



Raymond A. Mason School of Business

WILLIAM & MARY

DIVERSITY GOES TO WORK PODCAST

EPISODE 27: NATALIE HOSKINS – ENGAGING MEN IN ANTI-VIOLENCE WORK

Natalie Hoskins

So I'm not trying to say that we're all traumatizing our children, but I am trying to broaden this picture of, like, as we grow up and we're trying to make sense of the world, all of these little things build up.

Phil Wagner

Hello from the halls of the Mason School of Business here at William & Mary. I'm Phil, and this is Diversity Goes to Work. Buckle up because we're getting ready to take a deep dive into the real human lived experiences that shape and guide our diversity work in the world of work. Should be fun. Welcome, listeners, to yet another episode of Diversity Goes to Work. I've recorded a few episodes lately, and I found myself reflecting upon the fact that I often say how much I love today's guest, or today's guest is a dear friend and not to be like, super on brand, but both of those are really true today. I really do appreciate today's guest for so many reasons, and we kind of go way back. We first met in Bailey Hall in the beautiful campus of the University of Kansas. I won't tell you how many years ago we are not spring chickens anymore, but today's guest, Natalie Hoskins, has always just been someone you want to learn from, somebody that I wanted to learn from. She's got such a multidimensional career background, and she's the type of person that makes an impact in all that she does. And as we kick off our October releases, a month we dedicate as Domestic Violence Awareness Month and a time we hold space to honor the stories of those impacted by domestic violence, it was clear to me that Natalie would offer an incredibly helpful perspective. So she's here to discuss with us today these issues. Currently, Natalie is a faculty member at Middle Tennessee State University. As a teacher and a scholar, Natalie explores issues of health, wellness, gender, social support, emotional expression, and interpersonal aggression, violence, and conflict. She's published in top journals such as the Journal of Interpersonal Violence and the Qualitative Report. In particular, Natalie has also spent a considerable amount of time working in batterer intervention programs or bips and with male perpetrators of violence against women. Today I'm so excited to talk with my friend, and I can promise you're in for a treat, too.

Phil Wagner

Welcome, Natalie. It's always an honor to speak with you, but really, in this context, I'm pretty excited about what we're going to unpack today. First things first, can you tell our listeners

maybe a little bit more about who you are and what you do or what you study? I'm sure I bungled that bio in some way.

Natalie Hoskins

Oh, my gosh. No. That was the most excellent description of me ever, and I don't ever want to be described as anything different.

Phil Wagner

Okay.

Natalie Hoskins

Thank you for that.

Phil Wagner

I'll send you the script easy.

Natalie Hoskins

Yeah. I would only add that I really enjoy community building and making connections with people, and I think that's actually part of what might be considered at the root of the research that I've done because those bonds or connections, relationships with people that are, like, mutually beneficial are at the root of our interpersonal relationships and our health and well being.

Phil Wagner

Yeah, so as we talk about interpersonal violence today, I want to balance a little yin with the yang, and I want to go to sort of the other side of the equation. I'd love to start the conversation by talking about social support with you. Actually, kind of how we met was around this very idea. We took a seminar together in our grad school days on social support. One of my best classes, one of my favorite classes ever with a genius scholar. You and I both know her well. Dr. Adrian Kunkel. Social support is one of those buzzwords in the context of the world of work that we sort of know what it is. We sort kinda can spot it when we see it. But can you give us an everyday person's framing of social support?

Natalie Hoskins

Yeah, I think the thing that really is difficult about understanding social support is that it has a long history and evolution of being researched and talked about in different ways and from different perspectives. So I don't think there's a nutshell for social support. It's almost too big. There are kind of two areas of social support that are useful to hold on to. One is that social support is receiving support, giving and receiving support that is perceived as helpful by the recipient. And there are lots of different kinds of supportive communication. So we can give emotional support, which is understanding, listening, empathy. We can give material support, which is something that's tangible, and that's another word for materials, tangible support and informational support, and so on. Like, giving and receiving support is kind of one of the

most obvious definitions of social support. But I really like to think of this other way of seeing social support, which is actually the perception that one is belonging, the sense of belonging or acceptance in a social group or social relationship. You can see those are two very different ways of looking at it. But they're both simultaneously in that umbrella of social support.

