

## **Damsels in Democratic Distress (Best 500 words)**

Perceptions of female politicians are derived from the beliefs and values that are internalised as part of an individual's self-concept. Secondary research by Dr Jill Sheppard reported within an ABC news article stated, 'male conservative voters were less likely to support a female candidate or leader,'<sup>1 2</sup> which my questionnaire results supported. Of the 58.5% of males who indicated women were 'fairly represented' and 'over represented' in Parliament; 52% voted for right-wing, conservative political parties and 61% of these voters were Millennials.<sup>3</sup> When asked 'do you believe the ratio of male to female politicians in Australian Parliaments needs to change?', 51.2% males answered no; of which 54% voted for right wing, conservative parties, again 55% of these voters were Millennials.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, my primary research interview with Kate Washington Member for Port Stephens supports Dr Sheppard's research. When I asked her 'do you think the Australian constituency believes the ratio of male to female politicians in Australian Parliaments needs to change?' she stated "if you look at the political parties; within the Labor Party there has been an understanding that it needs to change, but obviously with the Liberal Party not introducing any of the targets or structural changes needed to change theirs [gender imbalance], arguably no, there's a whole side of the political fence that doesn't see a need for change,"<sup>5</sup> which corroborates Dr Sheppard's research that right wing conservative philosophy impacts the opportunity for gender equality within politics and Parliament.

It must be acknowledged that there are positive trends arising from female and left-wing participants. Dr Sheppard stated, "Every generation is getting more used to females in leadership positions. We're seeing small increases in the number of women but they tend to be driven by parties on the left. We will eventually change, but it could take another 20 years before the idea of women in politics becomes mainstream."<sup>6</sup> My primary interview and questionnaire supported Dr Sheppard's research. I asked Kate Washington MP, 'what do you think society's views about women being politicians are?' to which she responded, "[Society's views are] Changing for the better. Broadly I think there is an understanding that parliament

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<sup>1</sup> Sheppard, J., Chang Kang, W., Snagovsky, F. and Biddle, N. (n.d.). Ethnic identities and descriptive representation: a conjoint analysis of vote choice. pp.1-14. [Accessed 19 Jul. 2018]

<sup>2</sup> Jacques, O. (2018). Are Australians too conservative to vote for more women in politics?. [online] ABC News. Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-05/are-australians-too-conservative-to-vote-for-more-women/9804036> [Accessed 28 Jun. 2018].

<sup>3</sup> Appendix – Primary Questionnaire

<sup>4</sup> Appendix – Primary Questionnaire

<sup>5</sup> Appendix – Primary Interview with Kate Washington MP

<sup>6</sup> Jacques, O. (2018). Are Australians too conservative to vote for more women in politics?. [online] ABC News. Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-05/are-australians-too-conservative-to-vote-for-more-women/9804036> [Accessed 28 Jun. 2018].

should reflect the community and that there should equal representation of women in parliament, certainly on my side of politics [left-wing] that is well understood.”<sup>7</sup> Moreover, 72.5% of females believed that the ratio of female to male politicians needed to change. These results lead to a positive probable future of female politicians becoming part of the norm within Australian parliaments, as a result of evolutionary change and a demand for change amongst left-wing individuals and females. With increased societal discourse about the ‘#metoo’ movement and greater awareness of violence against females, social change is being demanded by females within society

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<sup>7</sup> Appendix – Primary Interview with Kate Washington MP