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# Transformational family science: Praxis, possibility, and promise

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## Abstract

We advance a transformational family science as an engaged practice that may serve social justice and an anti-racist project. Our companion paper proposed epistemic revelatory interventions through which family science may re-imagine itself. We highlight pillars of a transformational family science that (a) build with epistemological and paradigmatic stances of peripherals; (b) infuse an ethic of reflexivity, accountability, and responsibility in the pursuit of knowledge claims, and their validation; and (c) engage a critical interrogation of difference and power relations and the disruption of systemic and structural inequalities in which they are aligned. Informed by epistemic praxes, transformational praxes include inquiry, knowledge production, theorizing about structured inequalities, power differentials, and differences bound to social categories and social identities, as well as pedagogy and professional training. Transformative applications that are compensatory, reformative, restorative, reparative, and transformative may be used in multiple ways to advance social justice, anti-racism, and social transformations.

## KEYWORDS

anti-racism, epistemic praxes, family science, racism, social justice, transformative praxes

## INTRODUCTION

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1975), in a little-known paper that appeared in the *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, wrote: “[T]he disparity in the fate of white and black families in American society [reflects] the way in which our society now functions and, hence, is subject to change if and when we decide to *alter* our policies and practice.” (p. 451, emphasis added).

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Bronfenbrenner's incursions into race, gender, social class, and family on the soon-to-be political battleground of the cultural wars was prescient. He also illustrated the unrealized promise of racial equity brokered by the civil rights movement and its attendant legislation. The legacies of both bring us to this moment as a discipline and as a nation. Bronfenbrenner's juxtaposition of *fate* and *change* and the disembodied agency of "we" is also striking, as so much about race in America resides at this intersection of the three. That is, what is racialized has historically been cast as immutable and thus not subject to change. If not immutable, then what holds a racialized fate (i.e., racial disparities) in place, and who has the power and will to change this? Although policy, practices, and ideology implicated in racial disparities are unnamed by Bronfenbrenner, the research and public policy agenda he proposed had implications for social, including racial, disparities and structured inequality (in the areas of education, health care, day care, and income inequality) experienced by children and their families (cf. Tudge, 2013 for the body of such writings). Bronfenbrenner also critiques positivist empiricism, which removed development from the naturalistic contexts in which it occurred. With his characteristic boldness, he asserted:

I shall speak of reality and research in human development and try to make some connection between the two. The last is no easy task, for much of the research in my field is carried out not in reality, but in artificial settings believed to be more conducive to scientific investigation. (p. 439).

As family science grapples with its role in promoting anti-racism and social justice for family well-being, we must also consider the artifices of theory, method, and science that may remove, or make less plain to perception, the realities of structured inequality, and that which is unjust.

In *Dismantling the master's house: Epistemological tensions and revelatory interventions for reimagining a transformational family science (this issue)*, we propose an epistemic transformational praxis that surfaces the dualities and tensions of reality and science, as well as the discourses of fate and change, such that they are amendable to transformation (J. Jones et al., 2022). In this paper, we turn to the promise of transformational praxis for family science. In developing and implementing praxes—be it knowledge production or its translational application—to support and sustain what is just, we must always ask, "What and whose knowledges are activated and listened to? Who is empowered to participate in epistemic transformation, and in whose interest is transformation carried out?" We advance a transformational family science that places "engaged scholarship in service to contemporary social justice projects" (Collins, 2012, p. 22) through practices that (a) build with epistemological and paradigmatic stances of peripherals (i.e., individuals, groups, and communities that have been marginalized, subjugated, or silenced within disciplinary hegemonies; see J. Jones et al., 2022); (b) infuse an ethic of reflexivity, accountability, and responsibility in the pursuit of knowledge claims and their validation; and (c) engage a critical interrogation of difference and power relations, and the disruption of systemic and structural inequalities in which they are aligned (see Figure 1). Through the practices proposed, practitioners (i.e., researchers, service practitioners, and policy makers) uncover meanings and power relations bound to social categories, social identities (and difference), and the proximal and distal ways structured inequalities (i.e., social inequalities or disparities that adhere to institutional structures, including ideologies, policies, laws, practices, and systems of social stratification) impact families and their members.

## A moment of reflection

Engaging in a project such as "Dismantling the Master's House" and this current piece, both of which disclose epistemic and political tensions to create a path for family science's

transformational future, is no mere intellectual exercise. Ours is a transdisciplinary collaboration between family science, philosophy, and human service studies. We conducted this work as African American women scholars with complementary themes of research, teaching, and scholarship. We are surviving an academy that has often not wanted us in a nation no less keen. In this and our companion paper, we draw heavily on Black feminist thought through the work of Audre Lorde, which enjoins us to eradicate hierarchies of exclusion that construct oppression and create social injustices. In varied ways, we engage the philosophical, theoretical, and practice traditions of our disciplines. We center our scholarly expertise on African Americans, but see applications for intersectional identities and diverse racial/ethnic groups. Like many scholars of critical theories, we came to painfully understand the oft unspoken and silenced epistemological and paradigmatic tensions of our disciplines, not to mention their costs. As Tarver writes of her autoethnography of graduate training:

I found the development of my intellectual identity to be constrained and at times stifled by the institutional socialization I experienced. As I learned skills for engaging in research that reflected how I saw the world, I was simultaneously socialized to ‘fit in the academy’ by espousing theories and research methods that countered my ontological, epistemological, and methodological positionality ... (McCoy, 2018, p. 327).

We use contradictions and the kind of tension Tarver describes surrounding “ontological, epistemological, and methodological positionality” to conceptualize the relationality of positivism/post-positivism, which anchor family science, and perspectives *peripheral to it*.

