

Sociology 36
Sociology of the Family

Spring 2026
Dartmouth College

Class: MWF 10:10-11:15am, Silsby 126
Office Hours: Thursdays 11-12 pm, Blunt Hall, office 306B
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Description of the course

The family is an important social institution, a complex set of *roles* and *rules* that are organized to preserve and promote important functions in our society. The roles give rise to positions such as parent, child, spouse, stepfather, and so on. The rules offer us guidance about how to act in these roles, and are regulated by social norms, public opinion, law, and religion. The important functions include public ones, like raising children and caring for the elderly, and private functions, such as providing love, intimacy, and companionship to family members. In this course, we will learn about the family as both a social institution and as a set of private relationships. One theme underlying our learning is that the form, function, and definition of the family vary across historical and cultural contexts. Another key theme is that social class, race, and gender intersect with family well-being. We explore contemporary debates and issues affecting the family, with an emphasis on utilizing research evidence to inform public policy.

Course objectives

Students who successfully complete Socy 36 will be able to:

- Think like sociologists!
- Consider controversial social issues respectfully from multiple viewpoints, synthesize complex information, and articulate thoughtful and effective arguments.
- Contribute to the intellectual conversation by applying sociological research and theory to an oral history analysis and current debates in family policy.

Required reading

All required readings are posted in electronic format on the course Canvas site and printed. I expect you to read all course material before class on the day that we are discussing it. Discussion is an integral part of this course, and everyone is expected to contribute.

Assignments

1. Large and small-group discussion participation (20 points)

Participation in class makes up a small, but not insignificant, part of your grade. You can demonstrate active participation by contributing to class discussions in a critical, insightful manner. I will keep track of your participation and give you two grades, once at midterm and once at the end of the term.

2. Reading quizzes (10 points each)

Every day in which we have reading for class (which is every day!), we *may* have a reading quiz. You will have ten minutes to respond to two straightforward, but critical questions about the reading. These quizzes are closed book, and your responses will be hand-written. All you need to do to prepare is carefully read the piece(s) for the day. There are no opportunities to make up in-class quizzes. I will drop your 2 lowest grades or, if you are absent, I will drop that day's quiz.

3. Midterm Exam (100 points)

This will be an in-class, closed-book exam. It will consist of a series of short answer questions. All your responses will be hand-written.

4. Oral history project (100 points)

Oral history is the systematic collection of living people's testimony about their own experiences. Each of you will document at least two oral histories with people in your family (e.g., your parents, grandparents, siblings, or others you consider your close kin). You should focus your interviews on topics from the course, such as perceptions of childhood, intimate relationships, experiences with raising children, achieving work-family balance, and/or expectations for your own future. The project will consist of a series of steps:

- First, you will prepare interview protocols that include questions for each of your participants. (10 pts)
- Second, you will conduct interviews with each of your participants (separately). Each interview should be transcribed and coded. (10 pts x 2 = 20 pts)
- Third, you will analyze your interviews in the form of a 5-page, double-spaced analytic memo. Your analytic memo should have an overall argument, which is supported with multiple claims and evidence. This is an opportunity for you to begin to analyze the evidence and develop the narrative arc of your presentation. Your memo will be graded on both content and form. (30 pts)
- Fourth, you will share your contextualized analyses of your oral history projects in a 7-min presentation during the last weeks of class. You may create a slide presentation (e.g., PPT) or a short film (e.g., iMovie). Your presentation will be graded on preparation, critical thinking, clarity and rigor of argument, and time management. (40 pts)

Grading

I follow the grading conventions as defined by the Organization, Regulations, and Courses (ORC) at Dartmouth. http://www.dartmouth.edu/~reg/transcript/grade_descriptions.html

- A Excellent** mastery of course material (student performance indicates a very high degree of originality, creativity, and excellent performance in analysis, synthesis, critical expression, and independence)
- B Good** mastery of course material (student performance indicates a high degree of originality, creativity, and good performance in analysis, synthesis, critical expression, and independence)
- C Acceptable** mastery of course material (student performance indicates some degree of originality, creativity, and acceptable performance in analysis, synthesis, critical expression, and independence)
- D Deficient** in mastery of course material (student performance indicates some degree of originality, creativity, and deficient performance in analysis, synthesis, critical expression, and independence)
- E Serious deficiency** in mastery of course material (student performance clearly lacking originality, creativity, and seriously deficient performance in analysis, synthesis, critical expression, and independence)

I will determine your final letter grade according to the following percentage breakdown:

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Percent</u>
A	95-100%	C+	77-79.9%
A-	92-94.9%	C	73-76.9%
B+	89-91.9%	C-	70-72.9%
B	83-88.9%	D	60-69.9%
B-	80-82.9%	E	< 60%

Important Notes

Attendance

It is my expectation that you will attend each class meeting—and that you will arrive to each class on time and stay for the duration. I will circulate an attendance sign-in sheet at the beginning of each class meeting; it is your responsibility to make sure you sign it each day. There are no opportunities to make up missed in-class work. If you miss a class for any reason, please plan to get notes from another student. If you anticipate missing class meetings because of athletic team participation, religious observances, or some other reason, please email me at the start of the term to communicate the expected conflicts.

