When COVID-19 hit greater Boston in Spring 2020 and closed our majority non-White urban commuter campus, we were in the midst of our Psychology Capstone course on Gender, Culture, and Health Equity. For Ester, this class embodies my educational and social activism as I teach women (and courageous men) how to transform intersecting experiences of gendered, racialized oppression into professional knowledge and leadership skills needed to develop impactful social change careers. For Emu, the class was part of an Organizational Studies research internship, Resources for Educational Success and Wellness for diverse students at UMASS Boston (Kato, Lee, Martin, & Shapiro, 2020; Shapiro...
We use Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, and Arellano (2012) Multi-Contextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments, which maps characteristics of transformational Inclusive Educational Institutions supporting student capacity to both succeed in school and develop habits of mind and competencies toward living in a multicultural world. Together, we have learned to appreciate complex systems/social ecological models with multi-systemic “mappings” of factors contributing to outcomes of interest. These models help us identify individual factors, relationships, organizational factors, and public policies that can inadvertently conspire together to protect inequalities or can offer systemic leverage points for change. They are applied in many disciplines in addition to health equity, for example, as we review later, in assessing University institutional success in supporting women in medicine and science (Kalpazidou Schmidt, Ovseiko, Henderson, & Kiparoglou, 2020).

As a Cuban American immigrant woman, who has taken her share of hits for violating gendered cultural norms in both academic and family settings, Ester appreciates that our students have experienced both economic deprivation and educational inequalities “teaching” them to lower their aspirations and de-value their knowledge from hard-won experiences. For this reason, the course incorporates principles of Participatory Action Research supporting collaborative leadership development toward enhancing social change (Shapiro & Little, 2020). We begin class by sharing challenging experiences and affirming educational aspirations, valuing inclusive knowledge as “cultural wealth” (Yosso & Burciaga, 2016), celebrating the enormous diversity of backgrounds enriching our learning. Together, we confront the life and death consequences of health inequalities, working from the film “Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making us Sick” which immediately inspires appreciation for the Social Justice oriented multi-systemic theoretical frameworks and inclusive research methods needed to implement change. We study critical, multi-systemic theories and participatory action research methods generating knowledge designed for action addressing inequalities. We affirm the roles of Participatory Action Research and Cultural Humility as empowering strategies for life-long learning, methods valuing knowledge gained from lived experiences of the most excluded beginning with ourselves. We connect these values with methods in community-engaged participatory action research utilized in community economic development and organizing for equity (all course readings are described in Shapiro et al., 2018). Grounding our discussions in student lived
experiences, we had critiqued the broken US health care system with its multiple, intersecting inequalities and destructive forces of poverty, gendered racism, individualization of responsibility for consequences of “poor choices” and “risky behaviors”, and privatized responsibility for the care of the most vulnerable blighting the lives of so many of our students. We also celebrated the kinship and generosity allowing them to do so much with so little on behalf of those they love. Together, we challenged the unjust social conditions and unfair stereotypes that had dimmed visions of possible futures, and affirmed the power of inclusive dialogues as resources generating transformational knowledge.

Our Spring 2020 class convened a community of shared learning fortunate in our great range of voices representing Black, Latina/o/x, US immigrant (Haiti, Central and Latin America, Lebanon, Italy), and transnational/international (Morocco, Pakistan, China, Japan) men, women, and LGBTQ working students. Our course curriculum draws on multi-disciplinary, multi-systemic understandings of health equity as foundational to shared human development, working across Critical Organizational Studies, Health Psychology, transnational Feminist and US Women of Color Gender Equity Social Movements, inspiring and mobilizing students to translate their observations from lived experiences of social inequality into knowledge advancing their professional development while advocating for health equity (Shapiro, 2014, 2018; Shapiro et al., 2018).

Suddenly on March 12, 2020, our educational mission took on even greater urgency as pandemic precautions forced us into remote Zoom classrooms, exposing our inequalities. As the pandemic restructured workplace, family, and social ties we observed in real time how social determinants of health inequalities devastated the lives of our highly diverse working commuter students, responsible for extended kin in our most vulnerable communities. Together as teacher, students and partners in learning, we observed differential lived experiences of societal inequalities: who had access to broadband and computers required for remote learning? Who had to study, work, and contribute to caretaking of their own and extended kin’s children, elders, the disabled, and vulnerable others, including those that fell ill from COVID-19, or died, or experienced long recoveries? Who lived in crowded housing in a COVID-19 “hot spot” as they scrambled to pay Boston’s already unaffordable rents, now facing eviction? Who was considered an “essential worker”, risking their lives for low-wage work in a city known for its many prestigious
teaching hospitals but lacking access to needed testing or basic physical protective equipment including masks? Who had to increase their own work-shifts because everyone else in their household had lost their jobs during the shut-down? Who lived in mixed-status immigrant families who worried about deportations or barred entries? Who had to postpone lifesaving counseling sessions because they lacked a private space in their home? Who was forced to endure unrelenting family censure due to their non-traditional gender choices and sexual preferences, without spaces of acceptance outside their homes?

