

SOCIOLOGY OF FAMILIES

(SOCIOL 2PP3 – Summer 2019)

Instructor: **Casey Scheibling**
Course Time: Tuesday & Thursday 1-4pm
Course Location: DSB AB102

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Office Location: KTH-622
Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

This course is focused on the sociological study of families in North America. Casting a wide net, we will explore a variety of issues and topics that play a role in the social construction of family life. More specifically, we will become sensitized to the interplay between social structures and individual experiences in shaping our understanding of kinship, families, parenthood, and childhood. The first part of the course will be dedicated to developing a critical gender lens to interpret family research and unpack major trends in North American family life across the 20th and 21st centuries. The second part of the course will be dedicated to looking more in-depth at key subject areas in the sociology of families. These subjects include: motherhood and fatherhood; children and childhood; kinship and reproduction; family diversity and inequality across race, class, and sexuality; and, parenting culture.

Important questions shaping this course include:

- How do sociologists theorize and examine family life?
- What are the major trends concerning household labour and childcare in the 20th and 21st centuries?
- How are social factors, cultural discourses, and individual experiences interrelated in constructing meanings for what families are and what families are supposed to be?
- How are gender, race, class, and sexuality implicated in definitions, expectations, and practices of family life?
- How are kinship, families, parenthood, and childhood represented in popular culture? What roles do media play in reinforcing or reworking dominant meanings and perceptions of families?

Course Objectives

- Content – You will learn about the social construction of families and gender. You will also become familiar with particular theories and methodologies that sociologists use to analyze and make sense of family life. These ideas will be illustrated in guidebook chapters, peer-reviewed journal articles, and Statistics Canada reports that we will read and discuss.
- Skills – You will learn how to comprehend, compare, and contrast theoretical and empirical texts about families. You will gain experience in communicating your ideas about the course content in formal assignments and less formal discussions.
- Application – You will have the opportunity to apply your knowledge by choosing and using theoretical concepts or arguments about families in your own original research paper. This assignment will be a critical deconstruction of a media text.

Course Evaluation

1) Attendance and Participation (15%)

- You will be expected to attend the lectures and participate in discussions.

2) Midterm Exam (30%)

- There will be a midterm exam on the readings from the first half of the course. The exam will consist of short-answer and long-answer questions and will be written in class. The purpose of this exam is to evidence your understanding of sociological theories and methodologies for family research, as well as the major trends in family life over the past several decades.

3) Assignment #1: Annotated Bibliography (20%)

- The purpose of this assignment is to demonstrate that you have: identified a family-related topic of interest; found, read, and understood relevant sociological articles on the topic; and, learned how to use an appropriate academic citation style in your writing. As explained in the next section, the work done for this assignment can also be helpful for completing the final paper.
- To start this assignment, you will need to choose a specified topic from the sociology of families (e.g., childcare, assisted reproduction, LGBT parents). With

this topic determined, you then must find 3 peer-reviewed social science journal articles on this topic using the databases from the library website. These articles can be only loosely related to the chosen topic but they must be *empirical research articles* – not book reviews or short commentaries. We will talk more about this in class.

- Once you have collected your articles, you must read them closely. In reading the articles, you must identify: the background context for the study; the theoretical framework or key concepts used; the dataset and methodology; the overall findings and arguments. By identifying these elements of the article, you will be prepared to write the annotated bibliography.
- To write the annotated bibliography, you must do the following:
 - a) Provide full citation for each article in APA (American Psychological Association) format.
 - b) Provide a concise write-up of the abovementioned elements of each article.
 - c) Provide a brief critical discussion of each article that includes your thoughts and/or criticisms of particular elements (e.g., the methods or arguments) and some suggestions for future research.
- This assignment does not have a page limit but should be around 5-6 pages, double-spaced. This assignment will be graded based on: using the correct citation style; identifying the article elements; and, providing an insightful critical discussion.

4) Assignment #2: Media Analysis Paper (35%)

- For this final paper, you must analyze the representation of a family-related topic in a film (options below). Your analysis will be focused towards carefully explaining what *meanings* for family life are being constructed. What is more, you are expected to apply theoretical underpinnings and integrate findings from relevant readings. The overall purpose of this analysis is to use course material to help critically unpack what you see in the film.
- Though not mandatory, I *highly* suggest that you select a film that is on a similar topic to what you have chosen for your annotated bibliography assignment, which is meant to serve as a building block for this final paper. Hence, your annotated bibliography can provide a conceptual foundation for your media analysis – meaning: some of the work would be already done! You will, however, likely need to draw on additional readings from within or outside the course.
- The format of the paper will be outlined in greater detail during the lecture period. You will need to include *at least* 5 articles as citations in the paper. The

suggested length is around 10 pages double-spaced, references excluded. This assignment will be graded based on: using the correct citation style; using and applying relevant literature; and, providing an insightful analysis and discussion of the film.

