

# VIII. Men, masculine norms, and gender-transformative change

## A commentary by Michael Flood

*Unpacking the Man Box* makes five vital contributions to our knowledge of men's conformity to masculine norms and the impacts of this conformity.

The first two contributions help us to map men's patterns of conformity and non-conformity to traditional masculine norms.

1. A significant minority of young men agree with traditional masculine norms, including troubling patriarchal norms. Larger proportions – majorities, in some cases – agree that these masculine norms are enforced in society.
2. There is variation in young men's support for traditional masculine norms, depending in part on demographic and social factors.

However, it is the third, fourth, and fifth contributions that are most significant. The first of these adds to a very large body of scholarship on the links between conformity to masculinity and various outcomes among men, and the next two push the boundaries of this scholarship.

3. Men's endorsement of masculine norms has a unique and powerful influence on a large number of harmful attitudes and behaviours, over and above other possible influences.
4. Some elements of traditional masculinity have far stronger relationships than others with negative outcomes, and some elements even have associations with positive outcomes.
5. Specific unhealthy outcomes and behaviours are shaped more by some masculine norms than others.

Let us look at the detail of these findings.

## Young men and the Man Box

### 1. Patterns of endorsement of ideals of masculinity

The Man Box assesses societal ideals of manhood in terms of seven qualities: self-sufficiency, toughness, physical attractiveness, rigid gender roles, heterosexuality and homophobia, hypersexuality, and aggression and control. Young men's endorsement of such qualities is higher for qualities such as strength, physical attractiveness, control over women, and breadwinning, although only one-third to one-half of young men personally endorse these qualities as being part of manhood. Other qualities such as avoiding household work, using violence to get respect, and hypersexuality receive less endorsement. Men's levels of personal endorsement of these ideals of manhood are lower than the levels of perceived societal endorsement. Higher proportions of young men, including substantial majorities for some rules, agree that the Man Box rules are part of the messages they receive from society.

It is troubling to see that significant minorities of young men endorse explicitly patriarchal norms that men should have the final say in relationships (27%) or know their partner's movements (37%). It is also troubling that substantial minorities of men endorse the ideas that men should always act strong (47%), be the breadwinners in households (35%), and fight back when pushed (34%).

Most young men – around half to two-thirds – do not themselves endorse the Man Box pillars. Nonadherence to traditional masculine norms among men has been documented in other studies as well. In studies of men's agreement with masculine norms or reports on their own behaviour, group means tend to be near, and often below, scale midpoints (Smiler, 2014). In other words, among men there is often only moderate conformity to stereotypical norms of masculinity.

We cannot assess ideals of manhood among men in general in Australia using these data alone. The sample for this report is young adults aged 18 to 30, and it is likely that older men's ideals of masculinity are different. Older men tend to have more conservative attitudes towards gender than young

men (ANROWS et al., 2018, p. 95), and it is possible therefore that the Man Box pillars are a stronger reflection of younger men's attitudes. Other data, from a study that asked men in Queensland about the characteristics that made someone a 'real man', suggest more diverse notions of manhood, although there were overlaps with the Man Box pillars. Many men emphasised qualities to do with personality and character (honesty, calmness, confidence, and so on), roles and relationships (parenting, being a breadwinner or provider, a role model, taking leadership in the family, and so on), and physical qualities (being male, muscular, and so on) (Adegbosin et al., 2019).

## 2. Varying endorsement

The degree of endorsement of dominant masculine norms is uneven across men, as other scholarship on masculinities has documented (The Men's Project & Flood, 2018, pp. 48-49). Unpacking the Man Box finds higher levels of personal endorsement of the Man Box ideals among young men who are religious, heterosexual, from urban locations, or students. While the first two of these are largely expected, the second two are surprising.

**Religiosity:** In the Man Box study, young men with a religious identification had higher levels of endorsement of the Man Box statements. That said, while differences were statistically significant, the magnitude of this difference is relatively small. The differences that do exist fit with a general idea that people with higher levels of religiosity (religious belief, church attendance, and so on) also have more conservative attitudes to gender. However, research finds mixed associations between religiosity and masculinity. Some studies find links between traditional masculinity and religious involvement, but others find that men with greater religious involvement also have less stereotypically masculine orientations (Ward & Cook, 2011). The Man Box survey's findings are in contrast to a similar survey among young US men that found a negative association between religiosity and overall conformity to masculine norms (Ward & Cook, 2011).

