



Rotman School of Management  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



 **gender** AND THE  
**economy**



# Exploring Masculinity at Rotman

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Thank you, Sarah Kaplan and the Institute for Gender, and the Economy (GATE) for empowering me to challenge the *status quo*, and to all of the men that shared their voices. Without you this project would not have been possible.

Disclaimer: This report was prepared by Veronica Hernandez as a part of her 2018-2019 Institute for Gender and the Economy (GATE) MBA Student Fellowship. The opinions expressed in this report are her own and do not necessarily reflect the views of GATE or the University of Toronto.

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## Executive Summary

We cannot talk about gender equality without talking about men. Men's success as individuals could be an overlooked opportunity for gender equality.

Currently, young boys are educated and raised to portray an ideal form of masculinity that is characterized by strength, fearlessness, financial success, and emotional stoicism. From an early age, boys learn to wear the armor of a "real man," and must ultimately conform to a rigid definition of what a man should be.

Default gender roles are changing, however. We are starting to demand men to not only be successful breadwinners, but to also be nurturing fathers and equitable partners. Despite this, society and the workplace still punish many men for stepping outside of the aforementioned ideal form of masculinity, and this is where the problem lies.

It seems that two worlds are clashing, the old and the new, and in the midst of this confusion men are struggling to reconcile both. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to analyze how male Rotman MBA students are integrating these ideas into their lives.

Through the testimonies of twenty male Rotman MBA students, this research aims to understand what it means to be a man, the challenges, and how these students understand and relate to the gender equality policies and actions underway.

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***"Two worlds are clashing, the old and the new, and in the midst of this confusion men are struggling, trying to reconcile both"***

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### Lessons learned from the field

Three insights were extracted from the research:

**Insight 1: I still feel a lot of pressure to be a successful breadwinner and to be "rock solid"**

Male MBA students feel a lot of pressure to fulfill internal and external expectations of being top

performers and successful financial providers. They also absorb high amounts of pressure to portray emotional stability.

**Underlying need:** *I need support to know that I'm not alone.*

**Insight 2: There are no safe spaces to raise my questions**

The nuance of the issues regarding gender equality might not be entirely clear to male students. Since traditional gender roles have been reinforced and entrenched for many years, changing mindsets can be challenging. To make matters worse, most of these students do not feel safe asking questions about these topics for fear of being singled out or judged.

**Underlying need:** *I need psychological safety. Help me understand without judgement.*

**Insight 3: Show me concrete ways to move forward and grow**

The students reported that they're not sure how to move forward or address gender equality challenges in a concrete way. They know the figures and the statistics, but find it hard to grasp how to help achieve gender equality. Further, there is a desire to have forums for self-development and to learn about a more balanced masculinity.

**Underlying need:** *I need clarity, give me actions and room for growth.*

### The opportunity and action plans

If Rotman is not perceived as a safe place to have honest conversations, giving future leaders the space to solve and express their concerns, then we are not giving them the tools to ignite and lead change. Thus, we cannot expect to move the needle on gender equality.

