**South African female headteachers: G**ender and motherhood in relation to leading schools

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**Abstract**

The Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management (CCEAM), supported by the Commonwealth Foundation, the Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance, and the University of Southampton, have established a long-term plan to map women’s representation in CCEAM affiliate members’ countries, to record their experience and to use the data to make recommendations on how women can be further supported and empowered to lead schools. This paper reports on the pilot project to establish in two provinces of South Africa, in relation to women head teachers’ experience, the gender factors and other related factors (such as language, culture, religion or ethnicity) which impact on being appointed to a principal and on enacting the role. The paper draws on interviews with 54 female head teachers in the Gauteng and North West provinces of South Africa. Since a mothering style of leadership was self-reported by over half of the participants in our study (29 in total), this paper aims to explore the diverse ways in which motherhood was constructed and the outcomes of these constructions on women’s approach to leadership. Drawing on concepts such as gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987); (Corsun & Corsten, 2001) and mothering ([Nakano, 1994](#_ENREF_11)), the paper focuses on how women position themselves as mothers at the workplace and how this shapes their relationship with students, parents and other members of staff. It concludes by suggesting that in the ongoing struggle to achieve greater equality for women school leaders, homogenising western interpretations of doing and undoing gender are inappropriate.

**The Experience of Women Headteachers**

This paper focuses on the influence of gender on the career experiences of women leading schools in South Africa. The study, from a part of which this paper draws sought to contribute to the third Millennium Goal of promoting gender equality and empowering women (Lumby et al. 2010). Consistent with international literature, we found that in South Africa women remain under-represented in educational leadership roles, even in sectors where the majority of the workforce is female. However, the paper moves beyond concern with equal representation to consider the impact of gender as a socially constructed phenomenon affected by the individual’s history and choices, by the context of the workplace and by their immediate community (Lumby & Azaola, 2011).

Since a mothering style of leadership was self-reported by over half of the participants in our study, this paper aims to explore the diverse ways in which motherhood was constructed and the outcomes of these constructions on women’s approach to leadership and to addressing the discrimination they may experience. It focuses on how women position themselves as mothers at the workplace and how this shapes their relationship with students, parents and other members of staff. Our premise is that mothering, like gender, is a socially constructed phenomenon that is context contingent and full of emotional meaning.

South Africa presents a distinctive environment in which to study the link of gender and motherhood in relation to leadership of schools. Apartheid left a legacy of poverty that is not only racialised but also gendered (Hassim, 2003). Moorosi (2010) suggests that even if gender discrimination is not a direct result of Apartheid, it cannot be divorced from historically and culturally embedded racism. The new constitution that followed the demise of Apartheid in 1994 embedded a strong commitment to racial and gender equality. Consequently, a national gender policy was developed and structures were established that were intended to tackle and advocate gender equality (Chisholm, 2004). It is within this context, which holds in tension new commitments to equality with persistent discriminatory practice, that women head teachers’ experience is explored. The paper challenges assumptions related to ideologies of what it is to be a women, a mother and a female leader.

**Conceptualising gender**

When appointed as head teachers, women’s experience of leading may differ from that of men and some argue that women bring different qualities to the role of head teacher than do men (Brunner, 2002; Coleman, 2002). Such findings and their implications in terms of social justice are contested. In particular, what Nentwich (2006: 500) refers to as the ‘sameness–difference dualism’ has been at the centre of discussion of how to achieve equality, parity, fairness and other social goods at least since the inauguration of equality legislation in Europe in the 1960s (Peters, 1996). Should the goal be for men and women to be viewed as the same and treated the same, or should they be viewed as different, and the difference celebrated and used positively to benefit individuals and society? Both approaches have attracted passionate advocates and critics (Thomas & Ely, 1996). Postructuralist analysis has questioned whether there is a gender dichotomy at all and has argued that gender cannot be unequivocally assigned to two distinct sex categories. Sameness and difference therefore appear to lose any significance in the absence of a sex-related dichotomy**.** A second conceptual challenge is the belief that gender itself is a persistently reshaped achievement, ‘a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment’ (West & Zimmerman, 1987: 126), rather than a phenomenon that can be understood as stable and depicted with any assurance. Nevertheless, there is some agreement that whilst definitive differences cannot be drawn between what is construed as accepted attitudes and behaviours for men and for women, the parameters within which each gender functions may be constructed in socially approved ways and appear to represent different ‘bandwidths’ (Nentwich, 2006: 513), with wider opportunities open to men than to women.

