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THE *IF MEN* PROJECT – THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A HEALTHY
MASCULINITY CURRICULUM FOR YOUNG MEN

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PIM 74

A Training Course-Linked Capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for a Master of Arts in Intercultural Service, Leadership, & Management at S.I.T. Graduate
Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

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Date: April 3, 2019

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Abstract

This paper examines the creation of the *If Men Project*, a healthy masculinity training curriculum aimed at young men. The *If Men Project* seeks to create a better world by helping young men find a stronger sense of their own identity in a way that creates positive relationships with everyone around them. In short, it helps young men be good men.

The paper will track the creation process from my own social justice journey, through the conception of the project, the design of the training, multiple implementations of it, and finally to the reflections and learnings that came from this capstone project.

Ideally this paper will serve multiple purposes for the reader. First, it will show the personal journey of one social justice trainer, including the challenges, successes, and learnings along the way. Second, it will offer an example of a social justice training that seeks to create change by targeting members of a privileged group early on, in a way that seeks to enlist them as allies and proponents of equity. As I believe this type of training to be uncommon, having this example and a consideration of its applications will be a valuable addition to our collective pool of knowledge. Third, it will provide insight for other trainers and social justice workers into ways that they can adapt their own work to better serve different target populations, and when this might be valuable to do. Finally, it is my sincere hope that this paper will, through reflections on my own learnings, give all readers some ideas that they can bring into their own lives and relationships to help on their own journey of personal growth

IF

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

- Rudyard Kipling

Introduction

When I was an undergraduate student, I took a class called Feminist Philosophy that was the first identifiable domino in the sequence of events that has led to this capstone project. During that class and through a few key friendships at the time, I first truly embraced my identity as a feminist. I began to see powerful examples of how people whose gender identity was different from my own had very different experiences of the world and the society around me. With this came two realizations: 1) I wanted to really make a difference in the realm of gender equity in our society, and 2) I recognized that men should not be the leaders of this movement; it had to be led by the oppressed groups. This led to a problem for me however. I was not sure how I, as a cis-gendered (a term I did not know at the time), heterosexual, man could be a part of the feminist movement, apart from just being a good man.

Over the next several years I began my career as an educator. I developed my teaching skills and expanded my view of the world through living and teaching in multiple countries and cultures. All the time, I continued to try and be a good man and have healthy relationships with everyone around me, but at the same time there was still the lingering feeling that I was not addressing an important aspect of my value system as thoroughly as I could.

In 2011, after returning to the United States, I got a job as the Director of an after school program in Columbus, Ohio. One of my responsibilities with this position was to both create and bring in new workshops for my students. This was anything from art to tutoring to personal development programs. In my second year, there was a program that was recommended to me called ROX: Ruling Our eXperiences. This was a program that trained facilitators to deliver a 20-week program that helps young women learn about everything including leadership, healthy relationships, dealing with drama, and self-defense. I checked out the program online and

eventually met with the founder to find out how to best bring the program to our school. We eventually got the program running, and it was a great success among our female participants.

After the success of ROX I remember thinking, “This is great. Now I just need to find the same thing for my young men.” So I began to do research for similar programming in the area. There was nothing. The closest I could find were some mentoring programs that met at community centers or churches. While these were no doubt valuable, I wanted a program that would come to the school and not put the burden of transportation on my students. Finally, I decided that I just needed to start such a program myself.

I met with two other male staff members, and we talked about an outline for the program. We called it *Guys Group* as a working title, but never found anything better so the name stuck. *Guys Group* had no formal written curriculum or design, rather we decided that we would invite young men into the space and start off each weekly session with a topic of conversation. These would cover such topics as dating, fatherhood, responsibility, gender roles, masculinity in the media, etc. We also did a number of hands-on projects such as learning to change a tire, building a bench, and learning some basic cooking and sewing. This ran for two years, and we had fairly consistent group of about half a dozen young men.

Finally I left the job and entered a Masters Program at the School for International Training (SIT). When I entered SIT, I was still longing to go work abroad again, and I had a vague notion of doing educational development work in struggling countries. However, healthy masculinity work was still heavily on my mind. My final group training project in Training Design and Experiential Learning, *Reshaping How We Shape Masculinity*, was on this topic. Later my listening project in Training for Social Action, explored the issue of masculinity and working with incarcerated populations.

Perhaps the biggest shift came when I was approached by several female peers about the toxic masculinity going on amongst our fellow students. I knew that if this was happening even at a social justice minded school like SIT, then it was a bigger problem than I anticipated. So I reached out to a few male and female colleagues and proposed that we start a group that became known as Gender Brunches. It was a weekly event that combined time for people of all genders to meet, share homemade food, and talk about topics of gender equity. This group ended up being a much bigger success than I expected. We had a regular average attendance of around 16-20 people, and the feedback we got from the participants was positive.

The success with this program, as well as the projects I had worked on in my courses, convinced me to shift my future goals from working on education abroad to working on healthy masculinity here in the United States. While I knew there were some people talking about it and some programs happening scattered around the country, I knew there needed to be more work done. This also gave me a solution to the problem that had stymied me back in college. The thing I could offer feminism, as a cisgender man, was to work with other men to be better men. With this renewed focus and passion, I began to take the first steps of the *If Men Project*. The name was partly inspired by a poem my father gave me when I was a pre-teen, "If" by Rudyard Kipling, so in some ways it is appropriate that it truly began at an institution right where the poet used to live.

Learning Objectives

As I came into this capstone project, the following are the learning objectives I originally set for myself. While the final learnings took on a different feel from that what these express, they serve to provide an insight into my approach to this capstone.

Personal

- A. I will continue to refine my awareness of my own masculinity and privilege, the ways in which they affect my relationships with others, my ability to create positive or negative social and personal change, and the ways in which they shape my own sense of self-identity.
- B. I will have a deeper awareness of the positive and negative influences on the masculinity of young men in our society, and a greater understanding of their effects.
- C. I will increase my skills in asking questions that prompt personal change, while still showing support for others' experiences and autonomy.

Professional

- A. I will gain a deeper awareness of my role as a person of many privileged identities and its implications and effects on me as a social justice trainer.
 - Specific competencies from Training for Social Action and Training of Trainers classes address the issues of ethics in multicultural training. In particular, they are based on a trainer's awareness of their own identity and the biases and lenses they bring into their trainings. While I have continued to reflect on these issues on my own, this capstone will require that I learn experientially how this manifests in trainings outside of graduate school.
- B. I will develop greater awareness of the challenges men of this age group face and refine my skills in serving this population.
 - Before coming to SIT, I had already facilitated a young men's discussion group for two years as part of an after-school program. Through this I began informally

to learn more about these challenges and how to address them. The core competency in Training for Social Action relating to listening and Strategic Questioning (Green, Peavey, & Woodrow, p. 91) skills gave me a more formalized approach to learning about the young men's experiences and to work towards attitude shifts among them.

- This curriculum will allow me to implement and improve on this competency through the experience of directly serving the target population.

C. I will further develop my knowledge and skills related to training design, implementation, and feedback which will increase my ability to expand this curriculum to serve different age groups, identities, and cultures, as well as to design and facilitate future trainings.

- Multiple competencies from my Training Design for Experiential Learning, Training for Social Action, and Training of Trainers: Ethics and Intercultural Design courses relate to developing these basic skills. The greater scale of this training, compared with the in-class projects, as well as the fact that it is repeated and refined allows me to move these competencies from *basic* skills to *intermediate* or even *advanced* levels.
- By building on these increased competencies as well as those described Professional points A and B, I will be able to build on the purpose and goals of this curriculum to reach other key populations.

Methodology

My approach to this CLC Capstone, practitioner focused, project used the following steps:

1. I expanded my knowledge of training design, youth development, and masculinity in our culture through continued research and investigation. I also continued to enhance my

training design and youth development skills through my professional work, first through an internship with World Learning's International Development Education Programs Office and later as the Youth Programs Coordinator for the Brattleboro Area Prevention Coalition.

2. I reflected on the what I learned from my classes at the SIT, particularly those from Training Design for Experiential Learning and Training for Social Action as well as other sources on training design and healthy and toxic masculinity, to create the outline for a training curriculum along with several sample lessons. (Appendix 1)
3. I approached two different local high schools, and eventually presented the curriculum to one school as an after school program option.
4. I adjusted and completed the training curriculum to conform to the needs of the school and the students.
5. I facilitated the training three times, gathering data for research purposes on the third session.
6. I reviewed my data, reflected on my own impressions, and assessed the success of the training curriculum.

Literature Review

Why is there a need for this program?

The total suffering that has been caused by patriarchal systems and toxic masculinity throughout history is incalculable. There are the direct and obvious effects, such as daily gender-based violence, wars fought for egos, and genocide stoked by fear. There are the indirect and hidden effects like women and transpeople afraid to walk at night or who have to hide their true identity for the sake of their physical and emotional safety. Then there are the lost opportunities. How many brilliant ideas have been denied to our world because the voices that carried those ideas were not men? How many people of genders other than male have been turned away from

the chance to better serve this world through better education, high leadership positions, or even something as simple as a vote in a democratic country? This harm done to anyone not male and to our world at large cannot be underestimated or undone.

Jackson Katz puts it clearly when he says, “the ultimate responsibility for the perpetration of violence lies not with the victims, but with the perpetrators...in a culture where people are conditioned to blame *women* -indeed all subordinated groups- for their own predicament, it does not come naturally to focus on the harms caused by *men*.” (Katz, p. 92). Making social progress in gender equity is not about more personal self-defense classes or teaching people how to spot the warning signs of an emotionally abusive partner. Rather it is about stopping violence, abuse, and dominance at its source. In the case of gender inequity, that source is men.

This is not to say that people of other genders never perpetuate toxic masculinity or gender inequity. According to bell hooks, our culture is one in which women are socialized to encourage men “when they are doing the work of destruction,” but not “when he is working to be a creator.” (2006, p.187). However the statistics and our own experiences put the vast bulk of responsibility on men. The US Department of Justice reported that in the span between 1980 and 2008, nine out of ten homicides were perpetrated by men (Cooper & Smith, p. 3). Furthermore over 78% of violent crimes had a perceived male as the perpetrator (Maston & Klaus, table 38).

These kinds of statistics do not paint a complete picture, of course, because they do not discuss the fact that men are also far more likely to be the victims of violence. In 2008, men were four times more likely to be murder victims than women. In fact that year, 97.8% of all homicides involved men, either as the perpetrator, victim, or both (Cooper & Smith, p. 9). Even in non-lethal violent crimes, the victimization rate for men (26.7 per 1000 people) is slightly higher than that of women (22.7 per 1000 people) (Maston & Klaus, table 2). Furthermore we see that

men's suicide rates are substantially higher, with men in 2016 being 3.6 times more likely to commit suicide than women (Hedegaard, Curtin, & Warner, 2018).

An equally important reason for this training to exist in the world is for all of the reasons that are not measurable by crime statistics, or possibly even quantitative data at all. It is for the men who do not have quite as deep an emotional connection with their partners as they could. It is for the men who are uncomfortable around "guy talk," but are worried about speaking up. It is for the men who feel the need to earn big paychecks so they can indulge in overblown consumerism, all at the expense of their own mental and physical health.

These are the guys who are so desperate to be accepted by their peers that they do all sorts of behavior they secretly know to be not quite right. They lie about their sexual experiences to seem more manly; they drink more than they can handle because they don't want to seem weak or immature; they sheepishly engage in locker-room talk about young women they actually like and respect. (Kimmel, p. 19)

Men are also more likely to use illicit drugs and to end up in the emergency room or dead as a result of that drug use (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2018).

This training program seeks to be a place that can help young men break the cycle of being either perpetrators or victims of the harms of toxic masculinity and instead embrace the fact that pro-social and individual power can come from healthy masculinity. bell hooks envisions a classroom that liberates minds "rather than indoctrinating them." (2003, p. 1).

In my Training Design for Experiential Learning course at SIT, a phrase came up that was something akin to: we have been doing a much better job of telling our girls that they can play with trucks, but we have not done as good a job of telling our boys that they can play with dolls. This has stuck in my mind as yet another reason why training on healthy masculinity aimed at young men is needed. It will free men up to pursue the activities that they are most

interested in with less risk of them being bullied for violating gender stereotypes (Minerson et.al., p. 11)

A final point about the need for this project is one about myself as the trainer, rather than the project or the target audience itself. Lee Anne Bell, et. al. point out that the majority of people who teach social justice issues are from underrepresented and historically oppressed groups. “Thus, the most vulnerable groups take on the most difficult and...risky teaching.” (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, p. 393). This means men need to step up. We need to be active, engaged allies in the drive for gender equity and an end to violence. As Lisa O’Neil points out in her article “Dear Men Who Wish to be Allies,” it is not the responsibility of women to educate men about feminism and healthy masculinity (2016).

Why a training?

Guys tell them that they feel they are making it up as they go along, with neither adequate adult guidance nor appropriate road maps, and, at the same time, that they feel they are playing by rules that someone else invented and which they don’t fully understand. (Kimmel, 2018, p. 22)

Michael Kimmel’s observation in Guyland paints us a clear image of young men who perhaps want to be good men but are lost in understanding how best to achieve that. Messages about how to be men, whether positive, negative, or neutral, come from an overwhelming number of sources including family and authority figures, media and entertainment, and friends and peers (Allen & Robinson, p. 7). There is, of course, no way to shut down these messages. We cannot exist in a social vacuum. Nor would we want to shut down all messaging to young men. Rather we must provide solid positive messaging around masculinity and help them to navigate all of those messages in a way that is empowering both for the young men and for those around them.

