



# Culture & Intersectionality in Engaging Men Approaches

## Defining “Culture”

Culture is often presented as a neat bundle of values, customs, beliefs, and traditions that a particular group of people share that get reproduced through generations without much change or nuance in between.

Additionally, when individuals think of culture, they often immediately use races and ethnicities as examples of cultures. However, it is important to note that **culture goes far beyond racial and ethnic identities. In fact, culture is a complex system of socially constructed world views, beliefs, values, and attitudes that can be passed down from one cultural generation to another. Since culture is socially constructed**, members of a group, therefore, participate in the (re)creation and circulate their set of meanings that make up their culture.

---

## Culture is...

- **SOCIAL** – Created and reinforced by people; adaptable; shared language and familiarity
- **HISTORICAL** – A response to economic, political, social conditions
- **POLITICAL** – Related to power; actions and beliefs deemed acceptable or not; how decisions are made; in vs. out groups



## Why Does Culture Matter in Engaging Men Conversations on Campus?

**Because culture is social, historical, political, and a set of meanings that are socially constructed and adaptable, it impacts our Engaging Men efforts in the following ways:**

### **1 Dominant notions of masculinity (the “Man Box”) can be changed.**

By responding to the current historical conditions and cultural norms, working to promote healthy cultural notions of masculinity, and drawing connections between masculinity and power, we can create positive change. We can create a pipeline of opportunities and leaders to create, recreate, and disseminate new meanings of what it means for men to be advocates for respect, healthy relationships, nonviolence, and equity.

### **2 Men are not a monolith and must be engaged in culturally-relevant ways.**

It is important to consider how communities on campus receive and comprehend particular messaging based on their cultural experiences. Understanding the cultures of diverse men—whether based on social identities like ethnicity or sexuality, student group affiliations like fraternities or video gaming, or regional cultural experiences—allows us to build authentic relationships and to craft relevant and meaningful campaigns, programs, and initiatives.



## What does it mean to engage men in “culturally-relevant” ways?

- 1 Seek to understand the diversity and nuances of men’s experiences and identities with cultural humility.

When attempting to center culture in our initiatives and programming, a common question is:

*“What is the culture of the people we want to center and what are the elements of their culture we need to keep in mind?”*

This line of questioning typically reflects the desire to build cultural competence.



Ideally, however, rather than prioritizing cultural competence and asking outward questions, cultural humility asks us to go inward and make the commitment to self-reflect about:

Our own culture;

How we conceptualize and implement our power and privilege;

The way in which we see the world, and the manner in which we impact the world.





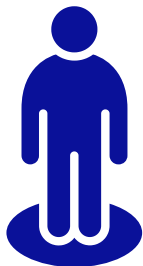
**Cultural humility in relation to Engaging Men efforts is crucial** because this practice allows for the creation of authentic and rich relationships, insights, and programs. When we practice cultural humility we build programs that not only understand men, but programs that see men that come from and are influenced by a variety of cultures.

**Cultural humility “means entering a relationship with another person with the intention of honoring their beliefs, customs, and values. It means acknowledging differences and accepting that person for who they are.”**

*(Foronda, Cynthia & Baptiste, Diana & Reinholdt, Maren & Ousman, Kevin. (2015). Cultural Humility: A Concept Analysis. Journal of Transcultural Nursing. 27. 10.1177/1043659615592677)*

**Consider the following question to ask yourself and your team to work towards cultural humility in your approach to Engaging Men:**

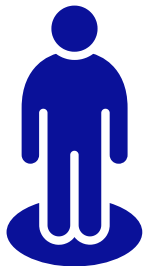
## QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS



- 1** What biases do I hold about men relating to gender based violence?
- 2** What story brought me to this work and how does that story impact the manner in which I view men as agents of change?
- 3** What types of privileges (race, class, sexuality, ability) do I have? How do these privileges impact the manner in which I engage men?



**QUESTIONS FOR  
INDIVIDUALS  
(CONT.)**



- 4 Am I the right person to lead/facilitate this Engaging Men program, event, or session?
- 5 How can I create opportunities for others to lead?
- 6 Do I have anyone who will tell me if my behavior or comments are not inclusive or equitable?



