

# Research Essay

This essay will analyse how Prime Minister Julia Gillard's famous misogyny speech in Parliament was covered by the Australian media, especially how it was received in many different ways by the Australian public who are also the voters who keep Gillard employed as Prime Minister.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

To emphasise the three different news frames that have emerged in the course of my research, I have chosen to analyse and refer to five academic journal articles.

1. *Media Tarts: Why I Wrote It and What The Reaction Has Been*—this article written by Julia Baird who wrote the article after being asked to speak about her book, *Media Tarts: How the Australian Press Frames Female Politicians*. In her book and in this article, Baird talks about the four frames that the Australian press choose to represent or present female politicians. The four frames are: The Steel Sheila who quote “would be elected backbenchers, plonked on the backbench and asked ‘so are you going to lead the country one day? What do you think of Maggie?’ basically The Steel Sheila would be the Australian equivalent of Margaret Thatcher and would be ambitious and aggressive. The Housewife frame would involve female politicians being portrayed to prove themselves as a component politician, wife and mother all at once. The Feminist frame would involve framing a female politician by implanting the question in reader's minds of what it takes to be a woman in politics. The Covergirl frame would involve framing a female politician, especially an attractive female politician as impossible, there had to be a flaw of some sort.
2. *The Many Faces of Political Eve: Representations of Queensland Women Parliamentarians in the Media*—this article written by Julie Ustinoff focuses on how Queensland female politicians are represented in the media, in particular focusing on Dame Annabelle Rankin, Cheryl Kernot and Pauline Hanson. This article also heavily emphasises the obvious fact that female politicians are treated differently in the media to male politicians.
3. *Women in Australian Politics: Mothers Only Need Apply*—this article written by Cathy Jenkins focuses on how childless and/or unmarried or single female politicians are portrayed in the media. This article actually does make several references to Julia Gillard as well as other female politicians and also gives a historical context to compare how female politicians were framed in the media in the past to how they are framed now.
4. *Political Cares: Gendered Reporting of Work and Family Issues in Relation to Australian Politicians*—this article written by Kathie Muir focuses on how both male

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and female politicians with families are framed and also analyses how both ends of the framing spectrum in regards to female politicians are contradictory.

5. *Julia the Hottie and "You Go Girl": Role Models for Girls and Young Women?*—This article written by Susanne Gannon focuses on how Julia Gillard was framed in the media in a post-feminist discourse, in particular with the media constantly emphasising Gillard's un-married and childless statuses.

Interestingly although not deliberate in terms of choosing these specific articles, all five of these academic articles were written by women, which will lead into one of my main points of discussion. I accessed these journal articles from the journal search database on the UOW Library's website.

## METHODOLOGY

To analyse how Prime Minister Julia Gillard's famous misogyny speech in Parliament was covered by the Australian media, of course I had to read and analyse news articles. For this essay, I analysed forty newspaper articles from eight different Australian newspapers: *The Courier Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Herald Sun*, *The Southern Highland News*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *The Australian* and *The Queensland Times*. I accessed the newspaper articles from ProQuest ANZ news stand database. The period of time I chose was from the day after her misogyny speech until the end of October (October 10<sup>th</sup> until October 31<sup>st</sup> 2012). I chose this period of time as that was when the gender debate and the aftermath was at its most heated. To retrieve the newspaper articles that I chose, I used the key terms "Julia Gillard" + "misogyny speech" + "gender card" + "feminism" + "victim" and "voters".

## RESULTS

In my analysis I found that three specific frames that repeatedly appeared in the forty newspaper articles that I chose: Julia Gillard as a feminist superhero, Julia Gillard as a manipulator and Julia Gillard as a victim. The example and frequency of these frames are demonstrated in the table below.

Frame	Example	Frequency
Julia Gillard as a "superhero" for standing up to a "misogynist" Tony Abbott and for defending women everywhere.	The <i>Daily Telegraph's</i> report, <i>Feisty Julia lets fly at the double standard</i> contained this quote,  "In an age of painfully cautious doublespeak from political leaders, Gillard's withering display of composed fury has made headlines around the	6 out of 40 articles. (15%)

