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# Placing feminist education within the three paradigms of knowledge and action

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## Abstract

Use of the three paradigms of knowledge and action (instrumental/technical, interpretive, and critical/emancipatory) to achieve the goals of feminist family education is explored. Each paradigm is described, including its underlying assumptions and when it is useful to use. Feminist methods in selected Family Relations articles between 1988 - 1999 are examined for their illustration of the three paradigms. Various challenges in using the interpretive and critical/emancipatory paradigms also are discussed.

key words: family life education, feminism, pedagogy

# PLACING FEMINIST EDUCATION WITHIN THE THREE PARADIGMS OF KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION

In the past 13 years, educational approaches designed to further feminism have become more widely acknowledged and discussed in family studies. Feminist educators seek to increase students' awareness of, sensitivity to, and critical reflection of (a) the experiences of women in families (Allen, 1988), (b) the multiple realities of families due to diversity in structure, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age, disability, and class (Thompson, 1995; Walker, 1993), and (c) the continued imbalance of power between women and men in families (Allen & Baber, 1992). Implied in these purposes is a call for educators to promote social change by facilitating students' examination of their beliefs and behaviors. Initial articles dealing with feminist family studies education appeared in Family Relations in a 1988 special section called "Feminism and Family Studies." At that time, Walker, Martin, and Thompson called for feminist practitioners to write about their experiences of trying to implement the goals of feminism.

Beginning with the 1988 issue, various Family Relations articles have contributed to our understanding of how feminist purposes, assumptions, and approaches can be utilized in learning situations (see as examples, Allen, 1995; Allen & Baber, 1992; MacDermid, Jurich, Myers-Wall, & Pelo, 1992; Marks, 1995; Thompson, 1995; Walker, 1993). As part of our ongoing journeys as feminist educators (one near the start of her career and the other more established), we looked forward to such articles and read them when they were published. However, we noticed that the number of explicitly feminist pedagogical articles had decreased recently, with the last obvious articles being published in Family Relations in 1995 (see Baber & Murray, 2001, for a recent exception). On one hand, we found ourselves wondering whether feminism had been integrated into the discipline enough so it was no longer necessary to delineate clearly that a feminist

perspective was being used. On the other hand, we wondered whether the topic had run its course. Certainly topics wax and wan over the years. Although we do not have a definitive answer to this, we argue that feminist principles continue to be relevant within family studies.

We seek to stimulate renewed interest in feminist pedagogy. Toward this end we propose a conceptual framework to guide the intentional, reflexive work by both new and seasoned educators who wish to incorporate feminist principles into their practice. Specifically, this article can help educators frame their practice within the conceptual framework of alternative paradigms of knowledge and action (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Having used this framework ourselves, we believe it has helped us develop a more thorough understanding of our practice and contributed to our facilitation of a more just society. First, we justify the need for a conceptual framework. Then, we describe alternative paradigms of knowledge and action and review the related literature. We describe the assumptions of each paradigm and provide examples of appropriate applications. Finally, we offer suggestions for new and seasoned family life educators to consider when using the alternative paradigms.

## The Need for a Conceptual Framework

As the field of family studies began to emerge, theorists organized their inquiries around conceptual frameworks such as structural functionalism and family development theory (e.g., Burr, Hill, Nye, & Reiss, 1979). The use of conceptual frameworks grew out of the multidisciplinary study of families (Thomas & Wilcox, 1987). They are thought to provide an orientation for examining social situations by stating theoretical propositions induced from research findings and are used as a way to develop an academic “tradition of introspection and reassessment” (Howard, 1975, p. 183).

We reviewed articles published in Family Relations dealing with feminist family

science/family life education from January 1988 to July 1999. Feminist educators stressed the importance of paying close attention to issues of power in the teacher-student relationship (Allen, 1988; MacDermid et al., 1992), encouraged community involvement (Allen & Baber, 1992), and offered lists of feminist resources for others to use (Thompson, 1988; Walker, 1993). A special series of articles on "impassioned teaching" (1995) included insightful articles by Allen, Marks, Thompson, and Lewis that dealt with issues of self disclosure and multiculturalism. These descriptions of concerns and techniques have been helpful in determining course content and processes that represent feminist principles. Nevertheless, the lack of conceptual frameworks has limited examination of underlying assumptions and philosophies about what constitutes knowledge and action in feminist family education. Understanding the relationship between knowledge, social change, and practice is essential for the actual accomplishment of feminist professional goals. If educators are using knowledge to accomplish a specific objective then it is important to do so in a purposeful and thoughtful manner. Consequently, we propose the use of alternative paradigms of knowledge and action (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) as a conceptual framework to achieve a more reflective understanding of feminist practice. This framework can focus educators' attention on the paradigms guiding their teaching and learning processes.

