

Sociology 247: Family and Modern Society¹

Fall 2023

Professor: Elaine Weiner (elaine.weiner@mcgill.ca)

Class Time: Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays 2:00-3:00 p.m.

Location: ARTS W-120

Office Hours (Professor): Fridays 12:30 p.m.-1:30 p.m. or *by appointment* (Campus office: LEA 732)

Teaching Assistant: see *myCourses* announcements for TA contact information and office hours

"A family is the nucleus of civilization." – William James Durant

"Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one." – Jane Howard

Course Description

By definition, sociology involves the systematic study of human social behavior, interaction and organization. Sociologists are particularly interested in understanding *how* human social life is shaped by social forces (e.g., globalization) and social structures (e.g., class). This is a survey course designed to introduce you to the study of one particular institution of human social life – the *family*. In this class, we will explore a variety of concepts, methodologies, theoretical perspectives and empirical findings pertaining to the sociological study of family, with particular reference to Canadian and American families.

Course Materials

Most course materials are available via the *myCourses* site (e.g., assigned readings, Powerpoint slides etc...). Please insure that you check the site on a regular basis for announcements, etc. You should, however, use the URL links on this syllabus to link to assigned podcasts, videos, documentaries, etc... for listening and/or viewing.

Course Organization and Requirements

Class Format: I will lecture on Tuesdays and Fridays. Conferences will be held on Thursdays, during our regularly scheduled class time. No sign-up for conferences is required. No lecture, however, will be held on Friday, September 1st or Thursday, October 19th. You must attend at least six conferences, of your choosing, in order to receive credit (i.e., = 5% of your final grade). Should you attend any less than six you will receive **no** credit.

Listen, Watch & Read These are the kinds of questions you should be thinking about as you are listening, watching and reading assigned materials in order to best process them:

1. What is/are the main point(s)?
2. What kind of evidence is relied on in order to make the point(s)? What are the strengths and/or weaknesses of evidence used/arguments made?
3. What are the larger implications of the point(s) made?

To further guide you towards thoughtful engagement with the assigned materials, I have devised some comprehension questions pertaining to the assigned materials (**posted on myCourses**). These are for your own study purposes.

I **strongly encourage** you to stay up-to-date on the assigned materials as this will enable you to most effectively synthesize them with lectures.

Course Requirements:

¹ In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

Conference Attendance = 5%

3 'Think About It' Responses – 45% (15% each) to be submitted *online via the 'Assignments' link on myCourses*

Midterm Exam = 20% (in class, Tuesday, October 17th)

Final Exam = 30% (to be scheduled during the final exam period)

Note: If you have a disability and require any special accommodations, please let me know.

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue).

'Think About It' Responses

Think About It Responses involve applying what you are learning and promoting your critical engagement with course material. You are required to write three responses over the course of the semester. ***Detailed instructions and due dates for these responses are provided on myCourses.***

Note: Please proofread your work, spelling errors/typos are not acceptable. You will lose 1% of your assignment grade for any such errors (= 1% *per error*).

Exams

I consider all materials in this course including readings, lectures, podcasts and documentaries/videos to be 'fair game' for exams. The midterm exam will be held in class on Tuesday, October 17th; it will be comprised of multiple choice and short answer questions. The final exam will be a three-hour exam, scheduled during the university's final exam period, that is comprised of multiple choice, short answer and long essay questions. The final exam will be cumulative.

Note: *The Midterm exam CANNOT be made up, except in instances of a doctor-verified illness, family emergency/death or a natural disaster. Also, according to Senate regulations, instructors are not permitted to make special arrangements for final exams. Please consult the Calendar, section 4.7.2.1., General University Information and Regulations at www.mcgill.ca.*

Late Submission Policy

For each day that an assignment is late, the grade will be lowered by half a grade (e.g., if the initial grade is a B- and you submit the assignment a day late, your final paper grade will be a C+).

Copyright Protection

All materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions, etc.) used in this course **are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form without explicit instructor permission.** Additionally, infringements of copyright can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

Distraction-Free Zone

The use of mobile computing (e.g., laptops) or communication devices (e.g., cell phones, recorders) is not permitted without my permission (thus, please come equipped with paper and pencil or pen).

General Academic Policies

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand offenses under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).

