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Trans family systems framework: Theorizing families' gender investments and divestments in cisnormativity

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Abstract

Objective: This article calls on family scholars to take seriously how families are invested and divested in maintaining and reproducing cisnormativity.

Background: Families can be a prime institution for the reproduction of cisnormativity. For transgender and nonbinary family members, families' investment in cisnormativity can generate ambiguous and toxic familial relations. Yet, family studies have not developed an adequate framework to examine how and why cisnormativity operates within families.

Method: The authors engage with empirical and theoretical work on gender, intersectionality, and families to examine how cisnormativity operates within family dynamics and processes. This article also focuses on work about trans people and families to capture how cisnormative processes within families affect trans people's familial relations.

Results: The authors advance a trans family systems framework to show how families' cisgender investments and divestments shape familial processes. The concept of cisnormative compliance is introduced to capture the beliefs and practices of obedience established by family members for the purpose of reproducing cisnormativity. Family studies can move forward in studying these cisnormative processes through documenting how gender accountability shapes family dynamics, implementing new methods, furthering an intersectional analysis, and exploring complexities of space and place.

Conclusion: To reimagine gender and families, family scholars need to study and foreground how cisnormativity shapes family dynamics and processes.

KEYWORDS
cisnormativity, family systems, gender, sexuality, transgender

INTRODUCTION

Today, 1.6% of all U.S. adults identify as transgender and/or nonbinary, and for adults ages 18–29 years old, 5.1% identify as trans and/or nonbinary (Brown, 2022). As trans people are gaining more visibility in U.S. society, they are disclosing their trans identity more openly (Puckett et al., 2022). Notably, after health professionals and friends, family members are the next main group of people that trans people disclose their identity to (Haimson & Veinot, 2020). In turn, receiving social support from family members can play a significant role in reducing minority stress for trans people (McConnell et al., 2016). Families, though, can be a main institution of policing gender and sexuality and upholding cisnormativity and hetero-normativity (Stacey, 2021). This article examines this contradiction between the value of family members in supporting trans family members but also how families can sometimes be a main site of policing gender to uphold cisnormativity. We ask, what are families' investments in gender and cisnormativity? What are the consequences of these investments for all family members, but especially for trans and nonbinary family members? And how do some families and family members divest from cisnormativity? In answering these questions, we develop the trans family systems framework that centers the examination of cisnormativity within family dynamics. This framework gives family scholars tools and concepts to explore the *how* and *why* some families and family members are invested in maintaining cisnormativity and the consequences of these familial cisnormative practices, especially for trans and nonbinary family members. This framework also examines how and why some families and family members divest from cisnormativity and how this divestment can expand notions of gender and families.

To note, we use cisnormativity to mean the structures and practices that privilege people who identify with their assigned birth gender and who embody and enact gender expressions aligned with this assigned birth gender (Robinson, 2022). Cisnormativity relies on a presumption of a naturalized gender binary of masculine boys/men and feminine girls/women. This system also values and privileges masculinity over femininity (Hoskin, 2019, 2020). As a system that privileges some people at the expense of other people, cisnormativity awards resources to people who are gender conforming and who identify with their assigned birth gender, and it erases and marginalizes trans people, nonbinary people, gender expansive people, and other people who may challenge the gender binary. Under cisnormativity, trans often means people who do not identify as the gender they were assigned at birth. We use trans, then, as an umbrella term for people whose gender identities and/or expressions are different from the cisnormative expectations based on their assigned birth gender. We use gender expansive to capture the wider range of gender identities and expressions beyond the cisnormative gender binary.

Furthermore, we recognize that cisnormativity works hand-in-hand with heteronormativity—the privileging of heterosexuality as natural and normal (Robinson, 2016)—whereby the naturalization of the gender binary is also about upholding heterosexuality as the dominant practice in society. Moreover, within the United States, the gender binary, cisnormativity, and hetero-normativity intertwine with processes of settler colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy (Collins, 2005; Enke, 2012; Morgensen, 2010; Snorton, 2017; Spillers, 1987). For instance, Black women have been and are often constructed as more masculine than white women, showing how cisnormativity, the gender binary, and dominant notions of patriarchal femininity operate in and through U.S. middle-class notions of white femininity and womanhood (Collins, 2005; Enke, 2012; Hoskin, 2017).

Building on this work about cisnormativity, this article empirically zooms in on trans people's experiences within families. Specifically, we theorize about gender and families through investigating families' investments and divestments in cisnormativity and the gender binary. In doing so, we call on family scholars to take seriously how some families and family members are often deeply invested in cisnormativity and how some families and family members are

divested in cisnormativity. We argue that centering cisnormativity within analyses of families is crucial to understanding gender and family dynamics today.

GENDER, FAMILIES, AND CISNORMATIVITY

Families are a gender and sexuality factory (Stacey, 2021). Indeed, families can be a prime institution for the reproduction of cisnormativity and heteronormativity. For instance, mothers often assume their children are heterosexual, discuss love and relationships with children as only heterosexual, and often do not tell their children about LGBTQ people or introduce them to LGBTQ people (Martin, 2009). Parents also often assume their child is cisgender and cannot imagine having a trans child (Miseo, 2022). Nevertheless, despite a wealth of rich research on gender and sexuality within families, a great deal of research on gender in families often does not specifically theorize about cisnormativity. Cisnormativity may be conflated with heteronormativity with little distinction between the practices. In addressing this gap, this article provides a systematic framework to examine gender and cisnormativity within families and does so by mainly centering research on trans people's familial experiences.

Even in the early 2000s, there was limited research on LGBTQ family life (Biblarz & Savci, 2010), and still little is known about transgender family life (Few-Demo et al., 2016; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019; Pfeffer, 2010; Reczek, 2020; Sassler & Lichter, 2020; Smock & Schwartz, 2020; van Eeden-Moorefield et al., 2018). Historically, studies of LGBTQ family life often neglected trans experiences—either focusing heavily on cis lesbian and gay men or eliding the experiences of trans and nonbinary individuals with cis lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people, including research on LGBTQ parents and families in non-Western contexts (Costa & Shenkman, 2020; Few-Demo et al., 2016; Pastrana, 2016; Roe, 2017). While trans people can also be LGB, this lumping of trans people in with cis LGB people can miss distinct practices and processes that may affect family dynamics for trans people differently than cis LGB people. For example, trans parenting is often quite distinct from cis LGB parenting as trans people may navigate the gendered cultural expectations of parenting differently than cis LGB parents and trans parents are often excluded from mainstream and same-sex parenting resources (Hafford-Letchfield et al., 2019).

