Evaluating programs aimed at gender transformative work with men and boys: *a multi-cohort, cross-sector investigation*

Final Report

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Acknowledgements

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Executive summary

"What works in gender transformative programs aiming to foster healthy masculinities with men and boys?"

In recent years, promoting healthy masculinities has become a key focus in the effort to tackle harmful masculine norms and achieve greater gender equality. However, there is limited evaluation data on programs that promote healthy and positive masculinities in the Global North (Ralph et al. 2020; World Health Organisation 2007), particularly in the Australian context (Stewart et al. 2021).

This report presents findings from a VicHealth funded evaluation of three healthy masculinities programs in Victoria, Australia, and makes a number of recommendations for future gender transformative[1] healthy masculinities work. This research was guided by the central research question: What works in gender transformative programs aiming to foster healthy masculinities with men and boys?

This evaluation involved partnering with three organisations that run programs aimed at fostering healthy masculinities:

Monash Respectful Communities (RC) is a division of Monash University that aims to ensure staff and students can champion positive social and cultural change. The evaluation focused on their 'Mobiliser Program', a 15-hour program (weekly 3-hour workshops run for five weeks) that aims to prevent gender-based violence by promoting allyship and creating agents of change who practice active bystander behaviours.

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1 Gender transformative approaches 'seek to challenge the causes of gender inequality and strengthen actions that support gender equality within a given context' (Varley & Rich 2019).

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The Man Cave (TMC) is a preventative mental health and emotional intelligence charity that aims to empower communities to raise generations of healthy young men. The evaluation focused on their one-day 'Realising My Potential' workshop with teenage boys (aged 12-16 years) that aims to deconstruct masculine stereotypes to aid the prevention of depression, suicide and gender-based violence.
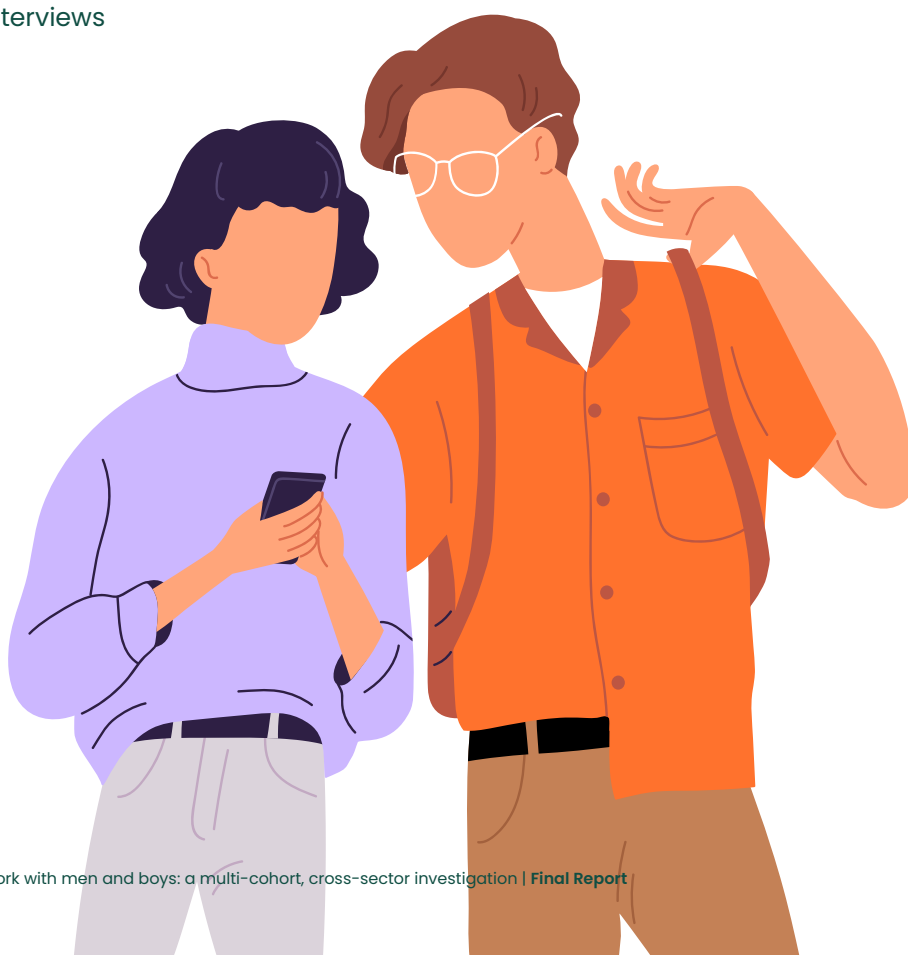
Sport and Life Training (SALT) is a not-for-profit mental health and wellbeing organisation that delivers a range of 1.5-hour workshops – on issues such as mental health and wellbeing, leadership, healthy masculinities, female empowerment, equality and respectful relationships, positive parenting, and coaching – primarily to sporting clubs, but also to workplaces and schools.

The evaluation used qualitative and quantitative methods to examine what works in these programs. The programs were evaluated separately, and the methods were tailored in close collaboration with program partners. The overall stages of the evaluation were:

- a scoping meeting with key staff;
- shadowing days at each organisations' offices;
- collection and analysis of key program documentation;
- ethnographic observations of workshops;
- facilitator interviews;
- pre-, post- and follow up-surveys with workshop participants;
- and focus groups and/or interviews with workshop participants.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the partner organisations and the research team faced a number of logistical challenges that limited data collection for the evaluation. TMC was unable to deliver their workshops in schools during lockdown periods, so participant survey and interview data was collected from one school and no comparison group was available. Though RC was able to deliver their program online, the pandemic reduced attendance by more than two-thirds, resulting in a small number of participants completing the program. COVID-19 challenges also meant that only facilitator interviews and observation notes, along with initial scoping activities, were collected in relation to SALT's work.

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Key findings

The man cave

- TMC facilitators are highly skilled in establishing rapport with participants, maintaining energy and engagement across the full one-day workshop.
- Facilitators effectively establish the workshop as a safe space for vulnerability and authenticity.
- The program content aligns with research on masculinity and mental health, and is presented in a manner that is well-structured and accessible.
- The workshop appears to promote empathy and a positive culture among the group, and appears to improve knowledge and attitudes about aggression and violence.

- Attitudinal and knowledge shifts do not necessarily translate into enhanced interpersonal skills or changes in behaviours.
- The workshop appears to challenge masculine norms that lead to negative mental health outcomes for men and boys.
- Norms of masculinity that require men to be strong and unfeeling will not change substantially if broader gender inequalities are not also addressed.

Suggestions for Future Delivery

Facilitation: Connecting with participants through sharing personal stories, humour, and ice-breaker techniques is effective at TMC. Avoiding stereotypical language will help programs model healthy masculinities and will ensure programs avoid reproducing harmful norms of masculinity.

Program content: Programs should consider integrating mechanisms for establishing the existing level of participant knowledge at the beginning of a workshop and developing adaptable content that can cater to multiple levels of prior knowledge and participant readiness.

Changing behaviours, not just attitudes: Programs should consider integrating activities that equip participants with practical tools for enacting the skills and knowledge they acquire from programs.

Gender transformative approaches: There is room to include an emphasis on broader aspects of gender inequality that go beyond men's emotions and ability to open up and share with others.

Program length: While there is value in the one-day workshop relative to the aims of the program, the research evidence indicates that multiple-session programs are more likely to achieve sustained desired outcomes.

Respectful Communities

- Facilitators demonstrated a solid grasp of course content and delivered it in an engaging manner.

- The use of a mixed gender facilitation team was well received by participants and enhanced the content delivery.

- Program design based on 'scaffolding' – a process of supported learning, where participants gradually become more independent – across multiple, strategically planned sessions allowed for greater engagement and comprehension.

- Participants in the program were willing to, and capable of, engaging with content around masculinity and gender-based violence.

- The program effectively integrated content around practical skills for the promotion of gender equality.

- The prevalence and impact of everyday sexism was a key focus of the program.

- Participants did not always feel confident engaging in conversations about gender equality.

Suggestions for Future Delivery

Structure of sessions: Though the 3-hour time slots for any one session created space for complex content and in-depth discussions, the ability for participants to sustain focus and engage for long periods of time – especially online – should be carefully considered.

Participant readiness: There is great value in working with participants who have pre-established knowledge, but programs might also consider targeting and upskilling others who might be considered 'persuadables' – that is, people who are more ambivalent or less knowledgeable about the issues of masculinity and gender equality, but may be open to supporting ideals of healthy masculinities (Flood 2020).

Sustainability of change beyond program attendance: Programs with a focus on bystander action and advocacy work might consider upskilling participants in strategies for promoting self-care and balance to avoid burnout so that actions and learnings from programs can be implemented in a sustainable way.

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SALT

- Facilitators were experienced and knowledgeable, and spoke positively about the program.
- Stakeholder buy-in is crucial for creating an environment conducive to success.

- Multiple-session, longer-term programs are valuable for sustained success. One-off sessions can create useful entry-points and introductions to the issues in organisations where there is visible leadership, understanding and demonstrated commitment to investing in further work.
- Timing and longer duration of sessions can increase effectiveness.

Suggestions for Future Delivery

Establishing expectations/ boundaries:

Creating a space where participants understand what is expected of them and feel safe speaking honestly can improve the quality of engagement and responses. This may also extend to the importance of club buy-in and ensuring clubs create supportive environments for workshops.

Power dynamics:

Interactive activities that get participants moving and/or sitting in circles may be more conducive to sharing and engagement than sitting in rows and watching a standing presenter.

Connection to content:

Encouraging participants to connect the content to their own experiences might help consolidate the material in participants' minds and open up space for more meaningful connections within the group.

Facilitation techniques:

Utilising a variety of facilitation techniques, including participatory activities, will keep energy levels high and allow less confident participants a chance to engage in a way that suits them.

Support for facilitators:

Utilising a team of facilitators may help support some of the recommendations listed above in relation to capturing and holding participants' attention.

Whole of club approach:

Multiple session programs that are embraced and reflected across all levels of the club are more likely to lead to long-term sustained change.

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Key Principles and Recommendations for Healthy Masculinities Programs

Recommendation 1

Healthy masculinities programs should attempt to include multiple sessions and/or workshops of longer duration to support participant knowledge, confidence and skill building and increase program efficacy. While there is no definitive evidence on exactly how long programs should be, evidence suggests that repeated exposure to ideas over a longer period of time is beneficial, with some suggestions that 16 or more hours of program time is a good starting point (Ralph et al. 2020; Stewart et al. 2021).

Recommendation 2

Programs should integrate activities into sessions that equip participants with practical tools to enact the knowledge and skills they acquire from healthy masculinities programs.

Recommendation 3

Comprehensive facilitator training should be prioritised in healthy masculinities programs. Rather than relying on an individual's apparent inherent skills, facilitators should for example be adequately trained in how to build rapport, model vulnerability, and create a sense of cultural and emotional safety. Training in principles of gender equality and gender transformative work is particularly crucial. Refresher training is also appropriate.

