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Investigating families from feminist perspectives has invigorated the field of family studies by continuously challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about the dynamics and structures of family relationships in social historical contexts. Feminists have contributed many new perspectives about the gendered nature of family and have shown that research and theory about families need to center on the ways that *gender relations* structure family dynamics and interactions with other social institutions, not on women per se. Families are private *and* public spheres; that is private family dynamics cannot be understood apart from the broader, public social systems in which they operate (Ferree, 1990; Walker, 1999). Thus, feminists have challenged mainstream ideas about the institutional context of families and the individuals who comprise them. Feminists

view families as an arena of contested relationships between intimate and intergenerational partners, where variability, not unity or predictability of perspective, is characteristic. Feminists have demonstrated that families are structured in pluralistic ways and are not reducible to the pervasive ideology of the Standard North American Family (SNAF). This “default” or SNAF portrayal is that of families being composed primarily of White, married heterosexual partners with dependent children who reside together in one household (Smith, 1993). Over the last 40 years, feminists have infused the study of families with critical analyses of how gendered relationships operate, bringing new ways of seeing the complexity and difference in families according to how lives are stratified by systems of oppression and privilege.

In this chapter, we address the contributions and potential of feminism as theory, method, and practice in family studies and assess its centrality for critique and transformation of this interdisciplinary field of study. We discuss how recent feminist conceptualizations have led to expectations for research measures and analyses that are still reflective of the personal, yet also capable of intersectional analysis (Ferree, 2010). We provide our own speculations and vision for the future of family studies informed and transformed by feminist perspectives, suggesting that what keeps our field lively and strong is the clash between critical ideas and lived experience.

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Theorizing Gender from Feminist Perspectives in Family Studies

Feminist influences on theory and research in family studies have been evolving for nearly 4 decades. Feminists have served to critique the very foundations of the field by challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about the natural order of family life and the passive way in which gender had been treated as a dichotomous variable (e.g., female, male). Research informed by feminist theorizing has broken new ground to reveal ways in which families intersect with society at large. In this section, we describe how feminist theorizing about gender has evolved over time and made significant contributions to theory in family studies.

Emergence, Development, and Critique of Gender Theorizing

Feminist ideas and social activism gained widespread visibility in the 1960s, beginning with the publication of Betty Friedan's (1963) landmark analysis of depression in women's lives, *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan named the insidious problem of women's passive acceptance of the limited roles of wife and mother in foregoing their own ambitions and fulfillment. Although it grew out of the experiences of educated White women, Friedan's book helped spark the beginnings of the second wave of the feminist movement, paving the way for later landmark texts such as *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (Boston Women's Health Book Collective, 1971). The Women's Liberation Movement grew out of the Black Civil Rights movement and the protest against the Vietnam War, and was a response to the sexual revolution many men had experienced in the 1960s. A feminist perspective entered academic discourse in the 1970s, with the advent of the first academic publications and the first women's studies courses (Freedman, 2002). The feminist movement in the 1970s was referred to as "second wave feminism," in comparison to "first wave feminism" of obtaining the right to vote, achieved with the passage of the 19th amendment in 1920.

In family studies, the introduction of "sex roles" as a distinct category for investigation was an important step in recognizing that the different roles assigned to women and men in families led to consequences in how their lives unfolded, as well as how gender was conceptualized and investigated in the field (Scanzoni & Fox, 1980). Yet, the term "sex" itself, implying biological difference, was soon replaced by the concept of gender. That is, feminists argued that gender was not essentially a function of biological sex, leading to differential and static roles in families, but rather revealed *gender relations*, or the social construction of gendered roles and relationships that connect private life with other social institutions (Ferree, 1990; Thompson & Walker, 1989). Utilizing the concept of gender roles, feminist family scholars made explicit the implicit assumption that male experience was the norm and exposed the ways in which women's work in and out of families was devalued.

Second wave feminism eventually was challenged by women from inside and outside the feminist movement (Freedman, 2002). Although the idea that women were diminished and even excluded from societal and academic equality was still important, the concept of gender posited by feminists was critiqued as reflecting an essentialist paradigm, in that it assumed that all women shared a common experience. Critics charged that second wave feminists conceptualized female gender as representing women much like themselves: White, middle-class, educated, heterosexual women, typically in young or middle adulthood, who were married and mothers. This definition, by omission, ignored oppression in other facets of life—marginalization by race, social class, sexual orientation—what Butler (1990) referred to as the illimitable *et cetera*: "Through this horizontal trajectory of adjectives, these positions strive to encompass a situated subject, but invariably fail to be complete" (p. 143).

Black feminists were among the first to critique the essentialist paradigm, persuasively arguing that from their standpoint, gender, race, and class cannot be separated (Combahee River Collective, 1982; Lorde, 1984). Lesbians, too, through coming-out stories and autobiographical narratives, argued that they had their own unique

standpoint as women dealing with heterosexism; they made claims to being more marginalized than women in the privileged group (Martin, 1994; Rich, 1980; Zimmerman, 1984). Similarly, working-class women were critical of middle-class feminists, saying the women's liberation movement's call for equality did not speak for them. Working-class women never had the luxury of homemaking; their wages were always needed to support families or to supplement family incomes (Stacey, 1990). The critique of gender as an essentialist category evolved to a model of additive oppressions where a woman's experience of oppression was seen as increasingly severe with each new layer of marginalized identity (Shields, 2008). In this model, for example, White women contended with one oppression (gender); Black women were more oppressed than White women because they were dealing with two oppressions (race plus gender), and Black lesbians were in triple jeopardy, disadvantaged by race, gender, and sexual orientation (Bowleg, 2008; Hurtado, 1994).

Thus, Black feminists, working-class women, and lesbians were among the first women to challenge what had become mainstream feminism (Freedman, 2002). This critique of a unified gender perspective from the late twentieth century has given way to twenty-first century feminist concerns with gender as performance, intersectionality, transnationalism, and critical race perspectives (Allen, Lloyd, & Few, 2009; Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Freeman, 2010; De Reus, Few, & Blume, 2005; Few, 2007; Mahalingam, Balan, & Molina, 2009).

