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Lecture: TR 9:30-11  
Room: CAS 316  
Office Hours: Tues. 11:15-12:15  
Thurs. 12-2

**HI303: Sex, Love, Family:  
Relationships in Recent American History and Pop Culture**



Studying the history of sex, love, and family reveals the degree to which our personal relationships are conditioned by the times. This course explores how Americans' most intimate bonds have and have not changed over the last two centuries, paying particular attention to romantic arrangements and family dynamics since the 1950s. Rather than moving chronologically (for example, by decade or presidential administration), we will follow the life cycle beginning with birth and ending with death, surveying common American milestones along the way such as coming of age, getting married, and having children. Using comparisons with the past to elucidate truths about our own era, this course will look for social norms, patterns of thinking, and widespread daily practices while also paying attention to differences due to class, race, and religion as well as sexual orientation and political affiliation.

The sources we will study range widely from diaries, short stories, films, podcasts, television episodes, and stand-up comedy to contemporary ethnographies, advice manuals, and memoirs. Together they will help us explore a variety of themes such as how new technologies have changed human interactions; how Americans have invented and understood various rituals such as coming out or having a mid-life crisis; how family and romantic ideals have stacked up next to everyday realities (and what Americans do to fill the gap between them); and how couples and families have answered the tricky question: who is in charge?

## COURSE MATERIALS:

The following books are available at the **BU Bookstore**:

Rachel Held Evans, *Evolving in Monkey Town* (2010) (or 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. *Faith Unraveled*)  
Daniel Jones, ed., *Modern Love* (2007)  
Daniel Jones, ed., *The Bastard on the Couch* (2005)  
Cathi Hanauer, ed., *The Bitch in the House* (2003)  
Dan Savage, *The Commitment* (2005)  
Tom Perrotta, *Nine Inches* (2013)  
Peggy Vincent, *Baby Catcher: Chronicles of a Modern Midwife* (2002)

A course packet should also be purchased from **University Readers**.  
(<https://students.universityreaders.com/store/>)

Additional sources will be available on **Blackboard Learn** (<https://learn.bu.edu>). Readings in the University Readers Course Packet are marked with \*\* on the syllabus. Clips, links to audio files, and other sources posted on Blackboard are designated with §.

This course will also have several **assigned films and television episodes** to view outside of class time. They are available at Krasker film library on campus, or can be “rented” online at amazon.com or other sites for a small fee. Netflix, iTunes, etc. are also good bets. Details and links can be found on Blackboard.

## ASSIGNMENTS:

Assignments for this course consist of **two in-class exams and a research project**, the details of which can be found at the back of the syllabus. Preparation for the research project, due at the end of the semester, will include a series of preliminary tasks to be completed during the course of the semester. To pass the course, **you must complete and pass all of the assignments**. You will not be able to do well without attending the lectures and studying the assigned sources.

Your final grade will be calculated according to the following percentages:

First Exam (20%)  
Second Exam (25%)  
Final Project proposal and bibliography assignments (20%)  
Final Project (35%)

## ATTENDANCE and PARTICIPATION:

Attendance is expected. The course will mix lectures and discussions, and will be more successful if everyone completes the day's reading before class. Thoughtful participation in discussions may be taken into consideration when determining final grades, especially in cases that are borderline between two grades. Students who miss more than a few classes should expect to have their final grades reduced.

## PLAGIARISM:

**Remember that plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct are serious offenses,** and it's your responsibility to know and understand the provisions of the CAS Academic Conduct Code. Cases of suspected academic misconduct in this course will be referred to the Dean's Office, where serious sanctions may be imposed, such as suspension or expulsion. For a detailed description of Boston University's rules, consult the code of conduct at <http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/> or pick up a copy in CAS advising at 100 Bay State Road.

## OTHER GROUND RULES:

**No laptop or cell phone use in class and no multitasking when reading, watching, or listening to assigned sources at home.** The temptation to check email, shop for jeans, or otherwise juggle and surf while studying or even sitting in class is strong. "Multitasking" sounds like a positive skill that good time managers master. Yet studies have shown over and over again that dividing your attention in this manner does not work. It lowers comprehension, thwarts long-term memory retention, and undermines the quality of class discussions. Your coursework deserves at least as much focus and respect as you would give to a yoga or gym class.

**This course will cover explicit and controversial content.** If you would not be comfortable viewing, say, a Seth Rogen movie (and I don't mean *Kung Fu Panda*), then this won't be for you. In addition to some R-rated content, we will also address many sensitive issues that may "hit close to home." Our goal in class will be to be honest but respectful of each others' opinions, so that we can bring our own experiences and knowledge of pop culture to bear on the course topics while also keeping our discussions civil, productive, and grounded in historical analysis. We will be testing our own views, assumptions, and practices by comparing them to how others have done things differently—asking not only what do we think but also why do we think the way we do?

