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THE RIPPLES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

David Maywald



ABSTRACT

Progress on gender relations and masculinity will be made in the centre, with moderate women and moderate men finding better ways of collaborating together. Boys and men face discrimination, Gamma Bias, sexist behaviours, and stereotypes. They frequently commit suicide, they often experience the negative impact of relationship breakdown, mental illness, and alcohol and drug abuse. Many men are not achieving their leadership potential in our journeys through work, business, and the public sector. The Awards for Under-Represented Men in Leadership provide tangible support plus inspiration for the male leaders of our future.

Keywords: boys, gamma bias, masculinity, male leadership, men

A unique event was held in Canberra on Sunday 19 November 2023. The capital of Australia is well-known as a “progressive” city, with pioneering achievements across diversity and inclusion. This is a place where women are empowered, to a greater extent than almost anywhere else in the country. Each year there are many events to commemorate International Women’s Day, they are well-attended, the speakers are lauded as champions of change. It’s very unusual to have an event that marks International Men’s Day, let alone one that specifically celebrates men and masculinity.

The inaugural Winners of the Awards for Under-Represented Men in Leadership were announced at this event, held on International Men’s Day. They are Torrien Lau (an experienced executive in the non-profit sector) and Rohit Borekar (an IT and cybersecurity professional who runs his own business). Both men are proud fathers, they both attended with their children. We celebrated the six finalists for these Awards. In particular, we recognised the positive impact that each of them has on our community.

I have a strong conviction that progress on gender relations and masculinity will be made in the centre, with moderate women and moderate men finding better ways of collaborating together. The radicals at both extremes create entertainment and colour, but they will not win over the bulk of sensible people in the long-term. So, my efforts have been concentrated on engagement with centrist individuals and organisations.

My journey of founding these Awards is indelibly marked by my experience of fatherhood, by my time working in the private sector and government as well as volunteering for non-profits. My personal activation as an advocate for boys and men was inspired by empirical evidence, but also by conversations with dozens of men and women. We’d sit down for coffee to discuss careers and politics and families. We’d share observations of bias and discrimination against boys and men. We’d share hopes for our own children, aspirations for men and women to collaborate better (for the benefit of all children). But of course, these were things that are only said in private.

The world embraced feminism like never before, and also moved significantly to the left of

politics, between the embrace of the Me Too movement in 2017 and the Covid lockdowns of 2020 and 2021. Women organised and lobbied for change: there was a focus on personal safety and protection of vulnerable girls and women. The outpouring was much needed, and it was cathartic. This movement was supported by many men. The Covid lockdowns were also supported by many men and many women, but more so on the left. These draconian measures were facilitated by risk aversion, and an increased embrace of safetyism. From 2017 to 2021, cancel culture became prevalent both on campus and in social media. The silencing of inconvenient voices often appeared to fall down onto men and people with right-leaning politics.

During the last couple of decades, we have continued to see the impact of the feminisation of Western societies and economies. Boys have been falling behind in education, for example: Australian boys are 9% less likely to complete high school compared with Australian girls. University campuses achieved gender parity about three and a half decades ago; now women achieve more than 60% of undergraduate graduations. Several Australian universities have campuses with 70% women in the student population.

Men's health and wellbeing has attracted some sympathy and some funding. Australia has homegrown successes in both Movember (fundraising and research) as well as Men's Sheds (older guys meeting to build/fix and to socialise). However, the burden of workplace injury and death falls much heavier on men than it does on women. In Australia about 75% of suicides are men, in the United States the proportion is closer to 80%. If six or seven Australian women were killing themselves every day there would be national outrage, and no other issue would contend for media coverage.

Men die four years earlier than women in Australia, and men also retire later than women. This results in men working a larger proportion of their lives, and enjoying a much smaller proportion of their lives in retirement. But the pension age (and superannuation preservation age) is the same for both men and women. Few people have ever pondered this unfair outcome. However, there is daily attention paid to the "gender pay gap".

I was curious about allegations against the so-called Patriarchy being used to tar all men

with the same brush. There certainly are privileged men, who make up a small minority. However, there are many more men who are disadvantaged and vulnerable. Intersectionality has been extensively applied to various cohorts of women (and used to advocate for their support), but the concept of intersectional groups of men has hardly been explored in any depth at all. Mentions of the Patriarchy have steadily increased during the last fifteen years, even as the Matriarchy has blossomed and grown into a formidable political force.

