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Intersections podcast
"Advancing women's leadership around the world"
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PITA: Welcome to Intersections, the podcast where two experts explore the important policy issues of the day. We're part of the Brookings Podcast Network, and I'm your host, Adrianna Pita

Today we're incredibly honored to have as one of our guests Julia Gillard, former Prime Minister of Australia, chair of the Board of Directors of the Global Partnership for Education, and the founder and chair of the Global Institute for Women's Leadership, and also a distinguished fellow with CUE here at Brookings. Julia, thank you for being here.

GILLARD: Great to be here, thank you.

PITA: Also with us today is Christina Kwauk, who's a fellow with our Center for Universal Education and also manages our Echidna Global Scholars Program, and focuses on girls' education in developing countries, gender equity in education, and 21st century skills and youth empowerment. Thanks for being here, Christina.

KWAUK: Thank you.

PITA: Julia, I'd like to start with you. You recently founded the Global Institute for Women's Leadership. They launched in April of this year. It's taking an interesting multi-pronged approach that focuses not just on advocacy but on research as well. Can you tell us about the institute's goals and what you've been doing over the course of its first year?

GILLARD: I certainly can, and I'm very enthusiastic about the work that we're doing. Our mission is to look at the global research base on women and leadership; what the barriers are and how best to clear them out of the way; and what also allows people to fairly evaluate women leaders rather than through the prism of gender. We're looking at women and leadership in all areas: politics, business, the law, media, civil society, the whole lot.

So, we've turned our eyes first to the global research base. There are many good researchers in these gender areas, but there are still some big gaps and holes, and we are hoping through our research to fill them. Particularly to find better ways in corporations – whether they're for-profit or not-for-profit - to clear the barriers out of the way that are still preventing women getting to the top. **The rate of change particularly in women becoming CEOs or in the C-suite generally is glacial.** We're also very focused on the data. We know some things about the position of women globally when it comes to leadership – for example, there's very good numbers over the long term about how many women parliamentarians there

are – but in many areas we simply don't have good longitudinal information to tell is it getting better or is it getting worse.

PITA: Can you share a little bit about some of your personal experiences and how they're fueling your interest in both women's leadership generally and also particularly the work of the institute?

GILLARD: For me, the institute is something that's come out of a personal journey, and the personal journey was being prime minister of Australia and seeing sort of gender issues raise their ugly head when I was prime minister and become part of the political debate. And then when I finished being prime minister I sat down to write my book, and when I did I wanted to make a thoughtful contribution on this question of gender. I'd said on the last night that I was prime minister in my final address to the nation that gender didn't explain everything about my prime ministership; it didn't explain nothing. It was complex. And I wanted to, in the book, play a role unpacking that complexity.

So, I did turn my eyes to the global research base, because I thought it's one thing to write and say "this happened to me." It's another to try and put it in a more generalized and informed context. I was trying to learn. And when I did that I was a bit stunned by how thin the research was in many areas. And so I mused on that, and that musing ultimately took me to King's College in London and to this idea of forming a research institute, but one that would be, like Brookings is, research into action. You know, not research papers that are gathering dust on that shelf that you keep all of the worthy things you should have read but you haven't got round to it yet. I've got one of those shelves at home; I'm sure everybody's got one. We didn't want that. We wanted it to be research with impact. So, my role – obviously I'm not a researcher – is to help mobilize the research we do into the global knowledge base and into the hands of people who can use it.

PITA: Do you picture the institute being a convening power, or being part of a network of these other researchers and the work that they're doing?

GILLARD: We certainly do want to link with others and we've already reached out to other centers around the world. There are people doing fantastic work – here in the U.S. fantastic work is being done on the portrayal of women in the mass media and the creative industries, and how that then gives us prisms and gender stereotypes when we look at women leaders. Fantastic work's being done on children's television and how does that shape aspirations for kids; if they don't see women in lead roles, then why would they think, as a girl, that I could be a leader. Great work is being done by Times's Up in the safety area, and more broadly to raise the issues of equity for women at work. So there's plenty of people to be collaborating with and we're really interested in doing that, including with the scholars and thinkers here at Brookings.