Recommendation 4

Programs should consider the use of personal storytelling, humour, and inclusive communication as strategies to build rapport and encourage openness from participants. However, programs should take care to avoid the use of stereotypical, casually sexist or homophobic jokes and language, as this reinforces the norms of masculinity that programs are attempting to change.

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Recommendation 5

Programs should prioritise strategies for actively including participants as collaborators in the program, rather than as more passive recipients of the information being conveyed. This could include strategies such as establishing a set of group principles at the beginning of workshops, sitting participants in circles rather than rows, or incorporating activities that get participants moving around and interacting with one another and the facilitators.

Recommendation 6

Programs should integrate mechanisms for establishing the existing level of participant knowledge at the beginning of a workshop or program, and developing adaptable content that can cater to multiple levels of prior knowledge and participant readiness.

Recommendation 7

Programs should strongly consider incorporating strategies that help participants connect the program content to their lives and experiences, such as sharing stories, building empathy and emotional connection to the issue, and helping participants see themselves reflected in initiatives.

Recommendation 8

Healthy masculinities programs should embed a gender transformative approach into their work in order to transform both the norms that affect men's mental health and emotions, and broader harmful norms that affect people of all genders.

Recommendation 9

Evaluation is key to refining program delivery and improving outcomes. Organisations delivering healthy masculinities programs should aim to factor approximately 10% of their overall operating budget for evaluation. This will vary by size of organisation and complexity of programs, but this figure is a well-recognised 'rule of thumb' in the research literature.

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Lessons for Conducting Evaluations of Healthy Masculinities Programs

Five key points stand out as important considerations for others conducting evaluations of healthy masculinities programs.

1. Stakeholder buy-in and clarification of roles and responsibilities

Expectations need to be negotiated and agreed upon with all stakeholders at the outset of evaluations. These expectations may be revisited and potentially re-negotiated across the life of the evaluation. Buy-in and a full understanding of the purpose and plan is required at all levels, from leadership to front-line staff within partner organisations, other stakeholders, and the evaluation team.

2. Data collection

While the context and sensitivities of programs must be carefully considered, data collection is sometimes optimal when undertaken – or at least supported by – the presence of someone from the evaluation team (whether internal or external evaluators). In some circumstances asking project staff/facilitators to disseminate surveys (for example) can reduce the response rate. This can occur because data collection and facilitation require different skill sets. For example, participants might associate internal staff with content delivery rather than data collection, and so not take the exercise of completing surveys seriously. In addition, project staff are often already busy and may not be able to make adequate time for data collection, especially if they perceive it as eating into their core task of facilitating the program. However, in some instances – for example when working with vulnerable or marginalised communities – having a member of the evaluation team present may not be appropriate. This should be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

3. Gaining participant and/or parental consent

Gaining consent from program participants can be time consuming and difficult. Evaluators should consider and plan options for gaining consent as early as possible. Online consent forms may be particularly important given the increasing prevalence of online delivery of programs in the context of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It should also be noted that there remains a need to build the evidence base on the efficacy of online versus face-to-face programs.

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4. Multi- or mixed-method, tailored approaches

Mixed-methods approaches to evaluation are increasingly recognised as most suitable for the evaluation of complex community programs or interventions. Methods should be carefully tailored in close consultation with programs.

5. Broader institutional challenges

It is important to reflect on the ways that institutional cultures and norms can pose a challenge to effective behavioural and attitudinal change amongst participants. Evaluators might make plans to help highlight to programs the significance of obstacles such as embedded cultural norms of masculinity.

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1.0 Introduction

"...Promoting healthy masculinities has now become a key focus in the effort to tackle these harmful norms..."

1.1 Background

Recent findings from The Man Box Report (The Men's Project and Flood 2018) show that Australian men are exposed to intense social pressure to behave in particular ways that accord with being a 'real man'. This includes being perceived as tough, stoic and self-sufficient. Conforming to these expectations is associated with poorer mental health outcomes and lower help-seeking behaviours among men, as well as a higher likelihood of violence perpetration (Herreen et al. 2021; Wong et al. 2017; Seidler et al. 2016). Promoting healthy masculinities has now become a key focus in the effort to tackle these harmful norms in a bid to work towards greater gender equality.

However, there is little evaluation data in the Global North on programs promoting healthy and positive masculinities (Ralph et al. 2020; WHO 2007) and a significant absence of evidence in the Australian context (Stewart et al. 2021).

The evidence base currently stems largely from the Global South and focuses primarily on issues such as gendered violence, sexual and reproductive health, fatherhood and paternal involvement,

and HIV prevention and treatment (Ralph et al. 2020). There is also limited longitudinal evaluation data on healthy masculinities programs, which means medium and long-term impacts of these interventions are not well understood.

This evaluation report responds to the lack of robust data on healthy masculinities programs in the Global North. We present findings from a VicHealth funded evaluation of three healthy masculinities programs in Victoria, Australia, and make a number of recommendations for other existing and/or future programs. We examine 'what works' in programs seeking to foster healthy masculinities and identify challenges, barriers and future needs for this work. The evaluation of the three programs was guided by the following overarching research question:

What works in gender transformative programs[2] aiming to foster healthy masculinities with men and boys?

1.2 Partner Organisations

Three healthy masculinities programs were included in this research: 'The Mobiliser Program', run by the Monash University Respectful Communities team as part of their 'Masculinities Project'; the 'Realising My Potential' workshop, run by The Man Cave; and the 'Healthy Masculinity' program, run by SALT. All three partner organisations were closely involved in the evaluation process, sharing insights into their programs, helping to design the evaluation

strategies and tailor data collection tools to their specific programs, and facilitating access to participants in order to roll out the data collection methods. Partner organisations also worked with us to develop the key indicators that would inform the evaluation of their programs.

2 Gender transformative approaches 'seek to challenge the causes of gender inequality and strengthen actions that support gender equality within a given context' (Varley & Rich 2019).

Respectful Communities

The Mobiliser Program is a new initiative by Monash Respectful Communities (RC) that aims to prevent gender-based violence by promoting allyship and creating agents of change who practice active bystander behaviours. As this was a new initiative, the evaluation team observed the pilot, which was originally designed to be delivered on campus at Monash University through workshops and weekly coffee catch-ups. However, due to the 2020 lockdown in Victoria, it was delivered via weekly, 3-hour zoom workshops, over a 5-week period. The pilot was designed to engage male and non-binary students between the ages of 18-30. The workshop material aims to equip participants with practical tools to challenge dominant masculine norms, harmful male-to-male peer relations and the normalisation of male aggression, and promote healthy masculinities. Each session of the Mobiliser Program was delivered by a team of two facilitators (one woman, one man). The knowledge base that underpins The Mobiliser Program's content includes:

- Feminism and a primary prevention approach to violence against women (see e.g. the Change the Story by Our Watch, ANROWS & VicHealth 2015);

- gender-transformative frameworks (see for example WHO 2011, page 42 onwards);

- bystander intervention (see for example VicHealth 2019);

- and VicHealth's work on encountering resistance and backlash (see for example VicHealth 2018)

Respectful Communities indicators

Process indicators

✓ The program is based on key evidence in the field and best practice

✓ Facilitators are adequately trained to competently deliver the program

✓ Number of participants who engage consistently in the mobiliser program and sessions

✓ Five sessions of the Mobiliser program are carried out (online)

Impact indicators

✓ Participants use the program tools and resources to practice positive and respectful masculinities

✓ Participants feel confident to communicate the program learnings to others

✓ Participants communicate the program learnings to others, both within and outside the Monash University Community

✓ Participants feel confident to enact change and promote gender equality, both within and outside the Monash University community

✓ Participants understand, and can identify and articulate, what gender equitable attitudes are and are not

✓ Participants understand and can articulate the link between dominant forms of masculinity and gender-based violence

✓ Participants challenge gender norms and promote gender equality

✓ Participants report using the program learnings, tools and resources to engage in the prevention of gender-based violence (e.g., in everyday interactions, role modelling, or participating in programs/organised activities)

✓ Number of participants who express interest in being peer facilitators for the 2021 program

✓ Facilitators report positive experiences of working in this program

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The Man Cave

The Man Cave (TMC) is a preventative mental health and emotional intelligence charity that empowers communities to raise generations of healthy young men. Their programs with teenage boys (aged 12-16 years) in Australian High Schools are full-day workshops with a focus on deconstructing the masculine stereotypes and giving boys strengths-based tools and mindsets to prevent depression, suicide and gender-based violence. Their 'Realising My Potential' workshop, which was evaluated as part of this research, is one of three one-day workshops designed to be delivered sequentially over a three-year period. The Realising My Potential workshop is delivered in schools to approximately 40 high school boys at a time, in year level groups ranging from Year 7 to Year 10. The workshop aims to educate participants about the effect of masculine norms, encourage them to express their emotions, and help them engage in more positive and respectful masculinities. It is run by three facilitators and consists of components such as games, call-and-response activities, storytelling, and a check-in circle. The knowledge base underpinning TMC's workshops includes:

- Adolescent psychology around resilience by Andrew Fuller, and educating boys by Steve Biddulph;

- gender and masculinity theory;

- educational theory around experiential learning by David Kolb, and social emotional learning by Louka Parry;

- and facilitation frameworks including Rites of Passage by Arne Rubinstein, Hero's Journey popularised by Joseph Campbell, and gender transformative programming by PROMUNDO.

The Man Cave Indicators

Process indicators

- ✓ The program is based on key evidence in the field and best practice
- ✓ Facilitators are adequately trained to competently deliver the program
- ✓ Facilitators successfully engage and build rapport with participants
- ✓ Participants demonstrate a willingness to engage with program content
- ✓ Program content does not inadvertently reify problematic masculine norms

Impact indicators

- ✓ Participants demonstrate greater awareness of mental health and wellbeing
- ✓ Participants demonstrate an awareness of and willingness to access the mental health support services available to them
- ✓ Participants understand and can articulate the impact of masculine norms on their attitudes, behaviours and wellbeing
- ✓ Participants understand and can articulate the links between dominant forms of masculinity and emotional and physical violence
- ✓ Participants use the program tools and resources to practice positive and respectful masculinities
- ✓ Participants demonstrate self-awareness, including a sense of responsibility for their actions
- ✓ Participants can articulate the importance of dismantling gendered power structures

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Sport and Life Training

Sport and Life Training (SALT) is a not-for-profit mental health and wellbeing organisation that delivers education sessions primarily to sporting clubs, but also workplaces and schools. SALT delivers a range of one-off, 90-minute programs covering topics including mental health and wellbeing, leadership, healthy masculinities, female empowerment, equality and respectful relationships, positive parenting, and coaching. All programs are delivered to both male-only and female-only teams, with the exception of Healthy Masculinity and Female Empowerment, which are delivered solely to men's and women's teams, respectively. Facilitators deliver sessions out of hours in line with sporting club needs and are gender-matched to the participant groups.

The sessions are PowerPoint-based and contain a combination of lecture style delivery, short video clips, small-group discussions and live quizzes/polls completed via mobile phone to allow interactive engagement with the content. Due to COVID-19 limitations (see below, '1.3 Limitations'), none of SALT's programs were able to be evaluated. Below, we present findings based on our scoping review of SALT's work, observations of their programs, and a small number of interviews with SALT facilitators.