Phil Wagner

Yes, I think they both fit well with the theme of our podcast writ large and then our podcast episode today. In particular, you study social support in the context of what you call adverse experiences or adverse emotions. I think, of course, that's the context today. I want to start to think about domestic violence and what that looks like, and we'll get there in a second. But can you speak a bit more on how adverse experiences shape and define who we are and impact our identity, the way we see ourselves, the way the world sees us?

Natalie Hoskins

So this is really where you can see that communication takes a lot from psychology research. All along our lifespan at different life stages. Our identities are shaped through our experiences, through observations of others, through indirect and direct messages that we receive about what's right and wrong and who we are, cultural norms, expectations of behavior, and all of that. And so everybody develops a sense of self, right? Then we create a worldview how we see the world, what we believe, what we value, and so on. So when we experience adversity, which is just simply another word for a negative experience or an experience that causes us to have distress or negative feelings. Those experiences add to that shaping of self because they contribute to all of those beliefs of what's right and wrong and so on. And so if adversity, we encounter adversity, and it doesn't align with what we believe, and it violates our worldview, then we have to make sense of it or reconcile it so that it fits. Or we can say, okay, I understand why that happened, and it doesn't define me, and I can move on past that and learn and grow from it and put it in the past. But like I was saying before, we can't do that if we don't have the tools and the skills and the support to make sense of it, to reconcile these opposing beliefs and values. And so it really is a communicative process where we have to rely on our ability to ask for help and talk to others so that we can what's called assimilate an adverse experience into our kind of timeline of events, so it doesn't stand out and become something that we ruminate about or become intrusive or have a traumatic health effect. I mean, really, to answer your question, these adverse experiences shape who we are because they can either stand out and change our definition of self as being someone to whom bad stuff happens or someone who's deserving of these adverse experiences or someone who's to blame for these adverse experiences. But when we have people to bounce these things off of and make sense of them who really care about us, and we can say, no, that's just a bad thing that happened to me. It doesn't define who I am.

Phil Wagner

Yeah. So, of course, we're here to talk about domestic violence advocacy. And you and I early on had some relationship convergence around not only that theme but also sexual violence advocacy. We did some service learning stuff together, and we've continued to have

conversations over the years about this. I want to see if I can recount my observation of your work and a little bit distant from it from you. But I remember when you began a research trajectory looking at acts of interpersonal violence that had played out and then sort of the redemptive process of rebuilding life and identity after. And it was easy for me to see why we would focus on adverse experiences among victims or survivors of domestic and sexual violence. But you took this in a radically different direction. And I'm wondering if you can unpack some of your work with interpersonal violence perpetrators, I mean, specifically men. You've found your way into batterer intervention groups, and I know you're somebody who is driven by a deep commitment to justice. Why spend your time examining those who have perpetrated acts of violence and not those who have been impacted by them? Can you talk a little bit about the adverse experiences cycle for those who have perpetrated violence? Because I think that tees up some important things we can unpack throughout the rest of our conversation today.

Natalie Hoskins

Yeah, that's great because I do remember. It's so funny because you're talking about remembering graduate school and I'm like, wait, do I also remember that?

Phil Wagner

I don't know.

Natalie Hoskins

Yes, okay, I do remember taking a seminar on social support. Okay, it's there. But I remember that you also had an interest in masculinities, as did I during our time together at KU. And what really drove me to look at perpetrators instead of the survivors or victims of intimate partner violence was that I was simultaneously studying social support communication and gender communication. And so, while I was learning about gender socialization and how we are all gendered, I was learning about the stereotypical masculine gender roles and characteristics as well as feminine stereotypical gender roles and characteristics. And some of these things were not new to me, but because I was learning about them in tandem with these supportive communication concepts, I started to think over I'm over here learning. Okay, so support can buffer the effects of stress. Okay, but over here, when I'm learning about gender, men and boys are taught not to ask for help. So wait a minute, there's something going on here. I'm really interested in this. And it actually came up at some point because of my work with Adrienne.

