

Curriculum for a Feminist Men's Group

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Dear Comrades,

In response to the #MeToo movement launched in 2017, the two of us, who were leading feminist men's work in our local communities, decided to investigate how we could increase support for ourselves and other men in similar roles. Over 18 months, beginning in January 2018 and connecting men across the country, our group practiced building healing connection, introspection, understanding our socialization, and effective allyship. Over the course of the year and a half we experienced joyful connection and deep learning from one another, for we which we are deeply grateful. The group stopped meeting regularly in July 2019 because of lowered capacity of members and leaders.

We divided our time between practical workshopping of a member's project or dilemma, and group reflection along a particular theme tied to the experience of being raised male. We've collected most of our agendas, cleaned them up, and put them into this document, along with the initial invitation we had sent out, in order to share our successes and learnings as we continue to fight for liberation. We hope this might be useful for other men engaging in future work. Please feel free to adapt, copy, distribute, as you see fit (but please don't commodify this work, as per the Creative Commons license below).

Yours in Solidarity,

Matt Goldfield & Jonah S. Boyarin

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Parking lot



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Invitation

Dear __,

Throughout our lives, we have seen many men in our lives who are kind, thoughtful, and struggle against sexism and the patriarchy. Often, we men (Jonah and Matt very much included) are doing this alone, or relying on women and genderqueer people around us: few of us are organized and connected with other men in our attempts to be active in this work.

We have been socialized to avoid reaching out to other men for help and connection; this is a simple but important habit to reverse, because isolation prevents us from organizing and from being wholer human beings! Only if we are able to reach for each other with courage, trust, and vulnerability can we support one another in our struggle against sexism, male domination, and the patriarchy. We, as men, know there’s a need for us to step up. In order to do that, we must organize to support each other in this difficult work.

What we’re proposing is a remote network to connect and share resources and support in the work we’re already doing (or want to start doing) towards feminist, collective liberation in our home communities. To that end, we plan to have a monthly conference call, starting either 7:00-8:30 Wed. 1/24/18 or 3:00-4:30PM Sun. 1/28/18 depending on what works

best for folks, and a fb group (closed, for members) to allow us to stay connected and sharing resources. Please RSVP by emailing jonahandmatt@googlegroups.com, and let us know which call date you prefer.

During the call, we plan to have explicit time to connect with each other, taking time to get to know each other. We will think together about how to do this work, support each other in our endeavors around moving ourselves and other men in our internal work and in our allyship to women and genderqueer led movements and individuals. The focus will be men's work, and our (Matt and Jonah's) background and experience is as cis men; we are open to people of any gender identity/experience joining, honoring marginalized voices, and figuring it out as it goes. Jonah and Matt plan to facilitate the first few calls, and then the group can decide from there how to move forward together. Feel free to contact us with any questions.

“People overestimate what they can do in a day, and underestimate what they can do in 10 years”

- Carlos Saavedra

Sincerely,

Jonah + Matt

More about us + the call:

Matt & Jonah are committed to organizing against sexism and male domination as well to our and others' men healing and connection. They are both white, Jewish, cis men. Matt loves playing and making music. He is also a computer engineer and bread baker, and lives in a cooperative home in Jamaica Plain, Boston. Jonah is an educator, writer, Yiddish translator, and yoga teacher. He loves spending time with family, friends, friends and community in New York City, where he was born and raised.

A little bit about our shared analysis:

This work involves both internal work (including, but not limited to patterns stemming from sexism, domination, and homophobia) and explicit ally/accomplice-ship/solidarity with women and genderqueer people (individually and through movement work.) We understand that our own healing is significant in and of itself, and that it can't be separated from taking effective action in support of women and genderqueer people. We also believe that the more that men show up effectively as active, accountable, and generative accomplices in feminist antiracist movement, the more free we will all become from the harms of patriarchy.

