

## Core Principles for Engaging Men & Boys In Preventing Gender-Based Violence<sup>i</sup>

### Introduction

Over the past twenty-five years, there has been a tremendous growth in efforts to engage, mobilize and organize men and boys to prevent gender-based violence and/or promote gender equality. As these efforts have matured, significant lessons have been identified that can be used to influence the further development of these efforts, and the launching of new initiatives. In addition to the lessons that are being learned by these efforts, there is growing recognition and acknowledgement that in order to achieve the goals of preventing gender-based violence and achieving gender equality, men and boys must be actively involved. To the point that in 2017, the United National Human Rights Council<sup>ii</sup> passed a resolution outlining the State's responsibilities to support male engagement efforts and encourage active male participation in efforts to prevent gender-based violence and promote gender equality.

Part of the lessons that have been learned is that in order to be most effective and accountable, efforts to engage men and boys need to be grounded in certain principles. Without clear and explicit principles, the work to engage men and boys, while well intentioned, can often be counterproductive, if not harmful to the realization of the rights of all women and girls, by reinforcing traditional gender norms, paternalism, hetero-normativity, or other harmful beliefs which actually run contrary to the stated goals of male engagement efforts.

In *The Continuum of Male Engagement* (Funk, 2006/2018), I outline a conceptual model for effectively engaging men and boys. The premise of this model is that effectively engaging men a) focuses on those men, boys or groups of men or boys who are most willing and able to be involved in efforts to prevent gender-based violence or promote gender equality, and b) align the strategies and efforts to engage men and boys with the level of their readiness to be engaged. At the foundation of the Continuum are four core principles that have emerged from the global movement as the building blocks for efforts to engage, mobilize, and organize men and boys:

- Feminist informed
- Gender transformative practice
- Human Rights based
- Intersectional
- Accountable to women and girls

### Core Principles

Male engagement efforts need to be **feminist informed** -- meaning that efforts to engage and mobilize men and boys should be grounded in, and informed by, a feminist analysis of how unequal power dynamics lay at the core of gender-based violence. This analysis is that gender-based violence both results from and reinforces gender oppression and has a disproportionate impact on women and girls. A feminist analysis argues that a part of what maintains gender-based violence is the

existence and persistence of traditional gender roles which maintain unequal power dynamics between men and women (both individually and structurally). According to traditional gender roles, there are certain ways to behave “like a man” and different ways to behave “like a woman.” These traditional gender roles include norms, values, beliefs, and behaviors that reinforce male dominant and female subordinate positions. Men and boys are socialized to believe male dominance is their inherent right, which becomes the basis on which men choose to perpetrate violence and abuse. This dominance is often magnified by other social factors such as racism, homophobia, classism, etc.

A feminist analysis also exposes the ways that this dominance overall, and women’s subordinate position within this, becomes sexualized. The sexualized objectification of women and girls, and the normalizing of both women’s sexualized objectification and men’s sexualized objectifying contribute to a social environment in which men choose to perpetrate violence and abuse.

As such, preventing gender-based violence, means engaging in efforts to do more than stopping the violence or abuse, but working to challenge the norms that maintain these traditional roles, supporting men and boys to question their own power and privilege, and attempt to confront the structural and environmental factors that also contribute to gender-based violence.

There is increasing recognition amongst scholars and practitioners that acknowledging, addressing, and challenging gender norms is central to the work of engaging men.

These efforts need also be **gender transformative** – that is, creating spaces and opportunities in which men and women are able to critically examine and deconstruct gender norms, the gender binary, and gender expression by centering gender equality. Challenging the structures, beliefs, practices, and

institutions that sustain privileges and inequitable norms is essential. Gender transformative efforts engage in practices that encourage boys and men to become aware of how gender norms affect them and others, and take action to become genuine change agents for gender justice. The process of self-awareness, often intangible and tenuous, and constantly shifting, is a critical foundation for transformation.

Gupta (2000), suggests that engaging in gender transformative and gender empowering practices challenge and counter the underlying social inequity upon which gender-based violence is based. Utilizing a gender transformative approach involves engaging in critical reflection of how male human beings can experience and express their humanity (rather than their masculinity(ies), while supporting them to challenge the constraints of the gender binary, reflect on their own power and privilege and internalize the lessons they’re learning.