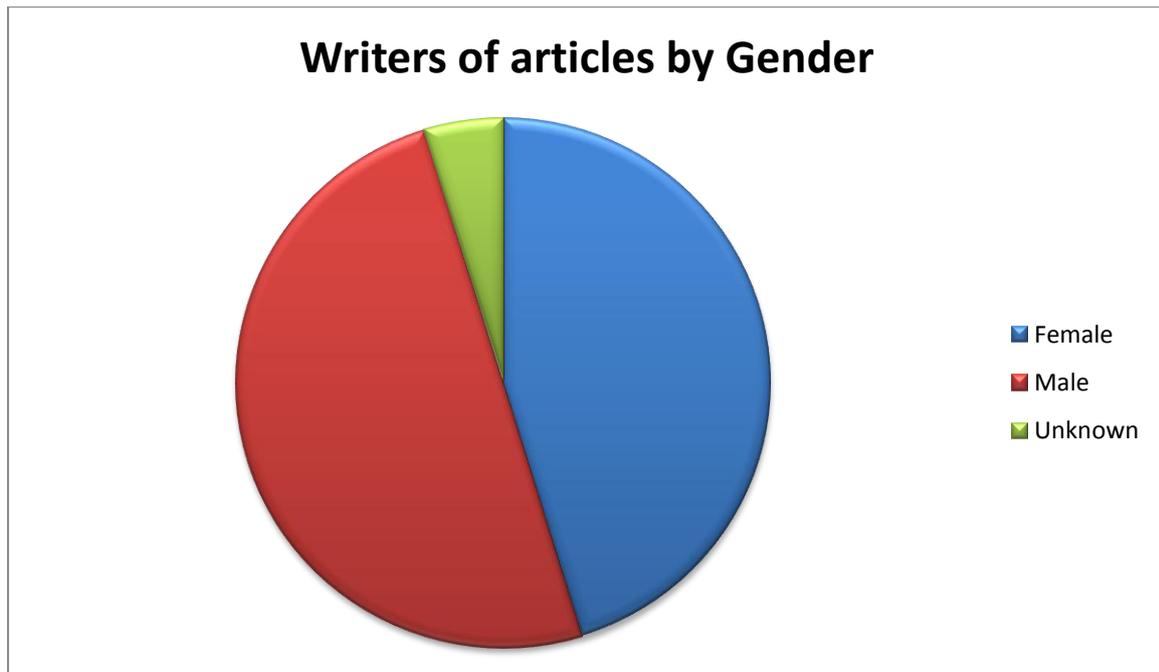
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	<p>world, with one British writer observing: ‘The Australian PM is angry. You wouldn’t like her when she’s angry.’” (That catchphrase is heavily used in Incredible Hulk comics, TV show and movies) (11 Oct 2012)</p>	
<p>Julia Gillard using the speech as a political tactic to sway voters to vote for her. Also using the speech to deflect from the Labor Party’s own issues.</p>	<p>The <i>Weekend Australian’s</i> report, <i>Conservative women dismiss those cries of misogyny as a cheap rhetorical tool</i> contained this quote,</p> <p>“It’s a deliberately orchestrated campaign when gender is being used for the first time in Australian political history as a shield for the Prime Minister so nobody will ask questions about her record and her behaviour and her judgment. It’s being used as a political weapon to attack Tony Abbott, to smear him. It’s all about deflection.” (13 Oct 2012)</p>	<p>10 out of 40 articles. (25%)</p>
<p>Julia Gillard playing the gender card/victim card.</p>	<p>The <i>Sydney Morning Herald’s</i> report, <i>Short-sighted see hate at every turn</i> contained this quote,</p> <p>“Gillard presented herself as a political leader who is attacked because of her gender.” (16 Oct 2012)</p>	<p>24 out of 40 articles. (60%)</p>

**Fig 1. Julia Gillard’s misogyny speech media frames.**

I found that despite the genders of every writer, it didn’t affect the way they covered the issue in regards to impartiality, with the exception of opinion pieces where the writers would have more room and freedom to express their own personal opinions on the speech. I counted the amount of articles that were written by males and females, the results are shown in the pie chart below.

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**Fig 2. Out of the 40 articles, 21 of those were written by male writers, 19 by female writers and two of the articles did not list an author.**

The majority of the articles, no matter what frame was being presented, made mention of the fact that whilst Julia Gillard's speech was powerful the context behind the speech: the scandal of the then-Speaker Peter Slipper sending sexist text messages regarding female genitalia as well as being sued by a former employee for sexual harassment and Opposition Leader Tony Abbott's request for Slipper to be removed as speaker, was not being reported enough by the media and didn't seem to be taken into consideration. This was essentially true in regards to social media and international media with the latter heavily praising Gillard's speech. The amount of articles that do and do not make mention of the Peter Slipper scandal are shown in the pie chart below.