## ENACTING A *DIFFERENT* DIFFERENCE: EPISTEMIC SPACES FOR TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE

This special issue on race, families, and social justice of the *Journal of Family Theory and Review* (JFTR) is predated by other attempts within the decade to grapple with race and ethnicity in family theory (Few-Demo, 2018) and to integrate social justice (A. James et al., 2016) as integral to family well-being. The shooting death of Michael Brown by police in Ferguson—his corpse lying unceremoniously where he fell—galvanized the social protests that were met by a militarized police response. Like the police-involved murders of George Floyd (with Derek Chauvin’s knee on his neck for 9:29 minutes), Breonna Taylor (asleep in her bedroom), and Sandra Bland (on a traffic arrest)—the starkness of injustice with race as protagonist re-energized social protest, as did the citizen patrol killing of Trayvon Martin. These public deaths of Black people are examples of the ultimate cost of injustice, whose manifestation did not begin or end in these few fateful minutes, but rather in social and systemic processes that produce slower extractions of life and liberty. With global racial protests as a frame, the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) invited submissions for a series of special issues on the theme: Transformative Family Scholarship: Theory, Practice, and Research at the Intersection of Families, Race, and Social Justice (NCFR, 2021). To pursue social justice and anti-racist projects as a discipline, we must engage an embodied epistemic praxis (J. Jones et al., 2022) and *begin* to think about transformative praxis in at least two ways: first, in the practice of knowledge generation, and second, in what we seek to inquire or theorize about. Both are implicated in what we may seek to transform. We can, as did Bronfenbrenner, boldly ask in matters of race, families, and social justice, and if we have the will, “Can our social institutions be changed—old ones modified and new ones introduced—so as to rebuild and revitalize the social context that families and children require for their effective function and growth?” (p. 467).

The promise of transformational family science is an intentional engagement with social transformation toward social justice, an extension of the translational emphasis of the

discipline, one that peripheral insights, difference, and power differentials must enter. As Figure 1 illustrates, peripheral insights and differences must enter the family science framework and impact it in salient ways. Transformative praxes seek to center peripheral praxes that have been ignored, extracted from, or marginalized within the legitimated family science framework. A transformational family science also engages in an interrogation of, and theorizing about differences, power relations, and structured inequalities in families and their members, as well as the engagement of transformative inquiry paradigms, applications, and pedagogy. With an ethic and practice of reflexivity (disciplinary and practitioner), transformational family science builds on open, democratic debate, exploration, and discovery and engages positivist/post-positivist and peripheral practitioners to create new arenas of thought and action, with the caveat that discussion and debate are themselves conducted within hegemonically structured dialogical space, thereby impacting the degree to which democratic processes are installed (J. Jones et al., 2022). We acknowledge the institutional challenge of infusing “alternative knowledge and frameworks” as integral to a transformational family science; as such, peripheral knowledges have long been situated outside of what is considered legitimate and validated scientific inquiry, thereby leaving their radical potential behind (Collins, 2017). We accept the

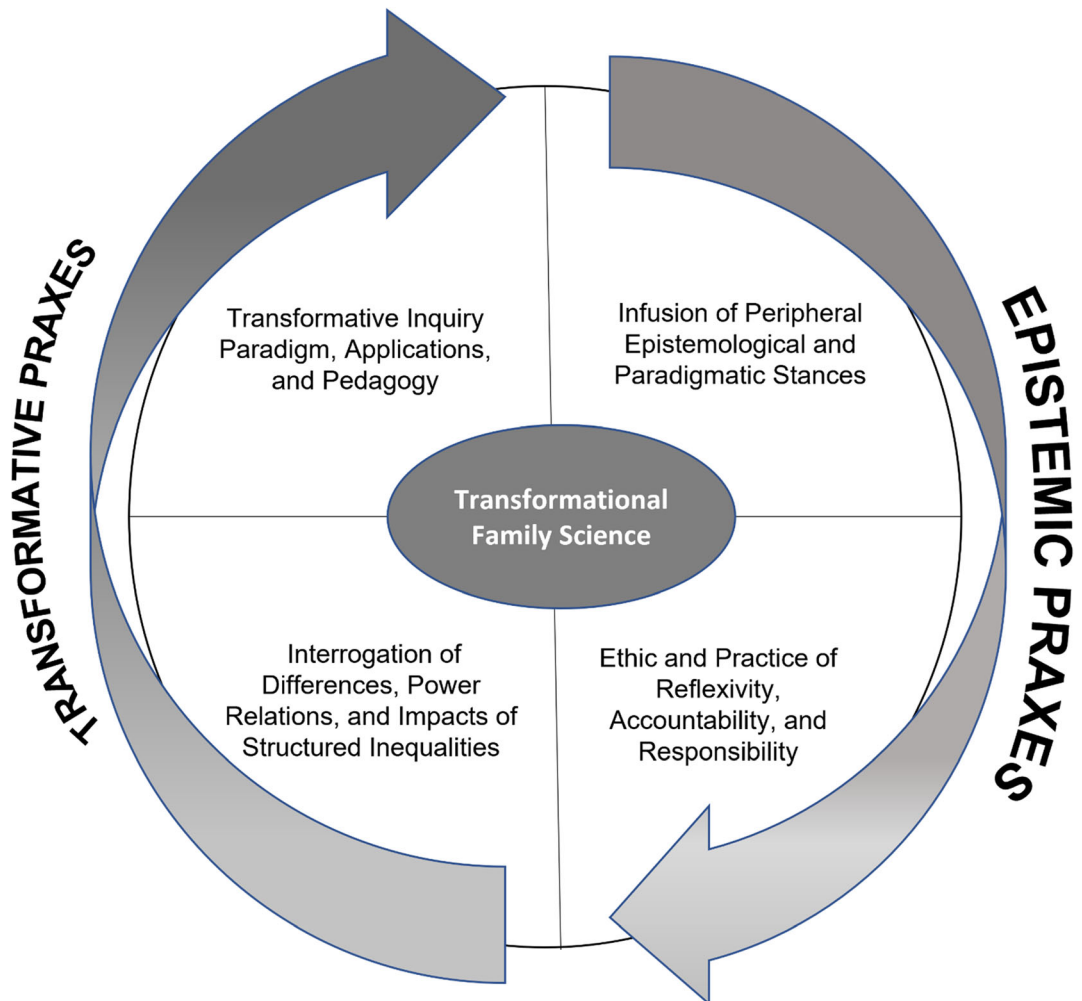


FIGURE 1 Transformational family science [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

challenge, as a transformational family science seeks change that enacts not the same difference but, rather, a *different* difference.