SALT Indicators

Process indicators

✓ The program is based on key evidence in the field and best practice

✓ Facilitators are adequately trained to competently deliver the program

✓ Number of players who participate in one or more SALT sessions

✓ Club Wellbeing Team report community members reaching out to them

Impact indicators

✓ Participants use the program tools and resources to practice positive and respectful masculinities

✓ Participants gain an understanding of what their personal values are

✓ Participants communicate the program learnings to others, both within and outside the Club Community

✓ Participants feel confident to enact change and promote gender equality, both within and outside the Club community

✓ Participants understand, and can identify and articulate, what gender equitable attitudes and behaviours are and are not

✓ Participants understand and can articulate the link between dominant forms of masculinity and gender-based violence

✓ Participants challenge gender norms and promote gender equality

✓ Participants understand and can articulate the attitudes and behaviours that lead to violence

✓ Participants report using the program learnings, tools and resources to engage in bystander interventions or the prevention of gender-based violence (e.g., in everyday interactions, role modelling, or participating in programs/organised activities)

✓ Facilitators report positive experiences of working in this program

✓ Club Wellbeing Team members report positive experiences engaging with the Club community

1.3 Evaluation Limitations

The COVID-19 pandemic, including lockdowns in Victoria, led to many logistical challenges for the evaluation. This included significant difficulties with participant recruitment and retention for programs, and often meant that programs could not be run at all. Given these challenges, many aspects of the evaluation data collection (outlined below) were unable to be completed as planned. This meant limited participant numbers for our evaluation of Respectful Communities' program; lower than planned number of responses and no comparison groups for the survey component of The Man Cave evaluation, and longitudinal follow-up data collection only three months after intervention; and no data collection for SALT's program beyond our scoping work, observations, and facilitator interviews. This report outlines the findings based on the data we were able to collect, which is outlined in section 2.5 ('Dataset characteristics').

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2.0 Evaluation Methods

This evaluation used qualitative and quantitative methods and a longitudinal design to examine what works in programs seeking to foster healthy masculinities. The methods were tailored in close collaboration with the partner organisations to ensure they were suitable for each program, their participants and their key indicators. The three programs were evaluated separately, and the data collection methods and tools looked somewhat different for each. However, the overall stages of the evaluation for each program was designed as follows:

"The three programs were evaluated separately, and the data collection methods and tools looked somewhat different for each."

Scoping meeting	A 3-hour meeting with key program staff to hear about and discuss the program delivery, design, aims, evidence base, and any existing theory of change or evaluation frameworks
Shadowing days	Members of the evaluation team spend time at the organisations' main offices and shadowed their operations to gain deeper understandings of the programs and organisations. Also allows time for questions and rapport building between evaluation team and program stakeholders
Collection of key program documentation	Key documents (e.g., mission/vision statements, theories of change, facilitation guides) are analysed to understand program philosophies and underpinnings
Observations	Each program is observed by members of the evaluation team for insights into content and delivery modes
Facilitator Interviews	Interviews conducted with facilitators of each program to gain their insights and perspectives
Surveys	Pre-, post- and follow-up interviews of program participants to assess changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviours as a result of the program
Participant focus groups/interviews	Focus groups or interviews conducted with participants post-program and 6 months after the program to capture changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviours and participants' perspectives on the program

As noted above, due to logistical challenges related to COVID-19, we were not able to proceed beyond the 'Facilitator Interviews' stage of the evaluation with SALT's program.

Here, we provide more in-depth information about the observations, facilitator interviews, surveys and participant focus groups/interviews.

2.1 Observations

We carried out one observation of Man Cave's programs, three of SALT's, and four of the five sessions comprising Respectful Communities' program. Ethnographic observations of program sessions focussed on the following elements of program delivery:

Facilitator-Participant engagement	Body language of participants before, throughout and after session. Is there evidence of 'opening' or 'relaxing' across the session?
	Where participants seat themselves to begin with (in groups, pairs or by themselves) and where they end up.
	Willingness of participants to speak/share.
	What techniques do facilitators use to build rapport and/or create a safe space?
Quality of the material presented	What are the key messages presented to the group? Is this informed by up-to-date research on masculinities? Do facilitators inadvertently reify harmful norms, or covert sexism?
	Is it presented in an accessible and engaging manner? Do the participants appear to relate to the material?
	Does the material have a good balance of social critique and empathy? Is it presented in a way that encourages productive self-reflection, rather than shame?
Evidence of potential for long term change	Does the participants' behaviour/engagement suggest they have 'bought in' to the messages?
	Are they given an opportunity to challenge the messages, and does the facilitator effectively respond to these questions/challenges?

In addition, the observations provided an opportunity to observe how facilitators engaged with participants and built rapport, their training and competence in delivering the programs, and the willingness of participants to engage with program content.

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2.2 Facilitator Interviews

In total, 14 semi-structured interviews (30-90 minutes in duration) were conducted with facilitators from across the three programs. The experience level of the facilitators was broad, with some being in the first months of their facilitation employment, and others having over five years' experience working in these programs.

2.3 Surveys

Participants in The Man Cave and Respectful Communities program completed a pre-survey before beginning the programs. Participants then completed the same survey after the program had ended (three weeks after program end for The Man Cave; one week after program end for Respectful Communities), and then again six months later, in order to measure any changes in knowledge, behaviour or attitudes that occurred as a result of participating in the programs. In the 'Findings' section below, we report the results of paired samples t-tests conducted on the survey data, including the mean (M), standard deviation (SD), t values and degrees of freedom (t(x) = x), and probability values (p).[3]

Survey: The Man Cave

Twenty-two participants from one TMC workshop filled out the survey. Results of the Man Cave survey are presented below (see 'Findings'). It is important to note that because we were unable to access additional school groups, which could have acted as control or comparison groups, we are unable to make causal statements regarding the impact of the program on various measures.

It is also important to note that there were strong reports of higher levels of mental distress in the Victorian population due to COVID-19, with Melbourne entering a lockdown before the cohort completed the survey at time point 3. The COVID-19 context could quite logically have impacted on the results of the study. In particular, it is very plausible that measures assessing optimism and mental well-being (DASS-21) would be significantly affected by COVID-19, undermining any potential effect of Man Cave programs on these types of measures. This is discussed further below (see 'Findings').

Survey: Respectful Communities

Participants from the Respectful Communities program were asked to fill out the survey at all three timepoints. Given the very small number of participants filling out the survey (seven at time point 1; three at time point 2; three at time point 3), statistical tests could not be run on the data.

3 Paired samples t-tests: A test used when comparing the mean scores for the same group of people on two different occasions (Pallant 2016).
Mean: The most widely used measure of central tendency. The mean is calculated by summing all the scores in a distribution and dividing the sum by the total number of cases in the distribution (Caldwell 2010).
Standard deviation: A widely used measure of dispersion or variability. The standard deviation is the square root of the variance (Caldwell 2010).
Degrees of freedom: Between-groups degrees of freedom is the number of degrees of freedom associated with the estimate of between-groups variance; equivalent to the number of groups minus 1 (Caldwell 2010).
Probability values: When less than .05, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between two scores (Pallant 2016).

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Survey scales

The survey was tailored in consultation with each organisation. The scales used for the programs are outlined here:

Scale	TMC	RC
Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI-30)	✓	✓
Social Connectedness Measures (VicHealth)	✓	✓
Healthy Masculinities Scale	✓	
Life Orientation Test (LOT-R)	✓	
DASS-21 (Depression & Anxiety Scales)	✓	
Emotional Styles Questionnaire	✓	
Open-ended questions on enjoyment of the program		✓
Demographic questions	✓	✓

Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI-30)
The Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI-30) (Levant et al. 2020; Mahalik et al. 2003) measures conformity to common norms of masculinity. Given participants in TMC's workshop were under the age of 18, the subscales 'Playboy' and 'Primacy of Work' were excluded.

Social Connectedness Measures (VicHealth)
Two VicHealth measures of social connectedness were included in the survey (La Trobe University CSSI 2019). The first was a single-item measure of overall social connectedness – 'I feel connected with others' – taken at Time 1, Time 2 and Time 3. The second was a single item measure of context/activity specific social connectedness – 'When I engage in the Man Cave sessions, I feel a strong sense of connection with the people I spent time with' – measured at Time 2 and Time 3 only.

Healthy Masculinities Scale
Because no validated measures currently exist for measuring many of the specific areas of interest within the programs evaluated, we developed six short scales measuring (Elliott et al. 2022): 1. Attitudes and knowledge about aggression and violence; 2. Self-efficacy in challenging aggression and violence; 3. Knowledge about sexism; 4. Self-efficacy in challenging sexist behaviour; 5. Mental health and emotions; and 6. Discussing masculine ideals. We followed approaches outlined by Bandura (1995) regarding the adaption/modification of existing measures, and the construction of issue specific self-efficacy measures. Initial testing of the scales reliability indicated that all scales had adequate-to-good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alphas[4] ranging from .59 to .86.

Life Orientation Test (LOT-R)
The revised Life Orientation Test (Scheier et al. 1994; Scheier & Carver 1985) measures dispositional optimism.

DASS-21 (Depression and Anxiety Scales)
The DASS-21 (Lovibond and Lovibond 1995) measures the emotional states of depression, anxiety and stress. For the purposes of this survey, only depression and anxiety were measured. The DASS-21 is a screening tool for further investigation, but is not a clinical tool per se, and no clinical diagnosis was given to participants on the basis of this survey.

Emotional Styles Questionnaire
The Emotional Styles Questionnaire (Kesebir et al. 2019) captures how people vary across six dimensions that make up a healthy emotional life: outlook, resilience, social intuition, self-awareness, sensitivity to context, and attention. For this survey, we assessed only Social Intuition and Social Awareness.

2.4 Participant interviews/focus groups

Participants from Respectful Communities were interviewed individually four weeks after completing the program, and then again 6 months later. Participants from The Man Cave took part in a focus group four weeks after completing the program. The interviews and focus groups explored the participants' experiences of the program; whether their attitudes, knowledge and behaviours had changed since participating in the programs; and their ability to articulate the program content. For focus groups, prompts were used in some instances to spark reflection and conversation (e.g., 'since doing the workshop, I have changed the way I ___', 'If we don't change our ideas about masculinity, then as a society we will/will not___').

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2.5 Dataset characteristics

The following tables outline the number of facilitator interviews, surveys, observations, focus groups and/or interviews conducted for each program, as well as the total number of participants captured through these different methods.

The Man Cave

Phase	Number completed	Total number of participants
Facilitator interviews	10	10
Pre-survey	1	22
Observations	1	40
3-week post-survey	1	15
Focus groups	2	11
3-month post-survey	1	11

Monash Respectful Communities

Phase	Number completed	Total number of participants
Facilitator interviews	2	2
Pre-survey	1	7
Observations	4 sessions	6
1-week post-survey	1	3
4-week post-interview	6	6
6-month post-survey	1	3
6-month post-interview	3	3

SALT

Phase	Number completed	Total number of participants
Facilitator interviews	2	2
Pre-survey	0	0
Observations	3	70
3-week post-survey	0	0
Focus groups	0	0
3-month post-survey	0	0

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3.0 Findings

In this section we outline evaluation findings for each partner organisation.