The gendering of family roles is an example of a social location where the expectations of what it is to be a mother or a father are generally different and have implications for the individual which reach far beyond the family milieu. For example, Kugelburg (2006: 153) notes that western countries research:

shows that the length of the working day defines the character of an employee. ….. This applies especially to leadership, which is characterized by long working hours and by giving priority to work before other commitments, such as the family.

Parenting is more associated with mothers rather than fathers, and is assumed to prevent the long hours which indicate effort and loyalty. Therefore women, as actual or putative mothers, are less of a match to the prototype of an ideal employee and particularly to that of a leader. Women who wish to achieve and enact leadership roles must therefore contend with stepping outside the acceptable notion of what it is to be a woman in order to match the leadership prototype. In doing so, they draw down disapproval for transgressing the boundaries of being a woman. As Krefting (2003: 269) explains:

Where groups are interdependent, stereotypes become prescriptive and do not change even with substantial contrary evidence. With the inherent interdependence of heterosexual men and women, gender stereotypes function prescriptively, serving an ideological function. All women *should* be like women in traditional private-sphere wife/mother roles: cooperative and likeable — empathetic, deferent, and nurturing — but not necessarily competent.

Women taking up headship roles may therefore face persistent and prescriptive stereotypes that mean that, whether competent or not, nurturing or not, they may meet negative responses, leading Swann *et al*. (1999: 6) to conclude that ‘ambivalent attitudes toward women… may be largely intractable’. Corsun and Costen (2001) suggest that those who are dominant attempt to control the boundaries of the field on which power is played and that women do not have the power to change the game rules or boundaries. Nevertheless, that is what they are forced to attempt if they do not wish to accept discriminatory practices without protest. Consequently, Khelan (2010: 190) suggests that ‘the idea would be to create gender trouble and to displace gender. This would mean enacting gender in a way that goes beyond conventional parameters’. It is accepted by some that women do hold certain power, or social capital, for example erotic power which uses sexual allure as a trade for rewards (Hakim, 2011). As motherhood is a fundamental role which creates gender boundaries, a key question is if it can be converted to social capital in the same way as beauty coverts to erotic power, within the context of a leadership role.

A self-assessed mothering style to leadership was found in 29 cases out of 54 of the participants interviewed in our study. This paper explores the diverse ways in which motherhood was constructed and the motives underpinning participants’ adoption of a mothering style to leadership. It does not focus on participants’ mothering experiences at home, but how women positioned their mothering skills at the workplace. Our premise is that mothering, as gender, is a socially constructed phenomenon, an identity that, in common with all identities, is intended to position the individual socially to their benefit.

**The concepts of mother and mothering**

Mothering and gender are closely intertwined (Nakano, 1994). The discourse of motherhood is bound up with ideas about womanhood and female gender identity (Walker, 1995). As Goldner suggests, gender identities are constantly shifting (Goldner, 2002), thus individuals’ understanding of gender and motherhood is socially and emotionally constructed in a dynamic and fluid way. Chodorow (2002) suggests that each person’s gender identity is an inextricable intertwining of personal and cultural meaning composed by language, culture and discourse. Feminist theory has succeeded in problematising gender and also motherhood (Walker, 1995) but, as Chodorow asserts, it has done so politically rather than individually, subordinating the realm of personal emotional meaning to language and power. She suggests that gender meanings are (re)shaped by an emotional self, forming and reforming the sense of gender throughout the life cycle.

Mothering has often been discussed within a dominant ideology that focuses on the nurture and protective practices of mothers. Scholars have labelled this dominant ideology in varied ways: unitary model (Arendell, 2000); intensive mothering (Maher & Saugeres, 2007); and idealised model (Nakano, 1994). As Hollway (2001) explains, what this ideology depicts is a totalising vision of what women are for, including their exclusive responsibility for children. It usually portrays and normalises the experiences and possibilities of idealised white, married and middle-class women (Vincent, Ball & Braun, 2010). As Nakano (1994) argues, it also prevents mothers from developing woman-centred desires and goals and denies them interests and activities outside the family.

