

# What's gender got to do with it? Gender and diversity in research on home and school relationships

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This article explores the use of gender and diversity in research on home and school relationships. The review is based on articles that were accessed through databases like Web of Science, Academic Search Elite and SCIRIUS. The articles were analyzed using a model featuring focus of inquiry and perspectives on communication. Initially describing the research field roughly as two distinct but corresponding branches, Critical Studies research and Parental Involvement research, the focus is on how the research relates to diversity and gender. The importance of a power perspective in the definition of gender is stressed while considering whether some interpretations of gender in the research field are reproducing instead of changing existing inequitable systems and structures by favoring an essentialist perspective on sex and gender both at home and in school.

*Keywords:* Gender; home and school relationships; multicultural; power relations.

## Introduction

There is an outcry all over the world: What about the boys? The existence of a "boy crisis" in educational contexts has been a topic of public policy debate since the late 1990s, not only in the United States but also in European and Asian countries (Berge & Forsberg, 2006; Kleinfeld, 2009a; Okopny, 2008; Younger, Warrington, Gray, Rudduck, McLellan, Bearne et al., 2005). Boys are losing ground to girls and are falling dangerously behind in terms of school performance: they lag behind in reading and do even worse in writing. But what about the girls? Some studies also show that girls are more stressed than boys and experience problems such as depression, eating disorders, suicidal ideation and attempts, while other researchers argue that both boys and girls suffer from characteristic problems (Kleinfeld, 2009b).

However, groups who call this either a "boy crisis" or a "girl crisis" are mistaken - both boys and girls have gendered problems (Berge & Forsberg, 2006; Kimmel, 2009; Kleinfeld, 2009b; Younger, et al., 2005; Zyngier, 2009). Obviously these are overall gender issues, but are schools able to deal with these problems on their own?

There is a connection between the debate on boys or girls 'underachievement' and home-school relationships found in the global phenomenon demonstrating parents<sup>1</sup> involvement in their children's schooling and that in many countries, the school has a mandate to cooperate with the homes. Several collaboration models and network systems in the school - family - community sphere have evolved since the 1970s and research on home and school relationships is increasing, for example through NNPS (National

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<sup>1</sup> Since this study also relates to family diversity, a more accurate term would be 'guardians' or 'carers'. However, as parents has become the established term in most contexts in the research field, it is used in the same way in this article.

Network of Partnership Schools, U.S.A.) and ERNAPE (European Research Network About Parents in Education). In the US, parental involvement in school is one of the six targeted areas in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (Uludag, 2008). In Sweden, the Swedish National Agency of Education recently organized four conferences about motivation, pupils' learning, leadership and parental cooperation in order to discuss the problems addressed above ([www.skolverket.se/jamkonferenser](http://www.skolverket.se/jamkonferenser)). But does the home and school relationship matter with regard to students' problems that are, among other things, related to gender? Is there research on home and school relationships that asks "What's gender got to do with it?"

This paper is a review that explores the use of gender and diversity in research on home and school relationships. I begin by stating my starting points and then go on by presenting a rough description of two discrete yet complementary branches in this research field, the focus being on how this research relates to diversity and gender. The paper concludes by questioning whether some interpretations of gender in the research field according to an instrumental rationale rather affirm than transform existing inequitable systems and structures by privileging the essentialist view of sex and gender both at home and in school. The author argue that the use of a poststructuralist feminist perspective on gender and diversity in research on these relationships makes it possible to consider individual subjectivity and experiences that contributes to asymmetric power relations as a possible starting point for deconstruction and change.

### **Starting points: gender and diversity**

From a poststructuralist feminist perspective, gender is considered to be the result of different systems of power that work together on different levels and produce identity categories such as gender, social class and race/ethnicity, which intersect with each other in a fluid manner (de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005). Differences between families and between homes and schools are the result of differential structures shaped by these identity categories which means an understanding of power relations is a crucial part of any analysis work. Having a social justice agenda as a starting point, the concept of diversity is used as a way of capturing the increasing growth of identity categories across classifications, applying a

poststructuralist feminist understanding of the characteristics that contribute to identity<sup>2</sup>.

