GENDER DOESN'T MATTER
Why women and gender are ignored in research on elementary level teachers (and what it will cost us)

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While it is arguable that gender matters in education, its relevance in educational research on teachers is less clear. Prompted in part by Acker's (1995-1996) call for additional research focus on gender and women in education, the authors ask «does gender still matter in US-based education with regard to women teachers?». We affirm that gender does matter in a conceptual sense, but our extensive critical review of the research literature suggests the inverse: that US-based scholars doing empirical work in education do not appear to value gender as a category for examining the experiences of female teachers. We concluded that current research foregoes gender in favour of other social categories and emphasizes research on girls and male teachers over research on women teachers. The paper ends with recommendations for a more robust handling of gender in research on women in education.

Keywords: elementary school, gender, teacher, United States, women

Introduction

From a US-based media outlet that reports on global matters, a recent headline read «End of gender?» (Weeks, 2011). The article continued to list several examples of global gender transgressions: Canadian parents who publicly and deliberately obscure their child's sex; an androgynous Australian fashion model; a mainstream American clothing catalogue featuring a

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boy with pink toenail polish. The author asked if the world has moved beyond the rigid social expectations paired with male or female sex, citing the US as a particular trendsetter in breaking down gender divisions on its way toward gender-neutral or gender-free approaches that would ultimately make rigid gender dualisms obsolete. Despite the eye-catching question that headlined this article, it nonetheless outlined several instances of people who, instead of trying to eliminate gender altogether, are working to open options for people who live as cis-gendered (i.e., at peace with the gender assignment given at birth), transgendered, or non-gendered assigned. The article also offered a sidebar about a more mainstream view that gender is of particularly great importance in education, where a persistent performance gap exists between males and females, a trend that is used as fuel for further reification of gender stereotypes even as other trends diminish the stereotypes.

A few days later, from another US-based media outlet that reports on global events, this headline read «Gender bias fought at Egalia preschool in Stockholm, Sweden» (Soffel, 2011). The taxpayer-funded Swedish school is designed as a gender-free experience that provides opportunity for students to be who they want to be irrespective of social gender expectations and stereotypes. Language, behaviors, materials, and practices that reinforce such stereotypes are eradicated but not to the pleasure of all. Some believe that by offering no gender roles to children, the school risks leaving young people ill-equipped to deal with and fit into the world outside Egalia. The school's name means equality, and its staff pride themselves on the inclusion of anatomically-correct dolls, acceptance of many sexualities, and recognition of gender assignments outside the male/female binary, which they say cultivates new ideas about gender without erasing it.

The same week these articles appeared in popular media sources, we and other academics and community leaders gathered in Porto, Portugal to examine «Why does gender still matter in education?». The question was not «does gender still matter in education?». If it were, the answer might be a simple «yes, of course», but, dubiously, gender seems to matter only to some and for some in some cases. As indicated by both the highlighted articles, gender certainly does seem to matter in education with regard to students, but the relevance of gender is not as clear when it comes to many of the other players in educational institutions and the scholarly community. Our research focus on women teachers prompted us to ask not «why does gender still matter» but rather «*does* gender still matter in education with regard to women teachers?».

The aim of this article is to examine some possible reasons for the lack of attention to women elementary teachers and gender that we found in a recent review of US literature (Galman & Mallozzi, 2012). In brief, while we affirm that gender does matter in a larger conceptual sense, the extensive critical review of the research literature suggests otherwise: that

US-based scholars doing empirical work in education do not appear to value gender as a category for examining the experiences of female teachers. This disregard for gender research specifically on women paired with the devaluing of the methodologies most effective in examining this topic has left the field with little research on this area. To reverse this trend, we conclude that both educational research and the category of gender need to be framed differently and put in a global conversation.

How can gender matter if nobody is paying attention to it?

While anyone would be hard pressed to argue that gender simply does not matter when it comes to research on women teachers, our literature review revealed that mattering and having a substantial empirical focus on the issue may be two different things. In short, irrespective of whether or not individuals may consider gender and women as critical areas in research on teachers, the body of research in that area is almost nonexistent.

