Race Without Gender? Trends and Limitations in the Higher Education Scholarship Regarding Men of Color

Dr. Nolan L. Cabrera & Dr. Alex K. Karaman, University of Arizona
Dr. Tracy Arámbula Turner, University of Vermont
Yadira G. Oregon, University of Arizona
Eliaquin A. Gonell, University of Vermont
Dr. Jameson D. Lopez & Dr. Regina Deil-Amen, University of Arizona

The underrepresentation and academic underperformance of Men of Color (MoC) relative to Women of Color (WoC) in higher education has been a central focus of both research and practice for the last two decades. Countless efforts have highlighted and address these disparities, but controversy has surrounded these initiatives including critiques like those by Kimberlé Crenshaw (2014), that they erase the unique needs of WoC and ignores the ways patriarchy advantages men and oppresses women.

Most literature reviews in this area tend to center "best practices" for supporting MoC. In contrast, the current literature review explores how scholars have discussed and framed the MoC in higher education experience in hopes of charting new and productive paths forward in this work. In particular, we focus on assessing whether or not the scholarship succumbs to the pitfalls Crenshaw outlined in her critique. Given the above considerations, our approach led to the following guiding research questions:

RQ 1: How are race and gender addressed within existing MoC research in higher education? How does this relate to the framing of the problem(s) the scholarship is addressing?

RQ 2: What other salient social identities are explored in the literature?

RQ 3: What social science methodologies and theoretical frameworks are primarily utilized to address this issue?

RQ 4: What additional approaches to the study of MoC in higher education might yield more holistic and inclusive scholarship?

THEORY: Intersectionality

We utilize an intersectionality approach in this research (Crenshaw, 1991; Harris & Patton-Davis, 2019; Haynes et al., 2020; hooks 1995, 2004a, 2004b). Developed by Black women, intersectionality means a concurrent focus on multiple, mutually sustaining, and mutually constituting systems of oppression—in this case, race and gender (Crenshaw, 1991; J. C. Harris & Patton-Davis, 2019; Haynes et al., 2020).

Utilizing intersectionality in our approach involves grappling with the racial marginalization and gender privilege concurrently, while exploring how race is gendered and gender is raced.

METHOD: Content Analysis

This is a systematic review of the existing scholarship on MoC in higher education, utilizing a census method of data collection so we would be able to speak to the aggregate trends in the way academic work in this area is conducted. We collected the sources that make up the extant knowledge-base (1999-present; n=153) and then applied a combined effort of systematic review (Alexander, 2020) and content analysis methodology (Krippendorff, 2013). Two members of the research team independently coded each piece of scholarship across 16 categories, achieving 97% intercoder reliability.

FINDINGS: Studying MoC - Methods, Population, and Theoretical Frameworks

We explored the following in the current scholarship: (1) Methodologies; (2) how different MoC populations are explored over time; (3) theoretical frameworks utilized; and (4) tensions between how race and gender are utilized.

Methodologies

In our review, the strong majority of scholarship utilized onetime, interview-based, qualitative methods. There is nothing inherently problematic about this, but we will explore the implications of this in the discussion section.

Disaggreagating MoC and Populations Over Time

Two key issues that arose from this component of the analysis: (1) when MoC are referenced in the literature, it usually implies Black and Latino men, and (2) the analyses tend to focus on one particular MoC group with very few examinations across different racial and ethnic groups. Disaggregating by racial and ethnic groups over time reveals that Black men were most consistently represented in the literature, with entries found from every year except 1999 and 2000. Latino men were less studied in the early 2000s but have consistently appeared in the literature since 2008.

Theoretical Frameworks: Assets-Based Approaches

We found no dominant frameworks for studying any population, however, consistently assets-based approaches tended to be used for this work (i.e., those that explore the cultural assets of marginalized populations instead of blaming them for their oppressed status). For studies on Black men, Critical Race Theory (Patton, 2016) was the most commonly used framework, and for Latino men, it was Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005).

Unexplored Identities: Sexual Orientation and SES

Not surprisingly, sexual orientation and SES were under-explored in scholarship on MoC. Specifically, only 20% (n = 31) of the pieces of scholarship addressed sexual orientation, but 90% (n = 28) of those centered homophobia and/or the marginalization of queer-identified MoC in their work. These contributions are relatively recent, as 61% (n = 19) were published since 2011.

For SES, 26% (n = 40) of the scholarship reviewed included some analysis addressing this issue. The majority (53%; n = 21), analyzed SES in terms of a social hierarchy wherein the authors framed SES in terms of MoC experiencing class-based oppression. Inclusion of SES in the MoC in higher education knowledge base is relatively recent as 85% (n = 34) were published after 2010.

Race and Gender Tensions

"Men of Color" has two social identities embedded in the term: gender ("men") and race ("of color"). The differential treatment of these by scholars in the field is a central tension in the work.

Underrepresentation: Framing the Problem

We centered framing the problem in our analysis because, by implication, the results/findings of the work should address the described issue. The most consistent approach to framing problem statements was to center them upon the underrepresentation of MoC in higher education. This was often measured using enrollment,

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retention, performance, and graduation figures. Fully, 62% (n = 95) of the scholarship we reviewed explicitly framed the rationale for their work in this way.

How Race and Gender are Handled for MoC Analyses
There were substantial differences how scholars addressed race and gender, and this relates to solutions they propose to the underrepresentation and underperformance of MoC. Specifically, 73% (n=112) of the works we reviewed treated race as a hierarchical social relationship. Scholars who focused on racial hierarchy routinely drew connections between educational outcomes and systemic racism. In contrast, 27% (n=41) treated race as a descriptor of social difference, used it to define and discuss participants, but did not specifically name and engage racial hierarchies or systemic racism.

