SOCILOGY OF [AMERICAN] FAMILIES
Instructor: Amy Sousa, Boston College
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COURSE DESCRIPTION
In recent years, U.S. public policy has focused on strengthening the nuclear family as a primary strategy for reducing poverty and improving the lives of America’s youth. It is often assumed that this type of family is healthy, financially independent, heterosexual, violence-free, normative, and grounded in historical tradition. This course examines these assumptions sociologically while considering systemic variations in race/ethnicity, class, gender, ability, and sexual orientation within and among American families. Specifically, this course will help students to do the following:

1. Expand sociological imagination to incorporate conceptualizations of American family life beyond personal experiences;
2. Consider the similarities and variations among American families;
3. Understand the social, political, economic, and historical contexts within which American families reside.

REQUIRED READING
Articles/Chapters Assigned on Library Reserves and Blackboard [BB]

ASSIGNMENTS (hard copies only; NO email)

Class Participation (10%): Students are expected to attend all scheduled classes and contribute constructively to discussions and activities. Students will work in pairs to lead a class discussion on one of the recommended readings for each section. Presentations will comprise half of the class participation grade.

Reflection Papers (30%): Each of the course sections is accompanied by a reflection question related to the reading material. Students shall select THREE (3) of reflection questions to answer in writing using the required and recommended course readings as support. Reflection papers should be approximately THREE (3) double-spaced pages. Reflection papers are due no later than ONE (1) week after class discussion of the selected topic.

Term Paper (30%): Students are expected to complete a term paper approximately 15 pages in length, which demonstrates knowledge of a specific area of sociology of the family AND
highlights systemic variations in structure and context based upon race, class, gender, ability, and/or sexual orientation.

• One page summary of topic and approach is due on **Wednesday, March 10, 2010.**
• Last day to turn in drafts for review is on **Wednesday, April 21, 2010.**
• Final paper is due on **Wednesday, May 5, 2010.**

**Final Exam (30%)**: Students are expected to take a final examination demonstrating cumulative knowledge from the course at the date and time scheduled by the university.

**Extra Credit**: Extra credit assignments will be considered on an individual basis. Assignments will address areas of weakness or enhance areas of interest. Extra credit assignments will be vigorous tests of knowledge, creativity, and analysis of social systems’ influence on family processes and structures. If you choose to take on an extra credit assignment, be prepared for a serious time commitment.

**GRADING**

**Letter Grades**: Each assignment will receive a letter grade ranging from A through F, along with instructor’s comments.

**Assessment of Content**: The course assignments are meant to inspire thought and assess understanding of the materials and perspectives presented. There are no “correct” answers to the writing assignments and class discussion questions; therefore, letter grades will be determined by the quality of presentations/arguments. “Quality” is evaluated as follows:

• In-depth understanding of the course materials as demonstrated by rigorous application of readings to the assignments;
• Respectful reflection on a broad range of families’ diverse perspectives;
• Continuity and coherence of presentation/argument;
• Creative application of the materials as demonstrated by making connections among the readings and topic areas; and
• Intellectual curiosity as demonstrated by the use of varied readings and resources, including, but not limited to required and recommended readings for this course.

**Revisions**: With the exception of the final paper, writing assignments may be revised within ONE (1) week for reconsideration. Students may present drafts of the final paper to the instructor for feedback up until TWO (2) weeks prior to the due date.
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

According to Boston College’s policies and procedures, academic integrity is violated by any dishonest act which is committed in an academic context including, but not limited to the following:

- **Cheating** is the fraudulent or dishonest presentation of work.
- **Plagiarism** is the act of taking words, ideas, data, illustrations, or statements of another person/source, and presenting them as one's own.
- **Misrepresentation** of one's own or another’s identity for academic purposes and/or the misrepresentation of material facts or circumstances in relation to examinations, papers, or other evaluative activities.

Boston College’s policy regarding academic integrity may be found on the following website: www.bc.edu/schools/cas/polisci/integrity.html. Students are urged to review the plagiarism examples and guidelines and complete the quiz offered by the Political Science Department.

COURSE SCHEDULE

1. **Historical, Theoretical, and Legal Perspectives on the Family**
   **Wednesday, Jan. 20; Friday, Jan. 22; and Monday, Jan. 25**

   - **REQUIRED Reading:**

   - **Recommended Reading:**

   - **Reflection Question:** What constitutes a “family” in America?
2. The Public and Private Spheres  
Wednesday, Jan. 27 and Friday, Jan. 29

• REQUIRED Reading:

• Recommended Reading:

• Reflection Question: How has industrialization impacted American families?