- The film options are: *Tully* (2018); *Roma* (2018); *20th Century Women* (2016); *Mommy* (2014); *Boyhood* (2014); *Delivery Man* (2013); *Like Father, Like Son* (2013); *The Kids Are All Right* (2010); *Beginners* (2010); *Juno* (2007); *Paris, Texas* (1984); *Mr. Mom* (1983); or *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979). If you need access to one of these films, please speak to me. If you wish to analyze a different film, please provide me with a 1-page proposal about why you believe the film is appropriate for the assignment. If I approve of your justification, you may write your paper on the proposed film instead.

Additional Information on Assignments

The first assignment should be submitted as a hard copy to me in person on **July 25th**. The second assignment should be submitted via Avenue to Learn on **August 8th**. I will be using the originality checking feature in Avenue to Learn to screen the final papers for plagiarism (see below). It is your responsibility to review this syllabus prior to each class to recall deadlines. It is also your responsibility to contact me about submitting assignments via email regardless of whether they are being submitted on time or not.

All pages of each assignment must be numbered and have 1" margins on all sides. All text should be double-spaced in Times New Roman or Arial 12-point font. You should use APA citation style in all the assignments. Failure to adhere to these guidelines will be reflected in the mark for the assignment.

Late Assignments

The McMaster Student Absence Form (www.mcmaster.ca/msaf/) is a self reporting tool for Undergraduate Students to report absences that last up to 3 days and provides the ability to request accommodation for any missed academic work. You may submit a maximum of 1 Academic Work Missed request per term. It is **your** responsibility to follow up with your instructor immediately regarding the nature of the accommodation. If you are absent more than 3 days, exceed 1 request per term, or are absent for a reason other than medical, you **must** visit your Associate Dean's Office (Faculty Office). You may be required to provide supporting documentation. This form should be filled out when you are about to return to class after your absence. In the absence of a vetted excuse, late assignments will be marked down 5 percentage points for each day late, including weekends.

Emailing

Please contact me via McMaster email (scheibc@mcmaster.ca) with questions or concerns. You can expect to receive a reply to your email within 48 hours, excluding weekends. Please note that it is best to raise questions about course content in class or during office hours. It is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all email communication sent from students to instructors (including teaching assistants), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University email account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at her or his discretion.

Accommodations

I am committed to making appropriate accommodations for students' observance of religious holidays. Please contact me early in the term to make arrangements. I am also committed to working with students with disabilities to make individualized accommodations according to your specific needs. All such arrangements must be made through Student Accessibility Services (by phone at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or by email sas@mcmaster.ca). Please drop by my office hours at the beginning of the term to make individual arrangements and to complete the necessary paperwork. All details regarding accommodation arrangements will be kept strictly confidential.

Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, specifically Appendix 3, located at <http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/AcademicIntegrity.pdf>.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- 1) Plagiarism (e.g., the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained).
- 2) Improper collaboration in group work.
- 3) Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Review of Grades

Occasionally, students may disagree with the grades they receive. If this occurs you may request a review of a grade by writing a brief 1-page memo that describes in detail the nature of the perceived marking error. Submit this memo to me via email. You may submit requests for review no sooner than 48 hours and no later than 2 weeks after the assignments are returned. Please note that, after a grade is reviewed, the newly assigned grade may be lower than the original.

Departmental and University Policies

The staff members in the Department of Sociology do not date-stamp assignments, nor do they monitor the submission or return of papers. The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check her/his McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

Course Readings and Lectures

All of the assigned readings for this course can be accessed via McMaster University's library system. For more information about locating journal articles, go to: https://library.mcmaster.ca/instruction/social-science-inquiry/finding-articles/story_html5.html.

This course is relatively *light* on reading and I would *highly* recommend reading all of the supplementary texts mentioned below. Each week, I will provide a lecture on the readings and take any questions you may have—but this will not take up the entire lecture period. After we have covered the readings, there will be time for watching relevant media clips and having a broader group discussion. And, especially in the section half of the course, *we will also use class time to work on the assignments.*

Course Schedule

June 25th: Introduction

(no readings)

PART I:

INTRODUCING THE SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF FAMILIES

June 27th: What is “Family”?

Coltrane, S., & Adams, M. (2008). The Social Construction of Gender and Families. In S. Coltrane & M. Adams (Eds.), *Gender and Families* (pp. 1-32). Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Fox, B., & Luxton, M. (2014). Analyzing the Familiar: Definitions, Approaches, and Issues at the Heart of Studying Families. In B. Fox (Ed.), *Family Patterns, Gender Relations* (pp. 2-30). Toronto, ON: Oxford University Press.

July 2nd: Stability and Change in Family Life (pt. 1)

Bianchi, S. M. (2011). Family Change and Time Allocation in American Families. *The Annals of the American Academy*, 638, 21-44.

Marshall, K. (2009). The Family Work Week. *Perspectives on Labour and Income*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 75-001-X.

Houle, P., Turcotte, M., & Wendt, M. (2017). Changes in Parents' Participation in Domestic Tasks and Care for Children from 1986-2015. *Spotlight on Canadians: Results from the General Social Survey*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-652-X2017001.

