

Session 2: JOURNEY

Session Two was an evening session, taking about 3.5 hours. In this session, participants continued to explore male supremacy by using their personal experiences as lenses through which they can understand how male privilege has shaped them through their lives and the subsequent personal impacts this oppression/privilege has. The key objective of this session was to deepen our relationships and trust within the group through exploring the forces of privilege/oppression that have shaped us individually with respect to gender. Through this process we also aimed to identify some of the changes we want to make in order to move toward our personal commitments to challenge male supremacy.

Preparation

As preparation for this session, we asked participants to:

- Revisit the somatic centering practice in order to become familiar with the practice and to be more fully in touch with our whole selves.
- Read the essay “Here Be Dragons” by James Baldwin and an excerpt from “Stone Butch Blues” by Leslie Feinberg.
- Write for 15 minutes on issues that came up while doing the readings - we encouraged participants to do this as a “free writing” exercise.

Opening activities

We opened the session with an overview of the session’s objectives and agenda, and a review of the goals, timeline and working agreements for the Study-into-Action process as a whole. We then revisited some of the key terms that were introduced in Session One (including terms such as sex, gender, cisgender, transgender, and sexuality) and reviewed our collective understanding of the meanings of these terms.

Participants were then reintroduced to Somatics and why it is incorporated into the Study-into-Action sessions. We led a Centering practice and followed up with a Mutual Connection practice. The questions we used for this practice were “How are you?” and “How have you been accessing support since Session One?”

We then explained to participants that in this and most of the subsequent sessions of the Study-into-Action, there would be time set aside for us to meet and talk in a smaller group, together with a member of the facilitation team. We explained that these Support Groups were intended as another way to build relationship and trust among participants, by creating time in each session to meet with the same group of participants, to discuss particular issues arising. Ahead of time, we had assigned participants to one of four Support Groups, each to be led by one of the Study-Into-Action facilitators, basing our decisions on the composition of each Support Group on our assessment of who would work best together. We presented this proposal for the composition of each Support Group, explaining that if anyone wanted to move and join

a different group, then we would make that happen. As it turned out, everyone was OK with the group to which they had been assigned.

We then met in our Support Groups to discuss the reading and writing that we had done in preparation for the session. We took extra time out to also discuss Baldwin's use of the term hermaphrodite within his essay.

Life journeys and male supremacy

The main activity of this session was a life-mapping exercise, in which participants were asked to depict the events and forces that have helped to shape their experiences and practices of gender, including their experiences and practices of male privilege (in relation to other systems of oppression.) Staying in our support groups, we asked each person to draw a Life Map - a picture(s) or a diagram that illustrated their life - and to mark on it three people and three moments/events that have shaped how they experience and practice masculinity and male privilege. Participants were given 20 minutes to do this. We encouraged everyone to pay attention to what was coming up for them physically and emotionally as they were creating their Life Maps. To help participants in creating their Life Maps, we also encouraged them to think about:

- Experiences and practices of masculinity and male privilege as they have related to other systems of oppression
- The different 'sites' for these experiences/practices (e.g. home, school, street, workplace etc) and the institutional forces in play at each of these sites - a key question we asked everyone to think about was "how have these institutional forces shaped our experiences and practices of gender and privilege in these spaces?"
- The ways in which we shape ourselves in terms of gender and privilege in response to these institutional forces.

When participants had finished their Life Maps, we met in our support groups to debrief the activity. Each person was given 5-7 minutes to share their map with their group members and to talk about the thoughts and feelings that came up in creating the map.

After a break, we met as a whole group to discuss the Life Maps. As facilitators, we used the following guiding questions to draw out the learning from the activity:

- How did it feel (emotionally, physically) to do your map and see/hear about other people's maps?
- How have we been shaped in terms of masculinity and male privilege by people and institutions in our lives?
- How has that shape helped us to survive?
- How has that shape benefited us?
- How has it limited or harmed us and our relationships?
- How is that shape (not) aligned with our values?

Personal commitments

Building upon this discussion, we moved into working on our individual commitments. We reminded participants of the discussion in Session One about the importance of stating and then working on one or more commitments as a way to begin to take action on challenging male supremacy in our lives. We reintroduced the Commitments Worksheet and explained how we would be using this throughout the Study-into-Action process.

To help participants begin to think about commitments on which they might want to work during the Study-into-Action process, we used a partner exercise. We asked each person to pair up with someone with whom they would feel comfortable going a little deeper. In choosing a partner, we asked everyone to practice asking for and giving consent. Each pair was given 10 minutes, 5 minutes each, to take turns in answering the following two questions:

- How have I been impacted by this shaping that I depicted on my Life Map?
- What practices, behavior and patterns in my life have come from this shaping?

Closing activities

We then closed the session with a reminder on self-care, the preparation assignments for Session Three and a closing circle, in which everyone was asked to share how they were feeling at the end of the session.