

## SYLABUS FOR SOCIOLOGY OF THE FAMILY

Course Number: SOC-K210 Sociology of the Family

Course Schedule: On-Line

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Office Hours: Tues and Thurs 9:00 – 11:00 a.m., or by appointment

### I. Course Description

The family is one of the most basic and fundamental institutions in society. It plays pivotal functions that both shape and are shaped by the larger society. It also involves close emotional and economic relationships that contain elements of both consensus and conflict and that have significant effects on the lives of family members. Examining the family in this manner is what it means to look at the family from a sociological perspective.

The course will focus on several key issues. First, we will examine how the structure and functions the family have changed as our society has developed economically from a pre-industrial (or agricultural) society to an industrial society and finally to what we call a “post-industrial” society today. The transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to a number of changes in the family, including the emergence of the nuclear family, increased rights for women in the family and in society, changes in the role of children and in views towards childhood, and declining economic interdependence and the transition to marriage based more on love, intimacy, and companionship. Along with the feminist movement, the transition to a post-industrial economy beginning in the 1960s contributed to the entry of women (especially married women) into the workforce, the sexual revolution, increasing individualism within marriage, delays in marriage, and delays in what is known as the “transition to adulthood”. As I will suggest, the transition from a pre-industrial to a post-industrial society has resulted in families becoming much more egalitarian over time. However, at the same time, gender inequalities persist within the family in a number of ways.

Second, we will take a closer look at roles and relationships relevant to marriage and the family. We will discuss the concept of love and examine how norms and expectations about sex have changed in our society as a result of the “sexual revolution” of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We will also discuss different perspectives on what is known as “mate selection”, as well as the growing trend of interracial relationships and marriages in our society. Finally, we will also discuss parenting and childcare, as well as issues of marital satisfaction and domestic violence in our society. As we discuss these issues, we will consider the impact that social class and gender have on them.

Third, we will explore family diversity in our society, especially the impact that race and ethnicity have on the structure and functioning of families, by examining structural and cultural characteristics of African-American, Hispanic, and Asian-American families, as well as some of their causes. Since Whites are the dominant group in society, structural and cultural

characteristics of White families have often dominated our perceptions and beliefs about how families in our society are and how they should be. While there is considerable variation within each group and many similarities these groups share with White families, important differences from White families can often be found. Some of these racial and ethnic differences that we observe are due to social class differences versus Whites, but important differences have also been created by the experience of racism and discrimination in society, as well as distinctive cultural traditions among these groups.

Finally, the latter part of the course addresses the current debate regarding whether or contemporary trends and changes in the family, and what should be done at the public policy level to assist families in our society. In general, the transition from an agricultural society to a “post-industrial” society has led to a decline in marriage rates, an increase in divorce rates, an increase in cohabitation, and an increase in non-marital births. There has also been an increase in “non-traditional” families such as single-parent families, blended (or “step”) families, and gay and lesbian families. These changes have produced a considerable and sometimes heated political debate over whether or not the family is in “decline” and what policies are needed to help the family as an institution in our society. This part of the course will look at trends in marriage, cohabitation, divorce, remarriage, and out-of-wedlock births in the U.S., as well as their causes and consequences. We will also examine the legal status and functioning of “non-traditional” families such as blended (or “step”) families and gay and lesbian families. Finally, we will consider the situation of low-income families and the status of policies designed to assist them, and we will also discuss conservative, liberal, and feminist policy solutions to strengthen the family and assess their relative merits.

## **II. Learning Outcomes**

Learning outcomes refer to the knowledge, skills, and abilities you should develop in this course. The learning outcomes for this course are:

- 1) **Critical Thinking:** To analyze and evaluate argumentation and persuasion in order to improve, refine, and refute it.
  - Analyze and evaluate original writings on the family
  - Understand and critique different policy proposals for strengthening families
  - Write a critical book review on the family
- 2) **Information Literacy:** To assess what information is needed to answer questions and solve problems and to retrieve, evaluate, and use that information effectively.
- 3) **Diversity and Multiculturalism:** Demonstrate awareness of structural and cultural differences in the family as an institution and how these differences affect how individuals see, experience, and act in the world
  - Understand family and kinship patterns in comparative and historical perspective

- Identify structural and cultural differences among socio-economic and racial and ethnic groups and explain how these perspectives influence how these groups see, experience, and act in their world
  - Identify unique issues faced by single-parent families, “blended” families (or step-families), and gay and lesbian families
- 4) Communication: To understand and convey ideas in diverse contexts using reading, writing, speaking and listening.

### **III. Course Readings**

The required books for the course are:

- Arlene S. Skolnick and Jerome H. Skolnick, *Family in Transition, 17<sup>th</sup> edition*, 2009. (Henceforth known as S & S).
- Roberta L. Coles, *Race & Family: A Structural Approach, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*, 2016.