July 4th: Stability and Change in Family Life (pt. 2)

Young, M., & Schieman, S. (2018). Scaling Back and Finding Flexibility: Gender Differences in Parents' Strategies to Manage Work-Family Conflict. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 80, 99-118.

Thebaud, S., & Halcomb, L. (2019). One Step Forward? Advances and Setbacks on the Path toward Gender Equality in Families and Work. *Sociology Compass*. Advance online publication. DOI: 10.1111/soc4.12700.

July 9th: How to Study Families

Acock, A. C., van Dulmen, M. M. H., Allen, K. R., & Piercy, F. B. (2005). Contemporary and Emerging Research Methods in Studying Families. In V. L. Bengtson, A. C. Acock, K. R. Allen, P. Dilworth-Anderson, & D. M. Klein (Eds.), *Sourcebook of Family Theory and Research Methods* (pp. 59-90). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lareau, A. (2012). Using the Terms *Hypothesis* and *Variable* for Qualitative Work: A Critical Reflection. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 74, 671-677.

July 11th: MIDTERM EXAM

(no readings)

PART II: EXPLORING KEY SUBJECT AREAS IN THE CRITICAL SOCIOLOGY OF FAMILIES AND GENDER

July 16th: Women and Motherhood

Blair-Loy, M. (2001). Cultural Constructions of Family Schemas: The Case of Women Finance Executives. *Gender & Society*, 15(5), 687-709.

Collett, J. L. (2005). What Kind of Mother Am I? Impression Management and the Social Construction of Motherhood. *Symbolic Interaction*, 28(3), 327-347.

- Recommended supplementary reading:

Nelson, M. K. (2006). Single Mothers “Do” Family. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68, 781-795.

July 18th: Men and Fatherhood

Shows, C., & Gerstel, N. (2009). Fathering, Class, and Gender: A Comparison of Physicians and Emergency Medical Technicians. *Gender & Society*, 23(2), 161-187.

Miller, T. (2011). Falling back into Gender? Men’s Narratives and Practices around First-time Fatherhood. *Sociology*, 45(6), 1094-1109.

- Recommended supplementary reading:

Ranson, G. (2012). Men, Paid Employment and Family Responsibilities: Conceptualizing the “Working Father.” *Gender, Work & Organization*, 19(6), 741-761.

July 23rd: Kinship and Assisted Reproduction

Hertz, R. (2002). The Father as an Idea: A Challenge to Kinship Boundaries by Single Mothers. *Symbolic Interaction*, 25(1), 1-31.

Almeling, R. (2007). Selling Genes, Selling Gender: Egg Agencies, Sperm Banks, and the Medical Market in Genetic Material. *American Sociological Review*, 72(3), 319-340.

- Recommended supplementary reading:

Hargreaves, K. (2006). Constructing Families and Kinship through Donor Insemination. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 28(3), 261-283.

July 25th:

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE IN CLASS

(no readings)

July 30th: Non-Heteronormative Families

Biblarz, T. J., & Stacey, J. (2010). How Does the Gender of Parents Matter? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72, 3-22.

Goldberg, A. E. (2013). "Doing" and "Undoing" Gender: The Meaning and Division of Housework in Same-sex Couples. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 5, 85-104.

- Recommended supplementary reading:

Berkowitz, D. (2011). Maternal Instincts, Biological Clocks, and Soccer Moms: Gay Men's Parenting and Family Narratives. *Symbolic Interaction*, 34(4), 514-535.

August 1st: Engendering Children

Kane, E. W. (2006). "No Way My Boys Are Going To Be Like That!" Parents' Responses to Children's Gender Nonconformity. *Gender & Society*, 20(2), 149-176.

Berkowitz, D. & Ryan, M. (2011). Bathrooms, Baseball, and Bra Shopping: Lesbian and Gay Parents Talk about Engendering Their Children. *Sociological Perspectives*, 54(3), 329-

350.

- Recommended supplementary reading:

Rahilly, E. P. (2015). The Gender Binary Meets the Gender-Variant Child: Parents' Negotiations with Childhood Gender Variance. *Gender & Society*, 29(3), 338-361.

August 6th: Parenting in Pop Culture

Milkie, M. A., Pepin, J. R., & Denny, K. E. (2016). What Kind of War? "Mommy Wars" Discourse in U.S. and Canadian News, 1989-2013. *Sociological Inquiry*, 86(1), 51-78.

Wall, G., & Arnold, S. (2007). How Involved is Involved Fathering? An Exploration of the Contemporary Culture of Fatherhood. *Gender & Society*, 21(4), 508-527.

- Recommended supplementary reading:

Quirke, L. (2006). "Keeping Young Minds Sharp": Children's Cognitive Stimulation and the Rise of Parenting Magazines, 1959-2003. *Canadian Review of Sociology*, 43(4), 387-406.

August 8th:

FINAL PAPER DUE VIA AVENUE TO LEARN BY MIDNIGHT

(no lecture)

Land Acknowledgement Statement:

McMaster University recognizes and acknowledges that it is located on the traditional territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee nations, and within the lands protected by the "Dish With One Spoon" Wampum agreement.