From men to Men

*A theoretical miniguide
to promote non-violent masculinities*
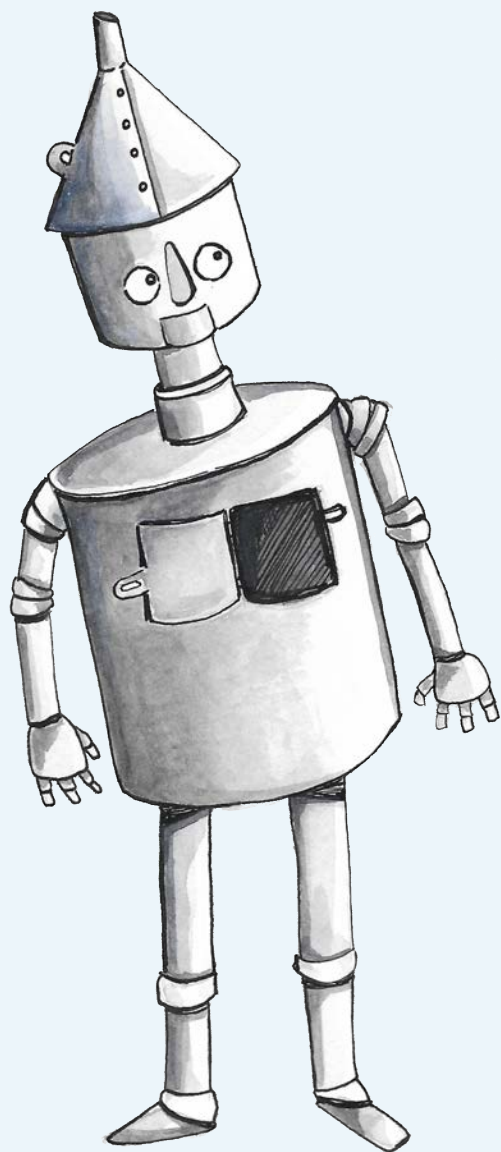
Toolbox from men to Men
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PRESENTATION

In a patriarchal society, relationships, social norms and language are established in a way that devalue[1] and subordinate[2] the feminine to the masculine. Daily practices of discrimination and violence towards women further reinforce these dynamics, where women often have less power, access to resources, and rights than men. This form of social organization is imposed from birth through the socialization of gender roles, leading individuals to unconsciously internalize and perpetuate this structure of inequality in their ways of thinking, acting, and feeling.

Despite being deeply rooted in the society, this structure can be transformed through public policies, collective social organization, as well as individual reflection and action. In this respect, Doctors of the World Switzerland - Mission Mexico has developed a series of initiatives to identify, prevent and respond to the diverse manifestations of gender-based violence (GBV). An example of such initiatives are educational and artistic programs in schools, neighborhoods, and institutions.

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1. Some examples encountered in daily life include sentences such as: "you hit like a girl", "don't act like a girl", among others.

2. Examples of this subordination manifest in women receiving less income than men, exerting less political participation, and being subject to beliefs that confine women to domestic roles with the sole responsibility of housework and caregiving.

What is the difference between the manual and the toolbox?

Doctors of the World Switzerland - Mexico Mission has created a methodological manual for implementing activities to promote non-violent masculinities through working directly with men. Based on this manual, and through a review of existing practices from several NGOs working on this subject, a toolbox has been developed to facilitate its use.

The toolbox consists of a theoretical miniguide, a methodological miniguide and a pre- and post-test evaluation form.

- The **theoretical miniguide** provides a review of the minimum knowledge requirements and good practices that should be mastered before implementing workshops on positive masculinity.

- The **methodological miniguide** sets out the methodological approach developed, as well as the logistical considerations for implementing the activities.

- The **pre and post-test evaluation form** is an exemplary test designed and ready to use to measure the knowledge acquired by participants following their attendance at the workshops.

This toolbox is designed for educators, professionals responsible for educational guidance in schools, workshop facilitators, as well as anyone interested in fostering spaces for reflection and action with groups of men from different contexts.

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Have you ever wondered why various forms of violence and inequalities exist between men and women in all societies? Is it perhaps a natural or normal matter? And what attitudes and actions can men take to transform this situation?

In the following paragraphs, we will attempt to answer these questions.

What are our societies like?