## Epistemic reflexivity, disciplinary dialogue, and accountability

The purpose of a transformative epistemic praxis is to create new arenas of thought and action through reflexivity, dialogue, and accountability to communities that family science serves. A transformative epistemic praxis is enacted through dialogue among positivist/post-positivists and peripheral practitioners about the ideologies that inform different family science paradigms and guide divergent family science praxes. This dialogical space, a disciplinary reflexivity, offers a realm where practitioners come to be aware of tensions and contradictions inherent in these differences and divergences and where positivist/post-positivist norms and values are resisted by peripheral practitioners, while ideologies, paradigms, and praxes are, in general, critiqued (J. Jones et al., 2022). External critiques of positivism/post-positivism by feminist and qualitative methodologies have placed reflexivity as a central component of the knowledge validation process and have made visible the influences of positionality within an epistemological frame (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A professional ethic of reflexivity and a sense of responsibility and accountability for the political implications of one's work (i.e., how practices may be implicated in the creation of unjust situations and outcomes) are intertwined. Indeed, ethics, justice, and power are not set aside from scientific enterprise. The underlying tenets of the Institutional Review Boards on human subjects in the conduct of research were, in part, a public response to the ethical failures of the *Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male* (aka Tuskegee Syphilis Study; J. H. Jones, 1981). These tenets derive from the *Nuremberg Codes* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949), the *Declaration of Helsinki* (World Health Organization, 2013), and the *Belmont Report* (Adashi et al., 2018), all of which are declarations of ethical research practices and the relations between the powerful and the powerless (or less powerful). The principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice in scientific enterprise acknowledge power differentials derived from the real world. For a transformative praxis, these values are tied to the aims of social justice. As Mertens (2007) writes, respect is defined "within the cultural norms of interaction within a community and across communities," and beneficence engages "the promotion of human rights and an increase in social justice" and explicitly connects "the research process and outcomes of research and furtherance of a social justice agenda" (p. 216).

Reflexivity and accountability in pursuit of a social justice project, then, is not a delimited exercise about intersectional location or a heartfelt acknowledgment that "I, too, have biases." Rather, it is a relational and communal mode of epistemic engagement constrained by considerations of institutional spaces (Mertens, 2007) and disciplinary moorings. The social and behavioral sciences do not simply passively observe. They *impact*. Family science's aims are scientific discovery or knowledge production, but also include *prevention*, that is, applying knowledge toward preventing problems. Furthermore, they are *translational*, involving the application of research to real life to help families. Finally, family science aims to deploy *evidence-based* praxis, which includes teaching, practice, and professional development grounded in research/scholarship (NCFR, 2022). What we can do and will do in any of these arenas is tied to the types of questions we are willing to ask and to what we imagine the answers mean. Epistemology, Collins (2017) writes, "may appear to be the great equalizer within academic settings yet placing epistemology beyond the boundaries of politics and ethics mitigates against seeing how hegemonic understandings of intellectual work reproduce social inequalities" (p. 118). Resisting the placement of epistemology beyond the boundaries of politics and ethics is the challenge of disciplinary accountability, in general, and for family science, more specifically.

An alternative epistemology, Collins (1989, p. 773) notes, "challenges all certified knowledge and opens up the question of whether what has been taken to be true can stand the test of

alternative ways of validating truth.” The rationale for excluding alternative epistemological and ontological approaches as value-*full*, and not objective, reveals the value-laden praxis of family science constituted as value-free, where such exclusions are also a political act. This is not a matter of scientific rigor, but rather, “Whose knowledge assertions are audible and legitimate, either as valid claims of social thought or as providing meaning represented through lived experience or as informing how we understand family life?” However, such alternative thought has historically been viewed as a threat to disciplinary legitimacy by incorporating less valid and reliable forms of inquiry, and barriers may then be instituted within the discipline that prohibit and limit peripheral epistemological and ontological perspectives.

Social justice projects should proceed in collaboration with and alongside impacted communities. Family science must go forth in such a manner with considerations of power relations in the frontline, particularly those that are institutionally inscribed (or accrued), including relations that derive from positions as experts in higher education and science. The co-creation of frameworks or the infusion of alternative frameworks, including social thought, which informs and is informed by activism that advances social justice, and has the potential to move the discipline and practice forward. For example, the Combahee River Collective Statement (1977)—which follows the political and intellectual traditions of Black women (Waters & Conaway, 2007) from the 19th century forward—states

We are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of an integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives.

Moreover, the roots of intersectionality as theoretical thought, articulated by the collective’s statement, are activist and grounded in the alternative epistemologies of Black women situated in lived experiences at the intersections of race, gender, social class, and sexuality (Few-Demo et al., 2022). Intersectionality, as an analytical framework, has become a critical lens in the social and behavioral sciences and humanities (Cho et al., 2013; Few-Demo et al., 2022). Still, Collins (2017) warns, as she reflects on intersectionality’s formal rise in academic disciplines, that the radical potential of alternative thought may become muted, neutered, or a “more, orderly, recognizable disciplined intersectionality” is put in its place (p. 120). Worse yet, subordinated people who advance new thought may be left behind, and a new narrative that privileges academics’ norms of objectivity and truth may be installed, as may new hegemonic understandings of intersectionality (Collins, 2017; Crenshaw, 1991; Few-Demo et al., 2022).

Afrocentric feminist epistemology reminds us that we are all accountable for our knowledge claims and for the importance of dialogue in assessing these claims (Collins, 1989). As bell hooks (1989) writes, “Dialogue implies talk between two subjects, not the speech of subject and object. It is a humanizing speech, one that challenges and resists domination” (p. 131). Disciplinary reflexivity, a collective, dialogic, and critical process, is also a transformative praxis (J. Jones et al., 2022). As Brian Lozenski (2022) articulates, “[t]he disciplinary self-examination, as with any project that requires us to look ourselves in the mirror, with a critical eye, is not a simple undertaking, nor should it be” (p. 3). Over the last four decades, family science has engaged in multiple attempts to name and brand itself and to establish a distinct disciplinary identity (NCFR, 2022). What has grown up in parallel is an insistent empirical and theoretical literature grounded in the ontologies of subordinated populations and groups, conducted primarily by their own specialists for whom social justice is not a marginal interest. We propose an epistemic revelatory intervention—what we call practicing or practice—as a reflexive tool to uncover or disclose epistemological, ontological, and disciplinary tensions between positivist/post-positivist and peripheral practitioners that can be rechanneled for transformative praxes in family science (J. Jones et al., 2022). This dialogic process surfaces asymmetries in institutional power by bringing to practitioners’ awareness and acknowledgment of epistemological tensions

and contradictions that provide a path through which positivist/post-positivist and peripheral practitioners can re-imagine family science praxes via a *form of practicing* that embeds practicing within praxes, thereby wedding scientific truth and social justice aims (J. Jones et al., 2022).

