

**SOCIOLOGY 305m**  
**Sociology of Childhood**  
**Fall 2019**  
**TTH 2-3:20 WPH 206**

**Dr. Karen Sternheimer**

Office: HSH 318

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What does it mean to be a child in America at the beginning of the twenty-first century? We have all been children at one time, and we all have ideas about how to answer this question. Within this class we will consider how the meaning of childhood changes over time, place, and social context. By moving children to the center of focus, we will see that there is no singular definition of childhood, but instead many different ways of experiencing childhood and adolescence.

In short, this course will examine how children are not just socialized by adults, but also shape their own (and adults') experiences. Typically children are only studied as victims or perpetrators of social problems, but in this course we will consider children in many additional contexts. We will begin by examining the meaning(s) of childhood and adolescence and how they have changed over time. Throughout the course we will consider the many diversity issues of childhood and adolescence, including, race, class, and gender. In this process we will see how children's lives are shaped by broader systems of inequality, as well as how young people are active in the construction of difference. We will also examine how young people are active in the construction of their own peer cultures and popular culture, as well as why the relationship between youth and popular culture is routinely viewed as problematic, and how children are discussed within the popular press. Finally, we will examine how public policies shaping children and adolescents' lives are formulated and how they sometimes serve to replicate various inequalities.

**Within this course we will:**

1. Explore concepts, theories, and empirical research within the sociological study of childhood;
2. Critically examine the social construction of childhood by bringing the experiences of youth to the center of analysis;
3. Consider diversity dimensions of childhood including age, gender, race/ethnicity, class, nationality as well as the importance of historical context.
4. [Develop critical thinking, research, data analysis, writing, presentation, and teamwork skills.](#)

**Student evaluation:**

Attendance and participation	15%
Tuesday in-class essays	5%
Midterm exam (Due 10/22)	25%
Group Project or JEP (various dates)	25%
Take Home Final exam (Due Thursday December 12 at 4 pm)	30%

**Tracking your progress:**

You are expected to seek more than a grade from this course. However, I realize grades are very important to students. You are responsible for keeping a record of your grades and to be aware of your progress as well as areas where improvement is needed, and for seeking help from your peers or professor. Use the breakdown above to calculate your grade.

### Participation and Attendance:

This class is based on active student participation in discussions and activities. Therefore, students are expected to attend *every class meeting prepared to discuss the assigned reading. Bring your book or a print out of the reading to class with you for discussion.* Students are expected to welcome differing viewpoints and to respect the thoughts and ideas of all class participants, listen quietly while others are speaking, and **arrive and leave on time**. Note that a great deal of information covered in the lectures may not be in the readings, and vice versa. **Students are responsible for getting notes or assignments from classmates** should an absence become necessary.

Students often overlook the importance of participation and attendance in their course grade. This grade is based on the percentage of class meetings and discussions you attend (you can't participate if you are not here!), and may increase or decrease based on your participation. Things that will increase it are comments and questions that reflect knowledge of course material, as well as courteous attention to your professor and peers. Things that will bring your grade down include disruptive behavior (includes using electronic devices and ringing cell phones), disrespect towards your professor or peers, and comments that reveal a lack of preparation and attention. Ideally all class members will attend class regularly, prepared to discuss the reading and be open and respectful of differing viewpoints.

To receive full attendance credit you must attend the entire class session. It is your responsibility to sign in every class, as attendance will be taken every day. Signing in for a previous day is not possible; **signing in for another student is a form of academic dishonesty and will not be tolerated.**

### Technology Etiquette:

E-mail is a great resource but never takes the place of a conversation. **Please include "SOCI 305" in the subject line.** Lengthy questions or concerns should be addressed during office hours or a special appointment. Emails are typically answered within one business day. **Absolutely no assignments will be accepted via e-mail.** We will be using Blackboard (<https://blackboard.usc.edu>) to post most handouts and some articles, so check this site periodically.

