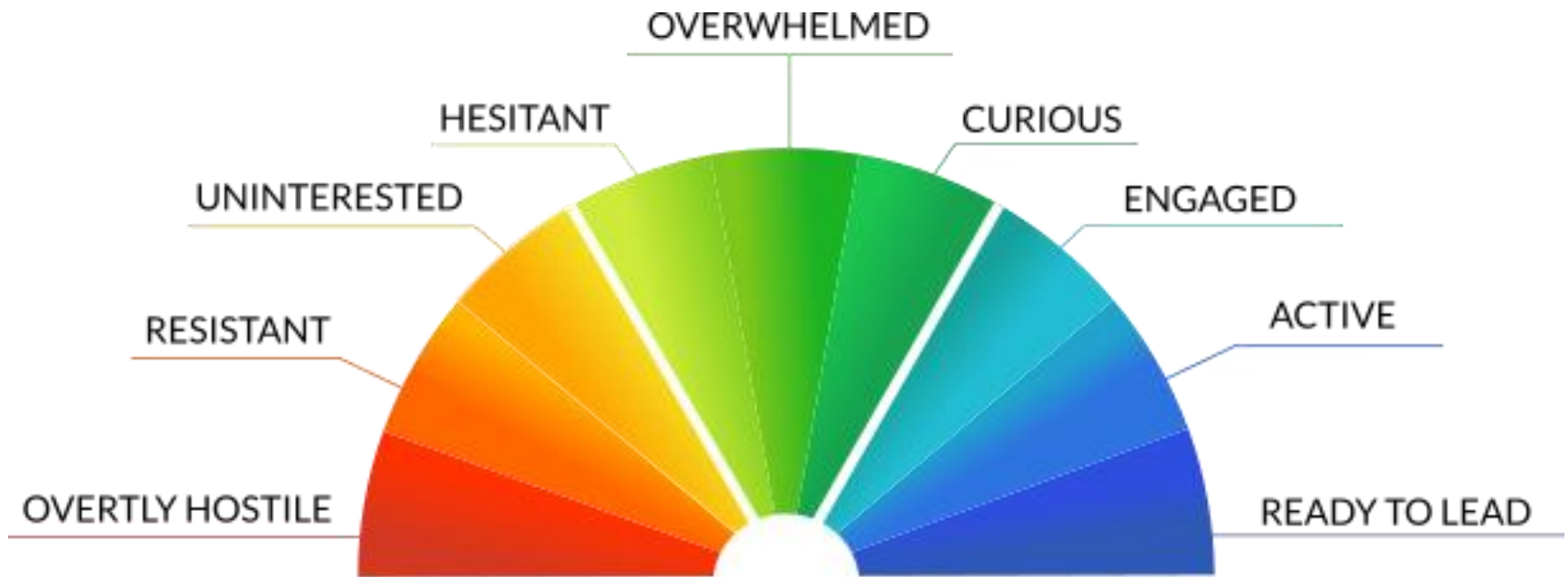


Continuum of Male Engagement



Background/Overview

The Continuum of Male Engagement was designed as a conceptual tool in the early 2000's and was formally published in 2005 in *Reaching Men: Strategies for Preventing Sexist Attitudes, Behaviors and Violence* (Jist Publications). It was conceived of and developed as a tool explicitly to support practitioners and organizers seeking to recruit, mobilize and organize men and boys in efforts to prevent gender-based violence, or to promote gender equality. There is a tendency amongst practitioners and organizations (both community- and campus-based) to launch efforts to engage “all men” in their community or on their campus. Not only is this an unrealistic and unattainable goal, but experience also suggests that when practitioners or organizations seek to engage “all” men, they tend to get distracted by those men who need to be convinced that a) gender-based violence is really an issue that can be prevented and/or b) that they (the men) have a responsibility to do anything. As a result, the focus becomes trying to convince men those men who don't understand, don't believe this is a “real” issue or don't believe men share any responsibility. Practitioners can then lose sight of those men who don't need to be convinced. Attempting to convince someone also has the inadvertent effect of reinforcing their defensiveness. Instead of being distracted by those men who need convincing, focusing on the men who *are* willing to be engaged (if practitioners come up with the right invitation). The continuum encourages practitioners and advocates to focus their energy and efforts on those tactics and strategies that align with where men are in terms of their readiness to be engaged. Educating men about the reality of gender-based violence or delegitimizing men who actively work to counter efforts to end gender-based violence or promote gender equality are different strategies and efforts than engaging men who are more ready to join these efforts.

The continuum is based on the premise that men vary in their readiness or willingness to be engaged. There are those men who are convinced that the issues of gender-based violence are over-blown by feminists “with a particular agenda.” There are also those men who perpetrate gender-based violence. There are men who are advancing a “men's rights” agenda who argue that women are as violent as men and that men are the “real victims.” There are men who might concede that gender-based violence is a significant issue but are convinced that it is only a handful of “sick” men who are the problem. While there are strategies and tactics that can be engaged with these groups of men, these efforts tend to be much more time and energy intensive, and much less effective than focusing efforts on those men who are more willing to be engaged. Again, the point is to align the efforts and identify the goals for engaging men with the degree of readiness or willingness.

Over the years, *The Continuum of Male Engagement* become widely used as a conceptual tool by practitioners and organizations as they developed their efforts to engage men.

Over the years, *The Continuum of Male Engagement* become widely used as a conceptual tool by practitioners and organizations as they developed their efforts to engage men. The focus of this tool has been on engaging men in ongoing, active efforts at the community or campus level. This tool is also useful when providing educational programs to men – with the goal of differently engaging men in those dialogues and conversations.

In regards to those men who *are* willing to be engaged, history and experience suggest that there are various levels of men's willingness to be engaged. Some men understand or recognize that gender-based violence is a significant issue but are hesitant to get involved. Other

men want to do something but become quickly overwhelmed at the enormity of the problem and the limited impact of what they believe they are able to do. Still others fully agree with the women's human rights agenda but are too busy with their own lives and already defined commitments to focus their time or energy on this. Each of these levels represent different groups of men who, while willing to be engaged, deserve different tactics, supports and efforts in order for them to become involved.

Each level has a set of corresponding tactics or strategies that have been found to be most useful. The tool helps practitioners to focus their efforts on the kinds of strategies or tactics that seem most useful in engaging men in a particular level. This is depicted as a continuum to suggest that men can move from one level of engagement to another. The main purpose of this tool is to clarify the goals and to help identify the strategies and tactics that best work with men we're seeking to engage.

