



USC University of Southern California

SOCIOLOGY 305m
Sociology of Childhood
Fall 2021
TTH 12:30-1:50 CPA 201

Dr. Karen Sternheimer

Office hours: TTH 11:15-12:15 *by appointment, other appointment times may be available*

Office Location: HSH 318 (Hazel and Stanley Hall Building)

sternhei@usc.edu (response time within 24 hrs M-F 9-5)

TA: Brigid Cotter

Office hours: T 11:30am-12:30pm

<https://usc.zoom.us/j/7202796956>

Students are expected to comply with all aspects of USC's COVID-19 policy. Failure to do so may result in removal from the class and referral to SJACs.

Please do not come to class if you have any symptoms. Every effort will be made to record class meetings. To access recordings, go to Blackboard, Zoom, and then Cloud Recordings. USC prohibits sharing of any course content outside of the learning environment.

What does it mean to be a child in America in the twenty-first century? We have all been children at one time, and we all may think we know 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.

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 within the experiences of childhood and adolescence, including, race, class, and gender. 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.

Course Goals:

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:

Participation	10%
Reflective Blackboard Journal Entries	5%

Weekly essays	5%
Take home midterm (due Tuesday 10/19)	25%
Group project or JEP paper and presentation	25%
Take home final exam (due Tuesday 12/14 @1 pm)	30%

Tracking your progress:

You are expected to seek more than a grade from this course. 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. You can access your grades regularly on Blackboard.

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. No assignments will be accepted via e-mail. We will be using Blackboard (<https://blackboard.usc.edu>) for all course content.

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.

Participation (10%):

This class is based on active student participation in discussions and activities and is designed to be hands-on and experiential. Students are expected to attend class meetings prepared to discuss the assigned reading and participate in all activities. *Bring your book or a print out of the reading to class with you for discussion.* **If you are not able to attend class, you are expected to fully participate in the discussion board conversations on Blackboard that week. Discussion questions will be posted each week. You are encouraged to participate on the discussion board even if you *are* able to attend.**

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 join and leave meetings on time. Note that a great deal of information covered in class may not be in the readings, and vice versa. Students are responsible for getting notes or assignments from Blackboard and other students if you miss class.

A full rubric detailing how participation is graded is posted on Blackboard on the “Syllabus and Grading” tab. Active participation in activities, comments and questions that reflect knowledge of course material, as well as courteous attention to your professor and peers are expected.

Reflective Blackboard Journal Entries (5%):

Each week, you are asked to reflect on what you have learned during the week and what questions you have about the material and your project using Blackboard’s Journal function. There will be ten journal entry requirements, each worth .5% of your grade. Only you and your professor/TA can see these entries. They are due each week of the semester by 11:59 pm PST on Fridays. *You can miss up to 5 without penalty.*

Essays:

Before the midterm, there will be five essay assignments to ascertain your comprehension of the course material. 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. These essays will be posted on Blackboard by 5pm on the Thursdays they are scheduled, and due the following Tuesday before the start of class. In order to earn credit your writing must reflect awareness of central issues and ideas expressed by authors and in class (see rubric on Blackboard for more specific details). These assignments are graded credit/partial 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 points extra on your group project grade or 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 12/3**). You will be required to briefly share your findings with the class as well.

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 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 contact 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. You are free to choose your own topic. In the past, students have written their papers on issues such as the construction of race/ethnicity or gender amongst peers, race/ethnicity or gender and popularity, and looked at teachers' interactions with students or have used a course reading as a research guide. 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 **November 30**, late papers reduced by 10% per day, no JEP papers accepted after **December 4**. 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

Midterm & Final Exam:

The midterm and final exams are designed to help you synthesize the central course concepts. Both exams will be take-home, essay format and should incorporate ideas from the readings and class discussions. Both exams will be distributed at least one week prior to their due date. Late midterms will be reduced by 10% per day and **no late final exams can be accepted**.

All assignments must reflect original work and must be turned in on Blackboard's Turnitin site to generate an originality report. 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 previous 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. **Please see Blackboard for USC Code of Ethics and student resources.**

Extra credit opportunities are built into this class; note that special individual opportunities for extra credit violate university policy and will not be considered. Finally, grades are earned, they are not given. It is your responsibility to do the best work you are capable of producing. *Nitpicking over points is discouraged, as it reveals a commitment to a grade rather than to learning.* **Once assigned, grades will not be changed unless a mathematical error occurred.** 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 8/24 | Thinking sociologically about childhood | • Sternheimer, Introduction, vi-viii, 1-3 |
| 2 | TH 8/26 | Historical conceptions of childhood and adolescence | • Jenkins, p. 15-22, "The Historical Evolution of the Child" (on Blackboard)
ESSAY #1 POSTED (due 8/31) |
| 3 | T 8/31 | Historical constructions of infancy and parenting | • Fass & Mason, "Childhood in America: Past and Present"
• Zelizer, "From Child Labor to Child Work" |
| 4 | TH 9/2 | Historical experiences of poor and enslaved children | • Douglass, Frederick. 1845. "A Childhood in Slavery" (Bb)
• Brace, Charles Loring. "Placing Orphan Children with Farm Families" (Bb)
ESSAY #2 POSTED (due 9/7); JEP SIGN UP DL 9/3 |