Our critical literature review methods included an exhaustive interdisciplinary search of 57 scholarly education, sociological, anthropological and gender and women's studies journals for the over 15 year period since Sandra Acker's (1995-1996) sociological perspective on British, Canadian, and US research. Her subsequent conclusion that more emphasis needed to be placed on «integrating gender into the mainstream study of teachers» (*ibidem*: 101) piqued our interest to see if gender was indeed incorporated into research on teachers. A more in-depth discussion of our literature search can be found elsewhere (see Galman & Mallozzi, 2012), but, briefly, electronic database searching for specific key terms yielded surprisingly few research studies about women teachers and gender. These findings suggest that gender is becoming even more invisible in empirical studies of elementary women teachers' work in the US context, even as specific research on teachers and gender surges ahead in Australian, Canadian, and European contexts (Sabbe & Aelterman, 2007), raising the question of why it has all but disappeared from the landscape of research on women elementary teachers in the US since the mid-1990s.

After conducting a painstaking Internet search using the Academic Search Premier engine, we were left with 54 research articles of initial interest. Upon closer examination within those original 54 articles, only 12 were found to deal empirically with questions about women elementary teachers and gender. The remaining 42 studies initially seemed to qualify under our search criteria, but ultimately we excluded them from our final list of relevant studies, because, in each of these, gender was not employed as a construct of analytic importance: it was treated as peripheral. Without taking the time to examine these closely, it would appear

to the casual database searcher that there were many, many articles about women and gender. This simply wasn't the case. Our key finding that gender was repeatedly sidelined by other analytic and design foci was concerning, and prompted us to further investigate the trends in the 42 excluded studies. Operating with the idea that gender is a complex social category that goes beyond divisions of sex (Galman & Mallozzi, 2012), each author independently and thoroughly read each excluded article seeking convergent and divergent themes (Patton, 2002) in theory, methodology, and findings. Each author then proposed her case for potential themes denoted by descriptive phrases (i.e., categories), until agreement was reached. Eventually, we found three themes that may shed some light on why the majority of the articles that appeared, at first glance (via keywords, abstracts and similar), to be about gender and women were really about other things altogether.

Firstly, *gender was highlighted in abstracts and keywords only to be ignored in favour of other variables*. Such studies included surface-level references to many social identities including gender, but these other social categories pushed gender into the background rather than retain it as a focus. This theme was especially clear in the case of studies that privileged analyses of race by reducing the attention to gender analyses.

Secondly, *female teachers are ignored but femaleness is still a problem for the girls they teach*. These excluded studies either proposed girls struggling in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) disciplines could be helped through teachers' implementations of gender equitable instruction or documented teachers' reflections on their gender and its perceived effects on working with students. Gender *vis-à-vis* femaleness was a significant variable for female elementary school students but not the adult women who teach them. In these types of analyses, gender was framed only as an academic barrier for K-5th or 6th grade girls, and greatly related to the remediation of girls in science and math content areas.

Thirdly, *female teachers are not research-worthy unless they have a negative impact on males*. In these studies, women teachers, as the representative majority of teachers in elementary settings, were positioned as a problem, especially for boy students. The spurious, seemingly foregone, solution to this ill-constructed problem was «fix» the damaging trend of feminization by adding males to the teaching force.

While we believe that the US research community as a whole has failed to adequately address gender and women in the research on teaching, it is important to note that we do not suggest that every article must do so. No study or research article is able to effectively address every variable involved, and we do not advocate any try. Therefore, we are not critiquing the quality of these excluded studies, but are instead reporting that those studies which claim to examine the complexities of gender and the female teacher often accomplish other ends instead, leaving the reader with a sense that she/he has been led to a foreign place,

not at all her/his original and intended destination. These patterns over the majority of the studies in our search appear significant.

Possible reasons for the pattern of inattention to women and gender

This pattern of inattention to women elementary teachers and to gender revives and reaffirms Acker's original call for more research in this area (Galman & Mallozzi, 2012), but questions about the nature of such persistent avoidance raised the question as to the reasons that might be behind such a marked dearth of research. We deemed it most appropriate to examine the absence of research in relation to what we did find in the meagre ten articles that did address gender and women. Together, analyses of these 12 included and the 42 excluded articles led us to focus on the following four potential explanations for the lacunae we observed.