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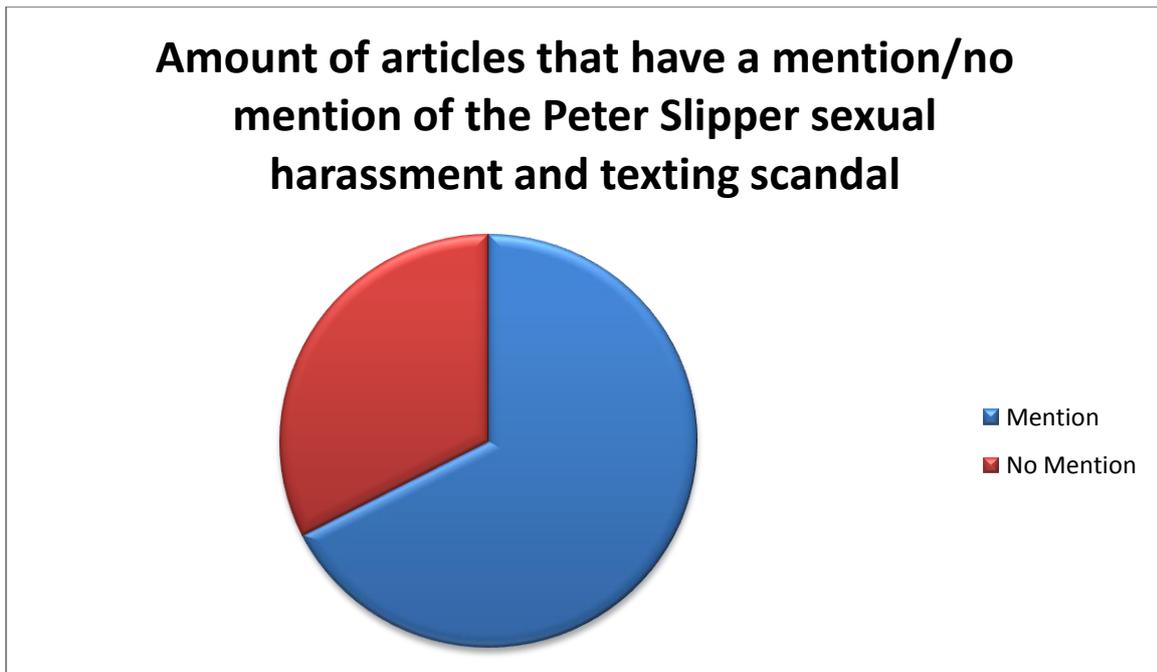


Fig 3. Out of the 40 articles, 27 of those mention the Peter Slipper scandal.

### DISCUSSION

#### Julia Gillard as a Superhero/Julia Gillard playing the Victim or Gender Card Frames

Even though there were three main frames identified: Julia Gillard as a feminist superhero, Julia Gillard as a manipulator and Julia Gillard as a victim, there were times where the frames crossed over, in particular the superhero and victim frames. There were two newspaper articles in which the two media frames crossed over obviously and they were both opinion pieces by Michelle Grattan and Sarrah Le Marquand. With both the superhero and victim frames crossing over, the misogyny speech was presented as a double edged sword, especially for women. Grattan's presentation of the double edged sword was more obvious to the reader, especially with the headline "Gillard's betrayal of feminism".

*"The PM may have made a hero of herself to some feminists but she did the wrong thing in trying to protect the sexist Peter Slipper."* (Grattan, *The Age*, 2012)

*"Despite attempts from her critics to portray the speech as calculated and self-serving, her undeniable conviction rang true to any woman—and quite a few men—who have felt similarly frustrated over sexist behaviour."* (Le Marquand, *The Daily Telegraph*, 2012)

*"...Play the gender card"* (Le Marquand, *The Daily Telegraph*, 2012).

The victim card frame relates to Jenkins' *Women in Australian Politics: Mothers Only Need Apply* as she states that "Gillard is female, single and child free, and her political enemies wasted no time in using these attributes as weapons against her." (Jenkins, 2006, p54)

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Jenkins also goes on to make this vital statement that is key to the victim card/gender card frame but also the superhero frame.

*“The stories being told about women in politics over the past century may have changed slightly, but the attitudes behind them have not.”* (Jenkins, 2006, p59)

This suggestion that the attitudes rather than the content of news articles and coverage of women in politics/female politicians, I believe is an accurate one. All forty of the newspaper articles I chose were accurate in their reporting, they were consistent and also repetitive. The articles that had the victim card frame frequently had words such as “gender card” and “gender war” to emphasize Gillard’s gender and possible accusing her of using the misogyny speech to play the gender card or a “poor me I’m a woman attacked by Tony Abbott” routine, which was the opinion of some voters and opposing politicians. This gender card frame presented itself in sixty percent of the articles as demonstrated in the frame table.

