FAMILIES, CAREGIVING AND KINSHIP
Soc. 130a Brandeis University
Fall 2012

Mon. & Weds. 2:00-3:20
Pearlman Hall 202

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Course Overview

As the complexity of family constellations intensifies in contemporary US society family roles, family boundaries and family configurations are contested, romanticized, and defined in countless domains. Appeals to family values are frequently invoked, often in contradictory ways while variations in families are labeled traditional or nontraditional, stable or unstable, functional or dysfunctional, normal or deviant. Yet family diversity is ubiquitous. Families are complex social institutions, dynamic, and inherently contextual. Transformations in US families have proceeded steadily for more than two centuries as economic, social, cultural, and political forces shape the contours of daily family life. Simultaneously families influence the broader cultural and social worlds of which they are a part. In consideration of historical contexts and in a time of accelerating social change, how then, are we to understand contemporary family life?

Family is one of the most pervasive and deeply personal social institutions within US society. In this course we will adopt a sociological perspective which entails ‘making the familiar strange’. Our investigation into the sociology of families will take us through historical changes and into the everyday worlds of a variety of families – including our own. We will proceed from a vantage point that emphasizes the intersection of families with other social institutions, particularly the economy. Accordingly we will consider how structural inequalities reverberate through family life and the impacts of economic changes such as industrialization and the increasingly global economy. Throughout we will probe the multifaceted intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic class, immigration and sexuality as critical factors circumscribing the diversity of family experiences. Through analyzing historical and contemporary variation in family forms and practices we will elucidate the changing character, role and meaning of families, family ideology and familial roles. In so doing, we will reflect on the social and political implications of these changes for men, women, children, and society at large. As we scrutinize the socio-historical evolution of families and explore family as a contested social institution you will be introduced to the essential concepts, theories, and research methods used in sociology to analyze families.

This course is built around student engagement, readings, discussions, occasional films, guest speakers and a series of written assignments that enable you to explore sociologically relevant issues within contemporary family life from a variety of angles. Our analytical point of departure—the everyday world of families—frames the questions we consider. In this way our inquiry is about how families and family members negotiate the specific socio-historical situations they encounter. We will contemplate continuity, change and complexity in family life as it is situated within a context of national and global inequalities and struggles for justice.
Course Readings

The following required books are available at the bookstore (also on reserve at the library):


All other course readings listed on syllabus are available through Latte.

Course Requirements

Honest effort, enthusiastic curiosity, and work reflective of thoughtful and thorough familiarity with readings and course material will be expected. Close and attentive reading of all course texts prior to our class meeting is essential to your successful leaning in this class.

Attendance and Participation

Regular attendance and active participation in class are each vital to your successful learning. They will also make the course more interesting for all of us. Please plan to attend every class and to be on time.

I encourage you to come to each class meeting prepared to engage with the material. Please be ready to raise questions and to speak about the readings, how they relate to your experiences, current social debates, and of course, issues addressed in prior weeks. I conceive of class participation broadly and will provide a variety of opportunities to facilitate your engagement in this class including small group discussion, group presentations, activities and open discussion.

There are two Web Field Trips throughout the semester. These virtual site visits will facilitate our discussion of current issues by providing you with an opportunity to explore various topics relevant to family life in the current cultural milieu. Web Field Trips are also an easy opportunity to earn some extra points toward your final grade; each is worth 4 pts.

Assignments

1. Families in the Media For this assignment you will draw on a specific example to write a brief essay about the way family is presented and/or framed in the media focusing on both explicit and implicit assumptions about family life. Due Sept 24th

2. Contextualizing our Experiences (Note: This assignment serves as the first portion of your Family History Interview Project) For this assignment you will explore your family’s past and consider how race and/or social class have influenced your family history, identity and experiences. Due Oct 22nd
3. **Family & Social Policy** This assignment allows us to scrutinize the intersections of family life and the law within a context of interest to you. You may select any public policy (federal or state level) impacting families and critically analyze it from a sociological perspective. **Due Nov 7th**