Yet in this time of heightened crisis, our class diversity and course approach to global/comparative, complex systems/multi-systemic, social justice thinking on social determinants of health equity throughout shared development in intertwined lives offered an ideal “laboratory” for inclusive participatory inquiry. Appreciating these realities, we began to work individually and collectively on topics of shared interest while articulating educational hope, voicing professional aspirations, and identifying steps in working toward career goals. We identified students interested in working on the continuing class research project, “Resources for Educational Success and Wellness at UMASS Boston” (Kato et al., 2020). A team of students struggling with intensified mental health concerns studied effective holistic stress reduction approaches supported by research evidence and served as class consultants on stress reduction resources available on campus and in the community. Their work became even more meaningful as students experienced severe stresses when the pandemic struck. We also brought together a team of immigrant identified Women of Color with experiences and interests in addressing Maternal and Child Health inequalities through culturally sensitive, socio-politically contextualized approaches to Birth and Reproductive Justice.

By far everyone’s favorite paper in this and all my classes is Public Health scholar/activist Camara Jones’s accessible, influential analysis of “Levels of Racism” (2000; also see video of her Ted Talk at Emory University, 2014). Jones uses “A Gardner’s Tale” as metaphor to identify three entangled levels at which societal institutions and organizations, relationships of unequal power, and our internalized beliefs regarding expressions and ethics of gendered lives, are mutually reinforcing, co-conspiring to protect the status quo. Students learned how sociopolitical contexts of inequality were protected by ideologies and institutional practices that taught us to blame ourselves and our families for our personal defects and bad choices resulting in ill health. They learned to use an
ecological life course approach in mapping variables contributing to ill health or flourishing, and the value of participatory methods in identifying action steps and promoting community organizing for health equity with accountability in Abraham Wandersman’s participatory community research model for “Getting to Outcomes”. Through training in critical cultural competence and cultural humility, we connected student lived experiences of health inequalities to systematic observations and analysis of needed change. Our own, specific local expressions of the global COVID-19 pandemic highlighted both our differences due to gendered, racialized, and economic inequalities and our human interdependence and shared fates. We recognized our intensified reliance on webs of support connecting family, neighborhood, workplace, schools and government as employment, access to health care, and safe affordable housing became matters of life and death.

The COVID-19 pandemic with its interruption of “business as usual” has exposed enormous gaps in supports offered to families for care of the most vulnerable (Power, 2020) and the ways these fall disproportionately on women. Yet this moment of crisis also offers an opportunity to better understand forces contributing to current dilemmas in work/family dynamics, while pointing the way toward potential re-design (Mlambo-Ngcuka & Dalli, 2020).

**Re-visioning Work Family Dynamics as Complex Systems: Achieving Valued Goals of Gender Inclusion with Undivided Equity**

In the United States, Europe, and around the world, most people of all nationalities, genders, racial and religious backgrounds endorse gender equity as a valued personal and societal goal across multiple domains of their lives and work (Pew Global, 2020; Thébaud & Halcomb, 2019). Yet while most may endorse gender equity as a social value, we deeply disagree about effective actions implementing its actualization. We have witnessed over a century of successes promoting gender equity through laws eliminating barriers to women’s social participation while enhancing protections and rights including securing women’s rights to vote, to own property, to decide if and when to have children, to achieve equal opportunities in employment, and to be protected from Gender Based Violence in its many forms. The United Nations Millennium Development
and Sustainable Development Goals have made Gender Equity central
to poverty reduction, with some significant successes (United Nations
Women, 2020).

Meanwhile gender equity remains elusive, what some call an unfin-
ished revolution (Swinth, 2019). Why does workplace gender inclusion
remain “Unfinished Business” (Slaughter, 2015) and a “stalled revo-
lution” (England, Levine, & Mishel, 2020)? Many of us who fought
personally and politically for societal gender equity during what’s termed
feminism’s Second Wave, now elders, have celebrated the growing soci-
etal recognition of gender complexity, expanding visibility and inclusion
of beautiful varieties of personhood. At the same time, we are shocked at
the enduring effects of narrow, imposed gender roles and accompanying
stereotypes and biases, especially as these are manifested at the intersec-
tion of the workplace and gendered family life course demands. Changed
demographics at the heart of family lives—how we make a living, the
timing and number of our children, how we share care for children and
elders—have challenged societies to re-vision gender at work. Workplace
gender inclusion has been shown to contribute to business effective-
ness and profitability (Moen, 2017; Williams, Berdahl, & Vandello,
2016), with traditionally male dominated industries paying a “mas-
culinity penalty” (Foreign Policy Analytics, 2020). Evidence on gender
and workplace equity in the United States and internationally consistently
finds that women enduringly experience greater workplace inequality, as
characterized by lower wages and fewer positions of leadership.

Analysis of global economic and demographic changes from a work-
place gender equity perspective (Catalyst, 2020; Cooper, 2017; Power,
2020; Williams et al., 2016) suggests that women all over the world have
found it necessary to increase their contributions to the economic survival
needs of their most vulnerable kin. These effects have been greatly inten-
sified by the COVID-19 pandemic, suggesting that workplace gender
inclusion and women’s economic participation may be set back signif-
ically by the pandemic unless strategic actions are taken (Williams,
2020). Sociologist Arlie Hochschild’s influential study The Second Shift
(1989) was the first to document the “stalled” gender equity revolution
as resulting from societal failure to support women in their homemaking
and child caretaking responsibilities. Her ethnographic study and inter-
views exposed the ingenious lies men and women, husbands and wives,
told themselves and each other to hide these contradictions between
their hoped-for egalitarianism and the realities of sexist roles at work and
home. She also uncovered significant strains in marital intimacy and in burdened child behavior as societal level inequalities, women’s high levels of caretaking burden and role strain, eroded family well-being.

