Changing Men: Integrating Freirian Education, Human Relations Training, and Anti-Oppression Education in a Men's Transformational Learning Experience

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Abstract: This paper presents a model of a pedagogy for anti-sexist education for men, drawing on and integrating principles and practices from the three approaches noted in the title, and adapting Kegan's conceptualization of the various kinds of learning (or holding) environments necessary to support developmental change.

This paper draws on my ongoing efforts to help men to learn about the varied and sometimes conflicting definitions of what it means to "be a man" in North American society today, how those meanings have been constructed, and how they might like to reconstruct those meanings, both within their own consciousness and within their social context. This work has been carried out through the development, in theory and practice, of a series of college courses with variations on the title "On Being Male: Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Society." In this paper, I summarize the theoretical foundations of this course and describe its main principles and practices in a model of a pedagogy for anti-sexist education for men.

In working to develop this pedagogical model, I have drawn on and integrated principles and practices from three educational approaches: laboratory and human relations training groups (T-groups) (Benne, Bradford, Gibb, & Lippit, 1975); Freire's education for critical consciousness (Freire, 2000); and anti-oppression (social justice) education (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). The teaching principles underlying those approaches are described briefly, followed by the presentation of an integrated model that draws on each in a synthesis of education for personal growth and social change. The synthesis creates a model of a pedagogy for anti-sexist education for men that can potentially be adapted and applied to work with more privileged members of society from various social groups to join with the less privileged or oppressed in working toward the creation of a new social order that is more just and more fulfilling for all.

This model is based most fundamentally on Freire' notion that "men's [sic] vocation is to become more fully human," (1970, p.4). From this perspective, even the "oppressors" – those who benefit from our current social, cultural and economic structures and practices - are prevented from fulfilling that vocation, preventing from realizing and actualizing their full humanity. As Freire argues,

> No one can be authentically human while preventing others from doing so…..The situation of oppression is a dehumanized and dehumanizing totality affecting both the oppressors and those whom they oppress….To surmount the situation of oppression, men {sic] must first critically examine its causes, so that through transformative action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity. (1970. p.42).

Applying this argument to patriarchy and sexism as a system of oppression, these assumptions point us toward a question that an anti-sexist pedagogy for men must address: How can we help men to recognize that their own humanity is limited by this situation of oppression; that is,

by our patriarchal institutions, structures, and cultural practices, and by the gender roles that support that oppression?

This work is based on the belief then, that patriarchy and sexism, while granting men many privileges, cuts men off from their full humanity, and that it will therefore be beneficial for men to reconstruct the meanings and manifestations of manhood and masculinity in three fundamental ways: to transcend traditional stereotypical definitions of masculinity or manly behavior, enabling them to choose from the full array of what have been labeled as "masculine" and "feminine" qualities and social roles; to develop an awareness of how those traditional gender definitions are linked to men's power over women, our preparation for dominance or subordinance, and to our patriarchal institutions; and to work to create the structural changes that will make full gender equity possible. The personal and political are clearly connected. Indeed, as Kaufman argues (2002), a key to opening the door to this connection is to help men to see the connections between our pain and our privilege, our power and our powerlessness. According to Kaufman, the reproduction of patriarchy is maintained through that pain-power equilibrium. Once those feelings of pain break through, a disequilibrium results, and if men can then come to see the source of their pain in the sexist and patriarchal system which limits them as it oppresses women, the web of personal behavior, social roles, and institutional structures which support patriarchy can begin to unravel. The model described below is designed to help men to feel that pain, to recognize those connections and to begin to engage in the personal and social change work that is needed. It is also important to note that a recognition of those connections must also be based in an understanding of the particular and varied racial, ethnic, class and sexual orientation positions that we occupy and experience as men. While there may be a hegemonic definition of maleness to which we are all compared (Connell 2005), there are many marginalized and subordinated masculinities (e.g queer, Black, Jewish, etc.), as gender intersects with other aspects of our identities, that we must also understand as we unravel the particular connections between patriarchy and other forms of oppression. Each man must come to this work from his own particular positionality.

