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Using sociological theory to problematize family business research

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ABSTRACT

This article critiques several taken-for-granted assumptions in family business research. We recommend the use of sociological theories to problematize the phenomenon of family business and to push beyond dichotomies in the field. To begin, we complicate the very definition of family—implicitly defined in most family business research as a heterosexual, conjugal family—by discussing socio-legal, socio-biological, and role-based ways of defining "families." Next, we suggest critical ways to research value and worth beyond the financial wealth-socioemotional wealth (SEW) trade-off, by considering major themes in the sociology of value and evaluation (SVE), including: the intergenerational transmission of various forms of capital, conflict over equivalent systems of accounts, and the blending of the intimate and the economic. The groundwork presented here through a focus on the family, provides important theoretically complex questions to help launch transformative research to move the field of family business forward.

1. Introduction

Research on family firms has been stymied by a narrow understanding of what constitutes a family and by a limited theoretical palate for exploring notions of value and worth. First, although the definition of family business is an on-going conversation in the field, the concept of "the family" has seen limited debate. Scholars typically take for granted that a family is an opposite-sex, married couple, living with their children under the same roof (see Stewart, 2003, 2010, 2014 for exceptions). This heteronormative perspective fails to account for the wide array of family arrangements in contemporary society, and limits opportunity for a more inclusive and empirically interesting collection of firms to study. Second, research on family business is dominated by a few theoretical frameworks that can be counted on one hand (Chrisman, Kellermanns, Chan, & Liano, 2010; Chua, Chrisman, & Steier, 2003). One of these concepts, socioemotional wealth (SEW) (Gómez-Mejía, Haynes, Núñez-nickel, Jacobson, & Moyano-Fuentes, 2007), describes organizational behavior according to trade-offs between financial and emotional wealth motivations (Vazquez & Rocha, 2018). This distinction suggests artificial boundaries around ideas of value and restricts understanding of the way worth is evaluated in different types of relationships. With limited perspectives employed, our understanding of critical areas of inquiry in the field are significantly constricted, resulting in only a narrow consideration of families and of family business behavior.

Our purpose is to provide a critique of two major assumptions in family business research—what constitutes "the family" and the distinction between emotional and economic value—and describe opportunities for scholars "to search for alternative (or pluralistic) ways of understanding the world" and family businesses' place in it beyond the field's current scope (Fletcher, 2014, p. 139). We accomplish this by introducing sociological theories and perspectives to problematize (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011) family business research.

It is widely recognized that disciplines in the social sciences borrow theoretical ideas and research methods from one another (Gedajlovic, Carney, Chrisman, & Kellermanns, 2012). This has been the case for family business research (Fletcher, 2014). As a relatively new field of inquiry, family business scholars have sought to incorporate theories and methods related to established social sciences, such as economics (Schulze, Lubatkin, Dino, & Buchholtz, 2001), anthropology (Stewart, 2003, 2010, 2014), psychology (Nicholson, 2008; Pieper, 2010; Strike, Michel, & Kammerlander, 2018), and family science (Jaskiewicz, Combs, Shanine, & Kacmar, 2017), while also expanding concepts from those fields (e.g. Daily & Dollinger, 1992; Sirmon & Hitt, 2003; Zahra & Sharma, 2004). Family business researchers have also distinguished the field through the development of unique theories and perspectives (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003; Gersick, Davis, Hampton, & Lansberg, 1997; Gómez-Mejía, Cruz, Berrone, & De Castro, 2011; Pearson, Carr, & Shaw, 2008). Nevertheless, the field seems to have coalesced around an inadequate definition of the family and a limited scope of theories.

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As a consequence of the field's narrowing, critical research questions, areas of inquiry, and theoretical development have been incomplete or possibly inaccurate (Dyer, 2003). As is the case in many fields, most family firm research questions are generated from scholars' pursuit of "gap-spotting" in prior published work—critiquing existing literature in order to identify overlooked areas that need to be filled (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011). Such gap-spotting may include extending inconclusive or underdeveloped theory, applying existing theory to new contexts, or exploring competing perspectives in existing research (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011). Although gap-spotting is not a simple endeavor, and is useful for theoretical advancement and application, it fundamentally reinforces assumptions that existing theories are predicated upon (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011).

Note-worthy and meaningful research challenges, or problematizes, the underlying assumptions of theories (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011) and the taken-for-granted paradigms of a field (Davis, 1971; Salvato & Aldrich, 2012). It questions a field's conventions rather than looks to fill gaps. Problematization as a methodological approach to generating research questions (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011) is difficult to accomplish (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011), may require unique or time-consuming data collection efforts (Astrachan, 2010; Neubaum, 2018; Wright & Kellermanns, 2011), and may be politically risky (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). Yet these same challenges are the opportunities scholars can embrace to produce truly insightful and impactful scholarship.

Within the field of family business, scholars have generally found that research considered among the most interesting and important centers on family-specific issues (Salvato & Aldrich, 2012). While a focus on the family would seem to be an obvious component of family firm research (Dyer, 2003), few scholars are investigating the kinds and quality of relationships between family members (Zellweger, Chrisman, Chua, & Steier, 2019) and what impact this has on firms' economic performance and non-financial family goals (Chua, Chrisman, De Massis, & Wang, 2018; Danes, Stafford, Haynes, & Amarapurkar, 2009). This type of inquiry is necessary to challenge generalized perceptions of what constitutes a family and how families (and different family members) ascribe value to family and firm goals.