Blair-Loy, Hochschild, Pugh, Williams, and Hartmann (2015) convened Hochschild and experts in work family dynamics and gender equity to review “stability and transformation”, identifying impactful factors preserving the status quo and contributing to possibilities of change. Following the failure to change gender polarized and stereotyped work/family dynamics in the decades since the book’s publication, they review the multiple levels at which gender roles are implemented and experienced. They argue for a multi-systemic approach that examines macro-level policies prescribing roles for government, organizations, non-profits, and educational systems. The authors also note that work all over the world has become more globalized as well as more precarious, creating maximum flexibility for capital flows and just-in-time manufacturing at the lowest costs but detrimental to workers and their dependents. Others warn that these models of economic development are environmentally unsustainable, requiring a more critical perspective on societal values and how to plan for changes more consistent with these values.

Bell Meriläinen, Taylor, and Tienari (2019) edited a special issue of the journal Human Relations, titled “Time’s up! Feminist theory and activism meets organization studies”, suggesting that a feminist analysis can contribute positively to our shared desire for improving lives all over the world through workplace gender inclusion. Contributing to the special issue, Tyler (2019) warns that gender inclusion in management needs to be accompanied by a critical perspective which reconsiders ethics broadly in light of what we value, alongside a revisioning of aims and practices of gender inclusion. Tyler suggests that a focus on embodied ethics has implications for the workplace as a space for “assembly” or the performance of alternative ways of expressing gender complexity and diversity. She argues that Organizational Inclusion consistent with feminist and social justice social movements can begin to counteract the powerful stabilizing effects of polarized gender roles maintaining stability in practices that are neither desirable in terms of ethics, employee well-being, nor even profitable. Without these insights, management strategies for gender inclusion may instead contribute to backlash and hardening of stereotyped gender roles. These may translate into workplace “masculinity contests” (Berdahl, Cooper, Glick, Livingston, & Williams,
environments encouraging gender polarized ideologies about men and women’s work/life roles (Leslie, King, & Clair, 2019), and discriminatory Human Resource practices reinforcing stereotypes (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015).

Historically, during this period of stalled progress toward workplace gender inclusion, global capitalism has intensified values and practices that reinforce workplace gender inequalities. These economic ideologies promised that if governments focus on providing the greatest freedom for profit-making, while privatizing responsibility for family survival needs, the rising tide will lift all boats, allowing women, children, and families to benefit. However, the individualization and privatization of caretaking responsibilities have resulted in intensified polarization regarding the proper roles of men and women, punishing women who work (Brandth, Halrynjo, & Kvande, 2017). In the United States and Europe, where these trends began, White, educated women from the highest economic strata were encouraged to enter the workplace and to view this as an emancipatory “choice”, with the expectation that low-wage caretakers could be hired to fulfill family responsibilities. However, we are seeing the collapse of these agreements about how women can “lean in” or “have it all”. In Europe, we first saw the tensions in the “choices” made by executive working women Italy and Spain, where choosing to remain childless was the only way to reconcile childbearing responsibilities and child care expectations in their strongly Catholic nations. We are now seeing these trends in China, where a reversal of the one-child law and the growing aging of the population are creating heightened expectations for women’s caretaking roles as a private family responsibility (Ji, Wu, Sun, & He, 2017). Le, Newman, Menzies, Zheng and Fermelis (2020) review the limited literature on work-life balance in Asia, arguing that advancing this work requires a specific focus on regional economics and culture.

In Japan, a masculinized culture of “overwork” requires the “good worker” to prove their devotion through unsustainable, ultimately unbearable hours resulting in high suicide rates. Emu was inspired to work in Organizational Studies by observing the impacts on both women and men of the rigid gender stereotyping of workplace roles and effects on mental health distress. In countries with the greatest gaps between gendered family expectations and workplace failure to support family and kinship responsibilities, women are “choosing” to remain single, forego childbearing, or abandon challenging careers in favor of more flexible employment with lower expectations for putting in long hours. Emu
observes: The reason why I am interested specifically in work environments is because people spend so much of their lives there, especially in Japan. I have always wanted to help Japanese people in some way and I think combining Organizational and Psychological perspectives on the expectations of overwork are especially valuable. Japan seemed always problematic regard on workplace environment including work-life balance and gender issues. A culture of overwork pressure for men has a huge impact on illness and suicide, so much so that there is a word for karoshi or “death from overwork” (Doner, 2019; Takahashi, 2019).

