

# Reengaging Youth into Feminism in the Current Media Environment: A Case Study from the Australian Election 2013

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## Abstract

This paper highlights the continuing problem of feminism being depoliticized among Australian youth through theoretical review, secondary research and a case study circa the Australian Election 2013. The research question hypothesized that societal conventions of traditional media and patriarchy in politics still challenge the celebration of women's achievement. This is argued as being due in part to the lack of interest by Australian youth in feminism. It was found that the aforementioned societal conventions are still influential and can extend to limiting the celebration of women's achievement in the mass media. The literature review introduces theoretical background of media, feminism and political participation. From this base, the secondary research showed in particular that the current conservative Liberal National Party (LNP) Prime Minister and the Chief Executive Officer of News Corporation, a dominant traditional mass media outlet, have links. This underlies the choice of case study which showcases and exemplifies patriarchy in politics. Despite LNP's stance of meritocracy, female parliamentarians are not necessarily rewarded based on their achievements. Rather, sexism prevails. This broadly affects Australian women's achievement in the political sphere. It is further reflected in: the present low levels of political empowerment on the Global Gender Gap Report; a one woman cabinet; and, prefacing achieving a LNP minister's sex appeal over merit. Based on this paper's literature review, secondary research, and case study, the answer to the research question affirms that unless youth become more politically engaged in feminism, social conventions of traditional media and patriarchy will continue. It is suggested that through social media, politicized campaigns such as Destroy the Joint's Twitter and continuing Facebook page could serve to better attract interest in feminism among the Australian youth. A more politically engaged nation would have increased cognizance of social conventions which do not celebrate women's achievement and seek to draw attention to this for the future enhancement of feminism in the Australian society.

*Key words: Australian Election 2013, feminism, depoliticized, reengagement, social media, patriarchy, sexism, youth*

## Introduction

This paper researches social conventions in Australia, predominantly referring to the traditional media environment and patriarchy in the political sphere, circa the Australian Election 2013. The research question hypothesizes that due to these social conventions,

women's achievement is not being celebrated in Australia, and the lack of political engagement of youth in feminism is one cause of its pervasiveness. Therefore, the issue of women's achievement not being celebrated in the political sphere and that tendency being further reinforced by traditional media is a concern and investigated by this paper. Moreover, the answer regarding how to decrease the level of subversion to women's achievement posed by these social conventions is sought throughout this paper and it is the prime motivator for this research. To do so, this research paper will be divided into several sections. Beginning with the literature review, and followed by the presentation of secondary data at the time of the Australian Election 2013 (AE 2013), these provide theoretical and data backgrounds for which to introduce the next part of this paper, the case study. This case study is taken from the time of the campaign trail for the AE 2013. After the case study is raised, future directions for the celebration of women's achievement is discussed, and finally, conclusions are made.

The two theoretical areas which are addressed in the literature review relate to the democratization of traditional media to social media and feminism in western society. For the following section of secondary data, it presents numerical data of what occurred during the AE 2013 campaign. It is further divided into two sections, the first covers the media environment and the other investigates female parliamentarians, including reference to: political empowerment from the Global Gender Gap Report, 2013; attitudes towards women politicians; and, the LNP's one woman cabinet. After the secondary data is presented, the case study of Fiona Scott, a LNP minister and her political achievements are presented vis-à-vis the sexism she experienced by the leader of the LNP and buttressed by the mass media. Next, future directions related to the promotion of social media propose a solution to the research question. That is, political engagement in feminism can be revitalized among Australian youth to celebrate women's achievements if social media is utilized. In conclusion, it is argued that since the users of social media are relatively more active and less homogeneous and passive than traditional media audiences, social media can provide the medium for societal transformation. In doing so, youth can become reengaged in feminism to celebrate women's achievement over the more derisive social conventions found in mediums such as traditional media and patriarchy in politics.

## **1. Literature Review**

### **1.1 Media democratization: Traditional to the social**

In the twentieth century, Hodkinson (2011) states that national identity was constructed and facilitated by media with the national population sharing a common engagement with content limited in range. Such homogeneity of what was broadcast combined with lack of choice meant that a majority of audiences had a shared experience (Hodkinson, 2011). Due to traditional media combining ownership of programming, production, marketing and

broadcasting, it became concentrated in the hands of a few (Cohen & Kennedy, 2007). Therefore, it not only threatens democracy, diversity and freedom of speech, but also, “The media moguls are able to influence business, international agencies and national governments, which often attend to them as if they were suppliant courtiers presenting themselves for royal approval” (Cohen & Kennedy, 2007: 341). Furthermore, the audience is passive and commoditized by audience ratings which also reflect gendered assumptions (Meehan, 2002: 217, cited by Shepherd, 2014). Commoditized, the passive audience can be segmented as a market, a demographic, and further into gender, which institutionalizes sexism (Shepherd, 2014).

