

Exploring Animal Traits to Decode Masculinities: A Critical Conscientisation Journey Towards Self-Awareness and Identity Development

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Abstract

Masculinity is a concept that has evoked mixed interpretations from scholars in the field of gender. On the one hand, some refer to the toxic nature of especially men who present themselves as masculine, and on the other hand, there is a strong push from those who believe that masculinity is not always toxic. While observable evidence might point to either direction, it is essential to ascertain from men as a group bearing the brunt of these diverse understandings their interpretation of masculinity and how that influences their identities as men and how they relate to others in their social space. This paper grapples with masculinity by reporting on a face-to-face group discussion with 10 male students at a higher education institution in South Africa. Rooted within a critical conscientisation lens and strongly drawing on animal traits analogies, the students embarked on self-awareness and identity enhancement discussion with the view to decode the concept of masculinities as it applied to them and deliberate on how formulated understandings of self could predispose them to socially unacceptable behaviours. An analysis of the day's discourse indicated that the students identified strongly with diverse animal traits, were conscious of the discursive practices linked to them, and understood how embracing such traits had influenced their behaviours in different relationships.

Keywords: masculinity; critical conscientization; self-awareness; identity