

“A Lifetime of Activism”: Doing Feminist Men’s Work from a Social Justice
Paradigm

By

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BA, University of British Columbia, 2012

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the projects and experiences of social justice organizers who place an emphasis on working to address heteropatriarchy and its impacts, work that I call *men's work*. In particular, these are organizers who take an intersectional, social justice approach to this work. In order to recognize who organizers are and the kinds of projects they engage in, I describe four major project themes within men's work and briefly explore their potentials and pitfalls according to those who are involved in them. I then analyze a number of the various considerations, tensions, and difficulties that arise for these organizers, particularly the personal and interpersonal components. In order to support organizers to be resilient and successful when faced with these issues, I conclude by sharing a variety of ways they may choose to navigate the various complexities they encounter in their organizing and in their communities.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Introduction.....	1
The Current Project.....	4
Chapter 1: Literature Review and Methodology.....	10
Literature Review.....	10
Methodology	21
Sampling and Recruitment.....	23
The Interviews.....	27
Analysis.....	29
Limitations.....	30
Chapter 2: Men’s Work Organizers and Projects.....	32
Men’s Work as Social Justice Work.....	33
Men’s Work Projects	39
Political Education	39
Men’s Groups.....	45
Reproductive Labour	50
Personal Work	55
Chapter 3: Issues and Challenges in Men’s Work.....	69
Connecting the Personal and Political.....	69
Capacity and Priorities.....	77
Inter-Organizer Dynamics	83
Mentorship	108
Accountability	116
Conclusion: Thriving in Men’s Work.....	125
Cultivate Resilience	127
Learn to Experience Feelings and Address Them Appropriately.....	131
Connect with Your Empathy.....	134
Be Transparent.....	135
Credit Where Credit Is Due	136
Be Humble	138
Learn to Be a Leader While Supporting the Leadership of Marginalized Organizers	139
Seek out Mentorship Relationships and Create Contexts for Them to Flourish	141
Develop Meaningful Relationships	143
Connect with Other Men.....	147
Bibliography	152
Appendix	157

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Introduction

During the 1970s and 80s and the rise of what is known as the second wave of feminism, a number of men responded to calls from feminists to support their efforts by developing approaches to working with men on unlearning violent behaviours. These include initiatives such as the White Ribbon Campaign, which began in 1991 in Canada and has since spread to at least thirty-five other countries,¹ Mentoring in Violence Prevention, the most prolific of the many bystander intervention approaches taken presently,² and numerous other local, national, and international campaigns and organizations. These initiatives created the groundwork for much of the most popular feminist men's work undertaken today.

Challenges to feminism—including to the work of feminist men—have demonstrated how addressing men's violence should be only one piece of the struggle for gender justice; heteropatriarchy is a multifaceted system of dominance and violence is only one of its constituent parts.³ Heteropatriarchy affects the entire structure of social life, creating unequal distributions of power, opportunities, and resources, according to its “male-denominated, male-identified, male-centered, and control-obsessed character.”⁴ It categorizes individuals into a male-female binary, polarizes these ideals into mutually exclusive, opposing identity categories, penalizes deviance from these assigned categories, and devalues the feminine/feminized

¹ Michael Flood, “Men's Collective Struggles for Gender Justice: The Case of Antiviolence Activism,” in *Handbook of Studies on Men & Masculinities 2005*, eds. Michael Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, and Raewyn Connell (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2005), 459.

² Jackson Katz, Alan Heisterkamp and Michael Fleming, “The Social Justice Roots of the Mentors in Violence Prevention Model and Its Application in a High School Setting,” *Violence Against Women*, 11, no. 6 (2011).

³ See for example the different scholarly approaches of Raewyn Connell and Jeff Hearn, respectively in Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities (2nd ed.)* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 205; Jeff Hearn, “From Hegemonic Masculinity to the Hegemony of Men,” *Feminist Theory* 5, no. 1, 2004; as well as the social-change approaches of organizations such as The Anti-Violence Project at the University of Victoria, and Project Respect at the Victoria Sexual Assault Centre.

⁴ Allan Johnson, “Patriarchy, the System,” in *Theories and Theorizing: Integrative Frameworks for Understanding* 2006, eds. Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okazawa Rey (New York: McGraw-Hill Humanities Social, 1997), 36, and 34.

individuals while rewarding the masculine.⁵ Accordingly, although many of the efforts to address men's violence have framed gender-based violence simply as a public health concern, some view ending gender-based violence as only one component of a broader social justice goal of addressing male/masculine dominance.⁶

Further, some of the most prevalent and consistent challenges to feminism have come from queer activists and theorists, trans-feminisms, black and intersectional feminisms, and Indigenous feminisms.⁷ The central message contained in them is that systems of dominance interlock, such that heteropatriarchy cannot effectively be addressed without also attending to other systems such as white supremacy, class hierarchies, colonialism, ableism, and others. In response, the scope of concern for many feminists has come to include working for justice along the axes of race, class, ability, and others in conjunction with gender and sexuality.

With respect to men's engagement in feminist work, these challenges demonstrate clearly that intersectional feminism requires more from men than only for them to address gender-based violence. Intersectional feminism calls on men to take responsibility for eliminating heteropatriarchy in all facets of their lives, both at personal and societal levels, while connecting this struggle to intersecting systems of dominance. However, in comparison to the number of highly publicized gender-based violence prevention initiatives noted above, activists and scholars contend that much more must be done to foster in men a deep commitment to feminist

⁵ Francisco Valdes, "Unpacking Hetero-Patriarchy: Tracing the Conflation of Sex, Gender & Sexual Orientation to Its Origins," *Yale Journal of Law and Humanities* 8, no. 1 (2013): 170.

⁶ Michael Messner, Max Greenberg, Tal Peretz, *Some men: Feminist Allies & the Movement to End Violence Against Women* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2015), 178.

⁷ For example, see Krista Scott-Dixon, *Trans/forming Feminisms: Trans/feminist Voices Speak Out* (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2006); Angela Yvonne Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (New York, Vintage Books, 1983); Joyce Green, "Taking Account of Aboriginal Feminism," in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism 2007*, ed. Green, Joyce, 20-32. (Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2007).

politics and practice.⁸ This lack notwithstanding, men's work from a social justice perspective has been taken up by individuals and grassroots initiatives, including those profiled in this research, which are doing both the personal and political work to illuminate and address the links between men, masculinity, violence, and the array of intersecting oppressions. Taken together, the diverse range of feminist projects undertaken to address heteropatriarchy by focusing on men and masculinity constitute what I call "men's work," a term I borrow from activist and educator Paul Kivel's foundational text *Men's Work*.⁹ These efforts range in their commitment to intersectional social justice goals, and this thesis focuses particularly on those doing work that is consciously working from a social justice perspective.

I have found that social justice efforts are greatly hindered by toxic dynamics that circulate within organizing communities. These dynamics are in large part the result of persistent training and behaviours influenced by heteropatriarchy and the various systems of oppression. Therefore, it is important that privileged organizers¹⁰ focus on the ways that they personally impact the people and spaces in which they work. By working together, men can increase their capacities to form better relationships with other organizers and to positively impact organizing spaces. When organizers are able to build strong relationships with one another and to contribute

⁸ See for example Walter DeKeseredy, and Martin Schwartz. *Male Peer Support and Violence Against Women: The History and Verification of a Theory*, (Boston, Northeastern University Press, 2015); "Ex Masculus," Accessed June 29, 2017, <https://www.scribd.com/doc/227913402/Ex-Masculus-Read1>; and bell hooks, "Men: Comrades in Struggle," in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press, 1984.; Jackson Katz, *The Macho Paradox: Why Some Men Hurt Women and How All Men Can Help*, (Naperville, Ill: Sourcebooks. 2006); Michael Kaufman, "Successfully Involving Men and Boys to End Violence Against Women: Lessons from Around the World from the White Ribbon Campaign." Keynote Address at Stop Domestic Violence against Women: Ten Years of Austrian Anti-Violence Legislation in the International Context, Vienna. Nov. 5-7, 2007.

⁹ Paul Kivel, *Men's Work: How to Stop the Violence and Tears Us Apart* (City Centre, MN: Hazelden Publishing, 1992)

¹⁰ I prefer the term *organizer* to the perhaps more common term *activist*. *Organizer* seems to include more of the roles people take on in social justice spaces, whereas *activist* conjures images of marches and microphones; the child care volunteer, dish washer, and cleanup crew are clearly involved in organizing, but it is more difficult for people to view them (or them to view themselves) as activists.

to organizing spaces in constructive ways, organizer communities may thrive and social justice organizing benefits.

The Current Project

As a men's work organizer myself, I embarked on my graduate studies with the hope of developing a research project that would support my and others' organizing efforts. Initially, I thought that this project would be about specific political projects, such as curriculum and approaches to political education or other externally focused political projects and how to do them better. As my work progressed and I began speaking with organizers, the direction shifted towards what appeared to be a more salient concern. Therefore, while I discuss the specific projects that organizers take on, this thesis does not specifically analyze the effectiveness of these projects or make recommendations for improvements. These practical components of improving men's work projects, such as how to develop curriculum, how to run groups, or best organizing practices, would make great topics for further research into men's social justice work, but they are not the focus here. Instead, this project focuses on organizers themselves and on relationships between them.

As I discovered by speaking with organizers, the many complex and often difficult dynamics that arise for organizers have less to do with the content of their projects and more to do with how they relate to one another. As one organizer shared with me, gendered-oppression, perhaps even more than other systems of domination, is reproduced in many subtle and intimate ways. In organizing spaces, the reproduction of oppression, often through privileged men's training to uphold these systems, contributes significantly to the issues that arise between organizers. In this way, doing social justice work as somebody who benefits from the very systems that they work against carries with it some unique challenges, and all organizers are

impacted when privileged people engage in social justice efforts. Organizers are already well aware of the issues that can arise in organizing spaces. They are already having these conversations amongst themselves, conversations about for example mentorship, accountability, the distribution of labour within organizing, the often-realized potential for men's involvement to negatively impact organizing efforts, men's personal transformation work, and what it means to embody a feminist manhood. I believe that working through these issues is part of the work men need to be doing together. These are the kinds of conversations I hope to amplify and to which I hope to contribute with this work.

Over four months, I interviewed twelve people who have been involved in men's work, primarily in British Columbia and California, but also across Canada and the United States. I used thematic analysis to explore what they shared in the interviews, and have various academic and non-academic sources helped to frame my analysis of the interviews. Some of the questions that guided my inquiry into these conversations were the following: what is being asked of the men who are doing feminist organizing? What roles should men be taking on within social justice organizing? What is difficult about being a social justice organizer and what approaches are useful when navigating them? Are there approaches that are suited specifically for those privileged by the very systems they are working against? What are appropriate and effective ways for men to unlearn their own heteropatriarchal and oppressive tendencies and learn feminist manhoods?

In exploring these questions, I do not attempt to generalize, homogenize, or constrain men's work; what is contained here speaks to the experiences only of those involved in this project, and any generalizations about men's work more broadly is up to the reader to determine.

Rather, in attempting what has been described as “humble continuity,”¹¹ I hope to respectfully share lessons and challenges across movement spaces. In doing so, I aim to contribute to the development of men’s work, to expand it in such a way that more men are able to envision themselves as active and committed participants, and in ways that support those already committed to overcome the anxiety and isolation often felt by those in the work. Several organizers shared with me how much they wish for more resources that demonstrate how men are working through the challenges of organizing and that support more men to do the same. Chris described well the isolation many men in the work feel and emphasized the need for more work that builds the tenuous connections between organizers:

Right now, honestly, it just feels like there’s like a bunch of guys, you know we’re all just trying to do the best we can in our little pockets, just trying to throw down. But [we need] a sense of like, ‘yes, there’s like hundreds, if not thousands of men, all over the country, all over the US and Canada, you know the world ... there are many of us and here are the kinds of things that we do, or can do, here’s the political vision that we’re operating from, here’s a general kind of approach’ that people could be like ‘oh, I could see myself doing that!’¹²

He was emphatic that men be intentional about documenting and sharing the lessons they have been learning: “We need living, breathing, reflective” examples, lessons from the “men that have been trudging through this work.” So sharing personal experiences of, for example, how to “trudge through this confusion, [to] trudge through these kinds of questions” is central to addressing the isolation that men in this work tend to feel from one another, and to supporting them to do the work better. Primarily, this project is my modest attempt to contribute to the deepening of the connections between feminist organizers doing work with and for men.

Throughout this project, I was aware that these are difficult conversations to have. In my experience, conversations about men in feminism can end up detracting rather than adding to

¹¹ Chris Dixon, *Another Politics: Talking Across Today’s Transformative Movements* (Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 2014), 7.

¹² Chris Crass in conversation with the author, October 7, 2016. All quotes attributed to “Chris” throughout this thesis are derived from this interview.

feminist goals; sometimes these conversations exclude consideration of marginalized people and instead focus on men as primarily victims and those to whom feminist efforts should be catered. Further, feminists tend to be well aware of this tendency and can justifiably be very vigilant about resisting initiatives that appear to be repeating this mistake. Many of the same friends and organizers who have been supportive of and at times excited about this project and the prospect of men working together to better their participation in feminism have also expressed varied degrees of concern that this project would replicate these patterns that they often witness. So there tend to be competing directives: on the one hand, feminist organizers must keep central those marginalized by heteropatriarchy and other systems of oppression, and on the other, they should organize with and for men around masculinity. The tension arises as it becomes clear that having a thorough and honest conversation about what it is like to be a man in feminist organizing is impossible to do without at least in some part centering men and masculinity. So how can organizers do this in such a way that remains responsive to the need to centre marginalized people and the fact of masculine privilege? This is the space I have attempted to navigate with this project.

There were countless ways I could have organized and made sense of all that I heard in my interviews. Initially, I set out to structure my writing around what appears to be an important distinction for the organizers I spoke with. They tended to understand their activities as falling into two distinct but connected categories. On the one hand, *external* or “political” work focuses outwardly on social change, aiming to bring other men into the work, to change beliefs and behaviours, to influence the broader community. On the other hand, the *internal* or “personal” work focuses on men changing themselves and their behaviour. But what became clear was that, while these are useful analytical categories for thinking through one’s relationship to organizing,

any attempt I made at actually developing a coherent account of men's work beginning from this binary distinction was overly simplistic. In hindsight, this is predictable; it has been decades since feminists popularized the notion that the personal is political and the political must be personal. Although it does appear possible to focus on personal work to the exclusion of external work and vice versa, for the organizers I spoke with, this is a problematic move. For them, the personal and political are intertwined and recursive. Engaging in political work catalyzes, demands, and illuminates the need for personal work, and personal transformation promotes active political engagement. They simply cannot be fully or neatly separated. So rather than focusing on the analytical binary between personal and political work, I have tried to develop a structure that better acknowledges the intertwined and recursive nature of these two components.

After laying out a review of relevant literature and my research methodology, I turn in Chapter Two to my interview data and lay out four of the primary types of projects taken on by the organizers I spoke with. I consider some of the projects men's work organizers are engaged in and explore their potentials and pitfalls according to those who are involved in them. Chapter Two provides a foundation for understanding who the organizers included in this research are and what they do. I organize the four project types according to their relationship to the internal-external distinction I make above. First, I discuss political education work, the most outwardly focused type of project organizers are prioritizing. I continue with an examination of men's groups and reproductive labour as political projects, both of which appear to combine many personal and political aspects of the work. Finally, I consider the most personal aspects of the work that organizers are engaged in, the ways that the men I spoke with are struggling with their own inculcation into oppressive systems.

Chapter Three takes a deeper look at the various issues, tensions, and difficulties that arise for men's work organizers. Because social justice organizing relies so heavily on relationships, it is crucial to understand the complex dynamics that arise for organizers. First, I discuss how organizers are connecting the personal and political components of their work, and the importance of doing so. Following this, I consider the issues that arise around choosing priorities, given the finite nature of organizers' time and capacity. The bulk of this chapter focuses on the various interpersonal dynamics that frequently arise when men do feminist organizing. Finally, Chapter Three addresses mentorship and how it has been experienced for the organizers I spoke with, and accountability and what it means to be an organizer who is privileged by the very systems they are organizing against.

After establishing what these organizers tend to do and exploring the kinds of issues that arise for and between them, Chapter Four focuses on the ways that organizers navigate these issues and their relationships. Sharing these insights and lessons learned is important in part because when organizers are thriving and their relationships with one another are strong, social justice efforts are improved. Further, by developing the kinds of strong, caring relationships organizers wish to see in the world, they create a small piece of this imagined world in their present context. Chapter Four thus focuses on a number of ways organizers are being intentional in responding to the various complexities detailed in Chapter Three. These include cultivating resilience and emotional fluency, being transparent and humble, developing one's own mentorship and leadership capacities while also holding up the voices of marginalized organizers, and prioritizing the many types of relationships that must thrive in order for organizers and their organizing to flourish.

Chapter 1: Literature Review and Methodology

Literature Review

During the 1960s and 70s, feminists reshaped public discourse on violence against women. Accordingly, bell hooks contends that one of feminism's most positive and widespread impacts has been its intervention into interpersonal violence.¹ Michael Messner, Max Greenberg, and Tal Peretz echo this sentiment when they state that "the feminist naming of violence against women as a social issue was nothing short of a radical paradigm shift."² From naming domestic violence as such,³ to politicizing spousal rape,⁴ visibilizing "date-" or "acquaintance-rape,"⁵ and combating the staggering rates of sexual assault on university campuses,⁶ feminists have long been dedicated to addressing gender-based violence in its many forms. It is in this arena that men have most readily taken up calls from feminists to become involved.

Since this era, feminism has been deepened and transformed into a politic that is more attuned to a diverse set of interests and experiences. For example, Black feminism posed one of the central challenges to mainstream second-wave feminism. For as long as violence has been on the agenda, it was clear that many feminists "seemed oblivious to any other perspectives other than those of white, middle-class, heterosexual, educated women who found the traditional roles of wife and mother unsatisfying."⁷ Although they claimed to, white, middle-class women did not represent the diverse interests and experiences of women and of the feminist movement as a

¹ bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (Boston, MA, South End Press, 2000), 61.

² Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz, *Some Men*, 11.

³ Stefania Abrar, Joni Lovenduski, and Helen Margetts, "Feminist Ideas and Domestic Violence Policy Change," *Political Studies* 48, no. 2 (2000).

⁴ Janet Halley, "Rape at Rome: Feminist Interventions in the Criminalization of Sex-Related Violence in Positive International Criminal Law," *Michigan Journal of International Law* 30, No 1, (2008).

⁵ Lois Pineau, "Date Rape: A Feminist Analysis," *Law and Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (1989).

⁶ Charlene Senn, "An Imperfect Feminist Journey: Reflections on the Process to Develop an Effective Sexual Assault Resistance Programme for University Women," *Feminism & Psychology* 21, no. 1 (2011).

⁷ Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2008), 28.

whole.⁸ Black feminists including bell hooks,⁹ Audre Lorde,¹⁰ and Patricia Hill Collins¹¹ pushed to broaden mainstream, white, middle-class feminist goals and analysis to include systems of race and class. One of the clearest articulations of this project was the Combahee River Collective Statement of 1974. The Statement explained that “the major systems of oppression are interlocking,” such that oppression cannot be reduced to just one system; the oppression of any one system relies on the others for its power, and the complex identities that form where oppressions intersect cannot be understood by an analysis of gender, or of race, or of class alone.¹² Kimberlé Crenshaw would later apply this concept within legal discourse, naming it “intersectionality” and ushering it into more popular use.¹³

While early Black feminists focused on the inclusion of race and class, “Aboriginal feminists raise issues of colonialism, racism and sexism, and the unpleasant synergy between these three.”¹⁴ Joyce Green explains how the lack of feminist work on or by Indigenous women “points to the invisibility of Indigenous women in the women’s movement and, beyond that, to the unthinking racism of a movement that has often failed to see Indigenous women in their full historical and contemporary contexts.”¹⁵ A growing number of Indigenous women are, however, developing the theory and practice of Indigenous feminisms. This project combines the priorities of feminism—taking gender seriously as a social organizing process and identifying the ways that gender hierarchy operates and can be resisted—with those of Indigenous anti-colonial struggles—

⁸ Davis, *Women, Race & Class*.

⁹ bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990).

¹⁰ Audre Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,” *Cultural Politics 11* (1997).

¹¹ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston, Unwin Hyman, 1990).

¹² The Combahee River Collective, *The Combahee River Collective Statement: Black Feminist Organizing in the Seventies and Eighties*, (Albany, New York: Women of Color Press, 1986).

¹³ Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum 140* (1989).

¹⁴ Green, “Taking Account of Aboriginal Feminism,” 20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21

confronting “the dominant myths and political, social and economic practices that dignify, deny or perpetuate colonialism”¹⁶—to show how “Aboriginal peoples, and in particular Aboriginal women, are affected by colonialism and by patriarchy.”¹⁷

Also responding in part to the inadequacy of mainstream feminism, beginning in the 1990s, transfeminists challenged (and continue to challenge) feminists to consider central the needs and rights of trans women and trans individuals generally. Emi Koyama characterizes transfeminism as “a movement by and for trans women who view their liberation to be intrinsically linked to the liberation of all women and beyond,” and for all people “who are sympathetic toward needs of trans women and consider their alliance with trans women to be essential for their own liberation.”¹⁸ Arguing that “sex and gender are both socially constructed,” transfeminism “challenges all women, including trans women, to examine how we all internalize heterosexist and patriarchal mandates of gender and what global implications our actions entail.”¹⁹ Transfeminism thus seeks to both “keep the complexity and particularity of people’s lives in mind” while deepening feminist politics such that they take on “a broad and rich anti-oppression mandate.”²⁰

These challenges to the mainstream currents of feminism are not the focus of this project. Rather, I highlight them here to provide context for the various ways men have positioned themselves relative to feminism’s dynamic political landscape. Of course, this landscape has been particularly relevant for the subset of men who are working to further feminist goals.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22)

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21)

¹⁸ Emi Koyama, “The Transfeminist Manifesto,” in *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century* 2003, eds. Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003), 245.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Scott-Dixon, *Trans/forming Feminisms*, 239

Men's Movements

Navigating their place in these complex dynamics of gender politics, feminist men have had to situate themselves in relation to the evolving feminist movement, but also relative to other men's projects. The most prolific men's project is known as the mythopoetic men's movement. This masculinity politic²¹ claims that contemporary men have been feminized, resulting in a "crisis" of masculinity and widespread confusion about what it means to be a man.²² Popularized in large part by the author Robert Bly, the mythopoetic movement draws on essentialist assumptions about gender distinctions, and encourages men to "retrieve the 'inner king,' the 'warrior within,'" to return to the "deep masculine" within them, and thus to reclaim their rightful place in the gender order.²³

While the mythopoetic men's movement does not share fundamental principles or goals with feminist men's work, it is also distinct from (but overlapping with) the most extreme, anti-feminist branches of non-feminist masculinity politics. This vocal and expressly anti-feminist current of masculinity politics, proponents of which are typically known as Men's Right's Activists (MRAs), claims that men are the real victims of the gender order, and that the success of feminism has been largely responsible for the oppression of men.²⁴ While somewhat distinct, the connections between the mythopoetic and the MRA movements are easy to identify. Unsurprisingly, then, "the pro-feminist men's movement is generally hostile to both perspectives,"²⁵ especially that of the MRAs, which many consider to be about reinscribing "patriarchy as a political system by asserting men's need for more power and refusing to move

²¹ A term Connell uses to identify any political struggle in which masculinity and men's position in the gender order are central themes. See Connell, *Masculinities*.

²² Michael Kimmel, *The Politics of Manhood: Profeminist Men Respond to the Mythopoetic Men's Movement*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

²³ *Ibid.*, 15 and 19.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

beyond an individual version of empowerment.”²⁶

Men in the Feminist Movement

Men who support feminism have distanced themselves from these currents within masculinity politics to align themselves with feminist values and practices. Men who have embraced the feminist challenge to meaningfully engage in active resistance to oppression have always walked a “fine line ... trying to be allies with a feminist movement” that has never unanimously agreed about “what role, if any, men should play.”²⁷ Feminist men have found it difficult to navigate this ambivalence.

Researchers Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz recently published a pivotal book titled *Some Men*, which “explores the importance and promise of men’s engagements with violence prevention, feminism, and gender politics ... cross-cut with its fraught tensions and contradictions.”²⁸ Using life-history interviews with men and women involved in feminist anti-violence work as far back as the 1960s, their study seeks to “capture the dynamic relationship ... between the individual and society, between biography and history,”²⁹ and in doing so, to document and unpack the complex histories of men’s involvement in a movement built by and for women.

Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz present their history of men in feminist anti-violence work from a framework based on what they call “moments of engagement,” a concept that speaks to “how life histories unfold contextually, through interactions with the social world.”³⁰ Since all activism, including gender-based violence prevention, is “always variously enabled and

²⁶ *Ibid.*, xii.

²⁷ Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz, *Some Men*, 28.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

constrained by social and historical contexts,”³¹ the social and political conditions under which men first come to feminism and anti-violence work define their moment of engagement. The authors demarcate three historical phases of the contemporary feminist movement—the growth of the grassroots feminist movement during the 1960s, 70s, and early 80s,³² the abeyance of the grassroots feminist upsurge as the 1980s and 90s saw severe anti-feminist backlash as well as some clear feminist institutional reform,³³ and the professionalization of feminist work through community and campus organizations.³⁴ As such, three overlapping yet distinct cohorts of men are defined by their moments of engagement in each of the phases—the Movement Cohort, the Bridge Cohort, and the Professional Cohort.

Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz name the first group of men who engaged with feminist anti-violence work, beginning in the mid-1970s and continuing until the mid-1980s, the Movement Cohort.³⁵ Anti-violence work was generally understood to be “part of a larger collective movement of radical transformation,”³⁶ and the men of this era worked to meet the new and difficult challenges presented by the growing feminist movement of the second wave.

Following the Movement Cohort, the Bridge Cohort comprised men who engaged with feminism and anti-violence work during the mid-1980s and through the-1990s, the transition period between the second and third waves of the feminist movement. Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz explain how during this time, feminist movement abeyance saw a decline in radical feminist movement momentum as well as some early success in building mass national liberal feminist organizations and reforms within various institutions.³⁷

³¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³² *Ibid.*, 10-13.

³³ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 14-16.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

The contemporary cohort, the Professional Cohort, includes men who became involved in feminism during the current period of “professionally institutionalized feminism,” beginning in the mid 1990s.³⁸ Many of these men first engaged with feminism in Women’s Studies courses and other academic settings, and were mentored by Movement and Bridge Cohort members. The institutionalization of violence prevention work has created greater opportunities for men in the field, and yet poses unique challenges, including professionalization itself, which, “threatens to sever violence prevention work from its political roots and its vision of feminist social transformation.”³⁹

The impacts of professionalization on social justice work has been widely debated, with some arguing that the “non-profit industrial complex” dilutes the political vigor of social movements and reliance on NGO and state funding must be resisted,⁴⁰ while others are more optimistic about the potential of these alliances.⁴¹ Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz demonstrate how men’s work has struggled with the contradictions inherent to the professionalization of formerly grassroots work. Most importantly, the “non-profit industrial complex” has a tendency to cast anti-violence work “less as a movement to bring about fundamental, feminist social change and more in a medicalized language that eclipses feminist language, analysis, and strategies.”⁴²

Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz identify one encouraging response to the depoliticization of violence prevention work: the “emergent social justice paradigm.” To situate this approach, they describe how the “continuing and always unfinished” history of men’s anti-violence work

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, *The Revolution Will Not be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007); Kristin Bumiller, *In an Abusive State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 2008.

⁴¹ Erica Kohl-Arenas, “Will the Revolution be Funded? Resource Mobilization and the California Farm Worker Movement. *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest* 13, no. 4 (2013).

⁴² Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz, *Some Men*, 99.

has been “characterized over time by emergent and opposing paradigms on gender-based violence.”⁴³ First, in response to a “pre-feminist” era—the period between the first and second waves—during which violence was understood as “a problem perpetrated by a small number of deviant, bad men, ... the women’s movement in the 1970s introduced a radical paradigm shift”: feminists argued that violence against women is in fact foundational to upholding men’s systemic domination of women.⁴⁴ Recent work has indeed suggested that men who perpetrate violence are in fact conforming to, not deviating from, social norms.⁴⁵ This era shaped the Movement Cohort. Then, in the 1990s and 2000s, the politics of the feminist movement were “largely eclipsed by an emergent public health model of violence prevention,”⁴⁶ in which professionalized anti-violence activists worked closely with state and corporate entities to address freshly termed “gender-based violence” from a public health and service delivery perspective.⁴⁷ The Bridge Cohort formed during the transition period between these two eras, and the current public health paradigm defines the era in which the Professional Cohort developed. Finally, Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz propose that a new direction for anti-violence work is underway, the emergent social justice paradigm, which they believe possesses the greatest potential for deepening effective violence prevention.⁴⁸

Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz only provide a very brief overview of the three defining characteristics of the social justice paradigm and its implications for violence prevention. Of these, my research has focused on two in particular. First, the paradigm increasingly prioritizes

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴⁵ Walter DeKeseredy, and Martin Schwartz, *Male Peer Support and Violence Against Women: The History and Verification of a Theory* (Boston, Northeastern University Press, 2015).