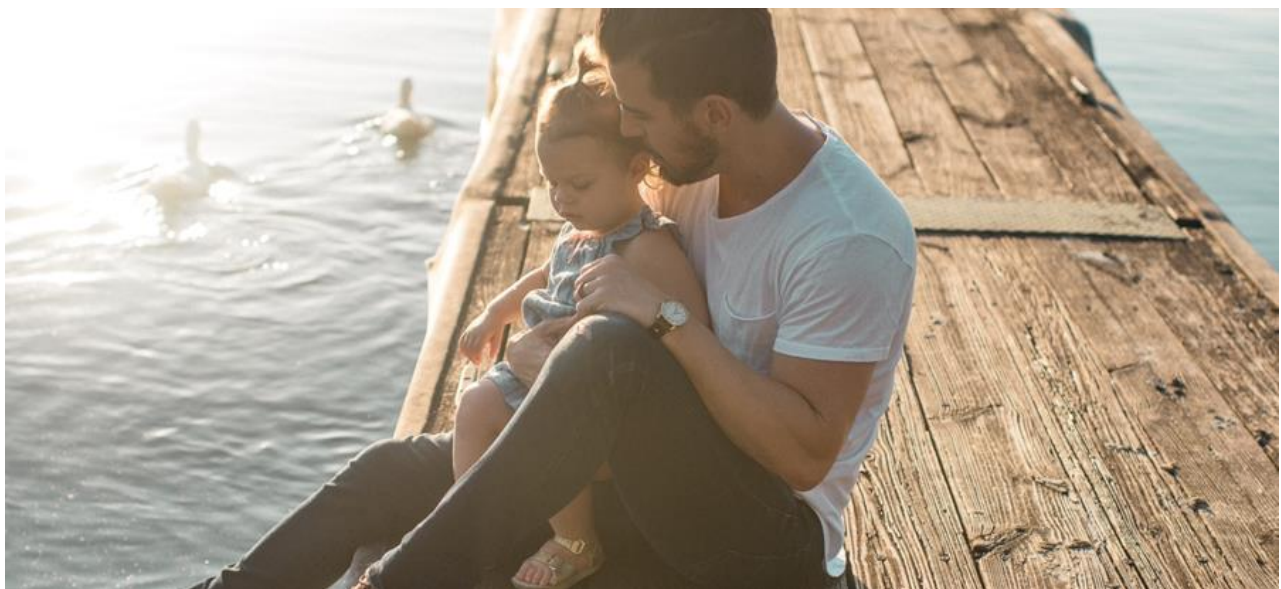
There is an opportunity to create a psychological safe space for male MBA students so that they can grow, raise questions, feel supported and be engaged while working towards achieving gender equality at Rotman.

This study proposes three action plans in order to start the conversation and seize this opportunity:

- “Men Talks Series”
- “The Anonymous Roundtable”
- “Remaking Manhood” role models panel

This is an open invitation to all of the Rotman community to join the conversation on gender equality. We have the opportunity to challenge an oppressive system that has limited all of us in our ways of thinking and in our interactions. By disrupting traditional gender roles in a joint effort, we will be able to bring our best selves to the table.

**Men are an essential part of achieving gender equality.**





## Background and challenges

### We raise boys to be men: The “paradox of men’s power”

The education we receive, in conjunction with the gendered expectations placed on us in today’s society, significantly impacts the manner in which we think and conduct our lives. All genders are subject to these gender narratives, which in turn shape how we interact on a daily basis.

From a young age, boys are prepared for a life within a patriarchal society. They are educated to respond in-sync to this established system through traditional gender roles, and they are socialized to fit into these roles by the clothes we buy them to the toys we give them to play with.

There is a certain ideal form of masculinity instilled in boys, this includes the notion that they have to be “strong, fearless, learn to fight, take the pain, never back down, and stand alone”. When men do not comply to this ideal, we generally tell them, “boys don’t cry, suck it up”<sup>i</sup>. To fit the ideal, men will often use their social class, cultural behaviors, physicality, ambition, and financial success.

The problem is that no man can fit this ideal. No man can live up to these expectations forever. Since traditional gender roles have taught them to hide their feelings, many have become adept at putting on an armor of a “real man,” but this outward stance is often a façade. The reality is that many are fearful of being unable to maintain that façade for long.

Traditional gender roles have created what Michael Kauffman, founder of White Ribbon, explains as the “paradox of men’s power” or men’s contradictory experiences with power. Meaning, the various ways in which we have defined the ideal form of masculinity have become a rigid “box” that locks them in<sup>ii</sup>.

There are several statistics that demonstrate this phenomenon. For example, men are more likely to commit suicide than women and are more likely to be addicted to alcohol or drugs. Men also die younger, partly because they don’t often ask for help or seek support for their emotional wellbeing<sup>iii</sup>. This pernicious cycle often translates

into obstacles that prevent men from personal growth and development.



### Default gender roles are changing, creating the “new male mystique”

On the other side of the spectrum, we are also witnessing a broadening of default gender roles. More women are actively closing the gender gap in the workforce and more men are increasing their participation at home. According to Kerstin Aumann in the *New Male Mystique*, the “ideal” man today is not only expected to be a successful breadwinner and an outstanding employee, but is also expected and demanded to be a more involved partner and nurturing father<sup>iv</sup>.

This has caused some men to struggle since the traditional gender roles they grew up with and were taught to conform to, as well as their internal expectations, are clashing with societal changes. Others struggle when certain aspects of society and the workplace punish them for stepping outside the traditional gender roles.

