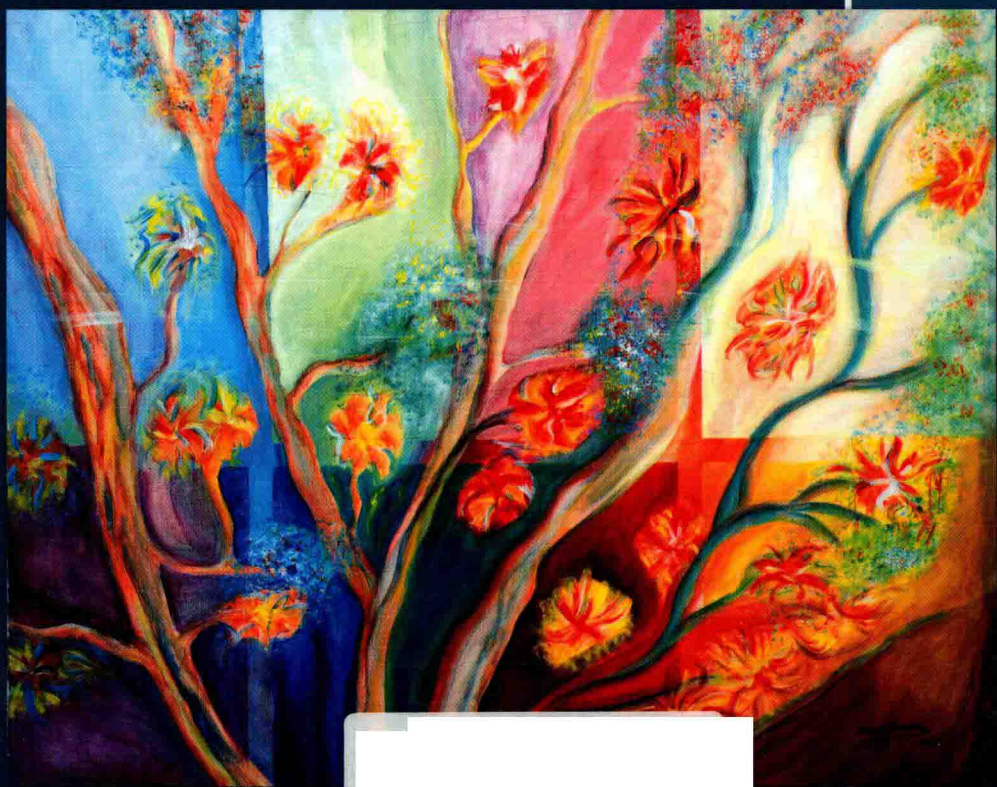


Handbook of
FEMINIST
FAMILY
STUDIES



Sally A. Lloyd • April L. Few • Katherine R. Allen
EDITORS



Handbook of FEMINIST FAMILY STUDIES

Sally A. Lloyd
Miami University, Ohio

April L. Few
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Katherine R. Allen
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

EDITORS



Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
Singapore | Washington DC

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For information:



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2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320
E-mail: order@sagepub.com

SAGE Publications Ltd.
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP
United Kingdom

SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
B 1/I 1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044
India

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte. Ltd.
33 Pekin Street #02-01
Far East Square
Singapore 048763

Printed in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Handbook of feminist family studies/[edited by] Sally A. Lloyd, April L. Few, Katherine R. Allen.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4129-6082-3 (cloth : acid-free paper)

1. Women—Social conditions. 2. Family—Social conditions. 3. Sex role. 4. Feminist theory. I. Lloyd, Sally A. II. Few, April L. III. Allen, Katherine R.

