

# THE COST OF THE MAN BOX

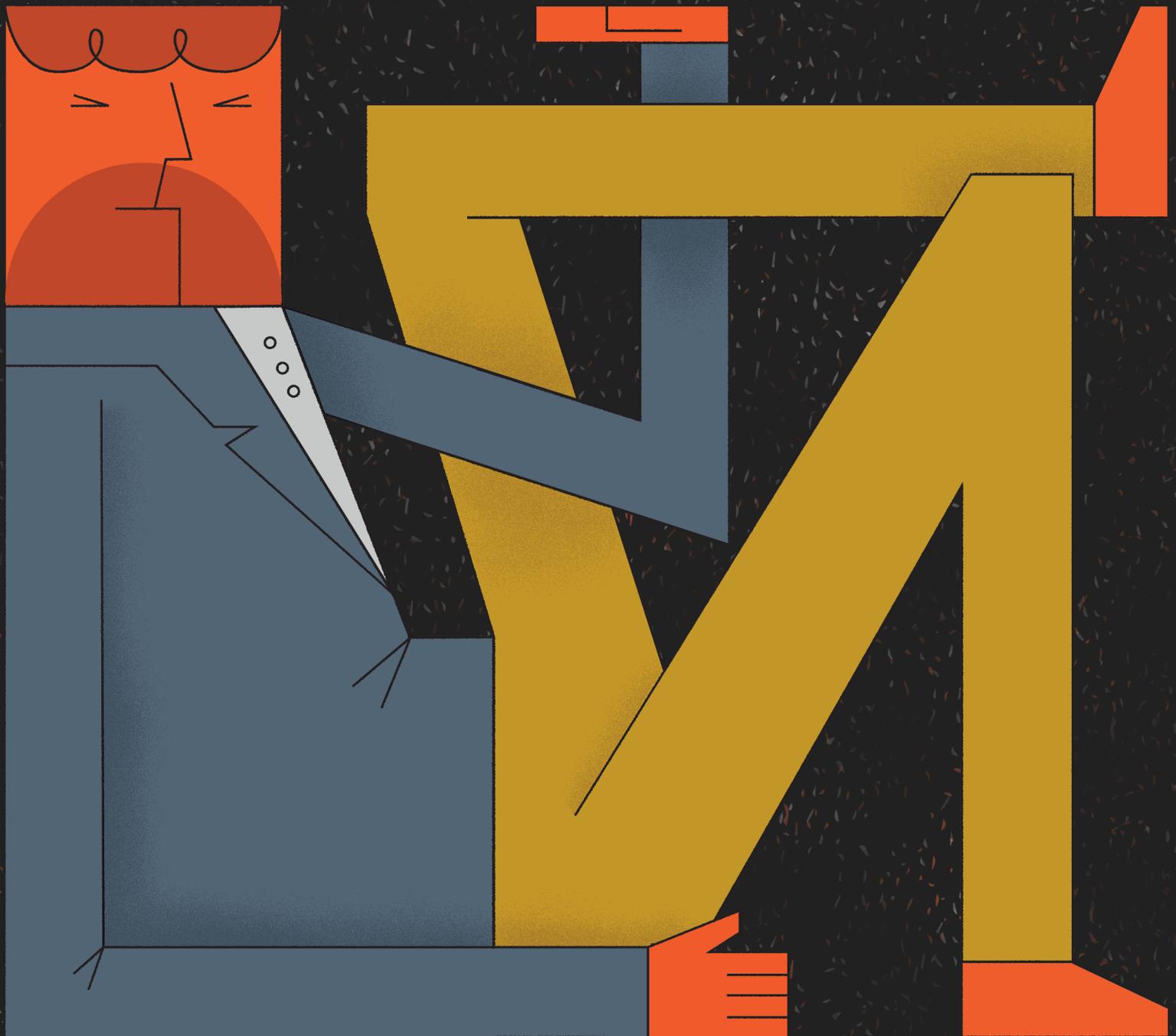
A STUDY ON THE ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF HARMFUL  
MASCULINE STEREOTYPES IN THE US, UK, AND MEXICO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Unilever

 PROMUNDO AXE





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## ALSO IN THIS SERIES:

- *The Cost of the Man Box: A study on the economic impacts of harmful masculine stereotypes in Mexico* (2019)
- *The Cost of the Man Box: A study on the economic impacts of harmful masculine stereotypes in the United Kingdom* (2019)
- *The Cost of the Man Box: A study on the economic impacts of harmful masculine stereotypes in the United States* (2019)
- *The Man Box: A study on being a young man in the US, UK, and Mexico* (2017)

To download these and other reports, visit [www.promundoglobal.org](http://www.promundoglobal.org)

Note: Some information presented in this report has been previously published in the 2017 study mentioned above.