4. **Engaging the Past: Family History Interview Project.** For this assignment you will gain hands-on sociological research experience by conducting oral history interviews to investigating the role of family history, rituals, traditions and change. **Due Dec 3rd**

5. **Final Essay:** During the second to last week of class I will distribute a broad question that allows you to reflect on that which you have learned about the sociology of families by synthesizing the concepts, theories and issues we have talked about throughout the semester. **Due TBD**

**Please Note:** Specific instructions for each assignment will be provided in supplementary handouts.

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### Grading and Policies

**Final Course Grades**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>% final grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance &amp; Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Web Field Trips</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper 1</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<td>Paper 2</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<td>Paper 3</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family History Interview Project</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Essay</td>
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All written assignments must be completed to receive a passing grade in this class.

**Assignment Submission & Format**

Papers are due at the beginning of class on the dates listed (unless otherwise noted). Late papers will be penalized for each 24 hours after the due date that the assignment is turned in. All extensions require prior notification and approval from the instructor. Please feel free to discuss any problems with me as they arise.

**Papers should follow ASA style formatting.** A style guide is available on the course page. Further information can be found both in the library as well as on the ASA website (see link below). [http://www.asanet.org/page.ww?name=Quick+Style+Guide&section=Sociology+Depts](http://www.asanet.org/page.ww?name=Quick+Style+Guide&section=Sociology+Depts)
**Policies**

**Computers in the Classroom** The use of laptop computers during class requires prior notification and approval. If you need to use your laptop to take notes during class please discuss this with me.

**Academic Integrity** You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University’s policies on academic integrity (see http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdje/ai/).

If you are a student with a documented disability in need of an accommodation, see me as soon as possible. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting an accommodation, contact Beth Rodgers-Kay at Undergraduate Academic Affairs (x 63470, rodgers@brandeis.edu). Accommodation requires documentation and cannot be granted retroactively. If you have questions about academic integrity, see the student handbook, Rights and Responsibilities. University Press, 2002.

**Questions** Lastly, please feel free to discuss any issues or questions you have with me at any time.
Course Outline

Sept. 5th Course Introduction

Why do we study families? What are some popular assumptions about family life and how do they impact individual’s experience(s)?

- Ferguson, Introduction Pp. 1-6

Sept. 10th & 12th Conceptualizing Families

How have sociologists studied, examined and critiqued the institution of family? What types of social ties do we as a society characterize as family? In what ways is structural inequality integral to an understanding of variations in family configurations and practices? What are some of the social functions of families?

- Coontz, Stephanie: Chpts 1 & 2 (pp. 8-41)
- Ferguson, Chpt. 2, Maxine Baca Zinn. “Feminist Rethinking from Racial-Ethnic Families”

Sept. 19th & 20th Contextualizing Our Study of Families

Who can be a family? How and by whom is this determined? What is the relationship between marriage and family boundaries? What role do you believe marriage should have in family life? In contemporary society?

- Ferguson, Chpt. 3. Kath Weston, “Exiles From Kinship”

Sept. 24th & 3rd On Love and Marriage
What does love have to do with families? Is cohabitating the new marriage? How does the ideal of family compare to the institution of family? How do popular beliefs and or myths about family life inform laws and policies?

- Ferguson, Chpt. 9. Martin King Whyte, “Choosing Mates- The American Way”
- Stephanie Coontz, chpts. 3 & 6

Oct. 9th & 10th Industrial Revolution, Capitalism and Family Life
What factors have historically mediated family life? How did economic changes in the 19th century influence families of various races, ethnicities and socio-economic classes? What is childhood? How do race and socio-economic class affect the boundaries between public life and private family life?

- Stephanie Coontz: pgs 113-115, 155-163, 207-217 and 237-241
- Ferguson, Chpt 7 Richard Griswold del Castillo “ La Familia”
- Web Field Trip: Presidential Campaigns

Oct. 15th & 17th Axes of Stratification in the Production of Families
How have transitions in work life and the economic structure impacted family formation? In what ways are variations in experience influenced by unequal access to social institutions and resources? How has family composition and definition been shaped by domains of stratification such as race, socio-economic class, ethnicity, citizenship status, sexuality, etc?

- Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”
- Ferguson, Chpt. 6. Shirley Hill “Black Families: Beyond Revisionist Scholarship”
- Johnathan Kozol, excerpts from Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America (1998)
- Readings continued on next page

Oct. 22nd & 24th “Modern Families”

What are some of the current familial configurations in US society? What factors shape patterns in marriage, parenthood, reproduction and fertility? How do current social institutions reflect or discard variation in family forms? How do medical advancements and new technologies impacting families?

• Ferguson, chpt. 15. Judith Seltzer, “Families Formed Outside of Marriage”
• Ferguson, chpt. 30. Luisa Margolies, “My Mother’s Hip”

Oct. 29th On Parents and Parenthood

In our current cultural milieu how are family relationships and roles defined? What does it mean to be a parent? What circumstances or factors impact parental roles and expectations? How do demographic trends impact family life and kin networks? Are families inherently gendered institutions?

• Ferguson, chpts. 28 Casper and Bianchi “Grandparenting”

Oct. 31st Fatherhood, Fathers and Gender

What is a father? Who can be one? What are the implications of cultural assumptions about fatherhood for families of various socio-economic locations? What distinguishes a sperm donor from a father?

• Nicholas Townsend. “The four facets of Fatherhood”
Nov. 5th & 7th Constructing Mothers, Mothering and Motherhood

How do race, class, sexuality, ethnicity and citizenship status infuse notions of motherhood? What do you believe constitutes mothering? How has mothering both adapted to and been influenced by broader social institutions, relationships and inequalities?

- Ferguson, Chpt 22. Patricia Hill Collins, “Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing about Motherhood.”
- Ferguson, Chpt 24. Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, “Mothering from a Distance”
- Web Field Trip Match Making in the 21st Century
- Begin Hochschild

Nov. 12th & 14th Family Work and the Second Shift

What are some of the strategies families employ to negotiate the balance between work and family? How is this division between experienced differently for families of various racial/ethnic and socio-economic statuses? What, if anything, do you think has changed since Hochschild wrote The Second Shift?

- Arlie Hochschild, The Second Shift. Chpts 1-5, Appendix
- Arlie Hochschild, The Second Shift. Chpts. 6-8
- Ferguson, Chpt. 43. Carrington “No Place Like Home: The Division of Domestic Labor in Lesbigay Families”

Nov. 19th Strategies of Negotiating Work, Family and the Second Shift

What social supports do families need? What determines how these vary among different families? What supports, public and private, are available to assist families balancing family life and paid work? What determines how these vary among different families?

- Arlie Hochschild, The Second Shift Chpts. 12 -14, 17

Nov. 26th & 28th Carework and Connecting Generations

What are some of the innumerable (and often invisible) ways family is created on a daily basis? Are there some other examples of where you see this pattern? As a society, who do we believe should do the work of taking care of children, family life, people who are sick or disabled, and the elderly?


• Lisa Dodson and Rebekah M. Zincavage, 2007. “‘It’s like a family’” Caring labor, exploitation and race in the long term care industry. *Gender and Society*. Vol. 21(6).


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**Dec. 3rd & 5th The Social Reproduction of Inequalities**

*In what ways are inequalities reproduced within the familial domain? How does the family serve as a vehicle for the social reproduction of privilege and disadvantage? How would you describe current parenting philosophies? Growing up, what were your parent’s attitudes toward education?*


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**Dec. 10th & 12th Historical and Cultural Perspectives of Family Violence**

*How much privacy should families have? How has the problem of violence within the familial sphere been viewed and responded to in the past? What are the explicit and implicit ideological beliefs about families in our current domestic violence laws and practices?*

• Ferguson. Chpts. 36 Kersti Ylo, “Gender, Diversity and Violence”


• Ferguson, Chpt 38. Claire Renzetti, “Toward a Better Understanding of Lesbian Battering