Although data shows that the official worktime in Japan is shorter than the United States, the problem is people also work while they are off the clock which can be forced or “voluntary” in keeping with presumed values of women who prioritize family and men who prioritize work obligations. Many companies expect their employees to work unpaid overtime. Also, despite Japan having more days of paid vacation than the United States, many employees refuse to use these. As we will discuss later, these same gender ideologies apply to men’s limited use of parental leave unless public/private policies and partnerships provide incentives while also addressing stereotypes. Often times, Japanese men feel pressure from their boss or coworkers not to take any time off. Some companies force them to use paid vacation for sick time. Many of them go out to drink after work, as this is considered as their job to have some drinks and associate with workers and entertain their boss. Most workplaces are male dominated because of the deeply rooted beliefs viewing men exclusively as breadwinners and women as housewives. Also, data shows that harassment toward women remains a serious unsolved issue in the Japanese workplace, as in many other countries. Marriage and pregnancy disadvantage women despite the law, in Japan as in the United States. With different sources, but similar effects, women’s biological role in childbearing becomes a barrier as they “choose” part-time work that is more flexible instead of full time pursuing their more ambitious careers. The whole social fabric conspires with these roles: Japanese elementary schools have parent teacher associations (PTA) where parents most of whom are mothers are expected to volunteer for school activities. Despite the fact they are called “volunteers”, it is pressured and forced by school and other mothers to participate, so it is hard to balance for working mothers. Although the government is trying to encourage women to work by implementing family friendly policies supporting work-life balance, and these policies have been helpful, I and others observe these gendered
expectations create severe burdens for office workers and penalize women as they try to balance work and family responsibilities. Women need to pick either job or having children, and those who pick their job are perceived as “losers” in the “feminity contest” that complements the “masculinity contests” we discuss later in this paper. This communicates an underlying message in Japanese society that women’s goal is to have a happy family. Although younger people both men and women would prefer greater equality in work roles and in family responsibilities, it is harder for younger Japanese workers to bring change because most of the companies are based on a seniority system so that the companies’ policies reflect older workers ideas. This contributes to continuation of power in organizations, as I never seen or heard any boycott by workers to bring change or anything, which I am not sure if they are allowed to do so on the first place. But younger people definitely have very little power in the companies. On top of that, women have less power than men. The research we reviewed and articles specific to Japan showed me that the work environment issues in Japan are deeply enrooted in our cultures. I do want to bring changes into the Japanese work environment, and appreciate that understanding gender within culture, appreciating stereotypes, biases, and discrimination people face, consciously or unconsciously, is crucial to accomplishing impactful change. Ester reflects that gender inequalities reflect both culturally grounded gendered stereotypes and social differences in national policies for what Amartya Sen terms the capabilities approach in Human Development. How we invest society’s money to achieve valued outcomes in health, education, and income? The capability approach argues that we can’t be educated without schools, we can’t be healthy without both health care and access to health social determinants (i.e., safe and secure housing, affordable healthy food), and we can’t earn a living wage without shared social responsibility for care of the vulnerable, especially during critical life course transitions of childbirth, care of infants and young children, care of the disabled and the elderly. The United Nations and Measure of America have developed tracking for these components of the Human Development Index, in the United States for each state and around the world, arguing that “We can’t change what we don’t measure”. We also recognize: we can’t fix what we don’t value.
Re-visioning Tensions Between Work and Caretaking Responsibilities: A Matter of Values

Williams et al. (2016) review extensive social psychological research to identify reasons for the enormous mismatch between changing realities of employment and what we term “work/family” or “work/life” conflict, integration, or balance. Williams argues that the workplace serves an important societal function in defining highly valued and personally cherished identities around highly stereotyped masculine and feminine roles. A masculinized, class-based “work devotion schema” associates male success with long work hours unimpeded by family demands. In contrast, for women, this “work devotion schema” is considered a moral hazard, interfering with the family caretaking focus associated with being a “good woman”. Drawing on extensive research, Williams suggests that generational preferences by young men toward re-defining masculinity to include meaningful family and fathering roles may contribute to shifting these workplace norms (Madhusoodanan, 2018). However, stated gender equity preferences at an individual or family level continue to confront barriers at the level of both organizational and governmental policies, leading to constrained decision making by individuals and families. Additionally, narrow psychological approaches focused on personal identities, gender stereotyping reinforcing inequalities by individual managers, and individual preferences or choices have interfered with implementing what Williams et al. (2016) term the “clear business case” supporting positive impacts of work/family flexibility for all employees, for customer experience, and for company profitability.

Brandth et al. (2017) suggest that disentangling forces contributing to change and stability in work family life require a change in frameworks and methods toward understanding dynamics as emerging from competing logics regarding regulation, economies, and ethics as these guide what we value as societies. Taking a comparative approach, they explore assumptions and consequences of societal beliefs and state roles regarding the individualization and privatization of family centered economic and caretaking responsibilities. As a gender and work equity legal and policy scholar, Williams (2020) has written important reviews assessing facilitators and barriers to women’s workplace inclusion by attending to practices and policies promoting work/life balance. In a recent essay on how COVID-19 has exposed gender inequalities at work, Williams notes that
in the US policies and legal protections for workers who also care for vulnerable family members are limited, uneven, varying by workplace and by patchwork of state and federal laws and policies, leaving many workers and their loved ones unprotected with limited recourses (Williams, Work-Life Policy Center, 2020). As we will discuss in the following review, single theme attempts to manage change often defeat our best efforts due to the entangled complexity of what some have described as “Wicked Problems” in Complex Systems.

**Disrupting Stability of Wicked Problems in Work Life Dynamics with Complexity and Developmental Systems Thinking**

Multiple disciplines in sociology, public health, environmental sciences, organizational management and leadership, and economics among many others have turned to complexity sciences to better understand the multiple forces that contribute to outcomes. Replacing cause and effect thinking, these approaches recognize the interdependence of factors and the unpredictability of interactive effects and unexpected contributions of even seemingly small factors leading to emergent outcomes (Capra & Luisi, 2016; Walby, 2007). Psychologist Enns (2008) focused on stereotyped masculinity as a complex systems problem interfering with women’s societal equality. Bringing Complexity Sciences to Business Management toward understanding Large Scale Change supporting sustainable business practices, Waddock, Meszoely, Waddell, and Dentoni (2015) argue that highly specialized knowledge will be of limited value in confronting real-world “wicked” problems requiring large-scale, transformational rather than incremental change.