⁴⁶ Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz, *Some Men*, 178.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 103 and 178.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

the intergenerational transmission of movement lessons.⁴⁹ Intergenerational mentorship has always played a key role in furthering men’s anti-violence work,⁵⁰ and movement scholar Chris Dixon emphasizes the benefits of more experienced activists working directly with those less experienced as a form of mentorship.⁵¹ The social justice paradigm will allegedly see activists increasingly creating intentional and explicit means of coordinating mentorship within the movement.

Second, intersectionality is fundamental to the emergent social justice paradigm.⁵² The first iteration of men’s anti-violence work, “like many feminist women’s organizations at the time [the 1960s and 70s] ... struggled to come to grips with differences and inequalities among men, especially along lines of social class, race, and sexual orientation.”⁵³ Much men’s anti-violence work operated from an assumption of universalized interest, and this “false universalization” centered the interests of white, middle-class, college-educated men and implicitly assumed that this perspective spoke for all men.⁵⁴ According to Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz, during the transition period, few men were making links between patriarchy and other systems of oppression, but this can be regarded as the beginning of the diversification of men’s anti-violence work.⁵⁵ Since then, the work has increasingly recognized experiences and priorities of people who are not white and not middle class. Yet, I see it as a mischaracterization of the second wave of the feminist movement to say it was a solely white movement (sometimes this criticism is leveled against contemporary feminism, too). There have always been feminists of colour working to broaden mainstream, white, middle-class feminist goals and analyses to

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 41, 80, 86, and 107.

⁵¹ Dixon, *Another Politics*, 195.

⁵² Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz, *Some Men*, 185.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

include systems of race and class (and other systems), as discussed above. Since the days of the Combahee River Collective four decades ago, recognition of the need for a well-developed analysis of interlocking systems of oppression—the analysis of which is often known by its more academic substitute *intersectionality*—has been a growing current within feminism.

Finally, Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz propose that the third characteristic of the social justice paradigm, which I do not focus on in this thesis, is the prioritization of transnational connections between activists. In particular, they suggest that in wealthier, Western nations, anti-violence activists can learn from their counterparts in the Global South about “how to draw connections between gender-based violence with broader efforts at social transformations” that confront issues such as poverty and the effects of war.⁵⁶ This type of work is well underway. For example, Chandra Mohanty’s *Feminism Without Borders*⁵⁷ urges a decolonization of feminist practice and a reorientation towards transnational anti-capitalist struggles, and Harsha Walia’s *Undoing Border Imperialism*⁵⁸ offers a rethinking of the immigrant rights movement through a transnational analysis of capitalism, the state, and racialization, among others, and proposes the conceptual frameworks of border imperialism and decolonization. While my research has not focused on this aspect of social justice work, it would be worth exploring in the future the particular implications of transnational connections for men’s feminist work.

As far as I can tell, scholarship on what men’s work from a social justice paradigm entails, and on the experiences of those in that work, is scarce. While there is much inspiring work done with a narrower focus on men doing anti-violence work, such as Katz’s *The Macho*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁵⁷ Chandra Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

⁵⁸ Harsha Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism* (Oakland: AK Press, 2013).

Paradox,⁵⁹ these projects do not tend to focus on a social justice approach but instead primarily on professionalized men's work. That said, there are works that do take more of a social justice approach. One example of these more rare projects is *Ex Masculus*, a collection of writings by a gender diverse group of authors who have been thinking through the roles of men in feminist anti-violence work. They write for anyone working "to deconstruct and challenge patriarchy in the world and in our lives,"⁶⁰ endeavoring to mobilize current and future anti-violence organizers to take up working with men in the struggle against patriarchy. Another project, Chris Crass's *Towards Collective Liberation*,⁶¹ offers first-hand perspective on social justice organizing. Although his focus is not on men, his work on organizing, feminist praxis, and movement building provides valuable insight into the kinds of questions and considerations that arise when doing this kind of work. Finally, the magazine *Voice Male*⁶² also provides some content on what it means to be a man dedicated to feminist social justice goals. Although the magazine is by no means exclusively focused on organizing per se, it takes a broad look at the lives and experiences of men who have been engaging with feminism and its implications for them as men. It includes essays on men within feminist activism and anti-violence work, on fathering and men's health, and on some of the intersections between men and masculinity, race, and sexuality, among other topics.

This thesis has been inspired both by the various works that focus on professionalized men and on those doing narrowly defined anti-violence work, especially that of Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz, as well as these more grassroots, social justice oriented projects. What is

⁵⁹ Jackson Katz, *The Macho Paradox: Why Some Men Hurt Women and How All Men Can Help* (Naperville, Ill: Sourcebooks, 2006).

⁶⁰ "Ex Masculus," 5.

⁶¹ Chris Crass, *Towards Collective Liberation: Anti-Racist Organizing, Feminist Praxis, and Movement Building Strategy*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2013.

⁶² Rob Okun, *Voice Male: The Untold Story of the Profeminist Men's Movement* (Northampton, MA: Interlink Books, 2014).

missing from this conversation is a consideration of what men's work grounded in a social justice paradigm entails and a detailed inquiry into the experiences and politics of organizers engaged in it. By drawing primarily on their experiences and stories, this project presents the voices and perspectives of those engaged in men's work grounded in an intersectional social justice perspective, and contributes to the ongoing conversations among men involved in feminist work.

Methodology

The methodology for this project has not strictly followed any one particular tradition. However, in conducting this research I have been inspired by feminist research principles, such as the commitment to developing research that honours the lived experiences of the participants. I find particularly exciting the concept of catalytic validity, which represents the degree to which research “reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it.”⁶³ I understand this attempt to empower participants to transform their own realities as being one part of a broader feminist goal to develop research that generates positive social change on a wider scale. Given these goals and influences, this project can be broadly categorized as *action research*. Mary Brydon-Miller, Davydd Greenwood, and Patricia Maguire describe action research as a general approach to conducting research, grounded in a range of academic fields,⁶⁴ that is “explicitly political [and] socially engaged.”⁶⁵ Action research rejects claims that research can and should be conducted by an objective observer who does not impose value-based direction on the research.⁶⁶ Instead, the research commits to action and reflexively

⁶³ Patti Lather, “Research as Praxis,” *Harvard Educational Review* 56, no. 3, (1986): 272.

⁶⁴ Mary Brydon-Miller, Davydd Greenwood, and Patricia Maguire, “Why Action Research?” *Action Research* 1, no. 1, (2003): 11.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

works to create positive social change.⁶⁷

I was inspired by two strains of action research. The first is the methodological approach to developing “movement-relevant theory.” Dixon’s ethical and methodological principle of “writing with movements” holds that “social movements . . . generate new knowledge, new theories, [and] new questions.”⁶⁸ By focusing on those engaged in men’s feminist organizing this project seeks to illuminate the kinds of knowledges, theories, and questions that are important to those doing the work. But Douglas Bevington and Chris Dixon note that most contemporary scholarship on social movements is “not particularly relevant to the very movements it studies.” In light of this, they propose that movement researchers can “bridge the divide between social movement scholarship and the movements themselves” by developing movement-relevant theory.⁶⁹ In order to develop movement-relevant theory, Dixon recommends that researchers can learn the most about movements by researching those with whom they have a direct engagement and personal investment,⁷⁰ and by looking “to activists and organizers as producers of vital knowledge about social movements and social relations.”⁷¹ Heeding this advice, I have chosen to conduct research with organizers engaged in similar work as I have been. Second, I have drawn inspiration from what colectivo situaciones call militant research, a methodology that “tries to generate a capacity for struggles to read themselves” and to consequently capture and disseminate knowledge generated by social practices.⁷² As an action-focused methodology,

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶⁸ Chris Dixon, *Another Politics: Talking Across Today’s Transformative Movements* (Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 2014), 13.

⁶⁹ Douglas Bevington and Chris Dixon, “Movement-relevant theory: Rethinking Social Movement Scholarship and Activism,” *Social Movement Studies* 4, no. 3 (2005): 189

⁷⁰ Dixon, *Another Politics*, 190, 192, and 199.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷² Colectivo Situaciones, “On the Researcher Militant,” Translated by Sebastian Touza, 2003, 2 <http://eicpc.net/transversal/0406/colectivosituaciones/en>

militant research places priority on “goals and processes over any kind of formalized method.”⁷³

While there are no standardized methodological steps for conducting action research, these two methodologies have informed my methodological choices.

Finally, Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, and Maguire assert that “abiding respect for people’s knowledge and for their ability to understand and address the issues confronting them and their communities” is a key value shared by action researchers.⁷⁴ To this end, speaking directly to men’s work organizers, in a format that allows them to speak about what they believe is most important about their work and experiences, is one of the best methods to gather their perspectives and understandings. For this reason, I chose qualitative, semi-structured interviews for my primary method of data collection.

Sampling and Recruitment

In total, I conducted twelve interviews with organizers currently engaged in men’s work. Choosing which and how many participants was a purposeful, strategic decision based on a number of factors. These included considerations of the kinds of data individuals could provide, a fairly small sampling pool from which to draw, the number of participants appropriate for a Master’s thesis level research project, and the limitations of previous research on men’s work.

First, I only selected participants who have experience in men’s work that is committed to intersectional feminist values and practices. Particularly, I focused on those who are attempting to think through and create projects that move the work towards broad-based social justice goals. I also wanted to get a sense of the diverse kinds of work men are engaged in, so while a few organizers I interviewed have worked on projects together, I tried not to select only organizers familiar with one another.

⁷³ Marta Malo de Molina, “Institutional Analysis, Participatory Action Research, Militant Research,” *Common Notions* 2 (2004): 5.

⁷⁴ Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, and Maguire, “Why Action Research?”, 14.

In order to identify potential participants who would provide specific perspectives on men's work, I used a combination of purposive, non-probability sampling techniques.⁷⁵ I initially drafted a list of organizers and groups who do work that appeared relevant to my research questions. Some of these were individuals with whom I already had personal and professional relationships, others were published authors or affiliated with public activist groups, and some were suggested to me by friends and colleagues. I began conducting interviews with several local organizers while refining my participant list. As I began conducting interviews, I utilized snowball sampling, asking participants if they knew of others who might be well suited for the study. When a recommended person appeared as though they would meet my sampling criteria and provide useful information, I asked the person providing their name to introduce me by email. A third of my participants were recruited via snowball sampling.

Second, fairly specific sampling eligibility criteria meant that the pool of individuals from which I could draw participants was relatively small. Men doing feminist work, although increasing in number, are still fairly rare and not always easy to locate. What is more, men doing work that appears grounded in intersectional social justice goals are even fewer. At first, it was difficult to identify more than a handful of people who met my sampling criteria. Once I was well into snowball sampling, my pool of potential participants ballooned such that I could have interviewed far more organizers than I did, which leads to the third and final factor determining my sampling.

Third, although the allowable size and scope of a Master's thesis limited the number of interviews I could conduct, my sample size nonetheless supplies enough data for analysis. As a qualitative research project, the assumption is that in-depth, rich interview data from fewer

⁷⁵ Victor Jupp, "Action Research," In *the SAGE Dictionary of Social Research Methods Online* 2006, Access on June 29, 2017, <https://srmo.sagepub.com/view/the-sage-dictionary-of-social-research-methods/SAGE.xml>

interviewees is more appropriate for describing experiences than less rich data from more interviewees.⁷⁶ Recruiting and interviewing twelve participants was more than sufficient for a qualitative interview-based Master's thesis. Although I could have continued interviewing organizers until I had twenty or thirty or more interviewees, this would have been beyond the scope of a Master's thesis as well as unnecessary, as the data I did collect allow for rich analysis.

Finally, I chose participants in part based on the limitations of Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz's work described above. They provide only a brief account of what the social justice paradigm may entail and how it informs the work of organizers. The majority of their participants were well established and up and coming professionals in the anti-violence field, who do not necessarily work from a broader social justice perspective. While their work provides a valuable perspective on professionalized men in feminist anti-violence work, I wanted to speak specifically to organizers who are engaged primarily in grassroots organizing from a social justice perspective.

While this project is predominantly about men who do this work, since relationships between organizers are so important in organizing, it is also inherently about everyone who organizes alongside men. To this end, although the vast majority of the participants in this study are men or identified with masculinity, one of the twelve is a cis-gendered woman. I had originally intended to include two or three women or folks identified with femininity, but scheduling prevented their participation. I believe my analysis would have benefitted from including these voices.

For confidentiality reasons, I have used pseudonyms for those individuals who wish to remain anonymous. The following are brief descriptions chosen by the participants themselves:

⁷⁶ Marie Hoepfl, "Choosing Qualitative Research: A Primer for Technology Education Researchers," *Journal of Technology Education* 9, no. 1 (1997): 51.

Captain is forty-five, gender queer, white, living in Victoria, BC.

Captain is a Somatic Sex Educator, Counsellor and Relationship Coach. Captain has decades of experience in feminist, anti-violence, and harm reduction organizing, holds a Master's degree in Public Health in Human Sexuality, and a Doctorate in Human Sexuality.

Chris is forty-two, a cis-gendered man, white, a father, living in Louisville, KY.

Chris is a long-time organizer, educator, and writer working to build powerful working class-based, feminist, multiracial movements for collective liberation. He gives talks and leads workshops on campuses and with communities and congregations around the U.S. and Canada, to help support grassroots activists efforts.

Colin is forty-two, a cis-gendered man, white, a father, living in Victoria, BC.

Colin participated in this project to better understand his own thoughts and action with regards to misogyny and patriarchy. Not interested in providing a list of activist qualifiers, he would prefer to use this experience as an opportunity to reflect with others on how to be a better person, friend, father, partner and lover. Being vulnerable is vital to honest self-reflection, and Colin hopes this experience will proffer those opportunities.

David is thirty-eight, a cis-gendered man, white, Canadian living in the US, living in Berkeley, CA.

David is an educator, writer, and somatic therapist working in the San Francisco Bay Area. He teaches with Generative Somatics, an organization working to empower social and environmental justice movements through transformative practice, and is adjunct professor of East-West Psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies.

Maggie is a white, queer, cis-gendered woman.

Maggie is an activist who has been involved in anti-violence work for 15 years, including support work and running prevention education programs in different communities on Turtle Island.

Gus is thirty-eight, a cis-gendered man, white, straight, living in Victoria, BC.

Gus lives on Lekwungen territory, colonially known as Victoria. He likes to learn at home with his kids, spend time with his partner, housemates and friends, and try as much as possible to sustain and bring into being better worlds, while undoing empire, in as many parts of life as he can. To get by he currently works as an instructor at the University of Victoria.

Julian is thirty-one, a cis-gendered man, white, straight, living in Berkeley, CA.

Julian has been involved in white anti-racist organizing for several years in the San Francisco Bay area. He's been focusing his efforts recently on an educational and organizing project with the ultimate goal of getting more white men participating fully, cooperatively, and usefully in movements for liberation. He works construction for "a living" (survival).

Kalbir is thirty-eight, a cis-gendered man, a Punjabi settler, living in Vancouver, BC.

Kalbir is an antiauthoritarian organizer/activist based in Vancouver, Coast Salish Territories. His work focuses primarily on migrant, trade, and environmental justice rooted in an anticapitalist and anticolonial analysis. He has organized with working class communities of colour and in solidarity with indigenous sovereignty struggles.

Kingsley is thirty, trans-masculine, white, queer/ambiguous, living in Victoria, BC.

Kingsley is a 30 year old, white, trans-masculine person living on Songhees Territories (Victoria, BC). Kingsley has been facilitating in the anti-violence and community engagement sectors for the past nine years, using an anti-oppressive lens to explore issues including consent, gender diversity, and bystander intervention with youth and adults of all a/genders.

Nick is thirty-two, a cis-gendered man, white, mostly heterosexual, living in Victoria, BC.

Nick is an organizer, writer, and theory nerd living in Victoria on Lekwungen territories. He is finishing a PhD project in Cultural Studies at Queen's University, which investigates intersections of anarchism and permaculture. As an organizer, Nick's main focus has been on projects that prefigure alternatives to the dominant order. He co-founded The Peoples' Apothecary, a medicinal herb garden commons; GRAFT, an initiative to propagate and share regionally-adapted fruit trees and perennials; and the UVic Men's Circle, a campus-based initiative for men and masculine-identified folks to support each other in working through heteropatriarchy and masculinity.

Paul is sixty-nine, a cis-gendered man, white, heterosexual, living in Oakland, CA.

Paul is a social justice educator, activist, and writer, and has been an innovative leader in violence prevention for more than 45 years. He is an accomplished trainer and speaker on men's issues, racism and diversity, challenges of youth, teen dating and family violence, raising boys to manhood, and the impact of class and power on daily life.

Ryan is twenty-seven, a cis-gendered man, white, living in Vancouver, BC.

Ryan began his career by volunteering with White Ribbon Campaign in Toronto and advocating for education for boys and men around gender-based violence and healthier masculinities. He's been a soccer coach and a camp counsellor, has developed homeschool programs on social justice and creative learning, supervised a before and after school program, facilitated a leadership program for teenagers, and developed and facilitated his own workshops on gender and violence. He now facilitates the "iGuy" program with Saleema Noon Sexual Health Educators in Vancouver, Coast Salish Territories.

The Interviews

Interviews were semi-structured, meaning I loosely followed an interview guide containing questions and follow up probes, but I allowed participants to direct the conversation as it flowed. While this method provides some structure to the interview, it allows for enough

flexibility that the interviewee can speak freely and take the conversation in whichever direction that they see as relevant.⁷⁷ Bevington and Dixon assert that developing questions and lines of inquiry that are eminent to the work of the organizers involved in a project or a movement under study is “foremost in generating useful findings” in movement-based research.⁷⁸ This allows research to be developed that speaks to the issues and questions that are important to movement participants, rather than remaining confined to academic debates, which often prioritize very different concerns. To meet this goal, my interviews comprised questions that were generated from the relevant literature, from my own experiences in men’s work, and in conversation with other organizers. I modified my interview guide depending on the kinds of projects I knew specific individuals were engaged in; I would modify, add, or omit certain questions and lines of inquiry so as to prompt discussions that were most relevant to participants and to which they could most readily provide answers. Finally, I revised the interview guide following each interview, based on what I had heard and how the questions had landed.

The majority of the interviews were approximately two hours long. One participant wanted to break his interview into two sessions of one hour each, but due to scheduling conflicts we were never able to conduct our second hour-long interview. I met participants in a location of their choosing. Most often this was in their home, but several chose to meet at a coffee shop, and one came to my home. I conducted one interview via Skype, since I was unable to travel to where the interviewee was located.

⁷⁷ Dina Wahyuni, “The Research Design Maze: Understanding Paradigms, Cases, Methods and Methodologies,” *Journal of Applied Management Accounting Research* 10, no. 1 (2012): 74.

⁷⁸ Bevington and Dixon, *Movement Relevant Theory*, 198.

Analysis

I analyzed the interview transcripts using thematic analysis, a method used to identify patterns or themes within data.⁷⁹ This process involves coding and categorizing the themes contained in the data set, in this case the interview transcripts. The coding phase of this analysis involves producing initial codes, which identify interesting or relevant features of the data. These are defined as “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon.”⁸⁰ By attributing codes to segments of the interview transcripts, the data begin to become organized into meaningful groups.

To match my goal of generating knowledge that is primarily grounded in the experiences of my participants, throughout this process, I used primarily what Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke call the inductive approach to thematic analysis. This means that rather than using predetermined codes or themes (what would be a deductive approach), I generated them from the interview transcript data themselves.⁸¹ However, since I possess my own understanding of men’s work and the themes discussed in the interviews, it is impossible to remove my own perspectives entirely from the coding process.⁸² This method continues to place priority in what the interviewees say and find important, while allowing me as a researcher to assess and discuss what I believe is important and relevant to the research questions. Given the involved nature of movement-based action research, this subjective involvement is not a pitfall as it may be viewed in other contexts.

Once the transcripts were coded, which took two or three passes increasing in specificity, my analysis refocused onto broader themes. This involved “sorting the different codes into

⁷⁹ Virginia Braun, and Victoria Clarke, “Using thematic analysis in psychology,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, (2006): 79.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 84.

potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes.”⁸³ Throughout this process, I used the qualitative data software Atlas.ti. Once I had developed a number of themes and organized the coded data accordingly, I could conduct some analysis on them. It was at this stage that I could begin to write about what I had heard in my interviews, to identify what I believe to be interesting and relevant to the research topic.⁸⁴ From this point onward, analysis and writing were recursive, analyzing as I wrote, writing as I analyzed.

Limitations

As with any research, the methodological decisions I made for this project contain some inherent limitations. Most of all, the choice to focus primarily on a group of individuals who are privileged by so many of the oppressive systems organizers are working against has implications for what this project can and cannot speak to. This focus has great potential, and work focusing on improving the work of men who are multiply privileged is greatly needed. Furthermore, my own social location as a cis-gendered, straight, white, upper middle-class man positions me particularly well to conduct research on this topic. That said, I want to acknowledge some of the limitations of this work and some of the places that others are choosing or may choose to do men’s work.

My sample includes only settlers, all but one of them being white. So while my project could provide important perspectives on what it is like to be a white man or a white person doing social justice organizing, it is limited in its capacity to speak to what it means to do men’s work in racialized or Indigenous communities or as racialized peoples. This choice to interview primarily white individuals may account for why Chapter Four disproportionately addresses

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

heteropatriarchy over other systems of oppression. Further, I have not brought in the important work being done on settler colonialism and the ways that work intersects with men's work. Decolonization work and the recent work on Indigenous manhoods⁸⁵ will have important things to say to those involved in men's work, but this project has not focused here.

Similarly, the majority of those I spoke with are cis-gendered and straight. While this is not true of my entire sample, I have nonetheless left out a specifically trans or queer focus. Again, I feel compelled in part by my own social location to focus primarily on other cis-gendered and straight men, and what this means is that these other perspectives are necessarily sidelined in this particular work.

Finally, the geographical and cultural scope of my research is limited. I confined my work almost exclusively to the West coast of Canada and the United States. The implications of this are surely varied, depending on in which other regions organizers are taking on men's work or reading this piece of research. Further, the organizers I spoke with are embedded in a particular cultural context; for example, English speaking and college educated. The basic implication of this is that what is contained here will likely speak less to the experiences of organizers not sharing this context than those who do. Given these limiting factors—and I am sure there are others as well—the applicability of what I have written here to other social justice and organizer contexts that are dissimilar to my sample is up to readers to decide for themselves.

⁸⁵ See for example Robert Alexander Innes and Kim Anderson, eds. *Indigenous Men and Masculinities: Legacies, Identities, Regeneration* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 2015); Sam McKegney, ed. *Masculindians: Conversations about Indigenous Manhood* (University of Manitoba Press, 2014).

Chapter 2: Men's Work Organizers and Projects

“In trying to be critical of what we were doing I don't mean to say that it was flawed in some fundamental way, and I especially don't mean to say that it shouldn't have happened, 'cause I think to me what is needed is a whole range of experiments ... and all those things can look different.” (Nick)

Introduction

This chapter explores several of the various activities and projects that men's work organizers have undertaken. I begin here in order to provide a picture of what social justice organizers are doing and how they are thinking through these projects. As well, I hope to contribute to an expansive conceptualization of men's work, one that includes many diverse ways of engaging in social justice organizing and in which more men can imagine themselves taking part. As Nick, an anarchist organizer in Victoria, BC, articulates above, there are no blueprints for how men can effectively engage with feminism. Organizers benefit from a range of experiments,

everything from deep friendships of care between men that are completely informal and just based in men deepening their relationships with each other in their every day lives, to men in organizing and activist communities changing their behaviour and developing some feminist commitments, to popular education where men can actually just encounter some of these ideas for the first time who have never thought about this stuff, to spaces where men can get together on a regular basis and support each other in thinking through this thing, and all those things can look different.¹

In this chapter, I first discuss how organizers are understanding their work in relation to other social justice initiatives, centering their focus on intersectionality and how important this concept is for doing men's work. I then move on to consider the four most prominent projects organizers told me about: political education, men's groups, reproductive labour, and personal work. While I have ordered them from what I see as the most outwardly focused to most

¹ Nick Montgomery in conversation with the author, August 11, 2016. All quotes attributed to “Nick” throughout this thesis are derived from this interview.

inwardly focused, each project contains aspects of both the internal and external components of men's work defined in the introduction.

Men's Work as Social Justice Work

This project has focused on those involved in men's work who take a social justice approach to their organizing. It is important to explore how they themselves understand social justice as a concept, how that informs their work, and their critiques of some of the projects that are considered to be part of this work. A number of organizers I spoke to think of the term *radical* as interchangeable with social justice. In this sense, social justice work is primarily about addressing the root causes of oppression. While Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz defined work from a social justice paradigm as being intersectional, several participants argued that much of today's men's work lacks a broad political analysis and fails to fall within what they believe is radical or social justice work. Some mentioned that much political work that focuses on single issues and often has no intersectional foundation at all is still considered by many to be social justice work. By pointing out the limitations of men's work that is not grounded in a social justice perspective, I hope not to replicate the dynamic I discuss in Chapter Three, in which organizers criticize other organizers in toxic ways that end up alienating one another and fragmenting the work. Instead, I hope to contribute to an important reflexive conversation on how organizers are doing their work and how they can do it better.

Paul, a social justice educator, activist, and writer, working in violence prevention for more than forty-five years, engaged in a critique of current work that is popularly considered cutting edge men's work. He believes much of it is too narrowly focused and a bit stunted in terms of making connections to any sort of political perspective. Paul Stated:

To me men's work is educating leading to activation and mobilization around issues that impact the states of violence that are impacting our communities, against women, against young people, against people of colour all of that. That's men's work! ... just being able to name something is

not [radical work], especially if the political framework is very narrow. If you're only talking about men's work as men hitting women, or sexually assaulting women, which mostly is what men are doing who are doing this work publically, then that is too narrow, too limited, too distorted from what male violence is, and from what our communities need ... I don't want to put down people's work, but I want to name the limits of the work. And there are ... folks who are doing work that is specifically around forms of male violence, particularly around domestic violence and or sexual assault, but don't have any kind of long term framework, they're not dealing with root causes, and they're not dealing with intersectional issues in general.²

For Paul, these aspects of many initiatives, along with their “often fairly conservative political agenda[s],” severely limit the kinds of results that can arise from such projects. Paul was not the only one who was somewhat critical of dominant types of men's work, including sexual assault prevention on campus, batterer support programs, and teen dating violence initiatives, among others. Nick spoke about the need for organizers' work to address men's violence as “all tangled up” with, rather than “as something separate from the rest of heteropatriarchy.” And Julian, an anti-racist organizer in the Bay Area, CA, asserted that “having community that's taking stances against [rape culture] is awesome. But ... that's a part of men's work but isn't all of it.”³

Although some of the organizers I spoke with took exception with Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz's use of the word *emergent* when referring to the social justice paradigm,⁴ all of them consider themselves to be doing work from this perspective. Generally, those I spoke with define social justice work as involving a broad-based systemic analysis of power and oppression, which includes intersecting systems and attempts intersectional solutions. All of them understood heteropatriarchy and its violences as being interconnected with other systems of oppression,

² Paul Kivel, in discussion with the author, September 26, 2016. All quotes attributed to “Paul” throughout this thesis are derived from this interview.

³ Julian Marszalek in discussion with the author, September 25, 2016. All quotes attributed to “Julian” throughout this thesis are derived from this interview.

⁴ Some questioned whether the paradigm is in fact becoming more utilized or if it remains marginal. They see that men's work projects are often single issue, socially conservative, and campaign rather than long-term based, and it is not clear that this is changing. Others argued that there have always been feminist organizers working from a social justice perspective, so calling the paradigm new in any way was problematic.

such as race, class, colonialism, and ability. Throughout our conversations, they identified some of the many complex interconnections between systems of oppression.

For many, colonialism underpins all other systems of oppression. Kingsley, an experienced political education facilitator in Victoria, BC, told me “the colonial mentality of power over, and of dominating everything outside the self and perhaps including the self, informs essentially all forms of oppression that we see.”⁵ Ryan, a youth empowerment facilitator in Vancouver, BC, echoed that violence is

based in a colonial and imperialist framework, that our systems, our industries, our institutions in Canada are built on a history of colonialism, and that is a history of conquering and taking and stealing and killing and those ideas are still built [in], whether we think they’re hidden or subtle or not.⁶

For Ryan, truly understanding heteropatriarchy and how gendered oppression operates means “understanding how this country came to be, and understanding the history that Indigenous cultures have experienced on this land ... And doing this kind of work, men’s work ... is understanding your identity based on the history that created our society.”

Organizers also highlighted the interconnection between heteropatriarchy and white supremacy. Julian said, “to me I see white supremacy very much kind of overlaid patriarchy ... Like I don’t see white supremacy as this separate and unconnected form of oppression to patriarchy.” Given the intrinsic connections between them, Julian noted that “there’s a lot of overlap obviously between white anti-racist work and male anti-sexist work.” Addressing this connection underpins much of the motivation for why Julian and others have started a group for white men who want to work for gender and racial justice, which I discuss more below.

⁵ Kingsley Strudwick in conversation with the author, August 17, 2016. All quotes attributed to “Kingsley” throughout this thesis are derived from this interview.

⁶ Ryan Avola in conversation with the author, September 7, 2016. All quotes attributed to “Ryan” throughout this thesis are derived from this interview.