This causes many men to feel caught between the old and the new world, and they’re starting to experience conflicts between work, society, and family. In fact, 60% of the men interviewed for this study are experiencing this conflict<sup>v</sup>.

## Gender equality is about men too

We cannot talk about progressing towards gender equality if we do not talk about men and factor the former challenges into the equation.

When men take a more active role at home, women can advance their careers in the workplace; they are more likely to be employed full-time and able to take more senior positions. This decreases the gender wage gap<sup>vi</sup>.

According to a recent study by Deloitte titled, “The Design of Every Day Men”, men’s success as individuals could be an overlooked opportunity for achieving gender equality.

Moreover, when men are not limited by the former expectations and manifestations (the “paradox of men’s power” and the “new male mystique”) they are able to be more authentic and develop themselves at work and at home.



## Initial Research Question and Purpose

Rotman prides itself as a breeding ground for future leaders. However, given the barriers and issues discussed above, future male leaders may struggle to achieve self-development and in response they might be hitting barriers in future roles to advance gender and diversity in the workplace.

Therefore, this present study analyzes how Rotman MBA male students understand what it means to be a man, the challenges, and how they understand and relate to the gender equality policies and actions underway.

The purpose is to evaluate the impact of past theories and suggest alternative actions so these male students can become more fulfilled leaders, colleagues, fathers, and partners, and most importantly, allies in advocating for gender equality.



## Methodology and Limitations of the Present Study

This study utilized ethnographic and design thinking methodologies to extract the following insights and themes, this included 20 in-depth interviews with male, full-time MBA students from the 2019 and 2020 cohorts. In these interviews, the students were asked about their own definitions of masculinity, its challenges, and their opinions about different gender inclusion policies and events.

Open interviews were performed with experts on diversity and inclusion, design thinking, and from the Desautels Centre of Integrative Thinking at Rotman. The quotes shown in the present study are verbatim and have not been modified.

It's important to note that these findings are not intended to be a thorough compilation of the many ways of thinking that exist at Rotman; they are interpretations and observations extracted from the participants.

The intention is to highlight the commonalities found among these 20 male students that might represent an opportunity to reframe a problem and tackle it in a different way.

Finally, the insights below are not intended to be limited to male MBA students as female students may also face similar challenges.



## Lessons Learned from The Field

Major commonalities among the interviewees are organized into three different insights:

- 1) I still feel a lot of pressure to be a successful breadwinner and to be “rock solid”
- 2) There are no safe spaces to raise my questions
- 3) Show me a concrete way to move forward and grow

### Insight 1: I still feel a lot of pressure to be a successful breadwinner and to be “rock solid”

Male MBA students feel a lot of pressure to fulfill internal and external expectations of being top performers and successful financial providers. They also absorb high amounts of pressure to portray emotional stability.

Despite their partners having a good job that pays well, they feel that if something bad happens the ultimate responsibility lies on them to keep their homes afloat. They feel that society still rewards them if they fulfil the traditional gender role assigned to men as the “provider” and punishes them if they don’t.

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***“I’ve accepted a job that I don’t entirely like but pays well and I can tell my mother-in-law [that] her daughter is in good hands”***

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Besides the pressure to be successful breadwinners, there is also the need to show psychological and emotional temperance. Male MBA students feel that they are not allowed to show fear amidst challenges and have no permission to appear to be anything but “rock solid.”

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***“As a leader of your family you have to be able to absorb a lot of pressure. Not shy away responsibility”***

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As a result, they believe that their inner value lies strongly in the way they perform at school or at their job, and among their peers. They are constantly comparing themselves to others and competing to appear competent. In response, failing academically, financially, or in any other capacity, is unacceptable. Therefore, they are in constant fear of letting themselves, and others, down.

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***“You don’t want to fail... it’s a huge thing, it’s kind of the wall of shame. I don’t want to look as an incompetent”***

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### Insight 2: There are no safe spaces to raise my questions

The nuance of the issues regarding gender equality might not be entirely clear to male students. Since traditional gender roles have been reinforced and entrenched for many years, changing mindsets can be challenging. To make matters worse, most of these students do not feel safe asking questions about these topics for fear of being singled out or judged.

Many of the students feel that if they ask more questions about gender equality with genuine curiosity, they will be judged, singled out, or frowned upon because they might be sending a wrong signal and deemed ignorant or “backward.”