PITA: You were interviewed a few months ago with Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand. She was at the U.N. General Assembly and she brought her baby onto the floor with her a view times, and that sparked a lot of dialogue. We've also seen that in recent years with some members of the European Parliament and some of the national parliaments whether the women were just having their babies present or breastfeeding while they were in session, which is, you know, a natural part of motherhood. Can you talk about how these particular examples, and more visible examples, reflect the challenges that women at all levels of leadership face?

GILLARD: I think Jacinda is doing the world a great service by being such a remarkable role model for combining a leadership role as prime minister with being a new mother. And this is really important because there's been so much pressure on women leaders, whether they're leaders in politics or business or any other area, a lot of pressure around their family circumstances and family arrangements. So I know from my own political experience -- I don't have children, but I know from my political experience and that of my colleagues – that it's only ever women candidates who get asked, "Hang on, you've got young kids, who's going to look after them while you're running around doing this politics thing?"

GILLARD: When men have young kids that's seen as a net advantage; it means they're in touch with everyday life, they understand the struggles of families, but everybody just assumes they've got someone at home who's making it happen as they go and pursue their political career. But for women it becomes part of the dialogue. And I think that has meant that for women who are really in their family formation stage, many of them think, even if I wanted to go into politics or to lead a business or to be a judge or any other high-level aspiration, that I couldn't combine it with my kids being young. And it's terrific that Jacinda is showing that it can be done when your kids are young. And I know if she was here, she'd say it's only possible because her partner has decided to be a full-time carer, and to run their family arrangements that way. Which then immediately takes us to the agenda about how much of the inequity that we see for women at work is really inequity which springs from the fact that domestic labor and the care of children is still not equally shared.

PITA: Right, I know there's been a lot of studies that have shown that's often improved over recent years, but even in households that think about themselves as being equitable it's still not actually 50/50 when it comes down to it, especially when the children are involved.

GILLARD: There is a lot of good research in that area, including research that shows that even in circumstances where the woman is by far the highest income earner, even that doesn't redistribute in the way you'd expect domestic labor. **So even when the costs of substituting paid work for domestic work are higher, there's still the gender stereotypes that dictate that women do more of the domestic load.**

PITA: So, speaking of women being in leadership, here in the U.S., the results of the 2018 midterm elections will see over 100 women take or resume their offices in the House of Representatives, and while that's a new record, that's still less than a quarter of representation – that's slight over 100 out of more than 400 seats. What do you think it will take, or when will women as heads of state or as leaders in government or industry, stop being unusual, or stop being a notable thing?

GILLARD: Well, I wish I could give you a statistic like, "in ten years, we'll be there," but the truth is that the current rate of change gets measured in hundreds of years rather than decades, so our job, I think, at the Global Institute for Women's Leadership and for everybody who's passionate about gender equality in our world, is to accelerate that change cycle. There isn't one mechanism for doing that, and we've got to be very evidence-based as to what works. It does break my heart in many ways that people of good will are trying to do good things, but that the evidence shows aren't that effective. So we feel at the Global Institute for Women's Leadership very powerfully that, let's get the research out there that shows what are the most effective instruments for change so we can get the biggest amount happening as quickly as possible. Because I would certainly before I'm done in this world, like to see a far more gender equal split of women leaders.

PITA: Can you speak a little bit to that – you were talking about some of the examples of really good interventions versus some of the ones that sound great but don't work so well. Do you have any to hand?

