editor Peter Hartcher (2010c):

Labor did not make her leader for any of the reasons political parties typically promote women to the top. She's never been the beneficiary of any sort of female quota. She's not there because she presents a 'softer face'. And she's not the leader because the men had failed hopelessly and only a woman could redeem the government.

Yet there is a problem with the lack of recognition of the gender milestone, as pointed out by social commentator and author Gretel Killeen, who suggested younger generations take women's gains for granted. She addressed young women specifically in an opinion piece:

The fact that you don't see a woman's elevation to the leadership of this nation as profound is the very reason that it is. Your perspective is the result of living

⁶ Morris appears to have overcome the chivalry mentioned in this quote: in August 2012 he referred to Leigh Sales (senior journalist and anchor of 7:30, the ABC's flagship news program) as 'a cow'. Morris publicly apologised the following day.

in a society that has allowed you to believe anything is possible - black presidents, female prime ministers, birth control, gay marriage - but you need to know that this world of possibilities has not always existed and has been hard-fought (Killeen 2010).

By the end of June 2010, speculation was rife about the timing of the federal election, due before February 2011 (Wanna 2011, 283). The significance of gender to the anticipated election was foreshadowed very early by polling data released by Roy Morgan Research (2010a) on 27 June. Its 'Finding No. 4516' revealed data, sourced up to a month earlier, which suggested the leaders' genders may have influence voting intention. When survey respondents were asked whether they preferred Rudd or Gillard as prime minister, 48 per cent favoured Rudd, and 36 per cent Gillard. When these results were broken down according to gender, however, a different picture was revealed: 30 per cent of women preferred Rudd, and 37 per cent favoured Gillard; while for men, 38 per cent favoured Rudd compared to only 15 per cent for Gillard. This points to the skewed frame adopted in the media coverage of leader preferences: despite a significantly greater extreme being evident in men's responses, the most widely reported statistic was that women were more supportive of Gillard than Rudd.

As the initial excitement about Australia's first female prime minister waned, some uncertainty was apparent in some segments of the political press over the kind of coverage to devote to Gillard. While making observations about a celebrity's appearance may be familiar territory for writers for gossip-style magazines, the decision on whether or not to report on Gillard's hair and

clothing may have been slightly more difficult for news or political reporters; generally, however, the press's attention to Gillard's appearance was widespread. There was an early suggestion that she should receive a 'clothing allowance' (following the precedent of the Governor General's one-off \$25,000 clothing allowance), as Gillard was perceived to not be dressing appropriately enough for her high office. This suggestion reflects a particularly gendered expectation concerning women's appropriate physical presentation in public, as Miller and Peake (2013) demonstrated previously in relation to Sarah Palin in her 2008 campaign to become United States Vice-President. Indeed, so natural does it seem to judge a woman on her appearance that the *Daily Telegraph* reported the opinion of image consultant Imogen Lamport: 'Julia needs to dress as if she is saying "This is how we run the country"' (Toohey 2010a). A fascination with Gillard's hair colour was also prominent: Scott MacKillop (2010) explained that on Twitter, 'references to Julia Gillard's red hair were made almost as often as references to the fact that we have our first female prime minister. It's clear that the red hair thing is an issue for us as a society.'

3.3 Hostility

Some of the most negative reactions to Gillard related to the political process according to which she became prime minister. Numerous Australians expressed outrage at the 'treatment' of Kevin Rudd and the 'ruthlessness' of Gillard. Some objections to the manner of Rudd's 'disposal' came from the Liberal Party and

its supporters: Liberal Party MP Sophie Mirabella (2010), for example, opined, 'there would be greater reason to celebrate our first female Prime Minister, were it not for Labor factional warlords using a woman as a last resort.' When Abbott wrested leadership of the Liberal Party from Malcolm Turnbull in December 2009, Mirabella had no such complaint, stressing the party would be united 'absolutely' behind Abbott and saying 'We're moving forward, united... There's great goodwill' (Coorey 2009). It is a tendency for both parties to portray leadership changes within their own camp as acceptable but as weak or illegitimate in their opponents. The picture Mirabella paints, however, adds a gendered element to critiques of Gillard's takeover, so that a transfer of leadership from one male to another seems normal, acceptable and a source of unity, whereas a transfer of leadership from male to female is an act of desperation; a 'last resort.' As Baird (2004, 49) noted, female leaders are often interpreted in this way: as a last-ditch effort to save the party, or as a cleaner enlisted to temporarily sort out and clean up the (male) mess (see also Bashevkin 2009). Women, such as former Labor MP Carmen Lawrence, are 'portrayed as housewives coming in to sweep up the crumbs of corruption, bad language and rowdy behaviour; as moral guardians; or, quite literally, to decorate the place' (Baird 2004, 49). Gillard was barely even accorded this 'use,' being cast instead as the deadly assassin.

Further evidence of hostility towards Gillard's takeover of the leadership was revealed in Roy Morgan Research's July 2010 findings on what troubled voters

in relation to each party leader. With reference to Gillard, voters were concerned:

about how she got the job saying such things as she's 'Untrustworthy,' and she 'Stabs people in the back,' 'She's sneaky,' and 'I don't approve of how she came into power,' and 'She hasn't been open with the public and hasn't even told us how she ousted Kevin Rudd.' (Roy Morgan 2010b).

This concern took some time to permeate social media websites such as Facebook; however, there were few group pages either supporting or opposing the change in leadership. Perhaps it is a reflection of the primary demographic of Facebook users that two of the most popular pages were 'that awkward moment when Julia Gillard takes your job' (more than 110,000 'likes') and 'dear Julia Gillard, Kevin Rudd gave us laptops, can we have iphones this time??' (more than 30,000 'likes')(Facebook 2010). Gillard (or her staff) maintained a Facebook page on which details of policy announcements and public appearances were posted. On 24 June 2010, a link to the YouTube broadcast of Gillard's first press conference after being sworn in as prime minister was posted to this page. Of the 346 comments posted by general Facebook members in response to the link, most were positive but there were some negative contributions. A small sample of each includes:

Colinwhocares Riddell: how can you call yourself prime minister you back stabbing woman with deputies like you ,you don't need enemies and before you all bitch i have only ever voted lib when latham ran and i am 58 and ex blf

meatworkers ,carpenters and amwu shop steward ,lowest thing i have ever seen
[25 June 2010 at 15:33]

Samantha Spicer: Thank god you took over phew!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Now lets watch a
woman fix up all this mess made by the men :-) Very proud of your
achievements Julia, keep up the great work! [25 June 2010 at 15:52]

Becky Hollis: The sad thing is I would have voted for you in a REAL
election.... not now... would never vote for a backstabbing traitor. Enjoy your
moment because it, like your loyalty to Kevin Rudd, will be short lived. [25
June 2010 at 16:24]

Gary Gleeson: Hopefully she'll see to it that men get a fair go. A Minister for
Men's Interests would be a good start. [28 June 2010 at 00:06] (Gillard 2010).

The other Goliath of social media, Twitter, was frantic from the moment a whiff of leadership change was in the air, with the hashtag #spillard trending during June 24 and 25 (Trenwith 2010). In fact, as pointed out in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, popular media may have influenced the speed with which the Labor Party acted. Scholar Elizabeth Van Acker (cited in Trenwith 2010) explained: 'It's in the interest of the party not to drag these things out because there'll just be more twittering and 24-hour news service talking heads having their two bobs' worth'. Thus, the power of the contemporary news cycle and intensity of some social media attention likely contributed to the level of hostility directed at Gillard: the speed with which Gillard took over the leadership may have added weight to the popular interpretation of Gillard as a disloyal, power-hungry

deputy (traits she had not been accused of until June 24), and many Australians complained of waking up to a new prime minister having had no forewarning that a leadership change was imminent.

3.4 Election

Gillard announced on 17 July 2010 that the federal election would be held on 21 August. The announcement ended the usual speculation over the election date, and whether Gillard would call an early election to take advantage of her ‘honeymoon period’ with the Australian people. Any sense of positive feeling amongst voters for their new prime minister, however, was tempered by the broad public hostility just described, making ‘honeymoon’ claims appear dubious. If anything, this hostility increased after the announcement of the election date. Although Gillard stated that the sanction of the voting public was of extreme significance to her (demonstrating this by not residing in the prime minister’s residence, The Lodge, until after an election win), she was often still perceived as a power-hungry, impatient and illegitimate leader.

On 17 July, the *Australian Women’s Weekly* (2010) posted a short article on its website stating that the election had been called, and invited readers to comment on whether they would be voting for Gillard and discuss what policies they found important. Of 1,388 comments, an overwhelming majority was critical of Gillard and the ALP, such as this post by ‘Ratter’: ‘I was a committed labour

[sic] voter prior to Miss Gillard's act of treachery. I could never vote labour again i'm afraid. She is a woman devoid of honour and decency with a toxic ego. She's a stain on the name of woman.' This comment is symbolic of the incompatibility between what is deemed acceptable behaviour for politicians and acceptable behaviour for women, identified as gender role theory and outlined in my discussion of social and psychological theoretical frameworks in section 1.1.3 (pp. 36-8).

Discussions also revolved around the political utility of the 'gender card', defined by Falk (2013, 5) as a metaphor used 'to implicitly convey the idea that when women mention gender on the campaign trail it gives women a strategic (but unethical) advantage in the race'. The day Gillard took office, for example, an online poll conducted by the *Herald Sun* revealed '9 per cent of respondents who claimed they voted Liberal in the previous election would vote for Ms Gillard *because she's female*' (AAP 2010b, emphasis added).

Attention continued to be directed at Gillard's appearance throughout the election campaign. Some journalists made clear their ambivalence in perpetuating this focus, such as the following *Sydney Morning Herald's* 'The Pulse' election blog entries:

9.27am: Gillard is giving a presser at a car dealership in Blacktown, in the marginal seat of Greenway in Sydney's west... The Pulse doesn't want to downplay the message, but let's just do a quick wardrobe check before the serious news begins: white blazer, pearl stud earrings today.

10.28am: Abbott presser at the Lutheran college - for the sake of balance we report that he is sporting a blue stripey tie and his hair is...the same as it was yesterday (Maley and Davis 2010).

The focus on Gillard's appearance was nowhere more absurd, however, than in the aftermath of the Leaders' Debate at the National Press Club in Canberra on 25 July. As Ninemsn (2010) staff reported: 'It doesn't have anything to do with her politics, but Julia Gillard's earlobes have become a talking point on Twitter during her debate with Tony Abbott tonight.' The common defence made by those wishing to avoid the charge of focusing on Gillard's appearance was that her earlobes were only so remarkable because the content of the debate was so unremarkable. More broadly, those wishing to justify their coverage of Gillard's earlobes, hair or other features of her appearance argued that other leaders have been subject to similar scrutiny, including former prime ministers, John Howard (eyebrows) and Paul Keating (expensive suits), and more recently Abbott ('budgie smugglers'⁷) – although Abbott is perhaps in a slightly different category, having been photographed and even interviewed in his swimwear, but not wearing them to work. The difference lies, however, in the judgment that accompanies observations about Gillard's appearance. Keating was criticised because he chose to wear fine suits, which made him vulnerable to the charge of being unable to connect with ordinary Australians (Howard's 'battlers', after all, could not have afforded similar attire). Keating was not, however, judged on whether or not he looked attractive or powerful in those suits, and nor was it

⁷ Slang term for men's swimming briefs.

suggested that Howard's bushy eyebrows or unfashionable glasses made him appear unable to run the country.

It is a socially acceptable, even expected practice for women to be subject to the gaze of the media. Rosalind Coward (1984, 75) explained: 'Western culture has become obsessed with looking and recording images of what is seen,' but as men tend to control visual media, the practice 'strikes at women in a very particular way.' She further argued:

the saturation of society with images of women has nothing to do with men's natural appreciation of objective beauty, their aesthetic appreciation, and everything to do with an obsessive recording and use of women's images in ways which make men comfortable (Coward 1984, 76).

Gillard may have attained the most prominent position of leadership in the nation, but not even the status of prime minister exempted a woman from this visual scrutiny. Indeed, Naomi Wolf (1991, 10) suggests 'the more legal and material hindrances women have broken through, the more strictly and heavily and cruelly images of female beauty have come to weigh upon us.' The 'beauty myth' that Wolf (1991, 10) identifies continues to actively shape the formation of discourses around Australian women of any status and occupation: it 'is always actually prescribing behaviour and not appearance. Competition between women has been made part of the myth so that women will be divided from one another.' Both these prescribing and dividing characteristics are evident in the discourse surrounding Gillard as prime minister. First, a woman must look as if

she can run the country: her experiences and abilities alone are not enough. Second, women must discursively be denied the chance to identify with or unite behind a female prime minister. This was evident in the numerous opinion pieces and public comments urging women not to vote for the ALP just because Gillard is a woman. This aspect of the discourse is examined in detail in the next chapter.

The focus on Gillard's appearance was not a short-lived phenomenon resulting from the novelty of a woman prime minister, but extended well past the period being analysed in this thesis. In April 2011, for example, leading racing identity and fashionista Gai Waterhouse published a blog entry on the topic of Gillard's fashion sense after viewing a photograph of the prime minister at one of the sites of the then-recent Japanese tsunami. Waterhouse (2011) suggested Gillard 'desperately needs a make over. On the front cover of the *Daily Telegraph* it wasn't the carnage behind that gave me the horrors but the woman standing in front of it.' Even more controversial was the comment by Germaine Greer on ABC's Q&A program (2012) directed at Gillard: 'Lose the jackets! You've got a big arse, Julia, just get on with it.' While Greer may have been launching a critique of the requirement women face to 'power dress' in ways which may not suit the female body, this point was largely lost in public discussions (Goodall 2013). Australians were divided on Greer's comment: some were mortified that a feminist could speak of Gillard in such a superficial way, while others felt it was taken out of context and overshadowed the rest of Greer's contribution to the discussion, in which she described Gillard as a skilled negotiator and

delegator, and a voice of common sense compared to Rudd who she characterised as verbose and ineffective (Adler-Gillies 2012; Sparrow 2012). In both of these instances, the ‘offending’ women’s comments were widely reported, the media seeming to relish the opportunity to discuss women’s hypocrisy, encourage the divisions between women and, in particular, foster hostility towards feminists. In this process of ‘dividing’ women, of course, the scrutiny of Gillard’s appearance was intensified.

Numerous other features of Gillard’s personal life became the focus of press attention, especially her relationship with partner Tim Mathieson. Typical of the media’s attention to Gillard’s personal characteristics amid the excitement of her appointment, *Australian* journalist Caroline Overington (2010) gushed: ‘She’s got a de facto. Imagine that, 30 years ago: an unmarried woman, living in sin with a man. Who is a hairdresser.’ This relationship later became the source of crass gendered humour in a four part television comedy series ‘At Home With Julia’ (Quail Television, 2011), in which Mathieson was portrayed as the emasculated boyfriend of a bungling, large-bottomed prime minister. Not everyone found humour in the couple’s ‘unhitched’ status, however. Author Bettina Arndt (2010) argued that Gillard’s de facto status would set a ‘bad example’ for Australian women:

If Gillard chooses to play house with Tim Mathieson in the Lodge, this choice sends a strong message to the huge numbers of women who rightly admire her and seek to follow her example. A lifestyle suited to her particular needs may be riskier for many women and their children.

While Arndt's opinion gained moderate publicity, it did not receive much support in the mainstream commentary, and much public response to it was dismissive. Of 549 reader comments posted in response to Arndt's column, most were disdainful of her 'anachronistic' and '1950s' attitude towards relationships, such as this comment by 'jj': 'It is nobody's business except that of the couple! Good grief, I can't believe there is even a poll regarding cohabitation in this day and age. What would be happening if it was a bloke who happened to live with his girl?' (see Arndt 2010). The poll referred to in this comment was run online in conjunction with Arndt's article and asked readers, 'Do you agree that Julia Gillard's de facto lifestyle is a bad influence for women?' A hefty 34,260 readers responded, with 79 per cent voting 'No' (see Arndt, 2010). One online comment took Gillard's potential influence over young women to the extreme. 'Nathan' (presumably tongue-in-cheek) explained:

07:36pm / 13/07/10: I like Gillard because she is anti-marriage, anti-children, an atheist and anti-church. Gillard's influence spells a new wave of freedom for Australian young guys, as girls are put off marriage, children and church in a big way. Thus us young guys can just have sex with them without any commitments and get rich! I bet she will even increase the pay for single mothers! Roll on Julie [sic], we love you!! (Miller 2010).

Despite the satirical nature of this comment, it has a similarity with Arndt's remarks; underlying both is an assumption that Australian young women are so impressionable to be at risk of not recognising a 'bad' choice when presented

with one. This view of Gillard as a role model for significant life choices does not give enough credit to Australian women, whose decision-making competency Arndt and others appear to doubt. Former Prime Minister Bob Hawke was renowned, if not lauded, for his larrikin behaviour, yet rarely did anxiety surface over whether he was a risky role model for young men. Neither did Keating, Howard or Rudd have to contend with the media casting them as role models for a generation of impressionable male youths (footballers generally, if dubiously, have that privilege). It is important for young women to see career possibilities opening up, and that women can attain any level of power. The sticking point, however, is the gendered way of viewing the role and extent of that influence. Perhaps the lack of powerful female role models places disproportionate pressure on any woman in the public spotlight; this only increases the symbolic significance of women's equal descriptive representation in politics, and other aspects of public life.

What also emerges out of these comments by Arndt and 'Nathan' is the 'us' versus 'them' mentality that continues to haunt Australian men and women. Infusing the way we speak with division between the genders perpetuates those divisions in dominant public discourses, and therefore in our thoughts and practices (in accordance with the understanding of discourse discussed in Chapter 2, pp. 54-5). Thus, one possible result of this discursive division, demonstrated by 'Nathan's' comment, may be a continued sense of solidarity among men ('a new wave of freedom for Australian young guys'), and continued othering of women ('a bad influence for women'), by both men and

women in accordance with de Beauvoir's (2009, 16) theory of women as the 'Other'. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003, 16) noted the immediate gender construction of babies ('it's a boy/it's a girl') has an impact on all future life stages: 'there are currently no other legitimate ways to think about ourselves and others – and we will be expected to pattern all kinds of things about ourselves as a function of that initial dichotomy.' If we, as a society, are unable to even *think* in equal, or gender-neutral terms, what chance is there of eliminating the social distinctions between men and women that perpetuate an unequal society? Perhaps here we begin to see some of the 'peril' Foucault refers to in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter: the 'danger' lies in the power of discourses to limit the ways it is possible even to think about a topic such as gender.

This is possibly one of the most fundamental challenges facing women. Commentators use language in relation to a woman that they would not use in relation to a man. Examples from the political discourse are numerous: Kuczynski (2010) proclaimed Gillard to be 'still in virgin territory'. Wilson (2010a) and Crabb (2011) likened her to Elizabeth I, the 'Virgin Queen', and Mark Knight often depicted her in this way in his political cartoons. A Wheeler Centre (2010) Talking Point asked 'will she be haunted like Lady Macbeth by the blood she has shed?' Abbott has on numerous occasions suggested Gillard make an 'honest woman' of herself – a phrase which in common parlance suggests a woman should marry (Kelly and Massola 2011). One Fairfax journalist even suggested 'Gillard's decision to dye her hair at the weekend – to

a shade somewhere between Irish setter and Cyndi Lauper's scarlet period – should have been a giveaway that something was afoot' (Murphy 2010).

Whether or not Gillard was an influence for many young women, her prominence gave some women something concrete in politics to identify with.

The Punch writer Carrie Miller (2010) exemplified this:

As an unmarried, childless heathen it looks like someone who reflects my personal values has finally become Prime Minister. I know she wouldn't put it as bluntly as I'm about to, but I feel positive that Julia privately holds my beliefs on some of the big issues: religion, marriage, and children.

Conversely, other commentators felt these traits would find Gillard out of touch voters in key suburban marginal seats. Former ALP leader, Mark Latham, well-known for his pithy political quips that usually generate widespread public discussion, remarked that 'Gillard ain't no soccer mum, so there might be a failure to connect there' (Guest and Don 2010, 7). It could safely be assumed that Latham also is no 'soccer mum,' and therefore could not speak with any real authority on what 'soccer mums' want from their political representatives. Yet his comment found traction in some parts of the media, as van Onselen (2010, 15), for example, suggested: 'while Gillard might more easily appeal to progressive inner-city electors, she also needs to convince the soccer mums—as Mark Latham describes them—that she is the sort of leader they respect.' It is this aspect of political reporting and commentary – men making stereotypical assumptions about women, and what women think and want – that I argue is

fundamentally problematic, perhaps largely because it continues to slip unnoticed in mainstream discourses, and therefore has the potential to influence broader social ideas about women.

In this chapter I have outlined the ways gender was one of the central elements of the reporting and commentary of the 2010 election campaign, based on a range of discursive sources including the political press, social media and online discussions. While both masculinity and femininity were the subject of discussions at different points in the discourses, from the outset greater attention was paid to Gillard as a woman than Abbott as a man. Thus, the usual media scrutiny of women in the public spotlight, which has long been the subject of criticism by feminist scholars such as those discussed in Chapter 1 including Okin (1979) and Pateman (1989), was not challenged by this milestone for women—at least early in Gillard’s leadership. Observing the principles of CDA research has facilitated this chapter’s exploration of natural language use in context, and allowed me to focus on discussions about women in the 2010 political discourses. It also means my analysis is sensitive to ways the discourses positioned women through this language use, leading to the conclusion that, at least in relation to the way women were discussed, these discourses do indeed ‘sustain and reproduce the status quo’ (Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak 2011, 358).

One result of this media focus on Gillard as a woman was a concomitant focus on women’s reactions to Gillard. I examine this attention to women voters in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

‘GENDER LUNACY’? GENDERED VOTING IN PRESS REPORTS OF THE AUSTRALIAN 2010 FEDERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The accession of Julia Gillard to the office of prime minister in June 2010 was an important moment in Australia’s political history. In the previous chapter, I explored discourses surrounding Gillard’s leadership and the 2010 federal election, to determine how gender was discussed in mainstream and social media at the time. I found a range of responses to the advent of a female prime minister, from elation to a post-feminist-like indifference.

Responses to Gillard herself – in mainstream press reporting, social media and news discussion forums – also ranged from adoration to open hostility, the latter often apparently shaped by political ideology or mistrust arising from the sudden and seemingly unethical way she gained party leadership. Regardless of the spectrum of attitudes towards Gillard, her presence stimulated widespread discussion on the difference a female leader would make, both on the institution of Australian politics, and on Australian voters themselves. It is this second point of discussion that is interrogated in this chapter. Concurrent with the elation that manifested in Australia’s political discourses over ‘our first female prime minister’ – or perhaps because of it – emerged speculation in the mainstream media that women would be swayed to vote for the ALP on the basis that its leader was a woman. As women have struggled since at

least the middle of the nineteenth century to be recognised as political agents, this attention to women voters may appear a logical and welcome culmination of feminist activism. This chapter contends, however, that this focus on women voters resulted from an androcentric press that placed disproportionate emphasis on women's voting behaviour, and obfuscated men's voting behaviour.

Further, some segments of the media portrayed gendered voting behaviour negatively, and this negativity was therefore also disproportionately associated with women. In the *Sunday Telegraph*, for example, Piers Akerman (2010, 108) wrote:

As a woman reader from Western Australia said in an email to me yesterday: 'No wonder the powers that be were so reluctant to give women the vote because, as we now see, they are so inclined to completely lose the plot. Gender lunacy, you said it! Let's pray it doesn't prevail until August 21.'

Akerman's is just one among many comments that suggested women would be irrationally influenced by Gillard's gender, but remained silent on any gendered response men may have. Crucially, such comments implied that voting for the ALP on the basis of its leader's gender was a negative or politically irresponsible action. Therefore, they are emblematic of a tone of hostility and ridicule that entered media discussions about women's voting behaviour.

Scholars have not yet fully explored the 2010 political discourses, or the responses of Australians to those discourses. Feminist media scholarship regularly examines the representation of women in politics (Baird 2004; Falk 2013; Garcia-Blanco and Wahl-Jorgensen 2012), and such critique is essential in revealing the media's power to shape

popular conceptions of women and femininity. Yet it does not often include the thoughts and responses of ‘ordinary’ women, as readers or viewers of media messages and objects of stereotypical representations. In keeping with the feminist CDA methodology, this chapter aims to address this gap, guided by two questions: how was gendered voting discussed in the political press in the 2010 federal election campaign, and how did women respond to that reporting? To answer these questions I examined, first, 53 articles that referred to gendered voting in three of Australia’s major broadsheets, and second, comments female readers posted online in response to those articles. A detailed discussion of the methods of discourse analysis, including the delimitation of sources, is contained in section 2.5.2 (p. 72), but to reiterate, the objective of CDA is not to provide an empirical analysis but to form critical impressions of prevalent discourses and their political implications.

In the next section of this chapter I review gendered voting in Australia as it is currently understood in scholarly literature. Following this, in section 4.2 I examine political press reporting of gendered voting behaviour during the 2010 federal election campaign. I focus on 53 articles published in Australia’s three mainstream broadsheets: the *Australian*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age*. The third section, 4.3, examines some of the opinions Australian women expressed online in response to that reporting. A number of themes are identified in women’s responses, indicating that many objected to the stereotypical assumptions made by political commentators. A concluding discussion in section 4.4 completes the chapter.

4.1 Media, the Internet and Political Participation

A burgeoning field of research into the relationship between mainstream media and the internet already exists. Early approaches to the study of this relationship perceived it in terms of a dichotomy, with the rise of the internet posited as responsible for the demise of the mainstream (Jenkins, H. 2006, 5). While this view occasionally continues to be found (see, for example, Ebert's (2011, 5-19) description of the rise of the internet as a 'Media Extinction Event'), much contemporary research recognises extensive interconnection between the two (Newman, Dutton, and Blank, 2012).

In particular, there has been a growth of interest in the effects of social media on the mainstream, including large-scale quantitative studies such as the Australian Twitter News Index, which records the number of tweets linking to Australian news sites (Mapping Online Publics 2012). Another effect is apparent in the now common practice of news organisations incorporating public comments such as Tweets into their reporting (Newman, Dutton and Blank 2012, 13). In many ways, news reporting has become a *conversation*, although it is important to acknowledge the 'digital divide': inequalities in access to and use of the internet (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman and Robinson 2001, 310; Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 2010, 1088). In addition to internet access and skills, power also pervades the conversation itself, as Henry Jenkins (2006, 3) contended, 'not all participants are created equal.' He explained:

Corporations—and even individuals within corporate media—still exert greater power than any individual consumer or even the aggregate of consumers. And some consumers have greater abilities to participate in this emerging culture than others. (Jenkins, H. 2006, 3).

