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Journal of Family Issues 2007; 28; 549
DOI: 10.1177/0192513X06297331

The online version of this article can be found at: http://jfi.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/28/4/549
Feminist-Informed Critical Multiculturalism
Considerations for Family Research

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In this article, the authors draw from feminist, critical, and multicultural research traditions to identify fundamental assumptions for researching from a feminist-informed, critical, multicultural stance. Core considerations include amplifying marginalized voices, interrogating the politics of knowledge production, ensuring research benefits to those at the center of analysis, attending to culture and context, holding ourselves accountable as researchers for our own multicultural competence, and using diverse methodologies to support social equity. They offer examples of critical multicultural research and argue for the potential of this approach to contribute to a corrective research agenda in the field of family studies.

**Keywords:** critical; diversity; family; multicultural; research

The multicultural movement in family studies has shifted from a position of “celebrating diversity” and understanding cultural differences toward critical analysis of power relationships based on group membership (cf. Dilworth-Anderson, Burton, & Klein, 2005; Falicov, 2003). Culturally centered knowledge continues to be of significant importance; however, from a critical perspective knowledge derived from different cultural traditions competes for legitimacy within the broader society (May, 1999). That is, cultural knowledge that is “normed” privileges those in power and marginalizes those who are not. As Smith (1999) argued, research is one way imperialism and colonization have been, and continue to be, achieved by defining what is considered “legitimate knowledge” (p. 5).

While feminist inquiries place women at the center of analysis (Allen & Baber, 1992), multicultural approaches center race, culture, and ethnicity. Critical multiculturalism and feminism intersect via an interrogation of
interlocking systems of oppression based on identity categories of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, nation of origin, language, culture, ethnicity, age, and abilities. We recognize that each of us belongs and is assigned to numerous identity groups that may be at odds with each other culturally and politically. There is also considerable diversity within all identity groups. Furthermore, all of our lives are significantly shaped by constantly shifting power relations associated with our multiple identities that merge at the intersections of political, social, and historical realities. We approached writing this article from different social locations in relationship to race and nationality. Teresa is European American and grew up in the United States. Shi-Ruei is Chinese American and grew up in Taiwan. We recognize that our social positions and personal histories affect our work as researchers.

The purpose of this article is to identify fundamental assumptions for researching from a feminist and critically informed, multicultural stance to tie together approaches that share these assumptions and to offer a framework for completing research from this perspective. To this end, we first define a number of primary concepts and offer a brief review of the current state of feminist and multicultural research in family studies. Second, we explore the meaning of critical multiculturalism and its interface with feminist discourse. Third, we offer core themes for researching families from a critical multicultural perspective, including amplifying marginalized voices, interrogating the politics of knowledge construction, ensuring research benefits those being studied, attending to culture and context, holding ourselves accountable as researchers for our own multicultural competence, and using diverse research methodologies to support cultural democracy. Fourth, we offer an example of participatory action research in family studies education. We end by considering challenges we believe are relevant to working from this perspective.

It is important to us that we do not overstate our claim to the research knowledge presented in this article. It is our goal to honor and support the work of feminist, critical, multicultural, and multicultural feminist researchers who came before us and who work along our side. We hope that by bringing together the work of many who have argued the value of these approaches, we will strengthen our collective voice to further influence the direction of family studies research.

**Defining Concepts**

Terms that reference constructs of culture, ethnicity, and race are often used in ambiguous, confusing ways that at best ignore important distinctions,
and at worst serve to maintain social inequities (Turner, Wieling, & Allen, 2004). For the purpose of this article, we define culture as sets of shared beliefs, values, and social practices. We define ethnicity as “a person’s identification with a group of people of the same race or nationality who share a common and distinctive culture” (Turner et al., 2004, p. 261). We define race as a socially constructed identity grouping that functions to maintain oppressive intergroup power dynamics in some national contexts, including the United States. Because racial identity is based on ancestral nation and shared history and/or experience in the United States, it is often linked to culture and ethnicity. We use the term feminism broadly to include the many feminist discourses (e.g., Marxist feminist, poststructural feminist, Black feminist, womanist, radical feminist, Chicana feminist) acknowledging the historical disparities and dissimilarities in lived experience of women across racial and/or cultural and socioeconomic groups. We use critical multiculturalism to refer to a nonessentialist perspective that values diversity and acknowledges the politics of cultural differences and social location. Finally, we define critical multicultural research as research that is (a) informed by critical, feminist, and multicultural theories; (b) supportive of equity and inclusion; and (c) centered on the concerns of those inhabiting traditionally marginalized and oppressed social locations. Critical multicultural research (CMR) is therefore a broad term that refers to the many research approaches which share these similarities.