However, according to Hodkinson (2011), with digitalization and deregulation this shared experience declined as national citizens began to personalize their experiences and moved away from common media experiences. As media is pluralized, Hodkinson (2011) states that the demise of a shared culture or discussions over matters of importance occurs, and the trivializing of society emerges. Moreover, difference and diversity become socially formed and are pushed forward by different forms of communication which are not shared, public or cohesive (Hodkinson, 2011). As the number of media consumption choices increases, citizens as users tend to forego the broader, national public sphere and instead engage in specialized and individualized identities (Hodkinson, 2011). That is, users seek more and varied modes of engagement which are individualistic and unstructured, hence the collectivity and centrality to the audience are lost (Livingston, 2003, as cited by McQuail, 2010a).

One example is, what Macnamara (2012) refers to as a universal concern by governments of the younger generation who have no formal political interest, or a democratic deficit. These days, the youth have transitioned, when receiving information, from traditional media outlets to Democracy 2.0, whereby social media users participate “politically”. They do this by: “following” a hashtag (#) on Twitter; or “liking” a comment with a thumbs up icon on Facebook; commenting on blogs; and/or, interacting with peers over these mediums (Macnamara, 2012). Thus, their interest in becoming a member of a political party, voting, submitting formal letters to ministries, and etcetera, as was considered political participation in the past, is diminished.

Nonetheless, Hodkinson (2011) believes this to be a crucial movement towards socio-cultural development, despite the majority of content created and published by ordinary users which most likely has small audiences and a more fragmentary effect due to the vastness and diversity of the Internet. Yet, Hodkinson (2011) also remains skeptical in terms of whether this would foster a society that talks to itself rather than being talked at by a powerful few. Nevertheless, Hodkinson (2011) still believes the challenge to the hierarchical nature of the twentieth century broadcast technologies was requisite. In doing so, Hodkinson (2011) envisions facilitation of mass communication which has more interactivity since citizens

become users who produce and consume content, collaboratively and simultaneously. This challenges the one direction bias and linearity of traditional media's approach to mass communication which could previously create a national consciousness held by a few to the many, as opposed to facilitating cultural and idea exchange (Hodkinson, 2011).

## 1.2 Feminism in western societies

In 'advanced' capitalized western societies, men are considered dominant in most spheres of life, structurally and interpersonally (patriarchy) (Hearn, 2004). Yet Hearn (2004) argues that this dominance lies not in the fact that all men are powerful, rather in its pervasiveness which can be seen in certain men's accumulation of it and associated resources. Hearn (2004) discusses the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci's theory from 1971, whereby a dominant (economic) class tends to control society. This class continues to press their definition with the active consent of supportive groups. Also it is backed by the state, as represented by political actors, the law, capitalists, intellectuals and etcetera and constructs a hegemony (Hearn, 2004). This hegemony, through the media, persuades the majority of the population that these social institutions are normal, and punishes non-conformity (Donaldson, 1993, as cited by Hearn, 2004). Therefore the leadership of the media can successfully purport society's outlook (Bocock, 1986: 63, as cited by Hearn, 2004).

In particular, Lacey (2009a) argues, when investigating women in western society, despite legally equal rights, they are subordinated due to the creation of gender representation. This is considered a dimension of patriarchal, bourgeois ideology whereby men are seen as a more powerful and dynamic than women who are weaker and more passive (Lacey, 2009a). Discourses of femininity in the media, Lacey (2009c) claims, are thus used to define, exclude and propagate a way of speaking and seeing. Aliefendioglu & Arslan (2011) research focusses more on the images portrayed by the media, and on how women are situated in this discourse. The research shows that they reflect how the more powerful men see themselves in daily social life and in a manner fail to convey how women's lives are changing. Supportive of this, Lacey (2009c) cites Casey et al. (2002) who put forward that since there is no neutral description of what is reality in the social realm; representations and readings of women are open to being structured by patriarchal discourse. This in turn defines femininity in western society (Lacey, 2009c; Aliefendioglu & Arslan, 2011). Moreover, the patriarchal domination and oppression shapes females normatively and according to a social prescription (Schippers & Sapp, 2012). Therefore, when the norm is imposed on women it reinforces and demonstrates a subordinate status to men.

Such subordination incited the defiance of the second wave feminists, especially when perpetuated by women, and even more so when femininity is defined by the male, since it can never liberate (Schippers & Sapp, 2012). To achieve the goals of the second wave of feminism, the action was collective and political (Mendes, 2012). Although such movements

sought to unify, Mann & Huffman (2005) state that the wave fractionalized due to ignoring differences such as race, age, sexual preference, and level in society. Hence, the third wave of feminism was a backlash against the inadequacies of the second wave of feminism (Mendes, 2012). However, rather than undermining the second wave, Mann & Huffman (2005) state that it is built on diversity and is resolved to be more inclusive. Sellnow (2010) further elaborates that the third wave does not entirely focus on women's issues. Rather, on a variety of standpoints which construct how we perceive the world to be shaped and how our life experiences are situated in it regarding class, gender, race, sexual identity, and so on (Sellnow, 2010). In addition, as the third wave broaches post feminism, it is therefore inextricable from neo-liberalism and is structured by strong individualism (Gill & Scharff, 2011, cited by Mendes, 2012). Moreover, this wave is not concerned with the social, political or other external influences or constraints, and is free, and self-reinventing. Mann & Huffman (2005) support, and while acknowledging that despite some benefit of challenging the second wave, the third is politically regressive.