The views privileged in mainstream reporting may therefore provide a limited understanding of public attitudes. Scholars have noted that online news media are just as dominated by experts and professionals as the print form, and that ‘popular inclusion does not occur’ (Gerhards and Schäfer 2010, 155). The social aspects of online media, however, may increase popular inclusion, as Newman, Dutton and Blank (2012, 17) argue that social media have ‘filled niches not being served by the traditional news media, such as in hyper-local news, or held the traditional press to account for their practices.’ Examining social as well as mainstream media, therefore, can broaden our understanding of social attitudes (Newman, Dutton and Blank 2012, 13).

As an element of social media, news discussion boards have received less scholarly attention than giants such as Twitter and Facebook. Appearing at the conclusion of many online news articles, discussion boards enable the general public to respond to or comment on the news immediately after reading it. Readers usually must supply a name (or pseudonym), and sometimes a location, which is published with their comment. These ‘reader comments’ are similar in many ways to letters to the editor, which Siebel (2008, 409) described as ‘an interesting social artifact; they are succinct, pointed articulations that are carefully worded by the author, and knowingly presented to the public for

consideration.’ In addition to the public intentions of their authors, as discussed in Chapter 2 (pp. 71-2) similarities online comments have with letters to the editor include their contribution by (usually) lay readers, their tendency to reflect on specific current affairs, and their broad representation of an aspect of public sentiment (Hart 2001, 409). While letters to the editor undergo more selective screening than reader comments, and their writers subject to greater identity verification, online comments are (in some cases, contentiously) moderated. Additionally, as they are not confined to one host like Twitter, but are used by most news providers, discussion boards are a more disparate data source, and the large number of comments posted in response to many news articles suggests they capture more of the range in public attitudes than published letters. This breadth may be enhanced by the internet’s potential for anonymity, which encourages unrestrained expression of opinion and has been acknowledged by some scholars as empowering marginalised group members to participate in public dialogue (McKenna and Bargh 2000, 62-4).

As with any data source, however, relying on information obtained from the internet has limitations. The veracity of the identity of readers who leave comments is impossible to determine, and this perhaps explains the suspicion some scholars hold for online opinions as data. Herring (2002, 137), however, has found that sustained identity deception on the internet requires some effort, and is not typical of average users. She notes, ‘this is especially true in asynchronous discussion lists, where people wishing to enhance their reputations as experts on a given topic must sign their messages in order to receive

recognition for their contributions' (Herring 2002, 137). Thus, the context of a news discussion board may reduce motivations for identity deception in contrast to, say, dating websites or other forums. This is not to suggest the identity of commenters be taken as authentic, but that there is value in reader comments as a source of data on the opinions of ordinary Australians. This value is reinforced by CDA as a research method, as it approaches discourse as 'social action and interaction' (see Chapter 2, p. 55). Participants' use of news discussion boards may be interpreted as a way some Australians formulate and assert social positions, and respond to the social positions of others. Accordingly, these online sites can be seen as windows into the construction of dominant ideas, and the ways that these dominant ideas can be challenged or transformed (see my discussion on page 56 based on Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak 2011, 358).

As a group, women are underrepresented in mainstream media: a report commissioned by Women in Leadership Australia (Media Research Group 2011, 6) found only 20 percent of commentary in Australian print media is from prominent female spokespeople. As the consumption of online news reporting has become increasingly popular, the question arises as to whether this underrepresentation also occurs socially, on news discussion boards. The answer may be especially vital when the news under discussion is women's voting behaviour, as a dearth of women's voices in a discussion about women could distort how the issue is represented and understood in the public domain. Implications of this distortion could be significant, in light of Gil de Zuniga,

Puig-I-Abril and Rojas's (2009, 568) conclusion that groups subject to 'forms of digital inequality can continue to be disenfranchised from the political system.'

Before proceeding to an examination of mainstream discussions of gendered voting, I will briefly outline scholarly understandings of gendered voting in Australia. The global growth in numbers of female candidates and representatives compared even with twenty years ago has seen an increase in an international body of research exploring the impact of candidate gender on voter behaviour, including the gender stereotypes voters apply to candidates (Huddy and Capelos 2002; Huddy and Carey 2009; Riggle, Miller, Shields, and Johnson 1997), and the voting gender gap (Bergh 2007; Hill 2003; Howell and Day 2000; Inglehart and Norris 2000; Kaufmann 2006; King and Leigh 2010). This has led to investigations of a 'gender affinity effect,' according to which voters are found, under certain circumstances, to prefer to vote for candidates the same gender as themselves (Dolan 2008; Sanbonmatsu 2002). The gender affinity effect, however, is not uncontested among scholars. Quantitative research on Australian voting patterns (and more recently, in other countries with the Westminster political regime) has determined gender affinity effects to be insignificant in those jurisdictions (Leithner 1997; Goot and Watson 2007, 261; Singh 2009, 424; Goodyear-Grant and Croskill 2011).

On the basis of data collected after the 2010 election, as part of the Australian Election Study, Bean and McAllister (2012, 344) found a gender difference in voting, with 8 percent more women than men voting Labor and 9 percent more

men than women voting for the Liberal Party. Sawyer (2012, 253) attributed this difference to the 'modern' voting gender gap (according to which men as a group tend to vote more conservatively than women as a group), evident in Australia since the 2001 federal election. Thus, while Gillard's candidacy, as the first female prime minister to contest a federal election in Australia, stimulated broad public interest in a female affinity effect, this speculation was not founded on or supported by prior research. It may be explained, however, by numerous scholars' findings that the mass media are implicated in the perpetuation of stereotypical portrayals of women's political participation (Adcock 2010; Baird 2004; Bligh, Schlehofer, Casad, and Gaffney 2012; Falk 2013; Kirk 2009; van Acker 2003).

4.2 Mainstream Representations of Gendered Voting in 2010

As the previous chapter identified, media interest in women's voting behaviour quickly emerged after Gillard rose to prime minister on June 24, 2010. Polling data released three days later by Roy Morgan Research (2010a), for example, indicated Gillard held more favour with women than men, and the assumption that women would vote for Gillard because she is a woman soon became a feature of the political discourse. To gauge the extent to which discussions of women's voting behaviour pervaded the Australian print media in 2010, I searched for press reports containing all terms 'Gillard,' 'women,' 'vote,' and 'gender' using the Factiva database. As previously indicated, results were limited to the 58 days from Gillard's accession to the election (August 21), and revealed 224 articles excluding duplicates – an average of just under four a day.

Confining results to the three major Australian broadsheets, the *Australian*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and the *Age*, left 53 articles (for a full discussion of the development of these research criteria see section 2.5, p. 67).

For the same period, a similar search for press reports containing terms ‘Abbott,’ ‘men,’ ‘vote,’ and ‘gender’ turned up 112 articles, with 35 in broadsheets. Of these 35 broadsheet articles, 32 were previously identified in the ‘women’ search, and three did not discuss Australian voting behaviour. These results show that in Australia’s three major broadsheets, approximately 60 percent of articles discussing women’s voting behaviour also mentioned men’s voting behaviour, but no articles discussed men’s voting behaviour without also mentioning women. It can be concluded then, that in media accounts of the 2010 federal election campaign, women’s voting behaviour was subject to greater scrutiny than men’s voting behaviour. One question this finding raises is why this attention might have been disproportionately directed to women.

Detailed analysis of the articles located by these searches revealed three main stimulants for the focus on gendered voting: political polls, the televised Leaders Debate and the dialogue contained in Letters pages. I explain each of these in the remainder of this section, drawing on specific examples from the 53 broadsheet articles identified above.

4.2.1 Polling

Seven companies conducted polls, both nationally and in marginal seats, during and after the 2010 federal campaign (Goot 2012, 85). Among these were Newspoll, associated with the *Australian*, and Nielsen, with the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald*. Much reporting of gendered voting behaviour emerged in response to polling data showing a gender gap: on the basis of the Age/Nielsen poll of July 12, for example, Grattan (2010a, 1) reported ‘There is a distinct gender gap, with Ms Gillard and Labor doing better among women than men. Labor leads 56-44 among women, but trails 48-52 among men.’ In the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Phillip Coorey (2010, 1) drew a similar conclusion, noting on July 24 that ‘With Ms Gillard Australia’s first female prime minister, women are shoring up Labor’s numbers, with female voters preferring Labor by 58 percent to 42 percent, while support among men is tied at 50-50.’ On July 25 Ker and Saulwick (2010, 9) in the *Sunday Age* explained: ‘Yesterday’s Age/Nielsen opinion poll showed women locking in behind Ms Gillard.’ Hartcher (2010a, 6), political editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, commented on July 24 that ‘Gillard’s advantage among women is big, it is real, and it is new – at the last federal election in 2007, there was no gender difference in voting patterns.’ On the basis of 2007 Australian Election Survey data, however, Bean and McAllister (2009, 209) had concluded that men were slightly more likely than women to vote for the Liberal or National parties.

Some poll results were used to demonstrate that women were boosting Labor's support base, but where polling results indicated greater support among men for the Liberal Party, women were still held responsible. The following excerpt quotes Martin O'Shannessy, chief executive of Newspoll:

The most recent Newspoll revealed that Mr Abbott's female support was flagging, with the Coalition's 38 per cent primary vote comprising 42 per cent support from men and only 33 per cent from women. 'That is almost a 10-point difference so there is clearly a female effect in play here,' [O'Shannessy] said (Stewart 2010, 11).

In the *Age* on July 24, Grattan (2010b, 4) argued 'The gender factor is playing big time for Australia's first female PM,' suggesting 'Abbott is running this race with added weight in his saddlebag simply because he's up against a female popular with women.' Only a few commentators seriously interrogated men's voting behaviour. The *Age* of August 11 cited Nielsen's John Stirton: 'the big question is will the women end up voting with the men for Tony Abbott or will the men end up voting with the women for Julia Gillard?' (Grattan 2010d, 7).

Some commentators used polling data demonstrating women's greater support for the ALP to argue that female voters who felt enticed to vote for the ALP on the basis of Gillard's gender were part of a feminist sisterhood, or politically inept. Columnist Miranda Devine (2010, 23)

suggested ‘The gender gap in the polls...was less a reaction against Abbott than a rush of warm sisterly support for Gillard.’ Sheehan (2010, 9) in the *Sydney Morning Herald* argued: ‘Many women will not have the heart to vote out Australia’s first woman prime minister after barely two months in office, a humiliation of historic proportions and enough to give pause.’ Phrased in this way, the suggestion that women would not vote against Labor cast doubt over women’s willingness to vote ‘logically,’ suggesting women would vote with ‘hearts’ instead of ‘minds.’ Albrechtsen remarked in the *Australian*:

Let’s have a more honest conversation. Free from the sisterhood’s political correctness, let’s admit that [Gillard] has pocketed a large part of the female vote and it has plenty to do with gender. Plenty of women will vote for Gillard because she is a woman. (2010b, 12)

Albrechtsen’s (2010b, 12) suggestion that Gillard was the beneficiary of a ‘free gender kick’ trivialised Gillard’s political skills and strategies by attributing her success to a ‘sisterhood.’ The ability to mobilise a sisterhood may itself be seen as a political strategy; while she studiously avoided such a strategy during the early stages of her leadership, Gillard did make use of gendered strategies from the second half of 2012 onwards, including inviting a group of influential women in the media (dubbed ‘mummy bloggers’) to a Christmas function at the prime minister’s residence (Priestley 2012).

The negative connotations associated with gendered voting were largely confined to women's behaviour, despite men also exhibiting preferences for the Liberal Party and Abbott. Given the feminist theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter 1 concerning the historical gendered public/private divide, this skewed interpretation, while problematic, is not unexpected. Negativity was similarly evident in discussions that emerged in response to the Leaders Debate on July 25, 2010.

4.2.2 *Leaders Debate*

With gendered responses to Gillard already the subject of media scrutiny, the vision of Gillard and Abbott facing off in the leaders debate intensified the public's awareness of gender. The live audience responses of both networks televising the debate (measured by the 'worm' on Channel Nine and the 'Polliegraph' on Channel Seven) were depicted as twin pink and blue lines, so that any difference between men and women's responses could be identified. Scholar Geoffrey Craig (2012, 112) found only minor differences in those responses: 'on Channel Nine, women voted Gillard the winner of the debate, 66 to 34 per cent, while the men voted Gillard the winner, 61 to 39 per cent.' This did not prevent extensive discussion of female audience members' responses: Devine (2010, 23) stated, 'So moronic were the kneejerk responses of the pink worm, one senior journalist confessed to shouting at his television: 'How stupid are women?''

A second feature stood out in post-debate commentary: Abbott's (2010) closing remark that the election would reveal 'whether Prime Ministers are to be chosen on the basis of the job they've done, or gender.' Whether an intentional or impromptu statement or gaffe, Abbott's remark implied that a vote based on gender would be less legitimate than a vote for other reasons. Campaign gaffes, according to Younane Brookes (2012), are significant because 'they are part of a broader campaign conversation that both reflects and helps shape how members of the nation imagine their priorities and values.' Abbott's comment both tapped and intensified public discussions about the role of gendered voting in the 2010 campaign. It betrayed the common sense assumptions about women that were pervading the political discourse: that women would be voting for the ALP in large numbers on election day quite simply because they liked the idea of a woman prime minister, and that this was a negative thing. According to Hartcher, the remark revealed that:

Abbott thinks Gillard the beneficiary of a gender bias, and sees himself as the victim... By suggesting some sort of gender inequality is at work, Abbott was not legitimately criticising his rival but revealing his own exasperation with women voters. (2010b, 1)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Falk (2013, 5) explained that situations of female solidarity causing 'advantage' are often referred to as a 'gender card,' interpreted as a strategic and unethical advantage. In

the above quote, Hartcher (2010b, 1) points out that Abbott's allusion to a gender card was motivated by an 'exasperation' with female voters, presumably resting on an assumption that women would vote in significant numbers for Gillard. This general assumption about women's voting behaviour became the subject of a number of letters to the editor.

4.2.3 *Letters to the Editor*

In contrast to the 'gender card' allusions discussed in the previous section, many letters took issue with the press's negative representations of women voters. Shortly after the debate, reader Helen Morrissey of Chatswood wrote to the *Australian*:

[Abbott's] chagrin at Julia Gillard's better poll showing amongst women may be understandable but his suggestion that women are voting on gender implies women are airheads incapable of policy analysis and judgment. That is grossly offensive. ('Letters' 2010b, 13)

Catherine Cresswell wrote to the editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

The real sexists parade their attractive wives and daughters in public as proof they are good guys. The real sexists think women will vote for Julia Gillard because of her gender not her policies. I think we all know who the real sexists are. ('Letters' 2010d, 22)

David Markham Flynn asked the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

If more women than men intend to vote for Julia Gillard, and more men than women intend to vote for Tony Abbott, why would Abbott

assume it is only the women who are voting on gender lines? ('Letters' 2010c, 10)

Even among those denying the prevalence of gendered voting, the idea of women voting for a woman was widely portrayed as problematic: a vote based on candidate gender was inferred to be politically illegitimate or inept. Julie Weckert of Coffs Harbour wrote to the *Sydney Morning Herald* ('Letters' 2010a, 12): 'Australian women surely can't be such airheads that they would vote for [Gillard] simply because she is a woman.'

The charge that women would vote for Gillard because she is a woman held such power in the public imagination that it created a number of real effects, including the anger some women felt at being stereotyped in this way. As this thesis is guided by the principles of CDA, which include being positioned 'on the side of dominant and oppressed groups and against dominating groups' (Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak 2011, 358), it is important to consider how some women responded to the negative discursive positioning and stereotypes identified so far in this chapter.

4.3 Women's Responses

To gauge the extent to which women were aware of, and responded to stereotypical assumptions about gendered voting behaviour, I examined some of

the opinions Australian women expressed online during the election campaign. I conducted a parallel internet search to see which of the 53 broadsheet articles discussed in the previous section were also published online, and found all except one via Google search, with open access. The public could post online comments on discussion boards on ten of those articles. The online edition of one of those articles omitted the reference to gendered voting made in its print version, and another was a series of letters to the editor; I have omitted these from the discussion that follows. Table 2 (p. 75) listed the headlines of the remaining eight articles, together with the number of reader comments posted in response to each.

To determine the extent to which women were participants in these online discussions, I disaggregated the reader comments according to whether they were posted by readers purporting to be men or women (through the use of a gendered pseudonym or mention in their comment), or by readers who remained gender unidentified (taking such details with the provisos discussed earlier – see Chapter 2, pp. 75-6). In all cases, women appeared either to be participating in lower numbers or revealing their gender less than men, as depicted in Figure 4.1.

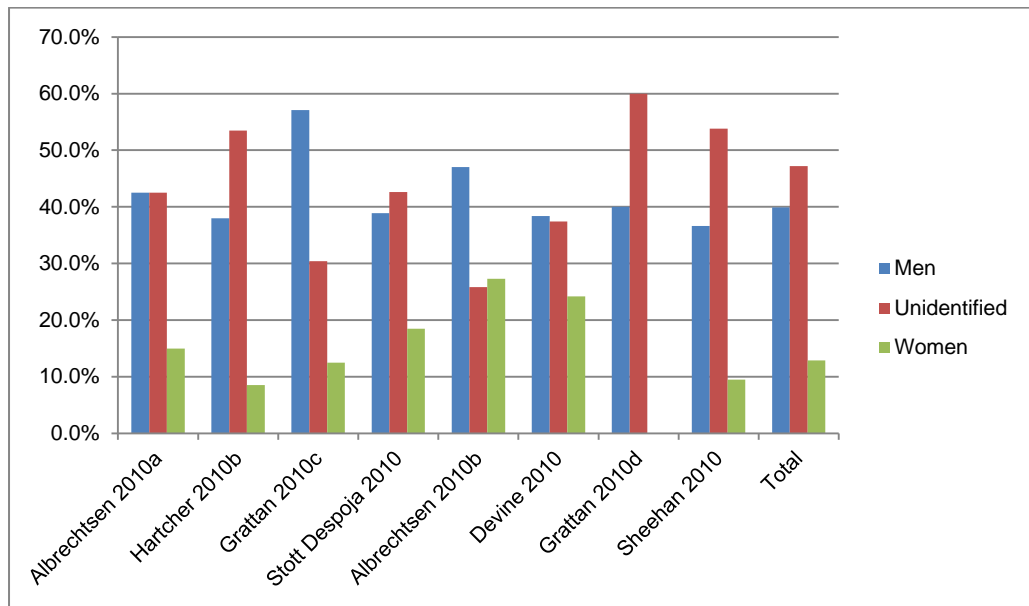


Figure 4.1: Posts by commenters claiming to be male, female and gender-unidentified

The gender unidentified comments may be interpreted in three ways. First, a majority may have been posted by men using non-gender descriptive pseudonyms, reflecting the data of the ‘known’ comments. If this were the case, the already significant proportion of men’s comments would be increased. The second possibility is that gender-unidentified comments may have been contributed by a roughly even proportion of men and women. If this were the case, both men’s and women’s numbers would increase, and the difference between the number of male and female commenters would remain similar to that depicted in Figure 4.1.

A third possible scenario is that more women than men may have contributed to online discussions without revealing their gender. At first glance this scenario appears unlikely, as women’s participation in discussion forums has declined

over time due to online harassment and sexism (Warren, Stoerger and Kelley 2011, 10). This study's finding of large numbers of gender anonymous participants, however, suggests an alternative explanation to this apparent decline: an increasing number of women may be participating online anonymously. If this was indeed the case in 2010 it could mean the proportion of women's comments identified in this study approaching, equalling or surpassing the number of comments made by men.

While these three interpretations remain speculative, it is noteworthy that the three articles with the lowest number of women's comments (Grattan 2010e, Hartcher 2010b, and Sheehan 2010) also have the highest number of gender-unidentified comments. It is not possible on the basis of this data to conclude any definitive relation between women and anonymous comments; however, further research may shed light on trends in men's and women's participation on discussion boards. On the basis of this data, which attributes 12.9 percent of total reader comments to women, 39.9 percent of comments to men and 47.2 percent of comments to readers who do not specify their gender, it can only be concluded that women appear to be underrepresented among readers who choose to leave gender-identified comments on political news stories. This is important to an understanding of women's power to participate in, and counter, public discourse. Until further work is undertaken, however, no conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the large gender-unidentified component, and the following remarks therefore refer only to those commenters who either gave a gendered name/pseudonym or referred to their gender in their comment.

In the remainder of this section I briefly discuss some individual comments posted in response to the broadsheet articles. Comments selected for inclusion were posted by internet users with women's names or who claimed to be women, as revealed by examination of all 837 comments. While acknowledging the variation in women's responses, I provide specific examples that represent a number of overarching themes identified in the course of analysis. The examples provided here should not, therefore, be taken as isolated or exceptional. Five themes were identified: denials based on personal experience; defences of women's political literacy; arguments that gender is irrelevant to politics; assertions that women were repelled by Abbott rather than attracted to Gillard; and critiques of mainstream reporting. The number and proportion of responses for each theme is listed in the table below, and explained in the five subsections that follow. A sixth category, 'other', is included in the table to account for women's responses that did not actually address women's voting behaviour (posts, for example, that respond to other posts, or respond solely to specific policy issues).

Theme	No. of responses	Proportion of total (%)
Denial	18	16.7
Political literacy	12	11.1
Irrelevance	6	5.6
Abbott	17	15.7
Critique of stereotype	20	18.5
Other	35	32.4
Total	108	100

It is important to note that these responses did not emerge predominantly either from Gillard supporters or critics, but from women of a variety of political persuasions.

4.3.1. Denial

One of the most prominent responses by women was to deny that Gillard's gender would influence women's votes. A reluctance to be associated with feminism may explain this phenomenon: Anita Harris (2010, 475) notes a 'widespread disavowal of the feminist label', which indicates that some women may object to the notion that womanhood is a cause for unity. This 'post-feminist' attitude corresponds with system justification theory, which I discussed in section 1.1.3 (p. 34), according to which a person may be 'motivated to justify their system in an attempt to view it in a more legitimate, fair, and desirable light' (Kay et al. 2009, 422). Thus, women may recognise the significance of Gillard's achievement as first female prime minister (emblematic of the historic and systemic exclusion of women from the public sphere, which I detailed in section 1.1.2), but at the same time may deny the need for female solidarity. This line of argument is adopted by some women who offered up their own stories to disprove stereotypical assumptions, while

others defended women in general. Sample comments of the former include:

Margaret from Adelaide, August 16, 2010, 10:50AM: Gillard is indeed a serial liar and not worthy of high office. Hopefully the women of Australia who you think may vote for Gillard as a woman PM will be like the many women of all ages in my family who find her a real turn-off, with one at least planning to change her vote from Labor to Liberal. (Sheehan 2010)

Amongst comments mounting a collective defence of women was:

Zilla, Brisbane August 16, 2010, 7:19AM: As to females (of which I am one) voting for Gillard out of feminine solidarity?? Get real! I'm embarrassed that Australias first female PM got in not on merit but by being devious and backstabbing! Give the females of Australia a break and credit us with some intelligence! (Sheehan 2010)

These two comments are representative of a common approach by women to the discourse: providing a personal narrative to counter a negative group stereotype. This line of response is significant, as women's narratives have been identified by Lafrance and McKenzie-Mohr (2014, 6) as an important means via which women can counter male-dominated discourses: 'like all speakers, women are not simply passive recipients of hegemonic discourse, but are also active in resisting and creating meanings'.

4.3.2 *Political Literacy*

References defending women's political literacy were used to challenge the inference that women were uninformed or incompetent. The following post responded to Sheehan:

Snaddle, ACT, August 16, 2010, 9:44AM: As a woman, I can't help but being offended by this article. Will I vote for Gillard just because she is a woman? Not likely!. Its policies that matter to me and most people. (2010, 9)

Another responded to Devine:

Pippa, July 29, 2010, 11:42AM: ...no, not all women are as stupid as you like to think, and this particular woman would rather vote for a political party, and their local representative on (1) policies (2) track record and (3) ability to see the big picture. (2010, 23)

Many other comments similarly pronounced women capable of voting for concrete political motivations rather than gender. The significance of this theme amongst women's comments suggests many objected to being portrayed as uninformed by or uninterested in policy issues. While I discuss research on women's political competencies in the next chapter (p. 143), I note that the theme represented by the above sample, as moments of activism that attempt to demonstrate women's political literacy, bears some parallel with studies that find some women to be as politically knowledgeable, interested and competent as some men (Dolan

2011; Mondak and Anderson 2004; Hooghe, Quintelier and Reeskens 2006).

4.3.3 Irrelevance

The argument that gender is, and should be, irrelevant to politics was less common among women (and men), but still a discernible theme. Two comments reveal this attitude among women:

Kathy Martins of Sydney, 6:18 AM July 28, 2010: I am not voting for a woman, I am voting for a PERSON who will make this country better. (Albrechtsen 2010b, 12)

LizzyLou, Melbourne, July 27, 2010, 9:52AM: To have an election campaign focused on a politicians appeal to my gender is not only patronising but is offensive in that it reduces the debate to that base rather than expands it to encompass all that we are. (Grattan 2010c, 6)

In a ‘post-feminist’ society where gender equality is widely held to be a given (Gill 2011, 62), the political focus on women’s voting behaviour in 2010 appears to have been frustrating for many Australians. It is a sign of some women’s frustration at being singled out for negative attention by the mainstream press that so many responded with the argument that gender is irrelevant to politics and voting.