Late policy

Please speak with me at the beginning of the term if you anticipate circumstances that might affect your ability to get your work in on time. Reading quizzes are designed to help you prepare for in-class discussion; therefore, they will not be accepted late. For the component parts of your oral history project, the maximum grade you may earn will be reduced by one letter grade for each day late. In other words, if you turn your assignment in 1-24 hours after the deadline, the maximum grade you can receive is a B; if you turn your assignment in 25-48 hours after the deadline, the maximum grade you can receive is a C; if you turn your assignment in 49-72 hours after the deadline, the maximum grade you can receive is a D. I will not accept your assignment after 72 hours. If you believe you are eligible

for an extension, it is your responsibility to notify me before missing the deadline to explain why your circumstances warrant an exception.

Communication

My office hours are for you. You are welcome to come in and talk with me about anything during my posted hours. I am also available by appointment if my office hours do not coincide with your schedule. I regularly check e-mail during the day (9am-4pm) and will make every effort to reply to messages as soon as possible. I expect students to regularly check their Dartmouth e-mail and Canvas for announcements and updates. Please turn on Canvas notifications, so you can ensure receipt of comments on your work.

Classroom responsibility and courtesy

All students are expected to have a voice in our class dialogue. Class participation involves thinking carefully, listening, and posing questions to others as much as it involves sharing your ideas. This requires us to be present, set aside distractions, and focus our attention on engaging with one another. Please put your cell phones on vibrate, do not text, and do not use your laptop during class. The tone with which we engage one another is also extremely important and should come from a place of mutual respect and understanding. You are free to disagree with the views raised in the material or by others in the class but must do so with a reasoned critique based on a complete consideration of their argument and evidence.

Academic honor principle

The faculty, administration, and students of Dartmouth College acknowledge the responsibility to maintain and perpetuate the principle of academic honor, and recognize that any instance of academic dishonesty is considered a violation of the [Academic Honor Principle](#).

Use of GenAI – *just don't*

Please do not directly copy from GenAI into your own scholarship. First, this is plagiarism. Second, and most importantly, writing for class is designed to develop your skills of careful observation, creative and experimental thinking, nuanced analysis, and authentic self-expression. If you outsource thinking to AI, you diminish your own learning experience.

Additional Support for Learning

The Writing Center: At the Writing Center, you can meet one-on-one with an undergraduate tutor to discuss a paper, research project, or multimedia assignment. <https://students.dartmouth.edu/writing-center/>

Academic Skills Center (ASC): The mission of the ASC is to assist students in achieving academic success through a wide variety of services and programs. The ASC is available to all students who wish to improve their academic skills and ability to learn, thereby maximizing their academic experience and allowing them to achieve greater academic performance and personal fulfillment. <https://students.dartmouth.edu/academic-skills/>

Religious observances

Dartmouth has a deep commitment to support students' religious observances and diverse faith practices. Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this

academic term. If you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please meet with me as soon as possible to discuss appropriate course adjustments.

Accommodations

Students requesting disability-related accommodations and services for this course are encouraged to schedule a meeting with me as early in the term as possible. This conversation will help to establish what supports are built into my course. In order for accommodations to be authorized, students are required to consult with [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) and to request an accommodation email be sent to me. We will work together with SAS if accommodations need to be modified based on the learning environment. If students have questions about whether they are eligible for accommodations, they should contact the SAS office. All inquiries and discussions will remain confidential. (student.accessibility.services@dartmouth.edu; 603-646-9900)

Mental health and wellness

The academic environment at Dartmouth is challenging, our terms are intensive, and classes are not the only demanding part of your life. There are a number of resources available to support your wellness:

- [Undergraduate deans](#)
- [Counseling Center](#)
- [Student Wellness Center](#)
- [Dartmouth Mental Health Union](#) and their [Peer Support Program](#)
- [Sexual Assault Peer Alliance](#) (SAPA)

Course Plan

Week One (Mar 30 – Apr 3) Why does the family matter?

Monday **Introduction to the course**

Wednesday **Moral panics and the family**

- Rather than reading, please listen to the first hour of the Ezra Klein podcast from August 2024. There is a good break point at 1:02:20.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/16/opinion/ezra-klein-podcast-election.html>

Friday **The way the family never was**

- Coontz (1992), *The Way We Never Were*

Week Two (Apr 6-10) Family formation and dissolution

Monday **Dating?**

- Wade (2017), *American Hookup: The New Culture of Sex on Campus*

Wednesday **Marriage**

- de Botton (2016), “Why You Will Marry the Wrong Person”
- Miller (2023), “A Tradition Going Strong”
- Sussman (2023), “Why Aren’t More People Marrying?”