Meeting #1: Launching, What Brings Us Here

-
- Soft-start [5 min]
 - Intro

 - Welcome/kickoff
 - Intros from others [10 min]

About a minute...Name, where you live, pronoun?, what's one relationship in your life that's going particularly well and why

Intro jonah and matt (facilitators) [10 min]

Go arounds [60-65 min]

Frame: we all have stories about what brought us into this feminist men's work...dominant society isn't going to tell us to do it, so there's some way if we're doing it, it's because we really want to be...we'll start with some questions and sharing about our background going into men's work, and then we'll talk more specifically about what projects we're doing or considering and how this group can support that work.

A main goal of ours for the group is that with time, we can grow to provide significant support to each other in men's work. That takes trust, vulnerability, and connection, which we know we don't have so many models for between men. It takes time to happen in a real way, and it also takes a conscious choice to open up and be there for one another, so what a wonderful opportunity we have to be models for one another. This next part is about just beginning that process.

Our individual histories [30-32 min total, 4-5 min each]

What does mens work mean to you? Who is someone who has played a crucial role in organizing or supporting you into this work, what role did they play?

Goals [30-32 min total, 4-5 min each]

- What do you want the group to know about what you're currently working on?
- How do relationships with men impact your current work?
- What are ways you hope this group might support your work, your individual growth?

Name future decision:

- Should we invite more folks now or later
- Email list or Facebook group? What's your preference?

Meeting #2: Workshopping Our Personal and Communal Work

- Soft-start [5 min]
- Intro
- Welcome/kickoff
- Intros from others [10 min]

About a minute...Name, where you live, pronoun?, what's one relationship in your life that's going particularly well and why

Structure of the call/agenda for today

- A. A prompt about inner (personal/interpersonal) work.
- B. A prompt about outer (communal) work.

[A. Personal Work] Needing help and asking for it is something men are socialized away from. We might have learned it's ok to ask for help in some areas, but in other spaces or topics learned to shy away from it.

Go around: What is one way you've let yourself rely on someone, or been able to ask for help?

[B. Communal work--workshopping a dilemma in pairs] In thinking about this group, we hoped it would be a place where we could look inward towards ourselves through connection with each other, and also to look outward in a few ways. We are hoping to create a space where we can workshop ideas and dilemmas that come up in our work and our lives, and also think about ways this group can act externally / to show up together in the world.

Quick go around - are there specific ways people would want to add to that?

- Prompt for pairs: what's a dilemma, a difficult problem that's come up for you in a leadership context, in men's groups or other organizing spaces?
- Protocol for peer workshopping (in pairs or triples):
 - 3 min - present describe the work or issue
 - 3 min - clarifying questions from subgroup
 - 4 min - pair/trio discussion
- Think out loud with the other person supporting
- Ask for feedback / brainstorm together
- What did we hear?

- What didn't we hear that might be relevant?
- What assumptions seem to be operating?
- What questions does the dilemma raise for us?
- What do we think about the dilemma?
- What might we do or try if faced with a similar dilemma? What have we done in similar situations?

Switch roles & repeat.

Back in full group, debrief: briefly summarize the dilemma, and let the group know, how can the broader group support you?

Meeting #3: Domestic Labor & Workshopping a Dilemma from One Member's Men's Group

Opening check-in [10 mins]: rose & buds: highlight from last week & something you're looking forward to next week.

Go-around [4 mins. each, 25 min]: thinking about passover coming up for Jewish ppl..patterns around domestic labor growing up, who did it, who didn't, what were the feelings expressed around it, what messages did you receive (and siblings?).

- What did you notice about domestic labor and when/how?
- What still gets in the way? Any currently sticky spots?
- How do you assess/respond when you notice a non-cis-man taking on domestic labor you might have done?

Workshop a Dilemma [32 min]: Washington Heights Men's Feminist Group co-leaders presenting to the whole group.

How do we (the co-leaders of the Washington Heights Men's Feminist Group) get men to be invested in more fully feeling our feelings (like, what's the stake in it for men, and how do we get men to feel like they want it)? And how do we help men actually feel our feelings?