**Trends in Feminist and Multicultural Family Research**

There have been significant strides in feminist and multicultural research in family studies during the past several decades. Many of these efforts have been led by ethnic family studies scholars who critiqued Eurocentered field knowledge and called for the study of diverse families (cf. Dilworth-Anderson, Burton, & Johnson, 1993; Staples & Mirande, 1980). The greater acceptance of postpositive research has been supportive of feminist inquiries, which in turn has led to greater acceptance of diverse methodologies. Likewise, as family scholars increasingly acknowledge the social construction of gender, a more sophisticated understanding of the structural and ideological interplay of multiple identities and social locations is evolving that includes analysis of race, ethnicity, and class (Allen & Baber, 1992; DeReus, Few, & Blume, 2005; Ferree, 1990). A number of reviews have demonstrated that greater attention is being paid to race, culture, and ethnicity (Bean & Crane, 1996; Bean, Crane, & Lewis, 2002); however, there continues to be an inadequate analysis of these concerns from feminist and critical perspectives (Thompson & Walker, 1995).
Critical Multiculturalism

Critical multiculturalism draws from critical and multicultural perspectives as well as feminist discourses on identity politics and social location to support racial, ethnic, and cultural equity. Central to critical theory is the social critique of how societal processes and institutions maintain material inequities by reproducing class structures. The many critical discourses share an interrogation of systems of thought and action that promote oppression, and a commitment to develop concrete strategies to reform social structures that maintain inequality (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003; Rediger, 1996). Critical research frameworks are based on critical realist ontology; reality exists apart from the researcher but cannot be fully known (Denzin, 1998; Rediger, 1996). Poststructuralists have criticized critical theory, particularly Marxism, as relying on essentialist and dichotomous perspectives of class structures and unrealistic ideas about social revolution (Lather, 1991). In turn, critical theorists have criticized postmodernists and poststructuralists as failing to adequately challenge social systems and structures that maintain unequal distribution of resources and opportunities (Thomas, 1993).

Feminist discourses on identity politics and the politics of location (DeReus et al., 2005) bridge these perspectives by situating individual experience and history within structural contexts. This allows critical multicultural researchers to acknowledge the potential for participants and researchers to simultaneously hold multiple cultural perspectives and relative positions of power. Numerous markers of group membership serve as criteria for privilege and oppression, intersecting in complex ways to position each of us along multiple continuums of power at any given time and place within all relationships. These positionalities are relevant in the relationships between us in all contexts (Tisdell, Hanley, & Taylor, 2000), including research.

How we understand, relate to, and act on our social identities is of primary importance in relationship to our lived experience and central to CMR. May (1999) argued the importance of situating “cultural differences within the wider nexus of power relations of which they form a part” (p. 32). This includes the dynamic of how minority cultural knowledges are subjugated or misrepresented through comparison to the dominant culture. Subjugated knowledges need to be recognized and “revalued” in their own right and as sources of critique of dominant discourses. May was careful to point out the potential pitfall of essentializing subjugated cultural knowledge—the risk of culturally “fixing” marginalized groups rather than recognizing differences within groups and the process of continual cultural reconstruction.
Critical Multicultural Research and Family Studies