While *one* goal is to deepen men's level of engagement, one of the lessons learned from the use of this tool is that it must *also* be okay for men to become involved at one level of engagement and remain involved at that level for some time before (or if) moving to another level. That is, if male student on your campus, or men in your community are "overcommitted," (a form of being "overwhelmed" as depicted in the continuum of male engagement) the goal should not necessarily be to support them to move to the next level, but rather to support them to stay engaged even while being "overcommitted." If men can find ways to integrate efforts to prevent gender-based violence or promote gender equality into the various commitments and activities that they are already engaged in, that is enough. That is, frankly, even fabulous!

Exploring Men's Hesitancy

"You Can't Engage Men by Trying to Change Men"

Men's hesitancy and lack of engagement has historically been interpreted to mean that men don't care about gender-based violence, gender equality or women's rights, and/or that we (as men) fear giving up male privilege or male entitlement. While these likely are a part of the reasons for men's hesitancy and historic (and current) lack of active engagement, these interpretations, I suggest, are only a part of the reasons for men's lack of involvement. If advocates and practitioners only attempt to engage men by developing initiatives and efforts that strive to reach through or past these defenses, we will only be partially effective. In order to increase the effectiveness of efforts to engage, mobilize, and organize men, advocates and activists need to more fully understand and be attentive to a wider of possible explanations for men's hesitancy to become active. *The Continuum of Men's Engagement* refers to some of these additional reasons to explain men's hesitancy, the relative lack of ability of efforts to effectively engage men, and suggests some strategies that can motivate and mobilize men.

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Men may be hesitant to get involved because they find gender based-violence so atrocious and disgusting as a topic that they want nothing to do with it – including becoming involved to prevent it. In their daily lives, most people avoid topics, situations or experiences that they define as atrocious, particularly if those topics also tend to be experienced as being inherently connected to a tidal wave of feelings (both in terms of the number and complexity of those feelings, and in terms of the depth of their feelings). Men may be hesitant because they honestly have no clue how to be involved. Men may be hesitant because they are overwhelmed at the enormity of the problem and underwhelmed at their perceived ability to have any meaningful impact. Men may be hesitant to become involved because they fear the implications of what being involved may mean for them. They may be hesitant because they have no image or model of what it means for a man to be active in efforts to prevent gender-based violence (for all the glamour attached to manhood and being a pioneer, most men – indeed most human beings – find stepping into a role of being a pioneer to be far beyond their interest, willingness, or comfort level). Men may be hesitant because they have some kind of history with gender-based violence and have never had the opportunity to attend to their feelings about this experience.

There are also some structural reasons why men, as a group, have tended to be hesitant to become active in these efforts:

- 1) Men and boys constitute a privileged population within our patriarchal system, so tend to be ignorant of the suffering that women and girls face and don't see their role there. Because they are often ignorant of this suffering, they rarely see the causes for the suffering and further, don't tend to see how they may contribute to and benefit from these causes.
- 2) As a group, men tend not to be supported to critically examine, nor do men feel comfortable talking about, giving up the privileges they enjoy – privileges that are directly related to the causes to the suffering of women and girls.
- 3) Gender as a subject of engagement has been historically been understood as only about women and girls, hence men and boys don't see themselves as being engaged in this directly.
- 4) As a result of this lack of perception of men as gendered beings, the conversations and actions around gender equality is usually negatively perceived.

This not meant to be an exhaustive list of the possible reasons (personal and structural) for men's hesitancy to become actively engaged. The point is to offer here that the reasons for men's lack of engagement are nuanced and complex. As long as the efforts to engage men remain based on an overly simplistic analysis of "we need to convince men to care", or that "these are their issue too", then advocates and practitioners miss a vast array of opportunities to effectively reach and connect with men (which is, after all, the first step of any form of engagement).

Uses of this Tool

The focus of this tool is to engage and mobilize men in ongoing, active efforts at the community or campus level.

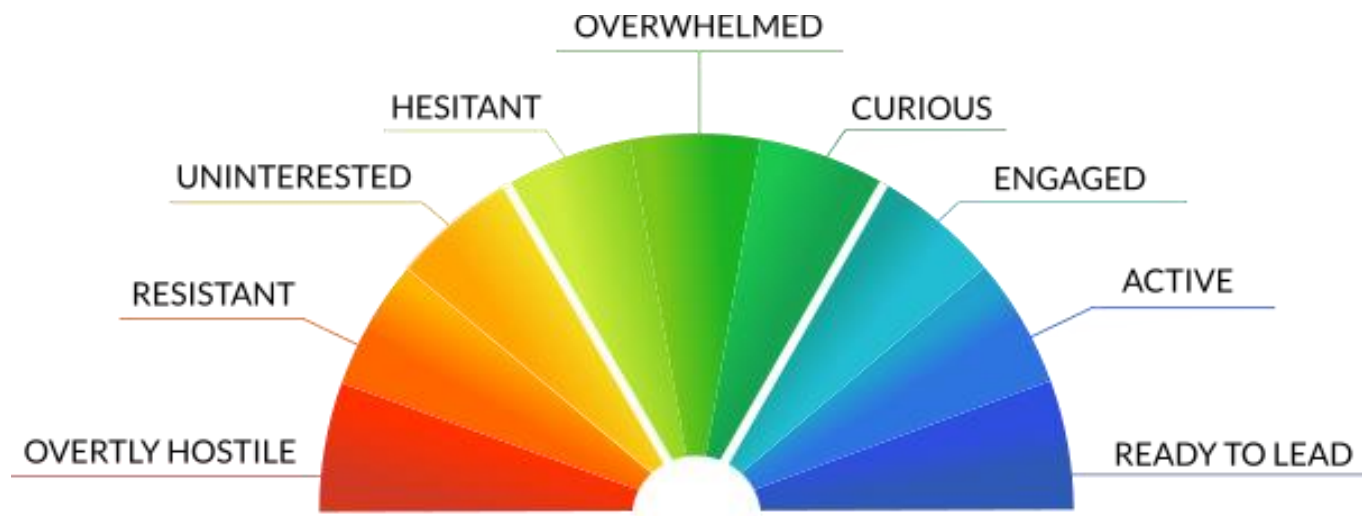
This tool is also useful when applied to educational workshops or presentations – thinking about ways to differently engage men as audience members.

