



Shifting Cultures

Some thoughts and reflections about
the Anti-Violence Project's *Men's Circle*

2017

2018

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Section I

WHERE WE ARE | TERRITORY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Anti-Violence Project and the Men's Circle would like to acknowledge the communities and nations in whose territories we work, live, and thrive upon: the Lekwungen (Songhees and Esquimalt) and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples. Both the Men's Circle meetings and the work that produced the following resource took place on these lands.

We acknowledge this because we understand that part of the work that takes place at the Men's Circle - which seeks to address dominant notions of masculinity, **gender-based** and **sexualized violence**, and a lack of **consent** - is inherently connected to and rooted in Canada's ongoing history of occupying lands without consent, of disrespecting territorial boundaries, and infringing on Indigenous persons' bodies with violence and coercion.

The connection between **colonization** and sexualized violence is not merely symbolic. Colonizers use rape as a tool of occupation and specifically target women and children to clear lands and violently disrupt the social continuity of Indigenous communities. Colonial masculinities also continue to be forced upon Indigenous masculine folks as an ideal standard. Those whose experiences and/or identities do not neatly adhere to the myth of the **gender binary** are often policed through violence. **Intersex, two-spirit, genderfluid, genderqueer, agender**, etc. experiences are continuously erased and invisibilized through processes of colonization. For example, residential schools forced children to equate gender and sex by dividing them up into "boys" and "girls".

AVP and the Men's Circle actively seek to challenge and dismantle dominant constructions of masculinity that are connected and rooted to colonization. However, we also acknowledge that this work is part of an ongoing resistance to colonization and **heteropatriarchy** that Indigenous people have been leading for centuries.

We value the messiness of this work, the continued learning and unlearning, the necessity of being uncomfortable and sitting in silence, and feeling into the realities of our collective colonial history and ongoing manifestations.

WHO WE ARE LEARNING FROM

The work of anti-violence advocacy, establishing processes of accountability, and pushing back on dominant systems of **oppression** is not new. The Anti-Violence Project builds on and learns from an ongoing legacy led by Indigenous people, people of colour, **trans** and **cis** women, **non-binary**, and **genderqueer** folks.

We have learned and continue to learn so much from their/our ideas, strength, experiences, creativity and guiding knowledge. Without this pre-existing and ongoing knowledge, resistance, and work, it would have been difficult to do the depth and breadth of work that was possible in this group.

WHO WE ARE | THE ANTI-VIOLENCE PROJECT

The Anti-Violence Project (AVP) is the on-campus sexual assault center at the University of Victoria. Since it was established in 1998, it has been actively working towards shifting the culture on campus from one of entitlement and expectation to one of care and informed **consent**.

As part of an effort to address and resist **gender-based** (and all forms of) **violence**, AVP strives to provide **anti-oppressive, sex positive** services, advocacy and action on-campus and off. We offer support services to people of all genders who have experienced gender-based violence themselves, are supporting someone who has, and to people who have caused harm and are seeking to change their actions. We also have free safer sex supplies and resources, and referrals to anyone who is looking for resources about gender-based violence. We also we offer workshops on consent, supporting survivors, and caring for each other.

As an organization, as first responders, and as community members, the Anti-Violence Project would like to openly recognize that creating a framework for people to navigate their most intimate relationships is an ongoing and transformative process. For this reason, the work of addressing gender-based violence must always continue to change, deepen, and become more nuanced in its understanding in order to remain relevant and responsive to the realities of gender-based violence. This means imagining and implementing creative and innovative ways to engage with diverse groups of people, including those whose identities benefit from forms of systematized and normalized violence.

This booklet is an effort to document and share our experiences with the Men's Circle and is meant to provide resources and tools to people who wish to also engage in the work of resisting gender-based violence by including men and masculine identifying folks in a conversation about gender-based violence. Our work comes out of an understanding that addressing gender-based violence is not solely about responding to and trying to stop violence between individuals. Instead, it is our collective capacity to hold ourselves and each other accountable, to deepen our knowledge of consent, and to respect boundaries that will create a society in which everyone's safety and dignities are held with respect.

This booklet is meant to provoke questioning and curiosity as much as provide some ideas around organizing a space where men and masculine folks can begin to and/or continue to challenge and resist **heteropatriarchy** and **rape culture**.

WHY A MEN'S CIRCLE

Background

The Men's Circle at UVic began in 2014 as a response to an incident of **gender-based violence** in our campus community. While working in a collective response with the University of Victoria Student Life office and the two men who had caused harm, AVP members realized that initially the two men did not understand what they were apologizing for. To them, their harmful acts were a joke. Realizing a need to help the two men understand the impact of their actions, AVP began to develop a process of accountability. This included putting out a call to action among men who had been involved in anti-violence work. The men that responded to the call were asked to help coordinate a group that would bring more men into a movement addressing dominant, violent masculinities, and taking action to address

rape culture on campus and in our greater community. AVP collaboratively created the Men's Circle as an urgently needed prevention-focused response to **sexual assault** and gender-based violence.

During 2016, the Men's Circle received funds from the Civil Forfeiture Office in partnership with the Victim Services and Crime Prevention Division, Ministry of Justice, as a part of the Violence Free B.C. strategy. Due to the amount of work and energy that goes into shifting culture, this funding gave us more opportunities to do this and appreciate those doing it with us. This includes building community through the sharing of food and practicing accountability by supporting other communities that shared their knowledge with us or are doing their own work to shift culture. Moving money from groups who more easily access funding to those that don't is one form of resistance.

Intentions of the Men's Circle

The Men's Circle aims to challenge and dismantle **rape culture** on our campus and move towards a culture of **consent**, community care, and safety. It also strives to undermine the idea that **sexual assault** is perpetrated by "monsters". We know that **sexualized violence**, including sexual assault, can be perpetrated by people of all identities and experiences—this is because we are all raised in a culture that glorifies violent masculinities, devalues women and **trans** people, and does not teach **consent** as a fundamental social value. However, we also recognize that most cases of **gender-based violence** are perpetrated by men (over 95%).

The Men's Circle was intentionally created to provide a bi-weekly space for men and masculine-identified folks from diverse backgrounds to:

- learn about the systems and structures which support and uphold gender-based violence
- work on strategies for breaking down and challenging gender-based violence and **oppression** on campus and the community at large
- connect with each other, share lived experiences, and work on themselves
- deepen their understanding of notions of masculinity as social constructions that have been distinguished from notions of femininity and those bodies deemed feminine
- resist, unlearn, and diminish the impact of dominant, violent masculinities
- develop skills and tools toward promoting caring masculinities
- learn to listen to and value the voices and experiences of women, **genderqueer**, trans folks, and children
- practice the above—while failing and flailing—with the commitment to do better

By engaging in practices of learning and unlearning the Men's Circle strives to push back against rape culture, **colonization**, **heteropatriarchy**, and other forms of oppression.

Why Masculinity

In hopes of understanding and ending **gender-based violence** in a more thorough, prevention-focused, and comprehensive way, the Men's Circle works to recognize the context, culture, and systems in which gender-based violence is taking place.

This means recognizing how systems like **heteropatriarchy** value men who embody dominant, violent masculinities over women, trans people, and men who do not neatly fit into dominant notions of masculinity. As a result, men are most commonly the people causing harm (over 95%) to other men, women, **trans** folks, and children. It must also be recognized that a disproportionate amount of violence continues to target women and feminine identifying folks—particularly those impacted by intersecting oppression based on race, gender, and ability. An estimated 1 in 3 women, 50% of trans folks, and 80% of people with a disability will experience a **sexual assault** in their lifetime.¹

In the face of these overwhelming statistics it is crucial to talk about notions of masculinity, not because men are bad or evil, but because the main messaging that masculine-identifying folks receive from families, friends, schools, media, religious institutions, government, etc. are valorizing notions of masculinity that rely on, or are associated with, entitlement, dominance, and violence. Even if one is not acting violently or harmfully, men and masculine folks are rarely active in preventing violence or supporting survivors. By addressing masculinity in the Men's Circle, we hope to challenge this trend by creating a space where those with male and masculine privilege take on a more active role in our collective culture shift.

Within **heteropatriarchal** societies, where misogyny works to deem women, girls, and femininity as less valuable than men, boys, and masculinity, being deemed/characterized as feminine becomes an insult. One way to push back against **misogyny** is by not using words that are associated with femininity in demeaning ways.

Toxic forms of masculinity—i.e. those that suggest that masculinity is dominant, unemotional, and violent (among other things)—negatively impact men, boys, and masculine identifying folks as well as those around them. Buying into these notions of masculinity, leaves men and masculine folks isolated and alienated as they are unable to express their feelings and emotions in compassionate or caring ways (ways that may feel more vulnerable) out of fear of verbal—and even physical—abuse.

¹ More information about these statistics can be found at: <https://www.hrc.org/resources/sexual-assault-and-the-lgbt-community> and <https://www.sexassault.ca/statistics.htm>

Spaces like the Men's Circle where men and masculine-identifying folks can come to discuss alternative notions of masculinity is part of a movement that seeks to end gender-based violence and rape culture. These spaces give folks an opportunity to reflect on how dominant notions of masculinity may impact their lives. Talking about masculinity means that men and masculine identifying folks can also talk about notions of femininity. From this, participants can begin to understand how their own actions and behaviors may have contributed to a **misogynistic** and heteropatriarchal society that devalues characteristics, traits, behaviors, bodies, and experiences deemed feminine and/or non-masculine.