"...Facilitators effectively establish the workshop as a safe space for vulnerability and authenticity..."
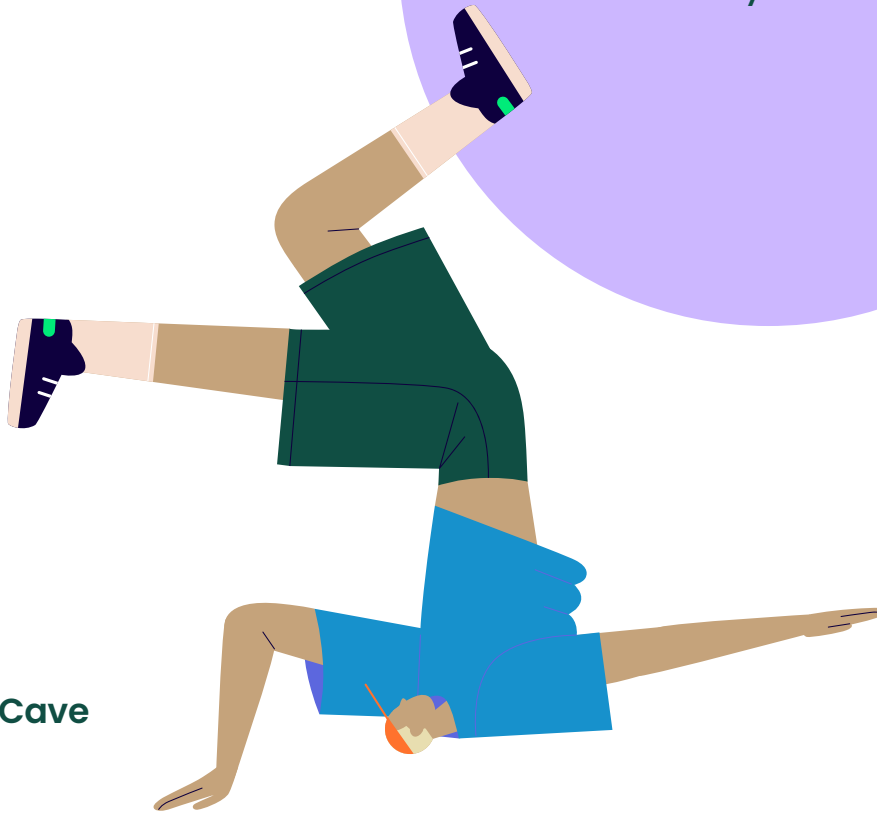
3.1 The Man Cave

Facilitation

TMC facilitators are highly skilled in establishing rapport with participants and maintaining energy and engagement across the full one-day workshop TMC facilitators use humour, personal storytelling, and ice-breaker techniques to quickly form a connection with participants. They then leverage that connection to promote engagement in content and activities that might otherwise make participants uncomfortable. The facilitators strategically use warm-up games, seated call-and-response activities, physically stimulating activities and meditation to engage participants. Observations of the workshop highlighted that these techniques maintain the group's energy levels and promote positive engagement from participants with diverse learning styles.

Participants in the focus groups reflected positively on the skill of the TMC facilitators, describing the workshop as 'fun', 'inclusive' and 'engaging':

"...it was well planned out and the activities were, like, fun."
(Focus group)

"...[the facilitators] got involved with people, they didn't just give you a sheet of paper, they actually tried to include everyone and have fun."
(Focus group)

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Facilitators effectively establish the workshop as a safe space for vulnerability and authenticity
Aiming to create a safe space, the TMC facilitators develop a set of expectations with participants that they document on the whiteboard. The facilitators also model vulnerability and authenticity to participants. One example of modelling vulnerability was facilitators telling personal stories about the harms masculine norms can cause, in order to encourage participants to also share stories and to empower them to be vulnerable. Observations of the check-in circle activity (where participants are invited by facilitators to 'check-in' and share how they are feeling) appeared to confirm the effectiveness of the facilitators' approach, with participants showing a readiness to share deep emotional disclosures and struggles.

TMC facilitators reflected in interviews on the profound disclosures they have witnessed in check-in circles. This includes seeing participants apologise for bullying, discussing their sexuality openly for the first time, and disclosures about struggles with suicidal ideation:

> *"There's been some really quite big and powerful moments in some of those sessions and quite big disclosures in that way."*
> *(TMC facilitator)*

Observations of the workshop supported this finding. We observed one participant discuss his experience of anxiety, while another admitted he was struggling with his parents' divorce. Focus group data further emphasised the positive impact that this kind of sharing has on participants:

> *"…at the workshop, it was a bit more normalised and not as weird to kind of ask if everyone's all good."*
> *(Focus group)*

> *"…the program was great because we got to express our feelings in a non-judgmental environment and we got to speak how we were actually feeling."*
> *(Focus group)*

In terms of the survey, paired samples t-tests were conducted in order to assess changes in feeling connected with others across time (time 1, time 2, time 3). The t-tests showed there was no significant difference between time 1 and time 2 ($p > .05$) or between time 1 and time 3 ($p > .05$). That is, participants did not report being any more or less connected with others in general across time and after involvement in the Man Cave's workshop. However, with regards to participants' connectedness with others within the Man Cave session, 66.7 percent of participants who responded at time 2 agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'When I engage in the Man Cave sessions, I feel a strong sense of connection with the people I spent time with'. This supports the qualitative data that suggests facilitators were effective at connecting with participants and creating a safe and open space during TMC sessions.

Program Content

The program content aligns with research on masculinity and mental health and is presented in a manner that is well-structured and accessible

TMC's workshop content problematises masculine norms of toughness and stoicism and links these norms to the high rates of mental illness and suicidality among Australian men. The program information is communicated effectively to participants, with the content structured but not wholly scripted, and flexible but not involving complete improvisation from facilitators. Focus group participants confirmed that they felt the content was relevant and useful:

> *"I felt the content was good, it touched on topics that I feel like people wouldn't really discuss in their daily life, but it kind of like needed to be talked about. It was a valuable workshop, and I feel like other people enjoyed it too. And yeah, got to talk about how they're feeling and stuff, it was good."*
>
> **(Focus group)**

> *"[Reading prompt] '"Since doing the workshop, I've changed the way I…" think about my mental health. I just reckon I'm more open about it, because now I realise it's a very, very common issue in today's society. So it's not really a reason to be embarrassed or ashamed."*
>
> **(Focus group)**

In focus groups, we heard that some participants have varying degrees of pre-existing familiarity with the core content:

> *"During Religion [class] and stuff, we've learnt a lot about masculinity… It was like masculinity and how the media view men, and like toxic masculinity. So, we've already heard quite a lot about masculinity. I guess some people probably learned a little bit more about mental health regarding masculinity [from TMC], but personally I didn't really."*
>
> **(Focus group)**

> *"I'd seen videos online, like at the end of people's videos they kind of make it aware that men's mental health is a thing and stuff, but like Man Cave kind of like, I don't know, ticked it off and said it's actually true."*
>
> **(Focus group)**

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Changing attitudes/knowledge vs. changing behaviours

The workshop appears to promote empathy and a positive culture among the group, and appears to improve knowledge and attitudes about aggression and violence

Focus group data revealed that the main benefit of the TMC workshop for participants was that it promoted empathy within the group. In particular, the participants said the check-in circle revealed that while someone might be the 'funny guy' or the 'tough guy' on the exterior, they could still be going through difficult times:

"In a way, you look at people differently. Not in a bad way, more in a good way. In the past, they might've had like, struggles … you're able to like help them out with that. Just take into consideration, like what you do, what you say, just try to help them out."
(Focus group)

"My perception of people changed from what I thought they were to like how they actually are … I thought this person was, like, stone-cold, but he was, like, he was different."
(Focus group)

According to participants, this had subtly shifted the group culture one month later:

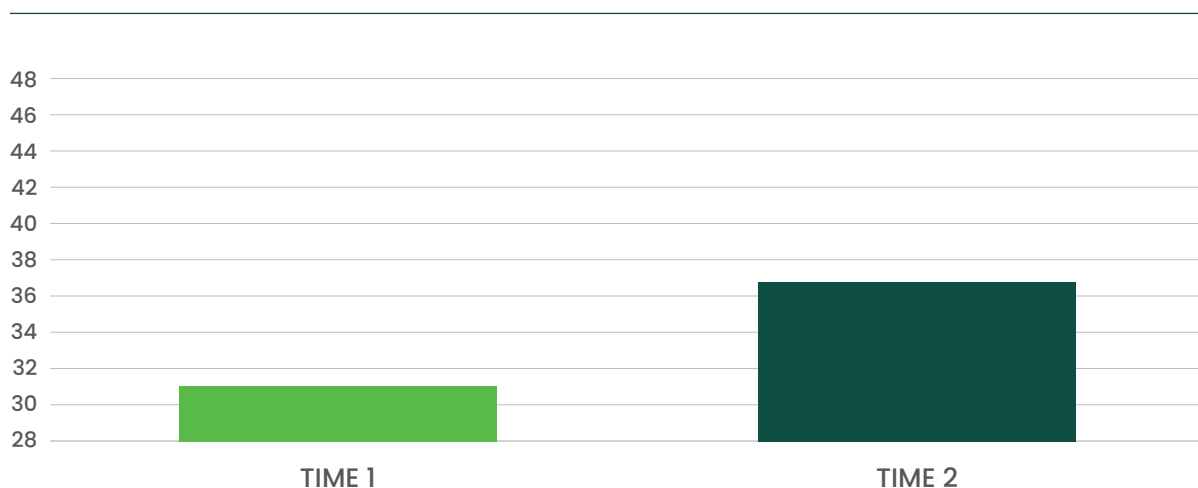**Interviewer:** Have you noticed a change in how the cohort interacts?
Participant 1: I reckon it's been pretty much the same.
Participant 2: I feel like everyone's got, maybe gotten like, not closer, but like just doesn't say anything [negative] to someone, like if they don't need to really… like there's not as much negativity around.

Paired samples t-tests were conducted on the survey data in order to assess changes in 'Attitudes and knowledge about aggression and violence' across time (time 1, vs. time 2, vs. time 3). The t-tests showed that there was no significant difference between time 1 and time 2 (p >.05).

However, as per Figure 1, there was a significant increase in knowledge about aggression and violence from time 1 (M=31.09, SD=5.56) to time 3 (M=36.82, SD=5.15); t(10) = -3.91, p=.003 (two tailed). Because we were unable to access additional school groups that could have acted as control or comparison groups, stronger claims of causation cannot necessarily be made, but these results appear to show that participants' knowledge and attitudes about aggression and violence improved after the program.

Figure 1: Knowledge about aggression and violence (higher score = higher self identifies level of knowledge; max score = 48)

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Attitudinal and knowledge shifts do not necessarily translate into enhanced interpersonal skills or changes in behaviours

Programs can often be successful in increasing levels of knowledge and awareness, but this does not necessarily translate into changed behaviours or taking action.