This tool is useful to assess which of the resources that are currently available and how they can be utilized in terms of engaging men at different levels of readiness to be engaged, and how these resources can help to support moving men from one level of engagement to another (such as those offered by Men Can Stop Rape, A Call to Men, Promundo-US, Coaching Boys into Men, Mentors in Violence Prevention, etc.).

Once the continuum of male engagement is understood as a conceptual tool, then a community or campus-based effort can explore these tools and resources available and link them to what stage of engagement they best fit. Furthermore, the tool that is being used can be re-conceptualized to engage men at certain points and support them to making the next step in engagement.

Finally, this tool is also useful as the beginning of a theory of change for an engaging men initiative.

CONTINUUM OF MEN'S ENGAGEMENT



Description of Each Level

For the purposes of this guide, the levels on the far left of the continuum (Hostile, Resistant and Uninterested) will only be briefly touched on. Practitioners and organizations working to engage men are strongly encouraged to focus your efforts on between one and three levels of those men who are most engage-able. To reflect this, there are much more thorough descriptions of these levels.



OPPOSED

Overtly Hostile

Men who are “overtly hostile” are those who discount a feminist analysis of gender-based violence, actively work to down-play the reports of incidence or prevalence, and/or who argue that “women are as abusive as men.” These men tend not to be interested in a real conversation or in real solutions to prevent violence of any form (including the ways that gender-based violence is manifest even in their analysis).

Resistant

Men who are resistant, as Michael Flood and his colleagues have outlined (Flood et al, 2018), take a particular position to resist efforts towards gender equality or to prevent gender based-violence. They vary in the degree to which they are organized, but tend to be very consistent in their messages, their information and their arguments. Their resistance seems based on maintaining the current status of men’s “rightful” place as dominant to women. According to Flood and his colleagues, resistance takes common and identifiable forms:

- Denial (of the problem itself and/or of the case for social change)
- Disavowal (refusing to recognize responsibility – either individual or collective)
- Inaction (refusing to implement change initiative)
- Appeasement (placating or pacifying the change efforts in order to limit the impact)
- Appropriation (simulating change while covertly undermining it)
- Cooption (using the language of progressive framework and goals (such as “equality”, “rights”, “justice”, etc.) as a way of resisting change)
- Repression (Reversing or dismantling change efforts, initiatives or progress).

“Resistant men” tend to struggle with the issue and through their struggle, resist what they’re hearing. They tend to throw up defenses or make counter-arguments to the claims that seem self-evident.

(Flood, Dragiewicz & Pease, p. 5).

“Resistant men” tend to struggle with the issue and through their struggle, resist what they’re hearing. They tend to throw up defenses or make counter-arguments to the claims that seem self-evident. Men who resist efforts to become engaged are very consistent and persistent about their resistance. (For suggestions and strategies for countering or responding to resistant men, see Flood, Dragiewicz & Pease, 2018; and VicHealth, 2018).

As an example, several years ago I was being interviewed on a radio show. The host actively resisted the accuracy of the incidence of rape and sexual assault that I used. He attempted to divert the conversation about whether or not the incident of “one in three” was truly accurate, yet he continued with the conversation. It seemed apparent that he was reacting to this statistic thinking of his own life and what this statistic meant in terms of the number of women he loved who may have been sexually assaulted.

He was *resisting*, not hostile.

It’s important to acknowledge that while there are some men who actively resist efforts to be engaged, resistance is also a common part of men’s process of coming to terms with the impact, dynamics, and extent of gender-based violence. To some degree, resistance is a natural part of the process of coming to understand these issues. It is not uncommon for most of us to initially resist new knowledge or attitudes, particularly those that seem to counter long held beliefs. This is not to suggest that men believe in or support men’s violence, but we live in a culture that has systematically under-valued the experiences of women, men and trans people who have experienced gender-based violence, while normalizing and minimizing a many of the behaviors that are, in fact, violent and abusive. Men often have a history of lived experience of having their attitudes and beliefs about gender-based violence as normalized and reinforced. When learning new information about gender-based violence that challenges these attitudes and beliefs, resistance is a frequent response.

It is quite common for men to recognize themselves in regards to perpetrating or tolerating some of the sexist behaviors that are related to gender-based violence as they get introduced to the issues.

As such, it is important to distinguish between those men who are

- Resistant -- men who make a conscious decision to adhere to and promote anti-feminist beliefs, and engage in efforts to counter strategies to prevent gender-based violence or to promote gender equality;
- Resisting -- men who are experiencing a sense of personal and emotional discomfort in the process of adjusting to new norms, and or beginning to recognize his complicity in sexism, and/or learning new ways of behaving³.

For more about supporting men who are in the process of resisting, see below in the “General Notes” section.

³ Special thanks to Dr. Michael Flood for his assistance this section.

Uninterested

“Uninterested” as the name suggests are those who are simply (or complex-ly) not interested. They may or may not have any particular agenda or beliefs. They may or may not have any beliefs or attitudes that drive their reasons to be un-interested. They don’t seem to care and aren’t able to be moved by either data, moving stories, or fear. Perhaps a better term for this group is apathetic. There may be any number of reasons why this group of men are uninterested. Frankly, people have the right to not care.

There *are* ways to reach and respond to men who are hostile, resistant or uninterested. The ways to reach and the reasons to respond, however, are different than approaches to engage. The ways to reach out to and respond to men is explored in a 2nd manual and with other resources on my website.



INTERESTED

Hesitant

A lot of men are initially hesitant. For most men, seriously considering becoming involved in efforts to respond to or prevent gender-based violence triggers a lot of doubt and insecurity. Remember, few men know of any other men who have taken or are taking active steps in this way, so they aren't sure what it looks like to be a man who attends a Take Back the Night March. The hesitancy may also involve some concern or question about how the men in their peer networks will respond to their being involved. Since most men do not have role models of other men being involved, how do they know that the men they hang out with – their peers, neighbors, friends, and family – will support them if they show up?

They also likely have developed some picture in their head about how women might respond to their involvement. Many men assume that women will judge them if they become engaged. The MeToo Movement has complicated this. The MeToo Movement appears to have positioned a much larger swath of men as being more willing to become engaged, but also hesitant for fear that something in their past may be uncovered or exposed⁴.

