

Why does it take boys talking feminism to have a viral video hit?

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Sydney Boys High School 'Feminism is Important to Us'



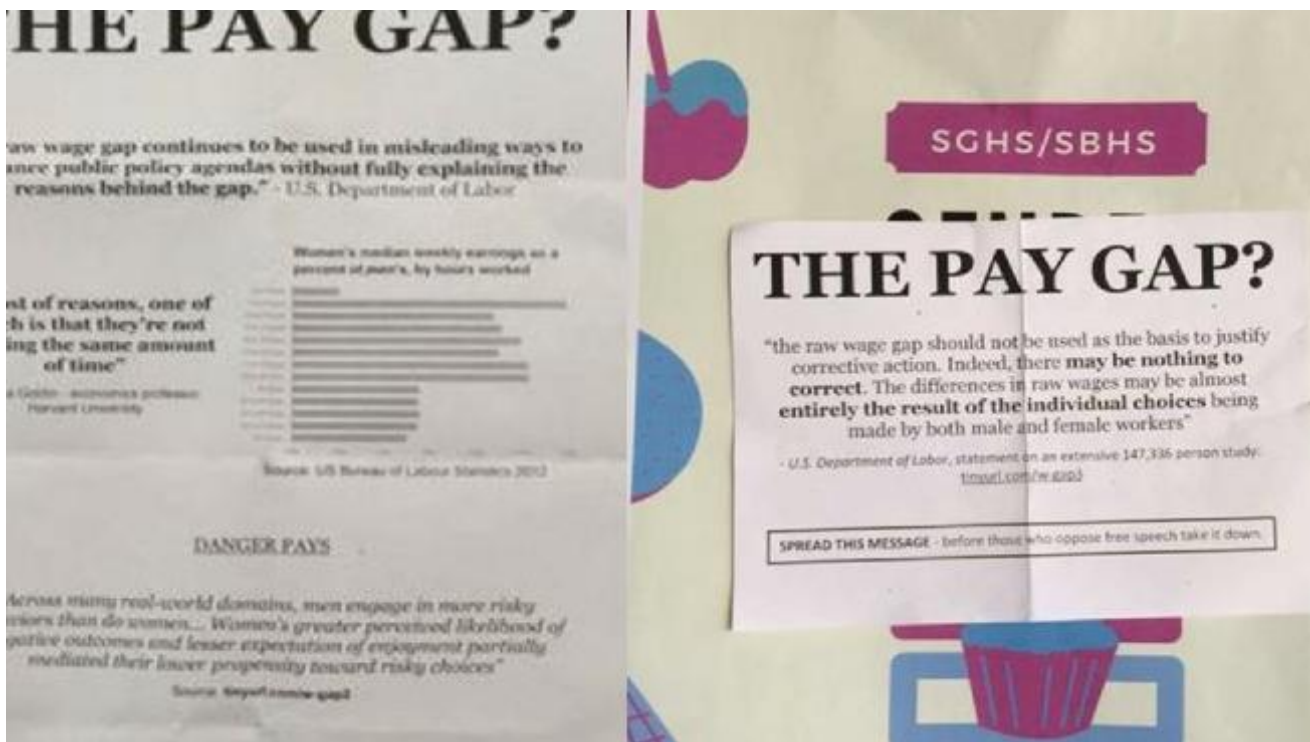
In the video, the male prefects recite statements written by women and girls about why feminism matters to them.

But in a startling development, over the weekend the Sydney Girls High School prefects [penned an open letter](#), critiquing the “tokenistic” video and calling out the “culture of misogyny present in boys’ schools” including Sydney Boys High School.

“As female students we experience first-hand the objectification and devaluing of women by male students” they wrote. “The fact that a tokenistic video, which appropriates women’s voices and reinforces the idea that women’s experiences must be voiced by men in order to be validated, has gained international praise is troubling.

“We do not wish to discourage further support of feminism. But we believe the question must be asked of why it is that male voices are needed, even on International Women’s Day, to bring attention to these issues that, if expressed by women, would be disregarded.”