Assuming that female and male subjects are defined on the basis of their relations to other people in a certain culture and subculture also means that universal, totalizing theories about regularities are abandoned because they miss most of reality (Hekman, 2008, p. 85). Instead of trusting assumptions inherent in the idea of "structure" and "center", an analytical focus is placed on differences within and between groups that can be addressed with the intention of contributing to an understanding of diversity (Benhabib, 2002; Peters & Burbules, 2004). A one-sided use of fixed categorizations such as family contributes to normalization because in most cases the image of the white, middle-class family is activated. This also means that other identity-building elements, such as those found in descriptions of so-called family diversity, are made invisible or denied (Turner-Vorbeck, 2005).

According to feminist poststructuralist theory, linguistic and discursive meanings in general relate to a male – female dichotomy in society. Therefore poststructuralists reject predominant discourses on gender being the result of fundamental biological differences between men and women, stating that today, even natural science views biological gender as being partly socially constructed (Lenz Taguchi, 2004). The question is not whether there is a natural and a social gender as in the essentialist view – more important is the understanding of identity as only being obtained from the social script extant in the society in which we live (Hekman, 2008). By exposing differences such as conflicting notions of the meaning of male, female, children, education, home and school relationships etc., new meanings and interpretations can emerge. Starting up communication between these different understandings of reality in order to open up new ways of being, doing and understanding - deconstruction through the exposure of differences - will make asymmetric power relations between individuals and between groups of people visible as a possible starting point for dissolution and change.

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2 This diversity agenda can be seen as being opposed to current tendencies trying to replace diversity vocabulary "with an instrumental rationale celebrating efficiency commitment to better education, market share and profit, and national security"(Prewitt, 2003, p. 18)

Essentialist views of identity and society are based on a faith in universal truth which leads to pursuing collective agreement as the ground for consensus. Because of this, communication of these views becomes bound to the language and culture they are expressed in, leading to an instrumental or strategic approach that does not consider individual subjectivity or experience but instead works to reproduce the male – female dichotomy.

Following John W. Creswell, this study utilized databases like Web of Science, Academic Search Elite and SCIRUS, giving priority to articles in open access journals (Creswell, 2003). The time frame includes research from the nineties to 2009 with an emphasis on the last ten years in order to be able to distinguish some contemporary trends in the research field.

Some of the search words used was home and school relationships, multicultural, gender, parental involvement, teacher involvement, parent responsibility. The search was successful with one exception: when using 'gender', only a handful of relevant hits were found. Eventually it turned out that the research field contains much material on ethnicity and social class, but much less when it comes to gender. A review of three journals in the field concerning the focus of this article may serve as an example. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *Gender and Education* and *Prospects*, published in 2007, 2008 and 2009, were examined by reading the title of each article and if the title was "promising", the abstract was also read. In total, 456 articles were published during this period but only two were using a gender perspective when focusing the home- school relationship (both in *Gender and Education*).

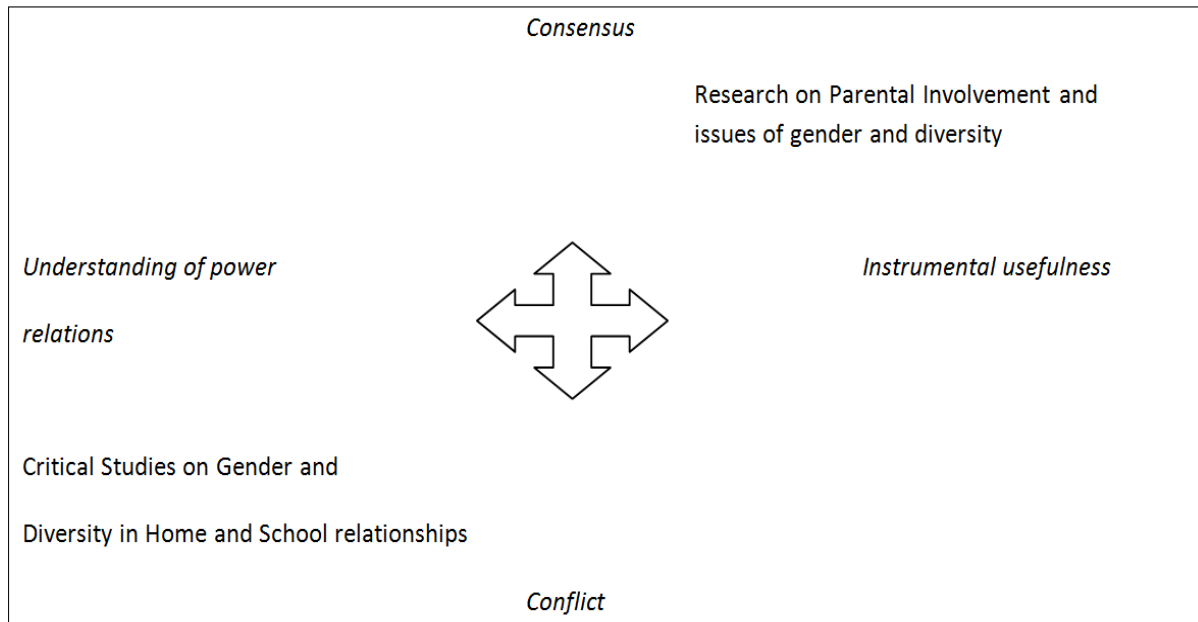
The next phase of the search was to use backwards or ancestry searches (Hill & Tyson, 2009) exploring reference lists with the hope of finding literature "outside" the databases. Those searches were fruitful inasmuch as they identified a number of relevant articles but also books and reports demonstrating a greater lack of gender perspective in articles than in books. As for example several key works on gender and home-school relationships were found (David, 1993; David, West, & Ribbens, 1994), but giving that these has been done in the past gave rise to the question why there seems to be less such work in this area now. We shall return to this issue at the end of the paper.