From a Gender Paradigm to an Intersectionality Paradigm

New conceptualizations of gender relations and intersectionality have altered the previous way of operationalizing gender as a dichotomous variable, from gender defined as a "being" (male, female) to gender defined as a social construction, a "doing" (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Risman (1998, 2004) has conceptualized gender as a social structure that exerts influence at

multiple levels: (a) individual—through identity, beliefs, and attitudes; (b) interactional—the doing of gender or gender performance; and (c) structural—the organization of women and men into work and roles with differing resources and rewards. Thus, feminist scholarship has advanced so that analyses must examine "both the politics of location and the intersectionality of multiple identities" (De Reus et al., 2005, p. 459). A contemporary feminist perspective should go beyond an individualistic standpoint, for example, as a disabled woman, or a lesbian, or an African American, as if one representative could speak for all members of that particular group. Instead, individuals engage their own multiple, contradictory, and intersecting identities through dialogue with others, whose identities also are fluid and complex (Collins, 1990; De Reus et al., 2005). To complete the process, examining the politics of location through dialogue with others is not an intellectual pastime; it must lead to action by confronting and transforming the political and economic contexts in which families struggle to live and survive (Ferree, 2010). Thus, the additive model of oppressions generated a new wave of feminist theorizing that changed the conceptualization of gender. This conceptual change was from an essentialist or layered paradigm to one of intersectionality in which gender can only be understood in relation to how it intersects with other social structures and identities.

In contrast to the former model that positions oppressions simplistically as accumulative or quantitative, there are "qualitative differences among different intersectional positions" (Shields, 2008, p. 303). Difference, not similarity, is the focus in the intersecting identities paradigm, where the concern is with the multiple axes of oppression (Collins, 1990, 2005). For example, given cultural, religious, and ethnic histories, Chicanas, relative to women from other racial ethnic groups, are likely to have very different views of motherhood, rooted in the principle of *marianismo* (e.g., a woman is expected to be nurturing and self-sacrificing, Lucero-Liu & Christensen, 2009).

Now in the third wave of feminist thinking and practice, the concept of intersectionality has

been hailed as the major contribution to feminist theory and method in the past 30 years (McCall, 2005). The contemporary conceptualization of structural and relational systems of oppression and privilege (e.g., gender, race, class, sexual orientation, age, ability, nationality, and others) as interlocking, overlapping, and mutually constructing one another has emerged through continuous engagement with feminist theory, method, and praxis (e.g., Collins, 1990, 2005; Crenshaw, 1991; Dill, McLaughlin, & Nieves, 2007; Few, 2007; Lorde, 1984; Shields, 2008).

The goal of feminist thinking, research, and practice is social change—in the academy, in the community, and in the hearts and minds of individuals. To be true to its ideals, feminist scholars and activists have responded to continual challenges, from both within and outside feminist movements that feminism needs to be more inclusive. Yet, the challenge to redefine feminism in more inclusive ways through key theoretical concepts such as intersectionality has also threatened to obscure the very concept of gender. The importance of gender is its focus on the experience and oppression of *women*, particularly as feminism has become institutionalized as a body of thought. At odds with academic feminism are activist efforts to transform women's lives throughout the world—and in the street, the village, the field—efforts that grew out of the women's liberation movement and not academia. As Mies (2007) explains, feminist research emerged not from the academy but from “women's struggles against patriarchal oppression and exploitation, struggles whose arena was the street rather than the classroom or research institutes” (p. 663). The struggles, originating in women's bodies, and hence inextricably tied to gender, had to do with unpaid labor in the home (e.g., housework), institutionalized discrimination against women in nearly all social structures, and control of women's bodies through abuse, rape, wife burning, female infanticide, and lack of contraception and abortion rights. These struggles began and were sustained by women who were “not mainly interested in careerism and academic fame” (p. 663), a charge made against purely academic feminists.

At issue here is to what extent does gender (still) matter as an organizing and stabilizing force in feminist intellectual and activist movement. This tension between (a) radical critique rooted in lived experience and (b) mainstream infiltration with the goal of influencing academic discourse has been at the center of feminism from its inception, particularly in the field of family studies (Allen et al., 2009).

As feminist perspectives have been integrated into family theory, method, and pedagogy, they also have been subject to critique both among feminist scholars and within the family studies discipline itself. The very issues that initiated feminist family studies—questions about the relevance of family theories such as developmental, social exchange, stress, and systems perspectives to women's lived experience (Allen & Pickett, 1987; Luepnitz, 1988; Osmond, 1987; Thorne & Yalom, 1982; Walker, 1985; Walker & Thompson, 1984)—can now be found in critiques of *feminist* perspectives in family studies: In what way is feminism relevant to family studies today (Thompson & Walker, 1995; Wills & Risman, 2006)? Are feminist concepts, such as intersectionality, too diffuse to guide research, particularly in family studies (Chafetz, 2004)? Is feminism just a particular version of some other theoretical framework, such as critical theory or poststructuralism (White & Klein, 2008)? Can research on gender and families ever be a “depoliticized science?” (Ferree, 2010, p. 433).

Perhaps the goal is not resolution of this challenge or tension but to continually find ways of keeping the promise of feminism alive and viable: (a) defining feminism as relevant to contemporary issues by keeping women *and* gender in the center of analysis, (b) operationalizing feminist concepts such as intersectionality to contribute new knowledge through scientific research, and (c) committing to revolutionary social change. Although these can be contradictory goals, rather than emphasize polarity, feminists work with the tensions. These tensions include the reality of being a woman in the context of intersecting identities, and the value of influencing scientific knowledge and academic discourse by tempering knowledge with lived experience.

As more scholars use an intersectional paradigm in analysis, more nuanced understandings of the construct have emerged. For example, Ferree (2010) offers a conceptual distinction between *locational* and *relational* intersectionality as a way to deal with the complexities inherent in the term. With its emphasis on content specific standpoints, identity categories, and disadvantaged social positions that occur simultaneously, locational intersectionality gives voice to oppressed groups. When locational intersectionality is used most effectively, it illuminates the issues facing what these multiply marginalized persons and groups face and also allows others to learn how intersectional systems of disadvantage (e.g., being poor, Black, lesbian, or being an immigrant domestic worker) operate from the perspective of those who actually experience such disadvantages. By example, Nelson's (2006) qualitative study of single mothers is an exemplar of the best of this type of locational intersectional analysis. The women in Nelson's study used their power as mothers to create families that conform to the SNAF family model (Smith, 1993), even though this traditional family form has failed them. That is, they designated their own mothers as placeholders for potential husbands they did not yet but one day hoped to have (e.g., mothers provided housing and financial support as well as help with childcare), so as to complete the dream of becoming a traditional family. This type of locational intersectional analysis demonstrates how individual experience with social location (e.g., divorced, single mothers) is reflective of larger structural and institutional constraints (e.g., risk of impoverishment because the husband is absent).