GILLARD: Yes, one intervention that's often backed by companies – they spend money doing it because they do want to see greater gender diversity, which is a fantastic value set to have, but many of them invest in unconscious bias training, and whilst the evidence is still being compiled, the early evidence is showing is that unconscious bias training, particularly if it's mandated and people might feel quite reluctant to do it, compelled to do it and consequently not happy about it, that it's ineffective. Now we don't know if that's because it reminds people of stereotypes rather than debunks them, but we know that the track afterward shows that unconscious bias training doesn't have an outcome for more women making it through to leadership.

PITA: Interesting. So, women in leadership do often face that burden of that it's not just that they are the CEO or the president or the senator, they're the lady senator or the lady CEO. I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about that burden and also wondering if you have some positive examples of places in the

world where there are women who are in leadership where it seems to be more natural, where there isn't that "lady" title.

GILLARD: I think New Zealand is interesting in this, because obviously Prime Minister Ardern has attracted a great deal of attention for combining being prime minister with being a new mother, and the world has stopped and watched that. But one of the things that I think has helped lay the foundation stone for her political career and for her reception as prime minister in New Zealand is she's actually the third woman to be prime minister. There was Jenny Shipley and there was Helen Clark who then came and served here in the US as the leader of one of the UN agencies. So, being a mother has attracted a lot of attention, but I don't think being a woman, in and of itself, has made people feel uncomfortable or questioning in New Zealand. I think that's just one of the things that's been there for a long time now, that yep, women end up prime minister, remember Helen, remember Jenny. So that's a good example. And it reinforces the point that you normalize women's leadership by there ending up being a lot of women leaders. So, the first one is wow, gee, extra pressure, extra burden, extra staring, extra everything. Second one, a bit less so; third one, less so; and on and on it goes, until it just is part of the swings and roundabouts of politics. Someone's in, someone's out, but around half of the time, the people who are in are women.

PITA: So we've been speaking very much in the context of the developed world so far. I'm wondering if I can ask you – and Christina, please jump in here – to compare the challenges that face women in positions of leadership from the developed world to being in the developing world. What are some of the commonalities in terms of the structural barriers or the perceptions of what gender roles should be and cultural taboos and that sort of thing, but also, what are the strategies for addressing these challenges? And what are some of the differences? Where do we need to take different approaches because the cultures are different?

KWAUK: So maybe I'll talk about some of the differences that we've observed here at the Center for Universal Education in running the Echidna Scholar program, where we have hosted 28 visiting fellows from 17 different countries around the world on girls' education. I think through seeing 8 cohorts now, I've come to see 3 kinds of differences in terms of the challenges that women leaders face. The number one difference is that we cannot assume that the safety and security of that individual leader is guaranteed. Developing country contexts, especially when you're factoring in under-resourced contexts or contexts of conflict and crisis. This includes psychological safety and security, emotional safety and security, physical security; talking about some returning home to do work on girls' education and gender equality and their lives are at risk; death is a real threat. Also thinking about the economic and financial security of that individual. Sometimes when we think about women leaders, we assume they have the financial resources to sustain shelter, food, all these sorts of basic needs, but you add the economic piece to their lives, and you add a whole 'nother layer of challenges of being a leader, being an effective, impactful leader if some of these basic safety and security pieces aren't addressed.

Then you take into consideration also, in many of the contexts that many of our scholars go home to, they're going home to intensely patriarchal societies. Not just talking about gender norms being unequal or gender expectations being unequal, but where the physical spaces in which women can enter are restricted. There are a lot of other contextual, structural factors to be taken into account.

Building off another point is the limited access to resources. If a women leader has this wonderful idea to help promote girls' access to school, if she doesn't have the financial resources to start an NGO or the human resources to be able to staff her organization, or the organizational resources and technical skills of running an organization or running a project. These are things we assume all leaders have access to. So, resources is a second issue.

The third difference is also related to my first point, is the structural and systemic barriers are just so much more acute in these contexts, because the unequal relations of power between men and women can sometimes be much more present in the day-to-day, not just the ideological space or in the hidden

invisible spaces of our day-to-day lives, but in very material realities. So, whether that means, like I said before, a women not even being able to enter the same room as a man, or having to take different types of speech patterns because they're speaking to a man, this will inherently change the relations of power and her ability to be recognized as a leader.