Furthermore, it also provides an opportunity to learn how heteropatriarchy is interconnected with other systems of power like **colonization, white supremacy, and homo- and trans-antagonisms.**

Who's in the circle?

We invite anyone who identifies with notions of masculinity, whatever those notions may be, not just **cis** men. This both challenges **trans-antagonistic** systems that erase and invisibilize **trans** people and experiences, and also helps us to realize that masculinity is a socially constructed notion, which means that no one form is better or more masculine than others. Opening up spaces where men and masculine identifying folks can come to discuss alternative notions of masculinity enables us to challenge two of the most pervasive myths in dominant culture—that there are only two genders and that these genders are each designated by one of only two sexes.

There are infinite sex and gender identities, expressions, and experiences. Identities, expressions, experiences and the way sex and gender interact for any individual are unique, personal, and not up for debate by others.

Redistributing emotional labour & the burden of teaching

By giving men and masculine folks a chance to come together to support one another in their journeys of learning, unlearning, and relearning as they explore and experiment with alternative notions of masculinity - that seek to foster caring and consensual relationships - it redistributes some of the burden of teaching and informing men and masculine folks about things like **heteropatriarchy, rape culture, privilege, consent,** etc.—which tends to fall on women and **trans** people.

“If we can even in a small way take some of the burden off of these folks and raise the awareness of the reality and burden of emotional labour and teaching it's a start.”
– Men's Circle Participant

Section II

WHAT LENSES AND PRACTICES HAVE SUPPORTED OUR WORK | OUR FRAMEWORK

By identifying a set of ideas to prioritize and navigate throughout our meetings and activities the group can continuously ground itself within its own broader intentions. This simultaneously accomplishes two things: one, provides structure for how topics, discussions, activities, and learning are approached and two, allow for flexibility and an openness to follow the work wherever it may take us. This is unfamiliar and even scary for us! Flexibility happens on an individual level by us reminding ourselves that our paths may come to look different than we expected, and working to find ways to shift our perspective to value and incorporate new things learned. We can ask ourselves, how can I foster flexibility within my own worldview to value and incorporate these ideas?

Decentering men & the comfort of men

The Men's Circle is meant to be a space that recognizes the reality of **rape culture** and the way individual men and their masculinities participate in it. That said, we live in a **heteropatriarchal** society that works to ensure men continue to gain **privilege** and power. For this reason, decentering men's comfort is an ongoing process, which can be difficult to do, even in the Men's Circle. In establishing a space for men and masculine identifying folks to have conversations and build relationships, it's important to actively resist reproducing heteropatriarchy by re-centering masculine and male privilege.

“It is an ongoing practice of noticing when we re-center men and really learning to stop ourselves without shame, because that re-centers ourselves again... We need to do it for so many reasons ... one of which is that we don't slide down the slippery slope into being a Men's Rights Group.”

– Men's Circle Participant

With this in mind, our circles work to constantly encourage the decentering of masculine and male privilege. Pushing back against the tendency to appease and comfort men and masculine folks can be done in numerous ways. At the Men's Circle, this is primarily achieved by seeking to center survivors and their needs.

Centering and believing survivors

Centering survivors means that we must *believe* those who tell us that they have experienced violence.

Dominant culture often makes people feel that the violence they experience is inevitable, their fault, and/or that they must move on from their trauma without support. We push back against **rape culture** by believing and placing trust in each other to name our own experiences of violence. If someone shares their experience of violence, they are demonstrating their trust in those they share it with. As individuals, as a community, and as a society, we value and uphold this trust by reciprocating it through sincere belief, care, and support. With this in mind, we also recognize that this support will look different for each person.

For the Men's Circle, the act of believing includes recognizing the fact that we live in a rape culture that actively normalizes and glorifies **sexualized violence** (and violence in general). This means that many people in our lives have experienced **gender-based violence**. It also means that some of the participants at any given meeting Men's Circle have experienced violence as well. One of the sayings that we often use in the Men's Circle is that "there are survivors in the room". This recognizes that there are different people with unique experiences of violence in the space, and we should always be aware of this fact.

Believing survivors also means coming to terms with the fact that a large majority of sexualized and gender-based violence is perpetrated by men. When men and masculine identifying folks come together to talk about masculinity, **heteropatriarchy**, rape culture, **consent**, and so on, we need to develop the skills to hold on to this and the tension that comes with it. For example, if we choose to believe survivors, individuals may be forced to accept that they have caused harm to others, or know people who have caused harm to others.

Recognizing that one has caused harm to others can be difficult to process. It can help to process this fact in a safe and intentional group setting. The Men's Circle seeks to create such a setting made up of a community of men and masculine identifying folks. Who is included in this group is intentional as it is in contradiction to the social convention of turning to women and feminine identifying persons for **emotional labour**. Instead men and masculine identifying people are learning to turn to each other for support.

A common and dangerous myth about **sexual assault** is that most reports of sexual assault are false accusations. In reality, false reporting of sexual assault occurs at the same rate as any other major crime (2-8%).

False Reports: Moving Beyond the Issue to Successfully Investigate and Prosecute Non-Stranger Sexual Assault, The National Centre for the Prosecution of Violence Against Women, 2009. Available at: http://ndaa.org/pdf/the_voice_vol_3_no_1_2009.pdf

One hope of the Men's Circle is to reduce harm by reducing the pressure on those most often devalued within the heteropatriarchy and affected by sexualized violence (women, feminine identifying persons, **trans** persons, etc.) to inform and support those identities who benefit from the heteropatriarchy and most often cause harm. Men and masculine folks doing emotional labour and supporting each other also challenges expectations of masculinity.

We support each other in the embodied realization that there are many kinds of harm we do to each other, big and small, each day. We use embodied realization so we understand not just in our heads but in our bodies. We attempt to achieve this in ways that honour and respect those that we have harmed, regardless of whether this harm happened recently or in the past.

Resisting actions that re-center men and male **privilege**, while attempting to honour and respect those who have experienced violence, is a complicated and messy process. We lean on several lenses to support our work, each of which are named below. We are on a continuing learning process with these lenses.

Intersectional feminism

AVP and the Men's Circle coordinating team believe that unlearning **heteropatriarchy** and **rape culture**, and ending **gender-based violence** requires adopting and embracing a feminist gender analysis. A feminist lens enables us to unpack and analyze the ways that violence impacts and affects different identities in different ways. However, feminism is not just a stance or a critical lens—it is a complex array of habits, behaviours, ways of thinking, and collective practices. Feminism can provide us with tools and strategies to encourage men and masculine identifying folks to better welcome criticism and self-implicate while also working towards creating and supporting alternatives to rape culture.

But our analysis must not only be feminist; it must also be intersectional. An intersectional feminist analysis recognizes that different forms of **oppression (racism, sexism, homoantagonism, transantagonism, ableism, classism, etc.)** interconnect and cannot be examined separately from each other. Different identities layer in ways so that personal experiences of oppression and/or power dynamics are unique and multifaceted. Focusing on one form of oppression can make invisible the unique inequities and discrimination experienced by folks who experience oppression by multiple power structures.

For example: The way one woman experiences sexism does not encapsulate the way all women experience sexism. Sexism can occur simultaneously as and connectedly with racism, transantagonism, ableism etc. depending on an individual's social identity. The way that a poor white woman experiences sexism will be different than the way a black lesbian experiences sexism (one will be informed by class dynamics and white **privilege**, while the other will be informed by racism, colourism, and homoantagonism). Recognizing the complexities of intersectional oppressions makes space for more voices to be heard, broadens understandings of the intersections of privilege, and creates more holistic and inclusive practical tools for challenging heteropatriarchy, rape culture, and ending gender-based violence.

An intersectional feminist lens enables the Men's Circle to recognize how its members share masculine privilege, yet also hold unique identities and experiences with privilege and oppression.

Non-disposability, accountability, and challenging the monster myth

AVP and the Men's Circle Coordinators take on this work with the understanding that no one is inherently good or bad; each and every one of us possesses the capacity to both cause harm and be harmed, and we believe that no one is disposable.

In order to cultivate a culture based on **consent** and respect, we must actively push back against the idea that **sexual assault** is perpetrated by “monsters.” Taking up a lens of **non-disposability** provides a way for folks to push back against other systems of **oppression**; such as **colonization** and **racism**. Within colonial **white supremacist heteropatriarchy**, it is most often the bodies of Indigenous people, people of color, **trans** and **gender non-conforming** people, and folks with differing abilities that are deemed disposable. These people are more likely to be subjected to violence because they are viewed as less worthy of the respect and dignity of others. Such violence can include verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, social and spiritual violence perpetrated by others against those viewed as disposable, as well as experiences of violence with imprisonment and institutionalization. For example, sex workers, especially Indigenous women, women of color, trans women, and gender nonconforming folks are often framed as disposable due to dominant stereotypes and stigma around sex work.