Nick emphasized the importance of considering how “patriarchy infuses capitalism.” For example,

we need to pay rent and make a living and all that stuff, and part of why our rent is so expensive and preparing food is so time consuming is because we live in nuclear family units, or we live in single dwellings, and that is an inheritance of rape culture and the rise of heteropatriarchy and the invention of the nuclear family. And capitalism wants us to exist in those little units, and the more we exist in those isolated units the more we have to work, and the more we have to work the less of our time we have to give to things that aren’t work.

Thus, Nick believes in finding collective ways of relating outside of capitalism whenever possible. For instance, communalizing living, “having intergenerational relationships, and collective care, and collective food preparation, and finding ways to re-communalize reproduction so that we are giving as little as possible to capitalism.” Maggie further noted that one of the results of living in a capitalist society, with nuclear families, isolation, and individualism, is that people often do not feel like they have the capacity to do what they believe is of most importance. Capitalism keeps us on “this little hamster wheel,” so that most people “do not have time to do the things that are often the most important and that would have the most impact.”⁷

Paul emphasized what he calls Christian hegemony as an often-unacknowledged system of power operating in conjunction with the others. “How can we possibly understand what we’re up against and have strategies that get to the roots of our problems if we don’t understand this whole piece of the work?” he asked me. He went on to say,

It’s my personal opinion that you can’t understand male violence in this society, or patriarchy, or sexism, much less racism, or capitalism, or anything, without understanding the long history of and present operation of Christian dominance ... And then it comes back to colonization; so much of the colonization process was lead and directed by the church, and sanctified and justified. So if you’re talking about indigenous struggles or slavery or you know any of these kinds of things, that was you know, official Christian policy for centuries, and it’s still built into our laws and the legal system and the whole framework.

⁷ Maggie Livingston in conversation with the author, November 28, 2016. All quotes attributed to “Maggie” throughout this thesis are derived from this interview.

As a number of participants noted, the connections between these systems are not simply between each system and heteropatriarchy, but rather they form a complex web of interrelations. As Kingsley put it, “it feels impossible to, say, address patriarchy without also simultaneously addressing colonialism, which also intersects with white supremacy, and like all of these notions of oppression can’t be addressed in isolation.” Gus, a grassroots organizer in Victoria, echoed a similar sentiment, describing how it is often difficult for him to know “which system of domination is doing the thing that sucks.”⁸ Their effects intertwine and feed off each other. Julian also asserted that it feels “pretty artificial” to talk about these systems in isolation from one another. Expanding on why this is, Nick explained why “it’s really hard to separate out like what is patriarchy, and what’s white supremacy, and what’s colonialism, and what’s capitalism.” It is because “they’re all part of the same fuckery.” Systems of oppression “coevolved” such that thinking of them as distinct systems is more an analytical tool than it is accurately describing how oppression works. “It’s not that there are all these different systems of oppression that then came together,” Nick said. In describing one key component of this coevolution, he cited feminist scholars such as Andrea Smith and Silvia Federici who have traced “how the first missionaries [to North America] tried as hard as they could to convince Indigenous men to beat their wives and children, and in some cases that was a condition for trading. Indigenous people weren’t considered civilized until they properly dominated their women and children.”

The organizers I spoke with did not identify an exhaustive list of oppressive systems; power is also distributed along lines of ability, size, nationality, and many others. What is important for those involved in men’s work is not necessarily to always be directly addressing each and every system with every project—this is impossible. Rather, since everyone’s lives,

⁸ Gus Abbot in discussion with the author, October 6, 2016. All quotes attributed to “Gus” throughout this thesis are derived from this interview.

identities, and behaviours are impacted in complex ways by multiple systems of power, not just heteropatriarchy, although men's work organizers focus on heteropatriarchy, we⁹ should never do our work as if it is the only system that matters. Rather, we should cultivate and maintain an analysis of intersecting systems, and develop and conduct the work with as much sensitivity to these as possible.

In practical terms, this can mean any number of things. For instance, one of the men's groups I heard about is specifically comprised of white men. It highlights the unique ways that they are brought into and uphold race and gender hierarchies. Similarly, one organizer was excited about future projects with men specifically in his Punjabi community, suggesting the specific position of being racialized men in a white supremacist culture, and what that means for engaging in feminism. Kingsley shared that there are ways to highlight intersectionality when facilitating workshops, whatever the topic and audience: "For example, when we talk about the gender binary, to say that it's also an expectation within these beauty standards, for example, to be white, or that the binary in and of itself is within a larger framework of culture that values whiteness." Further, this same gender binary conversation can demonstrate how the ways in which bodies are valued is based on structural ableism. Kingsley explained this facilitation approach as "start[ing] with a gender based lens," but thinking of that lens as spherical: "I'm looking at it from one vantage point, but it's prioritized only in that that's the angle I'm looking at it from - I could look at that sphere from another angle and take a different priority and then bring in gender as like an alternative angle." There are countless creative ways to do gender-based work that is attuned to structural intersectionality, and social justice organizers are experimenting with what these may entail.

⁹ Throughout this thesis I occasionally use inclusive pronouns like *we* and *our*; I do this to include myself in the topics I am writing about, yet I do not want to assume or imply that all readers, especially those from different social locations than my own, will see themselves implicated in the same way.

Men's Work Projects

The remainder of this chapter focuses on some of the initiatives organizers are engaged in and those that they suggested have the greatest transformative potential. Combining what I heard from organizers and my own experiences, it is clear that there are many different directions organizers take men's work. I heard about awareness campaigns in public spaces and online, rallies and demonstrations, and men's health initiatives. Men told me about volunteering at various frontline organizations, providing counseling or therapy, and supporting accountability processes with men who have sexually assaulted others. Men's work is using men's status in the workplace to support social justice policy, providing childcare at events, supporting women- and queer-led initiatives of all kinds, and often taking direction from those in marginalized communities. And men's work has a huge personal component as well. Organizers are grappling with their own inculcation into heteropatriarchy and other systems of power, and the impacts that this has had on them personally and on those around them. This list is by no means meant to be exhaustive, and any one of these initiatives could be explored in greater depth. While I am not able to consider each of the individual projects I heard about here, I want to explore four types of projects that were highlighted in my conversations with organizers. These are political education, men's groups, reproductive labour, and the personal component of men's work.

Political Education

Many organizers are doing different forms of political education as a way of contributing to feminism. These projects most often take the form of one-time workshops or workshop series, often with a youth focus or a focus on engaging men and boys. Some organizers are teaching university courses and bringing a social justice perspective to that context, and others are doing

work within activist collectives and organizations. While the majority of the organizers I spoke with have experience facilitating political education projects, a few are explicitly dedicated to doing this type of work.

Ryan, an organizer I spoke with in Vancouver, BC, has been part of a team facilitating workshops for youth in public schools. He came to this project as a fairly inexperienced facilitator, having been a social justice activist on issues ranging from Palestinian solidarity to the Occupy movement and anti-capitalist struggles generally. After attending a few mainstream men's work conferences and facilitating some workshops with young men through his local high schools, Ryan joined a team of facilitators who deliver workshops they call iGirl and iGuy, directed at girls and boys respectively. The workshops take what he called "a more mainstream approach to talking about sexual health and talking about gender and sexuality with youth in public schools." While all the facilitators involved collaborate on content, Ryan has largely taken on the task of adapting the long-running (around 15 years) iGirl workshops for boys, such that it mimics the original iGirl workshops but reaches boys in a way that speaks to their unique experiences in "relationships, school, and friendships" and to "some of the problems boys experience" due to their socialization as boys.

When I asked Ryan what his goals were in his workshops with boys, he told me he wants "to open their minds a bit to learning different ideas about who they're allowed to be as humans." He believes that societally "we just present such a limited idea of masculinity that's so harmful and damaging to youth," and so one of his primary goals is "to show young boys that they're allowed to be whoever they want to be. Whether that's their sexual orientation or their gender orientation or just how they express themselves as individuals." He is hopeful that if kids encounter these ideas young enough, "they're going to start making decisions at that age [so

that when they're twenty-five or thirty, they're going to be more comfortable with who they are, that they felt like they pursued their truth and who they actually are, as opposed to going so many years kind of lying to themselves or lying to the people around them or being so controlled or something.”

Ryan explained that another one of his goals is “to get boys motivated to take action.” He wants boys to understand their positions in the world and act according to the responsibility that comes with privilege:

Being a masculine person and being a boy in our culture provides you a certain amount of privilege, and that there are issues that we can do something about, that we actually have a responsibility to do something about. And that that's part of being a good man I think. Part of growing up and being the best person you are, I think has to do with being compassionate and empathetic and acting on things around you that are not good.

I spoke with another young organizer who focuses much of his efforts on political education. Kingsley, a trans-masculine anti-violence and community engagement facilitator, has been doing political education workshops for nine years. He started as a social justice facilitator and a safer spaces coordinator doing peer education on his university campus. After years engaged in this queer advocacy and education work, he began doing consent and gender-based violence prevention facilitation through the Sexual Assault Centre in Victoria. Kingsley credits his time working for the Victoria Sexual Assault Centre's prevention branch, Project Respect, as being instrumental in his development as a facilitator.

Kingsley explained that Project Respect delivers “participatory curriculum in school settings, as well as through creative social justice projects designed and executed by youth from the community.” In these projects, facilitators aim to “critically analyze dominant messaging about gender, sexuality, and relationships, and centre consent and bystander intervention” as tools for addressing heteropatriarchy and rape culture. “Project Respect is a youth-led,

community-based initiative,” that works to engage those privileged by systems of dominance (masculine people, white people, etc) in taking responsibility for addressing oppression.

When I interviewed Kingsley, he had recently launched his own consulting company. Under the name Ambit Gender Diversity Consulting, Kingsley engages “with businesses and companies who want to create affirming work environments for trans and gender diverse and two spirit people.” His work focuses on relationships internal to the staff at the organization, on potential or current clients, or on community engagement more generally. What this looks like in practice is a combination of political education, strategic visioning, and facilitating the implementation of the tangible steps to fulfill those visions.

Kingsley frames the fundamental goal he takes into all of his workshops as “enabling people to have integrity in what they believe in versus how they behave in the world.” He qualified that this is a “really broad” goal, but he thinks “people want to be good, and people want to do good in the world, and most of us can talk a pretty good game about what we want, and then sometimes there’s dissonance between that and how we actually behave in the world.” Through his trans and gender diversity workshops, Kingsley is looking to support organizations to link their actual practices to the vision they have of themselves as diversity embracing workplaces. He hopes that his work will contribute to diverse and thriving workplaces, rather than workplaces in which diversity is a tokenization of the people considered ‘diverse’ and in which they experience “so many barriers that anything that would be beneficial from that diversity is immediately squashed.”

Kingsley recalls how for a long time his subconscious goal in workshops was to get people to “buy into the framework” he was offering. He remembers how he would often encounter people in his workshops who seemed like they were “a brick wall,” particularly boys

and men. When he was attached to being perceived as “a traditional expert,” “someone who had all the information” and all the answers, he would come away from these hard interactions feeling like he had not made the impact he had hoped to and had in fact been responsible for the participants’ negative reactions. Kingsley suspects that his need to be right and have all the answers left those who were resistant to the framework feeling in conflict with him, such that their take away from, for example, a consent workshop would be along the lines of, “oh, I remember learning about this consent thing and it was such a joke and the facilitator was an asshole.”

Since Kingsley has shifted his mindset with respect to convincing people about the information he is bringing, he is feeling a lot better about how he reaches people in his workshops. He told me that now he focuses on understanding rather than combating people’s resistance to the material, specifically the internal “friction” they might be feeling about conflicting sets of beliefs and information. He stated:

I find that my shift in not needing to feel like a traditional expert, and more towards just being a person in the room with other people who are learning, means that people are way more open with questions ... people are just way more vulnerable and more honest about where they’re at in terms of their learning, and way more willing to say like ‘wow, I’ve never thought about that before.’ Whereas I think if I approach the room with an expert mentality, then it becomes very scary for people to say, ‘I’ve never thought about that before,’ or ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about,’ or ‘can you stop and explain that word?’ or whatever the case is. So I think it ultimately does a great service to the work to approach it [with] this other approach that I’m talking about.

Kingsley believes that this way of being with people, giving space for their friction rather than trying to provide all the answers, is what many will retain as their principle memory. This act of meeting people where they are in their emotional, psychological, and political journey is something other organizers spoke of as well. Kingsley hopes that this approach supports people in leaving his workshops with a positive association with him and the content, so that the next

time they find themselves in a situation in which they are not quite sure what is the best course of action, they may reflect on what they heard in the workshop and evaluate how it applies.

Chris is an author, movement educator, and a veteran organizer in the white anti-racist movement. He organizes and facilitates movement education in schools, with various community and faith groups, and with organizers around the United States and Canada. As part of this work, Chris helped to launch the Catalyst Project in the San Francisco Bay (a program several of the organizers I spoke with have been part of). As part of his anti-racist work, there has always been an emphasis on “men engaged in feminism and the importance of supporting men around feminist work,” so his transition into facilitating, writing, and speaking publically on feminism came naturally for him. His work for many years has reflected these two goals, bringing men into feminism and white people into anti-racist consciousness and action. Through this work, Chris has learned similar lessons about being a facilitator and how what facilitators model—in Kingsley’s case, patience, curiosity, and an appreciation for others’ unique journey—matters at least as much as the content of the workshop. Chris told me about the importance of modeling vulnerability and sharing his own struggles when he facilitates workshops for men: “I try to you know share some of my own experiences around emotions, try to be emotionally vulnerable with men.” He knows a lot of men are coming to these kinds of workshops because someone in their lives told them they need to do something about their sexism, and they are “super scared and freaked out” and not sure what to do about it. So he shares his own experiences of people in his life pointing out his sexism, the fear and confusion that this has evoked for him in the past, and some of the ways that he has successfully navigated these challenges.

Men's Groups

Men's groups are one of the more common and visible projects prioritized by men's work organizers. Broadly speaking, feminist men's groups are intentional gatherings of men and others identified with masculinity. Sometimes men's groups arise as caucuses that are part of larger, multi-gendered groups, but those I heard the most detail about from participants were stand-alone men's groups. These have typically involved a smaller coordinating group that takes on the logistics of organizing the group, while others were collectively organized by everyone involved. The content of what takes place in these groups varies, but tends to involve components of political education, personal growth, and social action.

During the interviews, I heard about past and present men's groups. Many organizers have chosen at one time or another to spend their energies creating and coordinating these groups as a way of bringing more men into feminism and supporting those already engaged. In this section, I focus on two groups. Although men's groups tend to address and face similar issues, such as those I discuss, this discussion is not representative of the experiences of all groups.

Three organizers I spoke with in the San Francisco Bay area are part of coordinating a nascent men's group whose foundational purpose is to organize white men into the ongoing struggle for gender and racial justice. The group was initiated by a loosely connected group of organizers, who were responding to various calls from organizers of colour, particularly those involved in Black Lives Matter, for white people to organize against white supremacy. Those involved see a significant overlap between white socialization and male socialization, and the roles that white people and men have in upholding oppression. Consequently, they see great potential for white men to play important roles in working for gender and racial justice.

Julian explained that the coordinators have organized the structure of the group by separating their work according to the internal-external distinction mentioned above: on the one hand, they consider what they “want to and ought to be working [on] ourselves” and, on the other, their focus turns to how they are “bringing [other] people into this work.” Julian described how an awareness of the internal-external categories informs the five basic themes they try to connect with each time they gather: political education, relationship building (“getting to know the people in the room better”), embodied practice (for example, role playing scenarios where they practice conversations with other white men around police violence), emotional intelligence (“building more emotional awareness and skills around being more able to discern our emotions” and be responsive rather than reactive), and finally to “build more unified goals and strategies for how we, as a group of white men in our political and geographic location, ought to be organizing other white men against white and male supremacy.”

When I spoke with the men involved in this project, the group was still in its infancy. Scheduling, structure, and formal objectives were still being developed. Hence the organizers were not able to provide too much detail about how the group was unfolding and how ideas were materializing; rather they mainly shared their hopes and expectations. That said, according to Julian, they have been a bit “blown away” by how much interest there seems to be from other white men who are attending, “a real eagerness to like talk about these things and actually meet other men,” and so they are feeling optimistic about the group’s future.

A number of organizers I spoke with in Victoria, BC, have been part of a longer-standing effort to organize a men’s group called the Men’s Circle. With a few years’ experience under their belt, these organizers were able to speak to some of the same issues those in the Bay were anticipating, but their insights were based on actual experiences. Towards the end of my

personal involvement in organizing the Circle, I sat down one-on-one with a few of the other coordinators.

The group began to form in the summer of 2014, when the staff at the Anti Violence Project (AVP)—the sexual assault centre on the UVic campus—brought together men who for the most part did not know one another, to form a campus-based men’s group open to the broader Victoria community. While the ultimate vision was to create a group open to all men and others identified with masculinity, this initial group was to form a smaller coordinating collective that would do the work necessary to run the larger group. The coordinating collective met with members of AVP through that summer and, by the fall of that year, was prepared to launch the public circle. Since then the group, which became named the Men’s Circle, has organized twice monthly meetings, excluding summer months during which the public group does not meet. The coordinating collective also meets regularly through the months that the Men’s Circle meets, and less frequently during the summer months.

The coordinating collective initially comprised several of the men from that summer meeting with AVP and, over time, other members from the Circle and broader Victoria community joined. The collective takes on the tasks of promoting the Circle, booking meeting space, organizing food, maintaining an accountable relationship with AVP, collaborating with AVP to decide on themes for meetings, facilitating collective discussions, and sometimes bringing in external facilitators or coordinating film viewings with discussions. Weekly topics have included gender and power, colonialism, emotional labour, personal accountability, emotional fluency, bystander intervention, consent, and vulnerability, among others.

Nick, a Victoria-based organizer in his early-thirties and one of the men at the initial summer meeting, recalls that the group was to be a “collective space” where those who attended

could support one another in identifying the ways that heteropatriarchy has impacted their lives and their behaviours, and in “supporting each other through the process” of undoing it. In part, this was about addressing gender-based violence, but it was also in a broader sense about heteropatriarchy and how it impacts every facet of men’s lives. As Nick indicated:

The purpose that ran through all [that we did] was to bring together men to talk about patriarchy and to find different ways to access feminist ideas and identify and undo the way that patriarchal masculinity shows up in our lives and in our relationships. So part of that was specifically about gender-based violence—and AVP is obviously focused on gender based violence—and I think we took it in a broader way, to think about heteropatriarchy in general, and the ways that heteropatriarchy kind of regulates the ways that we relate to sex, and to friendship, and to work, and community, and all the facets of our lives. And part of that is violence and sexual assault, but there’s all kinds of other parts too. And we were trying to get at the way that they’re all tangled up together rather than seeing sexual assault as something separate from the rest of heteropatriarchy.

Gus attended some of the early Circles as a participant and as a guest facilitator, and then in the group’s second year joined the coordinating collective. He sees the Men’s Circle as a place where men are learning to support one another in developing feminist politics and ways of being men. He understands the Circle as a place where men are trying to

circulate amongst each other the leadership that we’re getting from women and gender queer and trans and two spirit people, broadly and in our lives, so that we’re amplifying those conversations with each other and helping each other learn the skills that those conversations point to ... like support[ing] each other’s emotional intelligence, and support[ing] each other by practicing consent culture with each other, and support[ing] each other by practicing vulnerability with each other like. We’re supporting each other and we’re extending political organizing that’s happening from other social locations.

Nick spoke at length about how the organizational structure of a men’s group greatly impacts the kinds of work that can be done in that group. In the second year of the Circle, the group made a specific effort to bring in men who had been known to have caused gender-based harm through, for example, their involvement with Judicial Affairs at the university or after having come to AVP for support. This process showed Nick that there are “real limits” to the kinds of things a men’s group can do “that are based in the structure of what the Men’s Circle is and what it does and how it works.” Specifically,

if a goal is for men to be able to come and unpack their relationship to like sexuality and sexualized violence and harm and to find resources to undo that and rethink that, then the men's circle week to week wasn't always the best place for that, because sometimes it was like 'we're going to talk about emotional labour,' which is great and important and connected to undoing patriarchy obviously, but it doesn't necessarily directly help men think through harm and consent and give them immediate tools to stop hurting people in their lives.

There was always a kind of ambivalence between the Circle being a space "where, men are just being introduced to these concepts for the first time and where we're continually talking about sexualized violence and harm and rape culture" and it being a space

where we're trying to explore all kinds of different facets of patriarchy and feminism ... if we're exploring all kinds of aspects of feminism that means that sometimes we're not just talking about harm and sexualized violence and rape culture. We're talking about emotional labour and objectification and the gender binary and all kinds of things that aren't just about sex and consent and violence.

It is not that Nick believes any of the structures are inherently better than the others, just that each has its own potentials and "implicit pitfalls." The structure a men's group takes should therefore be based on the kinds of goals it is hoping to achieve. He nicely summarized the structural implications of how men's groups are organized:

If a goal is to have a circle running so that any man can show up any week and get some tools immediately to think through and work through sexualized violence and rape culture, then every week needs to be about that. Or if the goal is to have a broad conversation every week about different facets of patriarchy, that might enable some men to explore things more deeply or connect other parts of their lives to feminism and patriarchy, but it doesn't realize that first goal. And if the goal is to really nurture men to develop a deep analysis and to develop strong connections with each other and to develop the capacity to be vulnerable with other men, then you need a circle that's ongoing where men are consistently showing up and maybe it needs to be a small group and maybe it can't constantly have new people showing up. Whereas if you want a circle that's doing more popular education, where the purpose is to give a kind of introduction to feminism and rape culture and patriarchy, then you want to reach lots of men, and you want it to use accessible language, and you want it to be really introductory, and men who have already kind of been introduced to some of these concepts and are already working on it might not find that a useful space. And so I think whatever the structure is, none of them is necessarily better than the other but they all do different things and allow for different things and close off different things.

Nick identified restrictions to vulnerability as one of the other limits that arose out of how coordinators structured the Men's Circle. A facilitated public men's group limits the kinds

of conversations that men are likely comfortable having in the space. Given that the Men's Circle was open to anybody who showed up on any given night, attendees did not necessarily have strong relationships with everybody in the room. The way attendees relate to each other in that space is also fairly formalized, with facilitators, an agenda, time keeping, and the like. Nick recognizes that this means that there will be limits to the kinds of vulnerability many are comfortable expressing:

There's just not going to be a lot of space for vulnerability and for the kinds of discussions that involve like really hard stuff. So it's not just about whether or not it's a space for speaking versus a space for action. I think it's also about the kind of speaking that it makes possible. Again, I think that that's just due to the limitations of a structure. If the structure that you're creating is an open public space, where any person can come, I'm personally not going to share some of my deepest shames and struggles and difficulties with someone I've never met before.

While not all of the organizers I spoke with are keen to be involved in feminist men's groups, many of them have chosen to navigate the tensions and pitfalls of these groups, recognizing their potential to support men to develop themselves and their political understanding. There is further benefit to these groups for the organizers involved, as they tend to provide opportunities to learn and practice important organizing skills, as well as develop an orientation towards reproductive labour, which is a major component of men's work for many of the organizers I spoke with.

Reproductive Labour

The majority of the organizers I spoke with are involved in projects beyond those directly focused on heteropatriarchy. They are involved in anti-capitalist organizing, and have engaged in many resistance projects such as the Occupy camps, anti-Olympics, and anti-globalization. They organize around poverty, mental health, HIV/AIDS, Indigenous solidarity, migrant rights, environmental justice, religious oppression, freedom and democracy, and countless other struggles. Throughout their organizing, the men I spoke with consistently hear from other

organizers that so many of the less visible reproductive tasks in organizing fall to women and non-binary organizers, while the bulk of the more visible roles are seized by men. One illustration of this dynamic was when other organizers heard about this thesis project, their leading question for me, almost without fail, was whether or not it would include a conversation on the unequal, gendered distribution of labour within organizing spaces. So I highlight reproductive labour here not necessarily because it is something that men organizers are always or successfully engaging in—although it is something many of those I spoke with are thinking about and trying to prioritize—but because it is something that organizers generally need to focus on more.

Kalbir, an anti-authoritarian organizer in Vancouver, BC, reflected on how he is aware that within collective organizing spaces women do most of the reproductive labour. He recalled how in these spaces, “where a lot of it is about building leadership and relationships and all of that kind of stuff ... the work of actually keeping the space healthy and looking out for the individual members of that collective, in terms of their health and how they’re doing and all of that work, is usually done by women, the vast majority if not exclusively.”¹⁰ And Captain, a somatic sex therapist and long-time organizer in Victoria, described his experiences with this dynamic organizing while read as a woman.¹¹ He would consistently be frustrated with what he was not seeing from men, to the point of essentially choosing to stop organizing closely with them altogether. Men simply were not doing their share of this labour, and it made working with them feel like a burden.¹²

¹⁰ Kalbir Bachhal in conversation with the author, September 6, 2016. All quotes attributed to “Kalbir” throughout this thesis are derived from this interview.

¹¹ Captain expressed a lot of ambivalence about the concept of ‘transitioning,’ and about gender more generally. All of his claims of *being* a man or ever having been a woman were qualified with challenges to the very concepts themselves.

¹² Liam “Captain” Snowden in discussion with the author, August 31, 2016. All quotes attributed to “Captain” throughout this thesis are derived from this interview.

Given that individuals' time and capacity are finite resources, when one subset of the people in organizing spaces are consistently the ones doing the cooking, cleaning, sweeping, caring for children, taking minutes, and so on, the other kinds of activities they are able to do are severely limited. And the inverse, those who are not expected to take on these kinds of reproductive tasks are freer to take on the more visible, glamorous, traditionally desirable roles, such as writing press releases and speaking at events. So the gendered division of labour matters in a very practical sense, as it systematically decreases the availability of women and others expected to take on reproductive labour to take on varied roles and leadership positions.

In addition to the practical impacts of the gendered division of labour, there are theoretical reasons feminist men choose to prioritize reproductive labour. For Nick, a historical theoretical understanding of heteropatriarchy informs his belief that it is important for men to prioritize reproductive labour. He described how crucial it has been for him to learn about how heteropatriarchy, rather than being a structure of oppression that is stable and unchanged through time, has emerged historically over a long period of time and through its imposition on communities:

A big part of how patriarchy was imposed—through the attack on women's bodies and the introduction of rape culture, through the witch hunts and through the legalization of rape in Europe, and through the torture of women—was totally connected to a whole set of practices that devalued women's labour, the labour that women traditionally did, which is care work, reproductive work, taking care of children, taking care of the household, maintaining life.

This gendering and devaluation of reproductive labour served capitalism by reproducing its workforce for free, such that there became “a whole set of waged workers—men—who would be able to work for capitalism in the factories and have their daily lives reproduced for them by women.” This hierarchical division “was maintained through violence, like through the witch hunts ... and by encouraging men to beat ‘their’ women, to rape women, to see women as sub-human, as objects that were their property.” And so Nick has learned to see that

the gender binary and the idea that femininity is subordinate to masculinity and that it's associated with like care and vulnerability and love and all that stuff, and masculinity is associated with aggressiveness and assertiveness and rationality, is completely tangled up in rape culture and the attack on women's bodies. And it's tangled up with a whole economic regime where women's labour was devalued and they were prevented from doing certain kinds of labour and that their skills and knowledge was devalued in terms of saying it's not worth anything, but also economically devalued in terms of that they were forced to do it for nothing. And that's still present today in the sense that women are still trained and expected to do a lot of reproductive labour, and men aren't.

It is this historical division and devaluation of certain kinds of labour that is present in organizing spaces today. And many organizers understand the importance of challenging this division within these spaces as well as in their daily lives and relationships.

Part of learning to take on a fair share of reproductive labour is noticing where it is needed and putting yourself in a position to be the one doing it. This takes conscious awareness as well as embodied practice. One of the ways organizers are practicing these skills is by putting themselves in positions where there is nobody else to pick up the dropped work. For example, each meeting of the Men's Circle had food provided for attendees. Someone needed to take minutes, the meeting space needed to be booked, and the room needed to be set up before and cleaned up afterwards. These are the kinds of tasks that would not typically be taken on by men. But in an all men coordinating collective, the work had to be done by somebody. Coordinating these meetings week after week provided the organizers direct and consistent experience of what it means to be attentive to the tasks that it takes to run a meeting and space. In these ways, organizers are working on becoming better at noticing and taking on reproductive tasks, as well as supporting other men to do the same.

Reproductive work is not simply the physical aspects of the labour that reproduces people and spaces—setting up, cooking, cleaning up, etc—it is also the emotional work required for the reproduction of people and social spaces. Gus highlighted the emotional aspect of

reproductive labour as something that he has been consistently encouraged to prioritize and practice:

Emotional labour, that's a thing that I have been consistently hearing a lot, for a long time, is for cis-men to become more attentive to all of the emotional labour it takes to reproduce people and relationships and communities, starting from looking after ourselves better so that other people aren't having to labour a ton to be around us, to becoming capable and skilled enough to actually adequately emotionally support other people.

He believes that it is imperative that men learn these skills and strive to truly want to provide emotional support for others and to seek it out.

Julian and David, organizers of the Bay Area men's group, also told me about how learning skills around the emotional labour that goes into organizing spaces is fundamental for men organizers. One of the most central components of men's work "is to actually take on a large portion of the emotional work that's invisibilized by patriarchy," Julian said. Since the majority of this work is often left to women, and men are not encouraged to do this work or develop the skills necessary to do it, men organizers are working on learning these skills together. These include skills like listening and communication, empathy, and feeling and appropriately attending to their feelings. David framed these skills as largely about building men's "capacity to stay present for really hard conversations"¹³ and, for many organizers, this is a big component of doing men's work in social justice spaces.

