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FEMINIST FORUM COMMENTARY

The Complexity of Gender: It Is All That and More….In sum, It *Is* Complicated

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Abstract This commentary responds to "Two Traditions of Research on Gender Identity," where Wood and Eagly (2015) discussed two traditions of research on gender identity: gender self-categorization and gender-typed traits. This commentary replies, with a focus on research and theory from the U.S., by noting the importance of each approach, but more importantly, by noting the areas of gender identity not addressed by Wood and Eagly. Issues of complexity discussed include the multidimensional nature of gender, the limitations of the gender binary system, intersectionality, and the developmental context. Also, this commentary provides advice for incorporating the developmental context in research on gender identity. The commentary concludes by discussing the usefulness of qualitative research methodologies for incorporating other complexities in research, but also notes the need for innovation in methodology to better reflect the complex nature of gender in research.

Keywords Gender roles · Gender identity · Gender expression · Gender binary system · Intersectionality · Developmental context

Introduction

In *Two Traditions of Research on Gender Identity*, Wood and Eagly (2015) attempt to clarify two traditions of gender identity: the trait approach and the gender self-categorization approach. Wood and Eagly stress the importance of considering which of the two approaches to gender identity (trait vs. categorization) is most appropriate, given the research question. Focusing on the U.S., the Wood and Eagly critique the current practice of reaching, perhaps too quickly, for the well-known, classic gender-typed trait measures (e.g., Bem 1974), when gender identity measures (e.g., Egan and Perry 2001) might be more appropriate for some research. Wood and Eagly's article is an excellent starting point for elucidating the difference between gender-typed traits and gender self-categorization and the available measures for each. This work will help novice gender researchers understand the different operational definitions of various measures related to gender. That said, Wood and Eagly's account, as they themselves noted, is incomplete. The aim of this commentary is to address additional issues related to these two traditions of gender identity not discussed by Wood and Eagly. To do so, focusing on the U.S., the present article will discuss the missing complexities (e.g., intersecting identities, developmental factors,) that comprise a more complete understanding of gender and the methodological (and pragmatic) issues related to why these complexities are so frequently missing in discussions of gender. This commentary will offer various suggestions encouraging researchers to broaden the scope of research on gender and will remind gender researchers of the need to gain a more complete picture of the complexities of gender. All the cited studies are based on U.S. samples.

Two Traditions of Gender Research

Wood and Eagly (2015) accurately describe the current state of the gender research field— there are two approaches to "gender identity": self-categorization and traits. Self-conceptions, in general, including conceptions of our own gender,

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incorporate both social identity (i.e., self-categorization) and traits (i.e., person characteristics; see Deaux and Stewart 2001). As discussed by Wood and Eagly, self-categorization is frequently included as a starting point in many gender development theories and is thought to motivate individuals to engage in gender-typed behavior (Tobin et al. 2010). For example, in Bem's (1981) gender schema theory, identifying as a male or a female shapes gender development in multiple ways (e.g., by affecting what we pay attention to and process). Indeed, developmentalists focused much attention on when and how (stability/constancy) gender identity occurs (e.g., Kohlberg 1966; Slaby and Frey 1975). Thus, self-categorization as male or female has been noted as essential to our understanding of gender.

The trait approach is also essential to our understanding of gender. Although the trait domain is only one of many domains or dimensions of gender, it *is* one of the multiple dimensions of gender worth studying. The trait approach provides information about gender expression— in one of many domains. For example, in a study specifically designed to investigate the multidimensional conceptualization of gender (Lemaster et al. 2015, researchers assessed gender-typed traits and activities using Liben and Bigler's (2002) multidimensional Occupation, Activities, Traits (OAT) Scale (the adult version) and found several factors were associated with masculine or feminine traits. For example, men, but not women, who endorsed feminine traits, also endorsed feminist attitudes. Overall, Lemaster et al.'s (2015) pattern of associations supports the multidimensional conceptualization of gender and also the continued usefulness of trait measures.