To the first point, young men may often feel that their parents won't understand and that they cannot open up to peers for fear of mockery (Kimmel, 2018, p. 7). Furthermore, bell hooks points out that in the history of feminist writing, there is comparatively little that is geared towards helping men change (2005, p. 140). These challenges mean that immediate support systems and outside written resources are not an option for many young men. Indeed the problematic messages of toxic masculinity actually serve to prevent young "men getting any help resolving them" (Allen & Robinson, p. 111). As such, other adults may often be ideally placed to help encourage young men to embrace a healthier form of masculinity and step up to be allies in the drive for equity.

There is no single project that will end the harm that toxic masculinity causes, but an excerpt from Ron Couchman's *I Can MANifest Change Facilitator Handbook* offers something that a training can do:

Giving these workshops will not end violence all by itself, but will increase awareness of types of violence, social power structures, and destructive ways men are sometimes socialized to act. Workshops allow us to share tools and experiences that will strengthen both the facilitators' and participants' ability to end men's violence, particularly men's violence against women. (p. 10)

Workshops also offer the benefit of flexibility, variety, and cost-effectiveness (Brooks-Harris & Stock-Ward, p. 1). The first of these ended up being particularly important because even in the high school version of this training curriculum, each of the three sessions it was offered contained a different number of individual lessons. The cost-effectiveness aspect was another important consideration since the goal was to present these trainings at school, which are limited in the amount of fungible money they have to spend on outside resources.

What similar trainings exist?

There were two existing trainings in particular that I looked at as reference for this project: *I Can MANifest Change*, published by Men for Equity and Non-Violence in Ottawa, Canada and *Live Respect: Coaching Healthy and Respectful Manhood*, published by A Call to Men in Rockville Center, New York, USA.

Both of these trainings lay out a structure of many similar topics, but they do have slightly different structures. Live Respect uses nine lessons, the first lasting 90 minutes and the rest 45 minutes each. The *I Can MANifest Change* training is less specific in its structure and does not lay out suggested times but presents seven modules plus a wrap up period. The table below lays out the topics covered by these two training programs.

Live Respect	I Can MANifest Change
The Man Box	Introductions and Personal Stories
Society's Gender Rules	The Continuum of Violence
Man Box Teachings	Power and Control
The Media Connection	Act Like a Man
Understanding and Objectification	Equality and Friendship
Understanding Sexual Harassment	What Can We Do?
Understanding Sexual Assault	Wrap Up
Interrupt the Cycle	
Healthy Manhood, Healthy Relationships	

Many of these would also be present in the *If Men* training design, but with some fundamental changes.

As I envisioned the *If Men* training being an after-school program that would last an entire school year, the original training outline had thirty-three distinct lessons, which would cover these topics and more. As I discuss later, this design had to be adjusted multiple times to work within the needs of the school. These trainings, and in particular the topics they shared in

common, were some of the factors that influenced the selection of topics in my final training design.

I opted not to use one of these or another pre-existing training for three main reasons. The first being my goals for this Capstone Project itself. As I wished to increase my skills in designing and implementing trainings, I knew that I would be better served in this purpose by designing my own training from scratch rather than simply facilitating a training that was already developed. Secondly, I was envisioning a much larger scale for this training design. While this ended up changing and my final design is much closer to these two examples, my original concept was much larger than any training curriculum I could find. And finally, I believed that it was important to maintain as much flexibility as possible to serve the needs of the participants. When I first began designing the training, I did not yet have a sense of where I would be facilitating this training or what the space or participants would be like. So I felt that my own training design would allow me to better serve whatever participants I finally had.

Curriculum Design

Overview

The *If Men Program* was originally designed to serve between six and fifteen high school age, male-identifying participants in 33 weekly sessions of 45-60 minutes each. These would be conducted after school hours, but on the school campus of the participants being served. It would lead the participants through a series of lessons designed to increase their understanding of their own identities, gain an awareness of privilege and power in our society, shift attitudes around masculinity to being healthier and pro-social, and increase personal skills and knowledge that would help the participants be more successful in the world.

Purpose, Goals, and Participants

Too many young men lack a clear sense of self and an understanding of the way that they can fit into their world in a way that empowers themselves and helps them empower others. The If Men Program strives to help young men find their own positive self-identity and the way that they can be successful in their world according to the standards and goals they set for themselves. (Appendix 1)

I selected this purpose for several reasons based on the social needs as evidenced by the literature review, my own experiences, and my personal identities.

My professional experiences and personal identities informed the decision to choose this purpose and these intended participants. Of primary note is that I am a cisgender male. Coming to an understanding of that identity and the privileges that come with it, I realized years ago that I must not only use that privilege to affect change in the state of gender equity in my society, but also that I must not usurp the roles of people of other genders in doing so. Rather I must use that privilege where it would best serve. After a time, I realized that the best way for me to do this was in working with other cisgender men to develop the awareness, attitude, knowledge, language, and skills to promote gender equity. My professional experiences as a high school educator and administrator further cemented the idea that this program, especially as facilitated by me, would be best done with young men in high school.

There are two primary goals of this curriculum design: 1) The young men who complete one school year of the *If Men Project* will have a stronger sense of their own self-formed identity, and 2) The young men who complete one school year of the *If Men Project* will have greater confidence about their ability to create happy, healthy, and successful lives for themselves.

The first goal speaks to the development of the awareness and attitudes surrounding masculinity. It drives the training participants to raise their awareness of where their current sense of identity stands, particular when it comes to masculinity, and what influences have led them there. It also adds a critical lens to this identity and seeks to shift participant attitude around these influences from one of apathy to one of pro-social excitement. I want the young men to be excited about setting their own identity, choosing their influences, and being excited about who they are becoming as human beings.

This goal also covers all aspects of the Unfreezing, Changing, Refreezing process set forth by Kurt Lewin and referenced in Robert Golembinski's essay, "Individual Choice about Change: Four Useful Models" (Porter p. 54). First, the initial awareness raising allows participants to unfreeze from their initial unintentional identity. Next they will shift their understanding as they see where those influences come from and what the motivation of the influencers are. Finally, participants begin to deliberately choose their own identity and the influences as they enter the refreezing processes, ideally with the understanding that parts of their identity, especially as it relates to masculinity, will be continually evolving through their lives.

The second goal of the training speaks to the skills and knowledge that the participants will gain from the training. The skills range in everything from broader skills like open communication, prioritization, and collaboration to more specific skills like basic sewing skills, tire changing, and food preparation. The knowledge gained will also cover a wide range of topics about healthy relationships, consent, fatherhood, leadership, etc. Participants will gain these skills and knowledge through group discussions, practical applications, and activities. When participants already have some level of the skills or knowledge being presented, the

training will encourage them to take on more leadership roles, with the trainer slipping back into facilitator mode.

The parts of the training related to this second goal would use the benefits of the Experiential Learning Cycle to produce the most effective impact. By using experiential learning, the confidence of the participants to actually use what they are learning will increase and they are more likely to be able to put these skills to use in their daily lives.

Overall Design and Theory

The design of this training curriculum incorporates many of the fundamental training theories and concepts discussed in *Training Design for Experiential Learning*.

The overall training design and sequence of topics is guided by both Kurt Lewin's Unfreezing-Moving-Refreezing cycle (Porter p. 54), and by the Experiential Learning Cycle, laid out by J.W. Pfeiffer (p. 211-212). In the final design used for this capstone project (Appendix 2), the earliest sessions and activities use icebreakers, getting-to-know-you activities, and individual reflections. These create an environment that is emotionally safe, yet begins to question the status quo and causes tension as the participants reflect the way they label themselves as well as the way society labels them. This not only encourages the unfreezing of participant attitudes, but also allows them to navigate the Experiencing and Publishing phases defined by Pfeiffer. Some specific activities provide experiences while others draw from the participants' lived experiences in the world. Think-Pair-Share questions and other activities serve to put these thoughts into the training space.

The next set of sessions turn to issues of social identities, privilege and power, and social messaging. These fall into the Moving phase of this framework, as they encourage the

participants to see and test new approaches to thinking about these structures. This comes through activities and facilitator input, but primarily as think-pair-share and group discussions. These topics are both broader and deeper, requiring the participants to seek to understand societal patterns and consider how the new learnings might apply to a view of the world that moves beyond their personal experiences. These are key aspects of the Processing and Generalizing stages. (Pfeiffer, p. 211)

Finally the last sessions, which include topics of healthy relationships, consent, and healthy communication, serve the Refreezing function of the Lewin framework and the Applying stage of Pfeiffer. They provide solid skills and practices that participants can apply immediately to their lives such that they become “reinforced and internalized” (Porter p. 54). Activities like listening practices and the safer sex conversation create very specific skills that take the learnings out of the workshop and into their near future experiences. Even the larger curriculum outline (Appendix 1) follows these frameworks, though simply at a larger scale.

Daily Design Plans and Activities

Each daily lesson design also bases its structure on the Experiential Learning Cycle. Each day begins with an experiential activity, such as a game or video. This serves to set a shared experience that can be a stepping off point as well as a touchstone for the rest of the day. Following this, and serving as Publishing the beginnings of the Analyzing stages, are activities such as worksheets and other writing based activities, usually with think-pair-share questions. In many cases this also served as what Jeff Brooks-Harris and Susan Stock-Ward call “Reflecting-on-Experience Activities.” These “encourage participants to reflect on their own personal

behavior in a way that prepares them for new learning and change” (Brooks-Harris & Stock-Ward, pp. 64-65).

From there the plans usually move on to guided discussions that lead the participants through the Processing and Generalizing stages. Questions for these sections of the training design are often based on the processing questions that Pfeiffer describes (pp. 214-217). This is also where material is related directly to participants’ lives which Brooks-Harris and Stock-Ward describe as a critical step in cementing new information in their minds (p. 67). One particular example of this is in the discussion on toxic masculinity (Appendix 2 – Day 4). By asking participants to not only consider how toxic masculinity affects people of other genders, but also how it affects men, both positively and negatively. This discussion can begin with personal examples like bullying and unhealthy relationships, before moving to macro level examples of gender violence, wage gaps, and power structures. Finally this discussion leads to the question, “So why should we care?” This brings it to the broad general level, and sets up a move into the applying stages.

Often the applying stage of the cycle is the part least directly addressed in the daily design. This is where the “questions to ponder” come into the design. They encourage the participants to think or even directly apply the learnings from that day’s lessons.

Brooks-Harris and Stock-Ward lay out a number of different learning styles that can be considered in designing trainings and choosing activities. These include those described by Kolb, Dunn and Dunn, and Jung specifically (Brooks-Harris and Stock-Ward, pp. 23-35). Furthermore they say that these can be addressed with one of two strategies. A something-for-everyone approach brings in a variety of activities with the intention of reaching the learning styles of all participants. On the other hand, a measure-and-match approach has the trainer

conduct a needs assessment before the training to best assess the learning styles they will encounter, and design activities more geared towards what they know will be in the room (Brooks-Harris and Stock-Ward, pp. 21). For this training, I knew that students would be signing up for it only a week before and that it would be extremely difficult to get them a needs assessment, have it returned, and study it enough to apply it to the training design. For this reason a something-for-everyone approach was a reasonable option.

When creating structured experiences, Pfeiffer says that there must be clear learning objectives and that these usually fall into one of three domains: cognitive, affective, or skill building (p. 155). The activities chosen for this training curriculum (Appendix 2) adhere to these domains as well. Activities like the Personal Identity Wheel (Day 2), Cliques (Day 1), and Social Identity Wheel (Day 3) address the self-awareness, insight and empathy of the affective domain. Royalty (Day 4), The Man Box (Day 4), and the Tea and Consent video (Day 5) incorporate the cognitive domain by directly addressing content and bringing it to a broader conceptual frame. Finally the skill building domain incorporates practice and skills through activities such as Listening Practice (Day 6) and the Safer Sex Talk (Day 5).

Design Changes Prior to First Implementation

Originally, in keeping with the goals of the program, I approached Compass School in Westminster, Vermont, with this as an idea for an after-school workshop that could last the entire year. During the initial discussion the school director was eager for the program but was concerned about the set up. Compass did not offer an after-school program; and he was worried that if it were the only program, we would have trouble with transportation as well as

competition with the young men who play sports at the nearby public school. Instead they asked if I would be willing to offer the program as a health class during the school day.

For their health program Compass offers their students a number of different class options, some of which are specifically required while others are optional but still fulfil the credit requirements. The director proposed that *If Men* could be offered to their young men as one of these later, optional classes. This compromise ended up offering some positives as well as some challenges. The largest positive was that I had better attendance than I almost certainly would have had with an after school program. Given such a small student body to pull from, the challenges of after school availability and transportation as well as the fact that I was not someone the students already knew, my chances of attracting people to an after-school program would likely be much lower.

