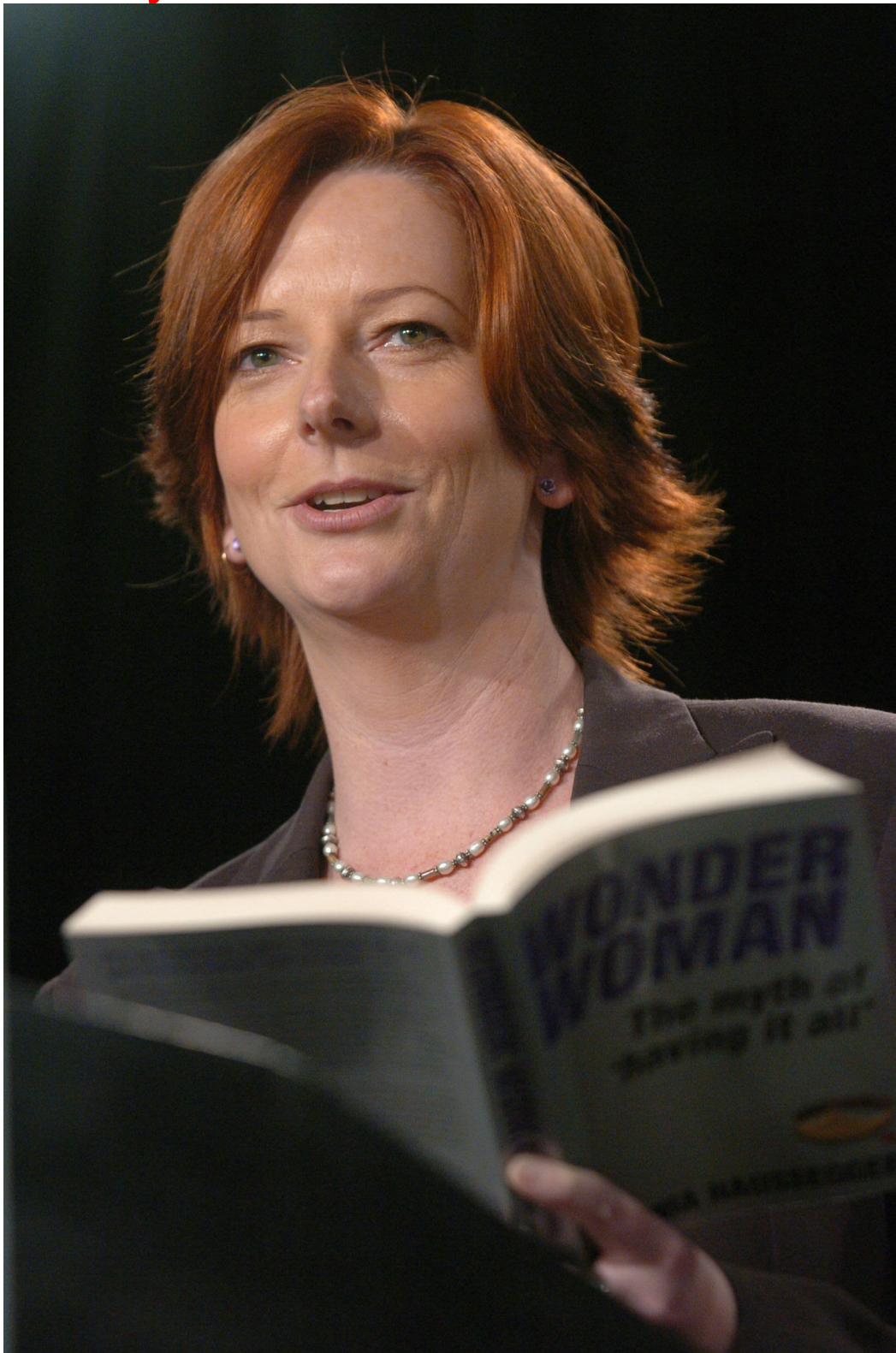


Wonder Woman: the myth of 'having it all', by Virginia Haussegger

Launch by Julia Gillard MP



National Press Club, Canberra - 4th May 2005

(Check Against Delivery)

It's fantastic to be here today with Virginia for the launch of her book, 'Wonder Woman The myth of having it all'.

Virginia, as I have said to you privately, I have marvelled at the courage you have shown in writing this book and your honesty about your own life experiences. You rightly said being call courageous makes you nervous, that you are worried you have been courageous in a 'Yes Minister' sense. But I think it's true courage, not foolhardiness and I believe many women will thank you for it. While bravery is one of your attributes, until the last ten days I would not have picked you as a clairvoyant.