### **Research on Home-School Relationships: two branches**

With these starting points, the presentation begins with a general description of existing research on home and school relationships. The research relates to the global changes in the political, policy and social contexts supporting "more active ways of constructing, as well as deconstructing, notions of participation, community and democracy" (David, 2005, p. 4). The main focus is on various methods and models of interaction between school and family such as parental involvement or participation in education, which thus describes the starting points for interpretation of gender in this field. According to Vincent and Tomlinson, there is a gap in this field between practice-oriented writing and work formed by a more sociological perspective, which concentrates on issues of power (Vincent & Tomlinson, 1997, p. 371). Although this paper focuses on gender and diversity in that field, the literature search basically resulted in the same patterns as those reported by Vincent & Tomlinson. Therefore I suggest a structuring of this "gender" research field into two branches: research on parental involvement and issues of gender and diversity (shortened to Research on Parental Involvement), and critical studies on gender and diversity in home and school relationships (shortened to Critical Studies Research). The description of the research field presents research in each branch examined in order to identify the ways it is related to issues of power and identity. As identity and power are two central concepts of gender (de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005; Harding, 1986; Jones, 1994), it is asked whether power relations and the use of diversity categories are included in the analysis. Then the focus is on whether gender is used in this analysis, either as the principal tool or together with other analytical tools.

Without making any claim to being complete, Figure 1 provides a rough picture of the research field using a two-dimensional analytical term-box featuring focus of inquiry and perspectives on communication. Home and school relationships considered as a medium or tool to achieve a certain goal i.e. better student performance, means applying instrumental usefulness as its focus of inquiry. If the purpose is to remove

Figure 1. Two-dimensional analytical term-box (focus of inquiry and perspectives on communication) mapping out the use of gender and diversity in research on home and school relationships



boundaries between various diversity categories by examining how they interact in the creation of social hegemony, the focus of inquiry is the understanding of power relations. Consensus means that collective agreement is the principal object of all communication within home-school relationships while the conflict perspective explores the productive use of a conflict.

### Research on Parental Involvement

The rapid spread of the principal models<sup>3</sup> of parental involvement in schools during the 1990s is the reason why this practice-oriented writing has been titled Research on Parental Involvement. Endeavors to emphasize parental involvement in education occupy governments, administrators, educators and parents' organizations across North America, Australasia, continental Europe, Scandinavia and the UK (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

Parental involvement as a way to improve children's success at school is partly based on economy discourses on a policy level dealing with school improvement and building community, but

for the most part on learning theories, teaching methods and the question of achievement on the practice level (Bakker & Denessen, 2007; Castelli & Pepe, 2008; Fege, 2006). Children will be more successful at school when their homes, schools, and communities work in partnership to support their learning (Epstein, 1995; Fege, 2006; Martínez-González & Rodríguez-Ruiz, 2007).

