

Cisgender Identity Amid Figured Worlds: Toward a Close Encounter of Being a (Masque) Uline in MPSPC's Male Dominated Course

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ABSTRACT: Education takes on direction and meaning as we try to figure out who we are. So, where do we begin on our new paths to achieving our goals of educating ourselves while maintaining our identities in a school setting? Individual interviews and observations were done throughout the paper to learn how students [personally] identified as “cisgender” male students perceive the Bontoc campus atmosphere at the ROTC UNIT-MPSPC and how that climate in the Criminology Department shapes their experiences. By employing a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach that considers the ways in which sexuality, gender, class, and other identity markers intersect, this study adapted Queer Theory, Gee's (2005) analytic guidelines, and Holland, et al. Figured World Identity (FWI) category that draws particularly from exploring three Bachelor of Science in Criminology male students' constructions of being cisgender that shaped their criminology careers. Rather than viewing identity through a singular lens, the term identity displays how manifold characteristics of one's identity comes together to form one's complete (gender) identity, conveying concurrently the mechanisms and the whole.

Keywords: Campus climate, critical discourse analysis, gender identity, Queer Theory

Introduction

This study began informally a few months back when the researchers accidentally bumped on a male student in military uniform wearing a scarlet red lipstick along the corridors of the Mountain Province State Polytechnic College (MPSPC), Bontoc campus. He did not have to hide that he was “bakla”. A week after, one of the researchers was greeted by a “macho” person with a sexy voice whose bearing was not that of a gay person. The researcher was surprised. He was a strong-looking he-man with a well-sculpted face that could win any girl with just a wink. He looked manly enough so there was no trace of his hidden personality. Lately, one of the researchers encountered a student in a green uniform (Criminology uniform) who proudly said, “I was celebrated and understood” when asked about his gender identity. In the cultural sense, the LGBTQ community particularly in Bontoc, Mountain Province, Philippines are more ever-present: the hairdresser, the couturier, a market vendor, mama's “sidekick”. Even everybody will probably know gays: the many professionals in other sectors and yes, the professors and instructors in MPSPC, both in the campuses. Aren't they all so

witty, entertaining, and oh so talented and bright? These are just a few examples of students the researchers want to comprehend about the impression who identified themselves as gays based on sexual orientation and gender identity and their experiences as students in a campus climate taking up Bachelor of Science in Criminology (BSCrim) in MPSPC, Bontoc campus. Although, there are such compliments about them, there always follows the word “sayang,” (too bad, what a waste). That is one of the kinder remarks. Others whisper: perverted, abnormal, “kaseseg-ang cha” (how pitiful are they) are typical responses.

With the instances above, the researchers felt it was time to study and reveal the MPSPC studentry that cisgender men are to be found in all courses in the college of which some factors come together creating a climate in MPSPC where the students live and learn. This climate in the Bontoc campus is then observed and experienced differently by them [students] which is centered on personal identity within the institution. It is a myth that everyone is in an open society. Campus climate affects all students enrolled in MPSPC, but it has a distinguishing impact on cisgender male students who are enrolled in BS Criminology. It is important to the success of every student and the overall success of the institution that instructors understand how the campus climate impacts the lives of the cisgender students at the institution.

This study is written as a narrative to capture the story of the respondents’ experiences as being cishgenders in a military classroom climate because it is particularly important to connect the experiences of the cisgender students to their environment.

The researchers chose, for the purposes of this study, to use the word (masque)culinary in the title, because it was spotted that this specific verbiage is connected to the researchers’ mutual awareness dramatically described in local gay jargon as “pagladlad” (out from the closet) or an unfurling of the “maskara” (masks). Nevertheless, within this particular perspective, they used the term “cisgender” instead that best appeared to work with the population because their respondents are focused on male homosexuals in the Criminology Department. The choice of being a “masque male/cisgender” mirrored the language used by students at this specific institution because they are not so much used on the term LGBTQ+. It is, therefore, a reflection of the environment and student experience. As a result, in the presentation, they chose to use this more specific and inclusive language term. For the literature review and to allow easier discussion, the term “cisgender” instead was used because it encompasses, for the most part, the context of experiences of persons centered on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Literature Review

Campus Climate

In the case of this study, the climate is referring specifically to an understanding of what it's like to be cisgender in a male-dominated course that includes the snowballing attitudes, behaviors, and ideals related to the level of respect for gays requests, skills, and capabilities. Encounters to some “heteros” Criminology students, they complain “masyadong maraming gay-gay dito sa ating school” (there are too many gay-gay in our school). Rankin (2006) still remarked that all individuals encounter unique challenges due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression that often prevents them from achieving their full academic potential or participating fully in the campus community. The

cisgender students enrolled in the Criminology Department have not been recognized over the past several years.