Methodological and related funding concerns effect empirical interests

Because most of the studies we investigated in-depth were qualitative in nature with very small number of participants (Ns), we wondered about the current valuing of experimental design and large-scale research and how gender-framed inquiry fits into those research emphases. An examination of the research questions across the ten relevant studies revealed them to be largely descriptive investigations that, while methodologically robust and appropriate, merit notice. The inappropriate titling of randomized-assignment experimental design research as the gold standard (Howe, 2009) sets studies of gender at a marked disadvantage. The research questions associated with complex examinations of gender as a construct cannot be answered by randomized-trial experiments. Therefore, it is unlikely, under this particular epistemological regime, that studies of gender and women teachers will ever be able to gain the respect that other research topics might. In a similar way, explorations of gender as a socially constructed and therefore dynamic, even pliant, category lend themselves to in-depth descriptive study, an endeavor not suitable for large-scale studies.

Large-scale research design attracts attention and respect across the educational research community, public and funding sources. Funding, of course, is always difficult to secure, and when a certain type of study attracts much of the funding, that type of research is, however blamelessly, incentivized. So, research of a certain type begets more research of that type, which attracts more funding, which supports more research, and so on. These cycles make it unlikely that examinations of gender and women teachers will become popular educational

research topics in the near future. Of course, epistemological regime change is possible, but it is not likely, and even then gender research faces additional disadvantages.

Let's not and say we did: gender ignored in favour of other morsels

Gender research is not constructed as fundable, avant-garde, or having strong appeal (unless, some argue, you are studying men and masculinity, and even then there are significant limits to the scope and type of inquiry [see Galman, 2012a]). Indeed, one of the authors was told by a male faculty member in graduate school that getting a certificate in Women's Studies, or doing gender research for the dissertation, would significantly limit her chances of getting an academic job after graduation. Gender research is just not politically attractive.

It is no surprise that paradigms of science change (Kuhn, 1962) and analytic categories follow suit. During specific periods in US history (e.g., late 19th and early 20th century, when more women became teachers), women teachers were a population of relative, although never earth-shattering, interest (see Beecher, 1846; Davis, 1929; Emerick, 1909). Also, gender as a category has received greater attention from scholars in years past (Acker, 1995-1996). In the contemporary context, the concept of intersectionality, which derails much of the late 1990s focus on identity politics, seems to be the de rigueur construct in studies on teachers and students alike. The premise behind intersectionality is that individuals' experiences are shaped by socially and culturally constructed categories (i.e., gender, race, class, sexuality, nationality, age, ability, ethnicity, and more). These categories are considered multi-tiered and overlapping, instead of separate. Therefore, an examination of one of those social categories – such as gender – may be seen as simplistic and unsophisticated as a lens for examining sociocultural experience.

In our review, we found that gender as a construct was swallowed up by research that documented women's experiences from an intersectional perspective, never to be heard from again. Femaleness appeared in many studies as a keyword, rationale, or sampling factor yet went unexplored in the article itself, continually subsumed in favour of other analytical axes. By including an array of social categories within an intersectional analysis, no single category seems to get its due, with the exception of, most notably, critical analyses of race, which we found to be a prime area of research focus even when studies proposed to be about gender and not about race.

We do not mean to imply that the only adequate treatment of gender avoids intersectionality; as McCarthy (2003) noted, it is difficult, if not impossible, to consider the gender variable without also considering it in the context of race (and class, sexuality, and other categories). However, an attempt at employing intersectionality may actually fail to adequately

