Families & Society

SOCY 4086

University of Colorado-Boulder

Fall 2016

Class meets in ECON 16 on TuTh 2-3:15

Professor Amy Wilkins

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Office Hours: TH 9:45-10:45 (drop-in)

**Course Objectives:**

In this course, we will study the changing relationship between U.S. families and society. This includes the impact of society on families as well as the impact of families on society. In line with the sociological literature, we will focus on the impacts of social class, gender, and race on creating inequalities among and within U.S. families. We will consider political, social, ideological, demographic, and economic determinants of family patterns, and their impacts on family life. To be successful in this course, I expect you to demonstrate that you have learned to think *critically*, *analytically*,and *sociologically* about these topics, and that you are able to bring *sociological evidence* to bear in making arguments about family issues.

By the end of the course, successful students are expected to

1. Identify key trends in family patterns;
2. Identify and analyze the social institutions that shape and regulate the ways we organize ourselves into social units called “families”;
3. Introduce historical origins of contemporary family formations;
4. Critically assess the roles men, women, and children play in families;
5. Identify the major problems facing contemporary families;
6. Use sociological evidence to think critically about public debates about families and “family values”;
7. Develop evidence-based approaches to supporting contemporary families;

8 Make connections between course materials, current events, and your own experiences.

Families seem like a happy, fun topic about which we all already know quite a bit. After all, we all have or have had one. Yet, it is precisely for this reason that this class can be difficult for some people. The course content may upset you, may engage “private” issues that make you uncomfortable or that trigger upsetting memories, or (most commonly) may challenge your cherished beliefs about families and family life.

Participation in this class requires you to be respectful of ideas and viewpoints that might be different from yours. In addition, like most sociology courses, this is a course that is concerned with inequality and that requires that you use evidence and analysis to make your arguments, not opinions.

Attendance policy: Attendance is required in this class. Missed classes will affect your grade in the following way. 1-2 absences: no penalty. Each subsequent 2 absences earns a 2.5% penalty on your final grade (so 3-4 absences = 2.5% penalty, 5-6 absences = 5% penalty and so forth). I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences except if you have more than 2 absences which have been officially excused by the university (e.g., if you are an athlete).

Arriving more than five minutes late, leaving more than five minutes early, or leaving the classroom excessively will result in a .5 absence.

**Course Materials:**

Course reReRr adings are available on D2L (learn.colorado.edu). You can log onto D2L with your identikey and password. If you have problems with D2L, please see: http://oit.colorado.edu/d2l and/or contact Information Technology Services (ITS) at (303) 735-HELP or help@colorado.edu. You should also become familiar with ways to find articles on your own, such as through library databases, jstor.org, or google scholar. If there is a problem with an article, please contact Professor Wilkins as soon as possible.

**Communication Policies**

1. I will use D2L to send emails to the class (probably a lot!). You are required to check the email account that is registered with the university at least once a day, and you are responsible for the information communicated in such emails.
2. You may contact me via university email. If you have a long question or concern, please use office hours or make an appointment to talk with me. I will not answer questions about assignments before or after class. Those questions need to be addressed in office hours or over email.
3. I require that you wait 24 hours to discuss a grade or graded assignment with me. IF you plan to query a specific grade, you must do so in writing. Before our meeting, write out why you think the assigned grade is incorrect and/or your specific questions about the grade.
4. Do not ask individual logistical questions or questions about grades before or after class. Logistical questions can be asked via email or at our offices. Questions about grades should always be addressed during office hours.

DO NOT leave your cell phone or other personal device on. Turn it OFF. (The only exception is primary care providers of children or others subject to seizures; please see me.) I will notice if you are checking your phone, and it will effect your participation grade.

**Please note that I do not allow laptops, notebooks, or other phones to be used in class**. I find that laptops are distracting to both the user and other students, even if students are using them for notetaking. In addition, studies have now confirmed that laptop use in class, even for notetaking, results in lower student grades. In lieu of typing notes, you will need to take notes by hand. Preparing good notes on both lecture and readings will help you better participate in class. I will not ask you to regurgitate small details on any assignment, but instead want you to understand the “big picture” and how specific content helps support, extend, or complicate that picture. If you find that I am talking too quickly or that I have made a complex point that you would like repeated or written on the board, tell me.