## Power differentials and difference must enter

Social justice and anti-racist projects require that we engage power differentials and their impacts, be it individual outcomes or group disparities. The John Lewis Institute for Social Justice (2022) describes the pursuit of social justice, in part, as:

A communal effort dedicated to creating and sustaining a fair and equal society in which each person and all groups are valued and affirmed. It encompasses efforts to end systemic violence and racism and all systems that devalue the dignity and humanity of any person. It recognizes that the legacy of past injustices remains all around us, so therefore promotes efforts to empower individual and communal action in support of restorative justice and the full implementation of human and civil rights ... (para. 1)

Anti-racism comprises strategic intentional actions that disrupt systemic racial inequities embedded within institutional policies and practices supported by the ideological-structural system of white supremacy (Johnson et al., 2022; Kendi, 2019). Ansley (1997) described white supremacy as:

A political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings. (p. 592)

For a transformational family science, we ask what it means to make plain to perception the actual centeredness of power differentials in family and social relationships, human development and well-being, and community life. Social inequities, such as social (in)justice, evoke power. The impacts of power differentials are not immaterial or randomly distributed. They are embedded within human ecologies and social relations that impact individuals and families through diverse pathways, mechanisms, and social processes. As a discipline, family science may seek to understand, mitigate, and *transform* such impacts. Power differentials associated with race and other social locations have institutional, interpersonal, and cultural impacts. However, oppression and discrimination, privileged statuses or marginalization, and subordination have been undertheorized in canonic family theories, as have systems and ideologies of inequality (e.g., patriarchy/sexism, racism/white supremacy, classism; heterosexism/heteronormativity; K. R. Allen & Henderson, 2022; Few-Demo et al., 2022; Spencer, 2006; Thompson & Walker, 1995; Walker, 2009; Walsdorf et al., 2020).

Subjugated knowledges, which are produced by individuals or groups that are dominated or suppressed, are those that are often hidden from view within the academies of science and its prevailing paradigms and in the hegemonies of political, economic, cultural, and social institutions that support systems of domination and subordination. It is also knowledge that is delegitimated, deemed unworthy of scientific inquiry, or suppressed (Collins, 1990). To acknowledge such knowledge is to concede the interconnections among knowledge, power, and ideas, and to unmask the ways that knowledge is situated within a “place” with a self-defined interest, be it domination or resistance to domination. The epistemological and ontological assumptions operationalized by positivism/post-positivism, which lie at the center of family science, raise



specific challenges for social justice praxis. A promise of epistemic and transformative praxes is that such knowledge can be located all over disciplinary frameworks, centered, *and* even near its edges.

Marginalized or subjugated voices and knowledges may be included, yet still be muted, contorted, or exoticized (Teasley & Butler, 2020). When positivist/post-positivist methodologies are employed, subjugated knowledges are often displaced by the legitimated knowledges of the researcher, or respondents are not positioned to be co-creators in knowledge, even about themselves. For example, survey participants are constrained by responses already thought (*for them*), and they may not provide the responses they desire to give (i.e., because they are not informed by group or community perspectives). Even with semi- or unstructured interviews or focus groups, participants may not be consulted about *whom* they may want to be in conversation with (a different consideration than informed consent), and may not determine the substantive terrain of their own stories. That is, respondents may not be asked, or it may not be considered with whom they *desire* to co-create knowledge. Thus, research practitioners may, by themselves, construct a world of knowers and the objects of their studies—the known. The problem is not that *the known* are objectified. Rather, it is that they are objectified from the outside, from those who do not know them, and from those who fail to imagine that they do not know (and perhaps cannot know) the constructed *objects* of their study. The methodologies deployed may also be poorly equipped to explore the social realities and methodologies peripheral to the field. Participatory action research is an example of a methodology that positions participants as researchers of their own intersectional social realities within defined contexts and as co-creators of knowledge (Fine & Torre, 2004; T. Stern, 2019). Intersectionality, which has proven to be fruitful to family science, posits intersectional categories, such as *Black woman* (Cho et al., 2013; Few, 2007; Few-Demo et al., 2022). Have such categories been incorporated into family science’s framework in such a way that they possess ontological meaning and traction? Peripherals who resist positivist/post-positivist discourses may find themselves challenged by systems of validation and reward within the academy and higher education institutions, especially when community discourses are not in concert with institutions or with a discipline. Practitioners from any social location may also align themselves with epistemologies or methodological practices that eschew social justice or may not serve the interests of communities deleteriously impacted by injustice and structured inequality.

In transformative paradigms, participants and their communities inform knowledge production (Mertens, 2007), but researchers may be challenged to engage with ontological categories that positivism/post-positivism may ignore or disavow. The lived impacts of injustice are corporeal and present and should be at the center of interest in family science, which is a discipline that addresses developmental and family processes, as well as outcomes for whom social inequities and power differentials shape the contexts in which lives unfold and families live. Intervention and preventative strategies often “make up” for resource differentials or provide support to mitigate against harms associated with social disparities even when they are not constructed as unjust. Critical perspectives and alternative epistemologies challenge scholars and practitioners to give language to consider how positivist/post-positivist tenets may drive inaction or, more aptly, pull them away from a transformational family science. Even as communities may rely on their own specialists as translational bridges, peripheral practitioners, who are outsiders within, are also challenged to excavate subjugated knowledges and seek out what is beyond their own biographies.

## Transformative praxes: when we decide to alter

A transformational family science neither jettisons theory nor knowledge production for a presumed lesser master of politics, in contrast to that of “science,” as if social justice resides in

the realm of politics and, therefore, outside what science endeavors to do. Transformational praxes enjoin theoretical innovations, a repertoire of methodologies, and infuse multiple voices, communities, and social realities to *inquire about* and *understand* how structured inequality impacts families and their members, and to *identify* targets for or to inform action (in multiple ways) toward social transformations that support and sustain social justice. In our companion paper, we propose an epistemic revelatory intervention for family science to wrestle with the epistemological tensions and contradictions between positivist/post-positivist and peripheral perspectives within the discipline that foreground the pursuit of social justice. These epistemic praxes inform transformative praxes that include two interrelated areas of practice: inquiry and knowledge production and transformational applications. Inquiry and knowledge production engage epistemic practices, epistemology, inquiry paradigms, and methods, as well as theory and what is inquired about. Transformative applications, directed by inquiry and knowledge production, target multiple levels (micro, macro, or their intersection) of application whose aims may be *compensatory*, *reformatory*, *restorative*, *reparative*, or *transformative* (see Table 1). Transformative pedagogy and professional training reflect, build on, and inform inquiry, knowledge production, and their applications.

