



**Student
Wellbeing Hub**

Out of the box

Lesson plan for years 9 and 10





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Out of the box

This teaching sequence has been developed to explore the impact of expectations of gender and identity on students. Students are asked to consider the social norms and expectations that are placed on different genders, before exposing them to a range of narratives about masculinity, including voices from culturally diverse backgrounds. It concludes with an exploration of the impact of the 'Man Box'.

This teaching sequence is designed for use with students in Years 9 and 10.

Before you start



Some of the resources feature the voices and experiences of young people from culturally diverse backgrounds in Australia. In addition, some students may be experiencing a disjunct between what is expected of males/females at school and at home.

Download and view the presentation [Culturally responsive teaching \[pptx, 13.3mb\]](#). It's designed to help teachers to think about how to respond to a range of perspectives how to avoid stereotyping cultures.

Lesson considerations

Facilitating a discussion about masculinity can make some males feel defensive. They may feel misunderstood or unfairly labelled. The context for this work is to create an environment with more space for boys to express themselves and where they are less likely to experience violence perpetuated by other males. Using statistics about community values can be helpful to establish context here, for example: [The National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey](#).

A driver underlying facilitation of this topic might be: 'You can choose what sort of men you want to be'.

If you feel things might become personal, use techniques such as [protective interrupting](#) or encourage students to talk in general or third person terms; for example:

- Some people might ... and this could cause a person to feel ...
- At some schools ...
- There have been times when ...



You may wish to revisit the concept of providing a safe environment for working with students around sensitive topics. Some useful strategies around 'Establishing a safe place' can be found in [R4Respect: Respectful relationships education](#).

More relevant links:



[Masculinities and health](#)

[Advice for schools when teaching about cultural diversity](#)

Additional preparation for this topic



Please note the following when facilitating a discussion about some of the topics raised in this learning sequence

It is important to frame that we are doing this so that we can better understand the messages we are sent around gender, and have more choices about how we relate to other people.

1. Expectations are created by our particular context – but not set in stone. Gender roles and expectations are learned, can change over time, and can vary within and among cultures.
2. Change is possible. (You may wish to give some examples of societal changes over the last few decades.)
3. Be careful that the things you say and the examples that you give do not reinforce stereotypes. It can be useful to ask questions to prompt critical thinking such as: 'Is this difference biological or physical, or is this learnt?'
4. Some participants, especially LGBTQI young people, may be triggered by parts of this lesson.

Australian curriculum links

Health and Physical Education

- Evaluate factors that shape identities and critically analyse how individuals impact the identities of others ([ACPPS089](#))

English

- Interpret and compare how representations of people and culture in literary texts are drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts ([ACELT1633](#)) ([Scootle](#))





- Compare and evaluate a range of representations of individuals and groups in different historical, social and cultural contexts ([ACELT1639](#)) ([Scootle](#))

Background

In 2015, Michael Kimmel, a leading US-based scholar on masculinity and the director of the Center for the Study of Men and Masculinities, stood in front of a group of undergraduates and asked:



'What does it mean "to be a good man?'

The students looked puzzled.



'Let's say it was said at your funeral, "He was a good man"'

'What does that mean to you? Tell me what it means to be a real man?'

A male student in the front said:



'Caring'

'Putting other's needs before yours'

another young man said,

'Honest'

A third said.

Dr Kimmel listed each term under the heading Good Man, then turned back to the group:



'Now,' he said, 'tell me what it means to be a real man'.





This time, the students reacted more quickly:



'Take charge; be authoritative'

Said James, a sophomore.

'Take risks'

said Amanda, a sociology graduate student.

'It means suppressing any kind of weakness'

Another offered.

'I think for me being a real man meant talk like a man'

said a young man who'd grown up in Turkey.

'Walk like a man. Never cry.'

Adapted from: J Bennett, A Masters degree in ... masculinity, New York Times, 12 April 2018, cited in [Boys to Men: Teaching and Learning About Masculinity in an Age of Change](#)

Reflection exercise

How would your students respond to this scenario? How would they describe a good man versus a real man? Are women boxed in by societal expectations along with men? What influence does culture have?