Furthermore, most research on trans people and their families that does exist often focuses on the relationships between trans youth and their parents (Reczek, 2020), showing a need to build on these important studies. There needs to be more research on the vast and varied familial relationships in the lives of transgender adults, including more work on trans parents. These gaps are critical as existing research fails to capture and understand how families' gender policing processes are not only about trying to uphold heteronormativity and not have a gay child or family member (Kane, 2006; Martin, 2005, 2009) but also about upholding cisnormativity and working to not have a trans child or family member. We turn, then, to the work on gender and families to examine and theorize how cisnormative processes unfold within families and to analyze why some families and family members are invested in cisnormative gender ideologies and practices and why some families and family members divest from cisnormative gender ideologies and practices.

TRANS FAMILY SYSTEMS FRAMEWORK

This article develops a framework that centers the examination of cisnormativity within family dynamics, interactions, and processes. That is, we advance a *trans family systems framework* (Figure 1). A family systems approach examines how family members influence each other, wherein familial processes are interactive, interdependent, and shaped by the contexts that
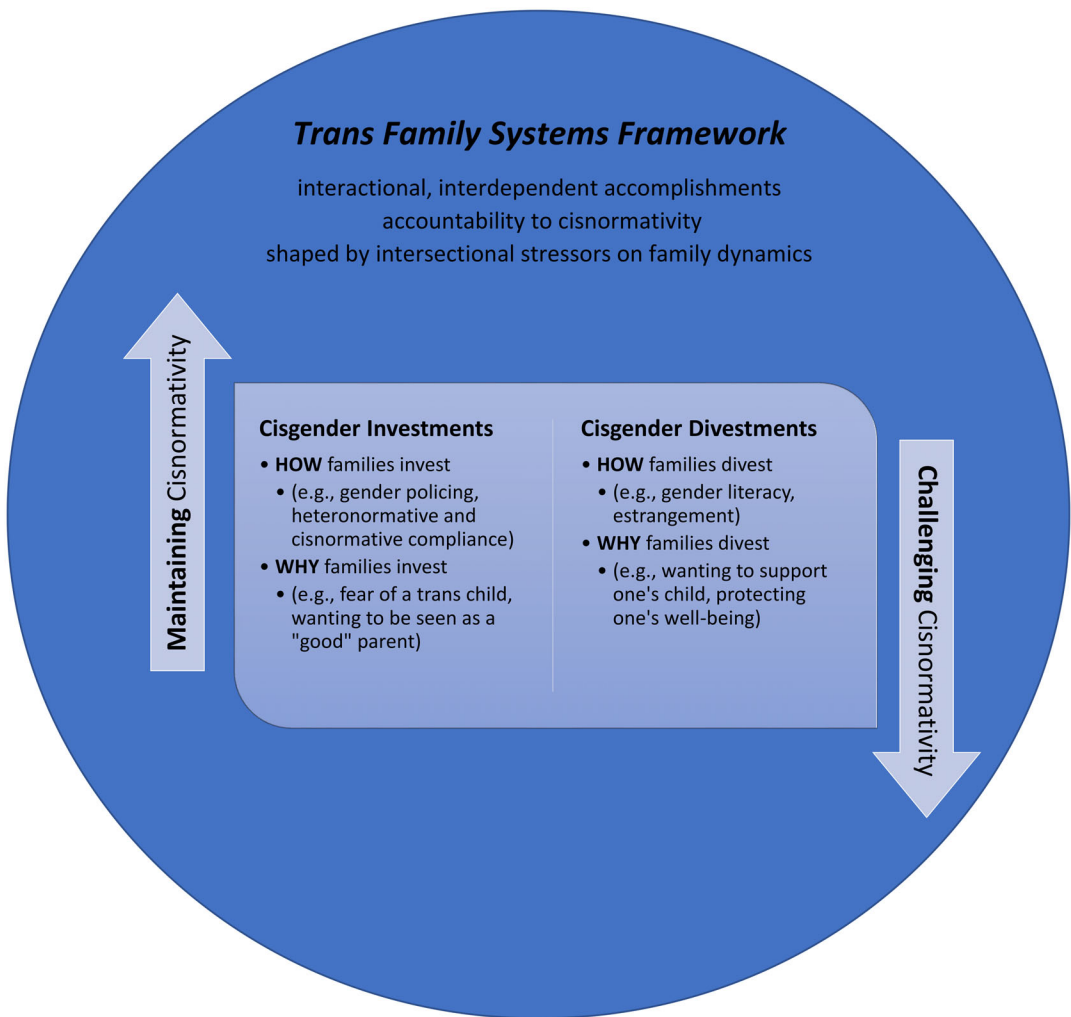
Trans Family Systems Framework

interactional, interdependent accomplishments
accountability to cisnormativity
shaped by intersectional stressors on family dynamics

Maintaining Cisnormativity

Challenging Cisnormativity

Cisgender Investments
- **HOW** families invest
  - (e.g., gender policing, heteronormative and cisnormative compliance)
- **WHY** families invest
  - (e.g., fear of a trans child, wanting to be seen as a "good" parent)

Cisgender Divestments
- **HOW** families divest
  - (e.g., gender literacy, estrangement)
- **WHY** families divest
  - (e.g., wanting to support one's child, protecting one's well-being)

FIGURE 1 The trans family systems framework.

families are embedded within (Cox & Paley, 2003; Watson, 2012). More specifically, families are both relationship and emotional systems, whereby family members influence each other's thoughts, feelings, and actions (Bowen, 1993). Roles, rules, and boundaries are constructed within families with the goal of homeostasis, stability, and maintenance of the status quo (Bowen, 1993; Erdem & Safi, 2018). A family systems framework documents, then, the beliefs that family members have about how each family member should act and how family members come to share these beliefs (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000). This perspective understands that families are active systems, and hence, it also studies between and within family differences (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000). A change in a family member's functioning, including one's behavior and emotional state, can affect and change the family system. Capturing this change and the challenge to the homeostasis of the family unit can be a ripe place to explore family dynamics and differences (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000).

Building on this approach, Schmitz, Robinson, and Sanchez (2020) developed an intersectional family systems framework to capture how processes around race, class, gender, and sexuality shape familial dynamics and relationships. This approach both captures how race,

class, gender, and sexuality simultaneously shape family processes and how interactions within families can reproduce race, class, gender, and sexual inequalities (Schmitz, Robinson, & Sanchez, 2020). This framework calls on scholars to understand how structures of oppression intersect to shape the contexts of family dynamics and how family dynamics can reproduce and/or challenge oppressive structures.

We propose a trans family systems approach. In developing this framework, we use trans as an analytical category (Stryker, 2007). As an analytical category, trans interrogates the sex/gender distinction and system, questions biology as destiny, disrupts cisnormative gender practices and ideologies, and shows how normativity is produced (Stryker, 2007). A trans family systems approach centers a trans analytic to focus in on how families' gender investments and divestments, particularly in cisnormativity, shape familial dynamics and the experiences of people within families.