## Inquiry paradigms, knowledge production, and pedagogy

A transformative paradigm to advance social justice, Mertens (2007, p. 212) writes, must explicitly address power and cultural complexity throughout the research process. Such an approach is informed by foundational beliefs. Mertens maintains that “multiple realities (ontology) are socially constructed, and it is necessary to be explicit about the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, racial, gender, age, and disability values that define [those] realities.” Furthermore, “[k]nowledge (epistemology) is socially and historically located within a complex cultural context,” and “an interactive link between researcher and the participant is necessary.” Mertens argues that within a transformative paradigm, different methodological approaches (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods) may be used. Indeed, a critical sensibility can be brought to bear on quantitative methods in the service of social justice. However, the framing of the research problem and the methods used should address power and power differentials, cultural complexity accommodated, and discrimination and oppression recognized (Mertens, 2007, p. 216). For example, Curtis and Boe (2021) illustrate that quantitative criticalism (QuantCrit) can be used to both “critique and produce socially just research.” A transformative paradigm also foregrounds the basic principles of ethics in research (i.e., respect, beneficence, and justice). Mertens highlights, in addition, that what is respectful practice should be informed by the cultural norms of the participants and their communities. The principle of beneficence should make the connections between the process and outcomes of research, and how they promote human rights and further social justice.

**TABLE 1** Transformative applications: Addressing structural inequality, systemic racism, and social injustice impacts on family well-being

<i>Compensatory</i> (Supports and mitigates inequality effects and harms)	<i>Reformatory</i> (Reforms or improves problem components)	<i>Restorative</i> (Builds new cultures of practice and addresses intergroup harms)
<i>Reparative</i> (Compensates for or addresses legacies of the past or current injustices and deep harms)	<i>Transformative</i> (Fundamental and systemic shifts in institutional, interpersonal, and symbolic levers of systemic racism, structured inequality, and injustice)	

Alternative epistemological (and methodological) approaches that support transformative praxis may be devalued and delegitimized (Collins, 2017; Hunter, 2021; J. Jones et al., 2022). Positivism/post-positivism has often removed or displaced the interpretative capacity of peripherals who “wore the shoe.” Indeed, the subjective realities and concomitant theorizing or insights about peripheral positionalities often do not fit with validated knowledges within the social and behavioral sciences (Collins, 1989, 1990). In dialogic tension with hegemonic epistemologies, alternative ways of thinking, situated in differentiated peripheral experiences, create new ways of thinking or theoretical thought (and new ways of validating that thought; Collins, 1990). In articulating an Afrocentric feminist epistemology, Collins (1990) illustrates divergences not only from the Eurocentric masculinist knowledge validation process, but also from those that are Afrocentric or feminist. All kinds of *outsiders within* have collectively served as an engine that has created paradigmatic rifts that broadened fields of developmental and family science to accommodate all peoples (see for review e.g., Dilworth-Anderson et al., 1993; McAdoo, 1981; McLoyd, 2006; Thompson & Walker, 1995; van Eeden-Moorefield et al., 2018). Resisting controlling images or representations that constrained the subject of inquiry and provided analyses of the impacts of power differentials, which were not theorized or modeled in canonic family theory, was required to carry out this transformational work.

Theoretical innovations sought expansion and accommodations, examined what was unnamed in universalist theory, challenged and debunked representations of racialized pathology, and brought new interpretative lenses. Family and developmental scholarship has assessed, modeled, and theorized the proximal and distal effects of race on social and familial relationships, development, and well-being reframed toward normative processes without a problem-focused lens (e.g., McLoyd, 2006). This scholarship has infused an emphasis on culturally based strategies and meanings in the research literature and canon (Causadias et al., 2022; Dilworth-Anderson et al., 1993; Hunter, 2021; McAdoo, 1985; McLoyd, 2006). Moreover, cultural ecological theories, critical theories (i.e., feminist, queer, Critical Race Theory [CRT], decolonial, Black feminist thought, and intersectionality), and strength-based approaches shifted, if not disrupted, the theoretical landscape of family science and pushed its boundaries. An early example of the push to expand the family theory canon to include cultural considerations and the structural impacts of racism is Peters and Massey’s (1983) conceptualization of mundane extreme environmental minority stress (MEES) and the expansion of Rueben Hill’s family stress theory (ABCX), which includes racial stressors, interpersonal and institutional aspects of racism, as well as culturally based influences and interpretative meanings of value systems that impact coping.

As with inquiry, knowledge production, and theorizing, transformative pedagogy seeks to critically integrate alternative epistemologies and subjugated knowledges, and to reveal the impacts, historic and current, of systemic inequalities. Transformative pedagogy engages power differentials and relations, difference, and structured inequality with the intentional socialization of inclusive professional skills, empirical methods, theoretical orientations, and disciplinary identity through core curriculum, instructional practices, and incentivized professional actions within the classroom, professional organizations, and disciplinary practices (i.e., conference presentations, publications, and leadership opportunities). The NCFR’s Inclusion and Diversity Committee (IDC) reports that only 20 of 302 family science programs include a social justice framework as part of their mission or program statement, which includes the “dynamics of socially structured and institutionalized oppression and privilege” (2016). Tarver (2022) writes that anti-racist pedagogy is “an action-oriented approach for engaging teaching and training professionals in ways that dismantle white supremacy within the educational curriculum” (p. 119). Critical indigenous pedagogy, Denzin and Lincoln (2008) write, “values the transformative power of indigenous and subjugated knowledges ... and the pedagogical practices that produce these knowledges” and is emancipatory and empowering (p. 2). Furthermore, Garcia and Shirley (2012) indicate that as a critical pedagogy, “it is concerned with disrupting injustices

and transforming inequitable and oppressive power relations ...” (p. 80). Anti-racist pedagogy, described by Blakeney (2005) as a “a paradigm located within Critical Theory also explains and counteracts the persistence and impact of racism using praxis as its focus to promote social justice for the creation of a democratic society in every respect” (p. 119).

