

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 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 from a pre-industrial (or agricultural) society to an industrial society and finally to what we call a “post-industrial” society today. This will include issues such as emergence of the nuclear family, increased rights for women, changing views towards childhood, the sexual revolution, the entry of women (especially married women) into the workforce, and increasing individualism within marriage. 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 explore that impact that social class and race and ethnicity have on the structure and functioning of families today. Since Whites are the dominant group in society, characteristics of White families have often dominated our perceptions and beliefs about families and how they should be. In this part of the course, we focus on the social class and racial and ethnic diversity among families in our society. While some of the racial and ethnic differences that we observe among families from different racial and ethnic minorities (such as Blacks and Hispanics) are due to social class differences versus Whites, 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 not the family is in “decline”, 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 and rise in divorce rates not just in the U.S. but in all developed countries (such as Europe, Australia, and New Zealand). This part of the course will look at trends in marriage, cohabitation, divorce, remarriage, and out-of-wedlock births, as well as their causes and consequences. We will also discuss the status of “non-traditional” families

such as single-parent families, blended (or “step”) families, and gay and lesbian families. Finally, 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.
 - Understand and critique different policy proposals for strengthening families
 - Read and critique original writings on the family
 - 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) **Global Awareness:** To examine the effect of historical and contemporary national and international events and trends on social, political and cultural institutions.
 1. Explain the impact of social, political, economic, and cultural institutions on individual and group values, attitudes, and beliefs
 2. Understand family and kinship patterns in comparative and historical perspective
 3. Identify 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.
- 4) **Communication:** To understand and convey ideas in diverse contexts using reading, writing, speaking and listening.
- 5) **Diversity and Multiculturalism:** Demonstrate awareness of variation in the family as an institution and its causes and consequences for society as a whole
 - Explain how social class and racial and ethnic differences and inequalities in society create family diversity
 - Identify unique issues faced by single-parent families, “blended” families (or step-families), and gay and lesbian families

III. Course Readings

The required books for the course are:

- Arlene S. Skolnick and Jerome H. Skolnick, *Family in Transition, 16th Edition*, 2009. (Henceforth known as S & S).

- Roberta L. Coles, *Race & Family: A Structural Approach*, 2006.

As indicated in the Course Schedule, for some weeks there are additional required readings that are available on-line, which you should access through the links provided.

IV. Course Evaluation

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

- You will receive a 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 counts for 20% of your final grade
- There will be a final exam that counts 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 2 assignments, each worth 10% 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. In judging the quality of your posts, I will consider factors such as how long they are, how much effort you seem to be putting into them, how relevant they are, and whether they are introducing new information (such as relevant websites, for example) and points that enhance the discussion. **You will need to post at least 4 times each week to receive an A, although 4 posts by itself will not result in an A or even a good grade if the other criteria just discussed are not satisfactorily met.** Weekly discussions will be closed to comments by 9:00 a.m. the following week when a new weekly learning module is posted.

All assignments and exams involve written work, and the quality of your writing, including spelling and grammar and proper paragraph construction, will be a factor in your overall grade. At a **minimum**, you should spell check all work before it is submitted. If you want assistance with your writing skills, I strongly urge you to use The Writing Center in room C-117. You can also contact them by email at TRWritingCenter@trcc.comnet.edu or by phone at 860-892-5773.

Late work will be penalized up to a full letter grade deduction depending on the severity of the infraction. Exams cannot be submitted after I have returned the graded exams, which is usually one week after the exams are due, without explicit permission from me. Failure to complete assignments and/or exams will hurt your final grade more than submitted work that receives an F but reflects some level of effort.

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.

V. Cell Phone Policy

Cellular phones and beepers are allowed in class only if they are turned off or turned to a silent mode. Under no circumstances are phones to be answered in class. When there are extenuating circumstances that require that a student be available by phone or beeper, the student should speak to the instructor prior to class, so that together they can arrive at an agreement.

VI. 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.

Mon 8/27 Week 1: Understanding the Family

Readings:

- S & S, Introduction and Reading 1
- S. Coontz, “The Way We Weren’t: The Myth and Reality of the ‘Traditional’ Family”, at <http://www.nvcc.edu/home/rgreen/PowerWeb03/The%20Way%20We%20Weren't.pdf>
- Coles, Chapter 4

Mon 9/3 Week 2: Industrialization and the Family

Readings: S & S, Readings 2, 3, 6, 7, 21; Coles, Chapter 3

Mon 9/10 Week 3: Love, Sex, and The Sexual Revolution

Readings: S & S, Readings 9, 10, 11

1st Film Assignment posted; due 9/24 by 9:00 a.m.

Mon 9/17 Week 4: The Post-Industrial Family

Readings: S & S, Readings 27, 28, 29, 30

Mon 9/24 Week 5: Motherhood and Fatherhood

Readings:

- S & S, Readings 4, 26
- “Honey, I’m Home: Stay at Home Dads’ Psychological Well-Being Gauged in New Study”, University of Texas at Austin website at <http://www.utexas.edu/features/2008/01/07/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>

- E. Tahmincioglu, “Return to Work not Easy for Stay at Home Dads”, NBCNEWS.com at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/19977348/ns/business-careers/t/return-work-not-easy-stay-at-home-dads/>
- N. Shapiro, “Ripped Apart: Divorced dads, domestic violence, and the systemic bias against men in King County family court”, *Seattle Weekly News* at <http://www.seattleweekly.com/2012-01-18/news/ripped-apart/>

Mon 10/1 Week 6: Marital Satisfaction and Domestic Violence

Readings: S & S, Readings 8, 15, 19, 25

Exam 1 posted; due 10/8 by 9:00 a.m.

Mon 10/8 Week 7: Social Class and the Family

Readings: S & S, Readings 22, 23; Coles, Chapter 7

Mon 10/15 Week 8: Welfare and Low-Income Families

Readings:

- Edin and Lein, “Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low Wage Work”, at <http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/l/lein-endsmeet.html>;
- Katha Pollitt, “Whatever Happened to Welfare Mothers”, *The Nation*, at <http://www.thenation.com/article/what-ever-happened-welfare-mothers>;
- “The Reauthorization of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program”, at <http://www.zerotothree.org/public-policy/policy-toolkit/tanf-june-16-2010.pdf>

Book Review Assignment posted; due 12/3 by 9:00 a.m.

Mon 10/22 Week 9: Race/Ethnicity and the Family

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

Second Film Assignment posted; due 11/5 by 9:00 a.m.

Mon 10/29 Week 10: African-American and Native American Families

Readings: S & S, Readings 32 and 36; Coles, Chapters 9 and 10

Mon 11/5 Week 11: Asian and Hispanic Families

Readings: S & S, Readings 33 and 35; Coles, Chapters 11 and 12

Second Exam posted; due 11/12 by 9:00 a.m.

Mon 11/12 Week 12: Marriage, Cohabitation, and Child Birth

Readings: S & S, Readings 12, 14, 37; Coles, Chapter 13

Mon 11/19 Week 13: Divorce and Its Consequences

Readings: S & S, Readings 4, 16, 17

Mon 11/26 Week 14: Non-traditional Families and Gay Marriage

Readings: S & S, Readings 13, 18, 35

Mon 12/3 Week 15: Public Policy and the Family

Readings: S & S, Readings 6, 20, 24

Book Reviews due Monday 12/3 by 9:00 a.m.

Mon 12/10 Week 16: Finals Week

Final Exam posted; Due Friday 12/16 by 5:00 p.m.