The relational approach to intersectionality moves beyond a focus on how the most disadvantaged groups are positioned within mainstream society and is more concerned with the processes that interact to produce patterns of inequality for everyone, not just those who are marginalized and oppressed. In the relational view, the focus moves to the institutional practices and cultural discourses with which individuals must contend. In this approach, intersectionality is seen as strategic and mobile. Identity, then, is not static, but shifts with changing cultural discourses and

social institutions. Challenges to heteronormativity in families provide a good example: Gay fathers who stay at home to care for their children (e.g., who "mother") while their partners work outside the home have less power in their relationships (Goldberg, 2010). Their multiple, conflicting identities are intersecting with ways in which social institutions (e.g., family and work) are changing and cultural discourses about families are interpreted. In a similar vein, among lesbian couples, birth mothers tend to do more of the childcare, whereas nonbiological comothers do more of the paid work (Goldberg, Downing, & Sauck, 2008). In another example, Dodson and Schmalzbauer (2005) used this relational approach to interpret how poor women of color utilized "habits of hiding" to exercise caution when discussing their lives with professionals.

Feminists have used the concept of praxis to work with the tensions created by studying family life from perspectives that acknowledge power. Praxis has been defined in many ways but a continuing thread is that the pursuit of knowledge and the choice of method to gather that knowledge are not neutral but always involve critical self-reflection about power relations and dialogic interaction between the researcher and the participant (Collins, 1990; Harding, 1991). Theory and method are symbiotically related, gathered with enquiring feminist eyes for critical knowledge and social change (Stanley & Wise, 1990); as Stanley (1990) explains, not simply "'knowledge *what*' but also 'knowledge *for*'" (p. 15).

Methodological Innovations in Feminist Family Studies

What are feminist family research methods? Perhaps no area in feminist scholarship is more subject to critique than feminist methodologies. Witness the lively debate as to whether there is something unique about feminist methods or if they do not differ substantially from methodologies used by researchers from other theoretical bents (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli 2007; Ramazanogulu & Holland 2002; Walker, 2004). A shared perspective is that feminist methodologies are methods

used by explicitly feminist researchers who are interested in confronting and ending gendered as well as other social inequities, and in transforming people's lives.

Classically, feminists have been distrustful of quantitative methods, preferring qualitative methods that lend themselves to theory building and that do not rely on obsolete claims such as objectivity (Reinharz, 1992). More recently, a growing number of feminist scholars use quantitative methods (Chafetz, 2004), particularly survey approaches, demonstrating that survey research can be a valuable tool for transforming research into practical action, particularly in terms of legislation and policy reform (Miner-Rubino, Jayaratne, & Konik, 2007). Other scholars emphasize the need to abandon dichotomized thinking about qualitative and quantitative methods (Baber, 2004). Sprague (2005) argues that feminists need to increase their "methodological mindfulness." The important choice is not between quantitative or qualitative method, but "how the method is used, both technically and politically" (p. 27).

A recent iteration of the methods debate appears in a 2004 issue of *Journal of Family Issues*. Here Chafetz critiques highly descriptive, qualitative feminist standpoint work and argues that feminist researchers need to embrace theoretical testing. Responses to her critique varied, but all objected to the notion that feminist methods are not useful for building new knowledge. First, Baber (2004) pointed out that there are multiple kinds of feminisms and that interdisciplinary feminist methods open new pathways for understanding gendered social relations. Walker (2004) argued that theory informs method and that a feminist perspective, or any perspective, will guide the questions researchers ask and the answers they discover. Finally, Allen (2004) questioned the usefulness of emulating "an outdated model of the natural sciences" (p. 985). That is, classically trained researchers in the natural sciences have categorized and quantified elements of natural processes, building testable theories to predict future outcomes. Allen argued that this model has limited applicability in understanding or predicting outcomes for individuals

and families. Worse, the normal science model has a history of being used in the social sciences to pathologize those who did not or could not practice the cultural norms of middle-class, White America (e.g., female-headed African American families, gay men and lesbians, immigrant families). Thus, although feminist work will no doubt always have its detractors, sometimes by feminist practitioners (hooks, 1984), such critiques tend to sharpen feminist analyses, rather than to silence activist-scholars.

Some leading feminists (Lather, 2007; Smart, 2009) have called for methodologies that resist linear narratives and attempt to retain the complexities inherent in people's everyday experience. Walker (2009) revealed that unconventional representations of data are not seen in family studies journals because journal editors and reviewers are either unfamiliar with or unfriendly toward qualitative methodologies in general and toward reflexive feminist methodologies in particular. In fact, two articles published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* on qualitative research methods (i.e., LaRossa, 2005; Matthews, 2005) explicitly advocate for conventional representation of data and findings, with the expectation that qualitative researchers should conform to prevailing, quantitative ideologies about knowledge production if they wish to be published in mainstream family journals. Despite these challenges, some feminist family scholars have successfully navigated the boundary between the use of innovative interdisciplinary methods and the conventional presentation of scholarship. Below we discuss two exemplary articles published in family science journals whose authors have transcended disciplinary boundaries and point to exciting methodological possibilities in feminist family science.

Adams's (2007) research on family rhetoric in nineteenth century texts is illustrative. She used feminist-informed grounded theory methods to juxtapose contemporary and nineteenth century feminist movements, demonstrating that so-called profamily public rhetoric is too often little more than racist, antifeminist backlash. First, from a critical feminist perspective, she read histories of American families and reports of

demographic change, pointing out that the contemporary profamily movement blames women's rights and gay rights movements in particular for the demise of the so-called traditional family. Next she focused her critique and findings on American profamily documents from the nineteenth century. Here she examined historical documents from the National League for the Protection of the Family (organized in 1881), a self-proclaimed "unbiased" group of academics, jurists, and clergymen who conducted research on marriage and divorce. Using grounded theory analysis, she found that nineteenth century profamily discourse linked the ideology of "family" with prevalent racialized ideologies of "nation." That is, using line-by-line coding, Adams saw close linkages throughout these historical documents between the importance of White, middle-class women's place in the home as mothers and wives and White women's patriotic duty to the nation. With concerns about population decline among Whites, and resonant with the rhetoric of contemporary White supremacists, writers for the National League for the Protection of the Family argued that married, White women had an obligation to reproduce the next generation of White Americans. Although Adams presents her findings in terms of themes, her example of textual analysis goes beyond a simple content analysis to develop a theoretically rich argument. She operationalized intersectionality by looking at how discourses about gender, race, and nationality function as antifeminist backlash in nineteenth century and contemporary profamily rhetoric.