The concept of **society** refers to a group of people who interact with each other, sharing culture, customs, institutions, and legal rules in a specific space and time. Societies are in constant change and adjustment, influenced by economic, environmental, political, educational, legal, and technological processes and factors, among others.

While all societies consist of diverse and multicultural elements, the principles of **patriarchal society** have consolidated and prevailed across societies all over the world over the last five thousand years. This is a social, cultural, and even legal configuration that grants men dominance, authority, and ad-

vantages over women, placing the latter in a relationship of subordination and dependence.

Patriarchy is "a traditional form of organizing society which often lies at the root of gender inequality. According to this kind of social system, men, or what is considered masculine, is accorded more importance than women, or what is considered feminine" (UN Women, 2016).

What is gender?

Often, the words *sex* and *gender* are used as synonyms, and it is thought that they generally refer to men and women. However, feminist theory has sought to differentiate these concepts to demonstrate how social factors affect what pertains to women and men.

Sex: Humans are born with various bodily characteristics as a result of biological processes. One notable distinction is the presence of different genital organs. This biological difference categorizes and differentiate individuals into males (born with a penis) and females (born with a vagina)."These sets of biological characteristics are not mutually exclusive, as there are individuals who possess both, but these characteristics tend to differentiate humans as females or males" (UN Women, 2016).

Gender: It refers to the social role assigned to individuals based on their sex; that is, "gender refers to the roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society at a given time considers appropriate for men and women. In addition to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male

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or female and the relationships between women and men, girls and boys, gender also refers to the relations among women and those among men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context" (UN Women, 2016).

In psychology, it is recognized that gender is a psycho-social process structured around three basic elements:

- **Gender Assignment:** At birth, individuals are assigned a biological sex —male or female— based on the external appearance of their genital organs. Meanwhile, each society imposes the rules, the guidelines, the norms, and attributes considered to be a "culturally appropriated form" of masculinity and femininity (Izquierdo, 2007). These include up to the clothes to be used, or colours and toys that are or aren't allowed. This process is known as gender socialization and is reinforced in all social spheres throughout the entire course of life.

- **Gender Identity:** The Yogyakarta Principles state that gender identity is "each person's deep, internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth." It is manifested through clothes, gestures, language, body expression, and patterns of behavior with others, forming the concept of *gender expression*. Individuals who identify with the gender assigned to them at birth are considered cisgender (the prefix "cis" meaning "on the same side"). On the other hand, transgender people (the prefix "trans" meaning "across" or "beyond") are those

who identify and perceive themselves with a gender different from the one assigned at birth; for example, a transgender man is a person who was assigned female at birth but feels, identifies, and constructs herself as a man.

- **Gender Roles:** The "social and behavioural norms which, within a specific culture, are widely considered to be socially appropiate for individuals of a especific sex" (UN Women, 2016). For instance, it is commonly belie-ved that a woman should be affectionate and nurturing, while a man should be strong and brave. These expec-tations are so deeply rooted in our societies that they begin to be assumed as natural.

How does gender affects the access to rights and the development of people?

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states in its first article that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." Expanding on this principle, when discussing **gender equality**, the focus is on ensuring equality in access to resources, rights, and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their sex or gender.

Despite the fact that these last few decades saw considera-ble advancements concerning the political, economic, social, and cultural rights of women, patriarchal society persists in shaping social norms. This grants men more power, access, and control over resources, decision-making, and public life. In contrast, women face lack of opportunities and are subjec-ted to conditions of subordination, resulting in disadvantages and inequalities.

Unequal treatment between women and men can be observed across various domains: the exercise of paid work, the occupation of decision-making positions, access to education. For instance, women are often responsible for caring and housekeeping roles, while men engage in paid work in public spaces. Even when women have paid jobs outside the house, they continue to take care of household responsibilities. It is not just the tasks assigned to women, but also the different value attributed to them, which put and keep women in a condition of inequality.

What exactly does "masculinity" mean?

The concept of **masculinity** can sometimes be challenging to grasp, so let's begin by stating what masculinity is not:

- It is not a biological determination, meaning it is not something someone is born with.

- It does not depend on the genital organs that a male mammal has (penis, testicles, etc.).

- It is not part of the innate energy of a male mammal.