Despite a reported increase in empathy and concern for others, and possible improvements in knowledge and attitudes about aggression and violence, focus group data revealed that participants nevertheless found it hard to continue opening up with friends after the program:

"I feel like it's a bit awkward to do so, because normally when you're with your friends, you're like joking around, or just having like good times … It never feels like there's a natural right time to check in on someone, unless they're visibly upset, which is barely ever 'cause a lot of people just hide their emotions."
(Focus group)

"It's harder to create a serious space without, like, an adult figure."
(Focus group)

In more serious situations, some participants did feel they could reach out to their friends. This aligns with research that finds it is largely acceptable for men to express vulnerable emotions and seek help in 'serious situations of loss over which one does not have control' (MacArthur & Shields 2015: 41-42):

"If I knew that that person was actually dealing with something and it was, you know, to that point where you can actually see in their emotion that they were dealing with something then I would ask them, just if, like if it's that serious."
(Focus group)

Using our survey data, paired samples t-tests also showed no statistically significant difference between time 1 and time 2 ($p > .05$) or between time 1 and time 3 ($p > .05$) for 'Self-efficacy in challenging aggression and violence' or for 'Self-efficacy in challenging sexist behaviour'. This similarly matches the qualitative findings and past evidence that while healthy masculinities programs often have success with increasing knowledge and improving attitudes, it is harder for them to change behaviours.

There may be space for TMC to enhance the workshop content so that it more effectively 'creat[es] sustainable, long-term impact' on participants' abilities to 'to discuss their emotions and masculinity with others' (Program Documentation, Program Overview). We discuss this further below in 'Suggestions for Future Delivery'.

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Gender transformative approaches

The workshop appears to challenge masculine norms that lead to negative mental health outcomes for men and boys

TMC's program challenges social norms that suggest men and boys should be strong and stoic, should not show emotion, should not talk to friends or others, and should not seek help for their problems. Adherence to these expectations is associated with poorer mental health outcomes and lower help-seeking behaviours among men (Herreen et al. 2021).

TMC uses feminist narratives to attempt to shift participants' attitudes around mental health and emotional openness. In focus groups, some TMC participants reported a subtle shift in their approach to their own mental health:

> *"I don't think Man Cave necessarily helped [my anxiety], but I guess because I have told a room full of people about my mental health problems, like, I felt more comfortable opening up to a psychologist or a doctor."*
> *(Focus group)*

Survey data supported this finding. Paired samples t-tests were conducted in order to assess changes in conformity to the norm of 'Emotional Control' across time (time 1 vs. time 2 vs. time 3) (see Figure 2). The t-tests showed that there was a significant decrease in emotional control scores from time 1 (M=3.33, SD=0.73) to time 2 (M=2.94, SD=0.65; $t(11) = 2.76$, $p=.019$ (two-tailed)). That is, participants appeared to reduce their tendency to hide their emotions from others. However, there was no significant difference between time 1 and time 3 scores ($p > .05$). This may be because there was a large proportion of participant drop-out across time, losing those participants who improved in their emotional sharing.

Figure 2: Conformity to the norm of 'Emotional Control'
(1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree)

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There was no significant difference in Life Orientation Test scores between time 1 and time 2, or between time 1 and time 3. This suggests that the program may have had little effect on the optimism levels of those participating in the program. However, as above, it should be noted that the extended COVID-19 lockdowns in Victoria at the time of the survey being administered likely impacted on levels of optimism. Similarly, paired samples t-tests showed there was a significant increase in depression from time 1 (M=3.82. SD=3.22) to time 2 (M=7.73, SD=5.33; t(10) = -2.81, p=.018 (two-tailed)); and in anxiety from time 1 (M=5.5. SD=4.17) to time 2 (M=9.3, SD=3.86; t(9) = -2.74, p=.023 (two-tailed)). There was no significant difference in depression or anxiety between time 1 and time 3 (p >.05). Again, this finding needs to be tempered and considered with caution. As noted, there was participant drop-out that could affect these scores, especially for time 3. More saliently, there were strong reports of higher levels of mental distress in the Victorian population due to COVID-19, with Melbourne entering lockdown before survey time 3.

Tackling broader gender inequalities and norms of masculinity
Norms of masculinity will not change substantially if broader gender inequalities such as gendered violence and wage inequalities are not also addressed. Focus group data indicated that some participants have a basic grasp of the importance of dismantling wider gendered structures, particularly in terms of the benefits for men:

"[Reading prompt] '"If we don't change our ideas about masculinity then as a society we will not..." Evolve. ... So, for example, the fact that women weren't able to vote and if they had never changed that, it would be very different to how it is now. So like with masculinity, I think it's important to say like, yeah, "we just need to be able to be open minded about this."
(Focus group)

However, often participants also conveyed limited understandings of gender, and of feminism in particular:

Participant 1: I think these days that like it's good to be a feminist and everything, but some people just take it too far, like the small minority, like not anyone I know, but just like that stereotype of mostly women, like just thinking everything a male says is toxic and that sort of stuff. And then it's put on to other males who aren't toxic. Just like, kind of, not taking it seriously.
[...]
Participant 2: Yeah. And... I'd say there's an equal amount of cases of men wrongdoing women and vice versa, women wrongdoing men. I feel like the male, when he's wrong done, doesn't really get the amount of sympathy that a girl would get.

When prompted, some participants acknowledged the broader impact gender inequality can have on women and people of diverse genders:

Participant 1: If we don't change then men will always be viewed the same, and people won't view them in the way that they actually do need help sometimes.
Interviewer: And what are some other consequences outside of the mental health stuff?
Participant 1: I'm not too sure.
Participant 2: They could take it out on other people around them and that'll affect them, and they could end up doing the same to other people and it just expands.

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These quotes indicate that some – though not all – participants can be open to exploring broader gendered inequalities and norms. Below (see 'Suggestions for future delivery'), we discuss how programs could integrate mechanisms for establishing participant knowledge and readiness to explore these issues at the beginning of sessions, and have adaptable content that focuses on tackling broader gendered inequalities where appropriate for a cohort.

These quotes also highlight that focusing predominantly on the norms that impact men's emotional openness could limit the space and time available for broader discussions of gender and gender inequality, which could be valuable content for those groups that are ready. One focus group commented:

"They could have talked more about treating women better, because I don't think that was really mentioned at all. And it's not like you have to ramble on about like all the stuff that people know, but like sometimes you could be like, even if it's harmless, like you could be being misogynistic without knowing it."
(Focus group)

In terms of the survey, paired samples t-tests showed there was no statistically significant difference between time 1 and time 2 (p >.05) or between time 1 and time 3 (p >.05) in conformity to the norms of: 'Winning'; 'Violence'; 'Heterosexual Self-Preservation'; 'Pursuit of Status'; 'Power over Women'; 'Self Reliance'; and 'Risk Taking'. Because we were unable to access additional school groups that could have acted as control or comparison groups, stronger claims of causation cannot necessarily be made. However, as above, the results of the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory showed a statistically significant decrease in conformity to the norm of Emotional Control, yet no associated changes in other norms. This supports the findings of the qualitative data, which shows that while TMC appears to be effective at changing participants' ability to be more open about their emotions and feelings, more could be done to tackle broader harmful norms of masculinity beyond emotional openness.

Furthermore, despite a possible improvement in knowledge about aggression and violence (reported above, see 'Changing attitudes/knowledge vs. changing behaviours'), paired samples t-tests showed there was no significant difference between time 1 and time 2 (p >.05) or between time 1 and time 3 (p >.05) in terms of knowledge about sexism. This supports the qualitative findings that while the workshop focused on – and appeared to have success with – increasing men's emotional openness, there was less emphasis given to broader knowledge or information about sexism. Again, challenging sexism and gender inequality more broadly will be an important part of shifting the norms that impact men's mental health.

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Suggestions for Future Delivery

Facilitation
A key principle of healthy masculinities programs is to 'meet participants where they're at'. It can be tempting for programs to draw on stereotypical ideas and jokes about gender, sexuality and women as a way to bond and connect with boys and men and meet them where they're at. However, we found that TMC facilitators do an excellent job of developing connections with participants through strategies such as sharing personal stories, humour, and ice-breaker techniques. Programs engaging with similar principles and strategies are unlikely to need to draw on stereotypical language, jokes or phrases to achieve connection with boys and men. Avoiding such language will help programs model healthy masculinities and will ensure programs avoid reproducing harmful norms of masculinity. Using inclusive language and techniques of connection is a particularly important consideration for programs given the likelihood of sexually and gender diverse participants in programs. Healthy masculinities programs should therefore consider implementing systematic approaches to ensuring they do not inadvertently re-inscribe harmful masculine norms.

Program content
Programs are likely to succeed when their content is based on research and evidence, and is delivered effectively, as in the case of TMC's program. Programs should also consider integrating mechanisms for establishing the existing level of knowledge at the beginning of a workshop, and developing adaptable content that can cater to multiple levels of prior knowledge and participant readiness. Differentiation – the process of adjusting content, process and product – is more readily associated with formal teaching, but is crucial to ensure that each participant can maximise the impact of the learning. For example, more advanced resources and activities on-hand for groups that demonstrate a pre-existing level of knowledge would be useful for programs, particularly as broader awareness in society about mental health and its connection to masculinity increases.

Changing behaviours, not just attitudes and knowledge
Healthy masculinities programs should consider integrating activities that equip participants with practical tools for enacting the skills and knowledge they acquire from programs. These skills could include overcoming the initial sense of awkwardness that participants from TMC programs described, as well as skills on how to be an effective and supportive listener. Doing so could increase the long-term efficacy of such programs, and may lead to sustainable changes in behaviour as well as attitudes (Grant 2017).

Gender transformative approaches
Norms of masculinity that require men to be strong and unfeeling come from a wider culture of gender inequality and adherence to strict roles and expectations for both men and women. Gendered inequalities go beyond stereotypes about men and women's emotions to problems like gendered and family violence; wage inequalities and gender-segregated workforces; and health outcomes and life expectancy. Harmful expectations around masculinity will not change unless these inequalities are also tackled, and people of all genders are afforded the same opportunities and safeties. Further, these harms will have greater chance of being diminished if interventions offer repeated exposure to ideas and are delivered over a much longer time frame than is currently common practice (Jewkes et al. 2015).

The evaluation data suggests there is room to include an emphasis in the program on broader aspects of gender inequality that go beyond men's emotions, and ability to open up and share with others. Tackling broader gendered norms can help to address gender inequality and norms of masculinity and femininity, which also need to shift in order to change the norms that specifically impact men's mental health. As noted by Grant (2017), 'interventions that encourage men to reflect on gender norms and roles have been proven to successfully spur critical thinking and encourage shifts in behaviour'.

Program length
While there is value in the full one-day workshop relative to the aims of the program, and in terms of the amount of content covered over the day, the research evidence indicates that multiple-session programs are more likely to achieve sustained desired outcomes. Regardless of length, the delivery of any healthy masculinities program will also require ongoing commitment to institutional change from the leadership of the setting in which the program is delivered.

