

## **The Sociology of Intimate Partnerships: Dating, Mating, Marriage, and Divorce** **AS.230.236**

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Office Hours: Immediately following class and by appointment

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### **Course Description**

How do we define an intimate partnership and what role does it play in society? At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century socially sanctioned intimate partnerships existed primarily in the context of marriage between a man and a woman. These partnerships formed the center of family units and provided a foundation of stability and security for the individuals that entered them. Since then, additional forms of intimate partnerships have become more widely recognized through dating and cohabitation, while marriage has become less stable. In this course, we will explore the evolution of marriage as the dominant type of intimate partnership in society and the concurrent rise of dating, cohabitation, and divorce. Using the context of how these intimate partnerships have changed in recent decades, students will explore and define the role these different types of partnerships serve in society today.

### **Course Objectives:**

1. Explore and develop answers to the two key questions of the course, posed above, and describe how the answers to these questions have changed over time.
2. Gain exposure to both qualitative and quantitative studies on intimate partnerships and develop competency in how to engage with these different kinds of writing.
3. Apply an understanding of sociological theories of the family to contemporary issues and popular culture.

### **Course Structure**

The class will meet for 75 minutes, twice per week. The first 15-20 minutes of class will be lecture based to provide students with foundational knowledge and relevant theories. The remaining class time will be used for class discussion of the assigned readings for the week. Class discussions will also integrate contemporary debates and popular media.

### **Textbooks and Reading**

All journal articles and most book chapters will be made available on Canvas.

You may choose to purchase the following texts, as we will be reading the majority of them:

- Coontz, Stephanie. 2006. *Marriage, A History: How Love Conquered Marriage*
- Cherlin, Andrew J. 2010. *The Marriage Go-Round*
- Vaughan, Diane. 1986. *Uncoupling*.
- Streib, Jessi. 2015. *The Power of the Past: Understanding Cross-Class Marriages*.

### **Course Requirements and Grading**

Attendance – 15%

Participation – 15%

Contemporary Application Video – 10%

Midterm Essays (Two) – 40%

Final Oral Exam – 20%

***Attendance (15%)***

Class attendance is required. You are allowed two unexcused absences during the semester. To receive an excused absence, you must email me at least 12 hours before the beginning of class with an explanation for your absence. The cause of the absence must be a reasonable interference with the course. Conflicts such as job interviews and planned appointments should be scheduled outside of class time. Please contact me to let me know if you have any additional circumstances that may interfere with your attendance.

***Participation (15%)***

Class time will be primarily used for discussion and engaging with assigned materials. There are many ways you may engage with class discussions including information or explanation seeking/giving, summarizing or synthesizing peer contributions, or comparing ideas.<sup>1</sup> If you find yourself having trouble engaging with discussions, please contact me to discuss further.

***Contemporary Application Video (10%)***

In the final weeks of the course, students will be asked to identify an intimate partnership in a book, film, television series, or long-form journalism article and assess the likelihood of its trajectory and how it fits into recent populations trends. Students will prepare a 5–7 minute video to share with their classmates on Canvas.

***Midterm Essays (20% each)***

Students will be given two prompts at the end of each of the first two sections of the course and will be asked to write a 500-word response to each. Students will be given 24 hours to complete the assignment outside of class.

***Final Oral Exam (20%)***

Students will be asked 3-5 questions from a prepared list of topics drawn from all units of the course. Students will respond verbally during a 10-minute exam with the instructor.

**Course Standards**

***Academic Integrity***

Undergraduate students enrolled in the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences or the Whiting School of Engineering at the Johns Hopkins University assume a duty to conduct themselves in a manner appropriate to the University's mission as an institution of higher learning. Students are obliged to refrain from acts which they know, or under circumstances have reason to know, violate the academic integrity of the University. Violations of academic ethics include, but are not limited to: cheating; plagiarism of another student's or another scholar's work; submitting the same or substantially similar work to satisfy the requirements of more than one course without permission; failure to cite sources adequately.