Masculinity is the "script" in the education and socialization of men, just as femininity is the "script" in the education and socialization of women. Masculinity is a mandate, a set of

norms, practices, and discourses socially assigned to men. Masculinity does not carry negative or positive connotations; however, when placed in the context of the patriarchal societies we live in, it allows us to see a particular type of masculinity—hegemonic or dominant—associated with an ensemble of practices based on power, privilege, or violence, which needs to be transformed.

Why do we talk about hegemonic masculinity?

When talking about **hegemonic masculinity,** we refer to a mandate—a set of norms, practices, and discourses that men must adhere to in a patriarchal society to maintain their position of privilege and power. Most men are conditioned to build their identity by strongly opposing the idea of femininity. In this way, to build themselves as men, involves tolerating and exercising violence, demonstrating strength or virility, while limiting the expression of emotions, particularly those indicating vulnerability, humility, and caregiving capability. Instead, men develop pride, aggressiveness, and avoidance, which negatively affect their family and emotional relationships, as well as their health.

Hegemonic masculinity conditions men to assume a position of power within the family (and often in public spaces as well). Traditionally, they are the ones leading important conversations, managing finances and properties, receiving care and attention (cooking, cleaning, sexual satisfaction), and have the final say, even on issues beyond them, such as women's bodies (abortion, rest, life plans, etc.). One way men can assert their masculinity is by demonstrating that they can have numerous sexual conquests or many children, preferably sons. The need to prove their masculinity is not only directed towards women but also towards other men, to whom they must prove that they are

men enough and/or to whom they shall demonstrate loyalty if these men hold more power, either formal or implicit.

Hegemonic masculinity not only puts pressure on every man personally as an individual, but it is also a foundational, often invisible, principle upon which most public, private, religious, and family institutions are built. To express itself, hegemonic masculinity often needs to exert violence in various forms—subtle, explicit, or extreme—towards whatever surrounds it.

What is violence, and what does it have to do with gender?

According to the definition of the World Health Organization (WHO), violence is "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation."

Expanding upon this general definition of violence, we can explore what is understood as **gender-based violence (GBV).** The United Nation defines gender-based violence as "any harmful act based on unequal power relationships directed against individuals or groups based on their gender, gender identity or expression, or sexual orientation." GBV stems from the unequal construction of power and authority relationships between men, women and non-binary people. Power is the ability or capacity to decide and act. There are many types of power (physical, social, economic, political, age-related, gender-related).

It's essential to highlight that the asymmetry in access to resources, power, and rights generally favors men to the disad-

vantages of women and populations which do not conform to the male standard, and this explains why GBV are mostly perpetrated against women, girls, LGBTI+ and other non-binary people. Finally, GBV may include violence that men exert on themselves and on other men, and it also includes any violence perpetrated by anyone for gender-related reasons.

So, is being violent part of men's nature?

No, it is a social construct that can be unlearned. It is not easy or quick because it has been transmitted for thousands of years from generation to generation on a societal level, which results in certain aspects of violence being fully naturalized, especially by those who do not experience their consequences on a daily basis (men) or those who may exercise it without realizing it. However, alongside violent masculinities, there are also non-violent ways of being a man.

Why do we discuss positive masculinity?

Non-violent masculinities[3] represent the diversity of positive practices that currently exist, have existed, or will exist within the identity of men. In the history of each man, there is the

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3. The methodology outlined in the manual and toolbox primarily aims to eradicate violent and aggressive behaviors linked to traditional masculinity; hence the term "non-violent masculinities" is being used throughout these documents. Nonetheless, we recognize that non-violent masculinities represent only one form of broader models of positive masculinities. By questioning cultural norms that promote physical, verbal, or emotional violence among men, our overall goal is to contribute to the development of an environment conducive to more positive and constructive expressions of masculinity.

potential to reject the "plans that patriarchy has made for him." All these single rejections of the mandates of dominant masculinity can intertwine with each other to create **a collective, non-violent, and positive masculine identity.**

Positive masculinity is the set of masculine identities that promote equity, more equal and non-sexist relationships, consent, shared responsibility, tenderness, and connection with emotions. Positive masculinity explores freer and more diverse gender expressions, desires, and socio-affective practices that challenge "romantic love", the use of inclusive language, or certain practices or processes that confront traditional norms of masculinity.

Historical and cultural changes are happening in our society in regard to how to live and how to shape ourselves as men; however, the reflection on positive masculinities doesn't want to offer a new "single model" of masculinity, a new should-be, but rather wants to encourage conversations about real and liberating experiences that aim to eradicate macho culture and allow the flourishing of experiences of freer women and men.