Three factors shape the potential associations between masculinity and religiosity: the specific masculine norms in question, the dimensions of religiosity being examined, and the character of the

religion itself. First, there is evidence that religiousness has positive associations with some masculine norms and negative associations with others. In the US survey, religiousness was positively correlated with three aspects of traditional masculinity: winning, power over women, and homophobia. But it was negatively correlated with three other aspects: emotional control, violence, and a 'playboy' mentality or a desire for multiple sexual partners (Ward & Cook, 2011). Second, it matters which aspects of religiosity we examine. In the US survey, for example, conformity to the norm of power over women went along with religious fundamentalism, but not with general religious commitment. Third, it depends which religion we are talking about. Within Christianity for example, there are more masculinised, 'tough' and 'muscular' forms and more tender, feminine forms (Hofstede, 2016). In the Man Box survey, the data focused on religious background rather than other dimensions of religiosity, and religion was coded in the analysis only in binary terms. Further examination of the Man Box data might shed light on these possible patterns.

**Sexuality:** This research finds that heterosexual men show greater endorsement of the Man Box ideals than gay, bisexual, or queer men.

Very little other research has compared the gender attitudes of people with differing sexual orientations, e.g. comparing heterosexual and gay and lesbian people. While there is a substantial body of research on gender stereotypes about gay men and lesbians, there is far less comparing the gender stereotypes held by gay men, lesbians, and heterosexuals (Clarke & Arnold, 2017, pp. 149-150). There is considerable research on how gender attitudes influence attitudes towards members of sexual minorities, but far less on the gender attitudes of members of sexual minorities (Kowalski & Scheitle, 2019).

However, there are reasons to think that heterosexual people will have more conformist attitudes towards gender than gay men, lesbians, and bisexual people. Constructions of gender and sexuality are intertwined, and because gay, lesbian, and bisexual people's sexualities violate aspects of traditional gender roles they may be more aware of these and more critical of them (Clarke & Arnold, 2017, p. 151). Because gay, lesbian, and bisexual people are more likely to reject heteronormativity, they are also more likely to reject traditional attitudes and norms regarding gender that

are interrelated with heteronormativity (Kowalski & Scheitle, 2019).

The Man Box survey lends support to this proposal with large differences between heterosexual and non-heterosexual men. Other studies find similar patterns. A study of couples in Israel found that same-sex couples had more liberal attitudes toward gender roles than heterosexual couples (Shechory & Ziv, 2007). A representative survey of US adults found that both gay men and lesbian women were more likely than their heterosexual peers to reject traditional gender roles when it came to household and family roles. But when it came to gender roles in the public sphere, specifically the suitability of women for political office, gay men's opinions did not differ from the opinions of their heterosexual counterparts (Kowalski & Scheitle, 2019). On the other hand, a study among US adults found no differences between heterosexual and gay and lesbian individuals in the gender stereotypes they held. This study focused on gender stereotypes of gay men, lesbian women, and heterosexual men and women as masculine or feminine (Clarke & Arnold, 2017). The authors of this study conclude that this may reflect the cultural prevalence of gender stereotypes of sexual minorities, with gay men and lesbians, like heterosexuals, influenced by these (Clarke & Arnold, 2017, p. 155).

**Location:** It is surprising that the Man Box study found that young men in urban locations had slightly greater levels of endorsement of the Man Box ideals than those living elsewhere. Other studies typically find the reverse pattern, with more progressive gender attitudes in cities than in rural and remote areas. A recent national survey of community attitudes in Australia found that people in major cities and inner regional areas had more progressive attitudes towards gender and violence than people in outer regional and remote areas, although this was reversed on some dimensions of gender attitudes (ANROWS et al., 2018, pp. 98, 155-156).

