

## Session 1: SHAPE

Session One was a full day session. In this first session, much of the focus was on establishing relationships and building trust within the group. We did this by asking participants to reflect on and share their reasons for taking part in the Study-into-Action process, and what they hoped to contribute to and gain from the process. As the facilitation team, we also sought to lay some foundations for the subsequent eight sessions of the Study-into-Action, by explaining its origins, goals and timeline as well as introducing Somatics as an embodied approach to individual and collective change that we would be using throughout the process. To assist us in the introduction of Somatics to the Study-into-Action process, we were joined by Staci Haines, founder of generative somatics ([www.generativesomatics.org](http://www.generativesomatics.org)), as a guest trainer/facilitator for this first session. Further objectives for Session One were to deepen the group's collective understanding of both male privilege and the gender binary, and to identify ways to access support, both inside and outside of the group, during the life of the Study-into-Action process.

### Preparation

As preparation for this session, we asked participants to:

- Fill out an Intro Questionnaire and return it to us (the facilitation team) before coming to the session. The purpose of the questionnaire was to help participants reflect on their motivations for taking part in the Study-into-Action, and what they hoped to gain from and contribute to the process. The questionnaire was also intended to provide us, the facilitation team, with information that would help us to create a healthy group space, respect people's histories, and support each person's process of transformation over the course of the Study-into-Action.
- Read the Goals statement for the Study-into-Action process and the handout on Trans Etiquette, so that everyone would have a shared starting point going into the group.
- Check in with one of the facilitators, in person or by phone, before coming to the session to discuss any questions about either/both of the handouts.

### Opening activities

We opened the session with an introduction to the Study-into-Action process and the members of the facilitation team. We explained why we had come together as a facilitation team to organize the Study-into-Action, and shared a brief history of the Challenging Male Supremacy (CMS) project. We also talked about some of the issues we were dealing with in our own lives that had prompted us to form CMS and some of the questions we were in that we hoped would be explored by the group.

We then asked each participant to take a couple of minutes to introduce themselves, saying their name, where or with whom they worked, and one question/issue/experience/person that has prompted them to participate in the Study-into-Action.

Following this round of introductions, we gave a very brief intro to Somatics, as an approach to individual and collective change oriented around embodied practice. In this introduction to Somatics, we made reference to the following three handouts, which we distributed at the end of the discussion: Somatic Transformation, Sites of Shaping/Sites of Change, and The Transformative Power of Practice.

We then explained that we would begin every session with a Centering practice, in order to build a practice of being more fully present to ourselves and each other during the Study-into-Action. We emphasized two key points in relation to the importance of this Centering practice:

- *Being present, open and connected:* We center to become more present, open and connected. We center to embody ourselves, allow more aliveness and feeling, and de-numb ourselves. We center to organize ourselves purposefully around what we care about and to have this inform and fill out our psychobiology. Centering builds presence. Centering in the body, mood and commitment gives us a pragmatic, body-based place to return to when triggered.
- *Taking Action from Center:* Often when we begin to take action and interact, we lose center or quit feeling ourselves. Taking action while centering let's us practice being in action while staying connected to our commitments, ourselves and others (i.e. community, relationships, organizations, political projects, movements, etc).

Following this Centering practice, we asked everyone to start walking in the room, and to feel what it felt like to be moving in this space with everyone else. We then asked participants to stop, identify another participant with whom they wanted to work and to approach that person and ask their consent to work together. As facilitators, we modeled this practice of seeking and giving or refusing consent, explaining that such Consent practices are a key step in challenging and undoing male privilege, because such privilege is often expressed in the presumption of consent.

Once participants were paired up, we asked them to sit down together and ask each other the following three questions:

- Which experiences with gender and oppression have brought you here?
- What do you want from this group?
- What do you hope to give to this group?

After about 10 minutes, we called everyone back together to debrief, in the large group, both the pairs conversation and the somatic practices.

