



Failure is impossible.  
- Susan B. Anthony

# Feminism and Family Studies Section Newsletter

Number 1

National Council on Family Relations

October 1992

## From the Chair...

The annual conference in Orlando is almost here. The section will be sponsoring two invited symposia, two submitted symposia, three paper sessions, four roundtables, and 22 posters. Each proposal submitted to the section was evaluated by three reviewers and the chair. Approximately 40 section members volunteered to serve as reviewers. Thanks to all of you. A standard set of criteria provided by NCFR was used to evaluate proposals. In addition, the FFS section used a criterion pertaining to feminist orientation/contribution. Feedback from reviewers was provided to authors.

I encourage all FFS members to attend the conference, even if you are not making a presentation. The plenary sessions look great--Arlie Hochschild, Sheila Kammerman, and Joe Pleck. FFS is working with several other sections (e.g., Research and Theory, Religion, and Policy) to co-sponsor sessions. Incidentally, the program planning staff has built time into the program schedule to allow conference attendees to see the sights at Disney World/Epcot/ MGM/ Universal/Seaworld, etc., so you might want to include these in your travel plans. Speaking as a resident of Florida, I encourage you to come to Orlando and spend lots of money. Our state budget needs it!

Good news to section members who were disappointed that our business meeting was too short to permit informal interaction (a.k.a. "schmoozing"). NCFR has extended section business meetings by one-half hour. Our 1992 meeting is scheduled for Saturday evening from 7:15 to 8:45 pm in Salon 13. There will be a social hour following the formal business meeting. Thanks to Vicki Loyer-Carlson and Bob Milardo for acting as "chairs" of this social event.

The section's Executive Committee (composed of current section officers, past-chairs, and current committee members) met several times during the 1991 conference to "brain storm". One of our major concerns was how to make the section friendlier (for lack of a better adjective). Many of us confessed that in our early days of attending NCFR meetings, we sometimes felt like "outsiders" and ate many a solitary meal in our hotel rooms. For many of us, those days aren't that far in our past. To prevent this from happening in the future, we've decided to try some practices that might facilitate more informal get-togethers. One idea was to experiment with "meal groups". Watch for more information about this. Hopefully, no one will have to eat alone again.

Another ideal that we will try out at this year's business meeting is to introduce each person in attendance. We considered doing that last year, but were prohibited from doing so by the short amount of time allocated to the meeting. If you have other ideas for

increasing the involvement of all members at our business meeting, please contact me.

Finally--our congratulations go to the recipients of the 1991 section awards. Polly Fassinger received the award for Outstanding Paper and Karen Blaisure received the Outstanding Proposal award. All 1992 section awards will be made at this year's conference during a special awards ceremony on Monday, November 9 at 3:30 pm. A reception will follow this session. I encourage all section members to attend this awards presentation.

Let me hear from you about your needs from the section.

Connie Sheehan, Chair  
Department of Sociology  
University of Florida Gainesville, FL 32611  
(904) 392-6777, 378-1262



## FFSS Conference Highlights

### Saturday, November 7

9:45 - 11 am	<b>Opening Plenary:</b> Sheila Kammerman
12:15 - 2 pm	<b>Symposium:</b> Grounded Theory Methodology
2:15 - 4 pm	<b>Paper Session 126:</b> Farm Women and Families
7:15 - 8:45	<b>FFSS Business Meeting</b>

### Sunday, November 8

9 - 10:15 am	<b>Plenary Session:</b> Arlie Hochschild
10 - 11:15 am	<b>Plenary Session:</b> Joe Pleck

### Monday, November 9

12:30 - 2:15 pm	<b>Symposium:</b> Feminist Perspectives on Interpersonal Relationships
2:30 - 3:30	<b>NCFR Presidential Address</b>
3:30 - 4:45	<b>Award Ceremony</b>
4:45 - 6:15	<b>Paper Session:</b> Division of Family Labor

### Tuesday, November 10

8:30 - 9:45 am	<b>Paper Session:</b> Gender Role Attitudes
11:45 - 1 pm	<b>Symposium:</b> Midlife Women: Work and Families
1:15 - 3 pm	<b>Symposium:</b> Race, Class, and Gender