The concepts of agency and emotional capital are central to the meaning of motherhood. Emotional capital refers to the emotional resources passed on from mother to child through processes of parental involvement (Reay, 2000). This type of capital is invested in others rather than the self (Reay, 2004). On the other hand, agency is constructed through individuals’ actions (Nakano, 1994). Barlow and Chapin understand mothers as actors who build meaning and try out different strategies in their interactions with children (Barlow & Chapin, 2010). Women’s actions, emotions and experiences are shaped by external factors, thus agency and emotional capital are context and resource restrained. The project of mothering is responsive to surrounding cultural, social, economic, and political context (Barlow & Chapin, 2010); women’s race also affects their agency and the choices they make (Miller, 2007). Consequently, motherhood cannot be analysed in isolation from its context (Collins, 1994).

The boundaries of domestic cooperation may be more expansive than is assumed by the dominant ideology of mothering (Nakano, 1994). In opposition to the dominant ideology that advocates an intensive mothering approach where women are required to be unconditionally available (Maher & Saugeres, 2007), in non-western societies maternal work is often conducted not only on behalf of individual children but on behalf of the larger social group in which they are situated (Arendell, 2000). For example, in parts of rural Africa women share the aspects of mothering that qualify as maternal work and everyday care (Hollway, 2001). In the particular case of South Africa, Walker (1995). explains that physical care of the children is often delegated to other family members. In this study, women’s own interpretation of their identity as leaders and mothers is that, as school principals, they provide maternal work not only to their own children and other dependants at home but to their students through their mothering style to leadership.

Assumptions of nurture and care are culturally and historically bound to the notion of mothering. According to Nakano, more than other aspects of gender, mothering has been regarded as natural and unchanging (Nakano, 1994). However, she asserts that differences among women are as important as commonalities and urges attention to the variation rather than searching for the universal characteristics of mothering. We adopt the view that theorising about motherhood needs to be shifted from the centre to the borders (Collins, 1994) in order to look at the experiences and challenges that motherhood can elicit in different contexts. As Collins argues, ‘we must distinguish between what has been said about subordinated groups in the dominant discourse, and what such groups might say about themselves if given the opportunity’ (Collins, 1994: 48). Hence, by analysing how mothering influences women in leadership roles in a variety of schools in South Africa, this paper aims to shed light on the experiences in the workplace of individuals who come from a historically divided society (Walker, 1995) and who do not conform to the dominant ideology of mothering. The participants in our study challenged three assumptions usually linked to the dominant ideologies, both on mothering and leadership: a) that women only mother their own children; b) that through motherhood women may gain status but not power; c) that women in positions of power necessarily adopt masculine ways of leadership.

**Methodology**

This paper draws on qualitative data from a mixed-method pilot study that analysed women’s experience as head teachers in South Africa. The study explored how gender and other related factors such as language, culture, religion and ethnicity positively or negatively influenced women’s access to the head teacher role and their leadership experiences. The research was carried out in the Gauteng and North West provinces. Gauteng is the smallest, most densely populated and highly urbanised province of South Africa. The North West province is a larger, rural and relatively sparsely populated province with higher levels of deprivation and unemployment. The project was funded by the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management (CCEAM), the Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance (MGSLG) in South Africa and the University of Southampton.

Ethical approval for the project was obtained in November 2009. A protocol of risks associated with fieldwork was distributed amongst researchers. Protocols for data security and transcription were also developed in order to address issues of data protection arising during the transcribing process. Overall, anonymity of places and participants was preserved and pseudonyms are used to protect identity. Data were collected from January to April 2010 by two local researchers.

Different challenges were encountered along the data collection process. Negotiating access, particularly in the North West province, was not easy and in both provinces the supplied data of school details and principals by gender contained many inaccuracies. The transcription of interviews demanded highly skilled transcribers with knowledge of South African languages. Despite the difficulties, the project collected rich and valuable data.

The interviews were undertaken in both urban and rural settings and in a full range of school types within the South African education system. Data from the Education Department of each province were used in order to construct a sampling matrix of schools led by female principals. The socioeconomic background of each school was also taken into account since South Africa categorises schools by level of socioeconomic disadvantage into five quintiles, quintile 1 being the most disadvantaged and quintile 5 the least disadvantaged. Four pilot interviews in each province were carried out, followed by 27 semi-structured interviews in each province (54 in total). Interviews were recorded in .mp3 format and, in addition to the interviews, demographic information was collected, for instance type of school, size and geographic location, participants’ age, highest qualification, number of years in post, number of children and whether they had other dependents.

