



Episode 8: Dr Zac Seidler

Transcript

Dr Zac Seidler

[instrumental music] Can we find ways to really connect with boys and men in a way that doesn't excuse or condone their behaviour in a way that seeks to understand it and make that change in such a manner that women and girls feel like they are actively benefiting from that conversation.

Female voiceover

Welcome to Voices Towards 2050: Ending Gender-Based Violence, the official podcast series of the Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence Commission. Please be aware that this podcast discusses topics related to domestic, family, and sexual violence, which may be distressing for some listeners. Support is available. If you need assistance, please contact 1800RESPECT or reach out to your local support services. Thank you for joining us.

Micaela Cronin

Joining me today is a true leader in the field of men's mental health. Zac, thanks so much for joining me for this conversation today.

Dr Zac Seidler

Great to be here, Micaela.

Micaela Cronin

So first, I want to start by acknowledging that today I'm on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, where I live, and pay my deep respects to their elders, past, present, for their care of these lands and for their ongoing generosity and wisdom. My commitment is to work and live as an ally, both in this role and always.

Zac, let me just take a minute to introduce you. It's worth going through, uh, and sharing with everybody what your level of commitment and work has been. So Dr. Zac Seidler is a clinical psychologist, researcher, and an expert on men's health. Zac is the Global Director of Men's Health Research at Movember and an associate professor at the University of Melbourne, where he leads the Young Men's Mental Health Lab with Orygen. With over 100 peer-reviewed articles and two edited books to his name, Zac has dedicated his career to understanding and improving the mental health of men and addressing staggering rates of both male suicide and domestic violence. Zac's pioneered initiatives like Men In Mind, the world's first training program designed to help mental health clinicians better respond to the unique mental health needs of men.

Zac, thank you for joining me today to share your insights, work, and vision for 2050.

Dr Zac Seidler

Thanks, Micaela.

Micaela Cronin

So Zac, let me start by asking you about what motivates you to do this work. What motivates you to strive for a different future?

Dr Zac Seidler

Hmm. I think that there's two parts to this. The first is my clinical psychology bent, which is that I'm obsessed with stories.



Micaela Cronin

Mm-hmm.

Dr Zac Seidler

And, uh, by virtue of that, I'm an extremely curious individual, which means that, uh, seeking to get to the, the bottom of, of someone's lived experience, seeking to really sit beside them and hear them out has always been, you know, a core value of mine. It's what got me into the profession, because I just loved knowing where people came from and what drove them, what their values were. And in- inherent in that, uh, was, you know, this understanding that there were power dynamics, that there was pain and suffering, that there was real hope and optimism in, in some corners as well. And really sitting with that messiness is something that I love-

Micaela Cronin

Mm-hmm.

Dr Zac Seidler

... um, and the stories that I get to, to hear day in and day out, not only clinically, but in, in the data and the qualitative, you know, stories that I get to see, it really drives me. And on the other side, I think that one of, uh, you know... Increasingly, as I've aged, I've realised that justice and fairness are, like, really strong values that I hold. I come from a family of, of four Holocaust survivors, and, you know, my, my grandparents saw the depths of humanity in many ways. And so, I think that what has been baked into my DNA is this desire to make sure that everyone's voice is heard, to make sure that those who are being taken advantage of are given an opportunity for fairness and justice. And when it comes to domestic, family, and sexual violence, it's just a no-brainer for me. I've always... You know, I went to a co-ed school. I've always felt really passionate about making sure that women and girls feel respected and cared for, safeguarded, and also that there are male allies out there who fundamentally care about this stuff. It's always been very strange to me that, that it's been really difficult to get some men on board this movement. And so, what drives me is that narrative of fairness, that narrative of, of altruism and service that I think is fundamental to healthy manhood, um, and trying to make, you know, other guys see the light, really.

Micaela Cronin

Zac, that's such a rich answer, and I really resonate with what you're saying about storytelling and what's baked into us from our family and our heritage. And I think it really... It resonates with the conversations I've had with people about, what does this mean, this ending gender-based violence in one generation? How can we do that when so much of this is generational? That lineage that you've described, the knowledge that is deep in your bones from your family-

Dr Zac Seidler

Mm-hmm.

Micaela Cronin

... a lot of people carry and will continue to carry. But I think one of the reasons I wanted to have these conversations is, is that we do have a national commitment to ending gender-based violence in a generation. And I want us to think about if that is successful, what I'm curious about is, what would your vision for what would 2050 like then?

Dr Zac Seidler

Hmm. I think that, uh, you and I have discussed this at, at length, at nauseam-

Micaela Cronin

Hmm.

Dr Zac Seidler

... uh, around the fact that there does seem to be a sense of hopelessness, I guess, because the statistics are so dire and because the stories are so dark in many corners of our country, um, especially when it



comes to our First Nations wom- women and girls, that it's very easy to lose sight of where we're headed and what is possible here.

Micaela Cronin

Yes.

