

Teaching for Inclusion and Equity Foundational Badge Artifact
Christopher Engle-Newman
Sturm College of Law

The Inclusive Teaching Practice Module I chose for explore was Hegemonic Masculinity.

The introductory section helped me learn more about the impact on hegemonic masculinity can have on the classroom learning environment and for men's own development and learning. Being an avid fan of Professor Scott Galloway who is known for his work on masculinity, I was aware of the problematic aspects of hegemonic masculinity can drive, such as aggression and violence and how an overall sense of needing to perform a certain way can have on a man's feeling of isolation that can lead to depression and anxiety. In my class relating to bar exam preparation, all of my students have to admit to not knowing everything as the bar exam questions we practice typically stump everyone. I had not thought about how admitting to not knowing and being vulnerable about the process of preparing for the bar may be more difficult for men. Thus, I desire to bring this perspective broadly into my classes about how expectations of society based on your gender, status, etc. impacts their learning and ability to prepare for the bar exam.

Under the teaching tools section, I focused on the section about removing barriers for reflection about masculinity. While the subject matter of my class does not itself lend itself to a smooth connection to independent writing assignments about masculinity, I do employ a number of instructional methods and assessment activities that help remove barriers of hegemonic masculinity. For example, I assign metacognitive assignments in my classes to engage reflective thinking and self-directed learning. These assignments provide an opportunity for all students, but especially men, to be honest about what they did well and what they could improve upon, along with steps to make improvement a reality. I can often find in these assignments when students are being vulnerable and when they are being guarded. I can take additional steps after reading a guarded reflection to follow-up with the student and discuss factors that contributed to their answers. Also, I do a lot of small group discussion and activities throughout my class, and with women making up over 65% of law classes, I think this helps reduce the need for men in class to "perform" a certain way in front of a large class.

I decided to watch, "Why I'm done trying to be 'man enough'," a TED Talk by Justin Baldoni. Justin correctly identifies some of the areas men struggle with facing, such as talking about their insecurities, even with close friends, and the fear of failure. He echoes the same issues written about in the introductory section of the message sent to men about the meaning of being a man as being "strong" as opposed to being "real." In terms of how this will affect my approach to inclusive teaching, I believe it helps me overcome a barrier that I have with how to best approach men in my class. While the approach of modeling vulnerability is obvious, it's not always easy, but I have endeavored to model vulnerability and will continue to do so in my courses next semester through sharing my own experiences with learning and preparing for the bar exam.

For the social identity group associated with this ITP Module page, are you part of the target group (which has historically been subject to discrimination in the United States) or the non-target group (which has historically received advantages in the United States)?

I chose answering this question, because the focus on hegemonic masculinity kind of flips the script on this question since they have historically received advantages. I also chose this question, because I feel I fall into both the target and non-target group. First of all, I do identify as a man and was born male at birth, and so I have historically received advantages associated with being a man. I certainly notice that I am not challenged by students or others as often as my woman colleagues, as I believe I provided more deference as a man. At the same time, I also do not fit with the group, because I have rarely in my adult life exhibited the masculinity described. As a gay man, I have often been a target of hegemonic masculinity, and thus, I have experienced the damage it does to others, and specifically, how trying to hide in hegemonic masculinity impacts learning. I can remember countless times not wanting to speak up in class in fear of looking inferior to other men or even sharing anything personal about my life in worries that I would be ostracized. So, my sexual orientation, and at times gender expression, provide an intersectionality with hegemonic masculinity that give me the opportunity to see and experience the advantages of being in the group (usually around strangers), yet on the other hand, allow me to reflect first-hand on the way hegemonic masculinity has negatively impacted my life and others around me.

Do you believe that a student who is struggling with issues of belonging has a reduced capacity to learn during class?

Without question, this is an emphatic yes. In teaching about learning for the bar exam, I spend the first week of class covering aspects of educational psychology to help my students understand factors that impact learning. While we cover learning strategies, we also cover social and psychological factors that also impact learning, consistent with Maslow's hierarchy of needs. One of the common factors I discuss is whether someone feels like they belong in this space – law school and the practice of law – and whether they feel isolated. The lack of belonging and feeling of isolation drive people to feel like they are an imposter and can have deleterious effects on their ability to engage, learn, and grow in a classroom environment. So, if men are feeling isolated due to the expectations that hegemonic masculinity places on them, I need to continue to highlight this as an example of a barrier that can prevent learning, along with many other examples from traditional target groups.