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**SOCIOLOGY 212**  
**Spring 2006**  
**PNE 139**  
**6:30-9:00pm Thursdays**

### **Comparative Sociology and Demography of the Family**

“Family is to society as water is to life.”

—Anonymous

You’ve seen it before—a well-chosen quote that is intended to strike you as witty or deep (ideally both) and hints at the possibility that you are about to take the most important and interesting course on the most important and interesting topic that you will every study while an undergrad. Talk about setting the bar high! Is this just another case of a leading quotation on a course syllabus that goes too far? Another case of a professor overstating his case? Delusions of grandeur? Perhaps. But think for a moment about the central place of the family in virtually any society. The family plays a critical role in the reproduction of our species and also has center stage in the reproduction of human society—a child’s first lessons in what it means to be American, Chinese, Russian, Indian, Brazilian, or Nigerian are more often than not taught by family members. If you think about it long enough, you will find it difficult to escape the conclusion that family life, as well as personal expectations and cultural norms about family life, have profound implications for the choices we make and the constraints that we face as human beings. For further evidence of the centrality of the family in our lives, consider the emotional, heartfelt, and often heated public discourse that erupts whenever family-related issues—e.g., gender roles, abortion, cloning, gay marriage, single mother families, welfare mothers, teenage pregnancy, transracial adoption, interracial marriage, etc.—are on the table. We will not touch upon all these issues but we will certainly discuss some of them.

This course is not your conventional “Introduction to Demography” methods course. Its emphasis will be on theories that try to come to terms with the underlying mechanisms governing events of interest to family demographers and family sociologists—events like choosing a spouse, getting married, having children, and getting divorced. We will wrestle with social science’s understanding of the structural forces and human motivations that underlie marriage trends, fertility trends, and divorce trends. We begin with a fundamental question—what is the family?—and from there move on to examine family trends and a long-running debate about family decline in the U.S. We then delve more deeply into marriage and childbearing decisions and explore what men and women think about marriage and family life, what they are looking for in a spouse and in a marriage, what they experience once married, and why they have children. Then, in last part of the course, we turn our attention to the lives of children and how the meaning of childhood differs over time and across cultures.

Finally, a disclaimer about the title of the course. The majority of our readings will be American-focused so the comparative adjective may be a bit misleading if you take it to mean comparisons with other non-American societies. We will definitely draw upon cross-cultural comparisons but they will be strategically interspersed throughout the course and not a weekly theme. More often, we will be making comparisons across gender and, to a lesser degree, across different ethnic and racial groups within the US. As for the demography part of the title, demography is the study of population structure and change. This course is dedicated to understanding basic population-related events and features like marriage, childbearing/fertility, fertility control, and living arrangements. Demographers study human societies by collecting, processing, and analyzing demographic data. The mathematics involved in working with such data is beyond the scope of this course. Instead we will focus on the subject matter of demography and less on the methods of traditional demography.

The success of this course hinges on the productive exchange of ideas through discussions. While I will give short lectures, your active participation is essential. I am convinced that the more you each bring to class, the better it will go and the more that you will take from it. In a liberal arts course, there are often not “right” or “wrong” answers. Therefore, just contributing something to the discussion can be very constructive in productively moving it along. With this in mind, I have borrowed Professor Rutherford’s ideas about “discussion prompts” and made them a required feature of the course (see below for a description of discussion prompts).

**Requirements:**

- 45% Two short (5-8 pp.) papers. You will be able to choose from among three or four paper topics. The first paper is worth 20% and the second is worth 25%.
- 30% Take-home final exam
- 25% Class participation and 5 discussion prompts (see below)

**Required Texts:**

Title	Author	Amazon New	Amazon Used (as of 27 Dec 2005)
<i>Urban Tribes: Are Friends the New Family?</i>	Ethan Watters (2004)	\$10.17	\$4.08 (64 for sale)
<i>Modern Babylon?: Prostituting Children in Thailand</i>	Heather Montgomery (2001)	\$22.50	\$20.25 (7 for sale)
<i>The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment</i>	Barbara Ehrenreich (1987)	\$10.36	\$0.99 (101 for sale)
<i>Hard Choices: How Women Decide About Work, Career, and Motherhood</i>	Kathleen Gerson (1986)	\$24.95	\$2.99 (56 for sale)
<i>Romance on a Global Stage: Pen Pals, Virtual Ethnography, and "Mail-Order" Marriages *</i>	Nicole Constable (2003)	\$21.95	\$8.39 (28 for sale)
<i>Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding *</i>	Cele Otnes, Elizabeth Peck (2003)	\$19.95	\$9.30 (22 for sale)