\* This course counts toward a Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies minor. For further information about the WGS minor, contact the program at [wgs@bu.edu](mailto:wgs@bu.edu) or see the website at [www.bu.edu/wgs](http://www.bu.edu/wgs).

\*\* This syllabus was designed with help from a GUTS grant from the BU Provost's office and the research assistance of Alexander Friedman '14 and Mimi Alworth '15.

## SCHEDULE OF LECTURES AND SOURCE ASSIGNMENTS:

### Week 1: Ideals and Realities Over Time

#### **Tues., Jan. 20: Changing Family Portraits**

#### **Thurs., Jan. 22: Changing Contexts**

SOURCES: § “Happy Weekend” (1958), *Leave it to Beaver*, Season two, episode 13

§ “Hawaii” (2010), *Modern Family*, Season one, episode 23

### Week 2: Beginnings

#### **Tues., Jan. 27: Being Born**

SOURCES: \*\*Dr. Joseph DeLee, “The Prophylactic Forceps Operation,” *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 1 (1920)

Peggy Vincent, *Baby Catcher: Chronicles of a Modern Midwife* (2002), pps. 17-38, 55-66, 185-90

#### **Thurs., Jan. 29: Baby Time**

SOURCES: \*\*Luther Emmett Holt, *The Care and Feeding of Children* (1900), excerpts

\*\*Benjamin Spock, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (1957 edition), excerpts

\*\*Dr. William Sears, *The Baby Book* (1993), excerpts

### Week 3: Childhood

#### **Tues., Feb. 3: Learning to Play**

SOURCES: \*\*”The Management of Young Children” and “Domestic Amusements” in Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman’s Home* (1869)

\*\* *The Art of Roughhousing* (2010), excerpts

**Thurs., Feb. 5: Learning to Cope**

SOURCES: \*\**Horatio Lovejoy's New Year's Eve* (1882)

§ Susan Burton, "In the Event of an Emergency, Put Your Sister in an Upright Position" *This American Life* (2001)

Week 4: Adolescence

**Tues., Feb. 10: Boys Will Be Boys**

SOURCES: \*\*"Diligent David," *Woodworth's Youth's Cabinet* (1856)

§ *Superbad* (2007)

**Thurs., Feb. 12: Girls Gone Wild**

SOURCES: \*\*Emily Thornwell, *The Lady's Guide to Perfect Gentility* (1856), excerpts

§ *Dawson's Creek* pilot (1998)

Week 5: Rites of Passage

**Tues., Feb. 17: No class**

**Thurs., Feb. 19: School Days**

DUE: *Final paper proposal due at the start of class.*

SOURCES: § *The Breakfast Club* (1985)

Week 6: Self Discovery

**Tues., Feb. 24: Coming of Age**

SOURCES: \*\* Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (1992), 31-45 (ch. 3)

Rachel Held Evans, *Evolving in Monkey Town* (2010), 1, 7, 9, and 17

**Thurs., Feb. 26: Coming Out**

SOURCES: \*\*Patrick Merla, ed., *Boys Like Us* (1997), selections

\*\*Joan Larkin, ed., *A Woman Like That* (2000), selections

Week 7: Detours

**Tues., March 3: Sex Talk and Teen Pregnancy**

SOURCES: \*\* “Karen,” “Marge,” and “Dorothy” remember teen pregnancy in the 1960s

§ “Maci,” *Sixteen and Pregnant* (2009)

**Thurs., March 5: Midterm**

Week 8: Young Adulthood

**Tues., March 17: The Lost Arts of Romance and Seduction**

SOURCES: \*\*E. E. Cummings, “may i feel said he” (1935)

§ “The Art of Romance” (1959), *Father Knows Best*.

§ “The Naked Man” (2008), *How I Met Your Mother*.

“Traveling the Too-Much-Information Highway,” “R We D8ing?,” and “I Seemed Plucky and Game, Even to Myself,” in Jones, ed., *Modern Love*

**Thurs., March 19: Being “Single”**

SOURCES: \*\*”When to Marry” in Rev. George Hudson, *The Marriage Guide for Young Men* (1883)

\*\* “Open Season on Bachelors” in inaugural issue of *Playboy* (1953)

§ [www.brosome.com](http://www.brosome.com)

## Week 9: Commitments

### **Tues., March 24: Tying the Knot**

SOURCES: § “The Bachelor,” *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1958)

\*\*Sheila Cronan, "Marriage" (1970) in Koedt, Levine, and Rapone, eds., *Radical Feminism*

Dan Savage, *The Commitment* (2005), chs. 4, 6, 8

### **Thurs., March 26: Considering Kids**

SOURCES: \*\*Letters to Margaret Sanger in *Motherhood and Bondage* (1928)

§ Melanie Thernstrom, “Meet the Twiblings” (2010)

## Week 10: Making a Home

### **Tues., March 31: The Politics of Housework**

SOURCES: \*\*Crystal Eastman, “Boys and Girls” (1924)