### Social Event

The FSSS social is going to be great fun! We'll start immediately after the section meeting in a nearby suite. There will be an opportunity to talk and enjoy wonderful refreshments. Members of FFSS and Family Action will be attending this event. Then, for all of you who are just getting going at 9:30 or 10:00, we have Milardo Picks...that is, you'll all have an opportunity to go out and continue having fun at the establishment Bob Milardo determines best fits our unique needs! Anyone with great ideas for the after-social party place is encouraged to make suggestions to Bob.

Vicki Loyer-Carlson  
Student/New Professional Rep

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### Feminism and Family Studies Section Awards

This year, the Feminism and Family Studies Section will give one award, The Outstanding Research Proposal from a Feminist Perspective. The award will be announced and presented at the NCFR Awards Ceremony and Reception on Monday, November 9 from 3:30 to 4:45 pm in Ballroom C/D of the conference hotel. Please plan to join us in congratulating our award recipient. Serving on the 1992 Awards Committee were Katherine Allen (Chair), Connie Shehan (ex-officio), Karen Blaisure, Beth Emery, Polly Fassinger, Vicki Loyer-Carlson, and Dena Targ.

The Awards Committee is making plans for 1993. Katherine Allen will serve as committee chair. We are still in the beginning phases of offering the section awards, and have learned that we will need to increase

our publicity about the award process. We encourage all section members to get the word out about the awards and to consider submitting their own work or to encourage students to submit. We plan to offer both awards in 1993: The Outstanding Research Proposal from a Feminist Perspective Award (a \$500 cash award to fund feminist research) and the Outstanding Contribution to Feminist Scholarship Paper Award (complimentary books offered by Westview Press). The tentative deadline for receipt of proposals and papers is June 15, 1993. Look for on-going announcements about these awards.

For more information or to join the Award Committee, contact:

Katherine Allen  
Family and Child Development,  
Virginia Tech  
Blacksburg, VA 24062-0416,  
Telephone: 703-231-6526.

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### Teaching Materials

The packet of teaching materials compiled by Donna Sollie and her committee will be available at the conference. The approximate price of the packet is \$7.50. Be sure to pick up your packet in Orlando. For more information, contact Donna at 205-844-3230.

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### 1993 TC&RM Pre-Preconference Workshop

Please consider writing a 1000 word abstract to submit to the Theory Construction and Research Methods Pre-Conference Workshop for March of 1993. The Pre-Conference is a great place to try out some new, and often controversial, ideas and receive thoughtful feedback from your colleagues. Works in progress are sought; your work should not be a finished product. This is a forum in which to try out new ideas. The point of the workshop is to use the participants to help develop your theoretical or methodological contribution.

The Pre-conference attendees are a small group of individuals committed to advancing theory and methods in our field. New scholars and new ideas are always welcome. For more information or to be placed on the mailing list for the "Call for Proposals" for 1993, write, call, or FAX:

Margaret Crosbie-Burnett  
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P.O. Box 248065  
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### NCFR Feminism and Family Studies Section

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Connie Shehan         | Chair                                   |
| Katherine Allen       | Vice-Chair                              |
| Polly Fassinger       | Secretary-Treasurer                     |
| Kristine Baber        | Newsletter Editor                       |
| Vicki Loyer-Carlson   | Student/New Professional Representative |
| Maureen Perry-Jenkins | Student/New Professional Representative |
| Rosemary Bliczner     | Endowment Committee Chair               |
| Leigh Leslie          | Mentoring Committee Chair               |
| Donna Sollie          | Teaching Committee Chair                |