Offering *If Men* as a class during the school day would eliminate the availability and transportation problems. Furthermore, by making it a class that would earn student's credit, it would also incentivize attendance. The way in which students signed up for their health classes also ended up providing an unexpected boost to attendance. When students at Compass sign up for their health classes, they put their top two preferences down, and then the health class coordinator decides which classes they will end up actually going to. Fortunately the health class coordinator has been an enthusiastic ally of this curriculum ever since I first offered it.

What he and I noticed with each time *If Men* has been offered is that almost no youth put it as their first choice, but many selected it as their second. There could be many reasons for this, from uncertainty about what the curriculum offers to the fact that it is a more sedentary class than, for instance, "Gym Time." Because he was such a supporter of the curriculum, the health class coordinator would usually put anyone who listed *If Men* as a choice into the class even if

there was availability in that student's first choice slot. This is something he did not do for most other situations where his goal was to give the students their first choice if possible. While I do not know if he informed the students of this, my impression was that only two out of the almost 30 students seemed reluctant to be there. Of these two participants, one became a fairly strong participant in the class, even if he seemed unsure of some of the ideas. The other was quiet but not any more so than some of the other participants.

So while all of these adjustments provided a benefit to the implementation of the training curriculum, they also added an extreme challenge to the design. The single biggest challenge then became the change in scope. The training would have to change from thirty-three sessions to six. The process of making this change required a reflection on what were the most important elements of the training, which elements could be combined, and which elements would best reinforce each other to achieve the goals. As such, I decided on two key questions. All remaining training elements must help participants find their own answers to them. They were:

1. Who am I on a fundamental level?
2. How do I want to relate to other people?

The first of these would, of course, seek to address the first goal of the training while the second would focus the goal of creating successful relationships in their lives. I believed this focus on relationships would provide the greatest impact on participants lives as it would influence their personal lives through positive romantic and familial relationships, their social lives through friendships, and their professional lives through good relationships with colleagues and supervisors.

These two questions were not 100% sufficient, however, as there were certain parts of the training design overall which could not be ignored. The opening day elements, such as norm

setting, training purpose, and basic getting-to-know-you activities could not be ignored. Nor could final day elements that revolved around reflection, application of what was learned, and evaluation of the training itself.

In the end the curriculum as it would be applied came down to the following topics, some of which would take two sessions:

1. Who are we and what are we doing here?
2. What are our identities and what do they look like?
3. What does privilege look like in society?
4. How do we have healthy non-romantic relationships?
5. How do we have healthy romantic relationships?
6. What is respect?
7. What does it mean to “Be a Man”?
8. Why are there men’s roles and women’s roles?
9. How does masculinity intersect with our other identities?
10. What is our relationship to fatherhood?
11. How do we listen and make space for others?
12. How is vulnerability different from weakness?
13. What did we learn? How did we do?

As I discuss below, once implementation began, even more of these topics were sacrificed out of the necessity of working with the school schedule.

Curriculum Implementation

Overall

I implemented the *If Men* curriculum to three different groups of high school students and a variation of it to three groups of 6th grade students. Only with one group of high school students was formal feedback obtained relating to this capstone project. As such all direct references to the implementation of the curriculum will only come from that group. However it is impossible not to reference my own reflections and notes and adjustments to the curriculum from other iterations.

The Participants and Set Up

The group specifically studied for this capstone project was the third group of high school students who were taught the curriculum from January to March of 2019. Participants were students at the Compass School in Westminster, Vermont. Compass is a grade 7-12 private school serving around 70 students. Students at this school come from over 20 towns in the area. Nine students participated in the training, but parental permission was only received from four of them.

The trainings took place in a classroom at Compass School. The teacher whose classroom it was would usually be present to take attendance and occasionally step in for behavior management issues. While some activities required us to spread out around the room and use desks or a larger open space, most of the time the set up was a circle of chairs and use of the white board.

The Implementation Process

As discussed in the design section of this paper, this curriculum had originally been narrowed down to fifteen lessons representing two school quarters, which ended up being thirteen lessons in the first session, spanning two quarters. The second session ended up being eight lessons in one quarter, due to scheduling conflicts. Finally in this third session, the school coordinator and I approached with the idea of one quarter again with a possibility of extending to a second quarter.

In reality we ended up with only five lessons days before I collected feedback forms and then a sixth lesson day that was an unexpected addition. This was due to a snow day and a lack of communication around the fact that this would be a shorter quarter than past quarters.

Since it was on day three that I learned there would only be two more lessons, even this plan had to be adjusted. With only two remaining lessons, I decided that the most important units to focus on would be Understanding Privilege/Toxic Masculinity, and Healthy Relationships and Consent. I also decided to create a new take-home supplement that would be a collection of resources that the participants would ideally explore on their own time (see Appendix II) to be given to participants on the fifth day. I was then contacted by the health class coordinator to see if I could offer one more lesson two weeks later. For this I decided that Listening and Communication would be the best topic to add.

In the end the final list of lessons was as follows. Specific lesson plans are available in Appendix 2:

1. Who are we and what are we doing here?
2. What makes me...me?
3. How do identities relate to privilege?
4. When does masculinity become toxic?
5. How do we have healthy romantic relationships?
6. How do we listen and make space for others?

The impact of all of these adjustments was a design without the depth and flow that I would have hoped. In order to make sure we addressed such key topics as healthy messages of masculinity and consent, we could not take as much time to really dive into all of the concepts. In the longer, past iterations, we explored how all of these play out at micro levels, such as in their classrooms, friend groups, or business meetings, mezzo levels like their school and future jobs, and at the macro levels of societies, cultures, nations, etc. It also meant that in terms of the Lewin Unfreezing-Changing-Refreezing cycle (Porter p. 54), most of the time was spent in the Unfreezing phase, by asking participants to question the status quo and their own assumptions. We had little time to create deliberate shifts to new attitudes, or to solidify new skills and knowledge applicable to the world.

Opportunities and Challenges During the Implementation

In addition to the overall structural challenge of implementing the curriculum described above, there were a number of challenges and successes that occurred while actually facilitating the trainings day to day.

One broad challenge was that of participant attitude. In my reflections following each lesson, I took note of some of the challenging attitudes that cropped up in the training lessons. The majority participants actually had a fairly positive attitude, exhibiting interest and a desire to learn.

Two other attitudes proved more challenging. The first I interpreted as being one of “I already know this.” This was a less disruptive issue since it usually came through as a lack of engagement from the participants. Interestingly enough certainly topics or discussions could get these participants to open up more and share some very important insights. In particular the discussions around messages we receive as men (Appendix 2 – Day 4), would bring out their feelings about which of these they felt to be ridiculous or harmful. They often backed up my own lessons with their personal experiences even if they seemed to feel that everyone should already be on this page. One way I addressed this was by really encouraging these students when they did open up and showed that their contributions were valuable. The other way I addressed this was by setting them up as allies rather than as being complicit in the problematic system. As this was one of my major learnings from this capstone process, I will go into it in more depth in a later section.

The second, and more problematic attitude, was when participants were apparently uncomfortable enough with the topic that they demonstrated more disruptive behavior. With this

session's group, this usually came out as distracting or even inappropriate jokes and comments. With past groups this would actually manifest more as direct pushback and challenges against the ideas and lessons being taught, but there was remarkably little of that with the participants studied for this capstone.

Addressing this attitude usually took one of three approaches depending on the situation. The lightest intervention, for simple distractions, was just to point out that we needed to stay on topic and focused so that everyone could be heard. When comments became too inappropriate or out of hand, either I or the classroom teacher would step in and point out why the comment was inappropriate ideally leading to some broader discussion about where that kind of thinking might be coming from and how it tied into the things we were discussing. For example a comment about women's fashion challenges being their own fault led to a discussion about body image and how those standards are problematic for people of all genders. So while these two different attitudes were challenging, they could almost always become opportunities to reinforce the learning goals of the training.

The last challenge worth noting for this capstone is that of time and balancing discussion lengths. This is a challenge that is certainly not unique to this or any training; but when combined with the challenge of the participants' ages and attitudes, it took on some interesting dimensions. While these participants had some choice in attending this training, it was not 100% a free choice for them. My experience working with both teenagers and adults has shown that teenagers are not necessarily harder to engage than adults, but rather that when they are disengaged they can be less controlled and more disruptive than most adults.

Some of the discussions that arose in the training ended up with high levels of engagement. This was particularly true of topics such as: The Man Box, Corporations

Spreading Social Justice Messages, and Consent. So, of course, these discussions usually wanted to run longer than the time allowed for in the lesson plans. It became a choice of seeking to balance a depth of learning through high participant engagement with a breadth of learning by covering more topics that might not be as engaging. It is perhaps impossible to know with each particular decision whether it was the correct one. Given the reasons above, however, I generally chose to keep a good conversation going rather than move on. If I were presenting this training to adults, and especially adults who had freely elected to be there, I would probably tend to end conversations sooner and move on.

Curriculum Reflections and Evaluations

Personal Reflections

Following each day of the *If Men* training, I took some time to reflect on what happened that day. These reflections covered: what participant engagement was like, what topics were covered and not covered from the lesson plan, how activities were received, specific challenges and successes, and thoughts for future lessons or sessions. Many of these reflections are addressed where appropriate elsewhere in this capstone, such as the Personal and Professional Learnings and the Capstone Applications sections. In general, however, there were several takeaways that should be covered here.

The first big note is that work reflecting on our own identities needs more time. In past sessions we were able to spend two full days on this, but with this session we could only do one and it just was not sufficient. I think that for many of the participants this is the first time they have done any amount of deliberate thinking about their identities and what social groups they are a part of. Several participants expressed some discomfort both in the personal and social

identities activities, as well as later in the Ubuntu card activity Strengths (Appendix 2 – Day 3) which asked them to choose an image that represented one of their personal strengths.

Another note that is worth mentioning here is the insufficient amount of time spent on power dynamics and especially on the concepts of “power over” versus “power with.” Due to the even more abbreviated schedule than anticipated, we only had one day to address social messages around masculinity, healthy masculinity, and power dynamics. Of course more time should have been spent on all of these, but in reflecting on how that day went, the brief discussion on power dynamics seemed to have the most potential for new information. The participants were fairly engaged and already aware of a lot of the messages of masculinity. They had no trouble with the Man Box activity, and a great discussion ensued. However when I brought in the topics of power dynamics, they seemed to know less and so could learn more.

Training Evaluation

While my personal reflections serve as one important form of feedback on the training, it is also important to look at how this training can be assessed with an eye to Kirkpatrick’s 4 levels of evaluation (BusinessBalls, 2019). During the course of the training, I used tools such as direct questions (Appendix 2 – Day 1), Blind Five Finger Feedback (Day 2), and Backpack/Trashcan forms (Day 4). These sought to evaluate the training primarily on a reactive and learning level, addressing how the participants were feeling and what ideas they were picking up as most important.

For an overall reactive evaluation I made use of pre- and post-assessments (Appendix 3). Due to receiving only a limited number of parental permission forms, I am unable to share much direct data from these. However they still provided some notes of feedback. One part of these

pre- and post-assessments tracked participants shifts in self-perception along six character traits: responsibility, motivation, self-respect, respect for others, and listening. According to the pre- and post-assessments for these three students:

- One participant showed no shift in answers
- One participant showed a shift from most traits rated “I am happy with where I am, but can grow a lot.” to all traits rated “I am happy with where I am, but can grow a little.”
- One participant showed a shift from mostly “I am happy with where I am, but can grow a lot” to “I don’t think I need to grow at all in this area”

While these are generally neutral to positive, there are some caveats which make them less useful. One is the small sample size of only three participants, and the other is the short turn around between when the pre- and post-assessments were given. As the training was originally intended to last several more sessions than it did, there were only three sessions from when they took the pre-assessment to when they took the post-assessment.

Another section of the pre-assessment asked about expectations, fears, and desires for the upcoming trainings. In this session, none of the students expressed any expectations, but two of the three said they feared it would be boring and lecture focused. This reassured me that the mix of activities and discussions, with only some parts tending to lectures, was the right approach. Finally, all three expressed a desire for Being a Leader to be one of the topics covered in this training. This is significant and will be addressed in “Future Curriculum Changes.”

Evaluations looking at behavior and results were two levels that I did not directly explore in this capstone project for reasons of time and parental permissions. However, these are important lenses with which to examine this training. As this training is offered at a school, with a group of participants who remain for at least the remainder of the school year, and potentially for one to three more years, it actually provides a stronger setting for gaining long-term, impact-based behavior and results data. For one thing, I will have an opportunity to reach out to

participants at later intervals to ask how they are implementing *If Men*'s teachings into their lives and whether they feel difference in their sense of self and their relationships as a result.

In fact, I have recently gotten some indirect feedback in this way about the first *If Men* session that I brought to Compass School. Speaking with one of the teachers, I learned that at the end of each year every student gives a presentation on some of the major learnings they had. She then told me that one of my first participants, and indeed my most challenging of that group, spent a significant amount of his presentation talking about *If Men* and what it did for him. Mindfully turning this kind of informal feedback into a deliberate evaluation tool, is an important next step for this training design.

Equally as importantly, I have access to an important group of outside observers, in the form of the school staff. These staff members have two helpful roles that can be tapped into. From a behavior evaluation perspective, the staff observe the participants both before and after the training, and can be asked about behavior and attitude changes they notice. This can be especially valuable as a supplement to participants' self-evaluation, as often times people change in ways that they do not see, but which outsiders do. The parents and caregivers of the participants could also serve this function, though in my experience it is much harder to connect with parents for this kind of feedback.