I agree with Wood and Eagly (2015) that gender self-categorization is an important construct and, in terms of choosing measures, perhaps deserves more attention from researchers. As stated by Wood and Eagly, it is probably true that researchers who want to measure some aspect of gender identity think first of the classic gender-typed trait assessments (e.g., Bem Sex Role Inventory, BSRI; Bem 1974; Personal Attributes Questionnaire, PAQ; Spence et al. 1975). However, trait measures do not assess identity per se. As suggested by Wood and Eagly, gender identity (or the degree to which you fit in with or identity with others of the same gender) is more accurately assessed by gender self-categorization measures. There are several psychometrically sound measures of gender self-categorization warranting use such as Egan and Perry's (2001) gender identity scale and Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) collective self-esteem scale, which can be adapted to assess identification with any social group.

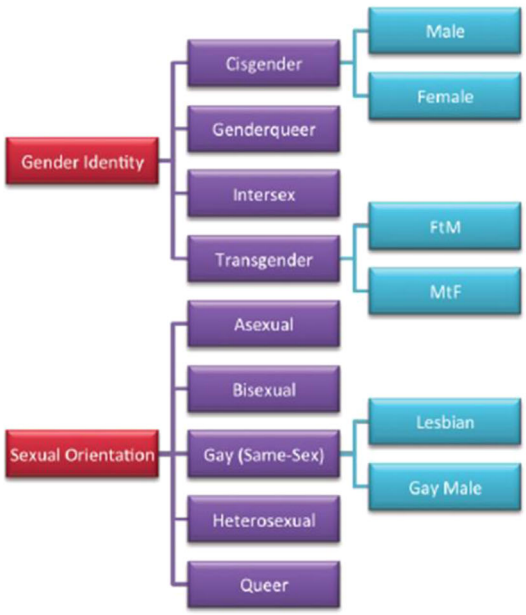
One source of confusion is the use of the term *gender identity* for both sets of measures. It seems that the term *gender identity* has unfortunately been used to refer to the constructs assessed in the BSRI and the PAQ. As discussed later, it seems that gender expression might be the more appropriate term for gender-typed traits. As stated by Wood and Eagly (2015), it is true that the gender self-categorization and trait approaches tap into different or unique aspects or dimensions of gender. That is, these two types of measures are used for different purposes. One is not better than the other, but one might be more appropriate depending on the goals of the research. As suggested by Wood and Eagly, researchers should use the compatibility principal and carefully consider which set of measures (self-categorization vs. gender-typed traits) match (or are compatible with) the constructs they are seeking to understand. Thus, it seems worth reiterating that one cannot be replaced by the other, but rather both approaches are essential to advancing our understanding of gender.

The Complexity of Gender

Multidimensional Conceptions of Gender

Although the multidimensional view of gender is important, this perspective should not be taken too far in thinking that gender identity, attitudes, traits, and behaviors are unrelated (Liben and Bigler 2002; Ruble and Martin 2002; Spence and Buckner 1995). It is not that gender-related variables are entirely unrelated to one another, but that gender self-categorization, gender-typed traits, attitudes, interests, and behaviors are possibly somewhat related, but should be assessed in separate domains to determine the nature of the associations. In assessing gender-typed domains separately, the complex interplay among these variables and, their relation to other variables, can be identified. Specifically, there are likely multiple moderating factors obscuring correlations among domains of gender-related variables. Lemaster et al.'s (2015) study supports this view. Specifically, if these researchers did not examine the endorsement of feminine traits separately by gender, as a moderating factor, then the significant association between feminine traits and feminist attitudes (for men) might not have been detected. In short, the self-categorization and trait approaches assess specific constructs related to gender, but they are not interchangeable.