The involvement perspective is based on a general reliance on the responsible family as a cornerstone in joint efforts to preserve social stability and a starting point for the development of caring conditions and for providing structure and processes to solve problems. As a client in the school, the responsible parent will be inspired by the different activities and will be able to offer an environment at home that creates the motivated student (Ravn, 2005). Due to this focus on effectiveness and measurement, this branch contains a growing body of literature described as practicing an instrumental approach (Chen & Fan, 2001; Edwards & Warin, 1999; Vincent & Tomlinson, 1997).

### Understanding of consensus and instrumental usefulness

Basically, this research is driven by starting points in a concept of consensus suggesting that collective agreement is the principal object of all

<sup>3</sup> Examples of these models are family involvement, parental participation, family participation, home-school collaboration (Castelli & Pepe, 2008)

communication on home and school relationships. This is the reason behind the development of a practice of instrumental usefulness as focus of inquiry in research, considering those relationships as a medium or tool to achieve certain goals. Although several models of involvement are analyzed in surveys within a theoretical framework that is occasionally inspired by socio-cultural perspectives on the learning process, the effectiveness and measurement framing of the field determines the interpretation and use of those analytical tools. Issues of power disappear or are transformed by a figure of thought based on shared visions and consensus launched through a top-down approach to organizational change, leading to only perspectives in the dominant discourse are exhibited.

In the US research the collective work for the common interest of all students that includes all parents and the community in school improvement is the starting point for a civic engagement designed to involve citizens in other areas of society too. The importance and use of parental involvement is emphasized in discussions on integration, decision-making and democratic involvement (Epstein, 1995; Fege, 2006) and in battling drug and alcohol abuse among students (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). This parental and community-based engagement is accompanied by a shared vision of creating quality and equality in public education and is also a strategy for achievement, though some internal criticisms directed towards an excessive focus on technical aspects believe that this could lead to questions whether democracy has been forgotten (Fege, 2006, p. 583). Various kinds of involvement strategies are examined. The U.S. researcher Joyce Epstein, for example, has outlined six levels of school-related opportunities for parental involvement that start at parenting (providing for basic needs and sound discipline) and move on through communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and finally involving parents in school-community collaboration (Epstein, 1995).

One U.S. study emphasizing that teacher preparation programs must provide the awareness of certain key elements to consider i.e. examining the role of culture and cultural identity and at the same time the fostering of effective communication and avoiding misunderstanding (Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009) may thus promote dominant discourse. Though recognizing identity dimensions like class, ethnicity and race, terms

like poverty and diversity are preferred in the analysis, asserting growing evidence that "socioeconomic status, family size, educational level of the parents and race are not the most critical variables (...) Many parents compensate for their lack of material resources by drawing upon the strength of a good attitude and high energy level to support their children's education both at home and at school" (Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009, p. 497).

A bibliometric study mapping the research of the European Network About Parents in Education (ERNAPE) showed that European Research on Parental Involvement in general is not as focused on efficiency and measurement as in the U.S. (Castelli & Pepe, 2008). Instead works tend to have a more sociological approach, especially in research based in the UK. Additionally, topics and keywords used by the European researchers mirror their own cultural traditions and their representation of parental roles in education. The main foci of researchers belonging to Western European and Anglophone countries are linked to aspects of partnership like "policy", "practice" while Nordic interest of research is focused on "cooperation", "power" and "local". Mediterranean countries researchers on the other hand, are generally focused on "family", "disable", "inclusion" and "parent training", demonstrating that in the European research, involvement is not limited to parents, but "embraces many other possible actors in children's development" (Castelli & Pepe, 2008, p. 8; Castelli, Pepe, & Addimando, 2009)

### **Research on Parental Involvement and issues of Gender and Diversity**

Although the concept of gender was once introduced as the cultural interpretation of biological differences between men and women that is structured by various power relations (Gothlin, 1999; Harding, 1986), feminist framing and vocabulary have been replaced by the use of gender as a variable in this branch. Through quantitative measurement, the focus is on number, attitudes and scores. Still, differences between men and woman are recognized and questioned but with few exceptions from an essentialist point of view. Research on Parental Involvement using gender dimensions is not particularly US-based but is also conducted in Europe and Asia.

One U.S. report explores what influence gender may have on ambition regarding education. Using gender as a variable, the differences between male and female students were measured in terms of academic ambition. Finding no difference between male and female students, the authors suggest that the reason for this is either: a) students do not subscribe to traditional gender roles, or b) the students acquire the attitude, both at home and at school, that both boys and girls are expected to deliver good results at school. But this is how far the gender analysis gets as the authors lose track by suggesting that the influence of siblings or half siblings should be explored (Ojeda & Flores, 2008).