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# FOREWORD

In our 2017 study, “The Man Box: A study on being a young man in the US, UK, and Mexico,” Promundo and Axe, Unilever’s leading male grooming brand, carried out nationally representative surveys in these three countries with young men ages 18 to 30 to understand the prevalence of harmful ideas about manhood and how broad the effects of these ideas are.

That study confirmed how much young men continue to be told “being a man” means using violence to resolve conflicts, refusing to seek help even if they need it, and sticking to rigid gender roles. It also confirmed that young men who believe in the most restrictive ideas about manhood are consistently more likely to bully, binge drink, be in traffic accidents, harass, show signs of depression, and have considered suicide.

The findings were so strong and so alarming that we wanted to dig even deeper into the data to see if we could estimate the size of the effects of harmful ideas about masculinity in a new way. The result is a new research series called “The Cost of the Man Box.” The reports in this series aim to estimate the actual economic impact of rigid masculine ideas in the US, UK, and Mexico. We believe that estimating the enormous toll of these harmful

ideas – in dollars, pounds, and pesos, in quality of life lost, and in unquantifiable costs alike – will boost the urgency of this issue and prompt new conversations, campaigns, and social change.

This report shows that our economies and societies are paying a steep price due to restrictive ideas about masculinity. As a result of these findings, we are more committed than ever to work collectively to change harmful norms and smash the Man Box for good. Our research adds to a growing recognition that rigid ideas about masculinity are a drain on our economies, and on all of our lives, regardless of our gender.

When young men reject the Man Box, embrace their emotions and vulnerability, demonstrate confidence in themselves and respect for others, and let their honesty, empathy, and caregiving define their identity, then we can expect wide, positive effects. This vision stands to benefit everyone in society: men and boys alongside the women and girls who so often bear the brunt of patriarchal ideas and practices. In the pursuit of a better, fuller, safer, and healthier society, join us in smashing the Man Box.

**Gary Barker – President and CEO, Promundo-US**  
**Rik Strubel – Global Vice President, Axe/Lynx**

**“MAN UP.”**

**“BOYS DON'T CRY.”**

**“BE A MAN!”**

**Unfortunately, the strict masculine stereotypes beneath phrases like these are still common today.** Too many men still feel pressure to stick to a very strict script when it comes to what makes a “real man.” In our 2017 study, “The Man Box: A study on being a young man in the US, UK, and Mexico,” we showed that 72 percent of young men in the United States, 68 percent in Mexico, and 57 percent in the United Kingdom had been told that a real man behaves a certain way.<sup>1</sup> Masculinity as a whole, or being a man in a physical sense, isn’t inherently bad. But over time, too many restrictive assumptions and expectations for how men are supposed to act, think, and feel have maintained their hold on our societies, to everyone’s detriment. Our research in 2017 demonstrated that young men “in the Man Box” – meaning those who most agree with a set of harmful “act tough” stereotypes and “man up” expectations – show many negative behaviors. For example:

- Three to six times more likely to make unwanted sexual comments to women
- Three to seven times more likely to use physical violence
- Twice as likely to have had suicidal thoughts in the previous two weeks (in the United Kingdom and United States)
- Two to four times as likely to have refrained from doing something for fear of appearing “gay” (in the United Kingdom and United States)

**To build on these ideas, we recently measured the economic impact of these harmful ideas and behaviors, asking: “What are the costs of the Man Box?”** We are able to build upon other evidence of the harms of restrictive masculinities by estimating a minimum cost that could be saved by the economy of each country if there were no Man Box. We say minimum because there are numerous immeasurable costs not included in the total numbers we produce, and of course, negative health outcomes and economic consequence are driven by factors beyond the Man Box. But the links between the Man Box and costly health and social outcomes are too strong to ignore – to the tune of \$15.7 billion in the United States, \$3.8 billion in the United Kingdom, and \$1.4 billion in Mexico.

**“THE MAN BOX IS A USEFUL NAME AND IMAGE, ORIGINALLY COINED BY PAUL KIVEL AND THE OAKLAND MEN’S PROJECT AND USED BY ACTIVISTS AND DISCUSSION GROUPS FOR DECADES, TO DESCRIBE THE RESTRICTIONS OF STEREOTYPES ABOUT MASCULINITY.”<sup>2</sup>**

Cost category	United States	United Kingdom	Mexico	Total
Traffic accidents	\$7,300,400,000	\$267,500,000	\$134,200,000	\$7,702,100,000
Suicide	\$4,422,500,000	\$313,600,000	\$79,200,000	\$4,815,300,000
Bullying and violence	\$772,100,000	\$2,877,100,000	\$670,000,000	\$4,319,200,000
Depression	\$2,410,300,000	\$47,300,000	\$2,900,000	\$2,460,500,000
Sexual violence	\$631,400,000	\$221,500,000	\$314,800,000	\$1,167,700,000
Binge drinking	\$181,090,000	\$96,800,000	\$160,600,000	\$438,490,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$15.7 billion</b>	<b>\$3.8 billion</b>	<b>\$1.4 billion</b>	<b>\$20.9 billion</b>