For this framework, we develop the concepts of cisgender investments and cisgender divestments to capture the interdependent and interactional accomplishments of *how* and *why* family members invest in cisnormativity and/or divest from it. This framework recognizes that families are often embedded within the larger context of cisnormativity, and hence, it works to capture the varied responses that families have to maintaining and/or challenging cisnormativity and the gender binary. This trans family systems approach is also attuned to how cultural contexts and structural processes such as racism and xenophobia shape these investments and divestments in cisnormativity. Furthermore, this framework makes visible the logics and dynamics that perpetuate cisnormativity within families and that can harm and subordinate trans, nonbinary, and gender expansive family members. Through documenting dynamics of cisgender divestments, it also captures family differences, challenges, and changes to the cisnormative maintenance of the status quo.

This framework proffers, then, both theoretical and methodological contributions. Theoretically, it centers the examination of cisnormativity in order to understand family dynamics, especially gendered dynamics. This theoretical intervention allows family scholars to parse through how cisnormativity shapes gendered familial dynamics and processes in addition to how heteronormativity and the patriarchy shape gendered familial dynamics. Methodologically, a trans family systems framework documents how cisnormativity shapes the gendered beliefs that family members have about how people within families should act and how family members come to share these beliefs. It also captures the actions that work to maintain cisnormativity (such as gender policing) or challenge cisnormativity (such as gender literacy through parents educating themselves, often via the internet, about expansive transgender possibilities). Importantly, individuals are always judged and held accountable for their success or failure of meeting cisnormative gendered societal expectations (West & Zimmerman, 1987). A trans family systems approach is particularly interested in how accountability shapes the interactional dynamics around gender within families—both how family members hold each other accountable but also how larger structures of accountability shape how and why family members may gender police other family members or may support challenges to the cisnormative status quo.

Notably, we mainly focus on research in the United States and document contemporary family dynamics within this particular Western context. However, we propose a framework and concepts that could be analytically useful to record how cisnormativity and family dynamics unfold in other times, spaces, places, and contexts. That is, as an interactional and intersectional framework, the trans family systems approach can be applied to other contexts to see how cisnormativity and family dynamics change across time, place, and contexts, and how other intersections that might be more salient in some countries (such as caste) can shape these processes differently than categories that are more salient in the United States (such as middle-class whiteness). Nonetheless, a trans family systems framework gives family scholars tools and concepts to document how and why cisnormativity operates in families and shapes familial gendered dynamics. We present two overarching concepts—cisgender investments and cisgender

divestments—in applying this framework and in understanding the consequences of cisnormativity within family life and challenges to it.

CISGENDER INVESTMENTS

Maintaining cisnormativity happens through practices that we are calling *cisgender investments*. Pfeffer (2018) offered up the concepts of methodological investments and disinvestments to show how queer scholars often have to disinvest from traditional sociological methods and invest in new ways of doing knowledge production. Borrowing from the language of economics, investments and disinvestments can be risky, and as Pfeffer (2018) demonstrated, disinvesting from traditional sociological methods and knowledge production can come with consequences such as other scholars devaluing a queer scholar's work. We build on this language of investment to explore how some families often invest in cisnormativity—which is often not risky as it maintains the status quo—and then we explore ways people engage in the risk of divesting from cisnormativity to provide other possibilities of understanding gender and families.

We take cisgender investments to be the ongoing emotional and personal stakes that family members have in the gender identity and expressions of other family members and one's self in order to maintain cisnormativity within one's family. Broadly, the concept of cisgender investments captures both the *how* (e.g., gender policing, heteronormative compliance) and *why* (e.g., fear of having a gay or trans child, not wanting to be seen as a bad parent) family members engage in these interactional practices and processes. In turn, families remain a cisnormative institution through these investments. In this section, we focus in on research about gender and families and theorize about cisgender investments and their relation to maintaining cisnormativity. Within the trans family systems framework, the concept of cisgender investments allows family scholars to explore how and why cisnormativity is maintained in and through families and the harm these processes can cause for trans, non-binary, and gender expansive family members.

A main mechanism of cisgender investments is gender policing. Research has shown that a major reason parents gender police their children is because parents of preschool and young children associate gender nonconformity with homosexuality and fear having a gay child (Kane, 2006; Martin, 2005, 2009). This association of gender non-conforming behavior with incipient homosexuality is a "stalled revolution" in parenting (Martin, 2005). Parents of both younger and older children may engage in these gender policing processes because they worry that their child will be bullied for being gender non-conforming and read as gay (Kane, 2012; Robinson, 2020; Stacey & Padavic, 2021). This gender policing can entail telling a boy that pink is only a girls' color or telling a girl that only boys have short hair. This policing can also entail not letting a boy paint his nails or bullying a boy with painted nails. Expressions of disapproval to verbal and physical abuse can work to police gender within families (Robinson, 2020). Notably, as femininity is devalued in society, boys engaging in feminine behaviors may often get more policed than girls engaging in masculine behaviors (Hoskin, 2019, 2020). Families are often a main site of perpetuating femmephobia—the systematic devaluation and regulation of femininity—and families as an institution can also instill femmephobic values and beliefs in family members (Hoskin & Serafini, 2023). Furthermore, parents and other family members often police sexuality vis-à-vis policing gender through enacting heteronormative compliance— "the beliefs and practices of obedience established by parents, siblings, and other relatives with the purpose of policing and reproducing heterosexuality as the norm within families and society at large" (González-López, 2015, p. 184). A key component of heteronormative compliance is enforcing gender conformity, as parents enforce hegemonic masculinity (Kane, 2006) and ideals about femininity and virginity (González-López, 2004) with their children.

Moreover, broader work on Black and Latinx family life (Higginbotham, 1994; White, 2010; Wolcott, 2013) suggests that Black and Latinx family members may experience more pressure to police the gender and sexuality of family members to maintain respectability for themselves and their family. For example, Black mothers stressed middle-class strategies of gender and sexual respectability to protect their daughters from police violence (Malone Gonzalez, 2022). This pressure for respectability often extends into adulthood for LGBTQ people (Acosta, 2010; Moore, 2011). As families of color are already marginalized because of racism and are already positioned outside of cisnormativity—which, in the United States, is partly in and through middle-class whiteness (Enke, 2012)—these larger structural processes can shape how and why family members of color may police another family member's gender and sexuality. Notably, parents and other family members seem consciously aware that gender and sexuality are things they must shape for a child, and many families often do so in ways that enforce and maintain heteronormativity and cisnormativity. A trans family systems framework critically examines gender policing in order to capture how family members influence each other's gendered thoughts, feelings, and actions and how rules and boundaries are constructed within families in and through these cisgender investments in maintaining the cisnormative status quo.

Cisgender investments and families as interactional accomplishments

But, again, *why* this investment? A trans family systems approach answers this question through documenting how accountability shapes interactional accomplishments within families and how accountability can shape the beliefs, values, and actions of family members in reproducing cisnormativity. Successful parenting or being a "good" parent is linked to whether a child is heterosexual, cisgender, and gender conforming (Reczek & Bosley-Smith, 2022). This pressure for parents comes from the fact that gender is an interactional accomplishment that parents do alongside their children. As an interactional accomplishment, parents are held accountable not only for how they do gender and sexuality but also how their child does gender and sexuality (Kane, 2006, 2012).