Moreover, for feminism to be transformative of the individual and society, Mann & Huffman (2005) contest that the politics of gender cannot be ignored. Mendes (2012) supports this position, lamenting the ability of the mass media and popular culture to refocus women's attention from political and economic power to purchasing and sexual power. Although Mendes (2012) concedes that the third wave has the right to promote the latter; concern is raised that in doing so the political aspect is irrelevant or undiscussed. Therefore, Mendes (2012) criticizes post-feminist discourses, as promoted by popular culture in the media, for commonplace values such as individualism, capitalism and consumerism. Due to this focus on identity and resistance to categorization, Mann & Huffman (2005) contend that the media has forgone reporting on feminism, and generalize this is a result of post-modernists and post-structuralists rejecting structural views of oppression.

Nevertheless, Aliefendioglu & Arslan (2011) state that even if gender equality is supported in the media, as femininity has no singular meaning nor fixed position, certain institutional and professional options selected by media corporations are promoted. Furthermore, these are centered in contexts which reflect their view of the historical, social, cultural, ideological and institutional. In this way, media discourse is driven by existing discourses confined within a pre-constructed cultural imprint of which producers and decision makers are not completely independent (Macdonald, 2003; Jogernson & Philips, 2002, as cited by Aliefendioglu & Arslan, 2011). According to Aliefendioglu & Arslan (2011), predetermined and obsolete media conventions place women in a certain discourse and contextualize them as a "real" portrayal of social life. This does not reflect the change of women and their achievements. Instead, it perpetuates powerful men while failing to engage female audiences (Aliefendioglu & Arslan, 2011).

For example, Ross (2010) cites the studies of Liran-Alper (1994), Fowler (1995), Kahn &

Goldenberg (1997), Norris (1997b), Lemish & Drob (2002), Ross (2002) and Atkeson (2009) to support the claim that women parliamentarians are not treated in a similar manner to their male counterparts by the media. According to Ross (2010), women parliamentarians are:

“Persistently trivialized by media speculation over their private lives, domestic arrangements, and sartorial style: they might be allowed to speak about policy, but their potency as change agents or even as serious politicians is casually undermined by the media’s use of extraneous detail such as their age, where they buy their shoes, and which stylist they use” (Ross, 2010: 98).

Furthermore, Ross (2010) does not believe that there are identifiable frames for emergent women leaders who have been able to break the mold and win against the odds to act as change agents. Ross (2010) argues that even with established career women they are at the media’s mercy and that it sets them up to fail. This is due to unrealistically high expectations early in their careers (Ross, 2010). Moreover, Aliefendioglu & Arslan (2011) contend that unless feminist works in the media and recognize such conventions, their crucial role in structuring social subjectivity with relation to gender roles and the accompanying discourse on patriarchy will go unfulfilled.

## 2. Secondary Data: Australian Media Environment, Circa Australian Election 2013

### 2.1 Australian Electoral Committee (AEC): Trends and voting for youth and women

The AEC (2012) posits that since social media facilitates sharing opinions online, and allows for media selectivity through for example Twitter, it has demonstrated the ability to be an active space of interaction between the elite and public. This is because citizens can communicate direct to the political, economic and media sites of power, and with other sites where citizen-centric scrutiny, micro-activism or counter public spaces occur and/or can form (AEC, 2012). However, regarding the politically-engaged social media users, despite their higher level of education, the AEC (2012)’s numbers show that they are not significant enough to challenge existing social norms nor have impact upon them. Nevertheless, the AEC (2012) suggests social media can mitigate the current decline in youth political engagement. Even so, although there is a momentum among researchers to study social media and political engagement among the youth; Xenos et al. (2013) state that current literature reveals mixed results. That is, ascertaining whether social media can affect the classic patterns of stratification of one’s socioeconomic status and political engagement behaviors is difficult (Xenos et al., 2013).

