

Introduction: Critical Feminist Sociologies of Families, Work, and Care

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IN 2014, the United Nations twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, there was a flourishing of conversations across the globe on family theories and policies, and challenges faced by families (e.g., the United Nations 2014). As we observed these developments on the international stage, we also reflected on the state of the sociology of the family in Canada as a field of research that seems to be waning in comparison to other areas of sociological research. We also noted how there is a strong history of feminist and critical approaches to critical sociologies of families, work, and care and how Canadian feminist sociologists have, for over three decades, reshaped the way we think, theorize, and intervene in policies and public debates about families, work, and care as well as gender, class, race, and sexualities. Keen to revive and expand upon these historical developments, we convened a keynote panel at the 2014 Canadian Sociological Association conference at Brock University that drew together an esteemed set of Canadian voices that have made foundational contributions to feminist and critical family sociologies, each of us have been deeply affected by the work of the scholars that we invited to participate in this panel: Ann Duffy (Professor of Sociology and Labour Studies, Brock University); Margrit Eichler (Professor Emerita of OISE/University of Toronto); Bonnie Fox (Professor of Sociology, University of Toronto); and Meg Luxton (Professor of Sociology and Women's and

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Gender Studies, York University). While we could include only this small number of participants in the panel, we also acknowledged the work of many other Canadian feminist sociologists who have made pivotal contributions to research on families, work, and care.

We titled our panel session “Feminist Sociologies of Care, Work, and Families in Canada: Histories, Stories, and New Challenges.” We asked the presenters to look back across the 30 to 40 years that they had each been working in this area and to reflect on what Eichler has referred to as the “hard work” of creating concepts, theories, and methodologies that could address areas of everyday life for which “no terminology had evolved . . . [and] no appropriate language had been developed” (Eichler 2008:199–200). Specifically, we asked presenters to reflect on key challenges they faced in their early work, positive changes they have witnessed in family theories, policies, and/or lives, and to consider a key issue facing Canadian families in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

This Notes section presents short pieces by the four authors who participated in the CSA panel and, in the case of one paper, their collaborative work (i.e., Duffy, Corman, and Pupo). Each of these articles builds upon a growing body of Canadian research and is informed by insights and observations gleaned from research on mothering and parenting (see Doucet 2009, 2013; Vair 2013), domestic labor debates (Wallace and Young 2010), the political economy of labor markets (Armstrong 2013; Boyd, Mulvihill, and Myles 1991), and the ideological and material effects on families of neoliberal capital accumulation (Albanese 2006; Bezanson 2006). These short papers speak from and to the current period of austerity and socio-economic uncertainty in Canada by exploring and cataloguing the relationship between environmental crisis, parenting, and child resiliency (Eichler 2015); the class, gender, and generational effects of increasing labor market precariousness on lower- and middle-income families (Duffy, Corman, and Pupo 2015); the significant changes in family configuration, social policy, and cultural norms around mothering and parenting (Fox 2015); and the ways in which neoliberal economic and policy orientations produce a pervasive individualization of risk, identity, and practices in families and communities (Luxton 2015). Taken together, these pieces share some common points: they lay bare the lived contradictions resulting from simultaneously raising standards for and expectations of parents (especially mothers) while forcing families to bear greater responsibility, debt, and risk; they highlight limited social supports, increasing inequalities between families, and new meanings of social class, economic fragility, and vulnerability; and they underline how neoliberalism and economic precariousness shape family forms and practices. We hope that these contributions by four of Canada’s leading feminist sociologists of families, work, and care will lead to new research developments, ideas for policy interventions, and to a rethinking and politicization of concepts of social reproduction.

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