An Integrated Model of an Anti-Sexist Pedagogy for Men

The three approaches noted above provide the building blocks that I have used to outline this integrated pedagogy that is capable of helping men to develop more autonomy from the dictates of gender role prescriptions, more awareness of the dynamics of patriarchy and sexism, more understanding of the connections between patriarchy, racism, and heterosexism, and more activism in response.

From the T-group approach come principles for helping men to become aware of the limitations of some of their traditional "male" ways of being and interacting and to develop a more balanced repertoire of interpersonal skills. In helping participants to get feedback about the impact of their interpersonal behavior on others, and to experiment with alternatives, such groups can help men to move beyond stereotypical patterns of behavior. When they increase their understanding of the roots of these attitudes and behaviors, and their relationship to gender expectations, men can develop more ability to choose whether or not they wish to follow the script that has been written for them. By itself, however, this approach can confine change to the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels, and without social and institutional changes that create changed contexts and power relations, these personal changes are difficult to actualize and sustain. A Freirian approach can help men to understand and address this limitation.

Freire's education for critical consciousness offers principles that can be used to help men to identify the factors in the social/economic/ political environment that limit their growth

and development, to see the connection of those limits to the oppression of women, and hence to motivate them to act against personal and institutional sexism. Through a process of dialogue, problem-posing, and action, Freirian education can present men with the opportunity to make connections between the limitations of traditional gender roles and patriarchal institutions and the power relations in which those roles are embedded. By beginning with issues about which men may feel pain and limitation, and may feel that their full humanity is being thwarted, such as, their ability to develop fully mutual, deeply intimate and satisfying relationships with women and with other men, the Freirian educator can pose these limits as problems to be solved, and help men to see the connections between these personal limitations and the privileges accorded to them by the social structures in which they are embedded.

Anti-oppression education (AOE) offers a set of strategies for helping men to recognize the contradictions between their current attitudes and behaviors and the democratic principles of equality and social justice, strategies that fit well within the Freirian process of dialogically analyzing codifications that reflect the limit-situations that people are experiencing. When men's awareness of the effects of sexism on women and on men themselves is increased, it can help motivate them to take anti-sexist actions in response. Anti-oppression education also offers a broad framework for conceptualizing the consciousness raising process as akin to the developmental change process described by Robert Kegan (2006) in the phases of defending, surrendering, and reintegrating. Each of those phases is supported by a learning environment offering *confirmation, contradiction, or continuation*, and on teaching strategies to provide the appropriate learning environment for each phase. To these three learning environments, I have added a fourth, "*creation*", which is needed to support the process through which people can develop and experiment with new ways of thinking and acting that can resolve the contradictions or disequilibrium that they may be experiencing.

The model of a pedagogy for anti-sexist education for men outlines the teaching principles to be used in the development of each kind of environment, integrating principles of Freire's approach with those of the T-group and AOE, all of which are based on a dialogical learning model that begins with learners' questions and experiences, builds group cohesiveness, and raises contradictions and problems to be resolved.[1] What follows is an outline of the teaching principles to be used in the development of each kind of environment, the objectives to be achieved, and some examples and illustrations of their application in practice.