## Minutes of the NCFR Feminism and Family Studies Section

November 18, 1991  
Radisson Hotel, Denver, Colorado  
43 persons in attendance

1. Connie Shehan called the meeting to order. The minutes of last year's meeting were read by Polly Fassinger and were approved.
2. The treasurer's report indicates that the section has a balance of \$3,337.80. The Jessie Bernard Endowment Fund has a current balance of \$9,117.13.
3. **Awards Committee report.** Connie Shehan reported that the proposal Award will be given to Polly Fassinger. They will be presented on Wednesday at the session on feminist pedagogy sponsored by the Feminism and Family Studies (FFS) section. The deadlines for next year's award are June 1 for proposals and July 1 for papers. People who served on the committee this year included Steven Marks, Maureen Perry-Jenkins, Elizabeth Bergen, Brenda Seery, and Suzanna Smith.
4. **Endowment Committee report.** Rosemary Blieszner encouraged all of us to make contributions to the fund at this meeting. Rosemary requested donations from publishers. Westview Press has agreed to donate \$250 in books each year. This donation will be given to the recipient of the Paper Award from FFS section. A certificate of appreciation was given to Rosemary by Connie Shehan to acknowledge our thanks for her extensive work on the endowment.
5. **Mentoring Committee.** Katherine Allen reported for Leigh Leslie, who was unable to attend this meeting. Only four people responded to the original call for mentors. A sign-up list was sent around the room at this section meeting for interested persons. Two matches have been made thus far. It is possible to contract for whatever you wish to do with a student.
6. **Newsletter.** Kristine Baber asked for submissions for the newsletter from all of us. Send in people's accomplishments, persons stories, discussions of teaching issues, etc. Kristine would like to publish three newsletters each year; four would be great, too.
7. **Student/New Professionals.** Vicki Loyer-Carlson and Maureen Perry-Jenkins stated that they would like to get more graduate students active in the NCFR and our section. It would be nice if people could get better acquainted with new professionals, too. Please encourage students/new professionals to submit proposals/papers for the Paper Award and the Proposal Award.
8. **Teaching Committee.** Donna Sollie distributed a prototype of the publication that our section will sell on "teaching family classes from a feminist perspective." She would like to see the proceeds from this publication go to the endowment fund. Submissions are still being accepted for this publication. Exercises, small pieces, bibliographic materials could be included. After the publication is completed, it will need to receive approval from the NCFR publications committee. Donna thanked Linda Thompson, Carla Howery, Margaret Crosbie-Burnett, and Pamela Lerna for their work on this project.
9. **Chair's report.** Connie Shehan said that there has been very positive response to the 1991 program thus far, thanks to Alexis Walker. The symposium on the economic consequences of divorce (sponsored by FFS section) went well this afternoon. In fact, the session ran over its allotted time, due to interest from those in attendance. There are 20 poster presentations from our section, another symposium on single parent families, and an invited symposium on feminist pedagogy. We need to get submissions up; they were down again this year. Each proposal was blind-reviewed. Connie thanked persons who read proposals this year. Connie requested volunteers for reviewing proposals for this year and sent around a sheet for sign-up. The deadline is mid-February; quick turnaround is requested. There were 21 submissions for our section this year. Submissions were down across all sections.

The NCFR Board would like each section to make an effort to help integrate minorities into sections next year. According to the membership survey from

1991, our section is 97% white. We could invite minority speakers to present papers or speak at the meeting. Please send suggested names to Connie Shehan.

Linda Walters is asking section chairs for feedback on the membership survey. Connie summarized the main findings, which included the finding that:

- 206 members of NCFR responded
- the average age = 43
- 84% female respondents
- 4% student respondents
- 25% dissatisfied with the direction of NCFR
- 27% felt the board didn't represent their needs and interests
- 45% have belonged to NCFR for 10+ years

Karen Polonko indicated that "NCFR" is equivalent to "FFS section" for many of us. We would not belong to NCFR without this section. A number of voices in the room indicated agreement with Karen. Others in the room said that the survey did not give people a chance to indicate both satisfactions and a desire to change the organization. For example, one person stated she was uncomfortable with a) NCFR's move toward concern with numbers, marketing, and the image of the organization vs. a concern for serving the needs of professionals and b) NCFR's desire to move dates for submission up, shorten review, yet require very early payment for registration.

Another suggestion was that NCFR could do a better job of informing new members about how to get involved, participate in sections, and hold office. The trend toward having serious scholars in plenary sessions is felt to be a good move.