Racialized stereotypes of masculinity, such as the myth of the “noble savage” and the hypersexualization of black men (which are the products of both racist and colonial structures, and merge with heteropatriarchy and **misogyny**), suggest that Indigenous men and men of color are more disposable than white men, due to their supposed inferiority. Consequently, both Indigenous men and men of color experience much higher rates of imprisonment and police brutality and murder than white men.² We choose to believe that nobody is disposable by challenging dominant violent notions of **masculinity**. By encouraging alternative notions of masculinity that center care, respect and communal accountability processes, we push back against colonial and white supremacist structures as well as heteropatriarchy that tell us that some bodies are less valuable and, therefore, disposable.

AVP and the Men's Circle believe that it will not be more punitive forces or policies that will change our culture; rather, it will be our collective capacity to hold ourselves and each other accountable, and to deepen our knowledge of consent and respecting boundaries, that will create new pathways for a society where everyone's safety and dignities are held with respect. This means finding alternatives to dominant mechanisms of discipline and criminal justice.

We understand that certain groups and identities benefit from violence—men with white, straight, **cis**, settler, and/or able-bodied **privilege**, to name a few—and may resist attempts to challenge systems of oppression out of a fear that such actions may threaten to diminish the power they hold in our society. Even though such resistance exists, we have to believe in people's willingness and capacity to unlearn harmful worldviews. This means striving to hold folks accountable for their actions by working to ensure that people understand the impact of their actions as well as collectively striving to unlearn the actions

² African Americans are six times more likely to be incarcerated than white Americans in the US. In Canada, Indigenous people make up almost 25% of the countries incarcerated population while only making up 4% of the population. More information can be found here: <http://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/> and <http://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/rpt/oth-aut/oth-aut20121022info-eng.aspx>. Also, one can think of the difference in media coverage regarding Bill Cosby and Woody Allen.

and behaviors that led to harm in the first place. For this reason, AVP and the Men's Circle coordinators approach this work with a critical optimism and hope.

Taking on a lens of non-disposability does not mean that we should ignore or forget about the harm done by some to others. For this reason, both AVP and the Men's Circle recognize that anti-violence work also involves holding ourselves and others accountable for the actions and behaviour that produce and reproduce **systemic violence**. We're still learning, unlearning, and relearning things as well.

Self-implication

Self-implication is the commitment and action towards speaking about our roles in individual and **systemic forms of violence** and **oppression**, while also committing to decentering ourselves in the process. This an important part of recognizing how one participates in and receives certain **privileges** from systems of power. Not having to be accountable for the harm one has done to others is a product of privilege. When we do not hold people accountable for harm caused, it means their comfort, reputation, and value is prioritized above those who experience the harm. Privilege is created through systems of power that determine which identities, bodies, and therefore individuals are disposable and which are not (e.g. **white supremacy, colonization, trans** and **homo antagonism, classism, ableism**, etc.).

In order to push back against the privilege we hold, the Men's Circle tries to identify, discuss, and understand how we — as individuals with different identities and privileges, as well as men and masculine folks that hold privilege within the **heteropatriarchy** — contribute to oppressive structures and systems of power. We work to acknowledge our everyday acts and interactions that take advantage of or reinforce the oppressive structures that privilege us. Through this process we collaborate about how we can challenge and responsibly use our privilege in our daily lives, and work to act accordingly.

Simultaneously, we work to ensure that the Men's Circle does not become a space of confession, or the relieving of male guilt, where men and masculine identifying folks come to confess their past actions of wrongdoing in order to gain pity or redemption from others in the group. Not only does such a process fail to include those who may have experienced harm, but it also re-centers the man or masculine-identifying person in the group. Instead, a balance must be struck between holding each other accountable while not simply resorting to a quasi-confessional booth where those with masculine and male privilege are comforted and, ultimately, re-centered.

“We can be both things, and maybe there are not both things, there are just people experiencing harm and people causing harm...and that's all of us all the time...it's serious and we need to stop saying ‘oh that's not me. I am not the kind of person that...’”

– Men's Circle Coordinating Team Member

Failing and flailing

One practice in the Men's Circle is to talk about the ways we fail at things in our lives, along with the ways that we flail when approached with call outs/ins, feedback and the emotions of others.

“We try to hold messiness and imperfection as a part of the journey of learning, unlearning, relearning and decolonizing.”

– Men's Circle Participant

Embracing discomfort

As mentioned above, one of the biggest challenges with having a group of folks coming together who share masculine **privilege** is ensuring that the group does not become a space that where masculine and male privilege is simply upheld in order to ensure men and masculine folks remain comfortable. Challenging and resisting rape culture and gender-based is uncomfortable work, especially for men and masculine-identifying folk socialized in heteropatriarchy. Ensuring that we have relationships that we are accountable to helps to prevent groups like the Men's Circle from reproducing attitudes and behaviors that are causing harm.

Organizing with accountability in mind

Our Men's Circle is accountable to AVP, the communities we take part in external to the group, and the core intentions and framework of the Men's Circle itself. One way we do this is through monthly meetings between the Circle's coordinators and AVP staff to openly discuss the content, activities, challenges, and approach taken during circle meetings. Establishing this relationship and maintaining a conversation between AVP and the Men's Circle is the primary way that the Men's Circle ensures that it is engaging in intersectional, feminist, anti-violence work. Accountability is also maintained between participants during circle meetings through sharing and recognizing the work we need to do on ourselves as well as communally, to uphold the group's values and intentions.

“We take direction from AVP. If there is something in the media or on campus they can say to us we need you to talk about or teach skills about listening or supporting survivors or caring for each other then we can gather the information to bring, work on it in the group, or find an outside facilitator to pay to help us learn.”

– Men's Circle Coordinating Team Member

The Men's Circle seeks to model mechanisms of accountability by creating intentional communities of respect and care. This is achieved at both an implicit and explicit level and, for this reason, cannot be fully captured in this booklet. However, below are some questions and practices that the Men's Circle employs in their attempt to model mechanisms of accountability and communities of respect and care.

- Who is our Men's Circle as a whole accountable to?
- Who are individuals accountable to?
- Who supports us individually/collectively?
- What are our intentions in creating this group?
- How can we ensure we keep these intentions in mind?
- How do we remain accountable to ourselves/the group/others?

Thinking about accountability can help make sure that topics, discussions, and practical tools remain in line with group intentions, recognize the roles others play in our lives by supporting us as a group and as individuals, create clear guidelines and expectations for who we remain accountable to and how we remain accountable to them as well as adjust circle direction, policy, and actions to remain accountable.

Section III

HOW DO WE DO IT? | OUR FORMAT

We're all trying together. Below are some elements we incorporated in our Men's Circle in an effort to collectively foster a space for learning/unlearning, understanding, working on ourselves, and working with each other. Some of these may be useful to include in other similar groups and some might not be. We also note some practical "suggestions" for facilitation and consideration.

Discussion circle

Our Men's Circle typically takes a discussion-based approach opposed to a lecture or workshop approach. Discussions are helpful for open-ended conversations on the topic of choice. Everyone in the group is learning and unlearning together! Having the conversation move around the circle from participant to participant can help to ensure that everyone has clear opportunities to share or pass on questions/topics. We are learning and honing our skills at providing a wide variety of ways of sharing that invites and ensures participation from more than just the folks who are comfortable speaking in groups already.

SUGGESTIONS: While discussion in the large circle can give participants an opportunity to share, circles can also be intimidating or folks may choose to pass anyway! Keep this in mind and consider smaller break-out groups and sharing in pairs for discussions as well.

Sharing food

If it is within the means of the Men's Circle or the folks taking part, creating opportunities to share food can contribute to building a community. Eating often calms the nervous system and makes being together more possible. This could include participants bringing food to the meetings (potluck-style, individual meals, taking turns each meeting etc.) or food being provided to the group as a whole. Sharing food can be a method of communicating, bonding, and an expression of care for the self and for others.

SUGGESTIONS: Ask about dietary restrictions and don't assume that all folks want to eat, can afford to bring food, or cook. If at all possible have a budget line for food. Are there catering companies or individuals (IBPOC) that your group could support financially in your community?

Coordinating group

Our Men's Circle has a volunteer-based coordinating team that takes on Circle organization. The coordinating team would meet every two weeks to eat together and discuss and plan future circles (including coordinating topics, discussion questions, facilitators, externally supported facilitation, and activities).

When creating a coordinating team, it has been helpful to including diverse expertise, identities, and lived-experiences. This may help promote different approaches to and reflections on various perspectives around circle topics. We try and don't always succeed in including:

- clinical and therapeutic backgrounds so that socialization, wellness, and care could be dynamically prioritized
- **anti-oppressive** or anti-violence backgrounds
- folks knowledgeable of and/or willing to discuss masculinity and its complexities
- a variety of ages, abilities, sexual orientations, cultures, educational experiences, etc.

SUGGESTIONS: Consider who gets to do this work, how they/we navigate getting held up or taken down in the community for doing this work. Talk about this explicitly in your group. Watch for coordinator burnout and fatigue. At times, it was difficult to interest new folks in joining the coordinating circle and members experienced burnout and cynicism. If there are folks interested in joining the coordinating team, mentor the next folks to take over before other folks near burnout. If there is a budget for it offer some facilitation training to interested folks.

