

The Family (SOC 3221.01)
103 Buttrick Hall • TR 1:10a-2:25p • <http://majorsmatter.net/family>

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Office Hrs: 11:00-01:00 Tuesday

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The overall goal of this course is to provide students with a working knowledge of conceptual frameworks and theories relevant to the sociological study of families. The course, which consists of lectures, readings, class and in-group discussions, weekly writing assignments, and final presentations is designed to focus on the question of how families function and how variation within and between families affects individuals and society. As you can see from the course schedule, this course is VERY theoretical. The course does not have sociology prerequisites, but having some experience with sociological concepts, theory, and research will prove helpful to students taking the class. Each week from September 6 through October 8, we will couple a lecture on one of seven major theories of family function with an in-class analysis of an episode of NBC's "Modern Family" sitcom using that week's theory. These analyses will help train students in the use of the theories as analytical tools and prepare them for their own analysis of a movie family. Upon completion of this course, students should be able to do the following: (a) Understand and be able to apply theoretical frameworks to contemporary family issues; (b) Be able to analyze studies of the family for their methodological strengths and weaknesses; (c) Understand the cultural, economic, and political factors that shape the structure/function of families; and (d) Understand how demographic variables such as sex, race, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status affect family structure and interaction

TEXTS

The two main texts for this course are Klein and White's *Family Theories: An Introduction* and Skolnick and Skolnick's *Family In Transition 15th*. Both books are available in the bookstore. Most of the readings listed in the syllabus are from these texts. Other readings will be in .pdf form on the course webpage. Summaries of the readings are listed on the Paidiea page of the course website.

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Your grade in this class is based on your performance on the following forms of evaluation. The blog is graded objectively; either you meet the requirements or you don't. Every assignment will be graded based on our subjective judgment; we will not, Not, NOT quibble with you over points. Your continued enrollment means that you understand and accept this grading policy. Unless otherwise noted, all assignments should be single-spaced, 1" margins, in Times or Times New Roman font, and have no more than a one line header with your name, the date, and the assignment. Do not use paragraph breaks (like I do in this syllabus); indent to start new paragraphs. Some assignments will be sent as an email attachment so ensure BEFORE YOU SEND IT that you've formatted it appropriately.

	B+ = 435-449 points (87%)	C+ = 385-399 points (77%)	D+ = 335-349 points (67%)
A = 470-500 points (94%)	B = 416-434 points (83%)	C = 366-384 points (73%)	D = 316-334 points (63%)
A- = 450-469 points (90%)	B- = 400-415 points (80%)	C- = 350-365 points (70%)	D- = 300-315 points (60%)

1) Attendance: As much of the learning taking place in this class will happen during the two and a half hours we have together each week, I take attendance very seriously. We will, therefore, take roll in each class session within the first five minutes of class. Each of you is allowed two (2) absences this semester. No other absences—whatever the reason, excuse, or emergency—will be accepted. If you miss class beyond those two absences, your grade in the class will drop 50 points automatically for each additional absence.

2) Article Reviews (200 points): In order to explore how researchers integrate theory and research, students will select two research papers to review. Each two-page paper should be based on a different theory that is being studied in class. Students will be expected to find these articles through a literature search. The reviews will include a very brief statement

regarding the goals of the research paper, a critique of the author's discussion of the theory used, an explanation of how the theory is used to identify variables for study, and a statement about the usefulness of the theory in the discussion of the findings. These reviews should be no shorter than 2 pages, single-spaced with 1" margins and are by email as a Word document sent to Lacey. The first article review is due on September 25th and should be based on either *Symbolic Interaction*, *Functionalist*, *Life Course*, or *Family System Theory*. The second article review is due on October 16th and should be based on either *Conflict and Stress*, *Social Exchange*, *Feminist*, or *Ecological Theory*. A photocopy of the article you are reviewing must be attached to it. Please choose articles from this list: *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review*, *Family*, *Family Process*, *Family Relations*, *Gender and Society*, *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, *Journal of Family History*, *Journal of Family Issues*, *Journal of Family Psychology*, *Journal of Home Economics*, *Journal of Homosexuality*, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *Journal of Men's Studies*, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *Marriage and Family Living*, *Research and Theory in Family Science*, *Sex Roles*, *Social Forces*, *Social Problems*, or *Sociology of Religion*

3) Mini-Project (100 points): Mini-projects are designed to allow you to further explore topics of interest that will not be covered in detail in the class. There are seven possibilities currently listed on the course webpage. These projects are in due in class on November 6th.