**Table 1.** Internet for Social Networking (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2014)

Age	15-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
%	90%	92%	85%	67%	52%	44%	30%

Table 1 shows the concentration declining from youth for 2012-2013 of Household Use of Information Technology: Internet for Social Networking (ABS, 2014). Moreover, Australia's major communications provider, Telstra's directory business arm, Sensis, conducted research in 2013 into social media and found: of those under 40 (including variations across age groups) that 87% use social media with the majority daily (Sensis, 2013). In addition, females are more likely to be frequent users of social media (Sensis, 2013). The AEC's (2012) research also highlighted that young people use social media the most. Moreover, emerging trends include higher usage by women and in the political context, namely for the Greens' Party voters (a minor yet established left wing political party) (AEC, 2012). In more detail, 53% of women use Facebook daily, and in the age group 18-24, 82% do (AEC, 2012). While for the 25-34 age bracket, 60%, and for Greens Party voters, 55% (AEC, 2012). Therefore, the AEC (2012) suggests that through social media, this shows minor parties' voices can have more equivalent visibility with the major parties. This is due to low the lower barriers of entry for producing content vis-à-vis the lesser amounts of funding received. Yet, the AEC (2012) also elucidated the tendency for major parties to have more significant levels of overall media coverage in traditional media, which in turn, carries over to social media.

## **2.2 Traditional media and the Australian Election 2013 (AE2013)**

Traditional media in twenty first century Australia is dominated by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation. Such corporate ownership is considered by Cohen & Kennedy (2007) as being: oligopolistic, complex, and, having overlapping control of various traditional media outlets, mainly in newspapers and film. Further, it is the largest circulator of conservative newspapers at 17.3 million. It also holds 59% of the market share, with its closest competitor, the more liberal orientated Fairfax Media at 22% (Siegel, 2013). With more than half of Australia's newspaper circulation being conservative, Cohen & Kennedy (2007) argue that images and ideas are projected on behalf of the media corporations' own interests rather than considering national or international ones.

Prominent media commentator for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), Jonathan Holmes stated that in the Australian Election 2013 (AE2013) campaign, the tabloid treatment given to the less conservative Australian Labor Party (ALP) had a significant adversarial impact. This was due to the dominance of News Corporation's newspapers (Siegel, 2013). Moreover, Siegel (2013) contended that though this behavior could be accepted if the media environment was truly pluralistic, it is less acceptable when their market position is so dominant. Given News Corporation's newspaper reach, of namely Sydney's Daily Telegraph and The Australian, Siegel (2013) notes that "... they are often credited with having an outside role in the country's politics." During the campaign trail for the AE2013, the conservative Liberal National Party (LNP) Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott showed his support of News Corporation when asked about the media mogul, Rupert

Murdoch in an interview by Triple M radio station. This was the day before the election that saw him become Prime Minister (PM) (Lane, 2013; Laughland, 2013). He said: “I’ve got a lot of time for Rupert Murdoch because, whether you like his papers or don’t like his papers, he’s one of the most influential Australians of all time and I think that Aussies should, we should support our home town heroes. And that’s what I think in his own way Rupert Murdoch is” (Lane, 2013; Laughland, 2013). On the other hand, the less conservative ALP PM mentioned to reporters, one month out from the election: “... he [Murdoch] doesn’t really like us, and would like to give us the old heave-ho” (Siegel, 2013). Further, Lane (2013) reported that the Deputy PM of the ALP, Anthony Albanese’s statements mentioned the “bias coverage” by Murdoch’s News Corporation the morning before the election, September 6, 2013.

### **3. Secondary Data: Australian Women in Politics**

#### **3.1 Political empowerment in 2013**

According to the 2013 Global Gender Gap Report, compiled by the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2013), Australia was ranked 24. There are four indexes used for measurement: Economic Participation and Opportunity; Educational Attainment; Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment (WEF, 2013). Of these, Australia attains equality or near equality in three of the four indexes, excluding political empowerment. The political empowerment index is further divided into three categories with ranking for each category as follows: Women in Parliament: 41; Women in Ministerial Positions: 47; and, Years with Female Head of State: 38 (last 50 years). Despite reported gains in 2012, due to wage equality and estimated earned income (WEF, 2013), the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) (2014b) points out there was a drop in 8 rankings from 2006 to 2011. This highlights its lack of progression in comparison to the rate of other nations. The Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Elizabeth Broderick (from September 2007~), who represents Australia at the United Nations, has been particularly active in working on reform in the following areas: Women on Boards, Male Champions of Change, Women in Male Dominated Industries and Women of Influence (AHRC, 2014a; AHRC, 2014b). However, the AHRC (2014b) shows that despite a high rank in educational attainment, gender disparity is particularly notable between men and women in leadership roles (AHRC, 2014b). Furthermore, the Global Gender Gap Report of 2014 highlights that the political empowerment index is the only one which has worsened since 2013 from 43 to 53 in 2014 (WEF, 2014).