Territory acknowledgment

Territory acknowledgments try to recognize and reflect on the history of the particular place and space you are on. The Men's Circle meetings begin with the speaking of an acknowledgement of the nations on whose territory we are meeting on. This recognizes the reality that we are living and meeting on lands in which Original Communities hold histories, cultures, relationships, traditions, languages, and resilience, but have and continue to be violently displaced. This is an attempt to implicate ourselves (the settlers in our group) in the ongoing process of unlearning harmful worldviews, such as values of entitlement and control. Territory acknowledgments help us challenge these values by acting as a method of 'unsettling' ourselves and practicing living in discomfort.

Territory acknowledgments help us (settlers) thoughtfully and earnestly reflect on our own relationship to **colonization** and our occupation of land without the **consent** of local communities, in truthful and grounded ways. For the Men's Circle, these acknowledgments encourage continuous reflection about colonization and a lack of consent, along with its connections to violent, dominant masculinities. Acknowledging territory and the deep, complex relationships and histories it holds offers a practical tool for resisting colonial legacies and toxic masculinities, and seeks to centralize those affected by such violence as well as their historic and ongoing existence and resistance.

Writing a territory acknowledgment

the following section was written by an Indigenous person not living on their traditional territory who gave us permission to include this

There is no one “right” way to do a territory acknowledgment but there are many things that can be incorporated in order for it to be honoured and rooted in authenticity. These things include:

- speaking from the heart
- speaking with integrity
- implicating ourselves in this work
- being gentle on ourselves as we learn and are accountable for our mistakes
- pushing ourselves to unlearn/learn more
- acknowledging when we don't know something, naming that we don't know, while also challenging yourself/others to learn
- practicing
- remembering we're all learning and at different places in that journey
- remembering colonial history is complicated and has resulted in a lot of messiness

Things we want to avoid because they lead to tokenization and replicating harm:

- making it a checkmark and not understanding why it's important
- doing it for show
- ignoring the connections of colonization/colonial violence after the acknowledgement is done ie. not challenging racist comments, not respecting people's pronouns
- playing “oppression olympics” - one-upping our experiences of oppression/marginalization
- avoiding it due to perfection - embrace the imperfection!
- getting stuck in shame or guilt, particularly white guilt
- naming others' experience or location

Territory acknowledgments can be written and/or read aloud by anyone in the group. Offering space for additional thoughts from the group at the end can encourage thoughtfulness and heartfulness within the group.

SUGGESTIONS: Admitting what we don't know and taking responsibility to find out while at the same time acknowledging the forces that have keep us from this knowledge is a powerful piece of the ongoing journey of **decolonizing**.

Introductions

Introductions contribute to a sense of community, and they can take any shape! Often we ask for participants to share names, pronouns, and to answer a check-in question (keeping in mind that passing is still an option).

Beginning meetings with names and pronouns:

- offers each individual the opportunity to self-identify and support others in their self-identification process across relationships and communities
- keeps meetings inclusive of newcomers
- opens space for folks to try out new names
- increases accessibility for **trans** and **genderqueer** folks
- helps folks learn names and practice challenging assumptions of gender and identity

Including a check-in question can also help:

- set or feel out the tone or energy of a particular group and meeting
- each individual reflects on various bodily/spiritual/emotional/mental feelings they may be experiencing—therefore encouraging a check-in with their self!
- gives folks a chance to share these feelings as they see necessary

Possible check-in questions:

- How are you feeling today?
- What was hot and hard about today?
- If you were a type of weather system/climate/dessert/drink, what would it be?
- What does your elbow say about how it is doing today?
- If you have/could have a superpower, what would it be?
- If your insides were having a party, what kind of party would it be?
- If you were a sea creature/bird/dinosaur, what creature would you be?

Offering participants the chance to name any accessibility requirements they may have is important for keeping the group inclusive. This can include sensory considerations (lighting, chemicals, temperature, etc.), wheelchair accessibility, or interpreter needs.

SUGGESTIONS: Change up the check in questions each time and invite folks to answer their own version of the question. Remind folks that everything is modifiable and passable.

Community agreements (and aspirations)

We are trying to create a space that represents the world we want to live in. Community agreements are lists of needs, wants, and desires, which are brainstormed and reviewed at the beginning of meetings and circles, discussed orally, and written up for folks to read. Community agreements can be a helpful guideline for the group to take care of themselves and each other! Collaboratively creating and clarifying the agreement gives folks a chance to name their needs for feeling safe enough to participate. It's also a helpful tool for accountability, that can be referred back to throughout meetings. Community agreements can be creative, unique, fun, flexible, and always changeable throughout meetings, weeks, and months! We have learned that community agreements can also highlight what might be possible in the group and point us in the direction of the cultural change we desire.

Some helpful questions for brainstorming community agreements:

- What is something you need from the space/the other participants to feel safe?
- What is something you feel that you can bring to the space that could make others feel safe?
- Am I someone who feels comfortable sharing? Why might that be? If not, what do I need from the space to feel encouraged to participate?

Here are some things that could be included:

* just like the community agreements these could also carry different meanings for different people and groups - openly communicating about definitions, clarifications, and modifications amongst the group can help create mutual and consensual understandings!

There are survivors in the room - This acknowledges that the group includes individuals with unique experiences of violence. With this in mind, we try to talk and hold space for each other with care and awareness.

Assuming positive intent/Accepting accountability - We're all learning! Assuming positive intent holds space for vulnerability in the exploration of new ideas in which folks can make mistakes and slip up. At the same time, we hope to compassionately maintain accountability and ownership of our actions and expressions that may be harmful for others.

Ouch/Oops - Related to intent and accountability, this may be used as a tool to acknowledge when harm may have been felt, accountability, apology, and further understanding. "Ouch" names that something hurtful has been said, "Oops" creates a space for learning and recognizing that harm occurred. It is beneficial to focus on the "Ouch," to understand *how* and *why* something may be harmful. This helps to push our thinking past simply acknowledging harm toward actually understanding another's perspective, and hopefully work toward shifting our own perspective and moving away from potentially harmful actions.

Confidentiality - "What's shared here, stays here. What's learned here, leaves here." Folks may share personal stories, experiences, thoughts, and feelings. To keep this space safe for sharing, it's important to

keep personal details or stories within the space, while lessons of the story are carried, processed, and shared outside of the space. Seeking **consent** from the owner of the story before sharing the story supports confidentiality as well. This phrase also reminds folks of their responsibility and opportunity to take their learnings outside of the Men Circle's discussion and into their daily interactions.

Make space/Take space - This is a shout out to those who don't usually take space to go for it if they would like to, and an invite to others to make some space by holding pauses/silences. This offers the chance to practice self-awareness, reflect on one's **privilege** and ability to share and listen, and on how these ideas work dynamically. It hopes to encourage participants to engage in conversation, share experiences, and answer questions as they feel comfortable, while also waiting, listening, and ensuring others have chances to engage within their own comfort.

Re-spect/Re-look - Folks can reflect on what respect means to them personally. Re-spect can also be about re-looking at ourselves and each other; thinking about how we are all capable of causing harm, changing, healing, creating/engaging in positive relations/relationships, and our shared **non-disposability**. This also means we can take time and space to notice the changes and growth within ourselves. Each individual holds multiple and ever-changing identities, stories, and truths!

Don't yuck my yum - Different strokes for different folks! Not everyone will share the same enjoyments, but we can share respect, care, and a safer place to be ourselves. This hopes to set a space where folks can explore/express their physical, emotional, spiritual, and sexual selves, safely, with excitement and without judgment.

Respect your emotional boundaries/Take care of yourself - Drinking water, using the restroom, taking a walk - we practice self-care in many ways! This agreement hopes to encourage participants to listen, identify, and respond to self-care needs. Identifying an individual in the room who is trained in support that can talk/sit with folks during or after the circle may be helpful as well.

You are the expert of your own experience - We are each the only ones who know who we are and how we feel, felt, and experience. This means we also recognize our ability to name our experience in our own words. Someone who experiences harm gets to decide how to name that harm. Respecting this in ourselves and in others ensures each is holding and sharing our individual power to self-define.

Space for silence - Time and space can be important for processing and understanding. Allowing silence to be held can help some folks think, contribute, or remain silent themselves.

Everything is passable or modifiable - Similar to appreciating space for silence, this seeks to give folks the chance to remain silent, hold their thoughts or feelings, or to offer other methods of contributing to discussions/activities. Participants are encouraged to feel out the degree of physical/mental/emotional vulnerability and ability that they can or feel comfortable with. This includes sharing, not sharing, standing, sitting, reading, writing, listening, or any other necessary modifications that ensures safety in this setting.

Avoid offering unsolicited advice - Folks share their experiences, feelings, and ideas for different reasons. This agreement acknowledges that sharing may be simply sharing without any other expectations or needs, maybe just to feel listened to. If a sharer is seeking advice, this can also give them the opportunity to ask for it! As many folks have experienced, often people who are socialized as male

internalize the expectation to fix things and have underdeveloped skills at sitting in the discomfort of our own emotions and the emotions of others, without taking action to make things better.

Use “I” statements - This encourages participants to use statements regarding themselves, their thoughts, and their feelings. This means not speaking for or about others, or telling others what they may or may not be thinking or feeling.

