



FEMINISM AND FAMILY STUDIES SECTION NEWSLETTER  
NATIONAL COUNCIL ON FAMILY RELATIONS  
Katherine Allen, Editor  
Number 1 January 1990

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FROM THE NEWLETTER EDITOR. . . . . Katherine Allen

In this issue, we have included Colleen I. Murray's excellent discussant comments from the FFSS paper session "Family Stress and Use of Violence: A Micro Look" at the 1989 NCFR Annual Meeting. Over 100 people attended this session, and it was apparent to many that the paper presentations, Colleen's comments, and group discussion that followed comprised a very exciting session, reflective of the overall quality of sessions offered by the Feminism and Family Studies Section. Colleen's comments are reprinted here as an example of an integrative, feminist critique that contributes to the ongoing process of knowledge construction among feminist family scholars and practitioners.

In the April 1990 issue of the newsletter, we want to print ALL FFSS paper session discussant comments and one page recorder summaries from the 1989 NCFR Annual Meeting. Section Chair Karen Polonko has received recorder summaries from only two members so far. Thus, RECORDERS AND DISCUSSANTS, we urge you to send your reports to Karen, with a copy to Katherine for the April newsletter: Karen Polonko, Sociology, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA 23529. Katherine Allen, Family & Child Development, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061-0416 (703-231-6526).

This year, the newsletter will be published four times (January, April, July, and October). Please send your materials to me by the 15th of the previous month for each issue: March 15, June 15, and September 15. Several articles in the present issue invite dialogue, and we welcome your ideas. Many thanks to the contributors for the January issue.

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FROM THE SECTION CHAIR. . . . . Karen Polonko

Just some quick reminders: If you have ideas on session themes and/or participants, please get them to me quickly. Also, for those who volunteered to review abstracts last April for the 1990 meeting, I should receive all of the abstracts by February 14. I will take 4-5 days to coordinate them with reviewer interest and send them out. As usual, reviewers will only have two weeks turn around time so that I can coordinate the 150-200 reviews and get a program together.

As you may have noticed in our President's report, NCFR is working through a major assessment of its roles in 1990. I know that for me, when professionals think of NCFR, I would like them to think of cutting edge feminist scholarship on families in research, theory, therapy, and practice. Please write to NCFR President Jan Hogan and others on the committee to ensure that your voice is heard with respect to the role of feminism and families in the future of NCFR. You could also take a moment to jot down your response to FFSS sessions at the Annual Meeting. Written comments do make a difference. I will be calling on many of you once again for your labor on this year's program. Thank you in advance.

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DISCUSSANT COMMENTS. . "Family Stress and Use of Violence: A Micro Look" 1989 NCFR Annual Meeting. . . . . Colleen Murray, University of Nevada

I appreciate the opportunity to discuss these papers on stress and family violence, and will direct my comments in line with the creed for feminist research proposed by Acker, Barry, and Esseveld (1983). That is, feminist research should generate emancipatory knowledge, use methodology that is nonoppressive, and sustain a critical stance toward prevailing approaches as well as our own approaches.

All of the papers seem to address two feminist issues. One is the relationship of previous experience (in particular, one's interpretation of previous experience) and response to current life situations. Differential socialization experiences influence so much of what was reported. For example, unless one wishes to open the can of worms related to a sociobiological perspective, we can assume that the women in Julien and Markman's study responded to discussions of personal problems and concerns based on techniques they had learned earlier in relationships--ways of responding that society has influenced in keeping with the power differentials that pervade it. Forest, Moen, and Dempster-McClain also suggest that previous experience moderates response, whether via coping strategies, integration of models or defining stressors in one's life as "normal".

A second commonality of the papers is that all are related to women's lack of empowerment in society. The authors look at women's strategies to gain power or their attempts to create a balance of power in relationships. Gryl and Bird discuss ultimate effort strategies and indirect methods by women in violent dating relationships. Emery, Lloyd, and Castleton state that one reason women hit is to regain control, or they hit out of anger and frustration, perhaps emotions that evolve in response to feeling ineffectual or constrained. For the women in Forest's study we may speculate that rather than stressor experience alone, having a sense of control and some perceived power may contribute to a greater potential for resiliency.

These papers reinforce the belief that the personal is political, that the personal experience and problems of women are shaped by the social, political, and economic systems of society. The problems and frustrations of the women the authors are addressing exist in part because society is organized around gender in particular ways.