Agenda, epistemology, methodology, and ethics are frequently cited as fundamental components to designing and carrying out research (Small, 1995; Thompson, 1992; Thompson & Walker, 1995). Agenda includes research purpose and goals. Epistemology refers to researchers’ views regarding the nature of reality and how reality can be known. Methodology is the research approach or design, including the methods researchers use. Ethics consider the implications of research processes to ensure researchers act out of social responsibility and are accountable to those they study. These components are overlapping and mutually informing. Researchers’ epistemologies shape the purpose of their research and the questions they ask. In turn, researchers choose methodologies that are congruent with their assumptions about how and what knowledge should be produced. The process itself often influences the researcher’s epistemology, research questions, and methods. In the following section we list core themes and considerations for researching families from feminist-informed, critical multicultural perspectives. We integrate agenda, epistemological, methodological, and ethical considerations throughout our discussion.

Amplifying Marginalized Voices

CMR supports cultural democracy by making inequalities visible through drawing attention to experiences of oppression and identifying, documenting, and attempting to correct social inequalities. At a minimum, researchers have a responsibility to use their power to uncover the voices of those at the margins and to bring them to our conscious so they can be heard (Sparks, 2002). CMR approaches often expose multiple truths and countertruths (that which is incongruent with dominant cultural knowledge) from diverse lived experience within and across cultures and identity groups, opening space in the larger social discourse for competing knowledges. We offer an example from our own work in which we used critical race theory to study the experiences of family therapists in training. Participants told a dominant story about professional education offering opportunities for growth in racial awareness and a counterstory about experiences of racial marginalization and discrimination. They described (a) the curriculum as Eurocentric, (b) many faculty as lacking in racial awareness, (c) a lack of attention in training to issues of race and racism, (d) negative assumptions and/or differential treatment based on race, and (e) experiencing and/or witnessing specific instances of White privilege and racial discrimination. Participants reported that taking part in the
research process—talking about previously silenced experiences, being part of a collective voice, and knowing their stories were being recorded—was liberating. The decision was jointly made to publish the study under only the primary researcher’s (Teresa’s) name because of her social position as a White academic who did not share the level of risk of participants—many of whom were women of color—and all of whom were just starting their careers (McDowell, 2004).

As others have argued, family studies knowledge has been primarily based on the voices of European Americans and derived mostly from Western traditions, ideas, and theoretical constructs. This partial knowledge is often masked by scientific notions that create the appearance of objective, universal knowledge. This purported objective knowledge has been embraced at the expense of the voices echoing from outside the mainstream and the dynamics of families outside the dominant norms have been viewed as pathological and deviant (Dilworth-Anderson et al., 2005; Staples & Mirande, 1980). Epistemological frameworks and methodologies that are congruent with the culture and life experiences of those studied increase the potential for participants’ voices to be accurately represented. For example, Bernal (2002) used critical race theory (CRT) and Latina/Latino critical theory (LatCrit) in a study of Chicanos to contrast how Eurocentric and critical race–gendered epistemologies shape knowledge in very different ways, particularly relative to language, culture, and community commitment.

**Interrogating the Politics of Knowledge Creation**

Critical researchers argued “that we can only see the world through our values-laden perception” (Gale, 1993, p. 77), supporting the assumption that all knowledge is culturally derived and influenced by existing power structures. These researchers consider the complexities of power relations in knowledge production and attempt to avoid essentialist perspectives by locating researchers and participants amid their unique, complex social contexts and experiences. This includes not essentializing cultural characteristics or taking a “hands-off” approach to power imbalances that exist within families and cultural groups. Gender analysis is of primary interest as gender inequality is common across cultural groups and typically central to the lived experience of women and men. Likewise, oppressive forces such as racism, heterosexism, ableism, and classism must be critically analyzed within and across racial and/or cultural groups. CMR approaches acknowledge that who we are, how we narrate our experience, is inseparable from the multiple structural contexts
that locate us in society. Specific epistemological frameworks within CMR often highlight certain identity locations, considering what is germane to the lives of those who are central to the inquiry (e.g., Black feminist, Chicana feminist, Afrocentered research approaches).

