


RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Crown must always win: Rethinking authentic leadership through ‘The Crown’ series

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## Abstract

This research explores the theory of authentic leadership and the critiques on the theory by analyzing the portrayals of Queen Elizabeth II, Princess Diana, and Margaret Thatcher in season 4 of the Netflix’s series *The Crown*. Utilizing directed qualitative content analysis, we seek to understand how authenticity in leadership is manifested, its limitations, and the role of gender within this framework. The investigation highlights the challenges leaders face between expected role fulfillment and genuine self-expression. It explores the benefits and drawbacks of authenticity, the attribution of authenticity when the leaders deviate from the formal roles, the nature of the role as influencing the expression of authenticity (e.g., degrees of freedom associated with each role) and the complex interaction between gender and authenticity. In response to these findings, the concept of ‘leader bounded authenticity’ is proposed, suggesting a balance between adhering to the formal role and the display of authentic leadership.

**Keywords:** Authentic leadership; gender; bounded authenticity; leader role; organizational behavior; diversity in organizations; relationships; authenticity

*‘The Crown Must Always Win’ (Queen Mary)*

## Introduction

In one of the popular TV dramas *The Crown*, after Queen Elizabeth II has just learned that her father, King George VI has died and she is now Queen, she receives a letter from her grandmother, Queen Mary, with the advice that ‘The Crown must always win’. In an era where authenticity is considered central (with ‘authentic’ chosen as Merriam-Webster’s word of the year for 2023), it is rare to find the understanding that the obligations of leadership and the monarchy must supersede personal authenticity for the sake of the people of the British Empire. Authenticity is commonly and intuitively defined as the extent to which an individual remains ‘true to self’ (Harter, 2002). Being authentic and true to oneself, raises many challenges while holding a leadership role.

In the field of leadership, there has been much interest in theorizing and empirically studying authentic leadership (e.g., Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Gardner, Karam, Alvesson, & Einola, 2021; Jun, Hu, & Lee, 2023; Zhang et al., 2022). However, given that ‘authentic’ is difficult to precisely define and often debated, the concept of authentic leadership is subjected to fundamental criticisms (e.g., Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Ford & Harding, 2011; Gardner et al., 2021). Critiques of the authentic leadership framework highlight a significant lack of theoretical coherence

(Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Einola & Alvesson, 2021), challenging the idea of an unchanging ‘authentic self’, advocating a view of the self as multifaceted, evolving and influenced by social interactions (Ibarra, 2015).

Authentic leadership is also described as potentially paradoxical because it requires the leader to focus on others while also emphasizing self-focus, which can lead to contradictions (Alvesson & Einola, 2019) and might not always serve leadership well (Caza & Jackson, 2011; Gill & Caza, 2018), since at times, being inauthentic can be crucial for facilitating certain positive changes (Harter, 2002). The authenticity framework also faces criticism for failing to adequately address the impact of individuals and groups that do not fit the typical leader image of the ‘ideal leader’ (e.g., Epitropaki, 2000; Epitropaki & Martin, 2004), since the social rewards for being authentic may not apply similarly to all individuals holding leadership roles (Cha et al., 2019). This gap is particularly challenging for women leaders, who must reconcile their authentic selves and their gender roles with the predominantly masculine norms of leadership roles, thus limiting their ability to be authentic (Eagly, 2005; Hopkins & O’Neil, 2015; Ibarra, 2015; Kark, Meister, & Peters, 2022). Recent reviews argue that understanding authenticity at work is far more complex and challenging than suggested (Cha et al., 2019; Rook et al., 2024).

The current study centers on three critical research questions designed to deepen our understanding of authentic leadership. The first question explores the constraints of authentic leadership, particularly the possible conflict between the leadership role expectations and the display of the authentic self. The second question is focused on understanding how, in various situations, authenticity might impede a leader’s role effectiveness. Finally, the third question examines the intersection of gender and gender roles with the ability of women in leadership roles to display authentic leadership. To address these questions, we employed directed qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Schreier, 2012) as our methodological approach, systematically examining the behaviors and qualities of three central characters in *The Crown* season 4, Queen Elizabeth II, Princess Diana, and Margaret Thatcher. We based our analyses on Shamir and Eilam’s (2005) conceptualization of authentic leadership. This study’s contributions include vividly illustrating the challenges and limitations of authentic leadership theory through analyzing popular media. It further explores various aspects of authentic leadership theory in greater depth, enhancing our understanding of its complexities. We conclude by introducing the concept of ‘bounded authenticity’, which emphasizes the balance between recognizing the limitations that formal roles impose on the expression of authentic leadership and maintaining authenticity within leadership.

## Literature review

### *The leadership role and authentic leadership*

A formal leadership role comes with specific social norms, duties, and both formal and informal expectations from followers and others regarding what constitutes a leader (Bates & Harvey, 1975; Biddle, 1986; Kark et al., 2022; Katz & Kahn, 1978). These expectations can sometimes be so idealistic and extraordinary that they are virtually impossible for any individual to fulfill (Anisman-Razin, Kark, & Ashforth, 2024; Epitropaki, 2000; Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Knights & Willmott, 1999; Razin & Kark, 2012). This often overly positive and idealistic narrative makes the expectations seem unachievable and bordering on the fantastical (Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006; Zheng, Meister & Caza, 2021). As a result, it is almost inevitable that leaders will experience a contradiction between their assigned social role and their personal sense of self, leading to a sense of inauthenticity or ‘fakeness’ within their leadership role (Holmes, Berghoff, & Kark, 2024; Ibarra, 2015; Kark et al., 2022). Despite this, there is a growing emphasis on authentic leadership, encouraging leaders to express themselves genuinely. This tension is the primary focus of our investigation.

Leadership authenticity is a topic that has recently attracted wide theoretical and empirical attention (e.g., Cha et al., 2019). An extensive review of the empirical research on individual authenticity

in work settings, as well as on leaders' authenticity, demonstrates that authenticity can generate significant benefits for the individual in terms of their personal and social power (Cha et al., 2019). Authenticity can enhance positive internal psychological outcomes for the leader (personal well-being and work engagement). It was also found to affect external outcomes of how others perceive and react to the individuals' authenticity, enhancing work performance outcomes. For example, leader authenticity contributed to effectiveness by increasing followers' work commitment (Kaiser, Hogan, & Craig, 2008). Leader authenticity is also associated with a positive image and career outcomes (e.g., better hiring options, job offers, promotion, status, and social power; Cha et al., 2019).

Although authenticity is generally associated with empirical positive outcomes, it was also found to lead to negative results. While authentic expression often contributes to positive internal states, previous studies have demonstrated that it can provoke negative reactions from others and create professional image risks (Hauser, 2017; Little, Major, Hinojosa, & Nelson, 2015; Roberts, 2005). Conversely, suppressing one's true self and acting inauthentically may elicit positive responses from stakeholders but result in negative internal experiences (Cha et al., 2019). As such, both theoretical and empirical studies have questioned authentic leadership, as it can lead to both favorable and unfavorable outcomes. Authentic behavior in leadership roles can be particularly damaging due to the high expectations placed on leaders, their power and visibility, and the need to act in a controlled and regulated manner (e.g., Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Ford & Harding, 2011; Gardner et al., 2021; Storberg-Walker & Gardiner, 2017).

The diverse definitions of leader authenticity further complicate this debate. Luthans and Avolio (2003) and Gardner et al. (2005), drawing on Kernis (2003) and Kernis and Goldman (2006), describe authentic leadership as the interaction between positive psychological traits and supportive organizational environments. According to these theories, authentic leaders exhibit confidence, hope, optimism, and resilience, maintain high ethical standards, focus on future possibilities, and commit to developing their team's leadership potential (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing and Peterson (2008) further refined this concept to include four key components: self-awareness, balanced processing, relational transparency, and an internalized moral perspective. Yet another different recent definition of leadership authenticity is based on signaling theory and suggests that authentic leadership is a concordant, values-based process in which the leader signals their inner moral perspective, self-awareness, relational transparency, and balanced processing (Lux & Lowe, *in press*, this issue).

A different theoretical conceptualization suggested an alternative to these definitions (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). They identify four core characteristics of authentic leaders: First, authentic leaders integrate their personal identity with their leadership role, allowing their true selves to guide their actions rather than merely performing assigned roles. Second, they are not driven by external rewards (e.g., recognition or material benefits) but by inner convictions and a deep sense of purpose rooted in their personal values. Third, authentic leaders are original, not mere replicas of others, using their unique personal experiences to guide their leadership enactment. Last, they maintain high integrity and consistency in actions and words, fostering trust and transparency. According to this perspective, leaders' behavior reflects who they truly are.

### *A critical examination of authentic leadership theories*

In the ongoing discourse over authentic leadership theory, there are critical examinations and comprehensive debates (e.g., Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Ford & Harding, 2011; Gardner et al., 2021; Gardner & McCauley, 2022; Storberg-Walker & Gardiner, 2017). Scholars have critically evaluated authentic leadership theory, highlighted its limitations, and cautioned against its uncritical acceptance. They argue that the theory of authentic leadership lacks cohesion across its elements and questions the assumed synergy between them (Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Einola & Alvesson, 2021). They challenge the notion of a singular, consistent self to support the idea of a multiple and evolving self, influenced by social construction rather than being static (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2013; Ibarra,

2015). This perspective complicates the pursuit of authentic leadership, suggesting that leaders must navigate a landscape of shifting identities and conflicting ideals and adapting their behavior to different roles and expectations, which may not always align with being authentically expressive (Alvesson & Einola, 2019). The quest for a 'true self' is further scrutinized, with questions about the existence and identification of a real self, also noting the paradoxical nature of combining leadership influence with personal authenticity, suggesting this blend often leads to tension and potential conflicts (Alvesson & Einola, 2019). Authentic leadership's emphasis on personal integrity and morality can introduce vulnerability, underscoring the balance between personal identity and professional role demands.

