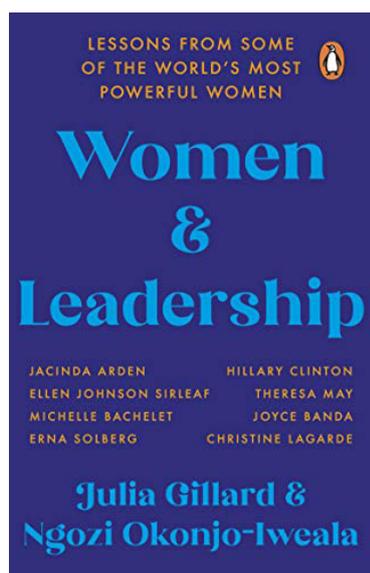


Women and Leadership: Lessons from Some of the World's Most Powerful Women
(Julia Gillard and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala)

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Women are often described as the pillars of society and the pioneers in political, economic and cultural life. Therefore, it is important that women are given the platform and equal opportunities to be able to lead in the workplace, to participate in the economy and have a say when it comes to politics. However, the above is not always the case, as women in this day and age and across the world are still not treated equal to men. Some societies and industries appear to have a hard time accepting that a women's role in society is changing. But many 21st century women have realised their full potential. Women are no longer just staying at home and raising children whilst looking after the household. Instead they are taking up space and cementing themselves in what is considered male dominated space, politics; both international and domestic. However, it is a bit hard for them to unleash their true potential because there are obstacles that are put in place to intentionally make it hard for women to excel. In response to this, Julia Gillard and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala saw a need to write a book on women and leadership.

According to the Gillard and Okonjo-Iweala “women leaders all seem to be facing the same kind of problems.” In the book, the authors set out to interview and discuss the lives and journeys of 8 formidable women who are powerhouses and have been the first (or close to being first) to hold the highest positions of power in their respective countries, the authors also draw on their own personal experiences. One gets an insight into each of these influential women's journeys into politics – the good, the bad and the ugly. The women leaders are Hillary Rodham Clinton, Theresa May, Joyce Banda, Christine Lagarde, Jacinda Arden, Michelle Bachelet, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Erna Solberg. The book is written in a conversational style. In its methodological approach, it tests out and analyses 8 hypotheses based on the experiences of these female leaders. The hypotheses are given the following names: (1) You go girl; (2) It's all about the hair; (3) Shrill or soft; (4) She's a bit of a bitch; (5) Who's minding the kids; (6) A special place in hell-do women really support other women; (7) Modern day Salem; and (8) The role modelling riddle. The book concludes with a section that summarises the lessons found throughout the book.

Gillard and Okonjo-Iweala seeks to answer the question of why there are so few women at the top of politics. They greatly achieve their goal because the book adequately brings to light the inequalities (pay gaps), glass labyrinths and ceilings, sexism and stereotypes from

the media and society that women leaders are faced with everyday in their political careers and therefore hinder them from holding the highest leadership positions. An impressive aspect is that the authors provide scientific evidence to prove majority of the statements and observations that they make. The book is well researched in that regard.

There are a few more aspects that stand out in the book. The first is Hillary Clinton's life changing presidential campaign. Had she won, she would have been America's first female president and this would have been a huge win for women throughout the world. Another intriguing aspect was the book's detailed treatment of Jacinda Arden's inspiring life story, more especially the part where she discusses her pregnancy and giving birth whilst serving her term as Prime Minister and carrying out that motherhood role so effortlessly whilst being constantly criticised about her life choices. Another interesting aspect of the book is that, even though it is focused on women and leadership, it gives men advice on how to be part of the solution and not the problem. Gillard and Okonjo-Iweala go on further to give crucial advice to the media: "Whenever you write a story about a woman, replace her name with a man's name and see if you would still write it, to check if you've used harmful stereotypes you wouldn't use for a man." This is probably the best unsolicited advice that the media has ever received.

The authors claim that "in order to be it, you need to see it." They hope that young woman from around the world will read the book and be encouraged because they will see a reflection of themselves in these incredible women leaders and be inspired. That if these women who look like them and are from similar backgrounds as they, they too can do it.

However, the book does fall short when it comes to representation. In particular, it lacks representation of Asian and Hispanic women leaders. Young Asian and Hispanic females reading the book might struggle to relate with the book because there is not a single female leader from their parts of the world or background that was interviewed and contributed to this book. The book would perhaps be even more impactful if it included the likes of Maria Teresa Fernández de la Vega who was the first Hispanic deputy Prime minister as well as Minister of the Presidency in Spain and Megawati Setiawati Sukarnoputri who served as the first President of Indonesia. Another shortfall of the book is that, in some sections, not much awareness was given to the responses from the interview questions, the authors could have put more effort in dissecting the statements made by the interviewees throughout the book. Instead, the authors mostly include their own analysis and observations from the interviews especially in 'You go girl' and 'A special place in hell – do women really support women?' Arguably, the book would have been even more valuable had it explored the aspect of intersectionality and included more insight and lessons on breaking the glass ceilings and overcoming the obstacles mentioned in the book.

Overall the book is very thought-provoking, well written and researched, the findings presented by the authors to prove their hypotheses were shocking but not surprising. In the concluding section of the book, the authors urge young women "to be aware" and "not beware." In other words, despite all the gender inequalities and obstacles discussed in the book, they want young women to pursue careers in politics and top leadership positions. The book is not very vocal on wanting to overhaul the system, but it is about women learning to navigate their way through the system while changing it bit by bit. The lessons from these inspiring women could apply to anyone not just young females who aspire to get into the political field. The world needs more leaders like these ten incredible women, and it is so inspiring to know that it is possible for all types of women to overcome the stereotypes and all manners of glass to become top leaders. The book is definitely worth a read.