address gender, subsuming it to another category such as race despite the best of intentions. The emphasis on race may be in reaction to a long US research history that systematically ignored race and ethnicity in educational research. In the case of the White women who dominate elementary school and early childhood teaching contexts in the United States, the monolithic nature of Whiteness is nearly always assumed, with some notable, recent exceptions (Galman, Pica-Smith, & Rosenberger, 2010). Therefore, researchers studying elementary teachers, a relatively homogenous group of White, middle class, heterosexual, family-oriented women, may feel pressure to highlight a mostly-ignored category like Whiteness. Understandably, the emphasis on race may be an attempt to address and acknowledge the historical and contemporary footprint of race and racism, and the legacy of Whiteness in research on teachers. However, it is possible that such an emphasis could play into the trap of measuring the individual oppressive worth of identity categories against one another in a competitive hierarchy of attention. This hierarchy assumes that a single social marker can be deemed most important, pitting subjectivities against each other as people fight to establish themselves as most oppressed and worthy of descriptive attention. Determining who is most oppressed employs competing political agendas and prevents collaboration for productive social movements.

In current education and academic politics, singular categories such as gender are less unattractive than intersectionality. Attaching oneself to a singular category creates a rift between all other categories, a legitimate critique against identity politics (Gitlin, 1995; Schlesinger, 1998). On the other hand, intersectionality, which is seen as a progressive and powerful conceptual tool, allows individuals to embrace a certain category while not necessarily rejecting all others. This conceptual middle-ground is attractive and useful in that it keeps options open, but also creates the possibility of misuse (Siltanen & Doucet, 2008). The ideological pressure to employ intersectionality may result in inaccurate keywords and incomplete analyses of categories like gender. This could send the message that even the most fleeting mention of gender is analytically adequate.

Female teachers are infantilized: research addresses girls, not women

Twenty-one of the 42 excluded studies approached female teachers only as an extension of the young pupils they teach. Little to no attention was given to increasing teachers' gender awareness for their personal knowledge or improvement, only as the matter of gender as a potential barrier to or issue around relating to students. The excluded studies are emblematic of a history of positioning women teachers as not quite adults. Throughout US history, female teachers have been treated as comparable and nearly indistinguishable from the children in

their care. In the later 19th and early 20th centuries, after women began to teach in public and private schools in larger numbers, they eventually outnumbered men in teaching positions (Marrais & LeCompte, 1998; Lortie, 1975/2002). Around this point, a concerned public raised the possibility that so many women teachers could not possibly match men's physical ability to regulate children in a classroom (Biklin, 1995). Subsequently and drawing on the available social discourses of women, the teacher's role eventually shifted from that of a masculine disciplinarian to the feminized and supportive mentor (Schutz, 2004). Women teachers were not considered authoritarian adults decreeing top-down demands or threatening physical control but became gentle guides, representing a more knowledgeable counterpart in a mutually respectful relationship reminiscent of the peer/mentor. This opened the door to the symbolic infantilization of the profession.

In spending most of the day with students, a teacher's primary worth is in relating to children and not to other adults, quickly reducing teachers' cache in an adult-run world (Biklen, 1995; Lightfoot, 1978, 1983). This childlike-by-relation position is reinforced by the dominant images of acceptable female in-service and pre-service teachers as asexual, both in terms of demeanor and clothing style (Alsup, 2006; Weber & Mitchell, 1995), where ubiquitous jumpers and sweaters literally hiding signs that these women have undergone puberty and have moved into adulthood. The same is true in many popular cultural representations of elementary teachers (Galman, 2012b). Women are seen not so much as adults but the biggest kids in the room.

Teachers are also implicated in the process of professional infantilization. Teachers report that job satisfaction is directly linked to associating with children; the students and their perceived love are seen as the actual rewards, often in place of or supplementary to inadequate financial compensation (Galman, 2012b; Lortie, 1975/2002). Female teachers, existing as they do in the liminal space between adult and child, have complicated relationships with adults, and those relationships are presented and evaluated in relation to students' school experience and learning (see Biklen, 1995; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], n.d.). The end product of this dynamic is a pervasive belief that elementary teachers, particularly women teachers who make up the majority of this group (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010; US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2007; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005), are childish and are ill-suited to hold positions of sanctioned power that could result in personal control over their careers.

