

The Men's Story Project

Bringing Critical Conversations About
Masculinities, Health & Justice
into Public Forums



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Masculinities & Health

- Social norms regarding gender roles & relations → health & justice challenges for everyone
- Men's belief in traditional masculinity ideals →
 - rape-supportive attitudes
 - sexual & physical violence against women
 - violence between males
 - homophobia / transphobia
 - HIV/STI risk behavior
 - substance abuse
 - risky driving
 - less healthcare-seeking (e.g., HIV testing)

Masculinities & Health

- Shifting gender norms in support of healthy masculinities: productive & needed approach to improving health for all people
- **Gender-transformative public health programs**, which engage men in critical reflection re: gender norms & masculinities: **most effective** (WHO, 2007)

Masculinities & Health

- Where's the mainstream, critical discussion about men's socialization?
- "boys will be boys," "youth violence," "it's just how men are"



- There are few ongoing, visible, public forums where traditional masculinity norms are examined and alternate, health-supporting discourses highlighted.

The Men's Story Project

The Men's Story Project is a replicable arts & dialogue project that brings critical exploration of masculinities into public forums.

Mission: To strengthen social norms that support healthy masculinities & gender equality, and to reduce gender-based violence, homophobia, and other oppressions that are linked with masculinities, through ongoing events of men's story-sharing & community dialogue.



The Men's Story Project

- ~15 local men share personal stories: artists, activists, men never onstage
- Multiple mediums (*slam poetry, prose, monologues, music, dance*)
- Celebrate & challenge
- Facilitated discussion
- Resource/action table
- \$\$ raised: to groups whose work coincides w/ MSP mission

The UCSF Center for Gender Equity presents:
Men's Story Project
Building Strength. Creating Change.
 Wednesday, Oct. 15, 2008
 7pm (doors at 6:30)
 \$5 optional donation at the door
 UCSF Cole Hall (Medical Sciences Bldg)
 513 Parnassus Ave., San Francisco

A powerful night of men's true stories examining social ideas about masculinity. Topics include: sexuality, identity, friendship, family, culture, HIV/AIDS, violence, rites of passage, transformations, and more.

Spoken word - Monologues - Music - Dance - Audience discussion

Storytelling: For preserving and passing on traditions, for challenging and breaking traditions, and for the creation of new traditions.

Co-sponsored by Arts & Events, UCSF Campus Police Dept., Diversity Celebration Committee, LGBT Resource Center, Office of Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity & Diversity, Office of Student Life, Student Activity Center, Medical Student Well-Being Program & Student Health Center. For more info contact: Chelsea Simms 415-476-6224



MSP Theoretical Framework

- **Social constructionist perspective** on gender
(Kimmel 2000, Courtenay 2000).
- **Social Cognitive Theory** - observational learning (Bandura 1986)
- **Diffusion of Innovations** (Rogers 1995)
 - “Innovation” of publicly exploring masculinities & embracing diverse, health-supportive masculinities
 - “Innovation” of MSP

MSP Pedagogy

- **Observational learning:**
 - people are more likely to learn from those whom they view as peers or role models
 - people learn from hearing about challenges someone faced, how they addressed them, and observing rewards received for a given attitude/behavior
- **Modeling** healthy masculinities; willingness to engage in self-reflection, personal transformation & social analysis
- **Modeling** solidarity among a diverse group of men

MSP Pedagogy

- For violence prevention, value in addressing masculinities **holistically** -- placing violence in broader context of gender norms & social structures
- Personal narrative
 - Emotion, empathy & identification
 - Challenges assumptions/stereotypes
 - Circumvents defensive response
- Community-based events
 - Relevance
 - Personal identification
 - Accountability

Men's experiences with violence - topics

- Empowered bystanders – men who have stepped in to prevent & respond to violence
- Men discussing their discomfort with other men's coercive sexual behavior
- Men who have supported friends & family members in dealing with sexual assault/partner violence
- Men who have witnessed/experienced violence in their own homes

Men's experiences with violence - topics

- Men who are survivors of sexual assault, partner violence, LGBT hate crimes, other gender-based violence
- Men who have perpetrated violence
- Men in hypermasculine environments (athletics, fraternities, military, prison)
- Men involved in other violence between men
- Men's violence against themselves – substance abuse, steroid use, risk-taking, etc.

