



The Man Box:

A study on being a young man in Australia

Fact sheet

About the Man Box

The Man Box is the set of beliefs within and across society that place pressure on men to be a certain way because of their gender.

We explored how young men encounter the Man Box rules in society and whether they endorse them personally by asking their views on 17 messages about how a man should behave.

Our findings were clear – the Man Box is alive and well in Australia today with the majority of young men agreeing there are social pressures around being a 'real man'.

A significant minority of young men personally endorse many of these rules, particularly around acting tough, being the primary income earner and being in control.

However, there is also a gap between young men's perception of the social pressures of the Man Box rules and their personal endorsement of these rules. Young men hold more progressive views on what it is to be a 'real man' than what they believe society is telling them. These findings show that many young men feel pressure to behave in ways that align with the Man Box rules in order to be seen as a 'real man', despite not personally endorsing these beliefs, and despite these behaviours being harmful to both them and others.

Man Box rule	Social message: Percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree that "Society as a whole tells me that..."	Personal Endorsement: Percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree that "In my opinion..."
Pillar 1: Self-sufficiency		
A man who talks a lot about his worries, fears, and problems shouldn't really get respect.	49%	25%
Men should figure out their personal problems on their own without asking others for help.	54%	27%
Pillar 2: Acting tough		
A guy who doesn't fight back when others push him around is weak.	60%	34%
Guys should act strong even if they feel scared or nervous inside.	69%	47%

"Society expects men to be not as emotional, you're forced to act on that and not show all your emotions compared to women."

"Men are expected to be more ambitious at work."

– Responses from focus group participants

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Pillar 3: Physical attractiveness		
It is very hard for a man to be successful if he doesn't look good.	57%	42%
A guy who spends a lot of time on his looks isn't very manly.	48%	32%
Women don't go for guys who fuss too much about their clothes, hair and skin	44%	39%
Pillar 4: Rigid gender roles		
It is not good for a boy to be taught how to cook, sew, clean the house or take care of younger children.	38%	23%
A man shouldn't have to do household chores.	39%	19%
Men should really be the ones to bring money home to provide for their families, not women.	56%	35%
Pillar 5: Heterosexuality and homophobia		
A gay guy is not a 'real man'.	47%	28%
Straight guys being friends with gay guys is totally fine and normal (positive statement).	64%	83%
Pillar 6: Hypersexuality		
A 'real man' should have as many sexual partners as he can.	47%	25%
A 'real man' would never say no to sex.	56%	24%
Pillar 7: Aggression and control		
Men should use violence to get respect if necessary.	35%	20%
A man should always have the final say about decisions in his relationship or marriage.	43%	27%
If a guy has a girlfriend or wife, he deserves to know where she is all the time.	44%	37%

