Transcript for Moving from Men as Allies to Men as Stakeholders
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JAKE STIKA:
Hi, folks. I have had some folks say hello in the chat here. My name's Jake Stika. I use he/him pronouns. And I'm honoured to be joining you all today from the unceded territories of the Coast Salish Peoples, the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh. And we are going to be discussing moving from men as allies to men as stakeholders. And kind of what goes into that is my background, leading an organization called Next Gen Men. So Next Gen Men is working towards a future where boys and men feel less pain and cause less harm. And so when we're talking about boys and men feeling less pain, we're acknowledging that, you know, men are three out of four suicides, die on average five years earlier that women, are you know, 82% of drug poisonings, overrepresented and incarceration, homelessness, substance abuse as, kind of, extreme examples. As well as the fact that men are the primary perpetrators of all forms of violence and aside from gender based violence actually experienced, most forms of violence are often at the hands of other men.

But all that, we still want to acknowledge that men cause a lot of pain and suffering as well too, hurt people, hurt people. And so we want to mitigate, you know, gender inequality, gender based violence, those kinds of things. So that's kind of the background. And Next Gen Men does that work by engaging, educating and empowering boys and men around gender inequality among youth in communities and at workplaces. So that's kind of where I'm coming from into this conversation. I'm probably going to talk at you for, maybe half an hour. But we'll have the back end because, personally, I would much rather talk with people. So we'd love to know, you know, what's going on with regards to this in your world, different concepts that come up in the conversation and all those kinds of. So there will be room to chat on the tail end of this as well, too. Alright, so under the banner of feminism, we have had a brilliant conversation about women's roles and identities in society over the past 70 plus years.

So we've been making a lot of progress with a lot more to go. But because we haven't had a parallel conversation for with and about men, actually, probably we have been talking a lot about men, but not necessarily always for it with them. We are simultaneously pressing the gas for women and girls while holding the brake for men and boys. And we know in a car when we do that, we start to spin our wheels, right. And so we got the screeching, we got the friction, we got, you know, this whole to do our things right now. So what we want to do is release the brake. And as well to just before I kind of jump into this a bit further. When I talk about men and women in those kinds of things, I really don't mean to erase trans and non-binary individuals. Liberation from gender roles and norms is liberation for all of us, but the reality is, the majority of society still is binary in that sense. So that's kind of what I'm defaulting to in a lot of these conversations, but there's always space for that nuance as we go.

And to give you a sense of, kind of where Next Gen Men is coming from in this conversation and, kind of, building on what I said earlier is a great quote from the recently deceased bell hooks from her book, The Will to Change. And she says, the first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not violence towards women. Instead, patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional part of themselves. And if an individual is not successful and emotionally crippling himself, he can count on patriarchal men to enact rituals of power that will assault

his self-esteem. And I remember when I read that for the first time, it really hit me. And I had already been running Next Gen Men. But this paragraph here really gave a container to the work before it, more so than even I had attempted to do it. As I mentioned, I'm one of the co-founders and kind of my catalyst in this you can't necessarily tell on Zoom. But I'm six foot eight.

I'm a former semi-professional basketball player. So tall, straight, white, male. All those checkboxes is a privilege. And despite that I was really struggling with mental health, with depression in my late teens and early 20s. And what I came to understand out of that was I had this script of, you've got to be tough, you can't show emotion, you can't ask for help. That was really limiting how I showed up in the world and causing me a lot of pain. And at 19, my coping mechanism was binge drinking and fistfights And at 22, my coping mechanism was self-harm, which then landed me in, kind of, therapy and beginning on a healing journey. So that was my own, kind of, personal entry point into this. Meanwhile, my best friend in university unfortunately lost his 13 year old brother to suicide, 2007. Young black men experiencing homophobic bullying. And collectively with his grief and my experience, we really wanted something different for the next generation of men. And so that was kind of the catalyst into this for us.

And really echoed a lot of what this paragraph here is talking about. And so when it comes to engaging men and boys in these conversations about gender inequality, you know you need to do it, but how's it going? I'm seeing some coy smiles from the folks who have their cameras on. So I appreciate that, hopefully, that reverberates across. An entry point into, I think, constructive conversations about this is kind of tackling this culture of competition and domination that men are socialized to from a young age. And so I'm going to tell a bit of a sensationalized story here in a few different generational pieces. And I don't mean to say that every single individual experiences this. But by the end of my story, I hope that you can kind of resonate with it and see that, either you have experienced it if you're a male identified individual or a man or a boy that you care about has experienced that in your life, and then we can kind of unpack that later. But when I talk about competition and domination, people often think, Oh well, that is men over women and trans and non-binary individuals in kind of a gender hierarchy.