**Education:** The Man Box study found that young men currently at university had slightly greater levels of endorsement of the Man Box ideals than those not at university. This is not quite equivalent to a finding regarding levels of education given that some of the non-students in this sample may have already attended university, but it is worth noting that more conservative attitudes towards gender tend to be correlated with lower levels of education, not higher

levels. A national survey of Australian adults found that people with post-school (university) qualifications had more positive attitudes towards gender equality and better understandings of violence against women than those with only secondary school education or less (ANROWS et al., 2018, p. 97). Other studies have also found correlations between higher levels of education and progressive attitudes towards gender (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004; Davis & Greenstein, 2009).

### 3. The impacts of men's endorsement of masculinity

It is the following three findings that represent the most significant contributions of *Unpacking the Man Box*.

*Unpacking the Man Box* finds that young men's endorsement of traditional masculinity has a substantial and negative association with wellbeing. The study uses statistical techniques of regression analysis to determine the unique contribution of masculinity to men's health and wellbeing. Demographic factors that may also shape health and wellbeing were controlled for in the analyses. Men's level of agreement with the seven pillars of the Man Box, as well as their 'total masculinity' score, explained substantial proportions of men's involvement in harmful behaviours for themselves or others. Conformity to masculinity explains, for example:

- over 25 percent of men's likelihood of perpetrating physical violence, sexual harassment, and online bullying;
- over 25 percent of men's likelihood of experiencing physical violence and online bullying;
- over 15 percent of men's likelihood of binge drinking.

Indeed, the impact of men's overall conformity to masculine norms on these outcomes simply dwarfed the impact of other potential influences such as education, occupation, and ethnicity. Masculine conformity had more power than these other variables in explaining young men's involvement in these harmful or risky behaviours.

This finding is striking. It should be a wake-up call to policy makers and advocates addressing these social problems to pay attention to masculinity. At the same time, this finding is not at all surprising. Over 500 studies over the past three decades have consistently documented that men's belief in and conformity to masculine norms is linked to poor health outcomes (Gerdes & Levant, 2018).

#### 4. Which masculine norm?

The fourth vital finding of *Unpacking the Man Box* is a more novel one: that some elements of traditional masculinity have far stronger relationships than others with negative outcomes, and some elements may even have associations with positive outcomes.

This finding fits with both recent meta-analyses of the research linking masculine norms and men's health and recent reviews of this scholarship:

- A content analysis of studies assessing men's conformity to masculine norms found that particular masculine norms can have positive or negative associations with men's health (Gerdes, Alto, Jadaszewski, D'Auria, & Levant, 2018);
- A recent meta-analysis on masculine norms and men's health, addressing 11 distinct dimensions of masculine norms, found that three of these had negative associations with men's mental health and help-seeking, others had no impact, and some had both positive and negative associations (Wong, Ho, Wang, & Miller, 2017);
- A review of 17 studies which examined correlations between the 11 sub-scales of the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (Winning, Emotional Control, Risk-Taking, Violence, Dominance, Playboy, Self-Reliance, Primacy of Work, Power over Women, Disdain for Homosexuality, and Pursuit of Status) found that some of these were associated largely with negative outcomes and had few associations with positive outcomes, some sub-scales had both negative and positive associations, and at least one sub-scale (Primacy of Work) had only positive associations (Gerdes & Levant, 2018).

Thus, men's endorsement of particular masculine norms seems to be just as important as their overall conformity to masculine norms.

There is a growing encouragement in the research to examine the links between conformity to specific masculine norms and outcomes among men. If we only look at men's overall conformity with measures of masculine norms, whether in the Man Box or other commonly used scales such as the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory, this may hide more complex relationships between conformity to specific masculine norms and men's health and well-being

(Gerdes & Levant, 2018) Thus, as well as reporting on overall conformity, we should examine and report on associations with specific masculine norms.

*Unpacking the Man Box* embodies this shift in scholarship on masculinity. It finds that while some masculine norms contribute to men's poor health, others are protective. For example, endorsing the norm of 'acting tough' was associated with decreased thoughts of suicide. (However, it may be that men invested in 'acting tough' also are less likely to disclose thoughts of suicide, or less aware of their actual thoughts of self-harm.) On the other hand, young men's endorsement of the masculine norm of self-sufficiency was a strong predictor of thoughts of suicide and lesser likelihood of seeking help.