Dr Zac Seidler

And I, I'm, you know, a co-... crazy optimist in, in some ways. Um, it's what gets me out of bed in the morning. And, and so I believe there is serious untapped potential here. And I'm only gonna speak on behalf of the stuff that I know because there are so many incredible, you know, corners of this sector who are doing really important work. And I think that, you know, to get towards 2050 and real systemic change w-... This is all boats rising. Everyone must work together and hear each other and, you know, see the value in all of this work.

But in my patch, I think that for violence to, to end in, in our homes, in our workplaces in 2050, we really need to see fundamental systemic and culture change. And at the core, in, in my eyes, of, of lots of this is the emotion regulation issues that men and boys face. I do not think that the full emotional range, uh, that exists within boys and men is respected, is understood, is spoken about actively. And so the fact is that shame, rejection, you know, these, these really complex feelings are not unpacked and not spoken about. And instead, men rely on dominance or withdrawal, uh, when they're faced with this stuff. So I- I'm really hoping that we can get to a point where we move beyond, you know, bystander interventions, for instance, and, and talking about your mate or someone in your workplace, but centering the man in his own life and, and reinforcing his potential, and, and offering an aspirational vision for him to see himself as part of the solution. We need to speak to him specifically as the stakeholder who is going to be able to make change here, and call on his better judgement, call on and offer solutions that make clear to him that here are all of the tools that you have in your toolkit.

Let's make sure that we, we are allowing you to access them, to utilise them, and to create an environment and a culture around you that not only expects it, but provides the infrastructure and the scaffolding for you to be able to succeed. Because guys are telling us day in and day out that they are really not feeling like they can live up to that potential. They're feeling that these narratives that are pushing them to be a type of man that is unattainable is, is undermining them and making, you know, their health and wellbeing really, uh, difficult. And so I think that what we know and what we talk about at Movember all the time is that healthier men, healthier world.

And that's only part of the solution here, but I have full faith that if we as a men's health sector, especially, can really double down on these efforts and, um, make men feel like they can actually change the game here, that this is their issue, that they can actively step forward as leaders here, I really think that we're gonna make a lot of change.

Micaela Cronin

Yeah, I think that's absolutely critical, Zac. I think the point that you made about that everybody's perspective and everybody's piece of the work needs to be done for us to get that change. This is a complex problem, but it is something. And really encouraging that belief in change. Uh, I agree with you. I think it is difficult to hold onto the hope. It is difficult to do both things, to really recognise the level of harm that is occurring and also be hopeful about change. And, but we have to do both.

Dr Zac Seidler

Oh, 100%. And I, I think that, you know, when we talk about men and boys, and I- I'll call it out because I know everyone listening thinks about this stuff as well, it's tense. It's historical. There are some really deep-seated problems here. There's a lot of, uh, trust issues that are understandably surfacing when we start to talk about how to engage with men and boys in a way that is not going to come at the cost to women and girls, um, within the sector. And I think if, if I'm to be honest with you around what I hope to see in 2050, it's can we chew gum and walk at the same time? Can we find ways to really connect with boys and men in a way that doesn't excuse or condone their behaviour, in a way that seeks to understand it and make that



change in such a manner that women and girls feel like they are actively benefiting from that conversation? Because I don't think we've found that trick yet, and I do think that it's possible.

Micaela Cronin

Mm. I agree with you, Zac. I don't think we're there yet. And if we've got a real focus on making Australia safer for everybody, for women, girls, people of diverse genders, and men, we have to be able to chew gum and walk at the same time. We have to be able to do-

Dr Zac Seidler

Don't- don't eat it

Micaela Cronin

... all of the things. No, don't eat gum.

Dr Zac Seidler

[laughs]

Micaela Cronin

[laughs] Not good for the gut.

Dr Zac Seidler

[laughs]

Micaela Cronin

So Zac, I'm giving you a pass to travel through time to this vision of yours of 2050 and spend a few days there. What would you wanna know? What questions would you have?

Dr Zac Seidler

Hm. Well, I think that something... Terminology that's thrown around a lot, which I have always loved is the, the idea of calling in rather than calling out-

Micaela Cronin

Mm.

Dr Zac Seidler

... um, as, as we kinda just discussed. It's, it's, it's a very difficult line to walk there. So I would love to move forward to 2050 and see what calling in actively looks like-

Micaela Cronin

Mm-hmm.

Dr Zac Seidler

... um, how to make men feel like they are part of the solution rather than, uh, merely being the problem. And that, that actively means talking about male-to-male violence. That also means talking about men as victim-survivors as well. This, this is a very complex national picture that you have to deal with day-to-day, Micaela, and, and we cannot leave our pockets or it comes at a, at a cost. And it comes at the cost of, of people disengaging because they don't feel like they are, you know, part of the conversation. And so I do think that moving into 2050, I wanna see how we can..... ask some of these questions and, and see what male mentorship and healthy fatherhood, how, how do they look then? Because I think we're at an inflection point right now, and given we've- we have 25 years ahead of us here, I think the pendulum is swinging. And I really think that it takes being very purposeful and targeted and opportunistic in our approach because there's a gender reckoning going on.