10. **Other announcements or concerns.** The Radisson Hotel has pornographic movies running the televisions in rooms. One member stated that we should complain to the management. We could be more political. It was suggested that FFS could draft a policy statement, which could be voted on by the section, and given to the NCFR VP for Public Policy.

Margaret Crosbie-Burnett asked members to submit ideas to the preconference workshop for next year.

Submitted by,  
Polly Fassinger  
Secretary/Treasurer

## Feminists and Marriage: A Qualitative Analysis

Karen Blaisure

*(I would like to thank the Feminism and Family Section members for the award, "Outstanding Research Proposal from a Feminist Perspective." The reviewers' comments were encouraging and constructive. I am delighted to be part of a group of scholars dedicated to using scholarship for women. The following is a brief overview of my research/dissertation proposal.)*

Feminist critiques of the past two decades have demonstrated the problematic nature of marital and family life for women (Glenn, 1987). The oppressive conditions of traditional marriage are well known to family scholars who are familiar with feminist critiques of the family (Bernard, 1982; Ferree, 1990; Glenn, 1987; Thompson & Walker, 1989). However, while feminist critiques of marriage are numerous, there exists few feminist research studies of

marriage (see Acker et al., 1981). What is not addressed in the literature is the experience of feminists, females and males, who choose heterosexual marriage as their primary relationship. What is not known is the extent to which such feminists are transforming marriage into a relationship that values both spouses, within a societal context that offers little assistance. This study thus begins to address the continued viability of heterosexuality for feminists (Stacey, 1986), specifically in the form of marriage.

This study applies the call to action to study feminist family program practitioners (Walker, Martin, & Thompson, 1988) to the study of feminists in marriage. This study focuses on how feminists are struggling with translating their values into practice [of marriage]. We need literature in all its complexity and contradictory detail on developing and implementing feminist [marriage]. We need to hear about their everyday personal experience in trying to apply feminist principles to [marriage]-- how they work within a system; how they experience double vision/consciousness as feminists [who are married] (p. 21).

In order to create relationships in which women are valued and equal, researchers need to listen to feminists who are making changes. Women are not "passive targets of oppression" but are actively struggling for equality in marriage (Glenn, 1987, p. 367). Treating women as agents of change translates into listening to their stories of continued relationships with men and listening to men who agree with the goals of feminism. To this end, I chose to interview feminists, female and male, married to one another for at least five years.

The research questions guiding the interviews are: how do couples describe the impact of their feminist beliefs on their marriages; to what extent do couples talk about having a double consciousness of marriage; how do couples describe and interpret equality/inequality in their marriages; and how does gender organize the couples' marriages and lives?

Participants for the study had to meet the following criteria. Both spouses were feminists prior to marriage (i.e., they used the term, "feminist," to describe themselves, they are aware that women are devalued in society in various ways, and they are consciously trying to create equality in their relationships) and continue to call themselves feminists. They have been married for at least 5 years and are willing to be interviewed at least twice for up to 2 hours per session. Couples first are interviewed jointly and then each partner is interviewed individually.

Four ads were placed in N.O.W. newsletters and regional newspapers. Out of 23 respondents and referrals, nine couples met the criteria and have been interviewed. Initial observations made in researcher memos include: the strong conviction of feminists beliefs and commitment to spouse and her/his well-being; the sense of isolation experienced by

most of the couples in regards to knowing other couples like themselves (perhaps due to the larger context of living in a highly conservative area of the country); and inequalities experienced outside of the relationship are considered more as annoyances than obstacles to creating a marriage based on equality.

I hope to interview at least one more couple before completing the analysis. Talking with these couples as well as those who did not fit the stated criteria (e.g., were married less than 5 years, did not use the term feminist prior to marriage) has given me hope that heterosexual marriage is more flexible in terms of change than the label "institution" perhaps suggests or than some of the feminist analyses theoretically acknowledge.