GILLARD: I agree with all of that; that's part of the differences and the challenges. I think there's many similarities too, having talked to women from developing country contexts who have gone on to political leadership. Many of them talk about the same kinds of issues that you hear women like myself speak about, so part of the agenda's shared and part of it's different, but we do need to be really alive to those differences.

PITA: Do you see the Global Institute taking a role in making sure that these cross-cultural conversations are happening? Bringing together women from these different contexts to share tactics, share practices?

GILLARD: Yes, we want to be talking about leadership in its broadest possible sense and for women of all kinds, so wherever they're from in the world, race, physical ability, sexuality, all of it, we want to be talking through what are the challenges and what best addresses those challenges.

PITA: How do you see the work of the Institute and the work of the Center for Universal Education since you are affiliated with both of them, how do you see them tying together the work on leadership and the work on education and where you see those pieces coming together?

GILLARD: In my mind, it's a continuum – it starts with educating a girl and hopefully it ends with women having equality in leadership positions. If we don't get one end or the other end right, then we're not going to see the profound change that I think all of us aspire to. If we are streaming girls out of education or out of quality education, early on in their lives, well, we've just set an insurmountable barrier in front of them. Mostly – not always, but mostly – the people who get through to be leaders in our world are people who've had the benefit of education. Obviously in crisis and conflict that can be different, but overwhelmingly people who've had the benefit of an education have had the benefit of an education that opened their thinking to what they could do, that didn't say to them there's only one role, only one path for you.

So it's not only access to education but the gender sensitivity of the education and the preparedness to role model in that education that women can do all things and walk all pathways. Which is why the Echidna Global Scholars really, really matter. It's not that they're just change agents, as big a job as that is, but they're role models too. They're showing girls that you can be the person in charge and use power and change to get things done.

KWAUK: Absolutely. It's worth also mentioning that continuum of you need to educate a girl in hopes that then we see more women in leadership, we also need to think about the skills that education opens them up to. In some of the research that we have done behind the design and incubation of the Obama Foundation Global Girls' Alliance, we talked to 150 girls' education leaders around the world to try and figure out what do they need in order to do their work more effectively. From that research we got more attuned to the hard skills that leaders need. And that organizational management and the back end office skills around how do you create a good grant proposal, how do you create a budget, how do you create a communications strategy, how do you think about a vision for your organization, and some of those hard skills, which education at some point in a girl's life can potentially open them up to or new opportunities later in adulthood could later provide.

But then some of our work with the Echidna Global Scholars has focused our attention on the soft skills or socio-emotional skills. And some of these are – there's one kind of framework you can put on this is thinking about these as education diplomacy skills: where you really need to be able to read your context, diagnose the situation; where you might need to be able to build trust, build relationships, build consensus, come to common solutions, identify other stakeholders' perspectives. These are all things that from a leadership perspective, we think, yes, common sense, we need to develop these skills in

leaders. But when we look at that from an education perspective, these are the same kinds of skills that we talk about in girls' education as life skills. Skills that girls need to be able to read their own contexts, to be able to see how do I negotiate a particular situation at school, or in the family? What if my family thinks it's time for me to get married? I need to be able to identify what are their calculus that they're going through to make that decision for me and how can I potentially persuade them and negotiate and communicate a way out of that to continue my education?

So we also have to think not only how education can hopefully in the long term change gender stereotypes and gender norms, but how education in the short term can provide girls with the essential and critical skills to be able to not only navigate their lives now but navigate the leadership situations they're going to face as women.

PITA: So this is the pipeline issue, right? What do you do in girls' education, how do you improve girls' education so that it's not just access to education, but that's this quality to build leaders for the future. Talk a little bit more about what strategies you're taking and from the Global Institute as well that you'd like to see happen more to cultivate that next generation of leaders.