But you must be a woman with one powerfully accurate crystal ball because today's book launch, organised so many month's ago, coincides with a raging national debate about women's choices caused by the Howard Government's cruel plans to cut back Medicare funding for IVF.

And of course behind the debate about the mean nature of this cutback, behind the debate about the dodgy figures used to justify it, behind the debate about Tony Abbott's description of IVF as 'non essential', lies a set of preconceptions about women's lives and women's choices.

Or perhaps I should more accurately say what lies behind is an arrogant and ill informed set of assumptions about women's lives and women's choices.

Women, their bodies and their babies have become a theme of Federal Budgets. Virginia's book says the following about last year's budget:

'What was supposed to be an election budget was quickly dubbed the "erection budget". Wearing the smirk of a private school boy telling a dirty story after a swig of his first UDL, Treasurer Peter Costello told the assembled media to go forth and procreate. In other words . . . ' go and get ...'.

And there follows a word one can't possible say on the ABC in the day time. Indeed as Rove McManus found out to his cost this week you can't say a variant of it at 11.50 pm on commercial television either. But I'm sure you get the idea.

Virginia continues:

'Go home and do your patriotic duty tonight' [the Treasurer] told the dozens of reporters before him. The message was unambiguous: the country needs your babies!'

And here we are again, one year later and another Budget. Now Treasurer Costello and the Minister Abbott and indeed the Prime Minister aren't just saying get on with it girls, now they are saying get on with it girls and get on with it early and save our budget dollars.

In making these statements, Peter, Tony and John don't seem to get the pretty simple concept that many women need access to IVF for infertility issues that have nothing to do with age. The assumption is if you are infertile you have waited too long and that's your fault and you can pay for it.

But whatever the reason for infertility, whether age has played a part or not, should we really be expected to put up with three men pointing the finger of blame at Australian women?

And should we really be expected to put up with this finger pointing, when it is perfectly clear that Peter, Tony and John haven't spent one moment of their precious time thinking about why 'the girls' don't get on with it earlier or perhaps don't ever get on with it all.

Today, I am laying out a challenge for Treasurer Costello and for Minister Abbott, both fathers of three children.

Peter, try and imagine you were born Petra and ask yourself the question, could you have been Petra, the mother of three of children and pursued a career that at this point in your life had you poised for a final struggle to be Prime Minister?

Tony, imagine being born Antoinette and ask yourself the question, could you be the mother of three and have led the same life, obviously swapping the time in the seminary for some time in a convent?

I won't ask you to imagine the Prime Minister as a woman, not because I think he is any less culpable than the other two, but because there are some places to which the human imagination should not run.

But coming back to Peter and Tony, or should I say 'boys', why don't you try for a day to walk in the high heels of Australian women and ask yourself, if I've been born a woman would I have made the same set of so-called 'choices'.

Would I have married? Would I have had children? Would I have had the same number of children? And particularly would I have had the same number of children if doing so meant the difference between having a shot at being PM and not ever having that shot? If it meant the difference between having the career you wanted and were capable of having, or holding a lower status, lower paid, lower profile, less interesting and less fulfilling job.

'Boys' take a walk in those high heels. Or if that is way too Alexander Downer for you, then do something easier. Read Virginia's book.

In *Wonder Woman*, women with humour and insight recount the juggle-struggle of trying to have it all, of being women who thought — not unreasonably — that if men could have uninterrupted glittering careers and be fathers, then they could do the same and be mothers. It also recounts the choices made by some women who realised they could do anything but who made choices only to find many moments spent wondering about the life not lived. Would it have been better or would it have been worse if they had made a different choice? And it recounts, through Virginia's own experiences, the pain that can be felt by women who made a 'creeping non-choice', who delayed child bearing until they were ready for it, only to find that when they were ready for it, their bodies were not.

Wonder Woman could be seen as a lament and in many ways it gives us permission to lament what is still so wrong and constrained about women's so-called choices.

But more than that it is an important contribution to the debate about what lies beyond feminism's second wave and the impact of the gender revolution.

The gender revolution cannot be undone, even if some Howard Government Ministers would dream of doing so. The only choice is to go forward, to carve out more change and to do what we need to do now so that women's lives are full of real choice. Virginia's book — by cataloguing what shaped the lives of the women of today — rightly aims to provoke a vigorous debate about what would give women better access to real choice rather than unsatisfactory trade-offs or non-choices.

Virginia congratulations and I am going to boost sales by making sure I buy a copy for Peter and Tony. You never know, they might just learn something!

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