4.3.4. *Abbott*

Related to the idea that gender was irrelevant to the campaign was the response by a number of women that their vote decision was not about themselves, their gender or Gillard, but about Abbott:

Thea, July 26, 2010, 5:27PM: Yeah, Tony. The reason that I wouldn't vote for you is cause you're a man. Nothing to do with being a hard-right, maniacally religious, homophobic, racist, sexist, narrow minded, climate-change denying, Ernie-award winning, media-exploiting, semi-coherent w*nker at all? (Hartcher 2010b, 1)

Rebekka Power of Melbourne Posted at 12:07 PM July 28, 2010: Women aren't voting for Gillard disproportionately based on gender, they're voting for Gillard because Abbott's views on women are medieval... You'd end up with a gender gap even if both leaders were male, as long as one of them's stuck in the dark ages and thinks women are objects to be used and traded. (Albrechtsen 2010b, 12)

This is an important point that was often overlooked in the more simplistic of the mainstream interpretations of polling data. Abbott's hypermasculinity also had an impact on both men and women (Sawer 2012, 251). Women's responses articulating this issue therefore make important contributions to understanding broader voter responses to party leaders.

4.3.5. *Critique of reasoning*

Many comments raised the question of why women's but not men's voting intentions had become the subject of popular discussion. Many women proved aware of this unequal focus, and attempted to draw attention to it:

Veracity, Sydney, July 29, 2010, 11:31AM: Why is it when women choose a candidate whose values and experience fits better with their own values and experience, they are called 'stupid' and accused of voting in 'solidarity and girl power'? That's just plain sexism... So why not ask why men aren't supporting Julia Gillard, rather than why women are supporting her? (Devine 2010, 23)

Kat, Auckland, July 27, 2010, 11:04AM: If you read enough of these comments, there are clearly people out there who will vote for Tony because he is a) a bloke, b) a Christian, c) has procreated. Why are these more valid reasons than voting for a female, an atheist, a dedicated career person? (Grattan 2010c, 6)

These critical responses directly challenge the common sense foundations evident in some press reporting, that the only 'gendered' behaviour belonged to women (see my discussion in Chapter 3, p. 108). According to Lafrance and McKenzie-Mohr (2014, 7), 'because counter-stories are positioned in direct opposition to their corresponding dominant stories their mere presence shines a light on those taken-for-

granted master framings.’ Thus, by pointing out the gendered behaviour of male voters in their online comments, some women drew attention to skewed interpretation of press reports that focused only on women’s behaviour.

Another avenue of critique addressed the negative connotations associated with gendered voting:

Sandra, Savage Death Island, July 29, 2010, 11:34AM: I will vote Labor not only because the coalition are staggeringly incompetent... but BECAUSE JULIA GILLARD IS A WOMAN. Having been born and raised in the sweaty nutsack of patriarchy and having only been able to choose which MAN to vote for I would like to finally be represented by somebody who is more likely to be sympathetic to women. SO YES I WILL BE VOTING LABOR BECAUSE JULIA GILLARD IS A WOMAN. Get that up ya, boys! (Devine 2010, 23)

By suggesting that it is acceptable for a woman to vote for a woman because she’s a woman, responses like this empower women to vote however they see fit, rather than in accordance with a traditional (male) orthodoxy which appears to privilege certain policy motivations over a host of other, equally legitimate, possibilities.

4.4. Discussion

The attention of the political press, in this study represented by three major Australian broadsheet newspapers, was directed to the issue of gendered voting by three main stimulants: political polls that were constantly broken down by gender; the graphic (blue and pink worms) that represented men and women audience members' responses to the Leaders Debate together with Abbott's closing remark about gender; and the number of letters to the editor penned and published on the issue of women voters.

In response to the question of how gendered voting was represented in the political press, this chapter has found that approximately 40 percent of Australian broadsheet articles that discussed gendered voting did not discuss men's preferences, and gendered voting was regularly portrayed as a female behaviour. In some cases, press attention to women's voting behaviour was in the context of reporting poll results, and data were discussed without framing a gender gap as positive or negative. In some opinion writing and commentary, however, gendered voting was negatively portrayed. The disproportionate attention to women's voting behaviour therefore meant that negative conceptions of gendered voting were also disproportionately associated with women. In some cases, this association was used to cast doubt over women's political aptitudes.

On the question of women's responses to this mainstream reporting, this chapter found first, that women appeared to be underrepresented in online discussions. Cautionary notes about internet data, discussed earlier, preclude firm conclusions about the identity of commenters; however, on the face of the data collected from 837 public comments, it appears that women participated in online discussions in smaller proportions than men. In light of previous research demonstrating women are underrepresented in expert and opinion commentary in mainstream reporting, the underrepresentation of women in online discussion boards may compound distortions already present in Australia's broader media environment.

It can also be concluded that a significantly smaller proportion of women than men chose to reveal their gender in the online discussion boards examined in this chapter. This may have implications for the broader counter-discourse, as a discussion board that appears to be dominated by men, even if it is not (due to women's higher anonymous participation), may discourage some women from participating. This is an important conclusion for a study such as this, being guided by CDA, on the side of the disadvantaged, and seeking to right a social wrong.

Despite women's smaller participation rates, a number of themes emerged in women's responses to political news reporting. Although women's responses were varied and should not be over-generalised, the identification of these major themes is important to an understanding of counter-discourses on gendered

voting. Both supporters and critics of Gillard objected to negative assumptions about women's voting behaviour perpetuated in the political press. Accordingly, this chapter suggests that if the hegemony of the mainstream press is to be countered, discussion boards are important sites of women's public political engagement. While taking a CDA approach means that this chapter has not aimed at the production of empirical data, it has identified a number of questions concerning the extent of women's participation in online discussions boards. These questions form the basis of my research and discussion in this next chapter.

PART THREE

PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSES

Chapter 5

‘MERE MOOD MUSIC’? DOES POLITICS MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO WOMEN’S ONLINE PARTICIPATION?

In Chapter 4 I argued that there was an imbalance in the mainstream media’s attention to the influences of gender on voting patterns. Speculation surrounded the effect the leadership of Julia Gillard would have on female voters. A stereotype emerged, suggesting that Australian women would vote for Gillard just ‘because she is a woman.’ The second half of Chapter 4 then explored some of the ways women responded to this stereotyping. I found that some women challenged the stereotype by engaging in online discussions via news comment boards. In the process of examining these responses, I found that women appear to participate in online comment boards in smaller proportions than men.

This last finding is perhaps not a contentious one, as other studies have suggested a similar pattern. In the United States, for example, Rosenberry (2010, p. 159) conducted a survey of online news discussion board participants, where self-selecting respondents comprised 56.5 percent men and 43.4 percent women. Such a gendered division in participation is, however, problematic. The ability to engage in online discussion in response to news items has been held up as an example of freedom of speech (Reader 2012), as a method of community engagement (Rosenberry 2010) or a forum for deliberative digital democracy (Weber 2014). Overlooked in some of these

conceptualisations, however, is the challenge gender disparities in participation pose to otherwise positive social understandings. While noting, for example, that ‘almost all identifiably gendered posters (by, e.g., names, references to wives) are male’, Goss (2007, p. 371) refers to the masculinism which pervades online discussions as ‘mere mood music.’ In a similar, androcentric vein, Weber (2014, p. 2) argues that:

by providing commentary and debate spaces, online newspapers create the opportunity for active communication that is easy and accessible for ordinary users in these important forums of the public sphere.

What these studies fail to consider is the impact gendered discourses, and male-dominated discussion boards, may have on women’s desire or ability to participate in online discussions. If such an impact does exist, as I suggested in Chapter 4, then questions must be raised about the extent to which these online spaces can really be viewed as enabling freedom of speech, community engagement or deliberative democracy for *all* citizens.

Following my analysis of women’s online participation in the previous chapter, I now hypothesise that the increased focus on women during the 2010 electoral period, in some cases including the use of negative gender stereotypes, may have had some influence on the way women chose to participate in online news discussion boards. The question to be answered in this chapter, therefore, is whether lower rates of online participation is a ‘normal’ or unusual pattern for women.

I address this question by exploring whether women participate online in the same way when the news article under discussion is ‘political’, compared to when the news is ‘non-political’. While this appears an almost impossible distinction to make, it is an important one, particularly in the light of research that posits women have reduced knowledge about, and therefore lower levels of interest and participation in ‘politics’ (Lizotte and Sidman 2009, 128; Ondercin and Jones-White 2011, 675). This view has been called into question by various recent studies that challenged previously accepted conceptions of what constitutes political ‘interest’ and ‘knowledge’. Hooghe, Quintelier and Reeskens (2006, 122) point to a bias in measurement methods on the basis of their finding that ‘including women-specific items [in surveys] increases the measured level of political knowledge for women without reducing it for men’. Mondak and Anderson (2004, 510) identified that men’s reluctance to answer ‘don’t know’ in response to survey questions ‘creates a systematic response set effect that inflates the observed gender disparity on knowledge’. Dolan (2011, 105) reached another distinctive finding: that men ‘are much less likely to be able to identify when they are represented by women Senators than when they are represented by men’. On the basis of this finding Dolan (2011, 105) challenged men’s status as the more politically knowledgeable gender, concluding ‘men may pay attention to gender relevant information in the same way we hypothesise that women do.’

5.1 ‘Political’ and ‘non-political’ articles

The distinction I draw in this chapter between ‘political’ and ‘non-political’ news is a difficult one to make, as most current affairs have a political element.

For the purpose of this analysis, however, I distinguished political news as stories relating to the *institution* of politics, including happenings within the parliament, the operation or structure of political parties or the conduct of politicians. The particular event I draw on for my political news sample was the leadership spill of 24 June 2010.

‘Non-political’ news I have identified as issues which are not directly concerned with institutional politics. These might be the subject of government policy or of an implicitly political nature, but would not require knowledge of, or interest in the workings of the Australian parliamentary system before they can be understood. Discussions concerning asylum seekers, paid parental leave and women in combat are the ‘non-political’ news items addressed in this chapter.

5.2 Examining women’s participation

To begin my analysis I selected four online news items from major metropolitan newspapers that reported on the leadership spill leading to Gillard’s rise to prime minister. Online press reports were chosen for inclusion on three grounds: first, they were published on the website of a mainstream press agency; second, they directly addressed the topic under examination, and third, they were open to online discussions. The first four press reports I examined together elicited 679 reader comments (Benson and Farr 2010; Murphy 2010; Hartcher 2010c; Grattan 2010e). Across all four articles, gender-unspecified commenters

comprised 55 per cent of responses, while posts by commenters with a name that identified them as men comprised 34 per cent and women, 11 per cent (a full discussion of my method of categorising commenters in this way appears on pp. 75-6). The results are represented in Figure 5.1 below.

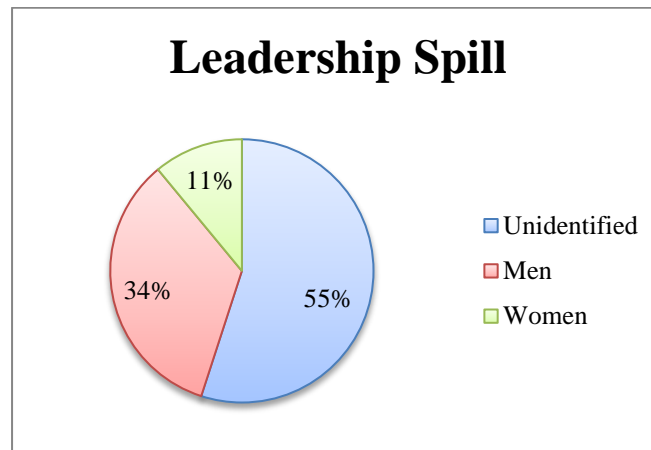


Figure 5.1: Gender break down of 679 commenters who posted to political news discussion boards on the leadership spill.

This sample has a similar gender break-down to the articles discussed in the previous chapter. On page 129 I noted that of 837 comments, 47.2 per cent were posted by commenters who did not identify their gender; 39.9 per cent were posted by commenters identifying themselves as men and 12.9 per cent were posted by commenters who identified themselves as women (which I round in my analysis for this chapter to 47, 40 and 13 per cent respectively). Those results are depicted in Figure 5.2.

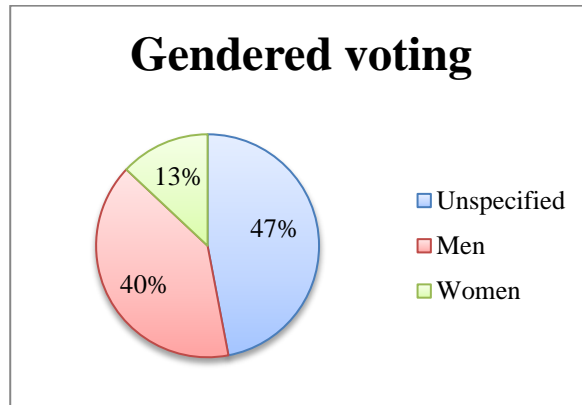


Figure 5.2: Gender break down of 837 commenters who posted to political news discussion boards relating to gendered voting.

While both Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show a striking difference in the apparent participation rate for men and women, and a significant overall preference for anonymity, they do not indicate whether this pattern of online participation is usual.

In an attempt to establish a benchmark for women's online participation, then, I turned to an examination of how Australians participate in relation to non-political news. First, I examined comments posted in response to a topic with which women may more closely identify, paid parental leave. As a news story, paid parental leave gained prominence early in 2010 as the two major parties promised to introduce different schemes should they be elected. Of 345 comments posted to five articles (Balogh 2010; Gettler 2010; Grattan 2010f; Karvelas 2010 and Perry 2010), 44 per cent of commenters did not reveal their gender, 34 per cent identified as men and 22 per cent as *women*. These results are depicted in Figure 5.3 below.

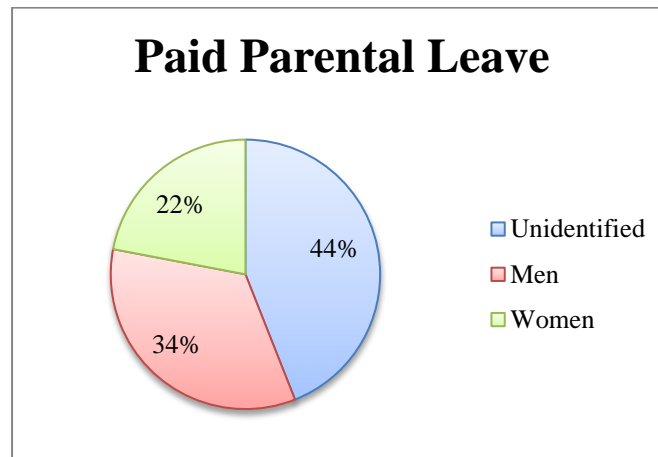


Figure 5.3: Gender break down of 345 commenters who posted to news discussion boards relating to the issue of paid parental leave.

Thus, while the proportion of commenters identifying themselves as men was similar across both the political and paid parental leave topics, the proportion identifying themselves as women was almost doubled in relation to the latter.

Yet as paid parental leave is a topic in which women may take a greater than usual interest, further data is required to test whether the political sample, or the paid parental leave sample, is more of a ‘norm’ in terms of women’s participation.

Accordingly, I examined responses to a third, possibly more gender-neutral subject—asylum seekers—and focused on five articles (Burnside 2010; Farid 2010; Marr 2010; Minas 2010; Packham 2010) which together attracted 415 comments. The results were more closely aligned with the pattern concerning parental leave, with 39 per cent of commenters not identifying their gender, 41 per cent identifying as men and 20 per cent as women. The results are depicted in Figure 5.4 below.

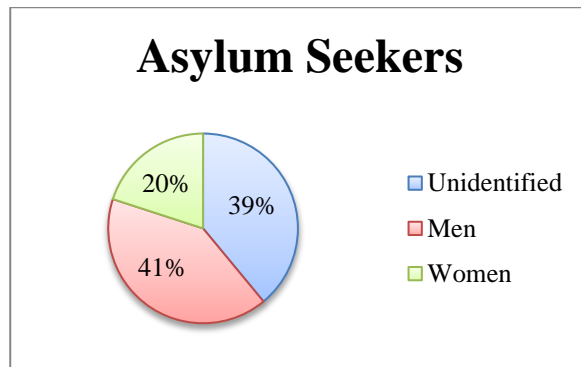


Figure 5.4: Gender break down of 415 commenters who posted to news discussion boards on the topic of asylum seekers.

Later, in Chapter 8, I discuss online comments in relation to a third non-political topic – whether women should be permitted to serve in combat roles in the Australian Defence Force. It will not pre-empt that chapter’s conclusions if I reveal here that of 579 comments (Hamilton 2011; Shepherd 2011; Sheridan 2011), I find 36 per cent were made by gender-unspecified commenters, 43 per cent by commenters self-identifying as men and 21 per cent self-identifying as women (see p. 238). Figure 5.5 shows these results.

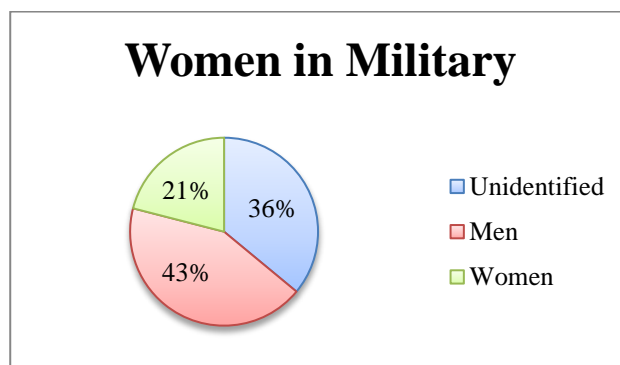


Figure 5.5: Gender break down of 579 commenters who posted to news discussion boards on the topic of women’s admission to combat roles in the ADF.

I have represented the combined results for both political news (1,516 comments) in Figure 5.6 and non-political news (1,339 comments) in Figure 5.7 below.

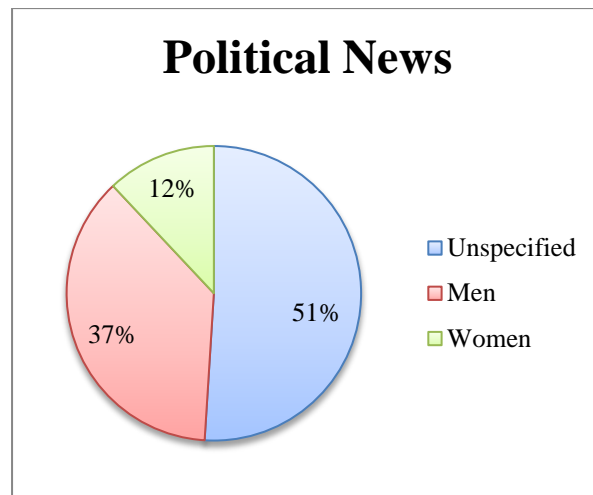


Figure 5.6: Gender break down of 1,516 commenters who posted to political news discussion boards.

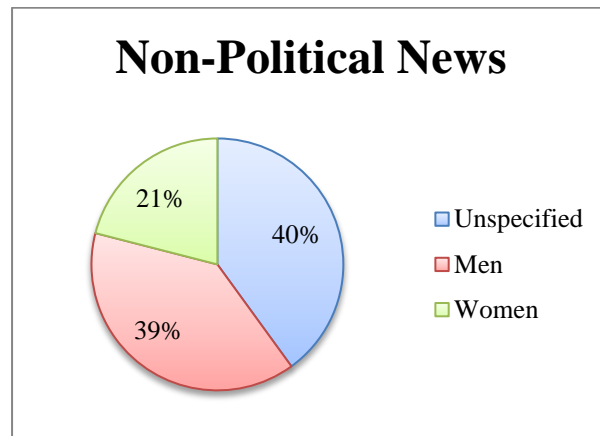


Figure 5.7: Gender break down of 1,339 commenters who posted to non-political news discussion boards.

5.3 Discussion

A number of conclusions are made possible by the data shown in Figures 5.6 and 5.7. One is that a majority of participants engage in online discussion boards without specifying their gender. This may lend support to the more positive interpretations of online anonymity as being important for broadening participation, as the absence of open declarations of commenters' gender could point to its irrelevance in this sphere (Reader 2012, p. 497). A challenge to this interpretation is implicit in all of the above Figures, however, as across all topics men appear more comfortable than women using their own names or at least identifying their gender. This means that more women than men appear to find gender-anonymity in public discussion a desirable, perhaps even necessary, method of participation. Whether this indicates that (a) fewer women than men are actually participating in online discussions, or (b) fewer women than men choose to reveal their gender online, cannot be determined on the basis of this data. In either case, however, the idea of online news discussion boards as sites enabling 'active communication that is easy and accessible for ordinary users' needs reconsideration (Weber 2014).

The final point to be drawn from Figures 6 and 7 is that women appear nearly twice as likely not to reveal their gender identities when commenting on explicitly political news articles (12 per cent) compared to other current affairs topics (21 per cent). One explanation for this disparity could be a difference in the levels of political knowledge and interest between men and women,

discussed earlier in this chapter. The analysis presented in this thesis provides another possible explanation, however.

As Herring (2004, 32) has noted, men's participation in chat rooms has been found to be more aggressive than women's, and men's language online differs to women's, suggesting a mirroring of 'real-world' gender inequalities. Given the gendered tone of some of the political discourses of 2010, discussed in Chapter 4, women's widespread retreat into gender-anonymous pseudonyms, if confirmed, would not be surprising. Indeed theories concerning social backlash against women's progress, discussed in Chapter 1 (p. 31) would support this finding.

Additionally, both CDA's attention to the productive power of discourses (which I discussed on page 56) and Pickering's (2001) observation that stereotypes function as a form of social control (pp. 23-4) support the conclusion that some women may be less inclined to openly venture an opinion on a topic, such as the politics of 2010, where they could be negatively judged on the basis of gender.

The greater number of 'unspecified' commenters in the political sample, however, also makes possible the conclusion that women are expressing political opinions, but doing so without identifying their gender. As a medium that has the potential for gender (as well as race, religious, disability and age) anonymity,

the internet has a distinctly positive role in facilitating women's participation in public discourses, whether they choose to identify their gender, or not.

Following CDA principles, this chapter has identified a *prima facie* case that in discussions on news websites women revealed their gender less often than men, and to an even lesser extent when the news under discussion was explicitly political. Building on prevalent gendered discourses identified in preceding chapters, the current chapter suggests that women are using the internet's potential for anonymity to avoid gender-based scrutiny, and raises questions about women's motivations for adopting online gender anonymity. While some scholars have found women's relationship with institutional politics to be characterised by reduced interest and knowledge, it also appears possible that as a discursively marginalised group, women employ non-traditional methods of engaging with and expressing political opinions. Adopting online gender anonymity may be one strategy some women employ to engage in political discussions without being subject to the negative stereotypes associated with women's political knowledge and participation. Further, this strategy can be interpreted as a means of countering the disciplinary effects of discourse, achieved in some cases by the use of stereotypes as a method of social regulation (Pickering 2001, 5).

There are many questions arising from this chapter's conclusions that could stimulate further research. As the main focus of this thesis is on the impact or influence of the stereotyping of women as voters, the next chapter seeks to build on current findings by

identifying whether there is any relationship between the 2010 political discourses and the way women engaged in online discussions.

Chapter 6

‘A CACKLING GAGGLE OF THE SISTERHOOD’: STEREOTYPES, THREAT AND AUSTRALIAN WOMEN VOTERS

In Chapter 5 I demonstrated that a disparity exists in the participation rates of men and women in online news discussion forums. In a variety of news topics, women appear to have participated at approximately half the rate of men. In response to news articles relating to the 2010 leadership spill and gendered voting, however, women appear to have participated at only *one third* the rate of men. I posited that the stereotyping, and in some cases hostility, directed at women in the course of mainstream political reporting may have influenced the way some women engaged in those particular online discussions.

Indeed, given some women’s responses to the stereotype that women would vote for Gillard ‘because she is a woman’ (discussed in Chapter 4), it appears the 2010 discourses may have constituted a negative or even threatening environment for women, at least in terms of women’s self-conceptualisations as political actors. As I demonstrated in Chapter 4, some media portrayals of gendered voting raised doubts about women’s political competence. This negative and doubting discursive environment had potential real effects for voters, particularly in light of Joanne Miller’s (2007, 217) finding that:

when media exposure to an issue causes negative emotional reactions about the issue, increased importance judgments will follow. And, as a result of increased importance, the issue will be weighed more heavily when making evaluations of political leaders.

The negative representations of gendered voting in the political press increased the importance of gender to the 2010 campaign. It is possible that this in turn heightened the significance of the leaders' genders to some Australians' vote decision (although due to Australia's use of the secret ballot this is not possible to verify). The 2010 election campaign was, then, a highly gender-charged, complex period in Australian politics, with some segments of the press reacting to a woman prime minister by stereotyping female voters, and with men and women as groups appearing to respond to this stereotyping in different ways.

In this chapter, I examine whether the increased scrutiny and stereotyping of women voters in 2010 contributed to a discursive environment that women may indeed have found threatening, by considering one of the potential effects of voter stereotypes. I explain the social-psychological concept *stereotype threat*, and use it to interpret some women's responses to the political discourses of 2010. Stereotype threat theory has hardly emerged outside social psychology, with most of the literature based on experimental studies. By ushering the concept out of the laboratory, this chapter brings new insights to gender and voter behaviour studies.

6.1 Background: gender affinity effects

The ascent of a number of women to positions of political leadership has recently captured the world's attention and been the subject of much media discussion. The high profile success of women including Angela Merkel, Hillary Clinton, Julia Gillard, Sarah Palin and others may suggest a level playing field in politics; however, women around the globe remain a long way shy of parity in descriptive representation (Kenworthy and Malami 1999, 236; Paxton and Kunovich 2003, 87-8). In Australia, of 849 candidates standing for election to the House of Representatives in the 2010 federal election, only 230 (27 per cent) were women. There was even greater disparity in the final constitution of the 43rd Australian parliament where, of 150 lower house members elected, only 37 (24.7 per cent) were women. Rather than an improvement, these statistics represent a decline from the 42nd parliament as the number of women in the lower house reduced from 41 (27.3 per cent) (Holmes and Fernandes 2012, 39). Scholars have observed similar stalling in the progress of women's representation in a number of other Westminster nations (Hill 2003, 80; Curtin 2006, 242).