The papers raise questions that go beneath the surface level and, as feminist work demands, address findings within their context. What is there about the experience of college age women that enables them to report that their relationships improved as a result of violence? Does the power that results from going off to college and increasing one's knowledge base upset the balance of a relationship and result in the use of violence by partners to restore the earlier power structure? Do college women in violent relationships actually use more direct negotiation than women in violent marital relationships or are these perceptions alone? And, if so, what contextual factors are in effect here? Does the relationship satisfaction develop in response to good communication skills; do skills develop in an environment which promotes other factors related to satisfaction; or is there a spiraling effect? What is it about the environments in childhood in interaction with

stressor events, individual characteristics and societal factors that buffer depressive vulnerability associated with stressor events in adulthood? Understanding contextual factors can fill in many gaps related to understanding the experiences of women.

Where I see much potential for these papers is in incorporating a stronger feminist approach to methodology. First, in terms of samples. We often rely on samples of convenience. Unfortunately, this limits the generalizability of our findings to middle class white women. Are we reinforcing the very approaches that we want to go beyond? Are the styles of interaction, communication, and coping that we find in our work relevant to the life experiences of Black, Asian, and Hispanic American women? Are we reinforcing a class system through our research?

We repeatedly hear that a strength of women is their connectedness. As feminist scholars, I would call us to use that connectedness in our research; to work together in broader studies to employ samples that can address the needs of a variety of women in the U.S. and across cultures.

The second area of feminist research that can be strengthened lies in methodology. Emery et al. came closest to this. Feminist methods start with women's own words. Linda Thompson (1987) said feminist methodology sees its subjects as active participants who can reflect on their own experiences and on the scientist's interpretation of their experience. Feminist methodology combines objective and subjective elements to arrive at what Allen and Walker (1989) call "an informed subjectivity".

Also related to methodology is Patricia Thompson's (1989) point that research on sex and gender is not the same thing as a feminist theory. Carol Gilligan (1982) says there are qualitative differences in women's and men's experiences. We should not force gender as a variable into our equations. Can we gain more from results of multivariate strategies that tell us "men do more of X than women" and "women do Y more often than men" or can we gain more from running separate analyses for women and men? I would suggest that we get a clearer understanding of women's lives from conducting separate analyses unless we are actually using family level data. In doing so, we are better able to isolate and define aspects of women's experience that are potential sources of strength and power for women.

Since feminist work seeks to enable a better understanding of women's experiences, we need research which attempts to explain rather than predict. Much of the data presented today is better suited for explanation than prediction. Sample size and subject areas addressed both scream out for the use of qualitative methods. Why then do we continue to rely on forcing data into quantitative methods of analysis? Qualitative methods would lessen the problems of experiment-wise error and strengthen the base of knowledge upon which we draw. Are we also caught up in the belief that multivariate quantitative methods are more legitimate or high powered science? If so, we are not truly doing feminist research but promoting an androcentric based approach.

It is clear from these papers that women and families do not naturally exist in separation from other societal structures and processes--the public/private spheres dichotomy may actually create differences between men and women. The authors could draw upon their work to aid in emancipating women by attempting to clarify the interrelationship of

micro (individual and family) and macro (societal) perspectives. Drawing on radical/critical theory (Osmond, 1987) may be useful.

I would also challenge the authors to ask themselves "in what way can my work promote radical change and emancipation of women rather than regulation of the current picture?" For example, how can we change the picture in which Gryl and Bird found 34% of subjects had experienced violence in serious dating relationships? When we can explain women's experiences related to stress and violence suggestions for practitioners and policy makers are appropriate. We want to be sure that those suggestions do not present a white middle class model of success, but one/or ones that can be useful to women in varied situations. For example, Forest's explanation of the role of childhood experience with stressors in buffering adult depression related to current stressors may only exist in an environment with a moderate number of stressor events (either in childhood or adulthood) or where there are sufficient resources available. Another example is Julien's work on the association of wives' and husbands' outcomes which dealt with the handling of an individual's problems--can it be translated to experiences in which a couple shares a stressor? One potential misuse of her work would be to reinforce the unrealistic expectation in our culture that when a couple shares a stressor (such as the death of a child) one's partner can be expected to be the support for the other. They generally cannot--its like expecting two empty glasses to fill each other.