Course Schedule

SECTION I : SOCIOLOGY OF THE FAMILY: THE FOUNDATIONS

Topics: Defining 'Family' and How We Know What We Know about Families

August 31, September 5 and 8



- ✧ Cherlin, Andrew. 2009. "BRIEF REPORT: One Thousand and Forty-Nine Reasons Why It's Hard to Know When a Fact is A Fact." *Council on Contemporary Families* August.
- ✧ Coontz, Stephanie. 2013. "When Numbers Mislead." *New York Times* May 26.
- ✧ Cowan, Philip and Carolyn Cowan. 2009. "BRIEF REPORT: When Is A Relationship Between Facts a Causal One?" *Council on Contemporary Families* August.
- ✧ Luxton, Meg and Bonnie Fox. 2014. "Analyzing the Familiar: Definitions, Approaches, and Issues at the Heart of Studying Families." Pp. 2-30 in *Family Patterns, Gender Relations* (Fourth Edition), edited by Bonnie Fox. New York: Oxford University Press.
- ✧ Powell, Brian. 2014. "Changing Counts, Counting Change: Toward a More Inclusive Definition of Family." *Journal of the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences* 17 (1): Article 2.

SECTION II: FAMILIES IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: CRISIS, CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Topic: Canadian and American Families in Historical Perspective

September 12 and 15



- ✧ *The Atlantic* (2020) "THE IDEA FILE: The Nuclear Family Wasn't Built to Last" (<https://www.theatlantic.com/video/index/606157/modern-family/>) ~5 minutes



- ✧ Adams, Marie Louise. 2014. "Sexuality and the Postwar Domestic 'Revival.'" Pp. 116-35 in *Family Patterns, Gender Relations* (Fourth Edition), edited by Bonnie Fox. New York: Oxford University Press.
- ✧ Bignami-Van Assche, Simona and Charles-Olivier Simard. 2020. "Indigenous Families and Households in Canada: A Tale of Statistical Disadvantage." *Canadian Studies in Population* 47: 119-30.
- ✧ Coontz, Stephanie. 2015. "The Evolution of American Families." Pp. 36-54 in *Families as they Really Are (2nd edition)*, edited by Barbara Risman and Virginia Rutter. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

SECTION III: INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Topic: Dating and Love

September 19, 22 and 26



- ✧ *The Atlantic* (2019) "THE IDEA FILE: Why Dating Is Hard For Millennials" (<https://www.theatlantic.com/video/index/603811/dating-millennials/>) ~4 minutes

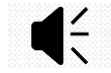
- ⌘ *The Atlantic* (2018) "Crazy/Genius: Is Online Dating Destroying Romance?" (<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/06/crazygenius-is-online-dating-destroying-romance/570154/>) ~23 minutes



- ⌘ Cancian, Francesca. 1986. "The Feminization of Love." *Signs* 11(4): 692-709.
- ⌘ Catron, Mandy. 2015. "To Fall In Love With Anyone, Do This." *The New York Times* Jan 11.
- ⌘ Lamont, Ellen. 2014. "Negotiating Courtship: Reconciling Egalitarian Ideals with Traditional Gender Norms." *Gender & Society* 28(2): 189-211.
- ⌘ Lamont, Ellen. 2018. "We Can Write the Scripts Ourselves: Queer Challenges to Heteronormative Courtship Practices." *Gender & Society* 31(5): 624-36.
- ⌘ Reid, Julie, Sinikke Elliott and Gretchen Webber. 2011. "Casual Hookups to Formal Dates: Refining the Boundaries of the Sexual Double Standard." *Gender & Society* 25(5): 545-68.

Topic: Cohabitation

September 29 and October 3



- ⌘ Sex and Psychology Podcast (Dr. Justin Lehmilller). 2022. Episode 85: Should We Move in Together Before Marriage? (with Arielle Kuperberg). <https://www.sexandpsychology.com/blog/podcast/episode-85-should-we-move-in-together-before-marriage/> ~37 minutes



- ⌘ Fetters, Ashley. 2018. "So Is Living Together Before Marriage Linked to Divorce or What?" *The Atlantic* October 24.
- ⌘ Huang, PM et al. 2011. "He Says, She Says: Gender and Cohabitation." *Journal of Family Issues* 32(7): 876-905.
- ⌘ Kroeger, Rhiannon and Pamela Smock. 2014. "Cohabitation: Recent Research and Implications." Pp. 217-35 in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Family*, edited by Judith Treas, Jacqueline Scott and Martin Richards. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.
- ⌘ Manning, Wendy, Susan Brown and Krista Payne. 2021. "Does Cohabitation Compensate for Marriage Decline?" *Contexts* 68-69.

Topic: Marriage

October 6, 13 and 20

****MIDTERM (in class) Tuesday, October 17th****

Conference cancelled on Thursday, October 19th



- ⌘ Poptech (2011) "Stephanie Coontz: On Marriage" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwtb7jz8G4k>) ~19 minutes



- ⌘ Bielska, Zosia and Stephanie Chambers. 2017. "A Century and a Half of Marriage." *The Globe and Mail* February 10.