Research on women's descriptive underrepresentation has identified numerous barriers to women both nominating for and succeeding in electoral politics, including organisational factors (Palmer and Simon 2001; Desouza and Foerstel 2004; Evans 2008; Lovenduski 2010); the masculine culture of political parties and institutions (Crawford and Pini 2010; Crawford and Pini 2011; Niven 1998);

and the unequal media representation of men and women candidates (van Acker 2003; Jenkins, C. 2006; Freedman, Fico and Love 2007; Kittilson and Fridkin 2008; Adcock 2010; Bligh et al. 2012; Falk 2013). Understandings of women's electoral successes and challenges are enhanced by a parallel body of research on voter behaviour. Some of this research explores the impact of candidate gender on voter behaviour, including the gender stereotypes voters apply to candidates (Riggle et al. 1997; Huddy and Capelos 2002; Paul and Smith 2008; Huddy and Carey 2009; Dolan 2010; Anderson, Lewis and Baird 2011), and the voting gender gap (Wirls 1986; Conover 1988; Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999; Howell and Day 2000; Inglehart and Norris 2000; Kaufmann 2006; Bergh 2007; Whitaker 2008; King and Leigh 2010). Researchers have also investigated a 'gender affinity effect,' according to which voters are found, under certain circumstances, to prefer to vote for candidates the same gender as themselves (Sanbonmatsu 2002; Dolan 2008; Goodyear-Grant and Croskill 2011).

As I discuss more fully in Chapter 8, scholars sometimes examine these 'gendered' effects more in terms of women's than men's voting behaviour. That such an unequal focus continues in the twenty-first century might partly be explained by the fact that women generally comprise a greater proportion of eligible voters than men: of all Australians registered to vote in the 2010 election, for example, there was in excess of half a million more women than men (Australian Electoral Commission 2010). With this numerical advantage, women could wield real power at the ballot box if they voted along gender lines. Yet, as feminists have often noted, the continuing underrepresentation of women

casts doubt on a decisive gender affinity effect in the absence of attitudinal factors that make a candidate's gender relevant to a voter (Goodyear-Grant and Croskill 2011). Media discussion of a female voting bloc persists, however, as the political discourses of the Australian 2010 federal election reveal.

6.2 Gender Stereotypes in Politics

The conception of voters in stereotypical terms was not new to the 2010 election. It is common, for example, for parties to tailor their electoral strategies to stereotypical constituents. Rebecca Huntley (2003) examined some of the media constructions of women voters in the discourses of the 1983 and 1993 federal elections. She suggested stereotypical representations of the 'women voter' shifted from 'carer' in the discourses of the 1983 election, to a 'carer-worker' and 'consumer' in 1993. Another example emerged from the 1996 Australian federal election, when Liberal strategists created a 'psychograph' of the typical disaffected ALP voter who represented a potential swing vote. Liberal strategists relied heavily on the snapshot they developed of 'Phil and Jenny,' hard-working but financially stretched mortgage-holders with a school-age child and a 1982 Commodore (Williams 1997, 65). Explaining the strategic use of Phil and Jenny, Williams (1997, 65) observed that, 'fictional the couple may have been...but their concerns and aspirations epitomised those of tens of thousands of real voters.' This use of a voter stereotype was an effective element of the ultimately successful Liberal campaign, but it remained part of an internal party discourse.

Voter stereotypes might also be thought of as manifesting in the findings of, and discussions about, polls. Huntley's (2003, 137-8) description of gender gap research as a technology of discourse through which understandings of the 'woman voter' were constructed also aptly applies to political polls. Public electoral discourses are often permeated with psephological research, via media reports on political trends and polling, the inclusion of expert analysis in media coverage, and open access to independent online sources (psephologist Antony Green's Election Blog, for example). An intriguing aspect of this process is the potential for individuals to locate themselves within a particular demographic: news reports of a poll showing that, say, 48 per cent of a social group intends to vote progressively, allows a voter to identify as a part of that 48 per cent (or not, as the case may be). One question that arises from discussions of polls and other forms of public opinion is whether they influence voters, in what Gollin (1980, 450) termed a 'feedback effect': making people more or less likely to vote a particular way. Such influence was posited by Lang and Lang (1984, 138) in their contention that 'the term "public opinion" stands not just for what people as individuals think but for something objective to which they react.' Almost every poll conducted during the 2010 campaign compared men's and women's vote intentions, which aided the construction in the broader media of men and women as discrete, and sometimes opposing groups. This construction may have had some impact on women, and other groups, and created a range of political effects.

Studies on a feedback effect on public opinion have had mixed findings. Polls are subject to countless manipulations, and the modern citizen may identify with any number of social groups based on gender, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, interest group and so on (Hall 1992, 279-80). These variations complicate any influence on public opinion that may be exerted by polls, and reduce the likelihood of a 'bandwagon effect' (Nadeau, Cloutier and Guay 1993). Yet, according to Lang and Lang (1984, 135), 'a poll finding that acts as a positive reference point for one group can be a negative reference point for others, spurring efforts to overtake a front runner or fostering sympathy with an underdog.' Murray Goot (1993) made a similar case in his analysis of surveys measuring levels of public support for the Australian High Court's decision in the *Mabo* case, recognising Aboriginal land rights. He explained:

One measure of the 'quality' of public opinion is people's willingness to accept the consequences or costs of their own views (Yankelovich 1991, 24). Confronted by certain sorts of consequences some change their mind completely, some change it in part, some change it not at all (Goot 1993, 144-5).

In his study, Goot found that polls commissioned by mining companies, worded a particular way, resulted in a smaller proportion of responses that proclaimed support for Aboriginal land rights. A feedback effect was manipulated both in the process of surveying members of the public, and in media reports of the survey data. Goot concluded, 'we should treat seriously a finding that suggests that an issue explained in certain terms generates one type of response whereas a variant generates something quite different' (Goot 1993, 153).

Hardy and Jamieson (2005) also demonstrated a feedback effect on public opinion in a study that found evidence of an ‘attribute agenda-setting function’ in political polls. After the publication of a *Los Angeles Times* poll that revealed 58 per cent of respondents agreed George W. Bush was ‘too ideological and stubborn’, Hardy and Jamieson (2005, 740) found ‘a small, detectable change in the public’s assessment of both Bush’s stubbornness and his steady leadership.’ They concluded that media discussions of that poll resulted in a slight increase in public opinion that Bush was ‘stubborn’, compared to attitudes expressed before the poll (Hardy and Jamieson 2005, 740). When considering the 2010 election in the light of Hardy and Jamieson’s findings, it can be hypothesised that the intense polling and media focus on candidate and voter gender in the 2010 federal election made gender and in particular ideas about a ‘female vote’ a salient political issue for Australians during the campaign.

Another recent study examined voter affinity effects and the influence of identity threat on Americans’ vote decisions. Böhm, Funke and Harth (2010) identified a ‘same-race’ voting pattern and a slightly smaller ‘same-gender’ pattern in their study of the 2008 US Democratic Primaries involving Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. Critically, Böhm, Funke and Harth (2010, 257) found that ‘the same-race voting preference among White voters was greater in states with a large proportion of Blacks than in states with only a small Black proportion’. This may be explained, they suggested, by the *threat hypothesis*: as the proportion of a minority group increases, the majority group’s perception

that the minority represents a political and economic threat also increases. Thus, the increased visibility or salience of an outgroup (in that study, Black voters) increased the sense of threat experienced by an ingroup (White voters) and therefore increased the likelihood of behaviour that affirmed the ingroup's solidarity, cohesion and dominant status (White voters voting for White candidates).

The threat hypothesis adds an interesting dimension to interpretations of gendered voting in the 2010 federal election. Women's voting behaviour has been viewed as a threat in the past: Magarey (1996, 99), for example, observed that for anti-suffragists, the prospects of the political empowerment of women evoked a 'lurking' fear of castration. It was not, of course, the case that the proportion of women voters increased sufficiently in 2010 to threaten the political and economic security of men. What did occur, however, was a significantly increased attention to gender and stereotypes about women's voting behaviour through media discussions and polls. This increased salience of gender (re)introduced the possibility of women voting as a bloc, a prospect that some opponents to Gillard and the ALP would have perceived as a threat.

6.3 Stereotype threat in women's responses

One of the stereotypes emerging out of the 2010 election discourse was that women would vote for Gillard because she is a woman, which provoked a

variety of responses from women. In this section, I suggest those various responses reveal that the stereotype was affronting for some women, and some may have experienced what Steele and Aronson (1995) first identified as stereotype threat.

As one of the more recent milestones in stereotype research, stereotype threat was defined by Steele and Aronson (1995, 798) as ‘the immediate situational threat that derives from the broad dissemination of negative stereotypes about one’s group - the threat of possibly being judged and treated stereotypically, or of possibly self-fulfilling such a stereotype.’ After fifteen years of investigating the phenomenon, Steele (2010, 5) wrote in lay terms: ‘We know what “people could think.” We know that anything we do that fits the stereotype could be taken as confirming it. And we know that, for that reason, we could be judged and treated accordingly.’

A person experiencing stereotype threat will be aware they are in a situation in which a negative stereotype may be applied, even if they do not believe the stereotype (Steele and Aronson 1995, 798; Steele 2010, 75). Although many stereotypes exist that could emerge in any number of contexts, scholars’ attention has most commonly been directed at two traditionally stigmatised groups: African Americans, stereotyped as academic under-achievers (Aronson, Fried and Good 2002; Aronson, Quinn and Spencer 1998; Steele 1999); and women, stereotyped as less competent than men in mathematics (Brown and Josephs 1999; Inzlicht and Ben-Zeev 2000; Johns, Schmader and Martens 2005;

Schmader 2002; Spencer, Steele and Quinn 1999). It is not enough for a person to be in a context where they know they might fulfil a stereotype, however. A person must identify with, or care about, that context, so that the mere risk of confirming the stereotype incites in that person feelings of discomfort or disappointment (Brown and Pinel 2003, 627; Steele 2010, 58). Women who do not care greatly about mathematics, for example, are unlikely to feel threatened by a stereotype that women are not naturally good at maths.

A person may conceive of his or her potential to confirm a stereotype in more than one way. This depends on whether a person views the possible stereotype confirmation as reflecting on him or herself personally, or the broader social group to which she or he belongs. A woman (or girl) about to sit a mathematics exam may, for example, be concerned that if she performs poorly it will confirm the negative stereotype about women and mathematics is true of her (as an individual) or her entire gender (for whom she is an ambassador). Both interpretations can create an 'extra cognitive and emotional burden' that has 'critically disruptive effects' (Aronson 2002, 282-3). Given the social-psychological orientation of stereotype threat research, studies on these disruptive effects have overwhelmingly focused on the cognitive. In simple terms, Steele (2010, 123) explained:

When we're at risk of confirming a stereotype that we don't like, and it's about something we care about, our minds race. They're probably doing all sorts of things: arguing against the stereotype; denying its applicability to us; disparaging anyone who could ever think that of us; feeling sorry for

ourselves; trying to buck ourselves up to disprove the stereotype. We are defending ourselves and coping with the threat of being stereotyped.

These cognitive effects negatively impact on a person's performance in a wide range of tasks (Steele 2010, 97-8). Studies have shown that in an academic exam, African American students under stereotype threat conditions perform less well than African American students who are not facing stereotype threat (Steele and Aronson 1995). The contextual difference between these two groups could be as minor as explaining to students that the test they are about to sit is diagnostic of academic ability (arousing stereotype threat), or a non-diagnostic problem-solving task (unrelated to the stereotyped ability and therefore non-threatening)(Steele and Aronson 1995, 799). According to McGlone, Aronson and Kobrynowicz (2006, 393), 'even seemingly innocuous environmental factors, such as the composition of the student group in a testing environment, can elicit threat responses.' Effects of non-scholarly stereotypes, too, such as Whites as less 'naturally' athletic than African Americans, have been examined and measured (Stone et al. 1999; Stone 2002). In laboratory studies, performance contexts are easily manipulated, and the effects of threat readily quantified. Yet little, if any, research has investigated stereotype threat outside of experimental conditions. The concept's relevance to political research has been demonstrated by McGlone, Aronson and Kobrynowicz (2006), who identified stereotype threat as a possible factor influencing the gender gap in political knowledge and interest. McGlone and colleagues found that 'explicit and implicit cues reminding women of the possibility that they might confirm a negative gender stereotype can impair their retrieval of political knowledge'

(2006, 392). Important questions emerged from that finding about prior studies that found women's level of political knowledge is inferior to men's (Mondak and Anderson 2004; Hooghe, Quintelier and Reeskens 2006; Lizotte and Sidman 2009; Dolan 2011; Ondercin, Garand and Crapanzano 2011; Ondercin and Jones-White 2011; Wolak and McDevitt 2011). McGlone and colleagues' study also indicates that stereotype threat is a useful explanatory concept in relation to women's political behaviour.

Strategies employed by stereotype targets for coping with threat in the short term can include denial, self-handicapping, counter-stereotypic behaviour, avoidance of the relevant domain and disengagement. After reading just over 2,000 comments posted in response to press reporting on the 2010 election, I identified some consonance between some women's comments and the responses of stereotype targets to threatening contexts. In the remainder of this section, I intertwine my explanation of each of these stereotype threat responses with a discussion of women's online comments in 2010. The comments discussed here were drawn from the same sample identified in Chapter 4, and are interpreted with the anonymity provisos also previously set out in Chapter 2 (pp. 75-6). A discussion of the methods according to which this sample was collected can be found in section 2.5.2 (p. 72).

6.3.1 *Denial*

A common response to the risk of being stereotyped is simply to deny the accuracy of the stereotype. According to von Hippel and colleagues (2005, 23), for people experiencing stereotype threat the ‘integrity of the self can be maintained either by denying the accuracy of the stereotype (a collective strategy) or by denying its self-relevance (an individual strategy).’

Many women’s online responses aligned with these strategies. Some engaged an individual strategy and offered up their own stories to disprove the stereotype. Sample comments taking this approach include ‘Veracity’: ‘I can assure you that my support of Julia Gillard has less to do with the fact that she is the first woman candidate for PM and more to do with the fact that she will do a better job than Tony Abbott’ (Devine 2010). Another story came from ‘Chrissy of St Kilda’ who explained: ‘I plan to vote on good policies that are good for Australia and Australians & from what I see now, Julia doesn’t seem to have many of those’ (Stott Despoja 2010).

Comments representing collective denial are exemplified by women who came to the defence of the entire gender. ‘Zilla’, for example, stated ‘Give the females of Australia a break and credit us with some intelligence!’ (Sheehan 2010). ‘Jan’ also stressed that she did not like

‘the idea that women are only voting for Gillard because she’s a woman. Why? Does he think we are not smart enough to spot a phoney when we see one, no matter what gender’ (Grattan 2010c).

6.3.2 *Self-handicapping*

Self-handicapping occurs when a person behaves in a way that will allow his or her potential confirmation of a stereotype to be attributed to something other than the stereotyped characteristic. According to Stone (2002, 1676), ‘once the negative stereotype is linked to an upcoming performance, targets may anticipate the potential for threat and begin to actively battle against the negative characterization’. Stone (2002) found White athletes practiced less for a scheduled golf task when they were told it was diagnostic of natural athletic ability than did African American athletes under the same conditions, and White athletes not under threat conditions.

In the case of the 2010 election, women’s vote decisions constituted an upcoming ‘performance’. Amongst commenters that might be identified as self-handicapping was ‘toribooster of perth’ who commented:

Surely in this day and age women will not place a vote simply because of gender... Where are the free thinkers, the independent strong women so often shouted about nowadays, seems they have again descended into a cackling gaggle of ‘the sisterhood.’ (Albrechtsen 2010b).

This comment appears to be anticipating the stereotyped behaviour of women as a group might be fulfilled, and sets up other women—the ‘cackling gaggle of the sisterhood’—rather than ‘toribooster of perth’ herself, as responsible for the outcome. Similarly, ‘Ann’ exclaimed:

Women are supposed to have better intuition than men, but I suppose being brainwashed by most of the msm who are biased against Tony Abbott and constantly place a negative spin on him, some people have obviously lost their bulls**t meter regarding Julia Gillard...Women wake up’ (Stott Despoja 2010).

6.3.3 *Distancing*

A distancing response to stereotype threat is evident when a person attempts to distance, or make less relevant to themselves, the attribute that is the subject of a stereotype. The argument that gender is, and should be, irrelevant to politics was common among women (and also men), and could be interpreted as a distancing approach. Writer and social commentator Marieke Hardy (2010) argued that ‘the idea of lauding somebody as the second coming simply because they have a vagina is nothing short of ludicrous.’ Many online responses echoed this sentiment, including ‘LizzyLou’ who commented:

I just find it all so patronising! I am a woman but I have so many other facets as well. I am a voter, I am reasonably intelligent (or so I’m led to believe), I am a worker, I am concerned about the environment, I have

concerns about society's move away from social justice and inclusion and I have many other interests that bear little relation to gender specific issues (Grattan 2010c).

6.3.4 Counter-stereotypic behaviour

Counter-stereotypic behaviour was evident in comments that portrayed women in a way that was contrary to the stereotype. References to women's political literacy were used to challenge the inference that women were stereotypically uninformed or incompetent. Journalist and social commentator Julia Baird, for example, was quoted by the *Herald*: 'when it comes to polling day, it's the economy, it's healthcare, it's education... We're not mugs' (Tippet and Munro 2010, 17). Some internet users, too, responded this way. 'Jenny L' commented:

I want a hard headed politician who can consider all sides of an economic proposal. That is why Julia Gillard is eminently suitable to be Prime Minister. Her parental leave scheme is opposed by those who want a gold pass for everyone and opposed by those who don't want women to work while having kids. It seems Julia has got the balance right (Stott Despoja 2010)

6.3.5 Questioning the Stereotype

My qualitative examination of women's responses in the 'real-life' context of stereotype threat has enabled the identification of another

important response that may not emerge under controlled experimental conditions. In online conversations, many women directly questioned or challenged the stereotype. ‘Helenh’ asked ‘Has anyone asked or polled yet on just how many men will vote for Abbot just because he isn’t a woman?’ (Devine 2010). ‘Fiona Thatcher of Brisbane’ posed a similar challenge in her statement ‘Maybe it’s not that women like her because she is a woman. Maybe men DON’T like her because she is a woman, thence the disparity’ (Albrechtsen 2010b). One last example comes from ‘Patricia WA’ who in response to Stott Despoja’s (2010) article, articulated her challenge to the stereotype in the form of a poem:

Tony says it’s ‘cos she’s a girl
The voters prefer Julia.
Another insult he can hurl
Though from him it is peculiar.
Is she exploiting ‘feminine’
With batting eyelids, female curves?
Who’s playing archetype ‘masculine’
Flexing muscles for all to perve?
Who’s running to the podium,
Showing off his manly splendour,
Aggressive, rousing odium?
Isn’t he exploiting gender?

6.4 Discussion

Although I have raised the possibility that some women experienced stereotype threat as a result of 2010 media discussions of women’s voting behaviour,

obviously not all women were subject to such an experience. Differences in the extent to which women identify with women as a social group would moderate the effect. As Sanbonmatsu (2010, 3) has noted, ethnicity, religion and class are identities that intersect with gender, and this complicates our ability to classify women as a voting bloc. Women whose self-identity was strongly invested in religion, family status or cultural background, for example, would have been less likely to experience threat stemming from the stereotypical representation of women voters.

Conversely, the threat may have been magnified for some women. Inzlicht, Tullett, Legault and Kang (2011, 240) note that: 'In the life of a stigmatized individual, ...threatening situations are a chronic reality exacting continuing demands on self-control resources, depleting the ability to resist aggressive impulses on a much larger and much more important scale—day-to-day life.' Thus, for women who strongly identify with women as a group, and perhaps women for whom negative stereotypical representation in the media is a more commonplace experience (feminist activists, or lesbians, for example), a greater than usual threat may have been perceived in 2010 political discourses.

Steele (2010, 173) noted stereotype threat 'unsettles one's sense of competence and belonging,' and this is evident in a number of the responses considered both in this chapter and Chapter 4. In every case, the comments explicitly or implicitly responded to the stereotypes of women as politically uninformed or irrational, or women voting on the basis of the leaders' genders.

I have limited my discussion to the primary short-term stereotype threat responses scholars have identified. While longer-term responses do exist—such as disidentification with the domain and identity bifurcation (Steele, Spencer and Aronson 2002)—it does not make sense to examine those in the context of this study, as it addresses a two-month period only.

This chapter has examined one particular ramification of the increased salience of gendered voting to Australian politics in 2010, drawing on the theory of stereotype threat to understand some of the effects of gender on voting. The increased salience of gender issues in the public domain from the time Gillard became prime minister, and the negativity with which women's anticipated unified voting was perceived by some segments of the media, may plausibly have led to an increased importance of candidates' and voters' genders to Australians' vote decisions during that campaign. According to data sourced from the Australian Election Study (McAllister et al. 2011), 37.6 per cent of men and 42.8 per cent of women voted for the ALP, and 42.0 per cent of men and 37.8 per cent of women voted for the Liberal Party. As I discuss later, in Chapter 8, fewer men and women voted for the ALP in 2010 than in 2007, leading scholars such as David Denemark, Ian Ward and Clive Bean (2011) to argue that Gillard 'saved' more votes than she 'lost' for the ALP. Yet the decline from 2007 in men's votes for the ALP was greater (8.8 percentage points) than women's (4.4 percentage points). In this chapter I have attempted to explore whether polling and media discourses, which tended to portray women and men as discrete and sometimes

opposing groups, may have influenced this decline. The threat hypothesis suggests men who believed large numbers of women were intending to vote for the female-led ALP (including men who may have felt threatened by the prospect), were less likely also to cast their vote in favour of the ALP.

On the other hand, I found that many women objected to negative representations of female voting behaviour. The comments some women made online in response to widespread, over-simplified assumptions about gendered voting align with characteristics that are associated with the responses of stereotype threat targets. The finding that political press discussions had an impact on some women (and other groups including men) by arousing a context of stereotype threat, is important for a number of reasons. It demonstrates the mass media's narrow interpretation of political polls, and use of gender stereotypes, may have a psychological impact—or possible feedback effect—on men and women voters. The extent of this influence, and its effect on men and women's vote decision, requires further investigation before concrete conclusions can be drawn. It is important, however, to acknowledge that the way women are discussed in the mainstream media has potentially significant psychological and political effects that are yet to be empirically quantified.

Understanding the role of psychological processes such as stereotype threat on voters may expand existing understandings of the causes of women's underrepresentation in politics. As Nguyen and Ryan (2008, 1314) have identified, 'knowledge of the effects of stereotype threat on traditionally stigmatized groups adds an extra dimension to sociological understandings of disadvantage, that is, beyond established factors

including socio-economic status, educational attainment and socialization'. It is important, then, for studies of gender and politics to consider the ways citizens respond to discourses, both psychologically and with their vote. To disprove the (usually negative) 2010 stereotype of women as likely to vote for the ALP, it is conceivable that some women may have deliberately acted contrary to the stereotype, and cast their vote for another party.

Given that Gillard was the first female Prime Minister of Australia, there is no direct precedent with which to make accurate comparisons. There is another possibility, however, which is to compare the 2010 discourses with another period in Australia's history in which gender had a high political salience. It is this possibility that is explored in the next chapter.

PART FOUR

HISTORICAL AND OTHER DISCOURSES

Chapter 7

‘DOUBLE THE VOTES AND DOUBLE THE TROUBLE’: ATTITUDES TOWARDS AUSTRALIAN WOMEN VOTERS, 1902 AND 2010

Mark Twain has been credited with the popular maxim ‘history does not repeat itself, but it does rhyme’. While Twain’s authorship of the phrase is subject to contention, the idea it so neatly expresses – that the present may ‘rhyme’ with the past – seems often to ring true. Thus far, this thesis has focused on a specific, contemporary period of time: a few short weeks in the middle of 2010. Having not had an Australian female prime minister before then, it has been crucial for this thesis to examine the political discourses of that time, and women’s responses to them, in the specific context within which they occurred, in line with a CDA approach.

Yet there was a shade of familiarity about some of these stereotypical discussions of women, and the arguments or comments some women made seemingly in defence. Thus, out of my analysis of the contemporary political discourses, a further question emerged concerning the extent to which these discourses are new. In this chapter, I consider whether there has, in fact, been a period in Australian history where political discourses ‘rhymed’ with those of 2010. More specifically, the question to be answered is whether there has been a period in Australia’s political history when women have similarly faced such intense political scrutiny and stereotyping as occurred in 2010.

Feminist scholarship has already established that gender stereotypes were among the founding myths of white Australia. According to Summers (1994 [1975], 313), ‘the notion that all women could be categorized as being exclusively either good or evil – with the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene being the prototypes of each kind – was brought to Australia with the First Fleet’. Despite persistent negative stereotypes associating women with the domestic sphere, which I outlined in my theoretical frameworks in section 1.1.2 (p. 21), women have continued over time to push for access to the public realm. When this results in changes to gender norms, one common result is the evocation of gender-based anxieties in some segments of the public (as mentioned in Chapter 1, Long (2001, 89-90) referred to this phenomena as ‘the wrath of the patriarchy’). The advances women made throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are now largely taken for granted, particularly in Western nations. Yet gender anxieties still emerge when women capture the public’s attention by breaking another barrier or reaching another milestone. Gillard’s leadership takeover and the gender-infused election campaign of 2010 is an example of a period marked by gender anxiety, as I have detailed throughout this thesis.

An earlier period I have identified as arousing gender-based anxieties occurred with the rise of the movement seeking women’s suffrage from the late nineteenth century. Thus, in order to determine the newness or otherwise of the 2010 stereotypes, in this chapter I explore the public discussion of both periods. This chapter is guided by two specific questions: how were women as voters perceived in suffrage debates of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century? And, are there parallels between early attitudes towards women voters and those expressed in political discussions of 2010? Answers

are sought first, in analyses of the Hansard record of the Second Reading of the Commonwealth Franchise Bill, 1902, in the Senate and House of Representatives; and second, in political press reports concerning the 2010 federal election. Although more than a hundred years elapsed between the two periods discussed in this chapter, their selection was intentional. The suffrage debates establish some of the earliest appearances of gender stereotypes in Australian politics, stereotypes that were still potent in 2010 despite improvements to the status of women in the intervening century.