Phil Wagner

Who's our adviser, by the way? We'll give her a shout on this podcast. Dr. Adrienne Kunkle. Just one of the most wonderful, smart, just a perfect human, if such a thing exists. So shout out to Adrienne Kunkel but yeah.

Natalie Hoskins

A beautiful soul with a giving heart and wonderful funny and everything. Just a perfect tent. Her work with domestic violence survivors and how that was incorporated in social support seminar. My work with gender all kind of coalesced at this time, and I really was interested in, well, wait a minute, how can we truly intervene or engage in restorative justice if we're not looking at the lives of the perpetrators? And so I became aware of batterer intervention programs in our area in Kansas. I began talking with the people who ran the program, and it made sense. It just all came together for me.

Phil Wagner

So put it all together for us. One of your most recent published pieces looks at the role of social support in life and how that might impact men across the lifespan and, in particular, their drive to commit interpersonal violence. I hope I'm wording that correctly. So can you maybe unpack the role that support plays in indeed buffering against stress and then intent to commit violence or actual commission of violence?

Natalie Hoskins

Yeah. First thing I want to do is I want to pause here and say, and I think that it was implied earlier when you told our audience that I made, like, a specific, intentional turn to look at men. I really want to pause and say my research, and the research is related to it, could easily be applied to anybody.

Phil Wagner

Sure, sure.

Natalie Hoskins

All genders, no matter your identity, could potentially be socialized with what we call so-called masculine ideologies. I really think it's important that while my research does look at men and how they were socialized and how they experienced social support and how that related to their perpetration of violence, I think it would map on to anybody. So social support, as I said briefly, has the ability or has been shown over and over again to buffer the effects of stress. And so it shows up in these men's lives because the men, particularly, that I worked with over and over would tell stories about how they didn't have people to talk to. They were discouraged from talking to people, that it was not only frowned upon to ask for help because that was a feminine behavior but that it was also dangerous to ask for help. There were dangerous consequences for some people to ask for help from situations that were traumatizing for them. And so, what role does support play in their moving from these adverse experiences into lives of violent behaviors? Again, this is where we kind of connect to the research in other fields. But if a person so I'm taking a broader outside of men, if a person is continuously told, you're not accepted. You don't belong. And these messages seem to be interpreted from the behaviors that children experience when they're abused or neglected. So these adverse experiences are typically extreme experiences of abuse, but they're also household dysfunction experiences that, in one way or another, communicate to the child that they're not

valued or that they're not taken care of. I mean, even my own kids, even my own kids, when I do something that to me seems so little like, I don't feel like telling you a bedtime story tonight. Mom's tired. Right? Later on, I come to find out they're like, that made me feel like you don't care about me. Right. So I'm not trying to say that we're all traumatizing our children, but I am trying to broaden this picture of, like, as we grow up and we're trying to make sense of the world. All of these little things build up into our worldview and our sense of self. And if you're in an environment where you're constantly being told, or constantly being demonstrated, that you have little value, that you are going to start to internalize that. And one of the communicative behaviors we engage in when we feel like we're hurt or belittled or weak, or somehow demeaned all the time is behaviors of self-protection. So it doesn't always result in intimate partner violence or physical or psychological, or sexual violence. Sometimes it's just being really shitty, right? I don't know about you, but when my cup is empty, you know the metaphor of when your cup is full, you've got lots of positive energy. When your cup is empty, it's been depleted. When my cup is empty, I can be kind of a jerk because I'm, like, get away from me. I can't take any more stress or problems. And so human behavior, human reaction to stress, is self-protection. And so social supports, having people who make us feel like we belong, having people that are available, or at least perceived as being available to talk to in times of need and then beyond that perception, people who are actually giving us helpful support, like tangible support, emotional support and so on. Cognitive support is another one I didn't mentioned earlier, where people, when we talk to them, can help us by giving us advice and helping us make sense. That helps us to feel like we're valuable, as well as move forward and become resilient in times of adversity. You know, if we don't have resilience, then adversity can actually break us down. Resilience allows us to grow from adversity. But if we don't have that, then we tend to get sick, or we tend to have mental health issues. I think I answered your question. But I'll say one more thing. The men that I worked with, they had a compound effect, or I mean, I don't want to say effect because, you know, this wasn't quantitative research. This wasn't I wasn't trying to show cause and effect here, nor do I try to claim that this is a direct cause. But they have this influence, like this coalescence of events in their young adolescents or early childhood, where they were made to feel like they were unimportant to the people who should have been making them feel valuable. And they were also told or shown that they couldn't ask for help or that there was no one there to help them. Or that they were told you need to take care of yourself. So this like what we would call it stereotypical masculinization, right? This like be tough, be self-reliant, be strong, and whatever. Don't show your emotions because that's all feminine stuff, right? Being weak and asking for help, they got that in. I don't know what the expression is. They got a lot of that, but then they also didn't have anyone to help them, with very few exceptions. And we can talk about that because I wrote a little bit about that kind of surrogate support because, ultimately, we're social animals, and we will seek out support, but if we can't find it, it's really damaging.

