

# **SOCIOLOGY 575(01) Youth and Society**

## **Course Syllabus**

Fall 2013

Time: Thurs 9:30 a.m.-12:10 p.m.

Location: Davison Hall, #128

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Davison Hall, Room 38, 848-932-7868

### **Purpose**

Many divergent opinions on the state of youth in America circulate through media and political discourse. This course critiques public discourse about youth and addresses core questions about youth from a sociological perspective. How have conceptual boundaries and public perceptions of youth evolved over time? Are contemporary youth more or less narcissistic, pathological, cynical, and politically engaged than preceding generations? Where does “youth culture” come from and how has it changed? How do social structure and the wider culture shape youth and social constructions of youth? We will also examine some of the problems and pathologies associated with young people and inter-dynamics among social institutions and service systems charged with managing these problems. We will use in-depth ethnographies centered on both inner-city youth and middle class youth to examine the socially stratified and fragmented experiences of youth and to explore whether there are aspects of youth culture and society that transcend the boundaries of race, class, and geography. Readings will permit exploration of the perceptions, behaviors, and experiences of youth within the larger social context in which the transition to adulthood takes place. The variegated social experiences of youth will also inform our critical examination of efforts to prevent and control youth pathologies and the consequences of expanded surveillance, supervision, and criminalization.

### **Learning Goals**

- Acquire broad understanding of the theoretical and empirical approaches taken to understand the shifting social construction of youth and the cultural and institutional forces that shape the social experiences of youth.
- Learn about the current state of knowledge regarding socioeconomic and ethnoracial variation in the experiences of youth and the causes and consequences of this variation.
- Critically analyze the conceptual and empirical underpinning of research on youth subcultures, youth pathologies, and the social control of youth.
- Identify significant new research questions related to the study of youth in society.

Several methods will be used in this class to measure achievement of these objectives:

- Participating in in-depth weekly discussions of assigned readings
- Helping lead the discussion for a seminar
- Writing a synthetical, critical, and reflective responses assigned readings
- Writing a final research paper.

### **Required Readings**

Three books are required in this course. They should be available at the Douglass College Book Store and on-line.

Milner, Murray. 2006. *Freaks, Geeks, and Cool Kids*. Routledge.

Carter, Prudence. 2007. *Keepin' It Real: School Success Beyond Black and White*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rios, Victor. 2011. *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*. New York: NYU Press.

Other readings, unless otherwise noted, will be available via Sakai (under Resources). I may add readings and other materials to Sakai during the semester. When an abundance of reading material is assigned, I will try to convey to you which readings or portions of readings are most important. I will provide discussion questions in advance of the sessions on particular readings. My intent is not to overwhelm you with readings but rather to provide many resources for your papers and to supply a variety of perspectives to inform and enrich responses to discussion questions.

### **Course Format**

This course will be taught in a seminar format. As a seminar, the course emphasizes discussion and writing. To encourage independence of thought, students are required to be lead discussant for one class session and to determine the specific focus of their term paper. I will also provide short lectures on the material as necessary.

### **Course Grade**

Your grade for the course will be apportioned (100 point scale) in the following manner:

Participation:	30%
Commentaries:	30%
Final Paper:	40%

*Participation.* Thirty percent of your grade will be based on the quantity and quality of your classroom participation. Absences from class without a valid excuse count against your participation grade. I encourage students who have not done the applicable reading

to let others respond to questions first. This helps keep class discussion pertinent and flowing. Classroom participation that detracts from focused, intellectual discourse and an open, congenial classroom atmosphere will not improve your grade. You will sign up for or be assigned a session in which you will be that session's designated "go-to" person (i.e. lead discussant), especially for the tougher questions. You should be prepared to both answer and ask discussion questions on that day. If you have a phobia about talking in class, please see me. We may agree upon a way to make up some of the lost points such as submitting additional commentaries (see below) or written responses to discussion questions. All students will be asked to give a short presentation about their final papers on the last day of class (October 17), which will count toward your participation grade.