Another example is work by Best (2006), who also used an explicit intersectional analysis in her investigation of the ways in which gender, class, place, and emergent adulthood structure family decisions and negotiations around driving. To obtain a rich understanding of family decision making, Best used multiple data collection strategies. She conducted in-depth interviews with 44 adolescents from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Subsequently, building on what she learned from these interviews, she organized focus groups with college-aged young adults to further her understanding about power

negotiations among young people and their parents. One strength of Best's intersectional analysis is that she complicated class by emphasizing the struggles of middle-class families from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds as they construct the "elusive American dream" (p. 56); she highlighted this money-consciousness by providing direct quotes from young men and women (ages 16–24) whose voices are often silenced in research. Moreover Best called attention to how the particular culture or place, a northern California city and suburb, shaped family decisions about when and whether young adults are allowed to drive; that is the lack of comprehensive public transportation factored into family negotiations. Best's research avoided one problem of some scholarship, an overly narrow focus on the topic of research, and examined the multiple intersections of sociostructural processes. Similar to Adams, she used grounded theory analysis informed by feminist theory and methods that called her attention to these larger structural systems. Best was able to recruit an ethnically diverse sample, yet even those using White, middle-class convenience samples can incorporate an intersectional lens by highlighting how practices or processes they describe reinforce, challenge, or complicate racial or ethnic discourses and power relations (e.g., Adams, 2007).

Although the preceding discussion focused on work that used more interdisciplinary methods, in general, recent scholarship using an explicit feminist theoretical framework has tended to be rich in building mid-level theories. Regardless of the methods, these theories have addressed dimensions of family life with a few of these articles blurring the boundaries between theoretical and empirical pieces (e.g., Blume & Blume, 2003; Dykstra & Hagestad, 2007). For example, authors using methods typically not associated with theory building, such as thematic or content analysis, explicitly connected their findings to feminist family theorizing (e.g., McGraw & Walker, 2007; Nelson, 2008). Nelson, for instance, used content analysis of over 100 online evaluations of baby monitors to inform feminist theorizing about mothering. Similarly, Blume and Blume's (2003) theory-building article, using a single

case, investigated family gender discourse through deconstructing how discourses about sexuality, body image, and gender identity were co-constructed by an adolescent girl and her mother. Although these articles are very different in terms of qualitative data and analysis, their feminist theoretical framework mean that they explicitly build on a feminist body of social-scientific knowledge. Moreover, many authors not using an explicit feminist theoretical or methodological framework typically approached their topics sensitized to feminist advances in research. This sensitivity is most striking in studies dealing with household labor (e.g., Utz, Reidy, Carr, Nesse, & Wortman 2004), work and family life balance (e.g., Armenia, 2009), and intimate partner violence (e.g., Teaster, Roberto, & Dugar, 2006). Thus, in some arenas, feminist theorizing has become one of the received discourses about certain topics, suggesting that feminist family science is a nomadic theory that is also a methodology “in a state of constant challenge and continual reformulation” (Smart, 2009, p. 297).

Review and Synthesis of Feminist Empirical Research on Families

Over the past 30 years, feminist researchers have devoted considerable efforts to documenting the existence of a gender divide across a wide reaching array of social systems. It seemed essential to do so, in part, to convince others of its existence but also, given the feminist focus on social change, to identify possible avenues for eliminating this divide and ultimately moving beyond it.

Feminists draw strength from evidence that households and the economy are incontrovertibly linked; that families are the social institution wherein, both structurally and symbolically, this connection is solidified, challenged, and modified in ways distinctly related to gender. Paid and unpaid work, therefore, is front and center in feminist empirical inquiry. Hartmann (1981) argued, in fact, that the creation of gender meets the social purpose of identifying “two categories of workers who need each other” (p. 393). Ferree (1990), too, positioned the organization of labor

and gender as a “substantial portion” of what families do (p. 871). Paid work in the economy and unpaid reproductive labor within households—and the connection between the two—are therefore key to understanding gender relations (Ferree, 1990). Not surprisingly, feminist family researchers continue to devote considerable attention to studying gender in relation to both paid and unpaid labor, exposing the myth that, in families, there has been a sole provider and that the provider role is the province of men and documenting how the meanings of femininity and masculinity are linked to power and expressed through gendered labor (Berk, 1985). In reviewing recent feminist empirical work, then, we too focus on both paid and unpaid labor and the relation between the two. We also look at some recent scholarship that documents the relationship between gendered experience and health, and end this section by considering the ways in which empirical work is one type of feminist praxis.

Feminist Research on Gender, Family, and Work

Paid work. As noted above, feminist researchers attend to the direct connection between gender in the workplace and gender inside families. Huato and Zeno (2009), for example, point to the striking variation of income within couples by socioeconomic status and race and ethnicity. These racial and gendered gaps in income are rooted in occupational segregation and gender discrimination in the world of paid work. Couples with more family income and larger differences in wives and husbands’ education have larger gaps in spousal income. Minority husbands, especially African Americans, have much lower income gaps with their wives than do Whites. Such within-couple conditions influence wives’ choices regarding the relative allocation of their efforts to paid work and to unpaid family labor. Among Whites, for example, especially the more educated, large income disparities within couples solidify husband’s paid work commitment and the priority of housework and childcare for wives. Among African Americans, the similar incomes of both

spouses mean both are essential for family survival, cementing wives' labor force attachment and compelling more involvement of husbands at home.

Cha (2010) also shows an effect on household inequality when men extend their paid work hours to 50 hours or more per week. Arguing that gender ideologies prioritize men's paid work over that of women, she shows that, when husbands work long hours, as is typical in managerial and professional jobs, and especially when couples have children, wives have a higher likelihood of leaving the work force. This pattern is particularly susceptible to the ideologies of more educated social classes that encourage commitment to paid work and also subscribe to an ideology of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996). Given changes in market forces, the ideology linking men to the provider role can readily change dual-earner households to traditional households with men who are wage earners and wives who are homemakers. In the workplace, and given cultural ideas that favor their husbands' careers, such patterns put married mothers with high work commitments at a disadvantage. Many women, for example, are destined to miss work to care for sick children. Although stay-at-home fathers are featured prominently in multiple media outlets and in everyday discourse, their proportion in the population remains very small (Tucker, 2005).