But I am also talking about a spirit of competition and domination within masculinity itself. And this is really well epitomized in Raewyn Cornell's hierarchy of masculinity. And at the top, she has hegemonic masculinity. And when I think of hegemonic masculinity, I think of like James Bond 007. He's fed. He's got fast cars. He's got more money than he knows what to do with all the gadgets. He benefits from a lot of the dominant narratives in society and has kind of got that unobtainable top of the pyramid, right. But in the nature of a pyramid, there's only so much room at the top, so he kind of occupies that top space. But beneath that is complicit masculinity. And that's a lot of men who benefit from a lot of those dominant narratives in society but aren't necessarily in a position or working towards competing to get to that top of the pyramid, but they still enjoy a lot of those benefits. Then beneath that, we have marginalized masculinity. And this is where men don't necessarily have access to some of those dominant narratives such as, you know, being white or socioeconomically affluent or those kinds of things.

So you know, someone like that could be maybe LeBron James, you know, he still has some of the dominant traits of masculinity, but being a black man is also limiting in certain aspects, in that sense. And then at the bottom of the pyramid, we have subordinate masculinity. And those are male identified individuals who just eschew the idea of masculinity, not for me, I don't want to participate, not going to take part, right. And so there is this spirit of competition that exists even among men and boys that gets

entrenched and socialized over a lifetime. And that's what we're going to dive into here. And it's formed through the stories we tell. And one of those major stories is before birth, when folks have gender reveal parties, which I always correct them that these are sex reveal parties, we do not know what the gender will be till later in life. But you know, I recently experienced this, one of my best friends had a baby girl within the last week. And all the conversations that we started having about what kind of a world he was bringing a daughter into.

And realistically, becoming a father is one of the few entry points where men think critically about gender. And if it's a girl, then you know, we have the trope of the male bringing out the shotgun and polishing it because they need to protect their daughter in this world. But rather than transforming the boys that are going to approach the daughter, they want to protect the daughter and maintain a status quo, right. So that's a narrative there. And then on the other hand, when they have a son, it kind of goes to waste. They either are worried that their son will grow up the same way that they had it as a boy, or they double down on that and say, I'm going to toughen him up so he can survive that gauntlet of socialization, right. And so those are some of the stories that start forming when we talk about blue and pink to the detriment of yellow and green and purple and all those other great colors that we should all have access to. And so, you know, now you've got this little child, and you have a toddler, and you see adorable three and four year old boys holding hands and hugging and kissing and being expressive and affectionate.

But at some point in time, often, their father figure distances from that intimacy, they don't snuggle them as much as they did when they were babies or super little, right. And they don't have that level of affection. But the child really needs it. And so they start roughhousing. And that's, kind of, the birth of boys will be boys because it's a way to get that physical intimacy and touch in a way that isn't necessarily vilified in that social narrative, right. And then we put them into the education system. And historically, we've known that women and girls have had to work twice as hard to get half as far. And so a lot of structures have been put in place to help girls succeed in school so that they can thrive in post-secondary and eventually, the workplace and those kind of things. And so there begins a young socialization where girls are conditioned to be, you know, prim and proper and behave themselves in these situations where boys have now, kind of inherited that boys would be rambunctious and energetic and outgoing type of thing.

And then we put them in a classroom together. And then we find the over diagnosis of boys with behavioral disorders or ADHD or ADD or those kinds of things. And a lot of struggles in those early educational situations. And you know, they might inherit this narrative that they're broken or that there's something wrong with them, you know, they might feel bad about that. And then they might, you know, tear up and cry about it. And someone says, well, boys, don't cry, right. And so they've already inherited the narrative, boys will be boys and then boys don't cry. And then going back to that idea of competition and domination, we basically introduce every single boy to the world of sports, one way or another, right. And in that space, you know, it's getting a bit better. But from a very young age, we start separating boys and girls in terms of competition. And what I always counsel coaches on is up until, you know, past the age of seven or something, they all suck. So why can't they play together.

But you know, at that competitive age, getting up to that age 15, you know, they're starting to be told to push through things. They might hurt themselves, twist their ankle or you know, get elbowed or those kinds of things. And they may be on the pitch and a coach comes to them. And we have to also think

about the role of a coach. The role of a coach, male identified coach is often one of the first male role models outside of their immediate family unit, because early childhood education is dominated by women, right. And so this important masculine figure comes and says, man up, play through it, push through, right. And so by the age of 15 and in these, you know, micro-transactions of masculinity, they've learned boys will be boys, boys don't cry and man up. And then before age 20, the dominant narrative among young people is that a rite of passage is losing your virginity. And at some point in age in their socialization, that kind of becomes the primary lens that they have their relationships with folks of the opposite sex.