In order to orient everyone to the group process during the Study-into-Action, we then presented the overall goals and session timeline, as well as the objectives for this session. We then presented a draft set of working agreements, as the basis for a discussion with participants of the key agreements that we needed to make together as a group which would help us to work together. One of the points we stressed in this discussion of working agreements was the importance of making a collective commitment to taking care of each other and the training space in very practical ways. The facilitation team provided lunch and snacks for this first session, and during this first session we created a roster for participants to volunteer to bring food to each of the subsequent eight sessions, which everyone followed through on.

Participants also volunteered to do the clean-up at the end of each session, and did a great job doing so. Having reached consensus on our collective working agreements for the Study-into-Action, we closed this opening period by introducing the Parking Lot, as a way to keep track of outstanding issues and questions to which we would return during the course of the sessions.

### **Shape of (male) privilege in our lives**

This activity took about 90 minutes. We began it by discussing some definitions and examples of male privilege and white privilege, using the handout Understanding Privilege as the basis for our discussion. We emphasized our understanding of male privilege as a practice and expression of male supremacy, which we defined as:

*“The pervasive, institutionalized, everyday system of exploitation, marginalization and violence that targets cisgender women and transgender/gender non-conforming people, and affords power, prestige and benefits to cisgender men.”*

We also stressed these key points:

- Male supremacy is organized to privilege cisgender men (particularly those who experience other systemic privileges, e.g., in terms of age, ability, sexuality, class, race, religion, citizenship).
- The reality and experience of male privilege does not imply that cisgender men do not experience violence and oppression, including in ways that reinforce the power, prestige and benefits of other cisgender men.
- Male supremacy works on a logic of domination and subordination (the male/masculine over the female/feminine) that is primarily organized around gender, but must also be understood in its interactions with other forms of privilege/oppression based on age, ability, class, race and sexuality.

After exploring some of these definitions, we reminded the group of the somatic centering activity and sharing earlier in the session regarding experiences that have brought us here, and of our ongoing exploration of intersectionality, and how male privilege relates to other forms/systems of oppression.

We then asked participants to break into pairs, using the partner consent practice which we had discussed earlier, and in their pairs to share examples of male privilege, and how it gets expressed in and by our bodies (e.g. in gestures and behaviors.)

We gave the pairs about 10 mins for this sharing, and then asked pairs to get together to form small groups. We asked each group to create a ‘shape’ to show how male privilege looks and works, and we reminded everyone that they could choose to focus on different spaces where this privilege is expressed (personal relationships, organizations, community settings and so on.) For example, one of the groups chose to base their collective ‘shape’ of male supremacy on a scenario in which a group of men are watching and commenting on women’s bodies in the street. To create their ‘shapes’ of male privilege, we invited the groups to either use role play/performance, with or without words, or to show a tableau of still image(s) with their bodies to represent a scene or scenes of male privilege in action. We allowed about 15 minutes for the

groups to create their 'shapes', and then each group took it in turns to present their 'shape' of male privilege to everyone else.

We debriefed this activity, seeking to discuss key features of male privilege and the practices that will begin to dismantle male privilege, by using the following questions:

- How does it feel (emotionally, physically) to both create and see the 'shapes' of male privilege?
- In what ways does feeling the 'shapes' of male privilege help us in the work of challenging male supremacy?
- What are some of the key features of male privilege expressed in the different contexts shown in these 'shapes'?
- In what ways does male privilege show up differently in different settings and contexts (personal relationships, organizations, community settings and so on)?
- What is at stake for us as men in seeking to dismantle male privilege and challenge male supremacy? What will we lose? What might we gain?
- What are some of the practices that we need to be in so that we can begin to dismantle male privilege? These could include practices of connection and vulnerability, shifting and sharing power, as well as followership and accountable leadership.