The concept of Gamma Bias helps to describe the positive framing of women and femininity contrasted with the negative framing of men and masculinity. After becoming conscious of this phenomenon a couple of years ago, I started to see and hear hundreds of instances of Gamma Bias that overlapped with my life (and I also became increasingly aware of misandry). The asymmetry really struck me. In many cases the sexist treatment of men, and even the outright hatred of men, was being openly celebrated. These behaviours clashed with my personal ethics, of applying principles to all people with neutrality.

What was I to do, as an individual man? I was intellectually and ethically very uncomfortable about the gender relations situation. I wanted to help the men and boys who have been overlooked, the people who have had little sympathy or support. I wanted to speak to moderate men and moderate women, in order to start making practical progress. I wanted to add a little weigh to rebalance the scales (which have been unhealthily unbalanced for many years).

Women's activists and feminists have been calling for men to be their allies, to support the good cause. For several years I have been a supporter through my personal actions, helping aspirational female executives and emerging board members to achieve the next steps in their career. I have enjoyed both working and volunteering in diverse teams. I have made a positive difference for dozens of women, of various ages and backgrounds. But my intuition was driving towards making a different type of contribution – women's empowerment is such a huge movement that the efforts of an individual are imperceptible. However, the efforts of an individual champion of boys and men are impactful and material.

I was initially keen to mentor younger guys in their twenties and thirties. Discussing this with a series of people who are close contacts resulted in a significant pivot. Focusing the support on under-represented men would put intersectionality into operation for men, and would also channel resources to where they are most needed. Shining a spotlight onto disadvantaged and vulnerable men is a direct challenge to the anti-patriarchy messaging that “tars all men with the same brush”.

After forming these nascent ideas into a single-page “term sheet” and a draft presentation, I discussed the concept with a further group of close contacts, seriously pitching it to them. It was edgy and fresh, it sparked their attention, and they leaned into the discussions. Some of them would publicly endorse the initiative, others were curious but would shy away from personally supporting it. I felt both anxious and energised. There was a window of a few days when it was possible to push ahead with the fully-formed initiative, or abort and walk away from the sunk costs...

The product design of the Awards for Under-Represented Men in Leadership eventually settled on:

- A scholarship of A\$10,000 for studies or professional development in leadership and governance, structured mentoring with the Winners for almost a year, plus tailored introductions and networking suited to each individual Winner.
- Available to applicants who live and work in Canberra, in response to the particular circumstances of this gender environment as well as to ensure in-person engagement with the Winners.
- A very broad definition of under-representation that captures ethnic-and-cultural diversity, Indigenous men, disability and chronic conditions, plus various types of social-economic disadvantage.

The launch took place on 19 September 2023, and the next month was consumed with promotion of the Awards as well as drumming up applicants. Social media usage included posts through my personal profiles, establishing pages for the Awards initiative on Facebook and

LinkedIn, as well as paid advertising. Articles and advertisements were placed in two weekly magazines, Canberra Weekly and CBR CityNews, which have both online as well as printed circulation. I used email and in-person networking to personally promote the initiative. The reach extended to tens of thousands of people across Canberra (including the 5,000 members and supporters of Canberra Business Chamber). There were hundreds of likes, comments, threads, and in-person conversations generated by the promotion. This is meaningful and material in a city of 460,000 people.

Pleasingly the Awards were publicly endorsed by several high-profile local women, leaders who can see the need to support a wide range of people (and not just double down on empowerment of elite white women). This was a crucial test of being able to engage with moderate adults, who sit towards the centre of social and political issues.

The four Selection Criteria for the Awards were mostly qualitative, as follows:

- How are you a **positive male role** model for others? This includes your roles in our community, as a part of your family, and covering all aspects of health (physical, mental, fitness, etc.).
- Specifically looking for the **demonstration of agency** (actions that you have taken to make things better). Plus, your personal achievements, and examples of overcoming obstacles in a constructive way.
- **Contributions that you have made to society**, our environment, and volunteering to help the broader community will be highly regarded.
- **Seeking male leaders with high potential**, favourable likelihood of driving positive change, as well as strong personal desire to achieve social impact.

Over twenty applications were received by the closing date of 19 October 2023. These comprised a Cover Letter addressing the Selection Criteria, as well as a Résumé from each applicant. I personally met with or interviewed every applicant, except for one who was travelling. These meetings were extremely rewarding and insightful. We discussed personal experiences and journeys (through work, business, public service, families, personal growth, and development). There were many examples of discrimination against boys and men, Gamma Bias,

sexist behaviours, and stereotypes. There were also harrowing stories of close experiences of male suicide, the negative impact of relationship breakdown on children and men, mental illness, alcohol and drug abuse. These are typical examples from the frontlines for modern masculinity.