- 2 minute frame by coleaders
- 3 minutes for factual clarifying questions from the group.
- 24 minute go-around [4 minutes each]:
Getting statements from folks in this group about why each of us feels it's important to feel our feelings, would help me turn back to my local men's group and articulate the "why" and "how" of feeling our feelings more. I think it would also be helpful for me for my coleader to hear others talk about it so it's not always just me pushing this agenda.
- 3 minute advice/strategies from the group.

Quick closing go-around [5 min]: Appreciations, Will send out doodle for future calls

Meeting #4: Homophobia & Workshopping a Dilemma from One Member's Men's Group

Kickoff go around [2 min each--15 min]:

What is one relationship in your life that is going particularly well these days?

5 min for the group to listen to a member who is getting married before our next call, how they're feeling, what they want to share with the group.

Structure of the call/agenda for today

- A. A prompt about inner (personal/interpersonal) work.
- B. A prompt about outer (communal) work.

A. Personal go around question [4 min each--28 min]:

What is one relationship you have where homophobia has gotten in the way? Some examples of ways homophobia affects relationships are external expectations around performing masculinity in a certain kind of way, and difficulty building safe closeness/intimacy with other men.

B. Frame: Member presents the situation he's workshopping and what he's looking for from us

- Member presents dilemma about men's group he's leading (4 min)
- factual clarifying questions (2 min)

Break into small groups for go-around (11 min):

Discuss what you heard from the presenter: 2 minute go-arounds + 1 to respond after each one

Potential questions:

- What does this bring up for you? What is scary / what is empowering
- How would you add to the accountability process stated? What's good here and what needs to be enhanced?
- Does the member's presentation give you any insight into a situation you're currently facing?
- Have you experienced similar things in community before? What did you learn from them?

2 min at end to synthesize

Report back(10 min)

- 3 min each for report back
- 1 min for anyone else to add / discuss
- 2 min presenting member responds back

Strategy call invitation

- Call to plan long term goals / s for this group and how to reach for them
- We're not going to decide everything, but we'll shape the conversation

Closing go around

Meeting #5: Accountability & Workshopping One Member's Men's Group

Kickoff go around [2 min each--15 min]:

kickoff prompt: what's a relationship that's going well in your life?

Structure of the call/agenda for today

- A. Visioning what we're building towards
- B. Prompt about how and when we do or don't keep other men around us accountable.
- C. Workshopping a communal accountability process.

1. Visioning what we're building towards

Brainstorm [90 seconds go-around--10 min]

describe the world to come--what gender liberation looks like to you--dream big;
[alternatively, structure it popcorn style, one thing at a time and everyone can talk]

Strategic planning discussion [15 min]

What are your hopes for the group in the short-run and long-run? When and how should we include new members?

B. Longer go around w/ journaling about accountability [20 min]

- What's a time you received tochecha [feedback about your negative behavior] in any kind of situation, that worked well? What made it work well? What kind of difficult feelings came up for you? What kind of support did you have?
- What's a time you gave direct feedback to another man about his behavior, and how did it go?

Don't need to think about the hardest instance. We don't need to start with the most extreme example because that's difficult to do. We're building up our ability as a group to talk about peer accountability/feedback, so this is a start.

What's a time you wish you gave direct feedback and didn't? Why didn't you, what was holding you back, and what would you have needed to be able to do it?

- Journal
- go-around

C. Workingshopping a communal accountability process.

Washington Heights Men's Feminist Group co-leaders present about a particular communal accountability process they're leading in Washington Heights, and dilemmas that have arisen.

Washington Heights Men's Feminist Group co-leaders present the situation they're workshopping and what they're looking for from us (6 min) [matt]

- co-leaders present (4 min)
- factual clarifying questions (2 min)

Break into small groups for go-around(11 min):

- 2 minute go-arounds + 1 to discuss after each one
- 2 min at end to synthesize
- Potential questions:
 - What does this bring up for you? What is scary / what is empowering
 - How would you add to the accountability process stated? What's good here and what needs to be enhanced?
 - Does the presentation give you any insight into a situation you're currently facing?
 - Have you experienced similar things in community before? What did you learn from them?

Report back (10 min)

- 3 min each for report back
- 1 min for anyone else to add / discuss

- 2 min co leaders respond back

Close--2min

1 sentence go around--how are you feeling right now?