“Wicked Problems” are so described because of their multi-systemic entanglements and seemingly inexhaustible capacity to defeat our supposedly effective, well-meaning but narrowly conceptualized solutions. Donella Meadows’ influential work (see Meadows, 1999 and the Meadows online archive) on systems sciences, economic growth, and sustainability challenged us to re-consider “growth” in economic theory through systems thinking. With many detractors during years advancing economic neoliberalism seeking to eliminate regulations on industry protecting employees or the planet, Meadows’ ideas are finding new relevance. Meadows and other systems thinkers in Organizational, Economic
Development, and Sustainability Studies propose that the most impactful ways to intervene in a complex system is to identify leverage points facilitating change, and those contributing to systems stability and interfering with desired change. Listing 12 points of intervention, in reverse order from least to most effective, Meadows lists number one as The Power to Transcend Paradigms (Meadows, 1999). Although Meadows’ work did not directly address work/family dynamics, her call to consider values, goals, and consequences echoes in much of the current work marshalling the power of business in creating partnerships that support gender inclusion as part of societally supported economic inclusion promoting human rights and environmental sustainability.

Writing for applied organizational and policy studies, visionary business writers committed to gender equity in re-imagining possible futures agree that the work must begin with the ideologies and assumptions that prioritize what we value and how our beliefs and practices proceed from these values. A global comparative perspective is especially valuable in illuminating some of the assumptions and practices that have so limited progress toward gender inclusion. Comparative systems thinking helps workers, managers, and policy makers assess the consequences of varied approaches by identifying agreed upon valued outcomes and insisting on accountability in measuring progress toward change. In their recent work Brandth, B., Halrynjo, S., & Kvande, E. (Eds.). (2017). Work-family dynamics: Competing logics of regulation, economy and morals, the volume Editors argue that changing economies emphasizing profit and reducing worker flexibility and protections are changing the logics of gender, work, and care world wide but with different effects depending on the values or ethics guiding national policies. In the United States, with one of the starkest systems designed to maximize profit and privatize family responsibilities, Gerson (2017) studied how couples seeking to establish gender equitable families confronted barriers and achieved compromises supporting possible alternatives. These and other authors argue that the process of change must begin with examining the language we use to describe “work/family conflict” as we begin to re-vision possibilities for change.

Starting from their earlier paper on Complexity, Wicked Problems, and Large Scale Change, in that article focused on the electricity grids, Waddock (2018) takes up questions of values in envisioning possible futures supporting more favorable outcomes. Taking up critical work on
the ethics of economic growth in facing challenges of justice and sustainability, Waddock (2018) follows Meadows and other systems thinkers in suggesting that incremental and reformist approaches to Large Scale Change often defeat us due to multiple, interwoven strategies protecting systemic continuity and stability. She argues that transformational change requires “Shamanic Leadership”, or the ability to “shape the shift” in envisioning new directions for organizations toward a sustainable enterprise economies in which businesses and jobs join with governments and other institutions in supporting families and communities in harmony with the natural environment and social justice needs. Waddock suggests that “memes” or inspiring images tapping core cultural values are needed for visionary leadership supporting transformational change. While we agree with the importance of systems thinking and ethics in re-visioning change, we believe, following the work of Robert Chambers in Participatory Rural Development and Meredith Minkler in Community Organizing for Health Equity (Minkler, 2012) that collaborative leadership informed by Participatory Research can best inspire and mobilize the shared work of identifying challenges and working toward agreed upon solutions required for large-scale change (George, Baker, Tracey, & Joshi, 2019; Shapiro & Little, 2020).

**Complexity, Transdisciplinarity and the Gendered Life Course: Highlighting Work Family Dynamics as Leverage Points Promoting Change**

In the United States the integration of women into paid work during the feminist “second wave” of the 1960s to 1970s, coincided with changing economies eroding the male breadwinner’s earning of a “family wage”. At the same time, these changes in work were accompanied by enduring social ideologies and public policies insisting that caretaking of children and elders along with homemaking remained the private responsibility of individuals and families, falling predominantly on the shoulders of women. Men who seek to increase family time and require workplace flexibility also experience penalties in evaluation and advancement. A growing United States and global comparative literature explores how variations in social policies such as opportunities for flexible scheduling, paid parental leave, convenient affordable child care, and protection of family
time from after-hours workplace demands, produce a win–win combination of increased corporate profits and innovation while also enhancing organizational and societal gender equity and family well-being.