- ✧ England, Paula and Jonathan Bearak. 2012. "FACT SHEET: Womens' Education and Their Likelihood of Marriage: A Historical Reversal." *Council on Contemporary Families* April 11.
- ✧ Kamen, Paula. 2000. "Modern Marriage: From Meal Ticket to Best Friend." Pp. 113-30 in *Her Way: Young Women Remake the Sexual Revolution* by Paula Kamen. New York: New York University Press.
- ✧ Kefalas, Maria et al. 2011. "'Marriage is More Than Being Together': The Meaning of Marriage for Young Adults." *Journal of Family Issues* 20(10): 1-31.

SECTION IV: HOUSEWORK AND PARENTING

Topic: Reproductive Labor

October 24, 27, 31 and November 3



- ✧ Goldberg, Abbie. 2013. "'Doing' and 'Undoing' Gender: The Meaning of Housework in Same-Sex Couples." *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 5(June): 85-104.
- ✧ Gottlieb, Lori. 2014. "The Egalitarian-Marriage Conundrum." *The New York Times Magazine*. February 2.
- ✧ Moore, Mignon. 2008. "Gendered Power Relationships Among Women: A Study of Household Decision Making in Black, Lesbian Stepfamilies." *American Sociological Review* 73(2): 335-56.
- ✧ Pinsker, Joe. 2022. "A Smarter Way to Divide Chores?" *The Atlantic* April 25.
- ✧ Rao, Aliya Hamid. 2019. "Even Breadwinning Wives Don't Get Equality at Home." *The Atlantic* May 12.

Topic: Parenting

November 7, 10 and 14



- ✧ Dow, Dawn Marie. 2019. "BRIEFING PAPER: Mothering While Black." *Council on Contemporary Families* September 19.
- ✧ Dozier, Raine. 2014. "Guy-Moms Unite! Mothering Outside the Box." Pp. 127-136 in *Queering Motheringhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives*, edited by Margaret F. Gibson. Ontario: Demeter Press.
- ✧ Hays, Sharon. 1996. "The Mommy Wars: Ambivalence, Ideological Work, and the Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood." Pp. 131-51 in *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* by Sharon Hays. Connecticut: Yale University Press.
- ✧ Lindemann, Danielle. 2022. "What Reality TV Reveals About Motherhood." *The Atlantic* February 13.
- ✧ Randles, Jennifer. 2020. "'Willing to Do Anything for My Kids': Inventive Mothering, Diapers and the Inequality of Carework." *American Sociological Review* 86(1): 35-59.
- ✧ Rehel, Erin. 2014. "When Dad Stays Home Too: Paternity Leave, Gender, and Parenting." *Gender & Society* 28(1): 110-32.

SECTION V: FAMILY DISSOLUTION AND REFORMATION

Topics: Divorce and Remarriage

November 17 and 21



- ✧ *Wall Street Journal* (2012) "Why 'Grey Divorce' is Surging" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCtFma4064k>) ~5 minutes



- ✧ Cherlin, Andrew. 1978. "Remarriage as an Incomplete Institution." *American Journal of Sociology* 84(3): 634-50.
- ✧ Manning, Wendy. 2014. "BRIEF REPORT: Remarriage in the United States: 'If at first they don't succeed, do most Americans 'try, try again?'" *Council on Contemporary Families* June 2.
- ✧ Pinsker, Joe. 2019. "How Successful Are the Marriages of People With Divorced Parents?" *The Atlantic* May 30.
- ✧ Rutter, Virginia. 2015. "The Case for Divorce." Pp. 329-39 in *Families as the Really Are (2nd edition)*, edited by Barbara Risman and Virginia Rutter. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- ✧ Sweeney, Megan. 2010. "Remarriage and Stepfamilies: Strategic Sites for Family Scholarship in the 21st Century." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 72(June): 667-84.

SECTION VI: TOWARDS A CARING SOCIETY; COURSE WRAP-UP

Topic: Towards a Caring Society

November 24 and 28 (Note: Thursday, November 30th follows a Monday schedule)



- ✧ Nakano Glenn. 2000. "Creating a Caring Society." *Contemporary Sociology* 29(1): 84-94.
- ✧ Roy, Katica. 2020. "I'm a Breadwinner Mom and This is Why Helping Women in the Sandwich Generation is Good for the Economy." *Fast Company* April 17.

Topic: Course Wrap-Up and Review

December 5

NO READINGS ASSIGNED