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Perspectives

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Taking Up Space: Men, Masculinity, and the Student Climate Movement

"Why are so many White men trying to save the planet without the rest of us?" (Goldenberg 2014)

Mainstream environmentalism is a White man's space. Eight of the top 10 "Big Green" environmental groups in the United States, including the Sierra Club, the World Wildlife Fund, and Friends of the Earth, are led by White men. Research has found that these mainstream environmental organizations reflect and reinforce the social privilege of White people, and particularly White men, through insular recruitment practices, implicit bias, and low levels of engagement with diversity and environmental justice concerns (Taylor 2014). The domination of American environmentalism by White men is ironic given that opinion polls suggest that they may be less concerned about environmental problems than any other demographic group (Leiserowitz and Akerlof 2010; McCright and Dunlap 2012). Women and people of color suffer comparatively more from the effects of environmental degradation and, as a result, have been at the front lines of grassroots environmental movements for decades in North America and beyond. Women in the United States have led struggles against toxic pollution and environmental racism; movements to protect trees and water have been initiated by women in the Global South; and Indigenous women are at the forefront of Idle No More and other movements to protect the land and water from colonial dispossession. The history of women and people of color resisting the destruction of the planet is extensive and well documented. Why, then, do White men almost exclusively claim the roles of experts and leaders in the mainstream environmental movement?

There is a lamentable lack of academic research on how hegemonic masculinity shapes environmentalism and how it interacts with embedded racism, colonialism, and sexism to construct an exclusionary climate. In response to this critique, our contribution is to offer a critical gender analysis of the micropractices and participation dynamics in one mixed-gender student environmental group. Working within the context of a North American university anti-climate-change campaign, we are in an ideal

location from which to explore the power relations on the front lines of mainstream environmentalism. At our university, students run the local chapter of an international organization dedicated to stopping climate change and, at least rhetorically, to fighting for climate justice. However, finding ways to integrate justice into the workings of the campaign itself has proved difficult. Even within the group, racialization, patriarchy, and settler-colonialism have often made it difficult for us to work together equitably. Racial and ethnic make-up fluctuates, but the group is majority White, even as Indigenous, Black, South Asian, and East Asian students become increasingly involved. Men and women tend to attend meetings in roughly even numbers (there were no openly trans or other-gendered students), and yet despite this balance, gendered participation dynamics—which we discuss below—significantly constrained women's ability to participate in the group. We came to the conclusion that White men's performances of hegemonic masculinity positioned them as leaders within the campaign, regardless of their level of actual experience, while rendering women and people of color marginalized. This finding prompted us to explore how hegemonic masculinity and expertise can become conflated and how they reinforce and reproduce the larger dynamics that are seen across the environmental movement in North America. We seek to understand and address these dynamics so that groups like ours, and others in the movement, can begin to change their participation dynamics in ways that support women and people of color, and to recognize their contributions, even when they do not reflect hegemonic masculine patterns of expertise and leadership.

Hegemonic Masculinity: Doing Gender, Doing Expertise

In thinking about the gendered dynamics of participation in our activist campaign, we use the idea of "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987) to reflect the view that gender is constructed through social interaction rather than being a fixed category. We understand the enactment of gender as a situated process, dependent on context as well as on people's location within social relations of race, gender, class, colonialism, dis/ability, and sexuality (Hill Collins 1986; West and Zimmerman 2009). This is an important lens for analyzing participation because it allows us to avoid essentializing notions of how men and women act as being tied to biology or psychology, and re-centers our attention on gender as an interactional process.

Connell's work on gender employs the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" to describe a pattern of practice that maintains men's dominant social position in relation to women (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is the culturally dominant, most visible form of masculinity in a particular context and is associated with positions of authority and leadership. The concept is frequently used to explain how behaviors of dominance—such as professed expertise, speaking in a loud, deep voice, and authoritative engagement in conversation, among other "typically masculine" behaviors—are constructed. They may vary from context to context, but similar types of behavior tend to be rewarded socially when they are performed. Connell emphasizes the need to address the participation of all genders in the co-construction of masculinity and argues for the recognition of the agency of marginalized groups as well as the power of dominant groups in the production of gender dynamics (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Certain patterns of masculine behavior become hegemonic when they are widely accepted, expected, and idealized in a culture.