Expect non-closure - Learning, changing, growing, and processing is ongoing. This group is not necessarily about coming up with fast solutions or reaching a final goal. It's about the continuous exploration that we are going through together, and there may be no finality or completion, and that's okay!

SUGGESTIONS: Groups and group agreements are always morphing and changing. This is a revolutionary thing, to have non-static language and ways of being with each other. It seeks to honour and celebrate that there is a galaxy of different ways to be in the world. We are learning all the time how to be with each other as individuals and as a group. Because of this, it is important to review group agreements every time the group meets.

Facilitation tools

While all sorts of facilitation tools could be used in a men's circle, we found it helpful to create lots of opportunities for discussion in pairs to allow time for personal sharing and reflection. When we tried out new skills or ways of being, such as active listening, we often practiced in groups of three so that two people could do the activity while the third person could act as a witness and give feedback. Here are a couple other tools we found helpful to use:

Embodiment activities and image theater: while discussions were definitely the most common format of the circles, we did attempt to bring in more embodied conversations by encouraging participants to reflect of how their bodies felt as well as using tools such as image theatre³ that gets participants to create representations of emotions or thoughts with their bodies. By engaging the body, we found we were able to change the dynamic of our conversations and get folks talking from the heart when often the tendency was to talk from the head.

Living dictionary: a place to work through definitions of terms that may be new, unclear, complicated, or carry multiple meanings. A living dictionary can be added to and modified at any point allowing the group to remain inclusive and curious, and encourage ongoing learning.

³ This is an idea created by Augusto Boal, for more information see our *Resources* section.

Parking lot/bike rack: a place to write down ideas, topics or discussions to come back to at another time. This allows the group to make note of conversations they want to have without straying from the current topic of conversation.

Lab time: designated time to talk through our shit. Labs are dedicated to discussing, with care and compassion, some of the more difficult/challenging interactions or situations we come across daily, while giving ourselves insights or invited help in dealing with them. Participants worked through feedback we'd received, times we'd fucked up, or things we wanted support on.

Above all, we found it helpful to slow down, to leave space for silence, to continue to recentre discussions toward the Men's Circle's intentions, and to have fun!

Topics

We found it helpful to focus each circle meeting around a central topic. As the term progressed the group would get into a comfortable rhythm of alternating internal and external facilitators, as well as alternating lecture-based and workshop styles. Brainstorming topics happened within the Men's Circle, reflecting on what would we like to learn/unlearn but also included input from AVP staff and Men's Circle coordinators. Consulting different groups can help the Circle consider/include diverse topics and perspectives.

It was also useful to look for knowledge held within circle participants as some folks have existing knowledge of or experience discussing important and related topics. Topics were also supported through the knowledge held in other groups on campus and in the community. Inviting external groups to share their knowledge and perspectives can help build a sense of community and foster diversity. For example, AVP volunteers and staff provided Consent and Supporting a Survivor workshops to our Men's Circle. A workshop on Bystander Intervention was also provided by other community members.

Because our Men's Circle grew from a sexual assault centre, some of our topics were a method of accountability to AVP. Depending on the origin of a circle, core topics could vary - keeping accountability in mind when picking topics may be important. Some other things that may be useful to think about when choosing your own topics and discussion questions might include:

- What would we like to learn/unlearn/relearn?
- What knowledge is held within and around us?
- What knowledge/experiences could we be forgetting?

Here are a couple circle topics we covered this past year, why we think they are important to talk about, and some questions for reflection:

Introduction

Typically, the semester begins with an intro session to give folks an opportunity to become familiar/re-familiarize themselves with the Circle and other members. While there are certain intentions of the Circle, the way these intentions grow in and from the Circle can look like anything that participants decide. To foster this responsibility within the group we would:

- Create an initial group agreement of expectations for the group and each other
- Listen to what everyone was hoping to get from the Men's Circle
- Brainstorm possible discussion topics

Rape culture & the gender binary

During the second and third circles of the semester we find it important to do a deep dive into defining and exploring our relationships to **rape culture** and the **gender binary**. This is crucial in order to address how these structures play a part in our lives and in **gender-based violence**. Using activities and discussion questions we set the tone for self-reflection, self-implication while troubling each other's preconceptions and practicing compassionate accountability.

Some possible reflection or discussion points:

- How are these structures related to each other?
- How do we experience or relate to these structures?
- How do we contribute to them (individually/collectively based on our different identities and **privileges** or as a society)?
- How can we challenge them (individually/collectively based on our different identities and privileges or as a society)?
- How does talking about/learning about these structures make us feel/where does it show up in our bodies?

"I learned tangible everyday things that men can do to resist rape culture beyond just being 'good guys'"

– Men's Circle Participant

Listening

Communication, relationship building, and personal growth all benefit from taking part in active, genuine, and heart-centered listening. It's how we are able to work toward understanding others, feel others understand us, and create opportunities for both stability and change within this understanding.

While listening is a daily practice for most people, it doesn't necessarily mean we are good at it. Discussing ways to be more engaged in the listening process and allowing room for others to speak and feel heard is necessary for voices used to taking up a lot of space.

Some possible reflection or discussion points:

- What does it mean to listen?
- How can we embody, experience, and identify our own listening?
- What does it feel like to listen?
- How do we embody, experience, and identify the listening of others?
- What does it feel like to be listened to?

Emotional labour

Understanding **emotional labour** opens up a conversation about the ways that certain kinds of labour are feminized, devalued, and rendered invisible, all the while being expected from women and feminine folks. Reflecting on emotional labour allows us to consider who we go to for support (even for the little things) and how we expect certain identities to respond or relate to us.

Some possible reflection or discussion points:

- What is emotional labour and what does it mean to you?
- Can you think of a time when someone provided emotional labour for you?
- How do you value emotional labour or how can you value it?
- Who does or doesn't do emotional labour?
- In what ways do you provide emotional labour?
- How do men and masculine folks take on this work with each other or how can they?

“Emotionally showing up for each other in the group is one really tangible way we can demonstrate to women and trans folks in our lives that we get the emotional labour they do and we want to shift that.”

– Men's Circle Participant

Accountability

Accountability is a way in which we can try to hold ourselves and each other responsible for our actions, without the threat of judicial punishment. Accountability is about recognizing our actions and how they may affect others, and trying to build relationships of trust while making mistakes and working on ourselves. Learning about concrete ways to engage in accountability is an important tool for practicing **non-disposability**, as well as for dismantling toxic masculinities.

Some possible reflection or discussion points:

- What is accountability and what are some embodied experiences of what it feels like?
- What does defensiveness feel like in our bodies and how can we build capacity to listen and accept feedback?
- How can we as men and masculine folks learn from our mistakes and do better?
- How can we be accountable within our relationships, and support one another to do the same?

Sex and desire

We tend to think our sexual practices and desires are entirely our own making—but similar to other preferences, so much of who and what we consider attractive has been influenced by dominant societal norms. Questioning and challenging our own desires can be a powerful first step towards caring masculinities.

We are first partners with ourselves. Being able to reflect on and even express our desires when communicating with partners helps to strengthen our relationships, both with ourselves and with others. By reflecting and communicating, we create space for boundaries, exploration, and understanding.

Some possible reflection or discussion points:

- What have we been told to desire?
- What do we actually desire? How can we tell?
- How does toxic masculinity affect our relationship(s) to sex?

“We are learning about failing and flailing. We are learning about admitting, owning, and being seen when we do. The circle tries to create a culture in which we can be seen in our fuck-ups and the subsequent flailing around that happens when we mess up. We try to bring things to the group labs to work through that others in our lives have said ‘you need to work on...’. In this we try to have support, accountability, and develop the ability to respond to parts of our behaviour that we do not see.”

– Men’s Circle Participant

Section IV

FAILS AND FLAILS | OUR CHALLENGES

Below is a short discussion of some of the primary challenges we have encountered throughout our experience with our Men's Circle. This list is not exhaustive, and we do not have all the solutions.

Defining the group

Our Men's Circle has often struggled with defining who it's for beyond its mandate of being a group for men and masculine folks. Partially because of the casual drop-in nature of our Men's Circle and because there are often new people at each of the circles, we have noticed how it can be challenging to provide a space for folks who have never discussed **heteropatriarchy, rape culture**, and masculinity while also holding space for those looking to nuance and dive deeper into these topics. This was also a challenge when members wanted to continue a conversation over multiple circles or to work on practically applying learnings that had been pulled from a previous and/or more theoretical discussion.

Building group momentum behind a topic or project can also be challenging when there are little expectations for people to show up regularly. It would have been ideal to have the resources and time to create an workshop for men to attend before the circle, or multiple circles appealing to different conversations people wanted to have. Unfortunately, this is beyond our capacity as the circle has largely been run by volunteers and a small organization with lots of other projects on the go. Despite this, we strive to embrace the imperfections of our work, and attempt to balance going deeper while still being inclusive of different stages of learning and bringing everyone along. This was maintained by regular check-ins during circles, by admitting what we don't know, and by giving folks resources to find out more.

"I think we needed to be clearer about our goals from the start. Since they didn't become apparent until around the second year, we were struggling with should it be a public or private group, should it be for newbies or social justice 'experts', and other tensions. We tried to do all of them at once and it made things more challenging."