Other family members, such as a child of a trans parent (Dierckx et al., 2017), siblings of a trans person (Reczek et al., 2022), or a partner of a trans person (Pfeffer, 2010), might all experience accountability differently and may gender police a trans or gender expansive family member differently as well. For instance, some children of a trans parent often feared experiencing stigmatization for having a trans parent (Dierckx et al., 2017). And while most children of a trans parent do not suffer severe stigmatization, the teenager still expected to have control over when a parent's transgender status should be disclosed in social settings (Dierckx et al., 2017). Furthermore, compared to cis LGB adults, trans adults often categorized their relationships with their siblings as more conflictual (Reczek et al., 2022). Trans people often came out later than cis LGB people and often experienced more rejection from their siblings compared to cis LGB people (Reczek et al., 2022). In regards to romantic partner dynamics, cis women in relationships with trans men often engaged in labor to support and reproduce masculinity and femininity within the home and within the relationship such as doing a great deal of housework, emotion work, and care work, challenging the notion that queer and trans relationships are always egalitarian (Pfeffer, 2010). Understanding and documenting, then, the various types of gender accountability within families can uncover the dynamic interactional accomplishments of familial cisgender investments.

Furthermore, as marginalized families are under more surveillance and already positioned outside of cisnormativity and heteronormativity (Enke, 2012; R. A. Ferguson, 2003), marginalized parents may be held accountable more (Robinson, 2020). For instance, gay and lesbian parents who tried to offer their children more gender and sexuality options felt this pressure that

a "good" parent entails raising a heterosexual, cisgender, gender conforming child (Averett, 2016). Sexual minority mothers who have a pre-pubescent trans child navigated being stigmatized as if the mother being a sexual minority is what made their child trans (Kuvalanka et al., 2018). These mothers of young children often still—at least initially—upheld cisnormative ideas about their child such as the mothers assuming that the child's gender nonconformity meant their child might be a sexual minority but not trans (Kuvalanka et al., 2018). Trans and gender nonconforming LGB parents may also try to get their children of all ages to be gender conforming, have ambivalence about their child being gender nonconforming, and described the possibility of having a trans child in negative terms such as being "heartbreaking" (Bergstrom-Lynch, 2020). In another study of 64 nonbinary or binary transgender parents of children 2–6 years old, trans and nonbinary parents allowed their younger children to have more gender expansive play and often would not label their young child's gender, but on average, the children's play was still conventionally gendered (Riskind & Tornello, 2022).

Child-rearing processes are also gendered. LGBTQ adults reported that dads often more strictly police a child's gender and see failure of gender conformity as failure of their own parenting, even with their adult children (Reczek & Bosley-Smith, 2022). Heterosexual fathers of preschool children played a central role in this process and saw having and raising masculine sons as a reflection of their own masculinity (Kane, 2006). These differences persist with older children, as fathers constructed their own identities as heterosexual and masculine through talking to their teenage sons about sexuality and raising their sons to be heterosexual (Solebello & Elliott, 2011). These fathers gained privilege and status through their own heterosexual masculinity and wanted their teen sons to have the same privileges (Solebello & Elliott, 2011). Moreover, parents of even young children worried about how their sons might be treated if they failed to live up to hegemonic notions of masculinity and that their preschool son might be gay or perceived as gay (Kane, 2006). For LGBTQ adults, there is even a "dad's closet," whereby because of gendered expectations of masculinity and fatherhood, the father was often the last to know about a child's LGBTQ identity (Reczek & Bosley-Smith, 2022).

Mothers also often worried about their daughters' femininity. For instance, Mexican mothers may work to protect their teen daughters' virginity, as virginity is seen as a type of capital for the daughters to use to maintain a privileged status within heterosexual dating and relationships (González-López, 2005). Notably, immigrant families and families of color may also enforce dominant understandings of gender on their children of all ages as ways to buffer the effects of racism, xenophobia, and homophobia (Acosta & Salcedo, 2018). For example, to leverage against racism, Filipino/a/x families positioned their adolescents and young adult daughter's gender and sexuality as morally superior than white women's gender and sexuality (Espiritu, 2001). Racial processes intersect with cultural and gendered processes to shape gender policing practices within families.

Furthermore, these cultural contexts and structural oppressions can also shape the gender and sexuality experiences of LGBTQ people within families of color. For example, Latina mothers saw their sexually nonconforming adult daughters as being feminine as important to not only avoid further discrimination but also important for socio-economic reasons such as securing a job (Acosta, 2013). Latino gay men who have a strong sense of ethnic identity may work to maintain their relationship with their immigrant family members by both enacting masculinity themselves and by only dating other masculine men (Ocampo, 2012). Filipino and Latino gay men engaged in a "moral management" of monitoring their gender presentation, behaviors, voice, clothing, and friendship to maintain support from family members (Ocampo, 2014). Because of racism in society, families, communities of color, and religious communities can be safe havens to combat white supremacy. But gender policing was often tied to anti-LGBTQ religious messages (Schmitz, Robinson, Tabler, et al., 2020). In turn, trans and gender expansive Latino/a youth feared not only a loss of family for not conforming but also a loss of religious and ethnic communities (Schmitz, Robinson, Tabler, et al., 2020).

In addition to moral management, queer and trans adult family members may also maintain heteronormativity and cisnormativity through conflict and comfort work—being the ones who played down their own gender and sexuality and tried to ease family members' discomfort (Reczek & Bosley-Smith, 2022; Stone, 2021). This work involved educating parents about gender and LGBTQ identities, avoidance work of not discussing LGBTQ identities, acceptance work of just accepting the conflict, and boundary work of establishing boundaries with parents (Reczek & Bosley-Smith, 2022; Reczek & Smith, 2021). Furthermore, trans youth often experienced family boundary ambiguity, whereby the youth wanted their parents' acceptance and also said they understood their parents' rejection—maintaining familial relationships through tolerating ambiguity (Catalpa & McGuire, 2018). But ambiguity can be as damaging as rejection. Trans people who experienced ambiguity with their families of origin experienced similar negative health effects as trans people who experienced rejection from their families of origin (Allen et al., 2022). This work, then, is often at the expense of LGBTQ people's own needs and health. This work maintains and promotes family functioning (Reczek & Bosley-Smith, 2022) but can keep families cisnormative and heteronormative. As families are interdependent and as family members influence each other, a trans family systems framework captures the interactional accomplishments of gender within families and the role of accountability in shaping these interactions in order to understand family members' cisgender investments and their consequences.

