Honoring the “Face Behind the Mask”: Interrogating Masculine Performatives to Promote Retention

Presenters

Dr. Keenan Yul Colquitt, Jr. kcolquit@nmu.edu and Twitter @doc_kyc
Dr. Tracy Davis tl-davis1@wiu.edu
Dr. Vern Klobassa vern.klobassa@stthomas.edu

Bookshelf

Terms and Definitions

**Cisgender**: The term “cisgender (from the Latin cis-, meaning “on the same side as”) can be used to describe individuals who possess, from birth and into adulthood, the male or female reproductive organs (sex) typical of the social category of man or woman (gender) to which that individual was assigned at birth. Hence a cisgender person’s gender is on the same side as their birth-assigned sex, in contrast to which a transgender person’s gender is on the other side (trans-) of their birth-assigned sex” (Aultman, 2014, p. 62).

**Gender**: Gender is social construct that is emergent and malleable within and across culture (Coltrane, 1997; Connell, 1987). Gender is *done* according to West and Zimmerman (1987; 2009). According to Butler (1993), gender is *performed*. Gender is a social practice that “responds to particular situations and is generated within definite structures of social relations” (Connell, 2005, pp. 71-72).

**Gender role socialization**: Gender role socialization speaks to how what is masculine, feminine, and androgynous is understood. Children learn acceptable behavior patterns through gender socialization, a process that instructs boys and girls on society’s gender rules (Adams & Coltrane, 2005).

**Hegemonic masculinity**: Hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to women and to subordinated masculinities; the ordering associated with masculinity and femininity within our society, and that this ordering creates hierarchy that is the basis for all the relationships men experience (Connell, 1987).

**Masculinity**: Masculinity is a performed social identity that is informed and regulated by socially prescribed notions of manhood (Kimmel & Messner, 2013).

**Patriarchy**: Patriarchy is “the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general (Lerner, 1986, p.239).
Patriarchy implies that men control power throughout society, in powerful institutions, and women's access to that power is restricted (Lerner, 1986). Patriarchy is also the systematic subordination of women and lower-status men and is made possible through demonstrations of behavior informed by socially dominant gender construction that empower masculinity and subordinate femininity (Courtenay, 2000).

**Toxic masculinity**: Toxic masculinity refers to a masculine identity defined engaging in toxic, noxious, or asocial practices; such as, excessive alcohol use, physically aggressive behavior, misogyny, and homophobia (Gross, 1990; Terry A. Kupers, 1997, 2005). Some researchers suggest that toxic masculinity asserts that men are granted power and privileges afforded to them by patriarchy and that men are, by nature, aggressive, misogynistic, and homophobic (Gross, 1990). Other researchers state that toxic masculinity is a form of hegemonic masculinity where men engage in toxic behaviors with the goal of ascending social hierarchy (Kupers, 1999; 2005).

**Toxic practices**: Toxic practices and behaviors include, but are not limited to, violent, aggressive, misogynistic, and homophobic behavior and other characteristics often associated with toxic masculinity. Toxic practices are commonly associated with hegemony but are not, however, always defining characteristics of hegemonic masculinity as hegemony is based on situational configurations that allow men social ascension (Connell & Messerschmitt, 2005). Adams, Anderson, and McCormack (2010) articulated

**Doing/Undoing Gender**: West and Zimmerman (1987) originally presented the concept of doing gender arguing that gender must be continuously socially constructed in alignment with social norms. Butler (1990, 1993) presented a concept of doing gender but through a post-structuralist lens. The differences in these approaches, according to Kelan (2018), are that Butler's "key concern is how the gender binary can be subverted through unusual and unexpected connections whereas for West and Zimmerman the category of gender has to lose importance for gender to be undone" (p. 545). Kelan's research used a more recent conceptualization of doing gender which was presented by Deutsch (2007). This conception entailed "doing gender as creating gender difference and undoing gender as reducing gender difference" (Kelan 2018, p. 548).

**Theoretical Perspectives & Conceptual Framing**

"have we considered that Black and Latino men do not seek you out because they receive cues from others that convey that their lives do not matter"... Dr. David Pérez II (2020)

“Dismantle the defacto practice of equating men with masculinities”...Dr. T.J. Jourian (2020)

“Give permission to men to stop being who they feel they have to be and start being the men they are”...Dr. Keith Edwards (2020)
The NVC Model

Common Strategies in Higher Education

- Men’s retreats
- Dialogue programs
- Peer education (seen in health promotions units, residence life, etc.)
- Student clubs and organizations
- Mentoring programs
- Living learning communities
- Academic curriculum

Implications…or what pros should do…

1. Understand the reciprocal nature of behavior-identity-environment so that we don’t ignore the environmental context and internalized hegemony that may drive the performance of identity.

2. Less “plus one stage” interventions and more of a holistic approach.

3. Listen instead of diagnosing.

4. Always be conscious of your own privileged and targeted identities as they are influencing the interaction.

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Institutional Plan

1st) Professional development regarding men’s identity development – know the literature & the issues.

2nd) Men’s retention is more than a student services issue. Need to partner with enrollment management and admissions staff, student leaders, athletics, institutional researchers, etc.

3rd) Before beginning resource allocation directed toward men’s recruitment and retention we need to discuss the rationale and seek input from women leaders on campus, women’s support centers, and those with gender non-conforming identities. Any efforts should also be: Preceded by inventory of gender resources - identifying any gaps; Transparent; Completely inclusive in the planning and execution of strategies to ensure that efforts for men complement and support students with minoritized identities.

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4th) Convene a team to: initiate benchmarking, identify scholarship & books to use, identify faculty and staff to conduct research on gender-related issues specific to this campus, conduct educational programs on campus.

References


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**Recommended Videos**

bell hooks: Mind, Body and Soul - Women of Color Conference Keynote
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAuHQIMQUns

Valarie Kaur @ Watch Night Service: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQ7QlKG70LE

Gillette Commercial: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koPmuEyP3a0

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We See the Good in Men Commercial: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_HL0wiK4Zc

John Stewart “This Little Piggy Went to Hell” Vintage Daily Show Monologue

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