It is quite common for men to recognize themselves in regards to perpetrating or tolerating some of the sexist behaviors that are related to gender-based violence as they get introduced to the issues. We know, for example, that many women (and some men) do not initially recognize what they experienced as forms of gender-based violence, but after some initial conversations or education or invitations to be more deeply engaged in preventing gender-based violence, come to recognize what they experienced as abuse or violence. The parallel is often also true for men. That is, they begin to understand gender-based violence as it tends to get played out and have some initial thoughts something like “Wait what!?! If what you're describing is rape, then maybe the sex that I thought was consensual last week (month, year...) was not consensual, maybe I raped her/him.”

Engaging hesitant men means that first and foremost, pay attention to your willingness and ability to connect with men who present as hesitant (your willingness and ability to be patient, understanding, compassionate, curious, and relentlessly engaging). They are likely to

⁴ This is in no way meant to be critical of the MeToo Movement. Rather to point out that this is a perception that men have and one that practitioners would be right to take into account in planning and implementing engagement initiatives.

ask some pretty basic questions and may well do so in ways that are challenging or confrontational. It's important to recognize his questions or exploration as his attempts to better understand. His hesitancy may well be interfering with how he inquires.

Generally, men who are hesitant tend to be best engaged in small group conversations and efforts. You may well identify a man or small group of men who appear "hesitant" in a large group presentation or event (for example, the man who hangs right at the edge of an information table or who circles back without asking questions), but actively engaging men who appear hesitant means talking with them in ways to explore their hesitancy further.

Men who appear hesitant are likely responsive to a relatively easy point of entry – not a task that requires a lot of effort, demanding much thought or analysis (or generating thought or analysis), or which expects much self-reflection. They may also be looking for something very specific that they are struggling with and may be seeking or exploring for support. Men who are friends or loved ones of women or men who have been harmed, as well as men who have been close with men who have been accused, are likely in this category. They present as hesitant due to having a range of strong emotions and unresolved (in many cases, even unattended to) feelings connected with the issue. They are drawn to do *something* but inherently realize that doing something will likely bring to the surface these feelings that they may have buried.

Advocates and practitioners need to develop the capacities to listen and analyze both what is and what is not being said, most importantly, need to develop and express patience. Men who are hesitant are going to want and deserve a significant degree of support. These men tend to respond well to engagement efforts that strategies that explicitly focus on developing an arena of "male peer support" – that is developing a social support network for them as they explore their willingness to become further engaged. Some men who are hesitant may respond to an initial "class" (such as a 3 – 5 session class on moving from bystander to ally). Others will who are hesitant will respond better to an opportunity to get involved in some kind of effort (for example, fundraiser for the local domestic violence shelter) but that entree activity needs to also include concrete efforts to help develop a sense of peer group amongst the men organizing this fundraiser.

Overwhelmed

Men who are overwhelmed are in an interesting and somewhat perplexing position. This category is meant to describe those men who would be, all other things being equal, ready to be engaged in some kind of concrete efforts. For the purposes of this continuum, it is assumed that the category of overwhelmed men is not referring to men who are hostile and also overwhelmed, for example. Rather, it is those men in communities or on campuses who all available evidence and experience suggests that they are likely candidates to be involved in this kind of effort or some kind of men's initiative.

There are a lot of reasons for men to be overwhelmed by the notion of becoming involved in efforts to prevent gender-based violence.

- The emotions attached to rape, domestic or dating violence, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, etc. are intense and for many people overwhelming;

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- The incidence and prevalence of gender-based violence firmly locates these issues as “overwhelming” in scope – the enormity of the problem is too much for some folks to grasp;
- Similarly, preventing something that is overwhelming can seem impossible and in and of itself, overwhelming;
- Men, wherever their point of entrée in becoming engaged, may enter a period of being overwhelmed as they begin to better understand the issues, dynamics and complexity;
- Finally, some men are “over committed” (I hate to use this term as it’s such a judgement) in their own lives. This can be readily seen on many college campuses – the male students who most readily sign on to be active in some kind of initiative to prevent gender-based violence are often the same students who are involved in a whole host of other issues and efforts. For men in the community, this can look like the realities of many men: they’re parents, their involved in their children’s school or are coaches to their children’s teams, their active in their faith communities, they have jobs, their involved in their neighborhood association...

Effectively working to engage men who are feeling overwhelmed means beginning by honoring that they are feeling overwhelmed. Gender-based violence is an overwhelming topic. Even for those who have been active and engaged for a long-time struggle with getting their heads and hearts fully around the enormity and depth of the problem.

Furthermore, a lot of men who are likely to be engage-able are also men who have loved or cared for women or men who have been victimized by some of the forms of gender-based violence. Basic statistics reinforce this idea -- If one in three women are raped in their lifetime, one in four women experience domestic violence, and one in seven men are raped, then how many men love women or men who have been harmed? There are a lot of men who both have very personal reasons for becoming engaged, but also have deep (dare we say overwhelming) wounds related to these topics. Adding to this dynamic is recognizing what we know about how males are socialized in the US. Few of the men who love women or men who have been victimized have been provided with the support and attention they deserve to make sense out of what their loved one was put through. This *IS* overwhelming. Perhaps some of the reason that men avoid workshops or presentations or invitations to get more involved has more to do with avoiding these unresolved feelings than it has to do with avoiding their responsibility to be part of the solution.

One promising engagement strategy is to shift from attempting to engage men to prevent something they find atrocious to attempting to engage them in something they find fulfilling and hopeful. Rather than engaging men to prevent rape or domestic violence, engaging them to promote gender equality or equitable relationships.

Many men have a lot of commitments in their lives. Using myself as an example, I have a demanding job that I love, I am active in my church, I have a partner and a child who I love spending time with, I’m involved in my child’s school, and I have other volunteer interests. There are often days that I am going full speed from the time I get up in the morning until I collapse in bed. Asking me to do one more thing is only going to frustrate both me and you, even if (perhaps

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particularly if) I completely agree at how important whatever it is that you're asking me to do. Rather than trying to convince men who are overwhelmed with their already busy lives that they need to adjust their priorities, effectively engaging these men might focus on how they could integrate some kind of efforts to prevent gender-based violence or promote gender equality into their already full lives. To use me as an example, there are ways to integrate this work into how I support my child (as a coach, on the PTA, etc.) or as a part of my work in my church.