*Unpacking the Man Box* shows that some masculine norms are more harmful than others. That is, they have stronger associations with men's poor health or with men's harmful behaviour towards others. In particular, the masculine norms of Rigid Gender Roles and Aggression and Control are the strongest predictor for most of the outcome variables, particularly the violent behaviours.

#### 5. Which outcome?

The influence of men's endorsement of traditional masculine norms also depends on the outcome in question. Focusing on particular outcomes among young men, *Unpacking the Man Box* documents that they are shaped more by some masculine norms and less by others. This is a fifth important contribution to knowledge.

The analysis in *Unpacking the Man Box* included analysis of the relationships between the outcomes and each of the seven pillars of the Man Box: Self-sufficiency, Acting Tough, Physical Attractiveness, Rigid Gender Norms, Heterosexuality and Homophobia, Hypersexuality, Aggression and Control. What associations are visible for example for violence?

The first analysis of The Man Box study found that men with higher levels of overall conformity to traditional masculinity were far more likely than other men to perpetrate violence, both against women and against other men. In the follow-up analysis, for violent behaviour, it was the combined pillars of Rigid Gender Roles and Aggression and Control that was most strongly associated with



perpetrating violence. Hypersexuality also had an association with violent behaviour, albeit a weak one.

These findings make sense. The belief among some young men that men should be dominant in households and relationships and controlling of female partners is likely to have a stronger relationship to their perpetration of sexual harassment against women than the belief, for example, that men should sort out their own personal problems. 'Hypersexuality' here is understood in terms of a focus on having many sexual partners and constant sexual interest. This has been documented in other studies as a risk factor for young men's sexual violence against women, with young men seeking to prove themselves and assert dominance over women through sexual conquests (Fahlberg & Pepper, 2016, p. 676). Surprisingly, the pillar Acting Tough had a negative association with perpetrating physical violence.

What about sexual harassment against women (here measured in terms of making sexual comments to an unknown woman in a public place or online in the last month)? Young men had significantly higher rates of perpetration of sexual harassment if they endorsed the pillars Rigid Gender Norms, Aggression and Control, Hypersexuality, and Self-sufficiency, but lower rates if they endorsed the pillar Acting Tough. It may be that the two statements associated with the pillar Acting Tough are a poor expression of this norm, and thus do not pick up on associations between men's use of violence and norms of toughness. The Man Box survey did not assess young men's perpetration of sexual violence or relationship and partner violence.

## Further questions: Which men in what context?

In explaining diverse relationships between conformity to masculine norms and outcomes among men, I have highlighted so far that we must consider two factors: the specific norms, and the specific outcomes.

The first involves a variable- or predictor-centered perspective. It emphasises that depending on the masculine norm in question, conformity to it may be adaptive or maladaptive, that is, healthy or unhealthy.

The second involves an outcome-centered perspective. It emphasises that the link between conformity to masculine norms and outcomes can vary as a function of the type of outcomes in question (Gerdes & Levant, 2018; Wong et al., 2017).

There is a third factor, however; the men and their contexts. A person-centered perspective emphasises that "the consequences of conformity to masculine norms differ for diverse groups of individuals. Because of cultural and gender differences, diverse groups of individuals may experience varying levels of rewards and sanctions associated with conformity and non-conformity to masculine norms." (Wong et al., 2017, p. 2). The positive or negative impacts of conformity to particular masculine norms may vary depending on the person or group – depending on their ethnicity, class, and so on. As an example, Wong et al. (2017) note that the impacts of the masculine norm of emotional control may be less serious among Asian American men than Latin American men, because emotional control is more congruent with Asian cultural values than Latin ones.