These considerations are useful in the study of families because they assume dynamics within families, and those between families and broader social systems, are reciprocally influential. Relationships between family members are deeply influenced by social discourses and material realities associated with the social locations of each member and the family as a whole. Likewise, power dynamics within families, and the role families play in the transmission of cultural and social knowledge, continually influence broader social structures. By attending to the politics of social location, family researchers can unmask essentialist explanations and oversimplified descriptions of family life. For example, DeReus et al. (2005) argued that critical race feminist theories, derived from legal studies, can guide research in ways that critically examine families within broader sociopolitical contexts, observing intersectionality at “intraperso-nal, interpersonal, and community” (p. 455) levels. By acknowledging the politics embedded in knowledge creation, family researchers can make responsible decisions about how they do research, including placing themselves in the analyses relative to culture, power, and social location. As Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett (2003) pointed out in their research with Black women from a Black feminist perspective care must be taken to continually monitor power, attending to the multiple complexities of race, class, and gender, and to contextualizing the research process.

**Benefiting Research Participants**

CMR approaches are designed and carried out in ways that benefit, as directly as possible, those who are centered in the analysis. Researchers employ methods of analysis and report results in ways that ensure researchers are accurately reporting the values, interests, and desires of those they are attempting to represent. In the more action-oriented approaches, agendas are participant driven, based on actual life needs rather than being driven by theory alone (Casas & Thompson, 1991). Researchers and participants often collaborate on how the research will be carried out and results will be shared with the ultimate goal of taking action that promotes the well-being of participants. Agendas frequently include processes of liberation, by which participants gain heightened awareness of the influence on their lives of larger social contexts. Participants and researchers
may collaborate to meet a general goal and then allow methods and specific outcomes to unfold through the research process. This may lead to identifying mechanisms for resisting oppressive forces and developing strategies for taking action toward social justice. Research findings are often used to advocate for changes in policy and practices that make a positive difference in the lives of those studied (Casas & Thompson, 1991; Small, 1995). For example, Teresa participated in an inquiry group process with a multiracial team of family therapists who were concerned about the lack of understanding and sensitivity in the field toward multiracial identity. Through a process of reviewing literature, discussing and developing frameworks for therapeutic work with multiracial individuals and families, and sharing personal experiences of racism relative to multiracial locations, group members were able to apply and advocate in the family therapy field for “critical conversations” in working with multiracial clients. This process encouraged professional development in coresearchers, offered an avenue for liberatory conversations with clients, and informed others in the field about social, political, and personal dynamics relative to multiracial identity (McDowell et al., 2005).

Participatory action research (PAR) is an example of a research approach in which the primary goal is to benefit participants. In this approach, researchers work collaboratively with participants, often as coresearchers, in ways that are mutually beneficial and explicitly political (Small, 1995: Small & Uttal, 2005). PAR was developed in non-Western countries and has been applied to family research and mental health issues in developing countries and First Nations research (Hudson & Taylor-Henley, 2001; Nastasi, Varjas, & Sarkar, 1998). PAR has also been applied from a feminist perspective in a number of studies (e.g., McClennen, 2003; Renzetti, 1995). Turnbull, Friesen, and Ramirez (1998) advocated for the use of PAR in family studies research and offered a detailed account of implementing PAR at all levels and phases of family research, arguing that it is particularly empowering, relevant, and useful to families. We offer a more specific example of using PAR near the end of this article.

Attending to Culture and Context

In a discipline such as family studies, it is vital that we stay true to the complex lived realities of people in all cultures and social locations (Bengston, Acock, Allen, Dilworth-Anderson, & Klein, 2005). CMR approaches highlight the significance of social, historical, and cultural contexts in which family
life is embedded to create more inclusive understandings of diverse families. Context shapes what questions are asked of whom, how and why questions are asked, and how results are interpreted (Sue, Ivey, & Pederson, 1996). Research approaches need to be congruent with the worldview of participants (Gibbs, 2001) to allow researchers to ask questions that are meaningful and informative from the perspectives of the people they are attempting to understand. Examples of research approaches that center race and culture include Afrocentric research (e.g., Asante, 2003) and research informed by CRT (e.g., Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Decolonizing methodologies (e.g., Smith, 1999) are another example, using a variety of methods, including storytelling, testimonies, remembering, and restorying to claim and/or reclaim indigenous cultural knowledge and to correct injustices.

