



WGS 353W:

The Nuclear Family

Tues/Thurs 9:40-11:10am

Eaton 409

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phone: (541)280-9984

office hours: M,W 10:00-11:00am T, TH 3:00-4:00pm or by appointment Smullin 212

Course Description:

The (nuclear) family is often referred to as the “cornerstone of American society;” an entity thought of as a sacred and cherished unit that serves as a source of value and identity. But within the modern, narrow definition of “family” what oppressive structures are perpetuated? Who is denied access and left out of this rigid definition? This course is designed to critically analyze and understand the modern “nuclear family” through a feminist lens. It is broken up into two sections. In the first section we will explore the origins of the nuclear family, the overarching ideologies and structure’s it perpetuates, gender roles and sexual intimacy within the family. In the second section we will examine alternate versions of the family structure, the ways it has changed overtime and the arguments opposing this redefinition of family. Each section is broken up into subsections that focus on key words and ideas that contribute to the overarching theme of the section. Using a feminist perspective will allow us to attain a thorough understanding of fundamental feminist ideas and foundations and then apply them to the “case study” of family. Reaching beyond sentimentality and tradition, our goal is to unpack the meaning of “family;” to understand its structure and to challenge its limitations.

Required Texts

1. Kolmar and Bartkowski, *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, third edition (McGraw-Hill 2009)
2. All additional readings will be accessible via WISE e-reserve or handouts

Required Assignments

- 3 short papers (3-4 pp each, 3 theoretical analysis and 1 personal analysis of family structure)
- Weekly WISE postings (“journal entries” addressing any lingering questions you have from that week’s topic/reading), you will be split up into groups that will lead the class discussion on the days you are assigned thought the semester, a final course project, various writing projects and in class assignments.
- Final Project: For this project you will compose a final paper (5-6 pages in length) that explores how this course has helped you to reimagine the nuclear family. You will choose one non-traditional family model we have discussed and articulate how this family challenges traditional ideas of kinship, gender roles and familial ideals. You will present your ideas in a brief 5min presentation to the class (visual aids and other creative ways of presenting information are encouraged!)

Course Objectives

Students will:

1. Demonstrate engagement with the theoretical ideas and materials through WISE journal postings and paper assignments.
2. Demonstrate thoughtful and vigilant reading ability through class discussion.
3. Demonstrate a commitment to improving as a writer through peer reviews, writer's workshops and development of their writing over the 15 weeks of the course.
4. Complete the course with a thorough and nuanced understanding of their own personal family structure and the nuclear family structure more broadly.

Disability Statement

Willamette University is sensitive to the needs of students with disabilities. The Disability and Learning Services Office strives to facilitate reasonable accommodations for those students with a qualifying disability or temporary medical condition and to provide academic assistance on an individual basis to any undergraduate or graduate student who requests it. Any student who requires these accommodations should contact the Disability and Learning Services Office directly at 503-370-6471.

Course Policies

Academic Integrity

Students of Willamette University are members of a community that values excellence and integrity in every aspect of life. As such, we expect all community members to live up to the highest standards of personal, ethical, and moral conduct. Students are expected not to engage in any type of academic or intellectually dishonest practice and encouraged to display honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility in all they do. Plagiarism and cheating are especially offensive to the integrity of the courses in which they occur and against the College community as a whole. These acts involve intellectual dishonesty, deception, and fraud, which inhibit the honest exchange of ideas. Plagiarism and cheating may, therefore, be grounds for failure in the course and/or dismissal from the College.

Class Preparedness

Class preparedness is essential to your success in this course. Being a discussion based class, a large portion of your grade will depend on your thoughtful engagement during class that reflects your comprehension of, qualms with or questions about the reading material. The texts for this course have been carefully chosen for each specific day of class to move us through difficult theoretical ideas and complex social issues therefore doing the reading assignments on the day they are assigned is vital to your ability to participate in and learn from this course.

Attendance

If you are not in class you will miss the opportunity to demonstrate your engagement with and understanding of the material and deny your classmates the opportunity to learn from you. As a small discussion based course, the attendance of every student, every time is crucial. If circumstances beyond your control (i.e. sickness, emergency etc.) prevent you from attending class, please inform me ahead of time via email or phone call. Three unexcused absences will decrease your marks by one full letter grade.

Tardiness

Be on time. More than three tardies will result in a 5% deduction of your participation grade.

Classroom Etiquette

Be respectful of your classmate's ideas and opinions. Turn off all cell phones and other distracting electronic devices. Laptop computers not permitted unless there is a legitimate need for its use. Please do not sleep in class. We are all busy people with a lot going on, if you are feeling drowsy get up and stretch your legs or get a drink of water.

Writing Center

Please use Willamette's Writing Center. It is a valuable resource that offers writing guidance, peer tutoring, paper feedback, and assignment advice and preparation. Find more info at: <http://www.willamette.edu/dept/wcenter/>

WISE postings

Every Thursday you are required to post to WISE two lingering questions and/or reflections you have from that week's discussion/reading. The responses should be from 200-300 words in length and demonstrate a deep engagement with the course material.