Women's presence in administrative and leadership positions (e.g., principal, superintendent) have slowly increased (NCES, 1997, 2007), but evidence exists that women in these assignments may feel pressured to adopt what they and others perceive to be a masculinized approach (Quartz et al., 2008), which sums up the expectations of hegemony. The history of female union leaders cannot be ignored (Gitlin, 1996); however, the union system, by design,

exists to contradict and complicate schools' power hierarchy and places female union leaders as external to the inner-school workings. Within school settings, women teachers occupy the problematic space of quasi-adult and pseudo-child and are thus removed from leadership and influence.

Similarly, teachers' experiences as adults are not innocuous and affect educational realities. Adult relationships are important. Stakeholders in schools, such as parents, have been cited as factors in job and career satisfaction (Liu & Ramsey, 2008; Macdonald, 1999; MetLife, 2005; National Education Association [NEA], 2003). Teachers who leave the profession or are fired and cite job dissatisfaction mention a lack of administrative support as a contribution to the shift in career (Dworkin, 1987). Finally, infantilization devalues teachers personally and the profession as a whole. Of the former kindergarten to 12th grade teachers who left the education field in 2003-2004, 47% rated their post-teaching non-education positions as having more professional prestige than teaching. Unsatisfying work environments with regard to diminishing adult teacher experiences can add to teacher turnover, creating an inexperienced teaching pool. Because more experienced teachers have been linked to higher student achievement (Wayne & Youngs, 2003), ignoring the pattern of teacher infantilization and not attending to the quality of adult experiences in schools may be detrimental to all people involved in a school, including the students.

Men are valued just for showing up

In the US, rarely are teachers referred to as «women teachers» – but in the feminized professions, males warrant special notice. «Male nurse» or «male librarian» signifies an anomaly, just as our elderly grandparents once talked about «lady doctors» or «girl detectives». Therefore, if parity or near parity were to be reached with teachers, perhaps we could project that the fascination with male elementary teachers in gender studies might eventually wane. However, while such an overwhelming number of women in the feminized teaching profession exist, problems arise when the bulk of research on gender and teaching is about men. In fact, our literature search using the terms «women» and «elementary teaching» pulled up a group of articles about men. Initially, this is counterintuitive, but a deeper look provides an explanation.

Women's experiences have been, and continue to be, measured in comparison to men and male achievement, even in a feminized profession. As a binary system (i.e., male/female and masculine/feminine) within a heteronormative society such as the US (Sumara & Davis, 1999), the gender of one person is seen in relation to the gender of another. Recognizing whether one's gender is either alike or different from another person's allows for analysis in context.

For example, the problems with education have partially been blamed on the teaching force. The severe achievement gap between girl and boy students (especially black or African-American and Latino boys) has prompted experts to question if a change in the teaching force would remedy this situation (Drudy, 2008). The suggestion heard repeatedly is to increase the population of male teachers, under the assumption that they will be able to «reach» the underachieving male student or in the least provide a positive male role model for male students (Martino, 2008). Wrapped in this suggestion is the implication that women teachers are currently failing half of their students, and, without male teachers, the problem of the achievement gap across female and male students will not be solved.

The real problem of low-achieving males is serious and deserves attention, creative solutions, and action (Tatum, 2005; Weaver-Hightower, 2003). The proposed action of increasing male teachers should not be disregarded, but there is also no reason to believe this approach to achieving parity will be any better received than other policies of adding of under-represented groups to a workforce (e.g., affirmative action of Executive Order No. 10925 in 1961) (see Harper & Reskin, 2005). The difficulty with solving this complex problem by simply adding males cannot be ignored. Women teachers paradoxically become a focus of blame as well as get shoved aside in favour of the invention of a male teacher capable of saving male students. In terms of research, women teachers become part of the problem statement but fail to become an object of analysis, leaving a hole in research on women teachers. Further, male teachers risk being critiqued as earning their teaching positions on a technicality of sex instead of merit (Martino, 2008). These effects leave everyone at a loss.