Now, in yet more disturbing developments, it’s been alleged that in 2016 male students at SBHS trolled, hounded and harassed female students — including making rape threats — after prefects of both schools organised a feminist themed bake-sale to raise awareness of pay inequality.



Posters to promote a bake sale organised by Sydney Girls High School and Sydney Boys High School prefects to draw attention to the pay gap were slapped with notices claiming the pay gap is a myth. (Pic: Supplied)

As part of the bake-sale female students were offered a 20 per cent discount off the price of cupcakes in recognition of the fact that across their lifetimes they will earn significantly less than their male counterparts.

When boys found out they went completely ballistic. (Because heaven help the poor soul who stands between a teen boy and his cupcake!)

Rape threats were allegedly made against the Sydney Girls School captain. Girls were trolled maliciously online. A fake counter event to raise funds for “oppressed men” was promoted. At school the posters advertising the bake-sale were torn down, defaced or replaced with new posters claiming that the gender-pay gap is a myth. A letter was sent threatening legal action if the pay gap bake-sale went ahead.

Given this recent history, it’s not surprising that the current prefect body at Sydney Girls High would balk at seeing their brother school heralded internationally as a “champion” for gender equality.

And while there is no suggestion that the individual boys featured in the video were involved in the furore last year, the culture of the school in general has been called into question. So too, has the hype around the video’s reception.

After-all, there is something particularly grating about seeing a group of young men lauded and applauded around the world, for doing nothing more than regurgitate the words of women and girls.



A Facebook page promoting a counter bake sale was set up. (Pic: Supplied)

As feminist commentator and author Clementine Ford, writes “(the female students) are 100 per cent correct when they highlight that men who speak about feminism are praised and platformed in mainstream places, while women who discuss the same things from a place of experience, are derided and, in many cases, subjected to vicious abuse.”

While this is not the fault of the individual boys involved, it still begs the question: why are we so quick to heap praise on men and boys for exhibiting even the most superficial level of support for feminism?

Across the board, society routinely bestows praise and accolades on men for doing the absolute bare minimum to raise awareness about gender inequality or violence against women.

Men who turn up once a year and pin a white ribbon on their chest, are celebrated and congratulated for all their “hard work” and “bravery”. Those who publicly commit themselves to the onerous task of not assaulting women, are fawned over and labelled

“Champions” or “Ambassadors” — as if it were some heroic achievement to not violate a woman’s body or rights.

But men do not deserve a cookie and a pat on the back just for showing up. And nor should we rush to praise young men for simply echoing the words of women and girls. Indeed the video might have been a lot more compelling if the young men had spoken directly about what they had learned from last year’s events: what it taught them, how they reflected upon it.



Campaigns calling for men to voice their support of women might be nice to have, but our praise of any man who makes even the mildest overtures towards feminism is out of all proportion. (Pic: News Corp)

It might also have been compelling if the male students had offered some of their own views on why feminism is important, rather than falling back on the shallow moral reasoning that "feminism is important to the women in our lives, so it should be important to us too."

To be clear, pushing boys and expecting more of them is not an insult. Setting the bar too low and patting them on the head is.

In her best-selling book, *Fight Like a Girl*, Clementine Ford argues that feminist men (especially those associated with the White Ribbon movement) are often allowed to get away with doing so little, because too many women shower them with credit and glory, stroking their egos, believing that deep down, "men need to have these things in order to continue caring about us".

Internalised misogyny is another part of the problem. When women absorb the notion that 'women's issues' are fundamentally odious and repellent to men, we also absorb the idea that girls and women should be eternally grateful to any man who deigns to align himself with a 'woman's cause'.

Thus any man who is even remotely willing to speak up for women's rights or other 'girlie topics' is automatically haloed in glory. No matter how shallow his involvement, no matter how superficial his understanding of the issues may be.

But the very fact that it is even considered a debasement (or a noble condescension, at best) for boys and men to publicly align themselves with women's advancement, is itself the problem.

And when we pander to feminist men by cheering them on for doing too little, all we're really doing is entrenching that notion that feminism is somehow beneath them.

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