Problematizing family firm research requires leveraging "root disciplines" (Wright & Kellermanns, 2011, p. 195) that may "expand and muddy the boundaries" of the family firm field that is necessary to "increase its relevance and legitimacy" (Neubaum, 2018, p.261). Although some previous work has introduced aspects of sociology to the field of family business, these works have concentrated on concepts specific to entrepreneurial recognition and new venture creation (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003), organizational survival and growth (Martinez & Aldrich, 2014), and methodological rigor (Fletcher, De Massis, & Nordqvist, 2016). The selection of sociological content presented in this article is focused on two theoretical areas we believe are most relevant to move the field of family business forward by drawing out the complexity of families and family firms. In doing so, we believe that this aim speaks to the call from Salvato and Aldrich (2012) to make family business research more interesting with a focus on family factors—paying attention to family heterogeneity (Jaskiewicz & Dyer, 2017), families' mobilization of resources (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003), interpersonal relations (Hanson, Hessel, & Danes, 2019), and the mechanisms families use to guide activity and govern their organizations (Stewart, 2010).

The paper begins with a review of the various ways to define and analyze what constitutes a family, or families, from socio-legal, socio-biological, and role-based perspectives. Next, we introduce research on the sociology of value and evaluation, discussing topics of intergenerational transmission of various forms of capital, interpersonal conflict over equivalent systems of accounts, and the embeddedness of the market within intimate relations and vice versa. Along the way we propose research questions that can be explored by employing the theoretical insights we discuss. Increasingly, scholars in the field are recognizing family firm heterogeneity and voicing the importance of employing new research ideas for the purpose of exploring family business variation (Chrisman & Patel, 2012; Jaskiewicz & Dyer, 2017). Our paper contributes to this attention from scholars to problematize the assumptions around families and family businesses, aiming to push beyond dichotomies in the field (Whiteside & Brown, 1991).

2. Sociology of families

At the heart of family business research is the confluence of relational dynamics and goals of both the family and the firm. Behavioral differences between family and non-family firms based on goal differentiation and subsequent performance outcomes, are fundamental claims used to established the importance for a field of family business (Chua et al., 2018). Attempts to identify the criteria that defines a family firm have been a mainstay of discussions within the field since its inception (for summaries of definitions see Dyer, 2006 and Handler, 1989). Scholars recommend structural, ownership, or management influence-based definitions (Astrachan, Klein, & Smyrnios, 2002; Shanker & Astrachan, 1996; Ward & Dolan, 1998), an integration of structure and motivation (Litz, 1995), or even 72 distinct family firm typologies based on stakeholder interest and influence (Sharma, 2002). Chua, Chrisman, and Sharma (1999) argued two decades ago that research defining family business by its components does not capture the "essence" of family business, and instead scholars should look to behavior, intention, and vision for definitional coherence. More recently, Zellweger, Eddleston, and Kellermanns (2010) introduced the family firm identity concept, which they recommend linking with the involvement and essence approaches, acknowledging the complexity of family firms and the possible positive and negative consequences of families as resources for the firm. Despite these efforts towards nuance and clarity to delineate family firms' uniqueness, few family business researchers have acknowledged, and therefore have likely not considered, their assumptions about what constitutes a family.

Many social scientists suggest that the concept of the family is not universal (and thus, it is unlikely that some generalized notion of family "essence" exists), but is instead context specific, defined differentially according to culture and time (Fortes, 1959). These scholars consider family as a type of kinship system (Stewart, 2014), and generally (but not always) identify families as small units of individuals with close and often specialized roles, with responsibilities that include reproduction and sexual regulation, child socialization, and economic functions (Levy & Fallers, 1959, p. 648.).

In many modern societies, it has become culturally normative to prioritize marriage as the reducible "family unit," and minimize the importance of, or exclude, other kinship principles. We believe this taken-for-granted definition of the family has led family business scholars to assume family responsibilities are accomplished by a "nuclear" or "conjugal" family unit. However, most societies "rate parenthood above marriage" resulting "in the consanguineal family, centered upon a single line of descent" whereby what we typically consider to be nuclear family responsibilities are accomplished by parents and extended kin (Fortes, 1959, p. 149).

Within the context of family firms, Stewart (2010) finds cases from across the globe of how kinship patterns were "fluid and inclusive because of alternative kinship modes that operate simultaneously" (Stewart, 2010, p.16). For example, entrepreneurs strategically and tactically "mobilize resources accessed through networks of kinship and marriage" (Stewart, 2010, p. 2) to serve their business purposes. Opportunities for employment or expectations of inheritance cannot be assumed simply based on family or kinship ties. Thus, family business scholars must recognize the assumptions they have made about what constitutes a family, and consider family complexity and the shifting utility of what family means in practice.

