



Crossroads for Men: Engagement or Exit in the DEI World

A Response from the Inclusion Allies Coalition
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THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

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STATE OF AMERICAN MEN 2025

Men's Engagement in Inclusion and Culture-building at Work

Men are currently at a critical juncture, grappling with complex issues of identity, belonging, and culture. This crossroads, while not new, has now reached a level of urgency that demands immediate attention. The stark contrast between idealism and compassion on one hand, and the allure of isolation, tribalism, and bullying on the other, particularly among socially isolated younger men, is a cause for concern.

- Men's beliefs (about themselves and the role of men in society) are becoming more restrictive. Equimundo's study "[The State of American Men and What it Means for DEI](#)" asked men and women questions about the accuracy of traditional "man-box statements," such as "If a guy has a girlfriend or a wife, he deserves to know where she is all the time" or "A man should always have the final say about decisions in his relationship or marriage." The responses from 2017 to 2025 show a significant trend of agreement with these and other statements.
- The same report also revealed increasing levels of anxiety: 53% of young men think "no one really knows them" and 69% of young men think no one cares if men are OK.
- Many men support tearing DEI down, sharing their perception that a single indelicate comment can have a permanent impact on their reputation. • The most commonly reported barriers to men's engagement are fear of backlash or saying the wrong thing, pressures to conform to masculine norms, lack of clear behaviors/skills to act, and organizational systems that don't reward allyship (no time, no recognition). Tackling those barriers requires culture work, not just awareness training.
- Studies and practical reports (Bentley/CWB, HBR guidance, Brussels Binder analysis) find that deliberate, structured engagement of men — with coaching, clear role-modeling from leaders, men's cohorts, and measurable commitments — correlates with quantifiable progress and improvement in several dimensions.



THE IMPACT OF CURRENT PERCEPTIONS



The Impact of Current Perceptions About Men, On Men

Well-intentioned DEI framing has at times cast men as “the problem,” which sidelined them from the very conversations needed to build belonging.

Gary Baker, CEO and founder of Equimundo, says “men’s issues aren’t as simple as men “being privileged” or “having advantages” — but that many men feel **left behind, unseen, and unable to meet** rigid expectations, despite other advantages.” The research also suggests that engaging men is *not only* about calling out toxic behaviors—such as bullying, harassment, or discrimination, but about **creating conditions where men can thrive** in broad, healthy roles. Baker also addressed how many younger men lack social support and become socially isolated. “Young men are vulnerable to online radicalization that feeds into a kind of “failure mode” when men’s needs (economic, relational, identity) are unmet. When these conditions exist, young men may gravitate toward communities that amplify harmful norms.

“Young men facing economic anxiety are more than twice as likely to support “strongman” political views.

For young men “being bullied leaves a mark. Its trauma becomes something that influences the way we think. It gives us a sense of shame and powerlessness. Toxic shame is the secret we hide from the world, and the antidote to toxic shame is compassion, it’s what is at the root of helping men recover from supremacy thinking,” says Tony McAleer, the author “The Cure For Hate – A Former White Supremacist’s Journey From Violent Extremism to Radical Compassion.”

What Men Say About Their Reasons for Disengagement in DEI

TIME & PRIORITIES / “TOO BUSY”

“They’d just thought, ‘I’m too busy.’” – male coworkers explaining why they didn’t step up to help, in an article summarizing the Center for Talent Innovation / Coqual survey on white men and DEI.

Quartz

“The ability to just get regular work done is so hard that there’s rarely interest or time to work on the ‘higher-order’ tasks that promote a healthy culture.” – anonymous male respondent.

Quartz

“IT DOESN’T BENEFIT ME”

“...the most common reason those men gave for not being involved with such efforts was that they ‘don’t benefit me.’” – survey of white, straight, cisgender men in U.S. white-collar jobs.

Quartz

TASK FOCUS OVER CULTURE

“I don’t want to perpetuate bias, but I’m focused more on accomplishing what is asked of me and my team to achieve.” – white man in senior management, anonymous.

Quartz

FEELING “FORGOTTEN” OR EXCLUDED BY DEI

“Almost 70% of men feel ‘forgotten’ by D&I initiatives in organizations...” – White Men’s Leadership Study, as reported in D&I Leaders.