4) Examination (100 points): I would like for you to master the material in this class at the following levels of understanding: (1) basic knowledge, (2) comprehension and understanding, (3) application, and (4) analysis and comparison. With that in mind, there will be a cumulative in-class exam composed of 100 multiple choice questions. Each question will be worth 1 point. That exam will take place on November 8th.

5) Application Paper (100 points): With a group of 3 other students, you will be responsible to write a 8 page examination of a movie family, being careful to use one of the theories as the analytical lens through which you do this examination. This paper should be a thoughtful, creative, synthetic, well-written analysis of the family as seen through the eyes of someone who is familiar with theory and research in the sociology of families and households. During the last four days of class (11/27-12/06), each team will have about 20 minutes to present their analysis in an oral presentation. Ninety percent of the grade will be based on the paper; the remaining 10% will be based on the oral presentation. This paper should be no shorter than 8 pages, single-spaced with 1" margins.

OTHER IMPORTANT THOUGHTS

Academic Excuses: With the astonishing incidence of sickness and death that invariably occurs just around due dates, my policy is to let you know in advance that if you need to hand in something late because of family or personal illness, or death in the family, I'll need either a copy of the plane ticket, the funeral bulletin, or a note from your doctor. Otherwise, NOTHING will be accepted late.

Academic Etiquette: As a sign of respect to your fellow classmates, please avoid walking in late or leaving early. Please TURN OFF CELL PHONES and PAGERS before class. Respect the views and opinions of others. Avoid talking when others are making a point. You will have your chance. Try to avoid destructive criticism. However, constructive criticism is welcomed. Don't read the paper, talk to your friends, etc. during class. DO NOT LEAVE CLASS UNTIL CLASS HAS ENDED! Not only are those things disrespectful and disruptive to your classmates and me, but they also limit your ability to understand the material.

Academic Integrity: Vanderbilt's Honor Code governs all work in this course. Any Honor Code violation will be taken up with the Honor Council and it is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the provisions of the Code. If you have any doubts about applications of the Honor Code, please ask me and/or consult the Honor Council's web page. Uncertainty about the application of the Honor Code does not excuse a violation. Plagiarism is easily detected and WILL NOT be tolerated. If I suspect that plagiarism has taken place, you will receive no credit for the assignment.

Curriculum Units

August 23	Introduction To Class	Klein and White, Chapter 1
August 28 and 30	Symbolic Interactionism	Klein and White, Chapter 4 Skolnick and Skolnick, Reading 5 and 21
September 4 and 6	Functionalism Theory	Klein and White, Chapter 2 Skolnick and Skolnick, Readings 31 and 37
September 11 and 13	Life Course Theory	Klein and White, Chapter 5 Skolnick and Skolnick, Readings 3 and 19
September 18 and 20	Family Systems Theory	Klein and White, Chapter 6 Skolnick and Skolnick, Reading 15 and 17
September 25 and 27	Conflict Theory <i>* Article Review Due *</i>	Klein and White, Chapter 7 Skolnick and Skolnick, Readings 16 and 26
October 2 and 4	Social Exchange Theory	Klein and White, Chapter 3 Skolnick and Skolnick, Readings 7 and 27
October 9 and 11	Ecological Theory	Klein and White, Chapter 9 Skolnick and Skolnick, Readings 8 and 29
October 16	Feminist Theory <i>* Article Review Due *</i>	Klein and White, Chapter 8
October 18	NO CLASS	Have A Safe Fall Break!!
October 23	Dating and Courtship	Skolnick and Skolnick, Readings 10 and 11
October 25	Cohabitation	Skolnick and Skolnick, Readings 12 and 13
October 30	Non-White Families	Skolnick and Skolnick, Readings 32, and 33
November 1	Gay & Lesbian Families	Skolnick and Skolnick, Reading 35
November 6	Gender Talk <i>* Mini-Project Due *</i>	Skolnick and Skolnick, Reading 5 and 8
November 8	EXAMINATION	
November 13	Schools And Family	Skolnick and Skolnick, Reading 23 and 24
November 15	Religion And Family	Skolnick and Skolnick, Reading 9
November 20-22	NO CLASS	Have A Safe Thanksgiving Break!!
Nov. 27 – Dec 6	MOVIE PRESENTATIONS	

How We're Going To Grade The Article Reviews

1. Did you meet the requirements of the assignment (80 points)? The paper should include all of the statements, critiques, and explanations indicated on the guideline. Each of these requirements should be completed comprehensively:

(A) The article must be explicit about its use of one of the four theories (**5 points**). You do not meet the requirements of the assignment if your article is about a family function (e.g., conflict, life course, decision making), but one of the theories is not explicitly used in the analysis.

