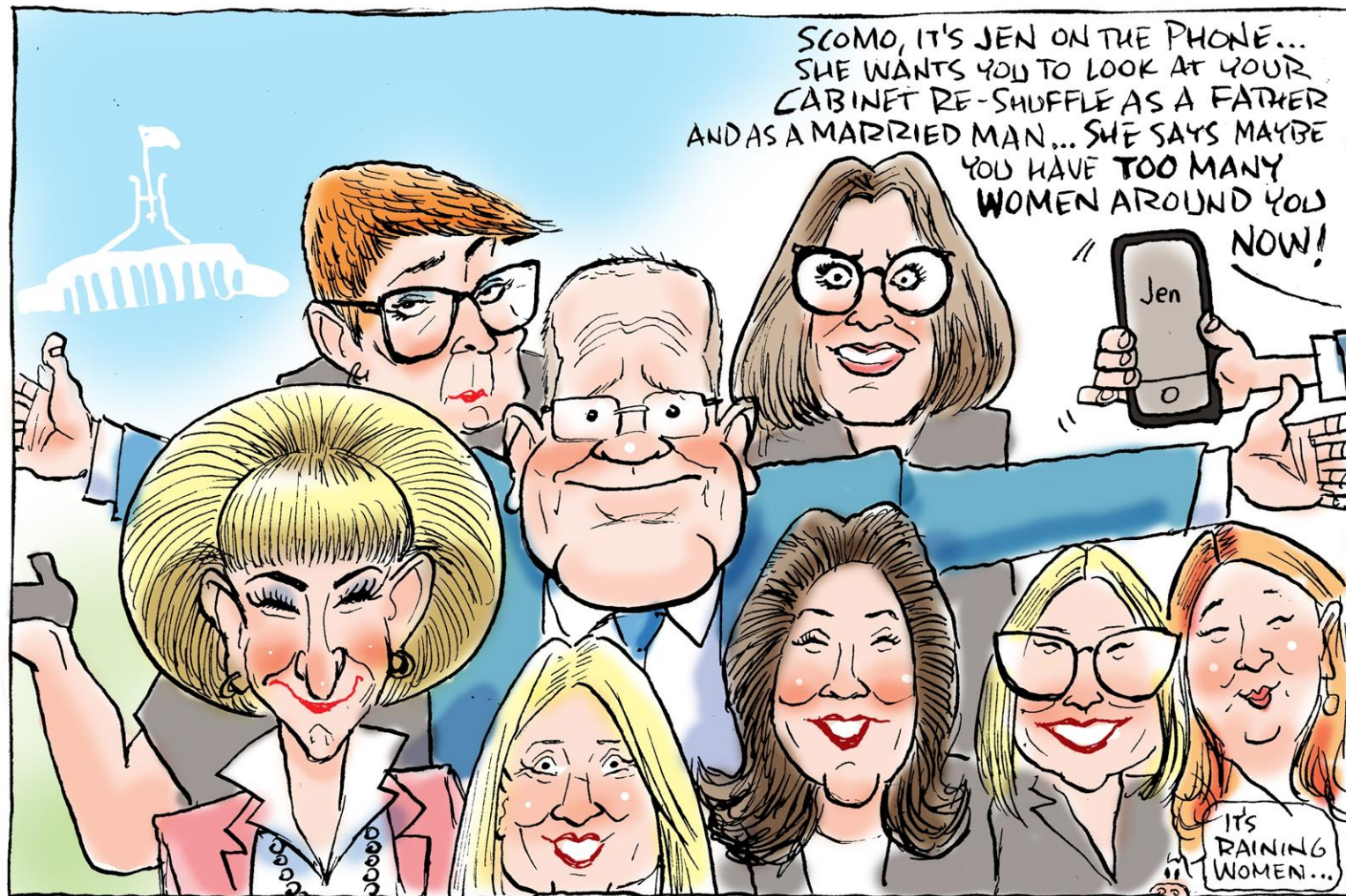


MARK KNIGHT

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RAY SWANN

Let's help our boys be softer

PRIME Minister Scott Morrison said recently "We must get this house in order" — but we can't address toxic behaviours without changing the underlying narratives that drive those behaviours. It all starts with how we teach our boys about respect.

For the past 20 years, I've mainly worked with adolescent boys. I have walked trails with them, listening to the bubbling brooks of conversation, and talked around the campfire. I've seen them achieve and seen them fail. I've witnessed amazing parenting and guardians who have walked alongside these boys and those who have preferred the remote-control option.

Over this time, we've seen big societal changes including vital shifts towards inclusiveness. But this is being undermined by the elephant in the room. The boys I work with now, like all kids, are out of their depth navigating an adult world of pornography, a lack of clear boundaries, with no stop cues.

There are reels, reams, and feeds all designed to harvest their impressionable openness. All of this occurs without supervision in a handheld device with hours of battery life: discrete and personal.

So how do we teach our boys to grow into healthy men for our age?

Our boys are pumped full of images of conquests through superhero-inspired movies, driven by archetypes of the lone, unfeeling champion. Anything that doesn't fit his ultra-masculine world is "weak": softer characteristics, connections, love, compassion.