1. Development of an Environment that Offers Confirmation

All of the approaches reviewed above are premised on the creation of an environment that helps participants to feel safe, supported and confirmed; an environment in which they can share their personal stories and reflect on their experiences and feelings, in and out of the group, and articulate and examine their current understanding of the issues. The creation of such an environment involves setting norms regarding the process of communication in the group and the content of the communication—which must center on the personal experiencing of the learners, The various means that can be used for setting such a climate can be combined into the following principles:

a) Set norms for nonjudgmental dialogical communication. These norms can be set by the leader through personal modeling, clearly announced guidelines, and monitoring and

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[1] The process described - disequilibrium, change, and action - is closely related to the transformative learning process as described by J. Mezirow (2000) *Transformative learning: A theory in process*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

enforcement. Guidelines, which a group can help to create for itself, may include such practices as active listening, use of "I" messages, confidentiality, and no put-downs.

b) Set norms that make the personal experience of learners the basic content of communication. These norms can be set by announcing that people will learn primarily from themselves and each other, not only from the leader, and demonstrating and engaging others in the sharing of personal experiences from inside and outside the group. Beginning the exploration of each topic with journal writing and discussion about individual experiences with, for instance, growing up male – in varied racial/ethnic/ cultural contexts, relationships with women and with men, followed by reading analyses of such issues, can support the development of such norms.

c) Structured experiences that build trust and dialogue. Activities that move from personal reflection to paired sharing to small group and then large group discussion can help to build trust and dialogue as people build relationships and gradually become comfortable sharing information and feelings with larger groups of people.

2. Development of an Environment that Offers Contradiction

The contradicting environment must function to help participants to experience feelings of anxiety, dissonance, and disequilibrium in regard to their interpersonal behavior and their attitudes and ways of making meaning about sexism and patriarchy. The necessary means for facilitating such dissonance are expressed in the following principles:

a) Process interpersonal behavior in the group, in regard to its effects on others and the group process, and its relationship to male role socialization. This processing can be facilitated by focusing attention on such behavior, asking processing questions, setting aside group time for it, and demonstrating and setting norms of self-disclosure and feedback. For instance, such processing and feedback may help some men to notice how much they may monopolize discussion, interrupt others, or intellectualize issues instead of expressing feelings,

b) Present new information, definitions, and cognitive organizers about gender roles and patriarchy. Examples might include information (or, in Freirian terms, codifications) about the relative status of men and women, statistics on rape and violence against women, videos on images of men and women in advertising and on date rape and theories about the dynamics of oppression in general and of sexism, racism and heterosexism in particular.

c) Structure activities through which participants encounter contradictions in their present behavior and consciousness. Examples of such activities may include (depending on the consciousness and identity development of those in a group) brainstorming about stereotypes of women and men, role plays involving images of men and women, feedback on interpersonal patterns of behavior, confrontation in regard to lack of action in support of professed beliefs.

d) Problematize – pose limits to men's growth and development as problems to be analyzed and solved. For instance, limits such as lack of fulfilling relationships with women or difficulties with expression of feelings can be linked to gender roles and to inequalities of power between men and women.

3. Development of an Environment that Offers Creation—New Models and Visions

Once people's attitudes, beliefs, and interpersonal behaviors have become "unfrozen," the next step is to create an environment that offers them the means for change, means which will help them to resolve the contradictions and reach, if even only temporarily, a new equilibrium. In order to facilitate that change, the learning environment must offer some idea or vision of what that change might be. Those alternatives, or models for new ways of thinking and

behaving, and new forms of social organization can be developed by participants themselves, or be presented in some form by the leaders. The principles involved in creating this sort of environment involve ways of either helping participants to develop and articulate their own alternatives or ways of modeling and presenting alternatives.

a) Modeling alternative interpersonal behaviors. As individuals search for alternatives to what they may discover to be their ineffective repertoire of male- stereotyped interpersonal skills, they need to see examples and models of new more effective behaviors, such as, for example, empathic listening, making sure that others in the group have a chance to speak, talking with other men about their relationships with one another.

b) Dialogue/discussion involving the analysis of the causes of the limits men experience, the connection of those limits to sex roles and the oppression of women, and the envisioning of solutions to those limits. Through a problem-posing and problem-solving process, it may be possible to some extent to help men to discover for themselves new ways of thinking about these issues, and to themselves envision alternatives and solutions. For instance, a focus on the limits a man may experience in his relationship with his father may lead to an analysis of male socialization toward the value of work and away from the family, which may in turn lead to a vision of more equitable gender roles in regard to the balance of family and work responsibilities.