In the same way that organizing men's groups provides opportunities to learn physical reproductive skills, it also allows men to practice the emotional skills. This is true of learning to facilitate workshops as well. In order to create a container for people to step out of their comfort zones and learn about such a deeply personal structure as heteropatriarchy and other systems of oppression, organizers and facilitators must be attuned to the emotions in the room, be skilled at

¹³ David Treleaven in discussion with the author, September 26, 2016. All quotes attributed to "David" throughout this thesis are derived from this interview.

communicating about what is going on, and be willing to be vulnerable themselves. All of these are reproductive tasks that many of the men I spoke with are working on learning and, as Julian put it, men's groups are "a really great place to be practicing [these] emotional skills."

Men's groups can support men in taking on reproductive labour in other ways as well. Gus, Nick, and Julian all noted the potential for men's groups to be a place from where men initiate work in other social justice projects. Men's groups "could potentially be a space from which men start to get organized," says Nick. Gus echoes that groups "could be doing that movement type work" of cooking food or doing childcare for other groups who are organizing around social justice issues. And Julian spoke about the benefit men's groups can have on white men and their ability to be "in community and supporting work being lead by women and people of colour." So men's groups, as Nick emphasized, can be places where men find comrades with whom they can do the important and often invisible reproductive labour that it takes to make meetings and events run smoothly (or run at all), in support of "initiatives that are led by, women, queer folks and trans folks."

Personal Work

As organizers learn to see the social and political impacts of heteropatriarchy and other systems of oppression, they also learn to see the ways that these systems have shaped them personally. Everyone's behaviours, desires, and orientations are deeply impacted by having grown up in an oppressive culture. Of course, the exact ways heteropatriarchy impacts men depends greatly on each man's relationship to other systems of power—race, sexual orientation, class status, and so on, will all mediate how heteropatriarchy impacts men—and on the ways they personally choose to engage with and resist them. That said, the organizers I spoke with understood the importance of doing personal work around these impacts, whatever they may be

for each of them personally. This understanding informs some of the central components of men's work: organizers are developing insight and awareness about how they have been effected by their inculcation into oppressive systems and in turn how they impact others, and taking the steps necessary to unlearn these habits and relearn other, feminist ways of being men. When I asked what kinds of patriarchal behaviours they were working on personally, the majority of the men I spoke with chuckled and responded with some version of "everything." As they described their struggles, I heard more specifically about countless ways in which they are working to address their own beliefs, behaviours, and desires. These include developing an ability to actually see the effects of oppression, managing a stunted or volatile emotional personal landscape, dealing with ego and entitlement, navigating romantic relationships, and generally addressing how their unconscious patterns and habits relate to all of this work.

"Seeing It"

Simply becoming the kind of person who is able to see the often-hidden, reproductive work that goes into organizing is an important and an ongoing project for many men organizers. Due to men's training *not* to see or value reproductive labour, many simply are not aware of all of the effort that goes into making relationships and organizing spaces function smoothly. Men have not been trained to see it, so it simply does not occur to them.

For Gus, heteropatriarchy, possibly even more than other systems of oppression, "feels like the kind of system of domination that is reproduced in [very] intimate ways." For this reason, Gus prioritizes the aspect of men's work that is attuned to the "intimacies of disrupting and unlearning and practicing alternatives." This includes learning to be attentive to reproductive labour—something that Gus has worked on diligently for many years—noticing when and how he is demanding psychological space and emotional labour from those around him, and proactively

fostering in himself an awareness of the reproductive tasks needed in any given space and making sure to follow through on what he sees and actually do the work.

Kalbir told me that he can see that over the years he has become much better at seeing the impacts of heteropatriarchy. He clarified that “seeing it” applies not just to reproductive labour, but to all aspects of heteropatriarchy and other systems of oppression. In particular for Kalbir, the ability to see the ways in which heteropatriarchy manifests and impacts people has “been huge” for his relationships and growth as an organizer: “I feel like it’s allowed me to have greater comfort and probably trust with women in my life about talking about it, which is great and is valuable just on a relationship basis in terms of the people that I’m around. But the other thing is that I think it allows me to act more.” For him, learning to see where heteropatriarchy is manifesting in his day-to-day life and organizing has meant he is able to have more meaningful relationships with people who experience the oppression of heteropatriarchy, and also that he is further enabled to do the work to resist that oppression.

Kalbir also recognized that the struggle to see the effects of oppression is not unique to him; it is part of the training to *not* see it, a lack of awareness that systems of oppression rely on to continue functioning. “We’re all steeped in it,” everyone has grown up surrounded by oppressive messages, and these messages influence who we are and how we act. Kalbir reflected that, for a long time as an organizer, he was not doing his self-education work, “not reading deeply into analysis, not reading deeply [on] interconnectedness and impacts,” and this “was a huge limiting factor” for him in his political work. For him as a person and as an organizer, then, doing self-education around structures of oppression has been important personal work.

Others also mentioned the importance of undertaking personal political education. For example, Paul has been involved in men’s work for more than fifty years, doing a variety of

educational work, organizing, writing, mentoring, and consulting around social justice issues, with a focus on gender, race, and religion. Paul described how even after all this time in men's work, he is still constantly learning. For him, one more recent instance of this has been the "learning edge around gender identity." In this case, younger organizers are catalyzing continued political education for him, as someone who has been engaging in his own work for decades. For Paul, this highlights the fact that there is always political learning to be done, a sentiment shared by all of the organizers I spoke with.

Emotions

From struggling to feel and identify emotions generally, to explosive anger, learning to skillfully and appropriately feel and navigate emotions was one of the struggles I heard about most from organizers. For some, this struggle was around anger primarily. Kalbir has been working on his anger, how he experiences and expresses it. He wanted to be clear that it is not that he is completely against being angry or loud. "I fully embrace and support people being angry," he said. But for him, it is "particularly the patriarchal dynamics" in terms of when and around whom he gets angry. "If it's being triggered by [his] conversations with women and how they respond and how [he's] responding," and if it is involuntary and lacking conscientiousness, these are markers that Kalbir is not expressing anger in the ways that he thinks are appropriate.

Colin, a harm reduction and anti-poverty organizer in Victoria, BC, also struggles with anger.¹⁴ He describes himself as having been "a bully" in his family and, although he has never been physically violent, he has had to work on how often he gets enraged. Colin's larger struggle in the previous few years has been learning to experience "emotions in a fuller way that aren't just limited to either emotional dryness, or to like anger or bravado." He has been learning to

¹⁴ Colin Fletcher in conversation with the author, August 24, 2016. All quotes attributed to "Colin" throughout this thesis are derived from this interview.

feel and appropriately express a more nuanced range of emotions, beyond those generally permissible for men.

Speaking to what may be the other side of the anger coin, Julian described feeling fairly emotionless as his principal personal struggle. He explained it this way:

I see my white male socialization primarily being [that] it's limited my emotional capacity ... I've really had to focus on just being more connected to myself so that I can connect with other folks more deeply ... [I] realized actually one of the most radical things I can be doing personally is to be developing more of an emotional awareness as opposed to just like an intellectual political education. Both so that I can like feel the pain that is caused by white supremacy and male supremacy, but also so that I can actually try to organize other white men from a more emotional space. I think like having that emotional connection to this work is necessary to stay in it for the long haul.

Julian has connected the personal work of developing more emotional fluency to the political work of being in organizing long term. He has noticed that he “shuts down” emotionally when he is feeling vulnerable, and spends much of his time feeling “numb.” By bringing his awareness to his numbness, Julian can practice moving into vulnerable situations, including those that arise in organizing, with intention and the opportunity to learn more about himself.

Both Nick and Kingsley echoed these sentiments around leaning to better feel and express a full range of emotions. Nick is also trying to “learn how to be more vulnerable” and “in touch with [his] feelings,” to “learn how to cry, and just express emotion in general more.” He is working on being “more consistent in terms of emotional relationships and intimate relationships, and more mindful of people’s feelings.” And Kingsley reflected that sometimes even though he may have the words to express “‘I’m angry’ or ‘I’m upset’ or ‘I’m happy’ or whatever, sometimes even that feels disembodied.” While he often knows “how to speak the language of emotions,” the words are “sometimes not actually connected to an emotion, it’s just like still in [his] logical or brain space.” Learning to be emotionally fluent and attentive when

heteropatriarchy has taught men not to prioritize these aspects of themselves is an ongoing struggle for many men in organizing.

Ego and Entitlement

Many of the men I spoke with struggle with their ego, arrogance, and entitlement. Paul reflected that, although he has worked hard over many years on addressing his “controlling behaviour, arrogance, condescension”—aspects of himself that he sees being heavily influenced by heteropatriarchal conditioning—these are still the same principle components of his personal work that need attention today. “You know those are deep parts of our socialization and, like I said, reinforced at every turn,” he explained. Further, Paul says that because he has “been successful in doing [men’s] work and recognized, and have a lot of opportunities to be out there, [he gets] a lot more reinforcement in some ways for some of that stuff.” He feels that he is constantly learning and being challenged by this project.

David, a somatic therapist, writer, and educator in the Bay Area who is involved in the white men’s group there, spoke of his struggle with arrogance as a pull to “declare reality.” He reflected on how his professional choices impact his work around humility:

I’m at a current professional moment where I’m about to launch this book, and starting to be given more power ... And so people are starting to ask me questions, about big things like [in this interview], and I can feel the tendency in me to declare reality. Like, ‘let me speak as if I know!’ And then I’m like ‘where’d my humility go!?’

Like Paul above, David draws attention to the ways in which doing successful political work around patriarchy can both help and hinder one’s personal work with ego.

Ryan has also noticed his struggle with humility and entitlement to space. He expressed a need for self-reflexivity around his tendency to take up more than his share of space in conversation:

I’m really interested in education and advocacy and spreading information and knowledge, but I think at times I can definitely like take up too much space still, or take up spaces where I

shouldn't be, and I think that's always something I have to be conscious of when I'm in groups of people ... and trying to learn about other people without just like blurting out things and being like 'my opinion is important!' you know?

Gus remembers grappling seriously with a similar tendency to Ryan. He recalled how shocked he was when he encountered feminism and started to notice how much space he felt entitled to take up, physically and otherwise. He would splay himself across a shared seating space, have his "things strewn around," and tend to talk "first, loudest, most, and last." He was "horrified by all of that," and sees that he was able to use that as an incentive to be a different kind of person. Notably, David mentioned another tendency he struggles with, which appears to be in synergy with men's entitlement to take up more than their share of space: he listens to what men say more seriously than the way he listens to others. He explained, "I just listen differently to men ... I just give different credence to a man saying something in a confident way." There is a lot of work for men to do to address their entitlement to so much space and also to honour the use of that space by others.

Romantic Relationships

Romantic relationships and sexuality were also areas where the men I spoke to are working hard on personal learning. Ryan told me about struggling with navigating his sexuality as a heterosexual cis-man: "I definitely struggle with my sexuality, as being right now a single person and dating. And trying to navigate healthy sexual relationships with women, while not being an asshole." When I asked him what was difficult about this, he spoke about his cultural training to "hypersexualize women, objectify women. The whole porn culture of seeing women as sexual objects, is something that, it's very insidious, it's very deep in your psychology, and unlearning that is a long process ... I think my struggle and my learning is still being able to treat women and see women as whole beings," and not be only interested in them for their bodies.

David also acknowledged that “objectification of women is an ongoing battle” for him. He is often frustrated at himself for still, after having worked so hard at altering pattern of behaviour, objectifying women in public spaces. What is more, in his romantic relationships, David described himself as “fucking fallible”: he has been working for almost two decades on unlearning unhealthy, patriarchal ways of engaging in conflict, sex, relationship structures, entitlement, and “all sorts of [other] ways” he has been trained by heteropatriarchy to behave in relationships with women. He recognizes that “this is just a lifelong thing, a commitment” he has made and is constantly struggling with. He regularly feels “humbled and humiliated” by how difficult this process is for him, not in a derogatory way but in a way that motivates him to continue doing the work.

Kingsley’s arrogance in relationship used to manifest in him thinking he knew what was best for other people, even when there was no way he could. Particularly in terms of “showing up for people,” Kingsley identified that he used to approach many situations with “a kind of savior mentality.” He did not need to ask what people wanted or needed, because he knew and would provide it for them. He is very glad to have become aware of this tendency and to have successfully made major changes in how he relates to people. He feels that he now better understands “how to ask people ‘what is it that you actually want in this moment?’” This involves Kingsley being aware enough to know when he is not sure of something, and confident enough to admit this and ask. He now makes sure not to assume he knows what people want and need and asks how they want to be supported.

Others I spoke with recalled how much personal work has been necessary in their long-term romantic partnerships. Colin told me that “there was a point where [his] partner didn’t think [they’d] make it,” due to the trauma he was bringing to the relationship. His drinking and anger

made it really difficult to be in a relationship with him. He believed in and aspired to the heteropatriarchal archetype of “the lonely warrior ... the disassociated, detached, emotionless, you know doomed to have no love,” and this contributed significantly to the issues in his relationship. His partner “carried a great deal of [his] emotional burden,” a dynamic he now understands as typical in patriarchal relationships. Colin also discussed how his emotional unavailability impacted other romantic relationships he has had, including a recent one (Colin and his partner are not monogamous). He was not there for her in the ways that she needed. He minimized and ignored her struggle and she came away with the impression that he just did not care. He sees now how the way in which he was approaching their relationship “was really problematic,” and how his own emotional inabilities were to blame.

Gus primarily struggles in his partnership with the feelings that come up around his partner and the other person they are seeing romantically. The insecurity he feels around his “partner having intimacy with other people” has been a learning edge that he has so far not felt successful addressing:

That’s one of those things where I can read everything I want about, you know intimacy and insecurity and polyamory and it doesn’t stop the feelings. And so of course I’ve puzzled really hard about what other things can I do and how can I like shift this and what can I do with [my partner] or what can I do on my own, it’s yeah ... that’s a really vivid place where it’s just all sticking points.

Gus sees how this tendency in his relationship to his partner’s intimacy is entitlement and ego, and at least partially attributes these aspects of himself to heteropatriarchal conditioning: “The patriarchal tendency within my relationship with [my partner] that would help explain my insecurity would, I think, just be entitlement to imagining that I can meet all of my partners needs for intimacy.”

Addressing the Unconscious

Many organizers are grappling with the gap between, on the one hand, having the ability to talk about oppression and see its impacts and, on the other, truly making the kinds of personal change needed to unlearn their own conditioning. In his practice as a therapist, David has learned repeatedly that “just because you have an insight about your behaviour, does not mean you can actually take different action.” Men have been “wired ... towards certain patriarchal moves,” and transforming them is difficult. Thus, he is constantly seeking to work with his clients on answering the question, “what is the gulf or the cleavage between someone’s values and their actual actions?” Given that this gulf often exists, organizing spaces end up containing, according to David, many “brilliant” people who “can quote amazing literature, and yet are acting out.” Nick told me about his personal experience with this gulf between belief and behaviour:

There’s a big difference between knowing about what feminism is and understanding gender and understanding patriarchy, in terms of concepts and ideas and structures, and actually being able to make changes in one’s body and in one’s relationships. I think that those are really different. I’m really good at the first thing, and talking the right ways and saying the right things and writing the right things ... And that doesn’t necessarily make me very good at embodying a lot of feminist values ... All that kind of stuff is not really stuff that I’ve been able to learn through reading. I can know that I should do those things by reading, but actually learning to embody them I think is different.

Somehow men have to move from a place of thinking and talking about feminism, to truly embodying feminist values and practice. As Gus told me, “men’s work isn’t about just reading about things ... we have to do more than that.” Maggie believes that having analysis is only “a very first step to understanding how to relate to people in a different way.” So how do men actually make the kinds of changes that will allow their behaviour to most accurately reflect their values and desires around the ways they want to show up in the world?

Part of this process is remembering to *add* capacities and behaviours, not simply subtract them. Organizers sometimes refer to this as *unlearning* and *relearning*: they are unlearning oppressive habits while relearning other, feminist ways of being. When Nick told me about this process, he described being motivated by the people in his life: “Part of it is it’s not about subtracting a behaviour. Like, it’s not ‘stop doing this thing Nick!’ It’s like, ‘start seeing this thing that you don’t see, or that you haven’t been seeing, start prioritizing this thing.’” For example, “to actually perceive and remember and be mindful of all of the little nitty-gritty reproductive labour things, or to be a consistent friend and support, or to check in with people and really be good at remembering what’s going on in their life ... is like the gaining of new capacities that it’s not [simply] about subtracting bad behaviour.”

A big part of what Nick is getting at here is that this process is so tricky largely because so many of men’s heteropatriarchal behaviours—so many oppressive behaviours in general—are unconscious. They are habits, beliefs, and desires, or things we are attuned to seeing and things we tend to not see that are so deeply and subtly rooted that they tend to be difficult to identify and become aware of to begin with, let alone to proactively unlearn. So one of the most important additive components of personal work is gaining the awareness of what is going on inside of ourselves that perpetuate habits and unconscious behaviours. What complicates this, however, is the way in which intellectualizing actually becomes a barrier to making these kinds of personal changes. I discuss this in more detail in Chapter Three, but the ability to stay in tune with our bodies and feelings, without retreating into analytical processing and intellectual analysis, is a main component of emotional fluency, and emotional fluency is a crucial and often lacking skill for men.

Organizers told me a lot about this tendency in many men to shut down emotionally and to

intellectualize, and how this negatively impacts their ability to make meaningful personal change. Many men, as Julian noted, have a “tendency to just escape into our heads and intellectualize” about our problems; “at a certain level of intensity or intimacy or pressure, most people check out from their bodies and become hyper-cerebral,” or just “check out” entirely, explained David. For David, emotional numbness and the escape into our heads is an important starting place for men learning to become more skilled at feeling their emotions. He characterized his experience in men’s spaces the following way: “OK, we’re good feminist men, we need to feel, ok go! – We’re all trying fucking hard to feel. Meanwhile what we’re actually feeling is numb.” David believes that if men start with an acknowledgement of the numbness, “and the costs of that, that’s the road to being in some kind of authentic relationship both with ourselves and in relationship [with others].”

None of the organizers I spoke with claimed a pursuit of perfection—they understand that there is no such thing—but nearly all of them emphasized the importance of improvement through practice. The term *practice* carries two meanings in this case. First, changing behaviour means changing practices, changing the actual actions taken day-to-day. As I mentioned, this tend to be unconscious, so part of the work to change them is to become more aware of them and their causes. And second, this process takes practice, in the sense of ‘practice makes perfect.’ Paul described it this way:

The work with men has to be based on changing behaviour, and changing behaviour is practice ... that’s not easy, but it’s not all that difficult, but it needs to be consistent. We’re basically building new practices, new ways of thinking, and new ways of behaving. So, it’s, it’s a life-long practice, because we’re constantly being reinforced with the old stuff right? So it’s not like we can ever not be thinking about you know how we’re not reproducing patriarchal stuff.

Oppressive ways of being are constantly reinforced and rewarded in an oppressive culture, so the struggle to learn other, feminist ways of being is constant. “It’s like a muscle” Colin stated, you have to continually use it to improve. This takes consciousness, focus, and continual practice.

For David, the question then becomes, “what consistent, sustained practices would I need to be in to move towards and ultimately embody a feminist ethic?”

This practice can look like so many things. For some, it is practicing learning to lean-in to their feelings of discomfort, or putting themselves in situations that feel particularly vulnerable (while still safe) and being mindful in staying present with those feelings. For others, it means abstaining from porn, or repeatedly visualizing themselves *not* checking out a woman from across the street. Practice is meditation, attending trainings on communication, and proactively seeking feedback from romantic partners on how the relationship has been impacting them. Some meet with friends to practice supporting and being supported, and some meet with professional counselors. Paul summarized the personal component of men’s work, and the kinds of questions that should guide men’s practices in this way:

[The work] is not about analyzing where we got it from very much – it’s everywhere; we got it from everywhere. It’s about thinking about, ‘OK, positively, how do I want to be treating people? How do I want to be showing up? What kind of presence do I want to have? What kind of impact do I want to have? How am I going to make that happen? What am I doing that gets in the way of that?’ It’s very concrete and specific. It’s embodied in our thoughts and our feelings and physical being. So, you know, it’s a really fascinating part of doing the work, is how do we actually take responsibility for who we are in the world, in an every day kind of way?

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of some of the more common projects men’s work organizers tend to take on, and some insights from those who take part in them. Of course, these four categories—personal work, reproductive labour, men’s groups, and political education—are by no means an exhaustive list of feminist men’s projects that are possible. Nor have I explored fully their potentials and pitfalls: exploring them in more depth would be a worthwhile pursuit. In the next chapter, I turn instead to a discussion and analysis of the kinds of issues that arise for organizers who choose to engage in these types of projects. These include more personal considerations, such as determining priorities given limited capacities, as well as much

more interpersonal issues such as the pedestal men organizers tend to be put on and the inverse tear-down effect, one component of what has come to be known as call-out culture.

Chapter 3: Issues and Challenges in Men's Work

“How do you trudge through this confusion; how do you trudge through these kinds of questions?” (Chris)

Introduction

This chapter considers some of the many common issues that appear endemic to social justice organizing at present. The negative repercussions of many of these dynamics tend to hamper social justice efforts by weakening organizer communities and relationships between organizers. While many of these will impact all organizers regardless of gender, I have primarily focused on those that have particular relevance to men organizers. I begin by exploring the connection between the personal and political components of men's work, and continue into a discussion about organizers' finite capacity and the priorities they choose. The bulk of this chapter analyzes some of the many, often toxic, complex dynamics that develop between organizers, and on the impacts of these dynamics. Following this, I discuss mentorship as an integral aspect of good social justice organizing, and as one way to mitigate and manage difficult inter-organizer dynamics. Finally, the chapter closes with a section on accountability, how organizers are building accountability into their organizing, and some of the major factors involved in accountable organizing.

Connecting the Personal and Political

As described in the Chapter Two, although the organizers in this research were chosen for their involvement in political work, they are also engaging in their own deep personal work around the ways that oppressive systems have shaped their behaviours, desires, and orientations to the world. In general, they view this personal work as a necessary component of doing good men's work. For many of the organizers I spoke with, men's personal work should be motivated by the desire to contribute better to social justice efforts. As Paul put it, “the end goal is that

[personal transformation] leads to people being activated and mobilized to actually get out and make the changes that are required.” Kalbir, too, asserted that the heart of men’s political work must be external to themselves and their own healing work. He told me about the men’s group he was part of: “the importance of what we were talking about existed outside of us, and we had to get outside.” They wanted to do both the internal and external work, so the idea was to create a space where they could do that personal work while understanding that their “responsibility was to do the outside work.” The personal work would enable the political work: it leads to richer, more effective, more genuine social change work.

As personal work supports political work, so too does political work encourage and support men’s personal work. Julian’s political work with other white men has been “deeply enriching” for him on a personal level, in terms of motivating and supporting him through acknowledging and addressing his own beliefs and behaviours. He suspects that this is the case for many of the other men who do social justice work. Paul also articulated a position shared by many organizers that, when you do social justice work, “you constantly are growing and learning and doing educational work about the issues in ways that lead to transformation in [your] consciousness.” Everyone I spoke to referenced how important doing political work has been for their own growth as individuals.

Paul and Julian both also spoke about the potential for personal work to overtake the emphasis on political work. Julian explained how the personal aspect to men’s work and the personal benefit that comes with doing social justice work should be “kind of secondary.” He does not want the personal work to be seen as “an end in itself,” but rather as a necessary component of doing work in social movements. He told me: “I think there’s value in white men like becoming more human, that’s great. But for me, if there’s not a piece connecting it to larger

movements, outside of like a very small intimate group, I just find it uninteresting.” For Julian, men’s work is not simply about “the work itself with other white men, but about being able to better participate in movements for justice.”

Paul also felt strongly that personal work “is a necessary but not sufficient part of the process of social justice work.” Illustrative of this belief, Paul was reluctant to speak much about my questions around men’s shame and personal healing. When I asked him why this was, this is what he told me:

I’m always cautious around how much the personal stuff can take over. Partly because I think that some of that healing has to happen in community, by being out in the community doing stuff, and confronting the shame, guilt, lack of self-confidence, any of that stuff, as well as the arrogance and entitlement. You know, that in the practice of being out in the community as an active person, there’s a lot of healing around that stuff that happens, and you can only do so much personal work around it.

As Paul sees it, the pitfall is that personal work can “become all consuming,” such that “the healing journey can overtake the community healing journey.” When this happens, and he sees it happen often, the “internal processing and growth and consciousness raising is an end in and of itself”; “the work” becomes defined as men doing their personal healing work and loses any focus on community-based work. That is not what Paul sees at the core of his work with men: “I work with men around male socialization. You know, we acknowledge the pain and the harm and everything, but that is a different kind of work in a different kind of arena, and especially if it’s around trauma, which it usually is.” “I’m not a therapist,” he emphasized. While Paul believes that personal healing and transformation is important, and supports other men who focus their energies on these goals, the bulk of his work has been instead on getting men involved politically.

Although my interview questions did not focus on them, a few of the organizers I spoke with referenced popular strains of masculinity politics that focus centrally on men’s suffering, to

the exclusion of more outward political work. For example, the mythopoetic men's movement is focused on healing the "warrior within" men and on returning them to their healthy "deep masculine" selves.¹ Here men are working on their personal healing, but are much less concerned with addressing the social and political context which has harmed them and in which they participate. Paul critiqued many of the batterer support programs for taking a similar approach. They do "a lot of intense work with men around their feelings and backgrounds and childhoods and all of that stuff," and give little or no attention to the broader context of heteropatriarchy and other power imbalances. Without contextualizing men's trauma and healing within a system that privileges men and masculinity, the work loses its political and social change influence.

Individualism greatly impacts this push towards personal healing to the exclusion of political work. As Paul explained, "mostly in this society, because it's so individually based, and it's so adverse to social action, one becomes the substitute for the other [and] the consciousness raising ... becomes the work ... [but] nothing's changed, either in your daily life or in the community." Kalbir was also clear that men's work "can't be about you ... like that all has to be done in the context of supporting the struggle of actually liberating the people who are oppressed." In light of this, it is vitally important that personal healing work be consciously connected to social change work.

Immediately after speaking with Paul, I made my way to my meeting with David, who *is* a therapist. David, too, recognized the tendency for men to focus inwardly and forget about broader social contexts and their complicity in oppression. But David tackles this issue directly, working with those in his practice to connect their personal healing to their work in community.

¹ Michael Kimmel, *The Politics of Manhood: Profeminist Men Respond to the Mythopoetic Men's Movement*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 15.

He told me how “lit up” he gets at the prospect of doing work to connect personal healing work to political work. For him the most exciting type of personal change work is not “just to stare at our bellybuttons and feel happier; it’s to change the world.” He explained it this way:

I’m really interested in the connection of patriarchy, white supremacy, and psychology. And by psychology I mean a lens of personal change, an approach to personal change. And where I get really lit up is the idea of doing personal transformative work [to] unpack, decolonizing² the mind and the heart around patriarchy, in the services of movement building ... [my work] is most exciting when it’s building someone’s capacity to do fucking movement work. And so I’ll see a lot of activists and organizers doing their ‘individual’ healing work around trauma, but in the service of them being able to stay in, not burn out, and actually live the values that they profess to have.

David often sees that there is a breakdown between the values people profess and the behaviour they tend to exhibit. He wants to contribute to people’s ability to live into their values, and does this through addressing the trauma and suffering they have experienced throughout their lives.

Although they take different approaches, David and Paul agree that it is necessary that, while men do their personal healing work, they also talk about what Paul termed “male privilege and male benefits.” He argued that it is not enough to simply look at how men have been wounded by heteropatriarchy and the other oppressive systems that privilege them (although yes, they have been); rather organizers must take it a step further and examine how “what men do with our hurt is turn it into abuse towards those around us,” and this is in part where heteropatriarchal violence occurs. “Violence isn’t only created by those feelings,” Paul clarified, “violence is coming from the whole society. But it inevitably gets stuck in that ‘poor me, I’m a victim of all the things that happened to me,’ unless it’s also acknowledge that I have turned my pain, anger, frustration and shame and guilt and everything into various kinds of behaviour that are very destructive to people around me and myself and everybody else.” For these reasons, the white men’s group Paul is co-coordinating is clear about connecting their personal healing work

² David questioned the appropriateness of using *decolonize* as a metaphor and in reference to something other than the colonization of lands and peoples. After discussing it, he decided he was uncomfortable using the concept in such a way, believing it should be reserved for reference to literal colonization.

as men with outwardly focused political work. “We’re very clear that there’s internal work for us to do, to be better prepared to be in the struggle,” he told me, but also that “there’s the external work which is being active in the struggle for racial and gender justice ... Everybody [in the group] recognizes that they overlap and are interrelated and you can’t do one without the other.”