Commonplace understandings of "doing expertise" conjure ideas of particularly skilled people capable of accomplishing specific tasks with more efficiency and better results than the average person. Within sociocultural theories of expertise, learning is as much about practicing skills and accomplishing tasks as it is about developing an identity as an expert and becoming recognized by a community of practice—including, and especially, those already in positions of mastery—as an expert member (Lave and Wenger 1991). Expertise, like gender, is thus fundamentally interactional, performative, and relational. In order to demonstrate expertise, one must master particular modes of performance—including speech content, delivery, and gesture—that communicate authority (Matoesian 2008). Carr (2010, 6) also observes that "realizing oneself as an expert can hinge on casting other people as less aware, knowing, or knowledgeable." In other words, people position themselves and others through actions, uses of space, ways of speaking, and physical presentation (Holland et al. 1998). To be recognized as an expert, a person needs to establish their place in a hierarchy and demonstrate both their own qualifications and an ability to judge the qualifications of others—and other people must agree.

Ideas about doing gender, doing expertise, and hegemonic masculinity can be linked as a way of theorizing how masculine domination is constructed and sustained in social groups. Feminist studies of conversation have shown that women's speech con-

tributions are considered less valuable and valid when they are delivered in typically feminine ways, e.g., with self-deprecation and in soft, high-pitched voices (Stokoe and Smithson 2001). Conversely, masculine ways of speaking and participating can earn disproportionate recognition; hegemonic masculinity is a way of "doing gender" that garners recognition and validation for those who perform it. Connell and Messer-schmidt (2005) have called for more research on the ways that hegemonic masculinities are produced collectively. In the next section, we illustrate how people of all genders participate in the validation of hegemonic masculinity, how men's voices become recognized as expert—while women's are sidelined—and how these dynamics affect men's and women's participation in the environmental movement.

Constructing White Male Expertise: Micro-level Practices

For 18 months, we conducted a research project designed to help us understand the gendered participation dynamics in our student environmental group. We used detailed microanalysis of group interaction, which involved recording all of the group's meetings and analyzing a specific set of participation dynamics, such as who speaks and how frequently, whose ideas are adopted, and who is recognized publicly for their contributions. In our analysis, we found several practices that we judge to be rooted in expressions of hegemonic masculinity. Here, we focus on "exclusive talk" and establishing expertise as two micro-level practices that reinforced White men's claims to leadership of the group.

Exclusive Talk

We observed that White men engaged more often than anyone else in "exclusive talk" (Dookie 2015), which is an exchange between two or more people that does not include the majority of meeting participants, despite being part of a larger conversation. In the meetings, exclusive talk was established through eye contact, body positioning, the explicit naming of speakers who "should" participate, and the discussion of issues about which only certain people had information. Exclusive talk often involved inaccessibly rapid speaking and a final decision being made within the closed, small group of participating speakers. Our analysis revealed that men were much more likely to engage in exclusive talk within groups consisting only of other men, than women were

to engage in exclusive talk with other women. People of color, by contrast, were never included in exclusive talk at all, despite being present at all meetings. When groups participating in exclusive talk consisted of both men and women, they often had a male to female ratio of at least two to one. This had the effect of relegating women and people of color to the sidelines during many important decision-making conversations and implied that the White men who participated in exclusive talk were more knowledgeable and experienced.

The fact that participation in these exchanges was so skewed based on gender and race demonstrates how White men's participation was affirmed as expert and necessary, while people of color and women's was not. During these exchanges, exclusive talk speakers often shared inside information that not everyone had, further demonstrating a position of access and authority. Through their quick exchanges with other knowledgeable colleagues, they affirmed those involved in exclusive talk as co-authorities, while others did not need to be brought up to speed or included in decision making.

Establishing Expertise

We observed the production of hierarchical expertise, structured by race and gender, to be an active process in our group. There were several mechanisms by which White men established themselves as experts in relation to women and people of color. As a result, even when women and people of color had achieved some level of skill or knowledge, it was not recognized in meetings in the same way as White men's contributions were.