People who do not specialize in the study of gender, likely do not understand how complex of a construct it is. To help novice gender students and researchers, I recommend two sources. First, I recommended Forbes (2014) where terminology related to sexual orientation and gender identity (transgender vs. gender queer vs. cisgender) is clearly defined in a very readable format (see Fig. 1). Second, Killermann's (2015), recently updated, *Genderbread Person* (*v 3.3*). This "edugraphic" (i.e., educational graphic, Killermann 2015, see Fig. 2) provides a visual representation of the multidimensional nature of gender. Gender identity, gender expression, biological sex, and sexual attraction/orientation are each depicted on the Genderbread person as unique, separate, distinguishable parts of the *cookie*. The fact that he has revised the edugraphic to add complexity 3 times is one indication of



Gender Identity

Cisgender – a male or female that identifies with the sex that they were assigned at birth. Cisgender people also identify, to some degree, with the gender norms (excluding sexual orientation) that are associated with their sex.

Genderqueer – is used to describe a gender identity when the binary conceptualization of gender, male or female, does not accurately describe an individual's gendered outlook or self-concept.

Intersex – describes a variety medical conditions wherein an individual's reproductive anatomy or genitals do not fit the binary definition of male or female.

Transgender –an individual whose self-concept and gender identity do not correspond with their natal sex.

Transgender man/Female to Male (FtM) – is a man whose sex is female but he lives and identifies as male.

Transgender woman/Male to Female (MtF) –is a woman whose sex is male but she lives and identifies as female.

Sexual Orientation

Asexual – refers to the absence of physical or sexual attraction to another human being. An asexual man or woman can have romantic, intellectual, or emotional attractions to other people but they do not engage in physical sexual acts.

Bisexual – the sexual orientation that describes either a male or a female who is attracted to both males and females.

Gay – Depending on the context, gay can refer to either gay males and/or lesbians. Gay males are self-identified men who are emotionally, physically, romantically, and/or sexually attracted to people who identify as male.

Lesbian – a self-identified female who is emotionally, physically, romantically, and/or sexually attracted to other people who identify as female.

Heterosexual –an individual who identifies as either male or female (can be cisgender, FtM, or MtF) and is attracted to individuals of the opposite sex.

Queer - is an umbrella term that is used to describe an individual's self-concept of their sexual orientation identity.

Fig. 1 Some terminology used to describe gender identity and sexual orientation. Figure reproduced with permission, Forbes 2014, p. 9, see http://www.thejuryexpert.com/2014/02/a-short-primer-on-lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-and-queer-lgbtq-culture-in-america/)

how complicated gender can be to deconstruct. That said, Genderbread Person v 3.3 is an excellent starting point. It certainly speaks to the issues at hand regarding the deconstruction of gender into identity (self-categorization) and expression (traits being one domain of expression), but also includes important related factors such as biological sex and sexual orientation or attraction. As depicted by Killermann, these dimensions of gender are each multidimensional and dimensions exist on a continuum. Based on my experiences teaching the psychology of gender, the general public seems to expect each dimension of gender to correspond to each other dimension according to cultural norms and standards. For (a simplified) example, a biological man (with XY chromosomes, more testosterone than estrogen, and with primary and secondary male sex characteristics) is expected to identify as a man, to express himself according to traditional masculine norms of his culture, and to identify as heterosexual (i.e., to be attracted to and have sex with women). As a quick aside, it should be noted (cf. Bem 1974; Eliot 2012; Lips 2014) that even biological sex is on a continuum where chromosomes, hormones, and sex characteristics do not always correspond to one's biological sex or the label given at birth (natal sex), which is usually based on primary sex characteristics. Similar to the above example, a biological woman (with XX chromosomes, more estrogen than testosterone, and with primary and secondary female sex characteristics) is expected to identity as a woman, to express herself according to the traditional feminine norms of her culture, and to identity as heterosexual (i.e., to be attracted to and have sex with men). Although these examples reflect the *gender* of many men and women, these are only two of the many ways in which these factors combine. The way gender manifests is much more diverse and