Hook (2010) similarly affirms the importance of national context in explaining couples' decisions regarding household tasks across 36 countries. Where employees work long hours and where use of lengthy parental leave is evident, women do more of the inflexible household work and men do less. When public childcare is available, however, and when men, too, are eligible for parental leave, women do less of this "women's" work. The national context, in other words, influences couple's decision making regarding childcare and parental leave.

Transnational carework. Although there is a long tradition of international family studies, feminist perspectives have been in the forefront of unveiling the gendered, classed, and racialized nature of globalization. Gender is a key component when

considering the consequences of transnational family patterns for maintaining family relationships (Clark, Glick, & Bures, 2009). From binational marriages to transnational caregiving, women from developing nations, particularly in the Philippines, Sri Lanka, India, and throughout the Caribbean, are leaving their homes, their families of origin, and their spouses and children, to live and work in more affluent places such as the U.S., Hong Kong, Taiwan, Israel, and Middle Eastern nations (Mahalingam et al., 2009). Their work—often referred to as transnational carework—is to take care of the young and the old for pay: "indeed, in Israel the term *Filipina* is synonymous with a caregiver, usually for the elderly" (Mendez & Wolf, 2007, p. 653). Immigrating to another country to work as a domestic servant, nanny, or elder caregiver creates complex new family forms that challenge western ideas of what it means to be a mother, a father, or even a family (Mahalingam et al., 2009). A global feminist perspective on families means that "[w]e all have to be political economists now" (Mendez & Wolf, 2007, p. 656).

One of the key issues uncovered by a global feminist perspective is the contradiction between provider and nurturer roles played by women in transnational families. When a woman leaves her home and children to work in another country, she may frame her work, although it is domestic caring labor, as that of primary provider (head of household). She also may maintain as much connection as she can to her own children and the family members in whom she entrusts their care, for example, with weekly phone calls in which she asserts maternal authority and expresses maternal concern. These strategies allow some women to overcome feelings of despair at being separated from their children by reframing their roles as mothers to a mixture of both maternal and paternal roles, thereby defying traditional gender structures (Mahalingam et al., 2009).

Carework is quintessentially a feminist issue because providing and receiving care is predicated upon a gendered system—it is mostly women and less-privileged men who provide caring labor. Women have the burden of invisible labor, in that their reproductive work—bearing and rearing children, caring for aging spouses, providing

emotional labor, and doing housework—is expected but often goes unnoticed and unrewarded. Carework is simultaneously devalued yet essential to society (Ferree, 2010; Folbre, 2004). When fathers provide care, however, their work is often exaggerated and thought to be praise-worthy, whereas mothers' work is more likely to be stigmatized as “gatekeeping,” with women described as controlling fathers' access to and involvement with their children (Walker & McGraw, 2000). When older wives take care of dependent husbands, they are more likely to perform multiple aspects of carework and to receive less assistance from the broader kin network than older husbands who care for wives (Connidis, 2010). Yet, despite the costs, women's reproductive labor has been one of the only ways in which women have had access to socially sanctioned power, particularly in their family relationships (Di Leonardo, 1987; Hochschild 2003).

A feminist intersectional framework is also useful in research examining power in intergenerational relationships within the context of gender and immigration. For example, in their study of 15 second generation Chinese-American women's relationships with their first generation Chinese-American mother-in-law, Shih and Pyke (2010) examined the intersection of multiple relational and institutional contexts: the overt and hidden dynamics of power within intergenerational relationships in a racial ethnic cultural context. Critical of a uniform application of Confucian cultural ideals of “familism, gender and generational hierarchies, reverence for tradition, and filial piety” (p. 334) to all Asian American families, the authors examined a particular type of Chinese family relationships. They applied Komter's (1989) concept of hidden dimensions of power, where power dynamics and outcomes are seen as shifting between individuals within the context of broader societal dynamics. These hidden dimensions of power were applied to younger women's accounts of their interactions and conflicts with older women in relation to their domestic and parenting roles. Shih and Pyke found that when younger women want to reinforce their own authority in the household, they appeal to the power of their husbands, particularly when their husband's moth-

ers have access to power through childcare. Such an analysis reveals the benefits of a feminist intersectionality framework by combining concepts such as gender, age, racial-ethnic status, national origin, immigrant status, family structure, and relationships, with feminist analyses of power and carework, particularly emotional economies of entitlement, obligation, and gratitude. This integration provides a more complex explanation of women's intergenerational relationships than previously depicted by strictly cultural approaches in family scholarship.

Unpaid labor. Since the 1970s, feminist family scholars have focused on the disproportional labor of wives in heterosexual families, documenting gendered patterns and showing repeatedly that the best predictor of who does what in the household is gender (Walker, 1999). Recent literature in this area has shown a narrowing of the time commitment of wives and husbands, in part, because husbands are doing more at home but primarily because wives are doing much less (e.g., Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006). Although there has been a considerable increase in men's time in childcare (e.g., Bianchi et al., 2006), childcare continues to remain largely the province of women (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). Craig (2006) affirmed this pattern with valid and reliable panel data from Australian couples. She found compelling evidence that mothers' total time with children, time alone with children, multitasking, responsibility for childcare, and rigid scheduling reflect their greater responsibility for and involvement in childcare in the home. Both the reduction in employment by mothers with overwhelming demands (e.g., Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 2000) and Lareau's (2000) finding that fathers claim “my wife can tell me who [of my child's friends and their parents] I know” harken back to gender essentialism: that women are better suited to family work and that men are better suited to providing. A stunning finding emerging in recent years is the development for the first time of a substantial gap in couples' leisure time favoring husbands (e.g., Mattingly & Sayer, 2006). For example, full-time employed mothers in dual-earner households have fewer leisure

hours than fathers, even though fathers spend considerably more hours than mothers in the paid work force (Milkie, Raley, & Bianchi, 2009). Although the total workweek (hours employed plus hours of family work) is nearing equality within couples (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010), women have a disproportionate share of family work hours, men have a disproportionate share of paid work hours, and only men have leisure hours.