Gender is frequently involved in analyses with a main focus on ethnicity framed within an essentialist view of culture. Promoting children's ethnic identity among immigrant Chinese families in Canada, the authors state that the parenting practice and especially the mothers' family obligation expectation are "providing an avenue for positive family identification and ethnic culture learning" (Su & Costigan, 2008). Highlighting mothers having more opportunities than fathers to engage with their children and directly transmit cultural information through their communications and actions exhibits essentialist views on culture and gender.

In addition to differences between sexes, various kinds of gender effects are considered. In a review developed in the UK, parental involvement is strongly related to the mother's level of education; females report considerably more home discussion than males (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003). However these effects are considered as background information and are not situated within a certain context.

In several reports, gender is considered to be an important factor although it is not explained why. One Korean report recommends educators to consider the unique role and influence of gender in their work, stating gender to be "a salient factor" (Lee & Kushner, 2008). But no proposals on how to use gender as the analytical tool when doing this are stated in the text.

In an Israeli study on teachers' attitudes toward parental involvement, gender is used as a variable combined with a power perspective on the policy level. The researchers state that female educators do not comprise a homogenous powerless group that accepts new policies or school reform without resistance and that they may take an active role in dealing with parents,

maneuvering their involvement in school, and even resisting their intervention (Addi-Racah & Ainhoren, 2009, p. 811). However, the fact that all 194 respondents were women is not questioned apart from a comment that this is typical of Jewish schools – another example of gender analysis losing track.

One study within this field that actually differs on issues of gender is a U.S. study which measures the gender role views of students from a prestigious, Mid-Western, all-male, Catholic high school (Thompson & Austin, 2010). Using quantitative data taken from a larger assessment tool, the findings suggest that all-boys schools are improved if they co-opt parents to become active partners in promoting women's awareness and that racial, economic and religious diversity appears to have an impact on school climate that is more female sensitive. Challenging their methodological starting points, they suggest "a critical investigation of not-so-obvious variables that impact gender socialization" and "an analysis of power and privilege" as further research (Thompson & Austin, 2010, p. 442).

### **Critical Studies on Gender and Diversity in Home and School Relationships**

This branch of research draws on a diversity of approaches to and perspectives on home and school relationships. It has developed by the contribution of educational, sociologist, psychologist and economist policy analysts, and critical perspectives by Marxists, feminists, poststructuralists and post-modernists have been applied. The approach in this branch is thus based on a scientific paradigm as opposed to absolute boundaries - poststructuralist theory practicing deconstruction by exposure of difference. Characteristic features are an interest in the contextual dimension at several levels, including how local power relations structure complexity, influence and affect people's identity and development. Because of this variety, practice and usefulness are not put in the foreground as is the case with the Parental Involvement branch of research.

### **Understanding of Conflict, Diversity and Power**

The use of diversity and power as analytical tools represents one of the major differences in the research field. In Research on Parental

Involvement, diversity categories are used as *variables* or as background information with no links to power or context. In Critical Studies, the *understanding* of conflict, diversity and power is crucial. It is primarily a research in the UK that accounts for most of contributions to this area of works. During the 1990s, the analysis of home and school relationships was initially linked to diversity as an effort to renounce the trend in previous research of conceptualizing middle-class experiences as being normative. The position was taken that social processes are differentiated by class, leading to the use of a class and eventually an ethnicity perspective in the analysis (Edwards & Warin, 1999; Diane Reay, 1996; Diane Reay & Ball, 1997; Tomlinson, 1997). In general, Parental Involvement based on the idea that teachers must teach parents as a general solution to problems in the school system is largely challenged within this branch (David, 1993; Edwards & Warin, 1999; Mattingly, Prislín, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kayzar, 2002). Some effects of Parental Involvement are described as "the swarming of disciplinary mechanisms" which seek to control the behavior of parents and their children (Edwards & Warin, 1999; Vincent & Tomlinson, 1997). It is also important to consider the socio-economic status of the families that have been studied (Bakker & Denessen, 2007; Chen & Fan, 2001; Tomlinson, 1997). Since the beginning of 2000, there has been a significant growth in the number of articles exploring the ethnicity dimension of diversity. For example is American, British and Swedish researchers analyzing how the intersection between global education policy and local education practice (glocalisation) is linked to dimensions of globalization and identity when describing parents as being exposed to differential effects produced by neo-liberal reforms, market thinking, social class etc. (Apple, 2001; Ball, 2003; Dahlström, 2009; Johnsson, 2009). U.S. research on Transnationalism states that immigrant families and their children benefit from trans-nationalist influences in the use of socialization strategies in their varied constructions of identity, gender and experience of belonging (Bekerman & Tatar, 2009; Sánchez & Machado-Casas, 2009). Influenced by these perspectives, some current research in Critical Studies describe the existence of so-called deficit thinking in educational and institutional practices with regard to views on migrant parents' ability to participate in home and school cooperation (Bouakaz, 2007; Edwards & Warin, 1999; Lightfoot, 2004; Walker-Dalhouse &