See the guide on “Academic Ethics for Undergraduates” and the Ethics Board Web site for more information: <http://e-catalog.jhu.edu/undergrad-students/student-life-policies/#UAEB>.

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<sup>1</sup> Criteria borrowed from Christopher Consolino

### ***Disabilities and Accommodations***

Students with disabilities (including those with psychological conditions, medical conditions and temporary disabilities) can request accommodations for this course by providing an Accommodation Letter issued by Student Disability Services (SDS). If you believe you might require accommodations, please contact Student Disability Services ([studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu](mailto:studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu), 410-516-4720) or visit their office at 385 Garland Hall.

### ***Mental Health***

If you are struggling with anxiety, stress, depression or other mental health related concerns, please consider visiting the JHU Counseling Center. If you are concerned about a friend, please encourage that person to seek out their services. The Counseling Center is located at 3003 North Charles Street in Suite S-200 and can be reached at 410-516-8278 and online at <http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/counselingcenter/>.

You can also find more information about support services at <http://wellness.jhu.edu>.

### ***Content Warnings***

It's important to note that in this course we may confront difficult ideas, images, and words. Our work will involve delicate and challenging discussions about topics such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and criticism of religious groups/beliefs. At times it may also involve reading texts that express offensive words and views.

We will study and talk about these topics and views in order to understand their social and historical context and consequences—never to endorse them. I promise to speak about them and facilitate our study with great sensitivity towards their potentially harmful impact, and to giving all students room to develop and express their own ideas in a respectful manner. I expect that you all will embrace those same commitments in our work together. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with material we're studying or are having difficulty adhering to these commitments, please speak to me individually.

### **Course Plan**

*Week 1 – Introduction (8/29, 8/31)*

Session 1 – Introduction

- The Americans, Episode 1: Pilot

Session 2 – What is an intimate partnership?

- Coontz, Stephanie. 2006. *Marriage, A History: How Love Conquered Marriage*, Chapters 1-3
- Fresh Air: [Marriage in Crisis – and the Role of Love](#)
- PBS Origins: [Where does the Nuclear Family Come From?](#)

**MARRIAGE** - *What role does marriage play in society? How has it changed over time?*

*Week 2 – History of Marriage (9/7, 9/12)*

Session 1 – A history of Marriage

- Coontz, Stephanie. 2006. *Marriage, A History: How Love Conquered Marriage*, Chapters 15-17
- PBS Origins: [When Did Marriage Become About Love?](#)
- The Atlantic: [How the Nuclear Family Broke Down](#)
- WCPO: [The History of Marriage](#)

Session 2 – American Marriage – What is unique about American Marriage?

- Coontz, Stephanie. 2006. *Marriage, A History: How Love Conquered Marriage*, Chapter 14
- Cherlin, Andrew J. 2010. *The Marriage Go-Round*, Chapters 3
- Blumstein, Philip and Pepper Schwartz. 1983. *American Couples*, Chapter 2
- All Things Considered: [Most Couples Living Together Marry](#)

*Week 3 – Marriage Today (9/14, 9/19)*

Session 1 – The Marriage Go-Round

- Cherlin, Andrew J. 2010. *The Marriage Go-Round*, Chapters 4 & 5
- Pew Research: [“I Do,” Again](#)
- Pew Research: [Modern Family](#)
- KQED Forum: [The Marriage Go Round](#)

Supplemental:

- Cherlin, Andrew J. 2010. *The Marriage Go-Round*, Chapter 6

Session 2 – The Deinstitutionalization of Marriage & Marriage as a Capstone

- Cherlin, Andrew J. 2004. “The Deinstitutionalization of Marriage,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*.
- Cherlin, Andrew J. 2018. “Marriage Has Become a Trophy,” *The Atlantic*.
- Hidden Brain: [When did marriage become so hard?](#)
- National Council on Family Relations: [Andrew Cherlin on marriage, cohabitation, and societal trends in family formation](#)

Supplemental:

- WGBH Roundtable: [Marriage: ‘A Luxury Good?’](#)

**MORE (ALMOST) MARRIAGE** - *What is cohabitation? How is it different from marriage?*

*Week 4 – Cohabitation (9/21, 9/26)*

Session 1 – What is cohabitation?