There is an increasing suggestion that the outcomes of conformity to masculine norms "are largely culturally, situationally, and contextually dependent" (Gerdes & Levant, 2018, p. 230). Thus, examinations of the impacts among men of masculine norms should pay attention to the specific contexts of these men's lives and communities, taking up the intersectional approaches that are increasingly common in masculinities scholarship. Unpacking the Man Box goes some way towards this in its investigation of the demographic correlates of conformity to the Man Box statements. However, a person-centered approach to the issue of men's conformity to masculinity could be extended by examining groups or profiles of men themselves – by examining how men themselves are clustered in terms of their endorsement of masculine norms and their participation in particular behaviours.

There is growing evidence to suggest that among men there is "a clustering of antisocial and violent ideas and behaviors and gender inequitable attitudes" (Jewkes & Morrell, 2017, p. 2). For example, the men who rape and abuse women are also more likely than other men to fight with other men, to have gender-inequitable ideas, and so on.

It is valuable, therefore, to examine patterns of masculine beliefs and behaviours among men in order to identify the groups or clusters of men who engage in high-risk behaviours and the men who do not. This would use the same techniques of Latent Class Analysis (LCA) employed in the Man Box survey, but rather than using them to identify associations among the Man Box pillars and outcomes, it would use them to identify the groups of men who show higher and lower levels of endorsement of masculinity and higher and lower engagement in risky behaviours. Such techniques can be used to identify relatively homogeneous subgroups of individuals within larger, heterogeneous samples, where each group has a unique profile based on responses to a set of indicator variables (Casey, Masters, et al., 2016).

Identifying how men's attitudes and behaviours combine to form different patterns of masculinity is precisely what two recent studies do. A study among 18-25 year-old heterosexual men in the U.S. documented three groups, which it termed Normative, Misogynistic, and Sex-Focused (Casey, Masters, et al., 2016). Comprising the Normative group, most young men (88%) had low levels of adherence to traditional masculine norms and low levels of relationship violence and sexual risk behaviours. Comprising the Misogynistic group, a small minority (8%) showed high endorsement of traditional masculinity and hostility towards women and high levels of sexual assault and violence towards female partners. A third, smaller group (4% of the men) had high numbers of sexual partners, but not high levels of aggression or traditional ideas about gender. Another study involved a similar investigation among men in two provinces in South Africa. It also found three groups of men with differing patterns of attitudes and behaviours related to violence, crime, drinking, gender attitudes, and other variables: highly violent / antisocial (24.7%), medium violence (29.6%), and lowest violence / most pro-social (45.7%) (Jewkes & Morrell, 2017).

## ImplicationsThe Man Box studies, and the other research that complements it, have a series of important implications.

Above all, the two Man Box studies reaffirm the finding that among men, endorsement of masculine norms has a distinct and powerful association with a large number of harmful attitudes and behaviours. Thus, if policy-makers, educators, and others wish to address such social problems as violent behaviour in and

around pubs and clubs, intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, or binge-drinking, for example, then their efforts should include attention to the role of masculine norms.

*Unpacking the Man Box* also suggests other, perhaps more novel implications. The Man Box study finds that most young men, just over two-thirds, do not personally endorse most of the Man Box rules. Higher proportions indicate that the Man Box messages are ones they receive from society. This has important implications:

- Endorsement of most elements identified in the 'Man Box' or similar measures may not be the dominant response among men. Large numbers of men may report attitudes and behaviours that are inconsistent with, or incomplete versions of, 'dominant' notions of masculinity (Casey, Masters, et al., 2016).
- The most common forms of masculinity among men, therefore, may be somewhat different from those identified in the Man Box or other widely used masculinity measures. Many men's attitudes and practices may be more egalitarian, and healthier, than those represented by the Man Box.

*Unpacking the Man Box* also alerts us to the fact that the relationship between men's support for masculine norms and unhealthy or harmful outcomes is complicated, and depends in part on both the norms and the outcomes in question. Again, this has important implications:

- Endorsing one or some aspects of traditional masculinity does not mean endorsing all aspects of traditional masculinity or the harmful or risky behaviours that may go along with this (Casey, Masters, et al., 2016).
- Men's endorsement of particular aspects of traditional masculinity does not necessarily generate risk or harm (Casey, Masters, et al., 2016).
- Behaviours associated with traditional masculinity may not hold the same risk across all men.