Transformative pedagogical approaches and practices challenge family scientists to examine a new curriculum, teaching and instruction, and mentoring that support social justice for all families. As a transformative praxis, anti-racist pedagogy mandates, as Tarver (2022) writes, “critical analyses of the disciplinary traditions and procedures that contribute to the maintenance and perpetuation of White supremacy, beyond the articulation of professional standards attempting to mitigate inequitable outcomes” (p. 120). Tarver and Herring (2019) posit that such pedagogy must include acknowledgment and consideration of the disciplines’ “ability to influence, control, and access resources within their respective roles” (p. 8).

## Transformative applications

Transformative applications (i.e., *compensatory*, *reformative*, *restorative*, *reparative*, and *transformative*) may be deployed to address structured inequality and social injustices in multiple ways and with different aims and outcomes. *Compensatory* applications seek to off-set the effects of structural inequities by helping families cope with or mitigate them, or by putting in place institutional resources that are structurally lacking to meet the acute or chronic needs that result from systemic inequality and disadvantage. For example, family-based interventions, such as Child First (Child First, 2022) or Head Start as early education intervention (e.g., Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 [United States Congress, 2007]), are compensatory intervention/prevention programs. *Reformative* applications seek to reform or improve problematic components of institutional policy and practice or shortfalls, but may not fundamentally transform institutions. For example, child welfare systems’ inclusion of kinship care fostering (Murphy et al., 2008) or Department of Justice mandated, or voluntary (Nakamura, 2022) reforms seeks changes in areas of policy or practice that have led to inequities, or shortfalls in service provision, or injustices and disparities in outcomes. *Restorative* applications build relations or new organizational cultures that may change or disrupt inequitable policies and practices. For example, restorative approaches have been used in schools to address the disproportionate rates of suspension among students of color (DePauli et al., 2021). Such approaches may also address deep harms and attempt to heal relations between communities where harms and injustices have occurred, which include human rights abuses, such as truth and reconciliation commissions (e.g., Greensboro Truth & Reconciliation Commission on the 1979 “Greensboro massacre”), to redress historic injustices and violence, or the absence of public acknowledgment or memory (e.g., the Tulsa race riots, Greenwood, 2015; the Museum of Memory and Human Rights, Opatow, 2015).

*Reparative* applications address the legacies of past injustices through acknowledgment and financial reparations (or other strategies to repair or replace something that was taken or lost through state action). For example, the federal apology and financial reparations to Japanese Americans who were interred during World War II (Civil Liberties Act of 1988 [United States Congress, (1988)]; Nagata et al., 2015). *Transformative* applications are designed to lead to fundamental shifts in institutional policies and practices or to address institutionalized inequities (e.g., Civil Rights Act of 1964 [United States Congress, 1964]) and to change systems and structures along matrices of domination. Examples include re-imagining the child welfare system (Roberts, 2022), universal health care, or a standard minimum living wage. These applications, which may be compensatory, reformative, reparative, or transformative, should be strategically engaged. They can be implemented concurrently and in different configurations, with a shared goal of transforming systems and institutional ideologies, policies, and practices. An example of

multiple transformative applications is the Kentucky Collaborative (Kentucky Statewide Family Engagement Center), whose aim is to support transformational family engagement with multiple partners, including families, schools, districts, and communities, with consideration of systemic racism, social justice, and attention to the institutional policies and practices that are levers of inequities that lead to disparities in children's academic and behavioral outcomes (Perry & Geller, 2021). It is critical that, with transformative applications, there be a commitment to and engagement with affected communities. Without such commitment, transformative applications may reify, maintain, strengthen, and create new levers of inequality, or nullify possible transformative effects.

### *A case exemplar of transformative applications: flint, michigan's water crisis*

To illustrate transformative applications, we turn to the lead-contaminated water crisis in Flint, Michigan, that began in 2014. Sixty-seven percent of Flint residents were people of color, and 40% lived in poverty. The water crisis, Melissa Denchak of the National Resource Defense Council (2018) writes, was "a story of environmental injustice and bad decision making," and the alarms from residents and reported health consequences were "chronically ignored and discounted by governmental officials" (Denchak, 2018, para. 1). Family science practitioners may investigate the long-term needs of families and children and identify comprehensive *compensatory* support services. Community-engaged or participatory action studies can surface the voices, needs, and experiences of the residents and the toll of injustices, as well as bring attention to the change residents themselves would like to see. Participatory studies may also inform and support collective organizing or advocacy for a *reparative* response to address the harm and its long-term impacts. It was the collective organizing by residents themselves that led to a \$662 million settlement (Clifford & Singh, 2021). This was a litigated state reparation, not a legislative one. Reformative actions may ensure that the clean-up and the required restoration of water systems are completed and that needed appropriations are made. A question that arises is, "What systems or levers of inequality (institutional to interpersonal) must be *transformed*—not just reformed (e.g., under federal watch for non-compliance or bringing into compliance with existing law)—in order to prevent such reoccurrences for marginalized communities, similarly gutted by post-industrialization and globalization?" What must we do to ensure that all children and families have access to safe drinking water?

Decades before the Flint water crisis, congressional legislation removed lead from paint and gasoline, and cleaned up water because of public health concerns (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2022) that included the unequivocal impacts on brain development and a range of cognitive, academic, and behavioral outcomes (Dignam et al., 2019). Even with these laws, structural inequities still placed Flint residents at risk of governmental decisions that led to water contamination and inaction (Michigan Civil Rights Commission, 2017). Residents' complaints about the smell or color of the water and unheeded health problems exposed failures in the water filtration system that went unaddressed. These failures illustrate the impacts of injustice, structured inequality, and racism on children, families, and the entire city (Michigan Civil Rights Commission, 2017). Transformative applications in multiple arenas are needed to address environmental injustices and structural inequities (including historical legacies) that placed Flint residents—primarily low-income, and Black and Brown people—at risk of deep harm, including unresponsiveness to citizens' needs. Such applications are also needed to identify, assess, and respond to short- and long-term consequences for development, families, and communities.