- Sassler, Sharon and Amanda Jayne Miller. 2017. *Cohabitation Nation*, Chapter 1-3 & 8
- NPR: [Who’s Moving in Together, and Why](#)

Session 2 – What does cohabitation look like today?

- Sassler, Sharon and Daniel T. Licheter. 2020. “Cohabitation and Marriage: Complexities and Diversity in Union Formation Patterns,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*.

- Morning Edition: [Record Number of People Are Cohabiting](#)

*Week 5 – Midterm (9/28, 10/3)*

Session 1 – Review

Session 2 – Take-home Midterm #1

## DATING

*Week 6 – How do men and women find intimate partners? (10/5, 10/10)*

Session 1 – Education as a match maker

- Arum, Richard, Josipa Roksa, and Michelle J. Budig. 2008. “The romance of college attendance: Higher education stratification and mate selection,” *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*.
- Armstrong, Elizabeth A. and Laura T. Hamilton. 2021. “Classed Pathways to Marriage: Hometown Ties, College Networks, and Life After Graduation,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*.
- Talks at Google: [The Sociology of Connection](#)
- CNN: [Should you go to college for Mrs. Degree? Princeton Mom weighs in](#)

Session 2 – The rise of online dating

- Rosenfeld, Michael J., Reuben J. Thomas, and Sonia Hausen. 2019. “Disintermediating your friends: How online dating in the United States displaces other ways of meeting,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*.
- Rosenfeld, Michael J. and Reuben J. Thomas. 2012. “Searching for a Mate: The Rise of the Internet as a Social Intermediary,” *American Sociological Review*.
- All Things Considered: [Computers Are Becoming Cupid’s Best Weapon](#)
- TEDx: [How I hacked online dating](#)
- The Economist: [How the internet has changed dating](#)
- The Atlantic: [Why Dating is Hard for Millennials](#)
- ASA: [Online Love in Later Years](#)
- The Verge: [Do Dating Apps Ruin Men’s Self-Esteem?](#)

## MATING

*Week 7 – Trends in sexual activity and fertility (10/12, 10/17)*

Session 1 – Sexual activity among adolescents

- Barcelos, Christie A. and Aline C. Gubrium. 2014. “Reproducing Stories: Strategic Narratives of Teen Pregnancy and Motherhood,” *Social Problems*.
- Bearman, Peter S. and Hannah Bruckner. 2001. “Promising the Future: Virginity Pledges and First Intercourse,” *American Journal of Sociology*.
- The Atlantic: [Why Are Young People Having Less Sex?](#)

- The Atlantic: [Can the U.S. End Teen Pregnancy?](#)

Supplemental:

- The Atlantic: [The Sex Recession](#)

Session 2 – Fertility and Parenthood

- Guzzo, Karen Benjamin and Sarah R. Hayford. 2020. “Pathways to Parenthood in Social and Family Contexts: Decade in Review, 2020,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*.
- The Atlantic: [The Next Century’s Big Demographic Mystery](#)
- PBS NewsHour: [How parenting evolved into cultivating kids’ happiness](#)

## **DIVORCE**

*Week 8 – What is divorce and what role does it play in the family? (10/19, 10/24)*

Session 1 – What does divorce look like?

- Vaughan, Diane. 1986. *Uncoupling*.