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***“For somebody that is willing to recognize that their views aren’t popular, but wants to understand more. To grow in a world that if they speak, they’re going to be labeled as an ignorant, it’s painful”***

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In response, Rotman is not perceived as a safe place to raise questions in order to understand more about diversity and inclusion. There is a sense that there is no forum for male MBA students to express their concerns or confusion.

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***“I would like to say Rotman is a safe place to express your questions, I wish it was...but it’s not”***

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The unintended consequence is that instead of encouraging male students to participate and become allies, many male students ultimately decide not to participate in events or discussions regarding gender equality and shut down because they feel vulnerable.

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***“Now you cannot express anything because this can be taken as if you are against the “movement”, that is why it’s not my movement, I prefer to sit down and shut up”***

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### Insight 3: Show me concrete ways to move forward and grow

The students reported that they’re not sure how to move forward or address gender equality challenges in a concrete way. They know the figures and the statistics, but find it hard to grasp how to help achieve gender equality. Further, there is a desire to have forums for self-development and to learn about a more balanced masculinity.

There are conferences and events that show figures and statistics, but it’s hard to have an affinity for the movement or have a grasp of the practical ways to contribute.

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***“We don’t need to be reminded about the gender pay gap or the stats on women. Yeah, we know, we want to fix it. What do we do?”***

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The students expressed the desire for self-development events in safe spaces where there is room for “real conversations” and concrete solutions. Essentially, they would like to raise their concerns and ask questions about gender equality, as well as understand further how to navigate traditional gender roles and society’s expectations. They would also like to learn more about empathy, personal growth, parenthood, and leadership.

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***“We have to be able to talk about the way we feel and not feel weak, where we can all express ourselves and have real conversations”***

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Finally, identifying role models is necessary in order to show male students that they are not alone, and that other men face these challenges as well. Role models can also show them that it’s OK to step outside traditional masculine gender roles, and how to do so.

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***“It would help me to know that others or leaders are successful that have taken paternity leave as well”***

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## Underlying Needs and The Importance of Addressing These

Listed below are three key takeaways and emotional needs for each insight gathered through this research that should be addressed:

**Insight 1: I still feel a lot of pressure to be a successful breadwinner and to be “rock solid”**

**Underlying need:** *I need **support** to know that I’m not alone.*

Male students should feel supported and know that it’s OK to ask for help when they’re in financial and/or emotional distress. They should be made aware that they don’t have to portray an unwavering stoicism and that failure is a part of the human experience. Ultimately, they should be encouraged to embrace collaboration, active learning, resilience, and excellence.

### **Why does it matter at Rotman?**

If Rotman—even indirectly—incentivizes a performance-centric environment, the result is poor collaboration and isolation, as well as an increased risk of burnout and frustration among students. Thus, the opportunity relies in creating a space where collaboration, teamwork, and resilience is rewarded instead of only performance or competition.

**Insight 2: There are no safe spaces to raise my questions**

**Underlying need:** *I need **psychological safety**. Help me understand without judgement.*

Psychological safety is necessary in order for male students to ask questions or express concerns about gender equality without being labeled as ignorant or frowned upon. This would enable male students to understand more clearly

why gender equality policies exist and the positive impact that they have for everyone. In turn, this would encourage male students to become active allies instead of indifferent bystanders.

### **Why does it matter at Rotman?**

If Rotman is not perceived as a safe place to have real and honest conversations, the room for self-growth and learning through dialogue is limited. The opportunity is to have safe forums where free dialogue is allowed to express and solve burning questions and doubts.

**Insight 3: Show me concrete ways to move forward and grow**

**Underlying need:** *I need **clarity**, give me actions and room for growth.*

Despite many efforts, we haven’t been entirely successful in communicating pragmatic ways to advance gender equality. There is still a sense that the topic is too broad and difficult to tackle on an individual basis. Thus, there is an unfulfilled need for a place to grow and to understand how other male leaders are addressing competing issues between work and family.

### **Why does it matter at Rotman?**

If Rotman is not giving future leaders enough tools to understand how to ignite and lead change within their organizations, the advancement of diversity and inclusion will remain cumbersome. Rotman has the chance to clearly identify and communicate the everyday actions these future leaders can take to be active changemakers within their workplaces and at home. Rotman also has the opportunity to inspire them by identifying and supporting role models that are challenging traditional gender roles and proposing new ways of leading.