CMR requires understanding on the part of researchers of the cultural orientation and lived experience of research participants to fit culturally and be acceptable to the involved community (Casas & Thompson, 1991). People from different cultural groups and social locations often have very different conceptualizations of relationships, and participants may have different and competing theories of family life and family dynamics from those of the researcher. This requires us as researchers to develop the skills and sensibilities needed to respectfully enter and attempt to understand the life world of those who are culturally similar as well as culturally different from ourselves. We have found research teams that include cultural “insiders and outsiders” can promote rich analysis from multiple perspectives (Twine, 2000). Outsiders often notice and question what is assumed by insiders, while insiders provide a cultural lens that supports and is accurate to the experience of those centered in the analysis.

Continual reflection on our own interactions has been vital in our attempts to create fair and inclusive coresearcher relationships. This has required us to be willing to openly discuss the privilege that some carry into research groups based on gender, race, class, nation of origin, position in the field, and so on. We have relied on our shared interest in understanding the complexities of power and privilege on global, national, and local levels, including how these dynamics influence our work. We expect that without interrogation it is more likely that patterns within insider–outsider research groups will reproduce broader societal dynamics. We have found that when researchers share social standpoints (e.g., antiracist, antisexist, antiheterosexual), there is less focus on differences as barriers between members and more on using each researcher’s perspectives and available privilege to meet collective goals (Twine, 2000).
Maintaining Awareness of Self of the Researcher

Papadopulos and Lees (2002) advocated for cultural awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity as essential elements in training culturally competent researchers. Because CMR approaches are politically driven and culturally situated, it is particularly important for researchers to clarify their epistemological lens. Working from this perspective, researchers are expected to be critically aware of their own worldviews, recognize the impact of their views on the research process, confront their theoretical biases and personal values and motives, and be attentive to relationships with participants (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003; Small, 1995). Because most researchers are socialized into dominant cultural perspectives, those using CMR approaches must be particularly vigilant about their own assumptions and epistemological perspectives to be able to center on what is important to participants and carefully attend to their cultural values. For example, Uehara et al. (1996) described a “values-based approach to multicultural social work research” (p. 613) in which researchers share a multicultural perspective and the goal of social transformation. The process includes researchers continuously reflecting on their biases while collaborating in democratic ways with members of disenfranchised communities toward participant-driven agendas. This is accomplished by researchers keeping journals and discussing with each other their cultural biases and experience as researchers throughout the process.

Although it is expected that researchers are critically and socially aware, they are not expected to be distant or neutral. Contact between researchers and participants is considered far from neutral, being influenced, among other things, by the researcher’s race, class, gender, and ethnicity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Few et al., 2003). In fact, in contrast to traditional goals of neutrality and distance, CMR approaches reflect the views of feminist researchers who argue the benefits of the potentially long-term nature of more collaborative, engaged relationships (Fontana & Frey, 1998). When interviews are used, they often take on the quality of a collaborative conversation regarding mutually relevant critical issues (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

As family researchers, we are in the unique position of having intimate experience with our subject matter. We have all been part of a family, as it is variously defined, at some point in our lives. Likewise, we are all relating to ourselves and others via the politics and social meaning of our locations relative to gender, race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, abilities, nation of origin, language, class, social position, and age. This places us in complex and fluid insider-outsider relation to varying degrees along each of these
dimensions with all research participants. Ignoring these complexities by taking an objective expert stance increases the likelihood of imposing our own culturally bound values, norms, and beliefs on others, furthering the potential for family studies research to subjugate and marginalize diverse life ways (Allen, 2000).