The Rutgers Sociology Department strives to create an environment that supports and affirms diversity in all manifestations, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, social class, disability status, region/country of origin, and political orientation. We also celebrate diversity of theoretical and methodological perspectives among our faculty and students and seek to create an atmosphere of respect and mutual dialogue. We have zero tolerance for violations of these principles and have instituted clear and respectful procedures for responding to such grievances

### **Writing Assignments**

The course has one major writing assignment and several small ones. The small assignments are an attempt to advance your thought process and enhance classroom discussion rather than ends in themselves. Beginning September 12, I ask that, you, prior to class, record and submit via Sakai some reflections on the reading for that week in the equivalent of two to three double spaced pages. You may submit up to six commentaries, but your grade will be based only on the top three (10 points each). Feel free to focus your commentaries on some of the discussion questions that I distribute. Whereas my grading criteria for a typical paper include organization and style, I am interested only in the depth of coherent and rational thought that you are giving to the readings, both individually and comparatively. I personally do some of my clearest and deepest thinking in e-mails to friends and colleagues, and ethnographers often keep journals. Such styles of writing are perfectly acceptable and you should choose whatever format is most comfortable for you. In these papers, I especially encourage you to ask critical questions of the readings and to integrate prior readings, considering, as Paul Mclean puts it, "how one author might interrogate another." You may also use these commentaries as a vehicle to test out, extend, and refine ideas for your final paper. Just be careful *not to focus your writing too narrowly*; it should be clear from the piece that you have done most of the reading for that week. References to recommended readings are also well received.

You are also required to write a final paper on a topic directly relevant to the course, 10-15 double-spaced pages long, which requires research and critical analysis. All papers will be judged on the depth and breadth of analysis, the quality of the writing, the sufficient and proper integration of course materials, and additional considerations specified later. Papers should reflect an understanding of both course readings and issues

and topics raised in class discussion. Please discuss your choice of paper topic with me by e-mail or in person by October 4<sup>th</sup>. You are welcome to request feedback on paper outlines or summaries. However, I will not read and comment on rough drafts of papers.

Please submit your papers through Sakai. It saves paper, and I hand-write far fewer comments because of my poor handwriting. It is your responsibility to make sure that your papers transmit properly, on time, and without viruses or macros.

Clear violations of academic integrity will be forwarded to the Graduate Chair (or to the appropriate Dean if you are an undergraduate). For more information on the University's uniform policies and procedures concerning academic integrity violations please see <http://teachx.rutgers.edu/integrity/policy.html>.

Late assignments will be deducted an additional half grade (a six-point penalty on a 100 point scale) for each additional day late beginning *immediately* after the time the assignment is due. Whenever possible, no-penalty extensions should be requested and approved in advance. If an extended illness or family situation prevents you from attending class and completing your assignments on time, you must receive a new paper due date, so your paper can be evaluated properly and fairly.

### **Communications**

*E-mails.* Although I encourage e-mail communication, please do not expect an immediate reply. Please first ask a classmate for information that I provided in a class that you missed.

*List-serve.* A course list-serve will automatically send messages to your official e-mail address on record with Rutgers University. The main purpose of the list-serve is for me to send you discussion questions as well as updates and reminders. Occasionally I may post items to the list-serve that are relevant to a pending assignment. It is your responsibility to check your e-mail regularly. As a rule, I plan to always give at least 2 days notice for any minor changes I make to the readings, papers etc., and to also make any important announcements in class. To contact the whole class, send a message to [youthandsociety\\_fa12@rams.rutgers.edu](mailto:youthandsociety_fa12@rams.rutgers.edu).

### **Discussion Topics and Required Readings**

Please do the reading corresponding to a class in advance of that class.

#### **Week 1. Introduction to the Sociology of Youth (Sept. 5)**

Furstenberg, Frank. 2000. "The Sociology of Adolescence and Youth in the 1990s: A Critical Commentary." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62(4): 896-910.

Shanahan, Michael J. "Pathways to Adulthood in Changing Societies: Variability and Mechanisms in Life Course Perspective." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26, no. 1 (2000): 667-92.