Interviews were analysed through a list of alphanumeric codes that covered a variety of issues such as participants’ career trajectory, domestic responsibilities, confidence and esteem, their approach to leadership, training and mentoring experiences, their causes of success, succession planning, whether they saw gender as an advantage or disadvantage to their career, and issues about sexism at the workplace. The codes were based on international literature on women’s participation in educational leadership and allowed the identification of recurrent factors and themes within data.

The data on which this paper draws are a subset of the interview data, identifying all those instances where a woman principal mentioned using a mothering style in their approach to leadership (29 cases out of 54). It is important to note that in the other cases we could find instances where female principals claimed that gender had no impact on their career or considered gender irrelevant to them and their careers. For the purposes of this paper, we focus here on those cases where gender and motherhood played a part in participants’ accounts.

**Data Analysis**

Starting from the premise that mothering and gender are closely intertwined (Nakano, 1994), we focus on the 29 cases that reported using a mothering style to lead. Analysis identified three orientations to the relevance of mothering to the individual and/or to their leadership role: a) female principals reflecting upon their motherhood skills as a means of self-improvement; b) female principals utilising their motherhood skills in order to try to overcome social problems; and c) female principals utilising their motherhood skills to ‘do gender’, gaining capital from employing their motherhood skills at the workplace. The three orientations are not necessarily displayed by discrete groups, in that some women may have demonstrated more than one orientation.

*Reflecting on Motherhood*

The first orientation is when female principals reflect upon their gender identity as personal development. Their accounts reflect their belief that being a mother has enabled them to develop their affective skills as relevant to leading.

A person that is a mother is just... you are softer, you are... you can see that the child also has a point and um... has a right to express themselves, has a... because you experienced sometimes that your own children were disadvantaged by a certain teacher or being treated unfairly [Principal from North West]

After my first baby I get... I got to understand more about raising a child and then being more compassionate towards other children. I think being more compassionate helps; more, more caring about other children… and seeing them as mine… wanting the best for them [Principal from Gauteng]

Having her really really made me more receptive and I don't know how to put it now, more understanding towards the ways of children, their ways and means of accepting things and I would say I was rather, I was not flexible, then after I had my daughter I really became I think a bit more understanding and a softer approach [Principal from North West]

Above all, these participants value the cultural and historical assumptions of nurture and care bounded to the notion of mothering. Hence, their mothering gender identity at work is a mix of emotional and cultural meaning (Chodorow, 2002). They centre their reflection on how motherhood has changed their vision of the world and how becoming a mother themselves has helped them not only to understand pupils at school better, but acted as a means of self-development.

*Utilising motherhood to overcome social problems*

The second orientation consists of female principals who, being aware of the affective and practical skills acquired though motherhood, use them in order to try to cope with the difficulties of their particular local context including poverty, auto immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) and parental absence through death or work demands.

Yeah, as a female Principal, I have young children here; the children that do not have parents, children that are sick... there are children that are sick in here that have these virus and as a female Principal, I have... I have that love for children because I am a mother, I have children. So I always assist them in so many things in many ways. [Principal from Gauteng]

The majority of our children are from single parents or from homes and um... their parents, if it’s mothers, they are out of work just trying to put food on the table and I am very much a mother figure and very much um... very warm towards the children and they respond to me. So I think that that’s an advantage in a way, they need love and they need softness because their lives are harsh and I think that that’s a great advantage to them. [Principal from Gauteng]

These boys regard us as their mothers. As their mothers, that is how they treat us. And then even when they are, when they are running short of, let me say, running short of something, let me say at home, they are not afraid to come to us and tell us that, look ma’am I don’t have something to eat at home, how can we help us. So we, we help them. [Principal from North West]

These female principals claim that, because they are mothers themselves, they are better equipped to deal with the difficult social problems they face at work. They emphasise the nurturing and caring aspects of their role as school principals and feel proud of being able to provide leadership that includes love and care to those students who need it. Through their emotional involvement they do not intend to act as a substitute for their students’ mothers, if they have mothers at home, but to complement what cannot be provided at home: sometimes care, other times clothes or food or medical attention. Mothering therefore becomes a community rather than a family effort.