**In short, the costs of the Man Box are significant – and these numbers are only the bare minimum of such costs.** With few exceptions, these calculations focus solely on men aged 18 to 30, the target population of the original Man Box study, significantly limiting the final dollar amount. As you can see, we’ve also only estimated costs for six categories – these categories certainly do not reflect the full range of costly behaviors that show a link with the Man Box. Due to lack of available data, we have had to leave out, for instance: men’s violence against female partners, homicide, theft, vandalism, armed conflict and war, drug use, poor diet, unsafe sex, and poor health-seeking behaviors, among others. Furthermore, the true costs of these behaviors are extremely difficult to measure, and as you can imagine, are not only economic in nature. Even with all of those limiting factors in place, these “minimum” sums are nonetheless staggering.

# THESE COSTS ARE ROUGHLY EQUIVALENT TO:

## IN THE UNITED STATES

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- The amount needed to cover the final budget for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for two years.\*

## IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

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- The amount needed to cover the National Health Services (NHS) annual deficit\*\*

## IN MEXICO

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- The amount needed to cover tertiary education for up to 900,000 students\*\*\*

Sources for cost comparisons:

\* The CDC is the leading national public health institute of the United States. It had a final budget of \$7.178 billion in 2016 and \$7.185 billion in 2017. <https://www.cdc.gov/budget/documents/fy2019/cdc-overview-factsheet.pdf>

\*\* National Audit Office, "Financial Sustainability of the NHS" (London, UK: National Audit Office, 2016), <https://www.nao.org.uk>.

\*\*\* UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Government Expenditure per Student, Tertiary (% of GDP per Capita)," The World Bank, 2019, <https://data.worldbank.org>.

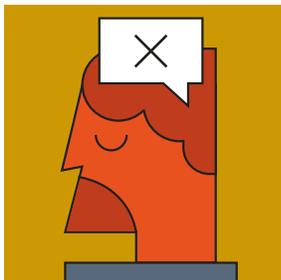
## The six cost categories included in the study reflect a range of outcomes linked with the Man Box.

Taking them one by one, we can see how much of a toll the Man Box takes on society and how urgent it will be to deconstruct the Man Box for good. The dollar figures included in the headlines below reflect the totals for all three countries' costs combined.



### TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS – OVER \$7.7 BILLION

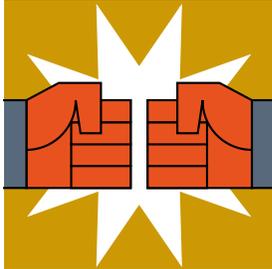
In 2017, guys inside the Man Box were two to three times as likely to report having been in a recent traffic accident. Globally, nearly three-quarters of all road traffic deaths occur among men under 25.<sup>3</sup> These consequences are costly in our three countries, particularly the United States. In 2010, motor vehicle crashes in the United States led to 32,999 fatalities, 3.9 million non-fatal injuries, and 24 million damaged vehicles; these figures may help explain why the US cost figure is so much higher than the other two countries in the study.<sup>4</sup> In the United Kingdom, there were 170,993 casualties reported in road traffic accidents in 2017, with 24,381 seriously injured cases and 1,792 fatalities.<sup>5</sup> In Mexico, there were 2,600,000 road accidents in 2013 that cost an estimated US\$7.8 billion (150 billion pesos), amounting to 1.7 percent of Mexico's gross domestic product (GDP), according to a report by the Pan American Health Organization.<sup>6</sup>



### SUICIDE – OVER \$4.8 BILLION

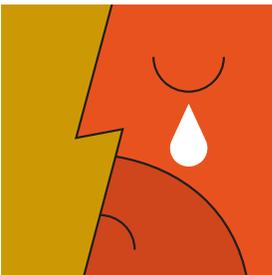
The World Health Organization estimates that more than 800,000 people die due to suicide every year and that suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15- to 29-year-olds globally.<sup>7</sup> Not only that, men are almost twice as likely to take their own lives as women are. Many societies encourage guys to repress their emotions, but “boxing things up” can rarely fix internal struggles. Too often, as encouraged by society, men in the Man Box do exactly that, however, with devastating consequences. Our 2017 Man Box study discovered

that guys in the Man Box were twice as likely to have suicidal thoughts within the past two weeks. The toll in terms of cost, particularly in the United States, is significant.