#### **3.2 Political patriarchy towards female politicians: Prime Minister of Australia**

##### **3.2.1 Julia Gillard’s misogyny speech**

On October 9, 2012, the former ALP PM of Australia, Julia Gillard, delivered her Misogyny Speech to the Australian Parliament in response to “perceived sexism from the



opposition leader” and the current LNP PM of Australia, Tony Abbott (Wikipedia, 2014d). The Misogyny Speech was a reaction to a litany of incidents played out in the media nationwide. One such example occurred in March 2011, when the PM (LNP Opposition Leader at the time), Tony Abbott, stood on a dais in front of television cameras flanked by two senior female ministers. In the background were placards by protestors against Julia Gillard’s policies which read: “Ditch the Witch, JuLiar, Bob Brown’s [Green’s Minor Party Leader] Bitch” (Grant, 2014). The Misogyny Speech received national and international media attention. Months later, when the former PM attended the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) international summit in Laos, she received congratulations from other world leaders including French President Francois Holland and Danish PM Helle Thorning-Schmidt, and was informally commended by other leaders (Ireland, 2012). An extract of Julia Gillard’s Misogyny Speech is as follows (Sydney Morning Herald, 2012):

He has said, and I quote, in a discussion about women being under-represented in institutions of power in Australia, the interviewer was a man called Stavros. The Leader of the Opposition says “If it’s true, Stavros, that men have more power generally speaking than women, is that a bad thing?” And then a discussion ensues, and another person says “I want my daughter to have as much opportunity as my son.” To which the Leader of the Opposition says “Yeah, I completely agree, but what if men are by physiology or temperament, more adapted to exercise authority or to issue command?” Then ensues another discussion about women’s role in modern society, and the other person participating in the discussion says “I think it’s very hard to deny that there is an underrepresentation of women,” to which the Leader of the Opposition says, “But now, there’s an assumption that this is a bad thing” (Sydney Morning Herald, 2012).

Hillary Clinton, Former Secretary of State of the United States, waged in on the issue when being interviewed by Sarah Ferguson from the less conservative ABC’s 7.30 Report, June 16, 2014. When asked about the reference made in her latest book to the sexism received by Julia Gillard while she was PM and the Misogyny Speech (ABC, 2014), she commented as follows:

*Sarah Ferguson:* One of the most strongly-worded sentences in the book—in that, you say Julia Gillard, when she was Prime Minister, “faced” —and I’m quoting you here— “... faced outrageous sexism which shouldn’t be tolerated in any country.” What specifically are you referring to there?

*Hillary Clinton:* Well I’m referring to several things. I’m referring to the way her political opponents characterized her, the menu<sup>1</sup> at that famous event that was in print about a prime minister who happened to be a woman. Some of the language that was used in debate or by opponents out of the Parliament, but still active in the political to and fro. And I make very clear:

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1 March 28, 2013 LNP Fundraiser, the menu said: Julia Gillard Kentucky Fried Quail/Small Breasts, Huge Thighs, and a Big Red Box (Bourke, 2013b)

I don't have a problem with anybody—man or woman—contesting anyone's position, anyone's policy, taking a person to account. But doing so in a way that I thought depersonalized the very personal, that demeaned, just didn't seem to fit the Australia that I have come to know.

*Sarah Ferguson:* When you say opponents, are you including in that the present Prime Minister, then Opposition Leader, Tony Abbott?

*Hillary Clinton:* I'm not going to name names. I mean, that's really for the Australian people to judge. But the overall impact—and I saw online the speech that Prime Minister Gillard gave about misogyny, was very striking to me because she did go chapter and verse. And again, this is not about whether you approve of, voted for or had any affinity with the positions that she put forward. I just don't think there's a place for sexism in our politics and I think we should be purging those kinds of comments and holding ourselves to a higher standard (ABC, 2014).

### **3.2.2 PM, Tony Abbott's one woman cabinet: The debate of promotion based on quotas or merit**

After becoming PM in September 2013, Tony Abbott of the conservative LNP announced his cabinet on September 16, 2013. Out of 19 cabinet members only one was a woman (Jones & Marszalek, 2013). At the time he was quoted as saying, "I'm obviously disappointed there aren't more women in Cabinet ... Nevertheless there are some very good talented women knocking on the door of the cabinet and there are lots of good and talented women knocking on the door of the ministry" (Jones & Marszalek, 2013). The PM's announcement of a one woman cabinet incited discussion in the media regarding quota verses merit based systems, vis-à-vis women's parliamentary representation levels (Abdel-Magied, 2013). Shadow Treasurer of the less conservative ALP, Chris Bowen, was reported saying that it signified going backwards for Australian politics (Jones & Marszalek, 2013). Further criticism was rife on the Internet, with an old quote from the 1970s by Tony Abbott rehashed and bandied around traditional and social media outlets alike: "I think it would be folly to expect that women will ever dominate or even approach equal representation in a large number of areas simply because their aptitudes, abilities and interests are different for physiological reasons" (Price, 2013). Even the conservative newspaper, *The Australian*, reported that the Twitter hashtag #auspol had had its first major spike since Tony Abbott was announced as PM, with 25,300 tweets recorded—dominated by references to the one woman cabinet through mediums of conversation, visuals, satirical graphics and doctored cabinet images going viral (Reynolds, 2013).