MSP Potential Applications

- Focus on presentation/dialogue event + follow-up activities
- Part of broader public health programs
- **Ongoing** (e.g., yearly) events with campuses & NGOs →→ **normative** part of social landscape, **counterpoint** to other mainstream forces
- Films of local MSP events magnify reach/impact

Audience Response

“...revolutionary...” “...groundbreaking...” “...a gift...”

“I laughed, cried & rethought my own prejudices...it was life-altering.”

“The courage it takes to not only reflect on, but to share stories that confront such taboo issues is very, very inspiring – and I will honor this bravery by engaging in this work with my students, friends, and future children. Thanks!!!”

“...Totally real, gripping, valuable and new. I can imagine it easily replicating with great groups all over the place.”

Audience Response

"In this one evening, my eyes, mind and heart were opened to more possibility & humanity than any 6 months in my Men's group..."

"It's time for men to be able to publicly express their humanity - for everyone's healing. It enriches our society to have something like this happening. And, it's about time."

"It was amazing to get past each person's façade/separateness as a person and fully relate to them, even if we have very different life experiences. Very powerful! Go on tour! Perfect time for this movement to take seed."

Audience Response

"This evening's event was a big step toward us, as a community of human beings, becoming more whole..."

"Thank you... I can't remember a more memorable and meaningful performance. Those men broke my heart and put it back together again with hope and love. Just amazing."

"...What a remarkable evening. This felt like church to me. Honest, raw, hopeful, healing. Thanks for letting me be a witness."

Study Findings: Male & female audience members

- Consensus: Valuable as an educational tool, stimulus for discussion
- 100's of hours spent emailing, talking – with family, boss, mentor, colleagues, dormmates, classmates, romantic partners. “Social learning communities”
- There aren't many, if any, public spaces where this sort of dialogue happens, and it is “needed.”
- Valued the diversity of perspectives; they don't often have access to such a range

Study Findings: Male & female audience members

- Respect for presenters' strength & willingness to be honest & vulnerable (“heroes”)
- Personal affirmation - own experiences reflected onstage
- Potential inspiration to share own experiences with violence
- Reflection on challenges involved in embodying multiple social identities
- Concern about preaching to choir – need for broad campus outreach. And even “progressive people” can have prejudices, learn new things.

Study Findings: Female audience members

- Wanting as many men in their lives as possible to attend, “hear about this”
- “Revolutionary”
- Emotional bond with men onstage: “it felt like it was your friend” “really relatable”
- “Humanization” of men - greater insight into emotional experiences & diversity of men, pressures they may experience

Study Findings: Presenters

- “Pride,” “empowerment,” “hope,” -- honor & privilege
- Valued opportunity to engage in a non-judgmental, open, supportive way with diverse group of men
 - For several: one of the first times they felt “safe” or “relaxed” with a group of men
- Personal affirmation – encouraging to see that other men share their experience
- Public accountability to not perpetrate further violence

Study Findings: Presenters

- Humanization of men from social groups they didn't often interact with; more empathy & perceived common ground; challenging of prejudices (but still a ways to go for some)

"I definitely got what I felt to be a very new insightful view into disabled people. Uh based on one of the performances and just getting the opportunity to interact with him. And this would be the kind of guy I would pass on the street and say, "that dude is some sort of quadriplegic" and there would be no common frame of reference and I would sort of feel sorry for them and move on. So that was sort of a humanizing experience, getting to meet this individual and talk to him."

Study Findings: Presenters

Humanization, cont'd

"Same with some of the gay presenters. I've had the opportunity to interact with a lot of gay people professionally but it was fortunate to sort of hear... um I'm one of the people that get a little bit annoyed by sort of like boisterous gay rights rallies and the like, kind of feeling like "you know what, we all have our oppressions." You know, like, I'll sign your petition but I don't want to hear you yelling. But to actually hear people's stories about how difficult their sexual identity has been for them, the experiences that they've had with it, the reactions of their family and stigma – you know, that was kind of a humanizing, like "oh man, I, you know, get it, I'm really sorry you had to go through that, that's not right."You know I was someone who opposed passing Prop 8 primarily based on a kind of a libertarian viewpoint that it's not the government's business... everyone should do what they want.... gay people should be able to marry the people they love.... I don't care, I don't want to go in anyone's business. But after this experience it's like, that's a real shame and it would suck for you and that's not right. And again sort of feeling humanistic."