\* Electronic book available through the Wellesley College Library

**Course Schedule:***Meaning of symbols:*

FC First Class folder

ER E-Reserves

JS JSTOR (or other on-line archive available via the Wellesley College Library)

<b>Feb-2</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
<b>Feb-9</b>	<p><b>The family decline controversy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coontz, Stephanie 1992. "Introduction" and Chapter 1 in <i>The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap</i>. pp. 8-22. (ER)</li> <li>• Popenoe, David. 1993. "American Family Decline, 1960-1990: A Review and Appraisal." <i>Journal of Marriage and Family</i> 55, Aug: 527-542. (JS)</li> <li>• Whitehead, Barbara Dafoe. 1993. "Dan Quayle was Right." <i>The Atlantic</i> April 1993, v.271, n.4, pages 47-68. (FC)</li> <li>• Murray, Charles. 2001. "Prole Models: America's elites take their cues from the underclass" (FC)</li> <li>• Cowan, Philip. 1993. "The Sky Is Falling, But Popenoe's Analysis Won't Help Us Do Anything About It." <i>Journal of Marriage and the Family</i> 55, Aug: 548-552. (JS)</li> <li>• Cherlin, "Going to Extremes: Family Structure, Children's Well-Being, and Social Science," <i>Demography</i>, November 1999, 36(4), 421-428. (JS)</li> </ul>
<b>Feb-16</b>	<p><b>Are friends the new family?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Urban Tribes: Are Friends the New Family?</i> by Ethan Watters</li> <li>• Collier, Rosaldo, and Yanagisako, "Is there a family?" in <i>The Gender Sexuality Reader</i> edited by Roger Lancaster and Micaela di Leonardo (1997): 71-81. (ER) ✓</li> </ul>

<b>Feb-23</b>	<b>Marriage and non-marriage: the female perspective</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Demography and the single girl” by Meghan Daum. <i>Los Angeles Times</i>, 23 August 2005 (FC)</li> <li>• Stone, Tony. 2001. “The Bridget Jones Economy.” <i>The Economist</i> December 20th, 2001 (FC)</li> <li>• Susan Berfield, “Thirty &amp; Broke: The real price of a college education today” BusinessWeek Online (FC)</li> <li>• “Japan's New Material Girls” and “No sex please—we're Japanese” (FC)</li> <li>• Edin, Kathryn 2000. “Few Good Men,” <i>American Prospect</i>, January (v11, no4) (FC)</li> <li>• Susan J. Ferguson. 2000. “Challenging Traditional Marriage: Never Married Chinese American and Japanese American Women.” <i>Gender and Society</i> 14(1): 136-159. (JS)</li> <li>• Goldman, Noreen. 1993. “The Perils of Single Life in Contemporary Japan” <i>Journal of Marriage and the Family</i> 55(1): 191-204 (JS)</li> <li>• Oppenheimer, Valerie. 1988. “A Theory of Marriage Timing,” <i>American Journal of Sociology</i>. (JS)</li> </ul>
<b>Mar-2</b>	<b>Marriage and non-marriage: the male perspective</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ehrenreich, <i>The Hearts of Men</i></li> <li>• Akerlof, George. 1998. “Men without children.” <i>Economic Journal</i> 108: pp. 287-309 (JS)</li> </ul>
<b>Mar-9</b>	<b>The allure of marriage</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Film: To be announced.</li> <li>• Rao, Vijayendra. 2001. “Poverty and public celebrations in rural India.” <i>Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science</i> 563(1): 85-103. (JS)</li> <li>• Chapters 1-5 of <i>Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding</i></li> </ul>
<b>Mar-16</b>	<b>The allure of marriage (continued)</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chapters 6-10 of <i>Cinderella Dreams</i></li> </ul>
<b>Mar 20 – Mar 24: MIDTERM BREAK</b>	
<b>Mar-30</b>	<b>Courtship, Marriage, and Power</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Romance on a Global Stage: Pen Pals, Virtual Ethnography, and "Mail-Order" Marriages</i></li> <li>• Letitia Anne Peplau, Susan Miller Campbell, “The Balance of Power in Dating” pp. 142-152 (ER) ✓</li> </ul>
<b>Apr-6</b>	<b>The realities of marriage for women</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gerson, <i>Hard Choices</i> (excerpts)</li> <li>• Story, Louise. 2005. “Many Women at Elite Colleges Set Career Path to Motherhood” <i>New York Times</i>, September 20, 2005.</li> <li>• Flanagan, Caitlin. 2004. “How serfdom saved the women’s movement” <i>The Atlantic</i> (March): 109-128. (FC)</li> <li>• Warner, Judith. 2005. “Mommy Madness” <i>Newsweek</i> February 21, 2005. pp. 42-49. (ER) ✓</li> <li>• Quindlen, Anna. 2005. “The good enough mother” <i>Newsweek</i> February 21, 2005. pp. 50-51. (ER) ✓</li> </ul>

