

Living Our Principles . . .

Appropriate Behavior at the Conference

– An Important Note To All Conference Participants –

There have been incidents reported to the NOMAS Council at past Men and Masculinity Conferences of sexual harassment and of sexist, racist or homophobic behavior. The Planning Committee and the Council want to make it clear that this behavior is inappropriate at an M&M Conference. We hope and expect that as Conference participants we will keep high consciousness about our behavior, so that it is non-predatory, non-objectifying, and non-exploitative, and so that it models respect and sensitivity toward all other people. We are trying to build a movement and a world that embraces differences, that is inclusive of all races, classes, ages, body types, genders, and sexual preferences. The principle of equality cannot go far beyond our walls if we can't model it here at our conference.

We acknowledge that we are products of a culture that is racist, sexist, and homophobic, a culture that socializes men into restrictive and damaging roles. We are deeply shaped by these forms of oppression and sex-role socialization. So, despite our principles and good intentions, we behave in oppressive ways from time to time. Yet this must not be used as an excuse or a reason to feel entitled to continue inappropriate behavior.

So our learned oppressiveness and our accountability to our ideas may come into conflict. To manage this conflict the Planning Committee asks conference participants to agree to the following guidelines:

1. We agree to behave with each other in ways that are not sexist, homophobic, racist or otherwise oppressive.
2. We agree to refrain from unwelcome offensive or repeated sexual overtures.
3. We agree that the person experiencing any oppressive behavior is the expert on their experience: we agree to listen to them, to hear them, and to accept responsibility for our actions.
4. We agree to be respectful of personal boundaries and needs. Specifically, we agree to be alert to the risk that our looksism, ageism, competitiveness, manipulateness, aggressiveness, or neediness might shame or exploit others.
5. We agree to a proactive process in which all participants in workshops that involve touching are made aware of what the workshop will entail, are explicitly given the opportunity to leave at any time, and are given time at the end to process feelings that the workshop evokes.

NOMAS PROCESS GUIDELINES

Value of the NOMAS Process Guidelines. A consensus which emerged from the Mid-Winter meeting was to acknowledge again the constructive value and humane, useful, practical ideas contained in our Process Guidelines:

1. It is almost always inappropriate and disrespectful to interrupt a person who has not finished speaking. We agree to be especially careful not to begin speaking until the previous speaker has finished. Conversely, we agree to remember when we are speaking that others in the room are waiting, and not extend our comments unnecessarily.

2. Care should be taken that all members of the group have an equal opportunity to be heard. While it is inevitable that some people will speak more than others, the group should be alert to efforts to speak by anyone who has not done so. In the event that several members wish to address an issue, those who have previously spoken less should be recognized before those who have spoken more. Members who are naturally "talkative" should not feel apologetic about this, but should monitor their own speaking behavior during meetings in order to give others an opportunity.

3. We agree that constructive criticism is an essential part of the process of political discussion. Restrained politeness is as oppressive as unrestrained criticism.

4. We agree to criticize the act or idea, and not the person. Personal attacks are worse than useless, they are oppressive and unfair.

5. We agree to freely give, and to accept, positive appreciations. This is important in breaking competitiveness and in building trust. We agree to listen fully to appreciations, refusing them if they don't feel right, but letting them in and enjoying them if they feel appropriate.

6. We agree to avoid criticisms that use generalities without referring to specifics. Criticisms should be as concrete and specific as possible.

7. We agree to avoid criticism which says only what not to do, rather than saying what to start doing. Criticism should point to specific ways the person or group could change, if they agree that the criticism is valid.

8. We agree to try to hear criticisms as statements about the criticizer's experience, not as the whole truth. It is as important for people not to devalue themselves when hearing criticism as it is for them not to devalue someone else when giving a criticism.

9. We agree that people are encouraged to ask for appreciation and support when they want it. Rather than "Every man for himself", people should try to take care of each other, and also of themselves.

10. We agree that people are encouraged to check out assumptions or hunches that they may have made about other people. For example: "I have a hunch that you're hurt and angry because I spoke against your point. Am I right about that?" Private processing thus becomes public, so people can respond to real issues and real feelings. We agree to recognize and validate grains of truth, when someone checks out hunches with us.

11. If we have played any part in a problem we are criticizing, we agree to give self-criticism along with criticism.