Men who are overwhelmed due to the enormity of the problem can be engaged by exploring how they might take “bite-size” efforts. The other side of feeling overwhelmed by the enormity is often a sense of inadequacy – so supporting men who are overwhelmed with the enormity of the problem by focusing on what it is that they *can* do that has meaningful impact is an important strategy. Be mindful that these are not the men to engage by doing “busy work.” If what they're being invited to engage in doesn't seem to them to have meaningful impact, your engagement efforts will likely be unsuccessful.

Providing a list of relatively easy do-able action suggestions for men who are overwhelmed: Can you wear a T-shirt proclaiming your position as a man against gender-based violence a day a month? Can you invite five friends to also wear the same t-shirt on the same day? Can you ask your business as a part of dress-down days, or to offer this T-shirt for men? Can you have some friends over to design a T-shirt?

Curious

Many men become curious about the issues, about exploring the degree to which prevention is possible, and/or what it might be like to be involved, as a man, in efforts to prevent gender-based violence or promote gender equality. This curiosity, of course, may come out in any number of ways – some of which may not look like being curious. But men who are curious will likely continue to ask questions, or stay “in the room,” or will demonstrate through facial expressions and body behavior that they are interested about what this might mean for them. This may be quite frustrating as they ask what seem like basic questions or re-ask questions that you feel like you have already answered. The fact that they are staying in the conversation to continue to ask questions, even when these are frustrating questions, can (and should) be taking as a sign of the potential to engage these men.

For example, men may well have a question about why women wear what women wear. They may ask it in ways that seem victim-blaming, such as “I understand what you're saying that women don't ever deserve to be treated like this. But if women don't want men's attention why do they sometimes wear such short shorts or their top plunging down to their navel?” While there are some victim-blaming elements in this question, there is also a real question that is being asked. A question that is fairly easy to answer in a way that acknowledges the question while also dismissing the victim-blaming aspects:

“It seems the height of arrogance and entitlement for me, as a man, to believe that a woman makes her choices about what to wear based on the possibility that she may randomly run into me in the street, workplace, or classroom?”

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They also are often curious about a lot – not just the topic. They may express their curiosity in one direction or another, but it's safe to assume that they are curious about many different aspects: the form of violence or abuse, prevention efforts, what it means to be “engaged”, what it means to be a man who is engaged -- and there is nothing wrong in this approach of being curious. Practitioners are encouraged to have trust in people -- that they will make the connections as they start working and engaging themselves on the issues.

It's important to also point out that some of men's curiosity (which is, an intellectual exercise) may well be an effort to avoid the emotionally challenging content. “Intellectualizing” is a fairly common behavior that people use to avoid feeling emotions that are too challenging or strong for them to know how to experience and express. A part of the frustration that practitioners and advocates may experience is attempting to emotionally connect with someone who is intellectualizing his curiosity.

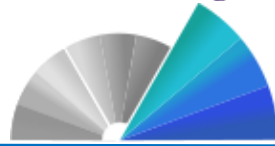
Engaging men who are curious involves answering their questions in ways that draw them towards some level of engagement or involvement. It's safe to assume that men who are curious are, at least in part, seeking ways to be more involved. They don't want to just know more or understand better in order to know more or understand better, they want to know more in order to do more. Practitioners and advocates who respond to curious men assuming that their curiosity can be a driving force for becoming involved and engaged, are both less likely to get frustrated with men's curiosity and their questions *and* more effectively engage curious men (even those curious men who do only have an intellectual curiosity).

Engaging curious men means providing them opportunities to do more as they know more, as well as inviting them to do more as a way for them to understand better. For example, a men's initiative in Dallas hosts a monthly “mentor” effort to bring men from the community into the domestic violence shelter to spend an afternoon. This is one possible engagement invitation for men in the community who are curious about domestic violence, the impact of domestic violence on kids, how men can be meaningfully involved, etc.

For men who seem to be using curiosity to avoid feeling the feelings, labelling that there are often a lot of emotions attached to thinking about and being involved in efforts to prevent gender-based violence, working to create space where it is encouraged and supported for men to feel and express these emotions, and encouraging the development of male peer support networks are all effective strategies.

In short, with men who are curious, practitioners and advocates can:

- Engage their curiosity
- Be patient
- Listen, respond and listen some more
- Provide opportunities for them to explore their curiosity by doing something



INVOLVED

Seeking Direction

Men who are seeking direction have already come to recognize (at least to some degree) that gender-based violence is a “real issue” that warrants their involvement. However, they don’t know what they could possibly do. Men who are at this level respond particularly well to invitations to be engaged in short-term, concrete kinds of efforts. In doing so, it tends to be more effective to involve these men in the actual planning of the event or activity that they’re invited to participate in.

Engaging active men, then, focuses on providing some parameters around what it is that they can do, but also trusting and allowing them to come up with the what that they are doing.

For example, for several years in Louisville, KY, the men’s group help to organize a Mother’s Day Breakfast for the women in the domestic violence shelter. While the men in the group had the skeleton of this event framed out, men in the community were invited to participate in the actual planning: what day will this be scheduled for, what’s on the menu, how to transport the food to the shelter, how the men will clean up after themselves, managing the press, ensuring that the men who are coming to participate are not perpetrators of domestic violence whose wife or girlfriend is in the shelter, etc. Having men involved in the planning and in the process of answering these questions proved not be not only an incredibly rich educational opportunity, but also deepened their degree of commitment and engagement.

When engaging men who are seeking directly, then, provide them with opportunities to be involved in ways that:

- Are accessible – in terms of the time required (both time per day/week, and length of involvement), the confidence and skill-set necessary, and the goals of those opportunities;
- Are meaningful -- that is, where the involvement that they’re having has an understandably direct link to either preventing gender-based violence or promoting gender equality.
- Allows them to leave.

Active

Men who are active, as the title suggests, already understand the need, and have answered the call to do something. They may have some ideas of what to do, and in the early stages of their activity may want or need some support to develop their understanding of how they

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can take action that will be most effective. Men who are active tend to be highly motivated to do something, and often begin taking action as the ideas emerge. At times, they need and deserve some support to set clear goals of what they want to achieve, and what they can do to best reach those goals.

While forming MensWork (an independent community-based organization in Louisville, KY that existed from 2003 – 2015) several of the early leaders wanted to produce and provide materials for women about how women can keep themselves safe – “from a man’s point of view.” These men did not need to be educated or convinced that rape and sexual assault are “real issues” nor did they need to be actively recruited to do something to end it. They needed some clarity about what men’s roles are in terms of preventing gender -based violence (and telling women what they should or should not do is decidedly NOT one of the roles for men).