Effective male engagement efforts (both conceptually and practically) utilize an **intersectional approach**<sup>iii</sup>. Intersectionality, first brilliantly described by Kimberle Crenshaw (1993), centers the experiences and lives of African American, Latina, Asian, Native and Middle Eastern women, and suggests that we all exist at the intersections of multiple identities in the context of historic and

current oppression and privilege<sup>i</sup>. Intersectionality provides valuable insight and direction in effecting reaching out to and inviting men to organize against men's violence. Men and boys, like women, girls and people of diverse gender identities, exist at the intersections of multiple identities, in the context of oppression and privilege. Black, Latino, Asian, Native and Middle Eastern men and boys have a different experience of and relationship to gender-based violence from each other, and collectively from white males. Recognizing these differences is a crucial part of effectively reaching and engaging men (see, for example, Peretz, 2017).

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Male engagement and mobilization efforts are most effective when grounded in a **human rights framework** - recognizing the ways that gender-based violence is a violation of the fundamental human rights of women and girls. This analysis recognizes that it is the violence and threat of violence that inhibits women's and girl's ability to experience their full human rights and empowerment. Working to prevent gender-based violence from a human rights framework also means working in ways that don't undermine other human rights for women and girls, and without violating the human rights of men and boys. It also works beyond development projects and paradigms focused on counting how many men and boys or women and girls have been reached, to driving social change towards the wellbeing of all human beings. This may seem an obvious statement, but without clarity, it is easy to become moved into directions that may be (by intent or design) shame-based or which reinforce racist or other stereotypes.

Finally, any and all efforts to engage and mobilize men and boys must be **accountable to women and girls**.<sup>iv</sup> Being accountable to women and girls means centering women and girls in the efforts to engage men and boys, and ensuring the rights and empowerment of women and girls are advanced. It also means involving women and girls in leadership and creating structures and processes to ensure that women and girls are involved in decision making at all levels and holding other men and men's groups to account for their efforts and the impact of their efforts.

## Conclusion

Grounding efforts to engage men and boys in core philosophical and theoretical principles provides a necessary guide-post for doing this work in ways that will maximize the positive impact while minimize any negative consequences. Engaging men and boys is challenging work that provides ample opportunities to drift away from principles that are the foundation for effective and meaningful efforts. Having these principles clearly defined and stated, give community and campus-based efforts, and practitioners, a distinct advantage in moving forward.

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When combined with the Core Standards (available at <http://rusfunk.me/continuum-of-male-engagement>), efforts to engage, mobilize and organize men and boys are significantly more likely to be accountable and create meaningful change.

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This is provided as a service by Rus Funk Consulting, for more information about engaging men efforts, or to find out more about the consulting, training and technical assistance services available, visit <http://rusfunk.me>.

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<sup>i</sup> Global MenEngage Alliance, (2017). "Accelerating Efforts to Prevent Violence Against Women: Engaging Men and Boys in Preventing and Responding to Violence Against All Women and Girls" Policy Brief, Inputs to the 35<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations; and Human Rights Council of the United Nations (2018). *Review of promising practices and lessons learned, existing strategies and United Nations and other initiatives to engage men and boys in promoting and achieving gender equality, in the context of eliminating violence against women*.

<sup>ii</sup> Human rights Council of the United Nations (2017). Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 22 June 2017 35/10. *Accelerating efforts to eliminate violence against women: engaging men and boys in preventing and responding to violence against all women and girls*.

<sup>iii</sup> Dr. Crenshaw, and the vast majority of the theory and practice on intersectionality has been related to women's experiences. I acknowledge a bit of a conundrum in applying intersectional theory and practice to men. Even in efforts to apply intersectionality to engaging men and boys, the core of intersectionality of centering the lives and experiences of African American, Latina, Asian and Native women must continue.

<sup>iv</sup> For a further developed resources on men's accountability, go to [rusfunk.me/male-engagement](http://rusfunk.me/male-engagement) and look under resources.