## **Support and resilience**

We spent the next 45 minutes discussing issues of support and resilience. As facilitators, we gave a brief presentation, making the following points:

- As men committed to social justice, we often come to the work of challenging our own privilege and systems of male supremacy from a sense of shame, about our own practice and our complicity with these systems.
- Trying to challenge male supremacy from this place of shame does not serve us or the work of challenging male supremacy - it can lead to being over-accountable (trying to overcome our shame by feeling that we are wholly and solely responsible for the male supremacy that is enacted in our lives.)
- Working from this place of shame can also lead to being under-accountable (trying to push away our shame by not acknowledging the specific and continuing ways that we contribute to male supremacy, but instead focusing solely on systems and institutions of male supremacy.)
- Focusing on and working from a sense of resilience is a way to deal with these issues and feelings of shame. In this context, resilience refers to a capacity to be in and work from a place of centered accountability, that takes full responsibility for our own actions in relation to systems of male supremacy and that understands the broader contexts and systems shaping these actions. To illustrate this, we gave examples from our own lives of how we are trying to shift from shame-based reactions and, instead, take action rooted in resilience-based practices of being responsible for our own parts in systems of male supremacy.

We then asked participants to get into small groups to discuss what/who gives them resilience. Following about 10 minutes for this group-work, we asked participants to do some individual journaling on a personal support plan, starting with these two questions:

- What do I need support around?
- How and with whom will I seek support?

In introducing this practice of creating and maintaining a personal support plan, we asked people to pay particular attention to the ways in which men can reproduce male supremacy by seeking only support from women, and expecting women to be their emotional care-takers. We made clear that we would be revisiting our personal support plans in future sessions.

## **Gender liberation**

We introduced a Gender Liberation exercise that we learned from other organizers, and is based on an activity from the book “Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice” ([www.routledge.com/cw/readingsfordiversity/s1/teaching/](http://www.routledge.com/cw/readingsfordiversity/s1/teaching/)). We began by sharing our commitment to gender liberation and offering definitions of some terms (sex, gender identity, gender presentation and sexual orientation.) Having shared our understanding of these terms, we had participants draw a line along the bottom of a piece of blank paper and write terms in the center of the page on six separate rows. From the bottom, these were: sex, gender identity, gender presentation, perceived gender identity, sexual orientation and perceived sexual orientation. The left side was the male/man/masculine end of a spectrum, while the right was the female/woman/feminine end. Participants were asked to mark a point each successive line, starting with sex; they were encouraged to choose a single point, but also allotted the space to do what was helpful for them. (Facilitators may find it helpful to clarify at the start or during the exercise that the spectrum is artificial and doesn't fit many people.)

After all six rows have been completed, participants were asked how it felt to do the exercise, what they thought a person's dots are supposed to look like ('all lined up in a perfect column on the far left or right'), and if their dots were perfectly lined up. Some of the takeaway points were that:

- Almost no one's dots line up perfectly
- You cannot assume any of someone's points from the others – although this is exactly what happens in our society
- Self-definition is of central importance
- Gender identity, expression and sexual orientation are fluid, and can change over a lifetime or from moment to moment
- People face various kinds of pressures that shape our gender expressions
- There are benefits and privileges that come with certain gender expressions/practices, and violence and punishment that accompanies others
- Heteronormativity is a powerful force, closely related to the policing of gender expression

We ended by stressing that linear spectrums don't do justice to the range of gender and sexual identities people hold, and introducing Dylan Vade's concept of a "gender galaxy" (<http://www.trannymals.com/gendergalaxy.htm>).

### **Closing activities**

We closed out the first session by introducing a practice of articulating and working on one or more Commitments, which would be one of the key practices around which we would structure the nine sessions of the Study-into-Action. We then ended the session with a reminder to everyone about taking care of ourselves and each other following what had been an intense day of reflection and discussion. We gave out the preparation assignments for Session Two and formed a closing circle, in which everyone was asked to share how they were feeling at the end of the session.