We have long known that there are diverse and distinct patterns of gender identity and practice among men. Preeminent theorist R.W. Connell noted that there are multiple masculinities, that in many contexts one particular configuration of male attitudes and practices is 'hegemonic' or culturally dominant, and that while many men do not live up to its ideals all live in its shadows (R.W. Connell, 1995).

The value of the analyses described above is that they allow us to identify more accurately the patterns of

attitudes and practices among men. In particular:

- Particular groups or clusters of men are likely to pose particularly high risks for the problem in question, whether that is suicide, or risky alcohol use, or partner violence. In turn, other groups or clusters of men pose lower risks.

There are several risks to avoid in focusing attention on groups, categories, or types of men. First, we must strive to avoid the racist and classist accounts of 'other' men that plague community understandings of problems such as domestic violence, and their complement, the comforting assumption often among relatively privileged men and communities that these problems are elsewhere (Flood, 2018, pp. 347-354). Instead, we must draw on careful, empirical data on the diverse realities of men's lives. Second, we must avoid the notion of fixed, static categories or 'types' of masculinities (R. W. Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, pp. 836-837). Men may move from one category to another, and the categories or clusters themselves may shift with wider changes in patterns of gender. Third, in documenting the clustering of certain attitudes and behaviours among men, we should not assume that these are reflected in actual social groups. Certainly there is evidence among men of shared and collective patterns of gender, but men's peer groups and communities may include men with diverse patterns of masculinity.

## Recommendations

We must step up the work of changing norms of masculinity in Australia. While there are promising initiatives and approaches underway, we must step up the scale and intensity of this work. On the one hand, this means scaling up existing initiatives to engage men and boys in positive change and to shift patriarchal norms of manhood. On the other hand, it means incorporating such approaches into existing efforts in health promotion and violence prevention.

I identified three urgent tasks in my commentary on the first Man Box report: (1) highlight the harms of the Man Box; (2) weaken its cultural grip; and (3) promote healthy and ethical alternatives (The Men's Project & Flood, 2018, pp. 50-53). All three are part of a gender-transformative approach.

### Transform gender

Above all, our work must be gender-transformative – focused on the active transformation of gender roles and relations towards gender justice. A gender-transformative approach seeks to “challenge and

redress harmful and unequal gender norms, roles, and power relations that privilege men over women” (World Health Organization, 2011). Unpacking the Man Box, like a wealth of other scholarship, documents that conformity to traditional masculinity is an influential risk factor for men's participation in violence, risky drinking, dangerous driving, and poor mental health. Evaluations of the impact of programs aimed at men and boys find that gender-transformative approaches are more likely to have a positive and substantial impact, whether in addressing HIV and STI transmission, violence, sexual and reproductive health, or gender attitudes (Barker, Ricardo, & Nascimento, 2007; Dunkle & Jewkes, 2007; Dworkin, Treves-Kagan, & Lippman, 2013; Fleming, Lee, & Dworkin, 2014). Gender-transformative approaches thus should be integrated into a wide range of programs, policies, and approaches addressing these and other social problems.

Programs and policies can be placed on a continuum in terms of their approach to gender, as follows:

- Gender-exploitative: perpetuate or worsen gender inequalities;
- Gender-blind: ignore gender norms and conditions;
- Gender-sensitive: consider women's and men's specific needs but do not address gender inequalities;
- Gender-transformative: create more gender-equitable roles and relations (Gupta, 2000; UNFPA & Promundo, 2010).

As this indicates, to be gender-transformative it is not enough to merely pay attention to gender, but it is important to seek also to end gender inequalities and create more gender-equitable relations.

Recommendations for a gender-transformative approach are increasingly visible in work with men and boys, both in Australia and internationally. Our Watch's recent report *Men in Focus* (2019) urges that, “Prevention efforts should seek to actively challenge dominant norms and practices of masculinity (rather than reinforcing or maintaining them) and promote a range of alternatives that are based on equality and respect”. One of Australia's leading health promotion organisations, VicHealth, also endorses a gender-transformative approach in its “Healthier Masculinities” framework (VicHealth, 2019). Other bodies such as Women's Health Victoria have produced guides on the approach for prevention practitioners (Varley & Rich, 2019). Internationally there is also increasing emphasis on a gender-transformative approach as defining

effective practice in work with men and boys (Burrell & Flood, 2019). Gender-transformative approaches should be built into the conceptual approaches and logic models of programs, the methods used to recruit and engage men, and the activities intended to make change (Casey, Carlson, Two Bulls, & Yager, 2016).