Session 2 – Divorce then and now

- Furstenberg, Jr. Frank. 1990. “Divorce and the American Family,” *Annual Review of Sociology*.
- Raley, Kelly R. and Megan M. Sweeney. 2020. “Divorce, Repartnering, and Stepfamilies: A Decade in Review,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*. Pages 81-85, 87-89.
- Death, Sex, and Money: [Downsizing after divorce](#)
- The Atlantic: [How Successful Are the Marriages of People with Divorced Parents?](#)

*Week 9 – Midterm (10/26, 10/31)*

1 – Review

2 – Take-home Midterm #2

**SOCIAL IDENTITIES** - *How do social identities like race, class, gender, and sexuality affect intimate partnerships?*

*Week 10 – Race (11/2, 11/7)*

Session 1 – Interracial dating and marriage

- Nemoto, K. 2006. “Intimacy, desire, and the construction of self in relationships between Asian American women and white American men,” *Journal of Asian American Studies*.
- PBS Origins: [Origins of the Asian Fetish](#)
- Lewis, Jr., Richard and Joanne Ford-Robertson. 2010. “Understanding the Occurrence of Interracial Marriage in the United States Through Differential Assimilation,” *Journal of Black Studies*.
- Tell Me More: [Intraracial Marriages on the Rise](#)
- NYT: [Mixed Race Marriages in the South](#)

Session 2 – Race, cohabitation, and marriage

- Apel, Robert. 2016. “The Effects of Jail and Prison Confinement on Cohabitation and Marriage,” *The Annals of the American Academy*.
- Teachman, Jay. 2007. “Race, Military Service, and Marital Timing: Evidence from the NLSY-79,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*.
- The Atlantic: [Mass Incarceration, Visualized](#)
- The New York Times: [The Upshot: 1.5 Million Missing Black Men](#)

*Week 11 – Class + Sexuality (11/9, 11/14)*

Session 1 – Cross-class marriages

- Streib, Jessi. 2015. *The Power of the Past: Understanding Cross-Class Marriages*.
- WPR: [Challenges of Marrying Across Class Boundaries](#)
- Contexts: [Marrying across class lines](#)

Session 2 – Gay Marriage

- Hart-Brinson, Peter. 2018. *The Gay Marriage Generation*. Chapters Introduction, 3, 6, Conclusion
- PBS News Hour: [Same-sex couples gain equal right to marry](#)
- Matt Baume: [Why Opinion Changed So Fast on Gay Marriage](#)
- Hidden Brain: [America’s Changing Attitudes Toward Gay People](#)

*Week 12 – Race, Class, Sexuality and Fertility (11/16, 11/28)*

Session 1 – Race, Sexuality, and fertility

- Sweeney, Megan M. and R. Kelly Raley. 2014. “Race, Ethnicity, and the Changing Context of Childbearing in the United States,” *Annual Review of Sociology*.
- Stacey, Judith, and Timothy R. Bilblarz. 2001. “(How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?,” *American Sociological Review*.
- Morning Edition: [Kids’ Voices Key on Both Sides of Gay-Marriage Debate](#)
- This American Life: [And Daddy Makes Three](#)
- AJ+: [The Myth of the Absent Black Father](#)

Session 2 – Class contexts and fertility

- Edin, Kathryn and Maria J. Kefalas. 2005. *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage*, Chapters 1,2,4, & 6.
- Edin, Kathryn and Timothy J. Nelson. 20014. *Doing the Best I Can: Fatherhood in the Inner City*, Chapters Introduction, 1, & 8.
- SCPI: [Unequal Childhoods: Annette Lareau](#)
- SCPI: [Having Children in Poverty](#)

*Week 13 – Gender (11/30, 12/5)*

Session 1 – Gender in Intimate Partnerships

- Daminger, Allison. 2019. "The Cognitive Dimension of Household Labor," American Sociological Review.
- The Atlantic: [Lessons from 40 men in egalitarian relationships](#)
- TEDx: [Gender equality through empowering men at home](#)

Session 2 – Contemporary Video Essay Discussion

*Week 14 – Review (12/9)*