And at some point in time, maybe a young woman would entertain the idea of having a relationship with them. And they get in a position where, you know, maybe there's some intimacy. And we know that the vast majority of young women's first experiences are unwanted, not necessarily that they're assault, but rather it wasn't the way that they had imagined, right. And so they get into this intimate moment, they're having a dialogue back and forth about the potential of what might happen between them. And she feels uncomfortable and she says, no, I'm not ready, please. And meanwhile, this young man had his whole life has been told, you know, boys will be boys. What do boys want? We allow them to behave that way. We've been told that boys don't cry, so they shouldn't feel emotional or uncertain about certain things. And then we've told them to man up and push through, right. And so that entire socialization plays out in that interaction that they don't have a lot of practice having. And so, perhaps they crossed the line and pushed forward with that and create those unwanted first experiences, right.

Then they go and they graduate. And they go off to post-secondary. And they learn this idea of, they can do whatever they want, right, whether it be school or workplaces or those kinds of things, learning a lot of different kinds of responsibility. And you know, there's a joke out there that men are assigned their closest friends based on their roommates in university. And the joke is funny because that's actually, my best friends to this day are guys that I was assigned to be roommates with. But you know, it's still easy and kind of post-secondary spaces to make those connections and kind of form those friendships and whatnot. But sorry, one more thing before I switch outside there. Moving from post-secondary into the workplace, we know that there's also this corporate ladder, this other piece of competition and domination, right. We want to move up the ladder. We want to make more money. We want to put ourselves in these types of positions. So it also affects and impacts our behavior and our connections with our colleagues.

But then before age 40, you know, we see a lot of men get more socially isolated through different ways. So there's always the joke, you know, the first guy who gets engaged. Haha, we lost one. He got married. Haha, we lost one. First guy becomes a dad. Haha, we lost one, right. But then by the time everyone else catches up and they become these family units, then someone gets divorced. Oh, we lost one, right. And men are over these transactions, losing their peers based on kind of how they've been socialized and having difficulty attempts in making new peers. Around a quick scenario by you, say my partner and I go on a double date with one of her girlfriends and girlfriends male partners. In our society today, if that double date was really fun, we all had a great time. At the end of the time together, I looked at him and I said, hey man, I had a great time, can I get your number? There's nothing wrong with that. But many men wouldn't even get to that point because they would say, oh, I don't want to come off as needy or you know, that's kind of weird asking male or guy for a number.

There's so much internalized in that that we're often our worst enemies when it comes to kind of social connection and cohesion. And then after age 40, you know, one of the major concerns that happens there. We know that suicide is the number one killer of teenage boys in Canada now. But the actual vast majority of male suicides happen from the age of 45 to 65. And a lot of that has to do with job loss, mental health crises, crises of purpose, family structure change, those kinds of things. So you know, I often make this trope of everyone knows the executive who's, you know, on their third marriage, their children hate them and their one bad day away from a heart attack, right. Is that the type of masculinity that we want to strive for in this culture of competition or domination? Is that actually fulfilling our deepest life goals and needs and desires? So that's some of the difficulty that comes later in life. And just to circle back to something that I said at the beginning, all of this kind of like socialization.

And like I said, not all men experience all of those exact situations, but hopefully, my story was sensational enough that you can imagine different people experiencing different parts of those stories in different ways. But the extreme outcomes of those are that three out of four suicides are male. Men die on average four to five years earlier than women due to lack of health seeking and help seeking behaviors, as well as increased risk taking behaviors. Like I said, the primary perpetrators of all forms of violence and aside from gender based violence, actually the primary victims of all forms of violence, often at the hands of other men, over 75% of opioid poisonings and 83 and 92% of provincial and federal incarceration. So those are the extreme outcomes of that. But if we imagine a, you know, healthy, thriving male in their lives to the extreme, there's still a big gap between that where men could be struggling or suffering in different ways as well. And so for me, an entry point into this conversation around engaging men and boys and moving them from allies to stakeholders is that question of what's in it for me, right.

It's a fundamental human question that we always ask when presented with a challenge or an invitation or those kinds of things. And in kind of talking about males vested interest in this subject matter and gender equity and reconstructing this, is a really good invitation. And I, you know, I won't throw the baby out with the bathwater, but I don't love the term male allies. We kind of all know what it means when we use the term male allies. But to be an ally, you have to have more privilege and power than someone else. And you're being invited to use that power and privilege to support that individual. But what ends up happening is we may do that, but we may be perpetuating a benevolent sexism, because then, we're saying all women and girls should be protected or put on a pedestal or those kinds of things. And we're not actually reflecting or transforming the reasons why we have that power and privilege in the first place, right. And so allyship to me isn't necessarily enough. It's an act on the journey.