Engaging active men, then, focuses on providing some parameters around what it is that they can do, but also trusting and allowing them to come up with the what that they are doing.

The above example is an argument for the value of mentoring as a part of the engaging process, both for men who are active and for men who are becoming more active. As men become more deeply engaged and active, it is critical to ensure there are supports around them as they begin to enter into the complexities of the issues related to gender-based violence and gender equality. This work is quite daunting and emotional, hence need to be prepared.

Ready to Lead

There are men who may have been involved for some time, or maybe come into the work already ready to lead. These men primarily are needing and seeking some leadership development support. Leading here, is different than doing it (whatever the “it” is). Leadership in terms of preventing gender-based violence or promoting gender equality, is best understood as a collective effort. This is not the kind of leading that most folks are most familiar with: *the* team captain, *the* general or captain, *the* person in charge. Rather, leadership in these kinds of efforts recognizes that there is always a group of folks who work together in order to achieve any goals or make any progress. Part of supporting men who are ready to lead is developing with them a sense of working collaboratively with others. Providing examples, and information about how to lead as a part of a collective rather than leading to take charge. The North American MenEngage Network (<https://namen.menengage.org>) and the Global MenEngage Alliance (<https://menengage.org>) both have information and resources available to assist with this kind of information.

Leading involves not only taking part in leading efforts, activities, or initiatives, but also involves supporting others to join in the leading. There’s an old phrase from community organizing – “the best leadership happens from behind.” What this statement refers to is the role within leadership of doing it in a way that propels others forward. Providing men who are ready to lead community or campus-based efforts to prevent gender-based violence or promote gender equality support to understand and develop their skills in this regard.

Men who are ready to lead also often need and deserve some support around what it looks like for men to be in leadership, which is also accountable to women's leadership. There are already women leading efforts to prevent gender -based violence and/or promote gender equality. This is not an invitation for men to come in and take over. Men's leadership development, in this arena, is accepting leadership in terms of helping to organize efforts and support the leadership of the next generation of men while being responsive to and supportive of the women's leadership that already exists. Part of men being ready to lead is learning how to promote women's leadership and be accountable to women's efforts on the community or campus level, in the process of leading.

Identifying Priority Groups

One of the outcomes of exploring the *Continuum of Male Engagement* is the opportunity to identify some which men/groups of men a practitioner or initiative might prioritize for efforts to engage. Based on the continuum, practitioners and advocates can begin prioritizing which groups (at least conceptually) that they want to focus on in their engagement efforts. Campus or community-based efforts can use this opportunity to explore which fraternities, faith groups, barbershops, men's clubs, etc. might be most responsive to some engagement outreach.

Practitioners and advocates may also begin re-thinking the strategy of having "a" presentation to provide to all groups and create some tailoring of presentations to different groups or audiences based on their degree of readiness to be engaged.

The following worksheet is a tool that can assist in the process, and support campus or community-based efforts to better consider and which groups of men to focus on in these engagement efforts. Beginning with identifying the groups or populations of men that is targeted for being engaged, practitioners can identify what work this group has done in the past to either prevent violence or promote equality, and the level of perceived support of this group to the efforts on campus or in the community to engage men. While listing the level of perceived support, be sure to include what evidence is being used to assess or identify that level of support – for example, a fraternity regularly mobilizes to attend the Take Back the Night Rally is evidence that this fraternity is supportive and can be approached to a deeper level of engagement or perhaps to take on some leadership on the campus.

"Feasibility" refers to how realistic or achievable efforts to engage them may be. For example, referring to the fraternity above, feasibility would refer to what kind of contact or relationship a campus-based initiative might have with them. If a group seems to have a high degree of support, but there's not relationship, then feasibility is rather low. Responsiveness refers to how responsive this group is to invitations to become engaged, and engage-ability refers to the outcome of these efforts. Are they becoming engaged?

This tool is available for you to use and adapt as needed, in your ongoing efforts to engage men.

Identifying Priority Groups for Engaging Men in Preventing Gender-Based Violence⁵

Group/Population	Work done to prevent violence or promote equality	Level of Perceived Support	Feasibility	Responsiveness	Engage-ability

⁵ Adapted from “Conducting a Community Assessment” in *Engaging Men at the Community Level* (2008) The Acquire Project/Engender Health and Promundo.

General Notes

Once men become active and begin developing their analysis, many men begin to fully grasp the depth of the problem. In some cases they find some of the attitudes they have or behaviors they engage in to be problematic as well. As they begin to better understand the dynamics of sexism and gender-based violence, they may begin to see themselves as part of the problem and may begin to have feelings of self-disgust, anger, or loathing. Referring back to the quote at the beginning of the section examining men's hesitancy, "you can't engage men by trying to change men." While this is true, it is *also* true that one can't be engaged in working to prevent gender-based violence or promote gender equality without being fundamentally changed (perhaps replacing "changed" with "*improved*" would be more accurate). Advocates and practitioners working to engage men need to be prepared to support men as they become engaged through some of this change/improvement process. While it is not be your responsibility to provide the full array of support that men you're engaging need/deserve, it is your/our responsibility to ensure they have access to the supports they deserve. This is another reason to consider developing male peer social support as a part of your engagement strategies -- improving men's abilities, confidence, and comfort in supporting and caring for each other as they become more involved and active is way to deepen men's engagement and activism.

Having systems of support and encouragement is important as it provides a space where men can "vomit" their frustrations, anxieties, and fears, as necessary. One way is to create a peer group at the community level -- or project level, site, campus, etc. -- who can meet frequently (both formally and informally) and have a space for guidance and emotional support. If there are no such support mechanism, then it's quite likely that these men lose their interest in continuing their engagement on this issue. When it becomes too painful or difficult, men are likely to opt out. Providing necessary supports via mentors, a developed peer support network, or through other means helps men to find strategies to manage the pains that emerge from this kind of internal change process.

Supporting Men who are Resisting

Resisting change is a common phenomenon. Most people like the *idea* of change, but rarely actually like to change. It's common and natural that, in the process of engaging men in efforts to prevent gender-based violence or promote gender equity, men will experience episodic resistance. As described earlier, as men come to more deeply understand the dynamics of gender-based violence, various forms of sexism, the degrees to which they have been complicit with other men's violence or the environments that allow or encourage men's violence, the degree to which they have engaged in sexist or other kinds of abusive behaviors, etc. they will likely resist. Few men want to acknowledge the degree to which we (and I include myself in this) have engaged in behaviors that support other men's violence.