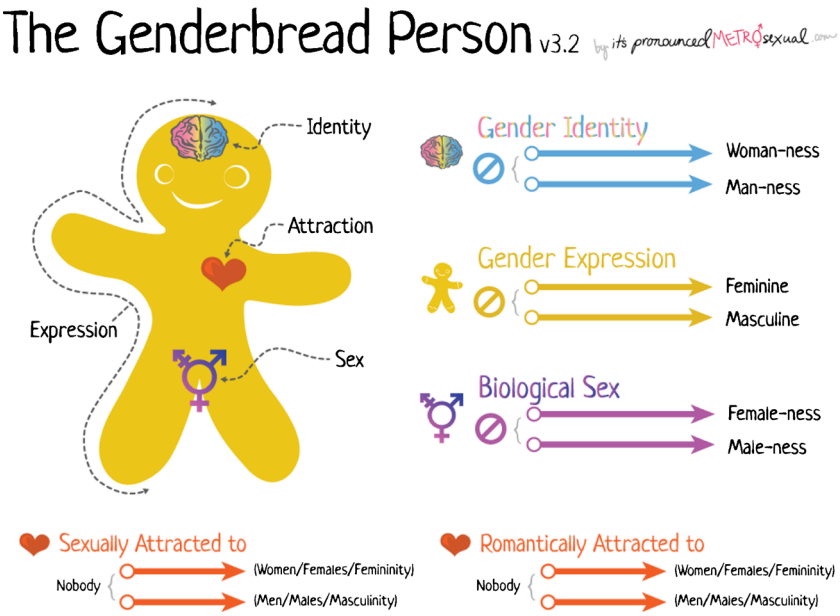


Fig. 2 The genderbread person is an "edugraphic" (i.e., educational graphic) created by Killermann (2015) to deconstruct gender into identity, expression, sex, and attraction. (This image is uncopyrighted/public domain)

complicated. For more information about the basics of biological sex and gender see Bem (1993), Eliot (2012), or Lips (2014).

To further understand the complexity of gender, consider additional examples where the dimensions of gender are not always related in ways that align with cultural standards and expectations: Some biological men, who identify as men, violate the traditional masculine norms and express more feminine characteristics, but identify as heterosexual. That is, men with a feminine gender expression are not always gay or bisexual and gay or bisexual men do not always have a feminine gender expression. Thus, gender expression and sexual orientation do not always correspond. Further, some people identify as transgender where their biological sex assigned at birth or natal sex (see Forbes 2014) does not match their gender identity and, as with all people, sexual orientation is independent from gender identity and gender expression (see Forbes 2014; Killermann 2015). Consider the sexual orientation of a transgender male to female (a person who was born as a biological male, but identifies as a woman) who is attracted to and has sex with women. What is the sexual orientation in this case? As is always the case for both *cisgender* (the term used for people whose natal or biological sex at birth and gender identity match; Forbes 2014) and transgender people, sexual orientation is self-defined. As these examples illustrate, gender is complicated!

With this complex multidimensional definition of gender explained by the Genderbread Person, it should be clear that the traditional binary (male vs. female) system for gender (see Forbes 2014) is inadequate. Gender as simply identifying as either a male or female does not accurately reflect the multidimensional nature of gender. As evidenced by multidimensional assessments of gender (e.g., Liben and Bigler 2002; OATS), it seems the field of gender has generally accepted this notion—that gender is multidimensional. However, (as discussed in the next section) it still seems that many measures reflect the outdated, incomplete notion of gender as a binary system.