- Friday** **Alternative family structures**
- Kearney (2023), “The Explosive Rise of Single-Parent Families”
 - Cross (2026), “Reexamining Family Structure’s Contribution”

Week Three (Apr 13-17) The importance of social position

- Monday** **Family inequality**
- Cooper and Pugh (2020), “Families Across the Income Spectrum”

- Wednesday** **Family insecurity**
- Halpern-Meehin et al. (2015), *It’s Not Like I’m Poor* (Ch.1)
 - McCarron (2025), “SNAP’s Food Budget”

- Friday** **Workshop: What is oral history?**

Week Four (Apr 20-24) Parenting in precarity

- Monday** **Reproductive freedom**
- Romero and Agénor (2017), “The Welfare Family Cap”
 - Taub (2025), “The Feminist Case to Boost the Birth Rate”
 - Rich (2024), “Can the Government Get People to Have More Babies?”

- Wednesday** **Solutions ... ?**
- Grose (2026), “Send American Women Back Half a Century”
 - Calarco (2024), *How Women became America’s Safety Net* (Intro & Ch.1)

- Thursday** **Interview protocol(s) due**

- Friday** **Mothering under surveillance**
- Fong (2023), “What Happens When the State Takes Your Child”
 - Lerma (2025), “Chicanas’ Decarceral Motherwork”

Week Five (Apr 27 – May 1) Family diversity

- Monday** **Race and families**
- Johnson (2024), “Navigating Hypervisibility and Invisibility”
 - Johnson and Ebert (2024), “A Future for White Families”

- Wednesday** **Transnational fathering**
- Parreñas (2008), “Transnational Fathering”
 - Lee (2019), “Middle-Class Korean Wild Geese Fathers”

- Friday** **Midterm Exam**

Week Six (May 4-8) Growing up

Monday Childhood and adolescence

- Mintz and Stearns (2025), *The American Child*
- Richtel (2025), “A Century Ago, Adolescents Weren’t Fully Human”

Wednesday Social class in childhood

- Lareau (2002), “Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing”
- Miller (2018), “The Relentlessness of Modern Parenting”

Thursday Coded interview transcripts due

Friday Social class in young adulthood

- Hamilton, Roksa and Nielsen (2018), “Providing a ‘Leg Up’”

Week Seven (May 11-15) The realities of work and family

Monday Women, work, and family

- Stone (2007), *Opting Out?* (Ch. 5)
- Stone and Lovejoy (2019), *Opting Back In* (Ch. 7)

Wednesday Gender equality and work

- Thébaud and Halcomb (2018), “One Step Forward?”
- Andrews (2025), “The Great Feminization”
- French (2025), “How Women Destroyed the West”

Thursday Analytic memo due

Friday NO CLASS, PROF TRAVEL

Week Eight (May 18-22) Make a change

Monday Changing your own and others’ behavior

- Sandberg (2014), *Lean In* (Ch.1, 2)
- Brooks (2014), “Recline! Why ‘Leaning In’ Is Killing Us”
- Whippman (2019), “Enough Leaning In. Let’s Tell Men to Lean Out”

Wednesday Finishing the gender revolution at home?

- Ely, Stone and Ammerman (2014), “High-Achieving Women”
- Coontz (2020), “How to Make Your Marriage Gay”

Friday Presentations (8)

Week Nine (May 25-29) Oral history presentations

Monday **Memorial Day, NO CLASS**

Wednesday **Presentations (8)**

Friday **Presentations (8)**

Week Ten (June 1-3)

Monday **Presentations (8)**

Wednesday **Presentations (4) + Putting it all together**

Reading List

Andrews, Helen. 2025. "The Great Feminization." in *Compact*.

<https://www.compactmag.com/article/the-great-feminization/>.

Brooks, Rosa. 2014. "Recline! Why "leaning in" is killing us." in *Foreign Policy*.

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/02/21/recline/>.

Calarco, Jessica. 2024. *Holding It Together: How Women Became America's Safety Net*. New York: Portfolio/Penguin.

Coontz, Stephanie. 1992. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York: Basic Books.

—. 2020. "How to Make Your Marriage Gay." in *New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/13/opinion/sunday/marriage-housework-gender-happiness.html>.

Cooper, Marianne, and Allison J. Pugh. 2020. "Families Across the Income Spectrum: A Decade in Review." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 82:272-99.

Cross, Christina J. 2026. "Through The Looking Glass: Reexamining Family Structure's Contribution to Racial Inequality in Life Chances." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 49(2):439-61.

de Botton, Alain 2016. "Why You Will Marry the Wrong Person." in *New York Times*.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/29/opinion/sunday/why-you-will-marry-the-wrong-person.html>.