3.2 Respectful Communities

Facilitation

Facilitators demonstrated a solid grasp of course content and delivered it in an engaging manner
The RC facilitators were heavily involved in researching and developing the program content. They demonstrated extensive knowledge on the topics of masculinity, gender diversity and gender-based violence and delivered this content in an engaging manner. The facilitators made a concerted effort to build rapport with participants and to create a safe space. They achieved this by collectively creating a set of 'ground rules' focused on respect, empathy and care, which the group revisited at the start of each workshop. The workshop activities were varied and highly participatory, including group discussions, quizzes, games, workbooks and a collaborative weekly task where participants developed a social media toolkit for use by the broader Monash University community.

Participants gave overwhelmingly positive feedback about the RC facilitators, particularly in regard to their approachability and ability to create a safe and open space for discussion:

"The facilitators did a great job. They were very respectful and very approachable."
(Interviewee)

"The space was really good because if you had any questions or if you needed to clarify anything you could just ask."
(Interviewee)

"The facilitation was extremely graceful and extremely sensitive. I really cannot think of a different word than graceful because it really does touch on the sensitivity, the lightness, the warmth that the facilitators put into it."
(Interviewee)

The emphasis from facilitators on personal storytelling also allowed participants to develop a deeper understanding of the program content and strong connections with one another:

> "A couple of us felt really comfortable sharing our experience and stories. And I think that really adds value. And what you learned from the program is through those personal stories as well."
> *(Interviewee)*

> "I feel like we did all connect, so that was good. Like I felt like I got to know the people in the group as well as I could."
> *(Interviewee)*

The use of a mixed-gender facilitation team was well received by participants and enhanced the content delivery
In line with the evidence review that informs RC's program design, a diverse facilitation team appeared to enhance the delivery of sessions. Our observations highlighted that the facilitators worked well as a team, were able to establish a good connection with participants from the outset, and built on this rapport across the program. The facilitators shared the delivery of session content and coordination of activities equally. Both were genuine and generous in sharing with the participants and in responding to the sharing of participants. Having a mixed-gender facilitation team allowed the facilitators to share different lived experiences, and the participants were enthusiastic and open in their engagement with both facilitators.

Our interview data indicates that the presence of a woman facilitator was seen as a positive, with one participant noting that it broadened the scope of voices in the space, leading to greater empathy and understanding:

> "I see things in a more open way and like, include more perspectives in my thinking. So like, definitely like a stronger empathy towards present women, but also women that [were] not there. People with diverse genders that [were] not there, but are potentially harmed or diminished by something."
> *(Interviewee)*

Effective structuring of sessions

Scaffolding learning across multiple, strategically planned sessions allowed for greater engagement and comprehension
Each workshop in the series was strategically designed to progressively build on participants' knowledge. Our observation data showed that by beginning with the content around masculinity – which resonated with participants' everyday experiences – the workshops established buy-in and then leveraged this to promote investment in seemingly more difficult discussions around violence and bystander responsibility. In doing so, the program was able to highlight the links between dominant masculine norms and gender-based violence and explore how this plays out – from obvious expressions of violence to the more subtle, everyday interactions. Each session started with a reflective exercise where the participants and facilitators talked about their experiences and thoughts about the program content from the previous week. This allowed participants to gradually build up their knowledge, but also to revisit and integrate past learnings across each week of the program to help solidify the key messages.

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The emphasis from facilitators on personal storytelling also allowed participants to develop a deeper understanding of the program content and strong connections with one another:

> *"The aspects that I liked the most of the workshops are their richness of content, the very inclusive and warm facilitation, the deeply personal nature of the stories I heard and shared."*
> **(Survey response)**

> *"Fifteen hours really allowed us to have a structure to look, like, every time at a different aspect of it … For example, they chose the social ecological model, which is something I'm familiar with, or the social constructivist perspective. I really love to see, like, applying to a concept like this. And I love the way that it unfolded the concept, like extremely well. And it allowed us to really dig super deep. I couldn't have imagined we could talk for so long."*
> **(Interviewee)**

> *"The idea of multiple masculinities was like, I don't know, something that was really cool. And just kind of like defining your own form of masculinity… and I guess just being however you want and you're still a man."*
> **(Interviewee)**

Preparedness of participants

Participants in the program were willing to and capable of engaging with content around masculinity and gender-based violence
In the gender transformative programming space there are concerns about men's discomfort with content that talks about the connection between masculinity and gender-based violence (Keddie & Bartel 2020). However, in line with O'Neil and colleagues' (2013) study of The Boys Forum, we found that participants in the RC program wanted to engage with critical thinking around masculinity.

This is perhaps because most participants had a relatively strong foundational understanding of the topic prior to attending the workshop. In the pre-survey, all six participants agreed or strongly agreed that they felt confident in being able to promote gender equality. One participant even had experience facilitating gendered violence prevention programs:

> *"I sorta knew a lot of it going in, in a sense, like I work in the space. So like I did, I facilitate [similar programs] at the moment. So a lot of the information was just a reiteration of it."*
> **(Interviewee)**

However, even those who held what might be considered 'problematic' views before completing the program responded well to the content:

> *"Realistically before that program, I would have said something like, "not all men", you know, that kind of first position of, "I know that I'm a good guy and that I'd never do something like that and that, you know, I stand up". But you're not standing up if you say "not all men". So I dunno, I think that kind of program was a really good basis to shift that mindset, to really take ownership, even if you haven't done anything wrong, realistically, you know, there's more that you can do."*
> **(Interviewee)**

Gender transformative approaches

The program effectively integrated content around practical skills for the promotion of gender equality
Gender transformative programs that include practical tools to recognise and respond to problematic behaviours have been shown to effectively increase positive bystander behaviours, and in turn lead to lower perpetration of abuse (Miller et al. 2016; Abebe et al. 2017). While it is not within the scope of this evaluation to measure abuse perpetration, our interview data suggests participants appreciated the active bystander content and the tools they were provided with to help them intervene in behaviours associated with gender inequality:

"Especially the active bystander week, I thought it was really important... I think it's easy to have that first step of like, not being ignorant, but doing something about that is just like totally different."
(Interviewee)

This aspect of the program was what stuck with participants six months later:

"The stuff about active bystander, I really, really enjoyed that. I think, you know, the tools about how to approach it. We had lots of discussions of, you know, "a lot of times this can be really uncomfortable", but how you approach it in an uncomfortable scenario, that was really stepped through, and we had lots of conversations about that."
(Interviewee)

Increased understanding of equality

The prevalence and impact of everyday sexism was a key learning of the program
In interviews, participants spoke about how the program demonstrated the prevalence and impact of everyday sexism:

"It helped me identify even the subtlest forms of misogyny in me and the experiences I go through everyday."
(Interviewee)

"My thinking has definitely changed... my friends would say downright sexist and misogynistic things and I wouldn't pull it up. I wouldn't give it any energy... the reaction would be very different [now]."
(Interviewee)

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In interviews held six months after the program, one participant told us that this attitudinal shift had been sustained in the long term:

> "The thing that has kind of held true for me throughout the whole time, is if you have an environment that says "it's okay for problematic forms to exist and to occur regularly", then that is the foundation for gender-based violence. And I think that was a bit of a light bulb moment for me. And then I think from that point, you look at it very differently. People say "oh, it's just a joke, don't worry", but no, if you allow that to slide then the next joke that's a little bit worse is going to be allowed, and then it's just a spiral from there. And it's easy not to say anything, but it's about the environment that you want to create."
> *(Interviewee)*

Participants did not always feel confident engaging in conversations about gender equality
Despite appreciating the practical tools they acquired through the program, the participants still found it difficult to intervene in certain conversations about gender. This was particularly the case when it came to challenging problematic views held by immediate or extended family:

> "My cousin's husband, he's on Facebook all the time and he just posts some cringe stuff and does a lot of comments as well like "aw, if the left wing get their way, then we're not going to be able to say anything anymore" kind of thing... It's like, I know you, but I don't know you that well to start a fight on Facebook, but also you suck [and] it's not so far away that I can completely detach from him."
> *(Interviewee)*

> "A couple of times with my girlfriend's dad, it's just a bit like, "ugh", you know, family dinner kind of environment, and it's like "uhhh", and usually she'll say something which is really good. So I'll kind of give her a bit of a look, and then she'll do it for me, which is great. But a couple of times, it just slides and ugh, I dunno, it's just so, I don't know."
> *(Interviewee)*

> "I've talked to my parents quite a bit, so they're very conservative and they're from a very different culture to how I grew up here, so there's a huge cultural barrier and a language barrier as well. So, for as long as I remember it's been sort of an uphill conversation with them about things in this area, especially in the queer space as well."
> *(Interviewee)*

Another barrier to engaging in conversations about gender equality is the likelihood that participants are already surrounded by like-minded people:

> "For myself, you know, I created an environment around me that is already more inclusive. So that's something that I was thinking like in the previous days, as in like, "how can I ever bring this message?" Because if I spread it around, the people around me, most of them are already aligned to this."
> *(Interviewee)*

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Suggestions for Future Delivery

Structure of sessions
The overall program time of 15 hours across 5 weeks is in line with literature that suggests more time for healthy masculinities programs is better. However, though the 3-hour time slots per session created space for complex content and in-depth discussions, an almost universal aspect of participant feedback in the qualitative surveys was that the 3-hour sessions were too long and therefore not conducive to sustained focus and engagement. This should be especially considered for sessions hosted online, and sessions may benefit from including more or longer breaks.

Participant preparedness
Programs could carefully consider whether to expand upon the target audience for their sessions. There is great value in working with participants who have pre-established knowledge. However, programs might also consider targeting and upskilling others who might be considered 'persuadables' – that is, people who are more ambivalent or even less knowledgeable about the issue of masculinity and gender equality, but may be open to supporting ideals of healthy masculinities (Flood 2020).

Bystander action
Participants in RC's program reported finding it difficult to speak up to challenge problematic ideas for discussion, particularly in the case of family members. Programs might consider building in tools and strategies to help participants have conversations with close family and friends about problematic gender norms, as this is likely to require different strategies to bystander action with strangers or more distant acquaintances. Program content could include exploration of the challenges of being a bystander in different settings, emphasising that the expectation is not to be an active bystander in all situations, but when the individual feels safe to do so. Resources such as VicHealth's (2019) 'Empowering Bystanders' would be useful to support this kind of content delivery.

Sustaining impact beyond program attendance
Programs with very engaged participants, as in RC's case for this evaluation, might consider upskilling participants in strategies for avoiding burnout and feelings of overwhelm in bystander action and advocacy work so that actions and learnings from programs can be implemented in a sustainable way. VicHealth's (2018) '(En)countering resistance', for example, provides useful strategies to illuminate the issue of 'backlash' responses to gender equality initiatives, and information on when and how best to respond. However, programs should consider the readiness of participants in each cohort to take on bystander or advocacy work. For some cohorts that are less familiar with healthy masculinities or gender transformative work, focusing on increasing knowledge and understanding may be a more suitable use of program time. Scaffolding program content to work up to bystander action may be another way programs can ensure sustainable work beyond the programs. Ensuring whole-of-organisation commitment and support to gender transformative work can also support sustainable gender transformative work, rather than relying solely on individual participants to become advocates without broader leadership and support.