#### References

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## The Witch Process of 1991

I thought witch-processes belonged to ancient times, but I was surprised to learn we have some today. When Kristine Baber asked me to write something for the newsletter, I decided to write about a witch process. It would be interesting to know if others have had similar experiences lately.

Let me start with some information about the context. In Norway, we have three Women's Research Centers--Oslo, Bergen, and Trondheim. The centers differ to some extent; two are interdisciplinary while the one in Bergen is in humanities.

(continued on p. 5)



Feminism and equity have been popular topics in Norway, as well as in other Scandinavian countries the last few years. This wave has given us several laws and regulations in order to prevent discrimination.

More than 40% of those in government are women. A quota rule was introduced by the Labour Party not only for the government, but also for the Parliament and other lower level organizations. Most of the other parties followed Labour even though they have not reached the goal to the same extent.

We have an ombudsman for equality (of course a woman). We have quotas at the universities for full professors (which is a position that one applies for). Until recently, there was only one professor in a department. Now this has changed. A number of women do get appointed every year to make up for previous injustices. Even with this system, the number of female full professors is not very impressive. Elisabeth Furst has shown in a study about women in academe that the choice among candidates is made at a much earlier stage than the official selection.

The list of actions that have been taken is rather long. The general idea has been to make complete equity between genders with the goal of a gender neutral society. However, the laws and the regulations do not affect the deep structures of society where gender inequities are created and recreated over and over again.

Now back to the Center for Women's Research in Oslo. The center was the first one and had a four-year trial period. After this period, an evaluation committee was established. (Evaluation committees are very popular now to determine if an institution is useful or not.) In this case, a high level committee of men and women was established. They spent 3/4 of a year researching all activities of the Center. Seminars were evaluated; participants were contacted. Research projects were examined. You name it, they went through it all. Their final report was very positive. They suggested some changes, but overall the evaluation was very positive. They said the Center had done an extraordinary job and suggested that it become permanent.

Women all over Norway celebrated and, of course, were very relieved. It also gave us the feeling that it is possible to be accepted if you just work hard. But we were selling the fur before the bear was shot. The University did not support the committee's work. It disapproved and recommended discontinuation of the Center.

Women from all around the world started sending support letters. An MP raised the issue in Parliament. The newspapers wrote about it all. The entire situation was rather strange. The evaluation was positive and still was not good enough. You are damned if you do, and damned if you

don't. Isn't this like a witch-process? The witches were clever and did a good job, and still they were persecuted. I thought the witch processes were over!

After a great deal of lobbying, the University finally decided to give the Center another five years, but not award it permanent status--just another trial period of five more years. Like nice little girls, we were to be satisfied by the decision made by men.

Irene Levin  
University of Trondheim and Center for Women's Research  
University of Oslo

## Accomplishments of Section Members

Katherine Allen

One of my doctoral advisees, **Karen Blaisure**, recently completed her Ph.D. from the Department of Family and Child Development at Virginia Tech. FFSS board member Rosemary Blieszner also served as a member of Karen's dissertation committee. Karen received numerous awards for her scholarship as a student. She received grants for her dissertation research on Feminists and Marriage: A Qualitative Analysis, from the Virginia Tech Graduate Student Assembly; the Fahs-Beck Dissertation Research Award; and the FFSS Outstanding Research Proposal from a Feminist Perspective. Recently Karen was elected the Student/New Professional Representative to the NCFR Board of Directors, and she is the co-recipient of the 1992 NCFR Student of the Year Award. Karen is now an Assistant Professor in the Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan State University in Kalamazoo.

Congratulations to **Alexis Walker** who was promoted to Professor of Human Development and Family Sciences at Oregon State University.

Congratulations to **Rosemary Blieszner** of Virginia Tech and co-investigator **Rebecca Adams** of University of North Carolina at Greensboro for receiving a grant from the AARP Andrus Foundation for their project, Older Adult Friendship Patterns and Mental Health.