But I think that we need to be stakeholders and even beyond that, co-beneficiaries and co-conspirators, right. And so a couple of lessons learned from seven years of meeting boys and men where they are, one of which on the first slide here is, we throw that term of where they are around a lot and nobody knows what the hell it means. So I think that, you know, having agility and being empathetic and curious when approaching these conversations helps us identify where people are. You know, this is a sneak preview for this audience, but I'm working with an academic to work on a model that can help us define this. And I'm using a gearbox, as you can see, I love to use male tropes and around automotive things to make my points. But if they're in reverse, they're actively working towards this, right. If they're in neutral, they're apathetic, they're disengaged, they haven't been invited in. If they're in first gear, they've had some sort of experience, but they haven't necessarily synthesized it that it was regarding to the male gender or the masculine experience or whatever.

And for anyone who drives stick, which I understand is a diminishing population these days, the hardest point in shifting is between first and second, that's where most people stall. And so that's where I think having definitions around people where they are understands, helps us understand, are they in first? Are they in second? Where can we move them along this journey? And for those of us who have a desire to move people along this journey, I think the end outcome this year. You know, we want to be intersectional, we want to be anti oppressive, we want to be all those kinds of things. But if you're engaging someone who's in reverse or neutral, who hasn't even begun their journey, they're not there yet, right. So we have to adjust our ability to meet people where they're at. Another thing, you know, coming from the non-profit space is that our sector, the charitable non-profit sector loves programs for problems. Here's the beginning. Here's the end. Here's the journey in between. Here's how we're going to evaluate it, please fund this.

That is not working in the context of engaging men and boys about these types of things. This work is non programmatic. It is culture change work, right. We have to meet them in the spaces that they occupy in the pub, in the locker room, in the boardroom. Not take them out of those spaces and put them in a dimly lit, you know, church basement and walk them through the steps of being better men, right. So people who care about this type of work have to have, again, that agility to meet people where they're at and to do this work and to unpack and take on those big conversations and questions. Another thing is that this work is anti-patriarchal, right. And so when we deconstruct the word patriarchy, it's patria and arkhē. Patria being father, arkhē being power, right. Father power, what we've inherited from our forefathers. And unfortunately, you know, I identify as a feminist. Not unfortunately, I identify as a feminist. Pause. I identify as a feminist, next chairman of the Pro-Feminist Organization.

Unfortunately, the word feminism is a giant F-word and a tripping hazard for people entering these conversations. I would love to use that framework to talk with a lot of men about this, but depending on where they are and their continuum of change that he dropped in the chat here as well, too. It may or may not work, but my hope in having this conversation and identifying what's in it for me, I can show them that what's happening to them is at the hands of patriarchy. And if we can agree that this system of power is harming all of us, we can together be anti-patriarchal. And then that puts us on the same side as our feminist identifying peers who are working towards their own liberation for women and girls and trans and non-binary individuals, right. So I approach this work as kind of being anti-patriarchal. Which, like feminism really is, but you know, you can't necessarily get a definition battle here. And then when we think about the work, you know, I think about Rachel Giese's book, Boys: What It Means to Become a Man.

And she's got a passage in there, she says, I'm glad we've begun to raise our daughters more like our sons, but it will never work until we raise our sons more like our daughters, right. And I see a huge issue coming ahead of us around this. We've done a lot of really great and continue to do really great work to advance women in underrepresented fields like science, technology, engineering, math, leadership, politics, and we still have so much progress to make there. But without a complementary structure to reconstruct men's roles and identities. Such as encouraging paternity leave, such as early childhood education, such as health care, such as direct service provision, we're actually creating a zero sum equation, right. And it feels like there's not going to be opportunities for them and they dig in further, right. So we need to create just as much effort into creating new possibilities and identities and roles for men as we do for women. And I promised 30 minutes of talking at you, and I'm two minutes shy.

So I'll play out this slide a little slowly. Like I said, my name's Jake. If you have questions, you can always email me if you're not the type to unmute or dabble in the chat, but I hope to have a good discussion with you. And if this stuff is interesting to you, then I invite you to sign up for our newsletter, futuremasculinity.com. And I'll pause there. And you know, either in the chat if you have questions or feel free to come on camera unmute. We would love to unpack whatever caught your interest from my presentation and dive in further. And special shout out to Les Tyler, Christine and David for allowing me to present at some people and not the wall. No shame to anyone else, though. You will have to forgive me. I will do my best. Is it Khairunnisa. Khairunnisa, you are muted. There you go.

KHAIRUNNISA:
Yes, just realized. I'm curious in terms of this type of work, it's probably, like not an easy answer to this question. But if you were wanting to just even introduce the idea in a class, for example, a university class. So I teach in cooperation education. So we're looking at, you know, students across disciplines basically. And they create different levels in their programs as well. But just to introduce the concept because it really does translate into, you know, all their experiences that they're having. But what's a safe, I guess way to start an introduction to thinking about it, I guess, without for course, necessarily.