Paradigms are ideological frameworks based on congruent and logical thinking patterns that support common assumptions (Kuhn, 1977). In his revolutionizing volume, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962), Kuhn argued that historical and socio-cultural forces influence inquiry processes in a gradual manner so dominant ways of thinking about knowledge and action gradually change. Habermas (1971) suggested that there exist three different paradigms of knowledge: instrumental/technical, interpretive, and critical/emancipatory. Each paradigm is founded on a different rationality, producing different kinds of knowledge and action (Kuhn,

1977). Feminist educators also have proposed alternative approaches to knowing and learning (e.g., Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, Ward, & Taylor, 1988; Lather, 1991).

All of these individuals realized that the Western world had overrelied on the instrumental/technical paradigm to the exclusion of the interpretive and critical/emancipatory paradigms. They charged that this overreliance had resulted in a false assumption that the distribution of facts and teaching of skills would provide the catalyst for change regardless of the circumstances (Fay, 1977). Habermas (1971) claimed that paradigms should be matched to learners' interests and needs and to the desired outcomes of educators. If such congruency exists, the action that emerges will be informed and rational, integrate values and facts, and work toward the creation of a more just society.

The relationship between paradigms and methods or strategies used in classrooms or educational settings also may be of particular interest to educators working toward a more just society. Methods or strategies are actual activities that are designed to guide students' thinking. They should be consistent with underlying assumptions of the knowledge and action paradigms because if certain paradigms are useful for accomplishing specific goals, teaching methods must be chosen that match underlying paradigm rationalities, learner needs, and educational objectives. In the next section, therefore, we provide examples of methods from the articles reviewed that would be associated with each of the paradigms. The examples given are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather illustrative of pedagogical methods associated with each of the paradigms.

Our examples of educational methods come from articles appearing in Family Relations. We focused specifically on feminist family science/family life education articles because we

believe Family Relations is a primary venue in which family studies educators read about pedagogy. Using both a CD-ROM and manual search, we identified articles on educational techniques that included the words “feminist” or “feminism” in either the title or keywords. We sought articles with a clear feminist pedagogical (academic or family life education) focus; therefore, we did not review articles related to feminist therapy. These restrictions resulted in the analysis of 11 articles. Two additional articles were an introduction (Walker, 1995) and conclusion (Lewis, 1995) to three articles in the “Impassioned Teaching” section in the 1995 issue. These two articles were not included in the analysis, because they summarized the other three articles. We also noted a few articles written by researchers we knew to have feminist views; however, because these articles did not have the terms “feminist” or “feminism” in the title or in key words (e.g., Hughes, Jr., & Perry-Jenkins, 1996), they were not included in the analysis.

Paradigms of Knowledge and Action

Instrumental/technical paradigm. The most commonly known and understood paradigm of knowledge is the instrumental/technical paradigm. It evolved from the natural sciences and is concerned with addressing and satisfying human needs in an effort to control life situations and environments (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Fay, 1977). Underlying assumptions of this paradigm are: (a) there is an objective reality beyond subjective perception; (b) laws that govern human behavior can be discovered through empirical research; (c) human needs can be addressed by learning the laws of human behavior so predictions can help control life situations (Braybrooke, 1987; Carr & Kemmis, 1986); and (d) an expert is needed to disseminate the knowledge revealed through empirical research. In other words, knowledge acquired through empirical research views individuals as sharing common characteristics and assumes that the “giving” of

knowledge, skills, and methods by an educator (expert) to individuals will result in life changes (Morgaine, 1992). Understandably, students and educators are most familiar with this form of education.