Phil Wagner

So talk to me. Someone committed to restorative justice. You have to surely make some. Maybe they're not concessions, but you had to reconcile. Like, this is a heavy thing to balance, right? You're trying to bring dignity back to men whose dignity has been sort of violated

somewhere throughout the lifespan. But these are the same men who have sort of violated the dignity and safety, and identity of others as they have perpetrated acts of violence. As somebody committed to, you know, trauma-informed being trauma-informed, I should say, or someone committed to restorative justice, what does it look like in your head as you reconcile, okay, I'm working with quote-unquote the enemy? I'm working with people who have perpetrated acts of heinous violence in some cases.

Natalie Hoskins

Yeah, I did struggle at times because I don't write about it. I haven't figured out how to write about it yet, but I interviewed them and asked them to tell me about their violence. I sat in the groups, these VIP groups, and I listened to them describe their violence. So I think I struggled a little bit in the beginning. Like, what am I doing? Oh, my goodness. I had that kind of question or doubt of, am I doing something wrong here? Am I in the wrong place? I stood out as a female researcher, a young female researcher in a group full of men, with the exception of one of our terrific facilitators, who's also a woman. But anyway, like, I have no struggle with it now, and nor did I for most of my work, because the way I see it is people won't be able to stop hurting people until they stop hurting. And so I didn't make that expression up. Like, there's some expression that goes, and I.

Phil Wagner

Hurt people, hurt people.

Natalie Hoskins

That's right, that's it.

Phil Wagner

Yeah.

Natalie Hoskins

And so yes, of course, I'm grateful that the programming and the facilitators I worked with, and this is true for most batterer intervention programs because the programmatic designs are all kind of coming out of the same place and the same ideology. They all tend to balance the goal of increasing the safety of families and survivors, of holding perpetrators accountable for their acts of violence while also asking them to reflect and grow and build and restore. So with all that being said, it's just there is no other way to do it. I don't think that we can have a decrease in violence in relationships until we address the harm that's been done to the perpetrators. And really, ideally, I am an idealist. Sometimes I regret it, but really, I think what would be amazing is to have parenting programs in place so that we could get to parents before they really hurt children. I know I hear myself saying it, and it's like, oh, my gosh, such an idealist. Like, there's no social service in the United States that can afford to do all of that. But anyway.

Phil Wagner

But that's where the inflection point is. That's where this really goes back to, is a cycle, right?

Natalie Hoskins

It does. And I absolutely feel that we have to give services and resources to victims and survivors, and none of the work that I do suggests otherwise. But if we don't have resources and services for perpetrators, then they're just going to do it again and again and again. Because, like I said, and this is again in a different discipline, mostly psychological and criminal justice research, it's just a cycle of violence. It's what they have learned to do to protect themselves, and so they are going to continue to do it until something stops them.