To broaden understandings of the power and operation of stereotypes, it is necessary to examine the sources of their development. Pickering (2001) argued for greater attention to the historical development of contemporary stereotypes, as their longevity is hidden when research is rooted in the present. 'It is because certain stereotypes may seem to rise without a trace', Pickering (2001, 8) suggested, 'that we need to excavate their obscured routes of development'. In the course of this chapter I analyse the Second Reading debate, identifying five themes in the speeches of members opposed to universal suffrage. I use those themes in section 7.3 to identify corresponding ideas in the 2010 political discourses. It is hypothesised that after comparing attitudes towards women in each of these periods, an element of 'rhyme' will be found between colonial gender stereotypes and 2010 political discourses. By examining negative attitudes towards and stereotypes about women in one of the earliest federal parliamentary debates on women's suffrage, I adopt an original approach to the period which should determine whether the current positioning of women voters has antecedents in the beginnings of federal government in Australia. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is not to demonstrate an empirical link between 1901 and 2010; but rather to highlight the

longevity of gender stereotypes and understand how they emerge and function in political discourses. Thus, I conduct this ‘excavation’ with a view to revealing and disempowering these negative gender stereotypes.

The second reading of the Commonwealth Franchise Bill is useful in establishing attitudes towards women for a number of reasons. By 1902, the arguments for and against women’s suffrage had been in the public domain for some time: as the Member for South Sydney G.B. Edwards pointed out, ‘they are all stock arguments, which, to a very large extent, have been worn threadbare, not only in legislative assemblies, but in debating clubs and institutions’ (Commonwealth Franchise Bill [hereafter CFB] 1902a, 11951). Thus, statements made in the course of that parliamentary sitting can be taken as emblematic of the long-running debate as it had been conducted for more than a decade prior.

Support for the Bill among parliamentarians was high, and MPs and Senators expected it to pass quickly into legislation (which it did). That objections to women’s suffrage were still raised in that milieu, however, reveals the strength of some parliamentary members’ beliefs, and the duty they felt to their electorates. The Member for Wannon, Samuel Winter Cooke, for example, explained that during his campaign, ‘the heartiest cheer I got during the addresses I gave was when I stated that I was opposed to the extension of the franchise to women’ (CFB 1902a, 11949). Opposition to women’s suffrage was not limited to the opinions of a few political elites, but arose from disparate sources including some trade unions, businesses and also some women (Oldfield 1992, 175-77). Thus, the objections to women’s suffrage raised in the

parliament were not isolated views, but are indicative of the attitudes of a segment of public.

At the time of its second reading, the Commonwealth Franchise Bill was considered a significant historic first. While women could vote in a number of municipal and state jurisdictions worldwide, nowhere except in New Zealand (which at the time was a colony, not a nation) did women have the right to vote in national elections. As Winter Cooke articulated:

We propose to more than double the number of our electors by granting the suffrage to women, who, save in two States, have had no experience in political matters. We are taking a leap in the dark, without any experience worth mentioning to guide us (CFB 1902a, 11950).

The historic significance of the proposal to extend the franchise to women, and the ‘leap in the dark’ represented by the ‘untested’ women’s vote, appeared to have intensified the anxieties of some members. This is an important parallel with the discourses surrounding Australia’s first female prime minister, to which I turn in section 7.3.

7.1 Gender Stereotypes in History and Politics

At its most basic, a stereotype is a cognitive tool that enhances a person’s ability to make sense of the social world: we are able to comprehend the complexity of human social life due to our ability to categorise it into easily recognisable

groups (McGarty, Yzerbyt and Spears 2002, 3). The construction of a worldview based on group commonalities, however, is an oversimplification often associated with negative behaviours such as prejudice (Houghton 2009, 189). When they become ‘shared group beliefs’ stereotypes are normative, and have therefore been recognised as relations of power (McGarty, Yzerbyt and Spears 2002, 2). Accordingly, Talbot (2003, 471) noted ‘stereotypes tend to be directed at subordinate groups (e.g. ethnic minorities, women) and they play an important part in hegemonic struggle’. Many groups could be discussed with reference to political stereotypes; however, the focus in this thesis has been limited to those about women. A long history of stereotypes about women in power exists, and they are evident in many great civilizations from Ancient Egypt to the industrialised world (Garlick, Dixon and Allen 1992).

Stereotype use by the media may induce public anxieties when women are represented as undermining gender norms or threatening the gender status quo—the depiction of feminists, for example, as angry, man-hating and masculine (Roy, Weibust and Miller 2007, 148). Cameron (cited in Dow 1999, 153) noted the social importance of gender norms when she observed: ‘sex differentiation must be widely upheld by whatever means are available, for men can be men only if women are unambiguously women’. There is a disciplinary element, then, to negative stereotypes about women, as they work to constrain women’s behaviour to within the bounds of acceptable femininity. CDA recognizes this as one way in which discourses are regulatory; by drawing on this methodology I

am able to focus on the disciplinary function of discourses which is sometimes achieved through stereotyping (Hall 2001, 72).

In the world of politics, some widely held stereotypical beliefs are ‘that men are more comfortable with power than are women; that it is right and natural for men to seek and hold power; that for a woman to do so is strange, marking her as un-feminine and dangerous’ (Lakoff 2003, 161). Scholars have noted the potential for news media to activate gender stereotypes, and identified a number of effects of that process (Adcock 2010; Bligh et al. 2012, 567). Charlotte Adcock (2010) found the use of gender stereotypes in UK political reporting may adversely impact on voters’ understandings of gender in politics and broader society. The Australian media also commonly relies on stereotypes in its representation of women politicians and leaders (Baird 2004; Jenkins, C. 2006; Simms 2008; van Acker 2003). The contemporary media stereotyping of women as voters, however, has to the best of this author’s knowledge not yet been explored in any detail.

7.2 Perceptions of Women in Anti-Suffrage Discourses

The suffrage debates occurred in Australia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A small but thorough literature has addressed the struggles and successes of the suffrage movements in Australian colonies, Commonwealth and states. Complementing comprehensive volumes by Searle (1988), Oldfield

(1992) and Lees (1995), for example, are accounts specific to the narrative of each colony (or state), and biographies and autobiographies of key activists including Vida Goldstein (Bomford 1993), Maybanke Anderson (Roberts 1993) and Catherine Helen Spence (Spence 1997 [1910]; Magarey 1985). Understandably, much of this existing literature focuses on suffragists' actions, speeches and written works. Less attention has been directed to anti-suffrage campaigns and the stereotypes of women specific to this period; these are found peppered throughout suffrage histories, or remain to be gleaned from suffragists' arguments.

When the colonies came together to federate Australia in 1901, women in South Australia and Western Australia had already gained suffrage at state level, while women in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania had not. Bills introducing women's suffrage had passed the Legislative Assemblies of those four colonies but had been rejected by the more conservative Legislative Councils – in Victoria this had occurred six times, twice in New South Wales. In its first session, then, the new parliament faced a quandary: parliamentarians desired uniformity in the Commonwealth franchise, but women's suffrage remained controversial. The Commonwealth Franchise Bill of 1902 was introduced to provide this uniformity, and in its Second Reading debate, arguments for and against extending the national vote to women were aired. While the Bill also addressed the franchise of the 'insane,' welfare recipients, Aboriginal people and immigrants, I have limited my focus to statements made in the Bill concerning women voters. Women of Aboriginal or non-white immigrant backgrounds, however, were not specifically intended to benefit from

the introduction of women's suffrage, and were often more closely associated with their cultural background rather than gender. Thus, Aboriginal women's suffrage was more a 'by-product' of white activism, as Crowley (2001, 237) observed in South Australia's case: 'Aboriginal women in South Australia were enfranchised in 1894 by neither accident nor design.'

For some opponents to women's suffrage, *motherhood was the quintessential state of womanhood*, and domestic life was women's natural vocation. Indeed, so strong were the entrenched beliefs about women's roles as mothers that suffragists had to adopt arguments that demonstrated a connection between women's domestic work and the work of politics and Empire (Devereux 1999). For anti-suffragists, the connection relied more on stereotypical, historical assumptions about women's abilities, as I outlined in section 1.1.2 (esp. p. 25). One of the leading opponents in the Senate, Sir Josiah Symon, stated 'woman is at her noblest and best as a wife and mother,' on the basis of which he argued, 'the introduction of political duties—I put it that way—into the ambit of their service in life is overloading them, and is certainly not promoting woman's destiny at its best' (CFB 1902b, 11463). Women's domesticity was portrayed by some as a higher calling: Member for Kooyong, William Knox, argued women's suffrage was 'counter to the intentions and to the design of the Great Creator, and we are reversing those conditions of life to which woman was ordained' (CFB 1902a, 11941). Thomas Skene, Member for Grampians, declared, 'woman has higher and more sacred functions to fulfil than those presented in political life' (CFB 1902a, 11945).

Related to the stereotype of women as destined for the private sphere were assumptions that women lacked either the inclination or knowledge to participate in political life. This attitude was revealed in Senator Edward Harney's comment that women have 'a too tasteful intelligence to meddle in the dry humbug, to them, of politics about which they know nothing' (CFB 1902b, 11488). To opponents of universal suffrage, then, no role for women existed in the political realm: according to Edwards, 'in the common turmoil of politics woman would be *out of place*' (CFB 1902a, 11953; emphasis added).

Dire consequences were expected by some opponents to result from women's political activation. Women's expanded access to the public sphere signalled a potential *disruption to the gender status quo*: 'How will the passage of this Bill', Senator Simon Fraser asked, 'bring any more comfort to the home?' (CFB 1902b, 11558). Skene produced evidence from 1889 in the United States that showed 'the largest number of divorces were to be found in those communities in which the advocates of female suffrage were most numerous' (CFB 1902a, 11945). Some parliamentarians held that political involvement would degrade women: Senator Edward Pulsford suggested universal suffrage would 'tend to the vulgarization of women' (CFB 1902b, 11466). Indeed, such was the threat women's suffrage posed to the established gender order that Knox argued: 'by passing measures of this kind we shall be gradually training women to become masculine creatures, and entirely unfitting them to discharge the functions which

properly belong to their sex' (CFB 1902a, 11941). Even more alarmist were the speculations of Sir Edward Braddon, Member for Tasmania:

think of the case when the woman will not take her husband along with her [to vote], but will go alone and leave him at home to look after the baby and cook the dinner?... [I]f the wife came back home and found her baby killed, and the dinner spoiled, there would not be a moment's peace in the family afterwards (CFB 1902a, 11937).

Admittedly, men's infanticidal tendencies were not a common feature of parliamentary debate; women's ability to reason was, however, openly discussed. Doubts about women's rationality were evident in a number of politicians' arguments. Braddon argued, 'women are apt to decide on instinct rather than on reason' (CFB 1902a, 11937); and Edwards claimed:

The greatest philosophers have held that at certain recurrent periods of a woman's life she is not so fitted as is man to exercise any powers which make a demand upon her judgment or logical faculties. I own that woman's instinct is, in many respects, superior to man's, but her powers of ratiocination are inferior (CFB 1902a, 11952).

The 'emotional' stereotype compounded doubts about women's political aptitudes. Accordingly, Senator James Styles argued: 'if enfranchised, woman would be carried away by her emotions—her likes or dislikes—to such an extent that the chances would be that she would vote for a young, handsome, plausible man' (CFB 1902b, 11560). Senator Thomas Glassey further explained, 'women

would be influenced by the clergy, by good-looking candidates, and by young men' (CFB 1902b, 11474). These comments additionally draw on heteronormative stereotypes, both establishing 'normal' relationships as those between men and women, and erasing any possibility of lesbian existence (Rich 1980).

One of the outcomes anti-suffragists anticipated was that women would be *easily influenced* by others, and that this would unequally affect men. Braddon explained:

A bachelor will have his one vote. The married man, happy in his family, whose wife's vote is one which he can command—and most men, I think, can command their wives' votes—will have two votes; whilst the man who is unhappily married, and whose wife, as a matter of certainty and principle and established policy will vote in the opposite way to that in which he does, will have no vote at all (CFB 1902a, 11937).

Edwards also raised doubts about the value to be gained from universal suffrage, anticipating women would merely replicate men's votes: 'If under present circumstances we have 500 or 1,000 votes in favour of any political principle, we shall, under the new conditions, have 1,000 or 2,000 votes. We shall only double the votes and double the trouble' (CFB 1902a, 11951). Evident in these statements and many others, is an *androcentric worldview* in which men's political attitudes, knowledge and votes form a standard to which women may only adhere, or not.

As the newly formed Australian parliament debated and granted women the right to vote in federal elections, opposition to universal franchise continued to be articulated with some passion. In anti-suffrage discourses, women were important as wives and mothers but, perceived as emotional rather than rational, were not deemed suited to political participation. Some anti-suffragists expected that women would be easily influenced by husbands and fathers to vote in a particular way; or be swayed to vote for a candidate based on good looks or youth. Others anticipated that access to the political realm would ‘vulgarise’ or masculinise women, and result in social decay such as neglect of family and households. Throughout the debate, a common sense standard founded on men’s existing knowledge and experience established women as either adherents to or deviants from accepted—that is, male—norms.

7.3 Perceptions of Women in 2010 Federal Election Discourse

The 2010 election was the forty-second occasion Australian women exercised a federal franchise; women casting their ballot and even standing for office were no longer a novelty. Despite the normalisation of women as political actors, in 2010 a disproportionate level of attention from journalists and political elites was directed at women. As Lakoff (2003, 172) noted in relation to Hillary Rodham Clinton’s campaign for the US Senate in 1998, in some ways this media attention to women was positive: ‘those who matter are finally realizing

that women do have power and cannot be ignored. But the way in which women apparently must be noticed is often distressing'. In a similar vein, I contend that the media attention to women voters during the 2010 campaign was not always motivated by respect for women as a constituency.

In this section I examine how Gillard and Australian women voters were discussed in online press reports that discussed women voters, published during the eight weeks between Gillard's accession (24 June 2010) and the subsequent federal election (21 August 2010). As in the previous section, I do not claim that the attitudes identified in this section represent those of a majority of Australians. According to Kennamer (2003, 8), however, journalists 'apply the standards and expectations of [a] dominant culture to everyday news stories, to provide the 'framing' consistent with the standards and expectations of [that] dominant culture'. Commentators' opinions discussed in this section can therefore be taken as aligned with the views of some sections of the Australian public. From a CDA perspective, under examination in the following pages are examples of 'language as practice.' As noted in Chapter 2 (p. 54), 'the discursive event is shaped by situations, institutions and social structures, but it also shapes them' (Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak 2011, 357). Thus, public attitudes to women voters are understood from this perspective as both shaped by and shaping discourses.

I have argued that the historic significance and 'leap in the dark' represented by the extension of the franchise to women intensified the anxiety felt by some

Australians about this social change. Similar public anxieties emerged in response to the ‘untested’ leadership of a woman prime minister, and the unknown political effects it would create. This modern leap in the dark appeared to have raised many similar questions about women’s political attitudes, and aptitudes, as did the expansion of the vote over a century ago, and I found many similarities between the stereotypes deployed by anti-suffragists and the attitudes expressed in modern commentary. In the following section, therefore, I discuss modern attitudes using sub-headings to that correspond to the major stereotypes identified in the previous section.

7.3.1 Motherhood as quintessential womanhood

As discussed in section 1.1.2, women’s biological functions – predominantly the ability to bear children – have been used historically to perpetuate the stereotype that women are ‘naturally’ more suited to domestic, rather than public life. Motherhood remains an important attribute for women who aspire to political careers: according to Cathy Jenkins (2006, 61), ‘from the time the first woman set foot in any Australian parliament in 1921 until the present, the expectation has been that female politicians should be wives and mothers’.

The Australian media has sporadically focused on Gillard’s single-and-childless status throughout her career: a Factiva search revealed 589 press reports mentioning the words ‘Gillard’ and ‘deliberately barren’

since Senator Bill Heffernan first made that connection in mid-2006 (Nethercote 2007). While many of these media references referred to the inappropriateness of Heffernan's comments, its repeated mention in the discourse serves to keep the comment alive in popular consciousness. Gillard's accession to prime minister inspired renewed discussion on the relevance of family to political life. The suggestion emerged that, being unmarried and childless, she would have difficulty connecting with 'ordinary voters' (a view that limits any conception of 'ordinary voters' to married couples and parents). As already discussed in Chapter 3 on page 107, former Labor leader Mark Latham remarked that: 'Gillard ain't no soccer mum, so there might be a failure to connect there' (Guest and Don 2010, 7). This comment inspired van Onselen (2010, 15), among others, to suggest that 'while Gillard might more easily appeal to progressive inner-city electors, she also needs to convince the soccer mums – as Mark Latham describes them – that she is the sort of female leader they respect.' One effect of this commentary was revealed by Meers' (2010, 6) report that Gillard had been photographed with babies 33 times during the election campaign, compared to Abbott's two, suggesting Gillard, or ALP strategists, were attempting to establish Gillard's 'maternal' credentials.

The renewed media attention to how mothers would vote was also reflected in the *Sun Herald's* assembly of a 'Mums' Jury', a panel of sixteen Victorian women to 'deliver their verdict' on Gillard, Abbott and

key political issues (Papadakis and Kelly 2010, 6). Megalogenis (2010, 11) suggested ‘This election will test whether Labor, the party of the blue collar male, can turn gender on its head by relying on mum, not dad, for their majority.’ In the *Australian Financial Review*, Walker (2010, 8) stated, ‘this election may be notable not simply for the fact that the first female leader of a major political party is presenting herself to the electorate, but for the differences that emerge in households between men and women voters.’ This reference to households as comprised of men and women excluded a variety of non-traditional possibilities including gay and lesbian couples, sole-parent headed households and singles. Walker’s comment also hinted at a new fascination with gendered voting: that men and women would be influenced differently by Gillard’s gender.

7.3.2 *Women as easily influenced*

Concern with women’s voting behaviour began in the wake of celebrations over Australia’s first female prime minister. Men and women across the political spectrum celebrated the event, but, because Gillard’s rise was hailed a *feminist* milestone, men’s responses to a woman prime minister were commonly overlooked. Polls revealing Gillard had greater support among women than men enabled women voters to be discussed, but as I found in Chapter 4 found, the suggestion that men were behaving in a ‘gendered’ way was not always mentioned.

Thus, gendered voting came to be interpreted in many press reports as a female phenomenon. It occurred to me, particularly in the light of my examination of the 1902 federal parliamentary debate, that perhaps there is always press interest in women voters. To determine whether the level of focus on women voters was consistent with that in previous elections, I conducted a simple quantitative search for press articles referring to 'women voters,' 'female voters' or 'female vote,' in three prior election years, 2001, 2004 and 2007 using the Factiva database. The search results revealed that the number of press articles referring to voters who were women almost tripled in 2010, rising from 38 in 2001, 45 in 2004 and 40 in 2007, to 115 in 2010. This points again to the increased press attention paid to women as a result of Gillard's political leadership.

One of the stereotypical assumptions that underpinned this element of election discourse was that women, as a distinct group, would be influenced to vote Labor because its leader was a woman. In the *Herald Sun*, Susie O'Brien (2010, 28) argued: 'you wouldn't vote for a male politician purely on the basis that he happens to be a man. So why are so many women willing to vote for Julia Gillard just because she is a woman?' Akerman (2010, 108) wrote in the *Sunday Telegraph* that Gillard 'is working on the assumption that women will vote for her no matter what policies she puts forward, treating them like absolute dummies.' Newspoll chief executive, Martin O'Shannessy called it 'the Julia Gillard effect' (Stewart 2010, 5). These assumptions echo anti-

suffrage sentiments that women's votes would be influenced by a candidate's physical appearance.

7.3.3 *Women as less politically competent than men*

For some commentators, gendered voting was viewed negatively and any women swayed to vote on the basis of Gillard's gender were deemed politically incompetent. Such a viewpoint might be explained by the traditional association between politics and reason, which has enabled 'patriarchal constructions of women as hysterical,' meaning women are understood as 'unreasonable, emotional and therefore unfit for the domains of science or public office' (Lafrance and McKenzie-Mohr 2014, 6). This historical construction underwrites the ability of the critics of gendered voting in 2010 to depict it as irrational and politically illegitimate. Abbott's comment in the leaders' debate—that 'this election would determine whether prime ministers are to be chosen on the basis of the job they've done, or gender'—established a strategic dichotomy to suggest prime ministers could have *either* competence *or* gender (Abbott 2010). This demonstrates Ross's (2002, 196) observation that 'it is clearly unthinkable that women could attain positions of authority merely on the basis of their ability to do the job'. Abbott's comment further paved the way for members of the public to express anxieties about women's voting behaviour, and a number of letters to the editor critical

of women were published, including Patrick of Camberwell: 'Are there really that many women in the country who are going to vote for Julia just because she is a woman? I would hope that women voters aren't that stupid' (Letters 2010f, 26). Another reader, John Cantwell of Belmont, wrote, 'I'm sure that women aren't really so stupid and that the women polled must merely be a sample of rusted-on Labor voters' (Letters 2010h, 24). The theme is continued in a third letter from '(Mrs) Paddle Sapiens' of Chadstone: 'I can only assume that the majority of Australian women are either politically naïve or just plain stupid' (Letters 2010e, 26).

Although editors did not refrain from publishing letters that suggested women might be 'stupid', most of the professional media did not use such derogatory labels. Some commentators did, nonetheless, raise questions about women's political competence:

Not enough women have placed our new Prime Minister under the same scrutiny they would a male leader. Her backers must be praying that the lack of a long, hard look by women will be enough to get them over the line (Wilson 2010b, 24).

Some self-identified feminist voters might have been expected to hold ideologies that rendered voting for Gillard a rational vote choice. Although speculative, this possibility suggests a vote on gender grounds could not always be considered irrational, or a vote on policy more

legitimate. Just as in suffrage debates then, some media discussions in 2010 stereotypically portrayed women as politically incompetent.

7.3.4 *Women as out of place in politics*

Both gendered and androcentric language were evident in the comments of 2010 reporters. Some of the language used to explain the unusual level of success by a woman in a 'man's world' tended to masculinise Gillard. Ross (2002, 197) has noted that, as assertiveness is stereotyped as a masculine trait, assertive women in parliaments are often perceived as 'honorary men'. For Hartcher (2010d, 3), Gillard was 'as smart as any man, as tough as any man, as able as any man', while Hudson (2010, 2) noted 'she can play politics as rough as the boys.' Hugh Mackay was quoted in the *Age* as saying, 'the women who have risen to the top have beaten the blokes at their own game. It's not some different game they play' (Tippet and Munro 2010, 17). Politics, in this view, still belongs to men: to succeed women play by the 'men's' rules.

Some journalists invoked visions of traditional gender roles and heteronormative language and stereotypes to describe Gillard's actions: 'When Julia Gillard and Wayne Swan walked side by side into the caucus room to destroy Kevin Rudd's prime ministership, they looked like a happy bride and groom being carried along on a hydrofoil of love to the altar' (Toohey 2010b, 5). Abbott also deployed gendered

language: he argued during the election campaign that Gillard should accept 'no means no,' a well-known Australian anti-rape campaign phrase; and later suggested she should make an 'honest woman of herself,' a veiled reference to her unmarried status (Maiden 2010a, 7; Grattan and Morton 2011, 9). In these ways the public was reminded of Gillard's gender and its associated traditional roles, marking her, like the suffragists of the late nineteenth century, as a woman out of place.

Further, the incongruity Gillard represented as the most powerful woman in parliamentary politics was compounded by her mode of ascension being depicted by some commentators as political betrayal and even 'violence'. Harvey (2010, 45) reflected in the *Sunday Telegraph*, 'I did not expect the Feminine Age would involve acts of political brutality like the execution of [former prime minister] Kevin Rudd.' An element of the Australian public remains uncomfortable with the idea of power-wielding women, especially when those women are involved in the hatching of parliamentary plots and as perpetrators of metaphorical violence (Hall and Donaghue 2013; Okimoto and Brescoll 2010; see also Bashevkin 2009 in relation to the Canadian context). Just as they did in 1902, then, powerful and politically engaged women continue to challenge accepted gender norms.

7.3.5 *Disruptions to the gender status quo*

Sawer and Simms (1993, 23) suggested that resistance to women politicians is often stronger once levels move beyond 'token' appearance: by the time women's numbers in parliament reach around 30 per cent women may be perceived as 'out of control' and 'taking over'. The rise of a woman to the top job may similarly have evoked this reaction in some Australians. In the wake of Gillard's accession, Livingstone (2010, 5) pronounced the 'sisterhood' irrelevant and called for the abolition of 'every 'status of women', 'office of women' and 'special adviser on women's affairs' minister and bureaucrat across the nation'. Other commentators raised concerns about the impacts of Gillard's leadership and a unified women's vote: reader Barry Lamb of Cairns wrote to the *Australian*, 'Next thing you know the sheilas will be taking charge of the barbecue' ('Letters' 2010g, 15). The Liberal Party and conservative commentators forecast more serious consequences: Bolt (2010a, 32) argued the public euphoria surrounding Labor's previously successful 'Kevin 07' campaign was 'happening all over again, but even worse this time with Julia Gillard.' He continued:

Just add the stupidity of Ms Gillard's noisiest fans and - bingo - our next Prime Minister need only dash to the polls in August to win an election without having to change a single one of Kevin Rudd's catastrophic policies (Bolt 2010a, 32).

When Gillard first took leadership some commentators were concerned with the ongoing comfort of masculinity. How Abbott and other male members of the opposition would fare against a female prime minister was a widely discussed topic. Trinca (2010, 5) speculated, ‘Labor knows there’s an upside in a female leader, not the least being that it will be difficult for the men of the opposition to take her on without appearing to be bullying her’. The comment recalls anti-suffragists’ fears for the emasculated husbands of 1902 who would be unable to command their wives’ votes. In 2010, some commentators anticipated the emasculation of powerful men who feared being seen by the electorate as bullying a woman leader in the confrontational world of politics.

After the campaign, as Summers (2012a) and Crooks (2012) revealed, the internet became host to an increasing amount of deliberately offensive and sexist material about Gillard, posted, viewed and shared by innumerable contributors. As the focus of this paper is the two months leading up to the 2010 federal election I will not dwell on that material here: it would be remiss, however, not to mention that the theme of women’s behaviour being socially destructive gained greater potency after the election. In mid-2012 prominent broadcaster Alan Jones said women leaders—Gillard, together with Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore and Former Victorian Chief of Police Christine Nixon—were ‘destroying the joint’ (see Caro 2012, 5). The comment incited a public backlash, including a social media campaign against Jones and his

commercial sponsors. Despite his open and unabashed denigration of women leaders, Jones remained an immensely popular talk show host. Gillard's 2012 'misogyny speech', which gained worldwide renown, drew attention to the continuing disrespect she faced as Australia's first female prime minister, but also provided a reference point for women and men who desire a more level playing field in Australian politics ('Motions', 2012).