Critiques extend to the practicality of merging authenticity with leadership roles, highlighting this endeavor's aspirational versus achievable aspects. The narrative around authentic leadership frequently overlooks the complexities and potential downsides, suggesting that excessive authenticity could be counterproductive (Caza & Jackson, 2011; Ibarra, 2015). They further question the idea that authenticity hinges on consistency, showing that for individuals with multiple valued identities, authenticity is less about maintaining a singular identity across various situations and more about accommodating flexibly multiple evolving authentic selves (Caza, Moss, & Vough, 2018; Ibarra, 2015). Apart from celebrating authentic leadership, negative aspects of leaders' authenticity were also explored (Cha et al., 2019). For instance, authentic individuals with high narcissism levels may be less effective (Buckman, 2014). Authentic expressions that upset or overwhelm others can also reduce influence. Furthermore, the modern emphasis on authenticity in the workplace (Fleming, 2009; Spicer, 2011) raises concerns about the pressure to express one's private self at work, which may not always align with organizational norms (Storberg-Walker & Gardiner, 2017).

Another criticism of the current conceptualization of authentic leadership arises from its apparent alignment with traditionally masculine ideals, potentially marginalizing women leaders and limiting their legitimization as authentic leaders (e.g., Eagly, 2005; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ibarra, 2015). Ayaz, Ozbilgin, Samdanis and Torunoğlu Tinay (2023) indicate that leaders from more traditional backgrounds – including those who are White, male, well-educated, and from higher social classes – often find it less challenging to be perceived as authentic in professional environments, in comparison to individuals from less conventional backgrounds. Hence, it is essential to recognize the gendered nature of authentic leadership and the unique challenges it poses to women (Eagly, 2005). Hopkins and O'Neil (2015) identify three major challenges for women's authenticity in leadership roles. First is the double-bind dilemma, where women leaders are trapped between the expectations of traditional gender roles and leadership demands (Kark, Waismel-Manor, & Shamir, 2012; Zheng, Kark, & Meister, 2018; Zheng, Surgevil, & Kark, 2018). This stems from the perception of leadership as masculine, often leading to women being criticized for being too assertive or not assertive enough. Second, organizational cultures prioritizing individual success can disadvantage women whose leadership styles are more collaborative (Eagly, Karau and Makhijani, 1995; Kark, Yacobovitz, Segal-Caspi, & Kalker-Zimmerman, 2024), potentially fostering feelings of inauthenticity. Third, the emphasis on individual agency in authentic leadership may overlook the importance of relational dynamics (Eagly, 2005; Hopkins & O'Neil, 2015).

In conclusion, the theory of authentic leadership has ignited intense debate within the academic sphere, with discussions centered around its definition, limitations, and practical applications. These limitations and criticisms of the authentic leadership theory inform the focus of our investigation in this study.

### *The current study*

The current study will focus on three pivotal questions aimed at enhancing our comprehension of authentic leadership: First, what are the constraints of authentic leadership, especially the potential clash between role expectations and the manifestation of the authentic self in a leadership position? Second, in which situations could authenticity hinder a leader's role performance or efficacy?

And third, how does gender intersect with the notion of authentic leadership? To address these inquiries, our research will employ visual media analysis as a method to elucidate theoretical concepts (Champoux, 1999; English & Steffy, 1997; Malloch & Callahan, 2012). Visual media enables an engaging connection with characters and narratives, facilitating the comprehension of complex leadership dynamics (Callahan & Rosser, 2007; Rajendran & Andrew, 2014; Scott & Weeks, 2016). Consequently, our methodological approach will include directed qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Schreier, 2012), a systematic technique designed to interpret and clarify the underlying meanings within qualitative data, in this instance, a TV drama series.

Our analysis will focus on the fourth season of the renowned Netflix television series, *The Crown* created by Peter Morgan (Morgan, 2020). This biographical drama series explores the political tumult and personal dramas of Queen Elizabeth II's reign in Great Britain. Set against key events from the latter half of the 20th century and the early 21st century (Singh, 2015), the series has garnered critical acclaim and numerous awards, including the Golden Globe Award for Best Television Series (IMDb, n.d.). Season 4 covers the period from 1979, starting with Thatcher's historic election as the first female Prime Minister, to 1990. Our decision to focus on this season stems from its detailed exploration of three central characters: Queen Elizabeth II, Princess Diana, and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. In prominent leadership roles, these women navigate the formal demands of their positions and societal expectations while contending with personal challenges and striving to maintain their authenticity in public roles. Our interest in these characters is driven by the pronounced tension between the demands of their official roles and their authentic self-expression, a gap often amplified by leadership positions and societal expectations traditionally influenced by masculine norms (e.g., Eagly, Karau and Makhijani, 1995; Eagly, 2005; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kark et al., 2024). The portrayal of these female leaders offers a critical perspective to assess the concept of authentic leadership and its limitations, particularly emphasizing its potential challenges.

Concerning the historical accuracy of *The Crown*, opinions vary widely. It is argued that initially, the show presented events with a high degree of accuracy. Still, as it evolved, specific moments and characters were depicted with less fidelity and creative interpretations of historical facts (Ciriago, 2022). Specifically, regarding the accuracy of season 4 of *The Crown*, opinions are mixed. Numerous media articles indicate that many depicted events reflect reality (Hill & Perry, 2020; Mount, 2020; Olito & McDowell, 2022; Quinn, 2020). On the other hand, royal historian Hugo Vickers criticizes season 4 as 'more subtly divisive', stressing it portrays all royal characters poorly, except Diana (Vickers, 2020). Thus, the series can be seen as capturing the essence of events, if not the exact details. In the context of exploring authentic leadership theory, precise factual accuracy is less crucial than the visual representations that bring the theory to life, facilitating an in-depth and critical discussion of authentic leadership and the concept of authenticity. Through these character portrayals, the complexity of authentic leadership theory is illustrated, along with the challenges in determining the authenticity of leaders.

## Method

### *Directed qualitative content analysis method*

In the current work, we use the directed qualitative content analysis approach to analyze *The Crown* series (Mayring, 2014; Schreier, 2012). Directed qualitative content analysis serves as a structured technique to interpret and elucidate the inherent meaning within qualitative data. This interpretation is achieved by systematically allocating data segments to specific categories delineated within a coding framework. While this method is frequently applied to qualitative interviews or focus groups, we adapted it for the analysis of visual media, as employed previously, to analyze leadership theories in the TV series 'Game of Thrones' (Yu & Campbell, 2021).

According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), qualitative content analysis consists of three main approaches: conventional, directed, and summative. **Conventional content analysis** is used when existing theories or literature on a phenomenon are limited, allowing categories and themes to emerge

naturally from the data, making it ideal for exploratory research. **Directed content analysis** is applied when an existing theory or prior research requires further validation or extension, with the potential to refine or challenge the original theory. **Summative content analysis** involves identifying and counting specific words or content to understand their contextual usage, moving beyond word counts to explore deeper meanings and patterns.

For our purposes, we chose to use the directed content analysis approach. This choice was motivated by the presence of developed existing theoretical frameworks of authentic leadership that are considered suitable for further exploration. A directed content analysis approach is most appropriate when an existing theory or prior research about a phenomenon is present but incomplete, thus requiring further elucidation to extract richer insights from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Given the vast research on authentic leadership and the criticism around empirical models of authentic leadership (e.g., Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Gardner et al., 2021), we intentionally adopted an approach that is not based on the development of another set of new categories of authentic leadership. Instead, we chose this research method to allow us to explore the alternative existing conceptualizations, propose potential limitations of current frameworks of authenticity in leadership, and critically assess how the framework of authentic leadership functions. Using the directed content analysis approach, we chose to focus on the theory of Shamir and Eilam (2005).

The major phases of directed qualitative content analysis involve identifying coding categories grounded in existing theory. This is followed by the coding process, which entails organizing the data into these predetermined categories. The final phase is the analysis, during which the findings are presented as evidence that either supports or refutes the existing theory.

### *Identification of coding categories based on existing theory*

To explore the underpinnings of authentic leadership, we have selected the conceptualization by Shamir and Eilam (2005). This choice is motivated by their emphasis on the significance of personal experiences, moving away from focusing on static attributes (e.g., Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Walumbwa et al., 2008) to highlighting the complex experiences that contribute to a leader's authenticity. Furthermore, focusing on the narrative and experiences of the leaders, this framework aligns well with our intention to conduct a qualitative analysis of character representations in the media.

The coding categories used in this study were derived through a process based on the key characteristics of authentic leadership, as outlined by Shamir and Eilam (2005). We began by conducting repeated, close readings of their work, paying particular attention to how they defined the core traits of authentic leaders according to their conceptualization. Through this process, we identified the main elements of authentic leadership as described in their work, including genuine self-expression, inner conviction, originality, and integrity (see Table 1). To ensure clarity and consistency in our analysis, we translated these elements into clear coding labels, each representing a distinct dimension of leadership authenticity. This translation from theory to coding categories aimed to make the abstract traits more applicable to the concrete analysis of leadership behaviors portrayed in *The Crown*.

The coding categories are as follows: *Leadership as a Genuine Expression of the Self*: Leadership as an expression of the leader's true and real self, not conforming to external expectations (e.g., societal expectations); *Inner Conviction and Purpose-Driven Mission*: Leadership motivated by deeply held personal convictions and values, rather than by external rewards or motivations; *Originality*: The formation of a unique leadership style based on a leader's unique personal values and beliefs, informed by personal experiences, as opposed to imitation; *Integrity and Transparency in Leadership Action*: A consistent alignment between a leader's actions, words, and beliefs, reflecting who they truly are and their integrity toward themselves, as well as their transparency toward others.

### *Coding process*

In the coding process utilized for this study, the first author, alongside a research assistant, thoroughly viewed all 10 episodes from the fourth season of *The Crown* series (539 minutes overall). This detailed

**Table 1.** Criteria for evaluating authentic leadership based on Shamir and Eilam's (2005) theoretical framework

Criterion	Definition
Leadership as a genuine expression of the self	Leadership as an expression of the leader's true and real self, not conforming to external expectations (e.g., societal expectations).
Inner conviction and purpose-driven mission	Leadership motivated by deeply held personal convictions and values, rather than by external rewards or motivations.
Originality	The formation of a unique leadership style based on a leader's unique personal values and beliefs, informed by personal experiences, as opposed to imitation.
Integrity and transparency in leadership action	A consistent alignment between a leader's actions, words, and beliefs, reflecting who they truly are and their integrity toward themselves, as well as their transparency toward others.

examination centered on the series' portrayal of its main female characters: Queen Elizabeth, Princess Diana, and Margaret Thatcher. Following the established criteria (Shamir & Eilam, 2005), each scene was meticulously recorded, whether displaying authenticity or inauthenticity, aligned with this theoretical framework. Whenever there was a difference of opinion between the coders, a discussion was held until a consensus was reached. The results of this coding process for each relevant scene included a detailed description, episode number, timestamp, and direct quotes that exemplified the scene. In total, the coders identified 74 instances of expressions matching the defined theoretical categories. The analysis comprised two stages. First, the characters' actions and leadership decisions were analyzed based on the criteria above to identify authentic and inauthentic behaviors. Second, for each instance, the limitations of authenticity in leadership were examined within the broader context.