KWAUK: At Brookings, with the Echidna Global Scholars program, we've been thinking about cultivating these skills through our leadership development program, and that has been specifically around increasing leaders' social awareness through self-awareness. So, this is tackling some of the underlying skills that build emotional intelligence. Really being able to take another's perspective, being able to understand reactivity versus strategizing, really trying to think about how does one, as a leader, use one's understanding of oneself and one's either personality or one's tendencies, and use that as a lens to think about how others, other stakeholders are coming to the table w/ equally individual lenses to a particular problem or situation. So we really try to build these skills through self-awareness training, socio-emotional skills training, and that sort of thing.

GILLARD: For me really, my engagement through education isn't through the Global Institute for Women's Leadership because we're looking specifically at women through their working lives, but it is through the Global Partnership for Education, which is the multilateral fund that supports school education in developing countries. And a lot of work is being done at the Global Partnership for Education to think about the gender strategy and gender sensitivity that is necessary as we work in developing countries on improving schooling systems, not only improving access, but improving quality. So it takes you to everything from what's in the curriculum, what's in the learning materials, who's in the classroom, to some aspects of physical safety—the journey to school, the safety within schools—because there have been such profound challenges to get girls educated in a number of countries. So, yes, we very much bear down on that, knowing that the face of the child most likely to miss out on education at the moment in our world is a child with the face of a girl.

PITA: So you have recently tapped into the power of Rihanna through Global Partnership for Education. She's one of your new global ambassadors. Can you talk a little bit about working with celebrities and tapping into their visibility in the nonprofit sector? How can they most be effective, rather than just, OK, here's a short couple of commercials with this person in it? How do you tap into that?

GILLARD: I liked your big smile when you said her name, that was cute.

PITA: She makes everybody smile.

GILLARD: She has been a fantastic global ambassador for us. I think there's a number of layers of it. Rihanna is personally very committed on education. She's very thoughtful on reflecting on her own life's journey. She was discovered when she was a very young woman, young girl, so didn't complete her own education. She's been very thoughtful about the power that education has and what it means to other girls and to boys to miss out on an education. So she's wanted to leverage her outsize voice in the global community and her navy of Twitter followers, to be activists in the cause of making sure that every boy and every girl gets a quality education. So for us, her involvement has been everything from an in-country

visit, actually seeing conditions on the ground and directly helping in improving those conditions. She was out constructing school buildings with her own hands, for example. Through to engagements with some of the most important leaders in our world, people like President Macron, to make sure that they're working hard – as he was – and continues to do, with the Global Partnership for Education and more broadly on the cause of education for all. And during our financing campaign, we had our major replenishment event in February this year, her Twitter navy certainly made a big difference to global visibility and to the debates that donors understandably have about what's the cause that should attract their financing. Now you've got to satisfy people on the power and impact of your model; people aren't going to invest in something that doesn't work. We can do that; we can show that GEP does work, but then you do, in this crowded, fragmented world, cut through and get the message squarely to people and Rihanna has helped with that.

PITA: I'm glad you mentioned boys' education as well, because one of the big questions in terms of cultivating a more gender-equitable society is how do you reach out to men as well? Not just giving girls the skills they need to deal with being in a patriarchal society but educating boys and cultivating male allies to make it less patriarchal. Can you talk a little bit about that?

GILLARD: I think you're absolutely right. We're only going to see the profound change we want to if this is a journey for women and men, which means it needs to start with understandings by boys and girls that this should be a gender-equal world. And this is not all one-way traffic. It's not just about boys and men giving up power and opportunities that they've had in the past. It's about saying to boys and men that the gender stereotypes that have impacted upon their lives shouldn't be there, and there's every choice available to them, too. So, it's not the unusual thing for a man to say that he would like to be a full-time carer for children. That's still a very unusual thing in our world for a man to say, but that is as equally common as the decision that when people are parenting that the woman stays home or the woman takes the part-time job to facilitate the family arrangements. That those things can be talked through by unique human beings with their own predispositions and own way of doing things rather than feeling like there's some edict about how to get this right.