7.4 Discussion

This chapter has examined two events in Australian history that were each characterised by an element of gender anxiety: one of the earliest debates on women's suffrage to take place in the newly formed federal parliament, and the first federal election campaign to be contested with a woman incumbent as prime minister. The aim of this analysis was to show the way negative gender stereotypes are used in public discourses at times of heightened gender anxieties. This use, I suggest, is to reassert traditional gender norms, such as the association of women with the private sphere, and to attempt to discipline women's behaviour.

This analysis has addressed my fourth research question, by suggesting that the 2010 gender stereotypes do indeed have historical foundations. The Second Reading of the Commonwealth Franchise Bill represented a distillation of the

long-running suffrage debates, and my analysis of Hansard records drew out stereotypical attitudes towards women as (potential) voters. Anti-suffragists were not a majority in the 1902 parliament, but in expressing concerns about women's suffrage they claimed to be faithfully representing their electorates. Among arguments against suffrage, many related directly to women's accepted roles: women were destined to be mothers and wives, and therefore lacked the knowledge and interest to effectively participate in politics. Women would be out of place in the political realm, and easily directed in their vote by male relatives, or in cases of an unhappy marriage would undermine their husbands by voting opposite to his wishes. Women were viewed by anti-suffragists as irrational, and therefore likely to cast a vote on the basis of a candidate's physical characteristics, rather than according to (accepted male) rational considerations. Others argued that political involvement would degrade women, 'vulgarise' or 'masculinise' them. Allowing women to leave the domestic sphere would threaten the accepted gender order, particularly the comfort afforded men by women's presence in the home. Underpinning all these stereotypical assumptions about women was the androcentric worldview I outlined in Chapter 1 based on de Beauvoir's (2009) theory that women could only be adherents to, or deviants from, accepted male norms.

I suggest there is a correspondence between parliamentary debate in 1902 and the press reports of 2010, as both can be seen as (a) 'natural language use' attempting to persuade an audience of a particular gendered argument, while at

the same time (b) having a reflective element, in that both parliamentarians and the press could claim to be representing popular public sentiment.

I also analysed media reports concerning Gillard and women voters published in the period leading up to the 2010 federal election. I found that, although negative perceptions of women did not dominate the campaign discourse, the media devoted disproportionate attention to women, and reached some inaccurate conclusions about women's voting behaviour. The political press queried how women, but not men, would respond to Gillard, revealing an androcentric bias. Motherhood remained a salient topic in 2010, with some commentators raising concerns about Gillard's childless status. Inaccurately portrayed in the press as a monolithic group, women were expected to be influenced by the novelty of a woman prime minister, and presumed to be voting *en masse* for the ALP. On this basis, doubts were raised about women's political aptitudes: women were viewed as either deviating from male political norms by voting on the basis of gender (and therefore assumed to be incompetent) or adhering to the norm by voting on the 'proper' basis of policy. Gillard was masculinised in some commentary, while others suggested her leadership would emasculate male members of the opposition who were afraid of appearing 'bullies'. The threat of women overturning the gender order thus appears to have unleashed similar fears in 2010 as it did in 1902.

The similarities I have identified between these two periods suggest that some negative stereotypes about women in politics have traversed from colonial

Australia into the present day. Indeed, some negative perceptions of women have barely shifted since 1902: they may only be evident in the views of a minority of people, but continue to find expression in mainstream political discourses. While these gender stereotypes persist in the public domain, the negative attitudes towards women, and discrimination and prejudice they enable, will continue.

The longevity of the stereotypes discussed in this thesis demonstrate a need to continue to improve women's descriptive representation. Stereotypes that cast doubt over women's political aptitudes may become increasingly difficult to maintain in the face of national governments comprised of 50 per cent women. Yet, as comments about 'binders full of women' (Keller 2012) in the US and 'handbag hit-squads' (Jackson 2012) in Australia suggest, while anti-discrimination legislation has been crucial, attitude change is slow. The task remains for politicians, policy makers and public commentators to reduce the use of gender stereotypes in political discourses, or be held to account if they do not.

The discursive 'rhyme' identified in this chapter between attitudes towards women voters in 1902 and again in 2010 adds a rich historical layer to the analysis presented in this thesis. It facilitates a long-range perspective which highlights the power and longevity of gender stereotypes in politics. One discursive arena where common stereotypes are often challenged, and sometimes laid to rest, is academia. Thus, in the next chapter I expand the focus of this thesis to include an examination of how political

science scholarship has contributed to discourses about women and gendered voting in 2010.

Chapter 8

‘UNNAMED AND UNEXAMINED’: FRAMING THE GENDER GAP IN AUSTRALIA’S 2010 FEDERAL ELECTION

The political discourses of 2010 discussed so far in this study subjected women voters to the gaze of what seemed an androcentric press. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, some journalists and political commentators (still overwhelmingly male professions) foretold how women would vote. The gaze-like quality of this discourse is evident in the fact that men and their voting behaviour were, comparatively, unobserved, uninterrogated and under-analysed. In this chapter I address the ways men’s voting behaviour was overlooked or obfuscated in both the mainstream media, and two academic analyses that emerged in the wake of the election. I argue that, like some media reports concerning the election campaign, some academic analyses of the 2010 federal election were disproportionately focused on women’s voting behaviour.

I examine two early academic articles on gender and the 2010 federal election, and then suggest a counter-analysis that similarly draws on Australian Election Study (AES) data, but includes a consideration of how the political behaviour of men as well as women contributes to a gender gap. Thus, while the methods employed in this chapter continue to align with CDA principles, the chapter expands the political discourse under examination by introducing academic texts. While not ‘popular’ discourse as the press

and online sources are, academic sources certainly play a role in shaping our understanding of society and the positioning of men and women within it. Indeed there may be some connection between the two, in light of Adcock's (2010, 138) contention that the media act 'not only as core intermediary communicators between government and governed and as a principal space in which citizens engage in politics, but also as integral participants in the *very shaping and interpreting* of the political process' (emphasis added). This chapter's analysis therefore compliments the layers of discourse analysis presented in earlier chapters.

The chapter adds an extra dimension to the answer to my first research question by contributing to the understanding of political discourses – of which political science studies are an undeniable aspect. It also, however, is directed at my final research question: what are the implications of these political stereotypes for women, and broader Australian society? By suggesting that there is some interaction between press reporting and the use of stereotypes, and political science research, this chapter posits important discursive effects that need to be overcome in both research and reporting on gendered voting.

8.1 The framing of gender in political science research

Political psychologists have identified socio-economic status and 'race' as important social identities influencing electoral behaviour: according to Kaufmann and Petrocik (1999, 884) 'after these two factors only religion and

religiosity rival the ability of gender to predict party preference and voting'. Election-specific issues, such as immigration and taxation, and factors such as party identification hold significant weight with political scientists seeking to explain voting patterns. Quantitative research on Australian and other Westminster nations' voting patterns have determined gender effects to be insignificant (Leithner 1997; Goot and Watson 2007, 261; Singh 2009, 424; Goodyear-Grant and Croskill 2011). Yet the leadership of Julia Gillard, as the first woman to contest a federal election in Australia, stimulated new scholarly interest in gendered voting effects.

It should be noted that the use of 'gender' in political science analyses to describe categories of male and female voters is often uncritical and simplistic. Gender theorists such as Judith Butler (1999) have identified gender as a process of 'doing' rather than 'being'. Consequently, 'there is as much variation in the experience and expression of gender as there are individuals in the world' (Gooch and Lenton 2010, 135). Voters, then, are men and women, and also variations between which occur naturally (or otherwise) in the human species, as well as men who identify as female and women who identify as male. Ideally, studies analysing gender should acknowledge this complexity. In the field of political science, however, the term is generally accorded its most basic meaning, as a distinction between men and women. Yet even this basic view of gender is sometimes lost when attention to men's and women's voting behaviour is not equally apparent. Sawyer (2004, 553) has previously noted the existence of gender 'oversights' in political science, and suggested such problems occur

when ‘a male-dominated discipline investigates a male-dominated political system’. More recently, Crawford and Pini (2010, 607) have identified the ‘propensity of scholars of “gender and politics” to focus their work on “women and politics”, leaving unnamed and unexamined men and masculinities’. Further, Elisabeth Gidengil (2007) pointed to numerous problems with contemporary approaches to the voting gender gap, among them being the tendency to view such gaps as resulting from women’s behaviour, and the risk that this will reinforce gender stereotypes. She suggests moving beyond the categorisation of voters into simple blocs of ‘men’ and ‘women’, to analyses that are sensitive to the ways gender intersects with other identities such as class and minority group status. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis as a feminist CDA project to analyse the influence of social class or ethnicity on the political discourses of 2010 (although this would be valuable research), this chapter builds on Gidengil’s (2007) observations of the pitfalls of quantitative analyses of gender gaps by examining the framing of studies of the 2010 federal election.

The power of framing to shape attitudes and behaviour has been explored across a number of research domains including political science, psychology and communication studies (Borah 2011; Chong and Druckman 2007; Entman 1993). Building on Goffman’s (1974) foundation, which established frames or schemata as ways of organising and understanding everyday life, Entman (1993, 52) explained that framing: ‘is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient... in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment

recommendation for the item described'. Part of this selection process necessarily includes the omission of detail(s), and the 'exclusion of interpretations by frames is as significant to outcomes as inclusion' (Entman 1993, 54). The process of framing, importantly, has social effects that become apparent when a frame's 'emphasis on a subset of potentially relevant considerations causes individuals to focus on these considerations when constructing their opinions' (Druckman 2001, 1042). Thus, framing theory has been widely employed in research on media biases, cultural shifts and the power of political elites to shape public opinion (Chong and Druckman 2007, 108-09). Borah (2011, 248) for example, used framing to explain 'how journalists organize enormous amounts of information and package them effectively for their audiences'.

As a site of knowledge production, dealing with vast quantities of information and intended audiences, academic research may also be analysed in terms of the frames it employs. In particular, research domains that include gender based studies would usefully be guided by an awareness of the frames that historically, and currently, dominate the field. In the light of Bacchi's (1999, 10) contention that 'the language, concepts and categories employed to frame an issue affect what is seen and how this is described', the framing of gender gap research, for example, in terms of the social and political behaviour of women may in turn shape what is sought in statistical data and how it is used. Thus, examining the 'competing constructions' of 'problems', as Bacchi (1999; 2007) suggested, is essential to any understanding of the voting gender gap. Framing theory then is

instructive for a CDA project, as it provides a basis upon which to question the way discourses are constructed, thereby helping to reveal the discursive power of some ideas over others.

8.2 Gender in Post-Election Analyses

As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, gender was significant in press coverage of the 2010 election. In discussions about gendered voting, what men would do or how they would vote, however, was largely absent. Chapter 3 examined the themes that emerged from press reports, social media and other mainstream sources, and found that while there was some initial press interest in how opposing a woman leader would affect Abbott's 'action man' persona, there was little concomitant speculation on how men were responding to a woman prime minister. This reduced visibility of men as voters in the political discourses of 2010 exaggerated the prominence of women's attitudes during the election campaign and was then used by some sections of the press to portray women as superficial or incompetent political actors.

The press's fascination with women's behaviour, however, all but disappeared after the election. A search of press reports for the month following the election reveals that newspaper articles including the search terms 'women or gender' and 'election or voting' were limited to a very small number that argued gender had been *irrelevant* to the election. Journalist Geoff Kitney (2010), for example,

argued that the advent of Australia's 'first ever female prime minister... never carried real electoral weight. Voters quickly moved on from the issue of gender to issues of leadership, authority and credibility'. Although news polls continued to disaggregate voter's survey responses according to gender, there was no discernible post-election media interest in whether women did actually vote as the stereotype had predicted. After the election, when the strategic value of gender to the press (in its constant need to woo readers) and the opposition and its supporters (in its attempt to delegitimise gender as a reason to vote for Gillard) was considerably reduced, discussions about women voters vanished from political press reports and mainstream discourses.

By contrast, academic interest in gender and politics following the election was noteworthy as it included studies by some scholars not usually engaged in gender research. This interest might be explained by the opportunity presented by the historic first of Gillard's leadership. Yet some of the omissions in these articles echo the gender bias identified in the media, suggesting similarities in the framing, concerns and presumptions made by some journalists and analysts.

At least three academic articles have addressed the role of gender in the 2010 election. Sawyer's (2012) examination of the way gender was both utilised and neglected in the political campaign is her latest in a series of post-election analyses (2002a, 2005, 2008), drawing on political reporting, polling and policies. The two other studies are quantitative analyses based on statistics from the AES. In the first, Bruce Tranter (2011) argues that women's high regard for

Gillard was a key advantage for the Australian Labor Party (ALP). The other article, by David Denemark, Ian Ward and Clive Bean (2011), draws on data from 2007 and 2010 to discuss gendered leader effects.⁸

The conception of gender used in both these studies was unproblematised: there was little recognition that women are not a monolithic group, or that there was not one ‘women’s response’ to Gillard, but many. This is in contrast to the work of theorists such as Huddy, Cassese and Lizotte (2008, 164) who explain that ‘race, religion, and economics form powerful sources of cleavage among women (and men) that vastly outweigh women’s commonality’ (see also Lovenduski 1998, 335). Although welcoming interest in the influence of gender on political behaviour, I suggest that the particular focus in these papers on women’s political behaviour produced a concomitant obfuscating of men’s voting behaviour. In this way, while the articles do not directly rely on the negative gender stereotypes discussed throughout this thesis, I hypothesise that their framing enables the perpetuation of those stereotypes. As the aim of this chapter is to examine the gender framing of post-election academic analyses, these two articles, rather than Sawyer’s feminist analysis, are the focus of the balance of this chapter.

I turn first to Tranter’s paper, to examine three contentions in detail. First, with reference to past and present political leaders, Tranter (2011, 713) states:

⁸ This 2011 Conference Paper was published under the same title in the *Australian Journal of Political Science* in 2012. The journal publication was markedly different from the Conference Paper, having had text, data tables and conclusions altered or removed entirely. For this reason, my critique in this chapter remains focused on the 2011 Conference Paper; however, details of the later paper are included in my reference list as Denemark, Ward and Bean (2012).

Women were more likely than men to positively evaluate all female party leaders with the exception of Pauline Hanson. Women evaluated Australian Democrat leaders – Janine Haines, Cheryl Kernot, Natasha Stott-Despoja and Meg Lees – significantly higher than men did, and rated Prime Minister Gillard more positively not only at the 2010 election, but also when she was deputy prime minister in 2007.

What this description omits, however, is that women rated male and female leaders in general higher than men. It therefore exaggerates the affinity between women and female leaders by excluding data on male leaders. A contrasting view is provided by Bean and McAllister (2012, 347), who reveal that '[Warren] Truss, [Bob] Brown, Wayne Swan and [Kevin] Rudd all had higher scores among women than among men. As a result, at least in the election of 2010, women voters emerged as having a considerably more positive view of politicians overall than men'. Thus, the assumptions underlying Tranter's (2011, 713) suggestion that female affinity explains why 'women are certainly more likely than men to evaluate female leaders positively' should be interrogated. A broader view, for example, might ask why this gap is attributed to women's more positive assessments rather than to men's less positive views.

Tranter (2011, 715) goes on to note that 'women were eight points more likely than men to vote for the ALP'. Bean and McAllister (2012, 344) note the same statistic, but also provide data on men. They suggest that a woman's leadership:

might make a difference to how women vote, with 8 per cent more women giving their first-preference vote in the House of Representatives to the Labor Party than men, *and 9 per cent more men voting Liberal-Nationals than women*’ (emphasis added).

Given that 9 per cent more men than women voted for the Coalition, Tranter’s focus on the 8 per cent lead in women’s votes for Labor is a strong indication of the limited frame he has constructed to explain these figures; one which, echoing media bias, shows little interest in men’s behaviour. Further complicating this example, Bean and McAllister (2012, 347) reveal that, on a ten-point leader evaluation scale (where zero represents strong dislike, five is neutral and ten is strong like), men rated both Gillard and Abbott equally (4.5 points). One question this raises is that, if men evaluated Gillard and Abbott evenly, why was there a 9 per cent difference in the distribution of men’s votes between Labor and the Liberal party? That this question was not addressed in the academic articles I discuss here suggests the authors assume men vote according to issues other than their personal reaction to the leaders, whereas women do not.

From the perspective of framing theory, overlooking this question is indicative of the androcentric framework employed in that study, as the author remains focused on how women’s behaviour deviates from the male standard. Accordingly we can see a continuation of the classic ‘othering’ of women. It should be noted, however, that in keeping with much of the previous literature on gender gap studies in Australia, when more sophisticated modelling factors in additional variables, little gender effect is evident (Goot and Watson 2007, 261).

At the end of his article, Tranter (2011, 716) does acknowledge that ‘the novelty of a female leader appears to have attracted many women to the ALP, although at the same time it may have turned away some men’. Hypothesising that men’s greater disapproval of the circumstances of Rudd’s removal could have turned them away from Labor,⁹ he refers to (but does not cite) AES data to conclude that ‘this factor did not remove the gender differential in voting behaviour. It would seem unlikely then that the 2010 gender gap is due to men’s discriminatory attitudes toward a female leader’ (Tranter 2011, 716). Bean and McAllister (2012, 352), on the other hand, conclude that ‘ironically, each of the party leaders conferred a benefit... on the rival party. In Gillard’s case, it was very small (about 0.2 per cent), while for Abbott it was more than 1 per cent, reflecting his substantially greater unpopularity’. This offers, at the least, a strong alternative interpretation to Tranter’s conclusion that the most likely explanation for the 2010 gender gap was that Gillard’s leadership ‘attracted many women to the ALP’. By overlooking data relating to men’s attitudes, Tranter appears to demonstrate a similar androcentric bias as that discussed in the previous section. More importantly, this androcentrism appears to have led to the exclusion of potentially relevant explanatory factors for understanding the election result.

Turning to the second academic article under discussion, Denemark and colleagues (2011, 8, 20-21) consider voter evaluations of the party leaders in

⁹ Although Denemark, Ward and Bean (2011, 9) found that women were significantly more likely than men to disapprove of the way Labor handled the party’s leadership change.

both the 2007 and 2010 elections and reach two conclusions. First, there was ‘no gender-based distinctiveness’ on leader evaluations in the 2007 contest between Howard (women 5.13, men 5.14) and Rudd (women 6.35, men 6.28). Second, there was a ‘significant evaluative gender gap’ in 2010 between Abbott (women 4.47, men 4.62) and Gillard (women 5.25, men 4.72). The conclusion reported by Denemark, Ward and Bean (2011, 8) is that ‘women in 2010 consistently saw Julia Gillard in a favourable light’. Looking at the latter set of numbers, however, there is nothing to indicate that the difference from 2007 was caused by women’s behaviour; it could be questioned whether the higher, or the lower, statistic represents the change from 2007. Certainly men’s evaluations of Gillard compared to Rudd fell by a far greater amount than they did among women. The shift from 2007 to 2010 reveals that the mean evaluations for the Liberal leader fell for men by 0.52 and for women by 0.66; and mean evaluations of the Labor leader fell for women by 1.1 and for men by 1.56. Thus, with a different frame, the greatest evaluative change is attributable to men. Yet, again, this was not identified in the article because, I suggest, the authors were interested in how women, rather than ‘gendered people’, responded to Gillard. Accordingly, it can again be seen that the androcentric framework employed – even if unconsciously – can have a significant impact on the knowledge that is constructed and then enters public discourses.

I will return to some further data provided in Denemark, Ward and Bean’s paper in the next section where, in light of the above critique, I set out some alternative ways of approaching the 2010 gender gap. I draw on AES data to consider

voting behaviour in prior elections to set a baseline for the comparison with 2010, and examine the behaviour of both women and men.

8.3 Another View of the Gender Gap

Commencing this segment of my research with an alternative frame to the studies just discussed, I am able to provide some alternative interpretations of the 2010 election and the impact gender may have had in its outcome. AES data on the vote breakdown reveals that 37.6 per cent of men and 42.8 per cent of women voted Labor; and 42.0 per cent of men and 37.8 per cent of women voted for the Liberal Party.¹⁰ The difference between these figures and those cited by Bean and McAllister (2011) and Tranter (2011) may be accounted for by my method of tabulating raw data obtained directly from the AES, rather than data that has been weighted (see Bean and McAllister 2011, p. 341). There is nonetheless, a similar approximate symmetry to the figures I obtain, as women's vote for Labor was greater than men's by 5.2 percentage points, and men's vote for the Liberal Party was greater than women's by 4.2 percentage points. Without some kind of benchmark to interpret these statistics, however, little more can be concluded. That is, these data would only be remarkable if either women or men voted considerably differently to past trends or other expectations. One of the most significant indicators of vote choice, as argued by

¹⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, data in this section were sourced from the Australian Election Study 2010 (McAllister et al. 2011). Questions surrounding the reliability of AES data, as a post-election survey that relies on voters' recall, have been discussed by Goot and Watson (2007, 254).

Senior and van Onselen (2008), is party identification. Next, therefore, I consider party identification statistics for 2010.

Data relating to the two major parties reveal that 38.6 per cent of men and 40.0 per cent of women identified with Labor, and 37.2 per cent of men and 37.8 percent of women identified with the Liberal Party. When comparing these statistics with respondents' reports of how they had voted in 2010, some instructive issues arise. Figure 8.1 illustrates differences in men and women's reported party identification and vote cast for the Liberal Party in 2010.

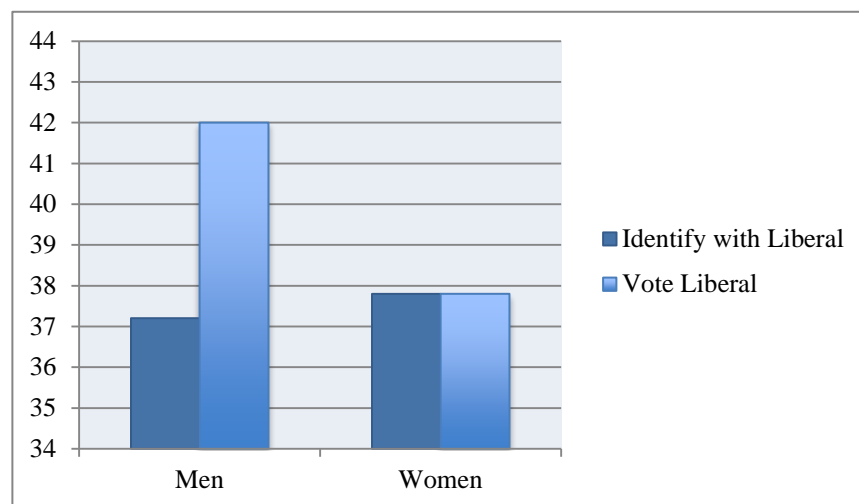


Figure 8.1: Proportion of men and women who identified with and voted Liberal.

From Figure 8.1 it is seen that the proportion of women who identified with the Liberal Party in 2010 was exactly reflected in the proportion of women who reported voting Liberal. The proportion of men identifying with the Liberal Party was slightly lower than the proportion of women; but the proportion of men who said they had voted for the Liberal Party was much greater than this.

Of the 2010 Liberal vote among men, then, 4.8 percentage points came from men who did not identify as Liberal voters.

The proportion of men and women who identified with, compared to voting for, Labor is illustrated in Figure 8.2.

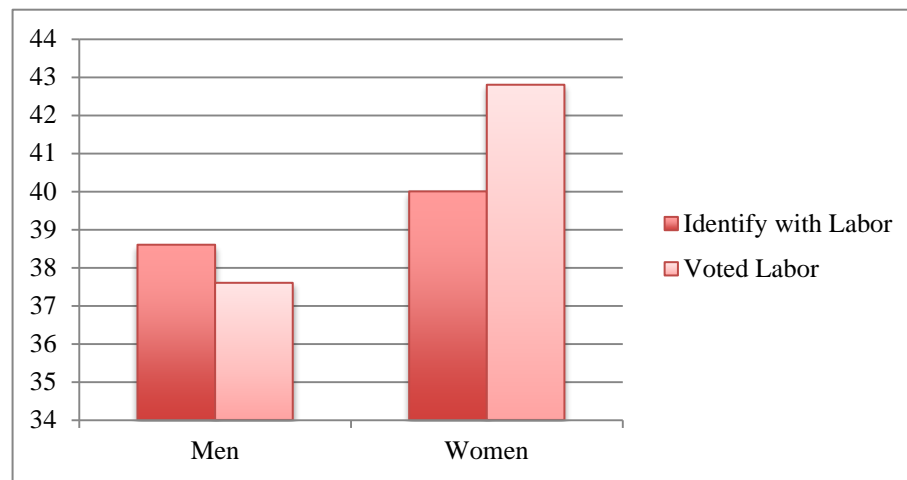


Figure 8.2: Proportion of men and women who identified and voted for Labor.

Figure 8.2 shows that of the proportion of women who recalled voting Labor in 2010, 2.8 percentage points did not identify with the ALP - that is 2.0 percentage points less than the number of men who appear to have drifted to the Liberal Party. By itself, this smaller gap for women may cast doubt over the focus on women's behaviour as the predominant influence on the election outcome. There is another surprise, however, and it comes from male Labor supporters. While 38.6 per cent of men reported that they identified with Labor, in terms of reported actual vote this number *fell* by 1.0 per cent. The biggest upsets, then, in terms of vote decision as predicted by party identification were by men: 1.0 per cent of men who identified with Labor chose *not* to vote for that party; and 4.8

per cent of men who did not identify with the Liberal Party cast a vote in its favour. It follows from this that both men and women exhibited some degree of gendered voting behaviour, with men's swings, at least in terms of party identification, being greater than women's.

Another approach is to consider how 2010 voters deviated from what men and women have done historically. The 2010 AES data shows its respondents' recall of the votes they cast in 2007 as follows: 46.4 per cent of men and 47.2 per cent of women voted for Labor; and 40.4 per cent of men and 40.6 per cent of women voted for the Liberal Party. These statistics are represented in Figures 8.3 and 8.4 respectively.