*Inclusion of an article in this newsletter does not imply endorsement by the National Council on Family Relations.*

## BOOK REVIEW

Elizabeth B. Farnsworth

**Stacey, J. (1990). Brave new families: Stores of domestic upheaval in late twentieth century America. New York: Basic Books.**

Brave New Families is an ethnographic study of two women and their real and fictive kinship networks residing in Silicon Valley (Santa Clara, CA). The book seeks to illuminate the "diverse, fluid, and unresolved" character of postindustrial family life. Stacey set the stage for conceptual understanding of the postmodern era by first reviewing the premodern and modern predecessors. Premodern families were characterized by a patriarchal structure and integrated economic, social, and political functions; modern families were characterized as privatized units with segregated roles for men and women. The review of the historical backdrop and the multiple contexts impinging upon families over time provide a framework for discussion of postindustrial family life.

A broader message, a metamessage, of the book concerns the nature of the research process and the ethics of the researcher's presence in people's individual trajectories. Throughout the book, Stacey raises questions, places her own thoughts and biases in the work, and demonstrates powerfully the importance of the researcher engaging honestly in the lived experiences of the informants. An additional metamessage concerns the illumination of personal troubles which provide insight into the significant public issues of our time. A case in point concerns the status of women in the current economic climate and the lowered standard of women post-divorce (Wietzman, 1985).

Silicon Valley, the "land of dreams and disaster", was the sight of unprecedented growth of the electronics industry during the 1960s and 1970s, as well as soaring rates of cancer and birth defects coinciding with the massive use of toxic solvents in the industry. Stacey entered into the lives of her informants, Pamela and Dotty, to study family life in this context. Both family networks originated in the lives of women whose husbands had benefitted from the "usually occupational opportunities offered by the electronics industry to white working class men during the 1960s and 1970s. Later postindustrial and feminist challenges disrupted both families and instigated their diverse postmodern responses" (Stacey, 1990, p. 35).

The ethnographies usher in a conceptual understanding of postmodern families which have no universal meaning or form, rather exist as fully socially constructed institutions that are diverse and fluid in response to changing economic, occupational, and social statuses. Researchers are challenged to suspend

preconceived prejudices about the nature of personal and familial experience as contradictions are revealed on multiple levels. For example, Pamela initially described herself as a divorced feminist who was employed as an administrator at an antipoverty agency. As her story evolved, she remarried and converted to fundamentalist religion. Over a period of several years, the discontinuities in the informants' lives with respect to economics, gender, family, and religion become clear. Stacey cautions ethnographic researchers against elitist bias in analyses which "pigeon-hole" individuals and families into rigid categories based on the researcher's own prejudices. So "fluid and complex are the occupational, economic, and social statuses of white working families in postindustrial society that few can be captured by a single social class category" (Stacey, 1990, p. 35).

Stacey recognized that distortions may occur in ethnography due to time and thus encouraged her primary informants, Pam and Dotty, to read her data and to provide the "final word" in the book. Pam critiqued the narratives and interpretations, pointing out absences of details that were significant to her. A very powerful closure discusses the impossibility of writing culture due to the fluid and diverse nature of people's lives. Pam's words close the book, "You know, you could never capture me" (Stacey, 1990, p. 278).

*Brave New Families lays to rest any notions about qualitative research as "easy" work.*

Brave New Families was an informative and complex "inside" view of two families residing in postindustrial Silicon Valley. Stacey attended to intricate detail in crafting this book, and in the process, taught salient lessons to those who might embark on ethnographic journeys. Specifically, the author informed

researchers of the necessity of suspending prejudicial judgments so that they can see "what is." The complex changes of families over time were revealed in this complex and dynamic study, changes which are often unexpected and contradictory. The saliency of economics was prominent as families restructured their priorities to meet changing needs. The individuality of children and adults was paramount as individual responses were often contradictory. The book demonstrated the necessity of viewing and privileging the experiences of individuals in families, as opposed to viewing the "family" as monolithic. In this regard, the feminist foundation of the work peeled back the layers of multiple perspectives and realities and honored them. The book touches and teaches in a dynamic manner and is an excellent teaching tool.