Applying Diverse Research Strategies

It is important that methodologies used in CMR approaches fit within the overall paradigm; however, many strategies can be used to target social change. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) pointed out that critical and cultural studies researchers use a variety of methods and should be bricoleurs, meaning they should be familiar with many methods of collecting and analyzing data. As with other critical approaches, CMR is not limited to what have traditionally been considered qualitative methodologies, sometimes using designs and methods traditionally considered quantitative within a critical interpretive framework (Greene, 1998). In fact, we must be prepared to challenge reified dichotomies so that traditional research canons cannot frustrate the broader agenda of promoting cultural democracy. For example, Gonzalez (1997) analyzed demographics to call attention to policy, research, and counseling needs of Chicanos. Numerous researchers have analyzed literature trends to critique the directions we are taking as a profession in relationship to multiculturalism (e.g., Bean & Crane, 1996; Staples & Mirande, 1980). Several researchers, using in-depth interviews to investigate race and ethnicity, have included analysis of relevant oppressive social forces—including the intersection of racism, classism, and sexism—on the lives of the families they are studying (e.g., Killian, 2001; Negy & Snyder, 2000).

This said, CMR methodologies typically democratize the research process as much as possible. There is often an attempt to form partnerships between researchers and participants, or “coresearchers,” in which power relationships are challenged and moved beyond the hierarchical relationships common in traditional research processes (Papadopoulos & Lees, 2002). Power sharing between the researcher and participants includes careful consideration of the data collection and interpretation processes, availability of results, and rights to the knowledge that is produced (Small, 1995). In the most collaborative forms of CMR, (e.g., PAR) researchers negotiate with participants how and if knowledge produced through the research should be published (Gibbs, 2001). Reporting and disseminating findings should be readily accessible, understandable, and have practical value (Small, 1995) to reach all stakeholders and benefit all parties (Papadopoulos & Lees, 2002). Research is seen as an
exercise of freedom and mutual responsibility of empowerment between the researcher and the participants.

**Case Study: PAR in Family Studies Education**

In this section, we describe PAR as particularly representative of CMR methodologies, offering an example from our own work. Guiding principles in PAR include (a) sharing power in the inquiry and learning process; (b) combining “expert” and “local” knowledge to meet goals; (c) centralizing co-researcher values in the goals, process, and use of produced knowledge; (d) raising consciousness through the inquiry process which in turn informs action; and (e) embedding sustainability via individual development of participants and community improvements (Kidd & Kral, 2005; Reardon, 1998).

In this example, we share our own work in a racial dialogue group, drawing attention our experience relative to guiding principles of PAR (for an in-depth description, see McDowell et al., 2003). The dialogue group began as a result of conversations about race in family therapy that occurred between Shi-Ruei, Teresa, and a number of 1st-year master’s students. Group members shared various levels of “expert” (e.g., knowledge of the field and research processes) and “local” (e.g., cultural knowledge and lived experience relative to power and oppression) knowledge. Group members of color brought with them lived expertise in racism, White group members brought their developing awareness of White privilege, and all members brought varying experience and expertise on families and multiculturalism. At the time, Teresa was working on an initiative to increase the racial and ethnic diversity in a family therapy program and felt limited by her lack of racial awareness. Shi-Ruei was at a more advanced level of awareness through personal experience and expertise teaching and researching diversity in family studies. Student members of the all-female group included an African American, a Mexican American, a European American, and an Asian Indian. The women of color in the group shared a marginalized position relative to the field of family studies and family therapy. For example, to seek guidance for becoming a clinician, a group member wanted to read about the experiences of African American family therapists working with White clients. She found only one article about Black therapists working with White clients among many articles helping White therapists work with clients of color. The prioritizing of Western values and Eurocentric theories excluded the life worlds of several group members. All of us shared a commitment to the value of racial equity and inclusion. We also shared a sense
of humility and respect for each other as well as the willingness to risk having difficult conversations.

Negotiating power sharing required open and continuous reflection about our relationships relative to power and social location within society, the family studies program, and the group itself. We had to name the privilege White group members brought with them and the elevated social position of faculty who are awarded greater power to shape and interpret student–faculty interactions. Our collective willingness to be transparent about the relative positions of all members was an important starting point. For example, in one instance Teresa was in conversation with a coresearcher of color who remarked on how a White person (Teresa) acknowledging racism was particularly validating. Shi-Ruei was able to call attention to this dynamic. She challenged Teresa to recognize the unearned privileging of her voice and asked our coresearcher to consider why her experience of racism was any more “real” via the “authority” of a White colleague’s validation. The continual unveiling of privilege stood alongside an ongoing process of analyzing experiences of marginalization and oppression as group members wove in and out of sharing personal and professional experiences—recognizing that the “professional” is always “personal.”