Dalhouse, 2009). Researchers in Sweden focus on so-called multicultural schools and issues of parental involvement, growing student exodus, lack of credibility and the ambivalent relationship between parents and society. A relational approach is suggested that links different interests in several groups, policy changes, forms of representation and the education practice (Bouakaz, 2007; Bunar, 2008).

### **The Question of Gender in Critical Studies Research**

Gender research in this branch appears thus as dependent on the simultaneous use of complementary perspectives as in Research on Parental Involvement. Initially, education and policy perspectives were used in this way, for example in a review from 1997 by Miriam David. In her view, the changing balance between home and school is also changing the balance between men and women's responsibilities and she criticized educational research in Great Britain for lacking a feminist perspective. In several books and articles, Miriam David emphasized the importance of a power perspective "since gender is a major operating principle" (David, 1993, 1997, 1998; David, et al., 1994). Most of the current research in this branch are conducted in Europe, and stresses the fundamental impact of gender in terms of how education policies are implemented and also the intersection between ethnic/cultural background and gender. Mothers in particular will have a key role as agents of social reproduction being responsible for school selection and education and through their impact on how cultural capital can be mobilized (Crozier & Davies, 2003; Hedegaard, 2005; Kristjánsdóttir, 1995; Diane Reay, 2006).

Diane Reay uses two intersecting analytical tools in an analysis that states that parental involvement is gendered and also powerfully classed. Reay states that educational success is a function of social, material and cultural advantages in which "mothers' caring within the family is transmuted by the operations of the wider marketplace to serve its competitive, self-interested ethos" (Diane Reay, 2006, p. 114).

In another British study Diane Reay and Heidi Safia Mirza analyses race, parents and gender when discussing black women's educational involvement through the supplementary school movement. The authors argue that these schools entails an implicit criticism of "pervasive unspoken

whiteness of mainstream schooling" stating that these schools provides a "sacred space of blackness" that engage black women educators in rewriting blackness as a social identity in its own right. These teachers were also altering notions of community when embracing "an interdependency of the individual and the necessity of the communal" in order to "create oppositional meaning and facilitate social transformation" (Diane Reay & Mirza, 2005, p. 153).

A rare example of research using gender as its main analytical tool is a Swedish study conducted by Lucas Forsberg, who argues that power and governing is exercised through a complex relationship between norms and the individual's desire to become the expected subject. Referring to Judith Butler and theories on subjectivity, Forsberg states that norms of 'intensive mothering' position women as being morally responsible for their children's education and more closely connected to involvement compared with fathers. Home and school relationships may therefore be characterized by a negotiation about responsibility for children's education and rearing. Teachers tend to homogenize parents as 'rearing experts' in these negotiations and, accordingly, dim gender differences in parental involvement (Forsberg, 2009a, 2009b).

### **What's gender got to do with it?**

Results indicate that the number of studies using any form of gender perspective is exceedingly small regardless of the epistemological and ideological bases used. Despite this limitation and with respect to available empirical findings, it is nevertheless possible to suggest some potential trends in the current research field. Common to both branches in this field is an increased complexity and diversity in the analysis. In previous Research on Parental Involvement, gender was more often utilized as a statistic variable analyzing various groups of parents or students but in current research, gender is also involved in analyses on resistance, minority parents, cultural capital and learning strategies. An increased interest in context has become prominent when considering environmental variables that impact on the success of involvement i.e. diverse population, dangerous neighborhoods, poverty etc. While the focus was previously mainly on gender and social class, a similar expansion of the toolbox is to be seen in current Critical Studies research using a

range of categories such as ethnicity, race, marketing and family diversity. However, the scarcity of examples within this branch that use gender as the main analytical tool may indicate an important difference as well as a possible tendency in the research field. What is at stake is how the two branches relate to diversity and power as the main concept of gender.