**Cell phones must be turned off during and put away during all class meetings, and laptops or electronic devices may only be used by special permission. Multitasking (web surfing, Facebooking, texting, studying for another class) is expressly forbidden and will negatively impact your grade.**

### In-Class Essays:

For five Tuesdays at the start of the semester (from 9/10-10/8) there will be a brief essay assignment at the start of class to ascertain how well you are engaged in the course (attending lectures and reading assignments). The assignment will start at the beginning of class so if you are late you will lose time and may not be able to complete the assignment. The essay topic will come from a central theme from the previous week's reading and course discussions and will be an opportunity for you to reflect on the material. Do not assume that simply filling a page will earn you credit; your writing must reflect awareness of central issues and ideas expressed by authors and in class. These assignments are graded credit/no credit and are each worth 1% of your total course grade. **Missed essays or essays that earn "no credit" can be made up with extra credit assignments, as noted below.**

### Extra Credit

After the midterm, an essay question will be posted on Blackboard at the end of each week. Your one-page response must be uploaded onto Blackboard before the start of class the following Tuesday. By completing these assignments you may make up any missed essays or no credit essays and/or earn up to 3 percent extra credit in the course (1 percent per essay).

You may earn *up to* 10 extra points on your midterm (i.e. a grade of 90 can be increased to a grade of 100) by reading one of the optional books in its entirety (listed on Blackboard) and answering the questions (also on Blackboard) in a 5-7 page paper (due date 12/5). A brief, informal presentation to the class is required as well.

## Midterm & Final Exam:

Both the midterm and final exams will be take-home essay format and will be distributed in class one week in advance. Your exam must be typed and incorporate your ideas with those in the reading and class discussions. All deadlines are firm – any late midterms, term papers, or projects will be deducted 10% per day and will not be accepted any later than one week following their due date. **No late final exams will be accepted.**

## Group Project or Research Paper

You have the option of completing a research paper individually or as part of a group project. The research paper will involve an in-depth analysis based on participation in the JEP program. The group project involves researching and presenting data on a social issue pertaining to children. A brief description is included at the end of the syllabus; the full description is posted on Blackboard.

All assignments must reflect original work and must not contain sections cut and pasted from other sources. All take-home assignments must be turned in on Blackboard's turnitin site to generate an originality report in addition to turning in a hard copy. Instructions will be provided before the midterm is due. Plagiarism will not be tolerated and consequences will be in accordance with university policy. Any papers that are dramatically different in style and content from in-class work will require an oral exam. Failure to appear or to successfully demonstrate that the work is your own *within one week* of notification will result in a failing grade and will be reported to Student Judicial Affairs.

Finally, grades are earned, they are not given. It is your responsibility to do the best work you are capable of producing. Special individual opportunities for extra credit violate university policy and will not be considered. **Nitpicking over points is discouraged, as it reveals a commitment to a grade rather than to learning.** Continued enrollment in this course indicates acceptance of class policies.

**\*\*Any special learning needs should be brought to my attention as soon as possible.\*\***

## Required Reading:

Sternheimer, Karen, editor. 2009. *Childhood in American Society: A Reader*, Allyn & Bacon.

**\*\*These dates are estimates and subject to change at my discretion\*\***

### I. Childhood and Adolescence in History

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|---|---------|--|---|
| 1 | T 8/26  | Introduction to course                               |   |
| 2 | TH 8/28 | Historical conceptions of childhood and adolescence  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduction, vi-viii, 1-3</li><li>• Jenkins, p. 15-22, "The Historical Evolution of the Child" (on Blackboard)</li></ul>   |
| 3 | T 9/3   | Historical constructions of infancy and parenting    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fass &amp; Mason, "Childhood in America: Past and Present"</li></ul>  |
| 4 | TH 9/5  | Historical experiences of poor and enslaved children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Zelizer, "From Child Labor to Child Work"</li><li>• Douglass, Frederick. 1845. "A Childhood in Slavery" (Bb)</li><li>• Brace, Charles Loring. "Placing Orphan Children with Farm Families" (Bb)</li></ul> |