“Attending class” is both physical and mental. Tips for good attendance and participations grades:

Listen carefully, without headphones or earbuds.

Respond to others’ questions and comments. Restate, extend, agree, disagree, connect to an earlier point, or connect to the reading.

Ask questions. It is OK to interrupt with questions, but if I’m on a roll, **I’ll get back to you. Questions should pertain to the material at hand.**

Bring either notes on the readings or copies of the readings to class, and be prepared to discuss them. Please quote from or direct collective attention to the reading.

DO NOT use body language to express disagreement or contempt. No eye-rolling, gagging sounds, dismissive or derogatory raspberries or “Bronx cheers,” etc.

DO avoid coming in late, leaving early, and getting up to use the bathroom, text friends, or other activities, as it is distracting to the whole class and disrupts the teaching and learning environment.

**I reserve the right to adjust evaluation criteria and weight according to scheduling and assignment changes, if necessary, but the following information will give you a broad sense of how you will be evaluated in this course.**

**EVALUATION**

This course requires attendance in class. You will be evaluated on the basis of attendance and completing readings, participation in whole-class discussions, and individual and group work. You must do the assigned readings and keep up with your assigned work from day to day.

**Bring readings and/or readings notes to class.** You may also bring laptops or other devices to class, as we will sometimes make use of them, but I do not allow you to use them during regular lecture or discussion.

**1. Participation (10%)**

You are expected to come to class having completed all assigned readings and work, and prepared to discuss this material. Your participation in whole-class and small-group discussions will both influence your participation grade. It is your responsibility to make sure that I am aware that you have completed the assigned readings and thought about the course material. You can do this through your comments in class.

You are not required to agree with opinions discussed in class but you must think critically about them and be respectful of others in the class. In this course, you are expected to learn a body of sociological thinking about families, regardless of your own perspectives on the topic. **To that end, your participation will be assessed on your engagement with, understanding of, and synthesis of academic knowledge (frameworks, theories, and evidence used in sociology) about the social construction of sexuality, not on your opinions (either those in agreement or disagreement with mine), and on your ability to engage respectfully with the members of the class.** Comments that are not based on course material are welcome but do not count significantly toward your participation grade. Hostile, disrespectful, or disruptive participation, or general disengagement, will count against your participation grade.

In the last five minutes of each class, I will ask you to reflect in writing on your participation in class that day and on any questions that were raised that you’d like me to address in the next class. You will turn these reflections in. Thoughtful reflections help me get to know you and build a better class, and they help you become a better class participant.

In addition, throughout the course I will ask you to complete 3-4 short assignments, which will also factor into your participation grade. **Failure to complete these assignments will significantly affect your participation grade, as will careless work.**

**Discussion Groups**:

At the beginning of the semester, you will form a discussion group with other students in our class (each group should have approximately 4 members). Over the course of the semester, you will meet at least weekly with your group to discuss the week’s readings. You will use your “Reading Summary w/Discussion Questions” weekly assignment to facilitate discussion.

**Group members will be asked to evaluate one another’s participation in and contribution to group discussions. These evaluations will be factored into each student’s participation grade.**

**2. Quizzes (20%):**

I will give unannounced quizzes on reading and course material. These will be worth ten percent of your grade.

**2. Reading Summaries w/ Discussion Questions**: **(20%)**

Every week you should prepare for class by writing a summary of the week’s readings along with three discussion questions. **You may skip two weeks without penalty.** Your summary of the week’s readings should be approximately 1 page in length (**typed**). Your discussion questions should be based on the readings for the week. You will use these summaries/questions to facilitate your participation in class and/or group discussions. **You may not turn them in over email but must turn them in in class. They are due on TUESDAY. I DO NOT TAKE LATE ASSIGNMENTS.**

3. **Emerging Research Assignment (10%)**

**Due in class on Thursday, October 20**

The website for the organization Council on Contemporary Families serves as a clearinghouse for emerging family research in sociology and related disciplines. One in each of the three units on contemporary families (unit 2, 3, and 4) you will need to go to their website and identify a piece of research related to the unit’s topic.

