



ANZSOG Case Program

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

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Julia Gillard became Australia's 27th prime minister and the first woman to have the role when, as his deputy, she ousted Kevin Rudd in a sudden leadership coup in 2010. The challenge was prompted by widespread concern within the ruling Labor Party at Rudd's domineering leadership style, including tight control of access to information and inability to reach timely decisions. Gillard, by contrast, was known for her ability to negotiate, plan and get things done. She sought to position herself as an authentic leader, 'the real Julia,' openly sharing information, standing by her personal values and choices and, as she says in her autobiography *My Story*, acknowledging mistakes as opportunities to learn. In the 2010 election campaign she pledged that:

As prime minister, I will be driven by the values I have believed in all my life. The importance of hard work, the fulfilling of the obligation that you owe to yourself and to others to earn your keep and do your best.(...) In my life I have made my own choices about how I want to live. I do not seek anyone's endorsement of my choices; they are mine and mine alone. I do not believe that as prime minister it is my job to preach on personal choices. However, it is my job to urge we respect each other's personal choices.¹

A better chance in life

Julia Eileen Gillard was born in Wales, and her family migrated to Adelaide, Australia in 1966 when Gillard was four years old to give the young girl who had suffered severe recurring chest problems a better chance in life. Gillard's parents both worked shift work with people in care and with disabilities. They stressed the importance of education, something they did not have the luxury to gain for themselves.

This case was written by Carin Sundstedt and Dr Todd Bridgman (both Victoria University of Wellington) and Janet Tyson (ANZSOG). The case is based on published materials and has been prepared as a basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation.

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¹ Gillard, J. (2014). *My Story*. Sydney: Random House pp. 134-137 (hereafter *My Story*).

Gillard's interest in politics started at university, where she studied law and joined the Labor club to campaign against education budget cuts. Gillard was elected to the House of Representatives in 1998, as was Kevin Rudd. Though his early life mirrored hers in many ways, as adults their personal styles and strengths were completely different. Rudd was a masterful user of the media and Gillard an effective builder of coalitions.² Together they were seen as a potential 'dream team'³, and Gillard supported Rudd in his successful challenge against opposition leader Kim Beazley late in 2006. Gillard was widely seen as an eventual contender for the top job, a view held by Rudd himself. However she acknowledged that 'I was not what Labor needed at that point: a woman, not married, an atheist. I would not be perceived as the embodiment of safe change'.⁴

Labor, with the 'dream team' in charge, won the 2007 election in a 'Rudd-slide' against John Howard's Liberal and National Party Coalition, which had governed for more than a decade. Rudd's emphatic intention to tackle climate change, 'the major moral challenge of our times', had been a prominent part of Labor's electoral campaign.⁵

Responding to global crisis

Almost as soon as the new government took office, it faced the challenge of the rapidly developing Global Financial Crisis (GFC). Rudd's proclaimed grasp of economics and finance and his desire to make decisions without 'deep consultation' seemed a good fit with rapidly unfolding events.⁶ Gillard described the GFC as 'a crisis where centralized command and control decision making was called for and Kevin excelled at it'.⁷ Rudd formed a 'Gang of Four' to make key decisions, comprising himself and Gillard, treasurer Wayne Swan and finance minister Lindsay Tanner.

Coming out of the GFC, however, Rudd faced criticism for his over-reliance on the 'Gang of Four' to the exclusion of the full cabinet. Gillard would later claim – and Rudd adamantly deny – that he stymied her attempts to increase cabinet involvement in decision-making.⁸

Despite the financial crisis, Rudd's government pushed ahead with a suite of economic reforms, the most complex being an emissions trading scheme to begin addressing climate change. In December 2009 Rudd left for a major global climate change conference in Copenhagen, seeking a historic binding global treaty to reduce emissions. The Copenhagen conference failed to agree a treaty, with Rudd blaming the Chinese.⁹

Back home, the ideas of an emissions trading scheme and putting a price on using carbon were becoming more contentious. The bipartisan political consensus surrounding Australia's response to climate change shattered when Tony Abbott defeated Malcolm Turnbull by one vote to become leader of the Liberal Party. Abbott opposed Turnbull's support of Rudd's scheme and soon after voted it down with the support of the Greens, who wanted more ambitious reductions.

Within the Labor Party, discontent with Rudd's leadership was building, although Rudd seemed unaware, and maintained his popularity in public appearances.¹⁰ Gillard, who had become one of Australia's most popular deputy prime ministers, believed the party was tiring of Rudd's autocratic (and increasingly chaotic) leadership style, although she decided against criticising him in public.