Masculinity is going through some really interesting changes that kind of happened to, you know, femininity in the '70s. And I hope that we can grasp this moment and actually make, uh, meaningful adaptations to

how we talk about our, what, what is possible for men and boys, uh, rather than letting it happen to us. And so moving forward in- into 2050, I guess, really being able to see that full spectrum of masculinities on display, being able to, to reduce the pressure and sense of control that so many men have over themselves, and then by virtue of that, over others in their lives. I, I think that we are going to really be able to learn a lot as we move through this transition period.

Micaela Cronin

Yeah, I get a real sense that we're in transition and that's why it's so important to really grasp this moment because there are enormous risks as you've pointed out as well. So given that, and as you said, from your perspective and from your work and vantage point, if you had the ability to make any necessary change, what would it be? What do you think is the one thing that really needs to be done to get us on the right path to achieving a violence-free 2050?

Dr Zac Seidler

I'm gonna talk about the thing that I know and the thing that I've [laughs] invested a lot of time and, and Movember has invested a lot of funds into. And that's what we wrote extensively about in our rapid review-

Micaela Cronin

Yes.

Dr Zac Seidler

... last year, Micaela, which is about unlocking the potential-

Micaela Cronin

Yes.

Dr Zac Seidler

... of the health system. I think that, uh, it's a no-brainer to me, not only as a psychologist, I work with GPs and psychiatrists and social workers on a day-to-day basis. There's tens of thousands of nurses who are coming into contact with us each and every day. And so I think that we are obsessed with certain sectors, like the education sector, who are really struggling to be able to, to respond, uh, to the need that's here. And I think that the health sector with a bit of help and a bit of push are actually really, really capable of making some really meaningful changes. And you, you, you mentioned in the intro of my, my program, that we work on at Movember called Men in Mind. And I think that that's a, a really tangible example of upskilling the workforce to understand how masculinity comes into the therapy room, what it looks like, how it can be weaponized, how it can be controlling, how it can be helpful, how it can be harmful. And actually getting clinicians and then working with GPs as well. You know, Kelsey Hegarty's done incredible work there, to be able to make sure that when these guys are coming in, because they are coming in, when they are coming in, uh, for a common cold, for a broken arm, in the same way that we, now, now doing for suicide prevention, we should be doing this for violence prevention. It is, it is really clear that there are so many access points, um, to do screening-

Micaela Cronin

Mm.

Dr Zac Seidler

... with these men to be able to understand what's happening, for them to do the same for women and girls. And to be able to create the infrastructure where the health system doesn't sit as this singular pillar that doesn't connect in with the violence prevention sector. But in fact, there is a really strong intersection and overlap here, and everyone feels empowered, uh, to be able to actually know, "Oh, I've seen something. I know what to do with that now. This guy fits in a risk profile," for instance, and through really good research that's going on, we can know, you know, where these men tend to show up, who they tend to, to look like, and what we can do to respond to them. And I think that doing that through a prevention lens where we don't wait for shit to hit the fan, but in fact, we can actively engage with these men. Because many of them are really unhealthy. Many of them are really, you know, showing up-



Micaela Cronin

Mm.

Dr Zac Seidler

... often to the health system. And we can, we can catch them there. We can speak with them. We can offer them resources, and we can divert them to a better life.

Micaela Cronin

Zac, I think that one of the things that does give me hope that we can make this change is the incredible both footprint and opportunity, as you've said, in the health workforce and the, some of the incredible work that is happening already that just needs to be scaled up. There, as you've pointed to Kelsey Hegarty's work, there are lots of people who are doing pockets of very good work, but we need to join it up more. So it's, I agree, it's a fundamentally important aspect to how we're going to achieve this vision for the future.

Dr Zac Seidler

100%. And I, I would say to, to your listeners, let's not lose sight. And I think, you know, Micaela, you've travelled enough internationally to know that we are at the, the, the pinnacle here in Australia.

Micaela Cronin

Mm.

Dr Zac Seidler

We do incredible work.

Micaela Cronin

Mm-hmm.

Dr Zac Seidler

We are, we are world leaders, and we often lose sight of that. We are, we are an island unto ourselves, but that also means that our ability to connect and collaborate is far greater than in many other countries.

Micaela Cronin

Mm.

Dr Zac Seidler

We should be leaning on that. We have incredible thought leaders here, and it is about connecting and scaling. And we just need to, we need to make sure that we can all speak the same language.

Micaela Cronin

Agreed. Thank you so much for your time, Zac, and I look forward to ongoing conversations about this and, and work and collaboration to achieve what we are deeply committed to. Thank you.

Dr Zac Seidler

Thanks, Micaela. [instrumental music]

Female voiceover

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