Despite a somewhat larger representation of women in the outer cabinet, the LNP does not have affirmative action programs as does the other major party, the ALP. The ALP has had affirmative action since 1994, with a 40% minimum target for women in all seats (Sydney Morning Herald, Editorial, 2013). In the 17 years since the ALP passed the

affirmative action quota, female representation has increased compared to the LNP. That is, in 1994, 14.5% or 16 of the ALP Ministers of Parliament were women, while in the LNP, 13.9% or 11 were; yet by 2010 the ALP had increased this representation to 35.6% or 37, with the LNP continuing to trail at 23.9% or 22 (Hussein, 2011). In fact, under Julia Gillard's ALP, from June 24, 2010 to June 26, 2013 (Wikipedia, 2014c) women had the highest representation at 36% with four women in the cabinet and six women in the ministry. Internationally, according to Inter-Parliamentary Union research of 22 nations which use electoral quotas; once legislated, women gained 24% of seats and when voluntary only 22% (Hurst & Peatling, 2013). Thus, both figures are significant when compared to the absence of quotas, when only 12% of seats were occupied by women (Hurst & Peatling, 2013).

Abdel-Magied (2013) further discusses the debate, shunning affirmative action to favor meritocracy, yet wonders what merits are best, especially considering when even female members of the LNP accept meritocracy. This is demonstrated by the current speaker of the House of Representatives, Bronwyn Bishop's opposition towards quotas: "I never want to see affirmative action—that is, you got the job because you were a woman—because that makes you a permanent second class-citizen." This stance is further supported by Julie Bishop, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and the one woman in Tony Abbott's LNP cabinet: "I believe in people being promoted on merit... The number of women in the ministry will build over time. Currently there are a number of capable, talented women who will be considered for cabinet in due course (Hurst & Peatling, 2013)." Hurst & Peatling (2013) reported that although the debate of the quota system was raised in the LNP in 2010 by Judith Troeth, a former LNP senator, it was rejected. Abdel-Magied (2013) questions: "The discussion around targets, quotas or affirmative action is extremely polarizing, yet the underlying question seems to be unclear. What exactly is it that we are trying to achieve—and why? If quotas are not the answer, what is?"

After becoming PM, particular concern was raised and continues to the present since Tony Abbott has appointed himself as Minister for Women of their policies and programs (with West Australian senator, Michaelia Cash, as minister assisting) (Price, 2013). He said: "This will ensure that these key whole-of-government priorities are at the centre of government." (Price, 2013). In support, Doctor Susan Harris Rimmer, at the Asia Pacific College of Diplomacy, Australian National University (ANU), believed the negative backlash to his decision, overshadowed how it was important for women's policy and the relocation of the Office for Women to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) (Reynolds, 2013). Now, according to Rimmer (2013): "... When the executive wants an issue to have a whole-government impact and to be a priority, it goes to PM&C" to become part of the prime ministerial portfolio. She justified his appointment because of its two initiatives needing clout—the Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, which

is tied to the Defense Department and the Australian Defense Force and The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (Rimmer, 2013). On the other hand, Price (2013), co-founder of the feminist social media group, Destroy the Joint (DTJ), Canberra Times columnist, and senior lecturer at the University of Technology of Sydney in journalism and social media, brought to the fore two key concerns about Tony Abbott in this position. First, his belief in a society which does not count women as equal nor believes they deserve equality; and second, his control over a position which affords him decision making power which affects Australian women (Price, 2013).

#### **4. Case Study: Australian Election 2013 (AE2013) and Fiona Scott's Seat of Lindsay: Tony Abbott's Sex Appeal Comment**

In the western Sydney seat of Lindsay, which has had bellwether status (that is, the seat always goes with the governing party) since its creation in 1984, went to Fiona Scott of the LNP in 2013 (Wikipedia, 2014b). Even though it was considered a marginal seat with a required swing to LNP of +1.1 to win (ABC, 2013); this does not reflect the ground work done previously by Fiona Scott in her LNP electorate. That is, for the 2010 election where the ALP won. In the 2010 election campaign, despite its bellwether status, Fiona Scott was able to get a swing towards the LNP of +4.1, and an overall swing of +5.2 after preferences (ABC, 2013). Even so, in 2013, Tracey Spicer (2013), a household name for news reporting in Australia, reported on a whistleblower, Kevin Lee's story. Kevin Lee was a former priest who attended the same seminary as Tony Abbott. The report said in 2010, in a slot set aside for meeting with public members interested in parliament in Tony Abbott's Sydney office, Tony Abbott had said that he was not pleased that Scott had been chosen for pre-selection. Further, he had attempted to block her as she had mainly been chosen due to her looks and father's money (Spicer, 2013). A spokesperson for Tony Abbott did claim that the meeting had taken place, yet that Lee's account was inaccurate (Spicer, 2013). The DTJ Facebook page provided comment and opened discussion with a link to Spicer's Sydney Morning Herald article in which Price commented: "I'm saddened that men are still reducing women to appearance. It's not the behavior we expect of leaders" (Spicer, 2013: DTJ, 2013c).