Ely, Robin J., Pamela Stone, and Colleen Ammerman. 2014. "Rethink What You 'Know' About High-Achieving Women " in *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2014/12/rethink-what-you-know-about-high-achieving-women>.

- Fong, Kelley. 2023. "'No matter what I do, I'm not in control': what happens when the state takes your child." in *The Guardian*. <https://amp.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/oct/11/us-child-protective-services-family-mother>.
- French, David. 2025. "How Women Destroyed the West." in *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/23/opinion/helen-andrews-feminization-compact.html>.
- Grose, Jessica. 2026. "The Heritage Foundation Wants to Send American Women Back Half a Century." in *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/21/opinion/heritage-foundation-women.html>.
- Halpern-Meehin, Sarah, Kathryn Edin, Laura Tach, and Jennifer Sykes. 2015. *It's Not Like I'm Poor: How Working Families Make Ends Meet in a Post-Welfare World*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Hamilton, Laura, Josipa Roksa, and Kelly Nielsen. 2018. "Providing a 'Leg Up': Parental Involvement and Opportunity Hoarding in College." *Sociology of Education* 91(2):111-31.
- Johnson, Katherine. 2024. "Navigating the hypervisibility and invisibility of mixed-race families." *Contexts* 23(2):18023.
- Johnson, Katherine, and Kim Ebert. 2024. "'A Future for White Children': Examining Family Ideologies of White Extremist Groups at the Intersection of Race and Gender." *Social Currents* 11(6):549-66.
- Kearney, Melissa S. 2023. "The Explosive Rise of Single-Parent Families Is Not a Good Thing." in *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/17/opinion/single-parent-families-income-inequality-college.html>.
- Lareau, Annette. 2002. "Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing in Black Families and White Families." *American Sociological Review* 67(5):747-76.
- Lee, Se Hwa. 2019. "'I am still close to my child': middle-class Korean wild geese fathers' responsible and intimate fatherhood in a transnational context." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47(9):2161-78.
- Lerma, Veronica. 2025. "'I Don't Want Them Investigating Shit and Taking My Kids': Controlling Images and Chicanas' Decarceral Motherwork in Police Encounters." *Social Problems* 00:1-18.
- McCarron, Meghan. 2025. "Experts Say SNAP's Food Budget Doesn't Match How People Actually Eat." in *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/13/dining/snap-recipients-government-shutdown.html>.
- Miller, Claire Cain. 2018. "The Relentlessness of Modern Parenting." in *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/25/upshot/the-relentlessness-of-modern-parenting.html>.
- . 2023. "A Tradition Going Strong: Brides Who Take Their Husbands' Names." in *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/12/upshot/maiden-names-change.html>.
- Mintz, Steven, and Peter N. Stearns. 2025. *The American Child: The Transformation of Childhood Since World War II*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar. 2008. "Transnational Fathering: Gendered Conflicts, Distant Disciplining and Emotional Gaps." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34(7):1057-72.
- Rich, Motoko. 2024. "Can the Government Get People to Have More Babies?" in *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/13/world/asia/birth-rate-fertility-policy-japan.html>.
- Richtel, Matt. 2025. "A Century Ago, Adolescents Weren't Fully Human." in *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/05/health/psychology-adolescents-neanderthals-hall.html>.
- Romero, Diana, and Madina Agénor. 2017. "The Welfare Family Cap: Reproductive Rights, Control, and Poverty Prevention." Pp. 381-95 in *Radical Reproductive Justice: Foundations, Theory, Practice, Critique*, edited by Loretta J. Ross, Lynn Roberts, Erika Derkas, Whitney Peoples, and Pamela Bridgewater Toure. New York Feminist Press.
- Sandberg, Sheryl. 2014. *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Stone, Pamela. 2007. *Opting Out? Why Women Really Quit Careers and Head Home*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Stone, Pamela, and Meg Lovejoy. 2019. *Opting Back In: What Really Happens When Mothers Go Back to Work*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Sussman, Anna Louie. 2023. "Why Aren't More People Marrying? Ask Women What Dating Is Like." in *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/11/opinion/marriage-women-men-dating.html>.
- Taub, Amanda. 2025. "The Feminist Case for Spending Billions to Boost the Birthrate." in *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/20/world/americas/birthrate-fertility-feminism.html>.
- Thébaud, Sarah, and Laura Halcomb. 2018. "One step forward? Advances and setbacks on the path toward gender equality in families and work." *Sociology Compass* 13:1-15.
- Wade, Lisa. 2017. *American Hookup: The New Culture of Sex on Campus*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Whippman, Ruth. 2019. "Enough Leaning In. Let's Tell Men to Lean Out." in *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/10/opinion/sunday/feminism-lean-in.html>.