Sociology 907: LGBTQ Families
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Spring 2015

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Office Hours: M 3-4pm and Th 9:30-10:45am
Office Location: 725 Oldfather Hall

Course Meeting Time and Location: Tuesday 2-4:45pm, 707 Oldfather Hall

Course Description and Objectives

This seminar focuses on LGBTQ families in the United States. I designed this seminar with the following two goals in mind. First, I want us to grapple with theoretical and methodological questions. Throughout the semester, we will engage in questions about LGBTQ families, including: What do we mean when we say “LGBTQ”? What do we mean when we say “family”? Which individuals and what families are or should be included under the umbrella “LGBTQ families”? How have researchers studied LGBTQ families? What questions have been asked and which ones have not been asked? What assumptions inform the research that has been done on LGBTQ families? Though these questions are seemingly straightforward, they are not. Our readings and discussions will explore the complexities surrounding these questions. Moreover, we will address how our answers to these questions impact our scholarship and knowledge about LGBTQ families.

Second, I want you to gain an understanding of the existing scholarship in the subfield of LGBTQ families. We will read research addressing the following topics: families of origin, relationships and marriage, families of choice, families with children, and kids’ perspectives. This list of topics is by no means exhaustive and you will have the option explore a topic not covered in class for your final paper. The readings primarily draw from sociological and other social science research; however, again, you have the option to explore scholarship in other disciplines in the final paper. The readings and our discussions throughout the semester will highlight how LGBTQ families are embedded in a broader social and legal context. Also, within each topic, I have included readings that address multiple identities (e.g. lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, etc.) and multiple family configurations (e.g. childfree families, polyamorous families, adoptive families, families formed through donor insemination, etc.). Likewise, our readings and discussions throughout the semester (starting with the first week) will be informed by intersectional perspectives that consider how other forms of difference and inequality, including race, class, and gender, impact the experiences of LGBTQ individuals and families.

Course Materials

The readings consist of articles, book excerpts, and one book. The articles and book excerpts are available as PDFs on our Blackboard site (or are available online through the UNL library). The book required for purchase is: Muraco, Anna. 2012. Odd Couples: Friendships at the Intersection of Gender and Sexual Orientation. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Course Format

This course will be a seminar format and will be discussion based. Our class time is your opportunity to engage with and clarify the readings, many of which are not easy. You are expected to come to class having done all the required readings and being prepared to discuss them. Please note that this class requires a lot of reading each week and plan accordingly.

Course Assignments

Your grade in this class will be determined by your performance on the following:

Weekly response papers (30%)

Since this is a discussion-based class, coming to class prepared to participate will play a large part in how well you do in this class. Your preparation will be assessed through weekly response papers. Each week you will be responsible for writing a response paper that is 2-3 pages (double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12pt font). These papers should be a critical assessment of the readings for the week. In other words, they should be a synthesis, not a summary, of the readings. Possibilities for what you can address in the paper include: identify themes across readings, identify common questions across readings, identify limitations across readings; connect to other scholarship or to your own research interests. Essentially, these papers are your opportunity to critically engage with the readings of outline your initial responses to the material. In addition, your paper should include two discussion questions for our class discussion. A hard copy of the paper is due in-class. Your weekly responses are worth 30% of your overall grade.

Participation (30%)

You are expected to participate fully in each class by discussing the readings, asking questions and engaging with your peers. Missing two or more classes with negatively affect your participation grade. The participation component is worth 30% of your overall grade.

Final paper (40%)

Your final paper must address a topic related to LGBTQ Families. You have two options for the final paper. The final paper should be 20 pages (double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12pt font). The final paper is due Thursday May 7th at 9AM.

Additionally, you must submit a 1-2 page prospectus by Thursday March 12th. The prospectus will describe which option you are choosing and will either identify sources (for critical literature review paper) or describe the data (for empirical research paper). You also have the option of submitting a rough draft and getting feedback from me before submitting the final paper; the rough draft is due Thursday April 16th.

The final paper is worth 40% of your overall grade (5% : the prospectus; 35%; the final paper).
**Option 1: Critical Literature Review Paper**

This option entails writing a critical literature review paper. You will pick a topic related to LGBTQ Families (it can but does not have to be a topic that we cover in class) and identify existing scholarship on the topic. In your paper, you will analyze the scholarship and critically assess the “state of the field.” Questions to consider include: What does existing research tell us about the topic? How do scholars define the terms in question? What theoretical frameworks are used in existing research? What methodology is used in existing research? Do we learn different things about the topic from different methods? What are the limitations of existing scholarship? What do we not know yet about the topic? What directions would you recommend for future research?

**Option 2: Empirical Research Paper**

This option entails writing an empirical research paper. You will pick a topic related to LGBTQ Families (it can but does not have to be a topic that we cover in class) and write an original research paper related to the topic. Qualitative and quantitative analyses are acceptable. The paper should follow the format required by the journal to which you are planning to submit the paper (e.g. for Sociology journals: introduction, literature review, methods, findings, discussion and conclusion).

**Grading Scale**

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**READING SCHEDULE**

*Please note this schedule is tentative. I reserve the right to make a change to the schedule to better meet the needs of the class. Additional or alternative readings may be announced in class.*

**Week 1: Introductions**

**January 13:** Introductions and Syllabus

**Week 2: What is LGBTQ?**

**January 20**

Pfeffer, Carla. 2014. “‘I Don’t Like Passing as a Straight Woman’: Queer Negotiations of Identity and Social Group Membership.” American Journal of Sociology 120 (1): 1-44.


Case study:


Week 3: What is Family?

January 27


Review pieces:


Week 4: How do we study LGBTQ families?

February 3

Methods:


Exemplars:


Ethics:


(optional: two articles cited - Kazyak et al. 2014 and Alexis et al. 2014)

Week 5: Families of Origin

February 10


Week 6: Families of Origin

February 17

*We will meet in Oldfather 438 today


Week 7: Relationships, marriage

February 24


Week 8: Relationships, marriage: legal considerations

March 3


Week 9: Creating families of choice

March 10


Week 10: Creating families of choice

March 17


March 24: No Class, Spring Break

Week 11: Creating families with children

March 31


Week 12: Creating families with children

April 7


Sheff, Elisabeth. 2010. “Strategies in Polyamorous Parenting.” In Extending Non-Monogamies

**Week 13: Creating families with children: Legal considerations**

**April 14**


**Week 14: Creating families with children: Legal considerations**

**April 21**


**Week 15: Creating families with children: Kids’ perspectives**

**April 28**


**FINAL PAPER DUE:** Thursday May 7th at 9AM