

4Y Mission Statement

This month's activity for the groups is somewhat different: though it does have some consciousness-raising aspects, it is less about creating a project or event and more about shaping your group's character and making it more effective in the long run. A mission statement is formal summary of your group's goals and values; we're going to use it to clarify your purpose, get everyone on the same page, and help the group stay focused for the long haul.

Below I provide a handful of topics to consider and discuss while developing your mission statement, including a little bit of explanation and background data from the research literature on men's gender justice groups. During an upcoming meeting, have your members sit down and discuss each of these issues in turn, take notes on the conversation, and when you have some consensus on what things are important to your group, write them down and put them together into a rough mission statement. If you want, you can even revise and polish it later, and then publish online or provide a copy to groups that you work with (e.g., women's groups you contact, institutions you answer to, funding organizations).

One other important note before you start: don't get bogged down on any one point for too long. All members don't have to agree 100%, as long as you agree enough to work together. You don't need to have a perfect analysis in order to start doing things – in fact, if you wait until you feel 100% ready, you are likely to never start at all! You also don't need to fit all these ideas in your statement, or necessarily make the statement a well-written, sharable document. Just considering these issues and getting a rough sense that you're all on the same page (or can work around the places where you're not perfectly aligned) will help your group be strategic and united in your later efforts. It's especially effective if you take some notes and return to them once in a while to make sure that you remember what you wanted to be doing.

Internal or External: Are we going to direct our efforts inward or outward? Are we about processing our own pain and struggles around masculinity, learning to be less sexist, and being more accountable for our male privilege? Or are we about going out and actively helping women, educating and challenging men around their sexism, and changing a sexist social structure? Both are important and it might be good to have a balance of both – but if half the group leans one way and half the group leans the other, it may divide the group.

Privileges, Costs, or Differences: The terrain of masculinity politics, according to [Messner \(1997\)](http://books.google.com/books/about/Politics_of_Masculinities.html?id=nG8MGcopgWQC) (http://books.google.com/books/about/Politics_of_Masculinities.html?id=nG8MGcopgWQC), can be drawn as a triangle, with the corners representing the three themes that men's groups prioritize more or less: 1) men's institutionalized privileges (the unfair benefits we receive just by virtue of being men), 2) the costs of masculinity (the ways that fitting in to masculine socialization limits and hurts us), and 3) the differences and inequalities among men (things like race, class, sexuality, etc. that shape men's lives in different ways).

Focusing more on one corner of this triangle usually means moving further away from the other two. Which of these areas seem most important to you? Most feminist groups promote gender equality by reducing men's unearned privileges (the top of the triangle), and moving too far from that focus can lead to anti-feminist backlash, or to straying from anti-sexist efforts to a focus on other forms of inequality instead of sexism. However, including some discussion of the costs of masculinity and the differences between men can also be useful and important in engaging men, by illustrating how feminist change can benefit men and addressing the ways that structured oppression impact their lives. Can you find ways to address the other two and still make sure you don't wander away from your primary focus?

Survivors or Perpetrators, Pre- or Post-Violence: Greenberg & Messner (2014)

(<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/books.htm?chapterid=17110559>) break down anti-violence efforts along two intersecting axes. Their first axis is time, after violence or before violence; the second "actor-axis" divides efforts at helping targets (or survivors) of violence from those addressing (potential) perpetrators of violence. This creates four realms of anti-violence projects: responses for survivors, responses for perpetrators, safety for potential targets, prevention with potential perpetrators. So, where will we focus our efforts? Will we be helping domestic violence survivors get restraining orders (responses for survivors)? Or teaching men how to intervene safely when they see another guy trying to score with someone who is clearly drunk (prevention with potential perpetrators)? Or maybe providing anti-violence education or therapy for men who have already abused someone (responses to perpetrators)? Think about which things you think you are most qualified to do, what is most needed in your community, and what you are most interested in doing.

Relationships to Women's Groups: How will we balance being accountable without burdening women

(<http://masculinities101.com/2014/04/21/focus-accountability-and-balance/>): how much do we rely on women to guide, support, and critique us? How do we support them in their work? Is our relationship to women's organizations formalized or informal? Of course, it's necessary to also ask the women you'd be working with what kinds of support and communication works best for them – don't assume they want your help and don't feel entitled to their guidance.

Root Causes of Violence: What do our group members see as the root cause of the violence we are addressing? Current feminist research suggests that men's violence against women is rooted in masculine socialization: men are violent because they are taught to be in charge, to score at any cost, to ignore their own emotions and everyone else's, to impress other men through sexual conquest and alcohol abuse, etc. As one of my dissertation interviewees put it, "we're told that we're men when we are

our most violent selves!” If that is your analysis of men’s violence, it makes a lot of sense to work to change masculine socialization (<http://www.paulkivel.com/resources/downloadable-tools/item/135-the-act-like-a-man-box>), like many (<http://www.mencanstoprape.org/A-Comprehensive-Approach-The-Strength-Campaign/>) groups (<http://greatist.com/happiness/healthy-body-image-men-031413>) do (<http://www.mencanstoprape.org/Healthy-Masculinity-Action-Project/>).

If, after you’ve read and understood that analysis and thought about where it might hold value for you, you still don’t agree with some of it – which is fine, it might not be the explanation of violence in your experience/community – then you would have other response efforts. If you think violence is rooted in men’s inability to empathize with women, you might try to teach men empathy instead. Just be careful that your analysis doesn’t imply that men’s violence is somehow women’s job to fix (some folks seem to think that if women were just better at defending themselves, or didn’t go out partying, or didn’t wear certain clothes, then men wouldn’t assault them. Not only is this demonstrably untrue, it also undeservedly blames the victims of violence for the actions of the perpetrators (http://www.feminist.com/resources/ourbodies/viol_blame.html)).

Using Your Mission Statement: When you start thinking about doing a project or event, or are wondering what to do next, take look back at your notes from this conversation. Check that the project you are considering fits with your analysis and moves toward your goals. If you find that you just cannot make clear connections between the projects you find yourselves wanting to do (or the projects that are working) and your mission statement, it might be time to revisit and reconsider your mission statement. Hopefully your group is learning and improving with time, so if these things shift a bit over time, that might just reflect your development as a group. Feel free to post your mission statement, ideas, or questions below, and if you do find things shifting over time, please return here and tell us all about it!

Greenberg, Max A. & Michael A. Messner. (in press). “Before Prevention: The Trajectory and Tensions of Feminist Anti-Violence.” In Segal, Marcia Texler and Vasilikie Demos (eds.) 2014. *Gendered Perspectives on Conflict and Violence Part B*. Bingley, UK.

Messner, Michael A. 1997. *Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movements*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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