### Get specific

My second recommendation is that we 'get specific', doing more to address particular norms and particular men. This reflects the findings in *Unpacking the Man Box* and other studies regarding the diverse links between certain masculine norms and certain outcomes. Efforts to shift men's and boys' gender-related attitudes and behaviours should address the specific norms associated with negative outcomes.

Work with men and boys, moreover, should do more to target those with specific patterns of attitudes and behaviours. Data on groups or profiles of men would be invaluable in designing interventions and tailoring them to local contexts and communities. For example, in violence prevention, we must customise our interventions for men at low risk and high risk of perpetrating violence to increase effectiveness (Casey, Masters, et al., 2016; Flood, 2018, pp. 320-322).

We must also 'get specific' about the forms of manhood we do want. Let us develop and popularise both detailed and diverse models of progressive, healthy, and feminist masculinities (The Men's Project & Flood, 2018, p. 53).

### Address men's over-estimation of men's endorsement of the Man Box

*Unpacking the Man Box* adds to the evidence for the value of publicising the actual character of men's beliefs about manhood: that, in this case, most young men do not support the tenets of the Man Box. While close to half or more than half of young men agree that many of the Man Box messages are the ones they receive from society, most do not themselves endorse them.

I argued in the first report that men often overestimate each other's endorsement of traditional masculine norms. Those men in the majority wrongly assume that they are alone in rejecting patriarchal beliefs and behaviours, while those men in the minority wrongly assume that their patriarchal beliefs and behaviours are widely shared (The Men's Project & Flood, 2018). There is value in publicising this finding. As another study concluded, "Assuring [n]ormative groups that their more gender-equitable approach to masculinity is reflective of the majority of men may increase their confidence in

their own masculine identity and empower them to interrupt the non-normative behavior of [m]isogynistic men." (Casey, Masters, et al., 2016, p. 1048). At the same time, we must also directly challenge the actual endorsement of unhealthy and patriarchal beliefs among young men.

### Support resistance

Accounts of the workings of masculinity often focus on men's conformity to dominant masculine norms and practices, but we must also focus on resistance. I suggested in the first report that we must "turn up the volume on the facts of diversity and change in manhood [... and] affirm and celebrate diverse forms of manhood, identity, and gender" (The Men's Project & Flood, 2018, p. 52). Extending this, we should:

- Pay more attention to men's and boys' active resistance to masculine norms and relations. How and why do men and boys resist? What makes it possible to sustain resistance? Is it resistance across multiple aspects of masculinity, or only particular masculine norms? How does context or setting shape resistance and conformity (Smiler, 2014)?
- Explore the protective or healthy value of non-conformity. While we know a fair amount about the negative impacts of conformity to traditional masculinity, what are the positive (and negative) impacts of non-conformity?
- Push back against the pervasive policing of masculinity, the wide array of efforts to punish or prevent behaviour among boys and men seen to be insufficiently masculine (Reigeluth & Addis, 2016).
- Reframe men's and boys' 'failure to conform', their inability or unwillingness to follow dominant masculine norms, in positive terms, as a desirable, healthy, and even courageous path to tread.

### Go beyond norms

Finally, changing masculine norms is itself only one part of a wider project. We must work for positive change in men's and boys' behaviours and interpersonal relations, but also in larger institutions and social structures. The 'engaging men' field, like the violence prevention field with which it overlaps, has often focused on attitudes and norms as the only or most important object of change. Yet these attitudes and behaviours are bound up with patterns and structures of power and inequality. A properly gender-transformative approach to men and masculinities, then, will "be concerned with



transforming unequal relations of power, and the social, economic and political institutions through which such power is structured" (Flood & Greig, 2020). Thus, we must tackle not only the norms that express unhealthy and oppressive forms of manhood, but the institutional and structural forces that sustain these.