Ester reflects on gender complexity and its relevance/impact in time (historical and personal) and space (national and geographic): Born in Cuba during revolutionary times and immigrating as a child to racially segregated South Florida, I have remained inspired by social contracts that help us actualize equality in all spheres of life. In the United States during adolescence, I welcomed feminist and civil rights movements as offering guideposts to a valued life. I began my Clinical Psychology Doctoral studies, in 1974, I was 21 years old and my same-age women cousins were marrying and having children. Like many women of my generation initiating long preparation toward careers, I planned to postpone childbearing for at least a decade. Interested in studying how gender equity could be achieved at the interface of our changing work opportunities and family lives, I was fortunate to study with pioneering feminist sociologist Alice Rossi, who had turned to narrative study of lives to better understand how women and men were negotiating these changing spaces. Alice believed that the biology of reproduction made women vulnerable to remaining fully responsible for the care of infants and young children and wrote a then groundbreaking paper on the biosocial interface of sex roles. She insisted that awareness of these biological realities would allow employers, policy makers, and women with their families to make intentional decisions on behalf of gender equity. Alice’s advice in changing gender roles: mothers need to leave babies with their fathers early and often. At the time she was accused of biological reductionism and rejected by feminist academics. Yet her visionary perspective recognizing the impacts of biology on gendered shared development, requiring targeted practices and policy solutions, has been supported by multi-disciplinary analysis. We find in 2020 that radically transformed demographic change resulting in smaller, more isolated seemingly autonomous families with two working adults remain tethered to gendered ideals of women as essential, unpaid caretakers of the vulnerable which includes infants and young children, the disabled, and increasingly the elderly. My own teaching, writing, and practice continue to study how we co-create knowledge toward shared accountability during important shared life course transitions (birth, death, coming of age, education, and workplace) that best sustains conditions allowing collective growth and thriving while supporting wellness as fairness across generational time in the settings where we live and work.
Connecting Personal, Organizational, and Economic Development: Complex Systems Principles Connecting Our Relationships, Environments, and Shared Fates

In better understanding progress and barriers toward achieving gender inclusion and equity in the workplace, we join others in many fields concerned with knowledge for socially accountable, sustainable change. Ester first began to appreciate the importance of Participatory Approaches to Community Economic Development through her work supporting Massachusetts Latinx communities who are the poorest Latinx in the entire United States when compared to White population incomes. Working in Latina/Latin American women’s health and rights, she began to read transdisciplinary Organizational Studies connecting individuals to social movements in achieving change, especially in women’s health and in education (Shapiro, 2014, 2018). Reading on multi-systemic approaches to workplace gender equity for this chapter, she discovered critical engaged Organizational research emphasizing holistic systems thinking consistent with integrative life course health equity, in publications as varied as the *Journal of Supply Chain Management* (Touboul, McCarthy, & Matthews, 2020) and *Global Sustainability* (Waddock, 2020). Whatever our own lines of work, we have learned how “just in time” manufacturing driven solely by policies enhancing profit without considering other valued outcomes has become highly, tragically visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have witnessed self-amplifying intersections of failed access to Personal Protective Equipment, precarious often underpaid and now dangerous employment for “essential workers” in factories and health care settings alike, and the continuing problem of unpaid caretaking for vulnerable family members falling on the shoulders of women who must work for wages, a second shift of child care and household responsibilities, and a third shift of care for the ill, elderly or disabled that societies fail to support. With Touboul et al. and many others, we find that complexity science as a tool contributing to valued outcomes must begin with examination of values embedded in our assumptions, toward new imaginaries or collective visions articulating “how the world ought to be”. We appreciate that racial, gender, and economic inequalities are interconnected, mutually reinforcing, and specific to the spaces where we live and work, to historical time, and to an evolving life course where we care for each other and sustain shared
lives through births, maturation and aging, periods where the vulnerable are cared for and all contribute to an evolving future.

A complex systems approach to social change as it impacts multiple ecologies of the gendered life course identifies gender equity as a “wicked problem” requiring a targeted multi-systemic approach through partnerships identifying valued outcomes, selecting impactful leverage points sensitive to contexts, and accountable to measurable outcomes. This work recognizes the complexity and diversity of our changing ideals as well as changing realities of employment, public policies regarding social, corporate, and individual responsibility, alongside changes in household organizations, intergenerational relationships, and kinship ties. Further, as in adrienne maree brown’s text on *Emergent Strategies* in organizing for change toward possible futures (brown, 2017), complex systems teach us that we must practice at the smallest scale the ethics of mutual respect and shared leadership we want to bring into the world on a larger scale. Writing about her work as a community organizer, and now teaching this work in communities and organizations, she describes the transformation of organizations from White heterosexual male dominant to Black Queer women of color organizing highlighting collaboration and co-creation of knowledge and shared actions with accountability in achieving social change.

Striving toward a paradigm shift grounded in complexity sciences we contribute to the conversation on complexity sciences and systems thinking an integrative cultural/developmental life course approach (also see Shapiro & Little, 2020) with the following features:

- **A historically informed, culturally grounded gendered life course perspective** recognizing connections between embodied experiences, societal processes, and health and well-being outcomes without insisting on biological determinism yet recognizing our human desire to care for vulnerable others. We appreciate the universality of interdependence throughout shared human development, even as cultures shape our thinking about these realities differently. We recognize myths of decontextualized individualism as failing to protect the health, well-being, and economic success of our own lives, our families and communities, and our environment. Alongside the Women of Color coalitional Birth Justice/Reproductive Justice movement, we affirm our human interdependence while recognizing women as people with rights and not as Vessels destined to matter
only when contributing to a child’s development (Ross & Solinger, 2017).

- **A transdisciplinary approach to frameworks, methods, practices, and outcomes** that begins by questioning binaries and shifting frames to prioritize human complexity, interdependence, consequences, and accountability. Examples: social determinants approaches require that we re-define “growth” and “development” while examining the underlying values as well as what responsibilities are excluded and fall on the shoulders of the most vulnerable.

- **Multi-systemic mapping of barriers and resources** in multiple systems facilitating positive outcomes, and impacts of multifaceted, site specific (i.e., workplace, educational setting, neighborhood) intersecting power inequalities on opportunities, decision making, and outcomes (Pugh, 2017).