JAKE STIKA:
Yeah. One of my favorite entry points and you'll have to take this away and see if it fits within your curriculum and how you approach it. One of my favorite entry points into this conversation is the man box activity. And essentially, you can take a step back and just call it the gender norms box and do it for both men and women. And through that activity, we make the invisible visible, right. And so much of this right like, you know, I often think about. OK, when we say the word gender, people are like, Ah women's issues. And if you're like extra woke, you're like trans and non-binary people. Rarely do you think of men as gendered, right. And so, you know, I think a lot of this work is making that invisible visible. We all have gender. We've all been socialized within it. So we should kind of all know it but we don't. So can we create containers where we have to name it. And through that practice, so you know, doing the activity, you'll unpack, you know, what kind of toys did you grow up playing with?

What kind of jobs did you grow up wanting to be or were asked by your family to be. You know, how should you dress at work? You know, those kinds of things. Like those are the questions. And literally, you see two sides of the coin form. And then once you have it on paper, you're just like, look at this, this is two sides of the same coin, right. And so, and people will kind of like push back because, you know, we're renegotiating all of that, but with the slightest nudge of like, how should men and boys be or how should women and girls be? We all slide into it.

KHAIRUNNISA:
OK, thank you.

JAKE STIKA:
And then, Belinda, I think I saw you had your hand up.

BELINDA:
I did and then I chickened out, but then you notice. And now I have to ask my question. And I apologize. I had a couple of personal calls. So I had to mute a couple of times so maybe you touched on this. So I caught the part where you said, you know, we don't want to have to, like we want to meet them where they're at and I love your critique of that. And then also, like we need to go into the spaces where they

are and you gave some examples. And not try to like draw the people we're trying to engage into, like our spaces. And so I thought that was very helpful and kind of like a tangible thought. So I work in sexual violence prevention in post-secondary. And so this is always an issue that we're constantly working on. And I like the gender box or the gender norms box because it also answers one of my questions around like, how do we do this? Like how do we, is it like a co-ed type model that we're working with? How do we facilitate like a more general discussion around gender norms where people are exchanging perspectives?

Because for example, in like my kids elementary school, they did sex ed. And the boys ran over here and the girls ran over here and I was like, that is problematic for all kinds of reasons. So how do we, can we do it that way where we're creating this exchange or is it better in some cases to invite like male identifying people into these and to engage? Yeah.

JAKE STIKA:
Yeah, I think that there's rules for gender specific and mixed gender spaces because, you know, to be incredibly reductive. But among children or youth that are having these sex ed classes, if Bobby likes Susie and he's near her, he's not going to say what he really thinks, right. It's going to be kind of performative. And so creating a space. And this is what we do with our youth programs, creating space for them to unpack what masculinity is for them, how they're grappling with that, kind of do that. But your point, like you know, going back to bell hooks as well too. I think that within that structure of kind of being a part. And this kind of translates also to like men's spaces. There's a lot of men's groups popping up now. I moved here from Alberta recently. And no disrespect to British Columbians. It's a bit of a fluffy space, everyone's a coach and a guru here, right. And so these men's groups are popping up with this kind of like mythopoetic spiritualist masculinity kind of aspect of it.

And they are picking up on the fact that, like things are kind of hard and wobbly right now, right. And you know, there's some people who are reductive and they say, Oh well, we want to go back to what gender norms used to be because we used to understand our roles in that sense. And ahead of them, they see a lot of uncertainty. So that's one aspect that's often kind of like men's rights and those kinds of things. But then there's the spiritual kind of mythopoetic piece and it's, you know, the divine masculine feminine kind of like those kinds of structures and whatnot. And I don't want to diminish that, that's an entry point into people. But I'm a very like cerebral person. And like I think of things as very systemic. And so like, social justice is really my entry point into this. But where I'm going with all of this is, we cannot start to then have a narrative for men to be whole, there have to be a part from women, right. I think there's a space to workshop certain things. And like, we see this in a lot of, you know, racial solidarity groups and stuff like that where you're like, well, people of color are like, I don't want to have to educate you, right, do that emotional labor, all those kinds of things.

So yeah, we as the dominant narrative, whether black or white people or men or whatever, we need to do our own work, our own learning and unlearning and hopefully be supported by other people. But then we have to have spaces where we can show up and we can build bridges and understand those different perspectives as well, too, right. So I don't think it's this or that, it's a yes, and. Thumbs up. Alright, there's a question here in the chat. I appreciate my perspective struck that a lot of my examples are heteronormative, absolutely impacts on trans men. It is hard to quantify because each trans experience is a unique trans experience. There are those who experience gender dysphoria and actually wants to embrace a lot of gender norms and structures that they may at the same time see as

problematic. But because they've been so disconnected, they want to strive towards that end, right, and not necessarily deconstruct it as much. Whereas there's others who are really challenging the ideas of gender norms in the first place.