HQ1111.H36 2009

306.8501—dc22

2008043102

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

09 10 11 12 13 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Handbook of
FEMINIST
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*We dedicate this book to our parents, Ed and Charlene Lloyd, Clarence J. Few, Jr.
and Geralyn B. Few, and Jack and Betty Allen. We thank them for teaching us how to stand up
for ourselves, even when we were young girls.*

*We also dedicate this book to our partners, Andrew Wong,
David Demo, and Jeff Burr, and thank them for their unwavering support.*

PREFACE

Over the past three decades, feminist theory, research, and praxis have had a significant impact on the field of family studies. Feminist family scholars have generated new theories, methodologies, and practices regarding how women, men, children, youth, and older adults relate in families and society. Feminists demanded that family studies become more attentive to contextualized and gendered understandings of families; as a result, we can no longer imagine a field of family studies that would limit itself to its once prevalent yet narrow view of “the family” as a White, middle-class, heterosexual, nuclear unit of husband, wife, and dependent children. This example is just one of many ways in which feminism has profoundly affected the field of family studies.

At the same time that feminist ideas have been infused into the discipline of family studies, they have also been challenged and debated throughout the wider culture as feminist movements have come of age. Ironically, as feminist ideas are embraced, there is also a backlash against them. Feminist ideas either comele or clash with other discourses and practices, particularly with the emergence of third-wave, transnational, and intersectional feminisms. Feminist ideas and practices occupy both old and new spaces in family studies—and they are increasingly subject to critique by feminists themselves. There is a great deal of interest in and need for feminist family scholars who span interdisciplinary fields to share the ways in which they integrate and critique their work across disciplines, practices, cultures, theories, and methods.

This *Handbook* showcases feminist family scholarship and provides both a retrospective and a prospective overview of the field by

creating a scholarly forum for provocative feminist work. The outstanding contributions gathered here reveal feminism’s dynamic influence and continuing potential to challenge the field of family studies, through revisioning the family in all its internal and contextual relationships and enacting feminist principles in scholarship and practice. Simultaneously, these contributions push feminist scholarship to reincorporate “families” as a central location of both oppression and resistance, agency and restriction. They remind us often that families, as sites of contradiction and tension, are profound in their enactment of both love and trauma. For many of us, despite their complex, politicized structures, families are where our hearts and deepest hopes lie.

GOALS

Our goals in creating this *Handbook* were to provide a resource for researchers and professionals on the major theoretical, methodological, and applied advances in feminism and family studies and to publish innovative contributions that fully integrate feminist theories, methods, and praxis across a range of topics in the family field. The chapters in this *Handbook* provide the most current theorizing and practice in feminist family studies. Across the chapters, there are common goals:

- To elucidate the impact of feminism on the field of family studies as a whole, including the many ways that feminism has catalyzed a broadly inclusive understanding of family, bringing about a “re-visioning” of families that incorporates multiple voices and perspectives;

- To center intersectionalities of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, nation, ability, and/or religion as pivotal frameworks for examining interlocking structures of inequality and privilege, both inside families and in the reciprocal relationship between families and institutions, communities, and ideologies;
- To provide overviews of the most important theories, methodologies, and practices in feminist family studies, paired with concrete examples of how scholars and practitioners actually engage in the “doing” of feminist family studies; and
- To critique the flaws and gaps within family studies and within feminism as well as the places where the infusion of feminism into family studies has simultaneously created a crisis over deeply held assumptions and been held back from reaching its full potential for creative, contextualized understandings.

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

In creating this *Handbook*, we deliberately chose a diversity of feminist scholars, and we view this multiplicity as one of the many strengths of our collective work. Readers familiar with the field of feminist family studies will see both familiar and new names in the list of contributors. We sought authors who might be considered the “grandmothers” of the field, along with their academic daughters and sons. While the book includes compelling contributions by many veteran scholars, it also showcases the work of new scholars making exciting contributions to the field.

