

Gender in organisations and its representation in pop culture

Protected: Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity has pervaded organisational gender research for a number of decades, identifying the domineering role that masculine characteristics play on the workplace and particularly at managerial levels. More recently, masculinity within society, and the concept of hegemonic masculinity, has been examined as a more fluid construct that possesses a plurality and hierarchy of masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). *Scrubs* represents this perspective of masculinity, presenting masculine characters in various ways and defining a hierarchy of masculine traits. For example, JD is presented as someone possessing traditionally feminine characteristics and lacking in traditionally masculine ones. He is caring, nurturing and takes pride in his feelings and emotions, while concurrently attempting to identify himself with masculine traits such as assertiveness, independence and rationality.

Due to the tendency for top level organisational positions to be dominated by males, specific masculine traits are often idealised within the organisation, with those not in possession of top level positions attempting to replicate the traits to ensure their career progression (McDowell, 2001). This is reflected in JD's idealisation of Dr Cox, who personifies the courageous, assertive and domineering male figure. The show consistently makes jokes on the relationship between the two, specifically JD's efforts to construct a more masculine identity in Dr Cox's image, and Dr Cox's constant rejection of JD's feminine qualities and attempted advances at building a friendship. Dr Cox even openly derides JD's femininities, calling him random female names and making jokes open him actually being a female. This is also reflective of standard practices within organisations, as the differentiated masculinities are subordinated to either eliminate them or make them more akin to the dominant masculine traits (McDowell, 2001). However, the show also endeavours to subvert masculine hegemony, consistently showing how JD's feminine traits actually make him a better doctor, and in the final few seasons show Dr Cox slowly being changed by these traits and begin to take on his own feminine characteristics.



The interaction of males and the use of masculinity as a form of power and dominance is also parodied within the world of *Scrubs*. The dominant form of masculinity frames the behaviour expected of others within an organisation, conscripting a code of conduct that is identified in *scrubs* as competitiveness and assertion of power through insults (Mumby, 1998). Dr Cox and Dr Kelso

constantly struggle for power and dominance over one another through slinging insults and jokes at one another, constructing a sort of battleground of masculinity within the hospital. While in most contemporary workplaces this would be deemed as bullying and inappropriate behaviour, *Scrubs* uses the exaggerated exchanges to highlight the constant power struggles males conduct in their quest for dominant masculinity.

Scrubs also examines the interaction of males when elements of masculinity are challenged, such as when a new Chief of Surgery comes to the hospital and Turk, hoping he would be a jock, frat-boy type alpha male that he can connect to, struggles to adjust to the new Chief's sensitive demeanour. Over the course of the episode Turk learns to let go of his long held belief that masculinity means not showing emotion, but still preserves his competitive and assertive traits. The episode shows the converging of gender concepts and practices while not undermining the patriarchy or ideas that men need to possess masculine traits (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).



Similarly, an episode in Season 2 confronts the idea of masculinity entering traditionally feminine roles, in which Elliot finds it difficult to admit she is dating Paul, a male nurse. The construction of gender identity in work and roles for males tends to manifest in jobs that are perceived to be authoritative, thus the idea of the male nurse undermines this (Bloksgaard, 2011). Elliot's role as a doctor and Paul's as a male nurse reverses the standard organisational practice of masculinity as dominant and femininity as subordinate, resulting in Elliot being ridiculed by her male co-workers (Bloksgaard, 2011). Paul's confidence and pride in his job further subverts this notion, with Elliot's eventual acceptance of his role within the hospital culminating in the show's broad assertion that gender roles are indeed interchangeable.

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