Gender as a Binary System

Are the assessments for gender self-categorization or for gender-typed traits discussed by Wood and Eagly (2015) able to account for variation in (or the diversity of) gender or do they reflect the gender binary, which reflects only two options for identifying one's gender—male/boy/man vs. female/girl/woman? Reflecting the diversity of gender, there are a number of other ways to identify one's gender. First, there's the issue of cisgender vs. transgender. Cisgender is the term used for when one's gender identity is consistent with the biological sex assigned at birth (natal sex). Transgender or *Trans** is when one's gender identity is not cisgender or is inconsistent with natal sex (see Forbes 2014). The asterisk * is used to denote the use of *Trans* as an umbrella term for various labels (e.g., gender queer, gender fluid, which refer those who do not identity as male or female; see Forbes 2014) for those who do not identify with the natal sex they were assigned (see Killermann, nd). People born as intersexuals (a medical condition where external genital are inconsistent with other primary or secondary sex characteristics or when biological sex is ambiguous) also do not fit into the gender binary. Cisgender people identify as either male or female and Transgender people identify as their current gender (male vs. female) or as Male to Female (MtF) or Female to Male (FtM). People who are gender queer or gender fluid do not identity as male or female (the gender binary system is rejected). People who are intersexual might identify by a gender (male or female) or

may not, thereby rejecting the gender binary system. As this long complicated list of names for gender identity suggests, the gender binary is insufficient and as there is much to learn from the diversity of gender identity measures of gender self-categorization and gender expression (e.g., trait measures) should be designed (or redesigned if need be) to allow for use by people who do not fit the gender binary.

Although measures from both approaches can assess gender self-categorization and gender-typed traits with people who do not fit the gender binary, as discussed below, each measure has strengths and weaknesses in this regard.

The trait measures, such as the PAQ or BSRI, do allow for gender-typed traits (one domain of gender expression) to be measured in a way that allows for a continuous vs. binary assessment of gender expression and thus moves away from the gender binary. Although the PAQ and BSRI are ultimately combined into two separate subscales reflecting femininity or expressivity and masculinity or instrumentality, when each subscale is used as a continuous variable, variation in the expression of gender-typed traits are accounted for in the scores. For example, participants receive a feminine score based on his or her endorsement of feminine traits. Similarly, participants receive a masculine score based on his or her endorsement of masculine traits. Regardless of gender identification as a cisgender man, cisgender woman, trans woman, trans man, or any other variation on gender, each participant receives a score for each type of trait. Thus, these types of assessments do not rely on the gender binary system.

Gender-type trait assessments are imperfect assessments of gender expression. However, they do work to assess gender beyond the gender binary and seem to be the best, yet incomplete, available option at this time. Although the PAQ and BSRI can criticized for focusing solely on traits (see Liben and Bigler 2002), other measures of gender expression assess gender-typed attributes in more than one domain and thus, are perhaps better suited for understanding gender expression beyond the gender binary. Some measures assess gender-typed expression in terms of traits, attributes, attitudes, and interests. Liben and Bigler's (2002) measure, OATS, assesses endorsement of gender-typed occupation, activities, and traits (of self and others). Diekman and Eagly's (2000) assessment of gender-stereotypic characteristics can be used, with modification to instructions, to assess gender attributes/traits in terms of stereotypical cognitive skills/interests, traits, and appearance. However, measures assessing gender expression more directly and in multiple domains are needed. Measures such as Lehavot et al. (2011) Gender Expression Measure among Sexual Minority Women where gender expression is assessed in multiple domains (i.e., appearance, emotional expression, and gender roles) are needed. Example items include "I keep my hair in a style that is spiky or buzzed, "I talk to my friends about how I feel," and "I am usually physically protective of my partner or date" (Lehavot et al. 2011, p. 387). This measure of gender expression is innovative and much needed. However, it is most appropriate for use with women (especially lesbians), but can be used regardless of sexual orientation with with cisgender women and transgender women. Similar multidimensional assessments of gender expression that can be used with both men and women (e.g., heterosexual or gay and cisgender or tans*) are needed. That is, multidimensional assessments of gender expression that can be used regardless or independent of gender identity (trans vs. cis) or sexual orientation should be developed.

Gender self-categorization assessments of gender identity (e.g., gender typicality) that can be used with people who are not cisgender (e.g., trans* or intersexual) would also be useful. However, gender self-categorization measures tend to ask questions about the degree to which one identifies as a boy (man) vs. a girl (woman). As discussed earlier, some people reject the gender binary and do not identity as either a man or a woman, but, for example, rather identify as gender fluid, gender queer, or simply do not use a label. Measures asking about the degree to which one *feels* like a boy/man or girl/woman could not be used with this population where the gender binary is (completely) rejected.