Activities

Activity 1: Gender and identity

Materials: Very large sheets of easel paper (preferably several sheets taped together), markers, masking tape

Step 1

Create boxes

Take large sheets of easel paper and draw a large box in the centre of each, leaving plenty of room to write or draw inside the box and outside the box. You will need about 6 large sheets of paper (for 6 groups)

At the top of three sheets, write 'boys', and on the other three sheets, write 'girls'. You could also write 'men' and 'women'.

Break participants into groups.

Step 2

Write or draw

Give the following instructions:



*'Inside of the box, I want you to write or draw as many things that you can think of that most people in the world would say are "appropriate" or "okay" for the group listed on your sheet. Think of activities, toys, games, emotions, colours, ways of behaving, ways of expressing themselves, what it means to act like a boy/girl/man/woman, etc. The idea here isn't to write what you think is "appropriate" or "okay", but **what you think most people would say.***

Take five minutes and brainstorm as many as you can think of, and write all of them inside the boxes. Don't write outside the boxes just yet.

Let participants know that in this exercise they're permitted to use words that are offensive to some people.'

Give participants five minutes to complete this activity.

Step 3

Trade sheets

When they've finished, ask your students to trade sheets with the other group. Give the following instructions:



'Think about what happens to members of the population on the sheet that you're looking at now when they step outside of that box. What names do they get called? What might happen to them physically? Socially? Emotionally? In public? In private? Write everything that you can think of that is said to or that happens to people who step outside of the box in the area around the box on your paper. Take five minutes, and come up with as many ideas as you can.'

Give students five minutes to complete the activity. After they've finished, ask them to post their completed sheets on the wall. Ask the students to look at both (or all) of the sheets, and to identify the patterns, trends, and commonalities.

Step 4

Discuss

Some questions for discussion – select what is most relevant to your context:

- What are some of the names or putdowns that each group gets called when they step outside the box? (For some examples from other groups, see Gender Role Boxes.)
- What are some of the ways we react when we're told that we don't fit into our prescribed boxes?
- How do young people and adults get messages about what's 'okay' or 'appropriate', and what's 'not okay' or 'inappropriate?' (Where in your life did you get some of those messages? Ask for specific examples if you get general answers like 'the internet', 'TV' etc)
- What might be different about the responses within and outside of the boxes if we were talking about adults ('men' and 'women') instead of children ('boys' and 'girls')?
- In your experience, what are some of the ways that your cultural background reinforces the boundaries of these boxes? In what ways might it support stepping out of the box?
- What social conditions exist that allow men/boys/women/girls to express qualities that are out of the box?
- Why might this be a challenging issue to talk about in school?

Based on [Keshet](#) and [Gender Role Boxes](#).



Activity 2: Expanding thinking

This activity is designed to expand thinking about the experiences – and depictions of masculinity.

Step 1

Review

Ask students to break up into small groups or pairs.

Give each group/pair one text to read or video to view from the list of resources for students below. Feel free to add to this list after thinking about the needs of your particular cohort of students.

Step 2

Discuss

Ask students to discuss the following:

- How are males/females represented?
- What are the positives and negatives in your text/video?
- Thinking about your own consumption of media (TV, gaming, social media, etc) – how are males/females represented?
- How do different parts of our identities combine to make us who we are?
- What are the benefits and challenges of belonging to multiple identity groups?
- What new ideas do you have about the topic, concept or object that you didn't have before?



Extend this activity with tips from [Reading Against the Grain](#).



Resources for students

[The mask you live in – trailer](#)

[Young men, risky drinking, public violence, and masculinity](#)

Student handout for prompting discussion.

[Complicit geek masculinity and The Big Bang Theory](#)

This video provides examples of how 'geeks' are positioned in relation to hypermasculinity in Western culture.

[Gruen – The pitch: Convince blokes to go to the doctor](#)

[Flowerboys and the appeal of 'soft masculinity' in South Korea](#)

This *BBC News* article explores the ways in which Korean men play with masculinity, starting with some of the K-Pop stars.

[The truth about men](#)

Set around the typical man's haven, the barbecue, two characters reveal what men are really like once the social pressure to be 'masculine' is lifted.

[You think you're a man](#)

Australian filmmaker Kim Gehrig noticed the changing size of Australian men along with story after story reported on the news of young men dying after being on the receiving end of a drink-fuelled blow on a night out: victims of the 'king hit'.