This does not mean families are indistinguishable from non-families (or kin from non-kin). Instead, researchers should pay attention to differences in individuals' social realities and be careful in how they describe relationships. From a sociological interpretation, we recommend family business scholars seek to identify and evaluate various types of family structures and relationships, and the implications for those relationships on firms (and vice versa), according to socio-legal, socio-biological, and role-based family perspectives.

2.1. Socio-legal families

Family business scholars' generally-assumed definition of the family as the "nuclear" or "conjugal" family, implicitly identifies a family by its socio-legal status, i.e. legally sanctioned social behaviors and relationships. This may be, in part, because family business scholars have been more sensitive to differences in business activity, strategy, finances, behavior, etc. than to differences in families (Stewart, 2014). However, since the 1940s, changes in family structure, household composition, social obligation and influence, the practical significance of marriage (Cherlin, 2004), as well as legal definitions of family (Powell, Quadlin, & Pizmony-levy, 2015) have been increasingly in flux (Rothausen, 1999).

2.2. Socio-biological families

Family member identification according to a socio-legal definition does not provide any insight on resource allocation between family members other than the minimum legal responsibilities a parent has towards his or her spouse and children. Instead, the socio-biological definition of the family provides a unique way to analyze the underlying priorities and motivations family members may have to provide support for one another. According to this evolutionary biology perspective, social behavior is motivated by genetic relatedness and reproductive potential. This long-term genetic fitness subsequently defines the family (Becker, 1976). Floyd, Mikkelson, and Judd (2006) describe one insight in this field, known as the theory of parental solicitude (Case, Lin, & Mclanahan, 1999), which suggests discriminatory resource allocation (namely money and time) to offspring (Nicholson, 2008; Thomson, Hanson, & Mclanahan, 1994). Studies show that stepchildren receive fewer resources from their stepparents than from their biological parents, including lower levels of food expenditure (Case et al., 1999) to decreased participation in youth activities (Thomson et al., 1994) to lower likelihood of receiving money for college tuition (Anderson, Kaplan, & Lancaster, 1997). However, other studies show that a variety of mediating factors, including income level, educational attainment, gender and age of parents, attenuate these differences (Case et al., 1999; Hofferth & Anderson, 2003).

Research on sexual orientation and reproductive capacity find that homosexual men are less likely to have children than heterosexual men (King et al., 2005). This biological reality of childbearing may support findings of parents' typical negative initial reactions to disclosure of homosexual orientation of offspring (Patterson & Frie, 2000); and accordingly, help explain why homosexual male children receive less affection from their biological fathers than heterosexual children (Floyd, 2001). Importantly, patterns demonstrating the principle of discriminate parental solitude appear to occur outside the conscious awareness of those providing resources and affection.

2.3. Role-based families

In addition to socio-legal and socio-biological definitions of the family, scholars also define the family according to roles, or "the extent that relational partners feel and act like family" based on widely recognized cultural norms (Floyd et al., 2006, p. 27). These roles, or behavioral patterns of interdependence, can identify families according to the responsibilities individuals have for one another, even if those individuals are not recognized as legal family members. These roles can include a variety of care taking activities, financial assistance, companionship, and emotional and psychological support (Rothausen, 1999). Defining families according to a network of interpersonal relations is especially important when investigating non-traditional families, or families that fall outside of the "nuclear" family definition. This structural relationship defined fewer than half of U.S. households by 2010 (Farrell, Vandevusse, & Ocobock, 2012, p. 297). Today, family role arrangements can vary from networks of family-like patterned behavior among those not living under the same roof (Waite & Harrison, 1992), to households of single parents (Duncan, Edwards, & Edwards, 2013) or "chosen family" (Gerstel & Gallagher, 1994; Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001).

Based on the resource sharing and emotional-support found within households, some scholars recommend focusing on households as a way to operationalize the family in family business research (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003). Such an approach is also an effective way to account for family heterogeneity. Within households, broader kinship-based networks have always existed (Rothausen, 1999), with some scholars claiming that multigenerational bonds are increasing in significance (Bengtson, 2001). Many other family households are "blended" families (Mclanahan & Sandefur, 1994) entailing relationships between divorced parents (at 43–46 % of the U.S. population [Schoen, 2016]) and their new spouses and half-siblings, or step-children, that often cross legal and socio-biological notions of family. Still, many others cohabitate without legal ties. An increasingly relaxed attitude about cohabitation has led to a fall in the U.S. marriage rate, plunging by 60 % since 1970 (OECD, 2016). Meanwhile, the number of cohabitating couples with children worldwide is on the rise, with almost 40 % of births occurring outside of marriage (although country-specific attitudes result in a great fluctuation of this average [OECD, 2016]).

Research on immigrant communities (Ebaugh & Curry, 2000), African-Americans (Chatters, Taylor, & Jayakody, 1994; Stack, 1975; and Hunter, Chipenda-Dansokho, Tarver, Herring, & Fletcher, 2019) and gays and lesbians (Muraco, 2006) have focused on individuals living separately but engaged in non-legal, non-biological family-like networks. Some of these individuals have been geographically separated from their families of birth to avoid persecution or to pursue economic opportunity, others rely on expansive social networks for financial support or child rearing, and others have historically faced social ostracism, rejection, and abuse by their legal families. Research shows that many individuals who identify as LGBTQ form lasting relationships and networked communities with those they perceive as "chosen family" (Weeks et al., 2001), also known as "fictive kin" (Ball, 1972) or kith (Perlesz et al., 2006; Weston, 2005). Significantly, relational meaning between individuals identified as kith or kin have been shown to have equal strength, demonstrated by time and financial commitment, among other family-like support (Waite & Harrison, 1992).