– AVP Staff Member

Reaching beyond the circle

One question that keeps surfacing for us was how the Men's Circle can take action. While the space we create for discussion is important, equally so is our relationship to the wider community; how we take discussions, lessons, and practical skills outside of circle meetings and how we incorporate the local community into these discussions. While we have made small moves in this, we think the Men's Circle has the potential to support other organizations and be a larger and more impactful force in the community.

Engaging with the community outside of the circle has been challenging for the group. We have been asked to support various events but it was often difficult to take on projects when the only people guaranteed to show up were the coordinating team. That said, we showed up to support a number of events over the years at the request of community including The Stolen Sisters Memorial March, Sexualized Violence Awareness Week at UVic, and Holding Community Space for Survivors. In 2016, AVP received funding for the Violence Free B.C. Strategy toward the Men's Circle which allowed us to support community based events with small donations. More information about this grant can be found in the *Resources* section.

Creating opportunities for engagement, idea, and skill sharing may be an intention or a method of accountability for the circle. Depending on how a circle is organized, some methods of reaching beyond the circle could look like:

- Creating a more dynamic, multidimensional relationships within our individual communities, the campus community, in our own lives, and amongst each other while outside the Men's Circle
- Producing art and multimedia creations for expression/information/advocacy (visual art, zines, blog posts, videos etc.)
- Hosting and/or supporting community events (public talks, workshops, other discussion groups, team and community building activities, food sharing etc.)

Maintaining and ensuring accountability

Accountability can be tough, because it can look like a lot of different things to different people. It's also hard work. It's about acknowledging our mistakes, taking responsibility for our actions and the way they impact individuals and communities, and changing our behaviour. Often, we aren't taught the importance of accountability and taking responsibility. The Men's Circle is trying to push back against a culture that does not expect us to be accountable to the impact of our actions.

We recognize that the value of mistakes in the learning process is often lost in our dominant culture. Often teachings about what to do when we cause harm center apology, which supposedly relieves us of responsibility for the harm we have caused. Whereas apologies focus on the recognition of harm, accountability requires that we understand why something caused harm, and challenges us to question our potentially harmful worldviews, while also moving away from actions that cause harm. Accountability moves us instead towards actions that contribute to communities of care and a culture of **consent**. In working toward a more holistic form of accountability, we hope to shift our understanding of mistakes and their impact. Instead of framing a mistake as something in the past that can be smoothed over with apology, we hope to understand mistakes as opportunities for learning.

Our Men's Circle works to remain accountable to AVP, a group largely made up of **trans** and **cis** women and **genderqueer** persons. This relationship is a privilege for our Men's Circle as helps us practice accountability to the greater community in which we live, and we encourage other groups are able to create these sorts of relationships. These relationships help ground the group, its intentions, its conversations, and its actions in pre-existing and ongoing projects and local advocacy work. This allows us to then work to listen to the change that our community is asking for (ex. change to **oppressive**

structures and systems of power) and structure ourselves in a way that supports this change. At the same time, Men's Circle participants can build relationships of accountability with individuals in their lives outside of the circle.

In determining who we are accountable to, we are recognizing that there are experiences out there that we don't understand, **privileges** that we hold that others may not, and that we cause harm in ways we may not have realized. We're building these relationships to say to those we are accountable to: we want to better understand, support change, challenge oppressive systems, and show care to you all in the way that you need it to be done. We aim to always ask: this is how we are doing it, is this what is needed? How can we do better?

That said, it is not the job of those who we are accountable to guide us through the process of learning and of being accountable. We need to figure out this learning and accountability ourselves. But we must ground this learning and our work in our relationships, and listen when given feedback as to how we can do better.

Understanding how we can be accountable is reliant on the relationship and open, caring communication between multiple people. Some considerations that may help when communicating about and creating accountable relationships:

- Who is the group accountable to? Another organization? Individuals?
- How does the group receive feedback?
- Who is coordinating accountability? What basic information do they need?
- How does the group and those they are accountable to understand accountability?
- How will they demonstrate/maintain/develop accountability?

SUGGESTIONS: Accountability to the community can become complicated when it is intertwined with personal relationships. The way that two individuals remain accountable to each other might look different than how two groups are accountable to each other. Clearly and collectively establishing guidelines and expectations about how community accountability will be held even while personal relationships and individual accountability continue is important. Also, community accountability is a lot of work, especially for volunteer coordinators! Try to ensure that those who are overseeing accountability (external groups/community initiatives) are not overly burdened (time, energy, etc.) during the creation and execution of accountability processes. That said, we don't have to do everything! Personal health is important and saying "no" may be at times necessary.

Push backs and pushing back

In doing this work, we're all coming from different places and understandings. Navigating this can be difficult in the Men's Circle, folks won't always agree, and some will actively push back against ideas. Some of the topics that we cover can be unfamiliar and uncomfortable, and that's part of the intentions of the Men's Circle – learning about the unfamiliar, unlearning what is simultaneously familiar and harmful all while learning to sit with our discomfort. This stuff isn't easy and that can cause people to react in different ways.

More often than not, participant push back is tied to feelings of discomfort and defensiveness that arise from the idea of that they have to “give up” their masculine and male **privilege**. Privilege that comes at the expense of others, like not having to be accountable to the harm we have caused to others, is not fair or acceptable. If participants do choose to push back, facilitators may need to respond by gently pushing back and inviting these participants to reflect and challenge their own ideas and beliefs.

Gentle questioning that asks participants to explain their thoughts further may help them realise how their attachment to masculine and/or male privilege comes at a cost to others. Gentle questioning may not be useful if participants are maintaining strong and harmful positions. This can create an unsafe space for other participants and detract from the discussion as it centres a single perspective and voice. If this occurs, we have found it useful to invite participants to discuss the matter after the Men's Circle meeting or at another time.

Sometimes facilitators may need to take a hardline approach to harmful ideas (this can be really hard). While we want to value assuming positive intent, making mistakes, failing and flailing, we also want to create a safer space for everyone. Creating such a space becomes complicated if participants are asserting exclusionary, violent, or offensive views. The facilitator's role will potentially require them to explain to participants that the Circle is not a space for saying harmful or dangerous things. Referring to the group agreement can also be useful in times of push back. Recognizing the importance of maintaining the agreement, sharing space, allowing silence, accepting accountability, as well as valuing that each individual knows their own experience can help invite folks into the spirit of the Circle.

“It's important as a facilitator to acknowledge when harm has been done, to validate the feelings of unsafety or hurt that someone might feel as well as the feelings of defensiveness and embarrassment that might arise. But ultimately, sometimes things get missed and harm occurs. Creating safer spaces is a process, one that I think we are all learning how to engage with.”

-AVP Staff Member

THANKS AND APPRECIATION

In closing we would like to acknowledge the countless hours that go into making the Men's Circle @ UVic happen both by the dedicated volunteers that coordinate the circles and by the staff at AVP who believe in the importance of this work. This resource document builds off of decades of work by feminists and anti-violence advocates and the work of AVP staff and volunteers over the past 20 years. Finally, we would like to thank all the people who generously shared their experiences and suggestions in the creation of this resource.

END MATTER

Glossary

We would like to make clear that although it can be useful to have this kind of structure to introduce folks to some of the language that is used to talk about anti-violence work and sexualized violence, this format does not lend itself to the magnitude of complexity involved in our relationship to these ideas. Please feel free to read, use, complicate, and expand on our ideas about any and all of these terms. We encourage folks to learn with us as we constantly come into new understandings of what these terms all can mean and the ways in which they are represented in our work and in our lives.

This section is from the Anti-Violence Project website, you can find more definitions at:

<https://www.antiviolenceproject.org/info/glossary/>

Ableism: A system of superiority and discrimination that provides or denies resources, agency, and dignity based on one's abilities (mental/intellectual, emotional, and/or physical.) Ableism depends on a binary, and benefits able-bodied people at the expense of disabled people. Like other forms of oppression, ableism operates on individual, institutional and cultural levels.

Agender: A person with no (or very little) connection to the traditional system of gender, no personal alignment with the concepts of any gender, and/or someone who sees themselves as existing without gender.

Anti-oppression: The process of making one's views of the world large enough to include everyone—looking for ways to make connections among different people's struggles and finding ways to think about how issues affect different people in different ways. It means not just not accepting 'norms,' 'isms' and oppressive dynamics, but actively working to make the invisible visible, and challenging the systems that hold them in place. Also, an anti-oppression analysis acknowledges that all forms of oppression are linked and that the best way to organize against oppression is to take into account that all oppressions are linked.

Cis or cisgender: Someone who is cis or cisgender identifies with the gender that they were assigned at birth. Typically, cis men are men who were assigned male at birth and feel that the words "man" and "male" accurately describe their gender. Likewise, cis women are typically women who were assigned female at birth and feel that the words "woman" and "female" accurately describe their gender.

Classism: A hierarchical system that provides or denies resources, agency, and dignity based on one's, or one's perceived, socioeconomic class (poor/working class, middle/upper class, upper class, etc.).