It does seem that with some minor modifications and clarifications, these measures could be used to assess gender identity in samples of trans* individuals who identify as MtF or FtM. To illustrate the complicated nature of using these measures, consider how a person with a Trans MtF identity would complete Egan and Perry's (2001, p. 463) gender typicality measure? When asked, how true a statement is (i.e., "Some [women] do not feel they are just like all the other [women] their age"), would *ze* (gender neutral pronoun) answer as a woman and thus feel that ze fits in and feels connected with other women or would ze answer as a biological male and indicate ze does not fit in or feel connected with other men. It seems that once transitioned from identifying as a man to identifying as a woman, a Trans MtF who lives as a woman might feel very connected and typical compared to other women. However, a Trans MtF who is identifying or living as a man (despite not feeling like one, but who might be *in the closet*) might answer very differently. Thus, it would be important to add instructions or questions to clarity whether transgender participants are answering in terms of their biological sex at birth (natal sex) or in terms of their current gender identity. These examples show how the gender binary system upon which these measures are based inadequately reflect the complexity of gender.

That said, the multidimensional and continuous nature of the gender self-categorization measures do allow for increased understanding of boys (men) and girls (women) who do not identity with their own gender or with either boys (men) or girls (women). For example, Smith and Leaper (2006) used Egan and Perry's measure of gender typicality (or the degree to which participants self-categorization as typical boys or

girls) and showed that peer acceptance, in part, mediated the association between gender typicality and adjustment (i.e., self-worth) indicating that it is not gender typicality (or lack thereof) that is predictive of adjustment, but rather peer acceptance might be the more crucial indictor. Thus, such multidimensional self-categorization assessments with continuous scales are useful to better understand factors associated with not being typical of others in your comparison group and do in some ways reject the gender binary system.

Although the available gender-typed trait and self-categorization (under some conditions) measures can be used to understand those who fall outside the gender binary system, there is a need for measures designed to assess gender expression (and gender self-categorization) in a way that accounts for the diversity of gender beyond the current, yet inadequate, binary system. Again, it is very complicated to take all of these factors into consideration, but ensuring the validity of measures for use with gender variant (e.g., Trans *) people is an important task and work needs done in this area. Not doing so provides an incomplete, inaccurate knowledge base.

Intersectionality

Similar to the complexity and increased understanding that occurs when we move beyond the gender binary and consider the multidimensional nature of gender, there are a number of other identities that intersect with gender in interesting and complicated ways. One example of intersecting race/ethnicity, gender identity, social class, and age identities would be a native American, two-spirit (Trans*), rich, older adult. Another might be a Hispanic, cisgender, middle-class, middle-aged man. This complicated array of intersecting identities makes it difficult to know whether findings from samples with a particular constellation of intersecting identities generalize to others with different constellations of intersecting identities. Specifically, do findings from studies on mostly White, middle class, young adults (one constellation of intersecting identities) generalize to others with a different constellation of intersecting identities? That is, would findings generalize to groups where even one (e.g., Asian, middle class, young adults), let alone several (Jewish, working class, young adult, lesbian) of these identities is different? It is very difficult to disentangle the confounds between gender and identity factors such as race/ethnicity and social class. As suggested by Lips (2006, p. 18), the metaphor of the kaleidoscope is especially helpful when she quotes Sneja Gunew as saying "we should perhaps use the image of a kaleidoscope, where each turn produces different patterns and no single element dominates." That is, although there are common constellations of intersecting identities, there are so many variations and changing even one identity can alter the *picture* drastically.

