

Men, Gender, and Healthy Masculinity

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(1) 'Gender' means men and boys as much as it means women and girls

- Gender: the meanings given to being male and female, and the social organisation of men's and women's lives.
- Men's and boys' lives are shaped, as much as women's and girls' are, by gender constructions and gender relations.
 - Like women and girls, men and boys are gendered.
- Masculinity: the meanings given to being male and the social organisation of men's and boys' lives.

(2) Gender roles and relations are the product of society

- Patterns of gender (of women's and men's lives):
 - are socially constructed – they are the product of society, not biology.
 - are the outcome of social forces and relations
- Example: Children are socialised into gender roles, through parental treatment, observation, toys, media, etc.
- Gender is embedded in social norms, media, social institutions (schools, sports, churches, workplaces), and law and policy



Gender norms (simplistic)

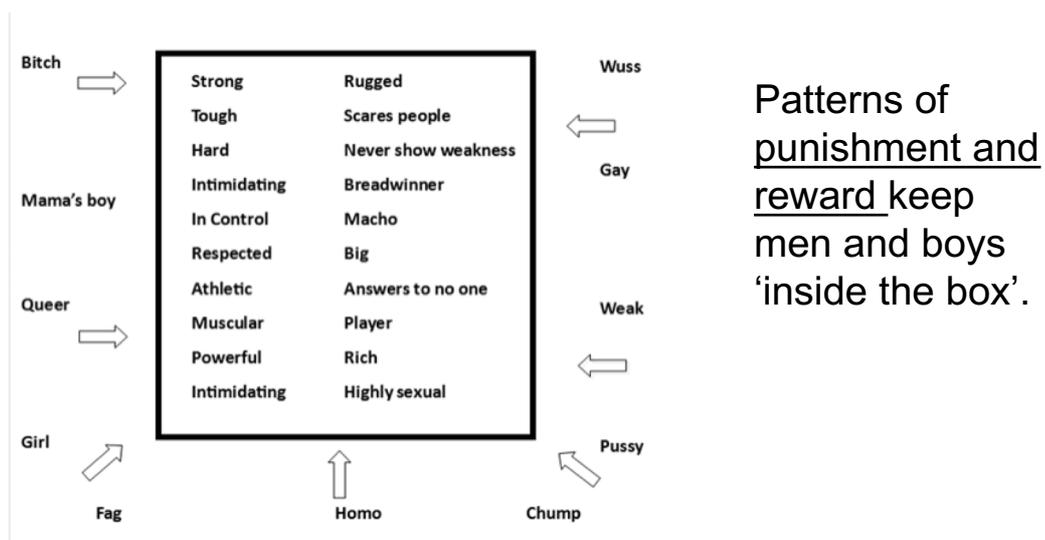
Boys must be:

- Masculine
- Tough
- Active
- Aggressive
- Tough
- Daring
- Dominant

Girls must be:

- Feminine
- Weak
- Passive
- Soft
- Emotional
- Sweet
- Submissive

Traditional masculinity: the 'Man Box'



(3) Conformity to masculinity shapes men's and boys' behaviour

- Gender norms and relations are implicated in a wide range of issues:
 - violence against women, violence between men, sexual and reproductive health, suicide, alcohol and drug use, mental health, occupational deaths and injuries, etc.
- Men who conform more strongly to traditional masculine norms are more likely than other men to:
 - assault and rape women
 - assault other men
 - consider suicide
 - take risks with sexual partners
 - drive dangerously
 - avoid help-seeking
 - refrain from active fathering
- Gender is not the whole story, but it is a key part of the story

(4) There is systemic gender inequality

- There is systemic gender inequality, in:
 - Economic power
 - Political power
 - Cultural power
- Gender inequality involves a systematic pattern of female disadvantage and male privilege

Gender inequalities

- **Many men sustain gender inequality**
- Gender inequalities are sustained in part by men – by men's attitudes, behaviours, identities, and relations.
- Men benefit from male privilege, whether we want to or not.
 - Men benefit from the unearned advantages of an unequal system
 - Example: Resumes or CVs with a male name versus with a female name
- Male privilege is personal: most men have acted in sexist ways
 - Including 'nice guys' and 'good blokes'
- Men are part of the problem. And men are part of the solution.