The website is [www.contemporaryfamilies.org](http://www.contemporaryfamilies.org/)

It features a host of information and I encourage you to peruse it carefully. For this assignment:

Identity one piece of related research (be sure to give the name of both the research and the researchers, as well as the date you retrieved it from the website). (Please don’t choose something we’re reading in class).

Write a careful and detailed one-paragraph summary of the research: what questions did it seek to address, what methods and data did it use, and what do the findings suggest so far?

Write 1-2 paragraphs connecting the new research to at least 3 readings you have done so far and to any course material we have discussed in class. In this paragraph you might address: how does this research build on, expand, or contradict what you have read for this course? How does it further knowledge about sociology of the family? What sociological questions does it raise or answer for you? Good answers will think analytically about the research.

You do not need a works cited for course readings, but you should reference them in the writing itself. Do not use quotes. I want you to put ideas in your own words.

**4. Group research project (40%)** A substantial part of the class will be spent working on group research projects, intended to extend your knowledge of new family forms beyond those discussed in class. You will form a group of **3 people**. **You may not work alone or in pairs and will receive a zero if you do so.** Within the broad area of family, your group may choose any topic it likes, but your topic should *build on and go beyond* the material we have covered in class. You should pre-approve your topic with me, and clear any changes in topic. Some possible topics include: cohabitation, stepfamilies, divorce, multiracial families, and adoption. But there are many, many more to choose from. You should choose a topic about which you are excited to learn more or that may be useful to you, but do not choose a topic about which you hold substantial stereotypes (e.g., teen parenthood is a topic that often backfires for students, or to which you are too personally tied, e.g., if you are angry at your parents for their divorce, do not choose divorce).

If you choose to conduct research with live subjects (aka, people), you will need to focus on an issue pertaining to people over age 18, and you may not include vulnerable populations, such as people in prison. **Your project must integrate both research and some empirical investigation.** Examples of acceptable empirical data are: in-depth interviews, surveys, content analysis of information posted on public websites/discussion forums, and time diaries. It should go well beyond the materials we cover in class, but it should make use of **sociological** and course perspectives in its analysis. If you decide to interview or survey people, you will need to pass a short online tutorial on conducting research with human subjects that is required by the university before you can collect any data. If you have taken field methods, you have already done this, and will simply need to provide me with a copy of your certification.

The end product of your group project will be a 10-12 minute presentation of your findings to the class, with additional time for Q&A. Presentations will take place in the last two week of the course. You will be free to choose the format of this presentation, as long as it is not a traditional paper (e.g., slides, pamphlets, oral presentations, posters, and other formats).

**Your final product should show evidence of extensive, high-quality research and/or data collection and insightful analysis that is linked to readings and ideas from the course.** You will be asked to evaluate your group members’ contributions. If two group members agree that someone did more or less than their fair share, your grade will be adjusted upward or downward. You will be assessed on the following criteria:

1. Equal use of all group members
2. Clarity, relevance, and engagement of presentation
3. Skill in communicating findings both orally and visually
4. Depth and quality of research
5. Incorporation of course materials (including accuracy)
6. Goes well beyond course materials
7. Contribution to sociological knowledge (neither superficial nor polemical)

Do not make the mistake of relying overly much on one group member, as the entire team’s grade may be penalized if one group member provides inaccurate information. You are all responsible for vetting all of the information.

25% of the grade is a group grade

5% grade is an individual grade

**Alternatively, you may choose to write an individual 15 page research paper, which will be due on the final day of class. You must make your choice on Sept. 20.**

**Grading Standard**

Below is the standard for the level of assessment of written assignments and overall evaluation for course grades.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Letter** | **Percentage** | **Description** |
|  **A** **A-** | **94-100****90-93** | Exceptional: Exceeds all required elements of the assignment, and the quality of the work is considerably greater than what is required. The quality of the work is considerably above the class average and impressive to the evaluator. |
|  **B+** **B** **B-** | **88-89****84-87****80-83** | Good: Meets all required elements of the assignment, and the quality of the work is better than what is required. |
|  **C+** **C** **C-** | **78-79****74-77****70-73** | Average: Meets all required elements of an assignment, no more, no less. Quality of assignment is satisfactory for college level work. |
|  **D+** **D** **D-** | **68-69****64-67****60-63** | Below average: Does not meet all the required elements of the assignment, and/or the quality of the assignment is considerably lower than satisfactory.  |
|  **F** | **59 and below** | Failing: Almost none of the requirements of the assignment are met and/or the quality of the assignment is well below basic standards of writing, comprehension, and/or ability to follow instructions.  |