2.4. A blended approach to defining families

Given these three perspectives of the family, is there an ideal one that family business scholars should employ in their research? It is evident that each approach to defining the family can provide insights in its application to family firm research, while each also has drawbacks and limitations. Nonetheless, in line with many other scholars, we encourage family business researchers to pursue family business definitions that are role-based, or behavioral (Cherlin & Seltzer, 2014; Floyd et al., 2006; Morgan, 2014; Sussman, 2013; Zellweger et al., 2019). Socio-legal and socio-biological definitions fail to account for the relational dynamics with which families operate. Relational definitions of family would better serve family business scholars with greater inclusion of a broad diversity of traditional and nontraditional family forms and demonstrates the value researchers place on individuals' own relational definitions and lived experiences (Zellweger et al., 2019).

Some may argue that defining the family according to role alone, in its extreme, suggests that any significant relationship can constitute a family relationship. And if this were the case, such an approach would

Table 1
Perspectives to define and research families and family businesses.

	Socio-Legal Families	Socio-Biological Families	Role-Based Families
Researchable families	• Nuclear families (including heterosexual and homosexual couples with children)	• Nuclear families • Blended families (*including families with stepchildren and half-siblings*)	• Nuclear families • Blended families • Households (*including non-married couples, intergenerational families and kin, and chosen families*) • Non-household networks of chosen families (*including non-traditional African American, immigrant and LGBT families*)
Examples of family-based areas of inquiry	• Legal and tax-based family and business obligations, including issues around inheritance and succession	• Resource allocation to biological and non-biological children (including but not limited to financial and emotional support) • Differential opportunities for children's employment, advancement and succession, compensation and other work place benefits (e.g. opportunities to work from home, family leave after the birth of a child, etc.)	• Resource allocation to biological children, non-biological children, and chosen families either within the household or recognized as a non-household networked family member • Differential opportunities for children and chosen family employment, advancement and succession, compensation and other work place benefits • Non-married couples or chosen families jointly developing new business ventures • Impact of an evolving composition of chosen families on resource allocation and business strategies

undermine the uniqueness of the family concept. While a role-based approach should guide scholarly definitions of the family and of family businesses, researchers should also account for the varying influences that socio-legal and socio-biological perspectives play within those familial relations because motivations for behavior are influenced by all these factors. Table 1 provides a summary of the limitations and variations of the types of families that each perspective can offer, and the how each approach bears unique value to exploring the heterogeneity of families.

Thus, we reject the need for family business scholars to develop a unified way to define and operationalize "the family" and "the family business." Instead, we recommend that family business scholars recognize the diverse and complex ways families and family businesses may be defined by considering socio-legal, socio-biological, and role-based perspectives of the family. Researching firms owned and operated by unwed partners, gay couples, and families identified by their "chosen family" relationships will offer opportunities for scholars to challenge family firm theories when investigating a greater range of businesses. Insights may serve to validate and strengthen theoretical insights and findings already developed in the field, while also problematizing other assumptions that require additional theory-building. Research on non-traditional families will also create opportunities for scholars to research families and businesses that have previously been excluded from study because of the heteronormative- and race-based assumptions in the field. Such inclusiveness can only benefit both scholars and practitioners.

Finally, we recommend, as has become common in sociology since Judith Stacey's seminal work, *Brave New Families* (1998), that family business scholars recognize the diversity of family forms by referring not to "the family" but to "families." This rhetorical change has already been recognized by some family business scholars (e.g. Jaskiewicz & Dyer, 2017) and accounts for the symbolic, meaningful, historical, political, and biological ways of identifying families (Crow, 2008; Stacey, 1998). Based on this imperative to recognize heterogeneity among families and businesses, we suggest employing the term "families in business" or "business families" in future research.

3. Sociology of value and evaluation

One way family business researchers have investigated heterogeneity among family firms has been according to the values that motivate business goals and decisions—namely, financial or non-financial drivers (Vazquez & Rocha, 2018; Williams, Pieper, Kellermanns, & Astrachan, 2018). Interest in the non-financial aspects of family firms led to the development of the concept of socioemotional wealth (SEW), generally defined by the family's emotional interests, values, obligations, and sense of identity that is tied to the businesses (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007; Gomez-Mejia, Makri, & Kintana, 2010). Preservation of SEW motivates the family to influence the direction of the business for the family's long-term control of the firm (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2011). Some researchers suggest prioritization of the family's control leads to "economically irrational" strategies (Nason, Mazzelli, & Carney, 2019; Vazquez & Rocha, 2018) that can result in a lower likelihood that families will hire non-family managers (Lubatkin, Schulze, Ling, & Dino, 2005), a diminished engagement in risk-taking business opportunities (Sirmon & Hitt, 2003), and a lower probability of supporting R&D activities (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2011), among other threats that may erode a family's influence over its firm (Schulze et al., 2001).