Meeting #6: Visioning, Sharing Intersecting Identities & Needs

kickoff prompt [2 min each] : what's a relationship that's going well in your life right now?

Structure of the call/agenda for today

1. Strategic planning
 2. who's in the room--identities and needs
 3. next steps
-
1. Report back from Strategic Planning crew (13 min)
 - 1 min. Yoynéh intro's the strategic planning call.
 - 3 mins. Each, 3 members present on what we took away from the process
 - 3 min. Yoynéh presents next steps/outcomes

Next steps:

Who's in the room convo

Potential small internal expansion convo.

6 month action

Yoynéh

- Research what else is out there in terms for groups and what people who aren't yet in the group need, October--Yoynéh will need coleader for Oct meeting.
- Set up a culture of external accountability, December

Member

- Different cultures need different kinds of support - what are we going for? (related to who's in the room ?) January
- Year action

Matt g

- start at least planning a meeting in person--February
- Starting new groups/2nd branch April

B&C. Who is in the room (53 min)

Warm up (6 min total): “who are you?” activity in zoom pairs [one person spends 2 min simply, evenly-toned asking the other person, “who are you,” and the other person responds, “I am...”, and just keep on repeating for 2 min, then switch]; time yourselves, person who is asking can be timer.

2 min each, in pairs

(5 min each + 45 seconds resonating--whole group) What are identities you hold that are important to you and how have they affected your masculinity? How do you want support around your identities in this space?

Matt & yoynah start the resonating/affirmations

Next steps 5 min

- Were there any requests for organized support?
- If so, we ask volunteers for a team on said issue(s) and have a goal to check in once, or devote time to it in our next meeting

C. Growing the group (7 min)

- Not wanting to grow a lot at once
- Goal -
- Everyone invites 0-1 person
- Let us know in the next month
- November will be 1st wave of join
- Think about identities - making a place where people of many identities will feel that they belong

Closing (7 min)

2 Appreciations - one of the group and one of Jonah/Matt

Meeting #7: “The Man Box,” Role Models, & Asking Each Other for Specific Help

kickoff prompt [10-14 min.: 2 min. each]: what’s a relationship that’s going well in your life right now?

Structure of the call/agenda for today

1. Male socialization

2. Supported Growth

1. 30-40 min Who's in the room: relationship to male role model and dominant culture

- 5 min group brainstorm Man Box: when you hear the phrase, “be a man,” “act like a man,” “man up,” brainstorm words that you associate with that. Don't worry about being obvious, or getting it right, just speak from the gut what feels true to you, the point is just to get this spoken and written so we have something shared to refer to as we continue.
- Sample notes from the convo we had :
 - tough
 - king of the hill: be the best at what you're doing
 - take up the most space
 - be the most funny/strongest
 - lots of girlfriends
 - violence and aggression normal
 - no bright colors
 - (some things that aren't told but forced to do)
 - women's clothes colors are various! men's are very dark and monotone
 - dismissive of emotional vulnerability
 - logical
 - problems solve
 - get it done
 - be efficient
 - be in charge of EVERYBODY
 - that's how we show love
 - love=being in charge=dominant
 - be only emotionally intelligent with female partner
 - only share/rely on female partner for emotional support/opneing
 - sports sports
 - muscles
 - depennnnnnnds on what culture
- Okay that's a portrait of our shared understandings of what the dominant social understandings of being a man are. [Name how there is a dominant cultural model of masculinity that has most power, but there are also other cultural models out there, that have influenced us too]

- Think of someone in your life who's been a key male role model for you (by key I mean very impactful, for better or for worse, someone that modeled a lot to you about what masculinity is like--i.e. Not necessarily your most positive male role, but someone who's really influenced you, for better or for worse. Could be teacher, father, uncle, friend, religious figure, a book or tv character, or even a community or group of men, etc.). Take a moment to think about, then we will do a go around: 25-35 min. Go around, 3 min each + 1 min followup q's:
- What are one or two key ways that he influenced who you are, particularly your masculinity?
- What ways were his masculinity similar or different to the dominant culture's masculinity (the kind we brainstormed for the man box: the kind that you see on tv, and praised in history books or about politicians or other public figures).