Instrumental/technical knowledge can be quite effective and facilitate action in people's lives when they realize that change is needed, but they lack information, skills, or methods to accomplish the change. For example, older women who have recently ended a long-term marriage and are attending a family life education workshop designed especially for them might realize the need for knowing how to use a checking account, ATM, or debit card. In a family studies course on relationship development, young adults might be interested in hearing about how one chooses a life partner. In such situations educators use a transmission model of sharing information, beginning with educators' knowledge rather than learners' knowledge (Belenky et al., 1986). In the first example, educators might bring in an expert from a local bank to describe various procedures and accounts. In the second example, they might consult the literature for various decision-making or relationship development models or use various textbooks to find handy mate-choosing suggestions. Additionally, educators might suggest ways of identifying desired characteristics in prospective partners and matching personal values and life goals with those of others. However, in both of these examples it can not be presumed that life change will result unless learners are motivated and ready for the information presented. If the older women are resentful about their life situations and resistant to change, the educators' transmission of knowledge will not facilitate action. Likewise, teens who believe they are in love may not be willing to objectively examine the ways in which the focus of their affection is not a realistic life partner.

We identified several instrumental/technical methods in the feminist pedagogical

literature published in Family Relations. The most common method described was to provide statistics or theoretical models that furthered feminist purposes or assumptions (Allen & Baber, 1992; Chow & Berheide, 1988). For example, Chow and Berheide described how various theoretical models of the work-family interface could be used to increase awareness of the diverse issues that families face and help individuals link their own experiences to larger societal issues. Thompson (1995) used statistics to show that women on welfare actually have fewer children than women who are not on welfare, thus challenging a commonly held myth that women receiving welfare have more children. Other instrumental/technical strategies involved the use of activities designed to help learners identify aspects of diversity in families (Allen & Baber). In summary, a variety of academic and feminist readings can increase awareness of diversity and of women's experiences in families.

Nevertheless, although the use of appropriate statistics, models, research findings, and guest speakers can result in effective learning by students or workshop participants, it may not always result in the type of learning toward which feminist educators are striving. Feminist educators have identified this as a concern. For example, Allen and Farnsworth (1993) noted that an emphasis on "expert knowledge and teacher authority" (p. 352) left little room for other ways of practicing. This limitation provides an impetus for a consideration of alternative paradigms of knowledge and action.

Interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm is based on the human need to understand self and others (Gadamer, 1975). Developing interpretations of the meanings that constitute life's realities is the focus of this paradigm. A key tenet is that humans organize their lives through "defining the objects, events, and situations which they encounter" (Blumer, 1956, p. 686). Underlying assumptions include: (a) instrumental/technical research methods are not

always appropriate for gaining insight into human needs and interactions; (b) many human interactions and actions can not be predicted or controlled and may not be congruent with ethical principles of respecting individual choices and values; (c) knowledge is dependent on social realities; (d) reflecting on the meaning of life experiences serves as a catalyst for action; and (e) experts can facilitate, but are not necessary, for learners to learn from reflecting on their life experiences (Braybrooke, 1987; Bredo & Feinberg, 1982; Brown, 1980; Carr & Kemmis, 1986). In other words, the interpretive paradigm views individuals as having different realities, and sees opportunities for individuals to reflect on their life experiences as essential to facilitating change (Morgaine, 1992).

Interpretive knowledge can be quite effective when instrumental/technical knowledge contradicts or juxtaposes everyday knowledge that is value laded or emotionally based. Unless people reflect on the values and emotions that undergird their everyday actions, the newly provided knowledge may not be integrated into everyday life. For example, continuing the previously provided examples for consideration, older separated or divorced women attending a family life education workshop on the use of banking processes may be resentful of their situation and resistant to new information designed to help them adapt to new life situations. They may be assisted by reflecting on their socialization into gender roles and the ways in which their family of origin handled financial matters. Bringing these assumed social constructs to the forefront for consideration can contribute to an expanded perspective of their situation and heighten their openness to new roles and information. Likewise, feminist educators may want to structure reflective experiences about how our society socializes adolescents to glamorize being-in-love for them and subtly, or not-so-subtly, teaches female adolescents that they are most valuable only when they are “in relationship.” Such insights are expected to increase

understanding and facilitate change in action.

Our analysis revealed that the primary way Family Relations authors used interpretive knowledge was through the use of reflective journal writing (Allen, 1988; MacDermid et al., 1992; Walker, 1993). In particular, this educational activity provided opportunities for respecting family diversity within a group, thus achieving a goal of feminist educators within family studies. Journal writing was described in a variety of ways. Students were asked to write anonymous personal reflections in a sexuality course (MacDermid et al.). Students reflected on their emotional responses to course material (Walker). They were encouraged to reflect on their own values (Allen & Baber) and to think about how their own beliefs and values influenced how they thought about families (Allen). They also wrote autobiographical papers or discussed an area in which they saw themselves as having personal expertise (Allen).