Context cannot be ignor ed

Including empirical work on the lives of women is crucial in progressing educational scholarship. It appears some areas of the world (e.g., Europe, Australia) accept and act on this necessity, but others (e.g., US) do not (Galman & Mallozzi, 2012; Sabbe & Aelterman, 2007). During our literature search, we frequently encountered research on women elementary teachers and gender that fit all our criteria except it occurred in a non-US context; therefore the shortage of research on women teachers and gender seems to be a US phenomenon at present. Due to the disproportionate influence the US has on other parts of the world (Bottery, 2006), we worry that the valuable research agenda on gender and women teachers enacted outside the US will eventually be cast aside as it has already been done in our country. We remain perplexed as to what factors might contribute to this trend, but a sociohistorical and sociopolitical outlook provides some insight.

The unique historical and political moment in which the US found itself just after the Acker (1995-1996) piece was published to the present may provide some tentative explanations as to the lack of research on women elementary teachers and gender. Bush-era neoconservativism and a severe funding crisis set the scene for neoliberal «post-feminist» and teacher deprofessionalization discourses (Aronson, 2003; Douglas, 2010; Hall & Rodriguez, 2003; Nail & McGregor, 2009). In May 2008, the University of Washington in St. Louis's bestowed an honorary doctorate on Phyllis Schafly, a staunch conservative anti-feminist, an act that was emblematic of the rise conservativism had made on university campuses in the US (Jaschik, 2008). So-called «post-feminism» (Douglas, 2010) is a sly, «seductive» (*ibidem*: 3) version of Shlafly and others' flagrant anti-feminism because it attempts to posit that that because gender parity has been achieved *carte blanche*, feminism (assumed to be a singular and unified movement) is as unneeded as it is *passé*. When there is still such a poignant need for feminisms, disregarding these needs is in effect anti-feminist and just another method of silencing women's and others' voices.

When basic gender equality has been reached in developed countries, people are able to do the work that lessens discrimination (Lopez-Claros & Zahidi, 2005). For the US, this means addressing inequities and injustices in job sites such as schools, whether they be related to the recruiting and retaining women in leadership positions, support for maternity leave, or equal pay for equal work. US research on the feminization of teaching and its subsequent inequities is relatively silent on these topics (Drudy, 2008), and there is no reason to believe that the US has any better foothold on gender equality than other developed countries. The 2010 *Report of the World Economic Forum* (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi, 2010), in examining women's health, education, political empowerment and economic participation, stated that the US improved its overall status of women since the entrance of the Obama administration, but attention is still needed on these issues.

The cost of not caring is too high: recommendations for future research

Considering the results of our review, we obviously recommend additional research into the gendered experiences of female teachers at work in feminized elementary teaching contexts. When elementary classrooms persist as feminized ghettoes, we witness a backlash both in scholarship and the culture writ large to the women's success (Young, 2005). The countless ways in which scholarly inquiry can move forward to improve this situation necessitates some general directions.

Researchers must resist uniformity of perspective and approach

Research energies devoted to a deeper understanding of the experiences of women teachers require a range of sociocultural perspectives. If one accepts that gender is a social construction and not a monolithic category, non-sociocultural theories will not help in examining gender as a constructed social marker. Gender matters in developing a nuanced understanding of human beings' experiences; however, gender appears differently depending on the theory in use. The range of sociocultural theories available necessitate researchers understand these theories deeply and name theoretical approaches carefully to build documentation for future bodies of research. A body of research from a singular perspective will only be helpful in establishing a depth of knowledge in one area of gender, leaving much of gender still in the dark. Therefore, we advocate for many types of sociocultural research to be done using many theories from many perspectives.

While there is room for all kinds of scholarship in the academy, we need to make room for research that does more than simply follow the dollars. In the US, this means respecting other researchers' choices to do experimental, quasi-experimental, or other positivist studies but remaining confident and strident in conducting qualitative research on gender as a constructed category. Although universities and other agencies pressure researchers to secure research funding, people need to understand that funded research is not epistemologically more valuable. Qualitative research, in fact, may be a relative bargain when we recognize that some research only requires a writing implement and paper or a simple recording device and a keen researcher eye and mind. The knowledge-return on this type of research may actually be more cost effective and even more democratic.