B. 30-35 min Supported Growth: one thing we're trying to get better at wrt masculinity that we want to share with the group.

Shifting gears a little bit, for many of us, it was recently Yom Kippur, a day of personal reflection on what we want to do better in the year to come. what's one thing you, on reflection, would like to make a commitment to working on around your masculinity--as specific as possible, a specific relationship, behavioral pattern, internal emotional goal, etc--and would like to share with this group, to receive accountability and support. And ask for the support you need--i.e. if anyone in the group has any advice on the spot, or if you want encouragement, cheerleading, ask for it; or anyone wants to be peer check-in buddy you can have a checkin text or phone call about it.

- 2-3 min each share out + 1 min each asking for support +1 min each receiving support
- Sample from our actual convo:
- Member 1: I want to hear stories of allyship from other men, how to be more behind the scenes than leading from front
- Member 2: specific strategies for how to start men's groups like, hear stories like this. Hear more about the structured work we've been doing...tangible structures
- Member 3: sexist tendency when i meet a new woman that I assume hey're not as radical as they are. Also, 2nd, how to do chores at home without resentment...checking in about commitments regularly.
- Member 4: I like supporting ppl, i don't like asking for help.i am going to write letter to my sister to try to start healing our relationship...

Close: let me and Matt G know if there's someone you would like to nominate to add to the group. One thing we're being thoughtful about is the identity of the men who are joining, in making an intentionally inclusive and supportive and antiracist so please let us know if the

person is poc or white and any other important details!

Meeting #8: What does it mean to ask for help, receive?

Matt shares about his recent wedding for 2 minutes! :)

kickoff prompt [2 min. Each)]

Speak about a person you rely on, and one time they helped you.

Structure of the call/agenda for today

1. What does it mean to ask for help, receive?

Go around prompt [5 min each]

Who's a man in your life who has a hard time accepting help, and how does it affect his relationships/your relationship with him? How are you that man (how do you repeat that pattern)? How did you learn those patterns?

Mini-presentation [5 min each]

Brief talk/rehash about domination and control socialization making it harder to accept help, to enact closeness, expectations of quid-pro-quo for support

Go around prompt [4 min each]

What is a time you got closer to someone through asking them for help, or accepting help? Were there things that got in the way? How did you move through them? what is a place you would like some help in your own life, and is there someone you would want to pull in to support you?

10 min: Member presents (4 min), we resonate (1 min each)

Meeting #9: Interrupting Other Men's Harmful Behaviors

kickoff prompt (2 min each)

Speak about a person you received support from recently, and your experience receiving support from them.

Also reminder that we will have between 1-3 new people joining next time.

Framing (2 min)

How hard it is to interrupt other men, even as we think about this work a lot. We can learn a lot from women, but it also it is different when men confront men.

Popcorn first and then go-around about a specific incident (3 min each)

What comes up for you when you see explicit masculinity being performed in a way that is toxic or violent? Think of a specific incident if that's helpful.

(4 min each) Have you ever been interrupted or seen someone else interrupted in a way that felt generative? What made it work well? Times that didn't go well and what made them hard? How are the feelings that come up for us in the moment helpful/unhelpful?

What are strategies you have used to -

- diffuse your own anger at the situation / person
- to mitigate embarrassment of the interruptee
- to handle anger of the interruptee
- other things thought above

2 min - times that went well

2 min - times that didn't go well

(2 min) resonating and response time

(11 minutes) breakout in pairs or triples

Thinking about a specific incident and/or imagine we're creating a resource on this - what should it contain?

(3 min each pair) report back

Meeting #10: Welcoming New Members, Recentering What Brings Us Here

kickoff prompt (2 min each)

Names, pronouns. Speak about a person you received support from recently, and your experience receiving support from them.

Intro (4 min)

Welcoming new member, 1-2 more joining next call, introducing roles notetaker and workshop/topic bringer.

