

Psych 468, Section 1: Child Development in the Context of the Family

Overview of Course

Family relationships provide important social influences on child development. In this class we will consider the history of American families and what American families have been like in the past. We will consider the rapidly changing demographics of families in our country and the issue of “What is a family?” There is tremendous diversity in what constitutes a family for children in our country, despite the fact that most family research has been done on two-parent, middle-class families.

We will explore theories and models for understanding how family relationships and family experiences are associated with child development. A developmental systems model (Cox & Paley, 1997; 2003; Sameroff, 1994) perspective stresses the dynamic relation between the individual and his or her social environment. Within the family, such a model emphasizes that individual family members are necessarily interdependent, exerting a continuous and reciprocal influence on one another. The model also recognizes that the family is embedded in neighborhoods, communities, cultures, and employment contexts, and that there is dynamic interplay between the family and those systems.

We will consider how a researcher goes from this kind of complex theory to actually doing research to test some of the questions that arise from theory. We will discuss different methods that can be used in developmental research, and the strengths and weaknesses of different methods. Original studies will be presented that are related to the issues that we are considering in class, and class members will be expected to provide a critical analysis of those studies in presentations that occur throughout the semester.

In terms of specific topics, we will discuss research on parenting, ask what parent-child relationships are associated with positive outcomes for children in what contexts, and think about the roles of fathers and mothers and siblings in families. We will consider different ages of childhood from early childhood to adolescence and emerging adulthood and how families play a role in the individual’s development. We will focus on marital or adult parent relationships in families and discuss how marriages change over time and the implications of those changes for the relationships parents have with children. We will consider divorce, remarriage, and stepfamilies.

We will discuss how families balance employment and raising children and the research on families and day care. We will discuss families at risk due to poverty or other challenging conditions. We will consider public policy that addresses family life and the implications that findings from family research have for policy. We will consider cultural contexts and how different cultural values and beliefs may shape family interactions and outcomes for children.

The class is designed to build upon the knowledge and skills obtained in earlier courses that students have taken including the prerequisites Psych 101 (General Psychology) and 250 (Child Development) and Psych 210 or 215 (Statistical Principles of Psychological Research). Students should come into this course with a basic knowledge of the field of psychology and

more specific knowledge of the research on child development as well as a good understanding of methods and statistics in psychological research. In this class we focus on the specific area of family factors in child development, we consider the research on this topic, and we put a critical eye to: the questions that arise from prominent theories, the research designed to address those questions, and the future direction that research should take to understand better the development of our nation's children. The class is focused on developing a solid knowledge base of the psychological research concerning family factors in child development, critical thinking skills that developmental scientists need to evaluate and conduct child development research, and the manifestation of those critical thinking skills in written and oral presentation.

Course Resources

There is no course textbook. Required and suggested readings for the course are provided under "Resources" in Sakai.

Honor Code

The honor code applies to all class work. It is expected that students will neither give nor receive help on any class assignments except for help that is specifically allowed. Students may help each other within group presentations, and study groups for exams are encouraged.

Requirements, Written Assignments, and Grading

The two course exams (midterm and final) will comprise 60% of the grade. Other course requirements include short class synthesis papers and class participation (5%), a course paper (25%), and a group presentation (10%). These are described below.

Short Class Synthesis Papers and Class Participation (5%)