## Reframing the Problem and the Opportunity

I believe that the initial problem can be reframed as an opportunity to be leveraged by GATE, the Rotman student clubs, faculty, and the entire Rotman community. There is great opportunity for Rotman to create a psychological safe space for male MBA students, where they can grow, raise questions, feel supported and engaged while working towards achieving gender equality at Rotman.





## Proposed Action Plans and Next Steps

Outlined in this section are action plans that can be implemented within the Rotman community. These action plans were inspired by a co-creation session held on March 2019 with seven male MBA students who, when presented with the previous challenges, expressed their solutions.



### “Men Talks Series”

This series of events would be held in an intimate space with 15 to 20 participants where each session would focus on a different topic related to personal development and growth. Topics could include how to detect and debunk pernicious masculine stereotypes and how to live a more balanced masculinity, as well as addressing external expectations regarding gender roles, parenthood and leadership.

These events could be moderated by a member of the Desautels Centre of Integrative Thinking in order to promote a safe and inclusive dialogue that soothes and alleviates doubts.

### “The Anonymous Roundtable”

The idea is to have a forum where an expert in diversity and inclusion space explains the reasons behind some of the most contentious and misunderstood gender equality policies and issues, such as quotas on boards, recruitment

quotas, parental leave, the pay gap, #MeToo and sexual consent, etc.

Participants can anonymously send their questions beforehand so they don't fear being judged. The setting should be private and safe, and to ensure anonymity, online formats can be leveraged through social media or online platforms such as Facebook Live, WebEx, or Zoom.

### “Remaking Manhood” role models panel

Finally, hosting panel sessions with successful male business leaders from different professional backgrounds and industries would be helpful for students. Panelists should be willing to share their experiences about balancing work and family, as well as, how they have dealt with the pressure of traditional male gender roles. The idea is to deliver real testimonies from male leaders in order to encourage male MBA students.

The aforementioned proposals are focused on including topics in Rotman's agenda that broaden what has traditionally been seen as related to “business” or “academia.” In particular, including topics centred on issues regarding masculinity and gender more broadly.

These are just a few ideas and if implemented, are only small milestones towards debunking limiting gender roles. We still need more ideas and willing participants to create alternatives that can address the needs of male MBA students.

Every member of the Rotman community must be involved in order to promote a more tolerant mindset that is practiced not only in the classroom but also in the workplace.



## An Invitation to Encourage a Path Forward

I invite all of the men in our community, including our partners, colleagues, mentors, and friends, to understand that gender equality is about everyone.

This is an opportunity for you to challenge a system that has limited our ways of thinking and interacting with each other. By debunking harmful gender roles together, we will be able to bring our best selves to the table.

For all of my female colleagues, please invite your male counterparts into the conversation and be aware that incentivizing harmful masculine stereotypes within our families and workplaces is not only pernicious for them but also for us.

Leaders, I invite you to realize that an organization's culture has a strong impact on men's behavior in the workplace and at home. By underemphasizing the fulfillment of family or personal commitments outside of work, you may be creating damaging environments where collaboration is poor and women are forced to bear the brunt of carework and thus more likely to leave the workforce.

To all of the men in the Rotman community, it's important for you to know that you are an essential part of achieving gender equality.



## Appendix

### Methodology

- 1) Problem finding – Sensing
  - a. Empathy Interviews
  - b. Interview with Experts
  - c. Observation
- 2) Problem framing – Sensemaking
  - a. Open sorting - Themes
- 3) Problem solving – Changemaking
  - a. Ideation
  - b. Co-creation

Source: Business Design Practicum, Dr. A. Beausoleil 2018

### Recruitment plan

20 Full-time Rotman MBA male students

#### Age

27-35 years old

#### Demographic Background

North America 30%  
 South America 30%  
 South Asia 20%  
 East Asia 10%  
 Middle East 10%  
 West Africa 10%

#### Professional background

Consulting 40%  
 Finance 40%  
 Entrepreneurship 20%

#### Family

0 children 81%, 1 child 19%

#### Marital status

Married/significant other 60%  
 Single 40%

### Discussion guide

What does it mean for you to be a man?

Do you think this kind of attributes have limited you in some way?



What do you think when you see this? How do you feel?