Journal writing was taken a step further by creating opportunities for students to share their experiences and thoughts with other students. For example, in an attempt to increase empathy for other viewpoints, Thompson (1995) asked students in her class “What does the world look like when I hold these things to be true?” (p. 132). Walker (1993) had students discuss in pairs a family tradition that was unique to their family and described how this helped them appreciate their own uniqueness and the diversity among other families. Several authors considered the sharing of personal perspectives within small groups essential in helping individuals recognize multiple family realities (Allen & Farnsworth, 1993; Thompson, 1995). Allen (1995) included multiple representations of lesbians and gay men throughout a course rather than reducing their experiences to a 50-minute class on the topic. She also discussed her experience of coming out as a lesbian to an undergraduate class in this article, noting that reading about the experiences of lesbian and gay teachers and students could be helpful in learning about

family diversity.

Authors noted that effective education occurred when learners realized how their own experiences had shaped their views and when they were able to use those realizations as the basis for further development (Allen, 1988; MacDermid et al., 1992). The importance of opportunities for self reflection in achieving diversity outcomes was mentioned repeatedly in this literature (e.g., Thompson, 1995; Walker, 1993). The interpretive paradigm provides opportunities for students to share the responsibility of their learning by seeing how their own diverse life experiences and perspectives can contribute to new insights and knowledge.

When feminist educators worked with the interpretive paradigm, they used learners' life experiences as a basis for all learning topics and concepts even when they integrated aspects of instrumental/technical knowledge. Instructors also viewed their role with learners differently. Incorporating a metaphor suggested by Belenky and her colleagues (1986), MacDermid et al. (1992) saw themselves as "midwives" who facilitated the birth of learners' self-awareness, understanding, and insight.

<u>Critical/emancipatory paradigm.</u> The critical/emancipatory paradigm elucidates the ways in which personal experiences and perspectives have been influenced by "systemic societal structures, myths, and assumptions" (Morgaine, 1992, p. 14). It assumes that when individuals develop insight into the way their lives are being oppressed by systemic forces, they can become emancipated from these situations through individual or collective action. This paradigm is central to a feminist approach, meeting the goal of understanding how the social context affects personal experience and translating personal experience into social action (Walker et al., 1988). Thus, this approach is important for feminist educators who want to facilitate insight into oppressive social systems. Use of this paradigm might underlie "ah-ha" moments of insight that

some students have in family education courses taught from a feminist perspective.

The critical/emancipatory and interpretive paradigms share several assumptions: (a) empirical research methods are not always appropriate for gaining insight into human needs and interactions; (b) many human interactions and actions can not be predicted or controlled and may not be ethical; and (c) knowledge is dependent on social realities. Other assumptions are unique to the critical/emancipatory paradigm: (a) people's values and perceptions about self and others have been influenced by the social conditions in their lives; (b) people ensnared in oppressive or self-defeating circumstances have distorted understandings that contribute to the perpetuation of their situations; (c) people are able to critically analyze the oppressive, limiting aspects of their lives; and (d) people become emancipated from their oppressive, limited situations as they gain insight into the ways in which they oppress others; they begin to perceive themselves as having options rather than being limited; they take action to stand against all oppression (Bredo & Feinberg, 1982; Brown, 1980; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Fay, 1977).

A critical/emancipatory paradigm is used when topics, life situations, or other related course content areas are laced with issues of injustice. Again we continue the previously provided examples and use the critical/emancipatory paradigm. The older woman who is recently divorced and resistant to life changes and adapting information may be energized and empowered as she consider the equity issues embedded in her situation. Coming to realize the ways in which the dominant culture is served by women's dependence on men and their colluding agreement to remain ignorant of money matters may create a new resolve to tackle new life situations. Likewise, adolescents who are exposed to issues of discrimination in adolescent pregnancy, a comparison between women's salaries in the service sector versus the professions, or work/family issues may create a resolve to delay serious romantic decisions until later in life.