Ultimately, we sought to include scholars who embody the intersectionality that is so carefully woven into this book—scholars whose lived experiences are both connected to and yet different from the family dynamics and processes that they study. We asked our contributors to incorporate their multiple identities into their work, as we believe that the power of feminism as theory, method, and praxis is its versatile ability to occupy multiple locations—center and margin—all at once. As passionate feminist inquirers in family science, we are not complacent theorists, researchers, or practitioners. Feminism requires us to contemplate how the interactions of identities flow in and out and spill over categories. Throughout these chapters, we invited our contributors to share their reflections and selves as they wrote.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE HANDBOOK

This *Handbook* is organized into four major parts. The book begins with an overview of feminist theory and family studies. This first part begins with our introductory chapter tracing the changes in the field that were catalyzed by generative works such as Baber and Allen (1992), Hull, Bell-Scott, and Smith (1982), Sollie and Leslie (1994), Thompson (1992), Thompson and Walker (1995), and Thorne (1982), among others. Here we examine the history of the influence of feminist theory, methods, and praxis on the field of family studies over the past three decades, emphasizing the emergence of concepts such as power, agency, reflexivity, intersectionality, and transnationalism. The introductory chapter continues with an analysis of three critical tasks for a “new feminist family studies”: conceptualizing intersectionality for family studies, reclaiming feminist praxis, and enacting the promise of interdisciplinarity.

Part I continues with a feminist critique of family studies research, followed by overviews of key arenas of feminist family theory (including racial-ethnic feminisms, queer theory, postmodern perspectives, and transnational intersectionality). These chapters share common features, including an emphasis on the basic tenets and assumptions of each type of feminist theory; an explanation of core concepts such as subjectivity, reflexivity, and intersectionality; the influence of these feminist theories on the discipline of family studies, definitions of family, and core family theories; and contributions of feminist family studies to interdisciplinary knowledge. The chapters in Part I come together as a compilation of the profound impact and potential of feminist theorizing to “remake” the field of family studies. Together they reveal the rich textures of feminist theorizing.

Part II is titled “Feminist (Re)Visioning of ‘The Family.’” The chapters in this part elucidate how feminist theory and research have fundamentally challenged and enhanced our understanding of “the family” in key areas (reproduction, intimate relationships, parenting, adolescence, family and work, communities, and aging). What makes these analyses unique is the emphasis on critical intersections (e.g., of race, class, culture, sexual orientation) with family developmental frameworks, as the authors of these chapters share how feminist scholars have wrestled with defining and

studying intersectionality in familial contexts. They also push us toward a renewed emphasis on the ways in which subjectivities and locations multiplicatively influence behavior and life trajectories and how family members subvert notions of the "traditional family" into spaces of creative adaptation. This part illuminates how each substantive area is understood from a feminist perspective and how feminism has catalyzed new theoretical and methodological developments.

Part III, "Feminist Theory Into Methodology," provides concrete examples of the enactment of feminist research methodologies (including narrative interviews, autoethnography, Internet methods, historical methods, theoretical reanalysis). These chapters share common features, the most important of which is their emphasis on "doing" feminist family studies research. Here, scholars demonstrate how they have translated feminist theory into methodology, explain links of feminist epistemology with theory and method, discuss the basic tenets of their "feminist methodologies," and elucidate the strengths and challenges of conducting feminist research within the field of family studies. Each chapter in this part contains an example of a specific research project that used both feminist theory and feminist methods as well as a discussion of the researcher's positionality and subjectivity and its interface with feminist methodology.

Part IV is titled "Feminist Theory Into Action." Here, authors explore their everyday lived experience of enacting their feminist visions. One of the consistently driving forces of feminism in family studies is its association with passionate inquiry and action. Feminism is all about vision—having a vision for the individuals and families we study and the groups to which we belong, a vision that is centered on a desire for and advocacy of justice and social change. The chapters in this part are centered on the

subjectivity of the scholar, for they elucidate the ways these authors translate theory into action through their advocacy, policy, and leadership work. The chapters share common features of border spanning (both figurative and geographic), praxis (translating theory into action), what it means to be a feminist professional, and the dialectical tensions inherent in the translation of feminist theory into policy and activism.