² Delahunty, M. (2014) *Gravity*. Melbourne: Hardie Grants Books p. xix (hereafter *Gravity*).

³ *My Story* p. 6.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁵ Ferguson, S. (2015) *The Killing Season*, ABC Television, (hereafter *The Killing Season*) episode 2.

⁶ *My Story* p. 11.

⁷ *The Killing Season*, episode 1.

⁸ *Ibid*.

⁹ *Ibid*, episode 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid*.

I became the fix-it person ministers turned to. I would endeavour to resolve their problems (...) on top of managing my own mammoth workload. (...) As the wear and tear on ministers, staff members and public servants grew, I kept my own counsel and focused on persuading Kevin to adopt more effective practices. To other ministers, I would defend him and try to jolly along frustrated public servants kept waiting for meetings. But the sense that things were out of control was becoming impossible to contain. The realization that so much was wrong and needed to be fixed was not confined to me.¹¹

Labor's standing with the electorate had been damaged by a series of controversies: the accidental deaths of four young men while installing roof insulation as part of the government's GFC economic stimulus package, a proposed Resource Super Profits Tax that was staunchly opposed by influential mining companies, and a dramatic increase in the arrivals by boat of asylum-seekers.

Leadership challenge

By early 2010, despite polls showing the Labor government maintaining sufficient support to win the election scheduled for later in the year, the pressure for change at the top was building.¹² Some of Gillard's supporters from inside the Party and the unions felt a decision had to be made before the winter break, the so called 'Killing Season', and started agitating for a leadership vote.¹³

In public, Gillard repeatedly ruled out a leadership contest, but on 23 June 2010 she and senior Labor senator John Faulkner called a meeting with Rudd, in circumstances later disputed. Rudd asked to be given more time and said Gillard agreed to this with a handshake. Gillard remembers otherwise, but acknowledges she 'gave Kevin some false hope'.¹⁴ After discussions with her supporters, the leadership challenge went ahead. Rudd, realising he had lost the support of his caucus, decided not to contest the ballot. He felt betrayed, labelling Gillard an 'assassin'.¹⁵

While Rudd saw Gillard as a Lady Macbeth who had plotted to take over as prime minister, others labelled her a pawn of the 'faceless men'; influential Labor insiders and the union movement who had orchestrated a coup. Gillard herself strongly denied this, insisting she was taking power as part of a collective – not for herself, but in response to the needs of the party.¹⁶ As Kevin Rudd saw it:

I think Julia has always had a bit of a problem with the truth. Julia is such a disciplined political player that she has almost in her mind a scripted answer to any question that you ever put to her.¹⁷

The public, however, had been largely unaware of Labor's infighting over Rudd's leadership and were surprised by Gillard's challenge. Her reluctance to explain the reasons behind the challenge¹⁸ did nothing to build understanding and support in the electorate. As she later reflected:

Because I wanted to treat Kevin respectfully, I offered no real explanation of why the change had happened. This was a decision I came to regret. I should have better understood and responded to the need of the Australian people to know why.¹⁹

¹¹ *My Story* p. 14.

¹² *The Killing Season*, episode 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid*, episode 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *My Story* p. 22.

¹⁷ *The Killing Season*, episode 3.

¹⁸ Curtin, J. (2015) The prime ministership of Julia Gillard. *Australian Journal of Political Science* 50 (1), p. 192 (hereafter Curtin).

¹⁹ *My Story* p. 23.

Will the real Julia, please stand up!

In the lead-up to the 2010 election, Gillard felt Labor's campaign had been overly stage-managed and 'spin-driven' – she wanted more 'authenticity', a term that had become increasingly popular within leadership discourse.

'It's time to make sure the real Julia is well and truly on display', she declared.²⁰ Whilst her desire for openness resonated with some sections of the Australian media, her critics concluded this meant she had not been 'real' or 'authentic' in the past.

Labor had a strong lead heading into the 2010 election campaign but support ebbed away. As one political commentator noted, too much of the media was captured by three men not standing for prime minister – Kevin Rudd, former Labor leader Mark Latham, and veteran journalist and Rudd ally, Laurie Oakes, with

each of them think[ing] that the election campaign is about them....Now would this have happened if this competition were between two men? I'm not sure. I think we have to unpack this and see what we are actually seeing with our own eyes, which is a lot of blokes trying to monster up a woman.²¹

The opposition benefited from Labor's inability to stand united behind Gillard. On election day, Labor and the Liberal-National Coalition each won 72 seats, and either could have formed a government. Over the next 17 days Gillard 'worked studiously and pragmatically to gain the trust and support of the crossbench members of parliament',²² enabling her, rather than Tony Abbott, to form a government. Kevin Rudd was appointed Foreign Minister, in what was seen as a move by Gillard to secure Rudd's support of her leadership.²³ It also ensured that Rudd remained in the public eye.