Each applicant was assessed against the Selection Criteria, based on their written materials and interactions. The short-list of applicants was formally interviewed in-person. These men were narrowed down to six finalists, whose references were checked with phone calls. There was broader due diligence, in order to ensure quality control for the process and for the selection of Winners.

Short profiles on each of the finalists were shared on Facebook and LinkedIn during the week before the announcement of Winners. This generated exposure for the applicants, engaged their online followers/contacts in the Awards, and it importantly put a spotlight onto each of them as positive male role models. In alphabetical order of surnames:

- Mark Acebo
- Rohit Borekar
- Saad Khalid
- Torrien Lau
- Craig Roxburgh
- Tinashe Sydney

There were about fifty people at the announcement event on Sunday 19 November 2023, men and women, boys and girls, from a wide range of ages. This was held mid-morning at a well-known location for conferences and events in Canberra near Parliament House (the Realm Hotel). I approached the announcement with equanimity, and felt comforted by the attendance of good friends. There were two guest speakers, Martin Fisk (ex-CEO of Menslink) and Lucie Hood (Head of Human Resources and Corporate Service for DOMA Group). There was also an exceptional panel of impressive men from diverse backgrounds: Eshan Ahuja (ACT Government Director and Engineer), Alfred Chidembo (Charity Founder and TEDx speaker), plus Mainul Haque (Board Member and Community Leader). It was a very positive event, celebrated with

families and children.

The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. There's a realisation that this Awards initiative starts to fill an enormous gap. The applicants are extremely appreciative. The positive and constructive messaging towards men is strongly supported, across a wide range of people. This makes me very confident that the initiative is worthwhile, and that it is helping to address the large imbalance in gender relations.

Here are some thoughts for moving forwards, through the centre with moderate men and moderate women:

1. Lower the inflated expectations that weigh down parents and provide realistic role models for younger men and younger women (juggling work, health, exercise, community, children and other caring responsibilities).
2. Increase the flexibility for mothers and fathers through the whole period of raising kids, transitioning to part-time work as a normal pathway and accepting that life changes a lot (for both mother and father).
3. Ease away from financial targets and measures towards quality of life, with a lot more focus on outcomes for children... Gross Domestic Product rises as we destroy the environment and as we harm society. Striving to maximise workforce participation and wealth is hurting the interests of children... Some progress has been made in terms of Wellbeing Budgets, but a lot more needs to be done. Quality of life for disadvantaged and vulnerable people is more important than growing GDP.
4. Have less ideology and noise. More evidence and listening. This includes tolerance, respect, and freedom to express a wide range of views.
5. Listen to men of all ages and all backgrounds. In the UK there's an All-Party Parliamentary Group on issues affecting Men and Boys. In Australia I envision there will be new advisory bodies, various committees to government and service providers, possibly a Parliamentary Friendship Group for Boys and Men, in addition to peak body

representation for men's issues and masculinity. We can't wait to be invited by government to form these bodies. Distilling priorities and writing action plans will lead, while governments, non-profits, and businesses will follow.

6. Recognize the importance of fathers. There is clear empirical evidence that children are more likely to thrive when living in a home with both their mother and father. Kids need positive male role models. Marriage is an important factor for the quality of life of children, according to the new book *Two Parent Privilege* by Melissa Kearney. Her focus is on the large proportion of babies born to unwed mothers in disadvantaged, poor and culturally-diverse communities.
7. Create more services tailored specifically for boys and men through co-design, most likely from existing and adjacent organisations (not necessarily by new organisations). This provides growth opportunities to non-profits, businesses, and government agencies.

Taken together these approaches will start to address the educational underperformance of boys, plus the poor health and wellbeing of many men.

AUTHOR PROFILE



David Maywald is father to a son and daughter, and happily married for over a decade. Fatherhood brings added meaning to his life. David grew up in Adelaide, studied at the Australian National University, and then worked for two decades as an Investment Manager in Sydney. He currently serves on five boards as a Non-Executive Director. He is Chair of a public company called SolarShare Community Energy Ltd, board member of St John ACT and Community Services #1 (both in Canberra), as well as board member of a foundation in Sydney and a trust in Adelaide. David is proud to be a champion for boys and men (while also supporting girls and women).

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