Finally, the staff members can serve an important results-based evaluative role, as they may have a sense of the school climate as a whole. Specifically, they can be asked how the introduction of the *If Men Project* to the school has impacted the overall school climate, the attitudes of young men who did not participate in the program, and how gender relations in the school may have shifted. This could be a huge evaluative gain, since long-term, results-based, organizational change can be very hard to measure (BusinessBalls, 2019).

Future Curriculum Changes

Based on the challenges some of the participants had with the identity work, I would try moving this section to later in the curriculum, especially given more time. Even in the 33 lesson outline for the curriculum (Appendix 1), identity is one of the first lessons taught. I still see it as a foundational piece which needs to be done before entering into reflections on things like privilege, power dynamics, and healthy relationships. However, the reactions show that ideally we should have more time to build trust and cohesion within the group before asking them to open up in this way. I am not sure whether this could be effectively done in another five or six lesson session, but it is worth trying. Units on listening and communication could move ahead to encourage better sharing within the Identities activity.

One of the learnings that I got most strongly from my training classes at SIT was about the importance that power dynamics have in shaping all that happens in our world, as well as the many and subtle ways that it can take shape. So in keeping with the thoughts on power dynamics, I would shift the balance in the amount of time spent on messages around masculinity and the time spent on power. This should lead to more new and applicable knowledge for the participants. It is still important to talk about social messaging because being aware will help them to stay resistant to it. An understanding of power, however, has a broad application as it applies across the realm of social justice and not just gender equity.

As you can see from the day five lesson plan (Appendix 3), the discussion of power dynamics involves a discussion of “power over” and “power with.” These are two terms that I learned in my SIT classes that have been an integral part of my discussions about social justice and especially about how we can apply social justice. Another change that I would make to this

curriculum comes from the *I Can MANifest Change* curriculum, and this would be to add the third concept of “power within” (Couchman, p. 39-40). Including this third dimension of power flushes out the conversation and can give participants another reason to focus on personal growth as well as group dynamics. By strengthening their sense of self-worth, personal power, and responsibility, they might feel more confident to push for social change even when they find themselves standing alone.

Based on the pre-assessments and the desire the participants expressed for learning about leadership, I would like to make a lesson on leadership part of the shorter version of this curriculum. As seen in the large schedule (Appendix 1), leadership is something that was part of the original plan, but which I have cut out of the shorter versions. I did this out of a desire to focus more specifically on the healthy masculinity and social justice aspects rather than the personal and professional development aspects. In order to serve this as well as the interests of the participants, it may be useful to tie a discussion of leadership into both the topics of power dynamics and how we can make changes in our society.

Professional Learnings

The Learning to Use My Inner Warrior

In her book *Awakening the Heroes Within*, Carol S. Pearson lays out a metaphor of twelve major archetypes that represent different aspects of ourselves and our personalities. For simplicity’s sake I will use this metaphor in reflecting on this particular learning. One of these that became significant to me both personally and professionally over the course of this project, is the warrior archetype. Pearson describes the inner warrior as the part of us that wants to “win, get our own way, [and] make a difference through struggle.” (loc. 1871). I know that I have long

been reluctant to work with this aspect of my personality. In large part this is because the negative version of the warrior, the drive to dominate, to achieve power for their own ego, and to glory in others' loss (Pearson, loc. 1919), is the very thing that this capstone project and my future professional goals are trying to overturn.

Reflecting on the warrior archetype understandably came up a lot during the process of this capstone. For one thing, it is an archetype that is strongly tied to the way our society views masculinity. The dark side of it is essentially a metaphor for toxic masculinity, and the healthy side of it possess a lot of the qualities that the *If Men* curriculum strives to instill. So while I didn't bring discussion of archetypes directly into the lessons, it was important to understand how to think about it in ways that could influence the discussion within the curriculum. This reflection inevitable led me to think about the way that aspects of the warrior archetype are present or not within me and which of those I want to cultivate.

One of the primary aspects I came to learn more deeply about myself was in setting and holding clear personal and professional boundaries. Carol Pearson says:

The well-developed internal Warrior is necessary, above all, to protect our boundaries. Without courageous, disciplined, and well-trained Warriors, the kingdom [self] is always in danger of being overrun by the barbarians. (loc. 1882)

In this case I see the "barbarians" being anything from minor distractions to harmful people and toxic settings in our world. For me, this took several forms. First was being able to set clear and consistent boundaries around my primary job. My work with the Brattleboro Area Prevention Coalition requires 31.5 hours per week, most of which must be done during typical school and work hours because they involve meeting with students, school staff, and other professionals.

Facilitating this curriculum also required my commitment to certain hours during the school day. It can be tempting when struggling to coordinate schedules to push meetings or trainings close to each other in order to make things easier. Over the course of the two years, balancing this training and my primary job, I have gotten better at clearing the time around this and other trainings to ensure that I had enough time to prepare for and reflect on trainings without causing myself more stress than needed. I believe this has led me to be a more prepared facilitator, trainer, and even participant in meetings.

The other aspect of setting and holding clear boundaries is that I have learned to better integrate facilitating discussions into my work as a trainer. It is always a challenge as a facilitator to navigate the need to let participants speak and be heard and to challenge the learnings, while respecting the well-being of others in the room, the need to progress the training, and the need to let others be heard. Before this capstone project, I recognized that I was more likely to let a speaker continue to talk, rather than to cut them off. I also recognized that a part of this came from me considering myself to be fairly non-confrontational.

Learning to better hold boundaries for myself and others has made me better at stepping in when a speaker is becoming problematic to the training rather than just challenging. I can recognize that I am intervening not only for my own sake, but because I have a responsibility to the other participants in the room. I am also better able to step in firmly, but with compassion, because I do value their voice being heard and can communicate that. Most importantly I can show that compassion while still pointing out why what they are saying is problematic whether because we simply need to move on or because they are saying things that are potentially harmful to others.

I do think that there is more room for me to grow as a trainer and as a person in regard to this learning, but I recognize the progress I have made. Much of the improvement in the future I think will come from practice and reinforcement as well as reflecting on moments when I am successful and unsuccessful in holding conversational boundaries.

The Power of Vulnerability

The power of vulnerability has been a particularly interesting learning over the course of this capstone project. This is not because it is necessarily a new insight, but rather that it has grown from something that I have understood and applied in my personal life, to something that I have also tried to apply in my professional life. In my personal life, I have long known the ways in which being open and vulnerable with people can deepen relationships, build trust, and even provide a greater sense of freedom since we are not worried about keeping things hidden or holding things back. I see vulnerability in this sense as a willingness to share personal truths and aspects of yourself that others could potentially use against you. This does not mean sharing everything about yourself that might be personal or embarrassing. Rather it is an ability to see when something about you might be relevant or helpful for the participants to know and a willingness to share that even at the risk of judgment or backlash.

Over the course of facilitating this training, both in this session and in the previous ones, I came to see the ways in which a trainer can, and should, be vulnerable with their participants. I also came to see how it could be especially helpful with this training. Indeed, Paulo Freire says, “I **cannot** [emphasis added] be a teacher without exposing who I am.” (Freire, p. 87)

With any training situation being vulnerable with your participants can be powerful because it helps build trust. If I can demonstrate that I am willing to be honest about certain

aspects of myself, even with strangers, then it conveys the messages that I am not seeking to hide anything. If I am not trying to hide anything about myself, then I am probably even less likely to be hiding something about the lessons I am trying to convey. Of course this does not mean that my participants will always agree with or believe everything I say, but I hope that they at least can trust that I believe it.

For the *If Men* curriculum in particular, showing vulnerability as the trainer carries another important benefit. By being vulnerable, I am able to model vulnerability and openness. As frequently comes up in the Man Box activity, vulnerability and weakness are not traits that are valued in our society's view of masculinity. Many men, and young men in particular, might not have had many examples of seeing the strength that can come from opening up and being vulnerable.

One resource that I recommended in the *If Men* Packet (Appendix 4 – Resources and Media), is the short story “The Knight in Rusty Armor” by Robert Fisher (1987). In this story a knight never takes off his armor so that he is already ready to dash off and defend innocent people from attacks. Because of this, his wife is unable to touch him and his child doesn't recognize him, only his helmet. So the knight goes to take off his armor, only to find that it is stuck, and he can't remove it. Over the course of the story, he goes on an adventure where he learns to cry, be vulnerable, and open his heart. Piece by piece his armor eventually falls off, and he returns home. This story shows how we can easily come to believe that our psychological armor is necessary for us and for others, but that it can also keep us from true closeness and connection. Ideally modeling this behavior and providing this resource will make it easier for the young men to emulate it themselves and perhaps even model it for others.

A final benefit of practicing vulnerability as a trainer lies in how it forces us to examine ourselves. In their chapter entitled *Knowing Ourselves as Social Justice Educators*, Lee Anne Bell, et. al. note that facilitators should be sure to look on their own identities and experiences and pay particular attention to how those shape the issue we are comfortable with, as well as those with we are more inclined “avoid, distort, or fear.” (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, p. 383). When we have some level of this self-knowledge we are able to be mindful of these biases in the design and implementation of our trainings. Equally as importantly however, we can take the vulnerable step of admitting to our participants that we have these biases and how we are, ourselves working to overcome them. Again this models the vulnerability and self-growth that we are asking of our participants in social justice work. During the *If Men* and other trainings, I will often admit that I have weak areas in my own understandings, particularly around classism and ableism, as these are identities that I have not been forced to address as directly.

As we confront our own misinformation, ignorance, and the blind spots of privilege, we create the possibility for modeling honesty and openness to what can be learned by listening to others who are different from us.... (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, p. 387).

Approaching Men as Allies and Sufferers

Author bell hooks says, “to create loving men, we must love males.” (2005, p. 11). If there is one professional learning that I would consider the most important from this capstone process, it is how we approach men in these situations. This is a learning that is applicable to all social justice work, rather than just training, but is still specific to working with men. Obviously men have been the main perpetrators and beneficiaries of the patriarchy and toxic masculinity, and in many ways it has been necessary to call attention to that system and recognize men’s role

in it. Indeed one of the reasons I designed this curriculum to target men is that I believe that shifting the behavior of such a key demographic will have some of the greatest impact possible.

Because of their role in the harm done by the patriarchy, gender equity work can often approach men with an attitude of “you are wrong,” “you are not to be trusted,” or even “you are the enemy.” This is understandable, especially from people of genders who have been directly harmed by men. However, I have come firmly to the belief that this approach is generally not useful if we want men to change and become part of the solution.

We have long known that personal attacks and shaming can often make people defensive and resistant to listening. I have come to believe this can be especially true for people who are so deeply embedded in privileged identity that they don’t see their privilege or the harm that is caused by the system. How much worse must it be to be attacked for something that you do not see your role in than for something that you know you are guilty of? Often people are reluctant to engage in personal change and in challenging their beliefs if they think they will get it wrong and be called on it (hooks, 2003, p. 107). The *Live Respect* program reinforces this notion by noting “This is not about blame. It’s about raising awareness.” (A Call to Men, p. 4)

Furthermore, it is critical that we acknowledge that men ARE harmed by toxic masculinity, even if it not to the same degree that people of other genders are. Without acknowledging that harm, we do men, and especially young men, a disservice when it comes to gender equity work. A peer in my Training of Trainers class, whose name I unfortunately did not think to write down at the time, said, “People can’t see past what they are going through.” So when men are seeing their own struggles either through toxic masculinity, or through one of their other less privileged identities, it will be challenging for them to see the broader picture of their systemic privileges.

While much of this was covered in the literature review as well as other sections, it is critical to remember that harm is not a zero-sum system. It is not a binary of privilege or harm, but rather a blend of these that we must be aware of if we are to engage men as allies. hooks writes, "...advocates collude in the pain of men wounded by patriarchy when they falsely represent men as always and only powerful, as always and only gaining privileges from their blind obedience to patriarchy." (2005, p. 27)

For these reasons, I have learned that we must approach men as potential allies and as sufferers of the systems we are fighting. This idea had been in my head for a while based on how I have personally been approached in different social justice spaces. I could feel my own positive emotions to being welcomed-in versus my defensiveness when approached with suspicion. My continued work in social justice spaces has certainly made me more understanding and less reactive to those suspicions, but I acknowledge that it has taken a long time.

The part of this capstone process that really solidified this learning was teaching the curriculum units on consent. In all of the sessions, I used the *Tea and Consent* video (May & Blue Seat Studios, 2015). However, there was a distinct difference in receptiveness when this was presented with an intention of "you need to know this so that you don't do" versus an intention of "you need to know this so that you can support the people around you." The later was empowering, rather than assumptive. It projected a strengths-based attitude that sets a positive standard for the men and expects them to achieve it, rather than setting a negative standard and warning them to avoid it. So by approaching men with an intention that they could be or already want to be allies we create the opportunity for a much better result than otherwise.

Additionally, when we recognize and call attention to the fact that men are also harmed by the patriarchy and by toxic masculinity, we create an additional motivation for them to get involved in the dismantling of these systems. As much as we would love for people to be motivated by altruistic drives, it is not the case for all people all of the time. Sometimes people benefit from a self-interested motivation early on in their involvement. Again, this can be especially true when their identities and experiences have kept them oblivious to the oppression of others.