JuLiar

In the negotiations to form a government, Gillard had agreed with Green's Leader Senator Bob Brown that an emissions trading scheme would be back on the table (and initially to be implemented in the form of a carbon pricing mechanism under the *Clean Energy Act 2011*). Gillard felt she had to honour international commitments made and believed it was the best way for Australia to contribute to tackling climate change. Before the election she had stated that 'there will be no carbon tax under the government I lead'.²⁴ Trade Minister Craig Emerson advised Gillard that, because technically an emissions trading scheme was not a tax, she should not now refer to it as a 'carbon tax' or she would be accused of breaking her promise. The prime minister said she did not want to get caught up in a debate about semantics,²⁵ and decided she 'was happy to use the word tax'.²⁶

Gillard considered this her worst political mistake. The opposition would seize on the initial 'fixed charge years' of the carbon pricing mechanism to label her a liar, and the nickname 'JuLiar' stuck. Gillard took offence at being called a liar (a term forbidden in the Australian parliament) but was advised against taking legal action because of the distraction it would create for her government. Despite Gillard feeling that no previous prime minister had been so systematically attacked, she decided to tough it out.²⁷ As she believed, you could and should be yourself as a leader, 'but always with a bit of padding on'.²⁸

²⁰ *My Story* p. 46.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 36; the commentator was George Megalogenis of *The Australian*.

²² Curtin, *op cit.*, p. 194.

²³ *The Killing Season*, episode 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Gravity, op. cit.* p. 36.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. xi.

The gender issue

For many Australians, having a female prime minister had been a source of pride, with the *West Australian* newspaper running the headline ‘Authentic Gillard gives Labor and Women Hope’ after she took office. Gillard herself good-humouredly joined the media’s interest in her appearance and dress, commenting on her first day as PM that it was ‘a good day for redheads’.²⁹ However, she soon would find the attention increasingly intrusive and distracting from the policies and changes she was trying to introduce.

When Gillard met with NATO leader Anders Rasmussen to discuss Australian participation in the war in Afghanistan, the media led its report with what she wore to the meeting.³⁰ Needless to say, there was no mention of what Rasmussen wore. There was also intense media speculation about what she would wear to the Royal wedding in 2011. Gillard, who had never been much interested in women’s fashion, now had her office record what she had worn and when so she would not accidentally wear the same clothes to two events in a row – invariably leading to critical media attention.

No matter how much she was criticised, Gillard was determined to be resilient and not give people the opportunity to see her as weak, vulnerable or struggling to cope in any way. She observed that if she let her anger show, especially about media misrepresenting facts, she was called ‘hysterical’. The few times she did cry in public, including when she introduced legislation in Parliament to fund the national insurance disability scheme, it always made negative headlines. At other times, such as during the Queensland floods in 2011, she was criticised for not showing enough emotion and for ‘seeming wooden and not caring’ by comparison with the State Premier, Anna Bligh.³¹

Following the ‘Juliar’ episode, sexualised and insulting cartoons began circulating with the phrases ‘ditch the witch’ and ‘another man’s bitch’ becoming commonly used slurs at political rallies and on social media. Gillard, who does not have children, had previously been criticised for choosing to ‘deliberately remain barren’ and therefore being out of touch with families.³² An article in *The Australian* likened her to a barren cow, arguing that like barren cows she should be sent to the slaughter.³³ While the Australian media is renowned for robust criticism of politicians, it was generally agreed that the ABC’s television sitcom, *At Home with Julia*, aired a year into Gillard’s term, took disrespect to unprecedented levels.³⁴

Speaking up – the misogyny speech

Gillard rarely expressed anger or hurt at the way she was portrayed. She felt that Abbott and others only got away with their behaviours because it was too closely in line with everyday Australian stereotypes. Had there been an Indigenous prime minister and Abbott had said ‘ditch the black bastard’,³⁵ she believed it would likely have been the end of his political career and a subject of community outrage for a long time.

²⁹ *My Story* p. 25

³⁰ *Ibid* p. 102.