Thus, the uneven and unfair distribution of unpaid labor within the home persists. For example, Eriksson and Nemo (2010) showed, that even in countries in which government benefits to care for sick children are extended to both parents, how these benefits are actually used by couples is a reliable and valid proxy for the gendered division of labor within the home. Those who exert more effort in the labor force, typically men, often apply less effort at home (and are less likely to use government benefits)—and their spouses exert more (and are more likely to use government benefits). Using data from 18 countries, Thébaud (2010) demonstrated that in national contexts that valued the so-called masculine pursuits of paid work and earning income, gender expectations were salient in how couples worked out the distribution of household labor. When husbands are unable to out-earn their wives, their efforts at home reflect attempts to neutralize their inability to meet standards for providing rather than a simple resource-exchange perspective. Similarly, when the highest income men—historically those with very high expectations of male breadwinning—are secondary earners, they are in poorer health (Springer, 2010). In other words, ideologies about men and men's roles lead to health problems when men are unable to perform in the stereotypical way; that is as primary breadwinners.

Regarding childcare at home, the mainstream literature on fatherhood highlights the importance of fathers in children's lives and focuses on the role of mothers in limiting father involvement (i.e., gatekeeping). Feminist researchers, however, such as Sasaki, Hazen, and Swann (2010), show how dominant social norms place women in a bind between helping fathers develop a strong relationship with their children and meeting societal demands for intensive motherhood. Not surpris-

ingly, employed wives who see their employed husbands as skilled caregivers feel less self-competent when their husbands are more involved in childcare; such involvement by husbands implies that these wives are not meeting the standard of intensive mothering. Husbands' self-competence, however, is unaffected by their wives' childcare involvement, demonstrating that fathers are not judged by the same normative standards applied to mothers regarding involvement with children. It is not simply that mothers and fathers are judged by different standards, but that they hold themselves to different standards as well. The authors suggested that "employed mothers . . . seem to be trapped between their desire for help with childrearing and the threat to their personal competence posed by failure to meet socially constructed ideals of motherhood" (p. 71). Relative to fathers, mothers also experience more time pressures. And women in shift work, relative to similarly situated men, experience more sleep disruption (Maume, Bardo, & Sebastian, 2009). Much of this gender difference is linked to women and men's differential responsibility for paid work and unpaid family labor.

Assessing change and stability. Recently, following nearly 40 years of research and practice about women's labor in the context of a gender system, England (2010) assessed the evidence regarding whether and to what extent things have changed. She concluded that changes in the gender system are best characterized as uneven; the lives of some have changed dramatically whereas the lives of others have not changed very much.

England (2010) offered two reasons to explain such variation. First, she argued that both the individual characteristics and the work that tends to be associated with women continue to be undervalued both culturally and institutionally. Unpaid work such as homemaking and paid work such as carework, still performed mostly by women, have little social value. For this reason, England argued, we should not expect men to take up work in these areas because there is very little incentive for them to do so. Second, aspects of paid work dominated by men continue to have strong cultural and institutional value. Jobs that

tend to be performed by men pay well, thus providing an economic incentive that, along with the decline of discrimination in employment, helped to drive women into work traditionally seen as “men’s” work. Not all women, however, can take advantage of this incentive, though more educated women are in a better position to take advantage of reduced discrimination in the labor market. Working-class women, for example, have much less capacity to respond in ways that benefit them and their families (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Edin & Kissane, 2010). In contrast, middle-class women are better able to benefit from higher employment levels and from expansion into the province of men’s paid work, such as male-dominated professional and managerial positions. Thus, paid work has changed considerably for some women and less so for others.

England (2010) situated her conclusions within two distinct and influential “cultural and institutional logics.” One of these is *individualism*, a predominant value of equal opportunity that impels society toward equality for women and men, in paid work, in schooling, and in the opportunity to express one’s self. Individualism encourages upward mobility for women but has limited influence on ideologies and beliefs about women’s characteristics and about women’s work. The other is what feminists describe as *gender essentialism*, a belief that women and men are biologically different in traits, in abilities, and in interests. Gender essentialism tracks both women and men into gendered choices. England argues that gender essentialism leads young people to see others of their same gender and social class background—and presumably race and ethnicity—as appropriate social comparators. She sees moving up from a factory job to a teaching job as likely for working-class women—who may see professions requiring years of schooling, such as medicine or law, as unattainable—and for middle-class women, moving from teaching to historically male-dominated professions. Consider that middle-class women may have seen men in their families model highly paid professional work, whereas working-class women would not have this experience.

Together, the cultural and institutional logics of individualism and gender essentialism impel

women into male-dominated fields when they do not otherwise see an opportunity for individual achievement within a female-dominated field. Otherwise, particularly for women from working-class backgrounds, the way to achieve individual expression is through education into “women’s” fields, such as teaching or nursing. Women from middle-class backgrounds maintained their status in these occupations unless they moved into male-dominated professions such as medicine, law, and higher education. England points to the strength of gender essentialism by showing how, even within these male-dominated fields, middle-class women disproportionately chose those areas more likely occupied by women (e.g., in medicine, pediatrics; in law, family law; in higher education, psychology or sociology).

In England’s (2010) view, social structures do not align toward changing the gendered system. Ideas about equality that resonated with individualism did much to increase women’s education and occupational status, where there has been considerable social change. But beliefs about the essential differences between women and men remain strong, cementing women’s attachment to lower-paid female-dominated occupations and also to unpaid family labor, both of which are poorly rewarded economically but are seen as suited to women’s characteristics. Essentialist beliefs further decrease the likelihood of men’s participation in female-dominated paid and unpaid work, thus maintaining their lower market value (i.e., work done *by* women is worth less than work done by men).

At present, according to England (2010; see also Risman, 1998), any continuing or additional gender revolution is now stalled. Recent evidence shows that women are no longer making additional headway into male-dominated occupations, and that their rate of employment has remained stable. Further, despite significant efforts to increase women’s recruitment and retention in the most male-dominated college fields of study (e.g., science, technology, engineering, math), women are still less likely than men to make a long-term commitment to highly lucrative occupations such as computer sciences and electrical engineering (U.S. Bureau of Labor

Statistics, 2008) or even economics and political science (England, 2010).