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3.3 SALT - Sport and Life Training

As noted, we were unable to conduct all phases of data collection with SALT participants. The following findings are therefore based on the initial scoping meeting with the leadership team, two facilitator interviews and observations of SALT's program.

Selection and training of facilitators

Facilitators were experienced and knowledgeable, and spoke positively about the program
SALT facilitators bring a variety of professional skills with them, with the majority working primarily as teachers (mainly in physical education, health and psychology) and others with a variety of prior experience in facilitation. The majority deliver SALT sessions in addition to their full-time work commitments because of their belief in the programs and their love and understanding of sport:

> *"People are quite often at their best when they're playing sport as a team. They communicate, they show courage, they're resilient, all those wonderful things.*
> *[...] I think the boys understand when you promote all the positive things that they do on the field through their sport, it's not such a big jump to get them to consider why we can do that off the field as well."*
> *(Facilitator)*

SALT facilitators spoke positively about the organisation, and said they enjoy and get a lot out of their work:

> *"It is a very rewarding job to do. To hop in your car after you've run a session where [the participants] just opened up and, you know, they're crying or they're hugging. And that environment has changed forever now, because they've had this opportunity that I've presented them with and they've grasped it."*
> *(Facilitator)*

Likewise, observation data indicated that the facilitators are passionate about gender transformation and have a good grasp of the content they deliver. Despite working within the limited timeframe of a 60- to 90-minute session, they present the content in an engaging manner and make a concerted effort to build rapport with participants, particularly through humour.

Facilitators spoke positively about the 'learn through experience' approach to facilitator training. This includes a two-day 'train-the-trainer' session delivered by SALT's leadership team, and then co-delivery of one to two sessions with more experienced members of the team. Peer feedback processes are used to ensure that new facilitators are confident and capable of delivering solo sessions.

> *"Well, initially we learn the content. So we were given all the material required to deliver the sessions. And before you do present in front of clubs, you present in front of the full-time staff at SALT. So you're, it's a bit like a group interview. So you present in front of them."*
> *(Facilitator)*

> *"I put my hand up to do as many [co-facilitated sessions] as I could early on and to get a good understanding of the group of presentations that they do."*
> *(Facilitator)*

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Program design and delivery

Stakeholder buy-in is crucial for creating an environment conducive to success
Across the sessions observed, it became clear that club buy-in and support for delivery of the session is critical. In this environment, players take their lead from the adults/coaches/parents around them, and we witnessed this working for and against SALT.

In one example, support for the sessions was made clear, with the club President introducing the facilitator, requesting respect and participation from his club, and then actively taking part in the session and generally leading by example. This resulted in a very engaged and highly impactful session for the men in the room.

The opposite example was a session in which the facilitator was not introduced and was left to call the young men (aged 10-14 years) to attention on his own. The coach did not participate in the session, instead walking in and out of the room and at one point dragging furniture around the room, and parents arrived at the club rooms before the session had finished. The facilitator handled these distractions well, but the impact on the players was observed in slouched postures and a lack of engagement in the question and response aspects of the session. Facilitators need to be able to walk into a supportive environment in order to fully engage participants and successfully deliver key program messages.

SALT might consider as a precondition working with clubs that demonstrate visible and supportive leadership at all levels of the organisation. This could also be formally documented through, for example, a social compact, statement, or memorandum of understanding that documents a whole of club commitment to the intervention and to overcoming the negative outcomes that SALT's programs attempt to address.

Multiple session, longer-term programs are valuable for sustained success, alongside a commitment from clubs to provide ongoing support to players and reflect the messaging of the program in the club culture and structure
Initial sessions can provide a useful entry point for working with clubs, providing an introduction to the topics being covered, starting discussions amongst players and staff, and giving the clubs a taster for how the sessions can benefit the club. However, sessions like those delivered by SALT need to be accompanied by a commitment from clubs to provide ongoing support to players and reflect the messaging of the session in the club culture and structure. This is something SALT are trying to establish by assisting clubs to set up a support system for the players:

> *"SALT is starting to change, you know, to make clubs accountable. If they take on our programs, there's an expectation that we'll be there for two years and we'll see everyone, you know, through your age groups and we'll have these conversations. That it's not just a one-off session. We want to be a part of and support your club as much as we can."*
> *(Facilitator)*

Unless clubs demonstrate what changes they are making in terms of culture, policies, practices, and support for players both before and after SALT deliver their sessions, the ongoing impact of a one-off 60- to 90-minute session will be considerably limited.

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Timing and duration of sessions can increase effectiveness

Session timing and duration is one challenge faced by SALT. Facilitators only have 60- to 90-minutes to engage and motivate players, and this is usually at night after a training session (physical exertion) and a day at school or work (mental exertion). The reality of the sporting club setting means this is a logistical factor that is unlikely to change, and SALT needs to proactively manage the challenges of late-night sessions.

One way to manage this is by feeding the players. We observed sessions in which food was provided to players in between training and the SALT session. Provided it is managed by club leadership and separated from the SALT session, this seems pragmatic given the session is being run at dinner time, and after a physical training session. However, we witnessed this being managed well and not managed at all, with the latter resulting in a distraction the facilitator had to overcome to draw players' attention to him.

Another approach is to make the sessions more interactive. Most sessions begin with a quiz that players complete on their phone. This is anonymous and used as a starting point for discussion. From here, there is a mixture of presentation, videos and some call-and-response, but for the first half to two-thirds of the session, players remain in their seats. The sessions we observed had one interactive component where players had to get up and move around the room. More frequent interactive and physical activities like this, including from the start of the session, would be one way to help combat the timing of sessions and support players to engage after a full day.

Suggestions for Future Delivery

Establishing expectations and boundaries early on in the session

Creating a space where participants understand what is expected of them, and feel safe speaking honestly, would improve the quality of engagement and responses. This may also extend to club buy-in, and the importance discussed above of ensuring clubs create a supportive environment for the SALT sessions. Ways to create this safe space could include ensuring club backing, modelling from leadership, and ongoing commitments to culture change in organisations. Pre-planned agreements about how sessions will be facilitated and supported, for example by attendance of leaders and club staff where appropriate, may be of use here.

Paying attention to power dynamics

Having participants sit in rows and watch a standing presenter can create a dynamic that could limit open and honest communication about sensitive or controversial issues, meaning the facilitator is on the backfoot from the start. As above, interactive activities that get participants moving and/or sitting in circles may be more conducive to sharing and interacting and may also assist with participant engagement.

Paying attention to power dynamics

Encouraging participants to connect the content to their own experiences in a safe space might help to consolidate the material in participants' minds and open up space for more meaningful connections within the group.

Utilising a variety of facilitation techniques, including participatory activities

Warm up activities, games and small group discussions will keep energy levels high and allow less confident participants a chance to engage in a way that suits them. This is particularly pertinent given that SALT sessions are usually delivered at night, after a training session and after a full day at school or work. Although some sessions start with the quiz, an initial activity that gets participants out of their chairs and physically involved in the session could help support several of the recommendations listed above and help the young men to be present in the moment.

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Support and training for facilitators

Across the programs evaluated in this project, SALT is the only one that uses one facilitator per session. Utilising a team of facilitators may help support some of the recommendations listed above in relation to capturing and holding participants' attention. It may also provide a way to break free from the presenter-audience format. Ongoing or refresher training might also be considered. In addition to ensuring all facilitators are up to date with the latest statistics and any program changes, it could allow for the development of a community of practice amongst facilitators, encouraging peer-learning around overcoming barriers or challenges and sharing successful tactics and experiences.

Whole of club approach

As noted above, multiple-session programs that are embraced and reflected across all levels of the club are more likely to lead to long-term sustained change. Discussions with senior SALT staff and facilitator interviews indicate that these aspects are on the agenda for SALT. However, it is worth stressing that the impact of SALT's programs will be limited if coaches and other club leaders are not fully behind the aims of the session. As above, formal documentation of a whole of club commitment to the intervention could be achieved through, for example, a social compact, statement, or memorandum of understanding between the club and SALT prior to undertaking the work.

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4.0 Key Principles and Recommendations for Healthy Masculinities Programs

"...in-depth discussions and knowledge-building that promotes attitudinal shifts..."

In this section we provide overarching findings from the evaluation and suggestions for future delivery of programs in the healthy masculinities space. We offer recommendations for those looking to run healthy masculinities programs in the future, or those interested in enhancing healthy masculinities programs that they currently run.

The value of multiple, longer sessions

Our data aligns with research around the value of multiple sessions (see e.g. VicHealth's Masculinities and Health scoping review) and an overall longer programming time (see e.g. Promundo's review of two decades of evidence related to such programs). Longer and multiple sessions appear to provide the space for in-depth discussions and knowledge-building that promotes attitudinal shifts, as well as time for activities that equip participants with practical skills that could enhance their confidence to act and may lead to behavioural shifts. Initial sessions provide a useful introduction to issues surrounding masculinity and promote important discussions among peer groups. When implemented in environments that are already supportive of gender-equality messages, one-off sessions can result in profound disclosures and the development of networks of support among participants. However, they should be seen as a beginning rather than an end in themselves.

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Recommendation 1

Healthy masculinities programs should include multiple sessions and/or longer workshops of longer duration to support participant knowledge, confidence and skill building and increase program efficacy. While there is no definitive evidence on exactly how long programs should be, evidence suggests that repeated exposure to ideas over a longer period of time is beneficial, with some suggestions that 16 or more hours of program time is a good starting point (Ralph et al. 2020; Stewart et al. 2021)

Recommendation 2

Programs should integrate activities into sessions that equip participants with practical tools to enact the knowledge and skills they acquire from healthy masculinities programs.

Suggestions for Future Delivery

Effective facilitators are those who are well-trained, knowledgeable and passionate. Such attributes, as well as humour and personal storytelling, can underpin effective rapport building and create a safe space for open dialogue. Importantly, personal storytelling from facilitators – as well as encouraging participants to connect content to their personal lives – can help participants develop a deeper understanding of content. Training is important to ensure facilitators do not inadvertently reproduce harmful norms of masculinity when trying to bond with participants, for example using sexist or homophobic jokes. Programs should avoid the use of strategies such as identifying the group's 'alpha' (the seemingly most popular, respected or influential among participants) to promote broader engagement. Such strategies can also promote negative stereotypes about masculinity. Using inclusive language and techniques of connection instead will ensure programs consistently model healthy forms of masculinity. Establishing a set of rules collaboratively with participants at the start of healthy masculinities programs and workshops is another way to promote and practice values like empathy, respect and care.

Recommendation 3

Comprehensive facilitator training should be prioritised in healthy masculinities programs. Rather than relying on an individual's apparent inherent skills, facilitators should for example be adequately trained in how to build rapport, model vulnerability, and create a sense of cultural and emotional safety. Training in principles of gender equality and gender transformative work is particularly crucial. Refresher training is also appropriate.