As indicated in the Course Schedule, for some weeks there are additional required readings that are available on-line, which you should access by clicking on the links provided. If the links do not take you to the appropriate web site, please cut and paste the address into your browser.

### **IV. Course Evaluation**

Grades will be assigned using a standard 4 point scale that is used by the college to determine your overall GPA. The scale operates as follows:

- A+ = 4.33
- A = 4.0
- A- = 3.67
- B+ = 3.33
- B = 3.0
- B- = 2.67
- C+ = 2.33
- C = 2.00
- C- = 1.67
- D+ = 1.33
- D = 1.0
- D- = .67
- F = 0.0

Your final course grade will be based on the following components:

- You will receive an overall discussion grade based on your participation in weekly discussions that will count for 20% of your final grade

- There will be a mid-term exam that will count for 20% of your final grade
- There will be a final exam that will count for 20% of your final grade
- You will write a book review of a book of your own choosing (not one of the required course readings) that will count for 20% of your final grade
- There will be 3 assignments that combined will count for 20% of your final grade

Your overall discussion grade will be determined by calculating the average of your weekly discussion grades. Each week, you will receive a letter grade each week based on the number of posts you make, the quality of your posts, and how consistently you post throughout the week. Overall, your weekly discussion grade will depend on various factors such as:

- how long your posts are and how much effort you seem to be putting into them
- how relevant and responsive they are to the topics and readings that I ask you to in my posts
- the use of appropriate spelling, grammar, and language for a college course
- whether they are introducing new information (such as relevant websites, for example) and points that enhance the discussion
- whether you post intermittently throughout the week, as opposed to making all your posts at one time, especially at the end of the week

**In order to receive an A grade for the week, you will need to post at least 3 times each week, and your first post must be made by midnight the day after the weekly discussion forum is opened.** However, this alone will not necessarily guarantee an A if the above criteria are not satisfactorily met, and you are free to make more than 3 posts a week to help ensure that you receive a good grade. Weekly discussions will be closed by 9:00 a.m. the following week when a new weekly learning module is posted.

All assignments and exams involve written work, and poor quality writing, including poor spelling and grammar, will negatively affect your grade. **You should proof read all work before it is submitted and use the Spell Check and Thesaurus functions that are available in Word or other software programs.** If you need assistance with your writing skills, I strongly urge you to visit The Writing Center in room C117.

All assignments and exams are due at specified times. Work received up to one day late will receive up to a partial letter grade deduction. Work received more than one day late will receive a full letter grade deduction. Once I have graded and returned assignments and exams, late work will no longer be accepted without my permission. **Failure to complete assignments and/or exams will hurt your final grade more than submitted work that receives an F but reflects appropriate effort.** Class participation will help boost your final GPA for the course.

Students are expected to follow to standards of academic honesty. If there is a question about cheating or plagiarism, the college's **Academic Integrity Policy** (revised 8 January 2003) will be followed.

If you have a disability that may affect your progress in this course, please meet with Matt Liscum in Room A-119 in the Counseling and Advising Office as soon as possible. He can

be reached at (860) 383-5240 or [MLiscum@trcc.commnet.edu](mailto:MLiscum@trcc.commnet.edu). Please note that accommodations cannot be provided until you provide written authorization from a DSP.

## V. Course Schedule and Readings

The following schedule is a tentative list of the topics that are intended to be covered each week as well as the required readings for the week. Since the schedule is tentative, the dates for specific topics and readings may be revised during the course.

### Part I: Macro-level Changes in the Family

Monday 8/29 Week 1: Theoretical Perspectives on the Family

Readings:

- S & S, Introduction and Reading 1
- Stephanie Coontz, “The Way We Weren’t: The Myth and Reality of the ‘Traditional’ Family”, on-line at <http://www.nvcc.edu/home/rgreen/PowerWeb03/The%20Way%20We%20Weren't.pdf>
- Stephanie Coontz, “Chapter 1: The Radical Idea of Marrying for Love”, on-line at <http://www.stephanicoontz.com/books/marriage/chapter1.htm>
- Coles, Chapter 4

Monday 9/5 Week 2: Industrialization and the Family

Readings:

- S & S, Readings 2, 5, 17
- Coles, Chapter 3

First Film Assignment Posted; Due Monday 9/14 by 9:00 a.m.