### II. Contemporary Constructions of Childhood and Adolescence

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|---|---------|--|---|
| 5 | T 9/10  | Has childhood disappeared?                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Buckingham, "In Search of the Child"</li></ul> <b>FIRST IN-CLASS ESSAY</b>        |
| 6 | TH 9/12 | Contemporary childhood, adolescence and fear | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sternheimer, Media Phobia #2: Popular Culture Is Ruining Childhood (Bb)</li></ul> |

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|---|--------|--|--|
| 7 | T 9/17 | Constructing meanings of childhood "innocence" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kelly et al., "Talking Dirty"</li> <li>• Heins, Minors, Censorship, Sex, and History</li> </ul> |
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- SECOND IN-CLASS ESSAY**

### III. Theorizing Childhood and Adolescence

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|---|---------|--|---|
| 8 | TH 9/19 | Traditional conceptualizations of children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sternheimer, 87-89</li> <li>• Corsaro, "Children's Interpretive Reproductions"</li> <li>• Thorne, "Revisioning Women and Social Change"</li> </ul> |
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|---|--------|------------------------------------|---|
| 9 | T 9/24 | Contemporary theories of childhood | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matthews, "A Window on the 'New' Sociology of Childhood"</li> <li>• Prout &amp; James, "A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood?"</li> </ul> |
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### THIRD IN-CLASS ESSAY

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|----|---------|-------------------------|--|
| 10 | TH 9/26 | Theories of adolescence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demos, John &amp; Virginia Demos. 1969. "Adolescence in Historical Perspective" (Bb)</li> <li>• Mead, Margaret. 1928. "Adolescent Girls in Samoa and America" (Bb)</li> </ul> |
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### IV. Children's Lives

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|----|--------|--|--|
| 11 | T 10/1 | Methods of studying children and adolescents | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sternheimer, 139-140</li> <li>• Corsaro, "Yeah, You're Big Bill"</li> <li>• Fine &amp; Sandstrom, "Researchers and Kids"</li> <li>• Wyness, "Researching Children and Childhood"</li> </ul> |
|----|--------|--|--|
- FOURTH IN-CLASS ESSAY**

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|----|---------|--|---|
| 12 | TH 10/3 | Peer cultures: popularity and stratification | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adler &amp; Adler, "Popularity"</li> <li>• Milner, "Exchanges, Labels, and Put-Downs"</li> <li>• Eder, et al, "Crude Comments and Sexual Scripts"</li> </ul> |
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|----|--------|--|--|
| 13 | T 10/8 | Peer cultures: constructing meanings of gender | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sternheimer, 247-248</li> <li>• Messner, "Barbie Girls Versus Sea Monsters: Children Constructing Gender"</li> <li>• Thorne, "Constructing 'Opposite Sides'"</li> </ul> |
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### FIFTH IN-CLASS ESSAY

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|----|----------|--|---|
| 14 | TH 10/10 | Peer cultures: constructing meanings of race and ethnicity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Van Ausdale &amp; Feagin. "Using Racial and Ethnic Concepts: The Critical Case of Very Young Children"</li> <li>• Lewis, "Constructing and Negotiating Racial Identity in School"</li> </ul> |
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### DISTRIBUTE MIDTERM

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|----|---------|--|--|
| 15 | T 10/15 | Children's diverse experiences in families | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Valenzuela, "Gender Roles and Settlement Activities Among Children and their Immigrant Families"</li> <li>• Lareau, "Concerted Cultivation and the Accomplishment of Natural Growth"</li> </ul> |
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TH 10/17 **FALL RECESS**  
**V. Children and Popular Culture**