Brave New Families was informative and educational to the student interested in ethnographic methodology. It served to raise questions and concerns in the research process without coming to closure on the "right" way to conduct scholarly inquiry. Brave New Families lays to rest any notions about qualitative research as "easy" work. The intensity of the process orientation, the place of the researcher in the work, the commitment of researcher and informant, and the continual questioning and re-questioning required in the interpretive process are evident in this work. Thus, the work educates on the level of the research process, as well as the personal integration of the nature of post-modern families. It is a volume well worth reading and valuable to the family field for its realistic study of families in an era of social change and economic uncertainty.

## Dialogue

### What is Feminism?

Feminism is a way of being, more than just a theoretical framework for research design or classroom teaching. It is a lens through which one interprets and defines life events. Because I believe this about feminism, I feel quite unsettled regarding external criteria for defining feminism. Specifically, are there any universal criteria to be met by those persons defining themselves as "feminists"? For example, a member of my university community referred to one of our colleagues as a feminist. I quickly responded, "She's not a feminist, she is anti-choice." This provides for me evidence of one of my personal criterion of feminism: Feminists are pro-choice. This also left me unsettled.

When I consider what I think to be some of the principles held by others of feminism, my belief and my work fall short. For example, Walker, Martin, and Thompson (1988) outlined three assumptions of feminism: (a) women are oppressed, (b) the personal is political, and (c) feminists have a double vision of reality. I readily agree with the latter two, but I have much more trouble with the first one. Does that mean that men are not oppressed? I don't feel oppressed in my family, but I feel oppressed in the workplace. So, do I agree with "women are oppressed?" Must feminists believe that all women are oppressed? I have asked other feminists this question. Katherine Allen, for example, suggested that I need to think about structural factors. "Oppression is real in everyone's life! That is patriarchy--it's not just a matter of whether you feel it or not."

As I presented to Katherine the question, "Am I feminist enough?" I was challenged with questions regarding my sensitivity to diversity, the ways in which I confront and rechannel the effects of racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism that oppress all of us. Katherine questioned whether one can separate family versus workplace oppression, and explained "Because oppression is in me as a member of a patriarchal society, I must be deliberate, conscious, and ready for change at every turn, lest the oppressive structures that exist within, around, and beyond me take more space in my life than I want." Katherine emphasized that families, as microcosms of an oppressive society, can also be oppressive for women, children, and men--in that order.

I object to the idea that I am more oppressed than is my husband in our family. As we work through the difficulties of two careers and a baby, our wonderful third career, the structural constraints of the society in which we live make it difficult for us to follow the decisions that we make, and the sharing of responsibilities that we do. My husband is not oppressive. He does not "crush or burden by abuse of power or authority." Generally, however, the problems we solve are family-work distribution problems. Perhaps the word oppression is the problem. There is no "unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power," but there is a great deal of unlearning an inequitable system that was so thoroughly taught in each of our families of origin.

Let me propose some Feminist Assumptions of Families as a way of dealing with my problem with oppression: (a) Every family member is important--human and non-human, (b) Some women

and men do not believe in patriarchal family systems, and (c) Families must be considered in terms of function rather than form. Again, is this feminist thinking? Katherine suggested that new questions might be, "In what ways am I aware that I experience oppression in my daily life? What am I doing to become more aware of how oppression operates (covertly and overtly) to control my life and the lives of others? What am I doing to try to change the world in which I live?" She said, "These are feminist questions because they locate the struggle in the personal life and they propose an agenda for change."

I return to the nagging question of whether diversity in feminist thinking is accepted and appreciated, or whether there is a politically correct form of feminism. Katherine assures me that there are "a thousand kinds of feminism." Trying to articulate my own version is a challenge because I am still not comfortable with defining myself in terms of family oppression. What do you think? What feminist questions do you struggle with? I invite you to continue this dialogue of "what is feminism?" by submitting your ideas for the next newsletter.

Vicki Loyer-Carlson  
Student/ New Professional Rep

### From the Editor...

Please contribute to the newsletter by sending articles, book reviews, news about yourself or other section members, or responses to items in this newsletter. Send information for the newsletter to :

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Feminism & Family Studies  
Section Newsletter

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