Study Findings: Presenters

- Greater understanding of how social norms affect men's behavior
 - "almost perhaps as a sociologist... like it's almost cracking the code on machismo"
- Shifts in perception of own life experience shared in MSP
 - "I went from victimhood to survivorship"
 - Generation of meaning: Seeing that sharing their painful experiences could help others
 - "By making my story into art, I didn't only get the sense that I was getting acceptance from the listeners. More than that, I became proud of my story and proud to tell it."

Summary

- The Men's Story Project approach is feasible, acceptable and promising as a means of fostering critical dialogue about masculinities & related health/justice issues with students, presenters, and their broader communities.
- (Enough) men want to participate in the project, and audiences are highly receptive.

MSP Progress to Date

- 6 live productions, San Francisco Independent Film Festival (2009)
- Website & YouTube channel
- Training guide, workshop, MSP license
- MSP film used in colleges, NGOs
- 2 studies in progress
- Advisory Council includes Michael Kimmell, Jackson Katz, Paul Kivel, Mary Koss, Frederick Marx, Chad Sniffen
- UC-Berkeley Bears Breaking Boundaries Award – Improving Student Life (2009), UCSF Chancellor's Award for Public Service (2010)
- CNN Headline News, SF Chronicle, VoiceMale Magazine

MSP Future Directions

- **Vision:** Global network of campuses, NGOs & independent groups creating & evaluating own MSP initiatives
- MSP Network website, linked to MSP YouTube channel
 - Highlight local initiatives
 - Groups upload films
- 2010: 1st year of broad campus/NGO project implementation & evaluation

Campus implementation – initial ideas

- At least 1 person leads effort as a whole. Led/supported by staff, faculty and/or student group.
- Recruitment
 - Start recruiting in Fall for Spring event (4-6 mo.)
 - Broad outreach – students, faculty, staff, local NGOs
 - Host MSP film screening for discussion/recruitment
 - Personal relationship with project director
 - Contact local NGOs to find men to speak about challenging issues (e.g. violence, HIV/AIDS)

Campus implementation – initial ideas

- Include all men who want to participate in some way – turn no one away (idea of Men's Collective)
- Independent study credit for student leaders
- Group activities for presenters
- Multi-gender committee for feedback on pieces in progress
- Broad outreach for campus group sponsorship & publicity

Campus implementation – initial ideas

- Attendance required for certain courses or campus groups
- Resource/action table
- Evaluate project with presenters & audience members
- Host follow-up dialogues/activities – e.g., at Gender Resource Center
- Use a theater space
- Film the event

MSP Fundraising

- 100% profits → groups whose work is aligned with MSP mission
- The benefiting organization can be mentioned in introduction; \$\$ raised announced at end of night →→ **Immediate, concrete contribution** the audience made.
- V-Day: 100% → groups ending violence against women & girls (\$60M in 10 yrs). The MSP is inspired by this model.

MSP Training & Support

- Training guide: “Tips & Guidelines for Creating a Local Men’s Story Project”
- DVD of debut production for recruitment, campus events, training
- Training workshop: ½-day or day-long
- Consulting
- License Agreement

MSP License

- License required to use MSP name & participate in Network
- Use of MSP name (with unique byline) → public awareness of a linked & expanding set of initiatives: a growing ‘movement’
- 1st event: “Men’s Story Project – *Building Strength, Creating Peace*”
- License agreement addresses topics including fundraising, discussion of violence, media release, publicity. Yearly renewal.

Training Guide Topics

- Leadership Roles
- Discussing Violence/Crime
- Recruitment
- Curating the MSP
- Staging & Flow
- Music
- Program
- Publicity
- Introduction
- Audience Discussion
- Filming & Audio Recording
- Building MSP Community
- Connecting with MSP Central
- Samples:
 - Call for Submissions
 - Introduction
 - Press release
 - Audience feedback form

www.mensstoryproject.org

www.youtube.com/user/mensstoryproject

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MSP Funding

- National Institute of Mental Health
- UCSF Center for AIDS Prevention Studies Innovative Grant
- UC-Berkeley Bears Breaking Boundaries Award
- UCSF & UC-Berkeley campus groups
- Vanguard Charitable Endowment Program
- Give Something Back, Inc.
- Private donors

Fiscal sponsor: YES! (www.yesworld.org)