

Session 9: MOVING FORWARD

Session Nine was a full day session. In this final session of the Study-into-Action process, participants were given the opportunity to share appreciations and to take a critical look back on the previous eight sessions, while still building towards the future. As facilitators, our intention was to help participants assess where they were at with respect to their commitments and to strengthen a sense of collective support for participants' own process of moving forward on these commitments. This closing session was also an opportunity to relate our collective and individual work around gender and transformative justice to ongoing struggles for collective liberation outside of the Challenging Male Supremacy project. Our aim was to find points of connection and collaboration to continue this work beyond our sessions together. We stated our key objectives for this session as being to:

- Bring closure to the Study-into-Action process
- Deepen our commitment to taking this work forward
- Identify potential next steps in taking this work forward and getting the support we need to do this
- Share our collective appreciations and evaluations of what we've accomplished together

Preparation

As preparation for Session Nine, we asked participants to continue to work on their Commitments Worksheet and also write about their commitments in terms of the following questions:

- What will you need to actually live your commitments?
- What are the obstacles standing in the way of that?
- What can support your efforts? What support will you want/need from others?

Participants were also asked to be in conversation with one or two people in their lives who benefit from male privilege, focusing on how male supremacy plays out in their lives and communities as well as how to challenge it. Participants were asked to share their experiences in this group and the commitments they've been developing throughout as part of this conversation. Questions for evaluation were also included in the preparation work, to be revisited in the Graffiti Wall exercise featured later in the session.

Opening activities

As facilitators, we opened the session with an overview of the session's objectives and the agenda for the day. We used this time to discuss and remind participants of the intent of the Study-into-Action process as it comes to a close in this session. We made the following key points about the Study-into-Action process as a way to orient participants to this closing session:

- This space was started as a space of inquiry, challenge, practice and reflection in order to respond to male privilege and to support others in doing so as well. The close of this process is not an end of our reflection, the end our personal transformation or the “fixing” of our own practice.
- Redefining masculinity, while also undermining male supremacy and our relationship to it, is an ongoing process. We must find venues and areas of our lives where we can put our ideas and conversations from this space into practice.
- Changing our behavior means being more like who we want to be and living with more dignity, which will give us more pride and the self-worth necessary to be more accountable.
- This reinforcing cycle has the potential to propel us towards our goals in a sustainable way. Session 9 is meant to be a space for tying these strands together particularly around shaping our individual commitments and building support.

We then led a Centering practice, followed up with a Mutual Connection practice, focusing on the questions: “What is one change that that you have made over the course of the Study-into-Action process?” and “What is one change that you are still trying to make?” Participants were then asked to resume moving in the room, taking action from center, and then select another partner and with their consent practicing Mutual Connection with the following two questions: “What has been a significant point of learning for you over the last eight sessions?” and “What questions about challenging male supremacy are you still left with?”

Reflections on Study-into-Action

The session’s activities began with participants taking time to honor and reflect upon their journey so far with an extended review of the overall Study-into-Action goals, timeline and working agreements. Our discussion focused specifically on the working agreements and our ability to maintain and shape them throughout the process thus far.

Lingering questions and other thematic topics that had not been explicitly addressed, or that were unclear or not given enough time, were revisited by checking in on the Bike Rack/Parking Lot - an ongoing list that had been maintained throughout the previous eight sessions, where participants could write up subjects or issues they wanted more information on or a deeper understanding of. The key topics for further discussion identified on the Bike Rack/Parking Lot included: accountability, “queering” of society, ableism and resources critiquing men’s relationship to pornography. We spent some time discussing each of these topics and, where applicable and possible, we also provided supplemental readings to support participants’ continuing reflection on them.

Graffiti wall

The main activity for our evaluation focus was the Graffiti Wall activity. We asked participants to write responses on post-it notes to three main critical feedback questions.

- What's worked well for you in this group?
- What are things you would like to see run differently if we were to run this group again?
- What are things you learned or gained from participating in the group?

As preparation for the session, we had already shared these questions with the group and asked everyone to be thinking about their responses. We wrote these questions up on butcher paper at the front of the room, thereby creating what we called a Graffiti Wall, and we asked participants to stick up their answers on the butcher paper under each respective question. We explained that we would re-visit these answers on the Graffiti Wall later on in the day during the second evaluation period.

Commitments check-in

After a short break participants broke into their smaller support groups, joined by a facilitator, to discuss and present their commitments. Each person took five minutes to share highlights from their Commitments Worksheet, while also requesting and receiving feedback from fellow participants. After each person had shared and received some feedback, there was time for individual writing and reflecting upon the critical feedback received.

When each person had shared in the smaller groups, we reconvened in the larger group, and participants again had five minutes each to present their commitments to the entire group with a voluntary period for feedback, if so desired.

Staying centered with our commitments

After the lunch break, we introduced a Decline and Redirect somatic activity as a way of practicing staying centered with our commitments, and in particular dealing with challenges that people might face in following through on their commitments. As facilitators, we explained and modeled the exercise for two rounds before inviting the participants to get into the practice. Participants were asked to focus on one of their commitments or on an aspect of male supremacy that they wish to practice challenging from center during the exercise.

Taking action on our commitments

As part of the future planning portion of the day, we then debriefed with participants the conversations that they had had as part of their preparation for this session. Building off of this, we gave a short presentation on ideas for the future work of the Challenging Male Supremacy project, and related these to participants' shared commitments, in order to talk about how to move this work forward in the near future. We used the following questions to help tease out possible ideas for collective action and to guide the discussion on what potential there is for continuing this work together on challenging male supremacy outside of the room:

- Which action ideas have the most support and energy behind them?

- Which action ideas do not, and what to we make of this?
- Which seem like a priority to take forwards?
- What are some next steps?

Reviewing the graffiti wall

After a break, we then moved into the retrospection portion of the day. We reviewed each session of the Study-into-Action process, discussing its specific theme, purpose, some of the activities we performed as well as the readings and learning materials associated with that session.

Transitioning again into the evaluation period of the day, we divided participants into three groups for a “gallery walk” of the butcher papers from the previous Graffiti Wall exercise. Each group was given a few minutes to read and discuss the responses to the questions that were posted earlier. With this exercise serving as a base for critical reflection, participants were given time to individually complete a written questionnaire evaluating the Study-into-Action program.

Appreciations and Closing

For the final portion of the day we moved into Appreciations and the Closing. For appreciations, we led a Centering practice and followed up with a Mutual Connection practice, addressing the following two questions: “What is something you appreciate about your own growth and development?” and “What is something that you appreciate about your partner’s presence and participation?”

As we returned to the closing circle, we invited one another to take time to silently appreciate someone outside the room who has helped them challenge male supremacy.

In the closing circle, we asked people to turn around and take one step forward, with one action in mind, that they are going to have to take, then turn around to reconnect with the circle by facing one another again. Using the following sentence completion exercise, facilitators encouraged at least two or three participants complete the following statements:

- “One action I’m going to take is...”
- “Three people I’m going to stay connected to are...”
- “An organization I’m going to stay connected with is...”

We then asked participants to turn around again and take a further step outwards, and again asked for volunteers to complete the above sentences. We did this one more time, and on this final turn, invited everyone to look around at how big the circle has become. We reminded everyone of the importance of staying connected to one another and this ever-expanding work. With this, we closed the Study-into-Action process.