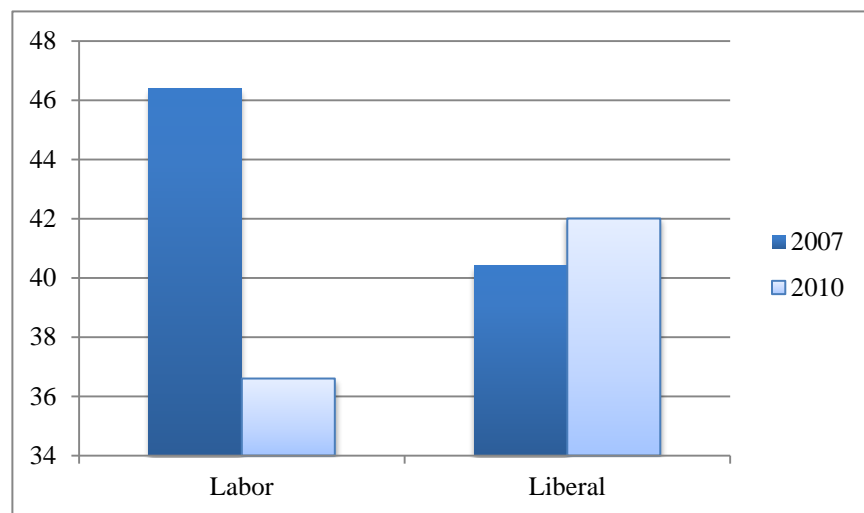


Figure 8.3: Changes to men's votes for Labor and Liberal parties, 2007 to 2010.

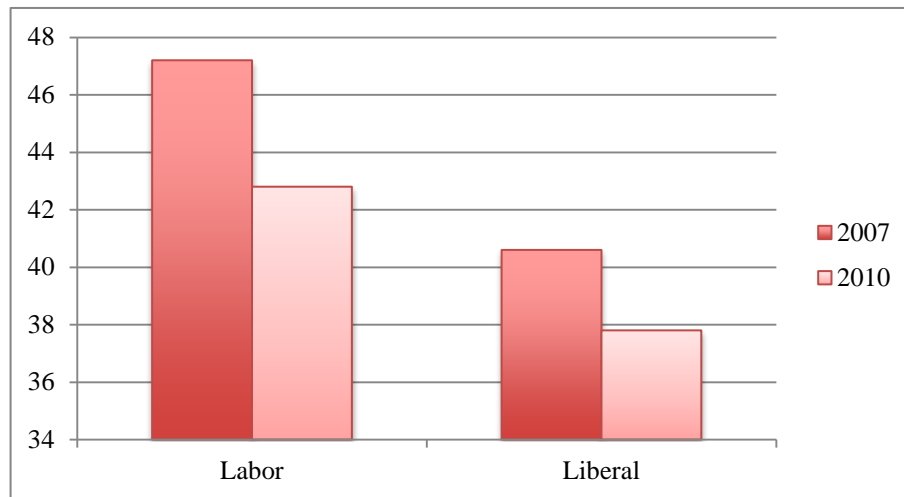


Figure 8.4: Changes to women's votes for Labor and Liberal parties, 2007 to 2010.

Again, the data reveal larger movements between 2007 and 2010 among men (Figure 8.3): the male vote for the Liberal Party increased by 1.6 percentage points; while the male Labor vote decreased by 8.8 percentage points. The variation in women's voting (Figure 8.4) shifted less dramatically: the number of women who voted for the Liberal Party decreased by 2.8 percentage points, while women's vote for Labor declined by 4.4 percentage points. This view of voter behaviour strongly suggests that any gender gap research that overlooks men's voting behaviour is providing only half an analysis. Contrary to media representations then, this interpretation on the basis of AES data indicates that if anything, women may have been a stabilising force on the national results.

Denemark, Ward and Bean suggest that Gillard had a significant impact on women's attitudes and behaviour during the election. They conclude that Gillard 'secured Labor more votes than she lost it' by pointing to gender differences in voters' perceptions of party leaders (Denemark, Ward and Bean 2011, 11). Women rated Gillard more positively than they rated Abbott, and both leaders

more positively than men rated either leader. On the 0-10 scale, 41.1 per cent of men and 50.3 per cent of women rated Gillard at 5 or better. While these numbers suggest Gillard had an electoral advantage, the question asked voters only what they felt about the leaders. Recalling that only 42.8 per cent of women said they voted for the ALP in 2010, 'liking' Gillard does not seem an especially reliable indicator of women's vote decisions. Thus, while interesting for what it reflects of the public mood, analysis based on positive regard for Gillard does not recognise women's (or men's) ability to hold a leader in high regard but vote for an alternative party.

Of further note is the fact that a greater proportion of men admitted to disliking Gillard (42.4 per cent) than to liking her (41.1 per cent), and fewer still said they voted Labor (37.6 per cent). If we are to measure the way gender influenced the outcome of the 2010 election, this is certainly an attitude that cannot be overlooked – and yet the significant papers to have offered analysis of this topic make few references to men's attitudes. By way of comparison, therefore, I look at the same data relating to Abbott: more women (48.7 per cent) *and* more men (44.9 per cent) disliked Abbott than liked him (35.6 per cent and 39.5 per cent respectively). However, while only 39.5 per cent of men reported liking Abbott, a greater number of men, 42 per cent, reported voting for the Liberal party. Given that the proportion of women who voted Labor was only 0.8 per cent higher than this (42.8 per cent), Denemark, Ward and Bean's (2011, 11) claim that 'in the razor-edged 2010 election, women's votes may well have made the difference for Labor' seems a little skewed. The key 'difference for Labor'

could, rather, be attributed to the negative swing in men's voting behaviour that this paper has observed in the three areas of party identification, leader evaluation and voting history.

8.4 Discussion

In Chapter 3 I established that negative gender stereotypes were present in the mainstream political discourses of mid-2010, when Gillard first came to office. In Chapters 4, 5 and 6 I examined some women's responses to those stereotypes, and found that many women challenged these stereotypes, or may even have found them threatening. This chapter has expanded this picture in two ways. First, it has added another layer to the discourse analysis presented thus far. The addition of academic studies to my analysis enriches this study as it demonstrates the way various discursive fields interact, and via this interaction function to preserve and perpetuate dominant knowledge and stereotypes. Clearly, although journalists and academics are incommensurable on a number of levels, their roles as influenced by and influencing discourses are similar. Thus, from a CDA perspective that aims to interrogate the ways power and the status quo are perpetuated through discourse, the examination of academic studies are an illuminative addition to my analysis.

Second, this chapter has indicated that more than 60 years after writing *The Second Sex* (2009), de Beauvoir's theorisation of women as positioned as Other

remains alarmingly relevant. Whether the academic studies discussed in this chapter were influenced by the gender stereotypes used in some segments of the press in 2010 is unclear, but the frameworks these academics used to analyse electoral data does point to this possibility.

As noted by Sapiro (2003, 603 original emphasis) ‘in all known societies, *gender has been the basis not just of differentiation but of inequality*, especially in politics, largely because of women’s historical exclusion’. This exclusion of women from both politics as a public domain and political science as a discipline is slowly breaking down, as demonstrated by the appearance of new research at the intersection of politics and gender. This is not necessarily cause for complacency, however. In this chapter I have identified some of the difficulties that persist in political science research, specifically in relation to how some research on the voting gender gap frames men as a standard from which women deviate and, in the process, obscures any political impact men’s behaviour may have from scholarly observation and analysis.

This lack of attention to male voter behaviour underlines a potential tension in gender and political research: that is, a tension between the need to recognise and include women in political science research, and the risk of engaging in blinkered studies that reinforce the perception of men as the norm and women as the aberration. It could be argued, on the one hand, that these one-eyed approaches occur due to an increasing recognition of the role women play in the political process and a concomitant desire to understand this role. On the other

hand, we might return to the media assertions about women's presumed voting behaviour and question whether the particular form that much of the focus on women in the 2010 election took is an example of the 'othering' of women. Perhaps, too, there is an element of defensiveness, or at least a lack of reflexivity on the part of a male-dominated discipline when engaging in gender research. My conclusions here reiterate the significance of Bacchi's (2007, 14) call to 'scrutinize reflexively one's own representation of the "problem"', for journalists and policy-makers, and also for researchers.

Accordingly it is possible for this chapter to conclude that one of the implications for women and broader society – a topic raised by my fifth research question – is the void in gender gap research in Australia, which needs to be filled with studies that are guided by the complexity of gender rather than conforming to the 'female behaviour' approach. Through the construction of an expanded frame for exploring the 2010 gender gap, I have found that men do display relevant voting behaviour. In fact, the swing of men's votes away from Labor and to the Liberal Party account for at least as much, if not more, of the gender gap than women's much-discussed support for Gillard. Therefore, future research should continue to question representations of the gender gap, and address men's gendered voting behaviour.

The examination of early post-election scholarship on gendered voting in this chapter completes (as much as 'completion' is possible) the major discursive fields to be analysed in this thesis. Overall, a 'big picture' of the 2010 discourses has been gained

by analysing mainstream discourses, represented by press reporting; counter-discourses, represented by women's online comments made on news discussion boards; and now an additional layer of discourse represented by scholarly examinations of gendered voting. Depth to this discourse analysis was also provided by my examination of a historical period in which similar stereotypes and anxieties about female voters were prevalent. In the next, final chapter of this thesis, I turn my attention to the way Australian political discourses intersect with, and are influenced by parallel discourses.

Chapter 9

‘POLITICS AS WAR’:

WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP INTO THE FUTURE¹¹

In this final chapter, I explore a discourse parallel to the 2010 political discourses that have been the subject of this thesis. One of the themes woven throughout this study is the way doubts arose about women’s political competency as a result of the stereotype that women would vote for Gillard ‘just because she’s a woman.’ In Chapter 7 I identified an earlier historical period when similar, or ‘rhyming’ discourses and stereotypes emerged, and when doubts were raised by some segments of Australian society about women’s ability to participate fully and equally with men in the political arena.

These anxieties about women’s ability to participate to the same standard as men have long pervaded politics; but they have also pervaded the way Australians discuss women’s participation in a number of areas. Female comedians, female mathematicians, female scientists and female generals have all seemed impossibilities at different points in world history. In this chapter I focus on one area where women’s participation

¹¹ While prepared during the course of my research for this thesis, an earlier version of this chapter has previously been published. Publication details are listed in the reference list as Gooch (2012).

remains contentious: military service. This chapter addresses my fifth research question concerning the implications of negative stereotypes for women and broader society and is particularly concerned with the implications for women of the continuing relationship between politics and war in view of the stereotype that women are not, or should not be violent. It does this by looking at how members of the public, making online comments, draw on stereotypes to resist policy changes that benefit women.

The research in this chapter adds to the work of previous chapters in that it continues to draw on CDA principles to examine gendered political discourses. Specifically, my focus in this chapter concerns the power of a particular form of ‘natural language use’ – war metaphor – to shape or influence some public attitudes. This chapter is also consistent with those prior, as it analyses online comments as a source of data, to reflect some elements of broad public sentiment, rather than as empirical evidence. It should also be noted that the relationship between women and war is constructed differently in different parts of the world. In this chapter, I remain focused on broadly Western and specifically Australian discourses and attitudes.

The research in this chapter is conducted in three parts. First, I establish a relationship between politics, language and masculinity, and this is discussed in section 9.1. Next, as it is my aim to analyse the use of war metaphor in political discourses, in section 9.2 I take the intermediary step of examining Australians’ attitudes to war. I do this, simply, because in order to understand the power of war metaphor, it is necessary to understand ideas about war. Obviously this is too large a task for one chapter, so I have narrowed the scope of this examination and remain focused on the question of gender. That is, I

ask how does the public perceive women in combat? A compelling case study through which to explore this question emerges from the Gillard government's announcement in September 2011 of the removal, within five years, of all gender-based restrictions to employment in the Australian Defence Force (ADF). This marked an important moment in public discourse formation as the announcement sparked widespread discussion in press reports and social media about masculinity, femininity and gender roles. One element of this discourse, online comments posted to news websites at the time of the announcement, is examined in section 9.2. These comments provide a key insight into some of the cultural challenges for women that arise out of gendered stereotypes.

In section 9.3 I provide an outline of how war metaphors feature in Australian political discourses, and examine how negative stereotypes about women in war may be evoked by the use of war metaphor in politics. At that point the chapter returns to the discourses that have been central to this thesis: those emerging at the time of Gillard's controversial leadership takeover in June 2010, and her party's narrow victory at an election in August 2010. This event – and the way it was discussed by the press – provides an opportunity to consider the extent to which war metaphors continue to feature in Australian political discourses. My hypothesis here is that the use of war metaphor in political discourses invites Australians to draw on stereotypical assumptions about women's perceived inabilities in front line combat when interpreting institutional political discourses.

9.1 Politics, war and language

An important narrative in Australia's white history concerns women's struggles for inclusion in traditionally male spheres of public life; struggles that have periodically challenged conservative attitudes towards women and the public/private divide. Describing the social anxiety aroused by the women's suffrage movement at the turn of the twentieth century, for example, Marian Sawer and Marian Simms (1993, 2) identified a 'perennial theme in conservative resistance to equality for women: the damage that will be done to the *moral fabric of the nation*, and in particular the family' (emphasis added). More recently, Katerina Agostino (1998, 61) has argued that the increasing number of women entering the defence force has resulted in men perceiving women 'to be undermining the *very fabric of society*, to be going against 'natural' gender laws which endow each human with an essential sexual and gender identity' (emphasis added). These authors emphasise the fundamental importance of gender to popular understandings of the social order, having tapped public attitudes towards masculinity and femininity that are so deeply entrenched as to appear not only natural, but also defining and immutable. The parallel between public attitudes towards women in war and women in politics is rarely drawn in scholarly research, as at first glance the two domains appear unrelated. This chapter, however, seeks to demonstrate such a relationship. The slow progress of gender equality in the military, and the seeming regularity with which sex scandals occur in the ADF, signal a need not only for institutional change, but an

examination of the broader Australian culture within which this institution is located.

Despite the current popular conception that women have achieved workplace equity, challenges remain for women as leaders that are underwritten by a historic connection between leadership and masculinity (Still 2006, 180-1; Sinclair 2005, 1-2). The increasing number of women in many of the world's parliaments has not seriously challenged the long history of white male leadership, particularly in Commonwealth nations that have inherited the Westminster system of government (Tremblay 2007b, 283-4). Politics is unavoidably infused with gender; even parliamentary architecture, for example, such as the oppositional seating design of the chambers in Westminster-style settings, has been described as 'deliberately designed for debate and to accommodate conflict', and encouraging a 'masculine style of politics' (Macintyre 2008, 4; Sawyer 2000, 369). The tradition for government and opposition to be seated 'two swords and one inch' across from each other is a physical manifestation of the historic association between politics, masculinity and violence that continues to influence the behaviour of today's parliamentarians (Bowden 2011).

Guiding this examination is an understanding that the language used in discourse has a significant impact not merely on the way issues are conceived, but how they are constructed, or shaped (Foucault 1972, 54). Two points on the

conception of discourse utilised should be noted before turning to the analysis. First, discourse is more than just speech or text; as Mary Talbot (2010, 110) has argued, it is a 'site of cultural production'. Thus, while it may appear that ways of speaking about women are reflections of women's circumstances, it is crucial to recognise that as discourse is constructive, so that the way women are discussed has an impact on women's lived experience. CDA conceptions of discourse 'rule in' all discursive statements including those at its periphery; not only the mainstream or dominant voices, but also the counter-discourse and marginalised voices (Hall 1997). This decentring has been a crucial aspect of feminist and postcolonial research (among other fields), enabling historically marginalised voices such as women's to be heard and valued (Speer 2005, 15). Yet some voices remain marginalised: 'everyday' attitudes, for example, are often considered extraneous to politically correct public discourse. In private conversation and social banter the language used to discuss women is often problematic, as suggested in Talbot's (2010, 117) contention that 'what appear to be natural aspects of the everyday lives of women and men have to be exposed as culturally produced and as disadvantageous to women'. Accordingly, the attitudes of 'everyday' Australians, such as those online comments explored below, are vital research subjects that, according to a CDA approach, warrant critical analysis.

The relationship between politics, masculinity and violence is also reflected in the continued use of the 'game frame,' including war and competitive sports metaphors, in political discourses (Trimble and Sampert 2004). The language of

politics and war intertwine so comfortably at least partly because, historically, both have been exclusively male domains. The pervasive use of war metaphors is problematic for women in politics, in the light of Veronika Koller and Elena Semino's (2009, 9) conclusion that such metaphors exert a 'masculinising force' on discourse and its 'related social practices'. Again, the increasing number of women in politics and political journalism does not appear to have mitigated the use of war metaphor, nor altered its gendered character. The Australian media, as Marian Simms (2008, 33) has noted, still tends to rely on 'tired old stereotypes about the gendered nature of leadership'. Consequently, there has not been an adequate cultural shift in the way we talk about, and therefore perceive, contemporary politics. So common has the use of war metaphor become that its influence in non-war discourses is often not recognised; as a result, the impact of war metaphor on public attitudes towards women in leadership has been insufficiently examined (Thorne 2006, 1).

War metaphors are identified in this chapter as vehicles for the expression of gender norms. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) established that metaphors are fundamental cognitive tools that allow humans to make sense of the world. Accordingly, metaphors are 'not primarily a matter of language but of cognition: people make use of some concepts to understand, talk and reason about others' (Ibanez and Hernandez 2011, 162). Thus, the use of metaphor to interpret politics is not an anomaly – but neither is it unproblematic. Deborah Tannen (1999, 8), for example, argued that an overreliance on war metaphors in the United States has created an 'argument culture', which in turn has increased

people's tendency to view society in terms of 'fighting, conflict, and war'. The constricting power of metaphors is revealed in the effects of this process, as it 'limits our imaginations when we consider what we can do about situations we would like to understand or change'. Similarly, Michelle C. Bligh et al. (2012, 562) revealed the divisiveness of war metaphors in their finding that although women and men often agree on political issues, there is a prevalent tendency 'to view the sexes as opposing forces, rather than as cooperative groups'.

Nicholas Howe (1988, 101) has suggested that as war metaphors draw primarily on 'male experiences' their use in politics may be exclusionary towards women. Little research has built on this argument, particularly its implications for women as political citizens: most studies focus on women candidates. Recently, for example, Erika Falk (2013, 2) analysed the application of the political 'gender card' metaphor to Hillary Clinton, and found that 'metaphors subtly express latent cultural values that may not be considered proper to explicitly articulate'. Thus, the use of metaphors as shorthand for 'less palatable' cultural sentiments tends to perpetuate stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes towards marginalised groups, creating difficulties for members of those minority groups who run for political office.

Questions such as the extent to which metaphor use in politics may shape public stereotypes about gender, then, are yet to be answered. Previous research has focused on gender differences in metaphor use; but whether pervasive use of

war metaphors impacts upon men and women differently remains underexamined (Ahrens 2009).

9.2 Women in war

War has been bonded to masculinity for thousands of years; as noted by Hugh Smith (1990, 127), it would seem that ‘war is a universal phenomenon and the male warrior is the universal archetype’. This association has contributed to a large-scale perpetuation of gendered violence against men, who ‘clearly bear the brunt of the violence of war as fighters, as targets of violence, as subjects of systems of interrogation and torture’ (Merry 2009, 156). It has also contributed to a widespread discomfort with the thought of women in war (Smith 1990, 127). The extent to which contemporary social attitudes continue to reflect this discomfort is examined in this section.

Women have always been present in and affected by war despite its perception as a male domain. Historically, women have been war’s prizes and victims; in post-9/11 war, women are upheld as subjects requiring ‘liberation’, and ‘appropriated’ as justification for war (Oliver 2007, 39). The stereotypes of women as agents of peace and healing, while often based in truth, have nonetheless been used to justify women’s exclusion from powerful roles such as tactician, fighter and leader (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002, 75-80). They have established powerful women such as Joan of Arc, Queen Elizabeth I and Margaret Thatcher as anomalies rather than serious challenges to the gender

order. Modern 'tough' women who have emerged in popular culture, such as Lara Croft and Buffy the Vampire Slayer, are socially acceptable precisely because they are fictitious. Sara Buttsworth (2002, 189) has argued 'the construction of feminine heroism necessitates that the individual be "not like other girls"'. Further, an audience's willing suspension of disbelief when confronted with powerful heroines ensures that the violent dominance of these characters does not seriously destabilise the gender status quo.

What does challenge popular social attitudes is the idea of women as perpetrators of violence, even if state-sanctioned or institutionalised. Marita Gronnvoll (2007, 372) has demonstrated, for example, that a fascination with Lynndie England as a gender 'aberration' was prominent in the media coverage of the 2004 Abu Ghraib scandal, while there was a 'gender silence' about the male soldiers involved. Nevertheless, women's global military presence is escalating; while this chapter addresses the Australian context, it should be noted that women are conscripted into the Israeli Defence Force and have unrestricted access to military roles in a number of Western democratic nations including Canada, Denmark and New Zealand. In addition, the blurring of the 'front line' through remote and virtual warfare, and the conflation of war, peacekeeping and reconstruction duties, means that Australian women have for some time already been involved in combat situations (Kennedy-Pipe 2000, 32-3). The broader public, at least in Australia, does not appear fully cognisant of these developments, however, as powerful gender stereotypes continue to

uphold the traditional link between violence and masculinity, perpetuating the belief that women do not belong in war (Summers 2011).

Renewed public discussion of these beliefs was stimulated by the Australian government's announcement in September 2011 that all gender-based restrictions to job opportunities in the ADF would be abolished over five years (Department of Defence 2012). Much of the press commentary on the proposed change was positive, but some public discomfort was evident, particularly in comments posted in response to the announcement by readers of online news articles. To gauge where contemporary public sentiments towards women in war lie, I selected three online news items, which between them elicited 692 reader responses. Two of these news reports were written by men and adopted negative approaches to the proposed changes (Sheridan 2011; Hamilton 2011); the third was a positive approach written by a woman (Shepherd 2011). After removing duplicate and irrelevant (unrelated to the topic of women in war) comments, 579 remained for analysis. These were then divided into posts by contributed by men (commenters claiming to be men or using male names); women (commenters claiming to be women or using female names) and unspecified (those that could not be determined by name or in the text as either men or women). Of course, the veracity of any of these details is not possible to establish, but this proviso is tempered by the power of online anonymity to encourage participation and foster the unrestrained expression of opinion (McKenna and Bargh 2000, 62). Indeed, some scholars have argued that online anonymity has been a significant development, enabling marginalised groups generally to participate in public

dialogue (McKenna and Bargh 2000, 64). It is noteworthy, then, that 36 per cent of the relevant comments fell into the ‘unspecified’ category, while 43 per cent were posted by men and only 21 per cent by women. That half the number of women as men openly admitted their gender when discussing personal opinion online may be explained as women utilising the opportunity for anonymity in greater numbers than men to avoid gender-based scrutiny; however, the data collected for this analysis is inconclusive on this point.

The three categories ‘men’, ‘women’ and ‘unspecified’ were then further separated into ‘positive’ (supporting the announced changes to ADF policy, or expressing a positive attitude towards women); ‘negative’ (objecting to the ADF changes or negative towards women); and ‘neutral’ (on topic, but unable to be identified as for or against the announced change). Combining all gender groups it is revealed that women’s equal access to jobs in combat was supported by approximately 41 per cent of this sample, with 38 per cent disagreeing and 20 per cent uncertain. Breaking this down by gender reveals that the responses of women to all three articles were predominantly supportive, combining to a total of 59 per cent positive. The unspecified comments, too, were primarily positive at 48 per cent across the three articles (again suggesting the possibility of some link between women and gender-anonymous posting).

There was more ambiguity in men’s attitudes with a majority of men supporting the ADF changes in response to one article, but overwhelmingly negative in

response to another. The total positive responses made by men over the three articles aggregated to 28 per cent. Judith Halberstam's (1998, 15) argument that the current gender order is 'sustained by a conservative and protectionist attitude by men in general toward masculinity' appears supported by this sample: the extent of men's negative responses (52 per cent) suggests that the proposed expansion of women's military participation is a threat to some men's conceptions of masculinity. The discussion of specific negative comments, which follows, adds further weight to this interpretation.

The negative responses generally corresponded to three timeworn arguments against women's participation in combat, previously identified by Smith. The first relates to women's physical characteristics: women are not physically as strong as men; they have a lesser spatial and mechanical ability; they fall pregnant, menstruate and have different hygiene requirements (Smith 1990, 126-7). Corresponding objections in my analysis included a comment by 'Sad Sad Reality' that 'the SAS is set at an elite male level and thus far beyond the capabilities of even the fittest most aggressive women. Forget the GI Jane BS. Women just don't have what it takes' (Shepherd 2011). 'George Copley' remarked that 'When men get terrible stomach wounds most can be fixed up with by first class doctors, but women have all their reproductive organs there'; and 'Maria Totto' stated 'I certainly would not like to find myself in a combat trench during my menstrual [sic] cycle' (Sheridan 2011). Smith (1990, 126-7) describes a second argument against women's participation in combat roles as belief in a 'natural' division of labour, based on the identification of women as

nurturers, not ‘killers’. Posts corresponding to this belief included ‘Anne71’, who contended ‘most men have it hard-wired into their psyche to protect the women around them in times of danger. That’s not sexism, that’s pure instinct’ (Shepherd 2011). ‘Creeker’ explained, ‘I was brought up to cherish and defend our women and children not expose them to the horrors of the battlefield’; and ‘James’ argued ‘women generally are viewed as having to expend energy on caring for offspring and bearing a baby for 9 months. So the potential destruction of women in a war is pretty bad because it then becomes harder to reproduce a population’ (Hamilton 2011). These comments reveal that paternalistic beliefs about biology, masculinity and femininity continue to influence the perception that women are less capable than men. Although they seem benign, such ‘protective’ beliefs preclude the consideration of women’s ‘needs, capacities, wishes, and interests’ and therefore have a greater social significance for women than is acknowledged in the public discourse (Cook and Cusack 2010, 18).