*Utilising motherhood to ‘do gender’*

The final orientation consists of female principals ‘doing gender’ and creating differences in the workplace. They aim to distinguish female and male approaches to leadership, portraying the latter as less appropriate and less effective. They depict the ‘other’, their male counterparts, as lacking mothering experience and, as a result, lacking knowledge and skills relevant to leading a school.

For males things like dirty water is not a big deal. Things like a child who is hungry coming to school hungry, it is not a big deal; there, there are points that they don’t touch to the child; unlike you as a mother... at home you always transfer that motherliness to the school environment. I do things that a male principal wouldn’t be, wouldn’t have time for. I stay, I’m a present principal, I’m here [Principal from Gauteng]

I mean that is... that is how a female... can try to assist as compared to a male because we reared children, we know the problems of different families... and we can always assist. We are thinking for them [children] also we are not here to work only, we are here to take care of them also: socially, intellectually and other ways. We are not only concentrating on teaching them [Principal from Gauteng]

Men run schools and they leave their heart somewhere in the forest. My success, I want to be honest with you, my, all my success from my attitude, I’m assertive, I’m objective, and I have my heart here, right here. And when I say here I’m not talking the school only the school and it’s community teachers, the learners, that’s where your success is. You cannot be successful if you can’t reach out to people [Principal from North West]

In general participants claimed in particular that it is most effective to be a biological mother; being only a woman was not sufficient. Childless colleagues of either gender were seen as deficient:

I understand children better. If I was single person I don’t think I, would not, when I say single person, a single person without children, or even if you don’t have children, it’s very difficult to have the empathy and the understanding of what parents go through…. I think having had my own children it’s made a, it is a tremendous advantage [Principal from North West]

I can see it on my own staff as well. The teachers who don’t have children, does have another approach towards learners; they are so strict, they are just seeing the straight and the narrow line, there is no deviations. Teachers and people with children do have deviations in the sense of you are more understanding [Principal from Gauteng]

In my specific career having children I think makes you a better educator; people are maybe going to be angry for saying that but I honestly believe that. Um... if you are a mother yourself you see children differently; [Principal from North West]

For some, being a mother, that is, having one’s own children, provided an advantage to the individual as a leader. For others, being a woman, even without children, invested them with the skills and attitudes of motherhood. For example, a childless female principal claimed to use a mothering style to leadership and believed that she was a ‘natural’ mother:

I love these little boys, I love the development in them and the impetus that they have and I watch the little girls growing from little girls into these emerging teenagers and you know watching their development…. The interesting factor is that some of the younger members of staff, call me ‘mum’... it’s naturally me you know, I care about every single member of staff…. Not having given birth to any children doesn’t mean I haven’t had children in my life [Principal from Gauteng]

Equally, though most claimed that their mothering skills and attitudes were acquired from being used with their own children, some used mothering skills at school while not exercising them as much at home:

I love my children but I’m not good with kids so I wouldn’t want to stay home and do stuff with the kids. Somebody has got to do it. [Principal from North West]

This principal prioritised caring for her pupils and delegated care of her own to others. She applied mothering skills in the workplace, but set aside the stereotypical mothering role in the home.

Stated beliefs of the relationship between mothering and leadership varied. Some principals expressed mothering as an integrated and essential element of leadership. Others saw it as a separate and complementary skill to ‘management’: ‘Women, how do I put it, we have got so many things in one, I can be a mother, I can alternate my roles, I can be a mother. I can be a manager’. [Principal from North West]

**Doing and undoing gender**

Interpreting the significance of this data depends in part on the researcher’s stance to the voice of the respondents. Some argue that women are so socialised by a discriminatory society that their views cannot but be distorted by their experience (Robeyns, 2003). Nussbaum (2003: 34) claims that women display ‘preferences that have adjusted to their second-class status’. Others counter that feminists are equally socialised into western, culturally-shaped preferences and that their response to women’s views is constrained by western feminist predilections. Our analysis is consequently cautious and ambivalent, raising questions about potential interpretation in a way that we intend to be thought provoking for those who read this paper, whatever their historical, cultural or religious influences.

