The affective intensities of gender transformative work: an actionable framework for facilitators working with boys and young men

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This brief overview explores the emotional intensities of gender transformative work, and provides an actionable framework for facilitators working with boys and young men. It is useful for facilitators as a self-reflective tool and as a tool for working with boys and young men to support respectful and inclusive behaviours.

For more information, please see:

our video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OnAH_QMssw

Paying attention to the emotional intensities of gender transformative work

Facilitating critical discussions with young men about issues of masculinity is not easy work. Gender transformative programs must necessarily engage with difficult conversations about issues such as sexism, homophobia and masculine entitlement. For many, these conversations can be emotionally intense.

We know that when men are emotionally engaged in the injustices experienced by women, they are more likely to examine their own complicity in women’s oppression and to recognise their responsibility to challenge their unearned advantages.1 However, we also know that the strong emotions involved in this process can shut down important conversations about gender.

Critical Affective Literacy2 is a framework that might help facilitators better understand and use the emotional intensities of these conversations to open up important ways of thinking, knowing and feeling about issues of gender when working with boys and men.

This framework can be useful to program planners and facilitators of structured curriculum-based group training programs aimed at critical reflection about gender and power. Such programs aim to foster critical reflection, personal insights and behaviour change among community members, including boys and men.

The Critical Affective Literacy framework can complement and contribute to the aim of these gender-transformative programs, by systematically acknowledging, interrogating and addressing the emotional responses of participants to the materials and their own experiences.

The paper entitled “The affective intensities of gender transformative work: an actionable framework for facilitators working with boys and young men” presents the Critical Affective Literacy Framework as a way to enhance the capacities of facilitators of curriculum-based group discussions with boys and men about gender. The paper outlines the four principles of the Critical Affective Literacy Framework, and offers questions that may be useful for facilitators to incorporate into their work. Such questions can help facilitate to both self-reflect on their own understandings, beliefs, and emotional investments in gender, power, and masculinity, and to enhance their ability to facilitate such reflections in group discussions with men and boys. The paper offers program planners and curriculum-based gender-transformative group discussion facilitators a series of relevant questions to consider using the four principles of the Critical Affective Framework, shown on the next page.

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Using the Critical Affective Literacy Framework in Gender-Transformative Discussions

**Principle 1: Why do we feel what we feel? What do emotions do?**

This principle asks us to examine not just what we feel in particular situations, but why we feel what we feel and what our emotions do.

For facilitators of gender-transformative group discussions, this principle invites the following questions:

- What aspects of gender transformative work incite particular strong emotions for you? (e.g. with the delivery of particular challenging content such as homosexuality and sexual consent);
- What are these emotions? Why and how are these emotions felt?
- What do they do?

**Principle 2: How can we understand the suffering of others?**

The second principle invites us to imagine standing in the shoes of others. Teaching for empathy is important in gender transformative work but we must approach this concept with caution.

For facilitators of gender-transformative group discussions, this principle invites the following questions:

- How might teaching for empathy enhance understanding of the suffering of others and how might it be counter-productive in presuming to know the other and their suffering?
- How might a critical reflection on the limitations of our own knowledge (of self and other) enrich our connections with and support for others?

**Principle 3: How do particular emotions become attached to particular people, objects and ideas through everyday politics?**

This principle invites us to think about how particular emotions become as: attached to particular people, objects and ideas through everyday politics. As an example, the term ‘toxic masculinity,’ currently used to describe a range of male behaviours, has become attached to particular groups of boys and men in particular ways with particular affects.

For facilitators of gender-transformative group discussions, this principle invites questions such as:

- How are gendered messages circulated through everyday politics in order to generate a specific emotional response?
- What are the implications of these emotional responses?
- How are our investments in particular ideas about gender and masculinity associated with the gendered emotions of everyday politics?

**Principle 4: How can what we say and feel become what we do?**

This principle asks how can what we say and feel become what we do? Emotions play a powerful role in transforming our words into action. They can produce a sense of alienation and resistance but also responsibility and solidarity for activism.

For facilitators of gender-transformative group discussions, this principle invites questions such as:

- How can facilitators channel the emotional intensities arising from difficult conversations about gender with men and boys to support them to become the men they want to be?
- How can these intensities create connection, solidarity and action for gender justice?

**Summary**

When we are emotionally engaged in issues of injustice, we are more likely to interrogate our complicity in producing oppression and to recognise our responsibility to challenge our unearned advantages. This framework recognises and engages with the power of emotions towards social change.

Please contact us with your questions and comments.

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