Part of the power of this particular learning is that it can be applied across the board in identities and oppression work. It can be used with white people when addressing racism, heterosexual people and homophobia, cisgender people and transphobia, wealthier people and classism, etc.

I would also like to make a distinction between this learning and the discussion around “calling in” versus “calling out.” While they involve many of the same issues and attitudes, I see “calling out” and “calling in” as being reactive to specific situations. Someone says or does something that is oppressive or offensive, and you must decide how to address that in the moment. When I am talking about approaching men as allies, this is in proactive, broader situations. Trainings are an obvious setting for this, but community projects, speeches, and recruitment drives are also prime situations for this to be used.

Personal Learnings

In many ways this capstone was almost guaranteed to bring with it a great many learnings for me personally. In addition to the basic idea that a project of this depth and intensity always brings some personal learning, this was a project about teaching healthy masculinity. As a cis-

gender male, this is of course something that I work with every day of my life. So as I strove to create the best healthy masculinity curriculum possible, I of course learned more that I needed to apply to my own life. Finally, as if that was not enough, as any teacher, trainer, or educator knows, you always have the likelihood of learning from the ones you teach. So there was no way I was going to escape this project without undergoing a great deal of personal growth.

The Power of Holding Space

Communication, and listening in particular, is an important aspect of the *If Men* curriculum. Indeed the Training for Social Action class put a heavy emphasis on it, from our Listening Projects to our Clearness Groups. As I was assured through talking with the participants whenever we went into that part of the curriculum, they too were familiar with active listening and some of the skills involved in that. There is, however, another phrase that I had heard long before attending SIT, and unfortunately the source escapes me, which is “holding space.” As I worked more with listening in the *If Men* curriculum, I gained a deeper understanding of this idea and how I feel it relates to listening.

Holding space to me goes a step deeper than active listening, or perhaps it is more accurate to say that holding space goes a step in a different direction. After several discussions with friends and other trainers, I have come to an understanding of what this concept means to me. For me, holding space is using your presence and mindful attention to create an emotionally safe space for another person in order to allow them to be vulnerable in whatever way they need.

Holding space may often require listening, but is different from it in some important ways. First of all, the person you are holding space for may not actually need to talk, rather they may need to cry, to sit in silence, or potentially anything else. Second is the goal of listening, if

it does happen. With good listening, as it is generally seen, we are striving to hear and understand the other person: their experiences, their values, their emotions. Perhaps we are striving to understand these things so that we can form a deeper connection to them or have a better understanding of a different culture, to give us a broader range of experiences, or perhaps it is even to learn their values so that we can better convince them to make certain changes. These are not bad things. Indeed we need to practice them more often in order to have a healthy and less polarized society. In all of these however, there is still the goal of something that is for us the listener.

Holding space on the other hand strives to leave that behind. Holding space becomes entirely about the other person. We are present with them, giving them our full attention, while not expecting anything in return. As communal beings we sometimes just need a safe and caring person with us while we process some of the more challenging aspects of our lives. When we hold space for someone, we are that person showing that we are there if they need us.

I did find a few opportunities to incorporate the idea of holding space into the *If Men* workshops. After doing the listening lessons during one of longer sessions, the lesson on communication in the most recent session, and even with one of the groups of 6th grade boys, I brought it up as a concept, I made some distinctions between it and regular listening, and asked some questions about why it is important. Despite this it never became part of the formal curriculum. I think this was largely with the intention of scaffolding the lessons appropriately. Holding space perhaps takes more patience, selflessness, and presence than other listening, and so it would be too much to try to bring in during such short sessions.

It did, however, become an important aspect of my life outside of the capstone. Over the course of the capstone process I have been integrating holding space more and more into my

personal relationships when appropriate, letting go of the desire to get anything from an interaction with someone and just being there for them. This has led to some important moments in personal relationships.

In the past, when other people would talk to me about challenges in their lives, I often listened with an intent to “fix it.” I wanted to hear the problem, so that I could use my intelligence, my outsider’s view, or whatever other tool my ego told me I had to offer, to save the day. This is certainly not an evil intention, but it is problematic. As I grew older and more experienced, I learned to listen without needing to problem-solve, or at the very least, ask if my advice was wanted. I recognized that sometimes people were either not looking for answers, or they already knew the answer, they just needed to talk. Even once I learned to ask, it was hard for me not to be in problem solving mode in my head.

I finally got a little better about letting this go and starting to listen more to understand and connect with the person. In particular some of the readings and practices from the Training for Social Action course brought me new ways of thinking about listening. These envisioned listening and questioning first, as a form of service to the speaker, such as in the case of Support Groups (Green, Peavey, & Woodrow, p. 13) and in Clearness Meetings (p. 55). Second, listening and questioning could be used as a tool for social change (p. 92). Holding space, then became one more dimension to add on these ideas. I can certainly envision using holding space as a tool for social change, such as when someone is processing their own identities, privilege, biases, etc. However I see myself most likely to use it as an additional form of service to others. As those around me struggle with the challenges of life, I hope I will continue to grow as a source of safety and support for them in the future.

Finding My Inner Warrior

As with the power of vulnerability, the ability to find and embrace my inner warrior is something that has applications in both my personal and professional life. Unlike with vulnerability, however, this is something that I had not learned particularly well in either part of my life before this capstone. In my personal life, I am a very social person and have never wanted to turn down offers to spend time with friends and doing activities that I love. As I have learned to embrace my inner warrior, I have been better able to set and hold to boundaries that allowed me to say either “no” or “not now” to opportunities that were desirable, but would probably have stretched me too thin.

I believe that balance is important in a person’s life, and that means being clear with ourselves how we want to apply our energy, time, and passion. Just as the warrior archetype sets external boundaries and protects us from others, it also helps us hold our internal boundaries and protects us from ourselves. We may know the right thing to do, but holding strong to that in the long run through discipline, grit, and resilience is challenging. As I have grown to see the value of this inner warrior, I have done better at setting my own boundaries on everything from fitness, to mental health, to personal growth. By setting clearer boundaries around these things, I have had more success along my goals than I have had in the past. So while better health and fitness is not something I would have set as a learning objective for this capstone, it has been a welcome, if surprising, outcome.

Challenges and Successes

The greatest success of this capstone process has been turning a vague idea for a project into a curriculum that has been presented to over 50 participants and continues to be requested by

the schools where it is has been taught. This curriculum then serves as the core project of a larger profession endeavor. It is one of my goals to create a large multi-level project that seeks to address issues of gender equity by working with male-identifying people. This would potentially involve:

- Youth Trainings - For high schoolers as in this capstone, but also for middle and elementary school students, college students, and adults
- Adult discussion and action groups
- Community forums
- Media projects
- A long-term listening project

This capstone has forwarded this goal by creating and implementing the high school curriculum that is the heart of the larger project, but it has also encouraged me to complete some other aspects of the larger goal. While creating and presenting this curriculum, I have also co-facilitated an adult men's discussion group that lasted for eight sessions and engaged with many of the same topics covered in this training. I have also conducted a series of interviews with men where I ask them about their experiences with masculinity. One goal of these interviews is to further my own understanding of how different men receive messages around masculinity so that I can better facilitate the *If Men* curriculum.

In addition to all of the specific challenges that arose throughout the design and implementation phases of this training capstone, there has been one personal challenge that has been a part of this larger capstone process. That is an issue of scale. As discussed in the design section, this curriculum was originally intended to be a very large undertaking. I would like to not only design, but facilitate and reflect on a 33-hour training program, ideally to multiple groups of participants. This is still part of my broader goal for the *If Men* curriculum; but as I began the process of negotiating with schools, I began to see that this would be starting on a much smaller scale.

Despite this, I still had a strong desire for my capstone to be an expansive paper laying out a large new young men's training program along with several sessions of reflections and adjustments that would help to influence these kinds of trainings in the future. Indeed as I got further and further away from my time on campus and in my training courses, the magnitude of this capstone grew in my mind and doubts plagued me. Were nine participants enough? Was one session of thirteen lessons enough? Should I take a different route entirely and focus on the adult interviews that I had been doing?

It took several conversations with my advisor, my partner, and other trainers from my PIM class to finally convince me. Not only were my huge expectations not necessary, but furthermore, were almost certainly too much to fit in a paper under 50 pages. I began designing this curriculum months after leaving SIT, and I taught my first session of it over two years ago. However my own unreasonable expectations and doubts prevented me from actually completing this project until now.

In the future I hope that this challenge will not dissuade me from setting high standards and taking on big challenges. Rather I hope that I will listen more closely to advice from those around me and being more willing to take the first steps even when I am unsure where the path will ultimately lead.

Capstone Applications

Capstone Limitations

While I believe this capstone and this curriculum will have broad and significant applicability, it is first important to look at some of the limitations of each so as to recognize where we need to be more mindful about taking these lessons forward. The most significant

limitations of capstone project itself are in its scale and scope. Primarily due to the constraints of data collection and participant numbers discussed in the Curriculum Reflection and Evaluation section, the amount of direct data collected was very small. Specific data was only gathered from three participants, and those were from the shortest session of this training that has been offered. Additionally my direct reflections only cover this same session even though my learnings cannot help but come from teaching all three high school sessions, as well as the sixth grade sessions. Such a small sample size means that any data taken from this capstone should not be considered as broad population data for the trainers and other social justice workers who might look to use it.

Secondly, the lack of geographic diversity of this research must be considered when considering how to apply it to further trainings. While the Compass School does serve students from over 20 towns, all are small towns in rural areas. None of the participants involved would have come from larger urban populations. While I hope that many of the lessons learned from this capstone can be applied to trainers working in a variety of settings, it is necessary that they consider what adjustments they must make with their own participant populations.

Another limitation that must be considered is the lack of cultural diversity represented in this capstone. With anonymous collection methods and no demographic data, it is harder to know for sure what cultural diversity was or was not present in the participants. However between the small response numbers and the lack of geographic diversity, it is probably fair to assume a low level of cultural diversity within the respondents. We know that messages around masculinity vary from culture to culture, and this in itself is an important area for study, especially for those who seek to do social justice work around gender equity and healthy masculinity. This capstone was unable to go into a deeper look at the culture of masculinity

surrounding the participants which would have provided a better context for what could be learned from this project.

Finally this capstone did not incorporate any feedback or observations from third parties. It only used data collected from the participants and the observations and reflections of the trainer/researcher. A more thorough study could have used neutral observers, such as other trainers, during the training sessions to help record anything significant that the trainer missed. It could also have collected data from a wider variety of sources. These other sources could have included the participants' caregivers and school staff, as I addressed in the Evaluations section previously. While I considered this possibility before beginning the project, I determined that it would be too much for the scale of a capstone project.

Curriculum Limitations

The training curriculum itself brings its own set of limitations which must be considered by other social justice trainers seeking to learn from this project. Granted these are limitations that were often deliberately imposed, but they still must be considered. The most significant of these is the make-up of the participants. This training was designed for male-identifying participants of high school age and in a school setting. It was also designed to be capped at fifteen participants, even though we never reached that number. Furthermore it was designed to take place over multiple sessions rather than a single workshop setting.

The learning goals of this curriculum are absolutely applicable to participants outside of this demographic range and can be conveyed in a different training settings. If a trainer wants to apply elements of this training curriculum to working with different groups in different settings, then appropriate adjustments must be made. Some of these will be discussed below.

Adjusting the Training for Context

If we consider that the overall purpose of this training design is to help men embrace a healthier practice of masculinity, then it means that the one characteristic of the target audience for this training, gender identity, cannot change without necessitating significant changes to the design. On the other hand, one participant characteristic that would be much easier to adjust for is age.

All of the topics and even many of the activities contained in this training design, I believe can be used in trainings with adults as well as with youth down to at least sixth grade and potentially younger. As the current target participants are already young adults, the fewest changes would need to be made to present this curriculum to college age or older adults. Depending on context and participants, it might be appropriate to replace some of the more physical activities with sedentary activities or even with more discussion time. I would also be clearer about laying out the broad course of the curriculum from the beginning. Also, while a good facilitator would allow this to happen naturally through the flow of conversation, I would expect to hear more input from adult participants in many of the discussions, with less from the facilitator. This is primarily due to adults generally having more experience with situations around relationships, work, social interactions, and messaging from society. Certainly, not all adults will have been as aware of their experiences as some of the youth, and this should be honored when working with particularly aware young participants. However, I would still expect more input from adult participants. Indeed, if this was being presented to a group of mixed age participants, then the facilitator would need to be particularly mindful about making sure that adult voices did not overwhelm or outweigh those of younger participants.

Using this training curriculum with younger participants would require more adjustments, but I believe would still be very effective. There are three adjustments in particular that I would emphasize: structure, processing questions, and the discussions of consent and healthy relationships. The structural adjustment would simply be to have shorter but more frequent lessons with more physical activities. Due to the developmental levels of youth at different ages, keeping the focus to shorter time periods and with more movement is usually more appropriate. I noticed this particularly when doing the modified version of this curriculum with sixth graders. Due to the constraints of the classroom teachers' schedules, we kept those lessons to just under 30 minutes. Usually this was not enough time, and we had to cut lessons a little short. I do believe that an additional 30 minutes to match the high school lessons would have been too long and their attention would have waned.