- **A global comparative perspective appreciating how work and family roles and responsibilities are defined** and gender equitable flexibility is supported or impeded through cultural beliefs as well as organizational practices and governmental public policies (Ji et al., 2017; Kaufman, 2020).

As suggested by Capra and Luisi (2016), a systems frame of mind and contributions of complexity sciences allow us to ask new questions in new ways, identifying the web of mutually reinforcing vicious circles impeding desired change while identifying the most impactful leverage points disentangling these stabilizing forces and supporting innovative possibilities for increased gender inclusion. This approach allows us to identify solutions affirming the varieties and complexities of gender in work, family, and community life around the world and highlighting shared social and organizational responsibility for collective well-being.
Where to Start Working Toward Gender Inclusion: Leverage Points Identified in the Literature on Workplace Gender Equity

Complexity Sciences allow us to view outcomes as emerging from unexpected, often unpredictable interactions and at times unexpected consequences of interventions. Yet working from these perspectives paradoxically allows us to connect interventions with identified, desired, measurable outcomes, permitting much greater accountability that in turn helps us invest in interventions that make a difference. These approaches help map multi-systemic factors offering impactful leverage points catalyzing measurable change. Global comparative literatures identify three transformative leverage points: (1) Gender-neutral paid family/kinship care leave when meeting life course challenges of childbearing/adoption and infant care; (2) Public/private partnerships providing flexible, predictable employment and institutional supports for early childhood care, schooling, and dependent caretaking needs for workers at all income levels (Thébaud & Halcomb, 2019); (3) Systems-minded organizational interventions addressing gender stereotyping of work/family decisions in Human Resources administration and in leadership training for both managers and workers (Chang & Milkman, 2020).

Disentangling Levels of Gendered Workplace Inequality: Beginning with Institutional and Societal Policies and Responsibilities

Research on workplace gender inequalities as they impact career choices, salaries, promotions, and leadership positions, suggests a primary turning-point can be found in what some term a “motherhood penalty”. This penalty is charged to those contributing to childbearing, adoption, early infant care, and organizing the daily needs of a household and its dependent members. Men and women’s hopes for gender equitable work for wages and fair caretaking and homemaking responsibilities consistently confront realities of social contracts regarding the individualization and privatization of responsibility for family lives, which are highly variable by country and region. Although societal gender stereotyping imposes workplace expectations tied to traditional masculine and feminine roles, their power is institutionalized by practices of gendered role enactment.
Consistently, women are more likely to be called on to bring coffee, order lunch, or take meeting notes, and more likely penalized for failing to put workplace first by being too involved with their household/family demands. These beliefs and practices translate to fewer promotions and limited advancement into leadership positions. Further, research shows that racialized gender stereotypes are imposed on women in the workplace, where implicit White male norms often label their leadership as too aggressive. These gendered expectations and penalties are intensified for women and men from economically vulnerable, racially targeted, and other marginalized groups, impeding workplace gender equity.

Recent transdisciplinary work on workplace gender inclusion has focused on workplace idealization of specific ideologies regarding masculinity, a culture of overwork, and “masculinity competitions” requiring extreme demonstrations of workplace devotion. Both men and women in the workplace experience these demands that contradict stated values regarding work/family balance. Focusing on parental leave, Kaufman (2020) titled her recent book *Fixing Parental Leave: The Six Month Solution*. Reviewing approaches to parental leave, she argues that offering six months of gender-neutral leave for parents of all genders and backgrounds; requiring that men take parental leave by having it expire if not used so that utilization is equalized; and protecting income and employment for workers who take parental leave, is associated with the best employment and family outcomes. Comparing the United States, United Kingdom, and European Union policies, Kauman finds that the United States offers the worst possible conditions for working families, as no paid parental leave is offered, workers experience minimal protections of their employment if they do not return immediately to work, and health care is offered primarily through employers and will be lost if the worker extends parental leave. Finally, the United States privatizes early child care and child schooling, assuming that workers who need child care will pay for it out of pocket. These are the conditions in the United States that have created a perfect storm in the wake of COVID-19, exposing the burdens on working families and especially on women working precarious jobs with little flexibility that place their own health and that of their families at risk.
Gendered stereotyping has been identified as a critical leverage point that can greatly contribute to workplace gender inclusion, when it is thought about from a complex systems perspective. In his compelling book presenting extensive research on his concept of stereotype threat, Whistling Vivaldi, African American Social Psychologist Claude Steele demonstrates how even seemingly slight invocations of widely held negative societal stereotypes (Women fail at math; Black students do poorly on standardized tests; White men can’t play basketball) measurably burden on-site performance for those targeted. “Whistling Vivaldi” is among Steele’s repertoire of self-presentations (along with wearing a suit) designed as active, performative solutions to the problem of gendered racism in public life. Joan Williams and colleagues at the Center for Work and Family Law similarly describe “savvy” for women in positions of business leadership as requiring careful strategic navigation of multiple, contradictory stereotypes. They recommend carefully designed interventions in the workplace that anticipate and counteract gendered expectations. While unjust assumptions and conditions in the workplace may make these strategic readings of stereotypes necessary for equity and inclusion, Williams, Steele, and others following from this work argue for structural and systemic solutions to the societal conditions within which “stereotype threat” is only among many societal strategies enforcing workplace intersectional/gendered exclusion.