Critical/emancipatory feminist teaching methods identified in the Family Relations articles facilitated students' analysis of the embedded messages of social structures that perpetuate oppression, thus emphasizing the relevance of "the personal is political." Walker (1993) described how she provided opportunities for students to analyze the ways media depict various family forms. This gave them an opportunity to discuss the way in which African American families were consistently portrayed as living only in poverty-stricken situations and why that occurred. MacDermid et al. (1992) encouraged students to consider whose interests were served by various definitions of "family." Allen and Baber (1992) facilitated discussions of the effects of long-term marriage on women's well-being. These scholars also taught students how to critique family theories and understand the societal context from which they emerged. Family theories are powerful frameworks that guide the way families are viewed by researchers, social service and educational practitioners, and policy makers. Instead of simply discussing a family theory, these educators helped students explore the historical, socio-political context out of which each theory emerged. Students were taught to analyze the hidden assumptions about families and gender roles behind the development of each theory. This facilitated students' critical analysis and insight (Allen & Baber).

Language subtly contributes to social structures and, therefore, attention to discourse is relevant in critical/emancipatory approaches. Walker (1993) encouraged students to consider how the language they use might reinforce oppression, such as using the term "the dark side" to describe negative aspects of family life (implying that "white" is good). Allen (1995) also facilitated students' awareness of the ways in which language is used to "normalize" certain groups. She pointed out how it is implied that individuals who are heterosexual are not considered to have a sexual orientation, because no response is expected unless the person is

identifying as gay or lesbian. The power of the written and published word also can be discussed in a way that reveals some of the politics in academia. Allen (1988) noted that educators can help students understand who or who does not get published in academia (i.e., through a discussion about the "gatekeepers" of knowledge).

Finally, educators using the critical/emancipatory paradigm described how they reflected on the context in which learning occurred. Primary to this consideration was an analysis of power dynamics within the teaching/learning setting (MacDermid et al., 1992). Hierarchical or unequal power positions were considered detrimental to critical analysis, development of insight into oppressive forces, and enlightenment; therefore, extensive efforts were afforded to creating learning situations in which power was made more equal between learners and educators and also between learners. Walker (1993, 1996) described how the distance between learners and educators was reduced, when educators revealed they were on a learning curve as well or when they revealed their thoughts and feelings about course content and process. Learners assisted in developing course content and evaluation procedures for their assignments and were involved in ongoing evaluation of their course (MacDermid et al.). On a final note, restructuring of the physical environment to a less hierarchical setup was noted for its importance (MacDermid et al.). This was achieved through arranging a circular format of chairs and desks rather than the traditional arrangement of educator at the front of the room with all students facing her or him.

In summary, the critical/emancipatory approach asks learners to reflect upon the discrepancies between their life ideals and the realities they have experienced. Of special focus are experiences of oppression or experiences that have occurred as a result of one's membership in a marginalized group. As these discrepancies are considered, instructors may integrate instrumental/technical or interpretive knowledge to illuminate the historical facts and hidden

influences or provide meaning to the situations that seem to have resulted in life discrepancies. These personal reflections help to reveal hidden influences or "any false set of social beliefs that we have taken for granted" (Brown, 1985, p. 4). However, the resulting awareness, enlightenment, and changed action have not been controlled or manipulated by the feminist educator. Instead, naturally occurring altered self-perceptions emerge. "This alteration of self and societal perceptions is thought to be the first step toward providing the foundation for personal self transformation which results in the breaking of cycles of self-defeating behaviors and societal change" (Morgaine, 1992, p. 14).

Pedagogical Challenges for Feminist Educators

As feminist educators attempt to create a world that drastically reduces hierarchical relationships based on the social construction of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, disability, and age, they experience multiple challenges and barriers. Some barriers are organizational and cultural and often are beyond educators' control (Walker et al., 1988). Other constraints may be more of a personal nature, such as an individual's comfort level with trying new educational methods. As a result, use of the alternative paradigms framework can be difficult at times. In this final section, we focus on four organizational and/or personal challenges that we have experienced in using the paradigms: (a) evaluation, (b) large classes, (c) the influence of personal experiences on educators' pedagogical approaches, and (d) the need for flexibility in teaching.

Before discussing these challenges, we want to identify a unifying theme to these challenges-- a theme that emerged despite having differing amounts of experience as feminist educators ourselves. After working for many years with early childhood and family life education pre- and in-service professionals, the second author developed a model that integrated all three paradigms (Morgaine, 1994) that has been useful in facilitating student insight and action. The

first author's initial experience with alternative paradigms occurred when she was taught as a Master's student by the second author. When she personally experienced new insight as a result of noninstrumental teaching, she became interested in using it in her own teaching. She has used the framework in various ways during the past six years. Although our pathways may be different, in discussions we realized that we have common experiences and interests and have dealt with similar challenges. These are challenges that both new and seasoned feminist educators may experience in using different modes of learning, and we conclude that these difficulties are tied intrinsically to issues of power. This is not surprising given that power dynamics are central issues in the interpretive and critical/emancipatory paradigms. If individual or social change is to occur when using these paradigms, it must occur in a noncoercive way. For example, if students feel under pressure to think or feel a certain way, they only may respond in the way they think they should respond. When this happens, real change may not result.