The second change to make would be in the processing and discussion questions asked in each section. I would not expect most younger students to have the depths of processing as high school students. Also, as a reverse of the adult situation, I would not expect them to have as much personal experience to offer up. That being said, I have found that youth can be surprisingly insightful and aware, so it is a mistake to discount them too much. It would be ideal to have both low and high level processing and discussion questions planned. This way if the facilitator senses that the participants are able to take on the more challenging questions they are prepared.

Finally it is important to consider the discussion of healthy relationships and consent. In the high school training design, healthy romantic and sexual relationships are approached as something that the participants are already experiencing directly themselves, indirectly through peers, or are immanent in their future. Furthermore the consent discussion is very deliberately

framed around consent in sexual situations. While I believe that it is important to have conversations around romantic relationships and sexual consent before youth start to engage in them, it can be a subject that schools and caregivers are not ready for students to deal with at a middle school and certainly elementary school level. That being said, some simple adjustments can be made to bring these important learnings in, while staying mindful of the participants' experiences and the schools and caregivers' comfort level.

These topics can be redefined as healthy friendships and consent around personal space and physical contact. All of the same lessons and discussions can apply to these issues as with the originals. That is, those of honesty, respect, compassion, and healthy boundaries apply to relationships with friends, peers, family, and other adults. In fact they lay a solid groundwork for participants to have the romantic and sexual versions of the training later in their lives.

As with any situation, a trainer should have as deep an understanding of the needs, cultural contexts, and experiences of the participants as possible. They should also have a flexibility to adjust the training as the situations require while still holding to their core values as a trainer and the purpose of the training. I would encourage trainers to use as much as they can from this capstone and training design, as long as they are mindful of their own training situations.

Conclusion

We must better serve our young men. Not just for their sakes, though they do deserve better, but for people of all genders. The institutions of patriarchy and toxic masculinity have effects far beyond gender-based violence and gender inequity. They reinforce racism by making the oppression of some people a path to power. They reinforce homophobia and transphobia by

falsely defining what a “man” is and then by making any person who does not fit into that box “less than.” They reinforce classism by creating power structures that oppress and setting up false models of success. They set us up for domination rather than collaboration.

This training curriculum is not the solution. It will take so much more than this to better our world. I do believe, however, that this training and ones like it can be a key tool in the solution. The fact that it addresses core issues early in people’s lives and has the flexibility to adjust to different settings and participants, makes it all the more valuable. It also has room to grow. It should definitely be adapted for even younger boys. This and trainings like it should also be taken into some of the realms of the most problematic masculinity, colleges and prisons.

This capstone project was able to teach me a great deal about myself as a trainer and as person. It helped me see where I can continue to grow, and where I am starting to achieve higher levels of competence. It taught me to hold space for myself and others. It taught me that social justice trainings are challenging and powerful, for the trainer as well as the participants. It also gave me hope.

The name for this project came partly from the poem If, but also from a dream of possibility. What if all young men could see that they can shape their own sense of self, and not leave it up to the social media influencers and schoolyard bullies? What if all young men could see that their power can come from within themselves and their relationships with others, rather than by a power over others? What if all young men could see that when life is hard, they can be courageous enough to keep going, rather than scared enough to lash out? What if all young men could see that vulnerability is how we grow stronger not weaker? What if all young men could see that compassion, love, and caring are not feminine traits but human traits? What a world that could be.

“Yes there is a problem with gender as it is today and we must fix it”
- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

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Appendix 1 - Materials Given to Schools

This appendix contains examples of the materials that were prepared for schools who expressed an interest in the If Men Program. Below are:

1. The If Men Program's purpose, goals, and objectives.
 2. The proposed overall schedule for an ideal 33 lesson curriculum.
 3. Two example lessons, demonstrating what to expect from a day of the program.
-

The If Men

Purpose:

Too many young men lack a clear sense of self and an understanding of the way that they can fit into their world in a way that empowers themselves and helps them empower others. The *If Men Program* strives to help young men find their own positive self-identity and the way that they can be successful in their world according to the standards and goals they set for themselves.

Goals

The young men who complete one school year of the *If Men Project*, will have a stronger sense of their own self-formed identity

The young men who complete one school year of the *If Men Project* will have greater confidence about their ability to create happy, healthy, and successful lives for themselves.

Objectives – For this we are calling **If Men** the young men who have completed one year of the *If Men Program*.

- **If Men** will report a strong sense of self-created and self-discovered identity.
- **If Men** will demonstrate a greater sense of responsibility.
- **If Men** will demonstrate greater communication skills.
- **If Men** will have experience working as individuals, team members, and leaders.
- **If Men** will demonstrate a greater understanding of racism, sexism, homophobia, and other social injustices and how those injustices affect themselves and their communities.
- **If Men** will be better prepared to be full partners in healthy romantic and sexual relationships.
- **If Men** will be better prepared to be successful fathers.

Proposed Thirty-Three Session Curriculum Outline

Day	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Theme	Intros, Sharing Name Ball,	Identity Pt 1	Respecting yourself	Respecting Others	Comm. - Listening	Being a Student	Being a Follower??	Being a Team Member	Being a Leader	Taking Responsibility	Sharing, C-Building
Activities	Norms, Expectations, Needs	Cleques/Are you more like?	Fireball	Respecting Others Passages	Communal Food Prep	Watch Study Skills Video	D-Chain	Rys Rope Activity	The River Wild	Communal Food Prep	Way of Council
Discussions	What shapes your identity? Who do you want to be?	Honesty/Integrity/T rust	Honesty/Integrity/T rust	Honesty/Integrity/T rust	Active listening	What is the point of school?	Heirarchy in school and work. Power and respect as a	Power with versus Power over	Animal Leadership Styles Handout and discussion		
Projects					Explain Listening Project	Check in - Fist of five					
M and E	Pre-Survey										
Notes											
Day	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Theme	Career Planning	Power and Privilege	Sexism	Racism	Sexual Orientation	Breaking the Binary	Comm. - Questions	Romantic Relationships	Sexual Relationships	Violence	Sharing, C-Building
Activities	Turning Over a New Leaf	Privilege Walk			Lap Sit	Communal Food Prep				Bombs and Shields	Way of Council
Discussions					Guys and touch		Strategic Questions		Discussion	An enemy is someone whose story you don't know	
Projects											
M and E	Check in - Backpack/Trash can			Mid-Survey							
Notes											
Day	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33
Theme	Sexual Violence	Allyship	Competition	Collaboration	Comm. - Sharing	Vulnerability	Being a Father	Being a Role Model	Identity Pt 2	Your Future	Conclusion
Activities	Cup of tea video	What is an ally? What is an Active Bystander?	Cave-in	Communal Food Prep	Low/Medium Risk questions	High Risk Questions, Cave in, or brave New World	Guest speakers	Reverse Candle Pass			Celebration, Connections web,
Discussions	Consent - Hell, yes or No.	What is the influence of competition in our							Personal Coat of Arms?	Letter to yourself	
Projects											
M and E											Post Survey
Notes											

Example Lesson 1

Theme: Why do we have “men’s work” and “women’s work”? Should we? – Part 1

Location: A classroom + parking lot (weather dependent)

Time: 60 minutes

Objectives:

- I want the participants to...
 - Learn two practical life skills.
 - Gain confidence in their ability to be independent.
 - Have a deeper understanding of unintentional, systematic sexism.
- I want to ...
 - Be confident that the participants can use these skills in the future.
 - Have a better understanding of the participants’ understanding of sexism in society.

[5/5] Opening Activity: 5 Finger Check in

- Materials
 - None
- Procedure – Facilitator participates
 - One at a time, Ps hold up a hand with a number of fingers extended to show how they are feeling that day. 5 fingers = Great! , 3 = So, So, 1 = Terrible. If they want to offer a quick explanation as to why they are at that number, then they can.
 - Students may hold up just a fist if they don’t want to show how they are feeling

Note: The skills shown below are examples of the kinds of life skills the participants will learn. In the program itself, the participants will be given a quick survey in a previous meeting to assess what skills they already have, and what skills they might want and need to learn. Furthermore, the amount of scaffolding used with the participants will also depend on their survey responses. This example represents a lower level of scaffolding required.

[45/50] Skill Builder: Changing a Tire and Changing Oil

- Materials
 - 1-2 Cars, tire iron, jack, wrenches, oil pan, oil, container for old oil.
- Procedure – Tire (Facilitator Supervises)
 - Take the participants to the parking lot and take off and reattach a tire on a car.
 - Discuss safety.
 - Let participants figure it out, being led by any who have done it before.
 - Facilitator should only offer guidance if needed, and make sure safety is being observed.
- Procedure - Oil (Facilitator Supervises)

- Change the oil in a car.
 - Discuss safety.
 - Let participants figure it out, being led by any who have done it before.
 - Facilitator should only offer guidance if needed, and make sure safety is being observed.
 - Discuss proper disposal of oil.
 - How often this should be done. (Read the Manual)
- Discussion
 - What was it like? What were some of the challenges?
 - Why are these important skills to have?
 - Who is more likely to be taught how to do these, men or women? Why?
 - What are stereotypes about Reading the Manual?
 - Why does this exist?

[5/55] Feedback and Q2P:

- Feedback – Five Finger Feedback
 - Everyone closes their eyes. Hold up a hand showing how you feel about this session.
 - 5 – This was awesome, I got a lot out of this. I will definitely use this.
 - 4 – This was a good session. I will use some things from this.
 - 3 – This was alright. Not much was new, but I didn’t dislike it.
 - 2 – A little boring. I didn’t get much out of this.
 - 1 – This was terrible. I got nothing from this.
 - Fist – I don’t want to share my feelings about this session.
- Question to Ponder:
 - As you go about the next week, try and notice as many activities as you can, that society seems to assign gender to. In other words, what are men’s tasks, and women’s tasks?
- Assignment
 - If you have a pair of pants that is too long, bring them in (but don’t wear them).

[5/60] Carry over time

Example Lesson 2

Theme: Why do we have “men’s work” and “women’s work”? Should we? – Part 2

Location: A classroom

Time: 60 minutes

Objectives:

- I want the participants to...
 - Learn two practical life skills.
 - Gain confidence in their ability to be independent.
 - Have a deeper understanding of unintentional, systematic sexism.
- I want to ...
 - Be confident that the participants can use these skills in the future.
 - Have a better understanding of the participants' understanding of sexism in society.

[10/10] Opening Activity: Verbal Check in

- Materials
 - None
- Procedure – (Facilitator participates)
 - Go around the circles and have participants talk briefly about how they are feeling today and why.
 - Think – Pair – Share: What were some of the tasks that you noticed in your Question to Ponder from last time?

Note: The skills shown below are examples of the kinds of life skills the participants will learn. In the program itself, the participants will be given a quick survey in a previous meeting to assess what skills they already have, and what skills they might want and need to learn. Furthermore, the amount of scaffolding used with the participants will also depend on their survey responses. This example represents a higher level of scaffolding required.

[40/50] Skill Builder: Sew on a button and hem pants

- Materials
 - Fabric scraps, buttons, scissors.
 - Simple sewing kit for each participant to keep.
 - Needles, thread (black, white, and khaki), pins, needle-threader, measuring tape.
- Procedure - Button
 - Talk the participants through how to sew on a button, then let them do it.
 - Discuss safety.
 - Let participants figure it out, being led by any who have done it before.
 - Facilitator should only offer guidance if needed, and make sure safety is being observed.
- Procedure – Hemming
 - Talk the participants through how to hem a pair of pants, then let them practice it.
 - Discuss safety.
 - Demonstrate measuring and pinning a hem.

- Demonstrate a catch stitch.
 - Have participants practice on the fabric scrap.
 - If anyone has brought pants to hem, let them start practicing.
- Discussion
- What was it like? What were some of the challenges?
 - Why are these important skills to have?
 - Who is more likely to be taught how to do these, men or women? Why?
 - Which do you think is more socially acceptable, for a woman to be able to change her oil or a man to be able to hem his pants? Why?
 - How would our society be different, if we didn't associate certain skills with specific genders?

[5/55] Feedback and Q2P:

- Feedback – Five Finger Feedback
 - Everyone closes their eyes. Hold up a hand showing how you feel about this session.
 - 5 – This was awesome, I got a lot out of this. I will definitely use this.
 - 4 – This was a good session. I will use some things from this.
 - 3 – This was alright. Not much was new, but I didn't dislike it.
 - 2 – A little boring. I didn't get much out of this.
 - 1 – This was terrible. I got nothing from this.
 - Fist – I don't want to share my feelings about this session.
- Question to Ponder:
 - What are some other skills (“men’s” or “women’s”) you think you should know? Who can you learn these from?

[5/60] Carry over time

Appendix 2 - Final Lesson Plans Used for Capstone Implementation of If Men

This appendix contains the six lesson plans of the *If Men* curriculum specifically examined in this capstone paper.

Day 1

Theme: Who are we and what are we doing here?

Location: A classroom

Time: 60 minutes

Objectives:

- I want the participants to...
 - Learn everyone's name, and get to know a little about them.
 - Begin to build rapport and trust: P-P and P-F.
 - Want to come back
- I want to ...
 - Learn everyone's name, and get to know a little about them.
 - Observe how P's relate as a group and as individuals.
 - Understand some of the needs of the P's.