Bringing this *Handbook* to fruition has been a profoundly collaborative and inspirational experience for us all. We stand on the shoulders of those early, pivotal feminists in our field who opened so many doors for us, and we stand in awe of the new feminist scholars who are challenging so many "sacred" aspects of the field of family studies, which is still quite conservative in its viewpoints. In these chapters, we collectively seek to bring our whole selves to the academic enterprise of feminist family studies. We hope that this book will be a source of both celebration and controversy, allowing those in the field of feminist family studies to understand just how far we have come, to spark new disagreements that spur creative conflict, and to be inspired to push the field in directions that cannot yet be imagined.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The processes of conceptualizing, inviting, writing, editing, and completing this *Handbook* have been imbued with creativity, commitment, and caring. Through these processes, we felt deeply what it means to collaborate as feminist scholar-practitioners around epistemologies, methodologies, and praxes. As editors, we joined an amazing group of 40 authors to share with our readers the enactment of an array of feminist perspectives.

Our first and most important acknowledgements go to each of the scholars who contributed to this volume. We thank you for sharing your expertise, for telling your stories, for incorporating our editorial input, and for providing such provocative insights. Each contribution to this volume portrays the profound impact of feminism within family studies as well as its potential to re-vision and remake the field. Thank you for the excellent chapters that comprise this *Handbook*.

We express our gratitude to our feminist mentors, colleagues, students, and organizations. The Feminism and Family Studies section of the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) is the inspiration for and energy behind much of the scholarship generated in the *Handbook*. For more than two decades, this group continues to provide an organizational structure in which feminist family scholars translate theory and research into action, changing scholarship on families and the discipline of family studies. We thank our own feminist teachers and students, as well, for all that you have taught us and asked of us. Sharing this burning desire for feminist knowledge, you have made the *Handbook* possible.

We thank our respective universities for their support. Sally was granted a research leave from Miami University to support her work on this project, and she enjoyed the camaraderie of terrific students and colleagues throughout the process. April and Katherine appreciate their colleagues and students at Virginia Tech for providing the kind of learning environment that inspires, requires, and sustains feminist thinking and teaching.

Our sincere thanks go to the editorial staff at SAGE Publications. This book began as a conversation at NCFR with Jim Brace-Thompson, who first encouraged us to think about its creation. It continued with the wonderful support of Cheri Dellilo, who mentored us through prospectus development and advocated for our proposal at SAGE. Sarita Sarak, editorial assistant, and Brittany Bauhaus, production editor, provided terrific support at SAGE (sorry for all those e-mail questions!), and Erik Evans provided key assistance during the production phase. We thank you all for helping this *Handbook* come alive.

We are deeply grateful to our families, partners, and closest friends, those with whom we share our daily lives. Their support throughout the process was unbelievably patient and understanding. Our desire to study families and to work for justice and social change on behalf of all families is central to our entry into feminist family studies. Our own families continue to offer us opportunities to reflect deeply on our motivations for the family scholarship in which we engage and the theoretical, empirical, and practical outcomes we provide. Families are what sustain us and families are what challenge us. We thank our own families for helping us keep it real.

Finally, we thank each other. What an amazing, synergistic, supportive experience this collaboration has been. We acknowledge our deep respect for each other and, once again, marvel at the way that feminist work changes our lives and our perspectives, profoundly.

SAGE Publications and the editors gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the following reviewers:

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Jeanne Armstrong, *Western Washington University*

Mary Cassner, *University of Nebraska—Lincoln*

Laurie Cohen, *University of Pittsburgh*

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PART I

FEMINIST THEORY AND FAMILY STUDIES

RECLAIMING FEMINIST THEORY, METHOD, AND PRAXIS FOR FAMILY STUDIES

KATHERINE R. ALLEN

SALLY A. LLOYD

APRIL L. FEW

Feminist ideas and practices challenge family scholars and practitioners to break with the status quo of conceptualizing families apart from history, context, power, and inclusivity. Indeed, feminism has revolutionized the way gender in families is conceptualized, evolving from concepts of sex roles to gender roles to gender perspectives to intersectionality. The intention of this chapter is to invigorate the discussion of how the intersection of feminism and family studies can build on this revolution to spark more theorizing, research, and praxis for the mutual advancement of both disciplines. Our challenge is to investigate families as contested sites of power without losing touch with their revolutionary potential as sources of resistance, empowerment, and change.