Colonization: Emma LaRocque has defined colonization as a "form of invasion, dispossession and subjugation of a peoples...The result of such incursion is the dispossession of vast amounts of lands from the original inhabitants. This is often legalized after the fact...The long-term result of such massive dispossession is institutionalized inequality. The colonizer/colonized relationship is by nature an unequal one that benefits the colonizer at the expense of the colonized". Colonization provides colonizers with political power and control, economic gain through the exploitation of peoples and resources, and social

power with the dominance of colonizer cultural practices and beliefs. Colonization is an ongoing process which continues to provide political/economic/social benefits to the colonizers of lands.

Consent: There are many different definitions and models of consent that take into account the particular wants, needs, and communication styles of those who practice it. At AVP, we define consent as a mutual, emotional, physical and psychological understanding between people(s) without force of any kind. When engaging intimately with other individuals, consent is necessary to ensure that everybody involved is aware and interested in what is happening. Consent is based on communication, not assumptions.

Decolonize: The active unlearning of values, beliefs and behaviours that have caused physical, emotional, spiritual or mental harm to the people or the land through colonization. These values and behaviours emerged out of the Colonial Process in Canada, and became normalized through settler society. In western culture people are targeted for gender-based violence based on intersections of vulnerabilities and identities. Some of these ideas include: the absence of the sacred, perfectionism, power hoarding, either/or thinking, the scarcity model — all ideas that emerged out of the colonial process.

Emotional labour: A term for the that which women- and other people that society labels “feminine”- are socialized and expected to provide: a vast array of emotional services for other people (usually men), to manipulate the appearance of their feelings in order to please, satisfy or accommodate others (usually men), often without acknowledgement or pay.

Gender binary: The most common classification system used in our society to categorize sex and gender. The model asserts a binary in that there are two distinct and opposite labels (female/male), qualifiers (vagina/penis), and behavioural expectations (e.g., caretaker/provider, emotional/rational).

(Gender) non-binary: (Sometimes abbreviated to “n.b.” or “enby”) A term for gender identities that fall outside of the binary of man/woman and male/female. As with all gender identities, some folks may identify as non-binary in addition to other identities, including male and female. While this may seem contradictory, it is also symbolic of the infinite ways that gender identities manifest in our lives. Some identities frequently associated with gender non-binary include genderqueer, genderfluid and gender non-conforming.

Gender non-conforming: Also called gender variance or gender nonconformity, this term includes actions, mannerisms, styles, fashions, and other aspects of appearance or behaviour that push back on or blur the gender binary of man/woman, male/female and masculine/feminine. Any person of any gender identity--including cisgender--may exhibit traits of gender nonconformity. The term “gender non-conforming” itself also refers to gender identities, such as gender non-binary.

Gender-based violence: Violence rooted in gender-based oppression and power inequalities based on gender identity, perceived gender identity and/or gender expression, such as sexism, cissexism, misogyny, and transmisogyny. Any act of interpersonal, institutional or systemic act of violence (physical, sexual, economic, emotional, spiritual, social) that devalues and/or reinforces expected entitlement to women, girls, and trans, Two-Spirit, genderqueer, non-binary, and gender non-conforming bodies and lives.

Genderfluid: Gender identity that is mutable (liable to change) or that that is not fixed/static.

Genderqueer: A term which refers to individuals or groups who “queer” or problematize the hegemonic notions of sex, gender and desire in a given society. Genderqueer people possess identities which fall outside of the widely accepted sexual binary (i.e. “men” and “women”). Genderqueer may also refer to people who identify as both transgender AND queer, i.e. individuals who challenge both gender and sexuality regimes and see gender identity and sexual orientation as overlapping and interconnected.

Heteropatriarchy: A colonial construct and concept that defines both masculinity and femininity in narrow and limiting ways in order to maintain a binary distinction between male and female, dominant and subordinate. It operates from the assertion that the earth is inherently female and is therefore seen as inherently subservient/available to be consumed and utilized. Heteropatriarchy serves to naturalize all other social hierarchies, such as white supremacy and settler colonialism. When colonists first came to this land they saw the necessity of instilling patriarchy in Native communities because they realized that indigenous peoples would not accept colonial domination if their own indigenous societies were not structured on the basis of social hierarchy. Heteropatriarchy denies and invisibilizes the infinite diversity of gender identities, gender expressions, ways of being, roles we hold as individuals, and sexualities.

Homo-antagonism: Active hostility or opposition towards people whose sexuality is not heteronormative. This is often based on the assumption that monogamous relationships between one man and one woman is the traditional, superior, and only legitimate form of sexuality. The language has shifted from the use of “phobia” (as in homophobia), to the use of antagonism to better encompass the violence that is perpetrated.

Intersex: A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that is outside the medical system’s binary classification of ‘female’ or ‘male’. For example, a person may be born with a noticeably large clitoris, or not having a vaginal opening, or a notably small penis, or with a scrotum that is divided so that it has formed more like labia. Or a person may be born with mosaic genetics, so that some of their cells have XX chromosomes and some of them have XY, or may be born with XXY chromosomes. Intersex is a socially constructed category that reflects real biological variation. Physical attributes considered markers of ‘sex’ — e.g., breasts, penises, clitorises, scrotums, labia, gonads, and sex chromosomes — all naturally vary, but in the dominant culture sex categories have been simplified into male and female, and people with intersex conditions subjected to shame, secrecy, and unwanted genital surgeries or hormonal treatments aimed at making bodies fit into a sex binary.

Misogyny: The hatred or dislike of women, girls, or femininity; the denigration of women and characteristics deemed feminine. Misogyny functions as an ideology or belief system that has accompanied patriarchal, or male-dominated societies for thousands of years and continues to place women and people who identify and express themselves in feminine ways in subordinate positions with limited access to power and decision making. Misogyny can be manifested in numerous ways, including sexual discrimination, violence, and the sexual objectification of women. Though commonly associated with men, misogyny also exists in and is practiced by women against other women or even themselves.

Non-disposability: The belief and actions that treat all folks as worthy of care, support, community, and accountability. Holding that we are indispensable in the web of humans. We are all needed! This is a lens commonly used by folks in transformative justice and anti-prison work. We all have the capacity to cause harm and while we must hold ourselves and others accountable to harm caused, causing harm doesn’t make us bad people.

Oppression: Institutionalised power that is historically formed and perpetuated over time that allows certain ‘groups’ of people to assume a dominant position over ‘other groups’ and this dominance is maintained and continued at an institutional level. This means oppression is built into institutions like government and education systems. It gives power and positions of dominance to some groups of people over other groups of people. Systems of oppression are built around what are understood to be “norms” in our societies. A norm signifies what is “normal,” acceptable, and desirable. “The norm” is something that is valued and supported in a society. It is also given a position of dominance, privilege and power over what is defined as non-dominant, abnormal and therefore invaluable or marginal. Norms are also considered to be stable or unchanging over time.

Privilege: Privilege is an unearned, special advantage or right that a person is born into or acquires during their lifetime. It is supported by the formal and informal institutions of society and conferred to all members of a dominant group, by virtue of their group membership. Privilege implies that wherever there is a system of oppression (such as capitalism, patriarchy, or white supremacy) there is an oppressed group and also a privileged group, who benefit from the oppressions that this system puts in place. Privilege and power are closely related: privilege often gives a person or group power over others.

Racism: Racism is a white supremacist ideology backed by systemic power, and reinforced through violence. It is a system of power that privileges those people who are defined and socially constructed as “White”. Racism treats all races as inferior to white people, and also subordinates each race to each other. Racism is often understood as an individual state of being, as in someone is or isn’t racist. Racism, however, is not merely a personal attitude, it is a racialized system of power maintained by violence. An individual can be perpetuating this system without even being conscious of their actions.

Rape culture: The culture in which we live that normalizes and glorifies sexualized violence, creating a sense of entitlement to other people’s physical, emotional, and sexual well beings without consent.

Sex Positive: Sex positive is a way of being in the world that believes that sex and sexuality can be integral part of being human. A sex positive perspective does not “yuck another person’s yum” meaning that all consensual expressions of sex are affirmed and not shamed. A couple of important nuances that often get lost are that this perspective respects all choices to have sex or not, including those on the asexuality spectrum. AVP’s approach to sex positivity includes remaining critical about how we have sex and how our sexuality is shaped by oppressive systems.

Sexism: Sexism is discrimination based on sex and/or gender, and the attitudes, stereotypes, and cultural elements that promote this discrimination. Given the historical and continued imbalance of power, where men as a class are privileged over women and those of other genders, an important part of the term is that sexism is discrimination based on prejudice, paired with institutional power.

Sexual assault: Any unwanted sexual contact. This is a range of things that includes touching or rubbing any parts of another’s body in a way that feels sexualized (always up to the person who was assaulted to decide this).

Sexualized violence: Anything that disrespects your sexuality (including disrespect of asexuality) or is violence in a sexualized context. This is many things and can look like comments, leering, intimidation, coercion, expectations, discrimination, non-consensual touching, sexual assault, sexual harassment, etc.

Systemic/Structural Violence: Violence which result from laws, policy, and/or dominant cultural practices, which discriminate against, create barriers, and endanger lives based on one's identity. Structural violence is a critical aspect to oppression and specifically targets those who are poor, racialized, Indigenous, disabled, and/or members of the LGBTQ community. This violence can inhibit social/physical/financial mobility and result in death. Structural violence is often ignored and erased by blaming individual people and ignoring the larger system that is not set up to support them.