In recognition of the relevance of family firm diversity, scholars have increasingly sought to introduce greater nuance and refinement to the way family firms set goals and make decisions according to SEW and financial wealth logics. For example, Nason et al. (2019) find that SEW as a reference point for strategic decision-making is not static, but shifts during family members' socialization, particularly when they work with non-family advisers. Joining the behavioral and stakeholder perspectives, Chrisman and Patel (2012) find that family member business involvement and family influence together, show variegated impact on the embrace of family-centered non-economic goals. Diving deeper into this notion, Kotlar and De Massis (2013) interviewed, observed, and gathered archival documents of family firms. They took a process view of goal setting and investigate the way individual firm members' goals influence organizational goals, particularly during critical organizations times like succession. In a similar process-oriented approach, Jaskiewicz et al. (2017) uncover the way various leadership styles act as filtering mechanisms as firms draw on the same institutional logics in different ways. Other scholars look to challenge the perception of a clean trade-off between SEW and financial decisions by employing a perspective-taking approach (Chua, Chrisman, and De Massis, 2015). For example, Gomez-Mejia, Patel, and Zellweger (2018) explore a mixed gamble perspective, where business decision making possibly impacts both gain and loss for financial and SEW dimensions. Kotlar, Signori, De Massis, and Vismara (2018) also employ a mixed gamble approach and evaluate the impact of the endowment effect, or the framing of loss on family firm IPO pricing. The authors find family business owners' aversion to loss of SEW results in a pricing impact to offset SEW costs.

Although such recent research has advanced our understanding of the way family firms differentially respond to choices that impact their financial wealth and SEW, the prevalence of SEW in family business literature perpetuates a dichotomized way to operationalize value choices according to an either/or mentality—decisions are *either* motivated by financial *or* emotional criteria. Even if firms act differently because of their organization-specific variations, including stakeholder engagement, family member goals, or the way issues are framed and referenced, researchers still structure their arguments around the financial or emotional values trade-off. We argue that such a distinction is artificial and limiting, and that sociological concepts can contribute to a more robust understanding of family business motivations and decision making through an expansive, fluid, and contested understanding of value.

The sociology of value and evaluation (SVE) encompasses a range of theoretical interests concerned by questions of what is defined as valuable, who is legitimized to make distinctions of value, and what is the impact of definitions of worth (Lamont, 2012). Lamont (2012) defines valuation as "giving worth or value" (p.215) and evaluation as a process for "assessing how an entity attains a certain type of worth" (p.215). Sociologists often situate SVE concerns in broad societal contexts to investigate inequality, identity, and morality (e.g. Bourdieu, 1986; Lamont, 1992; Lareau, 2002). However, scholars also investigate questions of value and worth within industries, from life insurance (Quinn, 2008; Zelizer, 1979) to entertainment (Zelizer, 1994), as well as within specific organizations, such as micro-level interpersonal exchanges in hi-tech firms (Stark, 2011), wall street trading rooms (Beunza & Stark, 2004), and parent-teacher meetings (Weininger & Lareau, 2003).

We believe that SVE theoretical insights provide a way for researchers to move beyond the either/or framework of value generation to better understand how worth and evaluation operate within family firms. Far from creating a distinction between values of financial wealth and SEW, or limiting our ideas of worth only to money and emotions, SVE insights suggest that value and worth can take many different forms, are ambiguous, can be transposed in a variety of ways in different contexts, and require ongoing reproduction and negotiation through social interaction. Table 2 lists examples of researchable questions based on the SVE approaches discussed below. These questions are organized according to the different family definitions discussed in the previous section, providing guidance for family business researchers seeking to explore the joint import of these sociological contributions.

3.1. Intergenerational transmission of social, cultural, and economic capital

The transmission of power and privilege and the perpetuation of cultural and financial value took a prominent position in contemporary sociology with the work of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986, 1989, 1996; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu argued that the ability to impose criteria of evaluation on symbolic fields—the structures, environments, and institutions in which individuals operate, each with their own set of rules, knowledge, and forms of capital (e.g. fields of art, religion, military, etc.)—allows actors to reproduce their own social positions (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 19). Various institutions, both overt and concealed, notably the educational system, reproduce the structure of power relationships and symbolic relationships between classes within fields. Bourdieu uses the term habitus to describe a broad range of practices available to an individual actor, comprised of a person's history, experiences, and dispositions, that become inscribed unconsciously in the mind (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 18). An actor's habitus, he suggests, predetermines (to a certain extent) a person's perceptions of the world, and in turn, one's behavior within fields (Bourdieu, 1986, 1989).

Bourdieu (1986) also introduces the concept of capital, identifying three distinct but interacting types: economic capital (something that is convertible into money), cultural capital (education qualifications, judgments, tastes, and mannerisms), and social capital (networks, group memberships, and potential available resources). Importantly, cultural capital places a central role in reproducing social power relations. It provides a non-economic form of domination through the ability to impose criteria of evaluation and legitimizes critics and gatekeepers of cultural production (Bourdieu, 2003, 1996). In addition, Bourdieu (1986, p. 16) states that both cultural and social capital can be institutionalized (e.g. cultural capital can take the form of educational attainment and social capital can be a formalized title), as well as transformed into economic capital (e.g. high levels of education provide opportunity for well-paid employment, and a title can foster networked relationships in turn leading to economic opportunities).