Our diverse claims to local knowledge and the lack of attention to race in family therapy lent authenticity to the inquiry and consciousness-raising process. No one could take the ultimate position of “expert.” To learn, we had to “do research.” We determined our direction as the project unfolded. Our methods included critiquing family studies literature on race, sharing personal and professional experiences of racism and privilege, and consulting with each other on racial aspects of our clinical work.

Sustainability was demonstrated as an outcome through the personal development of all coresearchers, which in turn led us to take action in our workplaces and professional field. All of us reported an increase in racial awareness (e.g., ability to acknowledge and critically examine racial issues, including one’s own racial self), knowledge of the social impact of race (e.g., demonstration of racial knowledge and fluency talking about race), and our abilities to intervene (e.g., appropriately and effectively challenge racial inequities). For example, an African American coresearcher had been socialized not to discuss race outside of her own racial group. The dialogue group helped her become more cross-racially fluent. This in turn allowed her to effectively challenge a White male cotherapist who had repeatedly demonstrated racism in his interactions with clients. Another example involved a Mexican American coresearcher who was able to sit with a White client who insisted that the coresearcher was not “Mexican” but
“Latina.” The ability to sit with this client and help her move toward awareness of her own racism was supported by consultation with the dialogue group. Students and faculty in the broader family therapy program were also affected as student coresearchers began raising issues of race and racism more frequently in classes, supervision, and with colleagues at their clinical practicum sites. The PAR group also took action aimed at unveiling racial inequity and raising racial awareness by publishing an article in the family therapy literature and presenting a workshop on raising racial awareness in family therapy at a national conference.

**Challenges**

There are important challenges in using CMR approaches. To a significant degree, critical multiculturalism is based on Eurocentric principles of democracy that infer an expectation that centering the lived experience of those who have been oppressed should and/or will help create social change. The assumption that fairness will ultimately guide the actions of those in power is naive. We, as family scholars, must vigilantly consider how our research contributes to structural change to avoid the sense of having addressed inequity while in fact failing to disrupt the status quo. It has also been argued that critical research approaches may themselves be oppressive, imposing a set of values and beliefs on others (Rediger, 1996). Researchers using these approaches must ask and re-ask critical questions throughout each research project. For example, How safe is it in any given context to ask those from historically marginalized groups to speak out about inequities and to make their resistance overt? In what ways might our research create backlash that further oppresses participants? What is the best way to protect study results from being co-opted in ways that further support the status quo? And how authentic are our attempts to flatten the hierarchy between researchers and participants?

Practical dilemmas surround the fact that CMR can be unpredictable and time intensive. Many approaches require us as researchers to be highly involved in a collaborative process and committed to the ongoing well-being of those we study. This can be extremely time-consuming and often does not fit well within product-based cultural contexts such as Western universities with time-limited tenure tracks. Research that is truly collaborative often takes unpredictable directions and may ultimately fail to produce research products or produce results that can only be shared within agreed-on limits. As researchers, we must be willing to be affected by the
research process in ways that strengthen and deepen our social consciousness and connect us with the realities of individual, family, and community life. In our limited experience, working alongside disenfranchised partners has had a way of humbling our tendencies as academics to get lost in theoretical minutia in favor of engaging in practical, concrete, and useful research activities.

Conclusion

In this article we argued that critical multicultural approaches are particularly beneficial in family research because they provide a way to construct knowledge that is consciousness raising, connecting personal and family experience with sociopolitical structures. They privilege egalitarian methods that include participatory forms of research engagement that frequently empower participants to engage in positive change. Finally, they address issues related to the ways in which power dynamics and privilege influence individual and family life. We believe that CMR approaches need to have a legitimate place at the family studies table as means of learning more about multiple life ways and challenging social inequities.

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