(5) There are also costs for men and boys

- Men and boys who conform to traditional definitions of masculinity:
 - also pay heavy costs — in the form of shallow relationships, poor health, and early death
- Some men and boys are disadvantaged by other forms of social inequality and injustice (to do with class, ethnicity, sexuality, etc.)
- Men are limited, but not oppressed, as men.
- The problem is not women or feminism, but destructive and unhealthy models of masculinity.

(6) There is diversity and change

- There is diversity among men and boys:
 - Across nations and cultures
 - Ethnicity. Class. Sexuality
 - Distinct cultures among peers, in sports, in workplaces, etc.
 - Footyheads. Hipsters. Nerds. Etc.
 - Large variations in men's endorsement of sexism and violence
- There is change over time:
 - Increased support for gender equality
 - Declining homophobia
 - Other positive shifts
 - Negative shifts:
 - Pornography
 - Patriarchal movements, alt-right communities, etc.

Men and gender equality

- Men have a vital role to play in building gender equality.
 - Many men already live in gender-just ways.
 - Some men are public advocates
- Men will gain from gender equality.
 - Men have a stake in gender equality.
- Men will benefit, in our:
 - Personal well-being
 - Relational interests
 - Collective interests
- Feminism frees men from narrow, restrictive gender roles.
- Feminism is good for men: good for men's health, men's working and family lives, men's friendships, and men's relationships and sex lives

Men and gender equality

- Men will gain. And there are some things men will lose.
 - Men will lose unfair privileges and unearned advantages. And that is only fair
- Men should support gender equality because:
 - (a) it's the right thing to do, and
 - (b) men will benefit from change

Engaging men is on the agenda

- There is a growing emphasis on 'engaging men', in such areas as violence against women, parenting and families, and sexual and reproductive health
- Example: We must address men and boys in preventing violence against women because:
 - It is largely boys and men who perpetrate this violence.
 - Constructions of masculinity play a crucial role in shaping boys' and men's violence against women and girls.
 - Boys and men have a positive role to play in helping to stop violence against women.
- (But women-only and women-focused efforts remain vital.)

The 'engaging men' field

- Is well established, through significant national and international groups and networks
- Shows evidence of effectiveness
 - A series of reviews of published studies: WHO 2007; Ricardo *et al.* 2011; Dworkin *et al.* 2013; Edström *et al.* 2015; Flood 2018
 - Interventions, if well designed, can produce change in attitudes and behaviours
- Has increasing support through both international commitments and state and national government policies
- Is growing in scale and sophistication
- Is based on feminist frameworks and done generally in collaboration with women

Engaging men: A spectrum of strategies

Level of Spectrum
Strengthening Individual Knowledge and Skills
Promoting Community Education
Educating Providers
Engaging, Strengthening, and Mobilising Communities
Changing Organisational Practices
Influencing Policies and Legislation

Engaging men: Key elements

- Use a gender-transformative approach
 - Oriented towards transforming gender roles, relations, and structures
 - Involving men in critical reflection on masculinities and gender
- Use effective ways to make the case to men
 - See Chapter 5 of *Engaging Men and Boys in Violence Prevention* (<https://xyonline.net/content/new-book-engaging-men-and-boys-violence-prevention>)
- Work intersectionally
 - Address intersecting forms of privilege and disadvantage among men and boys (See Chapter 11)
- Address typical forms of resistance and backlash
 - See VicHealth's guide (*En*)countering resistance and the evidence review (Flood, Dragiewicz, and Pease 2017): <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/13-steps-to-tackle-gender-discrimination>



Engaging men: Lessons learned

Rights	Wrong
Engaging men is one key strategy	Engaging men will fix everything
Women-focused initiatives are vital	Men must be in every room
Don't put men on a pedestal	Give that man a medal
Engage men at every level	Just the men at the top
Address diversities among men	Men are all the same
Make personal change	Tokenism and empty rhetoric
Organisational change	A handful of champions