Assigning grades presents a challenge to educators using alternative paradigms. As mentioned in previous articles on feminist education, formal educational settings place many constraints on educators (MacDermid et al., 1992). Feminists in academic settings experience a "double vision" (Walker et al., 1988) when they try to equalize power in environments that are based on traditionally hierarchical relationships. Grades must be given in many educational settings, and they are a constraint because they reproduce hierarchical relationships. Educators using journals within the interpretive or critical/emancipatory paradigm may wish to find nonhierarchical ways to evaluate those assignments. One strategy is to give students grades for merely completing journal assignments. However, this does not insure that students are reflecting personally on the intended topic. Another strategy could involve giving points based on criteria, such as (a) identifying a current professional issue, (b) relating it to a previous life experience,

and (c) explaining the links between the two. Evaluation may be a difficult issue because power issues are complex. For example, students may want specific grades or grading criteria because they are used to being in a subordinate position. Alternatively, some students may limit their effort on an assignment, if they know they will get an "A" regardless of what or how much they write. Between the two of us, we have tried various approaches for grading journals over the years and realize that no one approach works for all educators or situations. The challenge for feminist educators, ultimately, is to "share, but not relinquish, authority with students" (Allen & Farnsworth, 1993, p. 352), and we note that other alternatives for evaluating assignments have been suggested by feminist educators (e.g., MacDermid et al., 1992; Allen, 1988).

Large classes, a constraint identified in previous feminist writings (e.g., MacDermid et al., 1992), provide a second challenge for using alternative paradigms. It may be impossible, for example, to move chairs and desks in a lecture theatre into a less hierarchical arrangement. (We should point out, however, that teaching in a circular format does not automatically mean that an educator is using an interpretive or critical/emancipatory approach.) Sometimes an instrumental/technical paradigm may be more time efficient and easier to use in a large class than other paradigms. The interpretive paradigm can be used informally by simply providing opportunities for students to discuss personal experiences and perspectives about most topics or content areas. Translating this into a critical learning experience, educators can encourage students to identify embedded injustices in various issues.

The first author was able to have such a critical learning experience in a class of 120 students by using an opinion article from her university's student-run newspaper. The author of the opinion piece had written that although she supported lesbians and gay men's rights to have and raise children, she felt that they were selfish in doing so. She suggested that if lesbians and

gay men wanted to “do the right thing,” they should not have children because it would be selfish of them to bring children into a world knowing their children would have a difficult time because of their parents. Copies of the article were given to every student. They were asked to read the article privately and then to discuss their reactions in small groups. Afterwards, some groups shared their comments. Many students were quick in realizing the embedded justice issues. They noted how the author’s opinion about bringing up children in a difficult environment could apply to any type of family that veered from a two-parent, middle-class, thin, White, heterosexual family. They asked questions such as, “If that’s how the author feels, then should poor parents even be allowed to have children? Should an obese adult be allowed to have a child, knowing that the child might be teased about that? Should a parent with a disability be allowed to have children?” When asked if they could identify how this rhetoric might have been used historically, they noted its similarity to arguments used to prevent individuals of different races from having children together. When this occurred, they were able to connect the current issue to historical forces as well. Students developed these insights on their own rather than having the instructor make these links for them. The student newspaper provided a perfect opportunity to “seize [a] teachable moment” (Walker, 1993, p. 346). It was a powerful opportunity for the first author and entirely manageable in a large class.

A third challenge relates to personal constraints (although still connected to structural conditions). Educators may find it easier to teach from an expert approach because this is what they are most familiar and comfortable with even if they realize it may not be achieving the goals they hope to achieve. This points to the need for educators to reflect not only on their own educational experiences but also their family of origin experiences. Both educational and family experiences may affect how educators feel about authority- about students challenging their

authority and about how they feel when they relinquish some of their authority. Personal experiences with shame and power also may shape how individuals deal with such issues (Morgaine, 1994).