Cisgender investments and cisnormative compliance

Although a great deal of work often focuses on policing gender as a way to maintain heteronormativity, some work has begun to think specifically about cisnormativity. For instance, through the further medicalization of trans people, including trans children and youth, some professionals encouraged parents of young children to embrace their gender nonconforming child but, in doing so, to also ensure that the child becomes gay but not trans (Bryant, 2008). This process upholds cisnormativity through constructing being transgender as worse than being gay. It can also further the cisnormative idea that children should be protected from trans people and that children themselves cannot be trans, even at a time in which gay men and lesbians are becoming more accepted (Stone, 2019). This erasure or punishment of trans experiences may be part of how families reproduce a cisnormative reality (Sumerau et al., 2016). Cisgender investments partly work, then, not only through heteronormative compliance but also through what we are calling *cisnormative compliance*—the beliefs and practices of obedience established by parents, siblings, and other relatives with the purpose of policing and reproducing cisnormativity within families and society at large. Cisnormative compliance is not exclusive to trans and nonbinary family members; the previous section on cisgender investments documents a series of ways that family members police for cisnormative compliance for all family members. However, there are specific ways that trans family members are policed within families. We document some of these ways in this section in order to capture a specific mechanism of how cisgender investments unfold for trans people within their families. Cisnormative compliance is a key concept of a trans family systems framework as it can be used to capture both beliefs and practices that work to maintain families as cisnormative as well as their consequences for family members, especially for trans, nonbinary, and gender expansive family members.

An explicit form of cisnormative compliance is lack of gender recognition within families. Gender identity may be developed individually, but it is recognized, misattributed, or denied in social interactions. For instance, parents of a trans youth may experience "gender mourning," whereby they grieve the "loss" of their child (Miseo, 2022). This grieving or mourning upheld the investment in the cisnormativity of families as it revealed the assumption that the child will not be trans and that parents did not imagine a future of having a trans child (Miseo, 2022).

It is even more common for family members of trans people to deny the gender identity of the trans person and to refuse to use their name, pronouns, or other gender signifiers. This refusing gender is part of general practices of discursive aggression—communication in interactions that attempts to reinforce inequality and hold others accountable (Shuster, 2017; Stone et al., 2019). In the context of gender nonconforming people, discursive aggression was engaged to hold trans and nonbinary people to the gender binary, ignoring and denying their own understandings of their bodies and gender (Ansara & Hegarty, 2013). Trans and nonbinary family members may perceive gender refusal not as a consequence of ignorance or gender misattribution, but rather as a deliberate denial of subjectivity and group membership (Stone et al., 2019). Cis family members, though, may resist change within their families and prioritize their own comfort and stability over those of trans or nonbinary family members (Shuster, 2017). Nonetheless, trans people experienced abuse as a result of family members' perceptions of shame and stigma, such that "often the gender normative status of families was frequently privileged over and above the well-being of the trans family member" (M. Rogers, 2017, p. 237).

Beyond lack of gender recognition, family members may enforce cisnormative compliance through violence and expulsion. Some scholars have described this violence as identity-related abuse, whereby identity-related abuse of trans and nonbinary people may include physical, mental, and/or emotional abuse and may involve critical comments about a person's body, misgendering, withholding resources (e.g., medication, money), or intentionally "outing" someone (Riggs et al., 2016; Tesch & Bekerian, 2015). Furthermore, the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey ($N = 27,715$) found that one in 10 trans respondents who were out to their immediate family reported a family member had been violent toward them because of their gender identity (James et al., 2016). Studies demonstrated high rates of childhood abuse among trans people (Bandini et al., 2011; Nuttbrock et al., 2010), and trans and nonbinary people experienced more childhood trauma than their cis LGB peers (Schnarrs et al., 2019). Furthermore, trans and gender-expansive youth may experience homelessness due to being expelled from their family due to family members' refusal of accepting the youth's gender identity and/or expressions. For some trans and gender-expansive youth of color, the contexts of poverty, instability, and racism can shape this expulsion, whereby these "conditional families" may use expulsion as a mechanism to enforce heteronormative compliance within already marginalized families with tenuous ties between the family members and the youth (Robinson, 2018). Violence and expulsion become extreme ways of enforcing cisnormative compliance.

Cisnormative compliance extends to not only trans family members but other family members who support them. Parents of trans kids of all ages can experience minority stress on account of their child's gender experiences, including secondary stigma (Hidalgo & Chen, 2019; Katz-Wise et al., 2022). Two negative stressors for parents were rejection and non-affirmation, whereby rejection was family members not accepting the child and non-affirming was a family member not fully rejecting but still misgendering the child (Hidalgo & Chen, 2019). Parents also worried about their child's futures; these worries became a proximal stressor for the parents, including parental fears of bullying, unhappiness, and the child potentially having a difficult life (Hidalgo & Chen, 2019; Katz-Wise et al., 2022; Malpas, 2011).

All in all, cisnormative compliance illuminates an important mechanism of the cisgender investments of family members. Families are not inherently heteronormative and cisnormative. Family members may hold certain cisnormative beliefs and then try to enforce these beliefs and rules through accountability, gender policing, violence, expulsion, misrecognition, refusing gender, and other practices that invest in maintaining the family unit as cisnormative. A trans family systems framework offers cisnormative compliance as an important concept to focus in on specific beliefs and practices that are about maintaining cisnormativity and how these beliefs and practices particularly regulate trans family members and harm them. Importantly, family members interact and influence each other in both investing in cisnormativity and the gender binary and, at times, divesting from the gender binary—to which we now turn.

CISGENDER DIVESTMENTS

Plenty of family members also divest from cisnormativity. Indeed, there are some challenges to the understanding of families as a social system being oriented exclusively toward the replication of cisnormativity and heteronormativity in work on stepparents (Acosta, 2021; Stacey & Padavic, 2021), parents of trans people (Meadow, 2018; Rahilly, 2020), LGBTQ parents and other relatives (McGuire et al., 2016; Stone et al., 2022), trans youth (Robinson & Schmitz, 2021), trans parents (Goldberg et al., 2020; Tabor, 2019), and chosen families (Bailey, 2013; Hull & Ortyl, 2019). We coin *cisgender divestments* to capture both the how (e.g., giving gender, gender literacy, estrangement) and why (e.g., wanting to love and support one's child, desiring to protect one's well-being) certain family members disrupt and resist cisnormative understandings of gender and families. To note, while the words are arguably similar, we use divestment instead of disinvestment, as divestment is often an ongoing process that is the opposite of investment and is more commonly used when a person (and not a government entity) is getting rid of one's investment. Cisgender divestments challenge cisnormativity and expand the possibilities of how gender is performed, accepted, and accomplished within families.