Women in general are denied equal access to things valued in society so their range of options is narrower than men's. How does the knowledge generated here today free women from these oppressive conditions and enhance their lives? Can we improve the experiences of women by focusing on the micro level alone? Maybe not. But it does allow us the opportunity to fill in gaps in our knowledge about women. This may be a necessary step to macro level change. I was pleased to see that feminist theory and methods are being strengthened each year in papers presented at NCFR and look forward to additional and bolder movement.

#### References:

- Acker, J., Barry, K., & Esseveld, J. (1983). Objectivity and truth: Problems in doing feminist research. Women's Studies International Forum, 6, 423-435.
- Allen, K. R., & Walker, A. J. (1989). Caregiving as attentive love: An application of Ruddick's feminist philosophy. Paper presented at the Theory Construction and Research Methodology Workshop, NCFR, New Orleans.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). In a different voice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Osmond, M. W. (1987). Radical-critical theories. In M. B. Sussman & S. K. Steinmetz (Eds.), Handbook of marriage and the family. New York: Plenum.
- Thompson, L. (1987). Objectivity and subjectivity in feminist and family science. Paper presented at the Theory Construction and Research Methodology Workshop, NCFR, Atlanta.
- Thompson, P. J. (1989). The public, the personal, and the patriarchal: The potential of Hegelian theory for family study. Paper presented at the Theory Construction and Research Methodology Workshop, New Orleans.

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BOOK REVIEW. . . . Reviewed by Carol Hope, Therapist in Private Practice

Lesbian Ethics: Toward New Value By Sarah Lucia Hoagland (1988)  
Publisher: Institute of Lesbian Studies, Box 60242, Palo Alto, CA 94306

The principles of traditional ethics govern behavior in hierarchical systems. Traditional ethics are based on obedience to authority, which necessitates a numbing of self, a disregarding of our own needs and/or the needs of others. Operating within traditional ethics strengthens the system we as feminists desire to dethrone. In contrast, Hoagland offers principles of Lesbian Ethics based on awareness, integrity, and choice.

Lesbian Ethics describes a process of detaching from the patriarchal framework that oppresses women. When we remain focused on changing this system, we stimulate and vitalize the system. When we are committed to changing men's minds, we place more value on men than on women. Our success remains in the hands of men. When we withdraw our energy from this ideological tug-of-war, we have energy to create a woman-valuing system.

In this refocusing, self-understanding is the prerequisite for choice, for integrity, for intimacy, and for revolution. The patriarchal system promotes a sense of scarcity and competitiveness. We are taught to believe in win/lose, that is, if my needs are met, yours will be denied or vice versa. Within this system, women are trained to value self-sacrifice. Self-sacrifice involves the loss of a sense of self, while egocentrism involves the loss of a sense of other. Both self-sacrifice and egocentrism distort relationships and create an adversarial process. Hoagland calls for a consciousness of both self and other. With heightened awareness, we create a process in which the feelings and needs of each individual are acknowledged and valued. Understanding ourselves, we make considered choices about projects and individuals to whom we give time and energy.

As we claim our power-within, we can remain choiceful even in situations which we cannot control. Hoagland develops the notions of moral agency under oppression and resisting demoralization. The patriarchal system often holds women responsible for that which they cannot control. Women are left with a sense of powerlessness and failure. Hoagland calls us to act in morally responsible ways without taking responsibility for situations we did not create and outcomes we cannot control. Hoagland also describes the process of "attending," a way of focusing energy and being present to another without seeking control. Rather than creating a hierarchical system in which one person is "helped" and the other person is the "helper", attending empowers both people.

As we accept the premise that our choices reflect our values and create them in a circular process, we are called to examine the premises on which we make our choices and to acknowledge the many ways in which we maintain the patriarchal system. This book offers a path to a refined awareness of self, an enriched possibility in relationship, and a transformed world.