## **AMERICAN RACISM, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND FAMILY SCIENCE: CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS**

American racism costs, and its impacts are profound. Social and institutional determinants (e.g., health, education, employment, financial, and government) account for racial disparities

in health, life, expectancy, and mortality (Williams & Mohammed, 2009; Williams & Rucker, 2000; Yearby, 2020); education and employment (Pager & Shepherd, 2008); policing, sentencing, and incarceration (Alexander, 2010; Chin, 2016; Kurlychek & Johnson, 2019); housing and mortgages (Lynch et al., 2021; Korver-Glenn, 2018); cumulative (dis)advantage across the life course (Blank, 2005; O’Rand, 1996; Shuey & Willson, 2008); risk of exposure to environmental harms (Seamster & Purifoy, 2021); and racialized and intergenerational trauma (Hankerson et al., 2022; O’Neill et al., 2018). Furthermore, there are costs for all of us, as a Citigroup study indicated that the nation would have been \$16 trillion richer if not for inequities in education, housing, wages, and business investment between Black and White Americans over the past 20 years (Peterson & Mann, 2020). Margaret Beale Spencer (2006) critiqued the developmental literature, suggesting that context and racism had been missing in action, which produced limited scholarship on diverse youth and their families. Racism, Spencer writes:

... is an insidious and omnipresent phenomenon that is translated through multiple levels of social, cultural, and historical contexts and affects a large impact on human lives ... racism is signified not only by discriminatory behavior but also by structural relationships, political ideologies, and institutional practices, all of which are often viewed as normative components of our society and a critical aspect of everyday life for all. These structural and ideological components are highly institutionalized, thus affecting individual experiences and life trajectories, not only by disadvantaging people of color but also by privileging White people ... (p. 883)

Racism matters for what it confers and takes away. The disparate fate of American families, as Bronfenbrenner (1975) observes, “is a reflection of the way in which our society now functions and, hence, is subject to *change if and when we decide to alter our policies and practice*” (p. 451, emphasis added).

The social protests that followed a decade of bearing witness to “policing murders,” from that of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin by neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman to George Floyd’s video-recorded murder by former Lt. Derek Chauvin, renewed efforts to infuse the impacts of racism into canonic (and universalized) developmental and family theory where there had been no prior analytical space and to foreground a social justice or anti-racist agenda. To name, theorize, and target racial stresses and strains using an anti-racist framework that makes explicit the workings of white supremacy, and to advocate for anti-racist, social justice, and transformative agendas, is reminiscent of the scholar-activist stance among Black scholars 50 years ago (e.g., Joyce Ladner’s edited volume *Death of White Sociology*, Ladner, 1973; Robert Guthrie’s *Even the Rat Was White: A Historical View of Racism in Psychology*, Guthrie, 1976; Lerone Bennett’s *The Challenge of Blackness*, 1972). Special issues, such as this one, have been the venue of these renewed efforts. For example, cons *Attachment & Human Development’s* issue on attachment perspectives on race, prejudice, and anti-racism (J. A. Stern et al., 2022); the *Journal of Social Issues* volume on psychology, history, and social justice (Hunter & Stewart, 2015); *Child Development’s* special segment on advancing scholarship on anti-racism within developmental science (Cooper et al., 2022); and *JFTR’s* issues on revisioning family theories, centering race and ethnicity (Few-Demo, 2018), and on social justice in family science (A. G. James & McGeorge, 2019). Public health contributions to understanding the social determinants of health, including systemic racism, racial stressors, and discrimination, have also conferred a kind of “scientific legitimacy” to investigate multiple pathways through which race, as a social location, and racism impact well-being (Williams & Rucker, 2000; Yearby, 2020). Ultimately, the disciplinary impact of special issues is measured by whether their content becomes a part of the centers of inquiry and dissemination rather than peripheral to it (see e.g., McLoyd, 2006).

Distilling empirical findings from a variety of fields, Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child (CDC) developed an infographic on *How Racism Affects the Developing Child* that shows the multiple pathways through which racism impacts children and families, as well as areas for their mitigation, highlighting the very areas family science sees as its central mission. The CDC ends with a call to action:

[i]t's clear that science cannot address these challenges alone. But science-informed thinking combined with expertise in changing entrenched systems and the lived experiences of families raising young children under a wide variety of conditions can be a powerful catalyst of more effective strategies. (2022)

Family science has an interdisciplinary multi-located voice(s) to develop and advocate for social and public policies that do not sustain or reify structured inequalities. The discipline can also demonstrate the need for anti-racist and just best practices in health and public health, education, child welfare, human services, criminal justice, environmental safety, and more, and examine the deleterious consequences of racial inequality and racism for families. A social justice project seeks to unravel and transform that which creates ecological vulnerability and cumulative (dis)advantage for individuals and families across the life course and the aggregate differentials borne by social location and communities.

Urie Bronfenbrenner's, 1975 paper, *Reality and Research in the Ecology of Human Development*, was delivered on the heels of a social movement and the greatest achievements in U.S. civil rights in a century. Racial equity, however, would prove elusive, and racial injustices and disparities and their impacts on life, liberty, and well-being persist. What Bronfenbrenner proposed nearly 50 years ago did not specifically address race-based structured inequality, but the public policies he proposed did have implications for its amelioration, if universally applied. The policy recommendations were sweeping: some were compensatory and others transformative, but all engaged social equity. They include, for example, extending Head Start into elementary school (to be called Follow Through), a *Fair Part-Time Employment Practices Act* to accommodate parental caregiving demands, enhancing the position of women as mothers and workers, and connecting children with the world of work to build social and human capital. Moreover, Bronfenbrenner called for what he saw as basic needs for families, including healthcare for all children, guaranteed minimum income for families, and nationwide high-quality neighborhood-based day care for working parents. However, he notes that we, as a nation, do not act as other modern nations to support children and families in these ways because of "our determined resistance to communism or socialism in any form." (p. 469). The current political landscape of anti-racism and social justice is no less fraught than the old debates of Americanism vs. communism. The *culture wars* extend in many directions, and if it is a moment of racial reckoning, it is one that has brought us global protests for racial justice, the rise of replacement theory and white nationalist populism, and legislative attacks on critical race theory (Stout & Wilburn, 2022). So, how do we propose, as a discipline, to reckon with that which will support anti-racism, social justice, and well-being for *all* families?