Stepparents and LGBTQ family members often cultivate cisgender divestments. In a study of 20 biological parents and stepparents, stepparents were less inclined to police a child's gendered behaviors (Stacey & Padavic, 2021). Stepparents also did not think the child's sexuality reflected their own parenting (Stacey & Padavic, 2021). Furthermore, some LGBTQ parents of pre-pubescent children engaged in a "gender buffet" strategy of raising their child, providing many gendered options of toys, clothes, and activities (Averett, 2016). These parents were aware that a "good parent" is one who raises a child to heteronormative expectations, but LGBTQ parents also saw heteronormativity as something that can harm their child (Averett, 2016). As LGBTQ parents are already living outside of heteronormativity, there might be openings to also challenge cisnormativity. LGBTQ aunts, uncles, cousins, and siblings of LGBTQ youth also showed a divestment in heteronormativity such as supporting the use of drag by their other LGBTQ family members, along with creating a less heteronormative family environment (Stone et al., 2022). In occupying different roles—as a stepparent and/or as already challenging the heteronormative status quo for being LGBTQ—some family members may be more likely to also challenge the cisnormative status quo.

Parents also have varied responses to a trans child or a child's gender expansive behavior. In one study, the majority of parents of pre-pubescent gender-expansive youth felt neutral or positive about a child's expansive expressions of gender (Schlehofer & Cortez-Regan, 2022). Moreover, some parents of trans children also divest from cisnormativity by investing in their child's gender identity. Parents' recognition and "giving gender" to their gender-expansive child can be an important part of calling these identities into being (Meadow, 2018; Rahilly, 2020; Travers, 2019). That is, giving gender is the process of how people assisted their partners or child in securing their gender identity (Meadow, 2018; Ward, 2010). If a child is trans, this giving gender is a type of cisgender divestment, in that, it divests from the understanding of families or the child as cisnormative or cis. Nonetheless, giving gender is parents assisting their child or a person assisting their partner in validating their gender identity (Meadow, 2018; Ward, 2010). Importantly, parents play a pivotal role in recognizing and affirming the gender identity of their children (Gill-Peterson, 2018; Meadow, 2018; Travers, 2019). The gender of children being acknowledged by family members is partly how gender "comes into being in the world through intricate processes of social assignment, recognition, and regulation" (Meadow, 2018, p. 44).

Furthermore, a trans child can provide new possibilities for thinking about gender for family members (Travers, 2019). For example, some parents of pre-pubescent children engaged in gender hedging and gender literacy as strategies to support their trans child and support their

child's gender expansiveness (Rahilly, 2015). Gender hedging is the boundary work of somewhat supporting a child's gender expansiveness (such as buying a feminine son or trans girl pink socks) while remaining within cisnormative constraints (such as not buying a feminine son or trans girl a skirt). Notably, as femininity is more devalued in society compared to masculinity and masculine expressions (Hoskin, 2019, 2020), this gender hedging might apply more to policing feminine sons and trans girls. Furthermore, through gender literacy of educating themselves about trans people, parents gained the language and tools to equip their children and others with the vocabulary to discuss and understand trans people (Rahilly, 2015). In another study, parents who took their adolescent trans child to a specialty clinic engaged in four processes to move to acceptance: educating themselves, allowing themselves time to adapt, obtaining support from other parents, and obtaining support from professionals (Pullen Sansfaçon et al., 2020). Parents of trans kids might also push back at schools and in sports to try to get these institutions to accept and accommodate their child (Travers, 2019). These strategies may be impacted by cultural norms, as in a small study of eight Latinx fathers of trans children, fathers were both helped and hindered by Latinx cultural values like machismo (Teran et al., 2022). Notably, parents in Canada and the United States who have time to resist and advocate for their child are often white, middle-class parents, who have the resources to attend trans conferences, find other parents of trans kids, and the leisure time to advocate for their trans child (Meadow, 2018; Rahilly, 2020; Travers, 2019).

Trans people, including trans youth, themselves resist cisnormativity and divest from the gender binary (Robinson & Schmitz, 2021). Trans youth are social actors and not powerless. They shape the parent–child relationship and exert autonomy over their personal and social identities (Catalpa & McGuire, 2018). Trans people may choose estrangement as a way to divest from one's cisnormative family. Indeed, for a trans person to stay within a family that rejects them or ambivalently accepts them can take a great deal of conflict work—work that disproportionately often falls on the trans person (Reczek & Smith, 2021). This conflict work and navigating these ambivalent ties can also take a huge toll on trans people's health (Allen et al., 2022). Although estrangement is still rare, it can be a tool to divest from the cisnormative family structure. Moreover, queer and gender expansive adults may leave their families of origin and migrate as a way to escape the pressure to conform to gender and sexuality norms within families (Asencio & Acosta, 2009; Cantu, 2009). Trans adults can also push back in general against the cisnormative assumptions parents or family members may hold about gender and families—expanding the understanding of families—though this expansion is often a lot of labor on the part of the trans family member (Reczek & Bosley-Smith, 2022).

Trans parents can also challenge cisnormative understandings of families or the idea that only cis parents are suitable parents. In a study where around 20% of the trans people were parents, the trans parents were found to have no significant differences in mental health than their cisgender counterparts, challenging cisnormative assumptions that cis parents are better off than trans parents (Carone et al., 2021). People should not cisnormatively assume that trans people make unsuitable parents, but rather stigma and discrimination should remain the focus of the challenges that trans people, including trans parents, may face (Carone et al., 2021). Furthermore, parenthood was even positively related to the mental well-being for gay and lesbian trans parents (Zhang et al., 2021). Notably, trans people are often biologically-related to their children (compared to adoption and foster care), and older trans participants in one study were more likely to become parents before their gender transition (Tornello et al., 2019). Trans people also face more discrimination in adoption, even when trans people were often more open to adopting children with mental health challenges (Goldberg, 2023; Goldberg et al., 2020). Trans individuals often expressed a desire to have biological relatedness to a future child, but acknowledged the physical limitations and lack of legal protections as barriers to them becoming parents (Tornello & Bos, 2017). Trans parents can also challenge gender practices of parenting behaviors that often ascribed certain parenting behaviors as masculine and certain

parenting behaviors as feminine (Few-Demo et al., 2016). Notably, trans and nonbinary parents reported more egalitarian division of childcare labor, though the parent with the genetic relatedness to the eldest child predicted more unpaid childcare labor (Tornello, 2020). All in all, trans parents challenge some cisnormative and biological assumptions about parenthood and can divest from cisnormative assumptions about families.

While LGBTQ people are maintaining ties with biological and legal relatives, chosen family still play an important role in their lives, including providing social support and queer and trans affirmation (Hull & Ortyl, 2019). For instance, trans and queer people of color build families and houses and do kin labor within ballroom culture to support each other (Bailey, 2013). For trans youth, chosen family and meeting other trans people can also work to normalize one's own acceptance as trans and hence challenge cisnormativity (Robinson, 2020). Chosen families can be an important refuge for trans people, and trans young adults often relied on their trans support networks for mutual aid, for instrumental, emotional, and material support, and to navigate systems such as medical systems (Jackson Levin et al., 2020).