In this chapter, we examine the intersection of feminism and family studies as a radical opportunity to challenge and shape interdisciplinary family scholarship. We recall a time when feminist studies and family studies were bodies of knowledge with little to say to each other. We trace key developments in our history as follows: (a) the critique of the ideology of the private nuclear family versus the separate public arena, (b) the development of a gender perspective in family studies, and (c) the emergence of research from intersectional perspectives, where systems of power and privilege are viewed as interlocking, overlapping, and mutually constructing one another. In the present moment, we note the ongoing transition from feminism *and* family studies *to* feminist family studies,

Authors' Note: The authors sincerely acknowledge the careful reading and insightful critiques of this chapter by Kristine Baber, Alexis Walker, and especially Lynet Uttal.

where we cannot imagine a family studies not shaped by feminist contributions to our discipline. Embracing the tensions of this vibrant interdisciplinary adventure, particularly the necessity (and often, it seems, the impossibility) of integrating intersectionality into theory, research, and praxis, we propose that bold steps are required to resist the retreat away from the revolutionary nature of feminism and to collectively envision new directions for feminist family studies.

DEFINING FEMINIST FAMILY STUDIES

Feminist family scholars theorize and demonstrate through their research and praxis the ways in which families entail a complex, politicized matrix of meaning and structure. At its very core, feminist family studies theorizes gender as a key axis on which power is distributed, deployed, and misused in families; home is where caring and conflict comingle (Ferree, 1990; Thompson & Walker, 1989). Yet family members can simultaneously perceive and experience their family connections as valued sources of meaning and reality, regardless of gender, biological or legal connection, racial and class dimensions, age, and generation (see diverse family examples in Demo, Allen, & Fine, 2000). An important conceptual tool of a feminist analysis of families is deconstructing a binary notion of agency and structure by recognizing that both human interactions and social structures are characterized by tensions and ambivalence. For example, women are held responsible for the invisible labor of performing instrumental caregiving tasks at home, with little recognition, but they are expected to do so in expressive ways (Dressel & Clark, 1990).

Feminist family scholars recognize, however, that gender alone is not sufficient to understand the pervasiveness and interlocking reinforcement of structural inequities. Analyses of social structures—the institutionalized ways in which ideologies and socially constructed meanings are enacted and reproduced within social, political, legal, educational, and other structural systems—must go beyond gender to multiple and layered identities and systems of power and privilege, including race, class, sexuality, age, nationality, and ability status (Andersen, 2005; Baca Zinn & Dill, 1996; Dill, McLaughlin, &

Nieves, 2007; Osmond & Thorne, 1993; Risman, 2004). Multiracial feminist scholars, in particular, have led the way in helping feminist family scholars “leave home” and broaden analyses to outside family boundaries. These structural relations, or systemic hierarchies, are typically unjust; they disadvantage some groups of people and privilege others (Collins, 1990). For example, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender families who live outside legal and biological marital and parental ties, yet create families of their own, experience intersections of sexual orientation with gender, race, class, and family status, thereby resisting idealized family rhetoric (Weston, 1991). Such families challenge normative structures by their very existence (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001; Naples, 2001; Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005). Similarly, African American families who reclaim multiple dimensions of blood, family, and kinship to reconstruct home as a place, space, and territory (Collins, 2000) challenge normative ideologies about family structures. hooks (1984) describes *homeplace* as a site for resistance, a virtual and physical space where oppressed people can discuss the roots and consequences of their marginality (e.g., racism, sexism) and strategies that fully use personal, family, and community strengths. In the homeplace, individuals resist racist and sexist discourses by “rewriting” their own histories from both individual and collective points of view.