Figured Worlds

Humans are both social creators and social products, according to Kresser (2008). As a result, "individuals develop through their participation in figured worlds just as figured worlds develop through the participation of individuals" (23–24). This paper centers on the narratives that depict the stories of three cisgender respondents in the Criminology Department based on the concept of figured worlds that are used to illuminate the nature of their experiences in classroom settings. The stories were revealed to the researchers during individual semi-structured interviews with the respondents in a separate free time during the first semester (2019-2020). Although there are four theoretical tools of inquiry suggested by Gee (2004), they chose only Figured Worlds as the analytical tool to be used for analyzing the respondent's typical stories because it is a useful means for guiding a study of identities [...] (Boaler and Greeno, 2000; Holland, et al., 1998; Jurow, 2005; Urrieta, 2007).

The ability to visualize discourses or aspects of discourses at work in the world can, therefore, aid researchers in understanding how the world appears from a particular perspective, including that of the individual within that moment as well as their position within a structure of privilege (Chesanko, 2014:51 and Gee, 2004:43). The concept of figured worlds is useful for theorizing the way that meaning systems take on consistency in particular settings. The narratives personally revealed by the respondents provided the researchers with powerful insights into the figured worlds with meaningful experiences because figured worlds [to them] are considered as places of run-through in which they perform.

Identities in Figured World

Identities develop amid such figured worlds. The objective of this study was to recognize the selected cisgender students' experiences within the MPSPC Bontoc campus climate. Because these students' identities as cisgenders are so important to this study, it was necessary to use a methodical lens to interpret identity. Cited from Chesanko (2014-52), there are two types of identity constructed in figured worlds as categorized by Holland, et al., (1998:127). First, he categorized figural (or narrative) identity to those that speak to the events, actions, and characters of the figured world and is a part of the general storyline (Holland, et al., 1998). Secondly are the positional identities that have to do with behavior as indexical of claims to social relationships with others, how one identifies one's position relative to others, mediated through the ways one feels comfortable or constrained. These analytic approaches can mean many things within this study that incorporate sexuality, culture, ability, status within the MPSPC Bontoc campus where the selected respondents are positioned.

The researchers used figured worlds as a tool of inquiry to lead them to base from these interpretive questions such as: What figured worlds were relevant to the cisgenders in a male-dominated course? What it is like to be a cisgender in a male-dominated course? How do the students who were openly identified as cisgenders perceive the campus climate at MPSPC? What ways are their experiences shaped by that climate?

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The framework that centers cisgender's experiences is at the heart of the research methods that shape concrete decisions such as:

Queer Theory

It is the theory that was used to examine how MPSPC's context influences students' comfort level with "unfurling their masks" and what that means to them in a male-dominated course like Bachelor of Science in Criminology was one of the considerations that helped the researchers drive this understanding of queer theory.

Gender Identity and the Figured Worlds

This is regarded as a simple aspect of their [cisgender's] daily lives that should be investigated as such. The figured world of MPSPC's cisgender students entails making every decision in the friendliest manner possible. For some cisgender in other programs in the college, it means that one is in a persistent state of place identity and is capable to provide significance to their personal experiences. There is a wide space for their self-authoring for survival which means that they have space for identity within their own lives.

The researchers used the concept of figured worlds to describe both the lenses that different respondents brought to the collaborative and the shared cultural world that the group co-constructed. Their gender identity and expression have an impact on them, but the role it plays in their lives as cisgender completely shapes the world in which they live. MPSPC is a part of this, which contributes to the completion of their figurative world on the Bontoc campus.

Self-authoring

Self-authoring is a term that the researchers use to describe themselves and that is indistinguishable from itself. Self-authoring transitions from inner speech to social speech. The authoring space, according to Holland, is "a broad venue, where social languages meet, generally and accentually, semantically and indexically, freighted with the valences of power, position, and privilege" (p. 203). The identities and experiences of cisgender respondents interact and are shaped by the campus climate in this section. They face knowledge issues as they try to author themselves to correct the stereotypical question of who is cisgender and who is normal in the figured world of the college. What the campus climate only knew about being cisgender is based on how one walks or looks, the course one chooses, and the colors one wears. These may have nothing to do with whether a person is gay.