**QUESTIONS FOR  
GROUPS**



- 1 Does our group include and represent the voices and cultures (including race, sexuality, and interests) of men we are trying to reach?
- 2 Does our group feel comfortable naming our biases transparently and addressing problematic behaviors or comments?
- 3 How are we creating opportunities for our men and our communities to tell us what they need?
- 4 Should our collective be leading this work? Should we make space for culturally-specific organizations/clubs to lead these Engaging Men initiatives while we take more of a supporting role?



## What does it mean to engage men in “culturally-relevant” ways?

### 2 Ensure program development, messaging, and facilitation reflect principles of equity and cultural-relevance.

Culturally-relevant programming relies on the **best practice of “nothing about us, without us.”** The process of program development and the programming itself are equally important.

**Leveraging the voices of men in the community, existing cultural structures, and cultural concepts are key for meaningful programming.**

To develop programming that is culturally-relevant, consider:

- a** How do cultures—whether based in ethnicity, activities like athletics, or otherwise—define what “manly” means? What does it mean to be accomplished or cool? Or not?
- b** What cultural structures or places of connection can be leveraged to promote positive change (e.g., rituals, holidays, activities)?
- c** What influential figures exist amongst different groups or cultures of men and how can they be engaged for positive change?



## EXAMPLE: MACHISMO

While masculinity is a universal construct around the world, the performance of masculinity shows up differently in the United States, in different regions, in diverse ethnic communities, and on campuses. **Let's explore, for example, how Latine communities understand masculinity, referred to as machismo.**

MACHISMO  
VALUES

- Be brave and protect the physical safety of the family.
  - Provide financial stability to the family.
  - Be honorable by keeping your word (palabra).
  - Have high authority and dominance within the family.
- Be physically protective but not emotionally nurturing.
  - Repress emotions unless it is anger.
  - Rely on spouse for household tasks
  - Be heteronormative and encourage others to perform their gender appropriately, often stemming from traditional Catholicism.

## LET'S PAUSE AND REFLECT!

- So, let's say that you are trying to work with Latino men on campus for your next listening session. Now that we have a sense of some of the values within machismo, **How would you adapt your approach to engage men who identify as Latino?**
- Without the larger cultural context of familismo, which is the family system in which machismo exists, it is difficult to see machismo in a positive light. Machismo has mostly been seen for its toxic qualities. However, drawing on the strengths that the protective factors of machismo brings can be incredibly fruitful. **How can you develop programming that draws on possible strengths of machismo to engage Latino men on campus?**
- Having individuals on your team that look and experience life like the men you are targeting is not just recommended, but needed. **Does your team have someone that has experienced machismo first hand?**



## OTHER EXAMPLES OF CENTERING CULTURE IN ENGAGING MEN PROGRAMMING:

### LISTENING SESSIONS

Frame questions to be culturally relevant and use questions that can help you gather cultural dynamics within the group. *Examples:*

- “Ideals of what it means to be a man show up differently in different cultures. What are the characteristics of ideal manhood in your culture?” Follow-Up: “How can programming address any of these harmful ideals in your culture?”
- “Think about a time when an important man in your life, whether it was a teacher, a coach, a father, an uncle, gave you advice about ‘being a man.’ Why do you think that message has stuck with you for so long? How has it influenced how you define what it means to be a man?”

### DEVELOPING MESSAGING

Identify shared values and current trends within a cultural group to create buy-in to attend an Engaging Men event. *Examples:*

- At a catholic university, titling a workshop to be relevant to scripture, the religious roles of men, or the university’s motto. Also, engaging pastors who lead existing spaces of learning.
- Using culturally-specific language or concepts, such as an event to reach Latino men titled: The Power of Protection and Palabra.





## OTHER EXAMPLES OF CENTERING CULTURE IN ENGAGING MEN PROGRAMMING:

### PROGRAMMING

Ensure that the presenters represent the audience you are trying to reach and that you are using images of culturally-specific content or celebrities. Example:

- During a session with a Black fraternity, when speaking to and about stigma around crying and emotional expression, show a video clip like that of Caleb Williams, the USC football quarterback, and his emotional exchange with his mother after a tough loss. Then explore and unpack the comments at the end of this article, or ESPN's Instagram post. What master and counter narratives surrounding Black masculinity are present in these comments?