WHAT ARE THE BEST PRACTICES TO BE AWARE OF?

The term *best practices* refers to approaches, methods, or actions that are recommended for their effectiveness and relevance in a specific field, based on experience. In this mini-guide, we gathered *best practices* for conducting workshops on positive masculinity, working directly with men[4].

What are the best practices for encouraging men's participation in workshops on positive masculinity?

- **Establishing a trust relationship with men** can facilitate their commitment to the training process as they tend to become less wary once such a connection is established. For this reason, some organizations choose to integrate positive masculinity activities into later stages of existing projects.

- **Training men directly from the community** on how to raise awareness among other men on masculinity-rela-

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4. These practices were developed in collaboration with organizations, Solidar and Swissaid, which have specific expertise in this area.

ted topics and how to encourage other men to actively participated in the workshops (what is commonly referred to as "peer to peer" methods). Depending on the specific context, these men can be young or older, coming from various professions such as teachers or sports educators. This approach relies on the impact of awareness using culturally competent mediators who are close to the community's realities.

• **Establishing partnerships with institutions** to collaborate directly with groups of workers who are asked to participate in the workshops as part of their professional duties. This approach promotes continuous engagement and prevents potential dropouts, and at the same time it allows to reach individuals who otherwise may not have voluntarily participated. A variety of institutions can be targeted, such as universities, hospitals, public transportation services, or, if the project aims at broader dissemination, government institutions such as ministries.

• **Seeking the participation of men who represent a moral authority close to the participants,** such as a respected community leader or a recognized and well-liked teacher. The personal connection and trust established with an influential moral figure can significantly influence other men's decision to actively engage in positive masculinity workshops.

• **Thoroughly preparing invitations for future workshop participants,** as the topic of positive masculinity may generate little interest among men depending on the context. Invitations should be sent well in advance, preferably in written form. The invitation document should provide specific details about the location, schedule,

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name, and objective of the workshop. It is crucial to carefully choose the language used in order to evoke curiosity and engagement rather than mistrust, using positive and encouraging terms.

What are the best practices for conducting workshops on positive masculinity?

- **Prioritize participants who have a pre-existing connection among themselves,** even if indirect, such as young people from the same school or employees from the same company. Integration and participation become complex when groups come from different backgrounds and experiences. Nevertheless, even though an indirect or direct link is encouraged to facilitate interaction, it can be interesting to diversify participants in terms of age and profile to enrich the discussions during the sessions. This can mean for instance involving individuals from different generations within the same community or members of a sport team coming from different socio-economic backgrounds.

- **Use art or sport in the training process,** as this allows participants to explore their emotions and express them in a way that is sometimes more accessible and less intimidating than traditional methods like open discussions. Theatre, for example, is frequently used in this type of workshop as it gives men the opportunity to act out scenes from their daily lives, working as a mirror and a catalyst.

- **Have a trained and competent team of facilitators,** as questions and/or resistance may arise within certain groups, especially in the delicate context of questioning

masculinity. To ensure effectiveness and acceptance, it is advisable to have a facilitator who is experienced in positive masculinity and to use a previously validated methodology.

- **Before starting any educational process, create an environment of trust, respect, and collaboration among the participants;** participants should feel at ease, they need to familiarise themselves with the group and understand the objectives of the workshop. The facilitator should also identify participants' expectations in order to adjust the learning process or explain the objectives in more detail. At this stage it is important to establish the group's standards of conviviality.

- **Always maintain an open and constructive dialogue** when dealing with participants who show a hostile or resistant attitude; this is key to foster an environment conducive to mutual understanding and collective learning. Different types of measures can be adopted, such as understanding the reason behind the resistance in order to grasp the person's underlying issues; avoid taking the situation personally by recognising everyone's right to express disagreements; trying to have the group self-regulate itself by constructively reflecting on these disagreements, and if necessary, using arguments based on rights, laws or other regulations.

- **Put in place concrete measures to encourage men to take on more responsibility** at the end of the training cycle. This could involve awarding a *Diploma* at the final session, manifest the wishes or desires expressed by their children or spouses, or introducing a *Responsibility* Pact in which men commit to specific actions (such as doing the shopping, preparing meals, expressing their

emotions to those around them, etc.). These practical initiatives aim to translate the lessons learned in the workshops into concrete, day-to-day actions.

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