Common identity factors (e.g., race, class, age), which add complexity to any account of gender, are frequently acknowledged as important, but are often described as being beyond the scope of the topic at hand. These often excluded factors include age, gender identity (e.g., transgender), sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, class, and culture including the historical context. Wood and Eagly (2015) noted that developmental issues were beyond the scope of the paper and, although they mention transgender identity, issues of sexual orientation were not addressed. Also, despite the obligatory nod to issues of intersectionality and the socio-historical culture, the treatment of these issues was also cursory. That said, Wood and Eagly did what most authors do. They acknowledged their treatment of the gender-related issue was incomplete— pointing out, but not discussing, relevant factors. Perhaps this decision was made because fully incorporating all these factors makes the topic at hand more complex than any one paper can discuss. We, who read and write about gender in academic spaces, have accepted this situation. We accept that gender is too complicated to consider all that would need to be considered to even approximate a complete understanding of gender.

Having come to the point, as gender researchers, of acknowledging the incompleteness of our work, we recognized that we are like *The Blind Men and the Elephant* in the 1872 poem by Saxe (as described by Constantinople 1979) where we are each studying a different part of the animal (gender being the animal in this case) and depending on which part we study, we get a different understanding— each of which inadequately describes the animal. It seems that we, as gender researchers, are comfortable with the idea that we each do what we can to add to the knowledge base and that we need multiple researchers doing good work on related and overlapping topics from multiple perspectives— using a variety of methodological approaches.

Including Complexity: The Developmental Context

I would like to consider the ways in which one of these complexities, the developmental context, can be incorporated into research on gender to move beyond the present practice of making the obligatory statement about how these factors are beyond the scope of our paper and to think about even some small ways to do so. The types of incorporations I am suggesting are not new or revolutionary. There may be some researchers who are well beyond this point, but these are the types of changes I can see becoming mainstream. For example, there was a time when it was not customary, let alone considered a requirement of quality research, to acknowledge the cultural context. Today, gender researchers know that gender is culturally constructed and as such gender-typed phenomenon are culturally specific. Thus, we consider the cultural context of theoretical and empirical works we use to develop hypotheses and of the sample used to test the hypotheses. In at least some journals (e.g., *Sex Roles*), we do so by simply noting the country of origin for the studies we cite and by

making it clear which country/culture our sample is from. In other journals, noting the country of origin might not be explicitly or formally noted, but it seems that it would still be inappropriate (or a weakness) to use research from another culture (in terms of time and place) to formulate gender-related hypotheses without acknowledgment or strong rationale. As a field of gender, to more fully consider the culture in our research, we did not all have to become cultural psychologists. We were able to make small, yet meaningful, changes to address this issue. This example of how the field has begun to more fully consider the cultural context of gender research, illustrates how small changes in how we develop hypotheses and interpret our findings can make a meaningful difference. Making the consideration of culture mainstream seems to have helped the field more accurately reflect the complexities of gender in our research and thus advanced the field. Finding ways to more fully incorporate the complexities that reflect the complicated nature of gender is necessary.

Considering the Developmental Context

As a developmental psychologist, I cannot help but be disappointed with the number of times I come across statements about development being beyond the scope of the paper or topic at hand. I am sure it is similar to the disappointment gender researchers who focus on race and ethnicity feel when they see the mostly White samples. Similar to when researchers and theorists set aside issues of race (or any other identity), when developmental issues are set aside, we limit our view of gender and thus we introduce inaccuracies into our conclusions.

To echo the work of Eckes and Trautner (2000) who, more than a decade ago, called for a developmental social psychology, I would like to call attention to and restate their goal that social psychology should consider development or change over time and developmental psychology should consider the social context. I will focus on the latter issue—that gender researchers should consider the developmental context. Gender is a developmental phenomenon and considerations of gender identity without the developmental context are thus incomplete.

Considering the developmental context does not require delving into and describing the research findings related to your topic at every age period in the lifespan. Similarly, one need not use complicated developmental research designs (e.g., longitudinal designs) or to study children or older adults. Similar to how the cultural context is considered in gender research, the developmental context can be provided by adding highlighting or adding an emphasis. This can be done by considering the developmental stage of the target population and sample and by considering potential distal causes of gender-typed behavior such as developmental life tasks and motives most likely given the age (and culture) of your sample and of the studies and theories cited.