Discussion will be a central part of this class. It is critical that everyone read the material for each class prior to the class session. Three times during the semester you will be asked unannounced to write a closed-book 1-2 page synthesis of the issues we have been discussing in response to a specific question that I will give you. This will occur in the last 15 minutes of class. A question will be given to you related to the readings assigned for the week and the discussion that we have been having. You will write 1-2 pages summarizing the issues and the various points of view including what we know and what we need to know. These will be scored on a 5 point scale. Your best 2 scores will be retained. Thus, if you miss class for illness or other reasons and do not have a chance to do one of these, you will still have 2 scores. A third score on a 5 point scale will be given based on satisfactory class attendance and participation in class discussions. My expectation will be that no student will miss more than 4 classes throughout the semester (my definition of satisfactory class attendance) unless there are circumstances that make absence necessary (i.e. prolonged illness). The metric will be as follows: 5= satisfactory attendance and outstanding contribution to class discussion; 4.75 = satisfactory attendance and excellent contribution to class discussion; 4.5 = satisfactory attendance and good contribution to class discussion; 4.25 = satisfactory attendance and some contribution to class discussion; 4.0 = satisfactory attendance and little contribution to class discussion; 3.75 = less than satisfactory attendance but outstanding contribution to class discussion; 3.5 less than satisfactory attendance but good contribution to class discussion etc. The three grades (2 for the in-class essays and 1 for contribution/attendance) will be averaged for your participation score. Any student with a

prolonged illness that will affect this scoring should speak to me about his/her case to receive an adjustment in the scoring—please don't come to class if you are truly ill and/or contagious.

Paper (25%)

Each student will write a paper 8-10 pages in length on some aspect of research on family factors related to child development. A list of potential topics for the paper is posted on Sakai under “**Course Information**”. Students can use one of those topics or negotiate a different topic with me. You may submit a proposal for the paper or an early draft if you wish feedback on your topic. I encourage each student to do this. I am happy to give feedback over email if that is more convenient for you. The evaluation of the paper will be done using criteria listed below. This paper should attempt to synthesize the central research on a topic applying a critical eye to this research (focus on some central questions and synthesize what we know and what we need to know as well as some of the limitations of the research. Use references from peer reviewed journals (opinions from the web are not considered a reasonable reference.) A hard copy of the paper is due at the beginning of class on **March 24th, but the paper can be turned in at any time prior to March 24th.** The paper cannot be emailed to me unless special permission is obtained.

EVALUATION OF PAPER

Your paper will be evaluated based on the: **quality of writing, clarity of ideas, quality of information, and organization and coherence.**

1. What was the quality of the writing, i.e., were the sentences crisp and clear, did one sentence build on another, were new paragraphs begun in reasonable places, was correct grammar used, and were there few typos or misspellings?

Low quality

High quality

1 2 3 4 5

2. How clearly did the paper present the ideas that were central to the paper (i.e., was it easy for the reader to understand the ideas that the writer was trying to convey)?

Ideas were not clear

Ideas were very clear

1 2 3 4 5

3. Was the information of high quality (was it from good sources and authoritative, were there enough sources so that the paper did not depend on just a few sources)?

Low Quality

High Quality

1 2 3 4 5

4. Was the paper well-organized and coherent (i.e., were the goals of the paper clear, did the paper follow a logical sequence, were the transitions between paragraphs clear, were headings used where they were useful and helpful in structuring the paper, were there too many and confusing headings)?

Poorly organized/ Low coherence

Well-organized/high coherence

1 2 3 4 5

General Comments:

Group Presentations (10%)

Groups of 3 students will prepare a presentation of a specific original research report. The topics will correspond to the general topic the class is considering concurrently. The total presentation will be for 30 minutes with each student having 10 minutes for their part of the presentation. One student will present the introduction to the research, giving the logic behind the questions and tying the ideas to our broader consideration of that topic in class. A second student will present the methods and the results of the research tying their presentation to our broader discussion of methods and measures in family and child development research. A third student will discuss the findings, presenting the researchers' conclusions and expanding upon the discussion by consideration of how this paper contributes to the literature and what more needs to be done. The research report must come from a major journal in the field and be approved by Dr. Cox (I will suggest articles to the groups). The students' grades for the presentation will depend on their own presentation as well as the quality of coordination of the whole presentation (see grading guidelines below). The presentations will give students the experience of working in groups as well as the experience of providing a critical evaluation of published original research studies. Topic selection will occur in the first few weeks of the semester with the assistance of the instructor. Dr. Cox will do a couple of these presentations during the first month as an example of what is expected. The group presentations will occur in the last 30 minutes of class on selected days beginning in March.

