

This is a Call Out

April 6, 2021

"... call it out for what it is:" said Jeremy Cordeaux, "a silly little girl who got drunk."

This is a call-out.

This is me calling out men like Mr Cordeaux, whose wide reach should be used to empower *everyone*, and right now, especially women, instead of belittling their experiences and diminishing their agency. And this is a call for more men to call out other men. Women in all spheres have been calling out the behaviour of men for many decades.

It's not women who need to speak louder, it's men who need to join that chorus.

Jeremy Cordeaux has been a popular talkback radio host for decades now, but was sacked last Monday, March 29, for comments he made about Brittany Higgins, the former liberal staffer who alleges she was raped by a former colleague at Parliament House. When his guest expressed admiration for Ms Higgins, Mr Cordeaux disagreed, saying:

"Now, why are we going through these machinations about this young woman? She should have her bottom smacked. Why in God's name would she go out and get herself in that kind of compromising situation?"

"I just ask myself why the Prime Minister doesn't call it out for what it is – a silly little girl who got drunk. If this girl has been raped, why hasn't the guy who raped her been arrested? Apparently everyone knows his name."

There is so much wrong with Jeremy Cordeaux's comments that it's hard to know what to focus on. For starters, Mr Cordeaux apparently cannot decide whether Ms Higgins' allegations are true or not. In some moments, he questions it outright, deciding that if she *had* been attacked, the attacker would be in prison by now, as if the speed and accuracy of such an investigation have no bearing on the truth of the actual event, let alone the experience of the victim.

In other moments, though, Mr Cordeaux seems so certain that Ms Higgins *was* raped, that he admonishes her for just that. In response to his sacking, he doubled down on his original comments when speaking to the Seven Network:

"The advice I give to my own daughter [is], 'Do not go out and get drunk. Regardless of how well you may know the people around, do not put yourself in harm's way. Be on guard all the time, don't be a silly little girl.'"

The implication here highlights the tragic depths of Jeremy Cordeaux's worldview. To drink alcohol, to "go out," or to trust... *anyone*, is a mistake on the part of a woman. This crude, shallow understanding of the world we live in *would* reflect Ms Higgins' experience, if not for the last part of Mr Cordeaux's comment, where he once again calls her "a silly little girl."

Sadly, horribly, it is true that if Ms Higgins trusted the man who raped her, that her trust was misplaced. However, it's clear that Mr Cordeaux's view is not simply that some people in this world are cruel and violent; but instead that the world itself is somehow broken, and that women need to be wary at all times in case of something more like a natural disaster than a person: something without autonomy, thought, reason or emotions.

None of Mr Cordeaux's comments mention the *agent* of Ms Higgins' alleged rape. None of his comments offer any admonishments of the man in question. None of his comments suggest any way (or even the possibility) of changing the fundamental problem of our modern rape culture: the behaviour of sexual abusers.

It would be unfair to assume that the careless, un-empathic phrasing of Mr Cordeaux's comments definitely mean that he doesn't believe the attacker himself is ultimately to blame. But there is no question that these comments are *not just* the result of carelessness.

The repeated use of the phrase, "silly little girl," says everything.

In Mr Cordeaux's eyes, Ms Higgins is not an adult. Whether intentional or not, this phrasing at once diminishes the severity of the attack and places the blame for it on the victim. Victim-blaming and the casual dismissal of rape in general are beyond reprehensible, and Mr Cordeaux's words ultimately speak for themselves in this case.

By going public with her allegations, Ms Higgins is dramatically shaking up the culture and the conversation around sexual abuse against women, especially perpetrated by those in positions of power. And her success in this mission is predicated on making men question assumptions about ourselves personally, and of all our fellow men.

If the appalling behaviour of men in power is too frightening to look at head-on, women become easier to blame. *Victims* become easier to blame. But what I find most frightening is the appeal to authority that Mr Cordeaux makes in the most infamous quote from his tirade:

"I just ask myself why the Prime Minister doesn't call it out for what it is - a silly little girl who got drunk."

Here Mr Cordeaux calls upon the most powerful man in Australia to diminish and blame the victim of a rape that happened in Parliament House.

Ms Higgins is rightly concerned that "If [our leaders] aren't committed to addressing these issues in their own offices, what confidence can the women of Australia have that they will be proactive in addressing this issue in the broader community?" Her concerns only become more appropriate and potent when we see that the knee-jerk reaction of some men is not only to disregard the seriousness of sexual abuse, but to then appeal to the *leader of the country* to validate that disregard.

So, I will call this out for what it is.

Jeremy Cordeaux is a symptom of a victim-blaming rape culture that, consciously or not, protects men from the difficulty of investigating their own behaviours and beliefs, and in the process diminishes the authority, autonomy, agency, and ultimately the basic human rights of women.

Before I even begin to discuss The 15 Disciplines in my book, I argue for culture before all else. And we have no hope of changing the culture if men continue to disregard and disrespect the stories of women like Brittany Higgins. Furthermore, we have no hope of internalising the fact that this culture *exists*, unless men stand up to other men.

Mr Cordeaux appealed to the authority of another man in an attempt to dismiss Ms Higgins. We as men all need to make a commitment to do the opposite.

We need to make a commitment to "call it what it is:" to call men who are perpetuating a toxic culture exactly that. To commit to the belief that words matter, that power imbalances exist, and that victims are not to blame.