**SYLABUS FOR SOCIOLOGY OF THE FAMILY**

Course Number: SOC-K210 Sociology of the Family

Course Schedule: On-Line

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 12:30 – 1:00 p.m. and 3:30 – 4:30 p.m., or by appointment (please always confirm with me first!)

1. **Course Description**

This course examines the history, structure, functions, and varieties of modern American families. Changing definitions of marriage, sexual expression, child rearing, sex roles, and divorce rates will be examined from a sociological perspective that considers the family in comparative and historical perspective. Racial and ethnic diversity in family life will also be considered, along with the variety of family forms that exist today. Emphasis is less on personal adjustment in marriage and more on sociological explanations for why current trends are occurring and what implications they hold for the individual, family, and society.

1. **Course Overview**

The family is one of the most basic and fundamental social institutions in society. It consists of a group of people who have close emotional and economic relationships with one another and who occupy specific roles that are defined by society. Together the group performs pivotal functions for both the group and the larger society that are also defined by the larger society. The roles and relationships that characterize the family as well as the functions that the family performs vary across different societies and change as society changes. Examining the family in this manner is what it means to look at the family from a sociological perspective.

The course will be divided into two main sections, with a take-home essay exam after each. In the first part of the course, we will examine how the transition from a pre-industrial (or agricultural) society to an industrial society and finally to what is called a “post-industrial” society has affected the institutions of marriage and the family. Overall, we will see how the transition from a predominantly agricultural economy to a post-industrial economy has resulted in a decline in patriarchy and more egalitarian families based on love and intimacy rather than economic interdependence The transition from an agricultural society to a post-industrial society has also affected trends regarding marriage, cohabitation, divorce, and non-marital births in our society. While some people see these trends as representing a “decline of the family”, I will suggest these trends and their implications are much less clear. In addition, 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 20th 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. While the family has become a much more egalitarian institution, we will see that it also continues to be a “gendered institution” characterized by gender roles and important gender inequalities.

In the second part of the course, we will examine issues of family diversity. First, we will consider racial and ethnic differences in the structure and functioning of families that are found among African-American, Hispanic, and Asian-American families, as well as some of their causes. While there is considerable variation within each racial 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. In addition to racial differences, we will examine social class differences in family life, single-parent families. Finally, we will also examine the legal status and functioning of “non-traditional” families such as blended (or “step”) families and gay and lesbian families. A key focus will be the challenges and obstacles these families face, as well as policy solutions to help them and families more generally.

1. **Learning Outcomes**

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

* Analyze and evaluate original writings on the family
  + Understand family and kinship patterns in comparative and historical perspective
  + Identify structural and cultural differences in family life among socio-economic and racial and ethnic groups and explain how these perspectives influence how these groups see, experience, and act in their world
  + Understand the impact of broad transformations in the economy on the family as an institution in society
  + Explain the decline of patriarchy and the trend towards of gender equality in the family and in society
  + Explain various ways in which the family continues to be a gendered institution characterized by gender inequalities
  + Explain the decline of the two-parent, heterosexual nuclear family and the rise of “alternative” families such as single-parent families, “blended” families (or step-families), and same-sex families
  + Identify unique issues faced by single-parent families, “blended” families (or step-families), and same-sex families
  + Understand and critique different policy proposals for strengthening families

1. **Course Readings**

The requiredbooks for the course are:

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

1. **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 15% of your final grade
* There will be 5 film assignments that combined will count for 25% of your final grade

Your overall discussion grade will be determined by calculating the average of your weekly discussion grades. Your weekly discussion grade will be based on:

* how long your posts are and how much effort you seem to be putting into them
* the use of appropriate spelling, grammar, and language
* how well you discuss and address questions I raise, including questions I raise in the posts I make during the week
* 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. You are also free to make more than 3 posts a week to help ensure that you receive a good grade. You are free to respond to the posts of other students, but your responses should address questions and topics raised by me throughout the week. Weekly discussions will be closed by 9:00 a.m. the following week when a new weekly learning module is posted.

Your film assignments will be graded with either a check plus (good, representing 3 points), a check (satisfactory, representing 2 points), or a check minus (unsatisfactory, representing 1 point). At the end of the semester, I will add up your total number of points and assign an overall grade based on that.

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.