During the campaigning for AE2013, Tony Abbott went to Fiona Scott's electorate, the seat of Lindsay. Alongside Fiona Scott, Tony Abbott responded to the question asked about the last Liberal MP in the area, Jackie Kelly, and what Fiona Scott had in common: "They're young, feisty, I think I can probably say have a bit of sex appeal and they're just very connected with the local area" (Bourke, 2013a). As Tony Abbott stood between Fiona Scott and his daughter, Frances at the time, Bourke (2013a) reports that the accompanying news video footage showed they had both laughed. The "sex appeal" comment was defended by various politicians such as Andrew Robb, LNP finance spokesman. Due to it being done "largely in jest", and further excused because: "He's got three strong-minded daughters, he's

got sisters, one of whom's gay, he's got a highly competent and strong wife ... a very pleasant wife in Margie" (Bourke, 2013a). Andrew Robb continued to defend: "Look—he's an average sort of person as far as these sort of things go and we've just got to not start to get too precious about this" (Bourke, 2013a). Bourke (2013a) also reported that New South Wales and Community Minister, Pru Goward, told Macquarie radio that there was no major issue with drawing attention to a candidate's sex appeal, despite being a former sex discrimination commissioner herself. Pru Goward was reported to say: "a lot of politicians are described as sexy" (Donaghue, 2013). Even former LNP PM, John Howard weighed in: "the reaction of some people who tut-tutted about it is out of proportion and ridiculous" (Donaghue, 2013). Initially, even the ALP had distanced themselves from the remark, "Mr Abbott's comments are entirely a matter for Mr Abbott" (Donaghue, 2013). Although, his sex appeal comment was condemned by various ALP members later (Donaghue, 2013).

After the "sex appeal" comment went viral, News Corporation's digital media news.com.au. (2013) reported now Scott had shot to fame, it had given the AE2013 campaign levity. Moreover news.com.au. (2013) published an article entitled: "Liberal star power the secret to Fiona Scott's success in deposing former assistant treasurer David Bradbury in the seat of Lindsay". Even though the article conceded in the subtitle: "Hard work and star power were the secret to Fiona Scott's success in western Sydney, helping her claim the biggest Labor scalp of the election" (news.com.au., 2013). Furthermore, it made mention that Scott was able to capitalize on the national backlash directed towards ALP and translate it into a victory in her seat compared with other LNP candidates in western Sydney (news.com.au., 2013). Scott herself said: "They [the comments] created lightness... It meant people knew they could come and talk to me and have a joke with me" (news.com.au., 2013). As Dent (2013) from Women's Agenda a digital independent media source contended, the travesty is that Tony Abbott, now PM, blamed his comments on exuberance. When compared with President Obama of the United States, who made a comment about a judge's appearance, was expected to apologize. In his own words, Tony Abbott said: "Now, I was a bit exuberant today, a bit exuberant today. But we're all working incredibly hard to get her elected and to give Australia a better go... Look, Fiona and I have been mates for a long time. ... It's obvious that Fiona is a smart, hardworking candidate" (Dent, 2013). In fact, the morning after being pre-selected in 2010, Borello (2014) reported that Fiona Scott was on the pavements on Penrith's High Street, just after sunrise. She was there to speak with the Lindsay seat electorate constituents including the buyers and sellers at the Penrith Market. Such dedication had made her known to her electorate from pre-selection days. Once becoming the Member for Lindsay, post the AE2013, Fiona Scott said in her acceptance speech: "I don't think that there is a single person in this entire room who doesn't know what a massive, massive fight this has been for over three years" —and she gave the example of going through six pairs of flats in order to do so (Hills & Cheng, 2013). Dent

(2013) of Women's Agenda, a nontraditional digital media outlet, believes it is unlikely that Fiona Scott decided to enter into politics based on her own sex appeal.

## 5. Future Directions

The research question probed that societal conventions such as the traditional media environment and the political patriarchy are challenging the Australian society's ability to celebrate women's achievement. Women parliamentarians including the former PM, Julia Gillard and the case study outlined in this paper of Fiona Scott's "sex appeal" are examples in point. The continuance of this problem is anticipated if youth remain politically unengaged in issues such as feminism. As the Sensis (2013) studies revealed, left wing parties such as the Greens use social media to elevate their presence in the political landscape. Moreover, primarily, women are the larger users of social media in Australia. Therefore, if political engagement in feminism can be revitalized through social media among the Australian youth, women's achievements in the political sphere, as the first step, could be better celebrated.