1. Research Methods

a. Research Design

The best way to best capture "the socially constructed and locally negotiated nature of [their] experience" (Mehan, 1992) was to adopt a qualitative method that allowed for in-depth responses that highlighted an interpretive perspective. Reporting real-life experiences can be especially revealing and have a powerful impact on the study's audience, say Brown and Gortmaker (2009), who claim that one of the major advantages of qualitative methods in the study of [cisgender] student experiences is the "richness of the findings, as they capture the voices of the respondents."

Two major tools were used to construct narrative stories about the three respondents' experiences: the Figured Worlds Tool (Gee, 2011 & Holland, et al., 1998) and identity as a lens of analysis (Gee, 2001). The researchers attempted to zoom in on identity by using it as a lens of analysis within the

Figured Worlds Tool to answer the problems presented in this study. They organized the data into a narrative structure by noting key issues that emerged from the respondents' themes, perspectives, and topics and arranging them into five stages of a narrative adapted from Gustav Freytag (1895): (a) exposition, (b) rising action, (c) climax, (d) falling action, and (e) conclusion. Their stories are snippets of their real-life experiences as gay students in a military classroom.

b. Research Procedure and Techniques

Throughout the semester, the researchers interviewed five cisgender male focal students from the Criminology Department. They questioned these students about their gender beliefs and practices, but only three agreed to cooperate. During the observations, they took field notes about the students' academic performance in general, as well as the ways in which these respondents participated in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) and other male activities in their department in particular.

The researchers intend to highlight some of these complexities through the narrative analyses presented in this study. They used this connection to capture and present the very essence of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which is written in a narrative form. The voices they included were the voices of the respondents in the research process. Since this is a narrative in structure, they included dialogues closely represented through actual conversations. The story employs a five-part narrative structure adapted from Gustav Freytag (1895), moving from exposition to rising action, to climax, to falling action, and the resolution.

In this study, it was important to understand not only how participants perceived their identities, but also how they constructed meanings in their imagined world and what they perceived to be typical, as these stories can provide insight into how they perceive the campus climate.

2. Results and Discussions

3.1 Exposition

Several findings of the figured worlds in MPSPC speak to the overall campus climate within specific figured worlds. MPSPC, as a setting, creates a unique personal challenge for the respondents in their educational journey.

3.2 The Setting

This study was carried out at MPSPC, specifically in the Criminology Department, where the three respondents were registered. The main Bontoc campus served as the context and setting for the figured world that the participants encountered, but there were numerous figured worlds embedded within it.

3.3 The Characters

Inspired by the grace of the close encounters and deepening dialogues with these remarkable respondents listed below in Table 1 is the main reason for the coming out with this study denoting their experiences on gender identity, sexual orientation, and status as students in a male-dominated course in MPSPC.

Table 1. Participants' identities.

Pseudonym	Gender Identity	Sexual Orientation	Status
[Gay] Student 1 (GS1)	Cisgender	Gay	Criminology Student (2 nd Year-Section A)
[Gay] Student 2 (GS2)	Cisgender	Gay	Criminology Student (2 nd Year-Section B)
[Gay] Student 3 (GS3)	Cisgender	Gay	Criminology Student (1 st Year)

The identities listed above are based on the self-descriptions of the participants. Furthermore, it should be noted that the major participants listed as “cisgender” used that term to describe themselves, but as a sort of honorific label. They wanted to be associated with this label after it was described as comfortably fitting between the identity of female or male and the corresponding femininity or masculinity. Based on their identities, the participants experienced the world around them and the campus climate. Their identities are a part of the figurative worlds of a campus climate that has shaped and molded that figurative world.

GS1's muscular body, about 5'7" tall, and brown-skinned provided the look of a “military” man. On some occasions, the researchers observed him as an active student and an officer and a civil and friendly person to his lesbian [a close friend of his in the ROTC Unit] and heterosexual classmates and ROTC batch mates. He is articulate and outspoken sometimes to the point of being harsh. He is a student leader since high school and he believes every leader for that matter must develop strong qualities [as he has right now]. However, he became visible as gay because of his red lipstick that became his trademark despite wearing tight uniforms to accentuate his muscular body. This didn't bother him and never messed with them around, but rather he became everyone's counselor.