Dileaders



What Men Say About Their Reasons for Disengagement in DEI

APATHY / “IT’S ALREADY SOLVED”

“There are many men who feel a ‘level of apathy’ about D&I because they feel the issues have been solved or addressed.” – Lee Chambers, summarizing men’s attitudes.
Dileaders

FEAR OF SAYING THE WRONG THING

“Fear can get in the way because it gets in the way of learning... But saying the wrong thing is often how you learn.” – Daniele Fiandaca, reflecting how men describe their hesitation.
Dileaders

“Many of them are simply scared to speak up for fear of saying the wrong thing.” –
Fiandaca on men in the grocery industry disengaging from DEI.
LinkedIn

UNSURE IF THEY’RE “WANTED” IN DEI

“The single biggest challenge to engaging in D&I efforts — as noted by almost 70% of white men surveyed — is knowing whether they are ‘wanted.’” – White Men’s Leadership Study, quoted by Lily Zheng. PowerToFly

“Most white men want to help. They just don’t know how.” – White Men as Full Diversity Partners, summarizing survey findings.



What Men Say About Their Reasons for Disengagement in DEI

FEELING BLAMED, SHAMED, OR TARGETED

“It feels like a landmine. When people are looking for them (white men) to participate, they’re already feeling a bit on the defense... because they don’t want to feel accused or threatened or like a target.” – paraphrasing white men from a Forbes-summarized study, via Better Man Conference. Better Man

“White men don’t like to attend DEI training because they feel like they’re implicitly or explicitly being blamed for the current state of affairs, or that they’re being shamed for having the privileges they have.” Better Man

ZERO-SUM THINKING / LOSS OF STATUS

“Feeling disadvantaged: ‘Well if you are giving more opportunities to women, people of color, etc, then that means you’re giving fewer opportunities to me.’” Better Man

“They’re afraid of change anyway. They’re afraid of a loss of status, position, and way of life.” Better Man

ANXIETY ABOUT BEING CALLED RACIST

“I think that whites, some whites have anxiety about being blamed, being called racist, saying the wrong thing. Those are always concerns.” – Dr. Kenneth Hardy, describing what he hears from white people in diversity / social-justice work. Psychotherapy.net





WHAT CAN WE DO?

Facilitate Processes and Experiences and Meet Men Where They Are

More now than ever, men in the workplace need our support, especially the large group of young men who feel socially isolated, unseen, and unsupported. Equimundo is taking some steps, including: new research on the drivers of young men's civic engagement and human centered design research on creating inviting physical spaces and approaches for men to connect.

Facilitate Processes to Help Men Identify Shame



Programs, facilitated processes, groups and resources that help men learn to identify shame and shame triggers can be helpful, even liberating, to men who see DEI as a zero-sum activity for which they are to blame.

Through these discussions, men who previously felt DEI was disconnected from their experience often start to understand the idea that hard is hard meaning adversity and challenge can be part of many mens lived experience regardless of ethnicity, race, age, class, sexual orientation, etc.

Meet Men Where They Are: Online



Instead of eschewing social media and on-line content, Equimundo's suggests meeting men where they are: online. By expanding pathways to positive content and healthier spaces young men can build prosocial attitudes, beliefs, and relationships and civic engagement.

Facilitate Experiences Discussing Identity & Hardships



For all men, in the context of learning about how to support inclusion in the workplace, creating facilitated experiences where groups of men of all stripes can have discussions about identity and hardship, not because everyone's experience is similar, but because so many men - predominantly those from poor or working-class backgrounds, feel DEI overlooked the hardships they have experienced.

Pay Attention to Terminology, Map the Audience and Promote Young Men's Media Literacy

Pay Attention to Terminology



Be cognizant of terminology and the terms and language of DEI that have been co-opted and weaponized. This helps to invite men, predominantly white men, into the group. It's essential to continue to talk about what creates difference and discrimination in the workplace, while finding replacements for terms like "privilege", "woke," equity", "microaggression".

Map the Audiences and Target Messages



Use a targeted approach of mapping the audiences being captured by "manosphere" content and determine which messages and messengers appeal to them and why. Test new messages to reach "men in the middle."

Promote Young Men's Media Literacy



Schools and workplaces need to promote young men's media literacy and disrupt harmful content and misinformation by strengthening knowledge, and resources available to young men and the adults in their lives.

Apply Game Ecosystems, Refrain From Statistics, And Help Men Understand DEI Benefits

Understand and Apply Game Ecosystems



If we are to “meet men where they are,” we will need to learn more about game ecosystems that can accelerate and adapt emerging initiatives that enhance emotional and social connection, increasing player engagement, expanding audiences and strengthening in-game communities.

Refrain From Using Fact Checking and Statistics



Refrain from using fact-checking and statistics as a means of persuasion, The issues limiting men's engagement are primarily emotional vs. rational.

Help Men Understand How DEI Can Benefit Them



Continue to help men learn about and understand how DEI can benefit them, individually in terms of relationships, job performance and mental health. Begin these discussions by surfacing their hopes and dreams for the future while still making room for them to talk about the ways they have felt overlooked. Find common ground in fears, dreams and aspirations.



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