Understanding the way Bourdieu's concepts work in practice is a

Table 2
SVE approaches and researchable questions identified through different family perspectives.

	Socio-Legal Families	Socio-Biological Families	Role-Based Families
Intergenerational transmission of capital (Bourdieu)	• How might various forms of capital reproduction limited to nuclear families lead to intergenerational firm stability or decline?	• Does habitus help explain differences and similarities between heterosexual and homosexual couples with children and engaging the "next generation" in the family business?	• Do family firms, and those kin or chosen family who work in a family firm, constitute its own field? • Do families of mixed kin and chosen family demonstrate different habitus? What levels of habitus difference matters to the health of families and family businesses?
Conflicts of accounting schemes (Boltanski and Thevenot)	• How do accounts of worth and value impact decisions in the nuclear family, and what spillovers may occur from these accepted values into the workplace? • How might nuclear families that exhibit non-normative values impact business behavior?	• How are stepchildren valued in family businesses? • If biological and non-biological children are assigned different levels of worth in a family, what occurred in "critical moments" that led to these conclusions?	• Do schemes for interpersonal dialogue and legitimization of values differ by role-importance, by socio-legal, or by blood-based families and chosen families? • How and when do family values change, and how do such changes impact firm behavior? (E.g. Are there differences in business decisions over time between a cohabitating family that becomes a socio-legal family?)
A relational approach to economics and intimacy (Zelizer)	• What legal claims do nuclear families have over economic inheritance and how does this impact family relationships? • How do cultural variations impact perceptions of good matches among nuclear family members?	• Are there biological-based differences in the types of resource provisions in the home and in the business for different family members? • What kinds of economic exchanges within the business suggest an attempt to change a relationship between a parent and non-biological offspring, or between step-siblings or half-siblings, etc.?	• What are the similarities and differences between various economic-relationship matches that take places among different kin and chosen families within the business? • Do chosen families hold the same meaning for economic exchanges that biological or socio-legal family members hold?

task undertaken by many sociologists, including Annette Lareau. Lareau's work primarily investigates the process of intergenerational reproduction of social class at the intersection of family life and the education system. She explores how differential social and cultural capital among working-class and middle-class families influence parental involvement in children's schools, which in turn, impact children's educational opportunities and outcomes (Lareau, 1987, 2000; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). For example, Lareau and a colleague studied parents' symbolic capital as associated with situational authority in an analysis of transcripts of parent-teacher meetings (Weininger & Lareau, 2003). The researchers find differences in the amount and quality of information exchanged and class-based differences in parents' willingness to challenge teachers' assessments of their children.

Perhaps most notable is Lareau's observational study of families engaged in everyday routines with their 8- to 10-year-old children, which resulted in her conceptualization of distinct class-based styles of child-rearing (Lareau, 2002, 2011). Based on three dimensions—the organization (or time use) of daily life, the use of language, and social connections (Lareau, 2002, p. 752)—Lareau came to label schemes of family life as *natural growth* or *concerted cultivated*. Working-class and poor parents allowed their children to develop *naturally*, or "on their own terms" primarily providing basic necessities and strong kin ties, while middle-class parents made *concerted* efforts to stimulate children's cognitive and social skills development through a variety of structured and chaperoned activities. Lareau suggests that there are benefits and drawbacks to each form of childrearing, but she concludes in-line with Bourdieu's reasoning, that "middle-class parents and children were able to negotiate more valuable outcomes than their working-class and poor counterparts" when interacting with formal institutions (Lareau, 2002, p. 774).

Family business researchers have been interested in social capital (Arregle, Hitt, Sirmon, & Very, 2007) and developed the concept of a distinct family social capital (Gudmunson & Danes, 2013; Herrero, 2018; Pieper & Klein, 2007; Rothausen, 1999). Family social capital (FSC) is generally defined as internal cohesiveness, trust, and unique communication patterns specific to families, and is identified as an inimitable resource that can provide family firms a competitive advantage (Herrero & Hughes, 2019; Sanchez-Ruiz, Daspit, Holt, & Rutherford, 2019). A similar concept developed by Sharon Danes and colleagues, Sustainable Family Business Theory (SFBT), sees firm sustainability through a systems perspective, recognizing the interrelationship of firm performance and family (Danes et al., 2009; Gudmunson & Danes, 2013). According to SFBT, research suggests that strong family relations can enable such advantages as intergenerational entrepreneurial culture, which provides resiliency to families and firms to enable long-term success (Hanson et al., 2019). While FSC and SFBT would appear to benefit interpersonal relationships, organizational cultures and short- and long-term firm goals, researchers find that at very high levels, FSC may be a liability. Social bonds that are too tight and strong may result in restricting entry of new knowledge to the family and in groupthink, leading to negative firm consequences (Herrero & Hughes, 2019; Sanchez-Ruiz, Daspit, Holt, & Rutherford, 2019).

