

Focus Group End of Year Report for 2020

Name of Focus Group: Diverse Family Structures Focus Group

Chair/Co-chairs: Todd Jensen and Caroline Sanner

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1. What were your focus groups major activities or accomplishments this year?

The 2019-2020 year was the inaugural year of the Diverse Family Structures Focus Group, over which time we have amassed 82 members. Our primary goal in our first year was to establish a shared vision of what this group can be, what it can do, and how it can best service our work. We invited feedback from group members on two key questions: 1) What would you like to get out of this focus group? 2) What would you like to see this focus group accomplish? At our inaugural meeting, we discussed these questions in depth, which led to a lively discussion about the challenges and opportunities that exist in studying diverse family structures. Themes discussed at our inaugural meeting included (a) unpacking what is meant by “diverse family structures,” (b) effectively balancing the use of between-group and within-group analyses of diverse family structures, (c) reimagining how we theorize about why diverse family structures might yield disparate outcomes, and (d) advocating effectively for diverse family structures in research, teaching, and the public sphere (e.g., practice and policy). This discussion yielded a symposium that was accepted for presentation at the 2020 NCFR conference; four papers will be presented around the theme of methodological approaches to studying well-being across diverse family structures, where we will both chart where we have been and where we should go to better understand, study, and support contemporary families.

2. What has your focus group done during the past year to further NCFR’s inclusion and diversity initiatives?

In our inaugural meeting, we used Bethany Letiecq’s (2019) article *Surfacing Family Privilege and Supremacy in Family Science: Toward Justice for All* as a springboard for engaging in collective discussion about how our work on diverse family structures challenges, or falls short of challenging (even reinforcing), socially structured privilege. Specifically, we discussed questions including: (a) How might theories and methods commonly used to study diverse families reinforce the supremacy of the “Standard North American Family” [White, middle-class, nuclear families]?; (b) Does our theorizing about pathology and resilience confront socially structured privilege? If not, how can we move our work beyond documenting how individual families struggle or thrive to also address how laws, policies, and systems protect and enrich some families while excluding, pathologizing, and marginalizing others?; and (c) What types of research questions best allow us to interrogate family privilege? What should we be asking to instigate social change that arcs toward justice, equality, and the valuing of diverse family forms?

As a group, we are committed to critiquing and calling into question the research paradigms, including theories and methods, that we have used and that we see the field using to study diverse family structures, with the goal of better understanding how to conduct ethical, responsible, and just research that can better inform efforts to support families of all kinds, especially those at the margins.

3. Please list any concerns, questions or suggestions.

Return by **October 15, 2020** to the membership manager, Maddie Hansen – maddiehansen@ncfr.org.