## Results

Below, we present the findings showing each character and how the scenes align or do not align with the four categories. The analysis also critically examines when authenticity can contribute to or hinder the leadership role. We do not present all our findings below, but rather a representative account of the findings. For an example of the coding process (see Table 2).

### Queen Elizabeth II

Queen Elizabeth's role involves managing the responsibilities of her monarchy. Significant events highlight the conflict between her public obligations and private life, offering a glimpse into her complex and authentic nature. Analyzing the series scenes, it is evident that her role as a monarch is highly scripted, her freedom to express authenticity is limited, and as evident in the starting quote, she performs her role holding in mind the strong statement that 'The Crown must always win'. Though she is often constrained in her ability to express authenticity, we can see some glimpses of her 'true self' in her portrayal in *The Crown*. Below, we bring some of these examples.

#### Genuine expression of self

During one of the weekly meetings between the Queen and Thatcher (Episode 4), the queen demonstrates humane empathy and compassion, diverging from the traditionally reserved and formal demeanor expected of a monarch. This example illustrates that even when Queen Elizabeth deviates from her formal role, expressing her genuine self, it is portrayed as highly restricted by the obligations of the formal role. This is evident during a weekly meeting with Prime Minister Thatcher. In this encounter, the Queen notices Thatcher's unusual distress and inquiries about her well-being, showing a side of her character that extends beyond the official protocols of her position. Thatcher, initially reluctant to share her personal issues, grapples with the idea that revealing vulnerability could be

**Table 2.** Examples of authentic leadership representation according to the coding criterion

Character	Coding criterion	Example	Full quote	Explanation	Episode
Queen Elizabeth II	Genuine expression of self	Queen Elizabeth reflects on the distance between her and her children, acknowledging her parental failings.	<i>The conclusion I have come to is that ... our children... are lost. Each in their own deserts ... what does that say about us as parents?</i>	In this scene, Queen Elizabeth is candidly acknowledging her shortcomings as a mother, revealing a rare moment of vulnerability and genuine emotion. This expression of self contrasts with her typically reserved and controlled demeanor.	Episode 4
	Inner conviction and purpose-driven mission	The Queen aligns herself with the Commonwealth nations in the apartheid sanctions debate, opposing Thatcher's official stance.	<i>You see, I consider myself to be exactly like them ... Ghana, Zambia, Malawi are all great sovereign nations with great histories.</i>	In this scene, Queen Elizabeth challenges Thatcher's economic-focused stance, emphasizing her authentic alignment with the values of the Commonwealth nations. The Queen, true to her convictions, perceives her role as an active participant in global issues rather than a passive ceremonial figure, and sees this conviction as one of leading purpose in her role as a monarch.	Episode 8
	Originality	The Queen questions her silence about her disagreement with Thatcher's policies, contemplating the implications of a public rift.	<i>What if I'm not happy with the job she's doing? What if I'd be happy for people to know the displeasure was actually real? That I am personally concerned about her lack of compassion. You know how seriously I take my constitutional responsibility to remain silent, but each of us has our line in the sand. If it were to become public knowledge that there had been an unprecedented rift between sovereign and Prime Minister, would that really be so bad?</i>	The Queen contemplates speaking publicly about her disagreements with Thatcher, which is highly unusual given her constitutional role to remain neutral. This shows her wrestling with the boundaries of her position and her personal convictions.	Episode 8
	Integrity and transparency in leadership action	The Queen questions whether Diana's more open, emotional style might be what the monarchy needs to stay relevant.	<i>But is it possible that she has a point? We are rather a tough bunch in this family. We don't give out much praise or love or thanks. Perhaps Diana is the best place to ... to connect with the modern world. And isn't that how the Crown survives and stays relevant? By changing with the times.'</i>	Elizabeth reflects on the possibility that Diana's emotional openness is more in touch with the public, indicating her willingness to consider adapting the monarchy to stay relevant.	Episode 6

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued.)

Character	Coding criterion	Example	Full quote	Explanation	Episode
Margaret Thatcher	Genuine expression of self	Thatcher reveals her primary identity as a mother, not just as Prime Minister, showing a personal and vulnerable side.	<i>You are all used to thinking of me as Prime Minister, but what the last few days have shown me very clearly is that, above all else, I am a mother.</i>	Thatcher expresses her vulnerability and reveals that, despite her powerful political position, her most important role is being a mother. This shows a personal side not often seen in her public persona.	Episode 4
	Inner conviction and purpose-driven mission	Thatcher quotes her father, using his sermons to emphasize the strength and resolve required for leadership.	<i>My father used to give a sermon ... 'God needs no faint hearts for his ambassadors.'</i>	Thatcher's leadership is deeply influenced by the teachings of her father, and she uses this reference to highlight the moral conviction required to lead with strength and purpose. The quote emphasizes her unwavering commitment to her economic reforms, even when facing resistance from within her own party. Thatcher's determination reflects a purpose-driven mission, rooted in her belief that these reforms are essential for the nation's economic stability. Her reliance on personal conviction over party consensus illustrates her alignment of values and actions, showcasing the deeper purpose behind her leadership decisions.	Episode 2
	Originality	Thatcher advocates for a new approach to governance, rejecting collective duty in favor of individual responsibility, inspired by her father's experience as a businessman.	<i>If we are to turn this country around ... we really must abandon outdated and misguided notions of collective duty. There are individual men and women ... there are families. Self-interested people who are trying to better themselves. That is the engine that fires a nation. My father didn't have the state to rely on should his business fail. It was the risk of ruin and his duty to his family that drove him to succeed.</i>	Thatcher's belief in individual responsibility and her rejection of collective governance reflects her originality as a leader, drawing from her father's entrepreneurial experiences to shape her policies.	Episode 5
	Integrity and transparency in leadership action	Thatcher's leadership is characterized by a strong alignment between her actions, words, and beliefs, demonstrating consistency and integrity.	<i>It's true, but there is not a magical system whereby you can just push a few buttons and twiddle a few knobs and everything will be all right ... But to do that, we first need to get the inflation rate down, and that means cutting public spending. I would like to be much tougher, but I can't move faster than what parliament or the people will allow me.</i>	Despite opposition, Thatcher consistently follows through on her principles, showing a willingness to take tough decisions despite resistance, while transparently declaring her intentions and challenges.	Episode 4

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued.)

Character	Coding criterion	Example	Full quote	Explanation	Episode
Princess Diana	Genuine expression of self	Diana is described as being more relatable and real compared to the other royals, showing her genuine self.	<i>Well, She's not stuffy like the rest of the royals. You get a sense of her being a real person.</i>	Diana stands out from the rest of the royal family by being perceived as more genuine and approachable.	Episode 6
	Inner conviction and purpose-driven mission	Diana's mission to destigmatize AIDS by shaking hands with an AIDS patient without gloves, demonstrating her personal conviction and compassion.	No specific quote available, but Diana's visit to an AIDS clinic and her decision to shake hands with patients without gloves showcases her belief in breaking down stigmas and her personal conviction to act compassionately.	Diana's courageous decision to touch AIDS patients without gloves reflects her personal mission to lead with compassion and challenge harmful societal stigmas, demonstrating her conviction-driven leadership.	Episode 10
	Originality	Diana redefines the role of a princess by focusing on being a present mother and raising her son to be compassionate and humane.	<i>Then the greatest act of service I can give to the Crown as a Princess is not to be some meek little wife following the great Prince around like some smiling doll, but to be a living, breathing, present mother bringing up this child in the hopes that the boy that will one day become king still have a vestige of humanity in him. God knows he's not going to be getting it from any of his courtiers</i>	Diana reimagines her role as a princess, rejecting traditional expectations and focusing on raising her son with emotional intelligence and compassion. This shows her originality in defining her public and private roles.	Episode 6
	Integrity and transparency in leadership action	Diana openly shares her struggles with feeling unsupported and undervalued by the royal family, showing her emotional transparency and consistency.	<i>It does feel good sometimes to be cheered. It can be a comfort. Since I've joined this family, it's not been easy. I've been given no help, no support, just thrown in the deep end, and I think that people out there can sense that I've suffered, that I'm undervalued, ignored</i>	Diana expresses her struggles within the royal family, acknowledging the emotional toll it has taken on her. Her candidness and emotional transparency reflect her integrity and consistency in leadership.	Episode 6

perceived as unprofessional, particularly given her status as the first female prime minister. Despite Thatcher's reservations, the Queen gently encourages her to be open, creating a space for a more personal interaction. Thatcher eventually opens up and talks about her missing son after participating in the Paris-Dakar car rally, describing him as 'her favorite son'.

Apart from the Queen's ability to show genuine empathy to Thatcher's distress, this scene further evolves, leading the Queen to reflect on her own role as a mother. In a subsequent conversation with Prince Philip, she expressed her surprise about Thatcher's favoritism and asked if she had a child she favored. Philip validates Thatcher's sentiment, suggesting that any honest parent would admit to having a favorite child. The Queen uncertainly responds: 'I really don't know', to which Philip remarks on her lack of self-knowledge. The Queen then schedules official meetings with each of her children, revealing her limited understanding of their personal lives and struggles.