Grading Policies

Assignment Punctuality

All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day that they are due. If you are late, your paper is late. For everyday your assignment is late 5% will be deducted from your grade.

Paper Requirements

All papers must meet the following requirements in order to be graded:

1. Times New Roman font, size 12
2. MLA format
3. Double-spaced

Grading System

Participation, including weekly WISE postings, other writing, and quizzes: 30%

3 Papers: 50% (3pp each)

Final Project: 20%

Paper Criteria

An "A" paper offers a persuasive, eloquent, stylistically sophisticated argument. It presents a compelling thesis, which is then developed into a well-structured, coherent essay. An "A" paper uses evidence effectively. Such a paper thoughtfully considers and analyzes other viewpoints, including the views of the paper's intended audience. An "A" paper's style is distinctive, and this style helps further the writer's argument.

A "B" paper also offers a convincing argument. It has an interesting thesis and is, on the whole, well-structured. Like an A paper, it too considers alternative positions and does so in a thoughtful manner. A "B" paper's style is clear and relatively free of errors that could hinder its readability and/or persuasiveness. A "B" paper grasps the significance of style in making an effective argument.

A "C" paper makes an argument but does not do so effectively. It may fail to present evidence in support of its thesis or it may present evidence in a haphazard and hence unconvincing manner. In addition, a paper will receive a "C" if it is stylistically unsophisticated, replete with digressions, lacks a sense of audience, or ignores opposing opinions.

A "D" paper fails to present an argument. The paper lacks a thesis and is merely a string of ideas, some of which may be very interesting but none of which are developed into a clear, rational, coherent essay. Additionally, a plethora of typos, stylistic problems, or grammatical flaws may turn any paper into a "D" paper if such lapses significantly affect the essay's readability.

An "F" paper results when the writer neglects to hand in the assignment; refuses to address the paper topic; or violates common standards of decency. Additionally, plagiarism also will result in a paper grade of "F."

Numerical Grading Criteria

A 4.0 Performance at this level is exceptional. The student consistently demonstrates excellent command over the content and methods of the course as well as originality, depth, and distinctive insights.

A- 3.7 Performance at this level is of very high quality. The student demonstrates well above average command over the content and methods of the course as well as significant originality, depth, and distinctive insights.

B+ 3.3 Performance at this level is very good. The student demonstrates a strong command over the content and methods of the course, reflects clear comprehension, and achieves all the stated objectives.

B 3.0 Performance at this level is good. The student demonstrates an adept command over the content and methods of the course, reflects comprehension, and achieves the stated objectives.

B- 2.7 Performance at this level is above average. The student demonstrates general command over the content and methods of the course and reflects and achieves the stated objectives.

C+ 2.3 Performance at this level is slightly above average. The student demonstrates fair competence over the content and methods of the course and achieves nearly all the stated objectives.

C 2.0 Performance at this level is average. The student demonstrates average competence over the content and methods of the course and achieves most of the stated objectives.

C- 1.7 Performance at this level is below average. The student demonstrates less than average competence in the content and methods of the course. Clear comprehension and mastery of course objectives is not apparent.

D+ 1.3 Performance at this level is less than satisfactory. The student demonstrates inadequate knowledge of the content and methods of the course and minimal engagement with course objectives.

D 1.0 Performance at this level is marginal. The student demonstrates insufficient knowledge of the content and methods of the course and fails to meet the course objectives.

F 0.0 Performance at this level is unacceptable. The student fails to demonstrate any knowledge of the methods and content of the course or to engage in any way with course objectives.

Course Schedule

Section 1

The Nuclear Family

Formation and perpetuation of the nuclear family model

Week 1

The Formation of the Nuclear Family

- Tu Jan 18** **Course Introduction:** How we define “family” and why it matters.
(*Meet and greet, introductions, syllabus review, etc.*)
- Th Jan 20** Kathleen Gough, “The Origin of the Family,” 760-771 (e-resources)
Friedrich Engels, “From The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State,” 90-92 (FT)

Weeks 2 & 3

Fatherhood

- Tu Jan 25** Allan Johnson, “Patriarchy, the System: An It, Not a He, Them, or an Us,” 75-97 (e-reserve)
- Th Jan 27** Gerda Lerner, “The Creation of Patriarchy,” 212-229 (e-reserve)
Michael Kimmel, “Consuming Manhood,” 12-41 (e-reserve)
- Tu Feb 1** Susan Bordo, “Reading the Male Body,” 265-306 (e-reserve)
- Th Feb 3** William Marsiglio, “Fathers’ Diverse Life Course Patterns and Roles: Theory and Social Interventions,”
from *Fatherhood* 78-101 (e-resources)
Thomas W. Laqueur, “The Facts about Fatherhood,” from *Rethinking family: Some Feminist Questions*
(e-resources)

