



# Dominant & Counter-Narratives of Masculinity

In order for our Engaging Men initiatives to be meaningful, we—as organizers and educators—need to be clear on our goals:

- 1 What attitudes and behaviors are we looking to change?
- 2 What topics should our programming address?
- 3 How do we know that what we are doing is working?

To answer these questions, we need to define the Dominant-Narratives that men receive about what the “ideal” man looks like.

Equimundo’s 2017 [“The Man Box”](#) study defines the ideal man through seven pillars:

1. Self-Sufficiency
2. Acting Tough
3. Physical Attractiveness
4. Rigid Masculine Gender Roles
5. Heterosexuality & Homophobia
6. Hypersexuality
7. Aggression & Control

These seven pillars—and their “counter-pillars” which describe seven corresponding characteristics of healthy, connected, equitable manhood that we seek to promote—are detailed on pages 2 and 3.



1

## Self-Sufficiency

A man who talks a lot about his worries, fears, and problems shouldn't really get respect. Men should figure out their personal problems on their own without asking others for help.

2

## Acting Tough

A guy who doesn't fight back when others push him around is weak. A willingness to defend your reputation, using physical force if necessary. Guys should act strong even if they feel scared or nervous inside.

3

## Physical Attractiveness

Women don't go for guys who fuss too much about their clothes, hair, and skin. Don't try "too hard" or caring "too much," lest you be seen as vain or too feminine. A guy who spends a lot of time on his looks isn't very manly.

4

## Rigid Masculine Gender Roles

It is not good for a boy to be taught how to cook, sew, clean the house, and take care of younger children. Women's role is household chores and childcare; men should provide financially for their families.

5

## Heterosexuality & Homophobia

"Real men" have to be straight and have to be affronted at the idea of even possibly being anything else. A gay guy is not a "real man." Straight men can't be friends with gay men.

6

## Hypersexuality

A "real man" should have as many sexual partners as he can. A "real man" would never say no to sex. "Real men" should always want sex, always be ready for sex, and always wanting more. Women are seen as objects for sexual conquest.

7

## Aggression & Control

Men should use violence to get respect, if necessary. They should be confident and have the final say about decisions in his relationship. If a guy has a girlfriend or wife, he deserves to know where she is all the time.



1

### Interdependence

Men recognize the need for support, ask for help, rely on others in times of need, and seek medical and emotional health services. Men support other men when they ask for help.

2

### Vulnerability & Range of Emotion

Men express a full range of emotions beyond anger, such as joy, love, admiration, fear, sadness, anxiety, and insecurity. Men have communication skills to express anger in a nonviolent manner and acknowledge that strength never equals violence.

3

### Worth from Values, not Attractiveness

Men are included, valued, and respected no matter what they wear or how they look. Taking care of your appearance not shamed as “unmanly”; it can build confidence and comfort in oneself.

4

### Equitable Engagement in Relationships

Men contribute to the family beyond societally expected ways. Men are encouraged and supported to nurture children. Men participate in all household responsibilities, as they need attention or through fair negotiation with their partner.

5

### Gender & Sexuality-Affirming

Men feel safe—and are not shamed by others—to engage in romantic relationships with people of all genders. Men connect with and support each other regardless of sexual orientation.

6

### Worth from Connection, not Sexual Conquest

Men are supported to engage in intimate relationships when they are ready. Men have interest in women and girls outside of sexual conquest. Men prioritize sexual health and enthusiastic consent in sexual relationships. Men are taught they have the right to say “no” to sex at any time.

7

### Power With, Not Over

Men value the lives of women and girls, listening to their experiences with empathy. Men have communication skills to get their needs met rather than using violence and control. Men share power, rather than wielding power over others.