(B) A brief statement of the goals of the research paper (**10 points**). This statement should show that you have a general understanding of the research paper. In order to answer this question, you will have to understand what the research aims to say throughout the paper. As indicated, this can be brief, but do not simply paraphrase the abstract.

(C) A critique of the author's discussion of the theory (**20 points**). You now know enough about each theory to expect anyone using it to talk about some of the core concepts, scope conditions, and assumptions. A poorly discussed theory glosses over these and only uses the theory as a background for their research rather than the driving force for it. They should not simply explain the theory either. They should explain why the theory is the one used to answer the question.

(D) An explanation of how the theory is used to identify variables for study (**20 points**).

(E) A statement about the usefulness of the theory in the discussion of findings (**25 points**).

Parts "D" and "E" of the assignment require you to criticize how the author utilizes or employs the theory in order to make his/her argument and to explain how and why the theory can be useful in the discussion of the findings. A good critique and argument of your own involves persuasive evidence and concrete examples to support your points. Remember that analysis is different from mere description or explanation about what you read.

If you meet this first criterion, you don't have to worry about losing big points. But, this is just basic. The quality of your paper (the key to keeping your "A") will be mostly determined by whether the paper meets the expectations of the following criteria or not. An "A" paper will stand out in its depth and level of detail. We shouldn't have to read your article in order to understand what's going on in it. *Don't forget to staple the article to your review.*

2. Do you make clear thesis statements addressing each question above (10 points)? These are statements of the argument or the main point of your analysis. These statements should be easily recognized in the paper and understandable. They help organize the paper and let us know that you're moving on to a next section and what we should find there. If you aren't clear in these statements, they may lead the reader (us!) to think you're missing some of the basic requirements.

3. Is the paper well organized and easy to follow (10 points)? Do not divide your paper into four sections to answer each question in a discrete paragraph. A good paper uses smooth transitions from one paragraph to the next.

4. Does the paper use a college-appropriate style of writing? The paper should be free of errors in spelling and grammar and be formatted as required by the assignment (e.g., 1" margins and single spaced). Do NOT use spaces between your paragraphs; indent them. Meeting this criterion does not earn you extra points, but if your paper is full of errors in style, you will lose up to 5 points.

MOVIE FAMILY PAPER

Our ideas about marriage and family are shaped by the various experiences we have in our own culture. We are influenced by the families we live in or have lived in. We are exposed to other families, perhaps those of our friends or neighbors. We may have been formally taught in a structured setting (like school) things about marriage and family. Also, our ideas about marriage and family are shaped by the mass media. Think, for example, of the family of the 1950s. Images from popular TV shows, such as “Leave it to Beaver” or “Father Knows Best” may come to mind. Many of our ideas about the family of the 50s are shaped by these popular TV shows. Movies also tell us a lot about families whether we’re looking at a serious drama like “American Beauty” or a hilarious comedy depiction of family life like “Meet The Parents.” While these are all fantasy depictions of family life, they tend to be grounded in real-life experiences with families. There are usually the basic components of family that Strong and DeVault (1995) mention: one or more people; some relationship of blood, marriage, or affiliation; some economic cooperation; usually sharing a common dwelling place; often include child rearing. You can look at these movies and tell who the members are, why they are considered parts of the family, etc..

The theories we will be dealing with in this class can be used, not just to make sense of family life of real-world people but, to make sense of the movie/television families that help shape our impressions of family. These images have a role as an agency of socialization and are therefore worth pushing through the grinder of theory to see if they can be analyzed just like the families that they reflect.

Your group’s challenge is to write a coherent essay analyzing the family experience shown in the movie through a specific theoretical model discussed in class. You will be evaluated on how well you have been able to relate aspects of the theory to the encapsulated 2 hour experience you have with the movie family. This is more than just an opportunity to simply review a cool movie. It is important that you recognize our challenge to integrate course knowledge and maybe even some outside research in order to approach what you find critically. This paper should be a thoughtful, creative, synthetic, well-written analysis of a movie family as seen through the eyes of someone who is familiar with theories and research in the sociology of families and households. Remember, the point of this assignment is to help you move beyond catharsis to some level of competency as critical sociologists.