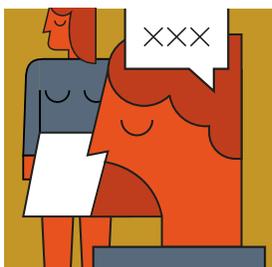
## **BULLYING AND VIOLENCE – OVER \$4 BILLION**

Harmful masculine stereotypes and “act tough” expectations are often at the root of men’s use of violence against their peers, partners, and others. Our 2017 study found that young men in the Man Box were significantly more likely to report committing and experiencing all three forms of bullying and violence: verbal, online, and physical. Our cost figures come from national crime victimization surveys in all three countries, which calculate this information in slightly different ways. Restrictive definitions in the United States and the inability to narrow down the age range of perpetrators as finely as we would like in the United Kingdom help explain the differences between countries.



## **DEPRESSION – NEARLY \$2.5 BILLION**

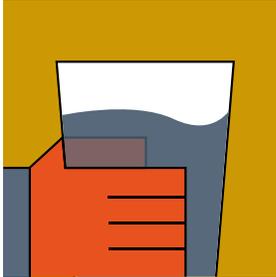
Harmful masculine stereotypes tell guys they should bottle up any feelings other than strength or aggression. It is no surprise, then, that guys inside the Man Box show a higher incidence of depressive symptoms in our dataset. In the United States, the total economic burden of major depressive disorder was estimated at \$210.5 billion in 2010.<sup>8</sup> Depressive disorders have also been ranking fifth on the top causes of disability in Mexico in the last decade, according to the Global Burden of Disease study.<sup>9</sup>



## **SEXUAL VIOLENCE – NEARLY \$1.4 BILLION**

The links between rape culture, sexual violence, sexual harassment, and the Man Box are undeniable and costly. In addition to personal-level outcomes, legal costs, and unquantifiable outcomes like fear and anxiety, sexual harassment also costs companies via legal expenses, decreased productivity, increased turnover, and reputational harm.<sup>10</sup> In 2015 alone, the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission recovered \$164 million for workers who had been harassed.<sup>11</sup> We need to bring young men into the conversation about ending sexual

violence, hold them accountable, and work together to promote positive portrayals of what it means to be a man, to reduce the prevalence and toll of these actions.



## BINGE DRINKING – OVER \$400 MILLION

Too many guys associate being a “real man” with alcohol abuse, putting themselves and others at risk when they try to meet this harmful standard. Guys are almost twice as likely to binge drink as women.<sup>12</sup> In 2014, 71 percent of US deaths from the effects of excessive alcohol use were men.<sup>13</sup> That’s over 1.8 million years of potential life lost annually, just in one country. Alcohol use has also been shown to be a factor in cardiovascular disease, cancer, chronic respiratory disease, diabetes, HIV, tuberculosis, transportation injuries, and many others. In the UK, the cost of binge drinking was estimated at roughly £4.86 billion per year at 2014 prices.<sup>14</sup>

**So, what can we do to change ideas about manhood?** The #MeToo movement has brought a historic and necessary questioning of some men’s behaviors. There is no going back. We can and must engage parents, teachers, the media, young women, and men themselves in conversations about what it means to be a man. There are plenty of ideas to work from, and ample evidence exists that campaigns and educational activities can lead to positive changes in ideas and norms about manhood – to the benefit of all. In addition to these approaches, brands like Axe are already lending their voice to promoting healthy manhood, and many others can and should do the same. It’s time to turn up the volume and put respect, care, nonviolence, and integrity at the heart of masculinity.

**For links to some key resources and organizations working in this space, visit Promundo’s Future of Manhood web page at [futureofmanhood.org](http://futureofmanhood.org).**

**To advance meaningful change, we must see increased actions and commitments at multiple levels, including the following.**

**1. At home, parents and caregivers should:**

- Challenge their own perceptions about what it means to be a man today.
- Talk to their sons and daughters early about respect and nonviolence, and helping children feel they can seek help when they need it.
- Help guide boys and girls in conversations that encourage more critical thinking about gender equality and masculinity.

**2. In schools and other institutions serving youth, classes and programs should:**

- Work to transform harmful gender norms in school curricula and activities.
- Include gender equality topics in all teacher, guidance counselor, or other related professional training.

**3. Brands, entertainment industries, news institutions, and all mass media should:**

- Normalize the inclusion of diverse, respectful, and healthy depictions of men and masculinity.
- Commit to abolish the use of harmful, outdated male stereotypes in the media.

**4. Celebrities, influencers, and role models of all kinds should:**

- Embrace and model healthy masculinities.
- Inspire others to broaden the definition of masculinity.

**5. Civic leaders, legislators, foundations, and philanthropic donors should:**

- Prioritize violence prevention and health education, specifically programs that work to dismantle the root causes of harmful gender norms.
- Fund additional programs for young people of all sexual orientations and gender identities that encourage healthy masculinity, respect, and equality.

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