Overall, we argue against any scholarly agenda coopted by an economic one, but we also recognize the reality that research that costs more tends to instil more confidence and its outcomes privileged in the academy. However, researchers have a political choice to build a body of research without yielding to financial pressures. If researchers persist in following the proverbial money trail, certain topics (such as gender), on certain populations (such as women teachers), using certain theories (such as sociocultural ones) and using certain methodologies (such as qualitative ones) may be abandoned *en masse* leaving further chasms in our cultural knowledge.

Researchers must realize that binaries are limited in their usefulness

Words such as *gender*, *masculine*, and *feminine* «are notoriously changeable» (Butler, 2004: 10) and slip from any constant meaning, because language is a system that is also contingent

on the socio-historical, culturally situational, and geopolitical. To describe a notion like gender that is always moving in negotiation with a tool like language that is also always not steady can lead people to seek a stabilizing touchstone.

This means recognizing that gender, like all other categories, is complicated – much more complicated that simply dividing humanity into «male» and «female» piles. Perhaps our current language and structure for scholarship is not adequate for questioning the primacy of binaries, but we must work toward an approach that is.

The sex/gender system is part of human identity and maintains bodies' sexual and reproductive markers plus societal formations and institutions determine the gendered identities of people (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Rubin, 1975). Heteronormative culture constructs the body as coherent because it suits the dominant discourse; however, destabilizing the body confounds societies that are arranged on the assumption that sexual and reproductive organs mark the division of the sexes. This insecurity threatens the hegemonic system. Thus, hegemony keeps the illusion of the body being stable as an unquestionable principle of identity, and conceals discontinuities and complexities of gender (Butler, 1999). After accepting this view, the physiology of sex assignment and the acts of a gendered identity can no longer be linked let alone equivocal. Choosing to challenge gender assumptions is choosing to challenge hegemonic heteronormativity.

The difficulty in simultaneously advocating for studies of gender and while also destabilizing gender is that researchers are challenged with a moving target. The target has not disappeared; it just requires a new way of looking, thinking, and communicating with new language. We are not the first to propose such a thing: Fausto-Sterling (1993, 2000), admitting that her goal was to be provocative, proposed and maintained that a sexual continuum is more comprehensive than a binary system. The gender continuum or some other construct may revive gender studies and provide more accurate language for researchers.

Researchers need to hear and disseminate diverse, international voices

The over-representation of Western, English speaking (especially US) research can shift what gets seen and reproduced. We recognize the value in researchers beginning wherever they are, working to understand what they know. This often manifests in researchers starting at home with local matters, as it did for us when we decided to conduct our literature search on US contexts. However, while examinations may begin at home, so to speak, they should not end there. Putting local gender matters in conversation with other bodies of gender research from multiple diverse contexts can serve to enrich the discussion and significance.

We are not suggesting all researchers engage in comparative research, but we do affirm that broadening one's perspectives to include international contexts is useful in situating a topic in the sociocultural, socio-historical, and geopolitical landscape. This wider lens may also be a tool for interrupting the tendency for educational research to produce, and reproduce, repetitive work of limited usefulness.

The foundations for internalized sexism and gender discrimination are already weighing on women teachers by the time they are schoolgirls, then young women entering teacher education programs. Teacher education students' hegemonic resistance to anything except a «post-feminist» or even anti-feminist and genderless interpretation of teaching (Abt-Perkins, Hauschildt, & Dale, 2000; Galman, 2012b; Titus, 2000) suggests that they as teachers are not likely, without intervention, to change the discriminatory practices in schools for the next generation of teachers. This, in practical terms, is another version of the pernicious *status quo* in education we rally against as we encourage US education researchers to shift toward gender research of women teachers.

In closing, the cost of not examining gender as a reality for women who work in schools with the youngest children could be catastrophic to individuals, scholars and the knowledge produced, not in the least because it potentially allows a hegemonic system of repeated inequities to persist without challenge. With women themselves currently so low on the US education research priority list, without change, it is possible that one day we might be reminiscing about when gender and women mattered in the US, though we suspect that sentiment will never be adopted everywhere nor for everyone. Still, when an acquaintance of one of the authors, during a uniquely US Thanksgiving holiday dinner, turned to her and asked «So whatever happened to all of those feminists anyway?», one has to wonder what will it take to make sure that we again recognize that gender indeed does matter.

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