In the realm of the personal, England (2010) is even more pessimistic, particularly in terms of heterosexual pairings. Men continue to initiate relationships and sexual interaction (England, Shafer, & Fogarty, 2008). Further, although both women and men are sexually active outside of committed partnerships, relative to men, women are judged negatively for such casual sex (Wood, Koch, & Mansfield, 2006). Indeed, women's sexual desire is regulated through the tool of sexual reputation (Baber, 2000), whereas casual sex is still a male prerogative (Risman & Schwartz, 2002). And men continue to be more likely than women to propose marriage as well as to marry at older ages (Sassler & Miller, 2007). With marriage, most women continue to change their surnames to those of their husbands, and children born to heterosexual married partners nearly uniformly receive their fathers' surname (Goldin & Shim, 2004; Gooding & Kreider, 2010). Whereas England noted tremendous incentives for women to achieve through education and occupation, there is little—mostly noneconomic—incentive for change in the personal realm. Such changes may lead to penalties for violating norms such as harsh judgments of women for casual sex. The combination of low incentives for change and penalties linked to norm violation solidify gendered behavior in the personal realm. In contrast, incentives of higher pay and higher status in the occupational realm are sufficient to neutralize social sanctions for norm violation.

Beliefs in gender essentialism are strongly held and begin even before birth. In her book, *Pink Brain, Blue Brain: How Small Differences Grow Into Troublesome Gaps and What We Can Do About It*, Elliot (2009) affirmed the power of essentialist ideas about gender. Although studies show consistently that infants, toddlers, and young girls and boys are similar in abilities, parents' (and others') gendered views have persisted for decades. Elliot argued these views translate into how girls and boys are treated, and, eventually, how they see themselves. She pointed to how the very small brain differences between young girls and young boys are both exaggerated

and viewed as important evidence of gender essentialism. These small differences should instead be addressed in ways that better prepare children for the worlds of school and adulthood in which women and men might best function similarly, a readily achievable goal given the plasticity of the brain.

Feminist Research and Health

Above, we focused primarily on issues related to paid and unpaid work but we would be remiss if we failed to mention exciting new areas of feminist scholarship that are contributing to the understanding of individuals and families. These areas of feminist research examine the assertion of power through bodies, dealing with physical health and well-being, or the lack thereof. Here, we highlight power differentials found in feminist research on the substantive topics of illness and abuse. First, a striking gender disparity in partner abandonment exists when a spouse has a serious medical illness. Glantz et al. (2009) showed that wives with cancer or multiple sclerosis were six times more likely (20.8% vs. 2.9%) to be abandoned by their husbands than were similarly afflicted husbands to be abandoned by their wives, especially when wives were older. As wives are likely to rely on their husbands for both income and health insurance, this gendered pattern of abandonment results in reduced quality of both health and life for women. Interestingly, the study itself was motivated by observation among neuro-oncologists that divorce among their patients seemed to occur only when the patient was the wife. The authors could find no reason to think the pattern would not also be evident across a range of other serious, life-altering medical conditions.

Second, feminists have made major contributions to the research on wife abuse and intimate violence. Pointing to literature showing that men with traditional views of gender who are out-earned by their female partners have higher rates of perpetrating wife abuse, Anderson (2010) postulated that such men may be more likely to victimize their wives and partners as

well as their children. For decades, traditional family researchers have been focused on gender symmetry in frequency of interpersonal violence, applying gender as an individual characteristic. Following Risman (1998), however, Anderson advanced feminist theory regarding intimate violence by proposing that feminists theorize interpersonal violence at the level of structure. Because of gender inequality, women and men occupy unique social locations. For this reason, the experience of interpersonal violence is different for women and for men. A structural approach enables feminists to explain why men's violence toward women is an effective way to control women's behavior because women experience it as humiliating and fear-inducing whereas women's violence toward men is seen as weak and ineffective (Romito & Grassi, 2007). A structural approach also explains why men are more likely to abuse women partners when their female partners occupy higher status positions and earn a greater portion of the couple's income (Atkinson, Greenstein, & Lang, 2005); that is men's violence is a way to perform masculinity. Thus, in Anderson's (2010) view, gender as a context matters more so than the context of the violent act. Furthermore, the study of women's violence toward men without the study of men's violence toward women is unable to show how gender matters in interpersonal violence. Structural theories also attend to intersectionalities and can do so using multilevel models that enable researchers to examine simultaneously characteristics of the individual and characteristics of the context (Anderson, 2005, 2010). They enable feminists to determine, not whether members of different groups have different rates of interpersonal violence but rather how inequalities result in the differential experience of "demands, opportunities and constraints . . . such that violence has different meanings and consequences for their lives" (Anderson, 2010, p. 735). Particularly, older women who report any experience with intimate partner violence report poor physical and psychological health in later life (Rivara et al., 2007).

Feminist Research on Families and Activism

Family studies share with feminism an origin in activist scholarship (Allen, 2000; Allen et al., 2009) and a content matter that attends to daily life experiences and that advocates for social change (Walker, 2000; Walker, 2009; Walker & Thompson, 1984). Family scholars deal with dynamic processes and structural relations as well as with the intersection between these micro and macro levels of analysis. Feminist family studies come together when feminist theory and research are applied to questions about the possibility of feminism to transform family life. Although feminism has not penetrated to the inner core of family studies, ways in which feminism has gotten through are instructive for its liberatory potential on multiple levels. Next we offer three examples of ways in which feminist research in family studies has an activist purpose and end.

A new perspective on the very patriarchal concept of hierarchy emerged from a feminist examination of family structure and process. Mack-Canty and Wright (2004) studied 20 self-identified feminist families, consisting of a diverse group of two-heterosexual parent families, single-parent families, and gay and lesbian families. Both parents and children were interviewed. The authors discovered common parenting practices derived from feminist values of challenging hierarchies and democratic decision making. As a result of these practices, feminist families fostered a sense of empowerment, where children were provided opportunities to think for themselves; to perceive sexism, racism, and other oppressions; and even to surpass their parents' own awareness of oppression to the point that they could "teach their parents a thing or two regarding isms" (p. 876). In a sense, families that were living their feminist values by instilling them in their children via overt parenting practices were practicing domestic activism, replacing hierarchy with shared responsibility and thus promoting social change.

Goldberg and Allen (2007) examined 60 lesbian birth and comothers' preferences and

expectations for male involvement as they were transitioning to parenthood. Most of the women had elaborated their views of male involvement in their child's life beyond the heteronormative family ideal of a live-in father. These expanded views included the presence of men they know, "men who will be involved not because of their embodiment of some father ideal but because they are good quality men" (p. 361). Lesbian mothers-to-be imagined biological fathers, male friends, brothers, their own fathers, donors, and other men in various kin and friendship categories they would consider to be "good quality role models." These mothers reframed fatherhood from a finite structure to a dynamic role, flexible with how family members related to each other and with what the mothers perceived their child might need. Fatherhood, therefore, was reconceptualized in a transformative way, consistent with activist feminism, in contrast to the absence of a feminist view of fatherhood in most of family studies. From a feminist lens, as with the activist mothers described by Naples (1992), we posit that deconstruction of the heterosexist ideal of fatherhood is a form of "activist fatherhood." Family itself is reimagined, and fatherhood is less an ideal than a reality of actual involvement provided by a spectrum of individuals who are connected in relationship and community.