Trans or Transgender: This term has many definitions. It is frequently used as an umbrella term to refer to all people who do not identify with their assigned gender at birth or the binary gender system. Some transgender people feel they exist not within one of the two standard gender categories, but rather somewhere between, beyond, or outside of those two genders.

Trans-antagonism: Active hostility, opposition, aggression and/or violence towards trans people. Transantagonism reflects a hatred of those who do not fit easily into the gender binary. The language has shifted from the use of "phobia" (as in transphobia), to the use of antagonism to better encompass the violence that is perpetrated.

Two-spirit: A word for non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender Indigenous people that is used to refer to identity, roles, and responsibility. Not everyone chooses to use this word and instead chooses to use words like gay, lesbian, trans, queer, genderqueer, gender-fluid, gender creative instead, or in combination. This word came into being in 1990 via Myra Laramee at a gathering for "Native American and Canadian Aboriginal LGBT people" (For more information see twospiritmanitoba.ca). This word is not for non-Indigenous folks to use.

White supremacy: An historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of colour by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege.

Resources

Here are some resources that might be useful to refer to, share, and/or discuss with your community! While they're categorized by the primary topic addressed, these topics are not mutually exclusive or definite and intersect in many ways. Resources focusing on different topics are often complementary to each other, creating opportunity for reflection on these dynamics may also be useful for individuals and the group.

Local Histories and Knowledge

- Pronunciation Guide for Indigenous Communities in B.C.
Bannock + Butter
<http://bannockandbutter.tumblr.com/post/31780109220/pronunciation-guide-for-indigenous-communities-in>
- Resources for Territory Acknowledgements (Map and Pronunciation Guide of Local Nations on Vancouver Island)
Anti Violence Project
<https://www.antiviolenceproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Resources-for-Territory-Acknowledgements.pdf>
- First Nations in British Columbia (Map)
Indigenous Services Canada
https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-BC/STAGING/texte-text/inacmp_1100100021016_eng.pdf
- Straits Territories of Vancouver Island (Map)
University of Victoria Legacy Art Gallery
<http://uvac.uvic.ca/gallery/salishcurriculum/files/2015/04/Map-3-A-Straits-Territories-1JPEG-copy.jpg>
- The First Peoples' Language Map of B.C.
First Peoples' Heritage, Language & Culture Council
<http://maps.fphlcc.ca/>
- Esquimalt Nation
Esquimalt Nation
<http://www.esquimaltnation.ca/>
- The Songhees First Nation
Songhees Nation
<http://www.songheesnation.ca/>
- Restoring Camas and Culture to Lekwungen and Victoria: An interview with Lekwungen Cheryl Bryce
Briony Penn
<http://www.firstnations.de/media/06-1-1-camas.pdf>
- Many Ways of Being a Human Being: Our Way Begins on LAUWELNEW MENETIA
<http://lauwelnew.blogspot.com>

Masculinity

- A New Masculinity: Why I Need Feminism as a Man
Jamie Utt
<http://everydayfeminism.com/2014/05/a-new-masculinity/>
- What is Normal? Addressing Violence with Young People
Benjamin Smith
<http://changefromwithin.org/2013/05/30/what-is-normal/>
- #BeThatGuy: 7+ Everyday Ways Men Can Transform Masculinity
Jamie Utt
<http://everydayfeminism.com/2013/12/men-can-transform-masculinity/>
- Come at Me Bro!! Men and Conflict Resolution
Jeff Perera
<http://higherunlearning.com/2013/08/24/come-at-me-bro-russell-brand-on-men-and-conflict-resolution/>
- “I Can’t Help Myself”: Do Men Need to be Saved from Themselves?
Jeff Perera
<http://higherunlearning.com/2015/06/17/i-cant-help-myself-do-men-need-to-be-saved-from-themselves/>
- How to Fight (Video)
Carlos Andrés Gómez
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=cKMhp7hpYIs>

White Supremacy

- White Settlers and Indigenous Solidarity - Confronting White Supremacy, Answering Decolonial Alliances
Scott L. Morgensen
<https://decolonization.wordpress.com/2014/05/26/white-settlers-and-indigenous-solidarity-confronting-white-supremacy-answering-decolonial-alliances/>
- Defensiveness (Video)
Notjohnjones
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HaGIUjse7PM>

Privilege

- Privilege - Part 1 (Video)
Notjohnjones
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cFFUpE7XooY>
- Privilege - Part 2 (Video)
Notjohnjones
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ib_SR_OantU

- Female Privilege (Video)
Notjohnjones
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kma_d3jGWxc
- Ableism (Video)
Notjohnjones
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cunxY2Yivpo>
- Male Privilege (Video)
Notjohnjones
<http://itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2012/11/30-examples-of-male-privilege/>
- Of Dogs and Lizards - A Parable of Privilege
Sindelókë
<https://sindeloke.wordpress.com/2010/01/13/37/>
- Proof of Male Privilege
Jon Greenberg
<http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/05/proof-male-privilege/>

Emotional Labour

- 4 Ways Men Can Take On More Emotional Labor In Relationships (And Why We Should)
Philippe Leonard Fradet
<https://thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/7-ways-men-must-learn-to-do-emotional-labor-in-their-relationships/>

Feminism

- On Feminism (Video)
Notjohnjones
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bT5d2bpiqw>
- Patriarchy Hurts Men (Video)
Notjohnjones
<https://youtu.be/PvMn7iAhz2M>
- Rape Jokes and the Rapist's Comrade (Video)
Notjohnjones
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q409VOLe_Y0
- On Gaslighting (Video)
Notjohnjones
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xq0keHc2JEQ>
- Violence Against Women - It's a Men's Issue (Video)
Jackson Katz
https://www.ted.com/talks/jackson_katz_violence_against_women_it_s_a_men_s_issue
- A Call to Men
Tony Porter
https://www.ted.com/talks/tony_porter_a_call_to_men

Facilitation Support

- Open to Outcome: A Practical Guide For Facilitating and Teaching Experiential Reflection” (Book)
Mari Ruddy
- Games for Actors and Non-Actors (Book)
Augusto Boal
- Theatre of the Oppressed
Mandala Center for Change
<http://www.mandalaforchange.com/applied-theatre/theatre-of-the-oppressed/>
- Theater of the Oppressed
Levana Saxon
<http://beautifultrouble.org/theory/theater-of-the-oppressed/>
- How to Tell Someone They Sound Racist (Video)
Jay Smooth
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0Ti-gkJiXc>
- Facilitating Workshops
Seeds for Change
<https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/facilitatingworkshops>
- Facilitation Tools for Meetings and Workshops
Seeds for Change
<https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/tools>

Grant

- Information about the grant we received can be found here:
<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/crime-prevention/civil-forfeiture-office/grants-compensation/applying>

Contributors

Kanika Jackson

Kanika is a biracial woman who has been living, uninvited, on Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ territory all her life. Growing up as a mixed race, able-bodied lesbian has allowed Kanika to learn about the intersections of power and privilege through her lived experiences, and fueled her passion for social justice. Her desire to participate in creating cultures of consent and community care led her to begin volunteering with AVP, and continues to inspire her to find new ways of challenging herself and those around her to be and do better. After graduating with a BA in Psychology, Kanika intends to complete her Masters and become an Occupational Therapist.

Yasmine El-Hamamsy

Yasmine has lived as an uninvited settler on Kanien'kehá:ka and Siksika territories, before moving to territory of the Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ peoples to study Political Science at the University of Victoria. She is a cisgender able-bodied woman. As a “mixed race,” first-generation North American from Arab and European heritage, she continues to learn to acknowledge her white privilege, self-locate, and balance her identity within and without these various cultural contexts. Yasmine began volunteering with the AVP in the fall of 2016 in the hopes of learning about and contributing to communities and relationships of care and support.

Brydon Kramer

Brydon is a cisgender, straight, white, settler man, currently living with able-bodied privilege. Born and raised on treaty 7 territory, Brydon moved to Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ territory to attend school at UVic in September 2011. While on the University of Victoria Student Society’s Board of Directors, Brydon became involved with UVic’s Let’s Get Consensual Campaign, which eventually led him to volunteer with the Anti-Violence Project. He has also participated in the Men’s Circle for a number of years and has taken on a coordinating role with the group since December 2016. Brydon is currently pursuing a Master’s degree in Cultural, Social, Political Thought and Indigenous Nationhood at UVic.

Paloma Ponti

Born and raised on the territory of the Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ peoples, Paloma is a cisgender settler woman. As a white presenting person of “mixed-race”, Paloma often struggles to locate herself while both acknowledging her Colombian roots and her own white privilege, and is always continuing to deepen her learning about this. Paloma began working on sexualized violence prevention at age 15 as a member of Project Respect’s Youth Social Action Team and Hollaback! Victoria, BC. She continues to expand her understanding of systems of oppression as a UVic Gender Studies and Social Justice Studies student and since 2016, in her work at AVP.



Lekwungen and WŚANÉC Territories
antiviolenceproject.org
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