1. **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**

Week 1 Wednesday 8/28: Theoretical Perspectives on the Family

Readings:

* S & S, Introduction and Reading 1
* Coles, Chapter 4
* Stephanie Coontz, “The Way We Never Were”, The New Republic, March 29, 2016, on-line at <https://newrepublic.com/article/132001/way-never>
* Phillip Cohen, “Family Diversity is the New Normal for America’s Children”, Council on Contemporary Families”, September 4, 2014, on-line at <https://contemporaryfamilies.org/the-new-normal/>

Week 2 Wednesday 9/4: Industrialization and the Family

Readings:

* S & S, Readings 2, 5, 17
* Coles, Chapter 3
* Stephanie Coontz, “Chapter 1: The Radical Idea of Marrying for Love”, on-line at <http://www.stephaniecoontz.com/books/marriage/chapter1.htm>

First Film Assignment Posted; Due Wednesday 9/11 by 9:00 a.m.

Week 3 Wednesday 9/11: Post-Industrialism and the Family

Readings:

* S & S, Readings 9, 19, 23, and 24
* Andrew Cherlin, “Marriage Has Become a Trophy”, *The Atlantic*, March 20, 2018, at <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/03/incredible-everlasting-institution-marriage/555320/>

Week 4 Wednesday 9/18: 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?rref=upshot>
* 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/>
* Jason Beaubien, “Stay-At-Home Dads Still Struggle With Diapers, Drool, Stigma And Isolation”, National Public Radio, June 17, 2018, at <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2018/06/17/619557786/stay-at-home-dads-still-struggle-with-diapers-drool-stigma-and-isolation>

2nd Film Assignment Posted; Due Wednesday 9/25 by 9:00 a.m.

Week 5 Wednesday 9/25: Love, Mate Selection, and Interracial Relationships

Readings:

* Coles, Chapter 13, especially section “Interracial Dating and Marriage” on pp. 240-247
* 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/>
* Wendy Wang, “Chapter 4: Public Attitudes on Intermarriage”, The Rise of Intermarriage, The Pew Research Center, February 16, 2012, at <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/02/16/chapter-4-public-attitudes-on-intermarriage/>

3rd Film Assignment posted; due Wednesday 10/2 by 9:00 a.m.

Week 6 Wednesday 10/2: Sex and the Sexual Revolution

Readings: S & S, Readings 7 and 8

Week 7 Wednesday 10/9: Marital Satisfaction and Domestic Violence

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

Exam 1 posted; due Wednesday 10/16 by 9:00 a.m.

**Part II: Family Diversity**

Week 8 Wednesday 10/16: Race/Ethnicity and the Family

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

4th Film Assignment posted; due 10/23 by 9:00 a.m.

Book Review Assignment posted; due Monday 11/25 by 9:00 a.m.

Week 9 Wednesday 10/23: African-American Families

Readings:

* S & S, Readings 25 and 29
* Coles, Chapters 5, 6, and 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>

Week 10 Wednesday 10/30: Asian and Hispanic Families

Readings:

* S & S, Readings 26 and 27
* Coles, Chapters 8, 11, and 12

Week 11 Wednesday 11/6: Social Class and the Family

Readings:

* S & S, Readings 18 and 22
* Coles, Chapter 7
* Claire Miller, “Class Differences in Child-Rearing Are on the Rise”, *The New York Times*, December 15, 2015, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/18/upshot/rich-children-and-poor-ones-are-raised-very-differently.html?_r=0>
* Claire Cain Miller, “The Relentlessness of Modern Parenting”, The New York Times, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/25/upshot/the-relentlessness-of-modern-parenting.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage>

Week 12 Wednesday 11/13: Single-Parent Families and Welfare

Readings:

* S & S, Readings 15 and 30
* 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>
* 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/>
* Jamelle Bouie, “The Myth of Welfare and Drug Use”, The Daily Beast, August 30, 2013, on-line at <https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-myth-of-welfare-and-drug-use?ref=scroll>
* 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/>

Week 13 Wednesday 11/20: Non-traditional Families and Gay/Lesbian Families

Readings:

* S & S, Readings 13 and 16
* Elizabeth Harris, “Same-Sex Parents Still Face Legal Complications”, *The New York Times*, June 20, 2017, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/20/us/gay-pride-lgbtq-same-sex-parents.html?_r=0>

Book Reviews due Monday 11/25 by 9:00 a.m.

Week 14 Monday 12/2: Policy Solutions

Readings:

* S & S, Readings 4 and 28
* Jessica Deahl, “Countries Around The World Beat The U.S. On Paid Parental Leave”, NPR, October 6, 2016, at <https://www.npr.org/2016/10/06/495839588/countries-around-the-world-beat-the-u-s-on-paid-parental-leave>

Final Exam posted Friday 12/6; Due Friday 12/13 by 9:00 a.m.