**Course Schedule**

**The course schedule may change with advance notice of the instructor. Changes will be announced in class and over email. You are responsible for all information communicated in class, whether you are there or not.**

**Week 1 (Aug. 23 and Aug. 25)**

Introductions

1. Coontz, Stephanie. “Introduction to the 2016 Edition” in *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*

**Week 2 (Aug. 30 and Sept. 1)**

**I. The US Family in Historical Context**

**Why is it important to put U.S. families in historical context?**

1. Coontz, Stephanie. “The Way We Wish We Were: Defining the Family Crisis” in *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*

2. “Pregnant Girls, Wilding Boys, Crack Babies and the Underclass: The Myth of Black Family Collapse” in *The Way We Never Were*

**Week 3 (Sept. 6 and Sept. 8)**

**Why is it important to understand the economic changes shaping U.S. families?**

1. Manfred B. Steger and Ravi K. Roy. 2010. *Selections from Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (pp. 1-20)

2. Coontz, Stephanie. “The Crisis Reconsidered” in *The Way We Never Were*

3. Sykes, Jennifer, Kathryn Edin and Sarah Halpern-Meekin. “Dignity and Dreams: What the Earned-Income Tax Credit Means to Low-Income Families.” *American Sociological Review*

**Week 4 (Sept. 13 and Sept. 15)**

**How can we make sense of U.S. marriage patterns, policy, and practices?**

1. Cherlin, Andrew. Introduction to *The Marriage Go Round*

2. “Cohabitation No Longer Predicts Divorce--and Possibly Never Did.” *Council on Contemporary Families*

3. “Gray Divorce: A Growing Risk Regardless of Class or Education.” *Council on Contemporary Families*

4. Gerstel, Naomi and Natalia Sarkisian, “Marriage, The Good, The Bad, and the Greedy”

5. Whitehead, Jaye Cee. “Risk, Marriage, and Neoliberal Governance.” *The Sociological Quarterly*

**Week 5 (Sept. 20 and Sept. 22)**

**What is the relationship between marriage and economic insecurity?**

1. An Interview with Naomi Cahn and June Carbone

2. Silva, Jennifer. “Coming of Age in the Risk Society” in *Coming Up Short: Working-Class Adulthood in an Age of Insecurity*

3. Silva, Jennifer. “Insecure Intimacies: Love, Marriage, and Family in the Risk Society” in *Coming Up Short*

**Week 6 (Sept. 27 and Sept. 29)**

**How does gender effect the division of household labor and why does it matter?**

1. CCF Symposium on Gender, Housework, and the Family: Overview

2. Hochschild, Arlie. Chapters 1-4 (pp. 1-60) of *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home*

**Week 7 (Oct. 4 and Oct. 6)**

**How does motherhood matter for women’s ability to work? How does working matter for women’s ability to mother?**

1. Fried, Mindy. “Five Work-Family Policies That Should Be a No-Brainer.” *Feminist Reflections.*

2. Blair-Loy, Mary. “The Devotion to Work Schema” in *Competing Devotions: Career and Family Among Women Executives*

3. Blair-Loy, Mary. “The Devotion to Family Schema” in *Competing Devotions*

**Week 8 (Oct. 11 and Oct. 13)**

**How does work shape fatherhood?**

1. Thebaud, Sarah and David Pedulla. “Masculinity and the Stalled Revolution: How Gender Ideologies and Norms Shape Young Men’s Responses to Work–Family Policies.” *Gender & Society*

2. Roy, Kevin and Natasha Cabrera: “Not Just Provide and Reside: Engaged Fathers in Low-Income Families.” In *Families as They Really Are*

3. Shows, Carla and Naomi Gerstel. “Fathering, Class, and Gender: A Comparison of Physicians and Emergency Medical Technicians.” *Gender & Society*