Speaking to this interrelation, David emphasized that “if we’re doing men’s healing work ... we have to do it in the context of knowing we have a ton of privilege and access.” He acknowledged that “we’re not just going to lock ourselves in this room and do a year of deep trauma work... that’s not what’s being called for right now.” Instead, he wants to identify a “common sense approach to saying, ‘yes’ we need to do healing work, and where are we putting our resources? ... how do we actually have a commons sense approach? How do we factor in social context to trauma healing? ... How do we in movement spaces actually engage in personal work” without having a huge separation between the political and personal aspects of justice organizing? David believes there is no formulaic answer to these questions, but that discovering answers must involve looking at what kinds of practices organizers can do to connect personal work to social change work, beyond simply “I go away and I do my healing work, and then I come back to my movement space.” These are questions that must be considered in emergent ways that are attentive to context.

While in a number of arenas men’s healing becomes central to the exclusion of political work, a kind of inverse dynamic can also take place. Often men in feminism will do political work without taking on their own personal work. Colin explained how he sees that sometimes organizers focus too much on their goals for political change and not enough “on process, how we organize, and how we care and how we build community.” For example, Kingsley recalled how, when he was first introduced to feminism, he had trouble acknowledging how it impacted

him and his behavior personally: “I could see how it applied to all the other systems in the world, but then couldn’t really apply it to myself. So I was very uncritical of my own masculinity, very uncritical of my own whiteness.” Many men, especially early in their work as feminist organizers, do not self-implicate or acknowledge that, like everybody else, these oppressive systems have impacted them in deeply personal ways. They plunge into their political work and their inward work falls behind.

Maggie told me about how frustrating it is when she works with men who are not doing the personal work necessary to show up well in their relationships:

If in the minutia of our interactions I’m seeing that you’re not actually doing the work, that is you can run a workshop and whatever but then all these things are happening that show a lack of practice in your actual way of being in the world, then that’s not ok. It would be like if we had facilitators here who were not practicing consent with each other in the office or whatever, but then going out and doing workshops on consent.

And of course beyond just being frustrated, men who are not taking personal responsibility to address their own behaviour sometimes behave in much more hurtful ways. A frustrating and heartbreaking number of men who do public work as feminists have been revealed to have serially abused and assaulted women and other marginalized people to whom they were close.³

While there are tendencies to focus on one of internal or external work to the exclusion of the other, some wanted to entirely challenge the conceptualization of these as separate. Nick’s present orientation towards personal work is informed by a tendency he sees for social change work to become divorced from the rest of organizers’ lives. He believes that one aspect of organizing things like men’s groups is that there is a “danger of reinforcing the division between activism and organizing and every day life, which is an always artificial division.” Kingsley also spoke to this tendency to separate the activist-self and the real-life-self. He told me how he has

³ See for example Cecilia D’Anastasio, “What Happens When a Prominent Male Feminist is Accused of Rape?” *Jezebel*, February 5, 2015. <https://jezebel.com/what-happens-when-a-prominent-male-feminist-is-accused-1683352727>

struggled with reconciling the two: “I used to feel like I had to put on a work mentality, and then come home and have my regular life, and was finding it very difficult for a period of time to kind of like turn life-Kingsley back on.” He called this a “disembodying disconnect” that was occurring between the self he attempted to inhabit in workshops and other work spaces, and the self he wanted to be in the rest of his life.

Kingsley struggles with precisely the kind of separation that Nick is challenging, the idea “that we all go and do our activism somewhere and then we go home to our real lives.” In the case of men’s groups, this would involve challenging the assumption that men go to the weekly meetings and that is where they do “the work,” and then they go back to their lives and live as they always were. Nick wants to see the learning that takes place in men’s groups to “percolate” and lead to new relationships and new ways of being in the world and in men’s every-day lives. He wants “men’s work to be part of [his] everyday life, which means that there’s no ‘thing’ called men’s work, there’s no time when [he’s] doing men’s work and time when [he’s] not. It’s something a bit murkier.” He seemed conscious at how this may sound, that perhaps it is “a cop-out” to focus more inwardly and on more intimate relationships rather than on furthering a broader, more public spread of feminist ideas to men. But based on what I have heard from organizers about how much the relational aspect of organizing impacts the overtly political components, I am not sure that it is a cop-out to focus attention on relationships. In fact, given how severely poor interpersonal dynamics impact social justice efforts and spaces, I argue that prioritizing the relational impacts organizers have on one another actually improves outward social justice efforts. I believe that Nick’s perspective speaks more to the need for balancing priorities than to it is a cop-out.

It became clear while speaking with these organizers that navigating a balance between inward and outward focused work is an ongoing endeavor. Both personal and service work are essential components of men's work, but organizers' time and energies are finite. There is no single catch-all answer to the question of how to balance these aspects of the work. Julian articulated this struggle well, as follows:

I've been thinking about balance ... like if we have only so much time in the day, or in our lifetime, where is the balance between having a more internal focus and kind of taking time to develop as humans ... like having the focus on us versus having the focus on those who are actually the targets of these systems of oppression? ... Like how do we centre women and people of colour as the real targets of these systems, while at the same time kind of encouraging white men to take on this work on a personal level and kind of thinking and feeling the ways that we've been affected personally?

This struggle for balance is inherently a struggle around priorities; given the finite nature of organizers' time and capacity, how do they choose what to prioritize and focus on?

Capacity and Priorities

Of course, addressing men and masculinity is the shared fundamental priority for those involved in men's work. "The first premise of men's work," Gus explained, is to "take responsibility for yourself and other men." For some organizers, the realization that they wanted to do work with men and boys felt particularly notable. For example, Ryan spoke to his process of discovering his place as an organizer:

I was trying to find my own identity and where my voice is more needed and where it wasn't, and where I was just taking up space that I didn't need to be taking up. And that's where I really started to be like ok my place is talking with men and boys, and talking to privileged white boys and men basically, about what our identity is and what lessons we've learned, and I felt way more comfortable doing that work. It became obvious that that's where I wanted to be.

There are a few reasons that organizers tend to feel best situated to work with other men and boys. For example, women and non-binary organizers are doing social justice work in arenas that may not be appropriate for men to be involved in, such as work with sexual assault survivors. Further, men are often more readily listened to in prevention work with other men and

boys. This is itself partly a symptom of heteropatriarchy. Another less problematic reason for this is that people tend to be better able to identify with someone they see as like themselves, so having a man work with boys allows them to more easily identify with and aspire to be like the person they are learning from.

One of the most important reasons for men to be working with other men and boys is that they are able to implicate themselves in the heteropatriarchal system. By modeling an embodiment of the perspective that all people inculcated into heteropatriarchal masculinity both play a role in upholding it and have great potential to disrupt it, men doing this work can alleviate some of the shame, defensiveness, and overall resistance many men and boys have to learning about oppression. Maggie reflected on how this has been true in her experience:

I think that's been one of the hard aspects for me of being a woman working with young men, is, I think it's partly maybe easier for people to feel shameful or guilty when it's coming from a woman, but it's also easier to be, for it to be dismissed or whatever. So I don't think I'm the right person to do that work. Or rather, that we all have to be doing that work from our own locations to truly disrupt systemic heteropatriarchy. And some young men will respond more strongly to cis-men than to women or trans folks as leaders in this work, until they get to the point where they can recognize that part of that for them is also internalized sexism [or] transphobia.

Since there tends to be a lot of resistance from some boys when she tries to do this work with them, Maggie has decided that she is probably not the right person to be doing the direct work with them, at least not on her own. In part for these reasons, it generally makes the most sense for someone masculine to be working with other masculine-identifying people.

Julian also described a process of coming to feel most comfortable working with people who share his privileged identities, "white men specifically." He feels "well positioned" to do this work, a role which Paul maintains is an important one for men:

It's useful when white men can show up, and it's useful to challenge other white men. It's useful for us to be models for and to challenge other white men around their privilege and their behaviour and also there's a lot of young white guys that are in our lives and it's important for us to be role models for them of different ways of being, holding white maleness.

Further, many organizers feel a level of personal responsibility to use their privileged positions to address the harms of heteropatriarchy, specifically because it is a system from which they benefit. As Ryan explained, he believes that those granted privilege in a system of oppression have a responsibility to use that privilege to address the system itself, a belief shared by many of those I spoke with.

Although engaging in prevention with other men and boys is a foundational priority for those in men's work, there is clearly vast variation in the kinds of projects they undertake to do this. Given all the contextual considerations, some of which I noted above, and how much need there is for all sorts of projects to address countless aspects of oppression, figuring out where to spend time and energy remains a central struggle for many organizers.

Given the finite nature of organizers' time and capacity, although we often want to be involved in everything all the time, we simply cannot be. As a result, many organizers feel like they are never quite doing enough, that they should "activist harder!" as Kingsley put it. For many, what results from this are feelings of shame and inadequacy. The task of undoing oppression feels so huge that everything organizers do can end up feeling really insignificant and useless. Kingsley shared his struggle with shame and feeling like he should be doing more. He has come to accept that he is "doing the best with what [he's] got," and that maybe he does not have to be "on the front lines of every single thing." This would not be ideal even if he could, he told me. Better that he commits deeply to the projects he has on the go, knowing that regardless of what his primary focus is, if he takes an intersectional approach, he is doing valuable work that connects with the work others are doing, and that this is how a strong and interconnected social justice movement develops.

Julian explained that what has helped him lessen these feelings around never doing enough are lessons he has “learned from disability justice politics around productivity and [his] worth being tied up in how much [he’s] involved in and how much [he] produce[s].” At this point, he still experiences the shame around feeling like he should be doing more, going to this or that event, contributing to this other thing, but, “at least in theory,” he has accepted that his worth is not only about what he is *doing*. “It’s also about that all people have value and worth regardless of like how many hours a day they can throw down for the revolution.” I asked him if this applied for white cis-men also, and he replied: “I don’t know! I mean I feel like I do have a higher standard for the able-bodied white cis dude.” I suppose that is where the discord exists between his feelings and his “in theory” acceptance.

Accepting that nobody can do everything is nice, but it does not actually tell organizers *what to do*. “Deal with your shit,” “don’t be an asshole,” and “be awesome for feminism,” while nice starting point for men in this work, are not exactly clear, actionable directives. People have to figure this out on their own. This results in organizers taking on sometimes very different projects from one another, while each ostensibly working towards similar goals. Consider the approaches taken by Paul and David described above. They are both focusing on movement building work, but come from drastically different backgrounds and use markedly different approaches. Or for even deeper contrast, take someone like Nick and compare what he is working on to someone like Ryan. Ryan has fully committed to the iGuy project, and since we spoke has also initiated other programming with youth around sport, leadership, and masculinity. His focus is very much outward looking, on working with as many people as possible, often only once or twice. In contrast, Nick is “wanting right now to focus on more informal things, that

allow [him] to develop or deepen relationships with people over a long period of time,” where intimacy and care are central.

This diversity is a good thing; there is no blueprint for how men’s work should look, and organizers benefit from developing lots of experiments through which they try out approaches, remain reflective and conscious about how they go, and adapt and make changes as required. None of these approaches or projects are inherently better than the others, just different, and there is potential in all of them. They achieve different goals, and when they are undertaken with a consciousness around building a diverse and interconnected network of men’s work projects, they can all be effective.

Which men?

One of the considerations that appear to underlie a lot of the priority choices organizers make in their work with men is *which men?* With which men should organizers work on issues of masculinity, heteropatriarchy, and oppression? The ongoing history of the Men’s Circle can illustrate this consideration well. As organizers of the group, the coordinating collective had to ask themselves for whom the group exists. Does the group prioritize a constant influx of new attendees who have potentially never thought about the topics at hand, or try to create a sustained and cohesive group that does ongoing work together? Factors like group size and topic choice are greatly affected by the answer to this type of question.

Further, is the Men’s Circle centrally for privileged men (white, settler, heterosexual, cis-gendered, etc), or for more marginalized men? There is no absolute trade-off here, but since the Men’s Circle tried to organize the group to meet people where they were in their learning, the organizers noticed this tension come up often. If racism, transmisogyny, and other forms of violence are being regularly enacted in the Circle, even though everyone does their best to

address, unpack, and learn from these behaviours, the space becomes far less welcoming for folks who experience these violences personally. And if the space is explicitly and strictly prohibitive of these behaviours such that people feel a need to never make mistakes or say the wrong things, those with fears of not knowing enough or making mistakes will feel unwelcome. For the coordinators of the Men's Circle, there was never any clear and obvious answer to this tension. As the group went on, it became clear that they were prioritizing the effort to meet men where they are and not prohibit certain kinds of ideas at the outset. This resulted in the group primarily consisting of white, cis-gendered men, a result that may be endemic to the style and structure of the group (and probably impacted by other factors, such as the identities of the organizers and the group's location being on campus).

A men's group being mostly cis, white men is not inherently a bad thing. In some cases, there are serious questions around structure and other barriers organizers should reflect on if their group is meant to be open to all, but such a relatively small range of identities are actually showing up. Such was the case with the Men's Circle. But some organizers address this tension around for whom the group exists by forming a group explicitly for a specifically privileged group of men. For example, the white men's group in Oakland defined the group as being specifically for men who are also privileged by their whiteness, and are choosing to tackle these systems together. For those involved in the project, this was a way to respond to the calls for white people to organize around racial justice and for men to organize around heteropatriarchy in an intersectional way. By drawing the parallels between how white subjectivities and masculine subjectivities operate to uphold oppression, the group hopes to specifically motivate and empower white men to show up better in these gender and racial justice initiatives. Julian feels compelled to do this work when he hears from other organizers just how terrible it can be trying

to work with white men who are not working to understand their own inculcation into heteropatriarchy and white supremacy. “The more white men I can be reaching, and kind of like figuring out how we can be behaving in ways that aren’t super shitty and/or straight up violent, in movement spaces, the better,” he explained. In the next section, I take a closer look at what exactly these “shitty” ways of being are that so many men appear to be complicit in, as well as some of the broader social dynamics between organizers.

Inter-Organizer Dynamics

One of the central questions I brought to this research was about the interpersonal dynamics between organizers. I am aware of how difficult it can sometimes be to get along with other organizers in meetings, workshops, or just generally at social events. So I wanted to know what other organizers thought about the effects these difficult interpersonal dynamics have on social justice spaces and efforts, specifically around men’s involvement in them.

Toxic relationship dynamics are common enough that everyone I spoke with had some understanding of and experience with the damage they can cause in organizing spaces. Unfortunately, as Nick pointed out, “proclaiming that you’re against all forms of domination doesn’t actually necessarily mean that you’re undoing every system of oppression at once” and all the time. According to Nick, oppressive dynamics in organizing spaces tend to “destroy our capacity; it makes it really hard to do anything and to sustain anything.” In this section, I explore some of the common and disempowering dynamics that tend to manifest in organizing spaces.

One of these dynamics I heard about repeatedly is essentially that men do not take on their share of the mundane kinds of labour that go into organizing. As I explained in the previous chapter, the reproductive work that goes into making meetings, organizations, and events happen often falls to women and non-binary organizers. Gus put it this way:

When I think about patriarchy in organizing spaces I often think about the reproductive labour of a collective or network or whatever, and I notice that's a thing that men in my life are getting better at. But I remember also when I first started organizing feeling like me and the other cis-men in my life weren't really doing like the minutes and making the meals and paying attention to the work of creating the flier and all of the humble quiet stuff that really needs to happen in order for there to be a person on a microphone that's going to tell you everything they know about what you're working on.

Gus is implying here that those same cis-men who are not taking on the reproductive tasks are the same ones who step up to the microphone, literally and metaphorically, and position themselves as central and important to the work.

This lack of putting in the humble work, combined with a number of other tendencies common to men in organizing, leads to a lot of frustration amongst organizers. The feeling I got in my conversations was that, at a general level and as Captain put it, it is "super annoying" and exhausting working with men. Men tend to take up too much space, speaking "first, and loudest, and most, and last," as Gus shared. Nick indicated that they tend to be "much more antagonistic and oppositional, think that they're right, and talk with confidence" beyond their level of knowledge. According to Julian, men tend to think that they are capable of holding leadership positions before they are ready, feel entitled to these positions, and are "often less concerned in developing leadership skills in other folks and more interested in kind of being seen as people involved." Men bring too much "macho male egoism" as Colin put it, and when this entitlement goes unacknowledged, what results is "all of [the] women doing most of the organizing, and then [men] showing up and grabbing the bullhorn." It should go without saying that not all men engage in these behaviours, and those who do probably do not do it all the time. These are tendencies and patterns, not exclusive to men and not the only way that men engage.

These kinds of tendencies, however, at best sap the life out of organizing spaces, and at worst destroy organizers' capacity to organize collectively across difference. David spoke of these dynamics being "disheartening and disempowering" for a twenty-eight-person collective

he was part of for six years: “The men were perpetuating patterns of domination unconsciously, and the women that were being impacted by the behaviour were both disempowered and kind of like, ‘well, same old shit ... here’s the moment where once again we’re going to shatter any chance of actually imagining a new future.’” These kinds of dynamics are super common, and are exactly why Julian felt motivated to work with other white men. For him, it was “just seeing the ways white folks and men, and obviously white men, show up in movement spaces and can be burdens at best, and like really problematic and sap the energy and perhaps just, at various times kind of take over and start leading work that is not [meant for] men’s or white leadership.” When men cause these kinds of problems, oppressive patterns can reify in the very spaces that have been created to address them, and people often end up frustrated, fed up, or hurt. Consequently, groups dissolve, campaigns cease to exist, people quit organizing or move on to projects where they will not have to engage with men; the result of all of this is that social justice organizing efforts suffer.

Organizing with men unfortunately also increases the risk of much more nefarious forms of interpersonal harm. It is well documented that organizing spaces often contain sexual assault and abuse of all kinds, and as in the broader social context, these aggressions are in the vast majority of cases perpetrated by men. The fact that these issues exist within social justice organizing spaces must be acknowledged. That said, my conversations did not focus on these most extreme examples of harm. What I heard often was that regardless of the type of transgression or harmful behaviour, the labour of trying to address them tends to fall to women and others identified with femininity; Colin referred to this type of dynamic as women being “forced to carry a man’s bullshit.” Of course, this is just another instance of the overall trend within organizing where the vast majority of emotional and relational work, whether it be

addressing overt harms or simple doing the more everyday caring forms of labour, falls on the shoulders of women and other femme identified people. The flipside of this is that men tend to do the majority of the more glamorous and visible tasks. In feminist organizing particularly, one reason for this is what has been labeled the pedestal effect.

The Pedestal

Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz define the pedestal effect as essentially a collection of ways that men are treated with more reverence and respect than others doing the same work. For example, men are often given credit for ideas that are not theirs, sometimes even when a woman has said literally the same thing moments before.⁴ The skewed “gendered economy of gratitude” means that men who even make the slightest effort to engage with feminism or anti-violence work “stand out as rare men who are then showered with praise and gratitude.”⁵

Those I spoke with recognize that it “happens all the time,” where men receive excess praise for doing even the simplest of tasks. Nick believes that “because the bar is often so low, it’s easy to become recognized and celebrated, at least by some people,” for doing the bare minimum to not being a “total douche or patriarch.” By simply showing up at a rally, co-facilitating a workshop, or writing a blog post, men can receive credit far beyond what many dedicated women and non-binary organizers may ever receive. Ryan recalled having often received this kind of undue praise, and how the “praise that comes with this kind of work is a hard thing to navigate, because it can really fill your head and then fill your ego.”

I want to be very clear that I do not intend to fault or criticize the women and others who lift up the men in the work. I do not want to fault them, in part because welcoming and acknowledging men for their organizing is one of the many reproductive tasks that are expected

⁴ Michael Messner, Max Greenberg, Tal Peretz, *Some men: Feminist Allies & the Movement to End Violence Against Women* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2015), 139.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

of women generally. What is more, the persistent lack of men that become involved in feminist work, not to mention the even smaller set of men who become trusted comrades, provides a context in which being to some degree overjoyed and grateful at men becoming involved seems inevitable and totally understandable. Most of all, the pedestal and escalator effects are important to understand, not to figure out who is to blame or criticize but rather so that organizers, men especially, can learn to navigate it in ways that do not replicate oppressive dynamics.

Chris shared one example of the concrete ways the pedestal effect emerges and how he dealt with it. For him, it often manifested in women wanting romantic or sexual relationships with him. Women who were usually significantly younger than him would see him speak or facilitate and “want to hook up,” but Chris recognized that this “would usually come from a place that was like wanting to share about their own experiences of assault, of sexism in their lives.” Feeling heard and seen and understood by Chris would often encourage romantic and sexual feelings. For Chris, being a responsible man and leader meant that he needed to hold himself to a policy of not hooking up with women in this context. This did not mean that he would never date or never hook up with women he met through organizing; rather that he would not use women’s experiences of him “listening [to] and affirming the experience of sexism” to create “sexual opportunities.” So being aware of the pedestal effect meant that he held himself to a policy of not using feminism as an opportunity to hook up with women and play into what he called a predatory dynamic this creates.

The Escalation of Men

Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz attribute the pedestal effect to causing another related dynamic, what they call the “escalation of men.”⁶ The escalator effect is a tendency in men’s work where this praising dynamic generates material opportunities, access, and social capital for men in feminist work, far beyond those available to their women and non-binary counterparts, and which are often above their level of expertise and experience. Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz describe how men get congratulations, job opportunities, and promotions above women who have been at the work longer.⁷

When I listened to Ryan tell me about how he initially came to men’s work, it reminded me strongly of my own escalated trajectory. He thrust himself into visible positions, educating others about topics about which he had only recently started learning. My own time in men’s work has been heavily influenced by this tendency. For example, within a year of becoming aware that men’s feminist work was even a thing people did, I became the ‘president’ of the feminist oriented men’s group on my university campus, *Allies at UBC*, and shouldered the bulk of the group’s work for the following two years. But after having read perhaps two feminist books, having organized with one public campaign, and having been peripherally involved in feminist organizing on campus, I was absolutely not yet qualified to run a public men’s group. I see my holding that position as demonstrative of “the rapid—even premature—escalation to positions of leadership and public visibility”⁸ that many men in the work experience.

Recruiting Celebrities

Maggie told me about how “gross” it feels when she sees men in the work held up far higher than those of other genders, who have often been doing the work much longer. She was

⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 140 and 142.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

critical of programs that recruit, for example, athletes as “mentors” in preventing gender-based violence. These types of programs tend to use the celebrity, such as professional and varsity athletes, as the foundation from which to launch educational campaigns around violence. Often players receive a few days of basic training on violence and then travel around facilitating workshops for and giving talks to youth. Maggie’s experience with these programs is that, since the workshops and presentations are run by “people who don’t have a solid analysis,” participants receive sometimes mixed and even problematic messages. She asserted that since “we all know that it takes a long time and continual practice for [those privileged by oppressive systems] to really start to shift perspective and understanding” around power and oppression and their place in these systems, it is important that men have undertaken enough of their personal work and political education to be able to responsibly step into these educational roles. While it may increase the total number of people reached by a campaign to recruit celebrities to do feminist work, the tradeoff is often that the content of the work suffers. For the organizers I spoke with, this tradeoff is seriously worth reconsidering.

Creating Celebrities

While it is frustrating and sometimes problematic when inexperienced men become figureheads for men’s work, there is another area where celebrity culture greatly impacts men’s work. This is when men in the work use what they do as a way of actively making themselves into celebrities and experts. When men take what they have learned from feminism and self-brand it, embrace the pedestal, and use their platform as a means of obtaining extreme personal benefit, Maggie sees this as an erasure of all the work that others organizers have “been doing at often great personal risk for very little money.” In addition, these massive programs tend to package complex feminist analysis and pedagogical material into curriculum that “pander[s] to

the lowest common denominator,” in terms of who the audience is and what the foundational goals are.

This takes place most notably in national and international initiatives such as Jackson Katz’ Mentoring in Violence Prevention (MVP) programming⁹ and the White Ribbon Campaign,¹⁰ but Maggie has seen this at work on much more local levels as well. In the town where she works, she has personally watched as men, some of whom she has worked with directly, appropriate workshop material that has been generated through collaboration between many organizers over many years, and attach their name to it. She has been at conferences and watched “cis-dudes kind of building each other up in the front of the room ... just really showcasing themselves,” with little acknowledgement of the women, trans, and non-binary people present, who made up the vast majority of those in the room.

Maggie recognized that this is a complex dynamic, since so many messages encourage striving for individual advancement. Paul spoke in similar ways of the tendency for men in organizing to be drawn into a celebrity culture:

That’s partly the way our society sets people up, to have celebrities basically, and name recognition and rewards and a whole system of doing that ... in the long-term it’s not movement building work, and it does tend to consolidate power and prestige and legitimacy and credibility among a small handful of folks who are usually very unaccountable in the work that they do ... It’s problematic in some ways for sure.

There is a whole industry built up around celebrities who work with men “around very specific issues,” doing education on sexual assault or domestic violence, but rarely does this lead to actually growing and developing social justice organizing efforts.

⁹ Jackson Katz, Alan Heisterkamp and Michael Fleming, “The Social Justice Roots of the Mentors in Violence Prevention Model and Its Application in a High School Setting,” *Violence Against Women*, 11, no. 6 (2011).

¹⁰ Michael Kaufman, “Successfully Involving Men and Boys to End Violence Against Women: Lessons from Around the World from the White Ribbon Campaign.” Keynote Address at Stop Domestic Violence against Women: Ten Years of Austrian Anti-Violence Legislation in the International Context, Vienna. Nov. 5-7, 2007.

The Tear Down

While men in social justice work tend to receive disproportionate praise, rewards, and career escalation, there also tends to be a “flipside” to these tendencies: there is a propensity for men to simultaneously experience extreme mistrust, skepticism, and criticism.¹¹ It is “a pattern that happens all the time,” Nick explained, “men get involved in feminism ... and we’re pedestalized by some people, and other people are like ‘fuck you, you’re not on a pedestal,’ and they rip the pedestal out from under us.” He recalled how frustrating this dynamic felt with regards to organizing the Men’s Circle. Some people really held up the Circle and the people in it, and other people were “kind of like ‘who the fuck are these people to be doing this?’” These tendencies can manifest in harsh public criticism of men’s work projects, often online, as well as in more intimate interpersonal dynamics with specific organizers being targeted.

While a few organizers may proactively tear down men who they see as gaining accolades for their work, many more carry a general mistrust and skepticism of men in feminist work. Chris told me that, in his experience, “you do open yourself up” to a high risk of criticism as a man identifying as a feminist organizer. Early on in his time as a feminist organizer, when he would identify himself “as a guy doing feminism, the general reaction from the majority of women would be ‘go fuck yourself.’ Like, ‘I don’t believe you, I don’t trust you. Men who say they’re doing this are just trying to sleep with women.’” This skepticism is often grounded in prior disappointing and hurtful experiences with feminist men. There are also theoretical reasons that some mistrust men’s involvement. For example, Melanie McCarry notes the danger that even well-meaning men’s contributions to critical work on patriarchy and men’s violence will become nothing more than another place for men to validate and centre themselves and to contribute to the patriarchal construction of men, rather than participate in a truly critical

¹¹ Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz, *Some Men*, 152.

assessment of unjust gender relations. She questions whether it is possible for men to truly critically engage in resisting patriarchy, “because ultimately they have no real motivation to subject their own practices to critical scrutiny.”¹² Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz note that others in the anti-violence movement share this skepticism.¹³

The Men’s Circle received criticism along these lines, that the men involved in organizing it were using it to centre and uplift themselves. According to Nick, organizers in the broader community were often suspicious of and second-guessing “the choices that had been made and the ways that the men’s circle is structured,” where the assumption was that the men were framing themselves as experts and the project as the perfect solution to heteropatriarchy. Chris told me of other men’s groups that have experienced similarly mistrustful responses from feminists in their communities. On one campus he visited, there was a new men’s group, “trying to do gender justice, trying to engage as feminists.” The other anti-violence organizers on campus simultaneously complained to Chris that there needed to be more investment from men in feminist work, while dismissing the members of the nascent men’s group as potential political allies. Chris saw this as an example of the disheartening impacts that these dynamics can have on organizers: “It was just kind of like an illustration of just like how challenging this work is. I mean here’s a group of men who are trying to do gender justice, trying to, trying to engage as feminists. They’re stumbling all over themselves, and then even women who want men to be involved aren’t seeing them as potential allies to get involved.”

By pointing out these tendencies to mistrust, I am not, nor were the organizers I spoke with, faulting women and other feminist organizers for making this work difficult for men. The mistrust of and skepticism towards men organizers are, in many ways, the result of

¹² Melanie McCarry, “Masculinity Studies and Male Violence: Critique or Collusion?” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 30 (2007): 408.

¹³ Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz, *Some Men*, 153.

heteropatriarchy and other systems of domination. As Paul put it, “look at history; I mean there are all kinds of reasons why [women would be uncomfortable with men’s groups]. You know, mostly when we get together we go out and kill people, to be most blunt about it.” Having spent their lives dealing with the countless ways that heteropatriarchy and other systems of oppression has lead men to uphold their own dominance, it is often difficult to switch to trusting the actions and intentions of men who profess to be on the same team.

One specific source of skepticism about men in feminist work is grounded in the fact that so many people in anti-violence work are survivors of gender-based violence, and if they are not personally, they certainly know many who are. Given this and the fact that men perpetrate the vast majority of violence, it is no surprise that men in anti-violence work are “feared as potential perpetrators of violence.”¹⁴ Organizers I spoke with also discussed how men in feminism do sometimes use their status to enable and obscure their borderline and outright abusive behaviour. What is more, there are many instances in which men engaged in the work have been exposed as enacting violence privately while participating in anti-violence work publicly.¹⁵ Understandably, both men’s potential and actual violence often makes it very difficult for women to imagine men being any different than they have been in the past. This tends to inhibit trust and instill skepticism about men’s involvement in feminist work. As Chris put it, hearing from a man that he is engaging with feminist work “raises up [their] defenses.”

