

Resource: **Men's Interests in Change**

RELATIONAL Interests:

As a group, men have a common interest in defending what they share in common as a group; that is, their male gender privilege. But men's lives are more complex than this. Their lives are shaped by more than just their gender identity; race/ethnicity, class, caste, sexuality, religion and nationality all influence how men identify their interests. In their families and communities, which are largely defined by these factors, men live in social relationships, many with women and girls: wives, partners, mothers, sisters, aunts, daughters, nieces, friends, classmates, colleagues, neighbors, and so on. It is the quality of these relationships that in large part determines the quality of every man's life. Men can see that their lives are damaged, too, by a system of gender inequality that damages the lives of women and girls with whom they are in relationship. It is clear that many men make sacrifices for their children, and want their daughters to grow up in a world that offers young women security, freedom, and opportunities to fulfill themselves. This is a powerful reason for many men to support gender equality.

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HUMAN RIGHTS & SOCIAL JUSTICE Interests:

In many ways, men continue to benefit from political, economic and social systems that privilege the male. But these systems are also bad for many men's health and well-being. Health research continues to document specific problems for adult men and boys, among them: lower life expectancy; premature death from accident, homicide and suicide; high rates of occupational injury in industries such as mining, transport and heavy manufacturing (closely related to gender segregation in the workforce); and higher levels of drug abuse, especially alcohol and tobacco. Men's unwillingness to seek medical help when it is needed has been observed in many countries. These health issues are, in part, the result of men's adherence to gender norms that equate masculinity with toughness and invulnerability. Where unemployment is high, the lack of a paid job can be a damaging pressure on men who have grown up with the expectation of being a breadwinner. More generally, less rigidity in the norms of masculinity will allow men more options in how to live their lives and more freedom to fully express themselves emotionally, without having to put up a 'front' of invulnerability and suppress their emotions in order to stay 'in control'. This is likely to yield benefits in terms of mental health and psychological well-being.

COLLECTIVE Interests:

Men may also support gender equality because they see its relevance to the well-being of their community. In situations of mass poverty and under-employment, flexibility in the gender division of labor may be crucial to a household which requires women's earnings as well as men's. Men may recognize that they benefit in the long run from the growth in collective well-being that flows from the better education of women and from improvements in women's health. Men are likely to benefit from broad social and cultural changes associated with gender equality. It will also yield benefits in security. Violence, both between individuals and groups, is strongly associated with dominant norms of masculinity and gender inequalities in economic and political life. Men have an interest in challenging these norms and inequalities, and the violence that follows from them, for the sake of peace in their communities. Men's groups have already demonstrated this interest, in the support they have given to the women's movement in ensuring adequate implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which addresses the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women and girls.

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HUMAN RIGHTS & SOCIAL JUSTICE Interests:

Men also get involved in the struggle for gender justice, and seek to change harmful norms and practices of masculinity, simply because it is the right thing to do. Women and girls have the same rights as men and boys. Even when men cannot see personal benefits in gender equality, they still have a responsibility to promote greater equality. As long as any systematic gender inequalities persist, privileging men over women and promising future advantage to boys, those with such privilege have an ethical responsibility to do what they can to change the system.

This responsibility may be more evident to those men who are working for social justice in their own lives, for example for economic or racial justice. They are increasingly recognizing that their struggles are related to women's struggles for gender justice. Beliefs about domination and subordination that lie at the heart of gender inequality (the power of the male over the female, the masculine over the feminine) play a fundamental role in other forms of injustice by 'naturalizing' relations of domination; for example, of rich over poor, or in some societies, of white over black.