c) Present alternative cognitive maps/forms of consciousness. In order to facilitate the discovery process mentioned above and to help people to sort out and make sense of the other contradictions they are experiencing it is often helpful to present through lecture or discussion new frames of reference. For instance, a framework that explains the relationship between heterosexism, sexism, and rigid gender roles can help men see their stake in opposing both of these related and interlocking forms of oppression. If these new "maps" do help people to resolve the contradictions they see, they will then appropriate and internalize these maps as their own, The presentation and internalization of different ways of thinking about sexism and gender roles can also help people internalize into their self-concept the new, more expressive behaviors they may be experimenting with.

d) Provide structure for planning actions for personal and social change. Once problems have been identified and analyzed and long range solutions have been uncovered, the next step is to plan how to get from here to there. That planning may involve simply thinking about when to try out a new interpersonal behavior or it may involve carefully analyzing a series of action steps to work toward one's vision of a new society, At any level of change, the learning environment must encourage people to think through those actions and envision concrete steps that they can begin to take. That encouragement can range from asking participants to set personal goals, objectives, and plans for change to engaging the entire group in creating plans for how to change or facilitate their own interaction, or how to take some political action together. Actions can take place, and be planned for, at a variety of levels.

e) Praxis—Engaging participants in action to transform themselves and their society.
Once alternatives have been envisioned and actions planned, the next step is to encourage and support people in taking action. Those actions may involve personal change in, for instance, one's level of self-disclosure in the group or way of relating to women friends, or social action such as forming an anti-pornography task force or joining a march against rape. Such actions can be encouraged through such means as setting a group norm of experimenting with new behavior, or asking people to take some action and report back to the group about it. As individuals reflect

on that action and its results, their understanding and awareness will continue to increase, and they can go on to plan for and take more action.

4. Development of an Environment that Offers Continuity

If the changes in behavior and consciousness that individuals experience are to be integrated into their life outside of and after the learning groups, an environment must be created which offers them some means and structure for facilitating that sort of integration on both the cognitive and affective levels.

a) Summarizing and synthesizing. At various points in the learning process and especially at the end, it is important for participants to summarize and synthesize their learning. Verbal written and verbal synthesizing can reinforce learnings and help people to gain clarity and perspective. Reflecting on their learning and sharing reflections with others in the group can catalyze a collective process of analyzing, naming, and potentially changing their social contexts.

b) Support groups. Support groups in and after the group can provide people with the interpersonal support they need to maintain and nurture their changing selves. On at least two occasions, for instance, this group study led to the creation of ongoing men's group outside of the class itself, and to participation in regional and national conferences of NOMAS, the National Organization for Men Against Sexism.

c) Continued praxis. Action planning, action, reflection. A full integration of the changes that are desired necessarily means that people will become engaged in an ongoing process of critical reflection and action to change themselves and their world. Once underway, it is a process without an end.

d) Gradual disengagement by the leader. As individuals and the group develop more and more of a capacity for critical thinking and action, it is important to gradually "wither away" and turn over more and more leadership functions to the group so that it and the individuals involved can function for and by themselves. In this way, the study can be an empowering experience for the participants rather than one that leads to dependence on or idolization of the group leader.

The particular way in which these principles are applied, and the specific content engaged will depend on the interests and concerns of those in any particular group. The leaders' role is to ask questions, pose problems, and offer new ways of seeing and analyzing, thus engaging in a critical dialogue.[2] We can help people to begin a process of change; where it leads is up to them.

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[2] For a full description of one such experience and course design, see S. Schapiro (1999). Toward a pedagogy of the "oppressor": A Freirian approach to anti-sexist education with men. In S. Schapiro (Ed.), *Higher education for democracy.* New York: Peter Lang.