



The Affective Intensities of Gender Transformative Work: An Actionable Framework for Facilitators Working with Boys and Young Men

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

There is a growing demand for programs that engage boys and men in promoting healthy relationships and gender justice. These programs vary in their specific goals, approaches, and target audiences. This article describes one such program that aims to promote positive and respectful gender relations. In the program, trained members of the community facilitated conversations among groups of boys and young men about gender issues and encourage participants to find alternatives to restrictive gender norms. In this article, the authors describe a framework to support facilitators who engage in this kind of work.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

- Gender transformative programs require advanced facilitation skills to facilitate difficult conversations about sensitive topics.
- Self-reflection is an essential facilitator skill. Facilitators who can critically reflect on their own emotional experiences are able to learn and grow alongside participants.
- Group facilitators can identify key moments where they experience strong emotions in the group and use these moments to explore empathy and incite change.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

The authors interviewed 10 adult staff involved in a gender justice program in the United States for youth ages 12 to 18. The interviewees were six researchers involved in evaluating the program and four individuals involved in managing or facilitating the program. The authors asked interviewees questions about their experiences of the program.





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WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

The study authors use interviewees' stories to illustrate how facilitators can navigate complex conversations around gender roles and relationships. The stories demonstrate how skilled facilitators may be able to notice their own strong emotional reactions to program topics (e.g., one facilitator became uncomfortable leading a conversation about homosexuality), as well as those of participants, and to use these reactions to support learning.

The authors also describe how facilitators can use empathy to create an environment conducive to exploration of difficult topics and to encourage participants to reflect on their understanding on others' experiences (e.g., considering how young women may experience issues of sexual consent). They highlight ideas about how facilitators can channel participants' emotions to create connection and spur action.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

The authors offer guiding questions for program facilitators and designers to reflect upon the emotions that arise in gender transformative work. The questions include:

- What aspects of gender transformative curriculum content incites particular strong emotions?
- How and why are gendered messages (for example, messages about masculinity in media) circulated in order to generate a specific emotional response?
- How can facilitators channel the emotional intensities arising from difficult conversations about gender with men and boys to create connection, solidarity, and action as feminist allies?

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

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