[Purl | Pixar SparkShorts](#)

This short animated film explores the constraints of corporate culture.

[Australian athletes come together to talk about men's mental health](#)

Research from Headspace shows young men work very hard on their physical conditioning but don't put the same effort into taking care of their mental wellbeing.

[Danzal Baker 2019 Young Australian of the Year](#)

Working across rap, dance, acting and graffiti, Danzal Baker, aka Baker Boy, is a multilingual Indigenous artist. He achieved mainstream success rapping in the Yolngu Matha language, coming 17th in Triple J's Hottest 100 of 2017.

[Sneak peek: Masculinity in popular culture](#)

This US-made video provides images of men from popular culture and sport.

[Be a man | Men | One word | Cut](#)

American boys and men aged between 5 and 50 were asked to do a word association with the phrase 'Be a man.'





[Man up](#)

Media personality Gus Warland is on a mission to find out what it really means to be a man today and how the average Aussie bloke is actually faring.

[Homer: There is no real man](#)

Homer is an online Australian magazine discussing masculinities and challenging ideas of what it means to be a man. The content is better suited to more mature students (Year 10 upwards).

You may wish to use excerpts from the following articles to broaden understandings of the experiences of masculinity.

[At the skate park](#)

[The hirsute of happiness](#)

[Grief and masculinity in you're the worst](#)

[Dance like your body's not watching: Fear of the feminine in dance](#)

[Teenage monsters: Coming of age in my father's care](#)

[#RoleModelReading: An interview with Benjamin Law](#)

Activity 3: The Man Box

Step 1

Explain

Introduce the research project [The Man Box: A study on being a young man in Australia](#) by The Men's Project. It focuses on the attitudes to manhood and the behaviours of young Australian men, aged 18 to 30. It involved an online survey of a representative sample of 1,000 young men from across the country, as well as focus group discussions. The study is modelled on 2017 research from the United States, United Kingdom and Mexico. (There is no equivalent project for women.)

Step 2

View



Show students the ['The Man Box'](#) video which summarises the findings from the men's project.



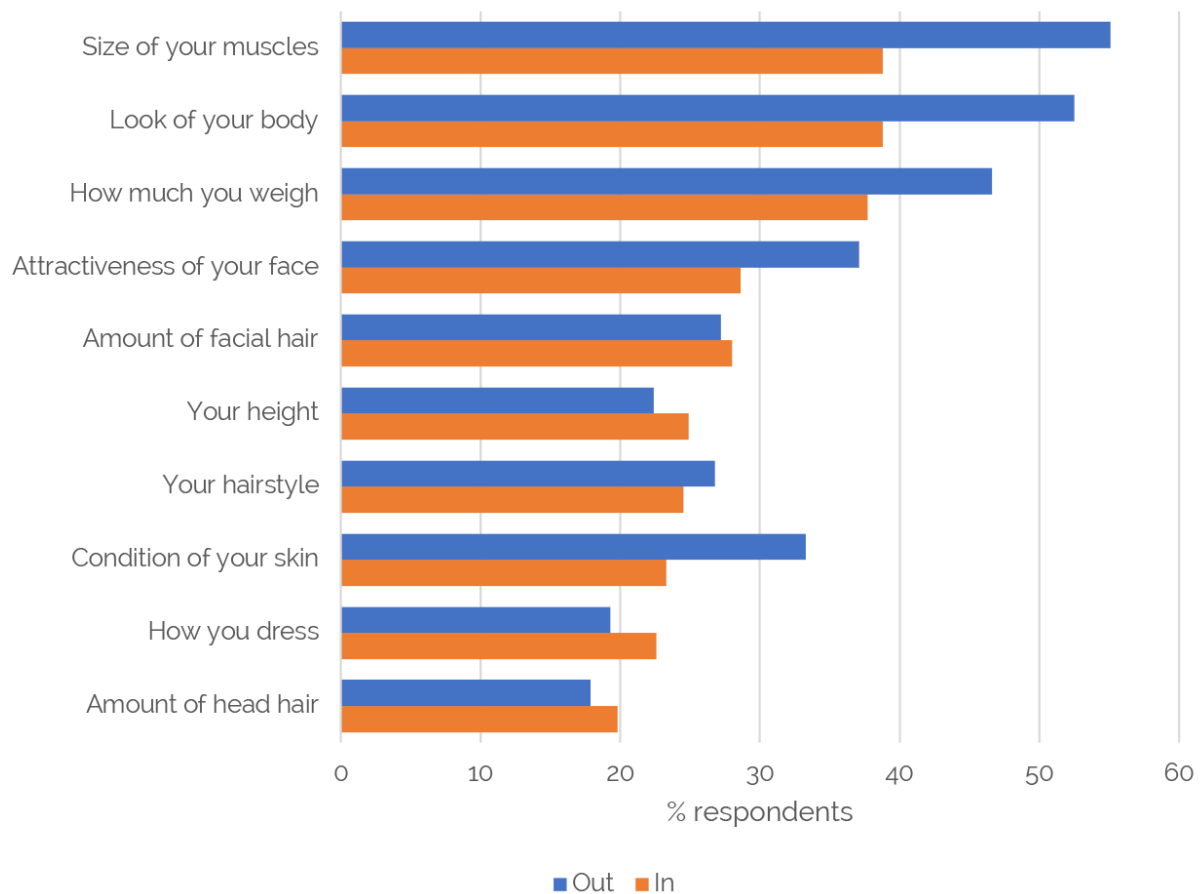
In addition, download and discuss the [Impact of the Man Box Fact Sheet](#).