And so it's really hard to categorize our trans experience in that way. And it really kind of becomes that way. Just as a lot of cis-hetero men have unique experiences, right, like I said, kind of to kick off. Like I am painting with broad brush strokes, and I really don't mean to harass anyone around these types of things, but the dominant narrative is cis hetero. And quite frankly, we create a lot of lateral violence and police each other's masculinity in really violent ways. And so when trans individuals, trans men, those kinds of things are not performing or, even just cis men are not performing gender norms as expected, you know, we belittle them. You know, we call them feminized words like, you know, pussy or those kinds of things, right. And you know, I gave Robynne a bit of a heart attack. I dropped it, that's my last time I did this. But like, I really try to use the language of where, like meeting people where they're at. If this is the language we use, OK, I'm going to use that language and we're going to deconstruct that as well, too, right.

So like, I think it's important to have spaces that are supportive of, you know, trans, nonbinary, curious questioning, ally oriented spaces. And those are starting to exist in a lot of spaces, queer spaces too as LGBTQIA+ spaces. I'm very concerned about the vast majority of cis hetero men because they're not beginning that journey and they're not having those conversations. And that is often where I default to because I was them, right. And I think a lot of Dr. Michael Keeler at the University of Calgary, who uses this language of the boys. And I think when we are critical of masculinity, it's often from the outside looking and it's female identified individuals. It's people who are, remember Cornell's hierarchy, the people who've repudiated masculinity altogether that are kind of criticizing it, but where is the work happening from the people that are of the boys. I'm very much a jock. I grew up in locker rooms and have benefited so much from cis white hetero male privilege. But like, that's kind of the lens and the population that I'm trying to seek and work with best.

And know that there's people who are tremendous in that other work that also needs to occur. So that's my long, rambly answer, not answer. Just reading Maddie's comment here.

MADDIE:
I guess, I can talk too.

JAKE STIKA:
Please, yeah.

MADDIE:
Well, I just, I found it. Well, thanks, first of all for a great, great, great presentation overview. I love the focus on the cultural and the structural forces at play here. And you know, we'll often unpack media and things like that in my classrooms to just really tease that apart and, you know, look at that side of the pyramid. But this piece around the men's groups came up for me recently with some students, so they were interested in this. And I found myself wondering too, you know, just what I'm saying here, navigating that piece of, you know. I guess, sort of individually empowering men to be who they want to be, not confirmative to patriarchal norms. But balancing that line of not, sort of further empowering male gender to maintain power over. And you know, sort of add on to that is what do you think of that role of a more traditional female traits of vulnerability and emotional intelligence playing a role in this?

JAKE STIKA:
Yeah personally, I really struggle when we codify anything as masculine or feminine, right, because I think that we then still perpetuate it, right. For some people, it really works to say within us, there's all that, we all have access to the masculine and the feminine and those kinds of things. But you know, as long as, you know, caregiving is codified as feminine, women won't get the credit that they've historically deserved for it and that men will get too much credit for leaning into it. And if leadership is masculine, you know, then therefore, women will never be measuring up to be in male spaces, right. So I would rather, like move away from the codification of those kinds of things. But on the men's group side of things, it's a really interesting question. I see a role for it, a space for it. One thing that I can tell you is from our experience, back in 2016, we launched, kind of, space for adult conversations. And I fully admit that I thought I was launching a men's group when I started, but like one of the worst things that could happen to me is being accused of being a men's rights activist in this work.

And so the first session, I invited people of all genders. And we spoke about body image. And we actually had a trans speaker talking about their transition and their dysphoria and those kinds of things to kind of open it up. And I found that the women who showed up actually elicited far more vulnerability than the men and so we kind of kept the model open. And what we came to realize is that we need to, kind of, build on one of the earlier questions. We need spaces in the community to have conversations about gender and masculinity, not just by men, but by everyone else. Because what can happen is us men in our little groups, we can like kind of, you know, build group, think about what that is to us. And then when someone says, well, actually, that affects me this way, we can be like, Oh, I didn't think about that, right. And so, like it's important to have that space, that bridge building space. And I think a lot of men's groups, like let's be real, I work in a lot of male dominated industries.

And the number one entry point that I get in a lot is through women's employee resource groups and the desire to get more women represented in those spaces. So this is technology, finance, resource extraction, et cetera, et cetera. When I show up and I kind of take stock of the situation where we're at, the reality is that men treat other men like shit in those spaces. And so like, how are they going to be inclusive to underrepresented or oppressed minorities in those spaces. And so we need to get guys to stop treating other guys like pieces of crap, right. And so the a lot of, I think, the men's group space is really good for healing what they call, like, the male wound. And like the original kind of male wound that they talk about is that idea that I talked about. When you're little, your father figure distances from you, right. And you kind of wonder why that happens. And you know, when you read up on kind of the psychological development, that's what they talk about that male wound.