Stages Of The Project

1. Pick a movie. There is a list on the webpage, but you should feel free to move beyond that list for other choices. Please do your best to pick a movie that is focused on ONE particular family and seems to have the relationships of the family members as its primary plot.
2. Pick a theory that interests your group. Make sure you understand the key concepts, some of the propositions that come out of the theory, and how people who use the theory to study real families do so. The article reviews and the empirical applications sections of the theory text will help with this. They may also serve as guides. For example, in the symbolic interaction theory chapter, the authors use “dating aggression” as an empirical application of the theory. Movies about domestic violence would be a place to start because the chapter gives you some sense of how the theory is related to that particular issue in family living.
3. Watch the movie and take notes. Are there key scenes that really show aspects of the theory? If you’re using systems theory, are there scenes that show closed or open boundaries? In *Meet The Parents*, how does the difficulty that Ben Stiller’s character has in being a part of that family show the closed boundary concept? How do the interactions of the three sisters in *Hanging Up* reflect the conflict theory proposition that coalitions form when families have more democratic authority patterns?

4. Begin to write your paper.

a) Describe the family in the movie. Who are the members of the family and how are they related to each other? What type of family is it (nuclear, extended, cohabitating, single parent, homosexual, blended, dual-worker, etc.)? Why do you characterize this group as a family? Is the plot of the movie realistic? How likely is it that a real family would be faced with this problem? If your only impression of families was based on this movie, what would that impression be? In other words, what would you think families are like, if the only thing you knew about them was based on this movie. This could probably be the first of the ten pages. Do not just answer these questions as if I'm asking for a short answer essay. Bring the answers together into a coherent thought.

b) Give us a broad sense of why you've chosen the theory and what it has to offer in explaining the family interaction. Then tell us about the theory. Please use the class texts to help you with this; both texts **MUST** be in your bibliography. Pretend I don't know anything about the theory. Make it clear to us that you do. This will give us some way to organize my thinking as I read the paper. This will tell us how I should think about what you're going to do. This will probably be two pages or so.

c) Pick some scenes (2-3) that most clearly reflect the themes, concepts, and propositions of the theory you have chosen. Discuss how the interactions or other aspects of the family relationships do this. Use the notes that you took and support your analysis with specific examples from your notes. For example, if you say that both mother and father have equal power in decision-making, give clear and descriptive examples from the movie that show this. I imagine a page or two using each scene, but you don't have to stick to this format. I just think it would be easier to write a coherent paper if you try to analyze key incidents rather than rambling all over the place trying to analyze the whole story.

d) Finally, surround the paper with an introduction and a conclusion that brings the reader into the paper and then closes the paper. Don't just stop writing and hand it in. A paper, like a book and like the movies you will watch, should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Please give us all three parts of your paper.

What will I expect from the papers and how will they be graded? The papers are to be no less than eight (8) pages. As usual, the paper should be single-spaced, have one inch margins, and have page numbers. The font should be Times or Times New Roman and nothing bigger than 12 point. The paper is worth 90 points; your class presentation will be worth the remaining 10 points. The grading criteria is as follows:

The balance in your paper between "the story"—that is, your description of the movie, your telling of the tale—and your sociological analysis should be weighted towards the "critical" more than the "descriptive." We will be looking at how well you describe the movie, relationships, and situations (i.e., with concrete facts and vivid details), but will be more interested in how well you analyze the relationships in the context of what we've discussed about the theory you're using. We obviously expect explicit references to course concepts and readings.

Each member of the group will fill in and submit a web-evaluation-form for each of the other presentation group members. That percentage will then become the factor to determine individual grades. For example, if the group receives 90 points total for the paper and the presentation, and one of you receives an 86% peer evaluation, that person's credit for the project will be 86% of 90 points. Her grade on the movie family project will be a "77". This approach provides you with protection against team members who wish to receive a good grade without doing the work.

Mechanics: Is the paper free of spelling, typographical, and grammatical errors? Are sources correctly cited throughout the paper and in the bibliography. Use APA documentation style for citations. We will take off 1/2 a point for every error up to 20 points. Every time I teach this class, I have students whose course grade drops as a result of this one issue. There's not much excuse for handing in a paper with 40 errors, yet I get papers with that many errors on the first couple of pages. Don't let this be your group.