Weeks 4 & 5

Motherhood

- Tu Feb 8** Azizah al-Hibri, “Reproduction, mothering, and the origins of patriarchy,” in *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory* (e-resources)
Lucia Valeska, “If all else fails, I’m still a mother,” in *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory* (e-resources)
- Th Feb 10** Kolmar and Bartkowski, “Sexual Division of Labor,” 49-51 (FT)
Sara Ruddick, “Maternal Thinking,” 342-367 (e-reserve)
John Stuart Mill, “From The Subjection of Women,” 76-81 (FT)
- Tu Feb 15** Joan Tronto, “The ‘Nanny Question’ in Feminism,” 34-51 (e-reserve)
Lisa Belkin’s “When Mom and Dad Share It All” (e-resources)
- Th Feb 17** Stacey Wilson, “Mommies Know Best” (e-resources)
Nancy Chodorow, “The Sexual Sociology of Adult Life” from *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*,” 64-75 (FT)

Week 6 & 7
Sex & Procreation

- Tu Feb 22** Anne Koedt, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," 186-190 (FT)
Ariella Friedman, Hana Weinberg, Ayala M. Pines, "Sexuality and Motherhood: Mutually Exclusive in Perception of Women," 781-800 (e-resources)
- Th Feb 24** Shannon Trice-Black "Perceptions of Women's Sexuality within the Context of Motherhood," 154-162 (e-resources)
Peter B Gray; Kermyt G Anderson, "The descent of dad's sexuality" from *Fatherhood: evolution and human paternal behavior* (e-resources)
- Tu Mar 1** Jeffery Weeks, "The sacramental family: middle-class men, women, and children," from *Sex, Politics and Society: the regulation of sexuality since 1800* (e-resources)
- Th Mar 3** Kerry H Robinson, "'Queering' Gender: Heteronormativity in Early Childhood Education," 19-28 (e-resources)
In addition to the reading for this day please bring in one children's book that addresses/reinforces the ideas of family and kinship. Mentally prepare a brief summary and analysis of what messages this book is promoting and the implications of those messages.

Section 2
Redefining Family:
Opposition to the "traditional" nuclear model

Weeks 8 & 9
Same Sex Families

- Tu Mar 8** Valerie Lehr, "Are We Family?" from *Queer Family Values: Debunking the Myth of the Nuclear Family* 43-76 (e-resources)
- Th Mar 10** Naomi Miller, "Homosexuality and Parenthood," 147-157 (e-resources)
Matthew C. Altman, "Kant on sex and marriage: the implications for the same-sex marriage debate," 309-330 (e-resources)
- Tu Mar 15** Valerie Lehr, "Social Problems and Family Ideology" from *Queer Family Values: Debunking the Myth of the Nuclear Family* 106-138 (e-resources)
- Th Mar 17** Lisa Belkin, "The Way We Live Now," NYT Article (link on e-resources)
Abbie E Goldberg, "Lesbians and gay men as parents," from *Lesbian and Gay Parents and Their Children: research on the family life cycle* (e-resources)

Weeks 10, 11 & 12
Surrogacy & Adoption

- Tu Mar 22** **Spring Break**
Th Mar 24 **Spring Break**
- Tu Mar 29** “Do we have an absolute right to have a child?” From *Private Choices Public Consequences* (e-resources)
- Th Mar 31** Angela Davis, “Outcast Mothers and Surrogates,” 447-453 (*FT*)
BK Rothman, “Reproductive Technologies and surrogacy: a feminist perspective,” 1599-607
Alex Kuczynski, “Her Body, My Baby,” New York Times article (e-resources)
- Tu Apr 5** Susan Sherwin, “Feminist ethics and new reproductive technologies,” from *The Future of Human Reproduction* (e-resources)
G Warnke, “Surrogate Mothering and the Meaning of Family,” 466-473 (e-resources)
- Th Apr 7** Jean Bethke Elshtain, “The Chosen Family – Adoption or the Triumph of Love over Biology” (e-resources)

Week 13 & 14
Single Parenting

- Tu Apr 12** Karen L. Kinnear, “Contemporary Concerns Regarding Single Parents,” from *Single Parents* 35-55 (e-resources)
Naomi Miller, “Why Single Mothers by Choice” from *Single Parents by Choice*, 11-19 (e-resources)
- Th Apr 14** Gwendolyn Mink, “The lady and the tramp (II) : feminist welfare politics, poor single mothers, and the challenge of welfare justice,” from *Feminist Frontiers* (e-resources)
- Tu Apr 19** Naomi Miller, “Single Parents by Adoption” from *Single Parents by Choice*, 53-70 (e-resources)
- Th Apr 21** June Lapidus, “All the Lesbian Mothers are Coupled, all the Single Mothers are Straight, and all of us are Tired: Reflections on being a Single Lesbian Mom.” 227-236 (e-resources)

Week 15
Activism and New Ideas

- Tu Apr 26** Nancy F Cott, Jill Lepore, “Reimagining the Family,” “ (e-resources)
The majority of this class will be spent in small groups discussing presentation ideas and getting feedback
- Th Apr 28** Presentations
- Tu May 3** Presentations

Final paper due to my office Wednesday, May 11 by 5:00pm