These interactions emphasize a disconnect between her public duties as a monarch and her private relationships as a mother. The Queen relates to her children primarily through the lens of maintaining their roles as royal family members. This approach hinders authentic communication. Any attempt by her children to express their individual selves or personal conflicts is met with responses from the Queen that reiterate their royal duties. This dynamic reveals the challenges she faces in balancing her gender role as a mother and her monarchical role. This is presented in the series as hindering personal reflexivity, as well as an emotional connection with her children. Instead, the interaction is shown as one in which she prioritizes the role responsibilities and expectations over a more personal and vulnerable exchange. Following this, she reflects on her parenting with Prince Philip, stating, 'The conclusion I have come to is that ... our children ... are lost. Each in their own deserts ... what does that say about us as parents?'. Then, to reconcile the cognitive dissonance that arose between an authentic expression of herself, and the limitations imposed by her official role, she recounts a conversation with her mother, the Queen Mother, who advised her not to blame herself, reminding Elizabeth that she is already a 'mother to the nation'. However, this conflict of the inability to hold simultaneously the leader role and the gender role authentically still haunts, and she continues the discussion with Philip, revealing her deeper feelings of responsibility and regret. This interaction highlights the conflict within herself, showing a divergence between her internal perceptions and the role she consistently presents to the nation:

*It was me who wanted Andrew and Edward. You didn't want any more. I wanted two more to prove to myself that I had it in me ... and to make up for my failings, especially with Charles... I remember insisting that I would never let the nannies do it ... bath time. But when it came to it ... I sat in a chair in the background because I didn't know how to ... hold him, touch him. (Episode 4)*

This scene presents the tension of her genuine self. Is it her role as monarch that influenced her motivations and values, or is she true to herself by being one with the role?

### *Inner conviction and purpose-driven mission*

The series analyses show three major events that illustrate the Queen's inner convictions and her occasional departure from traditional norms, and her expected role as a monarch. All these events include clashes with Prime Minister Thatcher. The first is their debate on the economy, the second is a confrontation on the apartheid sanctions against South Africa, and the third is after Thatcher is betrayed by her Cabinet members. In the first scene, the Queen expresses her concerns about the impact of Thatcher's socioeconomic policies on the British people. Deviating from her formal role, she confronts Thatcher (Episode 4) over the stark disparities between the Prime Minister's promises and the grim reality of Britain's economy, showing her inner conviction and questioning whether Thatcher's harsh measures might harm the very people they are intended to help.

The second scene is the Queen's most significant departure from her official role, occurring during the debate over apartheid sanctions against South Africa (Episode 8). The Queen's insistence on the UK joining the sanctions contradicts Thatcher's official position as Prime Minister. In a defining

statement, the Queen expresses her alignment with the Commonwealth nations: ‘You see, I consider myself to be exactly like them ... Ghana, Zambia, Malawi are all great sovereign nations with great histories’. This narrative revealed that the Queen perceives her role not merely as a ceremonial head but as an active, empathetic participant in the lives and destinies of these nations. While Thatcher focused on economic relationships and strategic interests, the Queen was ready to act authentically and true to herself despite the formal expectations of her role.

Lastly, Following Thatcher’s resignation (Episode 10), the Queen’s decision to meet her demonstrates her personal values of humanity and gratitude. The Queen acknowledges their shared experiences as women in leadership and commends Thatcher’s dedication:

*When I ascended the throne, I was just a girl. Twenty-five years old, and I was surrounded by stuffy, rather patronizing gray-haired men everywhere telling me what to do. And I wanted to say ... the way you dealt with all your stuffy, rather patronizing gray-haired men throughout your time in office and saw them all off ... I was shocked by the way in which you were forced to leave office. And I wanted to offer my sympathy, not just as Queen to Prime Minister but woman to woman. (Episode 10)*

In this part, the Queen reveals her self-crafted authentic leadership narrative centered around her values and experiences. She describes how her leadership approach has been shaped in response to male figures who attempted to influence her style. This revelation shows that the role she embraces is grounded in her own values and inner convictions, ones she has personally chosen, rather than being driven by external motivations or a desire to conform to the male-dominated environment that tried to influence her upon assuming her position.

### *Originality*

In the series, the queen takes several steps that push the boundaries of the monarch’s role, demonstrating authentic independence. The clearest example of this occurs, as mentioned above, during the crisis with Thatcher over the decision to impose sanctions on the apartheid regime in South Africa. Here, the Queen demonstrates independence, and in a conversation with the palace press secretary (Episode 8), when informed about rumors concerning a rift between her and Thatcher, the Queen acknowledges her displeasure with Thatcher while exposing her authentic perception. She says:

*What if I’m not happy with the job she’s doing? What if I’d be happy for people to know the displeasure was actually real? That I am personally concerned about her lack of compassion. You know how seriously I take my constitutional responsibility to remain silent, but each of us has our line in the sand. If it were to become public knowledge that there had been an unprecedented rift between sovereign and Prime Minister, would that really be so bad? (Episode 8).*

### *Integrity and transparency in leadership action*

When Princess Diana realized that her marriage to Prince Charles was deteriorating, she sought emotional support from the Queen. During a meal with the Queen Mother, Princess Margaret, and Princess Anne, the Queen exposes the details of her meeting with Diana, focusing on an instance where Diana tried to initiate an awkward, almost desperate hug, seeking an opportunity to discuss her marital problems. While other family members express disdain and disapproval of Diana’s actions, the Queen takes a moment to reconsider Diana’s viewpoint. She contemplates:

*But is it possible that she has a point? We are rather a tough bunch in this family. We don’t give out much praise or love or thanks. Perhaps Diana is the best place to connect with the modern world. And isn’t that how the Crown survives and stays relevant? By changing with the times.*

This introspection reveals the Queen’s inner integrity and willingness to understand Diana’s position and vocalize this perspective in a transparent conversation with her close family members.

### To summarize

Queen Elizabeth II's portrayal in *The Crown* reveals that her formal role mostly constrains her genuine expression of self, yet she occasionally shows a more authentic side. Conflict with her inner conviction and purpose-driven mission stand out as times in which she is portrayed as most strongly willing to expose her authenticity. This is evident, especially in her firm stance on socioeconomic policies, apartheid sanctions, and her empathetic acknowledgment of Thatcher's challenges as a woman in leadership. These instances demonstrate her commitment to her values and her readiness to act authentically, even when it contradicts traditional expectations and may bear a price. However, all these situations can also be seen as ones that enhance her role expectations and duties to be the 'mother' and 'protector' of the nation. Furthermore, it is visible in the series that she has a highly scripted role as monarch; her freedom to express authenticity is limited, and in most scenes, she is portrayed as completely unified with the leadership role.

### Margaret Thatcher

The character of Thatcher in *The Crown* exemplifies a leader who navigates the political landscape with unwavering conviction and a deeply personal and authentic approach. She demonstrates high levels of authentic leadership across all criteria. However, her authenticity became a double-edged sword and also hindered her ability to fulfill her leadership role. Below we demonstrate this.

### Genuine expression of self

In the beginning of the season, during her first meeting with Queen Elizabeth, Thatcher displays enthusiasm but does not adjust her responses to please the Queen. When the Queen subtly hints at the possibility that Thatcher's roles as a wife and mother could impact her performance as Prime Minister, Thatcher responds pointedly and with a hint of sarcasm. She asserts that women are often perceived as too emotional to hold senior positions despite the irony of speaking to the Queen (Episode 1). These instances from the early part of the season set the stage for Thatcher's character as a leader who is unapologetically herself, often challenging the status quo and not afraid to express her opinions despite formal expectations. Already at this point, we see that Thatcher does not view her official role as Prime Minister as something that should hinder the authentic expression of the other facets of herself.

Later, during the royal family's introductory meeting with Thatcher and her partner Denis, she retains a strong sense of self and does not succumb to the expectations typically associated with her formal role. This is exemplified when she personally attends to unpacking her husband's suitcase at Balmoral Castle. She tells the maid, 'I like to do that myself, especially for my husband'. Later, speaking to her husband, she comments, 'Unpacking your bag? What was she thinking? That's a wife's job' (Episode 2). This portrays her as one who does not draw a distinct line between her personal self and her role as Prime Minister. Her position as a national leader neither overshadows nor diminishes other authentic facets of her identity and personality, including her gender role. Further supporting this, when Thatcher's son, Mark, goes missing in the deserts of Algeria after participating in a car race, she does not conceal her profound concern for him, even during official engagements as Prime Minister. After Mark is found safe, she addresses the public in an interview, remarking, 'You are all used to thinking of me as Prime Minister, but what the last few days have shown me very clearly is that, above all else, I am a mother.' (Episode 4)

Thatcher's commitment to her personal convictions becomes evident in a speech delivered by her deputy, Sir Geoffrey Howe, in the British House of Commons (Episode 10). Howe's resignation is attributed to disagreements with Thatcher, highlighting Thatcher's assertive demeanor, characterized by 'finger-wagging' and passionate denials, which he suggests overshadowing the substance of her policies, indicating a crisis in national leadership. Howe's remarks suggest that Thatcher's unwavering authenticity sometimes results in inflexibility in accommodating the expectations of her colleagues. His resignation triggers a chain of events leading to a loss of trust within Thatcher's cabinet and party.

Thatcher's unwavering commitment to her values and her approach across her 11-year tenure as Prime Minister, as portrayed in the series, while admirable, becomes a double-edged sword since it overlooks the pragmatic demands typically expected from a politician.

### *Inner conviction and purpose-driven mission*

The portrayal of Thatcher in the series distinctly highlights her inner conviction and purpose-driven mission. For example, Thatcher presents to her party members a bold economic reform proposal addressing public sector inflation (Episode 2). In the face of significant opposition from her own party, Thatcher's commitment to her economic reform proposal demonstrates her unwavering conviction and determination. Her party members criticized the proposal as 'butchery', accusing Thatcher of acting too hastily and radically and stating that her approach was not only reckless but also fundamentally contradicted the core values of the Conservative Party. Despite these strong objections, Thatcher stands resolute, driven by her inner convictions and values, rather than swayed by party consensus, stating, 'My father used to give a sermon ... "God needs no faint hearts for his ambassadors"' (Episode 2).

Later, the first meeting between Margaret Thatcher and her husband Denis, with members of the royal family at Balmoral Castle in Scotland, illuminates her discomfort with the privileges associated with her role and status as Prime Minister. This discomfort becomes particularly evident when confronted with the aristocratic customs and luxuries at Balmoral (Episode 2). This scene reveals her detachment from the trappings of her high office and a preference for modesty, reflecting her personal values and background. Thatcher's attitude reveals her perception of the Prime Ministerial position not as a means for external rewards, privileges, or governmental incentives, but rather as a platform for authentically promoting her leadership ideology and values.