II. Contemporary Constructions of Childhood and Adolescence

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|---|--------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5 | T 9/7 | Is childhood "disappearing?" | • Buckingham, "In Search of the Child" |
| 6 | TH 9/9 | Contemporary childhood, adolescence and fear | • Sternheimer, "Media Phobia #2: Popular Culture Is Ruining Childhood" (Bb)
ESSAY #3 POSTED (due 9/14) |
| 7 | T 9/14 | Constructing meanings of childhood "innocence" | • Garlen, "Interrogating Innocence: 'Childhood' as Exclusionary Social Practice (Bb) |

III. Theorizing and Studying Childhood

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|---|---------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8 | TH 9/16 | Traditional conceptualizations of children | • Sternheimer, 87-89
• Corsaro, "Children's Interpretive Reproductions"
• Thorne, "Revisioning Women and Social Change"
ESSAY #4 POSTED (due 9/21) |
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| 9 | T 9/21 | Contemporary theories of childhood | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matthews, “A Window on the ‘New’ Sociology of Childhood” • Prout & James, “A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood?” |
| 10 | TH 9/23 | Methods of studying children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sternheimer, 139-140 • Corsaro, “Yeah, You’re Big Bill” • Fine & Sandstrom, “Researchers and Kids” <p>ESSAY #5 POSTED (due 9/28)</p> |
| 11 | T 9/28 | Children as researchers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wyness, “Researching Children and Childhood” • Kim, “Participation or Pedagogy?” (Bb) |

IV. Children’s Lives

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|----|---------|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 12 | TH 9/30 | Peer cultures: popularity and stratification | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adler & Adler, “Popularity” • Milner, “Exchanges, Labels, and Put-Downs” • Eder, et al, “Crude Comments and Sexual Scripts” |
| 13 | T 10/5 | Peer cultures: constructing meanings of gender | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sternheimer, 247-248 • Messner, “Barbie Girls Versus Sea Monsters: Children Constructing Gender” • Travers, “Transgender Kids” (Bb) <p>POST MIDTERM</p> |
| 14 | TH 10/7 | Peer cultures: constructing meanings of race and ethnicity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Van Ausdale & Feagin. “Using Racial and Ethnic Concepts: The Critical Case of Very Young Children” • Lewis, “Constructing and Negotiating Racial Identity in School” |
| 15 | T 10/12 | Children’s diverse experiences in families | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valenzuela, “Gender Roles and Settlement Activities Among Children and their Immigrant Families” • Lareau, “Concerted Cultivation and the Accomplishment of Natural Growth” |

FALL BREAK

V. Children and Popular Culture

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| 16 | T 10/19 | Children’s books | MIDTERM DUE |
| 17 | TH 10/21 | Children’s sports | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levey, “Outside Class” |
| 18 | T 10/26 | Children’s toys: gender, agency and reproduction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sternheimer, 339-341 • Williams, “Kids in Toyland” |
| 19 | TH 10/28 | Childhood rituals: The tooth fairy, Halloween, and other celebrations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jenkins, p. 23-33 “Children’s Culture” (Bb) • Clark, “Flight Towards Maturity” <p>Extra Credit Essay #1 posted</p> |
| 20 | T 11/2 | Class and consumption | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zelizer, “Kids and Commerce” |

VI. Social Problems and Public Policies

- 21 TH 11/4 Child poverty
- Sternheimer, 419-420
 - Roets, Roos, and Bouverne-De Bie, “Researching Child Poverty (Bb)”
- CHILD POVERTY GROUP PRESENTATION**
Extra Credit Essay #2 posted
- 22 T 11/9 Child work and child labor
- James et al., “Working Children”
 - Marosi, “Children Harvest Crops” (Bb)
- CHILD LABOR GROUP PRESENTATION**
- 23 TH 11/11 Child abuse
- Kitzinger, “Who are You Kidding?” (*Note: this reading includes information about sexual abuse that might make some people uncomfortable*)
- CHILD ABUSE GROUP PRESENTATION**
JEP TOPIC STATEMENT/OUTLINE DUE
Extra Credit Essay #3 posted
- 24 T 11/16 Foster care
- Schorr, Nanette. “Foster Care and the Politics of Compassion” (Bb)
- FOSTER CARE GROUP PRESENTATION**
- 25 TH 11/18 Children of institutionalized parents
- Bernstein, “Children of the Incarcerated”
- CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PRESENTATION**
Extra Credit Essay #4 posted
- 26 T 11/23 Health
- Clark, “Children Coping with Chronic Illness”
- CHILDREN’S ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE PRES.**
- 27 T 11/30 Education
- Stearns, “All are Above Average”
- EDUCATION GROUP PRESENTATION**
JEP PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS DUE
- 28 TH 12/2 Youth and politics
- Banet-Weiser, “We Pledge Allegiance to Kids”
 - United Nations. 1989. “United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child” (Bb)
- Extra Credit Essay #5 posted**
EXTRA CREDIT READING ASSIGNMENT & PRESENTATIONS DUE
- T 12/14 **FINAL EXAM DUE AT 1pm PST on Blackboard - No late papers accepted**