GS2 was known to be a shy and silent-type person. Yet he was a silent-type person, he is a good student based on his academic status in the researcher's subject taking every responsibility for doing what had to be done to excel. He never spoke during class discussions except when called [that's where the researcher noticed the “femininity” of his speech and actions and asked his participation in the study] but very shy and at times extremely insecure person. During recitations in class, he is a standout even if he still has butterflies in his stomach. His classmates do not know him as a gay except the researcher [when he revealed his true identity during the personal interview] because he hides his true identity away from them. According to him, he will “come out” soon and actively choose to live his own life, not in a way that family or religion dictates him. He knows that there are some friends and classmates who will be supportive and caring once he started the process of “coming out of the closet”.

Surprisingly, GS3, the openly cisgender student, became popular because of being brouhaha. He is so artistic, active, and open art enthusiast who presents every project in his subject associated with “feminine” tastes. He sports a “sexy” voice giving a complimentary appreciation from his instructor (the first researcher). With his actions, his clothes styles, and the way he talks, no one could mistake him, he is gay. Accordingly, he is lucky to have family members and straight friends who are supportive and caring; and is fortunate to receive such love and affection from them.

3.4 The Rising Action: The Participants' Figured World Journey of Campus Climate

The participants' responses about their perceptions of campus climate were used in concurrence with Gee's Figured Worlds tool (2011) to create a framework of what the figured [cultural] world of climate looks like on this campus. Gee's tool recognizes a specific way of combining the respondents' way of speaking, acting, interacting, facial expressions, body language, behaving, and valuing. The goal here in this study is to show these realities that the participants revealed through their words and actions uncovered through interviews and actual observations. The following will be included as a part of the figured world understanding from the three respondents: gender identity and figural worlds.

3.4.1 From the Participants' Perspective

For GS1, GS2, and GS3, they were participants who identified themselves as cisgender males, thereby recognizing their freedom in their gender identity. They accepted this identity as cisgenders when they were cleared about the term during the interview, but for the sake of a non-academic setting one of them just say, "Oh, I'm becky" (Filipino colloquial term for gay). GS3 said that he wouldn't unavoidably say that he is a cisgender, but he will identify himself still as gay because he has more effeminate actions than masculine and it is more applicable.

3.4.2 Gender Identity

When asked about the concepts of sexuality in the conversation, GS1 and GS3 first learned about sexuality and gender identity both inside and outside of academic classes during high school. They stressed the importance that all students should be aware of these topics, especially in the academe. They were asked why? It was revealed to the first researcher during the conversation that they experienced discrimination and discouragement when they enrolled in the Criminology course because of being cisgenders. Relative to this, they believe that it is institutionally reinforced that students should be encouraged to broaden their knowledge base through gender issues in the academe. GS3 said that he was advised during orientation to enroll something appropriate to him rather than to the course where only "macho" men can afford the physical training the course offers.

3.4.3 Gender Identity and Figured World

With GS1's revelations, he presented his figured world that he was never denied of his figural identity, one in which he was proud to be a part of the events and actions of the figured world inside the ROTC unit, and he had the space of self-authoring and was keenly aware of that. The figured world GS1 shared was based specifically on his experiences with the campus environment. To him, his campus climate is more accepting and open even when he is an officer of the ROTC unit than his off-campus climate that sometimes he hears negative remarks about him.

For GS2, his experience is in contrast to GS1, finding the climate of on-campus to be so difficult to deal with and relayed his story as follows basing from the question asked to him: Has there ever been a time during which you felt silenced or repressed while inside the campus?

"I just kept quiet hiding my humiliation. He again addressed the same way when we were on the field one Saturday for training. I had to correct him and he was like speechless (laughing). It went to my mind that this [homophobic] person is still confused". With this in mind, I have to be discreet, and still am up until now. (Interview with GS2, December 2019, Room 302, MPSPC-Bontoc Campus.)

His speech went slow and there was sadness in his eyes connoting a sense of insecurity during the part of the conversation where the first researcher brought up GS1 and GS2 being open about their gender identity and so it is quite impossible to have discussed more of his problem at this point. However, he was just plainly challenged about the matter and adds an answer to the question: How do you see your problem at MPSPC as having shaped you to move forward into the future?

“If my being a gay is a problem to my [conservative] family, then I will show them the other side of it—to accomplish this journey to become and to succeed as a Criminologist or a policeman someday [hehehe]. And my experiences regarding gender identity—nandito yan sa puso hindi mawawala (It is here in my heart and it will never fade) pointing towards his heart. (Interview with the respondents, December 2019, Room 302, MPSPC-Bontoc Campus.)