### *Originality*

Thatcher's sense of individuality is deeply rooted in her personal experiences, often involving her father, which significantly shaped her values and beliefs. An example of this is seen during a car ride with the Queen on their way to a hunt when Thatcher shares insights about her relationship with her father, explaining:

*My father taught me a great deal too ... we worked. Work was our play ... I worked with him in our shop. As an alderman, he took me everywhere. I watched as he wrote his speeches and listened as he rehearsed and delivered them. It was my political baptism. (Episode 2)*

Thatcher's recounting of working in her father's shop and being involved in his political life demonstrates how these unique childhood experiences shaped her values and beliefs. In the series, Thatcher's leadership narrative is exposed, highlighting her view of her father as a crucial influence who nurtured her ambitions and played a significant role in her development. For example, a significant conversation unfolds between the Queen and Thatcher following the break-in to the Queen's private room at Buckingham Palace by an intruder, Mr. Fagan (Episode 5). In this dialogue, Thatcher offers an apology on behalf of the government. The Queen, however, offers a different perspective, pointing out Fagan's non-violent behavior and attributing his troubles partly to the high unemployment rate, which has doubled since Thatcher took office. Thatcher defends her policies, asserting that the high unemployment rate is a temporary side effect of the economic measures her government is implementing. The Queen challenges this view, questioning whether such 'medicine' might be more harmful than beneficial and whether a collective responsibility exists to assist those like Mr. Fagan. Thatcher's response highlights her unique leadership philosophy. She argues:

*If we are to turn this country around ... we really must abandon outdated and misguided notions of collective duty. There are individual men and women ... there are families. Self-interested people who are trying to better themselves. That is the engine that fires a nation. My father didn't have*

*the state to rely on should his business fail. It was the risk of ruin and his duty to his family that drove him to succeed.* (Episode 5)

This statement underscores the way Thatcher developed her personal, authentic leadership vision, based on her family's and her father's experience, as an example of success achieved through personal responsibility and resilience.

### *Integrity and transparency in leadership action*

As portrayed in the series, Thatcher's tenure as Prime Minister exemplifies a strong alignment between her actions, words, and beliefs, demonstrating consistency and integrity in her leadership. For example, she remained committed to her economic plan, taking decisive action against cabinet members who opposed her (Episode 2). This alignment of her actions with her stated objectives is further highlighted during a conversation with the Queen when, despite the Queen's advice to foster goodwill and avoid making enemies, Thatcher firmly states her comfort with having adversaries, indicating her willingness to stand by her convictions even at the cost of popularity or harmony within her government.

### *To summarize*

Margaret Thatcher's portrayal in *The Crown* exemplifies high levels of authentic leadership across all coded criteria. Thatcher remains unapologetically herself, even in the face of formal expectations. Her inner conviction and purpose-driven mission are her strongest attributes, evident in her individualistic philosophy rooted in her early experiences. She demonstrates integrity and transparency by aligning her actions with her stated objectives and taking decisive actions while consistently adhering to her principles, even at the cost of popularity. However, this authentic stance also hinders her ability to function effectively as a leader. Her rigid adherence to her principles often leads to conflicts and alienation within her cabinet, reducing her capacity to build consensus and adapt to the evolving needs of her leadership role, ultimately contributing to her loss of the Prime Minister position.

### *Princess Diana*

The character of Diana in *The Crown* depicts her struggle to be authentic within the strict constraints of royal life. Her story highlights the tension between her public responsibilities and her personal self, at times affecting her ability to fulfill her role as the Princess of Wales and even her mental health.

### *Genuine expression of self*

Diana's story in the series starts with a notable contrast between her aristocratic background and her unconventional choices. Despite her noble origins, Diana's life deviates significantly from traditional royal expectations. Her sister, Sara, notes Diana's simple lifestyle, working in a kindergarten, handling everyday tasks, and living in a shared apartment, a clear deviation from the normative aristocratic behavior (Episode 1). Later, during an early morning hunt with Prince Philip, who is keen to assess her suitability as a potential match for his son, Prince Charles, the heir to the throne, Diana showcases her candidness and individuality (Episode 2). She boldly shares details of her modest lifestyle, including living in a shared apartment and working in cleaning jobs. This conversation reveals Diana's comfort in her identity and her willingness to be open about her life, regardless of Phillip's presence.

Later, as she transitions into her role as a member of the royal family, Diana faces the challenge of adapting to her new responsibilities. She finds herself isolated in the palace, experiencing a profound sense of disconnection from the world outside. The public adoration, evident through letters and gifts, contrasts starkly with her solitary existence within the palace walls (Episode 3). The internal conflict Diana experiences is further highlighted by her struggle with an eating disorder (Episode 3). Her discovery of Charles's ongoing affection for Camilla exacerbates her distress, leading to a desperate plea to the Queen: 'I need to speak to the Queen. I need to speak to her. Don't fob me off. It is

absolutely essential that I see the Queen. This wedding can't go ahead. It'll be a disaster for everyone' (Episode 3). However, her concerns are dismissed, and she feels unheard and powerless. These events highlight Diana's struggle to adapt to the external and formal demands of her role as a Princess and a royal family member. Her deep-seated need for authentic and unrestrained self-expression, stifled by the pressure to meet social expectations, leads to significant mental distress, manifesting in bulimic episodes.

Later in the series, during one of Diana and Charles's first joint royal tour to Australia, Diana's natural charisma and ability to connect with people become overwhelmingly apparent. As she walks the streets of Australia, she receives enthusiastic cheers and love (Episode 6). Her interactions with the public are marked by genuine warmth and engagement. Diana's innate ability to connect personally sets her apart from the traditional royal demeanor. This unique connection with the people is further highlighted by a broadcaster on Australian TV, who remarks on the success of the royal tour, acknowledging Diana's significant impact: 'The royal tour is going from strength to strength. And while it's been a great personal victory for Prince Charles, no one can deny it's the Princess of Wales who truly captures the heart of a nation' (Episode 6). This acknowledgment emphasizes Diana's popularity and her ability to resonate with the public in a way rarely seen among members of the royal family. During an interview on Australian television, this sentiment is echoed by a resident who offers a perspective on Diana's appeal: 'Well, She's not stuffy like the rest of the royals. You get a sense of her being a real person' (Episode 6). This comment underlines the contrast between Diana's approachable and more reserved, formal nature, which is traditionally associated with the formal role of the royal family. Her ability to break the conventional royal mold and present herself as an authentic 'real person' significantly contributes to her becoming beloved. By expressing herself in this manner, Diana presents a stark contrast to the members of the royal family, who tend to adhere more closely to their formal roles, often leading them to suppress authentic expressions of themselves.

Later in the season, a significant event occurs on the 37th birthday of Prince Charles (Episode 9). Diana prepares a special dance performance for him, choosing to dance to the sounds of 'Uptown Girl' by Billy Joel. In this moment, Diana expresses herself in a manner that is distinctly her own. However, Diana's genuine and heartfelt act of self-expression does not align with Charles's expectations or desires, nor does it fit the expectations of the Princess role. Later, we learn about Diana's affair with a military man named Major Hewitt, despite being married to Charles (Episode 9). This behavior marks a significant departure from the social expectations associated with her role as the Princess of Wales and the future Queen of England. Yet, on the other hand, it represents an authentic expression of a self that craves love and intimate connection, needs that she cannot fulfill within the family and with her partner.

In the last episode of the season, a poignant conversation between Prince Philip and Princess Diana at Balmoral Castle further encapsulates Diana's journey of self-expression amid the challenges of her marriage and life within the royal family (Episode 10). Philip enters Diana's room to address the troubles in her marriage with Charles. In the beginning of the conversation, he acknowledges the difficulties Diana faces in adapting to the royal family: 'We can be a rough bunch in this family. And I'm sure, on occasion, to a sensitive creature like you, it must feel like ... well, let me ask. What does it feel like?' Diana authentically responds, vividly conveying her feelings of isolation within the royal household: 'A cold, frozen tundra ... an icy, dark, loveless cave ... with no light ... no hope ... anywhere. Not even the faintest crack'. Philip's attempt to console Diana, suggesting that Charles will eventually change his affections, reflects a common hope or masking of the situation within the family. However, Diana's response indicates a profound shift in her perspective and a realization of her need for self-preservation:

*That might have reassured me once. But I worry we're past that point now, Sir. And if he ... if this family can't give me the love and security that I feel I deserve, then I believe I have no option but to break away, officially ... and find it myself.* (Episode 10)

At this point in their conversation, Philip's demeanor shifts, and he becomes visibly angered by Diana's lack of comprehension regarding her place within the royal hierarchy. He expresses frustration over her failure to recognize that they all play secondary roles in a spectacle that revolves primarily around the Queen. Philip emphasizes that their individual desires for self-expression are secondary to the overarching duty of upholding the monarchy's image and role.

### *Inner conviction and purpose-driven mission*

In the realm of inner conviction and purpose-driven mission, Diana's character is portrayed as someone deeply motivated by her personal values rather than external expectations. This aspect of her character is highlighted through various instances throughout the season. First, Diana's sister, Sarah, sheds light on Diana's childhood, revealing her nickname, 'Dutch'. This nickname was attributed to Diana because she behaved in a manner that suggested she believed she was destined for greatness (Episode 1). This insight into her early life offers a glimpse of Diana's inherent sense of purpose and belief in her own potential, hinting at the driving forces behind her actions and decisions later in life. Indeed, this sentence foreshadows Diana's leadership journey, unveiling a narrative that will be further revealed and developed throughout the season. Another significant moment that exemplifies Diana's inner conviction occurs during her visit to New York, mainly her stop at a hospital in Harlem (Episode 10). A reporter covering the event comments on the rarity of such a visit, especially to the pediatric AIDS unit. Diana's actions during this visit, notably her embrace of a child with AIDS, boldly challenged the prevailing societal stigma associated with the disease.

These instances collectively depict Diana as a character driven by a profound sense of personal mission and values. In her public interactions and attitudes toward social issues, she consistently demonstrates a commitment to her roles as a wife, mother, and compassionate individual, often placing these above the conventional expectations of royalty or societal expectations. For Diana, the prominence that comes with being the Princess of Wales is not leveraged for personal gain or power.

