

ANZSOG Case Program

Revealing the 'Real Julia': authenticity and gender in Australian political leadership (TEACHING NOTE)

2016-185.2

Synopsis

Julia Gillard, Australia's first female prime minister, was in her role for three years and three days, enduring almost constant destabilisation before her leadership was challenged and she was abruptly dethroned by the same man she had replaced — Kevin Rudd. Gillard describes herself as an authentic leader although her authenticity was frequently challenged by the opposition, the media and even the public. Her gender was another notable feature of public discussion about her leadership.

Description of research

The case covers a tumultuous period in Australian politics. It was written using a combination of primary sources (in the form of Julia Gillard's autobiography and transcripts of participant interviews conducted for retrospective documentaries) and secondary sources (including domestic and international print and broadcast media and other analyses). This balance between primary and secondary sources was appropriate given the nature of the case. It would have been extremely difficult and costly to gain direct access to the key protagonists for little additional gain, since their positions were well canvassed in the documentary interviews and extensive media coverage and commentary.

Course audience

- Advanced undergraduate students in public management and business programmes
- Masters level public management and business administration students
- Middle and senior managers in the public sector
- Journalists writing about leadership in the public sector.

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Teaching objectives

- To critically examine and discuss the concept of authentic leadership using examples from Gillard's leadership journey.
- To discuss the extent to which gender contributes to how a leader is perceived, portrayed and judged.
- To discuss the role of media in constructing a 'common sense' understanding of leadership.

Theoretical resources

This case has been written to seed critical discussions around the topics of 'authentic leadership' and 'women in leadership'. The following three readings are recommended as pre-class readings to enable students to explore these topics in depth.

Avolio, B. J. and Gardner, W. L. (2005). Authentic leadership development: Getting to the root of positive forms of leadership. *The leadership quarterly*, 16(3), 315-338.

Authentic leadership is a relatively new concept that sets out to address concerns about the risk of unethical yet charismatic leadership typically associated with transformational leadership. In this article, seen as a foundation of authentic leadership, four aspects of authentic leadership are identified that have relevance for this case.

- Self-awareness – developing an understanding and sense of self that provides a firm anchor for decisions and behaviour
- Balanced information processing – unbiased collection and interpretation of positive and negative self-related information.
- Moral and ethical perspective – behaviour and decision-making are guided by core values, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings rather than outside pressures and personalities.
- Relational transparency – high levels of openness, self-disclosure and trust in relationships.

Alvesson, M. and Svenningsson, S. (2013). Authentic leadership critically reviewed. In Ladkin, D. and Spiller, C. (eds). *Authentic leadership: Clashes, convergences, and coalescences*. Edward Elgar: pp.39-54.

This chapter critiques the authentic leadership concept, identifying a number of problematic aspects.

- Leader-centrism – the concept focuses too much on the leader and the leader's traits and does not take into account all those who are involved in change.
- The leader as a moral giant – seeing a leader as someone who is morally better than others.
- Tautology – authentic leadership is good leadership because good leadership is authentic.
- Real world imperfections – the tension between some kind of ideal and reality. For example, sometimes at work telling the truth is the least effective way to get things done. Then, do you become an inauthentic leader but an effective one?
- Lack of realism – the challenge/impossibility of assessing people's real motives.

Sinclair A. (2013) *Not just 'adding women In': Women re-making leadership*. Melbourne Business School.

This piece argues that gender influences what we see as leadership and can mask achievements made by women leaders. Mainstream leadership concepts draw from mainly masculine, hierarchical, heroic

ideals and have a strong influence on how the practice and performance of leadership is seen. 'Leadership is a white, male idea' (Sinclair, 2013, p 3). This reading can put the case study into a theoretical context from a critical, feminist point of view and form the basis of a discussion about the extent to which it explains why Gillard was treated the way she was.

Audio visual resources

1. *The Killing Season*

The Killing Season by Sarah Ferguson, is an ABC Television documentary in three parts about Rudd and Gillard's relationship and their leadership battle. The best excerpt for supporting the case is Episode 3, 19-27 minutes. It starts when Gillard announces to the media that she has decided to show more of 'the real Julia' and therefore provides a useful introduction to the issue of authentic leadership. The latter part of the segment highlights the abusive comments (such as 'ditch the witch') that Gillard received following her change of mind about the introduction of a carbon tax. This provides an excellent illustration of the issues around the treatment of women leaders. *The Killing Season* is available to purchase as a download at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/programs/killing-season/>.

2. *Misogyny Speech*

A useful way of introducing the case would be to show a segment of Gillard's 'misogyny speech', which was delivered when Abbott raised concerns about the speaker Peter Slipper who had sent a crude and sexist text message to another male staff member. Gillard was angered about having to listen to Abbott lecture her about sexism. Her 15-minute speech in response drew in part on her notes of Abbott's most sexist quotes. The speech is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOPsxpMzYw4>.

Suggested teaching plan

This case can be taught effectively in a 60 minute session. The suggested plan below is based on the case teacher leading the whole discussion. A number of alternative approaches could be taken, including breaking the class into small groups to answer questions.