These examples show how feminist family scholars deconstruct family as a privileged site for understanding intersectional inequities, and reclaim family as a source of resistance and change (Collins, 2000). Feminist family scholars recognize the feminist potential to “profoundly reorganize basic modes of understanding families and households and their interconnections with society” (Osmond & Thorne, 1993, p. 618). As most clearly illustrated in the work of racial-ethnic feminisms, theory and social action (*praxis*) are inextricably linked. Praxis refers to the resistance expressed by oppressed people and groups to limiting ideologies and inequitable institutions (Collins, 1990; Dill et al., 2007) as well as the opportunities for change that are spurred by collective analysis of common circumstances (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997). Pioneering women’s groups such as the Combahee River Collective (2000), organized in the 1970s, were among the first to define a Black feminist consciousness as one in which Black women

struggled together with Black men against racism but also struggled with Black men about sexism. The Collective thus revealed the intersectionality of racism and sexism in their theoretical analysis and praxis. Ensuring that *research findings* are also used for the goal of proactive social change is an integral commitment of feminist family praxis (Allen, 2001; Fox & Murry, 2000; L. Thompson, 1992; Walker & Thompson, 1984). Lest we become complacent about our praxis, however, vigilance is needed to follow through with more action orientations in feminist family studies today.

In addition, the emerging paradigm of intersectionality (Collins, 1990), while influential within feminism, has not been incorporated into the broader field of family studies, let alone reshaped it. We concur with intersectional feminist scholars that the versatility of intersectionality for scholarship and social justice work has a bright future for exposing the “roots of power and inequality” while pursuing “an activist agenda” (Dill et al., 2007, p. 636). Feminist studies, as well, has much to gain from “reclaiming notions of family that reject hierarchical thinking” (Collins, 2000, p. 171).

FAMILY STUDIES AND THE EMERGENCE OF FEMINIST FAMILY STUDIES

Activist Histories

Both feminism and family studies have early roots in the quest to examine and address social problems for women and families, respectively (Allen, 2000; Baber & Allen, 1992; Doherty, Boss, LaRossa, Schumm, & Steinmetz, 1993). Liberal feminism grew from grassroots concerns for White women's rights and equality and women's concerns about the well-being of their families. Feminists were active in addressing discrimination and securing access to legal, educational, occupational, reproductive, sexual, and familial rights; protection; and self-determination (Freedman, 2002). The importance of developing theory while maintaining rich descriptions of social movements and feminist activism remains an essential challenge for feminist research today (Maddison, 2007). Multiracial feminist scholarship, synonymous with the activist efforts of racial-ethnic women on behalf of their families and communities, continues to push White

feminism beyond examination of individual women's empowerment and toward family survival in the larger White world (Baca Zinn & Dill, 1996; De Reus, Few, & Blume, 2005; Uttal, this volume).

Family studies began during the Progressive Era in the United States at the end of the 19th century, at the time when industrialization and urbanization were creating numerous social problems affecting families. In particular, a concern with family-life-course patterns associated with poverty and European immigration (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918–1920) was characteristic of these studies. Many investigations were initiated by individuals who themselves had experienced the disruptions and social exclusions they studied (Dilworth-Anderson, Burton, & Johnson, 1993). For example, W. E. B. Du Bois (1903/1996), in writing about the alienation of Black people in White America, proposed the concept of double consciousness to explain how a person of color—a person with less privilege in a racist world—is always looking at himself or herself through another's eyes.

Despite their origins in social activism and concern for women and families, the field of feminism and that of family studies have taken different directions, as if they are operating in opposing universes (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Family studies remained fairly mainstream (i.e., White, heteronormative) despite serious challenges from racial-ethnic groups about cultural deficit perspectives prevalent in the literature (Allen, 1978; Peters, 1974). At the same time, an earlier examination of family in feminist studies (Thorne, 1982) was eclipsed by newer feminist work in the areas of paid labor, sexuality, media, and the body, among others. For example, the comprehensive *Handbook of Feminist Research* (Hesse-Biber, 2007a) contains only one entry related to family (“family violence and the women's movement”) in the index. It is taking deliberate effort by scholars at the intersection of feminism and family studies to demonstrate how critical families are for feminist analysis and how critical feminism is for family analysis. As interactional and institutional locations, families are key structures in which oppression and privilege are systematically experienced and reproduced; likewise, families are a key location for developing empowering