Resisting change is a common phenomenon. Most people like the *idea* of change, but rarely like to actually do so.

Understanding where the resistance comes from is one step in the process of supporting men *through* their resistance. Generally, resistance can be understood as an emotional response – typically connected to fear. Understanding this as an emotional response is critical in providing support to push through what they are resisting. When men resist, part of what motivates resistance is that their

privilege is being challenged. A purely logical response will likely not prove effective. Addressing men who are resisting requires utilizing a mixed strategy of information/knowledge and meeting them emotionally.

Part of the informative/knowledge-based response is to connect men's resistance to their privilege. Not in a directly confrontational way, but in a way that encourages them to recognize the degree to which their resistance is based on their privilege. Participation in a peer social support network where men can both express their resisting while also be supporting to move through their resisting is of great benefit. Some questions to consider asking men who are resisting include:

- What do they hope to accomplish by being involved in efforts to prevent/eliminate gender-based violence or promote gender equality and why?
- Why is their involvement important to them?
- If they were living in the world as a woman, with a 1 in 3 chance of being sexually assaulted, and a 1 in 3 chance of being beaten by the man she is in relationship with, a man she trusted. What would that be like? To live in that world of constant threat and/or reality of violence, from men?
- What would it be like to live in such a context in a world where men are in charge: financially, family, faith communities, government, education, etc? What would that be like?

In this context, then turn the conversation to being male allies, privileged allies. What are the privileges that men experience as a result of gender-based violence and gender inequality more broadly? How do men attend to these privileges? And to the concerns of those harmed by those privileges, and the unequal social stratifications.⁶

This process can assist men to come to terms with what they are resisting and continue to make progress.

Responding to Men Feeling “Challenged”⁷

Some men or men's groups who are seeking direction, active, and/or are ready to lead have likely come to understand that addressing or preventing gender-based violence is men's responsibility and are taking some initiative to do something. They have ideas about what it is that they should do in order to be a part of the solution and begin acting on those ideas. Men tend to be trained that a part of being a man is to “fix it” – identify the problem, find the solution, and then take steps to fix it. A part of this “fixing” pattern, often, is a tendency to take over. As a result, the men who come to accept that gender-based violence is a problem, and that the solution is for men to take responsibility, may move quickly to act on what ways men can take responsibility -- sometimes without much (or any) feedback or input from women, or without any accountability to women's leadership. They figure out what needs to be done and start working to implement the activity or strategy that they've come up with.

⁶ Thanks to Chuck Derry for his support in coming up with these questions.

⁷ Thanks to Chuck Derry and Michael Flood for their support and input on this section.

It is not uncommon for men to feel very wedded to the ideas that they come up. As such they will likely feel challenged (to the degree they feel wedded) if their ideas or actions are questioned. Advocates from community-based or campus-based organizations may experience this as men “digging in their heels” to any feedback about an approach that they’ve begun to implement.

Responding to this dynamic can be tricky. It may well be that some of these men or men’s groups, while well intentioned, are simply not willing to be responsive to concerns or questions by others in terms of how they do what they do. If this is the case, then a separate decision is the degree to which they deserve your support. But these are likely in the minority. Most men or men’s groups likely really do want to have a meaningful impact and to do so in ways that are responsive and accountable.

When maneuvering with men who are responding with this kind of defensiveness, it’s helpful to take a position of inquisitiveness or curiosity. Trying to convince people who are already feeling defensive only intensifies their defensiveness. Meeting them from a position of curiosity to better understand their perspective, encourage their questions, examine their doubts, etc. can create opportunities to work through the defensiveness.

...feeling challenged is not necessarily a bad thing (even though it often feels uncomfortable)

In this context, it is useful to recognize and acknowledge that feeling challenged is not necessarily a bad thing (even though it often feels uncomfortable) and that it, for many of us, has actually been good for us. Feeling challenged is also a frequent experience for most advocates and activists working to address or prevent gender-based violence. There are, for nearly all of us, ways that we are not doing this work in the ways we should be, or there are ways that we could do what we do better. We are challenged. Taking this kind of position and aligning with the men/men’s groups about being challenged can create a relationship that encourages them to explore why they are feeling challenged and get past it.

Asking them how their defensiveness (in response to feeling challenged) is helping them to achieve their goals. Defensiveness is great strategy for getting or staying stuck. It is not an effective strategy for making progress.

Some suggestions on ways to maneuver this dynamic include:

- Share some of the information available on key standards or best practice, including specifically key standards or best practice as they relate to feminist principles and accountability.
- Make the case that acting accountably is a key principle for appropriate / effective practice in this work. And that failing to act accountability will directly undermine the legitimacy of and support for their work.
- Note that there are direct benefits for them and their work from acting in partnership with and accountably to the women’s center / local women’s organizations: institutional support and resourcing, credibility, exchange of ideas, etc.

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The Global MenEngage Alliance has adopted core standards of accountability (available at <http://menengage.org/accountability/>) that provide clear recommendations on ways that men and men's groups can and should act in ways that are accountable to women's leaderships and the feminist movement more broadly.

For example, a fraternity at mid-sized university, responding to a series of reported rapes on campus, decided to take some leadership on their campus. This campus has a particularly active women's center and campus-based rape prevention effort that has been on campus for many years, and the fraternity system has been a particular focus of the bystander-intervention training offered by the rape prevention effort on campus.

This fraternity began putting their motivation into action by organizing "men's speak outs" on the campus. Their intention was to mobilize opportunities for men to speak out their opposition to rape and dating violence, and their support for gender respect. As they began rolling out this effort, some of the men who came to speak out, made statements that were victim- and woman-blaming, reinforced rape and domestic violence myths, and supported traditional gender norms. The fraternity was not prepared for this and so did not respond to these statements (which was of great concern to the women's center on campus). The fraternity felt it was important for men to have the opportunity to share their statements and became defensive to the women's center and rape prevention team's concerns.

Addressing Protectionism

As noted above, involving men can trigger a response of protectionism and a desire to "rescue the damsel(s) in distress." As practitioners, it's important that we specifically attend to this dynamic and work to counter it when it emerges. We are not seeking to engage more "heroes" whose job it is to protect and defend (some) women. While this is, for some men, a motivation for involvement, it is important to balance effective engaging practice (working with men from where they're coming from) while also supportively challenging them to explore different or additional motivations for being and continuing their engagement.