3. Work-Family Balance  
Monday, Feb. 1; Wednesday, Feb. 3; and Friday, Feb. 5

• REQUIRED Reading:
  [FIT] Hays, Sharon. Reading 5: Mommy Wars  

• Recommended Reading:
  [FIT] Clawson, Dan and Naomi Gerstel. Reading 20: Caring for Our Young: Child Care in Europe and the United States.  

• Reflection Question: Are work and family necessarily at odds?
4. **Wealth and Poverty**  
*Monday, Feb. 8; Wednesday, Feb. 10; and Friday, Feb. 12*

- **REQUIRED Reading:**
  - [FIT] Warren, Elizabeth and Amelia Warren Tyagi. Reading 31: Why Middle Class Mothers and Fathers are Going Broke

- **Recommended Reading:**

- **Reflection Question:** How does social class influence family structure and values?

5. **Marriage**  
*Monday, Feb. 15; Wednesday, Feb. 17; Friday, Feb. 19; and Monday, Feb. 22*

- **REQUIRED Reading:**
  - [FIT] Skolnick, Arlene. Reading 15: Grounds for Marriage: How Relationships Succeed or Fail
  - [FIT] Casper, Lynne M. and Suzanne M. Bianchi. Reading 12: Cohabitation

- **Recommended Reading:**

- **Reflection Question:** What is the meaning and relevance of marriage in contemporary American society?

6. Divorce

*Wednesday, Feb. 24 and Friday, Feb. 26*

- **REQUIRED Reading:**
  [FIT] Friedman, Laurence M. Reading 16: Divorce: The Silent Revolution

- **Recommended Reading:**

- **Reflection Question:** How does no-fault divorce impact the social meaning of marriage?
** Spring Break **
* Monday-Friday, March 1-5 *

7. Social Regulation of Sex and Sexuality
* Monday, March 8 and Wednesday, March 10 *

- **REQUIRED Reading:**
  - [FIT] Bailey, Beth. Reading 10: Sexual Revolution(s)

- **Recommended Reading:**

- **Reflection Question:** How do families maintain and alter sexual norms?

7. Socialization, Values, Tradition, and Religion
* Friday, March 12; Monday, March 15; and Wednesday, March 17 *

- **REQUIRED Reading:**
• **Recommended Reading:**


• **Reflection Question:** What does the term “family values” imply?

**Special Presentation by Susan Legere**

*Friday, March 19*

8. **Childhood**

*Monday, March 22; Wednesday, March 24; and Friday, March 26*

• **REQUIRED Reading:**


[BB] Valentine, G. Children should be seen and not heard: The production and transgression of adults’ public space, *Urban Geography*, 17, 2.

• **Recommended Reading:**


• **Reflection Question:** Why has childhood historically been a contested category of study and what is the meaning of childhood in contemporary American society?

9. **Parenting and Childrearing**  
*Monday, March 29; Wednesday, March 31; and Friday, April 2*

• **REQUIRED Reading:**
  [FIT] Townsend, Nicholas. Reading 21: The Four Facets of Fatherhood

• **Recommended Reading:**

• **Reflection Question:** What social values and hierarchies are reflected in parenting norms?

10. **Adoption, Foster Families, and Assisted Reproduction**  
*Monday, April 5 and Wednesday, April 7*

• **REQUIRED Reading:**
  [website] [www.adoptuskids.org](http://www.adoptuskids.org) (Spend a minimum of 10 minutes browsing.)
• **Recommended Reading:**  
  [BB] Rita J. Simon's essay, "Adoption of Black Children by White Parents in the USA,'  

• **Reflection Question:** How does the adoption system reflect inequalities in America?

11. **Caregiving**  
*Friday, April 9; Monday, April 12; and Wednesday, April 14*

• **REQUIRED Reading:**  

• **Recommended Reading:**  

• **Reflection Question:** How do social norms obligate individuals to care for their family members?
12. Violence In and Around Families
  
  *REQUIRED* Reading:

  [FIT] Johnson, Michael P. *Reading 38: Domestic Violence: The Intersection of Gender and Control.*


  • Recommended Reading:


    [website] *Helping Children Affected by Domestic Violence*: A report from the conference held on September 30, 2004 at the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission, Burien, WA.


  • *Reflection Question*: Government regulation of violence in families began in earnest during the mid-twentieth century, i.e. child abuse, marital rape, and domestic violence laws. What social forces influenced enforcement of these regulatory changes?
13. Privacy vs. State Regulation of the Family
   Monday, April 26; Wednesday, April 28; and Friday, April 30

   • REQUIRED Reading:
     [Handouts in class] Examples of the evolution of family laws – marital rape, prohibition against interracial marriage, child abuse, protection from abuse/domestic violence, and definitions of marriage.

   • Recommended Reading:

   • Reflection Question: What is the role of public policy in American families?

14. Catch-Up and Final Exam Review Sessions
   Monday, May 3 and Wednesday, May 5