Although the previous two examples showed how researchers make visible feminist practices within some families, feminist researchers can do activist family scholarship even with populations who are not consciously doing activist families. For example, McCann (2010) used a feminist family frame (integrated with life course and symbolic interactionist theories) to challenge stereotypes about working-class, midlife White women in Central Appalachia—the poorest region in the continental United States (Wood, 2005). She blended in-depth interviews, textual analysis, and autoethnographic data (insider/outsider perspective) to examine how aging, single women experience and construct intimacy and family life in the aftermath of the War on Poverty. McCann conducted intensive, life course interviews (Charmaz, 2006) with the women in her

study, asking them to be both descriptive and reflective about their close relationships at different points over their lives. This strategy encouraged the women to theorize about their relationships, which McCann later used to help build a mid-level theory about the meaning of family and intimacy in Central Appalachia. In the past, researchers have used middle-class, academic assumptions about family life to guide their (usually anthropological) research on Appalachian culture, and have pathologized Appalachian people whose family norms often strike an outsider as counter-productive to eradicating poverty. McCann provided not only a revised reading of earlier research, but also complicated monolithic constructions of "the Appalachian family" by focusing on the diverse ways that midlife single women "do" family and intimacy. Thus, McCann's project is feminist activist research in that it is part of a new generation of scholarship that challenges prevailing assumptions about poor and working-class families.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Rather than the presumption of distinct male and female sex roles as natural and normal, feminism has established the idea that gender is negotiated within the context of social relations, manifested in social institutions, expressed in interpersonal relationships, and experienced at the individual level (Ferree, 1990; Risman, 2004; Smith, 1987). Families are contested emotional and structural arenas where roles and relationships are often experienced as contradictory, and where rewarding and stressful feelings commingle (Baber & Allen, 1992; Dressel & Clark 1990; Hartmann, 1981). A feminist perspective presumes inequality that is always already present in social relationships, and where social justice must be vigilantly negotiated.

Most recently, feminist perspectives on intersectionality, interdisciplinarity, and internationality have collided to further broaden and challenge theory, research, and practice (Allen et al., 2009).

Rather than solely rely on gender as an explanation for difference, the concept of intersectionality examines multiple and shifting perspectives to reveal how social stratifications are reproduced in relationships and institutions. Thus, feminist work continues to generate knowledge by revealing the force with which structures such as sexism, heterosexism, racism, classism, ageism, and ableism are reproduced and maintained. Feminist perspectives allow us to demonstrate how families provide a key context for this reproduction at the same time that families offer great possibilities for changing the status quo.

This passion for scholarship that makes a difference—in peoples' lives and in the ability to shape knowledge—is often what propels feminist research forward, despite many obstacles. We could join with those who claim that there are too many risks to utilizing a feminist perspective in family studies, or that the time for feminist theory and research has come and gone. Surely we recognize that new scholars may struggle with how to position their work as feminist family scholars. For example, as more and more universities in the U.S. lose state and federal dollars, it may seem as if only those researchers who have “fundable” research agendas—read mainstream—are employable. Young feminist scholars may get caught in this bleak picture and choose to drop feminism in favor of more conventional work. At the same time, however, a feminist approach is a constant reminder to work through these struggles of dichotomous thinking; that is, feminist family scholars only ever struggle for legitimacy whereas conventional family scholars have it easy. Part of feminist praxis, then, is interrogating the inner critic who, using a purist mentality, too often thinks in terms of dualities. As we have described in many of the empirical examples provided in this chapter, feminist scholars are transforming the field with their groundbreaking work that is often on conventional topics. New scholars can also frame their unconventional feminist interests in terms with which more mainstream scholars and funding agencies can identify.

And, from the perspective of feminist scholars who have been working in the field for 3 decades,

we are struck with the resilience of gender problems still unresolved (e.g., unequal paid and unpaid labor) as well as the questions that are still being asked (e.g., what is unique about feminist methodology). At the same time, over these decades, the development of new ideas about intersectionality has irrevocably changed the standards with which issues of gender, race, class, and other structural dimensions must be examined. Just as it took many years of academic activism to transform our raised consciousness about diversity into new standards for improved samples, the complexity of intersectionality is now infiltrating scholarly work. The 2010 *Journal of Marriage and Family Decade in Review*, for instance, contains several applications of intersectionality generated by feminist research. As already noted, in her review article, Anderson (2010) specifically links violence in families to structural inequality inherent in gender, race, social class, and sexuality. Similarly, Ferree (2010) shows how research on carework should focus on how gender interacts with caregivers' other locational standpoints. Finally, Burton et al., (2010) point to critical race feminism as a way to draw researchers' focus to multiple systems of inequality in ways that advance knowledge about families of color.

Many new feminist questions are on the horizon, and we believe these to be among the issues driving the most exciting work in the field today. Feminist work on gender and its intersections connects with every other major social institution: family, economic, and political, and thus is the most interdisciplinary area within the family field. For example, rather than envisioning family structure in a heteronormative way, a new arena for feminist research on family relationships that cuts across families is to look at the context of couple relationships through a lens of power. Considering the combination of gender, sexual orientation, intimacy, and parenting from a feminist perspective—regardless of whether couples are of the same or other gender, married or cohabiting—an important question, then, becomes how power is distributed when one partner is seen as the primary caregiver of children: When family structure is deemphasized, the focus shifts to processes, thus allowing the possibility for new

ways of seeing how power operates complexly in family relationships.

Feminist perspectives raise the tough questions that force researchers to cross boundaries in informed, reflexive ways. A feminist lens is an uncomfortable one because it requires a shift from the safety of a distanced stance to one where the realities of what our research is doing to and saying about real people—the so-called “others” that we study—is exposed and must be examined. This exposure makes scholarship accountable. At issue, too, is whether one can fight social injustice using the very tools that cause social injustice—in this case family research. With reference to Lorde (1984), feminists ask, can the tools that have been used to cause oppression be used to bring forth liberation? And although some scholars lament the so-called stalled gender revolution, a way to reframe this approach is to see the very slow turning of the revolution’s wheel to be indicative of a true and lasting change.

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