**Week 9 (Oct. 18 and Oct. 20)**

**How do social institutions shape families, and how do families strategize to shape social institutions?**

1. Reich, Jennifer. “Children’s Challenges to Efforts to Save Them: Competing Knowledges in the Child Welfare System.” *Symbolic Interaction*

2. Dodson, Lisa and Wendy Luttrell. “Families Facing Untenable Choices” in *Contexts*

3. Butterfield, Jonniann and Irene Padavic. “The Impact of Legal Inequality on Relational Power in Planned Lesbian Families.” *Gender & Society*

**Week 10 (Oct. 25 and Oct. 27)**

**How do race, class, and gender shape mothering work?**

1. Elliott, Sinikka and Elyshia Aseltine. “Raising Teenagers in Hostile Environments: How Race, Class, and Gender Matter for Mothers’ Protective Carework.” *Journal of Family Issues*

2. Dow, Dawn Marie. The Deadly Challenges of Raising African American Boys:

Navigating the Controlling Image of the “Thug.” *Gender & Society*

**Week 11 (Nov. 1 and Nov. 3)**

**Case study: Why do parents reject vaccines, and why does it matter?**

1. Reich, Jennifer. *Calling the Shots*, Introduction and chapters 1-2

**Week 12 (Nov. 8 and Nov. 10)**

**How does society shape contemporary parenting among affluent parents?**

1. *Calling the Shots*, chapters 3-5

**Week 13 (Nov. 15 and Nov. 17)**

**What do affluent parents owe society?**

1. *Calling the Shots*, chapters 6-8 and Conclusion

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*Week 14 FALL BREAK\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**Week 15 (Nov. 29 and Dec. 1)**

\*Presentations

**Week 16 (Dec. 6 and Dec. 8)**

\*Presentations

\*Final Conversations

**University Policies**

1. If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me

a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs can be

addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented

disabilities. Contact: 303-492-8671, Center for Community N200, and [http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices](https://exchangeweb.colorado.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=7da2c7ca313c474d8e5baf428ecae718&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.colorado.edu%2fdisabilityservices). If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see guidelines at [http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices/go.cgi?select=temporary.html](https://exchangeweb.colorado.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=7da2c7ca313c474d8e5baf428ecae718&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.colorado.edu%2fdisabilityservices%2fgo.cgi%3fselect%3dtemporary.html)

Disability Services' letters for students with disabilities indicate legally mandated reasonable accommodations. The syllabus statements and answers to Frequently Asked Questions can be found at [http://www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices](https://exchangeweb.colorado.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=7da2c7ca313c474d8e5baf428ecae718&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.colorado.edu%2fdisabilityservices).

2. Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. Please notify me one week in advance of any religious conflicts to ensure accommodation.

3. Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, culture, religion, creed, politics, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression, age, disability, and nationalities.  Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.  See policies at

[http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html](https://exchangeweb.colorado.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=7da2c7ca313c474d8e5baf428ecae718&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.colorado.edu%2fpolicies%2fclassbehavior.html) and at

[http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student\_code](https://exchangeweb.colorado.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=7da2c7ca313c474d8e5baf428ecae718&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.colorado.edu%2fstudentaffairs%2fjudicialaffairs%2fcode.html%23student_code).

4. The University of Colorado at Boulder Discrimination and Harassment Policy and Procedures, the University of Colorado Sexual Harassment Policy and Procedures, and the University of Colorado Conflict of Interest in Cases of Amorous Relationships policy apply to all students, staff, and faculty.  Any student, staff, or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of sexual harassment or discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Student Conduct (OSC) at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH, the above referenced policies, and the campus

resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at [http://www.colorado.edu/odh](https://exchangeweb.colorado.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=7da2c7ca313c474d8e5baf428ecae718&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.colorado.edu%2fodh).

5. All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior.  All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-735-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Other information on the

Honor Code can be found at [http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html](https://exchangeweb.colorado.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=7da2c7ca313c474d8e5baf428ecae718&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.colorado.edu%2fpolicies%2fhonor.html)  and at

[http://www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode/](https://exchangeweb.colorado.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=7da2c7ca313c474d8e5baf428ecae718&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.colorado.edu%2facademics%2fhonorcode%2f).