To provide a developmental context, researchers should familiarize themselves with what is known or common about the developmental stage, life tasks, and motives of the age group being investigated. Just as U.S. researchers would not conduct a study from another culture without learning about that culture and then using that knowledge to develop their study and to describe findings in their reports, researchers should learn the developmental context of the populations they study.

Studying college students is no reason to neglect the developmental context. Gender researchers utilizing college student samples can also provide a developmental context. For example, if studying the role of gender in young adults' romantic relationships, it might be noted that given the focus of romantic relationships at this point in the lifespan, the present study's focus is appropriate and important. Or if studying gender dynamics within friendships, for example, it would be important to note the developmental context of friendships. For example, according to research on friendship (cf. Hartup and Stevens 1997, 1999) college student friendships take a different form and function than do friendships at other stages of the life span— in young adulthood, when independence from parents is being established, friendships are central. However, the centrality of friendships is not stable, but rather waxes and wanes across adulthood (see also Carstensen 1992). When studying gender dynamics in friendships considering the developmental context can help develop meaningful hypotheses and interpretations of findings.

Considering the primary developmental life tasks of the age group under investigation provides useful insights for understanding gender dynamics. Using the friendship example, research (see Carstensen 1992; Hartup and Stevens 1997, 1999) suggests that compared to young adults, adults in their 40's, on average, are more focused on career and/or family and thus have less time for friendship than young adults. Also, the functions of friendships change across the lifespan. In childhood, friendships help children learn about behavioral norms and help them gain impression management skills. However, in adolescence and young adulthood, friendships help with identity formation and self-exploration (Parker and Gottman 1989).

Another way to provide the developmental context is to consider the motivational orientation most salient or relevant to the stage of the lifespan under investigation (see Strough and Keener 2014). According to lifespan theorists (e.g., Baltes 1987), motivational orientations correspond to age and developmental tasks. For example, motives for social contact vary depending on the developmental stage of the lifespan. According to Carstensen's (1992, 2006) socioemotional selectivity theory, earlier in the lifespan, when time is perceived as unlimited, gaining knowledge for the future is the central goal. However, later in the lifespan, when people approach the end of life and time is perceived as limited, enhancing positive

emotion is the primary goal of social contact. According to Carstensen (1992), these motives influence the quantity and quality of our interpersonal relationships across the lifespan.

The point is that providing the developmental context does not have to mean considering every piece of the research literature on the topic, but might mean considering more distal causes of behavior such as developmental tasks. It is important to note that, similar to gender, developmental factors are embedded in sociohistoric context and thus change across historical time and culture. Considering this type of information might help researchers better understand gender dynamics related to identity or expression.

Conclusion: Considering all the Complexities

The current state of the field seems to be that we know that we need to consider all the complex and intersecting factors that comprise gender, but the pragmatics of doing so are overwhelming. Recruiting samples with large enough groups with similar patterns of intersecting identities to conduct the analyses to test for patterns is often unrealistic— or at least very difficult. Our existing standard research methodologies are inadequate to handle all the complexities of gender. However, one existing method, the qualitative research method, does a fairly good job at handling interesting identities. This method is not without its own weaknesses (e.g., small samples), but perhaps deserves more respect. In sum, the field is in need of innovation— new measures, qualitative or quantitative (or a combination of both) are needed to better assess gender identity and gender expression in a way that more accurately reflects the complicated nature of gender. As noted by Shields (2008, p. 306) "Audre Lorde famously asserted that you cannot dismantle the master's house with the master's tools." We need new tools.

It is worth noting that Sandra Bem and Janet Spence both recently passed and as can be seen in this review, their work continues to be thought provoking, informative, and generative. Gender researchers owe a debt of gratitude to Sandra Bem, Janet Spence, and many other gender pioneers.

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