#### It May Take Mandatory Quotas To Finally Put Women in Charge

Wendie Schmitt | Oct 5, 2015, 5:01 PM

#### Gender quotas make an impact in the boardroom

Germany's gender representation law is starting to bite, with significantly more women on company boards than three years ago. But senior management remains overwhelmingly male.

#### California just became the first state to require women on corporate boards

Published Wed, Oct 1, 2018 - 2:00 PM EDT

By David H. Green

Share

Source: <https://www.foxnews.com/real-estate/2015/10/05/germany-gender-quotas-impact-boardroom>  
<https://www.foxnews.com/real-estate/2018/10/01/california-first-state-require-women-corporate-boards>

When you see this, how do you feel?



Source: <https://www.foxnews.com/real-estate/2018/10/01/california-first-state-require-women-corporate-boards>

Has there been any time when you didn't feel safe to express your opinion or questions about topics around gender and diversity inclusion?

When I say "gender equality", what are the first thoughts that come to your mind?

If applies, what would make it better for you to know more or feel more engaged with the former topic?

Personas for co-creation session

## Matt



*"I know that at the end, the responsibility only lies on me"*

**Other quotes:**

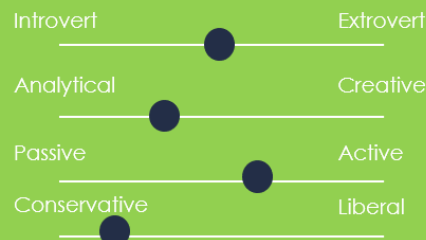
"Society rewards me if I am able to provide but punishes me if I am not"

**Age:** 31 years  
**Work:** Global Investment Banking Associate  
**Family:** Married with one baby girl  
**Character:** Responsible, achiever, protective, stoic

### BIO

- "I've always worked in Finance, now that Angie was born I'm glad I got a job in investment banking. Honestly, I've never liked entirely IB. I've always wanted to move to the "buy side" or risk management. I've heard has better work hours, but IB pays well and I can still tell Norah (my mother-in-law) that Louisa is in good hands.
- Louisa is planning to get back to work after her mat leave, but I know she'd like to stay more time looking after Angie. And I want her to feel ok if that's what she wants. We both know that no matter what I'll be able to take care of them.
- There is an option of taking pat leave but I haven't seen anyone from the leadership team taking it so honestly doesn't seem convenient. I cannot risk losing deals right now. I know that being a top-tier performer will let me cash in some free time afterwards (at least I hope so)"

### PERSONALITY



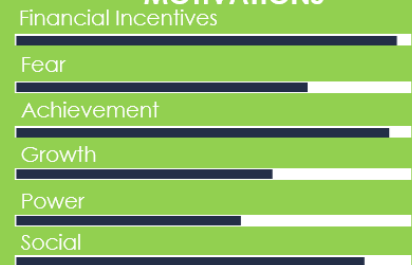
### GOALS

- To be a successful financial provider to my family
- To know I'm not alone in this journey, that I can relay in someone else
- To have the certainty that if I step outside gender roles, this won't hinder my performance to the eyes of the senior team

### FRUSTRATIONS

- I cannot fail, I cannot lose money right now, I have a family and got to bring that money home
- Failure is the wall of shame, you can't look like an incompetent
- My value directly relates to my performance

### MOTIVATIONS



## Sam



*"There is no safe space to raise my questions"*

**Other quotes:**

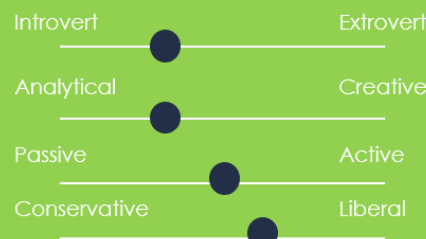
"For somebody that is willing to recognize that their views aren't popular, to grow in a world that if they speak, they're going to be labeled as ignorant, it's painful"

**Age:** 29 years  
**Work:** Tech Consultant  
**Family:** Engaged  
**Character:** Inquisitive, analytical, direct, honest

### BIO

- "Before coming to Rotman, I worked in tech consulting and planning to relaunch my career as an AI senior consultant in a boutique consulting firm after the MBA.
- I feel a bit uneasy towards the gender equality movement. I know there's a problem, but honestly, there are some policies I don't entirely agree with, like recruiting quotas, 1-hour only-women at the gym (especially in peak hours). I've always believed in meritocracy and these measures are just conflicting.
- Rotman claims to be a "safe space" for Gender and Diversity Inclusion, however there isn't a real safe place to have honest conversations or ask questions, without automatically feeling uncomfortable or feeling judged or pointed as having a backward thinking."