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AN AGENDA. . . . . Kay B. Forest

Still riding high on the energy of the annual conference, I am writing to encourage a continuing dialogue within the Feminism and Family Studies Section. During the days of meetings, presentation, and discussion, I observed three particular areas of tension that I believe deserve further treatment. None is new to a feminist discourse; I raise them as issues here because each came to the surface within some concrete context of the conference, and it is my hope that this newsletter can provide a forum to keep the debates, questions, and flow of considerations alive until we meet again next November:

1. Qualitative versus Quantitative: What is feminist research? What are the strengths and tools of the traditional male academy that we can reappropriate rather than throwing the baby out with the bath water? Is there a place for number crunching within a feminist analysis, or does doing qualitative research become a litmus test for political correctness?
2. Feminism and Heterogeneity: The question was raised in one business meeting, "Is my work feminist?" It is important not to assume that we all share one cohesive understanding of feminist principles, but that we draw on the varied experiences of our lives to shape our analyses. Moreover, we are coming to feminism at different times in our lives. Precisely because of our diversity--as married women, single mothers, lesbians, never-married heterosexuals, and so on--we need to expand our analyses to understand the multiple ways that gender is constructed in our society, yet it is not enough to say that research about women is by necessity "feminist".
3. Class, Race/Ethnicity, and Sexual Orientation: Although these areas of focus are currently possibilities within the agenda of the Feminism and Family Studies Section, we need to more actively expand our scope to include the impact of economic and educational statuses, racial and ethnic diversity, and the varying sexual orientations of women's lives. Too frequently, the mainstream academy sorts out those who are not doing the research or teaching that reflects white, middle class, heterosexual experiences; we can provide a buffer to that process of exclusion. At the same time, there is a parallel danger in assuming that we can rank oppressions to focus only on those who have suffered most in our society. How can we establish a responsible research and teaching agenda that does not lose its rigor in an attempt to being inclusive?

I offer these as suggestions for dialogue within the newsletter. This list is, however, by no means exhaustive. Over to you. Kay B. Forest, November 1989, New Orleans.

Editor's Note: Congratulations to Kay B. Forest, FFSS Student/New Professional Representative and Doctoral Candidate in Human Development and Family Studies at Cornell University, on accepting a position as Assistant Professor of Sociology in Sex and Gender at Northern Illinois University. Kay's appointment begins August 1990.

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 PROGRESS REPORT ON AWARDS COMMITTEE. . . . . Polly Fassinger

The Feminism and Family Studies Section Awards Committee for 1989-90 has announced that two awards will be made at the November 1990 NCFR Meeting: the first annual "Outstanding Proposal from a Feminist Perspective Award" and the first annual "Outstanding Contribution to Feminist Scholarship Paper". See enclosed flyer for more information. The deadlines for the two awards are April 30, 1990. Award Committee members will be reading and evaluating the papers and proposals. Members include Alexis Walker, Marie Osmond, Maureen Perry-Jenkins, and Polly Fassinger. The Awards Committee would like each of you to encourage your feminist colleagues to apply for these two awards. Since this is the first year for both awards, it is important that section members spread the word about this opportunity.

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 UPDATE ON FEMINIST TEACHING MATERIALS COMMITTEE. . . . . Donna Sollie

The Feminist Teaching Committee is seeking materials from family studies courses that are taught from a feminist perspective. These materials, (syllabi, class projects, bibliographies), will be included in a teaching materials packet that will be available for purchase by NCFR members by Fall 1990. Therefore, your materials are due immediately. Please include course materials that address topics such as family diversity, gender roles and the impact on individuals and families, inequality in families and society, and age, class, gender, and race issues. If you have taught a course or a portion of a course from a feminist perspective, please send the course materials to Donna Sollie, Family & Child Development, 203 Spidle Hall, Auburn University, Auburn, AL 36849-5604 (205-844-3230). Other committee members are Dorothy Call Balancio, Margaret Crosbie-Burnett, Carla Howery, Linda Thompson, and Anisa Zvonkovic.

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 CALL FOR PAPERS. . . . . Margaret Crosbie-Burnett and Katherine Allen

Family Relations will feature a special collection of papers on "Innovative Ways and Controversial Issues in Teaching About Families". The collection will include articles on new methodology in teaching about families in early childhood programs, elementary school, high school, undergraduate and graduate education, adult and community education, and articles that address the uniqueness of family studies pedagogy and the challenge of teaching about families. The collection might include issues like teaching small versus large classes, teaching across disciplines or from a multidisciplinary or multicultural perspective, feminist pedagogy, family life education in diverse settings, or the challenge of teaching about families as part of a liberal education curriculum or in a department where family courses are not taught traditionally. Manuscripts should be grounded in literature; preference will be given to papers demonstrating empirical support. Manuscripts should be no longer than 20 pages, double-spaced, and follow APA style. Manuscripts will be reviewed anonymously, and must be postmarked by March 1, 1991. Send to: Margaret Crosbie-Burnett, Counseling Psychology, 1000 Bascom Mall, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706 (608-262-0461), or Katherine Allen, Family & Child Development, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061-0416 (703-231-6526).