First, the men asserted their claim to expertise by advocating for a type of framing within the campaign that was at odds with how women and people of color wanted to work. Most of the White men in positions of expertise dismissed the legitimacy of other approaches to campaign strategy and asserted that their particular approach, namely working through the university's bureaucratic and administrative avenues, was best. They enacted a form of hegemonic masculinity in arguing that their frame was more rational, practical, and appropriate to the task. At the same time, they continually claimed that other approaches—such as doing Indigenous solidarity and anti-oppression work—were not only ineffective, but also a distraction from the group's main priorities.

A second mechanism was undermining others' competency by equating participation with expertise. We saw this at work in a meeting held halfway through the academic year, attended by a large number of new members. In an attempt to be welcoming, returning members of the group offered to explain the context of the conversations. Over the course of the first 10 minutes, with 16 women and 9 men in attendance, 4 White men spoke a total of 41 times, for a total duration of almost 9 minutes. Two women spoke a total of 20 times, with a total duration of just under a minute. Even more revealing than the imbalance in speaking time was a set of comments made by 2 White men, 8 minutes apart, at the beginning of the meeting:

> Student 1: *Ask us questions. And also, if you have a question you don't think you want to ask in public, just write it down, ask one of the people that talks a lot.*

> Student 2: *If you would really like to come to the retreat, I guess just talk to . . . any of the people who you see talking a lot.*

These statements, combined with group dynamics in which White men were the people who spoke most often and for the longest duration, advised new members that the White men in the room were the experts. They also implied that the women and people of color in the room, who spoke less often, were unable to answer questions and were not in positions of authority.

The ongoing and interactional process of performing expertise shaped the group's dynamics into a self-reinforcing feedback loop. White men in positions of authority became gatekeepers, deciding whose claims to expertise were legitimate and valuable. By perceiving only White masculine performances of expertise as indicative of competence, men constantly reestablished themselves as experts. Women and people of color also treated their own work as less valuable than that of the White male members, contributing to a group culture that habitually undermined their leadership. Moreover, women and people of color rarely actively dismissed White men's ideas—and were often ignored when they did.

How meeting participants recognized expertise in general became patterned after the way White men performed hegemonic masculinity: by speaking frequently, authoritatively, and at length to the exclusion of other voices. Over the year, men gained access to training and skill-building opportunities and were increasingly likely to be selected as public representatives. The more this happened, the more quickly White men's positioning as experts gained legitimacy, despite their not necessarily having as much experience with activism, or as much technical knowledge about climate change, as some of the women and people of color in the group. For White men in the group, their ways of interacting quickly and confidently were invisible to them. When faced with decisions to include women and people of color, White men continually invoked a dichotomy between being "diverse" and having the "best" people representing the group. For these men, doing their race and gender in hegemonic ways made them "the best." Thus, we conclude that doing race and gender—in particular Whiteness and masculinity—is key to the performance of expertise. How we interpret claims to expertise cannot be disentangled from how we understand White men's performances of Whiteness and masculinity.

Conclusion

In 1990, Connell suggested that men's participation in environmentalism would not only lead to positive sociopolitical change, but also help men reflect critically on the power and privilege that comes with masculinity. Nearly three decades later, there are few signs that either of these predictions has been realized. In fact, judging by the composition of key institutions involved in environmental governance and expertise, from the United Nations to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, men dominate mainstream environmentalism at all levels. Some have suggested that the movement has become more masculinized than ever (MacGregor 2010).

Recognizing how hegemonic masculinity is collectively constructed and conflated with expertise within our student campaign may offer important lessons for the environmental movement more broadly. Our group is not unique; these gendered and racialized dynamics are reproduced in all sorts of contexts and organizations. But what our research achieves is to observe, measure, and document the patterns of behavior and habits of thought that equate hegemonic masculinity with authority and expertise

almost without question in group participation settings. For environmentalists, it is imperative that we learn to recognize and disrupt these patterns of interaction so that our movements are able to integrate all people as members and leaders. We cannot fight for climate and environmental justice in name only, without addressing implicit racism and sexism in practice. Exposing and challenging how hegemonic masculinity operates within the environmental movement is an important place to start.

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