[5/5] Opening Activity: Toss-A-Name

1. Materials
 - a. 3 - 4 tossable objects
2. Procedure – Facilitator participates
 - a. Groups stand in a circle
 - b. One person starts with an object, says a person's name and tosses it to them. Continue randomly around the circle.
 - c. When things are going smoothly, add another object, then another, etc.
3. Discussion Questions
 - a. How did this go?
 - b. What made it challenging?

[10/15] My Research Project

- Explain what it is and purpose
- Hand out student and parental consent forms
- Go through student form
 - Invite questions/concerns

[10/25] Discussion: Group Norms

- Rules versus Norms

- Rules
 - Externally imposed
 - Reasons are not always known
 - Hard to change
 - Good for large groups and for consistency
- Norms
 - Created together
 - Everyone knows the reasons
 - Help us work together
 - Good for small groups
- Brainstorm, Choose, and Record our *If Men* Norms.
- We will revisit them from time to time.

[25/50] Main Activity: Cliques

- Materials
 - 3 rope circles (~3' diameter)
 - “Are you more like…” prompts
- Procedure – Facilitator Participates
 1. Place rope circles on the floor around the room.
 2. Tell P’s to get into groups of 2, one at each circle. (They can form their own groups.)
 - They must have both feet inside the ring.
 3. F asks questions from the “Are you more like…”.
 - P’s must answer, but you do not have to explain your answer.
 4. After a few minutes, say “Change.” P’s have to move to new groups in new circles. Repeat.
 5. After a few rounds, take away a ring, but continue to call “change.” P’s must form larger groups in closer proximity.
 6. In final circle, everyone asks one, everyone answers one. This time you DO have to explain.
- Processing Questions
 - a. Think about the first pair you were in. Why did you choose this group?
 - b. What was comfortable about this group?
 - c. What was your reaction to the circles being taken away?
 - d. What was it like getting to know people you did not know as well?
 - e. What can be challenging about sharing things about yourself with new people?

[5/55] Closing and Q2P:

1. Closing
 - a. What is one takeaway you had from today?
 - b. Remember signed forms
 - c. Consider group norms
2. Question to Ponder:

- a. Think about what full participation/full engagement means to you? Why should you fully engage in this program?

[5/60] Carry over time

Day 2

Theme: What makes me...me?

Location: A classroom

Time: 60 minutes

Objectives:

- I want the participants to...
 - Reflect on their own identities.
 - See where those identities come from.
 - Have some insight into other people's identities.
- I want to ...
 - Provide P's with a chance to express their identities.
 - Have an understanding of what work P's have done in their own thinking about identity and masculinity.

[5/5] Check-In

1. How is everyone?
2. Review Norms from last time
3. Permission Slips

[10/15] Activity 1: Get Into Your Groups

- Materials
 - Deck of Cards
- Procedure – Facilitator Observes
 - Give each P a card.
 - Tell them this is a no talking activity.
 - Tell them to “get into your groups.”
- Discussion:
 - What determined what group you were in?
 - Did the groups seem to change during the activity?
 - Do you agree with the groups that were formed?
 - How did these groups form?
 - Do you agree with the group you ended up in?
 - What other groups could have been formed?

[15/30] Personal Identities

- Materials:
 - Personal Identities Wheel
 - Pens, Pencils, etc.
- Procedures
 - Pass out identities wheel
 - P's fill them out as much as possible
 - Share your answers with a partner (one trio)
- Discussion:
 - How challenging was this?
 - What did you notice about each other's answers?
 - How well does this summarize who you are?

[15/55] Feedback and Q2P:

1. Blind Five Finger Feedback
 - a. Do you feel engaged?
 - b. Is this group useful so far?
2. Feedback – Two things you want to make sure get discussed in this group.
3. Question to Ponder:
 - a. What is an identity of your own that you still struggle with? Why? What effects does that struggle have on you?

[5/60] Carry over time

Day 3

Theme: How do identities relate to privilege?

Location: A classroom

Time: 60 minutes

Objectives:

- I want the participants to...
 - Have a deeper understanding of their own identities.
 - Begin to think about how others' identities affect those people.
 - Begin to understand the ties between power and identity.
- I want to ...
 - Better understand the identities of my participants.
 - Better understand how their identities shape their world view

[5/5] Opening

1. Welcome, Permission Sheets
2. Pre-Assessment

[10/15] Opening Activity: Common Bond and Strengths

- Common Bond Questions:
 - What did you notice?
 - Did you figure out the secret?

[20/50] Social Identities

- Materials:
 - Social Identities Wheel
 - Pens, Pencils, etc.
- Procedures
 - Pass out identities wheel
 - P's fill them out as many as possible based on time.
 - You only have to fill out what you are willing to share in this group
 - Norm reminder: Privacy, not secrecy.
- Questions – Think – Pair - Share
 1. Share two of your identities.
 2. What do these mean to you?
 3. How visible are your identities?
 4. What effect do they have on your life positively and negatively?
 5. Who assigned you these identities?
 6. Can they be changed?
 7. Why would we want to understand our own identities?
 8. Why would we want to understand the identities of those around us?
 9. How can we seek to understand the identities of those around us?
 10. What do we need to be cautious about when we do this?

[20/50] Discussion: 1 Ups and 1 Downs

- Framework: All of our identities give us either a 1 up, or a 1 down.
 - Context dependent
 - Saying “It depends.” is not the same as saying “It makes no difference.”
 - Some are neutral, but rare
- Visibility is also an important factor.
 - But just because it is invisible does not mean that it doesn't matter.
 - Perceived visibility
- 1 up vs 1 down is not about good vs bad, want to be vs don't want to be, it is about understanding.
 - It can be easy to feel our own 1 downs, and others 1 ups. The challenge is...
 - Understand the unearned benefits that come from our 1 Up identities
 - Understand the unearned challenges that come from other people's 1 Downs.
- Go through the social identity wheel.
 - Pick some of the categories: Race, First Language, Gender, Etc.

- In the context of Westminster Vermont in 2019, are these 1 ups or 1 downs?
 - Why?
 - How do you see that privilege or lack manifested?
- Processing Questions
 - How might we evaluate these differently in different contexts or cultures?
 - Why is this important?
 - What can we do about it?

[5/55] Feedback and Q2P:

1. Question to Ponder:
 - a. Which of your identities are as part of a relationship (son, partner, etc.)? How do you think the other people in that relationship view their identities?

[5/60] Carry over time

Day 4

Theme: When does masculinity become toxic?

Location: A classroom

Time: 60 minutes

Objectives:

- I want the participants to...
 - Have an understanding of toxic masculinity.
 - See how TM affects them as well as others.
 - Be active bystanders against TM.
- I want to ...
 - Understand how these Ps perceive masculinity.
 - See how P's currently deal with TM.

[10/10] Opening Activity: Royalty

1. Materials
 - a. 1 playing card per participant, some low, some mid, some high
2. Procedure
 - a. P's get one card, unseen and hold it face out on their forehead.
 - b. No talking
 - c. Walk around and treat each person the way the rank on their card indicates they should be treated.
 - d. After ~1 min, stop but don't look at your card.
 - e. Without helping each other line up from lowest to highest, where you think your card is
3. Processing Questions

- a. How well did you rank yourselves?
- b. High cards
 - i. How did you know?
 - ii. What were some of the ways people treated you?
- c. Low cards
 - i. How did you know?
 - ii. What were some of the ways people treated you?
- d. Middle cards
 - i. How was your experience?
- e. How does this apply to our social identities discussion of last week?

[15/25] Activity: The Man Box

- Materials
 - Large Post-it notes
 - Pens
- Pre-Activity Questions:
 - Last time we started talking about identities. No matter what they are we get messages ABOUT those identities.
 - Where are some the places those messages come from?
- Procedure – Facilitator Observes
 - Give each P at least 5 post it notes
 - Write some words/phrases that describe the messages you hear about being a man and what a man IS. On others write the messages about what men definitely are NOT. Positive, Negative, Neutral, whatever.
 - Come stick them up on the board, inside the box for what a man IS, and outside for NOT.
- Discussion:
 - What do you notice?
 - What were some messages other people but down that you didn't? (Either because you forgot, you don't hear that message, etc.)
 - Which of these messages do you hear/see the most?
 - Where do these messages come from?
 - Which of these messages do you feel like you fit?
 - What are the consequences of that?

[15/40] Group Discussion: Toxic Masculinity

- Which of these messages do you think are positive?
- Which are negative?
- What does the term Toxic Masculinity mean to you?
- What are its consequences for people of other genders?
- What are its consequences for men?
 - Does it have any advantages for men?
- Why should we care?

[10/50] Group Discussion: Power Dynamics

- How does being male, and being “a man” relate to power in our society?
- How are men encouraged to achieve and demonstrate power?
- **Power over versus power with**

[5/55] Feedback and Q2P:

1. Feedback – backpack/trash can.
 - a. Handout
 - b. On the trash can side, write one idea from today that you didn’t find valuable and will leave behind.
 - c. On the backpack side, write one idea that you found especially important and will take away with you.
2. Question to Ponder:
 - a. What do you like about yourself? What do you not like about yourself?

[5/60] Carry over time

Day 5

Theme: How do we have healthy romantic relationships?

Location: A classroom

Time: 60 minutes

Objectives:

- I want the participants to...
 - Have a deeper understanding of consent and healthy boundaries, particularly in romantic and/or sexual contexts.
 - Understand that they also have a right to consent and health boundaries.
 - Have a tool for setting healthy sexual boundaries and desires with others.
- I want to ...
 - Better understand how my participants view healthy relationships.
 - Better understand how their identities shape their world view

[5/5] Intro - Check In

1. Parent Permission Slips
2. Last Day - Focus on one last thing: healthy boundaries

[10/15] Opening Activity: Tea and Consent

- Watch the Tea and Consent Video
- Discussion Points
 - **Enthusiastic** consent

- Hell yes, or no.
- The “Not Every Man” argument
- Checking your friends

[15/30] Discussion: Healthy Communication and Healthy Boundaries

- Discussion Questions:
 - What are healthy boundaries?
 - How do they relate to consent?
 - T-P-S
 - Why do we need to be clear on our own healthy boundaries?
 - Why might it be important to make sure our partners are clear on THEIR healthy boundaries?
- Healthy communication:
 - Why is communication critical in any relationship?
 - What are the parts to healthy communication?
 - Honesty, Trust, Integrity
 - What is the difference?
 - Importance of vulnerability in your communication
 - Knight in Rusty Armor
 - Try to communicate with people in the way THEY wish to be communicated with.

[10/40] Handout: Safer Sex Talk

- Go through it.

[10/50] Wrap Up

- Go through remainder of handout resources.
- Backpack/Trash Can
- Post Assessments

[5/55] Feedback and Q2P:

1. My gratitude
2. Question to Ponder:
 - a. Which of your relationships need work? Why? Regardless of what the other person is thinking/doing, what is one first step YOU can take to improve the relationship?

[5/60] Carry over time

Day 6

Theme: How do we listen and make space for others?

Location: A classroom

Time: 60 minutes

Objectives:

- I want the participants to...
 - Have a deeper understanding of the ways in which they relate to other people.
 - Begin to think about how others' identities affect those people.
 - Begin to understand the ties between power and identity.
- I want to ...
 - Better understand the identities of my participants.
 - Better understand how their identities shape their world view

[10/10] Activity: How did you get here this morning?

- Partner up.
- Take turns. Talking for a full 2 minutes, describe in detail how your morning has gone from when you woke up until now.
 - Take a minute to think about it.
 - F models a very detailed description of this.
- Partner's job is to listen as fully and intently as you can.
- Discussion Questions
 - How did that go?
 - What challenges did you have as a speaker?
 - As a listener?
 - Why is good listening important?
 - How does good listening effect the speaker?
 - How can listening be challenging?

[10/20] Activity: Building My House

- Give everyone in the group a handout and a pen/pencil.
- Write the following on the board:
 - On the foundation, write a value or principle that governs your life.
 - On the walls, write anyone or anything that supports you.
 - On the roof, write something or someone that protects you.
 - On the door, write something that you keep hidden from most other people.
 - On the sign, write something that you are proud of and want to let other people know.
 - In or next to the chimney smoke, write something you do to "let off steam," or get your negative emotions under control.
 - On the garden, write something about yourself that you want to grow or improve.
- Tell P's to write something for every part of their house, but they don't have to write anything that they are not comfortable sharing with the entire group.

[10/30] Discussion: The Art of Asking Questions

- What makes a good question?

- What kinds of questions are most powerful?
 - Yes/No
 - What/When/Where
 - Why/How
 - Tell me (more) about...
- Why is it important to ask questions?
- What is challenging about asking questions?
- How are listening and asking questions related?

[5/35] Activity: Tell me about your house

- A. P's ask their partner to tell them about their house. They need to ask at least three why/how questions about it.

[20/50] Discussion: Making space in conversations

- Discussion points:
 - Who here is comfortable talking in one on one? In small groups (around this size)? In classroom sized groups (15-30)? Large groups?
 - What do you think it means to make space in conversations?
 - Why is this important?
 - How is this challenging for some people?
 - Why do we, as men, need to be especially aware of this?
 - What should we do about it?
 - Making sure others get heard.
 - What is mansplaining?
 - Why does it happen?
 - How can you be more aware of your actions?