### *Originality*

The theme of originality and individuality, especially in shaping one's values and beliefs through personal experiences rather than imitation, is a central aspect of Diana's portrayal in the series. This aspect is further highlighted in the design of her leadership style, which is based on a unique narrative that Diana constructs for herself. For example, a significant instance highlights Diana's individuality during her visit to Australia with Charles. This visit is contrasted with Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip's visit to the Crown Colony of Australia in 1954, where Queen Elizabeth left her children behind for an extended period. Unlike the Queen, Diana insists on traveling with baby William despite the displeasure expressed by Charles and his advisors (Episode 6). This decision underscores Diana's prioritization of her role as a mother over her royal duties, even when the visit holds considerable diplomatic importance. Diana's commitment to her son is further evident when she learns about the extensive travel plans in Australia. Concerned about the impact on William, she remarks, 'It's an awful lot of moving around. A baby needs stability'. When Charles's advisor suggests that it might have been better for William not to join the tour, Diana firmly responds, 'I always made it perfectly clear. No baby, no me', demonstrating her strong conviction to the role as a mother and her unwillingness to compromise on her son's well-being for the sake of royal protocol. Her individuality is further emphasized during a confrontation with Charles's advisor. Diana retorts when he addresses William by his title, 'That's a title. You can't see a title ... This child is perfect in every single way. So why should you expect me, as his mother to be without him for one second, let alone two weeks?' Her response highlights her perspective that her primary duty is to her child, not to the Crown. This is further highlighted in Diana's assertion that her role as a mother is one of the most impactful moments in the season, when she firmly states:

*Then the greatest act of service I can give to the Crown as a Princess is not to be some meek little wife following the great Prince around like some smiling doll, but to be a living, breathing, present*

*mother bringing up this child in the hopes that the boy that will one day become king still have a vestige of humanity in him. God knows he's not going to be getting it from any of his courtiers. (Episode 6)*

### *Integrity and transparency in leadership action*

Diana's character consistently demonstrates a strong alignment between her actions, words, and beliefs, illustrating her integrity and transparency. For example, during the royal tour of Australia, a moment of tension arises when it is decided to send toddler William to be with a nanny. Despite Diana's pleas, William is taken away, leaving her heartbroken. Her distress and inability to focus during a press conference further illustrate the depth of her emotional connection and her struggle to maintain her public composure (Episode 6). Diana exhibits authenticity by being unable to disguise the mismatch between her inner world, her emotional state, and her outward behavior. Moreover, her integrity and commitment to her family are further emphasized when she insists on seeing her son, saying, 'If people expect me to continue with this tour for another minute, then I need to see my son first. Our son.' This insistence leads to a change in the tour's arrangements, and her subsequent happiness upon being reunited with William is evident.

Diana repeatedly demonstrates an ability to express her authentic emotional self consistently and transparently. After following the successful royal tour in Australia, where her connection with the public becomes evident, Charles feels overshadowed, leading to tensions in their marriage. Seeking support, Diana arranges an urgent meeting with the Queen. In this meeting, she breaks protocol by informally addressing the Queen as 'mama', sharing her sense of struggle and seeking guidance. Despite the Queen's cold response and questioning of Diana's intentions, Diana candidly expresses her feelings of being undervalued and ignored, saying:

*It does feel good sometimes to be cheered. It can be a comfort. Since I've joined this family, it's not been easy. I've been given no help, no support, just thrown in the deep end, and I think that people out there can sense that I've suffered, that I'm undervalued, ignored. (Episode 6)*

In a moment of vulnerability, Diana awkwardly embraces the Queen (referring to her as 'Mama'), expressing her longing for love and acceptance. The Queen is taken aback and doesn't return the hug, keeping her arms folded. This encounter illustrates Diana's ongoing struggle to fulfill her emotional needs and display authenticity within the royal family.

### *To summarize*

Princess Diana in *The Crown* exemplifies a deeply authentic individual who navigates the complexities of royal life with a genuine expression of self and is portrayed as choosing to prioritize her authentic self over her role. Her inner conviction and purpose-driven mission are evident in her commitment to her alternative gender role as a wife, mother, and compassionate individual. Diana's originality shines through her unique approach to her duties, prioritizing personal values over traditional expectations. Her integrity and transparency are consistently demonstrated through her honest interactions and alignment of actions with her beliefs, making her a relatable and beloved figure. Although she holistically embodies all attributes of authentic leadership (Shamir & Eilam, 2005), her originality is most central. Diana shapes a royal role that does not conform to traditional royal scripts, highlighting her unique approach to leadership.

### **Discussion**

This study embarked on an inquiry into authentic leadership by focusing on three critical questions designed to deepen our understanding of the concept. First, we explore what are the inherent constraints of authentic leadership, particularly the potential conflict that arises between the expectations tied to a leadership role and the expression of the authentic self. Second, we investigate the effectiveness of authenticity, exploring if and when authenticity might impede a leader's effectiveness.

Lastly, we examine the role of gender within the framework of authentic leadership. While our results align with prior studies that have identified various limitations within the realm of authentic leadership (e.g., Eagly, 2005; Einola and Alvesson, 2019; Storberg-Walker & Gardiner, 2017), we go a step further by shedding light on certain dimensions that have thus far been overlooked in discussing the conceptual shortcomings of authentic leadership theory. We do not question the validity of the authentic leadership theory itself but rather aim to delineate its boundaries, advocating for a more nuanced interpretation of authenticity in leadership, which we refer to as 'bounded authenticity'. This approach underscores a pragmatic pathway to achieving authenticity in leadership roles, recognizing the complexities and constraints inherent in such positions.

### *Tension between the formal leadership role and authentic self-expression*

Integrating the self with the role is fundamental to authentic leadership theories. However, our analysis of the characters from the fourth season of *The Crown* suggests that there is often a notable discord between the demands and expectations associated with the leadership role and the display of authenticity. This discord can reach a point where showing one's 'true self' may adversely affect a leader's performance. The three leadership figures we analyzed are depicted differently in terms of their compliance with their leader's role and their display of authenticity. On this continuum The Queen is portrayed as most highly adhering to the role, Thatcher as demonstrating authenticity while also holding on to the role demand, and Diana as mostly showing her authentic self, with lower adherence to role expectations.

According to the analyses, Queen Elizabeth is portrayed as prioritizing the demands of her role over her personal wishes, a way of conduct that seems to help preserve the monarchy's stature. Throughout the series, she is mostly presented as following the expectations and demands of her monarchical role. There are only limited scenes in which we see glimpses of struggles between her authentic personal stance and the role demands. This is evident in her conflicts with Thatcher and in situations where she reflects on her children and her relationship with them. While she feels an internal push toward fostering more genuine relationships with her children, she remains committed to the expectations of the monarchy, justifying her limited involvement with them as a necessary sacrifice for her broader role as 'mother of the nation.' This situation clearly showcases leaders' difficulties in balancing authenticity with their professional obligations, suggesting that excessive openness could potentially undermine their leadership position.

In contrast, Thatcher's portrayal in the series reveals many more instances where she deviates from the conventional expectations of her role as Prime Minister. Particularly at the start of her term, she occasionally sets aside the formalities typically associated with her position and instead openly embraces her identity as a mother over her role as Prime Minister and her personal political and ideological perspective, over flexible perspectives that may be more fit and beneficial in her role, as part of the leader of the Conservative Party. Throughout her tenure, Thatcher remains unwavering in her adherence to her personal principles across economic, social, and political realms, reflecting her steadfast commitment to her inner beliefs. However, this dedication also hints at a sense of rigidity, particularly evident in her reluctance to consider the perspectives of her party members as the season progresses. This suggests a prioritization of her personal convictions over the collective demands of her roles as Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative Party. Such a portrayal implies that Thatcher's strict adherence to her authentic self, without pragmatic adjustments to her role and party dynamics, may have contributed to her eventual loss of the mandate to be Prime Minister. Thatcher's character may underscore the delicate balance required to maintain authenticity in leadership.

The third character, Diana the Princess of Wales, is portrayed in the series as the one that is most authentic to her 'true self', deviating in many instances from her expected royal duties and obligations. Her strong commitment to authenticity, which often contradicts traditional royal norms, poses significant challenges. This tension, as portrayed in the series, led to rifts between her and other members of the royal family and impacted her functional ability to perform her royal role, as well

as possibly harming her mental well-being (i.e., depression and eating disorders), limiting even further her ability to hold her designated role. As reflected in the series, Dianna's character illustrates the potential downsides of focusing on authenticity without considering the requirements and responsibilities inherent in the leadership role. This chasm and the inability to bridge the gap between the 'true self' and the role is portrayed as leading to unbearable strain. Conversely, her popularity and the love of UK citizens, in response to her authenticity, are also evident. These different enactments of authenticity and the portrayal of their outcomes in the series demonstrate a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of displaying authenticity in leadership roles.

### *Role deviation as an indicator of authenticity*

In assessing leadership authenticity, it is essential to scrutinize the foundational assumptions regarding what constitutes authenticity. Our analyses show that leaders are perceived as authentic when they deviate from the formal expectations of their roles and as lacking uniqueness and inauthentic when conforming to the role. Queen Elizabeth consistently embodies behaviors aligned with her monarchical role, maintaining a stoic demeanor and upholding established traditions, and is thus seen as mostly inauthentic. In a striking contrast, Diana's constant deviation from the formal expectations and her visible struggle to comply with the formalities of her role are portrayed as authentic.

This assessment of authenticity, by the observers, to individuals who deviate from the role is a deeply ingrained societal perception. In contemporary Western societies, authenticity is often equated with uniqueness, originality, and independence. Historically, authenticity evolved during the Renaissance, recognizing individuals for their unique attributes (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Henderson and Hoy (1983) formalized the concepts of authentic and inauthentic leadership, emphasizing that authentic leaders prioritize their true selves over role expectations. Shamir and Eilam (2005) furthered this discourse by highlighting the originality of authentic leaders. In a recent examination of authenticity, Baumeister (2019) argued that the societal upheavals of the 20th century emphasized deliberate, intentional action, contrasting with passive conformity to familiar habits and doing what everyone else does. Thus, authenticity holds significant value in contemporary societies, and researchers commonly define authenticity as something that is 'genuine, real, and true' (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Kovács, 2019; O'Connor, Carroll & Kovács, 2017; Thompson, Rindfleisch, & Arsel, 2006). Thus, based on the analyses, we propose that behaviors deviating from the expected norms of a leadership role are more likely to be perceived by the followers as exemplifying genuineness and uniqueness, and thus, characteristics of more authentic leaders.

