

I shouldn't have to try hard to fit in: A discursive analysis of women's accounts of their performance in gendered organizations.

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Gendered organizations typically “create a climate” where women (as minority members or tokens) are not assumed to “quite fit” and are thus expected to be not as competent as men (the dominants) (Ridgeway et al. 2022: 645). This creates increased pressure on women not only to perform according to the prescribed policies and regulations, i.e., to do their job flawlessly, but very often to work beyond what is expected of them, i.e., to over-perform (Yoder 1991). The question remains whether such (over-)performance suffices for these women to develop a sense of felt inclusion and to be recognized as legitimate members of the organization.

Drawing on Discourse Analysis and Conversation Analysis, we qualitatively unpack the complexity of how women's performance is perceived and received in highly gendered masculine organizations. Our data sets are in-depth, semi-structured interviews with U.S. military women and dyadic coaching interactions between a coach and female leaders working in (technology and reinsurance) business. Assuming that gender-based inequality regimes produce “markedly different experiences” (Flores & Bañuelos 2021:111), we examine these women report on their experiences regarding ‘doing their job’, i.e., performing their organizational duties. Our analysis reveals a problematic (self-)perception and reception of women's (over-)performance that may have real-life consequences for their career(s). Women's accounts allow us to both demonstrate how the organizational climate of ‘having to fit in’ is constructed as well as identify various practices of how these women orient to that climate. The accounts also reveal women's immense labor of coping involved in that process (Ridgeway et al. 2022) and that the practices of (over-)performance do not secure women's sense of acceptance and inclusion in highly gendered organizations.

On a more general note, our talk is part of a larger research project on “*Discourses of (not-)belonging: Exploring women's experiences of functioning in highly masculinized socio-cultural contexts using discourse analysis.*” The overall focus is on how language and discourse(s) are used to express, (co-)construct and enact gendered propositions and gendered identities across various linguistic, socio-cultural, and professional contexts. Concretely, the project focuses on ‘executive coaching’, ‘football’ and ‘military’ and analyzes women's lived experiences and coping strategies there. The goals of our project are to make women's experiences and their coping strategies in these contexts visible by linguistically analyzing how these are framed and accomplished during real-time talk-based interaction and as reported by them during interviews. Second, to compare such lived experiences and strategies to carve out similarities and differences across these diverse communities-of-practice. Third, to critically relate these more specific socio-cultural experiences to more macro-discursive (Western) norms and ideologies in the context of gender hierarchies and essentialized gender orders with the aim to help counterbalance such negative experiences by giving an ear to those (still) discriminated against in institutionalized and professional settings.

Flores, Glenda & Maricela Bañuelos. 2021. “Gendered deference. Perceptions of authority and competence among Latina/o physicians in medical institutions”, *Gender & Society* 35(1): 110-135.

Ridgeway, Cecilia, Korn, Rachel, M. & Joan C. Williams. 2022. “Documenting the routine burden of devalued difference in the professional workplace”, *Gender & Society* 36(5): 627-651.

Yoder, Janice D. 1991. “Rethinking tokenism: Looking beyond numbers”, *Gender & Society* 5(2). 178-192.