Statistics from the Australian study, such as the example below, may also be useful, either as a reference point or to use with students.

Figure 1: Percentage of respondents who are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with aspect of physical appearance



Source: The Men’s Project & Flood, M, (2018) [The Man Box: A Study on Being a Young Man in Australia](#). Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne.

Potential activities based on The Man Box

The Live respect: Coaching health and respectful manhood – [Educator guide with lesson plans](#) has several teaching activities based on the theory of The Man Box. The ‘Flip the Script’ activity described on page 15 (and repeated below) could be completed by both males and females.

Ask students to look again at their drawing of the box from and to identify at least one rule that they would like to be free of.



Flip the script!



I was taught gender socialisation. I can teach myself to be free.”

Ask the students to choose one man box rule they would like to get rid of for themselves. Encourage them to try to stop following that rule for at least one week. Suggest that they have a defined behaviour in mind to exhibit in place of the rule they are giving up. Remind them that it takes a lot of courage to break out of the man box. The man box was created long before they were born and was taught to everyone by society. No one is at fault for this, but collectively, we can help change it.



Find other activities in the [Live respect](#) resource if you wish to extend thinking about this topic.

So what now?

The harmful effects of being in the Man Box are severe, real, and troubling.

And the process of breaking out of the Man Box is not easy. [International Man Box research](#) revealed some contradictory trends. Young men in the Man Box are more satisfied with their lives, even as they display more symptoms of depression, for instance.

Young men reap certain benefits from staying inside the Man Box: it provides them with a sense of belonging, of living up to what is expected of them. Friends and parents may praise them. However, when those same norms tell men to be aggressive all the time, to repress emotions, and to fight every time someone threatens them, the Man Box demands that they pretend to be someone they are not, and study results show how violent and lonely the resulting life can be.

Young men need support to break out of the box; they cannot do it on their own.

Respectful relationships education focus



Search for the Respectful Relationships curriculum in your jurisdiction. It provides support in working with your students to increase their skills in communicating, in relationship-building, in working with difference and in emotional literacy.



English focus

The [Reading against the grain](#) lesson plan encourages students to analyse the dominant reading of a text and engage in alternative or 'resistant' readings. Students could apply what they have learnt about the constructions of the Man Box – along with their analysis of what is expected of a woman – to a popular and current text, film or TV show.

This article may be a good starting point for discussion:



[Abusive men are too often celebrated as desirable boyfriends & it terrifies me.](#)

Other useful resources

This range of resources includes some that are teacher-focused with lesson plans and some that could be used with groups of students to expand thinking about expectations and possibilities of identity.

[Societal forces](#)

This playlist explores the range of societal forces that can influence our decisions and actions on a day-to-day basis.

[The good society: Gender](#)

This playlist explores the different gender norms and stereotypes that exist in our society and how they can influence our decisions and behaviour.

[Gender box](#)

[How challenging masculine stereotypes is good for men](#)

[Identity and cultural diversity](#)

[Raising boys with a broader definition of masculinity](#)