The stories depicted the figured worlds relevant to the three respondents' life that seem to guide their choices made about their participation in the Criminology Department as cisgenders. The three respondents, although they have different perceptions, made decisions about their learning practices based on their figured worlds. They were good students academically. In the ROTC field training, they act actively and are interested and participate in every activity. Their active actions in the class made it clear that their figured world in the campus climate motivates them. The course they chose to enroll motivated them, the people outside themselves did not.

3.5 Climax: Figured Worlds Findings

3.5.1 From the Researcher's Perspective

3.5.1.1. Institution-Identity

As researchers, they have their own identity to be understood as an institution-identity process within this study. According to Gee (2001), Institution-identities are characterized by a "continuum of how actively or passively the occupant of a position fills or fulfills his or her role or duties" (p. 103). In this case, the institution-identity was authorized as collaborative researchers in the college and particularly in the Teacher Department (TED) within which they are presently affiliated. The process through which this research work is through authorization from the Research and Extension Unit in the college. Some of the Institution-identities which they have included as part of this context include the students and some instructors.

3.5.1.2 Discourse-Identity

From a thorough observation, the researchers observed and found that these respondents created their own spaces for authoring through figured worlds with their respective instructors and professors including themselves. These participants felt very strongly about the impact of them not only on the environment around them and their classmates but also on the impact of the instructors and professors on their own experiences.

3.6 The Falling Action: Drawing Back to Figured Worlds and Campus Climate

The respondents' experiences were influenced by their undergraduate identities, academic identity, and involvement in the campus activities where their perceptions of campus climate in the MPSPC Bontoc campus were based from. They openly shared their roles in the Criminology Department, their

explorations within the environment mostly dominated with straight men, and choosing their comfort zone within the climates of the college. As GS1 mentioned when asked about his experiences in the ROTC Unit as a cisgender student officer (some of the lines were edited and paraphrased by the researchers):

“Do you think that every facet of my life will be in jeopardy because of being gay? Joining the ROTC Unit as an officer is something I am enjoying despite some [referring to his critics] raised their eyebrows against me or rather of what I do. Hindi nila kaya nakikita at nararamdaman ang mabigat na ginagawa ko bilang isang opisyal. (They cannot visualize and feel the difficult task I am doing as an officer [in the unit]). I feel the support of my peers inside the unit so I don't care.”

The three respondents embraced a figured world in which gender identity does matter. However, their beliefs about what is meant to be a masque (masc)uline in a military classroom, played a role in the decisions they made about their active participation in the Criminology Department. In their stories, what was most superficial in the form of their words was the strength of their opinions and beliefs as well as their responsibilities.

3.6.1 Climate Influences Students

The experiences of the three respondents were based on social and physical settings. They had to explore the figured worlds of the MPSPC-Bontoc campus, but it was clear that cultural or figured worlds existed in them. From the first time they entered the campus [based on their stories], they had to learn independently how to explore the social and physical settings. The setting in which MPSPC is located influences the participants' experiences and understandings of their own identities. They explored the campus differently. For example, how GS1 explored the campus community versus the local community is different, unlike GS3 feeling more comfortable venturing into the local community and the campus because he is from the same place locally, and GS2 expressing that his campus climate is not comfortable to him.

3.7 Resolution: The Assessment

Perhaps the most striking evidence for the narrative's resolution is recent assessments from the respondents' journey to their figured worlds. Figured worlds, in which they had experienced what is to be cisgender in a male-dominated course, is the ultimate tool. Hence, the respondents are now the experienter, and the potential exists to convey an understanding of their identities is through direct experience. Besides, the researchers' accepted the respondents' suggestion that there should be a specified clear need for further research on the overall campus climate related not just to their gender identity and sexual orientation, but also to students' organizations and religious affiliations, why? Because the researchers saw how religion becomes a source of anguish, rather than strength, for many cisgenders in MPSPC.

3. Concluding Remarks

The figured world findings and identity findings were revealed in the study based on the respondents' revelations done in a narrative structure. This study was done to understand cisgender students' experiences within the figured world of sexuality and gender in the Criminology Department in MPSPC, Bontoc campus. By merging Gee and Holland's contributions in Critical Discourse Analysis in using identity as a lens and the figured world's tool, this study was able to present some of the

respondents' experiences of gender and sexuality in their figured worlds. There is still much to learn though, not just from these respondents enrolled in the Criminology Department, but from every student in the entire campus at large through gender awareness.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts to declare.

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