Scholars should continue to explore these social capital ideas further at the individual and family level from a Bourdieusian perspective. For example, in line with Lareau's work on class reproduction, what are the specific mechanisms that enable intergenerational transmission of FSC and SFBT? Are FSC and SFBT class-based, and distinguished by economic capital? How might differences in cultural capital between family members impact FSC and SFBT or openness to new knowledge?

In additional to capital, researchers may also consider Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus to investigate relationships between family and non-family employees. For example, researcher suggests that non-family employees of family firms with high levels of psychological ownership (and no formal ownership) engage in extra-role behaviors that benefit the firm (Ramos, Man, Mustafa, & Ng, 2014). Other scholars find that the intersection of job class status (blue- or white-collar work) and leadership responsibilities of non-family employees result in differential levels of turnover intentions (Gottschalck, Guenther, & Kellermanns, 2019). How might power and practices vary in family businesses leading to different kinds of motivations and interactions between family and non-family employees? How do these variations result in higher or lower levels of psychological ownership and turnover intention at family firms? How might economic, social and cultural capital be transmitted differentially to the next generation, resulting in different kinds of habitus within the same family? What might these habitus distinctions mean for family firm interpersonal relationships and business decisions? Finally, how might family business scholars integrate the notion of patient capital (Hoffman, Hoelscher, & Sorenson, 2006) into an understanding of various types of capital transmission?

3.2. Conflicts of accounting schemes

Another line of SVE research focuses on unveiling evaluation criteria and the cultural and social structures that support or enable them (Lamont, 2012). Based in part on their observations of verbal spats during everyday interactions, Boltanski and Thevenot (1999, 2006) study the ways that individuals explicate their positions according to competing, but equivalent, accounting schemes, or logics (Jacquemain, 2008). These scholars find that during a "critical moment" or "moment of crisis" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999, p. 134), actors justify their position among one of six different historically constructed (but changing) logics—civic, industrial, market, domestic, inspiration, and fame. In everyday social situations, conflict between individuals results in competition among actors to legitimize their perspective of the situation. Boltanski and Thevenot suggest that business organizations are a great place to investigate and test this conflict of evaluative logics because of the necessity of actors to interact with individuals from different departments, with different resources and agendas, and different status in the organization's hierarchy (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999, p. 369).

Boltanski and Thevenot's principles were tested in ethnographic work by sociologist David Stark and colleagues. In one study, the researchers investigated the problems of valuation in arbitrage and "the construction of equivalence (comparability) of properties across different assets" (Beunza & Stark, 2004, p. 369). In other work, Stark investigated the challenges of collaboration within teams comprised of individuals with diverse expertise, which resulted in a multiplicity of criteria for evaluating the worth of project work and outcomes (Stark, 2000).

Based on Boltanski and Thevenot's typologies in "critical moments," investigating the ways conversational turn taking unfolds within family firms, and within distinct contexts and settings throughout the day, may help us understand how family and non-family employees evaluate their positions in the workplace. Within families, it would be especially interesting for practitioners to know if there are similar patterns of valuation agreement among the healthiest family firms, and if so, how are those family firm members communicating their understanding of worth to each other?

3.3. A relational approach to economics and intimacy

Finally, a line of SVE research that may be most accessible to family business scholars and generate relevant research for practitioners is the relationship between intimacy and economic exchanges (Ben-Porath, 1980). One of the most prominent scholars in this area of research is Viviana Zelizer. Based on extensive historical and legal research, Zelizer suggests that culturally, social actors perceive the marketplace (i.e. economic exchanges) and interpersonal relationships (i.e. emotionally-laden exchanges), as operating in two distinct spheres. Accordingly, these spheres, or "hostile worlds," are thought to be governed by incompatible rules and norms (Zelizer, 2006, 2009). When the boundaries between these spheres gets muddied, contamination and disorder is the consequence (Banlj, Morgan, & Sowers, 2015). In addition to the hostile worlds perspective, Zelizer finds that other scholars assume a "nothing-but" approach to market transactions—in that all economic exchanges are nothing but cost-benefit decisions or an expression of cultural values, and the introduction of money into an intimate relationship turns that relation into a coercive exchange (Zelizer, 2011).

Zelizer contends that both the "hostile worlds" and the "nothing-but" perspectives are flawed. Instead, she argues that individuals work carefully to match the meanings of various types of economic exchanges (e.g. gifts [purchased products, cash, gift cards], salaries, bonuses) to the type of relationship (e.g. siblings, spouses, colleagues, best friends) and that the interplay of economics and intimacy is a factor in nearly all types of exchanges (Zelizer, 2005, 2006). Rather than developing spheres of fixed rules and normative behaviors, Zelizer (2012) suggests that we should evaluate the types of relationships and economic exchanges individuals construct. This includes healthy and successful relationships as well as instances of relational violation (and repair) that occur with the "wrong kind" of economic exchange–e.g. giving a cash gift to a girlfriend after she spends the night at your place.