A third longstanding objection to women in combat is what Smith (1990, 126-7) identified as a ‘military ethic’: a belief that the presence of women would interfere with male bonding and other processes essential to a frontline operation. Accordingly, ‘Ex Infantry’ stated that ‘placing a few females in sections of an Infantry rifle company will change the psychological dynamics massively and these will be negative on the overall performance of the unit’ (Sheridan 2011). According to ‘Trevor’, ‘the male–female dynamic destroys the chain of command which is essential in combat units’; and ‘Old Digger’

described the brotherly relationships he formed on military duty, being ‘close knit, welded to each other through extended bouts of extreme physical and mental discomfort with the kind of non-sexual love they call mateship, so close we would die for each other, literally ... I can’t honestly see how girls are going to fit in’ (Shepherd 2011). Substantial evidence was found in this sample to add a fourth popular objection to women’s combat service: antifeminist sentiment. According to ‘Tucky’, for example, ‘really, what we’re seeing here is the lesbian feminists screwing things up again’; while ‘Zac48’ suggested that ‘the best choice of female soldier would be those feminazis who have always got their teeth bared and blood running down their jowls. That should frighten the sh*t out of the enemy’ (Shepherd 2011; Hamilton 2011). There were also, as indicated, a variety of positive responses that supported the announced change to ADF policy, such as this comment by ‘Paul’: ‘Would I want my daughter to be a combat soldier? No, but then I wouldn’t really want my son to either. If that was her desire, though, she should have the chance’ (Sheridan 2011). Overall, positive comments were a minority among men. One explanation for this may be that the process of leaving comments tendentially elicits argumentative rather than supportive views. According to Susan C. Herring (2004), when online men are more likely than women to ‘manifest an adversarial orientation towards their interlocutors’. Alternatively, or perhaps additionally, the comments may represent a deep level of discomfort with the idea of women in combat.

Public discussions about the presence of women in war are generally dominated by the professional views of journalists, politicians, social commentators and

ADF spokespeople. One of the more interesting elements of this discourse is that these mainstream voices appear somewhat disconnected from the discussion at an ‘everyday’ level. The counter-discourse is fascinating for what it reveals of the variety of attitudes towards women that exist in contemporary Australia. Rather than dismissing this element of public opinion as an irrelevant fringe, I contend that such a counter-discourse may influence the broader public discussion about women, and therefore affect women’s lives. Thus, it is critical to interrogate the ways attitudes towards women in war may parallel or reinforce attitudes towards women in politics, particularly in light of the discursive connection between politics and war, to which I now turn.

9.3 Women and war in politics

In his posthumously published lectures of 1975–76, Michel Foucault (1997, 15) quipped that ‘politics is the continuation of war by other means’. He was referring to the famous dictum of Karl von Clausewitz (1967 [1831], 57) that war is a continuation of politics by other means; turning it on its head to suggest a more cynical relationship between war and politics. Although Foucault pointed to this relationship only to explain its limitations for the study of power, the idea of ‘politics as war’ continues to have a profound impact on contemporary thought, demonstrated in part by the use by journalists and commentators of the language of war and war metaphor in political discourses.

Examples of the use of war metaphor in Australian political discourse are numerous, and appear limited by neither partisanship nor time. One of the longest running ideological battles between the political left and right, over the legacy of Australia's colonial past and its impact on Indigenous peoples, has been dubbed the 'culture wars' (Johnson 2011, 573). Controversial politicians with reputations for intentionally making statements to 'damage' their opponents have been described in the Australian media as 'bomb throwers', and aggressive politicians called 'attack dogs' (Shanahan 2010a). Following the Liberal Party's defeat at the 2007 federal election Tony Abbott, then Opposition Leader, set out his political ideologies in a book titled *Battlelines* (2009). Within the 'ranks' of Labor, too, political beliefs are linked to war: delegates describe the party mechanism for agenda setting, the National Labor Conference, as a 'battle of ideas' (Emerson 2011). Under Kevin Rudd's leadership (2007–2010), a select few senior cabinet ministers were responsible for making many of the party's decisions; these MPs were dubbed the 'Gang of Four' (a reference to a powerful communist faction known by that name during Mao's Cultural Revolution), and depicted in political cartoons as gun-toting gangsters (Taylor 2009).

As regular contributors to broader political discourses, some journalists and commentators engage in war metaphor to a greater extent than others. One of Australia's senior political reporters, Dennis Shanahan, is renowned for infusing politics with war metaphor. He described ALP politicians in the 2010 campaign as 'depressed about the prospect of further incendiaries going off on the campaign trail like political roadside bombs, planted ahead of time and

detonated by remote control’ (Shanahan 2010b). Even in the space of 140 characters on Twitter, Michelle Grattan (2011), another ‘veteran’ of the press gallery remarked of the former prime minister, ‘Kevin Rudd must be in a fine old mood in Germany. Talking about Afghan war, thinking about the one on the home front.’ To be clear, however, what is under discussion here is not the tendencies of individual journalists to draw on war metaphor to make politics more interesting or accessible for the public (although that does occur). Rather, the examples provided, I suggest, are indicative of a broader culture that sees politics in particularly combative, warlike terms.

The question to be asked, then, is what impact this cultural view of politics as war has on women in politics and political leadership. The process according to which Rudd was deposed by his party and Gillard installed as leader, despite being constitutionally legitimate and politically valid, was commonly described in the press as a ‘coup’, a ‘knifing’ or an ‘execution’ (see for example Thompson 2011; Ferguson and Lewis 2010; Rodgers 2010). Gillard was accused of having ‘blood on her hands’, of being a ‘backstabber’ and was depicted in political cartoons in the garb of an executioner. The application of these violent metaphors to Gillard may suggest their association with masculinity is eroding. Conversely, I contend that the use of these metaphors intensified the public hostility directed at Gillard for her part in Rudd’s replacement. The representation of Gillard’s behaviour as ‘violent’ implied she had transgressed gender norms, and thus heightened the public disapproval of her political actions. Mary Crawford and Barbara Pini (2010, 609) have noted that

stereotypically masculine behaviour is afforded greater legitimacy in politics than stereotypically feminine behaviour: such legitimacy, however, appears to hinge on whether the actor is a man or a woman. As exemplified in Gillard's case, women whose behaviour is perceived, even metaphorically, as violent, face a number of layers of hostility and disapproval that are difficult for women, including the most talented and professional, to overcome.

9.4 Discussion

As a junior politician, Gillard (2000, 238) wrote that the ALP was born in a culture of 'male bonds, male mateship, male leadership and male aggression. A decade later she attained the office of prime minister; yet still, as Anne Summers (2012b) noted, from the moment she 'became leader in June 2010, she has run into the view that "being a prime minister is a man's job"'. This chapter has illustrated some of the cultural reasons this view persists through an examination of comments posted to online news discussion boards, which represent some public attitudes towards women and war, in conjunction with a study of the use of war metaphor in political discourse.

The political significance of public attitudes is demonstrated by the extent to which political parties rely on opinion polls and focus groups. Here, I have explored an alternative source of public attitudes: the opinions posted in response to online news reporting. These attitudes are valuable for a number of

reasons. As spontaneous comments, they are not subject to influence from a scholarly agenda. Further, while the veracity of some details may not be certain, scholarly research has found that most internet users maintain substantial links between their online and offline selves. The variety of opinions found in these online public debates (although not always particularly ‘informed’), and the considerable number of people who engage in this form of political discussion, provide a valuable snapshot of the public mood.

The particular significance of public attitudes for women politicians is that ‘cultural factors’, including stereotypical attitudes towards gender roles, have been found to influence the proportion of women elected to parliaments (Tremblay 2007a, 535). My analysis of contemporary public attitudes found strong evidence of such ‘cultural’ gender norms. Overall, the sample was divided on the question of whether women should be directly involved in military combat, although women were more likely than men to support the Australian government’s pending removal of restrictions to women’s service in the ADF. Further, this public discussion makes clear that traditional gender stereotypes (men are warriors, women are nurturers) continue to influence attitudes towards women in war. The use of war metaphors in politics, then, subtly embeds these same stereotypes in the mainstream political discourse. Until the power of these gender stereotypes is challenged and dismantled, the masculinising, divisive and exclusionary effects of war metaphors will continue to pose a challenge to women in politics.

The traditional association between leadership and masculinity has been recognised as problematic for women, and the fine line women in political leadership must walk to balance political competence with appropriate displays of femininity has been well documented (Still 2006, 186; Eagly and Karau 2002). This chapter extends this understanding by identifying war metaphors as one of the mechanisms enabling the public to interpret women's behaviour as 'masculine' and therefore stereotypically inappropriate. A woman's perceived transgression of gender norms concerning violence exacerbates the 'incongruence' of a woman in power and creates myriad difficulties that male politicians do not suffer.¹² This was demonstrated, for example, in the federal election that followed shortly after Gillard's rise to power: the negative stereotypes about women and violence may be one among a number of factors that explains why the swing away from the ALP under Gillard's leadership was double for men (8.8 per cent) compared to women (4.4 per cent) (McAllister et al. 2011).

The visibility of women in politics has a distinct symbolic significance; as Sawyer, Tremblay and Trimble (2006, 17) have explained, 'the presence of women in parliament increases respect for women in society and is a form of recognition of the equal status of women'. In the light of the public attitudes discussed here, there is a similar symbolism inherent in the visibility of women as equals in war, although I suggest that this extends beyond the ADF. Such a

¹² While Gillard has been subject to criticisms for Rudd's removal that persist more than two years later, allegations and incidences of actual violence and aggression committed by former ALP leader Mark Latham received far less attention and criticism (Donovan 2004, 232-40).

presence will challenge the paternalist attitudes that underwrite persistent gender stereotypes; not just in relation to war but also in politics and other ‘masculine’ domains that utilise stereotypes to exclude women. Thus, what is critically needed is a decoupling of war and masculinity, via the inclusion of women in discourses and domains of power. The Australian Government’s removal of all gender-based restrictions to ADF jobs is a positive and timely step in this regard. Of course, the relatively small legislative amendments required to change this policy will not directly, or quickly, change negative stereotypes about women in war *or* politics, as cultural change is generally slow. Many feminists have argued against women’s participation in war in any capacity, while others have argued that the culture of the military remains unsuitable for women (Simonds n.d.). While not necessarily dominant in number, objectors to women in combat include both men and women from all backgrounds, and objections arise for varying reasons, suggesting women face a long and difficult road to full social acceptance in this domain. While one of the strongest bastions of hegemonic masculinity remains unchallenged, however, some segments of society will continue to use gender stereotypes to justify what is acceptable for women, and where women do and do not belong.

Implications for women from this chapter revolve around the continuing power of stereotypes to have real effects on women’s lives, and also therefore, concern the need to challenge and dismantle negative gender stereotypes. Slow as this change may be, it is critical. Women’s access to, and acceptance in, positions of leadership will improve, as women are recognised not only as victims and as

objects for protection, but as capable as men of being protectors and wielders of power.

A number of questions raised in this discussion point to the need for further research. The issue of whether women more than men utilise gender anonymity online was foreshadowed in an earlier section; further investigation would assist our understanding of women's self-expression in online environments. It would also be useful to explore whether discussion topics that relate explicitly to gender, as in the present case, result in a higher proportion of gender anonymous comments than non-gendered discussions, as this would reveal whether certain online discussions are threatening for users of any gender. Further, my analysis suggests a divide in the attitudes of men and women to the topic of women in war. An examination of attitudes towards women's participation in other traditionally masculine fields, such as firefighters or engineers, could identify whether stereotypical gender norms hinder women in other domains. Related to this, research into the impact of war metaphors beyond war and politics would be fruitful. Finally, there is a wealth of public opinion online waiting to be explored in an academic context. Further research that sheds light on the influence these public attitudes have on women's experiences will enhance current understandings of women's social status in Australia and around the world.

The points of intersection between political and war discourses shape public attitudes towards gender, and consequently impact on cultural beliefs and practices. This chapter's analysis of online comments concerning women and war has revealed the pervasiveness in public attitudes of stereotypical assumptions about women's strength, physiology, communal roles and social 'fit'. As powerful vehicles for the implicit communication of such stereotypes, war metaphors render these attitudes salient when used in political discourse. In answer to my fifth research question, then, this chapter argues that the public use of war metaphors perpetuates gender norms, and thus is one factor contributing to the scarcity of women in leadership and the difficulties women continue to face in politics.

This chapter's analysis has extended the initial discourse analysis by examining the way discourses interest and influence one another. By examining one element of discourses on war and gender, and interrogating how it may influence political discourse and public attitudes, this chapter has added to knowledge about how gender stereotypes can exert power across a number of domains. Accordingly, this chapter is consistent with the CDA approach, as it focuses on how discourses perpetuate inequities in power between women and men.

CONCLUSIONS AND ANSWERS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study emerged out of a period in Australian politics that was characterised by an intense public awareness of politicians and voters as women and men. Stimulated by the elevation of Julia Gillard to prime minister, this public awareness was sustained by a news media that made repeated references to Gillard's, and women's, gender. The negative stereotypes that formed part of this reporting were key to the formation of the objective of this thesis, which was to examine the interplay between gender stereotypes and women's positioning in the Australian political domain; and to examine the hypothesis that there was a specific relationship between the way gender was stereotyped in political discourses, and the ways in which women and men participated in the 2010 political environment.

I commenced this thesis in Part One, 'Interdisciplinary Theoretical Frameworks and Methodology,' with a discussion of the theoretical frameworks and fields of research that both shaped and guided my study. Feminist and social-psychological theories of gender stereotypes and politics contributed much to the answers this study was seeking. I also explained my research methodology as Critical Discourse Analysis. This approach encouraged my study to be research-led, allowing the investigation of questions as they arose in the research process. I approached discourse as 'natural language use,' and worked with Fairclough's (2010, 235) four-stage research process which focuses on the semiotic aspect of a social wrong, and identifies ways to

ameliorate that wrong. As a result, this research project was positioned as a feminist project, concerned with negative gender stereotypes as a social wrong and seeking to understand their causes and effects with a view to improving Australian women's political participation and social inclusion.

Over the next few pages, I set out my answers to the research questions initially introduced on page 48. Although there is much overlap between answers, and they generally intertwine, to be as clear as possible I provide discrete answers to each question. I finish the thesis with a discussion of possible directions for future research.

1. What stereotypical representations of women featured in Australia's political discourses in the period between Gillard's leadership takeover (24 June 2010) and the subsequent federal election (21 August 2010)?

It was in seeking to answer this question that I conducted a broad analysis of mainstream media coverage and political commentary within the period identified, which I set out in Chapter 3, 'Our First Female Prime Minister.' That chapter highlighted the ways gender was both a subject of and a feature pervading public discussion: that is, commentators were drawing out differences between women and men in politics, and often did so using gendered language, concepts and myths. A number of stereotypes were evident in the political discourse, although two in particular stood out as important for this study. One was that women were a voting bloc who would flock to the ALP, simply for the chance to vote for a woman. On

the basis of prior studies I noted this view of women's voting behaviour was historically unfounded, and failed to recognise the diversity of women voters. The second was that as 'gendered' voters, women were less competent than men at making a vote decision. The possibility that a woman would vote for Gillard 'because she's a woman' – whether insinuated by a journalist, hinted at by a polling graphic, posited by a letter to the editor writer, or even uttered by Tony Abbott himself – was often met with scorn, or an accusation of political ineptitude or plain stupidity.

These two stereotypes – that women would vote for Gillard, and gendered voting was a sign of political incompetence – formed the common thread that tied together the chapters of this thesis. My comparative analysis of the political discourses of 1902 concerning women's suffrage, and the 2010 discourses, revealed further details of contemporary gender stereotyping, however, I will address that detail in response to question 4, below.

2. What factors contributed to the perpetuation of these stereotypes?

There is, of course, not just one answer to this question. Different research approaches no doubt could shed different light on how and why the stereotypes identified in this thesis persevere. One of the key factors identified in my research, however, is the androcentric frame adopted by the mass media, which tends to result in the portrayal of women (and not men) as 'gendered' voters. This androcentrism

was identified in my theoretical frameworks as part of a dominant worldview in Western history, against which feminist activists have long railed. It is a clear finding of this thesis (although not *only* of this thesis), that an androcentric worldview still permeates some elements of the Australian political press and some public attitudes (including some political scientists).

More specifically, three key stimulants rendering the stereotypes highly salient in the 2010 political discourses were identified in Chapter 3. The recognition that Gillard's leadership takeover on 24 June 2010 was a 'feminist' milestone – or milestone for women's advancement – made gender immediately and powerfully salient both to the mass media and much of the general public. The televised Leaders Debate was a second stimulant. The pink and blue 'worms' measuring women's and men's audience-responses, and Abbott's comment that the election would reveal 'whether Prime Ministers are to be chosen on the basis of the job they've done, or gender,' both prompted widespread discussion about women voters and, importantly, facilitated the stereotype that women rather than men would be swayed to vote on the basis of gender. The third major stimulant of public discussions about gender was the numerous letters to the editor published on the topic of gendered voting. In some cases editors and journalists allowed members of the public to articulate what was perhaps less proper for professional journalists to say through letters to the editor (or an email in the example of Akerman's comment at the beginning of Chapter 4).

In the process, discussions about gendered voting multiplied, as readers responded to these stereotypical views on online news discussion boards. In conjunction with the stereotype of women as ‘gendered’ voters, some segments of the press and public portrayed gendered voting as a negative phenomenon. A number of letter writers and online commenters asked whether women were ‘stupid’ or ‘airheads.’ This negative commentary generally failed to consider the plethora of legitimate and rational reasons a female leader may appeal to a voter, and only a handful of views expressed by either professional or lay writers suggested that in a democratic election, a vote by secret ballot can legitimately be cast for any reason, or none at all.

3. How did women respond?

One of the strengths of CDA as a research methodology was its ‘ruling in’ of traditionally discursively marginalised voices. It was according to the principles of CDA, and again my understanding of discourse as ‘natural language use,’ that allowed me to delve deeper into the 2010 political discourses with an examination of some women’s online comments made in response to news articles discussing gendered voting.

By fleshing out the diversity in women’s responses I demonstrated first, that many women were actively engaged in political discussions in 2010. Second, I identified that a variety of attitudes existed among these Australian women commenters: some

denied their behaviour would conform to stereotyped expectations; others outright challenged the dominant discourses. The importance to women of challenging assumptions about gendered voting was therefore clearly evident in this counter-discourse.

Chapter 5 introduced questions about the extent of women's participation in political discussions, which led me to examine men and women's patterns of participation on the discussion boards of news websites. Results showed that women revealed their gender in these online discussions on fewer occasions than men; crucially, this gap widened when the topic under discussion was politics. While a number of factors may have contributed to this difference, it is possible that the intense media scrutiny of women in politics influenced women's decisions not to reveal their gender.

The limited avenues women have to participate in mainstream discourses, however, rendered online discussion boards an important (although not unproblematic) site for women's expression. It is therefore possible to conclude from my analyses in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 that as women are underrepresented in mainstream media, the online expression of women's opinions is an important counter-discourse, despite the apparent smaller numbers of women than men who engage in these discussions.

4. Were these gender stereotypes new discursive features, or did they have historical foundations?

My analysis of the Commonwealth Franchise Bill, 1902, as one of the first debates to be conducted in the newly formed Australian federal parliament, revealed a multitude of (positive and negative) stereotypes about women. I concluded that in 1902 these stereotypes were made salient by women's struggles for acceptance in the public domain, manifested at that time in the push for women's suffrage.

Opponents of women's suffrage argued women were mentally and physically inferior to men, politically uninterested in or unsuited to politics and irrational. Women who sought inclusion in the public realm were perceived as at odds with gender norms that stipulated women belonged in the private sphere, and therefore a threat to the social status quo. Analyses of 2010 attitudes revealed the re-emergence of many of these same stereotypes, predominantly as part of political strategies based on a fear of women's power at the ballot box or in the political realm more broadly. While not suggesting a direct continuity, I drew similarities between that period and the responses of some Australians to the leadership of Julia Gillard, as Australia's first female prime minister.

Accordingly, despite the many advances women have made into the public domain, stereotypes about women remain steeped in the historical gendered division of the public/private spheres. The changes sought by suffragists were threatening for some Australians – those men and women who had a stake in, or were simply comfortable

with, the gender status quo. I concluded negative stereotypes about women were used to manipulate public discourse in both periods, and therefore that historical attitudes towards women, founded on crude gender stereotypes, continue to shape the Australian political landscape.

5. Finally, what are the implications of these political stereotypes for women, and broader Australian society?

The CDA approach enabled my analysis to be sensitive to the ways Australian political discourses position women, at times discipline women's behaviour, and generally shape social institutions and society. In Chapter 8, I found that media and public discussions of women's voting behaviour ceased after the election, which reinforced my interpretation of the use of this gendered stereotypes and rhetoric as political strategy – as an attempt to influence or discipline women's behaviour in relation to their vote decisions.

Indeed, drawing on social-psychological frameworks, I posited different psychological responses by men and women, which may have influenced the way some members of each gender approached their vote decision. It cannot empirically be proven that some men felt threatened by a perceived unity among women voters; AES data demonstrates, however, that more men than women voted for the Liberal party, and that a proportion of those votes did not derive from men who identified with the Liberal Party. While other explanatory factors, such as Rudd's removal, may have influenced these results, psychological responses may also have been at

play. Similarly, for a variety of reasons, more women than men voted for the ALP, and one effect of the public attention to Gillard's gender may have been to solidify the significance of gender to some women's vote decisions. On the other hand, women who were threatened by stereotypes about women's voting behaviour may have been more likely to vote for a party other than the ALP, to deflect that stereotype. It is relevant to note, therefore, that the largest national vote swing of 4 per cent went to neither of the major parties, but to the Greens (Bartlett 2012, 167).

The publication of a number of letters to the editor suggesting women who voted on gender grounds were 'stupid' or 'airheads' signals a continuing intolerance for women's differences to men. This aspect of political discussions might possibly be viewed in a positive light: as Australians disciplining (perceived) aberrant voters in order to preserve the (perceived) virtue of Australian democracy. On the other hand, it suggests a resistance to difference among many Australians; a reluctance to accept that voters may be influenced—legitimately—by any number of motivations on election day. By identifying this element in Australia's political discourses, this study may contribute to finding ways of overcoming this immutable character, and encourage stakeholders in the political sphere to adapt to the increasing diversity that characterises Australian society in the twenty-first century.

Along the same lines, Chapter 9 turned from the 2010 election campaign to the future of women in politics. An analysis of public comments in response to the opening up of all Australian Defence Force jobs to women revealed continuing paternalist attitudes towards women in war. I argued that these attitudes may affect

women engaged in other (non-military) fields that might, even metaphorically, be considered 'violent.' The prevalence of war metaphors in Australian political discourses constitutes one such case. An ongoing challenge may therefore exist for women in political power, in light of the continuing public perception of powerful women as incongruent to the female norm of non-violence.

Positive implications are also discernible. The existence of counter-discourses indicates that some women were prompted to speak out against negative stereotypes, and particularly following Gillard's 'misogyny speech', may feel empowered to challenge dominant discourses that portray women negatively. The competing discourses may have resulted in a greater awareness of gender issues and stereotypes among some Australians, due to the very public and often heated nature of discussions. This is a promising implication, but one that will require constant effort if the counter-discourse is to be maintained. Falling back on historical stereotypes is easy, as both their longevity and pervasiveness suggests; countering them is slow and difficult. It is a crucial exercise however, as expanding the knowledge and ideas women and men may access when formulating opinions or responses to mainstream discourses – or vote decisions – could benefit Australian democracy.

One means of breaking this cycle is to publicly name and discredit the use of stereotypes when it occurs, as a handful of prominent women, including Julia Gillard, argue. A recent initiative by the Victorian Women's Trust takes up this challenge in a publication entitled 'A Switch in Time: restoring respect to Australian

politics' (Crooks 2012). Intended for widespread public dissemination, the publication provides easy-to-understand information about the 'gender-based undermining of a prime minister which reflects a lack of respect for her, the office she holds, and for women generally' (Crooks 2012, 2), together with strategies on how to counter these negative discourses. Compared to the blaring trumpets of Jones, Bolt, Devine and other influential conservatives, 'A Switch in Time' is a modest appeal. It is a promising early step, however, in a counter-discourse that needs to build on the voices of those 'ordinary' women who used online forums to challenge gender stereotypes in 2010.

As a vast literature on barriers to women's equal representation reveals, eradicating gender stereotypes from politics will not automatically result in an equal status for women in politics. Challenging negative stereotypes about women, and in the process confronting the public attitudes that underwrite the power of those stereotypes, could, however, have a positive impact on women's political participation and identification as political citizens.

Further research

A number of avenues for further political and gender research are suggested by this study. The most obvious, perhaps, is to monitor and analyse the development of voter stereotypes in the next Australian federal election (due in 2013). Assuming that Gillard retains the leadership until then, it will be valuable to examine the use of gender

stereotypes during the campaign, to observe whether there is a recurrence of the 2010 stereotyping and determine the extent of party differences in stereotype use. A qualitative study concerning voters' cognisance of, and responses to, political stereotypes in the political discourse would provide invaluable data complementary to the reader comments explored here. Further, the limitation of this study to print and online sources could be expanded in the future to encompass discussions on television and radio, both of which nowadays contain some element of public response. In the case of a future federal election where the contest is between two men, such a study could examine whether the focus on (women's) gender remains a feature of Australian politics, or recedes from mainstream discussions in the absence of a woman leader. This would provide a valuable opportunity to determine the extent to which women have gained some authority as a distinct constituency, or whether attention to women in 2010 was a response unique to the Gillard/Abbott election.

Campaign discourses prior to 2010 remained beyond this study's scope. Identifying the extent to which stereotypes about women may have been prevalent in other historical periods may therefore shed further light on their strategic use. Similarly, while I have encountered the use of stereotypes predominantly by conservative parties and commentators, whether other parties have adopted similar strategies in other historical periods remains to be uncovered.

As has been noted, the stereotypical portrayal of voters is not limited to women. In light of AES data that revealed 42 per cent of men voted for the Liberal Party, it would be relevant to explore whether the identified stereotypes about women, or even stereotypes

about men and masculinities not addressed in this study, had any distinctive influence on men's voting behaviour. Further, there would be value in exploring whether the stereotyping of other social groups has similar influence. This approach, of course, is not limited to the Australian context. With the 2008 candidacy of Barack Obama, the US media was regularly focused on African Americans' voting intentions, suggesting another case study. Voters are also geographically stigmatised: the media regularly draws on stereotypes to discuss the political attitudes of residents of the western suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne, areas renowned for their low socio-economic status and high levels of intolerance towards 'boat people.' Whether any of these instances of media stereotyping had an impact on voter behaviour is a potentially rich area for future scholarship.

Finally, the discussions of women's participation in online forums raised numerous questions. The *prima facie* case that women reveal their gender less when commenting on institutional politics is particularly intriguing. Research that further investigates this possibility is needed to determine whether women participate in online discussions on equal terms to men or whether they use anonymity in order to gain those equal terms.

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