Cont/d…

Anne Summers in her book the Misogyny Factor has documented that women in Australia continue to be second class citizens. And as she has stated in the last 24 hours “the bullies have won”.

The vitriol and abuse that has been directed at Ms Gillard as Prime Minister has also been well documented. But it is important that this misogynistic behaviour be placed in the context of how every woman in Australia is treated.

Each of us:

·         Fear rape and sexual assault which impacts on our behaviour every day

·         At least 1 in 3 women experience domestic violence in their relationships

·         We experience sexual harassment at work, at home and in the street

·         Violence against women is the biggest health problem for women in Australia

·         Our legal system – family law, criminal law etc all fail to protect women from violence and abuse. It discounts and denies violence against women – it calls women liars

·         Women and poverty – single mothers are the most impoverished group in Australia

·         Families, which are described as the “core of our society”, are not a safe place for women. When commentators and politicians talk of the importance of families they inevitably fail to identify the oppression that many women experience in families

On a regular basis, another male sporting hero is found to have raped, sexually assaulted or violated women

Women’s services are increasingly being outsourced to generic and faith-based organisations. Faith based organisations have a history and ideology of treating women as lesser human beings than men.

Ms Gillard, as with many women who achieve positions of authority, did not emphasise her femaleness or so-called “women’s issues”. In fact one can say that it is advisable for women who wish to be in positions of influence, not to highlight that they may want to represent women or challenge women’s position in our society.

It was only after a relentless sexist and misogynistic campaign from the media and the Coalition opposition that Prime Minister Gillard stood up and in her famous speech challenged these sexist attacks on herself and on women as a whole.

It was a speech that galvanised women worldwide. Women responded with an awareness that at last, a woman in a leadership position was identifying the experiences of women everywhere – and was assertively challenging misogyny and defending all women.

And yet, as a reflection that our social systems continue to be patriarchal, continue to be run by men, for men, her speech was either ignored or criticised in Australia.

When the “Women for Gillard” campaign was launched there was even further criticism for Ms Gillard “playing the gender card”. Identifying that women have specific needs, have specific and serious concerns as women in Australia’s patriarchal society is just not on.

Under relentless misogynistic attack we were told by the polls, by the media and by the Opposition that Gillard was losing popularity. And make no mistake a major reason for this supposedly loss in support was based on the fact that she is a woman.

A constant underlying aspect of Ms Gillard’s position as Labor’s leader was the undermining by members of her own party. This may be seen as a very normal part of internal politics with factions and those seeking power, jockeying for supremacy. It happens in all major political parties. So how does gender become an issue in this? The fact is that those who are responsible for ousting our first female Prime Minister should have been challenging the sexism and misogyny; should have been standing by Ms Gillard, because she is a woman, because she was being bullied and vilified as a woman. Instead they took advantage of her vulnerability as a woman – they made use of the ammunition provided by misogynists and sided with the bullies and perpetrators of abuse.

Even strong women within the political system, who themselves have been subjected to sexist abuse, in order to retain their positions of influence, became one with the bullies. Patriarchal dominated women, who if they challenge patriarchy, know that they will lose.

So where does this leave women in Australia. It leaves us oppressed, violated and abused. It means that despite the sacrifices women made to win us the vote, that women are not represented by our social and political institutions. It means that our voices continue to be silenced.

This is unacceptable.

Marie Hume

Secretary

WEAVE Inc.