# References (Section VIII)

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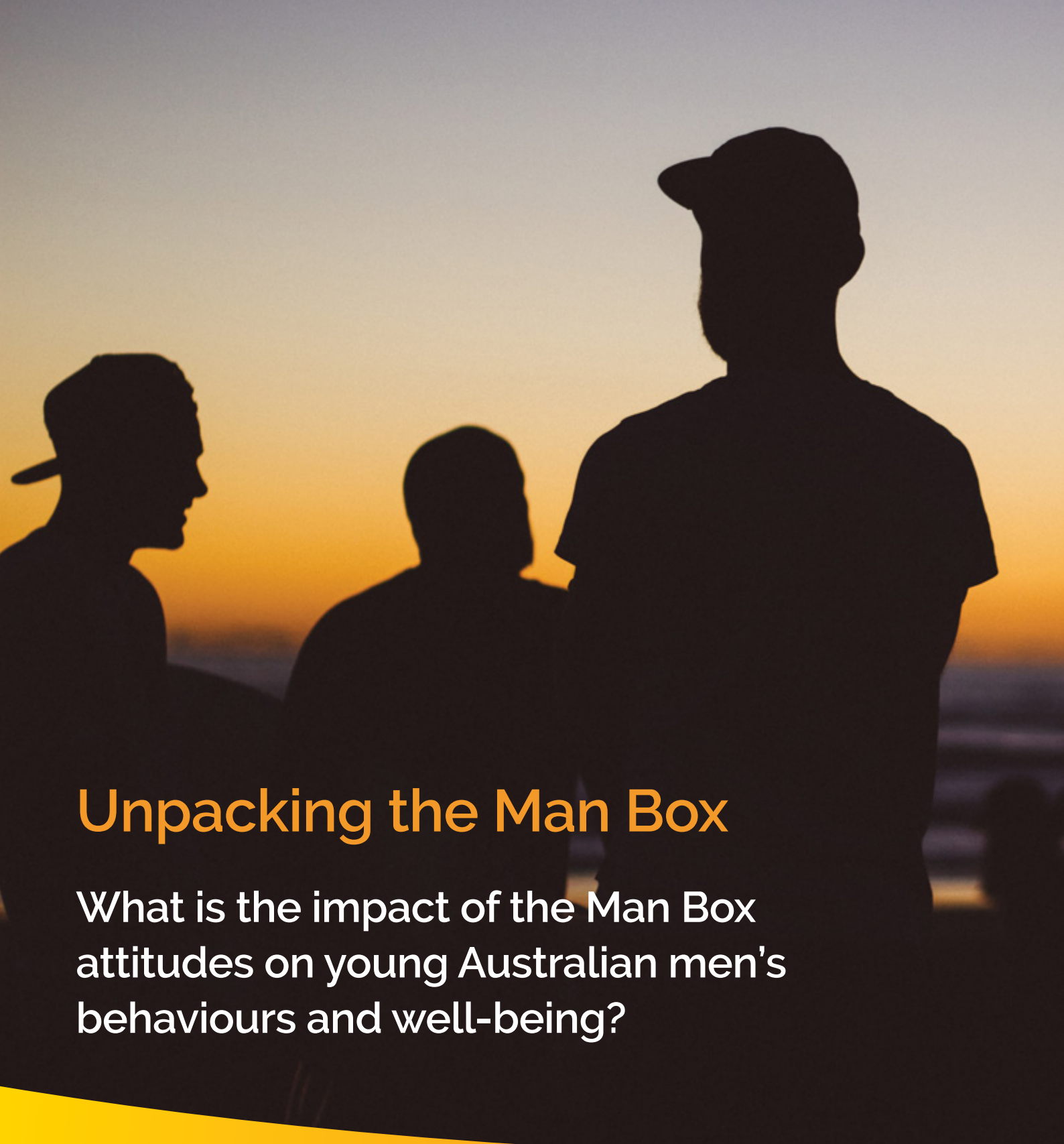
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# Unpacking the Man Box

What is the impact of the Man Box attitudes on young Australian men's behaviours and well-being?





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