

## OPINION

## COMMENT: ANNIE LEWIS

## Enough is enough, so hear us women roar

**H**UNDREDS of women, men and children marched down Baylis Street on Monday in solidarity with thousands of people around the country calling for action to stop gendered violence.

The March 4 Justice rallies, which were held at locations across the nation, demanded action from all levels of government to ensure equality and respect for women.

At the end of the rally, I stood alone waiting for a lift thinking about how empowering it felt to march alongside the residents of Wagga who felt "angry" and fed up with the way the system worked. At this point, a man asked, or rather shouted out, as to what all the fuss was about. When I tried to explain, he cut me off and began yelling that "women have enough rights as it is".

I am perhaps known to my family and friends for being loud or slightly confrontational, but in that moment I felt all my energy leave me and I said nothing.

When finally in the car with my friend, I started to tear up feeling frustrated with myself for not speaking up in the moment.

It made me realise that although participating in the march was great, there is so much more that we all need to do.

And one of those things is to clearly pronounce the why.

So, to that man and any others who question the need for this sort of action, this is why I participated in the March 4 Justice.

I marched because when I was a teenager I was taught if I wore jeans it would be harder for a man to rape me.

I marched because on one of my first nights out at a club, a man pushed me up against the wall and told me I should be grateful for his attention because I was fat and no one else would give it to me.

I marched because two men in a ute decided it would be funny to follow me in my car back to my office because I hadn't responded to the sexual comments they made sitting in a lane next to me. They only stopped following me when I pulled up in front of the police station.

I marched because some of the things that have happened in my life are too graphic to write.

I marched because many women in my life are unable to speak about the things that have happened to them.

I marched because when a woman does dare to come forward they are asked "what were you wearing" or told "you were asking for it".



**MARCHING FOR JUSTICE:** Wagga women, men and children lend their voices to the rallying cry across the nation calling for action to address gender-based violence. **Picture:** Emma Hillier

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I marched because on one of my first nights out at a club, a man pushed me up against the wall and told me I should be grateful for his attention because I was fat and no one else would give it to me.

I marched because women are taught how to avoid being raped, rather than men being taught they do not have any right or ownership over another person's body.

I marched because I have to hold my keys in my hand when walking at night because experience has taught me to never leave

myself defenseless.

I marched because women are called sluts or prudes, no matter what way they choose to live their life.

I marched because the impacts of gendered violence don't just affect women, but also the incredible men in my life who are unable to comprehend what we face.

I marched because I don't know any woman who has not been belittled, harassed, or assaulted by a man.

I marched because I do not feel like the politicians running this country care about me or other women in this community.

I marched because we should not need to "imagine if it was your sister, mother, or friend" to decide we need to enact change.

I marched because women bear the brunt of the impacts of gendered violence.

I marched because not all women survive.

And, I marched because a man decided it was OK for him to yell at a woman standing alone on a kerb waiting for a lift after she had marched down Baylis Street to protest

gendered violence and the harassment of women.

Monday was inspiring, the march was empowering, but that's the easy part.

Our Deputy Prime Minister and Member for the Riverina Michael McCormack said "every home, workplace and public space in Australia should be safe for all those who are lucky enough to call Australia home."

Yet, women in the very same city that he grew up in do not have those rights afforded to them. We need to write to our politicians, have difficult conversations, share our thoughts on social media, and it needs to be all of us - women and men.

This issue is rampant and manifests in both overt and subtly sinister ways, and impacts every single woman young or old.

So to all those who would try and dismiss us, let me tell you, enough is enough.

In the words of the incredible Helen Reddy, "I am woman, hear me roar".

- Annie Lewis is a reporter with The Daily Advertiser



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