Recommendation 4

Programs should consider the use of personal storytelling, humour, and inclusive communication as strategies to build rapport and encourage openness from participants. However, programs should avoid the use of stereotypical, casually sexist or homophobic jokes and language, as this reinforces the norms of masculinity programs are attempting to change.

Recommendation 5

Programs could prioritise strategies for actively including participants as active collaborators in the program, rather than as more passive recipients of the information being conveyed. This includes strategies such as establishing a set of group principles at the beginning of workshops, sitting participants in circles rather than rows, or incorporating activities that get participants moving around and interacting with one another and the facilitators.

Program design should account for different levels of existing knowledge

Effective facilitators are those who are well-trained, knowledgeable and passionate. Such attributes, as well as humour and personal storytelling, can underpin effective rapport building and create a safe space for open dialogue. Importantly, personal storytelling from facilitators – as well as encouraging participants to connect content to their personal lives – can help participants develop a deeper understanding of content. Training is important to ensure facilitators do not inadvertently reproduce harmful norms of masculinity when trying to bond with participants, for example using sexist or homophobic jokes. Programs should avoid the use of strategies such as identifying the group's 'alpha' (the seemingly most popular, respected or influential among participants) to promote broader engagement. Such strategies can also promote negative stereotypes about masculinity. Using inclusive language and techniques of connection instead will ensure programs consistently model healthy forms of masculinity. Establishing a set of rules collaboratively with participants at the start of healthy masculinities programs and workshops is another way to promote and practice values like empathy, respect and care.

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Recommendation 6

Programs should integrate mechanisms for establishing the existing level of participant knowledge at the beginning of a workshop or program, and develop adaptable content that can cater to multiple levels of prior knowledge and participant readiness.

Connecting content to participants' lives

A crucial aspect of the success of healthy masculinities programs appears to be connecting program content to participants' lives and experiences. This accords with research on engaging men and boys in violence prevention, where it has been found that successful strategies include encouraging men's reflection; allowing men to see themselves reflected in initiatives; building men's personal and emotional connections to the issue (for example through exposure to women's stories of experiencing violence); building empathy; and using positive messaging (Casey 2010; Our Watch 2019). As above, personal storytelling from facilitators – and encouraging participants to share their own stories where they feel safe to do so – is one possible way to achieve this more personal connection to program content in healthy masculinities programs.

Recommendation 7

Programs should strongly consider incorporating strategies that help participants connect the program content to their lives and experiences, such as sharing stories, building empathy and emotional connections to the issue, and helping participants see themselves reflected in initiatives.

Creating change requires a gender transformative approach

Programs focusing on mental health may have success in enhancing participants' understanding of harmful masculine norms that promote stoicism and repression of men's emotions. However, sustained and comprehensive change will require a broader gender transformative approach that takes into account the impact of broader masculine norms and of gender inequality. A gender transformative approach is one that 'seeks to challenge the causes of gender inequality and strengthen actions that support gender equality within a given context' (Varley & Rich 2019). A gender transformative approach also 'seek[s] to transform gender relations through critical reflection and questioning of individual attitudes, institutional practices and broader social norms that create and reinforce gender inequalities and vulnerabilities' (United Nations Population Fund & Promundo 2010: 14).

Gender inequality goes beyond stereotypes about men and women's emotions to problems like gendered and family violence, wage inequalities and gender-segregated workforces, health outcomes and life expectancy, and overall mental health and wellbeing. The harm that expectations around masculinity have on men will not be successfully addressed unless broader inequalities are also tackled, and people of all genders are afforded the same opportunity for success, safety and wellbeing. Programs could consider the guidelines set out by Varley and Rich (2019). Although these guidelines are related to gender and family violence prevention, they are instructive on how to implement gender transformative practices and lenses in broader work on healthy masculinities too.

Recommendation 8

Healthy masculinities programs should embed a gender transformative approach into their work in order to transform both the norms that affect men's mental health and emotions, and broader harmful norms that affect people of all genders.

Creating change requires a commitment to organisational learning and evaluation.

It has long been the case that 'there is a pervasive expectation that prevention or health promotion efforts will be complemented by examination of their effectiveness' (Flood 2013: 11). Over the last decade, evaluation has become widely understood as key to refining program delivery and improving outcomes in interventions aiming to challenge and transform harmful gendered attitudes and norms. Despite growing acceptance of its significant role in generating best evidence to underpin best practice, evaluation is not a fully embedded norm in the emerging field of healthy masculinities interventions (Ralph et al. 2020). Monitoring performance and refining programs is essential to achieving productive positive social change.

Recommendation 9

Organisations delivering healthy masculinities programs should aim to factor approximately 10% of their overall operating budget for evaluation. This will vary by size of organisation and complexity of programs, but this figure is a well-recognised 'rule of thumb' in the research evidence.

5.0 Lessons for Conducting Evaluations of Healthy Masculinities Programs

Reflecting on the evaluation, here we note a few key priorities for organisations and practitioners to consider in planning and designing future evaluations of healthy masculinities programs. Derived from our experience of undertaking this specific evaluation, these interrelated key principles are largely consistent with other reflections in the evaluation best practice literature. We recommend our reflections are read in conjunction with VicHealth's guide to evaluating primary prevention projects.

1. Stakeholder buy-in and clarification of roles and responsibilities

Optimally, organisations conducting healthy masculinities programs will play a key role in leading communications with stakeholders like teachers, club leadership, parents and so on, and helping evaluators to negotiate access to participants and program sessions. This can help ensure that evaluation is understood as a core part of – and not separate to – the business of delivering programs. Engagement of all stakeholders is critical for successfully evaluating healthy masculinities programs. Evaluators should ensure plans are in place for achieving buy-in from gatekeepers such as the institutions where programs are delivered (e.g., schools, sporting clubs, universities), program staff, and participants. Schools and sports clubs in particular present challenges for access and recruitment. Evaluators should incorporate time to develop relationships with school contacts, and in particular to gain ethics approval from the Department of Education where public schools are involved.

Evaluation teams and organisations conducting healthy masculinities programs also need to ensure expectations are negotiated with all stakeholders and confirmed at the outset of program delivery and that these expectations are revisited and potentially re-negotiated across the life of the evaluation. This includes communication of expectations with all relevant staff members across the organisational hierarchy to ensure that, for example, facilitators understand the importance of making time for data collection during the designated session. Optimally, evaluators will meet with and explain the evaluation process to front line staff like facilitators, as well as leadership teams prior to and during the research. In addition, the urgency and significance of the tasks related to the evaluation need to be regularly communicated by leadership and senior staff. This will ensure that all parties equally prioritise access and data collection.

Key to all of this is an understanding about what the partnership between all parties will look like and a clear agreement of the roles and responsibilities of all parties. This will include clarity about who is involved and when, time commitments, task allocation, lines of communication and contingency plans.

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2. Data collection

Related to the above, data collection is optimal when undertaken or at least supported by the presence of those undertaking the evaluation. The context of each program will require a particular approach – for example, in vulnerable or marginalised communities, having an evaluator present might not be appropriate. Alternatively, in some circumstances asking program staff/facilitators to disseminate surveys, for example, can reduce the response rate. For instance, in the present evaluation, in one setting where it was more practical to have the program staff distribute and encourage the filling out of surveys (because of COVID-19 movement restrictions), participants were reluctant to engage and this led to no data being collected. This was despite apparent significant buy-in from the stakeholders and leadership. With no corresponding data we can only speculate the cause for this lack of engagement when presented with the survey by a facilitator. We suggest, though, that this could occur as a result of a form of role strain. Given that facilitators are tasked first and foremost with delivering the program material in the allocated time, data collection might therefore be perceived as a secondary concern by both facilitator and participants. This is an example of where a purposely trained evaluator might have provided a better rate of data collection.

3. Gaining participant and/or parental consent

Another key challenge relates to gaining consent from program participants to be part of the evaluation data collection. Evaluators should consider whether they will use paper-based consent forms, verbal consent, or online consent forms. Online consent forms may be particularly important given the increasing prevalence of online delivery of programs. As well as participant consent, navigating parental consent for participants under 18 may be necessary in many cases. Parental consent can be difficult to acquire. We had best success with embedding parental consent forms into an online platform (the RedCap electronic data capture tools hosted at Monash University) that enabled parents to be sent a link that they could click on and sign on their mobile phones. Crucial to all of this is a clear understanding of who has responsibility for administering the consent collection process. This might vary but, for example, it can be smoother and faster at times for the organisations conducting healthy masculinities programs to be involved in obtaining participant consent if it involves negotiating with school and parents.

4. Multi- or mixed-method, tailored approaches

Mixed-methods approaches to evaluation are increasingly recognised as most suitable for the evaluation of complex community programs or interventions. While surveys can reveal overarching patterns and outcomes of programs, qualitative data collected through, for example, interviews or focus groups, can help gain insights into broader patterns and experiences of participants and stakeholders.

Methods should be carefully tailored in close consultation with programs to ensure they are suitable. This can also help with ensuring buy-in of stakeholders. While COVID-19 related lockdowns and restrictions made it infeasible to engage in a consistent longitudinal approach, we agree with the literature that emphasises the need to build in plans to evaluate both attitudinal and behaviour change at different time points. Ideally, this would mean collecting data from participants at 6, 9 or 12 months beyond the program delivery.

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5. Broader institutional challenges

While difficult to fully factor into evaluation planning, it is important to reflect on the ways that institutional cultures and norms can sometimes pose a challenge to effective behavioural and attitudinal change amongst participants. Established norms and performances of masculinity by stakeholders can contradict the messages of healthy masculinities that programs are trying to impart to participants. For instance, wanting to engage a healthy masculinities program does not preclude a sports club or educational setting from having pre-existing masculine hierarchies that rely on forms of dominance and a corresponding lack of care and empathy. Indeed, research shows that many organisations are rife with 'masculinity contests' that reward high degrees of individuality, a spirit of ruthless competition, poor work-life balance, endurance (through extremely long hours), and suppression of doubt or vulnerability (Glick et al. 2018). Such cultural norms will be a barrier to any program attempting to implement and sustain positive change with boys in men in the wider organisation. This highlights the significance of considering cultural norms as part of the evaluation equation.

6. Concluding remarks

At present there are a variety of health promotion/socio-ecological methodologies and approaches, in Australia and globally, that are deployed to educate men and boys (and in some cases people of other genders) and to encourage the uptake of positive or 'healthy' masculinities. While the evidence base is building, there remains a lack of robust, long-term evaluation data, especially in Australia (Ralph et al. 2020; Stewart et al. 2021). This makes identifying best practice difficult. As a means to contribute to the evidence base, the present study set out to evaluate three different programs aiming to foster healthier masculinities among differing cohorts of boys and men – in school, team sports, and university settings. The restrictions related to COVID-19 lockdowns and its associated impacts constrained both the delivery of the programs and the evaluation data collection – particularly for data that would permit a better understanding of the medium- to longer-term effectiveness of the programs. Nonetheless, what emerges in the data from across the three programs are a number of important lessons that can help refine the program delivery of the respective organisations. These lessons can benefit the design, implementation, delivery and ongoing refinement of other programs, both new and pre-existing, that are aimed at gender transformative work with men and boys in the pursuit of gender equality.

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