



Gender Quotas Are Simply UnLiberal

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The story of Scott Morrison since he became Prime Minister a few weeks ago is very much the story of a boss in the modern-day Australian workplace.

On one hand Morrison is attempting to do his best in the face of an external threat – the Labor Party – to his business.

Meanwhile, he has the internal challenge of managing a team of staff – [Liberal MPs](#) – comprising a sizeable proportion of those who think they could do his job better than he can. The team also includes a small but loud minority of individuals who appear committed to acting not as members of Parliament carrying the authority and responsibility of such a role, but as 19-year-old members of the “snowflake generation” currently populating university campuses around the country.

In common with a growing number of teenage undergraduates, [some federal Liberal MPs seem to believe having their feelings hurt or their opinions challenged is “bullying”](#) and that the theories of

identity politics require MPs and candidates to be categorised according to their gender, race and class.

The issue of bullying in workplaces is serious and real, but when MPs throw the term about as a political weapon and a slur to publicly accuse their colleagues – but then refuse to provide the evidence to support such claims – they are trivialising the issue and making it more difficult in the future for real victims of real bullying.

Definition of bullying

Liberal MPs should know better. The definition of “bullying” under the Fair Work Act is repeated unreasonable behaviour towards a worker that creates a risk to health and safety. A colleague arguing with you about who should be the next prime minister is unlikely to be bullying. And in the world of politics it’s not unreasonable for it to be pointed out to some MPs by other MPs that how they vote in a leadership contest could have consequences for their preselection.

Liberal MPs should stop and ponder the consequences of their bullying claims, for not only victims of bullying, but also for anyone accused of bullying. Liberal senator Lucy Gichuhi said of the leadership dispute: “Everything was happening so fast. And that in itself is a form of intimidation because we were supposed to make a very important decision within a very short time.”

Presumably from now on any employee anywhere asked to make an important decision “too quickly” will be entitled to claim that they were “intimidated”.

As ridiculous as it sounds there might actually be some merit in the Liberals having an inquiry into bullying because then at least bosses would know what bullying is and isn’t.

Liberal MPs wanting to play identity politics, however, is a much bigger issue for the Liberal Party. The suggestion, for example, that the Liberal Party should now adopt [gender quotas](#) cuts across every single philosophical principle the party stands for. Providing equality of opportunity by encouraging more women to stand for Parliament for the Liberals is entirely appropriate. But enforcing an equality of outcomes is a very different question.

Applied consistently

[Julia Banks](#), a Liberal MP who supports gender quotas and who has announced her retirement at the next federal election, said in Parliament last week that, “the concept that this [gender quotas] will begin that path to destruction of micro quotas depending on people’s sexuality or ethnicity is ludicrous. We are talking about quotas for women, who represent more than half our population.”

The suggestion that if a category of identity possessed by more than half the population is not represented in at least half of all candidates, then the balance should be redressed through quotas, is at first glance not unreasonable. But it raises the question of whether gender is the only identity that should be treated in such a way.



According to the most recent census, 52.1 per cent of Australians identify as Christian.

For Banks' formula to be applied consistently, if ever less than half of Liberal MPs were Christian, the Liberals would be forced to create a quota guaranteeing a certain number of Liberal Christian MPs.

It remains to be seen whether the Liberals imposing quotas for Christians would be as popular as the party creating quotas for women. Especially if such a quota was suggested by Scott Morrison.

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