Phil Wagner

So, Natalie, talk to me about the overall takeaway, then, of your work. I think you're still piecing together what that means for you as a scholar, right and how you reconcile all these things. And I know your work isn't sort of to give a pass for acts of intimate partner violence, but how might your work shape our understanding of how to work with those who have committed acts of violence or maybe other forms of dignity violations? I mean, I find your work to be redemptive without sacrificing accountability. So how do we take that and put it into a model we can put into practice in our day-to-day lives?

Natalie Hoskins

Oh, I love that you ask that because, like yourself, my day-to-day life is teaching, right? I teach my kids. That's not my job, obviously, but I spend a lot of time, more time than at my job, teaching my children. When I have the opportunity, I teach neighbors or community members. I don't always try to be like the pedantic lecturing friend. And then, of course, my profession is that I'm a professor, and I teach. The answer to your question is really that our day-to-day lives should involve our awareness of other people's trauma. And you mentioned being trauma-informed earlier, and I think that's super important. So trauma-informed allows us to recognize that when people have traumatic experiences that are either chronic, and they continue to experience or that in the past, that they've not really healed from them or processed them, that will affect how they're able to interact with you or the space and participate in whatever it is that you're offering them. So, for me, I'm offering them an education. For some of your audience, it's perhaps they're offering a client relationship, a service, some kind of business interaction. And if we don't acknowledge that people have these adverse experiences and, you know, whole host of beliefs about guardedness and protecting themselves or, you know, skepticisms about interpersonal interactions, then we're really going to miss the boat on what types of quality interactions we can have. So something that I've started to do in my work I can't not apply what I know to my family life. And so I really do want to emphasize that while I try to imbue it in my work, it's also something I'm injecting into raising my children, who are now teenagers. But I start a semester now by having a conversation about this, and it's not like, I don't want anybody to think that I'm, like, all feelings and fluff and there's no hard work. But research shows us that students can't learn if they are guarded, if they are stressed if they are suffering. And so it's not just touchy-feely stuff.

It's scientific, empirical evidence that shows that you have to give a little bit of space for building rapport and gaining trust before you can actually move forward with asking them to do the hard work. Right? And so most of the time, our first day of a semester is, like, here's like a water hose. You remember the movie UHF? You want to drink from the water hose or the fire hose? The fire hose.

Phil Wagner

You're revealing our age in so many ways. You're talking about teenagers as kids and old movies, but yes, I'm with you.

Natalie Hoskins

And I'm older than you, so I don't know what you're talking about. So, first day, we always want them to, you know, here's the syllabus stuff, and all the policies, and these are all the assignments and blah, blah. And it's like information overload, even for the most stable person. But, you know, these young students, typically traditional students, are 18 to 23. And with COVID and with the rise in mental illness, rise in social media, and anxiety, all these things are documented empirical findings. Our students come to us in real bad shape often, and they're starting the semester with five classes, sometimes five, six, sometimes. And yours isn't the most important thing in their life. And if you don't acknowledge it, they may not even be listening to you on the first day. So that's what I do. I really think that we can take not even just a trauma-informed approach but a trauma-focused approach, which is that, like, we openly acknowledge that people are experiencing challenges that may disrupt their ability to engage in whatever it is that they're coming to you to engage in.

Phil Wagner

Yeah.

Natalie Hoskins

Yeah, so I think that it's really important and entirely possible for everybody to be somewhat trauma focused in whatever work that they do.

Phil Wagner

Oh, that's so good. It's always good to speak with you, but thank you. I mean, thanks for sharing time to speak to your work and your experiences and helping us think about intervening and establishing social support as a norm. You know, dignity affirmations as a norm and how that can shift the cycle of intimate partner violence. And really, I think so many of the issues that we see play out in the DEIB space. So, my friend, thank you for your conversation today. Always a pleasure to speak with you.

Natalie Hoskins

Thank you very much.

Phil Wagner

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