

EDITION #86 Winter edition

KATE RAMSAY AND THE AnD COACHES WELCOME YOU TO OUR STAYING IN TOUCH NEWSLETTER.

There is a hint of a Covid-19 theme in this edition. In **Learning Moments** we share an article about how many of the countries doing best in this pandemic are led by women. A segue from there is a recent interview with Julia Gillard about what she believes are the three biggest issues still facing women leaders in 2020. Our **Good Read** is a book written by Jess Hill about the current crisis of domestic abuse in Australia. The **AnD Story** in this edition is an essay by Rebecca Solnit proposing that hope can co-exist with difficulty and suffering. And **To Close** we quote the author Charlotte Wood about how we might nurture our rich inner lives during this time of enforced isolation.

Learning Moments

i Women leaders are doing well in the lockdown

In the May 1 edition of the Guardian Weekly Jon Henley and Eleanor Ainge Roy pose the question - Are female leaders better at tackling the virus? They write about how Germany, New Zealand, Denmark, Taiwan, Norway, Iceland and Finland, which are some of the countries leading the way in their response to the pandemic, are all led by women.

For example, Angela Merkel (with her doctorate in quantum chemistry) has been giving clear, calm expositions to the German people; and Jacinda Ardern has been "holding the Kiwis' hands", with her empathetic messages and daily communications.

The authors acknowledge that countries with male leaders such as Vietnam, the Czech Republic, Greece and Australia are also doing well, and therefore caution that there may be complicating factors in making a gender argument.

Nonetheless the authors conclude that the best leaders are both strong and decisive and capable of displaying feelings, and that women leaders are perhaps leading the way in "showing that these are not competing and conflicting attributes, but complementary - and necessary for good leadership".

ii The biggest issues currently facing women leaders

In a recent episode of the Women are the Business podcast Julia Gillard met with host Sophie Thomas.

Thomas began by quoting to Gillard an excerpt from her last speech as Australia's first female Prime Minister:

Gender doesn't explain everything, it doesn't explain nothing, it explains some things.

Gillard, who among other roles is the Chair of the Global Institute for Women's Leadership, has also been recently appointed as the new Chair of the medical research giant Wellcome as it continues to play a crucial role in the global response to Covid-19.

Gillard told Thomas that she has been gratified to back up her own instincts about the challenges facing women in leadership with research from the team at the Global Institute.

Gillard believes that the three biggest issues still facing women in leadership in 2020 are:

1. *The inability to find structures and supports to help them balance work and family life.*
2. *The continuation of sexist stereotypes and unconscious bias.*
3. *How merit is valued and interpreted.*

To Thomas's question about who's responsible for changing the landscape of women in leadership, Gillard responded:

It often comes down to female activists with male supporters campaigning for it. Then governments and institutions respond. And it's important that everybody in that chain steps up to the plate.

A Good Read

Kate writes: One treat I'm having during the Covid-19 lockdown is participating in Zoom compassion meditations. At the most recent of these our leader invited us to hold a person or group of people in our hearts during the meditation. I held those women who are in abusive relationships in my heart because they have been even more unsafe than usual during lockdown.

The reason these women were front of mind for me was that I've just finished reading Stella Prize winner Jess Hill's book *See What You Made Me Do - Power, Control and Domestic Abuse* (Black Inc. 2019).

My adjectives to describe Hill's book are grim, gruelling and important. It is thoroughly researched and well written and Jess Hill weaves a combination of theory, analysis and many tragic human stories into the text.

I believe that this is a 'must read' for politicians, the police, those on the frontline of delivering domestic violence (DV) services, psychologists and social workers. And also for those of us who find it totally unacceptable that one in four Australian women are abused each year and that at least one woman is murdered by her partner or previous partner each week.

On her last page Jess Hill makes the plea to "courageous people" around the country to:

Become really serious about ending domestic abuse, and devote the resources necessary to do it. The results could be spectacular. It would, in my opinion, be one of the greatest nation-building exercises in Australia's history.

Hill ends with the example of what the #MeToo movement has done to shift the agenda on sexual harassment and concludes with what I'd describe as a call to arms:

Revolutions are impossible, until they are inevitable.

An AnD Story

Kate writes: An article in the April 24 edition of the Guardian Weekly caught my eye. Called *Hope in a time of crisis*, it's written by Rebecca Solnit. In her introduction Solnit writes:

In the midst of fear and isolation, we are learning that profound change is possible. Maybe during catastrophe we understand the power of community and what we can achieve together.

In the body of the text Solnit continues:

When this storm (the pandemic) clears, we may, as do people who have survived a serious illness or accident, see where we were and where we should go in the new light. We may feel free to pursue change in ways that seemed impossible while the ice of the status quo was locked up. We may have a profoundly different sense of ourselves, our communities, our systems, our production and our future.

For example, Solnit wonders whether we might be reluctant to resume our "rushing about", and that something of the stillness we're experiencing because of the lockdown might stay with us. Here's hoping!

Solnit ends her essay by quoting the currently highly topical mission statement of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement:

Provide hope and inspiration for collective action to build collective power to achieve collective transformation. Rooted in grief and rage but pointed towards vision and dreams.

Solnit praises this mission statement not only because it tells us that the BLM movement does transformative work, but also because it acknowledges that hope can coexist with difficulty and suffering. And having declared this possibility of hope and/both difficulties in times of crisis, Solnit finishes with a hope-filled wish:

It is too soon to know what will emerge from this emergency, but not too soon to start looking for chances to help decide it. It is, I believe, what many of us are preparing to do.

To Close

In an essay called *As we shovel in distractions, the inner life grows dim*, author Charlotte Wood uses the analogy of her garden to explore the often-times chaos and sometimes tranquility that her life feels like during the Covid-19 lockdown:

So much of our world is in unspeakable pain right now. As individuals we have no way of easing most of it. But it feels important to say that despite all this we're allowed, when it doesn't hurt others, to protect and nurture that which helps each of us to live fully. We have a right to joy.

Wood finds it in her garden, I'm finding it by Zooming with my choir. How and where have you found some joy in this time of social isolation?