The notion of perceiving leaders' deviation from the role as a form of authenticity is of value; however, it also may be limited since this assessment could introduce bias, as leaders who adhere to their formal role expectations may still embody authenticity. In the examples gathered from *The Crown* series, the Queen is shown as fully following the obligations of her professional leadership role, and the viewers can interpret this as an inauthentic behavior. However, this may not be the case. For example, when the Queen summons her children to private meetings to learn more about who they are and their personal aims and wishes, her reactions to them highlight that they need to comply with their formal royal obligations. Furthermore, the seemingly authentic questioning of her motherly relations with them concludes in her justification that she should not blame herself, since she is 'the mother of the nation'. While this can be seen as a commitment to the Crown and her leadership role, it comes across as actually giving voice to her authentic self. Thus, while adhering closely to the role and enacting as one with the role, it is possible that the Queen might portray her authentic, genuine self. While Diana and Thatcher are portrayed as more authentic than the Queen, when relating to their children and deviating from the role, the Queen might not be less authentic 'playing the role' of Queen. This underscores the complexity inherent in evaluating authenticity and points to the potential biases in the perception of leaders' authenticity, suggesting that while leadership authenticity is mainly perceived as such when individuals deviate from their formal leadership role expectations, they may still be authentic when adhering to the established norm of the role.

### *Role definition as indicating levels of authenticity freedom*

Another aspect evident from our analyses and comparison of the three leadership figures is the characteristics of the leadership role, its formulated scripts, and the ability to show authenticity within each designated role. In the fourth season, we witness varying levels of authenticity freedom among the characters and their personality and the different types of roles. While the Queen's role as monarch imposes strict constraints rooted in long-standing tradition, protocols, and institutional norms, Diana enjoys a greater latitude of self-expression due to the less defined nature of her role as the Princess of Wales. Thatcher's role as Prime Minister is less scripted and more malleable than the Queen's. However, it may be more structured and formalized than the role of Diana as Princess.

The roles' different levels of formal characteristics and structuredness can influence the ability to enact authenticity within the role. The role of the Queen, who has represented the monarchy for decades, has scripts in every aspect of daily life rituals. Starting from interpersonal meetings with stakeholders, ceremonies, actions, decisions, and personal relationships. These are all scripted and have protocols for how they should be handled. In occupying such a role, finding the freedom to deviate from the role and show more personal and genuine aspects is harder.

On the other hand, the role of Princess is less scripted, and occupying this role may allow for more leeway to show individual, unique, and personal characteristics. They may also be less scrutinized when doing so. While roles have structures and restrictions attached to them, they may also have their boundaries and limitations. For example, it is somewhat acceptable for Diana to restructure her role in Australia to enable traveling with the children. However, in other instances, when she openly discusses her problems within the royal family with family members or even more so outside of the family, she is scrutinized for doing so. Similarly, when the Prime Minister does not comply with the expectations of her party members, she pays a high price for this. Thus, our analyses demonstrate that the role's nature and structure may significantly impact the ability to show authenticity within the role freely. Hence, we suggest that the nature of the role itself is a crucial factor in determining the degree of freedom a leader is afforded to display his or her authenticity.

### *Authenticity and role effectiveness*

#### *Leadership stability*

Our analyses of the portrayal of Queen Elizabeth, Thatcher, and Diana vividly illustrate the perceived outcomes of authenticity versus adherence to the role expectations. Throughout season 4, the Queen's high adherence to her role is portrayed as effective, leading to stability. In contrast, Thatcher and Diana face consequences for their display of authenticity. In Thatcher's case, her authenticity contributed to her ability to bring about vast changes in the UK and gain power. However, over time, this rigid commitment to being authentic contributed to her losing her position as Prime Minister. In the case of Diane, her authenticity led to experiencing exclusion, loneliness, being cast away from the royal family, and eventually to her departure from the Princess role. Furthermore, adherence to the role expectations versus demonstration of authenticity may have outcomes for personal well-being, as presented in the case study of *The Crown*. While the Queen is protected by her role scripts, portrayed as enabling her longevity, Diana, taking the freedom to construct her role and enact it authentically uniquely, is portrayed as paying a price in terms of her well-being and health.

#### *Competence versus warmth*

In *The Crown* series, fulfilling role expectations and being low in authenticity is portrayed as leading to attribution of competence and professionalism (e.g., the Queen). In comparison, exhibiting authenticity seems to be linked to the attribution of warmth and leads to stronger emotional attachment in the form of likability (e.g., Diana). According to earlier research, whereas traits related to warmth are crucial for fostering positive interpersonal relationships, attributions of competence predominantly influence how individual success in their roles is perceived (Fiske et al., 2007). While the Queen's

adherence to her role seems to boost the sense of her competence and adequacy, signaling that she is qualified for the role, she is mainly portrayed as cold and less liked by the people. On the other hand, Diana who is depicted as high on authentic display, is perceived as warm and accessible, and gains much love from the public. However, in conjunction, her competence in the role is questioned.

Thatcher's characters' depiction is more complex. She is seen as highly authentic and is attributed competence. Yet, she is portrayed as lacking warmth. This is especially evident in her economic reforms and political stance. Thus, authenticity judgments are not solely contingent on warmth and do not automatically lead to likening. In the case of Thatcher, her authenticity relates to extremely negative emotions toward her. This is in line with other leaders, such as Steve Jobs and Donald Trump, who were perceived as authentic and assessed as competent but also aroused negative emotional reactions. Thus, it is possible that while adhering to the role expectations can result in attributions of competence, exhibiting perceived authenticity can have more complex relationships with likability. It can arouse a strong emotional reaction that can result in positive or negative emotions of dislike.

Our analysis suggests that perceived authenticity does not necessarily correlate with effective leadership. Imhoff and Koch (2017) propose a curvilinear relationship between agency and communion, suggesting that moderate levels of agency are seen as more communal. Applying this to warmth and competence, leaders must balance authenticity to be perceived as competent and liked. This interplay highlights the nuanced perceptions followers have regarding leadership authenticity.

### *The intersection between gender and authenticity judgment*

Authenticity may be a privilege that mainly exists for individuals holding social status that is seen as more in line with the 'ideal leader' image (Epitropaki, 2000; Epitropaki & Martin, 2004). Individuals who deviate from the role expectations and social stereotypes of leadership (e.g., Women and members of minority groups) may be unable to display authenticity freely without paying a higher price (Eagly, 2005). Furthermore, as the notion of the 'double bind' suggests, they may be expected to also demonstrate their gender role, which deviates from the leadership role (Kark, Blatt, & Wiesel, 2024; Zheng et al., 2018). In season 4 of *The Crown* series, although we focused only on female characters, this intersection and the limited freedom for female leaders to express authenticity is exemplified and sheds light on the unique challenges women leaders face in embodying authentic leadership. The Queen's deviations from monarchical norms often occur within a 'gendered' space, such as her display of communal qualities. Similarly, Thatcher departs from her formal role and aligns with traditional female gendered roles, such as mother or wife. Princess Diana embodies expected communal figures of women, exhibiting maternal, humane, and compassionate traits. While these deviations may be perceived as authentic self-expression, they also align with gender role expectations.

This raises the question of whether behaviors conforming to stereotypical 'feminine' norms are perceived authentic in leadership roles. Arguably, such behaviors may not be seen as authentic outside leadership contexts, as they may contradict individualistic principles. Leadership roles, rooted in masculine constructs (Kark et al., 2024), may lead to interpreting expressions of 'femininity' as role deviations rather than authentic self-expression, reflecting societal expectations for women. This presents a challenge for women, who must navigate both their leadership and gender roles simultaneously, risking being seen not as authentic, but as merely conforming to one of these roles. Thus, they may be paying the authenticity penalty in both fronts, resulting in not gaining credit for their authenticity.

### *'Bounded authenticity': A balanced approach for displaying authenticity in leadership roles*

Integrating our findings, with regards to the debates in the literature on the desirability to behave authentically as leaders, along with the critiques on authentic leadership, we put forward the novel concept of 'leadership bounded authenticity'. We draw on the prior concept of 'bounded emotionality', suggested by Mumby and Putnam (1992), in contrast to the cognitive concept of 'bounded

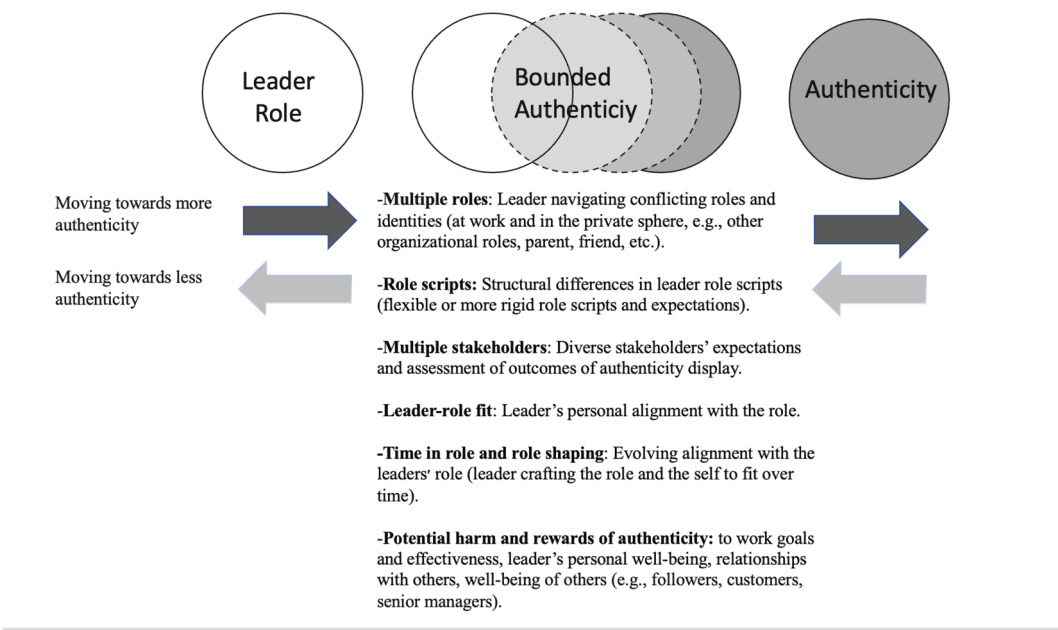
rationality' (e.g., Meyerson, 1998). Bounded rationality was suggested as a practical alternative to rational decision-making, arguing that to reach an optimal, reasoned choice aimed at maximizing gain and selecting the best alternative for reaching a particular goal, organizational actors are inevitably limited (Simon, 1976). This is because individuals' cognitive abilities are limited, enabling people to explore only limited alternatives, use simplified heuristics and 'rules of thumb', draw on incomplete information, and rarely reach optimal choices. Thus, bounded rationality is a modified form of rationality grounded in finding a satisfying and 'good enough' solution to organizational problems. The concept of bounded emotionality was critiqued as a male-centered concept, representing the centrality of cognitions, highlighting the organizational metaphor of the 'brain' (Kilduff, 1987; Morgan, 1998) and as devaluing emotions (Mumby & Putnam, 1992).