Let's focus on the kinds of conversations we need to be having with boys at home, at school and among themselves. If we don't let our boys talk, mistakes and all, they won't change and grow.

According to Robert W. Blum of Johns Hopkins University in the US, parents and guardians need to continually "monitor" our adolescent boys. This happens by establishing clear boundaries for technology (phones are switched off after hours) but also picking up on the casual, sexist dialogue we see every day all around us, describing how we feel about it, and in turn inviting a response.

Research has shown children start to figure out as young as 3 that masculinity is "hard" and femininity is "soft".

To grow into healthy adults, our boys need to be connected to their feelings and to others, they need to be motivated by good values and they need to be authentic, values-based beings.

DR RAY SWANN IS HOST OF THE UNDERSTANDING BOYS PODCAST, HEAD OF THE CROWTHER CENTRE AT BRIGHTON BOYS GRAMMAR SCHOOL, AN HONORARY FELLOW AT MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY, AND AN EDUCATOR OF BOYS FOR MORE THAN 25 YEARS

Parliament must be a safe and fair workplace

WOMEN are seething. The recent justice marches show just how pent-up the rage is across Australia with regards to violence against women and the lack of justice delivered.

You could literally see heads nodding across the country when the Prime Minister outlined the long laundry list of grievances in his "That's not OK" speech to the press last Tuesday.

"Women are too afraid to call out bad behaviour for fear of losing a job or being intimidated in the workplace. That is not OK, and it is not their fault, it is the environment we have allowed to be created.

"Women who are afraid to walk to their car from the train, and they carry their keys in their hand like a knife for fear of being attacked. That is not OK. That is not acceptable in a country as great as Australia.

"Women are overlooked, talked over, by men, whether it is in boardrooms, meeting rooms, staffrooms, in media conferences, in cabinets, or anywhere else. Overlooked and treated like they have nothing valuable to contribute ... (they are) marginalised, intimidated, belittled, diminished, and objectified. That is not OK.

"I have heard that women, when offered a job, take the salary offered because they do not feel they can ask for more, whereas the blokes do, and they get it."

None of it is OK. So, with the tipping point of recent events creating a #MeToo moment for parliament, and indeed for the



KATIE ALLEN

whole country, what can be done? Let's start with the Respect@Work report. It is a hefty report deserving of a strong and funded response.

The report identified many high-risk settings — but missed out parliament. This is now being rectified with Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins leading a special inquiry into Australian Parliament House — triggered by the recent events.

The report identifies three key factors that drive a toxic workplace culture for women. One is a strong workplace hierarchy — clearly on display in parliament by its very nature.

The second is a lack of awareness regarding gender inequality and the third is alcohol in the workplace.

The latter can be addressed by mandatory induction and OHS training for staff, members, and senators. As Senator Sarah Henderson and I recommended on *Insiders* on Sunday, we need to ensure a culture of responsible drinking with work hours more reflective of a standard workplace.

But more than this we need more women in parliament to help "change the conversation" and therefore the culture. When it

comes to increasing female representation, more can be done.

The implementation of prospective candidate training and quotas for candidate lists not only increases female representation but ensures prospective candidates are recruited and trained from a range of diverse backgrounds that reflects modern Australia more accurately.

By making parliament a better workplace for staff and elected members through standardised HR systems and processes, an environment is created that provides confidence to those who wish to follow a career in politics that parliament is indeed a safe place to work.

Processes and training need to become more professional to ensure staff are supported in the high-stress environment that is their workplace.

To this end the Prime Minister has announced mandatory staff inductions, with annual training and upskilling opportunities to better support staff in understanding issues of sexual harassment and what is and is not appropriate. A 24-hour helpline has been set up to deal with the issues in real time.

We all know change isn't just needed in parliament — things need to change for women right across Australia. Safety at home, in the workplace, on the street and online.

The Morrison government has already taken action to support women, especially over this last year during the pandemic, whether it be through increased investment in the women's economic security statement, or practical support to employers to prevent and address

sexual harassment. And it's invested heavily in addressing family, domestic, and sexual violence.

Women have had enough. They are sick of the violence against women. They are sick of the lack of convictions that occur after rape allegations. And they are sick of some men not understanding that "no means no".

Australian of the Year Grace Tame said it all when she stated: "Evil thrives in silence". This is a conversation we all need to have.

We need to better address education regarding sexual consent with mandatory training in schools. We need changes to the court system to ensure more than 10 per cent of rape cases are successfully prosecuted. And we need significant changes to online safety laws to help keep all Australians — not just women — safe.

I welcome the Prime Minister's announcement of a task force of women's portfolios created to provide a team of ministers working on women's issues. Senator Jane Hume is now Minister for Women's Economic Security. Senator Anne Ruston is Minister for Women's Safety and Senator Amanda Stoker is Assistant Minister for Women in support of Senator Marise Payne.

It is great to see such capable women helping to ensure women are safe, heard and economically empowered.

These issues should be above politics. It's time for us all to lean in on these issues.

DR KATIE ALLEN IS THE LIBERAL MEMBER FOR HIGGINS