Men who operate (whole or in part) from the motivation to rescue or protect can be reminded of the women they know who are women of power, strength, and autonomy. As an example, Jose (not his real name) was becoming engaged in efforts to support women who had been victims of domestic violence. He came across as someone who wanted to protect and defend women. As it turns out, his grandmother had been killed by his grandfather (one of the motivations for him to begin volunteering at the domestic violence shelter). When he was reminded of his view of his grandmother – a woman that he defined as strong, powerful, an authority -- someone who did *not* need to be rescued or protected, he was able to begin to shift some of his attitudes and behaviors towards other women with whom he was working as an advocate. This, in turn, opened additional doors for Jose's engagement and activism more broadly.

Encouraging Ongoing Self-Reflection

As men become increasingly engaged and active, it is virtually inevitable that their increasing engagement/activism will generate in increasing levels of understanding and recognition of just how normal sexism (and other forms of oppression) is, *and* how these normal

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expressions of sexism relate to the perpetration of violence and abuse. Men often become aware of the ways that they hold these kinds of beliefs and attitudes, and the ways they (we) express sexism on a regular basis.

This increasing awareness often is accompanied by varied thoughts, feelings and reactions. It's not uncommon for men to become aware of these feelings and responses, without necessarily recognizing how they are connected to the self-awareness that they're developing. In other words, men may begin to become aware of how deeply they hold sexist beliefs and attitudes, begin to feel anxious, depressed, or angry, without realizing that the feelings they're having are related to this growing self-awareness.

...being active in working to prevent gender-based violence and/or promote gender equality does not magically remove men's privilege and entitlement. As men become more engaged and active, they may or may not be paying attention to the ways that they express male (or other forms of) privilege or express male entitlement.

There are also a host of other responses that men tend to have as they face different kinds of reactions (both positive and negative) from peers, co-workers, friends and family. Friends, peers and others may resist how men who are deepening their engagement may be changing as a result of their involvement.

Furthermore, being active in working to prevent gender-based violence and/or promote gender equality does not magically remove men's privilege and entitlement. Privilege and entitlement tend to be stubbornly invisible. As men become more engaged and active, they may or may not be paying attention to the ways that they express male (or other forms of) privilege or express male entitlement.

For example, as I was becoming involved in responding to and preventing domestic and dating violence, I began to learn about the various forms of abuse and dominance that men tend to engage in that are a part of the dynamics of abuse – what Evan Stark refers to as patterns of “coercive control.” Behaviors like interrupting, talking over, what we've come to refer to as “mansplaining”, getting “big” during arguments (that is filling out the chest, straightening the back – behaviors that suggest getting ready for a physical fight), etc. I began to realize how many of these behaviors I had adopted and used on a regular basis. I needed to be supported to do a significant amount of self-reflection to come to notice these behaviors, recognize the impact, learn new ways to behave *and* not punish myself too severely for engaging in these kinds of hurtful tactics.

For these reasons (and others), effectively engaging men means also providing opportunities to engage in self-reflection.

- What is the impact of being involved in these ways on their understanding of themselves?
- What are they having an unexpected hard time doing -- and why?
- What are they noticing about themselves that makes them uncomfortable or anxious?
- In what ways and in which situations do they feel a bit like a hypocrite?
- What questions are emerging for them that they don't know how or where to ask?

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Some of this evolution is somewhat of a natural progression. Men who are initially hesitant and become more engaged often become overwhelmed. As their reasons for being hesitant are addressed and they feel more supported, learn and understand more, and develop deeper confidence, men who are initially hesitant can easily become overwhelmed at the enormity of the problem, and the (seemingly) small-ness of what they have to offer, of the emerging emotional responses they have to these issues and their increasing involvement, etc.

Part of engaging men is that as you continue your efforts to engage men, they become your next best engagement strategy. The men they know and the men in their peer networks are men they can effectively engage. Strategically, they likely know and relate well with men who are at different degrees of willingness to be engaged. Given that they have a relationship with these other men, they are very able to connect with and engage those men as well, either at whatever level they are at, or to bring them into a different level of engagement. For example, men who are part of a bible study who become engaged by working within their faith community to find ways to promote gender equality, can effectively reach men within their church/faith community who are more hesitant or resistant.

Conclusion

Engaging men to prevent gender-based violence and/or promote gender equality is a process, not an event; it is one part of a coordinated effort to prevent gender-based violence or promote gender equality in your community or on your campus. Since preventing gender-based violence achieving gender equality are both most effective when conceived of as a long-term campaign, engaging men initiatives are similarly most effective if they are conceived of and implements as a integrated plan of this broader campaign. In this way, initiatives to engage men involved strategically considering ways to invite men in, support them once they enter, and encouragement to do more (recognizing the challenges they may face for doing more).

The Continuum of Male Engagement is a tool that is meant to enhance your (individual and/or collective) ability to effectively engage men, allowing you to better connect with and build relationships with the men you're seeking to engage, thus strengthening their relationship to and ownership of efforts to prevent gender-based violence or promote gender equality.

It is hoped and expected that this tool, and the efforts to engage men, is integrated into the broader efforts to prevent gender-based violence and /or promote gender equality.

Additional Resources

Global MenEngage Alliance

The Global alliance of the regional and country menengage networks.

<https://menengage.org>

North American MenEngage Network (NAMEN)

The network of US and Canadian based practitioners and organizations working To engage men and boys in promoting gender equality.

<https://namen.menengage.org>

A Call to Men

A CALL TO MEN works to promote a healthy and respectful manhood and shift attitudes and behaviors that devalue women, girls and other marginalized groups.

www.acalltomen.org

Men Can Stop Rape, Inc.

To mobilize men to use their strength for creating cultures free from violence, especially men's violence against women.

www.mencanstoprape.org

Promundo

Promundo works to promote gender equality and create a world free from violence by engaging men and boys in partnership with women and girls.

www.promundo.org

White Ribbon Campaign

White Ribbon is the world's largest movement of men and boys working to end violence against women and girls, promote gender equity, healthy relationships and a new vision of masculinity. Since its inception in Toronto in 1991, The White Ribbon Campaign has spread to over 60 countries around the world.

<https://whiteribbon.ca>