As an alternative to bounded rationality, Mumby and Putnam (1992) offer the construct of 'bounded emotionality', as a different mode of organizing that can foster caring, nurturance, supportiveness, community, and interrelatedness. It is not restricted by the 'mind' or the human inability to consider all alternative options; rather, it is bounded by individuals' recognition of other people's subjectivity in order to contribute to building interrelated relationships in which everyone can display their emotions and build a community. Bounded emotionality is conceptualized as enabling the expression of a broader range of emotions than is usually encouraged in traditional organizations. It stresses the significance of holding on to interpersonal sensitive and variable boundaries between what is expressed and what is actually felt (Mumby & Putnam, 1992) and tolerating organizational ambiguity and uncertainty rather than reducing it (Weick, 1979). According to this definition, boundedness of emotional expression is a necessary condition, because individuals should constrain emotional expression in order to function effectively in interpersonal relationships in ways that are sensitive to other people's subjectivity, emotional needs, and competencies (Martin, Knopoff, & Beckman, 1998; Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Putnam & Mumby, 1993). While rationality is bounded because of unavoidable human limitations in information processing (Simon, 1976), emotions should be bounded voluntarily to protect interpersonal relationships and the ability of others to express their own emotions in organizations (Martin et al., 1998).

Drawing on this conceptualization, and in line with our findings, we offer the concept of 'leadership bounded authenticity'. We define leadership-bounded authenticity as a display of authenticity in which the leader demonstrates authenticity in a way that is restricted by the expectations of the leader's role and their responsibility toward the followers. This is a voluntary action in which, on the one hand, the leader is true to oneself, showing an alignment between their inner characteristics, values and convictions, and their behaviors. However, at the same time, they constrain their authenticity in ways that will not impair the role's requirements and outcomes, make ill use of their power and authority, and harm their followers and other stakeholders (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

Based on our analyses of *The Crown* season 4, we suggest that the authenticity in leadership role should be bounded, due to several considerations: **First**, our findings show that there are structural differences in leadership roles, affecting the scope of freedom to show authenticity in a non-harmful way in the role (Queen vs. Princess). This suggests that while some roles are more highly scripted, others have more latitude in displaying authenticity. This will affect the levels in which different roles are bounded and the consequences of showing greater or lesser authenticity in different roles. **Second**, displays of authenticity can result in different outcomes for diverse stakeholder. For example, while Diana's authentic displays led the love of the crowds, the royal family condemned her, accusing her of damaging their reputation. Thus, voluntarily navigating bounded authenticity is a state that considers multiple stakeholders and the effect of the leader on them. **Third**, leaders hold multiple identities and

<sup>1</sup>For example, a leader may feel disappointment or anger toward the followers and want to express it directly and in high intensity. However, being aware of the power discrepancy between them and the followers' and the possible harm that the display of these emotions may cause, they limit the expression of their authentic emotions and display them in a more controlled manner toward the followers.



**Figure 1.** Factors shaping the malleable display of leaders' bounded authenticity.

roles that are at times conflicting (leader role, gender role, professional role, etc.). Thus, to be authentic in one role may not allow one to be authentic in another role. Furthermore, some roles align more with the leader role, and some are less. Authenticity displayed in a non-leadership role (e.g., mother, friend, marathon runner) may conflict with the expectation of the leader role, calling for the need to restrict authenticity. **Fourth**, showing a high level of authenticity may be harmful to the leaders' ability to achieve their goals in their leadership role and their own well-being. Showing more bounded and malleable authenticity may be an antidote, at times, to the leaders' ability to manage their role, as well as limit their personal suffering. **Last**, over time, the challenge of bounded authenticity may be reduced in some instances since leaders change themselves to fit the role and mold the role to fit their size (e.g., values, convictions, and purpose). Construction and crafting of the leadership role over time and the crafting of the self-identity can enhance the felt authentic representation of the role. This is evident in how the Queen becomes one with the role over time. This suggests that bounded authenticity may change over time, demanding more or less effort and possibly requiring less authenticity restriction.

Bounded authenticity is not a magic wand that can rid the tensions and conflicts between the true self and the leadership role. Understanding in which ways leaders should bound authenticity and when is yet to be better understood. However, bounding authenticity in a way that allows for an ongoing dialogue between the person in the role and the leadership role, can lead to better outcomes in terms of performance, positive relationships, leader well-being, enacting diverse conflicting roles (leader role vs. gender role) and being able to serve a verity of stakeholders.

*Study limitations and future research directions*

While our study provides some insights into authenticity in leadership as depicted in *The Crown*, it is important to acknowledge several limitations that warrant consideration in future research directions. *Fictional Basis:* The primary limitation of this study is its reliance on a TV series with fictional elements. While based on historical figures and facts, the dialogues and interactions are largely

imaginative, interpretative creations. This fictional aspect limits the authenticity assessment of the characters but also serves as a valuable tool for visualizing and discussing the theoretical concepts of authentic leadership.

In the current study, we focus on figures holding the positions of Queen, Princess, and Prime Minister. These are not positions of typical managers in organizations. This, along with the analyses of fictional images, raises the question of extending the learning and theorizing from this case study. According to qualitative research experts, it is possible to draw on small samples or on specific case studies if they generate concepts or principles with obvious relevance to some other domains. If a systematical analysis of a specific small sample or a case study can allow us to provide general principles that can enhance our more profound understanding of a specific phenomenon, they are seen as holding “transferable generality – namely, ‘principles that are portable’ from one setting to another” (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013; p. 24). Thus, we believe that the case study of *The Crown*, although focused on a specific context of the monarchy and prime ministership, exemplifies wider principles of the complexity. These principles demonstrate wider a understandings of authentic leadership in a role, that can be transferable to other fields, including leadership in work organizations. For this reason, this sample can be a rich and viable context to explore and rethink the critiques of authentic leadership theory.

Our interpretation of authentic leadership in the series may be influenced by our subjective biases and the theoretical framework we chose to interpret the data (i.e., Shamir & Eilam, 2005). However, recognizing potential bias underscores the study’s central argument about the complexity of determining authentic leadership. It highlights the importance of considering context and various influencing factors, acknowledging that our viewpoints and theories may shape our understanding of leadership authenticity. Last, we focused on a *gender-focused analysis*, analyzing only female characters and excluding male characters. This gender-specific approach does not allow a comparative comparison between the authenticity portrayed by male and female characters, which could have provided additional insights.

Given the limitations identified, we suggest the following avenues for future research. First, we urge researchers to adopt similar methods and expand their analyses of authentic leadership to include representations of characters in the media and other outlets. This approach may provide additional insights into authentic leadership behaviors and their portrayal, making the discussion of leadership theory more vivid and helping us reach further depths (see also the work of Bell & Sinclair, 2016). Furthermore, conducting real-world case studies and analyzing leaders in various contexts, such as survey perceptions toward contemporary leadership, analyses of biographies and autobiographies of life stories of leaders (e.g., Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, & Adler, 2005), conducting archive research focus on the authenticity of leaders or in-depth interviews with leaders and followers, could offer invaluable insights. Second, it is worthwhile for future studies to focus on leaders from other, more typical contexts, such as organizational mid-level managers, CEOs, school principals, and other leadership roles, to gain a broader understanding beyond the monarchy. Third, we suggest examining authentic leadership using multiple theoretical lenses to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of its portrayal and implications, such as the signaling theory offered in this special issue (Lux & Lowe, *in press*, this issue). Fourth, exploring the intersectionality of gender and other minority status groups to assess authenticity in leadership is crucial for understanding how gender stereotypes and biases shape perceptions of authentic leadership behaviors.

Lastly, our conceptualization of bounded authenticity resonates with other recently proposed constructs, such as strategic authenticity, providing a deeper exploration of the complexity and duality of authenticity. Strategic authenticity emphasizes balancing an employee’s self-presentation of enacted behaviors intended to enhance colleagues’ perceptions of the actor’s authenticity, while simultaneously maintaining a positive professional image (Pillemer, 2024). The concept we suggest of leaders’ bounded authenticity, along with other novel conceptualizations, opens up new venues for future research on the complexity of leaders’ being true to themselves while holding on to the leadership role expectations and requirements.

**To conclude**, our exploration of authentic leadership has revealed complexities and nuances inherent in authentic leadership. Through qualitative analysis of the portrayals of Queen Elizabeth, Princess Diana, and Thatcher, we explored to deepen the understanding of authenticity in leadership. We highlighted the inherent constraints leaders face, between role expectations and authentic self-expression, and the consequences of this tension. We showed the potential bias in our perception of authenticity, when attributing deviation from official roles to authenticity. Furthermore, we exposed the impact of contextual variables, such as the type of role, on a leader's ability to express authenticity, revealing the varying degrees of freedom associated with each role. We also explored the possible complex outcomes of attributions of leadership authenticity, which can lead simultaneously to positive and negative outcomes. Finally, we scrutinized the intersection between gender and authenticity, revealing women leaders' complex challenges. In response to these insights, we advocate for a balanced approach encapsulated by the concept of 'bounded authenticity'. This nuanced perspective recognizes contextual constraints while valuing authenticity, fostering adaptability and fluidity within leadership roles. By embracing 'bounded authenticity' leaders can navigate the complex landscape of authenticity, maintaining effectiveness while remaining true to themselves.

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