Monday 9/12 Week 3: The Post-Industrial Family

Readings:

- S & S, Readings 19, 23, and 24
- Brigid Schulte, “Don’t Call them Mr. Mom: More Dads at Home Because They Want to Be”, *The Washington Post*, June 5, 2015, on-line at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2014/06/05/dads-who-stay-home-because-they-want-to-has-increased-four-fold/>

Monday 9/19 Week 4: Gender Roles and The Family

Readings:

- S & S, Readings 3, 6, and 21
- Claire Miller, “Men Do More at Home, but Not as Much as They Think”, *The New York Times*, November 12, 2015, at

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/12/upshot/men-do-more-at-home-but-not-as-much-as-they-think-they-do.html?ref=upshot>

- Claire Miller, “Millennial Men Aren’t the Dads They Thought They’d Be”, *The New York Times*, July 30, 2015, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/31/upshot/millennial-men-find-work-and-family-hard-to-balance.html?mabReward=CTM&moduleDetail=recommendations-2&action=click&contentCollection=Books&region=Footer&module=WhatsNext&version=WhatsNext&contentID=WhatsNext&src=recg&pgtype=article&abt=0002&abg=1>
- Gretchen Livingston and Kim Parker, “A Tale of Two Fathers: More are Active but More are Absent”, The Pew Research Center, June 15, 2011, on-line at <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/06/15/a-tale-of-two-fathers/>
- K. Shaver, “Stay at Home Dads Forge New Identities, Roles”, *The Washington Post*, June 17, 2007, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/16/AR2007061601289.html>

2<sup>nd</sup> Film Assignment posted; due Monday 9/28 by 9:00 a.m.

## **Part II: Micro-level Family Relationships**

Monday 9/26 Week 5: Love, Sex, and the Sexual Revolution

Readings: S & S, Readings 7 and 8

Monday 10/3 Week 6: Mate Selection and Interracial Relationships

Readings:

- Coles, Chapter 14, especially pp. 298-317
- Wendy Wang, “Chapter 1: Overview”, *The Rise of Intermarriage*, The Pew Research Center, February 16, 2012, at <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/02/16/chapter-1-overview/>

Monday 10/10 Week 7: Parenting and Childcare

Readings:

- S & S, Readings 18 and 22
- Coles, Chapter 7

Monday 10/17 Week 8: Marital Satisfaction and Domestic Violence

Readings: S & S, Readings 10, 14, 20, and 31

Exam 1 posted; due Monday 10/26 by 9:00 a.m.

## **Part III: Race, Ethnicity, and the Family**

Monday 10/24 Week 9: Race/Ethnicity and the Family

Readings: Coles, Chapters 1, 2, 5, 6

Third Film Assignment posted; due 11/2 by 9:00 a.m.

Book Review Assignment posted; due Monday 12/7 by 9:00 a.m.

Monday 10/31 Week 10: African-American Families

Readings:

- S & S, Readings 25 and 29
- Coles, Chapter 9
- Ylonda Gault Caviness, “What Black Moms Know”, *The New York Times Sunday Review*, May 2, 2015, on-line at <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/03/opinion/sunday/what-black-moms-know.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=c-column-top-span-region&region=c-column-top-span-region&WT.nav=c-column-top-span-region>

Monday 11/7 Week 11: Asian and Hispanic Families

Readings:

- S & S, Readings 26 and 27
- Coles, Chapters 8, 11, 12, and 14 pp. 289-298

#### **Part IV: Current Trends and Public Policy**

Monday 11/14 Week 12: Marriage, Cohabitation, and Out-of-Wedlock Births

Readings: S & S, Readings 9, 15, and 30

Monday 11/21 Week 13: Divorce and Its Consequences

Readings: S & S, Readings 11 and 12

Monday 11/28 Week 14: Non-traditional Families and Gay/Lesbian Families

Readings: S & S, Readings 13 and 16

Monday 12/5 Week 15: Public Policy and the Family

Readings:

- S & S, Readings 4 and 28
- Moura, M. (2015) “Parental Leave and Childcare Policies: Comparing Family Outcomes in France and the United States”, *Stanford International Policy Review*, January 18, 2015, at <http://www.stanfordpolicyreview.org/democracy->

[development-and-rule-of-law/parental-leave-childcare-policies-comparing-family-outcomes-france-united-states/](#).

- Mark Rank, “Poverty in America is Mainstream”, *The New York Times*, November 2, 2013, at <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/11/02/poverty-in-america-is-mainstream/?hp&rref=opinion>
- Katha Pollitt, (2010) “Whatever Happened to Welfare Mothers”, *The Nation*, May 31, 2010, at <http://www.thenation.com/article/what-ever-happened-welfare-mothers>
- Khazan, O. (2014) “How Welfare Reform Left Single Moms Behind”, *The Atlantic*, May 12, 2014, at <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/05/how-welfare-reform-left-single-moms-behind/361964/>
- Cunha, D. (2014) “This is What Happened When I Drove My Mercedes to Pick up Food Stamps”, *The Washington Post*, July 8, 2014, on-line at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/07/08/this-is-what-happened-when-i-drove-my-mercedes-to-pick-up-food-stamps/>

Book Reviews due 12/7 by 9:00 a.m.

Monday 12/12 Week 16: Finals Week

Final Exam posted; Due Monday 12/21 by 9:00 a.m.