Like a family systems approach, a trans family systems framework captures how a change in the family—in this instance, often having a trans family member—reshapes family dynamics. Cisgender divestments captures, then, the beliefs and practices of how and why family members may challenge maintaining the cisnormative status quo. From gender recognition to gender literacy, family members may engage in cisgender divestments in order to support a trans family member. Moreover, estrangement and building families of choice can become strategies for trans family members to invest in their selves and divest from the cisnormativity of families of origin. Cisgender divestments capture family differences and varied responses to a trans family member and show how and why families can change and resist cisnormativity.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In this section, we introduce ways for family scholars to implement a trans family systems framework. These approaches include documenting the nuances of gender accountability within families, new methods of measuring and documenting gender, and furthering an intersectional analysis, including exploring the complexities of space and place. In doing so, scholars can document and disrupt cisnormativity within family dynamics and get at how cisgender investments and divestments unfold within families, especially over time.

Documenting accountability within families

Scholars should continue to explore how extended family members (e.g., grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, siblings) may challenge and/or uphold cisnormativity and their cisgender investments and divestments. For instance, LGBTQ youth having an LGBTQ adult in one's family (such as a bisexual aunt) may help the youth find support and may challenge familial heteronormativity, but challenging cisnormativity may be more complicated (Stone et al., 2022). Moreover, various family members may be held accountable differently, and hence, may engage in gender policing practices or not toward a trans family member. Continuing to study extended family members and how accountability shapes their gender beliefs and practices is a ripe field for exploration that can illuminate the constitution of and challenges toward cisnormativity within family systems.

One can theorize that other family members may not be as invested in gender and cisnormativity or may, at least, be held accountable in different ways. For example, critical aunty studies theorizes that aunts and aunties, including heterosexual aunties, are queer figures who blur the boundaries of the nuclear family (Khubchandani, 2022). That is, the "home" is

not always a sanctuary for women, queer, and trans people, and as such, the aunt can infiltrate the borders of the home and be life-giving or life-saving to queer and trans people. Aunties, then, in blurring the boundaries of the home and the nuclear family, expand queer possibilities of these relations and formations (Khubchandani, 2022). A recent study even found how aunts often engaged in gender-affirming practices with their LGBTQ nibling (the gender-neutral term for the child of one's sibling), including housing their LGBTQ nibling when the youth was experiencing conflict with their parents often around their gender and sexuality (Robinson et al., 2023). These aunting practices challenged the cisheteronormativity of the home and of families (Robinson et al., 2023). A preliminary study of two grandmothers raising pre-pubescent trans grandchildren also suggested that the warm bond between grandparents and grandchildren may lead to these grandmothers being the trans grandchild's first and strongest ally (Kuvalanka et al., 2020). In another study with Latinx LGBTQ youth, grandparents supported some forms of gender expression of their grandchild such as allowing a trans boy to buy clothes deemed masculine, but the grandparents may still misgender and deadname the trans grandchild (McCandless-Chapman et al., e-pup ahead of print). This study showed how cisnormativity impacts grandparent-grandchild relations in complicated and nuanced ways that is not complete rejection or complete support (McCandless-Chapman et al., e-pup ahead of print). These few studies lay the groundwork for studying other family members and their relation to gender and families. Continuing to study other family members besides parents is a crucial way to understand families, cisnormativity, and gender dynamics. In documenting these dynamics, one can see if or how parents may feel the greatest level of accountability and how other family members also experience accountability. More specifically, focusing in on how accountability operates for various family members and how this accountability shapes their cisgender investments and divestments is an important way to understand family systems and family differences.

Toward trans methodologies

To get at the dynamic processes of cisgender investments and divestments, a trans family systems approach requires innovative methodologies. These methodologies include rethinking survey measures, conducting family ethnographies and observations, continuing to expand definitions of families, understanding more trans households, and studying acceptance and rejection as ongoing processes, rather than one-time events. If family dynamics and gender processes are complicated and unfold over time, then we need methodologies to capture these complexities.

On a basic level, scholars lack rudimentary measurements of the existence of trans and nonbinary people in family life, beyond tacking trans and nonbinary people or categories to existing measures of gender in quantitative work. We need better measures on gender expression, as gender nonconforming trans people face more challenges than gender-conforming trans people (Miller & Grollman, 2015). A way to measure gender conformity is implementing gradational measures of femininity and masculinity such as measuring on a scale how feminine and masculine the respondent sees themselves and how feminine and masculine they think other people see them (Magliozzi et al., 2016). In another study that tried to measure gender expression, the researchers used these questions on a scale: "My physical appearance and demeanor are typical of someone of my gender," and "My interests, hobbies, and skills are typical of someone of my gender" (Pollitt et al., 2018). Notably, a radical shift is needed methodologically and theoretically to not see masculinity and femininity as categorical binary categories but as orthogonal, whereby masculinity and femininity can co-occur in people's gender expression and whereby other gender expression categories such as butchness and femmeness co-exist (Sedgwick, 2012). Survey measures also need to distinguish between sex and gender, allow people to self-identify

both their sex and gender, and have ways to measure and document changes in sex and gender over the life course (Westbrook & Saperstein, 2015). As of now, best practices should at least have a two-step sex and gender measure as well as gradational gender measures, whereby people rank *both* their femininity and masculinity on scales and the categories are not treated as mutually exclusive as someone, for instance, could rank having both high femininity *and* high masculinity (Saperstein & Westbrook, 2021).

We also need better methods to get at gender policing mechanisms and cisgender investments and divestments. For instance, one study used an online experiment with vignettes to capture biological parents' and stepparents' beliefs about a child's gender nonconformity (Stacey, 2022). Future studies should continue to find creative and innovative ways to capture the beliefs that parents and other family members hold about gender expansive children and family members. Moreover, more observations of actual behavior (and not just what people say about their behavior) is needed to capture how gender policing operates on the ground—which may be more nuanced and complex than what interviews and surveys can capture. While ethnographic studies have done a great job of documenting gender policing within schools (A. A. Ferguson, 2020; Pascoe, 2007; Thorne, 1993), ethnographic studies have not really observed gender policing within families. Moreover, some intensive family observation studies have captured gender inequality in relation to household labor, but intensive family observations are needed to also study gender policing (Lareau & Rao, 2022). In studying gender policing, scholars should be attuned to femmephobia and how gender policing is often also about upholding the devaluation of femininity within society (Hoskin, 2019, 2020; Hoskin & Serafini, 2023).

The definition of who counts as a family and what kind of family life is normative epistemologically and methodologically limits the study of trans family life. Oswald et al. (2005) defined one component of heteronormativity in family life as the binary opposite between "genuine" and "pseudo" families in which genuine families are biologically or legally connected. Family studies disproportionately takes a heteronormative approach to studying trans family life, focusing on either trans people as children or as parents raising children (Fish & Russell, 2018). These "genuine" families center children, monogamous coupling, and biological kinship. Family studies scholars also select disproportionately U.S. white, middle-class, cisgender, same-sex partners with children to understand queer family life (Fish & Russell, 2018; van Eeden-Moorefield et al., 2018). Yet trans and queer families are "complex, dynamic, personally meaningful, developmentally situated, historically located, socially ascribed, and diverse in ways that have not been captured in family science scholarship" (Fish & Russell, 2018, p. 14). A trans methodology broadens who counts as family and kin and which families and kinships are worth studying.