Start with opening questions that draw out students' views on: - what values and standards of behaviour do we expect of our political leaders? - do we expect women political leaders to lead differently to men?	5 minutes
Show one of the videos listed in the AV section to give students a visual introduction to the key characters and events in the case.	10 minutes
Engage the class in discussion of the following topics, encouraging them to make connections between evidence from the case and the assigned theoretical resources. <i>Leadership authenticity</i> - Gillard was accused of changing stance on the 'Carbon Tax'. Can a leader change their mind and still be considered authentic? - How is authenticity in leaders assessed? Can this case study show whether Gillard is an authentic leader or not? - What happens if a leader who seeks to be authentic is portrayed in media as the opposite – how might this happen and how could it be resolved?	30 minutes

<i>Women in leadership</i> • To what extent did Gillard's gender influence the evaluation of her as a leader? • Gillard attempted to 'move away' from gender as a way of defining her and her leadership. What effect did this have on her prime ministership?	
Conclude the discussion by returning to the opening questions which drew on students' views of political leadership. Ask them about the ways in which the case encourages them to think differently about issues and authenticity and gender in their understanding and evaluation of political leaders.	15 minutes

Suggested student assignments

This case raises a number of controversial issues and debates for which there is no right answer. As a result, what is provided below are not 'answers' but a brief explanation of some ways students might address the questions. It is not intended to be an exhaustive account.

Gillard was accused of changing stance on the 'Carbon Tax'. Can a leader change their mind and still be considered authentic?

Yes

- As long as the decision resonates with Gillard's sense of self and purpose and doing the right thing by her values. She presents a strong rationale in the case study, including why she feels it's the right thing to do. This could indicate she is being authentic.
- It could be said that breaking promises is part of the art of political leadership. All leaders have to sometimes change their minds, it's a political reality – it's how you do it that matters.
- She had to honour promises made therefore she was still being authentic, even though it was not interpreted that way by some critics.
- The opposition exaggerated this event as a way to make her look dishonest – that does not mean that she was a liar.

No

- You cannot claim to be authentic if you are perceived to have changed your mind for advantage.
- It is more important to keep your promise to the public in order to be considered authentic, no matter what.
- In the case study it states that she changed her mind for gain — getting another supporter for her minority government coalition. She was therefore dishonest because she was simply advancing her own agenda.

How is authenticity in leaders assessed? Can this case study show whether Gillard is an authentic leader or not?

Yes

- Her values, purpose and resilience align with Avolio and Gardner's description of authentic leadership. Gillard says she was making decisions consistent with her values, she admits to making mistakes and in her autobiography she reflects deeply on her leadership experience.

- Media played a strong role in distorting Gillard's image – just because the media says she is inauthentic doesn't mean that she actually is inauthentic.

No

- Authenticity as a concept is too difficult to assess because there is no way of knowing if what she says is true. Rudd believes Gillard to be inauthentic, describing her as a sophisticated political operator who has a scripted answer to any question she is asked.
- Gillard acknowledges that describing herself as 'the real Julia' was a tactical mistake, implying that she regrets her decision to be more open and honest. This suggests her 'authenticity' was a calculated tactic, rather than something genuine.

What happens if a leader who seeks to be authentic is portrayed in media as the opposite – can this authenticity paradox ever be resolved? Draw from your own experiences and readings to discuss this paradox.

This assignment topic is deliberately quite broad, inviting students to think on:

- the complexity around deciding/assessing what an authentic leader is – how can you assess something if you are told the opposite by media. How do you ever get to the 'real' anyone?
- how important the portrayal of what leaders say and do is for us to perceive them as authentic or not.
- whether it is possible, and if so, desirable, to have 'neutral' reporting of political events.
- examples when it may be more advantageous to be inauthentic which can challenge the equation 'authentic leadership = good leadership'.

Gillard attempted to 'move away' from gender as a way of defining her and her leadership. What effect did this have on her prime ministership?

- Gillard actually didn't gain support from feminist supporters because of her chosen stance.
- The media still focused on 'feminine aspects' of her appearance, such as looks, hair, dresses. This reporting created a further dissonance between her focusing on work and policy messages and the 'human interest pieces' – potentially making her a less effective communicator.
- She tried too hard to ignore the sexism and when she finally addressed it in the misogyny speech – the effect was two-fold. It was both recognised as a positive move and criticised as a tactic and the start of a 'gender war'.

What do you think the cartoon below tries to illustrate about Gillard's leadership using examples from the case study and readings to demonstrate your point?

This is a different style of assignment as it gives a lot of room for interpretation and can be used in many different ways – students are encouraged to think more creatively about how leadership is seen and portrayed.

Examples could include:

- Abbott's portrayal as part of a sexist 'swim trunks and boys' club' relates to the misogyny speech and Gillard's comment about Abbott only needing a mirror to see what sexism in Australia looks like.

- That boys' club can't see the glass ceiling because it does not apply to them. Interestingly, opposition member Julia Bishop is portrayed as being part of the boys club too – the dominant culture is so strong females also conform.

Further reading on Julia Gillard's leadership

Curtin, J. (2015). The prime ministership of Julia Gillard *Australian Journal of Political Science*. 50(1): 190-204.

Delahunty, M. (2014). *Gravity: inside the PM's office during her last year and final days*. Melbourne: Hardie Grant Books.

Gillard, J. (2014). *My story*. Sydney: Random House Australia

Hall, L. J., and Donaghue, N. (2013). Nice girls don't carry knives': Constructions of ambition in media coverage of Australia's first female prime minister. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 52(4), 631-647.

Exhibit 1



Source: <http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=38201#.Vw2cTPnvMdU>