Prompt (3 min each)

What draws you to center this work in your life? what are you hoping to get out of the group? Or what are you getting out of it already? (new people go last)

Prompt (4 min each)

What are some important identities, relationships, or experience that you want us to know more about as we do this work together. For returning members, it's a chance to either revisit something you're feeling strongly in the moment or want our new members to know, or to tell us about something that's been hanging back in the background until now. For our new members, it's a chance to introduce yourself in the way that's important to you.

Prompt (3 min each)

Reaching for other men is hard sometimes - success story of reaching for another man. Asking for help, making a friend, calling in.

4 min total--Housekeeping

assign workshopping rotation

- List of potential topics for workshopping
- Skill share?
- Dilemma in group
- Try out an idea
- Will meet with jonah or matt 1:1 beforehand to help plan the time.

assign notetaking rotation

Meeting #11: 1:1s with each other

Kickoff Prompt (2 min each)

Names, pronouns. Speak about a person you received support from recently, and your experience receiving support from them.

5 minute presentation and discussion on 1-1's (mostly facilitators speaking)

Tips and tricks for 1-1's go round?

How are 1-1s harder for men ?

Discussion

Team building - how have we done it / what are successes in really feeling collaborative?
Men?

Logistics are hard too...

What is it like to lead / be in the spotlight

Barriers to starting something big

1-1s with each other:

Potential topics around starting a mens group:

- Close male relationships
- Building a team
- Larger community
- Don't work alone
- Mirror held up to oneself
- Avoiding male relationships when others are available
- Feeling spotlighted as a leader: Like a unicorn, feeling like showing off, impostor / insufficiency
- Logistics as men
- What's live for us about mens work stuff
- What's a relationship we're working on that the group could support on
- Romantic relationships
- (another direction) What is the value of male relationship? What's one that you're working on?
- What's a choice point that brought you here?
- Obstacles to building male relationship
- Crying
- Experiences being on a team
- Benefits of male relationships - why do men have to do this work together ? (aside from justice)... how do men benefit
- Workshop slot topic/work

Pair share-back

Meeting #12: Organizing Other Men

Kickoff prompt (2 min each)

Names, pronouns. Speak about a person you received support from recently, and your experience receiving support from them.

(5 min) Member presents about starting a men's book group

(4 min) Clarifying questions

Prompt (20 min total)

Is there a story you have about organizing men you'd like to share? What were the successes and challenges in building relationships with individuals or groups of men in your story?

- Importance of not leading alone
- Importance of connecting in addition to shared work

Discussion (10 min)

Frame around member's presentation, member starts with resonance or response to the stories

(5 min) Member presents about how to show up as a man in mostly female community

Prompt (20 min total)

Is there a story of organizing, as a man, in majority-women spaces, or of showing up for women in majority-women spaces? Is there an on-going challenge you are grappling with in this area? Is there something you've figured out about your roles here?

Discussion (10 min)

Frame around member's presentation, member starts with resonance or response to the stories

(5 min) appreciations for Member(s), Facilitators

Parking lot

How to start a men's group; sharing experiences from starting and running groups

Sharing skills/knowledge as facilitators

Patterns of wanting to fix/control/be in charge/be mindful/woke, even in a good way.

How do we (men) respond to other's anxiety?

Processing the hugeness and everydayness of misogyny/sexism on women in our lives.

Frame within the context of the body keeps the score

What does it mean to be an ally to other men?

What are stories of times you've significantly contributed from the behind the scenes, and without much visibility or even recognition?

- Differentiating between public feminist work and private feminist work...how does it feel to receive recognition or not
- What draws you to being a leader in this work?

What does it mean to lead through vulnerability?

Domestic life stuff--sharing chores, differences in values of cleanliness, mental load of supervising domestic life, etc.

What is one success you've had organizing other men?

How has your approach to your relationships with men changed over time? How has your approach to your relationships with women changed over time?

What are some ways you've learned how to interact with ciswomen and gender-queer, how did you learn them and what was the impact?

Tell a story about a time that you received support, wisdom, love, or something else important from another man. What happened, what did it feel like what was the impact?