By using a view of consensus, the existence and impact of power relations as framing factors situated in local culture and structuring the practice of home and school relationships is not considered in research on Parental Involvement (Vincent & Tomlinson, 1997, p. 373). Due to the consensus approach, links to local practice are mainly based on achievement which immerses the question of gender in a larger matrix focused on perspectives like policy, decision-making and achievement emphasizing the instrumental usefulness of this practice. The meaning of gender and diversity is interpreted in accordance with this instrumental rationale used as a variable subordinated to those other more carefully examined main categories. This view does not clarify the structures of power relations and how they are constructed and re-constructed both on policy levels and on individual level which is fundamental in the general definition of gender (Harding, 1986).

According to the results, an essentialist view of gender is inherent in any analysis of home and school relationships in Research on Parental Involvement. Despite an otherwise increasing complexity and diversity in the "toolbox", gender is still viewed as a variable or general information not linked to the effects of local power relations. Because of this, any exposure to differences by considering individual subjectivity and experiences contributing to asymmetric power relations is not possible within this branch. Interpreting gender in this way may give preference to the essentialist view of sex and gender which is likely to affirm rather than change existing inequitable systems and structures.

Within Critical Studies Research, social class still dominates the analysis of educational inequalities (Diane Reay, 2006). Recently the analysis of the intersection of ethnicity and social class has been emphasized, probably because of the growth during the last decade of some bordering fields of research focusing on issues of globalization and trans-nationalism. However, the main perspectives in such analyses are downloaded from a partly political canon which, in



spite of starting points in identity, still seems to be ignorant of the gender perspective. One purpose of this branch using these perspectives seems to be the questioning of the international growth of various parental involvement programs and their interpretations of statistics, definitions, ideology and policies etc. But, as this challenge is based on the mutual use of already established perspectives, analysis is leaving the diversity categories "in the backseat of the car", one of them hardly being used at all: the gender perspective. Contemporary processes in the research field influenced by globalization, neo-liberalism, market thinking etc. reinforce the influx of additional theoretical categories and concepts in order to manage an increasing complexity in a constantly changing society which dims these perspectives. Moreover, when actually referring to diversity, perspectives like social class and ethnicity are preferred in analyses while terms like gender and equity are mentioned only in abstracts and reviews without any further use. This gender invisibility is representative of the research field in general; although acknowledged, gender is merged in or disappearing larger concepts and is hardly ever utilized as a main perspective in an independent analysis.

On the other hand, some results do indicate that an understanding of power relations such as the male - female dichotomy is increasingly important within current Critical Studies Research. British researchers are emphasizing use of a conflict perspective in analyzing intersecting systems of power, race and local context that are highlighting the gender dimension in particular. This utilizing gender as main perspective sitting "in the front seat" of its analysis may therefore be one possible tendency. While most contemporary studies within Research on Parental Involvement seem to be lost to the steamroller of technical fixes, a focus on power and dimensions of gender as unexplored areas of conflict within Critical

Studies Research may indicate a trend towards contributing new knowledge that will actually make a difference in understanding home-school relationships and by doing so, maybe also a phenomenon such as the Boy Crisis.

Finally, the question of why it seems to be less work on gender and home-school relationships now compared to the number of studies done in the past. Following the reasoning in this paper, this might just be another case of preferring already established perspectives in analysis. Additionally, the general image of research and the research practice is under strong influence of a laboratory science discourse practice at present, claiming trust in scientific method as a set of mechanisms and practices rule out the critique of unjust forms of privilege that applying the gender perspective means (Scheman, 2001). The influence of this discourse also explains the need for additional perspectives in the analysis as perceived to have a stronger scientific status in order to legitimize the use of gender. This highlights the need for further developed gender analysis and methodology in the future. Maybe collaboration between Black women educators and members in Bristol Women's Studies Group in the UK using auto/biographically writing and explores 'voices' and narrative that develops feminist theory and methodologies might be a model?

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