PITA: Christina, are there any examples from the Echidna Scholars program about doing any work in this area?

KWAUK: Absolutely, yes, and actually as Julia was speaking, I was thinking back to the conversations we were having this week during our alumni convening on the topic of engaging men as allies and engaging boys in this work as well. I think a critical piece of this is ensuring we have a diversity of perspectives as we're talking about how do we promote and create opportunities for girls to get educated. Just as we want to ensure that women are represented at the table and that their perspectives are brought in, I think there's an equally interesting perspective that boys and men can bring to that table as well. Particularly when we think about how do we incorporate their narrative into some of the exact sort of things, like, what are some of the expectations around masculinity that are equally toxic for them, that are impinging on their ability to develop their full potential? And how can we lay that side-by-side with some of the conversations—the very important conversations—we're having about girls and how stereotypes and discrimination can equally constrain girls' ability to develop to their full potential.

A particular example that comes to mind that is, I think, very noteworthy to highlight, is how engaging male allies can be incredibly important for breaking or disrupting the patriarchy in a way. We had one scholar, Ganga Gautam, from Nepal, who was describing to us a particular instance where his wife, a health educator, was trying to pick through a set of courses and potential universities to spend a sabbatical at or something, and she came up to him and said, "where should I go? Which one should I choose?" and Ganga says, "I can give you my advice, but if you're asking me to choose for you, that choice is yours. You're the expert, you're the health educator, you have a much better sense of which one is the right choice for you."

And then she came back and said “No, but I really don’t know what to do, what should I do? You choose for me.” And then Ganga says, “you are reproducing the patriarchal mindset. This is your choice, you must choose.” So it’s that sort of thing where you get reminded of the importance of incorporating male allies into this work, otherwise we are missing out on another perspective, another narrative, an important voice to ensure, or maybe a hammer to chisel away at that patriarchy.

PITA: For the both of you, what do you think are the next steps for the respective programs that you’re working with, whether that’s over the next two years, five years, what do you have as your goals as you’re expanding and continuing your work?

GILLARD: We’re very focused on expanding the evidence on what works, so we’ll have a number of projects and research endeavors to do just that, and to get that material into people’s hands in really practical and effective ways. And I hope we can make a big contribution on the data that’s missing so we can have a more informed debate about women’s leadership in our world. I’m also hoping that there can be some very practical collaborations with Brookings because when we’re talking about all of these agendas, they’re so joined up that if we’re not leveraging off each others’ strengths then I think we’re missing a really big opportunity.

KWAUK: At Brookings we’re going to continue to evolve our approach to leadership development with the current programs that we manage around girls’ education, but I think a very key piece that we’re keen on exploring is how can we practically inform and influence how girls’ education leadership programs are creating pipelines to leadership as they become women leaders. I think one key area that we’ve done a little bit of exploration on this is on the climate change area. So how do we ensure that if we want more women participation in climate action, in climate policy, how do we ensure that girls have the opportunity to even learn about climate change, gain the kinds of STEM-related skills that they need to be active participants in conversations at the community level, then at the organizational level, around energy efficient technology, or innovations in agriculture, or whatnot? So that’s one area that we want to explore a little bit further, but I think the more concrete pieces will be to continue to evolve our leadership development approach with the Echidna Global Scholars Program.

PITA: Great. Well, we look forward very much to see the work that comes from the both of you and your programs, and thank you again so much for being here and discussing this with us today.

GILLARD: Thank you.

KWAUK: Thank you so much.

PITA: Thanks for listening. You can find more episodes of Intersections and the rest of the Brookings Podcast Network on Apple or Google podcasts, on Spotify, Castbox, Stitcher, or your other favorite podcast app.

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