Despite the evident mixing of the economic and the intimate in family firms, family business scholars often implicitly perpetuate the model of separate spheres by foregrounding either family values or business values (e.g. Gómez-Mejía et al., 2011; Habbershon & Williams, 1999; Sirmon & Hitt, 2003) while others explicitly discuss the assumed incompatibility of these worlds (e.g. Lansberg, 1983). It can also be suggested that the three-circle model of the family business system (Tagiuri & Davis, 1996), arguably the most dominant conceptual tool in family firm research and practice, is a boundary-defining framework that divides and isolates family members into different normative spheres of activity. Preeminent family business scholars, including Whiteside and Brown (1991), have warned that the systems approach may bias researchers' observations of the firm. They argue that a focus on subsystem functioning would lead to a variety of conceptual research errors, including subsystem stereotyping, inadequate analysis of interpersonal dynamics and a limited analysis of the family business system as its own work system (Whiteside & Brown, 1991, p. 384–386).

Rather than pursuing a subsystem-level approach to studying family business, the point of inquiry should be the interpersonal relationships themselves—how individuals operate together and the negotiating and matching of economic exchanges with relations. Hedberg and Danes (2012) find that copreneurial couples—spouses that jointly own a business—make more productive business decisions when each see their roles as equal. However, both relational conflict and support exist at different times in spousal relationships, with potential impact on firm decision-making (Danes, 2011). It would be revealing to uncover the types and processes of exchanges which support the perceptions of power equality among successful copreneurs, as well as the relational work required to resolve disagreements. Beyond these dyadic relationships, family firm researchers must consider the ways that different types and structures of legal, biological and chosen families demonstrate relational meaning and sentiment through diverse exchanges.

Using Zelizer's relational perspective, family business scholars may also consider the various types of economic exchanges between family and non-family employees. For example, Barnett and Kellermanns (2006) propose a conceptual model to evaluate non-family firm employees' perceptions of fairness of HR practices. Through a relational perspective, researchers can evaluate if non-family employees of family firms receive equal or equitable HR benefits and treatment compared with family employees. How are these types and forms of economic exchanges determined for family and non-family employees and are they understood by both groups of employees as appropriate? If not, how might these inappropriate exchanges impact family and non-family relationships, and what tools might be used to ameliorate these perceived relational violations?

Finally, another area of relational research to investigate is the types of economic exchanges that exist between family firms and between family and non-family firms and the meanings that constitute such exchanges that help to reinforce interfirm relations. To this end, Kushins's (2016) model of inter-firm exchanges based on Zelizer's relational perspective may be a useful guide.

4. Conclusion

Limitations in the field of family business research based on assumptions about "the family" and a slim collection of dominant theoretical perspectives has narrowed researchers' opportunities for a more robust investigation of this phenomenon. We believe this is a result of taken-for-granted positions scholars have maintained about what kinds of relationships qualify as a family and narrow, dichotomized views of value and worth as financial or emotional. We contend that researchers who engage the sociological perspectives presented in this article will develop family business scholarship that problematizes the field by explicitly recognizing and addressing the heterogeneous reality of family life and of family businesses. By challenging the assumptions that underlie existing family firm research, scholars can produce interesting, impactful, and rigorous transformative research.

Our push to problematize the common approach to defining family business through a sociological frame provides researchers greater depth of relational factors to analyze when considering who is a family member and what impact different family members have on firm decisions (Zellweger et al., 2019). This greater focus on the family, and a more expansive approach to defining family through a role-based perspective, should provide more analytical depth when investigating the mechanisms that impact families in business. In addition, the role-based approach offers scholars the opportunity to research a larger spectrum of businesses, providing increased opportunity for comparison studies of firms, especially between those with different types of biological, legal, and "chosen family" forms.

When considering motivations and decisions that involve the significance of value and worth, scholars should consider SVE theories. The ongoing creation, conflict, transmission, and legitimization of various forms and exchanges of value and capital provide opportunities to expand investigations of the drivers and behaviors of family firms. SVE concepts also provide a lens for greater understanding of family relationships, how those relationships are sustained, and how relationship strength and relevance may be amended over time.

Our selection of two sociological topics provides a very small slice of the impact that this discipline can offer the field of family business—albeit, one that we believe could be the most significant to family business research. Robust perspectives from other areas of sociology that can contribute to problematizing family business research and lead to theory-building and new avenues of empirical investigation include: gender, race relations, inequality and conflict theory, intersectionality, symbolic interactionism, and the life course, among others. In addition, although not discussed in this article, some of the perspectives we describe are best suited for qualitative research methods, including interviews and ethnography. Most family business research employs quantitative methodological approaches, which are appropriate for the types of theories that scholars have so far investigated. However, our recommendations are to question, complicate, and expand our understanding of what or who qualifies as family and the various ways that values operate in families and firms. Therefore, we recommend scholars pursue sociological methods that best match these approaches, some of which are rarely seen in the field today. By engaging in sociological theories and methods, we believe the field of family business can continue to thrive, engage in dialogue with more established areas of social science, and provide a greater understanding of the lives of families and the firms they operate.

Author statement

The authors' joint collaboration contributed this manuscript. No additional CRediT information needs detailing.

Declarations of interest

None.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary material related to this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jfbs.2020.100337.

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