Further, when men do try to engage in feminism, they bring whatever unchecked oppressive baggage they may have, such that, as Chris pointed out, “overwhelmingly women’s experience with men trying to engage in feminism is one of heartbreak and political frustration.” Even the most well-intentioned and self-reflective men, doing their best not to cause harm and to

¹⁴ Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz, *Some Men*, 154.

¹⁵ For example, Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz, *Some Men*, 158; Cecilia D’Anastasio, “What Happens When?”

be accountable to their actions, must grapple with the interplay between their status as feminist men and their inculcation into oppressive systems, inculcation which encourages behaviours that reinforce their status and uphold these hierarchies. Chris sees that this well-founded suspicion of men means it therefore takes “a while to build trust” among organizers.

The women interviewed by Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz also contend that the mistrust and scrutiny with which they view men in the work is “not *extra* scrutiny.” It is the “appropriate response” based on the fact that their conditioning as men means they make “many more errors” in the work, and feel entitled to take over leadership roles and to “stomp on” and disrespect others’ leadership.¹⁶ Since feminist men are often highly visible in their work, sometimes as the public faces of feminist organizations, they are thought to be exemplars of “a different sort of man,” and, being in this position, “comes with a certain responsibility.”¹⁷ Thus, these organizers contend, rather than being unfair, the scrutiny of men organizers is an appropriate means of holding them to the standards of feminist manhood. When I asked Maggie about this kind of suspicion, she too framed it as “a reasonable suspension of trust ... that there needs to be consistent and ongoing demonstrated action and relationship building to gain that trust.” For her, “that’s the crux of the work,” gaining the trust of those oppressed under heteropatriarchy and other systems of oppression.

Call-Out Culture

Although she believes that the mistrust with which men are often held is warranted given the oppressive structural context, Maggie also acknowledged “a certain kind of activism” that tends towards “calling-out in a way that is not productive ... and [is] very much like ‘you did this thing and my analysis says that’s fucked and you suck.’” This tendency towards attacking

¹⁶ Messner et al, *Some Men*, 152.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

individuals, often publicly and with much spectacle, for certain statements or behaviours that are considered oppressive forms what is known as call-out culture. Writing about call-out culture, Asam Ahmad identifies the call-out as a tool for the strict enforcement of who is progressive or radical enough, in such a way that it is impossible for anybody to live up to expectations all the time:

It isn't an exaggeration to say that there is a mild totalitarian undercurrent not just in call-out culture but also in how progressive communities police and define the bounds of who's in and who's out. More often than not, this boundary is constructed through the use of appropriate language and terminology—a language and terminology that are forever shifting and almost impossible to keep up with. In such a context, it is impossible not to fail at least some of the time.¹⁸

In their recent work on dynamics within social movements, Nick Montgomery and Carla Bergman speak about call-out culture as one symptom among many of what they call “rigid radicalism,” a toxic current within organizing. Rigid radicalism speaks to the phenomenon within organizing spaces through which “radicalism becomes an ideal and everyone becomes deficient in comparison.”¹⁹ Rigid radicalism “compels us to search ourselves and others ruthlessly for flaws, errors, and inconsistencies. It crushes experimentation and curiosity. It is hostile to difference, complexity, and nuance.”²⁰ Alternatively, rigid radicalism frames itself as “the most complex, the most nuanced, and everyone else is simplistic and stupid, lacking the most radical analysis.”²¹ Either way, rigid radicalism stifles connection and promotes suspicion and hostility.

Montgomery and Bergman trace how adherence to two “related and overlapping” phenomena feed rigid radicalism. First, rigid ideology’s tendency to “generate certainties and

¹⁸ Asam Ahmad, “A Note on Call-Out Culture,” *Briarpatch*, March, 2015, <https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/a-note-on-call-out-culture>

¹⁹ Nick Montgomery and Carla Bergman, *Joyful Militancy: Building Resistance in Toxic Times* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, Forthcoming), 20.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

fixed answers that close off the potential for experimentation” contributes to the rigidity of radicalism.²² They argue that, “from this perspective, ideology is a screen that limits the possibility of open-ended encounters, where mutual learning and transformation can take place. Its inducement of conformity tends towards closed, stagnant little enclaves.”²³ Second, Montgomery and Bergman trace moralism, the other contributor to rigid radicalism, to its Christian roots. While most social justice spaces tend not to be overtly religious, rigid radicalism is fostered by a secular version of the same guilt and shame that underpins religious morality, such that “the affective structure of *lack, guilt, fear, and purism* remains intact.”²⁴ This “liberal morality” finds its way into movement spaces and “replaces the transformative power of dignity with moral indignation and its tendencies of shame and self-righteousness.”²⁵ Liberal morality reframes organizers and their efforts in countless ways that undermine their power. For instance, it “pathologizes anger, hatred and destruction, turning non-violence into a moral imperative rather than a tactic.”²⁶ And it converts oppression into “questions of individual prejudice” rather than acknowledging them as structural issues.²⁷ But what develops within social justice spaces, as a response to liberal morality, is “an anti-liberal morality,” complete with the same reliance on guilt, shame, and rigidity.²⁸ As they put it, “the targets and the enemies change, but the structure remains.”²⁹ This morality leads organizers on the search “for any shred of complicity with Empire,” and tends to surface as

an incessant search for oppression and a ceaseless attack on anyone who is found guilty, including oneself ... Call-outs and radical take-downs proliferate. Indignation grows: everything is corrupt and tainted; nothing is as it should be. This ‘as it should be’ is no longer determined by

²² *Ibid.*, 187

²³ *Ibid.*, 200

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 205

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 214

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 285

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 206

priests and pastors, but by the secular certainty that one is on the right side of a moral drama between good and evil.³⁰

Feminist work that is grounded in rigid ideology can become toxic in precisely the ways described by Montgomery and Bergman. Anti-oppression analysis and terminology can be wielded against others who do not measure up, shaming becomes a comfortable and often used tactic, and organizers become hyper-vigilant for the mistakes and faults of their fellow organizers. This current “can activate and intensify a climate of fear, shame, and self-righteousness,” in which participating becomes exhausting and hurtful.³¹

The way that this dynamic often manifests with regards to men specifically is that their behaviour and being in general gets reduced to their structural position. Ahmad writes of the call-out as follows: “one action becomes a reason to pass judgment on someone’s entire being, as if there is no difference between a community member or friend and a random stranger walking down the street (who is of course also someone’s friend).”³² In the extreme, men’s behaviour that does not fit the perfectly feminist ideal is reduced to nothing more than the result of men being living, embodied instances of all that is wrong with oppression. When a man’s feelings are hurt, it is nothing more than ‘man tears’ and should be met with indifference or snide comments; when a man is displaying defensive behaviour, he must be deflecting; when a man does not communicate his feelings clearly and immediately, he must be withholding and manipulating. It is not that these things are *never* true, only that if people adhere to rigid ideology, they must *always* be true. What this rigidity precludes, of course, are responses that acknowledges that men have their own histories, families of origin, personality quirks, insecurities, and feelings that can be hurt, that many men are doing the best they can to learn and

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 211

³² Ahmad, “Call-Out Culture.”

grow and be responsive to the people around them. When men are viewed *only* as their position within a system that privileges them, this is when they experience the most hurtful kinds of responses from their fellow organizers.

Calling-In

Ahmad recommends *calling-in* as an orientation that more compassionately addresses someone in our community who does something hurtful or that we view as oppressive. He believes that *calling-in* is “a less disposable way of holding each other accountable.”³³ To understand calling-in, I first want to introduce another concept utilized by Montgomery and Bergman. *Common notions* are essentially what they propose as a counter point to rigid ideology’s lack of sensitivity to context and obsession with the correct behaviours. To contrast with this insensitivity, common notions are “shared values and sensibilities that are flexible and based in relationships with human and non-human others.”³⁴ Further, “to have a common notion is to be able to participate more fully in the web of relations and affections in which we are enmeshed.”³⁵ Where ideology and moralism would demand that the person pointing out the perceived harm follow some pre-ordained protocol, or determine who is right and who is wrong, or hold the other person to a rigidly defined set of consequences and demand certain ways of handling those consequences—all things commonly present during a call-out—common notions sensitize the person to their situation; they become capable of navigating their situation in a way that is responsive to the various factors impacting it. Thus calling-in is a common notion simply in that, when calling-in, a person is attuned to the contexts and relationships involved in a situation.

In his essay, Ahmad refers to social justice writer Ngọc Loan Trần, who initially

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Montgomery and Bergman, *Joyful Militancy*, 132

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 32

popularized the concept of calling-in. Like Ahmad, Montgomery and Bergman, Trần does not propose that organizers view calling-in as a replacement for the prolific call out: “I do think that it’s possible to have multiple tools, strategies, and methods existing simultaneously. It’s about being strategic, weighing the stakes and figuring out what we’re trying to build and how we are going to do it together.”³⁶ Rather than providing a set alternative protocol, the invitation to practice calling-in is an invitation to address somebody’s behaviour in a way that is attuned and attentive to the various relationships and contexts involved. Maggie spoke clearly to this invitation when she referred to the importance of being attentive to context when addressing harm. She explained that organizers should be clear about what the goals and contexts of that specific call-in (or -out) are: “I think that the people developing their practices of calling-in is important, and I think that there are you know more effective ways to do that, some more effective and some less effective ways, and probably it depends on what people’s goals are.”

As I have mentioned, calling-in is a particularly important tool for addressing the harmful behaviour of friends, colleagues, and comrades. For Trần, when the goal is that a friend or comrade or another person we care about learn from their behaviour and move through their own hurt, pain, or confusion—all which may cause defensiveness—then it is important to utilize compassionate ways to call each other in:

Mistakes are mistakes; they deepen the wounds we carry. I know that for me when these mistakes are committed by people who I am in community with, it hurts even more. But these are people I care deeply about and want to see on the other side of the hurt, pain, and trauma: I am willing to offer compassion and patience as a way to build the road we are taking but have never seen before.³⁷

Ahmed also writes about using compassionate and creative ways to deal with one another. He frames these more compassionate ways of holding each other as a counterpoint to the reduction

³⁶ Ngọc Loan Trần, “Calling IN: A Less Disposable Way of Holding Each Other Accountable,” *Black Girl Dangerous*, December, 2013, <http://www.blackgirldangerous.org/2013/12/calling-less-disposable-way-holding-accountable>

³⁷ *Ibid.*

of individuals to their location in systems of oppression, which I identified as a problematic tendency inherent to organizing spaces. He states that

no matter the wrong we are naming, there are ways to call people out that do not reduce individuals to agents of social advantage. There are ways of calling people out that are compassionate and creative, and that recognize the whole individual instead of viewing them simply as representations of the systems from which they benefit.³⁸

It is worth mentioning again that a call-in is *not* simply a replacement for a call-out.

Someone attuned to context may still decide that in a certain situation a call-out is the right thing to do. Or they may deem it inappropriate for a man's upset feelings to be processed in that particular space, or that a specific case of defensiveness should be met with firm boundaries and that the defensive person should be left to do their own work. What is different, however, is that these are not the *only* options, or the *right* options, in the way that rigid ideology and moralism prescribe them. The number of ways to address these situations expands in direct relationship with the creativity of the people involved. That is the gift of calling-in and the context-sensitive orientation towards addressing harm.

Intersectional Feminism

Given the tenuous position men in feminism hold, it is not easy to speak aloud any structural critiques of intersectional feminism. Of course, there are good reasons to be suspicious of men's critique of feminism; the majority of their critiques *are* rooted in anti-feminist backlash, and even those who are supportive of feminism can often fall into problematic defensiveness and denial. But to cast *all* critique as backlash is to enshrine feminism as perfect and free from any need to grow and develop. Understanding the precarious position that voicing these critiques puts a person in, a few of the organizers I spoke with brought up structural tendencies within contemporary feminism that contribute to the particular kinds of problems that

³⁸ Ahmad, "Call-Out Culture."

men face. Gus recalled first encountering the idea that straight, white men could not possibly offer anything to radical social justice work: “You know I have always remembered with horror the quote ... [that] says something along the lines of, ‘I have no idea what possible revolutionary role white, heterosexual men could play in undoing interlocking systems of oppression.’” Being at the nexus of so many privileged systems, this line of thinking implies, precludes a person from being truly invested in or effective at radical social justice work. This current of doubt is at the core of the structural issues within feminist organizing that make being involved difficult for men. As Gus put it,

that informs how often times I have felt like that discourse reminds me and means that I am being looked at as the embodiment of everything that people are wanting to transform. And that’s an anxious place to be. It’s a place where, if things aren’t going well for you, or they’re hard for you, or you feel hurt, you don’t feel like there is a structural opening for you to share that hurt or pain because the framework is telling you that you are the least hurt and the least oppressed person in the room, and so how can you express ouches and disappointments and hurts given that?

What Gus is saying here is that the doubt about white heterosexual men’s involvement in feminist work contributes to a situation in which he and other men become reduced to their positions within social hierarchies. Once this happens, he feels that there is not space for him to have his full range of experiences and emotions, specifically of being hurt and struggling.

Gus, like the others, was very clear that he was not condemning intersectional feminism as whole; he and everyone else I spoke with believe strongly in the analysis and praxis that has come out of that discourse. What Gus is expressing is what he sees as “a tendential pattern” within the discourse and the spaces that take it up, for people to be treated in ways that make them feel “unwanted or unworthy.” He summarized this dynamic well:

And again, when I’m saying this I’m thinking again about how anti-racist feminism, as a discourse, it’s really important and it’s true; it’s a true thing, and it comes with certain structural challenges that when people like [privileged white men] are unheard and unvalued or whatever, that’s not going to necessarily be the most prioritized kind of pain or harm in the room. There’s all kinds of good reasons for that ... [And] if we for a moment just like lift off the whole privilege-oppression thing, and we’re humans with each other, when you’re not valued, seen,

heard, known, loved, it sucks. And sometimes some of the reasons why you aren't valued, seen, known, heard, and loved have to do with ways in which people have been hurt by people that look like you, and then you get kind of collateral damaged with that. And those are difficult things to hold, because people aren't always fair in how they decide that you're conducting yourself. And there isn't always a way to feel like that can be addressed, and so there's just pain that can accumulate, in all of that messiness, that is really hard to let go of, because there isn't structural discourse kinds of ways for that to be let out.

David spoke about how this tendency plays out in many organizing spaces he inhabits. He referred to it as men (and other people with privilege) being invited to share their feelings and experiences and simultaneously being told there is no room for them. "We were both inviting it and the room was saying there's no room for you," he said of his experience in a white caucus in a mixed race group. "There's something painful about that." Thinking about how so many people feel alienated by radical organizing spaces, David realized in that moment that, "oh this is the moment where someone says there isn't space for me here."

To be clear, it is not that David or Gus thinks that organizers can always (or ever) create spaces where nobody is going to feel hurt sometimes. As Gus put it: "I don't want my baseline expectation to be that I'm never going to be hurt, or that every hurt is going to be resolved." Instead, what they are talking about are the detrimental effects of there being *no* space in which someone feels they can legitimately take up space, and how spaces tend to hold hurt feelings when they occur. Feminist politics that focus on identity in these ways create structural avenues through which some people's feelings get prioritized and others ignored. In many cases, this is warranted, given that men tend to dominate every space, even those that are created explicitly for others. But as with many of the things I discuss in this thesis, context is important.

The Effects

The negative effects of many of the toxic dynamics within organizing spaces are of course not only felt by men. "If you talk to a lot of people who have been involved in political organizing they will tell you lots of experiences where they did not feel safe, they didn't feel

supported, they didn't feel heard, and left feeling fucking shitty," Colin told me. There is a tendency for everyone in these spaces to be "super repressed and suspicious," explained David. Yet as I explained above, some of the dynamics tend to be experienced primarily or exclusively by men. Further, the *effects* of all of these complex and sometimes toxic dynamics can be particularly difficult for men. Heteropatriarchy and other oppressive systems have stunted men's emotional fluency, resulting in a diminished ability to withstand and navigate complex and emotionally difficult situations. This is why I stress in Chapter Four how important it is that men cultivate their emotional resilience.

What is important to note, however, is that under certain conditions that are often reproduced in organizer spaces, men's lack of emotional resilience actually gets reinforced. Although feminism as a political framework provides men the opportunity—and in a sense requires that they embrace it—to develop their emotional landscape and skills, the on-the-ground social dynamics in feminist spaces often do not allow for this. Like I described above, stifling phrases like "man tears" and mindsets like the utter lack of understanding of defensiveness, often result in men experiencing *more* emotional distancing, confusion, and shut down, rather than the liberatory potential offered by feminism.

This is another conversation that tends to be really difficult to have. The either-or kind of thinking that frames feminism and feminist spaces as wholly liberating, on the one hand, or oppressive towards men, on the other, is drastically oversimplified. What men experience in organizing spaces is clearly not *oppression*; perhaps there are similarities in how individuals experience their contexts, such as with hurt, shame, or helplessness, but opting into a subculture that does not always feel good and in which the other people do not always treat you fairly is clearly not the same as being born into a society that structurally marginalizes and disadvantages

you. While it is not oppression exactly, the fact remains that many common dynamics within organizing spaces are not conducive to men's growth, or to their ability to effectively participate in feminist work.

Another reason this conversation tends to be difficult to have is that all of these dynamics and conversations take place within a broader context in which women and other femme people are expected to do the majority or all of the emotional labour, such that men end up feeling entitled to having their feelings prioritized in every context and at any moment. This makes it difficult to talk about men's hurt feelings in organizing spaces, because the implied and often unspoken solution tends to be that everyone should stop what they are doing and tend to the men. I am *not* proposing this as the solution. What I *am* proposing is that a common notions type approach to men's feelings and experiences in organizing spaces enables organizers to hold this conversation with more nuance, and that perhaps this will allow for more relationally attuned, compassionate, and productive solutions to these problems.

Shame

Shame should be a central piece of these conversations about men in social justice spaces. The proliferation of shame and the general lack of tools for dealing with it contribute heavily to the toxic dynamics within these spaces. R.L. Stephens writes about social justice organizers' ("the left's") "obsession with shame," and how shame is circulated and proliferated in the ways that organizers treat one another.³⁹ Before analyzing how shame circulates in these spaces, it is worth considering what exactly shame is and what is likely to produce it. To experience shame is essentially to believe your own inferiority or fundamental bad-ness. Shame is a complex experience, which is implicated in many other emotions (for example,

³⁹ R.L. Stephens, "The Left's Self-Destructive Obsession with Shame," *Orchestrated Pulse*. August 1, 2014, www.orchestratedpulse.com/2014/08/shame-left

embarrassment is mild shame, shyness is anticipatory shame, and mortification is unendurable shame).⁴⁰ What is important to understand is that there are certain kinds of conditions that are predictive of a shame response. One of these is the presence of “a viewing, judging other” (who can often be the self-critical part of ourselves). When a person feels that their whole identity is being judged negatively, this is especially likely to produce shame. Note what I have said about call-out culture and the performative spectacle that tends to accompany harsh criticism. It is no surprise that shame would be a typical reaction to such an experience.

When experiencing shame, people tend to behave in any of four ways: they withdraw, attack self, avoid, or attack others.⁴¹ These typical responses to shame are in fact all ways to avoid honestly acknowledging what is going on inside when experiencing shame. Withdrawal and isolation, self put-down, escape into drug and alcohol, and lashing out and blaming others (as examples) are all fairly effective ways of removing the spotlight from our low self-esteem, hurt feelings, regret, and so on. When a person responds to shame in any of these ways, what they are doing is leaving shame unacknowledged and unaddressed.⁴²

Stephens argues convincingly that shame—specifically, unacknowledged shame—is both a principle cause and typical effect of toxic dynamics between organizers. First, I want to consider shame as the result of these dynamics. Variations on the four responses to shame can be seen in many of organizers’ responses to the difficulties of organizing. I spoke with a few organizers who referenced thoughts about quitting organizing. In large part, this was because they did not know how to cope with how difficult many of the dynamics between organizers can be.

Organizers tend to go through episodes of hopelessness, not seeing any way through difficult

⁴⁰ Robert Stolorow, “The Shame Family: Many Emotional States Have Shame at their Core,” *Psychology Today*, October 5, 2013. www.psychologytoday.com/blog/feeling-relating-existing/201310/the-shame-family

⁴¹ Holly VanScoy, “Shame: The Quintessential Emotion,” *Psych Central*, Accessed June 29, 2017, <https://psychcentral.com/lib/shame-the-quintessential-emotion>

⁴² R.L. Stephens, “The Left’s Self-Destructive Obsession with Shame.”

relationships with other organizers or ways to do work that would not elicit extremely critical reactions. Others, although quitting has never felt like an option, have felt intense anxiety, depression, and a strong need to withdraw from organizer social settings. I heard from individuals about working with therapists to address the emotional toll organizing was taking on them, and I heard about men retreating from public projects due to the exhaustion of dealing with the intense criticism. Organizers told me about how incredibly vigilant they are to avoid doing or saying anything that might trigger the kinds of intense public criticism that can crop up seemingly at any moment. For many, the fear of making mistakes and opening themselves up to whatever punishment they may receive inhibits them from doing anything at all.

The despair and doubt often produced by trying to engage in a politic whose central analysis is ambivalent about whether you have anything meaningful to contribute can be immobilizing. Like Gus above, Julian told me he sometimes doubts “how much revolutionary potential white men [have] in general.” “Like, is it really worth anybody’s time to work with white men?” he asked. He went on to tell me that he is not totally convinced it is, that “maybe it just makes sense to do more damage control type stuff, versus actual long-term leadership development and skills building.” Of course, there are plenty of different ways men can engage with feminism, and what organizers choose to work on can and should depend on their context—again, a common notions approach. But the shame response that casts doubt that there is *any* useful way for them to be involved tends to lead to a lot of confusion about what to do, where to do it, and with whom, as well as undermine organizers’ motivation and overall capacity to get and stay engaged in social justice efforts.

While shame seems to be a major effect of toxic organizer dynamics, it can also be identified as one of the primary causes of these dynamics. Unacknowledged shame, according to

Stephens, is at the root of call-out culture. Shame, he argues, originates from oppressive systems: “Oppressive power systems confer a status of inferiority onto select groups, which is then internalized and taken for granted—thus strengthening the dominant group’s stranglehold on power.”⁴³ Thus one of the principle effects of oppression is internalized inferiority and the shame that this produces. It is important to remember that shame and a reaction to it is not a personal failing on the part of the individual: these are systemic structures of oppression that *produce* shame.

Toxic dynamics between organizers are often the result of cycles of shame. The shame experienced by marginalized organizers is transferred, usually unconsciously, onto offending organizers with more privilege, and in turn these organizers respond with predictable shame reactions. They defend or distract or self-chastise or isolate or attack, and this unsurprisingly evokes more negative responses from the people calling them out and probably from other additional witnesses. This results in the relational breakdown that organizers are so familiar with, and nobody feels seen or understood.

What is important to understand is that shame undermines the ability to be responsive and relationally attuned people. It makes acting on common notions nearly impossible. Shame takes a person out of their unique context and rigidifies their worthlessness and the hopelessness of the situation. For example, when men consistently receive the message—including from other organizers and from the books they read—that, because they are men, they have nothing positive to contribute to efforts towards a more just world, they sometimes internalize this belief. Because internalizing this shame inhibits their ability to be responsive and effective people, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that they have nothing to offer. Thus, learning to identify and effectively discharge shame is key for becoming a productive and thriving organizer.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

I believe that mentorship from other organizers is one of the most promising ways for organizers to mitigate and overcome shame. The support, validation, and insights from older generations of organizers, or simply organizers with varied perspectives, directly counteract the isolation and hopelessness that accompanies the shame response. As I've noted, Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz propose intergenerational mentorship as one of the defining features of the social justice paradigm,⁴⁴ and the organizers I spoke with affirmed how important mentorship is for social justice work. The next section concentrates on mentorship and the various ways organizers are relating to it.

Mentorship

Another of my guiding questions going into this project was around how men in feminism are experiencing mentorship from other organizers. I wanted to know if organizers in men's work had mentors who were supporting them, how this works if they were, and if organizers found this to be a valuable experience. What I learned was that, while everyone seems to agree that mentorship is an important component of social justice organizing, intentional mentorship relationships are lacking in the lives of the majority of organizers. Further, what people actually mean when they say mentor seems to vary. In this section, I look at how organizers are defining mentorship, and propose that, in its relative absence, organizers are looking to less formal channels of support.

Defining Mentorship

For many, experience, perspective, and knowledge are the important components provided by a mentor. Paul described mentorship as “a relationship of mutual support, but also based on recognition that some people have more experience in a particular [thing], or life

⁴⁴ Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz, *Some Men*, 184.

experience, or whatever, and can provide support for folks who are going through similar kinds of things.” Chris was emphatic that men’s work needs “living, breathing, reflective” examples that organizers can look to, where other men are saying, “I’ve done these things, and here’s what that’s like and here’s what I’ve learned in terms of how we can do it better. Here’s my experience around working with men in my community.” As Julian put it, “I think there’s a lot of value in [having mentors]. I mean, if only so that we as organizers don’t continually repeat the same mistakes ... You know just having some historical understanding ... is valuable.”

Similarly, Gus spoke of mentors being those who carry historical perspective that can help newer and younger organizers do their work better. “People who have been at it for quite a while and so can situate the thing that you’re experiencing in this broader framework that helps you get perspective ... like a lived historical framework of where we were at. That seems like a nice thing that a mentor can do,” he said. He thinks of mentors as “combining like experience and knowledge into wisdom. And so there’s a kind of wisdom they have about the thing that you want to cultivate that around. So they have answers to your questions and they’ve experienced the thing that you’re grappling with, and so can reflect good questions back at you and provide sometimes ... support and reassurance, perspective.” Mentors are often older, often more experienced organizers who have been through and thought about similar things, who can provide tools, guidance, support, perspective, encouragement and reassurance. That said, what struck me about my conversations with organizers about mentorship was how beyond this basic understanding, the concept got a bit muddled. The following sections are my attempt at clarifying what exactly organizers meant when they talked about mentorship, and how they are being impacted by the current state of mentorship within organizing.

Formal and Informal Mentorship

The ways organizers spoke to me about mentorship in their work gave me the impression that there are two general types of mentorship, what I am calling *formal* and *informal* mentorship. Formal mentorship is a relationship in which it is clear and explicit that there is a person with more experience who is giving support and guidance. These types of relationships are much less common than informal mentorship relationships, and seem to form most often through official channels such as work or established social justice groups. For example, in the Anne Braden program of the Catalyst project—a white anti-racist training program in the Bay Area—a few men I spoke with received formal mentorship from other men who had been through the program previously. Similarly, Kingsley found formal mentorship from the prevention manager at the Victoria Sexual Assault Centre when he began working there. Occasionally, younger organizers seek out and approach directly those with more experience to request some sort of mentorship relationship. For instance, Julian approached Paul at one point a few years before we spoke, and they met regularly over the course of about two years. Although organizers do identify formal mentors they have had, most I spoke with could not identify more than one or two, if any.

Informal mentorship relationships are far more common. Everyone I spoke to had experienced these relationships, which themselves fall into two types. The first type I call *peer mentorship*. These informal mentorship relationships look more like friendships than they do formal mentorship. The relationship is defined by both people mutually benefitting from the experience and support of the other. The mentor-mentee hierarchy of formal mentorship is rejected in less formal peer mentorship; often the individuals in these relationships refuse the

term ‘mentor’ entirely. Mutuality is therefore the predominant quality in peer mentorship relationships.

Paul described the having had many “peer mentors ... folks that were like mentors to me but it wasn’t such an intentional relationship ... they were friends or older folks who were teachers or community activists that I was around you know, learned from and could ask questions of, that kind of thing.” These kinds of relationships tend most often to be between organizers of similar age and experience level. Although two people may share age and degree of experience, everyone brings with them different knowledges and perspectives, and this is the benefit to having peer mentorship type relationships. Paul explained, speaking about his experience at the Oakland Men’s Project, “we brought in different life experiences, different political frameworks, different sources of skills and things so that we could learn from each other.”

The second type of informal mentorship relationship is more accurately described as *role modeling*. Role models are essentially reference points that, as Gus explained, “show you the right way to do something, or a good way to do something.” He described role models as “less intimate” than mentors. Having a role model “doesn’t seem the same thing of like asking questions and puzzling with, and that kind of element seems to be missing,” Gus said. He has many role models in his organizing, people who he thinks are adept at something that he wants to cultivate more of in himself. These relationships differ from peer mentorship in that he “wouldn’t necessarily ask them” about these things directly; rather he would just “watch them and try to do it [himself].”

Although formal mentorship and peer mentorship require some active attention, Paul explained that in a basic sense all men are role models to somebody, whether they put their attention to it or not. In the case of men's work, those doing the work publicly

are role models for a whole lot of young people around us, not just in our families not just the people we talk to directly but people who see us, young people who notice us or hear about us or in conversations with us. So, being a role model is something that we don't have a lot of control over; it's something that we need to recognize is happening, right? [Whereas] being a mentor is something that's a direct relationship ... one on one and you know there's a stronger personal relationship there.