Research on increasing inclusion of women and underrepresented groups in Science and Technology (STEM) studies and careers finds that targeted single-dimension attempts to increase the flow of students and workers through affirmative action, individual self-affirmation, or teacher and employer training to counter implicit bias, are undermined by persistent impacts of gender stereotyping reinforcing multi-systemic practices of exclusion. Schmidt, Ovseiko, Henderson, and Kiparoglou (2020) conducted a systematic evaluation of gender equity strategies used by European University and Medical School programs, whose ability to apply for research funds required demonstrated progress toward specified gender inclusion and leadership outcomes. Successful program strategies operated at the interface of Organizational Culture changes (i.e., workload allocation, scheduling, zero-tolerance for gendered bullying),
Career Development (i.e., mentoring & support with attention to key transitions and to changing needs for work/family flexibility), and Organizational self-monitoring and outcomes analysis. Complexity sciences require interventions grounded in the specific, unique characteristics of local organizations and institutions (i.e., Universities or Medical Schools as compared to Health Care Delivery Systems; European & Canadian context of public minded services rather than US individualization and privatization), at the same time that they appreciate how strategies operate across systems to produce emergent outcomes both intended and unanticipated. Consistent with a gender-sensitive life course approach, they mapped successful interventions in multiple domains that considered the caretaking responsibilities women carry at critical moments in science careers, cultivating role models, and training faculty and administrators in the effects of gender stereotypes. Emu noted that in Japan gender stereotypes continue to be advanced in the media by showing only males as doctors or executives. She appreciates the way models with “mapping” allow both strategic and comprehensive interventions. Ester noted that in the European Union and United Kingdom/Commonwealth nations that are part of the Award and its agreements, application for certain kinds of funding requires certification in achieving a “Silver Award” denoting significant progress toward gender inclusion, requiring not only good intentions but also accountability to successful outcomes. They also noted that in the qualitative interviews, women faculty complained that they conducted the majority of administrative service work required to submit reviews toward the Award. Their meticulous analysis documents how a complex systems framework accounting for dynamics of change and stability helps illuminate and mobilize impactful interventions. However, it is no surprise to readers of this chapter that this study also found women scientists were more likely to carry the heavier administrative burdens required by the laudatory, effective, and time-consuming monitoring and evaluation process. At the University of Massachusetts, at Boston, we have a similar documentation that Women faculty, especially Women of Color, carry higher administrative and mentoring responsibilities (Steele, 2011; Williams & Dempsey, 2018).

The Path Ahead: Education for Possible Futures
As the global pandemic continues, it has precipitated worldwide recognition of our interdependent ailments while identifying opportunities
for transformation centered on gender justice and the crucial role of business organizations in contributing to transformative change. Intersectional approaches working from within complexity sciences/complex adaptive systems help us recognize how racism, poverty, and barriers in access to educational and economic opportunities dynamically co-occur with sexism and heterosexism, effects that pile up for both individuals and targeted groups over time. We suggest that complexity sciences, socio-politically informed ecological models that contextualize how we create systems in which some thrive and many suffer, and gender-sensitive life course approaches centered on shared responsibility for the care of the most vulnerable among us, help us appreciate how best to support evolving choreographies of gendered selves in life course time and specific spaces where we live and work. Yet as we show in this chapter, just because a problem is complex, that is, persistent and “wickedly” entangled in ways that protect its enduring stability, seemingly resisting well-intentioned change, does not mean it is insurmountable. We dedicate this chapter to the truly essential work of increasing workplace gender inclusion, as we witnessed a global pandemic of gendered, generational, economic inequalities. We appreciate that seemingly good intentions are easily subverted by barriers and contradictions across multiple systems and no longer good enough. Turning to Complex Systems models for transformational gender inclusion, we renew our commitment to workplace gender equity recognizing our complexities as foundational to sustaining our interdependent lives, dedicating this chapter to knowledge promoting inclusion with accountability to shared values.

**Chapter Key Takeaways**

- The COVID-19 pandemic with its interruption of “business as usual” has exposed enormous gaps in supports offered to families for care of the most vulnerable and the ways these fall disproportionately on women.
- In the United States, Europe, and around the world, most people of all nationalities, genders, racial and religious backgrounds endorse gender equity as a valued personal and societal goal across multiple domains of their lives and work. Yet while most may endorse gender equity as a social value, we deeply disagree about effective actions implementing its actualization.
Gender equity remains elusive, what some call an unfinished revolution. Evidence on gender and workplace equity in the United States and internationally consistently finds that women enduringly experience greater workplace inequality, as characterized by lower wages and fewer positions of leadership.

Global capitalism has intensified values and practices that reinforce workplace gender inequalities.

The workplace serves an important societal function in defining highly valued and personally cherished identities around highly stereotyped masculine and feminine roles. A masculinized, class-based “work devotion schema” associates male success with long work hours unimpeded by family demands. In contrast, for women, this “work devotion schema” is considered a moral hazard, interfering with the family caretaking focus associated with being a “good woman”.

Multiple disciplines in sociology, public health, environmental sciences, organizational management and leadership, and economics among many others have turned to complexity sciences to better understand the multiple forces that contribute to outcomes. These approaches recognize the interdependence of factors and the unpredictability of interactive effects and unexpected contributions of even seemingly small factors leading to emergent outcomes.

Research on workplace gender inequalities as they impact career choices, salaries, promotions, and leadership positions, suggests a primary turning-point can be found in what some term a “motherhood penalty”. This penalty is charged to those contributing to childbearing, adoption, early infant care, and organizing the daily needs of a household and its dependent members.

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