These factors may combine with the level of experience of a feminist educator to create unique experiences. In particular, when faced with students who object to course content focusing on social inequalities (e.g., gender and sexual orientation oppression), educators who are younger, female, untenured, or of graduate student status may become increasingly defensive (Copelton, 2001). They may turn to the safety of being the expert, defending the information being put forward. This has the potential to develop into an instrumental/technical form of teaching. Thus, there is a risk for educators to lose sight of some of their feminist goals and the underlying assumptions of knowledge paradigms in the face of learner resistance. The first author, a female doctoral student, recently experienced difficulty with student resistance. As a result, she has begun to reflect more deeply about her practice, considering how her occasional authoritarian reactions as an educator may be related to the authoritarian parenting she received as a child, experiences that may have shaped her expectations and comfort levels regarding power. We encourage other educators to think intentionally about possible connections such as this.

We also encourage feminist educators to think about the need for flexibility in their practice. It is important for educators to pay more attention to the underlying assumptions and rationalities of the teaching/learning methods. If feminist family education is indeed trying to promote radical change, then an exclusive adherence to an instrumental/technical approach may hinder the achievement of its goals and purposes. A narrow approach can contribute to the transmission of a patriarchal teaching style and assumes that one kind of knowledge can

accomplish all forms of action. We encourage educators to consider how all three paradigms can be integrated into their teaching/learning processes. As educators become more experienced using the interpretive and critical/emancipatory paradigms, they may be able to move with increased fluidity between the paradigms, quickly discerning the needs of students and adapting learning methods to the appropriate paradigm. This may be the sign of a more experienced feminist educator, and it will take time to develop such discernment, flexibility, and fluidity. We stress that it may not be easy to observe another educator's methods and readily identify the underlying paradigm. Additionally, it may be difficult to "learn" how to "do" alternative paradigms from others because to do so might be instrumental in nature.

## Conclusion

In educational settings, students or participants must become familiar with and master relevant bodies of knowledge as well as relevant competencies. There is much to be known and mastered regardless of gender, socioeconomic class, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. However, when topics or professional competencies are influenced by value, moral, or ethical histories, traditions and experiences, instrumental/technical knowledge may not suffice. Because nearly every topic or skill within the field of family life education or family science is influenced in these ways, interpretive and critical/emancipatory knowledge is needed. These paradigms encourage actions related to self-understanding, empathy for others, insight into oppression, and an ability to be involved in societal change.

Feminist family educators must continually reflect on the expressed and implied needs of their students, match these with their teaching/learning objectives, and then match needs and objectives with knowledge and action paradigms. This means that educators will familiarize themselves with each paradigm and think through the underlying assumptions of various

methods or strategies. They also may need to consider ways to deal with various constraints in using these paradigms. The critical/emancipatory approach, which is central to feminist education, is the paradigm that is probably most difficult to implement for a number of reasons, including those noted here. We encourage educators to reflect in both professional and personal ways about various constraints. A continuous cycle of reflection and action will be important, because a specific formula is not possible. We refer readers to Morgaine (1994), who discussed additional helpful characteristics of educators using a critical/emancipatory approach.

We end with a quote from one of the initial 1988 articles dealing with feminist education. This quote frames the goals of feminist practice within the three paradigms of knowledge and action. Feminist educators may not have claimed this conceptual framework, but they have been reflecting and practicing in ways that demonstrate use of the three paradigms of knowledge and action. We have added italicized paradigm terms in brackets to emphasize how the paradigms are reflected in feminists' thinking.

> Feminist programs endeavor to provide clients with the knowledge and capability to solve their problems [instrumental/technical], to change the conditions of their lives. Programs should enable clients to do what they want to do. Empowering, emancipating, liberating knowledge helps clients to make sense out of personal problems and experiences [interpretive] (Klein, 1983); it helps them to see their problems in new ways, thereby furnishing new alternatives for actions; it helps them to break out of seemingly inevitable conditions [critical/emancipatory] (Gergen, 1980) (Walker et al., 1988, p. 20).

This quote and previous examples shared indicate that feminist educators have been using a variety of effective methods and paradigms to achieve the goals of feminist education. It is our hope that by framing their practice more explicitly within the conceptual framework of

alternative paradigms of knowledge and action, feminist family science/family life educators may develop a more thorough understanding of their practice and increase their facilitation of a more just society.

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