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Tony Abbott: Boy or man - or maybe just wired differently

David Leser

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It's hard sometimes to tell a boy from a man, especially when the boy is 58 years old. We need to observe closely how he behaves, listen to what he says, attempt to read his state of mind, before we reach any firm conclusions.

Boy or man? It's an important question, given how destructive youthful macho behaviour can be. We see it everywhere. Fighting, bullying, reckless driving, binge drinking, treating sex as a conquest – all of these high-risk behaviours passing for manliness, creating mayhem along the way.

That's why, since the dawn of time, various cultures have had their rites of passage, not just around birth, death, marriage and puberty, but around boys becoming psychologically sound and functioning men.

A strong community depends on it, depends for its very survival on turning boys into competent and responsible young men. But manhood doesn't just happen. It requires a concerted effort on the part of wise elders – normally through ceremonies and rituals – to point the way towards healthy male psychology. Otherwise a man might end up as a boy trapped in a man's body, lording it over his family, his company, his nation.

Ask many women and they will confirm it. They married one.

Two years ago Dr Arne Rubinstein, an expert on adolescent development, published a book called *The Making of Men* outlining the importance of rites of passage in making the transition from boy psychology to well-adjusted man psychology. It is a useful guide for thinking about the man who has been holding the highest office in the land for nearly two years.

In boy psychology young males refuse to take responsibility for their actions and have a propensity to blame others. (It's the parliamentary entitlement system, not Bronwyn Bishop.)

With boys there's a tendency to see things short-term and to see themselves at the centre of the universe, rather than as part of something much greater than themselves. (The climate change argument is absolute "crap".)

Most young boys normally view other boys as rivals. They wrestle. They act tough. They like to show who's boss. ("I'm going to shirtfront Mr Putin. You bet I am.")

And often boys like to take the chocolate bar – or the unpeeled raw onion – and eat the whole thing, without so much as offering anyone else a bite.

Healthy male psychology recognises that true power lies in collaboration, in consultation, in the art of persuasion, in working as a team. A trusted, truly self-confident leader doesn't recommit troops to the catastrophe of Iraq without the approval of – let alone a debate in – federal Parliament.

He doesn't ignore his own colleagues, and the Productivity Commission, by sticking rigidly to a deeply flawed paid parental leave scheme; nor does he reintroduce an antiquated imperial honours system and then knight the Duke of Edinburgh on Australia Day without consulting senior colleagues. That's like saying "boo" in the dark.

He doesn't order his frontbenchers to boycott one of the most respected television programs in the country because the program has infuriated him with one conspicuous error of judgment. That's a boy having a temper tantrum.

Nor does he thwart a conscience vote on marriage equality by including the Nationals in a joint party room meeting at the last minute. That's a boy playing "ambush".

Young men often like to swagger. They like to flaunt their bodies – sometimes in budgie smugglers – and show off their drinking prowess – sometimes at university parties in Sydney pubs. Somewhere in the circuitry of their testosterone-filled brains they think this actually looks good.

A healthy male not only doesn't treat women as sex objects or countenance the vilification of women, he actively condemns both. He doesn't stand in front of placards that speak of the country's first female prime minister as a "witch" or a "bitch", because to do so would discredit not just the office, but women generally.

Nor does he lecture that same prime minister on sexism, or wink at a radio host when a 67-year-old pensioner with three incurable medical conditions calls to say she works on an adult sex line in order to make ends meet.

We have spent five years and eight months observing Tony Abbott up close, three years and nine months as leader of the opposition, the remaining 23 months as Prime Minister.

To be fair, it's not the Prime Minister's fault that boys are wired differently to girls; that modern society fails to support the psychological transition from boyhood to manhood, nor that there aren't better mechanisms in place to prevent young males from wreaking havoc on themselves and others.

Tony Abbott said last Saturday the Liberal Party needed to become less "blokey". That's true, but there's a bigger problem at play. We have a boy running the country and he's scaring the pants off everyone.

David Leser is a former staff writer at *Good Weekend* and the author of *To Begin To Know: Walking in the Shadows of my Father*..

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/tony-abbott-boy-or-man--or-maybe-just-wired-differently-20150819-gj2fyj.html>