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## Book Review: *Some Men: Feminist Allies & the Movement to End Violence against Women*, by Michael A. Messner, Max A. Greenberg, and Tal Peretz

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## BOOK REVIEW

### **Some Men: Feminist Allies & the Movement to End Violence against Women,**

by Michael A. Messner, Max A. Greenberg,  
and Tal Peretz

New York, Oxford University Press, 2015, 256 pp.,  
\$99.00 (hardcover), \$24.95 (paperback),  
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In their book, *Some men: feminist allies & the movement to end violence against women*, Michael A. Messner, Max A. Greenberg and Tal Peretz outline the history and contributions by men to feminist, gendered, anti-violence activism. As empirical research, *Some men* is a formative work in two key ways: it is a historical overview of men's place in feminist activism, and an inspiration for men looking into how to get involved.

The authors provide an in-depth examination of the kinds of anti-violence work men do and how that work has shifted over time, by relying on 64 life history interviews (52 men, 12 women) with North American anti-violence activists between the ages of 20 and 70. Taking an intersectional approach, the authors also describe how race, class, and sexual orientation shape these allies' identities and their work. For example, most of the older men in their sample began by starting therapeutic men's groups, primarily dominated by white men.

Messner, Greenberg and Peretz further examine how and when men of colour made their way into the fold, followed by men of differing sexual orientations. Reasons for entrance into anti-violence work also varied. For a number of men in the earlier cohorts, it was the intimacy of experiencing or witnessing sexual violence first-hand that inspired their vested interest in advocacy work. Subsequent generations of allies, however, often found initial motivation from established institutions – academic coursework and community groups.

Messner, Greenberg and Peretz discovered three distinct ‘cohorts’ of male anti-violence activists. The activist work of these three overlapping cohorts is described within a historical context, highlighting how these allies gain trust in the Women’s Movement, particularly concerning what are often regarded as ‘women’s issues’. Beginning with those who started their work during the 1970s and 1980s, the authors call this group the Movement Cohort. For the Movement Cohort, key to gaining ground within the movement was following women’s leadership. During a lull in public feminist activism during the middle of the 1980s and into the 1990s, the Bridge Cohort found they had different lessons to learn. Their challenges came in identifying and achieving goals that did not require taking resources from women and evaluating the increasing role of racial diversity in sexual violence conversations. The youngest cohort, deemed the Professional Cohort, find feminism and anti-violence ideologies within established institutions like universities and professional organizations. For this group of men, the challenge is, in part, the dissemination of information, but also the added negotiation how of men’s presence might work to silence the voices of women working against and affected by sexual violence.

It is on this topic that concluding chapters take over as too often male activists are placed on pedestals for their work in speaking about women’s issues. To this end, Messner, Greenberg and Peretz present several examples in which due credit to women leaders was not appropriately delivered. Indeed, male feminists can be subject to tokenism as a result of their few numbers and heightened visibility. Notably, unlike women tokenized in professions dominated by men, men’s tokenization is often associated with additional privileges, support and praise. It is through this discussion of the pedestal that a central question of *Some men* comes to light: how exactly

do men become good allies? For the authors, the answer stems from women's guidance. Their advice is to 'ask, ask, ask', and to acknowledge women's lineage of knowledge and leadership (p. 160). By asking women how men can help, these male feminists allow women's voices to be heard. Further crucial to the ethics of being a good ally involves self-reflection and citing those women whose work came before them.

Finally, the authors return to the parable that opens *Some men*, which describes a river used to refer to the work of allies and activists in going 'up stream' to abate issues at the source (p. xi). While going back to the source and working with men and boys is one option, merely by being an ally and finding a place within the feminism and anti-sexual violence milieu is useful. As the authors suggest, 'Whether one works downstream or upstream, in this tributary or that one, ultimately we all share the same waters. [...] Pick a spot; join hands, wade in' (p. 190). This book will become a central work in the disciplines of women's and gender studies, feminist theory, activism, as well as men and masculinities. Simultaneously an excellent resource for study and for teaching in the classroom, this book is a clearly written text digestible for many levels and worthy of further discussion.