And I think male groups do a great job of creating spaces where men can be vulnerable with other men and not face consequences for it. And that's really positive. But you know, if you can't do that in other spaces, it's tough, right. And it kind of builds on what Belinda was saying earlier about. You know like, that like, vulnerable space and needing it to be male specific or otherwise, right. Because what happens if we can't create a space where that's just kind of our default or we remove people from that space, once they go back to their male dominant spaces at the pub, in the locker room, at the boardroom, and they don't feel like they have social capital in that space, their allyship dies because they don't have the skills to navigate that. So great you've got this men's group that supports you, but you're not able to navigate those mixed gender spaces once you get back, put into those male dominant spaces, right. Again, I love to ramble in my answers, so if I don't make sense, just tell me.

MADDIE:
I'm sure we could link that to some bystander work, too. If you know, you have more than one man in part of those spaces and taking it. I like that idea, though, like taking it out of this. I think the safe space for men's groups to encourage that possibly uncomfortable experience with vulnerability. And then yeah, how can we bring that outside into the less safe world, right?

JAKE STIKA:
Well, I also talk about it. I never promised a safe space. I can't do that, right. It's a brave space, right. And it's a space to challenge and be challenged. And you know, here's the rules of that, you got to be curious, you got to be empathetic, you got to be courageous, and you got to be equitable, right. And those are next chairmen's values. And if we bring that into that brave space, then we can actually challenge and be challenged and make progress on that. I'm just catching up on some of the comments here. Yvonne, I'm reading yours, I don't know if you want to come on mic, but I'm happy to read it all too.

YVONNE:
Oh, I'm OK if you read it.

JAKE STIKA:
OK yeah, but this makes me think, our community manager is a woman, and she told me a story about how late elementary school. She was friends with a lot of the guys, and then kind of come in grade eight, they all became like super paranoid about, like being guys and being a man and what it was. And didn't act like themselves anymore. And there was like a shift there. Right, they had to conform and it like broke her heart. And like, you know, she's an adult now and she remembers that. And this is like a big driving force about why she wants to work with Next Gen Men. And then I'm just reading Christy's comment here. Totally and how, you know, feminism can be ostracizing even to female identified individuals. You know, I think that the tough part, just like kind of any politic, whether that'd be progressive or conservative or those kinds of things, is which feminism, right? Because there is trans exclusionary, radical feminism, there's sex work exclusionary radical feminism, there's you know, feminism that isn't for men.

Like one of the reasons why we call ourselves a pro feminist organization is because there's people within the feminist movement who think that men don't necessarily have a role in identifying as feminists, right. And so like, this work is highly political, unfortunately, as well too. Belinda, that last comment breaks my heart. I thought that we were past that. And like to, you know, build a story on what Belinda said there about hearing her kids or not her kids use that term, but her kids hearing gay being used as a derogatory term. And this goes back to it, like none of us are free of these things. This is the type of work that I do. And one of our early board members was gay. And it took me a long time to say that he was gay because of my own internalized homophobia. Because saying someone was gay out loud in my head was like, that's a negative. I'm saying something negative about them, right. And so like, it's these little micro things that we're so steeped in our socialization and culture.

So that's really disheartening to hear that that's still a thing. Yeah, but on the flip side, if I can offer a little bit of hope on this, you know, we predominantly work with 12 to 14 year old boys with our youth programming. And I love that age because that's kind of when they're losing their innocence of boyhood and starting to act like what they think it is to be a man. Unfortunately, that's where we see rises in homophobia, racism, sexism, other marginalizing attitudes. Because you tell 14 year old boy, hey, you

have power and privilege in this world and they're like, my mom tells me what to do, my teacher tells me what to do, my coach tells you what to do. I don't have any power. I have no idea what you're talking about. And so they start enacting power through differentiation in their little friend groups, right. And the low hanging fruit unfortunately has gender and sexuality and race and those kinds of things. So it's a really great opportunity for us to come in and disrupt and role model new ways of being a man that overcome that.

And the thing that gives me hope in and around this. Like I am in my mid-thirties and when I was growing up in high school, I went to Catholic school, so there was nobody out. If I use the word trans, I probably would have said like tranny or something like that. And feminism, it never crossed my mind. These boys know all of those things and more, right. And so like, they've made a lot more progress comparatively to where I was. And on the one hand, we see progress and, you know, more allyship and normalization of these kinds of things. On the other hand, we're also fighting a lot of right wing propaganda that puts a lot of shit on the internet, that drags them into these rabbit holes, that kind of tells them that they're oppressed and marginalized and that they're the victims of something. And they are the victims of sometimes being kind of left out of conversations. But like systemically, they can't necessarily see that yet. And when you catch them at that young kind of vulnerable age, it's a very slippery slope.