Despite the many engagements with social justice among family science scholars and practitioners (A. James et al., 2016), there remains an underlying uneasiness with social justice as what *science* endeavors to do or as existing within the domains of politics. Moreover, NCFR has a complicated and uncomfortable history of race and racism. Eugenicists were first welcomed into the organization, and a paper on its "progressive" applications was published in the inaugural issue of *Living* (Osborn, 1939). A generation later, what Hunter (2021) described as Black scholar radicals, many of whom were civil rights activists, challenged the social and behavioral sciences in the wake of the Moynihan Report (Moynihan et al., 1967) and civil rights and Black nationalist movements. There were ever-louder critiques in family science, such as Robert Staples, who wrote in 1971 that "the myths perpetuated about the black family are,

perhaps, no less important than the myth of a value-free sociology” (p. 119) (Staples, 1971). After more than a decade of challenge, in 1979, *Contemporary Theories about the Family*, vol. 1, edited by Wesley Burr, Rueben Hill, F. Ivan Nye, and Ira L. Reiss, on which many of our most senior family scholars were trained, was a 653-page tome with only four subject-indexed references (and fewer pages) to race, racial background, or ethnicity. No indexed references to racism or discrimination appeared (see Doherty et al., 1993 for a discussion of *Contemporary Theories* and the discipline’s history). In 1981, in the first edition preface to *Black Families*, Harriet McAdoo, the 51st president (1993–1994) of NCFR, and the first African American, writes of professional organizations and the pursuit of studies on race and families:

The major professional organizations are the validators of the field and control academic and professional futures .... These efforts are only possible within journals or institutions that have gone beyond such debates as “Are black families really a valid subject area? Are these really just polemic exercises? “Are we giving too much emphasis to minorities?” “Can’t we just focus on ‘good research’ and forget about all of this race business?” (p. 14)

The debates and underlying critiques to which McAdoo refers remain present in considerations of racism and social justice.

Nearly 80 years after Frederick Osborn’s paper (1939), *The Comprehensive Program of Eugenics and Its Social Implications* appeared in *Living*, the Inclusion and Diversity Committee (IDC) of NCFR (2016) advanced a social justice framework and challenged family science and the organization to *identify* “dynamics of socially structured and institutionalized oppression and privilege; *reflect* “on our own socialization linked to social locations (e.g., race, class, age, gender, sexual orientation, ability, etc.)”; and to *act* “on systematic and hidden disparities with meaningful leadership in the field of Family Science” (A. James et al., 2016, emphasis added). Family scientists have also described the multilayers of a social justice focus for the discipline. Anderson (2019, p. 386) writes, “... social justice transcends mere distribution of resources to require the transformation of systemic social processes of oppression.” When applied to family studies, Shih et al. (2019, p. 414) write that a social justice framework “emphasizes how structural inequalities, differential access to privilege and power, and oppression can influence the lives and well-being of all individuals and families.” Russell (2019, p. 350) directs us toward lived experience and the quality of life in a socially just society where there is “the ability of people and families to realize their potential for health and thriving in the context of the society in which they live.”

The possibility for a transformational family science requires dialogic engagement between positivist/post-positivist and peripheral practitioners (inclusive of researchers, service practitioners, and policy makers) within communal spaces, as proposed in our companion paper (J. Jones et al., 2022). We introduce frameworks inspired by the work of philosophers Charles Mills and Rudolph Carnap. Our intervention works from the supposition that all social thought reflects the standpoint of its creators (Collins, 1989), including that which is legitimated through standards of objective inquiry and thereby codified as without bias and self-interest and as value-free. Differences must also enter through a dialogic space for discussion among diverse parties, which includes peripheral practitioners who occupy a myriad of social locations and who use positivist/post-positivist and non-traditional methodologies, such as intersectionality. Dialogic space within family science includes positivist/post-positivist practitioners, who, even within a hegemonic paradigm, differ in their opinions. Family science dialogic space should also include members of the communities that family science serves, people whom community members look to as their communal leaders, and experts with knowledge about families and about their communities.



In 1948, Lawrence Frank, then president of the NCFR, wrote of the importance of the development of a national policy for the family as one of the aims of the organization (Frank, 1948):

In times of social-cultural change we have to undertake the most difficult of discriminations---of recognizing clearly and upholding our enduring values and advancing our cherished aspirations while we revise, reorganize, and sometimes replace the specific formulations and patterns through which we and our predecessors have tried to embody those values and achieve those aspirations. (p. 4)

Family science can provide “science-informed thinking combined with expertise in changing entranced systems” (CDC, 2022) so that we may address racism and social injustice, not as a political platitude, but because we know the real-world consequences of structured inequality and injustice for families and their members. As an evidenced-based discipline with scholarship informed by multiple epistemologies and armed with diverse theoretical and methodological approaches, family science has many tools for pursuing anti-racist and social justice projects to support family well-being. If and when we decide to alter systemic racism, structured inequality, and social injustices, efforts must be incisive, intentional, multilayered, and focused on critical mechanisms of impact with strategic deployment of transformational applications. The question is not can we, but do we, as a discipline, want to re-imagine a transformational family science that recognizes we cannot support healthy families if, even tacitly or unintentionally, we do not acknowledge and address racism, structured inequality, and social injustices of all kinds? We cannot extract them from our scientific enterprises, as if they are not part of the lived experiences (i.e., the reality) of families and their members. We have focused here on the costs of racism and social injustice for those who must endure their wraths, but we must also examine their rewards and costs to families and communities privileged by them (McGhee, 2021).

The IDC indicated the potential for family science practitioners and NCFR as a professional organization to engage in social justice praxes (A. James et al., 2016). Not all will pursue a social justice agenda, but we can and must be reflexive about the ways our praxes may sustain or justify structural inequality and its institutional mechanisms, and acknowledge that all our practices have implications for (in)justice as it is lived. Family science can, and should be, more than a passive bystander. As Collins (2017) warns,

Assuming people bear the burden of making changes by themselves and that everyone else can either study the efforts of the oppressed or cheer them on from the sidelines undermines the field. How to do the hard political work of challenging epistemic inequality within epistemic practices requires far more diligence. (p. 117)

We can accept the challenge as a transformational family science that seeks change that enacts not the same difference, but, rather, a *different* difference.

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