Lacking Mentorship

What became clear to me during my conversations was that formal mentorship across generations of men's work organizers is severely lacking. This affirmed my own experience of not having older men as mentors. I have had many invaluable mentors who are women and queer folks, and who are mostly in my own age bracket. But older mentors from whom I can learn, and especially older men, have been few and far between so far in my time as an organizer. Those organizers I spoke with definitely shared this experience. For the most part, they could identify a long list of mentors they have had who are not cis-men, but could rarely point to one who was, and most of their mentors were within a handful of years of their own age.

When organizers spoke about lacking mentorship, it became clear that what they were referring to was formal mentorship. Most of them shared plenty of examples of informal mentorship, peer mentorship specifically. For some, even finding role models has been difficult, while others have looked to some of the more mainstream, celebrity men who are doing work around heteropatriarchy as role models. Whether or not men's work organizers have found good role models in the work, it holds true that formal mentorship appears to be lacking in the lives of the majority of them.

It seems like, in the absence of formal mentorship, organizers focus on informal, peer group inspiration and finding role models as a stand in for mentorship. But informal mentorship is simply not the same thing as formal mentorship. The age and experience factors that are so crucial for organizers' learning are absent. But when organizers are unclear about the different types of mentorship relationships, it is easy to become placated by having peer mentorship and sometimes good role models—both of which are important in their own right!—and to discontinue any search for mentors from an older, more experienced cohort.

There are various reasons that formal mentorship is lacking. The lack of mentorship is a result of organizers in both would-be mentor and would-be mentee positions underestimating the importance of mentorship. On the one hand, those who would be mentors are not taking on this role in an intentional way. As someone who has been in social justice work for decades, Paul has reflected a lot on what it means to mentor younger generations of organizers, and unfortunately he does not see a lot of his peers moving into these roles:

I see that a lot in my generation that a lot of folks have not stepped up to support younger leadership ... Often people in my generation either get in positions of leadership and hold on until they literally pass out or die, or they get burned out and they leave but they don't stay [connected]. So there's no in-between around actually mentoring leadership and a younger generation of folks.

For a lot of younger organizers who want mentors, then, they are difficult to find. David shared that he is continually looking for older mentors and role models, what he called “embodied reference points,” who he can look to for examples and guidance around how he can engage with feminism. Unfortunately, he has not found many white men who he would say have done the deep emotional work that he would look up to, a situation he called “sad but true.” Gus also lamented how difficult it is to locate older mentors: “People leave the movement, and it's not that they don't exist but I don't know where they are because they've left. And that's a really [major] thing that the dominant order does, is break political communities apart.” For various

reasons, including burn out and finding better paying jobs outside of grassroots work, many veteran organizers spend their time away from the contexts in which grassroots social justice work is happening.

Maggie identified another tricky problem that arises when looking to older generations for mentorship. The people she believes should be mentoring her in her anti-violence work, white women of the older generation, do not necessarily hold the political perspectives that she would want from a mentor. She explained:

When I think of the white women across generations with whom I find myself in contact through anti-violence work... they don't often hold the frameworks that are important to me. And yet I want to have mentorship in how to engage deeply in a continual process of unlearning and undoing white supremacy in my actions, relationships, work. So... I don't know how [mentorship] develops where, you know, folks coming out of second wave feminism would be able to mentor an emergent social justice anti-oppressive movement, or intersectional movement.

Kingsley finds himself faced with a similar problem. As a trans man, he is particularly attuned to the way in which many men of the older generation of organizers have not kept up with changing analysis in terms of queer and trans feminisms. So it is not simply that would-be mentors are not around; not everyone from previous cohorts of organizers have burnt out or left organizing. Younger organizers unfortunately do not necessarily see older organizers doing the work required to keep up with often-rapidly changing social and political contexts.

It is not just that would be mentors are not moving into these roles, or that those who do are not the kinds of mentors younger organizers are looking for. There is a devaluation of mentorship at both ends of the relationship, such that younger generations also do not necessarily seek out the kinds of guidance older mentors would provide. Nick barely thought about mentors until he was in his mid-twenties and had been an organizer for years. Suddenly, he realized that he did not have anybody in his life that is older and more experienced,

“committed to the same kinds of like struggles and activities and forms of life” that he is, from whom he would want to receive mentorship. Nick recognized that his previous attitude towards mentorship is common among organizers, and one that contributes to the intergenerational mentorship gap that appears endemic to social justice organizing spaces currently. He said, “I think that the flipside of not having mentors [available] is being ... the way that I was in my early-twenties, and not thinking that I even needed them or that I wanted them ... Yeah, it goes both ways and I think; you know people have to see that they need and want mentors and mentors have to see themselves as people who can mentor.” Paul also recognized this dismissive attitude towards mentorship as “pretty common. You know when you’re coming up you don’t think that folks significantly older than you have anything that’s relevant because you have all the answers.”

When people on all sides devalue mentorship and mentorship relationships do not form, organizers and their efforts suffer. The negative consequences that arise from the absence of mentorship are of two general types. First, the lessons and insights gained with experience are lost. When mentorship relationships across generations of organizers do not form, knowledge does not pass from older to younger generations of organizers. “We lose information and experience when people aren’t passing on intergenerational, cross-generational stories and histories, then we lose a lot of the essential insights and learnings from those periods,” Paul told me. Consequently, organizers are bound to make more of the same mistakes their older counterparts did, or will waste energy on recreating what has already been tested rather than building on what was learned.

Second, there is a subtler, less tangible loss. It is the validation organizers can get from more experienced mentors, the empathy they can provide having felt some of the same hard

feelings and dealt with the same toxic dynamics. This can come from simply sharing spaces with those who have learned to see and address their unconscious patterns, or those who are more vulnerable, or more and attuned to the kinds of things we struggle to notice. Sometimes these benefits come from a mentor simply being present and listening, or through watching them take on a task. But when mentorship across generations is lacking, all of these benefits diminish, and organizers tend to be left figuring things out on their own and without really important emotional support that could otherwise come from their mentors.

Although organizers young and old often underestimate the importance of formal mentorship relationships, there is a desire among many to form these relationships. Many organizers do have abundant peer mentorship relationships and tend to also have role models that they can look to for examples of how to be and behave, but formal mentorship tends to be more elusive. When mentorship relationships do not form between organizers, organizers are less likely to acquire the knowledge that previous generations of organizers have gained through their experience. One arena in which organizers stand to benefit greatly from previous generations is that of accountability. The notion of accountability and being an accountable organizer is a fairly complex topic, and one that organizers continue to struggle with. The rest of this chapter focuses on a discussion of accountability and how organizers are thinking it through in their organizing.

Accountability

Accountability is a central concept for organizers, especially those doing social justice work against systems from which they benefit (i.e. men doing work around heteropatriarchy, white people doing anti-racist work). The organizers I spoke with had many thoughts about what it means to be an accountable man in feminism. At a basic level, accountability means being

responsible for your actions and responsive to input from those with whom you align yourself—in the case of men in feminism, feminists and those oppressed under the systems they work against. Paul defined it this way: “the core of [accountability] I think, for me anyway, is taking leadership from those on the frontlines of grassroots struggles.” This “practice and set of relationships” can be complex and take multiple forms. In this section, I discuss a number of factors that organizers are considering as they attempt to do their work in accountable ways. In practice, for those I spoke with, accountability tends to include at least three major components: respecting the leadership of others, being responsible for your actions and the impacts of those actions, and supporting the voices of those in marginalized social locations. Further, I consider the question *accountable to whom?*, and reflect on the role of making mistakes.

Respecting leadership

Perhaps the most discussed aspect of accountability was taking direction and soliciting feedback from organizers who are not men. The foundational belief motivating this stance is that social justice struggle should be led by those oppressed under the oppressive systems being fought against. For men doing work directly related to gender, this means that organizers are attempting to draw on the leadership of women and non-binary organizers, and to marginalized organizers generally, for direction on how to proceed with their work.

Paul defined two types of accountability that can develop out of the relationship between men organizers and those they are looking to for direction. He called them *direct* and *indirect* accountability. To be directly accountable, people respond to specific requests. For example, “we need you to show up for this demonstration,” or “send sleeping bags,” or “provide childcare.” In contrast, indirect accountability is “a more general form” of accountability. For example, creating a feminist men’s group in response to the request for men to organize with

other men around gender-based violence is attempting indirect accountability. The indirectly accountable project stretches through time, whereas with a direct accountability request tends to be a one-time event. Paul was not making the distinction to argue that one form is better than the other—they are both important and necessary. What is important to note is that both forms require looking to the of leadership marginalized people; however there is more room for creative interpretation when attempting indirect accountability.

Supporting the voices of marginalized people

As already discussed, it is important for men organizers to avoid platforming themselves and positioning themselves as experts or celebrities. And to be truly proactive about this, some organizers prioritize using their resources to support and centre the voices of marginalized people. Kalbir believes that part of accountability is that “you’re giving voice to people on an issue [when they often aren’t listened to].” He gave an example of men from his men’s group offering a workshop at a political convergence on heteropatriarchy and men in organizing. He did not support this decision, since it felt like platforming themselves as men organizers. He would rather have seen the energy used to submit and develop the workshop proposal, which was facilitated by all men, to give space to other voices on the topic of how heteropatriarchy and oppression generally shows up in organizing spaces. Maggie spoke to a very similar situation, where men have chosen to take up public space at an event. She posed the questions to those considering doing this: “do you have practices around deciding whether your voice is the one that should be amplified? Do you have people to check in with about that? You know, what are the practices that you’re doing to decision-make about where your voice should be the one or whatever?”

The feminist praxis of centering survivors speaks to these questions around supporting marginalized voices. Developed as an approach to restoring justice and healing after sexualized violence, centering survivors can be expanded to mean centering those affected by systems of oppression. Thus, as men, organizers can strive to centre those most affected by the systems against which they are organizing.

Accountability and relationships

Accountability is another area in which organizers having good relationships with one another is crucial. All of these practical considerations in accountability require that organizers have relationships across difference; that is, if they are to be accountable in their work, it is vital that men organizers have close relationships with organizers from other social locations. Kalbir explained it as having “deep” relationships where those people become “your accountability in doing that work, so that you’re not just kind of doing it on your own.” By having trusting relationships with organizers from other social locations, men can achieve some of the other components of accountability, like taking direction, receiving feedback, and better knowing how to give support to voices that are not their own. Julian described his experience with this dynamic: “I mean, I think for me personally, being in relationship with folks is really important and seeking guidance and feedback is one way that I feel like I can stay accountable to my politics, but also to justice more generally.” Paul described it this way: “You build relationships with people on the ground, and out of those relationships comes enough trust that people make requests of you or make it clear what they need, and you work in partnership around that.” Of course, there are countless ways that accountable relationships might look, depending on circumstances and the beliefs and personalities of the people involved.

It is worth noting Julian's perspective on *why* organizers create accountable relationships. He said, "accountability isn't the end, but rather the means to doing something. I like that perspective just because I often have thought about like, 'ok, how can I build an accountable relationship so that I [am] accountable?' You know, as opposed to thinking about taking action with folks and strengthening movements is the goal, and we do that by being accountable." Julian believes this is a "kind of a simple but important shift," viewing accountability as a means rather than an end in itself. Organizers develop accountable relationships so that their work is better, not simply so they can say they are accountable for its own sake.

Accountable to Whom?

One of the factors that make accountability tricky is the obvious heterogeneity of political beliefs within feminist organizing. "There's not one voice," as Paul put it, "ultimately there's no way that you can avoid having some privilege to decide who you choose to work with." What Paul means is that it is impossible to take direction and leadership from feminist organizers as a homogenous group, since there simply is no consensus on pretty well any issue. Therefore, men must choose with *which* feminist organizers to develop relationships of accountability.

If men are to determine to whom to be accountable, they must also be doing their own work to ground themselves in a political framework that will guide these decisions. Kalbir was critical of a tendency he sees among some organizers to be a bit lazy when it comes to choosing accountable relationships. "You're not only getting women to speak because they're women," he asserted; that is basing the decision on the assumption that all women are the same, or all feminists are the same, or all Indigenous Peoples are the same, which is to reduce them to their social location with no sensitivity for multiple differences. This is tokenization and should

absolutely be avoided. Instead, organizers should be more nuanced and intentional about how they choose with whom to align. “Your critical faculties matter a lot,” Kalbir told me.

Speaking to this type of deliberate decision making in the context of writing about settler allies relating to Indigenous communities, longtime organizer Harsha Walia advises that alliances “should be based on shared values, principles and analysis.”⁴⁵ What this means for men in feminist work, if they are to take this suggestion seriously, is that they must walk the precarious line of becoming in touch with their own political leanings and beliefs, without presuming that they are experts on oppression that they do not experience.

Nick addressed this tension in relation to the Men’s Circle’s relationship to AVP as an attempt at an accountable relationship:

[the men in the coordinating collective are] particular men, and we all have our own histories and values and commitments and priorities, and the only way to deepen feminism, I think, in a relationship-based way is to start from where you’re at. And so we had to also have our own conversations and figure out what do we want to learn and what do we want to support other people learning, and yeah. So yeah, I think you’re right that [an accountable relationship] is symbiotic, that’s a word for it.

Others also spoke about the need for individual organizers to be grounded in their own sense of what is right. This applies to choosing with whom to build relationships, and manifests especially when organizers receive feedback on their work. Paul has learned that everyone is going to have an opinion about most of the things we do as organizers, but we cannot go around simply averaging all their opinions and choosing what to do based on that. He told me “feedback is always good but it doesn’t mean that you just immediately roll over and do whatever somebody says, but you always have to take it seriously and weigh it and reflect and think about what changes need to be made.” Maggie, too, stated that there will always be somebody who disagrees with some component of your organizing work. “It’s a big world, and if you’re going

⁴⁵ Walia, 3

to do something public [there will always be someone with] different politics around it or maybe different assumptions.” Organizers therefore “need to have solid practice[s]” for how they “acknowledge and learn from critiques” in a way that is discerning and constructive. Kingsley felt similarly, that “some balance of receiving feedback and input but also having a felt sense of what is important and trusting that” is important as organizers. Kingsley then spoke to how precarious this position can be. Self-doubt, fear of making a mistake, and all the other insecurities one may have picked up make it difficult to trust one’s own internal compass. “It’s hard to trust it! Because, what if I’m wrong? What if I pursue this thing that no one cares about? Or it’s like, the opposite thing that people want?” he asked.

Making mistakes

Kingsley’s anxieties around making the wrong choices in his organizing speak to organizers’ relationships with making mistakes. Often, they are terrified to make even the smallest mistake. There are various kinds of mistakes an organizer can make, from saying the wrong thing in a meeting one time to dedicating countless hours on a project that people deem more problematic than helpful. Some spoke of strongly regulating their behaviour so that they would not say or do something that would upset others, at events or in meetings or online. Often this self-regulation is a result of the toxic dynamics I have discussed above. David told me how “vigilant” he is about being sure to say only things that will not upset people: “I am tracking so much for how what I’m saying is going to land ... I work so hard to not fuck up.” Of course, self-awareness and healthy self-regulation are good things, but David recognized that this hyper-vigilant self-regulation can actually cause problems in its own way. For him, these problems tend to manifest in him actually not taking enough action when it is needed. Speaking to this type of dynamic, as Kalbir shared his experience that sometimes “people don’t step out until

they feel they're perfect," and often that means never. In addition, another problem arises when organizers are constantly terrified of making mistakes. They miss out on learning and growing.

Many of the people I spoke with told me about how important making mistakes has been for their political and personal learning. It was not quite that they were promoting making mistakes—they were genuinely regretful for the hurt that their mistakes caused friends, comrades, or organizing efforts. Rather, they believe men should have an approach to organizing that looks to mistakes as an inevitable part of the process, from which they can learn a lot about how to do better. Here is how Julian put it:

I think for a long time I thought about accountability as not fucking up and just doing the right thing, and I'm thinking more about accountability as actually being able to take risks and maybe risk making some smaller mistakes ... [but now] I think there's nuance there, about fucking up and making mistakes. Like, that's not what we want to be doing, and we don't want to be totally cool with [making mistakes], but I think we want to be thinking on a large enough scale that we're actually risking making mistakes, and not being so fearful and timid that we actually don't even give ourselves an opportunity to make a mistake, because we're not really going to get anywhere that way.

So there is a degree of becoming comfortable with making mistakes that is important for men to cultivate in their organizing, and that means becoming comfortable with the fact that people are going to point out your mistakes. Julian told me that, once organizers learn to accept that they will make mistakes, they can practice "graceful ways of receiving feedback" and see feedback as new opportunities to do their work well.

If organizers can hold mistakes in this way, the question stops being about how can they be perfect men and perfect organizers all the time, and instead becomes about how they can take the right sized risks, in the right contexts, and learn from the outcomes whatever they may be. David told me that rather than holding back and worrying about what is the absolutely perfect behaviour, there are generative questions that can move organizers out of immobilizing fears around making mistakes:

how does one assess when is the right time to take risks? ... How do white men take right sized risks in their activist work, where you know mistakes are going to happen, and let life and healing happen in community? ... How do we not collapse into immobility with each other because we're afraid of fucking up, and how do we build the capacity that we know conflict can be generative?

These are the kinds of questions that can mobilize rather than immobilize. Rather than worrying about how to be perfect, organizers can assess the contexts they find themselves in and take action.

While Chapter Two focused on the projects that organizers are engaged in, Chapter Three has explored the kinds of issues that arise while undertaking these projects. From connecting the personal and political, to confronting finite capacities and setting priorities, to navigating a variety of complex interpersonal dynamics, organizers spend a lot of time and energy addressing the subtler, behind the scenes components of political organizing. When these issues arise and are not productively resolved, they tend to hamper political organizing efforts. Not only that, but taking seriously the dictum that the personal is political requires viewing the interpersonal aspects of organizing as political in themselves, not simply for the benefit of more overtly political projects. To support men organizers in particular in the task of improving their relationships and the ways that they impact organizing spaces, the following and final chapter provides a variety of suggestions for how to be intentional about these aspects of organizing.

Conclusion: Thriving in Men's Work

“Ok, positively, how do I want to be treating people? How do I want to be showing up? What kind of presence do I want to have? What kind of impact do I want to have? How am I going to make that happen? What am I doing that gets in the way of that? How do we actually take responsibility for who we are in the world, in an everyday kind of way?” (Paul)

“We have all done things in our lives that show how we are complicit with patriarchy. Yes! We need to learn from that; we need to grow from that; we need to be conscious of that. But now we have to also put our eyes on how can we be heart and mind and soul and body engaged in feminism in a way that does not strive for perfection, but keeps us committed to doing this work even when it's hard, even when we feel our own short comings, even when people are suspicious of us.” (Chris)

Introduction

During my conversations with organizers, I was curious about what kinds of things they were doing to overcome their doubts and fears, to stay grounded in and committed to their social justice work, and to navigate the intense personal work required of feminist men. How have they answered for themselves some of the questions that Paul asks above? How *do* organizers take responsibility for who they are in an everyday kind of way, and how are they making sure they have the kinds of impacts on organizing and organizer communities that they desire? As I discovered just how many complex issues arise for organizers, I also heard from them how much they desired to see more examples of how men are navigating them. In light of this, this chapter focuses on synthesizing, exploring, and sharing the lessons learned and insights gained by men's work organizers as they have navigated being a man in feminist organizing. While this chapter focuses on what individuals can do at a personal and relational level, this is not to devalue the need to remain politically engaged and active, and to be continually developing the political analysis and practices to remain with evolving social and political contexts. Rather, I share the belief that many organizers communicated to me, that the continued sharing of these types of insights and lessons learned will empower more men to become proactively engaged in political

projects, to thrive in their relationships, and to positively impact organizing spaces and communities.

Before turning to those insights, I want to address two points. First, it is important to acknowledge how the interpersonal dynamics within organizer communities are important in their own right, not simply to improve outwardly focused political projects. If organizers take seriously that the personal is political, then these relationships matter whether or not they empower more and better outwardly focused political projects. The concept of prefiguration speaks to this phenomenon. To prefigure is to strive to embody “within the ongoing political practice of a movement ... those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal.”¹ In this way, to prefigure politics is to not only work towards different and better social relations through political projects, but actually to form those relationships now and to behave presently in ways that tend to create those relationships. A clear example of prefiguration can be found in something I discussed in Chapter Three. Valuing and practicing calling-in is a prefigurative way of addressing harm. That is, if organizers want to see a world in which people are not disposable, then treating our comrades as valuable and not easily disposed of, even when they have hurt us or someone else, is the prefiguration of valuing human beings for their own sake. The lessons and insights contained in this chapter will hopefully *both* empower more and better political projects as well as allow more organizers to prefigure the kinds of relationships they want to see in the world.

Second, I must note a potential limitation of what is contained in this chapter. Given that this thesis and the questions I asked were structured around a particular focus on men and the roles of men within organizing, our conversations about personal work and about the impacts of

¹ Carl Boggs, “Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers' Control,” *Radical America* 11, no. 6 (1977), 100.

oppressive systems on organizing spaces—the more inwardly focused aspects of men’s work—tended to focus especially on heteropatriarchy and less so on other systems such as white supremacy, colonialism, and so on. Although many organizers did express ambivalence about directly identifying any one system of oppression to the exclusion of others as the cause of any particular toxic dynamic, what we ended up talking about were the impacts they tended to attribute to heteropatriarchy. While I believe that the following insights and lessons learned will likely benefit many organizers, particularly those privileged by the systems they work against, this disproportionate focus on heteropatriarchy may be considered a limitation of my research and analysis. Inquiry into the personal and interpersonal impacts of oppressive systems on organizers and organizer communities would benefit further from a nuanced look at the impacts of intersecting oppressions. This critique notwithstanding, the rest of this chapter concentrates on the lessons and insights organizers shared with me.

Cultivate Resilience

Cultivating the ability to withstand, self-soothe, and manage difficult emotions is crucial for organizers who want to remain in social justice work. Given that organizer communities are far from free of hurtful and otherwise difficult dynamics, learning and remembering to take care of one’s self is one crucial component for developing this long-term resilience. “We have to have personal practices that sustain us to do a lifetime of activism,” Paul explained. He wanted to push back a bit against the individualized notion of self-care that is so often replicated in organizer spaces. Although personalized and individual practices that sustain are fundamentally important for organizers’ long-term well being, Paul argued that self-care often happens in community, by being engaged and involved with other people, not only in isolation. Even when things are difficult, remaining engaged in collective social justice work can itself be healing and

sustaining. For Paul, self-care, both collective and individual, is about discovering the “practices that bring healing and solace and connection to broader reality and grounding.”

Gus articulated the desire for personal resilience well: “I know I want to cultivate resilience, and I don’t want to do that at the expense of not noticing when I’m hurt. Like, I don’t want to have this like *fortitude at all costs* thing, *I don’t even feel the fact that you’re, that arrow sticking out of me*; I just don’t want my baseline expectation to be that I’m never going to be hurt, or that every hurt is going to be resolved.” Organizers simply cannot expect that they will never be hurt by their friends and comrades; like everybody in this world, organizers carry wounds and trauma and pet peeves and various personality traits, such that everyone is bound to hurt and be hurt at some point. Although it is often difficult to accept and manage, Gus understands that there are many cases and contexts in which a person causing him hurt will not be in a position to resolve that with him, or that it is not reasonable for him to expect them to. “So then I’m left with no option but to figure out a way of continuing to be in community when things are hard,” he said. Developing one’s resilience is a crucial part of remaining active in community when things become difficult.

Gus called the work of not collapsing under emotionally difficult situations “subtle and hard work.” For him, there is always an “irreducible level of wanting to remember to try really hard, to like keep going where there is that hurt.” He wants to become more skilled at appropriately expressing when he is feeling hurt, but also continue to increase his capacity to manage his hurts without demanding that others do the work for him. For Gus, these are difficult practices to navigate: “I want to feel pain, and I don’t want to mope.” Moping is essentially the word Gus used to describe *not* being very resilient, or crumbling under hard feelings. He recognized that perhaps this tendency to crumble is part of men’s training. That said, he believes

that this experience is possibly one necessary step in his processing of hard feelings, but not somewhere he wants to stay long-term: “I must need to be in it ... I want to have compassion for the hurt, for the mope, even as I’m like wanting to remind myself that I can’t stay there indefinitely.”

Maggie also spoke about men’s tendency to crumble under criticism and other difficult dynamics. She invoked the idea of “fragility” to explain why this happens. “Fragile masculinity,” “white fragility,” and other similar terms speak to how those who hold identities privileged by systems of oppression—whiteness, man-ness, etc—tend to easily slip into defensiveness, minimizing, and other defiant patterns when the privilege of those identities is challenged. Understanding this, Maggie believes that white men especially need to develop a “thicker skin” when they engage in organizing.

I often hear some variation of this thicker skin argument. I understand there to be two interpretations for this argument, and I have seen both invoked within organizing spaces. First, *thicker skin* may simply be another way of saying *cultivate resilience*. In this resilience interpretation, men are required to develop their abilities to ward off the fragility of their own masculinity and be able to withstand and integrate constructive feedback and the typical emotional hurts that come with being a person engaged in social justice work. Critique is an inherent part of organizing. As Maggie put it, “it’s a big world and if you’re going to do something public everyone has a different kind of politics around it,” and that is going to mean some critique or another will be unavoidable. As an organizer, it is important to develop the ability to withstand and continue to thrive under some level of scrutiny, and in this sense developing thicker skin is incredibly valuable.

There is, however, another interpretation of the thicker skin assertion. I think of this as the *man up* interpretation. Basically, how the thicker skin assertion is used in this case is to tell men to suck it up, that there is no space for their feelings because they do not experience oppression, that they should be grateful for the feedback they receive regardless of how they are actually feeling about. Of course, there are plenty of contexts in which men's feelings are not the ones that should take up space, and sometimes valid and constructive feedback is very difficult to hear. But taking up space and receiving/offering feedback are common notions, they are context sensitive ideas, and therefore universal rules cannot be applied across all situations. In effect, when this happens the conditions are recreated in which men developed their masculinity, which tell them to ignore and deny their feelings. Sometimes men may be hurt or defensive because of their fragility, and sometimes simply because someone is being mean to them. Being sensitive to these differences is important for those wanting to determine how to proceed. That said, even if men's hurt or defensiveness grows out of their fragility, simply telling them to suck it up is unproductive; *suck it up* reinforces men's lack of emotional fluency. What men should be encouraged to do, rather than swallowing their feelings, is to develop the ability to discern what they are feeling and why they are feeling it, and the skills around appropriately communicating and resolving those feelings.

When Nick and I discussed fragility, he recalled the way one of his mentors talks about thicker skin. Rather than developing a permanently thick skin (essentially, *man up*), the goal is to develop the ability to fluidly, quickly, and easily alter the thickness of our skin, our emotional barriers. A person skilled at this may be able to withstand a barrage of critique, reprimand, or yelling from a friend or comrade, understanding that, given certain contexts and relationships, this is the most productive and relational thing in that very moment. That same person, however,

would also be able to have open, vulnerable, emotive conversations and relationships, given the right kinds of contexts. This perspective speaks directly to a theme I heard throughout my conversations with organizers, that men must develop their abilities to feel their feelings and their bodies, and learn and practice skills at appropriately addressing and resolving these feelings.

Learn to Experience Feelings and Address Them Appropriately

Developing skills concerning emotions is one of the more crucial pieces of men's personal work. Emotional fluency (also referred to as emotional intelligence) is a term used to address the broad set of skills one needs to navigate one's own and other people's emotional landscapes. As I described in the previous chapter, many men organizers are struggling to develop these skills. Emotional fluency is a direct antidote to the emotional and relational struggles men organizers tend to experience. The critical skills organizers told me they are working on—learning to feel through numbness, to navigate defensiveness, to tell someone when they have hurt them, to set appropriate emotional boundaries without constructing impermeable walls—are integral components of emotional fluency. They are crucial skills for all individuals, as they enable the development of healthy relationships. Since healthy relationships are vital for organizers to do their work, and because men in particular are not encouraged by dominant society to develop their emotional landscape or skills, developing emotional fluency is perhaps especially important for men who want to engage with feminism.

bell hooks traces how the heteropatriarchal masculinity that men and boys are forced into greatly reduces their ability to live full and free lives.² By emotionally wounding boys, a heteropatriarchal culture teaches them that certain parts of their beings must be repressed and destroyed, and this dis-integration is at the heart of men's emotional pain and destructive

² bell hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004), 154.

behaviour.³ To overcome these difficulties is to learn to live with integrity, which hooks defines as an integration of all parts of the self. For wounded men to have integrity, they “must recover all the parts of the self they abandoned in serving the needs of patriarchal maleness.” This will involve reconnecting with the whole range of inner emotions, developing the ability to differentiate and navigate them, and accept them as part of who one is. This internal integrity is at the heart of emotional fluency, such that the first critical component of emotional fluency is developing one’s relationship with oneself. Whereas heteropatriarchal masculinity encourages an internal disassociation with many of the emotional parts of the self, by integrating all parts of themselves, men can develop or renew a trust in themselves and in their emotions. When men can comprehend and trust their own emotional landscape, they can trust themselves, their experiences, and their ability to behave in trustworthy ways.

When a person trusts themselves and their ability to feel and manage their emotions, this then allows them to lean-in to difficult and emotionally risky situations. This further enables a responsiveness to context that is much more difficult when they are feeling numb, emotionally panicked, or defensive. Of course, emotional responsiveness and *not* being defensive or reactionary are precisely the kinds of behaviours that earn the trust of other organizers. In this way, developing emotional fluency and self-trust directly translates into becoming better, more trustworthy organizers and comrades.