EVALUATION OF INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATION WITHIN GROUP PRESENTATION

Each presentation will be evaluated on each criterion listed below: **clarity of ideas, quality of synthesis, coordination with other members of group and with material being presented on this topic in class, and maintenance of class interest.**

1. How clearly did the individual present the ideas that he/she wanted to communicate?

Ideas were not clear

Ideas were very clear

1 2 3 4 5

2. Was the synthesis of information of high quality?

Low Quality

High Quality

1 2 3 4 5

3. Was the presentation well-coordinated with the other members of the group (well-organized and coherent)?

Poorly coordinated

Well-coordinated

1 2 3 4 5

4. Was the presentation well-coordinated and synthesized with other information/issues on this topic being discussed in class?

Poorly coordinated

1

2

3

4

Well-coordinated

5

5. Was the presentation given with energy and enthusiasm so that class interest was maintained?

Good interest maintenance

1

2

3

4

5

Poor interest maintenance

Exams (2 exams, 30% each, 60% total)

There will be two exams each covering approximately 1/2 of the class material. The first exam (midterm) will be given in class on **February 23rd**. The final exam will cover material since the first exam and will be given during final week at the time scheduled for this class (**May 3rd from 8-10am**). The exams will be a combination of short-answer, multiple choice, and essay questions. If you have a legitimate reason why you cannot take the midterm exam, you must contact me before the exam time. I only will allow changes in the midterm exam schedule in unusual circumstances (**note the Dean's office must approve final exam changes because the course final exam is given in compliance with UNC final exam regulations and according to the UNC Final Exam calendar.**).

Grading Scale

Overall final class grade shall be assigned as follows: A = 93% or above; A- = 90-92%; B+ = 87-89%; B = 83-86%; B- = 80-82%; C+ = 77-79%; C = 73-76%; C- = 70-72%; D+ = 67-69%; D = 63-66%; D- = 60-62%; F = <60%.

Weekly Course Topics: (See Course Assigned Readings and Documents in “Weekly Readings and Presentations” under “Resources” in Sakai). *Note that the timing of these topics may change depending on our progress through the semester. Also note that I may change readings when, for example, there is a new reading that is better etc. I will always do this at least 3 weeks ahead of the assigned date.*

Week 1	
8/23 & 8/25	Course Overview and Introduction to “family” and child development; history and demographics of American Families
Week 2	
8/30 & 9/1	Theory regarding families and child development/Attachment
Week 3	
9/6 & 9/8	Parental attachment and relationships and emotional development in children
Week 4	

6/13 & 9/15	Child Temperament: Fathering
Week 5	
9/20	Fathering continued; Families and adolescent
9/22	Group 1 Presentation
Week 6	
9/27	Families and Adolescents Continued;
9/29	Group 2 Presentation
Week 7	
10/4	Midterm Exam; Marriage and Child Development
10/6	Group 3 Presentation
Week 8	
10/11	NO CLASS – UNIVERSITY DAY
10/13	Interparental Relationships; Group 4 Presentation
Week 9	
10/18	Poverty
10/20	NO CLASS – FALL BREAK
Week 10	
10/25	Poverty Continued
10/27	Group 5 Presentation; Paper due
Week 11	
11/1	Parental Work
11/3	Group 6 Presentation
Week 12	
11/8	Child Care
11/10	Group 7 Presentation
Week 13	
11/15	Child Care/Early Childhood education
11/17	Group 8 Presentation
Week 14	
11/22	Early Childhood Policy
11/24	NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING
Week 15	
11/29	Policy and Culture
12/1	Group 9 Presentation
Week 16	
12/6	Culture
12/13 – 8AM	FINAL EXAM