The women in this study make claims for themselves as women and mothers that, inherently or through acquired experience, they have affective and practical skills that advantage them as leaders and, in some cases, advantage them over men as school leaders. Hence, our participants ‘do gender’ but not in conformance with gendered norms where women are perceived as subordinate and where motherhood is deemed to be deviant from the prototype of leadership competence. Over half of the participants of this study emphasise their nurturing and rearing responsibilities whilst at the same time claiming assertiveness and determination. They do not conceal their femininity but use it to attempt to undermine the ability of male principals or, in a minority of cases, childless colleagues. They do not comply with the dominant ideology of mothering as focused strongly on one’s own family; they have interests and activities outside their family and some leave the everyday care of their own children to professionals or other family members. They ‘do gender’ at the workplace, in Corsun and Corsten’s (2001) terms, by attempting to change the boundaries and rules of the game. Instead of motherhood as a factor of gender deemed detrimental to leading an organisation, they depict it as an essential factor. The 29 principals in our sample have chosen a strategy to undo gender in a specific way:

Women identified more with being professional than with being a woman, and they presented themselves as gender-neutral…. Another way of undoing gender is to introduce multiplicity in relation to gender, broadening the parameters of how gender is enacted. (Khelan, 2010: 189–190)

Part of our data provide examples of Khelan’s first strategy; women who insist that gender is not relevant to their role as leaders and has had no influence on their access to or enactment of the role. They are attempting, consciously or otherwise, to subvert their gender by decategorising as women and recategorising in the professional role as headteacher (Gurin & Nagda, 2006), so avoiding its potential negative impact. They are not the focus of this paper which is the 29 cases that adopt a different strategy, in Khelan’s terms stretching the understanding of the nature, relevance and thereby the social capital of motherhood. Khelan (2010) goes on to argue that this may have the unintended effect of embedding further the belief that women’s approach to leadership is limited by their propensity to adopt a nurturing rather than a more aggressive or strategic approach to leadership. The assessment of the impact of the strategy depends on the rules played by those who interpret their action. As Corsun and Corsten (2001) suggest, it is the control of the rules that is the power house of dominance. Who is deciding that motherhood is limiting or otherwise? This exemplifies how gender identities shift, as suggested by Goldner (2002), to accommodate different discourses: nurturing towards children and assertive and aggressive towards colleagues. Therefore, the participants in their own view use their motherhood to gain power and deploy their agency (Barlow & Chapin, 2010) to construct different meanings of motherhood using different and sometimes contradictory strategies with children and adults.

The paragraphs above suggest one interpretation of the data; others are possible. The analysis relates to a western interpretation of motherhood. African parenting practices differ from those in the west and may distribute the mothering role amongst many blood relations and community members (Collins, 1994). Consequently, a head teacher may be viewed literally as mother within a mothering network, and not just a surrogate or quasi-mother to the pupils in the school. This communal approach to parenting has received impetus not only from the absence of many biological parents who have no economic option to working at a distance from home, but from the considerable rise in the number of those orphaned by the AIDS epidemic in South Africa (CSA, 2005). If this interpretation is accepted, then gender is still being done and undone, but the context makes a significant difference to understanding the processes at play. The mothering approach to leadership may be in part conformance to the expected community parenting role, or may be compelled by the poverty of learners, where water, food, clothing, medical care and some protection from violence and rape are demanded before any learning can take place. Viewed from this perspective, mothering is indeed a vital attribute of leadership, but in quite a different way from that understood in the west.

**Moving forward**

This paper has done no more than select from a rich dataset and tentatively explore one theme that emerged from respondents’ views on their school leadership experiences. It suggests that, in the ongoing struggle to achieve greater equality for women school leaders, it is inappropriate to homogenise western interpretations of doing and undoing gender. The paper further suggests that the interpretation of data in relation to gender may be coloured not just by the value base of the interpreter – so much is commonly asserted in relation to particularly qualitative research – but by the status of the interpreter, whether dominant or otherwise. It might be argued that the women’s actions described in this paper potentially attempt simultaneously to do gender, to undo gender, and to increase gender role bandwidth simultaneously. To escape the ambivalence of interpretation one must either accept the self-professed empowerment that adopting a mothering role appeared to give the principals, or reject such as self-delusion. On what value basis is such a choice to be made? Perhaps the most significant challenge in gender studies currently is not the collection of data related to gender, but struggling to resolve ambivalence in the ontological and axiological position of the researcher.

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