16 T 10/22 Children's books

17 TH 10/24 Children's sports

18 T 10/29 Children's toys: gender, agency and reproduction

19 TH 10/31 Childhood rituals: the tooth fairy, Halloween, and other celebrations

20 T 11/5 Class and consumption

**VI. Social Problems and Public Policies**

21 TH 11/7 Child poverty

22 T 11/12 Child work and child labor

23 TH 11/14 Child abuse

24 T 11/19 Foster care

25 TH 11/21 Children of institutionalized parents

26 T 11/26 Health

27 T 12/3 Education

28 TH12/5 Youth and politics

**MIDTERM DUE**

- Levey, "Outside Class"
- Sternheimer, 339-341
- Williams, "Kids in Toyland"
- Jenkins, p. 23-33 "Children's Culture" (Bb)
- Clark, "Flight Towards Maturity"
- Zelizer, "Kids and Commerce"

- Sternheimer, 419-420

**CHILD POVERTY GROUP PRESENTATION**

- James et al., "Working Children"
- Marosi, "Children Harvest Crops" (Bb)

**CHILD LABOR GROUP PRESENTATION**

- Kitlinger, "Who are You Kidding?"

**CHILD ABUSE GROUP PRESENTATION**

- Schorr, Nanette. "Foster Care and the Politics of Compassion" (Bb)

**FOSTER CARE GROUP PRESENTATION**

- Bernstein, "Children of the Incarcerated"

**CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PRESENTATION**

- Clark, "Children Coping with Chronic Illness"

**CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE PRES.**

- Stearns, "All are Above Average"

**EDUCATION GROUP PRESENTATION**

- Banet-Weiser, "We Pledge Allegiance to Kids"
- United Nations. 1989. "United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child" (Bb)

**JEP/EXTRA CREDIT PAPERS DUE**

**TH 12/12 TAKE HOME FINAL EXAM DUE 4 PM HSH 314- NO LATE PAPERS ACCEPTED**

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Complete **either** a research paper **or** a group project:

***Groups and students writing individual research papers must turn in a one-page topic statement outline (see instructions on Blackboard) at least two weeks before the due date, worth 10% of the paper grade***

**JEP OPTION: (with collaboration as an option)**

To complete this term paper option, you must sign up at the JEP house by the end of the second week of classes. You will have the option of teaming up with 1-2 other students also participating in JEP to write your analysis together (you will share your paper grade with them). Your paper will be based on thorough, detailed observations about a topic that we cover in class. If you are interested in writing about a subject we do not discuss in class please see me as soon as possible. You will be expected to take field notes during your JEP visits, which will become the basis for your paper. In the past, students have written their papers on issues such as the construction of race/ethnicity or gender play amongst peers, race/ethnicity or gender and popularity, and looked at teachers' interactions with students. You are free to choose your own topic. We will be discussing this project throughout the class; **10% of your project grade will come from your JEP evaluation**. A **7-9 page paper is due December 5, late papers reduced by 10% per day, no JEP papers accepted after December 9**. *Full details of the assignment are posted on Blackboard.*

**GROUP PROJECTS AND PRESENTATIONS**

Groups of 2-3 students can choose to complete a group project instead of a JEP research paper. Sign-ups for groups are first-come first served. Presentations should be 10 minutes and should include multimedia examples. Each group will also submit a written report, approximately 7-9 pages summarizing your findings. **Participants will share equally in the project grade** and students will have the chance to evaluate their fellow group members' contributions anonymously. Each student will write a brief essay detailing their responsibilities within the group's process. ***Full details of the assignment are posted on Blackboard. Groups will work periodically during class meetings and receive feedback and suggestions during that time.***

**GROUP PROJECT OPTIONS:**

Find data from sources such as the Census Bureau, the US Department of Health and Human Services, UNICEF and present your findings to the class. What do the data teach us about how these issues relate to race, gender, and parents' education or income? What are some specific challenges we face regarding these problems at the local level? Choose from one of the following topics:

- Child poverty
- Child labor
- Child abuse
- Foster care
- Children of the incarcerated
- Children's access to health care
- Educational inequality