We found the inverse of what we outlined in the section on race. Only 14% (n=22) of the reviewed literature treated gender as an oppressive social structure that privileges masculine forms of gender expression while marginalizing all others. In contrast, 75% (n=115) of the scholarship treated gender as a simple descriptor of social difference in the absence of any analysis of oppression, power, or privilege that acknowledged the role of gender as a social construct. Additionally, in 10% (n=16) of the entries, author(s) paid so little analytical attention to gender that the reviewers were unable to classify how it factored into the analyses while almost all tended to race.

DISCUSSION and IMPLICATIONS
Complicating Masculinites: Exploring Gender, Privilege, and Sexism for MoC
A central tension we identify is that the problem statements often center MoC underrepresentation and underperformance within institutions of higher education, yet they typically focus on racial oppression while ignoring gender privilege in the analyses. If racism is the cause of the underrepresentation and underperformance of MoC relative to WoC, then it follows that racism adversely affects MoC more than WoC. This has not been established in the literature, yet it still functions as an implied assumption of the work.

To more clearly align problem statements with proposed solutions, we offer a working hypothesis that critical masculinities is a missing link to understanding MoC's lagging success in higher education (e.g., Connell, 2005; Miradé, 1997). This seems counterintuitive because most feminist and masculinities research on the subject begins with the orientation that men in a patriarchal society are systemically privileged relative to women and gender-nonconforming individuals (Abalos, 2002; Connell, 2005; hooks, 1995, 2004b). However, this same vein of scholarship reveals links between masculinities and

self-harm by what Abalos (2002) refers to as the self-inflicted wounds of patriarchy.

If patriarchy conveys privilege and power to men, how can scholars understand said privilege and power in an environment where all success measures indicate underrepresentation and underperformance for MoC? How do critical masculinities approaches to the study of MoC in higher education complicate our understanding of what constitutes MoC? Grappling with these questions, we argue, will lead to both more epistemically consistent scholarly work in the future that also could offer pragmatic insights into how to effectively serve the educational needs of MoC.

Underexplored Racial Identities: Asian American, Indigenous, Multiracial, and Middle Eastern/North African (MENA) Men
The knowledge base on MoC is largely driven by analyses of Black and Latino men. The intersection of race/ethnicity and gender for these groups provides important and under-explored areas to further develop MoC scholarship. For example, Asian American men are frequently read by racist stereotypes wherein they are portrayed as anti-social, poor athletes, overly studious, and even asexual (Han, 2008; Sue, 2005). This can also lead to overcompensation, whereby Asian American men subscribe to White patriarchal norms (Eng, 2001; Shek, 2012). In contrast, Native American men struggle with a general social invisibility, coupled with the pressures of colonialist masculinities whereby seeking help is seen as "weak" (Polaw, 2018). For both Asian and Native American men, there is a strong need to also disaggregate each category (Lopez & Marley, 2018; Vang, 2018).

MENA and multiracial men pose difficult analytical issues for future MoC research because they can often be demographically treated and socially perceived as White, despite their membership in minoritized communities (Johnston et al., 2015; Karaman, 2020). Simultaneously, they are often quickly identified as non-White when circumstances change, such as 9/11 (Johnston et al., 2015; Rizk, 2011). Some work has explored multiracial men's college experiences (e.g., being Afro Latino, García-Louis, 2018). Thus, the area of masculinities for MENA and multiracial men is wide open for scholarly inquiry.

Underexplored Identities: SES, Sexual Orientation, and (Dis)ability
Intersectionality gestures toward a more robust theorization of MoC that includes other forms of social oppression. Therefore, SES (i.e., parental education and income), sexual orientation, and (dis)ability are three identity categories that require increased attention moving forward. SES has been severely understudied, but it is critically important to understand the way SES interacts with the gendered lives of college MoC. Regarding sexual orientation, scholars have only recently begun to examine its influence on the experiences

of MoC college students (e.g., Duran & Pérez, 2017; Hurtado & Sinha, 2016). This is critically important because sexuality is often defined and policed in ways that seek to feminize non-heterosexual men (Falomir-Pichastor et al., 2019).

Finally, the question regarding how (dis)ability affects MoC is consistently overlooked by scholars. We argue this oversight is a detriment to the field in two keyways: First, learning disabilities can have a negative impact on success in higher education (Denhart, 2008; Heiman & Precel, 2003). Second, masculinity and (dis)ability are interconnected, as hegemonic masculinity is often defined in terms of physical strength and dominance (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Underexplored Gender Identities: Trans* Men and Masculinities
Currently, MoC analyses treat gender as a static, demographic marker. Trans* Studies can mitigate this troubling trend by separating T (non-cis gender identity) from LGB (sexual orientation identities; e.g., Stewart et al., 2015). Commitment to critical masculinities by higher education scholars will be efficacious only if we include trans* MoC in practice and simultaneously name and de-center cisgender men as the unmarked research norm.

Methodologies: Old and New
The majority of research on MoC in higher education is driven by onetime, retrospective interviews. Within this context, we argue that more longitudinal, survey-based, and ethnographic methods would help further develop this area of scholarly inquiry. Harper (2014) contends that future research on MoC must be "methodologically sophisticated and based on more institutions and larger sample sizes" (p. 137). Harper clearly articulated that in-depth, qualitative analyses focused on small samples of students in a single sites still have relevance; however, the aforementioned methodological approaches are largely absent.

CONCLUSION
This analysis shows that MoC research is wide open and requires further, critically oriented inquiry. Greater attention needs to focus on gender and masculinities as socially constructed, dynamic, multiple, and diverse. New and novel approaches to MoC in higher education scholarship can aid in this endeavor, including with longitudinal, ethnographic scholarship, multi-institutional case studies, and storytelling methods.

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