McClellan & Maalsen (2013) posit that there is a revitalization of feminism in Australia due to campaigns supported on social media such as DTJ. Although McClellan & Maalsen (2013) report that there have been some conflicting reports regarding the decentering, diversifying and transitory nature of membership of such campaigns. The DTJ namesake was coined by founder Jane Caro initially on a Twitter hashtag: #destroythejoint, which went viral (Angyal, 2012). It was further reinforced by a DTJ Facebook community page, created by co-founder Jenna Price (Angyal, 2012). "This page is for people who are sick of the sexism dished out to women in Australia, whether they be our first female Prime Minister or any other woman." (DTJ, 2014). The catalyst for its inception was Julia Gillard's Misogyny Speech; yet as their Facebook page claims, there are other new examples of sexist remarks in the media. These provide the content for women called "Destroyers" to rebuild the joint — a colloquial Australian reference, in this context to an institution—into one which does not promote demeaning and public speech against women in the Australian media, and rather, a more equitable society (DTJ, 2012). McClellan & Maalsen (2013) state that DTJ, which has a membership of 46,000 on Facebook and over 14,000 followers on Twitter (at the time of publishing), is evidentiary of the cohesive and growing ownership of feminism and its politics. Thus, social media is facilitated through new spaces, created by technology and is a medium necessary for gendered power relations to be renegotiated (McClellan & Maalsen, 2013). Angyal (2012) reported on comments made to Jane Caro, which show the spirit of the movement: Destroyers had said they were proud to be feminists again and were enjoying women's rights like they had not done in decades.

DTJ addressed the "sex appeal" comment made by the current PM of Australia, Tony Abbott during his campaign trail in 2013 with vigor through their social media forums. DTJ's Twitter and Facebook page (Figure 1) invoked discussion among Destroyers who



Figure 1. #SexAppeal (DTJ, 2013b)

questioned what it really takes to be a candidate in a marginal seat other than #SexAppeal (DTJ, 2013b). DTJ reiterate that they have brought their namesake into the Australian lexicon, yet reject that women are actually destroying anything. Rather, they are being called upon to rebuild a society that is civil and decent, with optimism and good humor to reduce sexism (DTJ, 2012). Such momentum in feminism, in both political and public spaces, is a call to action and is burgeoning due to the notion of “issue publics”, encouraged by new technologies and social media (Kelly, 2010 as cited by McClean & Maalsen, 2013). In short, it is proposed that for the future directions of addressing negative societal conventions, if the youth became more reengaged in politicizing feminism through the medium of social media, sexism can be better challenged in Australian society and women’s achievement more celebrated.

## Conclusion

This paper has researched through literature, secondary research and a prominent case study the continuing problem of feminism being depoliticized among Australian youth, circa the AE2013. The research question hypothesized that societal conventions of traditional media and patriarchy in politics still challenge the celebration of women’s achievement. It cannot be said that this is a minor issue due to the Global Gender Gap Report of 2013, stating Australia’s poor ranking on the index of political empowerment. Further, Hillary Clinton, former US Secretary of State, made reference to the issue of sexism in Australian politics at the senior level. Although meritocracy may be a valid argument over quotas for the promotion of females in parliament, it is considered difficult to justify when situations such as the case study of Fiona Scott arise. Fiona Scott is a female politician of the LNP party who, in the previous election campaign, was almost successful in changing her seat of Lindsay from the bellwether status it had held since its inception decades ago. Nonetheless, the social conventions of traditional media and political patriarchy reduced the merit of her prior and current achievement when campaigning in AE2013. During her campaign in her bellwether seat, the leader of the opposition and current PM of Australia said that she had sex appeal. This statement contributes little to her prior nor future merits as a female politician and certainly does not celebrate her achievements as one.

The solution prosed by this paper to answer the research question is that social media

is a medium which can challenge the social conventions of traditional mass media and political patriarchy. In doing so, women's political achievements, by female politicians such as former PM Julia Gillard, or Lindsay seat minister, Fiona Scott would be recognized based on their inherent merits.

However, even though the secondary data shows the growing trend for youth and women in Australia to use social media, the youth are depoliticized. They typify the third wave of feminism, where the youth are not interested in political participation. On the other hand, they are large users of social media. DTJ is a fitting example of how social media can, through a Twitter feed and/or a Facebook page, engage a larger user base of youth and women. It can further encourage them through online campaigns to participate in a dialogue which can be drawn upon to be published in traditional media. Since it is a reactionary medium to what is prescribed by dominant institutions in society, media or political alike, campaigns exemplified by DTJ can pose a challenge to the aforementioned social conventions of traditional media and political patriarchy. In doing so, they are held accountable to more women and youth in Australian society.

In conclusion, this paper probed a solution to the research question, based primarily on the literature review, secondary research and case study of Fiona Scott, circa the AE2013. That is, the youth of Australia should become more politicized in regards to feminism through mediums such as social media that challenge traditional media and political patriarchy. Through this user level base, reengagement is facilitated, and the capability of challenging the societal conventions, which do not celebrate women's achievement, can be increased.

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