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 REPORT FROM THE MENTORING COMMITTEE. . . . . Alexis Walker

The FFSS Mentoring Program helps students and new professionals negotiate the early years of an academic position. Senior members will be paired with students/new professionals for a one-year period. Together, the mentor and student/new professional will revise a manuscript for publication, revise a research proposal, or other related activity. Mentoring Committee members include Pauline Boss, Linda Haas, Vicki Loyer-Carlson, Peggy Quinn, Suzanna Smith, and Catherine Surra. Section members interested in serving as mentors or those who wish to be paired with a mentor should contact committee chair Alexis Walker, Human Development & Family Sciences, Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR 97331 (503-737-4765).

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 ANNOUNCEMENTS . . . . . Katherine Allen

If you receive the newsletter before February 1, please send your abstracts for the 1990 Annual Meeting to Section Chair Karen Polonko.

Karen Polonko presented the 1990 FFSS proposed plan of action at our November 1989 Annual Business Meeting. The major activities of the section are to assemble a FFSS program for the 1990 NCFR Annual Meeting and recruit with other sections a distinguished lecturer, in addition to our on-going committee work (Mentoring, Awards, Teaching, Endowment, Hospitality). New concerns are to ask each member to recruit at least one new member to the section, focus on fundraising, and continue to integrate feminist scholarship into the study of families.

Endowment Committee Chair Rosemary Blieszner also discussed fundraising plans at the business meeting. Approximately \$550 was collected from members for the FFSS Endowment Fund. Contact Rosemary (Family & Child Development, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061-0416) with your ideas and suggestions about our goal of endowing the new awards program.

Peggy Quinn is coordinating the list of outstanding works in feminist scholarship. She is now collecting illustrative works in feminist theory and methodology. Send suggestions to Peggy: Social Work Program, Niagara University, Niagara University, NY 14109 (716-285-1212 ext 576).

Suggested Reading for a comprehensive and challenging review and analysis of the research on gender: Linda Thompson and Alexis Walker, "Gender in Families: Women and Men in Marriage, Work, and Parenthood," Journal of Marriage and the Family, 51, 845-871.

Katherine Allen is teaching a summer course for the Women's Studies Program at Virginia Tech, "Feminist Research Methods: Applications in Family Studies". Call or write to her if you would like a copy of the syllabus, or if you have suggestions for additional readings to include.

Special thanks to the Department of Family and Child Development, Virginia Tech, for supporting the cost of this newsletter.

The information and articles in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints of the National Council on Family Relations.

# OUTSTANDING RESEARCH PROPOSAL FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE AWARD



The Feminism and Family Studies Section is seeking applicants for our first annual "Outstanding Research Proposal from a Feminist Perspective Award." Graduate students and new professionals (with up to five years post-doctoral work) are encouraged to apply for this \$500 award. Proposals will be evaluated for their potential contribution to feminist scholarship and use of feminist frameworks and methods. Applications should include: a) an abstract of 100 words or less, b) a five page (maximum) proposal outlining the project's theoretical foundation, research methods, and potential contribution to feminist scholarship, and c) a half-page budget. Please send five copies by April 30, 1990 to: Dr. Polly Fassinger, Awards Committee Chair, Department of Sociology, Concordia College, Moorhead, MN 56560 (218-299-3549). The Award will be presented at the 1990 NCFR meeting. A summary of the recipient's research results will be published in the Feminism and Family Studies Newsletter.

# OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO FEMINIST SCHOLARSHIP PAPER AWARD



The Feminism and Family Studies Section is seeking applicants for our first annual "Outstanding Contribution to Feminist Scholarship Paper Award." Applications for this non-monetary award are open to all graduate students and new professionals (with up to five years post-doctoral work). Papers should demonstrate contribution to feminist scholarship and use of feminist frameworks and methods. Applicants should be sole author or first author of the published or unpublished paper. To apply, please submit five copies of your paper by April 30, 1990 to: Dr. Polly Fassinger, Awards Committee Chair, Department of Sociology, Concordia College, Moorhead, MN 56560 (218-299-3549). The Award will be presented at the 1990 NCFR meeting. A summary of the paper will be published in the Feminism and Family Studies Newsletter.