And so I think, you know, again, having that conversation and having a lot of empathy for that lived experience as well too is important. And I think again, having more people who look like me, who've had a lot of lived experience like me, engaging and reading a lot of those conversations helps a lot. Because when you have, you know, underrepresented or marginalized individuals, they don't necessarily relate often and they can't connect. And you know, in a lot of dominant spaces, we see this with a lot of diversity and inclusion work. If it's women or people of color leading it, the most apathetic people are the male, pale and stale. And it comes off as, you know, these people are complaining, right. And that's incredibly unfortunate. And again, I have to name my privilege and being able to lead those conversations in productive ways in those spaces. And it's unfortunate that that's a reality. I think we have, based on my long answers, time for one, maybe two questions if folks have something still.

Les.

LES:
I just. I've got so much to think about and I don't think I'd be able to. The questions that people have brought up have got me thinking about this even more, but just a comment that even your first slide there about, you know, looking at things like the gas pedal and the brake pedal. I've been looking for language to try to understand that concept. And that I'm going to have to think a lot about that one because, you know, this sense of, you know, of being stepped on, which you know again, with all those things that you've said acknowledging all the wonderful things that we benefited from. And I say we as a white male, you know, cisgender, all that stuff. But that's just great. So again, rambling a little bit, but just wanted to say thank you. Even that first slide and then everything else that everybody has said, we have got less than thinkable. So thank you.

JAKE STIKA:
I appreciate that. But to maybe build on that a little bit, like looking to the future and some of the potential consequences, like we're all pretty aware of the trucker convoy in Ottawa right now. Within the last two years, it has been surpassed. But before that two, like two years and before prior, the

number one most common job for men in Canada was truck driver, right. And so if we think about the fact that we're not creating possibilities for them to have other good employment or those kinds of things, like we know that all this entire complaint is, you know, white supremacist and you know, anti-vax and all the stuff that's wrapped up into that. But I'd worry about that population, right, and we see how they've been radicalized. If we're not having these conversations about that, Elon Musk tweeted his support for that group. He is building trucks to be autonomous to remove them from their jobs, and that is the second most popular job among men in Canada right now. And so, you know, if we don't want more trucker convoys in Ottawa or wherever they are because it was up and down West Broadway here in Vancouver as well too, we need to be doing upstream work in and around these issues.

So just to build on your gas pedals there Les.

LES:
And I think, the only other thing I would say is just, and I think it was Maddie, I saw here just the whole idea of self-awareness. And you know, I'm kind of seeing what you're talking about and the work that you're doing, Jake at age. But then just even adult development as a person who's closer to 60 than 50. I still got a lot of work to do. And most of my peer group does too around this. So ages and stages and all those things that we talked about. Anyway, that's all.

JAKE STIKA:
And if we think about like, you know, the vulnerability of doing that work, right, and the unlearning, right, because we've had an entire lifetime of socialization in this competition, domination. Unlearning is one of the most vulnerable things that you can do because it involves recognizing that the things that you once knew and believed to be true either aren't or are harmful. And so therefore, you have to replace that with a new belief and think about, you know, what kind of culture we live in now, just to be like, I once believed this and now I don't believe it. People get called out for that all the time, right. I'm a huge basketball guy. I don't know if anyone else is following this, but one of the major stars, Kyrie Irving, refuses to get vaccinated, right. And the tough part is, I actually don't think we've created a media climate where he could say, well, I've actually learned that, you know, the vaccine is safe and therefore I can take it and I can change my mind because people would lose it on him for that, right.

And so like, when we're inviting these people to do the unlearning in that journey and wherever they are in life, like you said. Like how do we create those conditions that are inviting our empathetic that we're sitting with them, we're walking with them, we're acknowledging our own journeys, and then that's really important work. And like Maddie said here, education on intersectionality, like I'm talking a lot about gender here. Largest demographic divide that we have in society, roughly 50, 50. A few percentage points for trans and non-binary individuals across each side, but you know, we need to talk about race. We need to talk about socioeconomic class. We need to talk about faith. We need to talk about all those kinds of things because it impacts our ideas of our gendered experience as well too. So I think I'm at time. So Robynne, if you have anything else to say. But like I said, feel free to reach out. My email is up on there, I believe still. And do subscribe to our newsletter.

ROBYNNE DEVINE:
Awesome, thanks so much Jake. Another great session. And thanks to everybody that came out and shared and asked questions, too. It's always so fascinating and such great questions, so thanks to everybody for sharing. And have a great night. I'm not going to tell you to have a great morning, I'm going to tell you two other great afternoon.

JAKE STIKA:
We want to do the end, Robynne, we don't want to start over. Thanks all.

ROBYNNE DEVINE:
Take care.

JAKE STIKA:
Bye.