[5/55] Feedback and Q2P:

- Really final goodbye and gratitude
- Question to Ponder:
 - Think about someone who you think might have an interesting story. It could be their whole life, or just a specific incident. Ask them about it. Be genuine. Really listen to them. Ask questions. Thank them

[5/60] Carry over time

Appendix 3 - Pre- and Post- Assessments

This appendix contains examples of the pre- and post-assessment forms given to participants.

IF Men – Pre-Class Assessment

ID Code _____

- The # of your address and the last 2 digits of your phone #.
- If my address is **286** Main St., and phone number is 802-999-21**42**, then my ID Code is **28642**
- This let's me compare your answers now and at the end without knowing your name.

For each personal trait, mark where you think you are with it.

Personal Trait	I don't think I need to grow at all in this area.	I am happy with where I am, but know I can grow a little.	I am happy with where I am, but can grow a LOT.	I am NOT happy with where I am, and I need a lot of growth.	I am NOT happy with where I am, but I don't feel a need to grow.
Responsibility					
Motivation					
Self Respect					
Respect for Others					
Communication Skills					
Listening					

What expectations do you have for this class?

What fears do you have for this class?

Circle one topic you want to make sure we cover this semester?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Healthy Romantic Relationships | <input type="checkbox"/> Body Image |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Male Power and Privilege | <input type="checkbox"/> The Idea of Gender |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being a Leader | <input type="checkbox"/> Men and Violence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communication | <input type="checkbox"/> Expressing our emotions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being a Father | <input type="checkbox"/> Career and Job Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vulnerability and Masculinity | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Write below) |

IF Men – Post-Class Assessment

ID Code _____

- The # of your address and the last 2 digits of your phone #.
- If my address in **286** Main St., and phone number is 802-999-21**42**, then my ID Code is **28642**
- This lets me compare your answers now and at the end without knowing your name.

For each personal trait, mark where you think you NOW are with it.

Personal Trait	I don't think I need to grow at all in this area.	I am happy with where I am, but know I can grow a little.	I am happy with where I am, but can grow a LOT.	I am NOT happy with where I am, and I need a lot of growth.	I am NOT happy with where I am, but I don't feel a need to grow.
Responsibility					
Motivation					
Self Respect					
Respect for Others					
Communication Skills					
Listening					

What was a new idea or insight you had during this class?

What do you think you gained most from this class?

What part of this class would you want to see changed?

Appendix 4 - *If Men* Resource Packet Given on Final Day

This appendix contains an example copy of the packet given to all participants on the fifth, and supposedly, final day of the *If Men* program during the session addressed in this capstone. It contains:

1. The poem *If* by Rudyard Kipling, with comments by me.
2. The essay *Iron and the Soul* by Henry Rawlins, with comments by me.
3. A Resources and Media suggestions page
4. The Safer Sex Conversation guide

Scott's Comments: My dad gave me this poem when I was around 12. Since then it has been something I have come back to from time to time. Indeed the title is what inspired the title of this class. What I love about it, that it acknowledges that life is full of hardships and trials, but it is how we meet and react to those challenges that speaks to our character. These are of course traits that are true not just for men, but for all people. Bearing these things in mind can help you stay true to yourself throughout life.

IF

By Rudyard Kipling

If you can keep your head when all about you
 Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
 If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
 But make allowance for their doubting too;
 If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
 Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
 Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
 And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:
 If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
 If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
 If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
 And treat those two impostors just the same;
 If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
 Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
 Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
 And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:
 If you can make one heap of all your winnings
 And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
 And lose, and start again at your beginnings
 And never breathe a word about your loss;
 If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
 To serve your turn long after they are gone,
 And so hold on when there is nothing in you
 Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!^[P]_[SEP]

Scott's Comments: I like this essay because it speaks to the fact that we all need that thing that helps us cut through the bullshit of society's and our own messages, and find something that is honest. For Rollins it is weight lifting, for others it might be art, music, running, or whatever. Bear in mind that I don't agree with part's of his teacher's methods, but there is power in having more faith in a person than they have in themselves.

Iron and the Soul by Henry Rawlins

Henry Rollins is probably best known for being the front man for hardcore punk bands Black Flag and the Rollins Band. He has also been a music producer, dj, writer, and spoken word artist. He has also been a human rights activist, speaking largely for LGBTQ equality.

I believe that the definition of definition is reinvention. To not be like your parents. To not be like your friends. To be yourself. Completely.

When I was young I had no sense of myself. All I was, was a product of all the fear and humiliation I suffered. Fear of my parents. The humiliation of teachers calling me "garbage can" and telling me I'd be mowing lawns for a living. And the very real terror of my fellow students. I was threatened and beaten up for the color of my skin and my size. I was skinny and clumsy, and when others would tease me I didn't run home crying, wondering why.

I knew all too well. I was there to be antagonized. In sports I was laughed at. A spaz. I was pretty good at boxing but only because the rage that filled my every waking moment made me wild and unpredictable. I fought with some strange fury. The other boys thought I was crazy. I hated myself all the time.

As stupid as it seems now, I wanted to talk like them, dress like them, carry myself with the ease of knowing that I wasn't going to get pounded in the hallway between classes. Years passed and I learned to keep it all inside. I only talked to a few boys in my grade. Other losers. Some of them are to this day the greatest people I have ever known. Hang out with a guy who has had his head flushed down a toilet a few times, treat him with respect, and you'll find a faithful friend forever. But even with friends, school sucked. Teachers gave me hard time.

I didn't think much of them either.

Then came Mr. Pepperman, my advisor. He was a powerfully built Vietnam veteran, and he was scary. No one ever talked out of turn in his class. Once one kid did and Mr. P. lifted him off the ground and pinned him to the black board. Mr. P. could see that I was in bad shape, and one Friday in October he asked me if I had ever worked out with weights. I told him no.

He told me that I was going to take some

of the money that I had saved and buy a hundred pound set of weights at Sears. As I left his office, I started to think of things I would say to him on Monday when he asked about the weights that I was not going to buy. Still, it made me feel special. My father never really got that close to caring. On Saturday I bought the weights, but I couldn't even drag them to my mom's car. An attendant laughed at me as he put them on a dolly.

Monday came and I was called into Mr. P.'s office after school. He said that he was going to show me how to work out. He was going to put me on a program and start hitting me in the solar

plexus in the hallway when I wasn't looking. When I could take the punch we would know that we were getting somewhere. At no time was I to look at myself in the mirror or tell anyone at school what I was doing. In the gym he showed me ten basic exercises. I paid more attention than I ever did in any of my classes. I didn't want to blow it. I went home that night and started right in.

Weeks passed, and every once in a while Mr. P. would give me a shot and drop me in the hallway, sending my books flying. The other students didn't know what to think. More weeks passed, and I was steadily adding new weights to the bar. I could sense the power inside my body growing. I could feel it.

Right before Christmas break I was walking to class, and from out of nowhere Mr. Pepperman appeared and gave me a shot in the chest. I laughed and kept going. He said I could look at myself now. I got home and ran to the bathroom and pulled off my shirt. I saw a body, not just the shell that housed my stomach and my heart. My biceps bulged. My chest had definition. I felt strong. It was the first time I can remember having a sense of myself. I had done something and no one could ever take it away.

You couldn't say s-t to me.

It took me years to fully appreciate the value of the lessons I have learned from the Iron. I used to think that it was my adversary, that I was trying to lift that which does not want to be lifted. I was wrong. When the Iron doesn't want to come off the mat, it's the kindest thing it can do for you. If it flew up and went through the ceiling, it wouldn't teach you anything. That's the way the Iron talks to you. It tells you that the material you work with is that which you will come to resemble.

That which you work against will always work against you.

It wasn't until my late twenties that I learned that by working out I had given myself a great gift. I learned that nothing good comes without work and a certain amount of pain. When I finish a set that leaves me shaking, I know more about myself. When something gets bad, I know it can't be as bad as that workout.

I used to fight the pain, but recently this became clear to me: pain is not my enemy; it is my call to greatness. But when dealing with the Iron, one must be careful to interpret the pain correctly. Most injuries involving the Iron come from ego. I once spent a few weeks lifting weight that my body wasn't ready for and spent a few months not picking up anything heavier than a fork. Try to lift what you're not prepared to and the Iron will teach you a little lesson in restraint and self-control.

I have never met a truly strong person who didn't have self-respect. I think a lot of inwardly and outwardly directed contempt passes itself off as self-respect: the idea of raising yourself by stepping on someone's shoulders instead of doing it yourself. When I see guys working out for cosmetic reasons, I see vanity exposing them in the worst way, as cartoon characters, billboards for imbalance and insecurity. Strength reveals itself through character. It is the difference between bouncers who get off strong-arming people and Mr. Pepperman.

Muscle mass does not always equal strength. Strength is kindness and sensitivity. Strength is understanding that your power is both physical and emotional. That it comes from the body and the mind. And the heart.

Yukio Mishima said that he could not entertain the idea of romance if he was not strong.

Romance is such a strong and overwhelming passion, a weakened body cannot sustain it for

long. I have some of my most romantic thoughts when I am with the Iron. Once I was in love with a woman. I thought about her the most when the pain from a workout was racing through my body.

Everything in me wanted her. So much so that sex was only a fraction of my total desire. It was the single most intense love I have ever felt, but she lived far away and I didn't see her very often. Working out was a healthy way of dealing with the loneliness. To this day, when I work out I usually listen to ballads.

I prefer to work out alone.

It enables me to concentrate on the lessons that the Iron has for me. Learning about what you're made of is always time well spent, and I have found no better teacher. The Iron had taught me how to live. Life is capable of driving you out of your mind. The way it all comes down these days, it's some kind of miracle if you're not insane. People have become separated from their bodies. They are no longer whole.

I see them move from their offices to their cars and on to their suburban homes. They stress out constantly, they lose sleep, they eat badly. And they behave badly. Their egos run wild; they become motivated by that which will eventually give them a massive stroke. They need the Iron Mind.

Through the years, I have combined meditation, action, and the Iron into a single strength. I believe that when the body is strong, the mind thinks strong thoughts. Time spent away from the Iron makes my mind degenerate. I wallow in a thick depression. My body shuts down my mind. The Iron is the best antidepressant I have ever found. There is no better way to fight weakness than with strength. Once the mind and body have been awakened to their true potential, it's impossible to turn back.

The Iron never lies to you. You can walk outside and listen to all kinds of talk, get told that you're a god or a total bastard. The Iron will always kick you the real deal. The Iron is the great reference point, the all-knowing perspective giver. Always there like a beacon in the pitch black. I have found the Iron to be my greatest friend. It never freaks out on me, never runs. Friends may come and go. But two hundred pounds is always two hundred pounds.

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Media and Resources

Stories/Articles/Books to Read

Just google the titles:

- The Knight in Rusty Armor - Robert Fisher (Short Story)
- Between the World and Me - Ta-Nehisi Coates (A father's writings to his son)
- Awakening the Heroes Within - Carol S. Pearson (A look at 12 archetypes within us)
- The Book of Joy - Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama (A book of conversations)

Videos to check out (on youtube)

Tony Porter - A Call to Men - Ted Talk

Joe Erman - Be a Man - Ted Talk

"Man Prayer" - words by Eve Ensler, film by Tony Stroebel

Human Sexuality is Complicated... - Vlogbrothers

Three Movies to Watch

Look, there are many great movies about powerful women, and these are important to watch. We need to get an understanding of the challenges that people of other genders face. However with this list, I really wanted to focus on example of positive masculine characters, as well as films that are more explicit about the effects of unhealthy masculinity on men.

Aliens

Of course Ripley is a classic powerful female character (and of Vasquez is hardcore), but I really want you to pay attention to two male characters:

Corporal Hicks - How does he respect Ripley and accept her ideas while still maintaining his own identity as commander (once everyone else dies)? How does he balance bravery in the face of the enemy, with compassion for Newt, Ripley, and his fellow Marines?

Burke - How does he use women for his own gain? How does he use lies and manipulation to disempower women?

Moonlight

Pay attention to the way that different mindsets about masculinity affect Little/Chiron/Black at the different stages of his life. What shapes those around him? What messages does he take?

What are the consequences?

Moana

How does Maui eventually support Moana, without doing things for her? How is his relationship with her different from the traditional Disney Prince/Princess dynamic?

Safer Sex Conversation

This is the conversation to have when you feel like you are getting more physically and emotionally intimate with someone. Have it earlier if possible.

Yes, it will feel awkward.

Yes, they have probably never had this kind of talk before. **Trust** the process on this. It will serve you well in the long run.

Start with safety. (You answer all of these, then they answer all of these).

Here are my risk factors:

- I was last tested....
- My results were....
- My high risk behaviors since my last test are....
- My STI prevention method is...

Pregnancy Prevention

- My pregnancy prevention methods are...
- If we were to get pregnant...

Then move onto the intimate stuff. (Again, you answer all of these, then they answer all of these).

What would it mean to you if we connected?

- Are we dating? Closer friends? Same as before?
- What do you think you will need afterwards?
- Phone calls/texts? Frequency?

Desires...

- Here is what I would like...

Fears...

- This is what I am worried about...

Boundaries...

- These are my limits right now...