### PERSONALITY



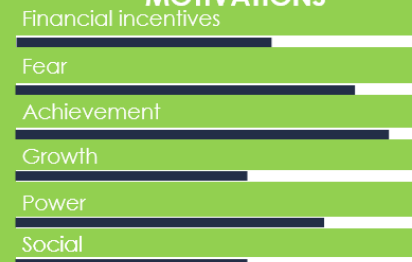
### GOALS

- I want a place where I can make questions about policies I don't understand
- I want to have an open dialogue about the topics that confuses me (quotas, sexual harassment, pay gap)
- I want to have real conversations without being judged or frowned upon

### FRUSTRATIONS

- Being finger pointed for having different beliefs or questions
- If we are gender equal and quotas exist, why should I still pay the check in a date? There are some things that are contradictory

### MOTIVATIONS



## Ethan



*"Let's move forward please, but how can I help?"*

**Other quotes:**

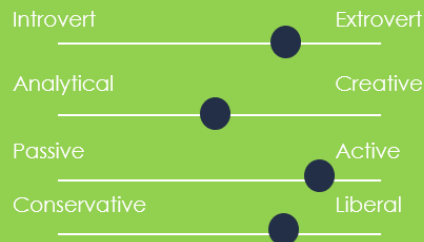
"We have to be able to talk about the way we feel and not feel weak. Where we can all express ourselves and have adult conversations"

**Age:** 28 years  
**Work:** Entrepreneur  
**Family:** Single  
**Character:** Pragmatic, direct, collaborative, reflective

### BIO

- "I have a passion for entrepreneurship so this year I'm part of the CDL student cohort at Rotman. As an entrepreneur, I understand that a more diverse team bring more ideas to the table.
- I'm aware gender equality is a challenge, but what it really frustrates me is that there is no clarity in the actions I can take to address the problem, I only listen to complaints and sad stats and figures.
- In the past I might have had ideas that were not precisely very pro "gender inclusive" or did things that I'm not very proud of. But, genuinely, I am curious to learn more... It would be useful to know if there are other people or successful entrepreneurs that share these thoughts or have firsthand experience of how they are dealing with these new changes in gender roles, and to know how they are overcoming the stereotypical stories that we tell ourselves as men that limit our growth."

### PERSONALITY



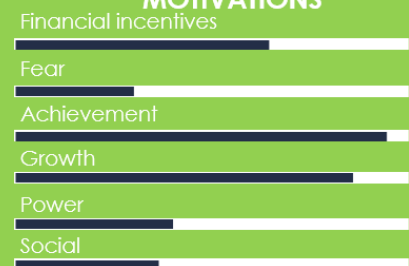
### GOALS

- To have clarity of concrete actions to address gender equality (please no more figures nor stats, I know them by hard)
- Self-growth through recognizing unconscious gender stereotypes
- Meet more successful entrepreneurs that have similar challenges and had overcome this by building a common understanding w/their partners and team

### FRUSTRATIONS

- No clear actions to move on and that are not letting us work towards a more collaborative environment
- Tired of "angry" statements against men in the gender equality movement
- Confused about this whole trend of "toxic masculinity"

### MOTIVATIONS



## Sources

<sup>i</sup>, <sup>iii</sup> Michael Kauffman, "The Time Has Come: Why Men Must Join the Gender Equality Revolution", January 2019

<sup>ii</sup> Edwards, K.E. (2012). "Man, in a Box: The traditional hegemonic definition of masculinity". Retrieved from <http://www.keithedwards.com/2012/10/10/man-in-a-box-the-traditional-hegemonic-definition-of-masculinity/>

<sup>iv</sup>, <sup>v</sup> Aumann, Galinsky, and Matos, "The New Male Mystique", Families and Work Institute, 2011.

<sup>vi</sup> Eric Arthrell, Carolyn Lawrence, Jodi Baker Calamai, and Alex Morris, "The Design of Everyday Men", Deloitte, 2019.

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