Mortimer, Jeylan T. and Reed W. Larson. 2002. "Macrostructural Trends and the Reshaping of Adolescence." Pp. 1-17 in Jeylan T. Mortimer and Reed W. Larson (eds.) *The Changing Adolescent Experience: Societal Trends and the Transition to Adulthood*. New York: Cambridge

*We will spend the most time discussing Furstenberg and the least time on Mortimer et al.*

### **Week 2. Public Discourse on Adolescence (Sept. 12)**

Mazzarella and Pecora, "Girls in Crisis: Newspaper Coverage of Adolescent Girls"

Wyn, Johanna. (2005). "Youth in the media: Adult stereotypes of young people." In Williams and Thurlow, (eds), In A. Williams and C. Thurlow (eds), *Talking Adolescence: Perspectives on Communication in the Teenage Years* (pp. 53-71). New York: Peter Lang.

Males, Mike, "Why the Gigantic, Decades-Long Drop in Black Youth Crime Threatens Major Interests."

*I will also circulate a few examples of mainstream news cover of youth pathologies for illustrative purposes.*

### **Week 3. Adolescent Society and (Sub)Culture (Sept. 19)**

Milner, Murray. 2006. *Freaks, Geeks, and Cool Kids*. Routledge.

*Skim Chapter 4; Chapter 5 is especially important.*

### **Week 4. Opportunity, Cultural Capital, and Urban Education (Sept. 26)**

Carter, Prudence. 2007. *Keepin' It Real: School Success Beyond Black and White*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fordham, Signithia and Ogbu, John. 1986. "Black Students' School Success: Coping With the Burden of 'Acting White.'" *Urban Review* 18: 176-206.

Recommended Reading:

O'Connor, C. 1999. "Race, Class, and Gender in America: Narratives of Opportunity among Low-Income African American Youths." *Sociology of Education* 72, no. 3: 137-57

### **Week 5. Social Variations in the Transition to Adulthood (Oct. 3)**

Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr. and Julie A. Kmec. "Racial Differences in the Transition to Adulthood: A Follow-Up Study of the Philadelphia Youth Study."

Zhou, Min. 1997. "Growing Up American: The Challenge Confronting Immigrant Children and Children of Immigrants." *Annual Review of Sociology* 23:63-95.

Michael Massoglia and Christopher Uggen, 2010. "Settling Down and Aging Out: Toward an Interactionist Theory of Desistance and the Transition to Adulthood" *American Journal of Sociology*. *American Journal of Sociology* 116 (2): 543–82

Recommended Reading:

Portes Alejandro, Fernandez-Kelly Patricia, Haller William. Segmented assimilation on the ground: the new second generation in early adulthood. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*.2005;28(6):1000–40.

### **Week 6. Social Control of Youth (Oct. 10)**

Rios, Victor. 2011. *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*. New York: NYU Press. (*Chapter 4 is especially important; skim chapter 2 but read 40-42* ).

Nelson, Margaret, 2010 "From Care to Control" in *Parenting Out of Control: Anxious Parents in Uncertain Times*. New York: NYU Press.

Recommended Reading:

Nelson, Margaret, 2010 "The Consequences of Parenting Out of Control"

Weiss, Jen "Scan This" in In Torin Monahan & Rodolfo Torres (Eds.), *Schools Under Surveillance: Cultures of Control in Public Education* (pp. 38-54). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Hirschfield, Paul, & Celinska, Katarzyna (2011). Beyond Fear: Sociological Perspectives on the Criminalization of School Discipline. *Sociology Compass*, 15, 1-12.

Hirschfield, Paul. (2008). Preparing for prison? The criminalization of school discipline in the USA. *Theoretical Criminology*, 12(1), 79-101.

Hirschfield, Paul. (2008). The declining significance of delinquent labels in disadvantaged urban communities. *Sociological Forum*, 23(3), 575-601.

**Week 7. Emergent Adulthood and Student Presentations (Oct. 17).**

Marantz Henig, Robin (August 18, 2010) "What Is It About 20-Somethings?"

Furstenberg et al. "Growing Up is Harder to Do" *Contexts*. Summer 2004

Bynner, John. "Rethinking the Youth Phase of the Life-Course: The Case for Emerging Adulthood?" *Journal of Youth Studies* 8, no. 4 (2005): 367-84.

Recommended Reading:

Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. 2007. "Suffering, Selfish, Slackers? Myths and Reality About Emerging Adults" *Journal of Youth & Adolescence* 36:23–29.

Final Papers will be due on Saturday, Oct. 19.