³¹ Davies, A. (2011) *Sydney Morning Herald*, Captain Bligh steers the ship in face of adversity (January 13)

³² The ‘barren’ comment was made initially by controversial Liberal Senator Bill Heffernan in 2007 (see “Barren Gillard ‘unfit to be PM’” at <http://www.news.com.au/national/barren-gillard-unfit-to-be-pm/story-e6frfkp9-111113448384>) and reprised in 2011 by former Federal Labor Party Leader Mark Latham (“Mark Latham says Julia Gillard has no empathy because she’s childless”: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/mark-latham-says-julia-gillard-has-no-empathy-because-shes-childless/story-fn59niix-1226033174177>)

³³ *My Story* p. 102.

³⁴ As viewed by one critic: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-09-08/crave-inane-drivel-of-the-most-idiotic-kind/2877228>

³⁵ *Gravity*, op.cit, p. 35.

Gillard maintained that although she was effective in terms of passing legislation and getting the job done, her political messages were simply not being heard despite her efforts. The media seemed obsessed with her as a person, but not interested in her policies.³⁶

On 9 October 2012, Gillard decided to fight back. Abbott had raised concerns about improper behaviour including sexist language by Peter Slipper, a former Liberal National Party MP whose controversial installation as Speaker of the House of Representatives had been critical to keeping the Labor Party in government. In response, Gillard delivered a speech, now known as *the Misogyny Speech*, which made news around the world:

I say to the leader of the Opposition I will not be lectured about sexism and misogyny by this man...If he wants to know what misogyny looks like in modern Australia, he doesn't need a motion in the House of Representatives, he needs a mirror.³⁷

Gillard's speech struck a chord. She was commended for standing up and naming the treatment she had received as sexism. However, she was also accused of playing the 'gender card', starting a 'gender war' and 'playing the victim'. The opposition's most senior woman, Julie Bishop, the deputy Liberal Party leader, believed Gillard used her gender to deflect attention from Slipper and Gillard's lack of capability. 'She'll be remembered as the prime minister who let down the women of Australia'.³⁸ Many in the press gallery seemed to share Bishop's view.³⁹

The last days

The carbon pricing mechanism was eventually passed in November 2011 after lengthy negotiations. Gillard felt it was a historic moment, but it had come at a cost to her political capital. By the middle of 2013, an election year, polls were predicting a landslide against Labor. Despite Gillard having survived a leadership challenge from Rudd in 2012 and receiving an assurance from him that his leadership ambitions were over, the media was full of stories saying another challenge was imminent.⁴⁰ On 26 June Gillard announced another leadership vote, with the proviso that the loser would commit to retiring from politics if they lost. Rudd defeated Gillard by a margin of 12 votes.

Julia Gillard's term as Australia's first woman prime minister lasted three years and three days. It seems that for many the way in which she came to power did indeed cast a 'long, dark shadow' over her term.⁴¹ Christopher Pyne, the then Shadow Minister for Education, stated:

What we are seeing at the moment in Australia is a Prime Minister who has gone from being the hunter to the hunted. She started as Lady Macbeth three years ago, and this week we see her in the role of Madame Defarge, who thought she was going to an execution and it turned out to be her own.⁴²

Gillard herself thinks that Australians may still be ambivalent to women and power: 'it's as though Australians are comfortable with the principle of female political power but ill at ease with its practice'.⁴³ She often deliberately distanced herself from the discussion around her gender because

³⁶ Ibid, p. xii.

³⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOPsxpMzYw4>

³⁸ Pearlman, J (2012), *The Telegraph*, 'Julia Gillard accused of letting down women'.

³⁹ Curtin, op cit, p. 198.

⁴⁰ In *My Story*, p. 79, Gillard observed that at least 150 articles written between 2010 and 2013 had said that her leadership would be over soon.

⁴¹ *The Killing Season*, episode 3.

⁴² *Gravity*, op cit, p.217

⁴³ *My Story* p. 31.

she believed it should not be what defined her leadership. Gillard felt she did not set out to smash her 'head into any glass ceiling'⁴⁴ but admits that she was surrounded by gender stereotypes.

It felt that to me as prime minister that the binary stereotypes were still there, that the only two choices available were 'good woman' or 'bad woman'. As a woman wielding power, with all the complexities of modern politics I was never going to be portrayed as a good woman. So I must be the bad woman, a scheming shrew, a heartless harridan or a lying bitch.⁴⁵

In her final speech to parliament she concluded:

I am absolutely confident... it will be easier for the next woman and the woman after that and the woman after that. And I am proud of that.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ 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), p. 641.

⁴⁵ *My Story* p. 107.

⁴⁶ *Ibid* p. 114.

Exhibit 1



⁴⁷ www.dailytelegraph.com.au