<b>Apr-13</b>	<b>Families and poverty</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daniel Moynihan, <i>The Negro Family: The Case for National Action</i> (ER) ✓</li> <li>• Oscar Lewis, “The Culture of Poverty,” <i>On Understanding Poverty</i>, pp. 187-200. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1969. (ER)</li> <li>• Wilson, William Julius. 1987. <i>The Truly Disadvantaged</i>. Chapter 3 “Poverty and Family Structure: The Widening Gap Between Evidence and Public Policy Issues.” (ER)</li> <li>• Frazier, E. Franklin. 1937. “The impact of urban civilization upon Negro family life.” <i>American Sociological Review</i> 2(5): 609-618 (JS)</li> <li>• Murray, Charles 1993. “The Coming White Underclass” <i>Wall Street Journal</i>, 29 October 1993 (JS)</li> </ul>
<b>Apr-20</b>	<b>The meaning of childhood in cross-cultural perspective</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Modern Babylon?: Prostituting Children in Thailand</i></li> </ul>
<b>Apr-27</b>	<b>Childbearing decisions and the value of children</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caldwell, Jack. 1976. “Toward a restatement of demographic transition theory” <i>Population and Development Review</i> 2(3/4): 321-366. (JS)</li> <li>• Scrimshaw, Susan C. 1978. “Infant mortality and behavior in the regulation of family size” <i>Population and Development Review</i> 4(3): 383-403. (JS)</li> <li>• Viviana A. Zelizer 1981. “The Price and Value of Children: The Case of Children's Insurance” <i>The American Journal of Sociology</i>, Vol. 86, No. 5. (Mar., 1981), pp. 1036-1056. (JS)</li> <li>• Luker, Kristin. 1991. “Dubious Conceptions: The Controversy Over Teen Pregnancy” <i>The American Prospect</i>. March v2, no5. (FC)</li> <li>• Jencks, Christopher. 1995. “Do Poor Women Have a Right to Bear Children?” <i>The American Prospect</i> v6, n20. (FC)</li> </ul>
<b>May-4</b>	<b>Son preference and other topics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Son preference: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “The Demand for Sons: Evidence from Divorce, Fertility, and Shotgun Marriage” by Gordon B. Dahl, and Enrico Moretti, NBER Working Paper No. 10281. (FC) <a href="http://www.nber.org/papers/w10281">http://www.nber.org/papers/w10281</a></li> <li>○ Steven Landsburg. 2003. “Oh, No: It’s a Girl” and “Maybe Parents Don’t Like Boys Better.” <i>Slate</i>. (FC)</li> <li>○ Leonhardt, David. “It’s a Girl! (Will the Economy Suffer?)” <i>New York Times</i> 26 Oct 1993 (FC)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Additional topics and readings will be announced later.</li> </ul>

### **Discussion prompts (my thanks to Prof. Kelly Rutherford for suggesting these prompts):**

Each of you will share responsibility for encouraging and facilitating class discussion. To do so, you will need to e-mail me one of the following by 8:00 am the day of class:

- 1) A brief written reaction (2-3 paragraphs) to one or more readings, either in support of or against an argument or assumption made by the authors. Briefly summarize the reading—or readings—that you are engaging but do not stop there. These reactions need to demonstrate a critical engagement with the reading(s). Written reactions may be no longer than 1 single-spaced page and must include 2-3 discussion questions that are suitable for contributing to class discussions.
  - Tips for writing good discussion questions: Good discussion questions rarely ask for only a summary of an article's main point(s), but rather ask questions that engage readers in dialogue with one another or with the author. The goals of discussion questions should be to stimulate discussion (i.e., get people talking) and to engage critically readings by analyzing the way arguments are constructed, questioning the assumptions behind what is said, subjecting arguments to questions of evidence, and/or synthesizing information and viewpoints from various readings.
- 2) A current item from the news media that relates to a family-related topic, along with a brief written memo tying the item to previous course readings or discussions. You may offer items that illustrate concepts or patterns that have been discussed, that serve as refuting evidence for some argument that has been offered in a reading or in class, or that raise interesting questions to add to an earlier discussion. Your memo may be no longer than 1 single-spaced page.

Although there may not always be time to discuss all of these in class, I will expect that you will sometimes lead in discussion based on your memos. No late submissions will be accepted as I will need time to read, evaluate, and organize them before class.