*“When a woman’s performance is under attack, rhetorical strategies and visual images that draw upon traditional myths of femininity are frequently deployed to discredit her by her political opponents and also by political reporters. These strategies include representations of her both in relation to supposedly ‘essential’ characteristics of femininity such as an (excessively) emotional nature and characteristics that are associated with maternal qualities (or lack of them).”* (Muir, 2005, p83)

This strategy is present in the newspaper articles that present the gender card frame. Especially in Julia Baird’s article in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, “Words that millions of women have rehearsed, yet never spoken”

*“Ah the gender card. It’s a funny old phrase isn’t it? You won’t find it in any dictionaries but we all know what it means: a trick women use to get out of detention, by vowing they are criticised not because they performed poorly, but because their critics are sexist.*

*You’re just acting the victim, women have been told for decades when speaking about vile remarks, sexual approaches or differential treatment. You should toughen up, take it on the chin, or accept it as a part of life...”* (Baird, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2012) Baird’s article continues in that fashion.

*“A woman politician may be attacked for being excessively feminine or insufficiently so, or even both in the one article.”* (Muir, 2005, p83) This quote emphasises the crossover between the Julia Gillard as a superhero and the Julia Gillard as a victim/playing the gender card frame.

### **Julia Gillard the Manipulator/Voters Frame**

This frame was the second heaviest out of three with 25 percent of the articles presenting this frame, especially since the women that were affected by the speech were not just

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women but voters and not only that voters-to-be with one of the articles interviewing HSC students, mostly female HSC students.

*“Whilst blatant sex stereotyping is becoming far less prevalent, common themes still remain strong in the rhetoric surrounding female politicians.”* (Ustinoff, 2005, p98)

The articles that presented the manipulator/voter frame used strong language and rarely went without the words “gender wars”, “sexism”, “misogyny”.

*“Despite all this it was clear within days the PM’s gender-based declaration of war had made quite an impact with many Australian women.”* (Oakes, *The Daily Telegraph*, 2012)

*“Australia’s first female prime minister has been trying to exploit the gender gap.”* (Devine, *The Sunday Telegraph*, 2012)

*“Ever since Ms Gillard’s impassioned speech against sexism and misogyny—in which she attacked Mr Abbott for seeking to remove Peter Slipper as Speaker over his degrading messages about women—the political debate has been filled by the gender wars.”* (Shanahan, *The Australian*, 2012)

*“Liberal women also have spotted strategic calculations in the Prime Minister’s attacks, a bid to win back into her camp female voters.”* (Kerr, *The Weekend Australian*, 2012)

Many different sub-frames, if you will are being presented in the manipulator/voter frame. Gillard is being framed as exploiting the gender gap, being manipulative and being a passionate politician all at the same time. This is most likely due to the polarisation that comes with being on either one side or the other with politics. Julia Baird points out that female politicians are framed in four different ways in the media: the steel sheila, the housewife, the feminist and the Covergirl. Julia Gillard with her misogyny speech was already the steel sheila, will long be the Covergirl for feminism as well as the feminist and will not be the housewife.

### CONCLUSION

*“Frames are ways of organising, presenting or understanding data, or, in newsroom terminology, provides the ‘hook’ or ‘peg’ which defines a story as newsworthy.”* (Baird, 2004, p75)

The whole point of this essay was to analyse how Julia Gillard’s misogyny speech was covered by the Australian media, especially in the different ways it was received by the Australian public as well as how the event and Gillard was framed by the Australian media. Clearly the three frames that were present were the most obvious ones that would come out of an event like the misogyny speech and because of Gillard’s gender, the three frames cross over. The five academic articles I have chosen and referenced repeatedly emphasise that female politicians always have and always will be covered differently and unfairly in the

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Australian media due to their gender because there is still the subconscious notion or opinion in society that women, even successful political women belong in the home, so the media naturally follows society's lead.

*"The sort of feminism that might want to celebrate such an achievement, or that might position a woman as a role model, is at least old-fashioned at worst unjust, in this depoliticised 'girl power' post feminism."* (Gannon, 2010, p5)

This quote was taken from Gannon's article in the context of some teenage girls interviewed for the article who said they were uninspired in a way when Gillard was appointed prime minister as they felt that women were already equal to men, at least they thought they were or were questioning if there was still inequality present. Clearly the media is quick to point out and frame this.

The misogyny speech's affect on voters and the media alike can be easily summed up with this quote from Peter Hartcher's article "Misogyny card helps, but Labor's hand still weak" in *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

*"And the verdict seems to be that it has had a positive effect for the Prime Minister, but a limited one."* (Hartcher, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2012).

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