More scholarship also needs to happen about trans people and their romantic relationships and households. Some work has begun to document relationship dynamics of cis women with trans men (Pfeffer, 2010; Ward, 2010) and other work has shown how trans and nonbinary parents reported dividing household labor and childcare in more egalitarian fashion (Tornello, 2020), but there is almost no scholarship about trans women and their relationships and households. This gap may partly be due to femmephobia and the devaluation of women, femmes (a person who presents femininely), and femininity in society (Hoskin, 2019, 2020; Hoskin & Serafini, 2023). Future research needs to explore how the division of labor unfolds in households and relationships with trans women and trans femmes as well as with nonbinary people. As gender is relational and interactional, this research needs to also document the labor trans women's partners might do to make trans women feel feminine or not. Another field ripe for further research is trans people's intimate relations and households with one another. Research has begun to show that many trans people date one another to avoid the discrimination they often face in dating cis people (Zamantakis, 2020); therefore, research needs to explore how gender processes, household labor, and other family dynamics unfold in these trans for trans relationships. More

research is also needed on trans and nonbinary parents, their relationships with their children, and their child-rearing strategies (Bergstrom-Lynch, 2020; Goldberg, 2023; Goldberg & Sweeney, 2019). How the timing of transition (before having a child or while having a child) also shapes these parenting practices and family dynamics needs explored (Hafford-Letchfield et al., 2019).

Finally, methodologies for trans family studies need to incorporate the dynamic nature of trans family life. Notably, scholars should not measure acceptance and rejection as a one-time event. Work has begun to show how these processes are often ambivalent, ambiguous, may change over time, and are shaped by contexts and structural conditions (Allen et al., 2022; Bosley-Smith & Reczek, 2022; Robinson, 2018, 2020). Indeed, trans youth over time can experience rejection, acceptance, ambiguity, ambivalence, support, positivity, advocacy, negativity, and reconciliation from parents (Catalpa & McGuire, 2018). And, in general, LGBTQ family life is often characterized by ambivalence in family relations over time (Bosley-Smith & Reczek, 2022). Therefore, we need new methods and measures to capture the dynamic processes of acceptance and rejection in relation to gender, gender identities, and gender expressions, especially for trans and gender expansive people. Longitudinal work may be most adept at documenting this change over time and these dynamic processes.

Race, space, and class

A trans family systems framework would also examine how racism, cultural contexts, structural conditions, socioeconomic status and access to resources, and religion all shape processes around families' cisgender investments and divestments in cisnormativity. Research has begun to explore how race, class, and structural conditions shape processes of gender and sexuality (Acosta, 2013; Acosta & Salcedo, 2018; Ocampo, 2014; Robinson, 2018, 2020), and hence, processes around cisgender investments and divestments, but much more research is needed in these areas. As cisnormativity in the United States is in and through middle-class notions of gender (Enke, 2012), how families of color navigate cisnormativity could vary. Moreover, work on these processes with white samples also should theorize how whiteness is shaping these investments and divestments. A great deal of work still needs to be done on trans people of color and their families and how socioeconomic status shapes access to resources. As family systems are embedded with larger contexts, studying structural conditions around race and class is crucial to applying a trans family systems framework.

Space and place can also shape these processes; therefore, studying these gender processes and trans people and their families in "ordinary" towns and cities—outside of the often overstudied major metropolitan areas in research on LGBTQ life (Stone, 2018)—can open up new ways of understanding regional variations in family making. For example, nonmetro LGBTQ youth lack the urban infrastructure of resources and organizations and may rely on families more for support and resources (Cohn & Hastings, 2010; Paceley et al., 2017, 2018). Moreover, the privileging of masculinity in white, rural communities in the contemporary United States can create openings for some gender nonconforming women and trans men who rely on white, working-class styles of masculinity and who can connect with others in their communities (Abelson, 2016; Kazyak, 2012; Silva, 2017). Furthermore, work on trans men and drag kings in the South suggests that the way masculinity is constructed in the region impacts trans people and how they navigate family gendered dynamics (B. A. Rogers, 2018, 2019). Space and place are crucial to understanding family systems and dynamics, including cisgender investments and divestments.

Outside of space and place in the United States, work in the Global South maps complex and contradictory ways that cisnormative compliance is maintained and enforced. For example, Saria's (2021) work on hijras and Brainer's (2019) work queer kinship and families in Taiwan both suggest complex relationships between adult children and their parents. One of the

elements that both studies have in common is the deeper cisgender investments of men in families compared to women. The hijras in Saria's ethnography often experienced violence, coercion, and domination by men in their families, who seemed to have the deepest cisgender investments. However, mothers, sisters, and sister-in-laws had more divestment in the gender of hijras and relied on them for care work (Saria, 2021). In Taiwan, parents' understanding of their adult children's queerness was intimately linked to parents' desires for their children's economic success, as heterosexuality and marriage led to more social mobility in Taiwanese society. These cisgender investments were not about the gender of the parents but rather aspirations for economic success. However, mothers expressed more support and closeness with trans adult children than fathers did (Brainer, 2019). Examining various transnational contexts can get at the nuances of family differences in relation to cisgender investments and divestments.

Finally, there is also a need to examine the ways cisnormativity is embedded in transnational processes of empire and colonialism. The concepts of gender and sexuality themselves were and are formed through imperial histories and processes (Patil, 2022). When we study, then, gender and sexuality, we are already studying transnational processes because these concepts are part of ongoing colonial modes of empire (Patil, 2022). Families' cisgender investments and divestments in cisnormativity and the gender binary need to be better contextualized and understood within these larger imperial, transnational, and colonial processes, and how families' investment in cisnormativity is related to empire. Seeing how this framework and its concepts can apply in other spaces, places, times, and contexts can help us to better understand the nuances of cisnormativity and family life.

CONCLUSION

The time has come for family scholars to understand and document how and why families may invest or divest in cisnormativity. We developed a trans family systems framework to give family scholars tools and concepts to get at the interactions and dynamics of family life in relation to maintaining and challenging cisnormativity. While this framework is important to understanding trans family life, this approach allows family scholars to understand how cisnormativity shapes all family members, especially through documenting familial gendered processes such as accountability and gender policing. Cisgender investments, cisgender divestments, and cisnormative compliance are crucial concepts to document how family members influence each other's thoughts, feelings, and actions, how family differences occur, and how the maintenance of the cisnormative status quo is kept stabled or challenged. A trans family systems framework can transform family studies to take seriously how cisnormativity affects family life and how family scholars can work toward expanding understandings of gender within families that can benefit all family members, but especially trans, nonbinary, and gender expansive family members.

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