Another important effect of men acquiring better emotional fluency is that it reduces the need for those around them to pick up the emotional work that needs doing for any relationship to thrive. The men I spoke with understood that the tendency for men to remain satisfied with (or altogether unaware of) their relative lack of skill around emotional labour unfairly draws on the

³ *Ibid.*, 155-7

emotional resources of those around them. By developing these skills there is a direct reduction in the unfair emotional burdening of others.

In some ways, the extra emotional burden placed on women and femmes is a result of bad emotional boundaries. For example, when somebody does not have a good connection with their own emotional landscape, the tendency can sometimes be to spill their emotional baggage onto others in inappropriate ways and contexts. Some call this emotional dumping. But bad emotional boundaries can take other forms as well. Withdrawing completely at any request for emotional vulnerability is the other side of the dumping coin. Impermeable walls are not skillful boundaries, although they may be useful defense mechanisms for those who have not developed nuanced boundaries. I heard about various other ways that unskilled boundaries manifest, from simply determining what kinds of things an organizer should include in their accountable transparency, to needing to figure out how and when to assert personal boundaries during sticky kinds of situations in which someone is very upset and is behaving in hurtful ways. An emotionally fluent person has developed their emotional boundaries on many different fronts and can skillfully soften or harden them depending on context.

Finally, as I have noted, one pitfall when navigating emotions is to intellectualize about feelings rather than truly feeling them. This tends to be a particularly difficult pitfall for many men. Since many have not been taught how to maneuver their own feelings, and instead have often been encouraged to develop their critical thinking capacities, people learn to protect themselves from strong, unmanageable emotions by moving out of their bodies—where emotions originate—and into their heads. This is an understandable and effective coping mechanism. Unfortunately, this tendency becomes engrained as a habit. Individuals become so adept at suppressing the physiological sensations that originate emotions that the repression becomes

virtually instantaneous; numbness is a predictable result of reliving this repression countless times. Numbness simply becomes the habitual resting state of the emotionally repressed person. This repression can have all sorts of physiological, emotional, and psychological repercussions. And, of course, these translate into behaviours that are often self-, other-, and community-destructive.

Connect with Your Empathy

It is perhaps a little paradoxical that one of the ways organizers can alleviate some the personal difficulties that come with interpersonal dynamics is by focusing on how others might be feeling. When I asked Maggie about how men could better shoulder sometimes unfairly harsh criticisms, she asked me, “how do we feel compassion and empathy for the people giving the critique? ... Can we connect systems and the real life experiences they have because of them to real hurt? And also compassion and empathy about that?” By connecting with compassion and empathy men can get in touch with something else other than their hurt. This is not to suggest simply to distract from feelings or to invalidate them; rather, this is a move to contextualize feelings so as to hold a scope larger than the narrowness of one’s personal reaction.

There are two components to holding a larger context in mind. First, men can remember that the oppressive systems that they are organizing against are most often a main contributor to the reasons for the hurtful behaviour they are experiencing from someone. We live in a context of immense systemic oppression, so when those who are oppressed under these systems do things those of us privileged by them do not understand or view as hurtful, it is important and useful to keep in mind a systemic analysis. For example, the mistrust and skepticism towards men in feminism is grounded in things like the ways that oppressive systems have caused other men to harm those who are mistrustful and skeptical. Gus described how, when a person is

reducing him to his structural position within heteropatriarchy, he tries to focus on what he knows of that person's history "and the intense ways that patriarchy has affected them," and that this helps him "not take it so personally." This does not mean he ignores the critique altogether; he still wants to take seriously others' feedback and critiques. Rather, it is a move to situate the critique so that he can hear it more easily and take seriously what is at the heart of it. Others also spoke about how focusing on structural analysis has helped them get out of feeling trapped in the hurt that can come with being a man in organizing.

Second, there is a purely emotional component to empathetically holding context in mind. Having empathy for what another is feeling while also not ignoring what we are feeling—this is one of the more difficult components of having emotional fluency—helps us stay grounded in our connectedness and can alleviate hurt and resentment. Julian speculated about how empathy can help men in social justice work. He suggests that there is some benefit to witnessing women and non-binary folks' strong emotional responses to the oppression they have experienced: "I think there's probably a lot of use and growth, even if politically it's not principled or feels super shitty, seeing that sort of emotional response ... seeing that sort of personal and emotional response to these systems of oppression, like I feel like we need to feel that every moment." Thus, not only will remembering context and developing empathy make organizers better at getting along with one another, but it can also support becoming more attuned and more motivated in the work.

Be Transparent

Given that it is still an unusual thing for men to be organizing publically around feminism, men's efforts can often be uncomfortable for other organizers. Men organizing in groups can be unsettling, given the ongoing history of what men have tended to do when they

gather in exclusive groups. For men, being transparent and communicative about what work they are undertaking is therefore important. There are many ways individuals and groups can do this, whether online, in person, or at events. Chris spoke about how in the men's groups he has been in, they have role played how to discuss the group with others. They practiced finding the language to describe why the group is important, what their personal connection to it is, and what they do as a group. As he said, "I know it's a small step but it's an important step to be taking, because you know we eventually want to be able to do x, y, a z. But there are so few men who are out there publically doing this, there's just a lot of pressure for a man to sort of be in the world as a feminist in a way that you're not going to get kind of like annihilated." Maggie, as someone who is herself wary of men's feminist projects, believes that men being transparent about their intentions and the details of their projects empowers those who are not involved to see clearly what they are doing, understand the politics behind the work, and determine whether they believe it is supportive of their goals for feminist work. As she put it: "I think transparency and communication, [for example] having a thing online or whatever that talks about the intention of what you're doing and being clear in whatever way that can be made clear in the community, I think is important." It might take some extra effort to demonstrate one's intentions and to gain the trust of other organizers, but there is often good reason for this and some degree of willingness to put in the energy to explain oneself is important.

Credit Where Credit Is Due

All men in feminism, whether they choose to foreground this or not, have countless women and non-binary folks to thank for the frameworks they employ, the tools they use, the lessons they have learned, and the emotional support they have received. A huge part of being an accountable and valuable man in feminism is therefore giving credit where credit is due.

One important time to think about this is when facing the pedestal effect. Like so many of the men doing feminist organizing, Ryan often receives high praise for his work and for his person generally, at times to uncomfortable levels. When I asked him how he tends to respond, he told me that after “humbly accept[ing] the compliment,” he brings up the point that he thinks we should not be praising men for doing the basics of being a good person in the world. This is a direct approach that I can really appreciate. However, I have yet to come up with a really good way of using it that does not end up shaming the person giving the feedback. Her: *Thanks for all the work you do!* Him: *Thank you for the encouragement, but actually that’s patriarchal of you to say.* Not ideal. Ryan immediately understood what I was getting at when I mentioned this pitfall: “Yeah yeah! That’s happened!” he exclaimed. This approach needs subtle development. Ryan said he tries to take the gratitude given to him and “channel” it in humble and uplifting ways. “It’s not about the praise,” he told me, “it’s about taking that energy and knowing that this is good work, it is valuable work, it’s important work in our world, and I’m just going to keep going, [to] use this kind of responses from other people to feed my energy and to just keep going.”

Kingsley talked about giving credit where it is due in workshops. In workshops, the pedestal effect manifests in people tending to listen to those they perceive as men much more closely and with less skepticism than they do others. Kingsley suggested that one way to address this is to name it explicitly: “be explicit about these things within workshops.” This means being intentional about supporting the ideas of co-facilitators who are not men, especially when it is clear that what they have said has been ignored or undermined. Sometimes this will mean directly pointing out when the group has been tending to listen better to the man facilitator.

Be Humble

Being humble as a man in feminism takes work. This is in part, as Paul explained, “because of our socialization, [men] come into this with a lot of arrogance, and entitlement and privilege and benefits and that we have to examine that and let go of that and act from a place of recognition of that, before we can do anything but get in the way.” In this way, men can recognize that they are not in this work to “save” anybody. Rather, as Paul continued, men must “start with the internal recognition that we have been part of the problem.”

Part of this arrogance, according to Colin, takes the form of men feeling “overly compelled to know.” Men think that they need to, and in fact do have all the answers as to how justice work should best be done. But, as Colin told me, “there are some people who are actually better situated to know than me [as a straight, cis, white man].” So staying humble means recognizing that men do not and cannot have all the answers, and that we should be constantly learning from others, especially those from other social locations.

Being humble in this work also means remaining focused on the collective effort rather than on individual advancement and accolades. “This is about a collective piece of work,” said Colin. And others told me stories about how frustrating and unhelpful it is when men platform themselves and build themselves up as brands. Rather, men in this work should be using their voices and the access granted to them under heteropatriarchy strategically to centre the voices of those more marginalized.

Remaining humble can be particularly difficult for men in feminist work in part because of the pedestal effect. The praise can fill your head and fill your ego, as Ryan put it. There is an inherent tension associated with praise for feminist men. On the one hand, men’s work is largely about inviting men into feminism, a politic that they have traditionally tended to not engage with

positively. It is a predictable reaction for feminists to be surprised and grateful when men do take on this work in good ways, and it is not wrong to express this gratitude. On the other hand, men are often praised and rewarded for doing even the most basic of things. These are often things that women, queer, and trans organizers have been doing without praise for many years. The invisibilization of these people and these efforts leads to a dynamic where men's praise is often at the expense of other organizers. I do not have an answer to this dynamic, but I would argue that the answer cannot be simply to withhold all love and praise and care from men until the rewards balance out. Of course, neither can it be that men who do even the slightest feminist thing be treated like rock stars. Instead, I think that understanding the dynamic can support organizers to treat praise as a common notion, as something that must be thought of as tied to particular contexts and particular relationships.

Finally, it is worth noting that being humble can often be confused with trying to become invisible. David emphasized how his attempts to stay out of the limelight and maintain a background role have been poorly received by the very people he hopes to support. "The people that are close to me are like, 'you're really limiting your power and our power by doing that, and you hiding doesn't make me safer,'" he shared with me. So being humble is not so straightforward as staying at the back, and in fact there is a degree of moving into appropriate positions of leadership that men in this work must do.

Learn to Be a Leader While Supporting the Leadership of Marginalized Organizers

This is a complex dynamic. On the one hand, men must be developing their own ability to talk about these issues, bring more men into the work, and effectively lead initiatives like organizing groups and facilitating workshops. On the other hand, most of this work is not men's to lead. Given the ways that certain voices are privileged while others marginalized, those whose

voices are held up must do the work of supporting the leadership of women, queer, and trans people, people of colour, and marginalized people generally.

Chris called this aspect of the work “proactively trying to be awesome for feminism.” It is not just learning to be a good person who reflects on their behaviour and impacts, supports the women and queer people in their life, and is not “an asshole.” This is setting a rather low bar for what it means to be a man and feminist organizer. Instead, it is figuring out proactive steps to enhancing the reach of feminism into the lives of other men, and contributing to the leadership of those working in feminist organizing spaces. Chris hopes that more and more men, who are involved in justice work of all kinds, will become able to speak out for feminism and “confidently feel like they could bring leadership publically around [it].” That said, for him, men’s involvement in feminism “is fundamentally about developing the leadership of people of all genders,” and developing “feminist male leadership” should be considered part of “supporting and encouraging and developing women’s and trans and genderqueer people’s leadership.”

In the same way that being humble does not equal being invisible, supporting the leadership of marginalized organizers does not mean simply taking a back seat and constantly waiting for direction. Kalbir told me how important it is for men to not simply wait around for explicit requests from other organizers. As he sees it, the problem is that many men have internalized an ethic of supporting others, which is itself a positive thing, but have not taken a further step and taken appropriate initiative: “I think men feel that they’re going to wait for solidarity [requests]; I imagine a lot of women are like ‘why aren’t men doing more?’” Men have an important role to play in feminist organizing, but it is a matter of figuring out what that

role is and making sure that men's involvement does not negatively impact the ongoing work of other organizers.

Seek out Mentorship Relationships and Create Contexts for Them to Flourish

Since Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz highlighted intergenerational mentorship as a defining component of social justice organizing, this was one theme I focused on in my interviews. It was clear when speaking with organizers that when they had older, more experienced mentors to support and guide them, not only does their organizing benefit, but their personal growth and well-being does also. That said, I also found that there is a dearth of this type of mentorship amongst organizers: instead, they tend to rely on peer mentorship and role models for the majority of their guidance. Social justice organizers, therefore, will benefit from making more formal mentorship relationships a priority and from creating the kinds of contexts in which those can flourish.

Paul was adamant about the need for mentorship: “when [mentorship] happens people are really happy; I mean it is so rewarding to build those cross-generational relationships and break down the isolation that people often feel at both ends.” He therefore encourages other organizers, especially of his own generation, to take seriously their potential to play meaningful roles in the lives and organizing of younger organizers.⁴ The majority of the organizers I spoke with felt themselves newer to the idea that they would be mentoring other people; while they have desired and in many cases felt a lack of mentors, they are learning to step into those roles themselves. For younger organizers, it is important to have these people to look to for support, and as organizers gain experiences it is worth learning to view themselves as the kind of people who can provide mentorship, and to consider what that might look like.

⁴ For example in this essay: Paul Kivel, “Are You Mentoring for Social Justice,” 2004, <http://paulkivel.com/resource/are-you-mentoring-for-social-justice>

In the same way that developing one's leadership as a man organizer should not be confused with controlling leadership positions that should be held by women and other organizers, stepping into roles as mentors should not be seen as a replacement for the invaluable mentorship men have been receiving from other organizers. Men's mentorship for one another is needed in addition to the important leadership work that feminist organizers have long been providing.

While organizers can and should personally seek out mentorship relationships, they can also contribute to an environment in which there is the right context for mentorship relationships to form. To have mentorship, organizers need to have meaningful relationships with one another. Nick laments that relationships between organizers are "quite fragile," that we "don't know each other very well and we're not very well connected, and there isn't a kind of dense fabric of care and reciprocity." Through structures such as school, which enforces separation according to age, and monogamy and the nuclear family, which discourage building a variety of strong and intimate connections, the oppressive structures organizers spend so much time resisting create a context in which it is no surprise that relationships are lacking. For Nick, mentorship is something that happens alongside building the other important components of close and healthy relationships. In order to create communities in which mentorship relationships thrive, organizers can look to create communities that are overall more connected and intimate. This will likely involve multiplying spaces to encounter one another and become more entangled, outside of meetings at other political events.

Not only do organizers need closer relationships, but for cross-generational mentorship to take place, there have to be relationships that are inter-generational. Regrettably, organizers tend not to organize very much with people in other generations. Paul often finds himself being the

only person of his generation at meetings. He shared with me that, “unfortunately I’m often in situations where I’m considerably older than most of the people that I’m working with, and that’s again a reflection of a lack of my generation stepping up and staying connected and involved.” It takes conscious intent to build cross-generational relationships, and he argued that “mostly that gets built in doing things together.” And since most organizers are not doing things together, they are not building those relationships. One of the added benefits of developing formal mentorship, according to Paul, is it encourages more “cross-generational relationships, and that leads to cross-generational organizations and movements. So it has tremendous payoffs in that.”

Develop Meaningful Relationships

For many of the reasons I have discussed, radical organizing can feel like an isolating experience, especially when it often feels like other organizers are mistrustful of you. So intentionally building close communities of support is crucial for organizers’ longevity, and in many ways organizers are working to develop these. For example, the Catalyst Project, the white anti-racist organization where a few of the men I spoke with are involved, creates close, multi-gender relationships in which they try to cultivate investment in one another as people and thriving organizers. These relationships take time and a lot of effort, but the benefit is huge.

Chris described how crucial having a network of support was to him stepping into public roles as a feminist man. “If I was just a guy doing this without them, it would have been incredibly challenging,” he told me. But once he had formed close relationships, he was able to trust that he had a base of support, comprising people of many genders, which made it feel easier to be “like, ok yeah some people are still like skeptical, that’s fine, but I have a community of support of people of all different genders who believe in this and are encouraging me to do this

work, and now I've got a base of support to feel more grounded." For Chris, really internalizing the feeling that there are people of all genders who want men to be outspoken leaders around gender issues helped him overcome his insecurities and ambivalence around being a man in feminism. He acknowledged that many men struggle to find this kind of supportive community, but was hopeful that more and more could come to this place as men's work grows and expands.

Gus has also found it invaluable to have supportive people around him. When we discussed "moping" and how hard it can be to move out of those phases, he emphasized finding other people who share his identities with whom to process: "Some of that I think for me is finding other men that I can share that shittiness with, so that we just kind of hold that together and don't make it seep out into other social locations who [shouldn't] really have that responsibility to attend to us in that way." Both finding and becoming men who can support other men in taking on this emotional work collectively, when typically it falls to women and others, is incredibly important for men's work organizers.

Of course, creating supportive communities depends on the formation of close relationships between individuals. So many of the organizers I spoke with emphasized the need to develop and maintain strong relationships. These included mentorship relationships, deep friendships and romantic partnerships, more distant friendships and co-organizer project based relationships, which all play important roles in the development of strong, supportive organizer communities. Organizers also told me how crucial these relationships have been for many aspects of their work and personal well-being.

Maggie spoke about how developing and maintaining relationships can in-and-of itself be resistance to oppression. In her work with boys, she has witnessed how aspiring to oppressive expectations of masculinity "hinders people from having really deep relationships in the world."

For her, a huge part of working with young men has been figuring out how to encourage them “to be really awesome humans who have really great and meaningful relationships with people, and get the benefits in life of having compassionate relationships.” This same idea has contributed to Nick “start[ing] to see how crucial it is to recover long term intimate caring relationships.” He therefore wants to prioritize “more informal things that allow [him] to develop or deepen relationships with people over a long period of time.” And as I mentioned, the “base of support” that Chris found so crucial for his health and development as an organizer relied on developing and maintaining good relationships. As he understands it, “if you have deep loving, affirming bonds and connections of solidarity and tenderness, that begins to undermine hierarchical power ... [and] opens you up to a wide range of experiences that patriarchy does not want men to have.” In these ways, relationships tend to be positive in their own right, not just as means for better social justice work.

Relationships can also be used as anchoring points for doing good justice work. For example, Kingsley emphasized how important it is for them to build “genuine relationships” across difference. He tries to develop meaningful friendships with people different from him—for example, Indigenous folks—so that when he needs to think through some aspect of his work there is a pre-existing relationship of care and trust with someone who is also invested in the work. Friendships can also anchor men’s personal work, as the friends they choose tend to be the people who have most influence over the kinds of beliefs and behaviours that are deemed acceptable. Thus it is important to seek out relationships with others, especially other men, who share feminist values and politics and who want to support one another to better embody feminist manhood.

Gus uses his relationships as a gauge for how he is doing in his justice work. When he feels like he is connected to the people around him and that his relationships are going well, those are the times when he thinks that he is doing his work as an organizer well. As he put it, “if I’m experiencing connection with other people it tells me that I am showing up in their life as a trustable person, with integrity and that is worthy and safe to have intimacy with,” and that is how he evaluates whether he is succeeding at his goals as an organizer.

For Captain, it is sometimes only through his pre-established relationships that he feels willing to engage in certain projects. For example, his prior relationships with two members of the Men’s Circle coordinating collective enabled him to envision himself participating in the group. Especially with projects involving only men, it has been difficult for him to trust that the goals and intentions of the group will align with his own. By knowing individuals already involved, he is better able to gauge whether or not it will be a good fit, and for him this is a valuable result of maintaining good relationships.

Relationships are also often valuable motivation for doing more and better work; many of the men I spoke with identified close interpersonal relationships with those oppressed under heteropatriarchy and other systems as central to them becoming and staying motivated to do social justice work. Colin told me how a “sense of care and love” for his friends and colleagues drives him to want to do the self-work necessary for him to show up in ways that contribute to their flourishing. Kalbir noted how it has been through many challenges in his interpersonal relationships that he has learned about his own patriarchal behaviours and has been motivated to address them. And Nick expressed how both seeing and coming to understand how widespread and constant the experience of being touched, cat-called, and raped is among his friends has been a motivating factor for him. And especially motivating has been his own implication in

how patriarchy shows up in those relationships themselves, between him and his women, queer, and two-spirit friends.

Connect with Other Men

Inculcation into heteropatriarchy and other forms of dominance erodes men's abilities to create and maintain healthy relationships. For various reasons (homophobia, neither possessing solid emotional skills, and so on), this is particularly true of relationships between men. Gus shared with me that, in his relationships with other men, vulnerability and intimacy has often felt impossible: "vulnerable disclosures are met with indifference or callousness or fumbling, and intimacy is hard to generate or sustain." Ryan echoed that he does not "think we promote strong, positive healthy relationships between men very much." So cultivating mutually supportive relationships between men can be an important way of addressing the effects of oppression. The dominant culture prescribes options like sports, other physical activities, and talking about women as ways that men should relate to one another. But these are not sufficient for the kinds of connections that feminism asks of men. Understandably, in order to develop better relationships with men, men's groups, less formal gatherings of men working through these issues together, and one-on-one friendships between men are very important for the organizers I spoke with.

Paradoxically, beginning to do critical work around heteropatriarchy and masculinity can sometimes further alienate the relationships men have with other men. Colin and Ryan both articulated some regret and confusion about how doing men's work has impacted their friendships. For Colin, it was a gradual shift in his relationships with men with whom he had been friends since long before discovering feminism. "I just found I sought their company out less and less," he reflected. For Ryan, this manifested in feeling socially isolated the more he

worked on critiquing dominant masculinity and developing his feminist manhood. He came to find it difficult to maintain relationships that had been built before he began doing feminist work. It is important that men work to mitigate these alienating effects and do the work of connecting in meaningful ways with other men.

Unfortunately, many men in organizing take considerable time to come to understand the importance of connecting with other men, and some never quite do. For Chris, part of the problem with men's organizing is that

some of the initial phases of becoming a man [in] feminism is like, 'ok I'm going to tear down every other man I know, because I'm going to try to, you know this is how I'm going to practice my being a feminist.' You know, 'I just got like told all the ways that I'm screwed up, and so now what I'm going to try to do is tell lots of other men about how they're all screwed up.'

As an alternative, Chris wants to see men to engage with one another from "an affirming place of love," viewing each man's journey into feminist manhood as a "developmental process" rather than requiring immediate perfection. He emphasized the need to move away from "that understandable place of cutting down other men ... to really being able to develop a sense of love for yourself as a man and really starting to be able to feel a deep sense of love, *a feminist love*, for other men where we want to end the nightmare of patriarchy in their lives." He advised men wanting to do feminist work:

For those of us who are trying to support men around feminism, [it comes down to us being] able to change our hearts around the ways that we love ourselves and love other men, so that we can then hear and see other men from that place and not hear and see other men from the place of like looking for their failures. I mean yeah, seeing shortcomings as places for us to grow, but not looking for failures as places to condemn people or trash talk them and throw them away.

All of the organizers I spoke with recognized the need for men to take on the work of supporting other men in this development of their feminist manhoods and adopting feminist political practices. Nick shared that he believes it is important that "men have compassion for

each other,” and that we recognize “that we’re all in different places and we all have different tendencies.” Some organizers I spoke with told me about the great enrichment that comes from accepting and loving the many diverse ways of being men. “We all embody different things,” David told me, so there is a lot of personal learning that can happen when men have close relationships and organize with other men. Julian spoke about a time when he and another member of their men’s group clashed on a political issue. He reminded himself that he valued the other man’s contribution to the group as being one of the more emotionally engaged participants, actually living and feeling the weight of the concepts that Julian tends to hold mostly in his head. “It enriches everyone’s experience” to have this kind of diversity in groups, he explained. Finally, Gus spoke about how often he sees the rigid requirements to be socially accepted in organizing spaces prohibit certain kinds of people from being in them. He believes that this does a disservice to those spaces and to the work generally, since all of the various ways people inhabit the world bring valuable experience and knowledge to the work. When some are systemically excluded, social justice efforts suffer.

Most notably I was struck by how deeply Chris emphasized this compassionate orientation towards men. His stance on maintaining a feminist love for men is inspired by author bell hooks, who asserts that “to create loving men, we must love males.”⁵ As I thought about what loving men on a large scale would actually look like, I encountered in myself the same fears organizers shared about making mistakes and being criticized or called-out. It felt paradoxical and a bit ridiculous to write that feminist men need to love *men* more and in better ways; am I not replicating the problem I mentioned at the very beginning of this thesis wherein men are centered to the exclusion of marginalized people? Do we not already live in a world where men are showered with love? As I struggled with these questions, I remembered the

⁵ hooks, *Will to Change*, 11.

refrain *love is not a finite resource*. Loving men does not have to marginalize others. Adopting a loving orientation benefits everybody.

hooks provides her own response to the kinds of fears I experience when speaking about loving men. She explains that loving men is *not* “praising and rewarding males for living up to sexist-defined notions of male identity,” although that may be how it is defined in a heteropatriarchal context. Rather, “when we love maleness, we extend our love whether males are performing or not.”⁶ To love men is to value them for their unique identity, and to see that their worth derives from them simply being, rather than requiring that they prove their worth. This is the difference between feminist love and the privilege granted to men under heteropatriarchy. Privilege and access are not love, particularly as they are contingent on performing oppressive masculinity. And, of course, loving men does not mean excusing their harmful behaviours. But feminist love, according to Chris, “comes down to valuing people’s actions and their commitments and having a wide range of ways that people can express themselves.” With this mindset organizers can “engage with other men from that place of love,” and build social justice work that is “rooted in a vision and love for men ending patriarchy and building beloved community with feminism at the heart.”

Maintaining love at the heart directly addresses many of the issues described in this thesis. For example, being received with a feminist love actually supports men to become more loving individuals.⁷ Love and acceptance are an antidote to shame,⁸ which is often a response to being judged as bad or inherently lacking. Feminist love is also, in many ways, a counterpoint to the tendency I described in Chapter Two, through which men are essentially reduced to their structural position within heteropatriarchy. But most notably, I think a move towards feminist

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ For example, bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*. (New York: William Morrow Paperbacks, 2001), 217.

love for men speaks to what is at the heart of this thesis. Gus articulated this point well, when he mentioned that he feels, as a man committed to social justice work and organizer spaces, a responsibility to be supporting men to engage productively and positively with other organizers and organizing spaces, while simultaneously holding up and valuing men for their unique personhoods and contributions. He called this “working in both directions”: working to benefit organizers who share spaces and projects with men, on the one hand, while working to support men to feel loved and valued, on the other. Ultimately, this is the impact I wish for this thesis. I hope that men organizers can find inspiration and guidance in reading about the projects other organizers are experimenting with and what they have learned. And I hope they find validation in witnessing that others have also felt their doubts, their hurts, or their confusion, and feel empowered to move through them by utilizing the tools that others have experimented with. And not least of all, I want these men to take what they see of value written here and use it to show up in more and better ways in their projects, relationships, and communities.

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Appendix

This is the basic template interview guide, which I adapted for each interview to suite the interviewee.

This research is focused on men who are dedicated to working on themselves and with other men on issues around patriarchy and violence, how we relate to one another, etc. Could you speak about what that work has looked like for you?

Do you consider this feminist work?

How so?/why not?

How did you come to the work?

These can be complex timelines, so probe for details and different thoughts.

What keeps you doing it? Makes you want to do more, better, etc? (inspiration)

What types of organizations have you been part of, if any?

which worked and which didn't, which aspects did and didn't.

When you've worked directly with other men what have your goals and aims been in the work?

How did that go?

What do you consider to be some of the root causes of violence and patriarchal behaviour?

How do you bring this understanding into your practice?

How have you noticed race and racism show up in your work?

What about other forms of oppression?

What do you see as the relationship between academia and anti-violence work?

What, if any, academic disciplines inform your work?

Could you say more about how you're informed by these?

Have you noticed a prioritization of paid and professional positions in anti-violence work?

How has this impacted your work and the choices you've made?

Does being paid change how the work is done?

How do funding imperatives impact the work?

How do decisions get made when you organize around men's work?

Who makes them, horizontal/hierarchical, etc.

How has this work impacted your every day life and relationships?

What are you hearing from the those in your life who aren't men about what they want to see from you and your work, from men generally, etc? How does this impact your work?

Do you have mentors? Is mentorship important to you?

Why does that look like?

Do you mentor other people?

How do you know when you're doing the work well?

Tell me about some successes you've had.

Get specific cases, but also general types of success.

How do you know what you're fucking up?

(This is where accountability will show up)

What have been some of the most difficult aspects of being immersed in this work?
personal difficulties as well as more work related.

Could you tell me about any difficult experiences you've had with someone else in the field
critiquing or challenging your work?

Relate my own experience with the limitations of knowledge in actually changing the
behaviours, habits, belief systems, etc, then ask if they've thought about these limitations, if
they've encountered them, how they've made inroads, etc.

What are some patriarchal tendencies that you are personally trying to work on, that are
particularly entrenched and difficult for you personally?

What kinds of things do you find yourself telling yourself and others about the work you're
doing, why you're doing it, what it's for, how you frame it, what makes it worthwhile, that kind
of thing?

Biographical Information

How would you like me to refer to you and your identities in my work?

Gender, race, economic background, anything else they find important

How old are you?

How specific can I be when referring to your age in my work?

Where do you live?

Where do you do your work?

What 'tag line' should I use when referring to you?

Is there anything that I have not asked about that I should have?