“Toxic masculinity”

- A term for the narrow, traditional, or stereotypical norms of masculinity which shape boys and men’s lives
 - That boys and men must be dominant, in control, aggressive, tough, risk-taking, stoic, compulsively heterosexual, etc.
- Toxic masculinity:
 - Is bad for women
 - It shapes men’s involvements in sexist and patriarchal behaviours and relations, including men’s abusive or violent treatment of women.
 - Toxic masculinity contributes to gender inequalities.
 - Is bad for men themselves
 - Limits men’s physical and emotional health, their relations with women, their relations with other men, and their parenting of children

Questions of language and meaning

- ‘Masculinity’; the meanings given in any particular society to being male and the social organisation of men’s and boys’ lives and relations.
 - I.e., in part, the dominant or most influential ideals or norms of how to be a boy and man
 - An open-ended term. Can be good or bad...
- *Toxic masculinity*: names a *particular* type of masculinity
 - Unhealthy, dangerous, oppressive.
- Synonyms: Sexist / Patriarchal / Dominant / Hegemonic masculinity
- Other possible synonyms: Traditional? Stereotypical?
 - What if the most influential norms / ideals of masculinity are not ‘toxic’ or patriarchal?

The term ‘toxic masculinity’: some benefits

- It emphasises that the problem is a *social* one, of how boys and men are socialised and how their lives are socially organised
- It highlights that it is one specific form of masculinity which is unhealthy or dangerous.
- It implies that there are other healthy, equitable forms of masculinity
- It may help to popularise feminist critiques of gender and gender inequalities
- It may be used in educational work among boys and men about masculinities and gender
 - Like the “Act Like a Man” Box

The term ‘toxic masculinity’: some risks

- May highlight only male disadvantage and neglect male privilege
- May shift attention away from actual men and men’s behaviours, identities, and relations
- May be used in generalising, homogenising, and simplistic ways
- May reinforce the assumption that the only way to involve men in progress towards gender equality is by fostering positive forms of masculinity
 - And not also encouraging males’ *disinvestment* in gendered identities and boundaries
- (Note: Any criticism of men’s attitudes and behaviours, regardless of how we term it, will generate defensive resistance.)

Beyond patriarchal masculinity

1. Highlight the harms of patriarchal masculinity

- Highlight the price of blind conformity to masculinity.
- Sensitise public health, welfare, & service provision to the harms of traditional masculinity.
- But also acknowledge male privilege.

Beyond patriarchal masculinity

2. Weaken the cultural grip of patriarchal masculinity

- Highlight the gap between masculine social norms and men's own ideals
- Turn up the volume on diversity and change among men
- Engage men and boys in critical conversations about manhood
- Challenge the sources of patriarchal masculinity

Towards healthy masculinity

3. Promote alternatives to patriarchal masculinity among boys and men

- Boys and men cannot be what they cannot see
- Promote healthy masculinity. And/or equitable and ethical ways of being
- What do we call it?
 - Feminist? Gender-equitable? Democratic?
- Whatever vision we have for men and boys, it must be:
 - a) feminist – based on equality
 - b) diverse and multiple
 - c) non-essentialist

So...

- We won't see much progress towards gender equality unless boys and men change too.
- If we can make progress towards gender equality, then women and girls will have better lives, and *so will men and boys*.

Resources

- The Man Box, its harms, and what to do (a short piece): <https://theconversation.com/australian-study-reveals-the-dangers-of-toxic-masculinity-to-men-and-those-around-them-104694>
- Men and the Man Box: a commentary: <https://xyonline.net/content/men-and-man-box-commentary>
- Engaging men in building gender equality: A massive collection of resources: <https://xyonline.net/content/men-building-gender-equality-guide-xys-content>
- FREE Book, *Engaging Men and Boys in Violence Prevention* (Flood, 2018): <https://xyonline.net/content/new-book-engaging-men-and-boys-violence-prevention>
- Dr Michael Flood's publications: <http://www.xyonline.net/category/authors/michael-flood>
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