\*\*Pat Mainardi, “The Politics of Housework,” (1970)

Tzivia Gover, “Jill and Jill Live on the Hill, but One Must Boil the Water,” in *Modern Love*

### **Thurs., April 2: Domestic Economy and Design**

SOURCES: \*\*“The Housewife as Purchasing Agent” and “Reliable Records in the Household,” in Christine Frederick, *The New Housekeeper: Efficiency Studies in Home Management* (1914)

§ Arnold, Graesch, et al, *Life at Home in the Twenty-First Century: 32 Families Open their Doors* (2012), pps., 4-5, 14-19 and chs. 2-5, and 9

Week 11: Mom and Dad Paying the Bills

**Tues., April 7: The F Word**

DUE: *Research report and annotated bibliography due at the start of lecture.*

SOURCES: \*\*Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), 15-32

“Attila the Honey I’m Home” and “The Myth of Co-Parenting” in *The Bitch in the House* (2002)

Terry Martin Hekker, “Paradise Lost,” in *Modern Love*.

§ Femivores and New Domesticity, *Salon* (2013)

**Thurs., April 9: Man Up**

SOURCES: “I Am Man, Hear Me Bleat,” “Chivalry on Ice,” “The Lock Box,” “A Brief History of the (Over)involved Father,” “The Dog In Me,” “Ward and June R Us,” and “Father of the Year” in *The Bastard on the Couch* (2004)

§ The Art of Manliness blog

Week 12: The Prime of Life

**Tues., April 14: Second Exam**

**Thurs., April 16: Sex and Intimacy after Marriage**

SOURCES: \*\* Crystal Eastman, "Marriage Under Two Roofs" (1923)

\*\* Marabel Morgan, *The Total Woman* (1973), excerpts

Jill Bialosky, “How We Became Strangers” and Cynthia Kling, “Erotics 102,” in *The Bitch in the House*



Week 13: Middle Age

**Tues., April 21: The Mid-Life Crisis**

SOURCES: “The Smile on Happy Chang’s Face,” “Kiddie Pool,” “The Chosen Girl,” and “The All-Night Party,” in Tom Perrotta, *Nine Inches* (2013)

**Thurs., April 23: Growing Old**

DUE: *Final paper draft due at the start of class—optional, but late drafts cannot be read.*

SOURCES: \*\* Will Carleton, “Over the Hill to the Poor-House,” (1872)

§ Sandra Tsing Loh, “Daddy Issues: Why Caring for My Aging Father Has Me Wishing He Would Die,” *The Atlantic*, March 2012.

Ellen Pall, “Father and Daughter: One Final Connection,” in *Modern Love*.

Helen Schulman, “My Mother’s Ring,” in *The Bitch in the House*.

Week 14: Wrapping It Up

**Tues., April 28: Dying and Death**

**Thurs., April 30: Historicizing Your Life**

SOURCES: *Email Professor Blower your own photos to appear in lecture on the last day.*

**Final project due May 5, by noon to Professor Blower’s mailbox on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor of 226 Bay State Road.**

Final Project: 8-10 page double-spaced essay

**Develop a research project that reveals the history of an everyday object, practice, or social type related to intimate American life. The smaller your topic the better this assignment will go (something weird or obscure but revealing would work well). What are your subject's origins and how and why has it changed over time? What does your research reveal about the broader culture—what's actually at stake in this bizarre relic or custom? In other words, if you gave the class a lecture on your subject, what story would you tell and why?**

Your goal will be to gather and analyze an array of sources and make a compelling argument that enriches your readers' understanding of recent American history. A strong essay will go beyond providing a simple summary report. It will be anchored by a complex, arguable thesis that is developed and sustained throughout. It will also rest on a solid, creatively assembled body of evidence—from the course lectures and readings as well as outside research. The finished product should demonstrate the writer's interest in the topic and ability to engage the material using skills and knowledge gained over the course of the semester.

Your progress on the research project will be assisted by a series of workshops and deadlines during the course of the semester:

**Optional workshops on research strategies and effective curation** (during Week 3): The teaching fellow will hold workshops to explore effective strategies for historical research for the final paper. Special attention will be paid to assessing, managing, and discerning among online sources.

**An initial proposal and preliminary observations** (due Week 5): Make a 1-2 page pitch of the specific question, problem, or topic you would like to address for your final project. Convince us that you should be allowed to write about what you've selected. Include some ethnographic observations about your practice or subject as it appears in American culture today, explain why you find it interesting, and speculate about how researching your topic's longer history might reveal new insights.

**An explanation of research approach and annotated bibliography** (due Week 10): Write a detailed paragraph outlining how you've gone about your research. Summarize what you've found so far and what you haven't found but wish you could. Add to this an annotated bibliography of the ten most important sources that you will use in your essay (i.e. include the sources full bibliographic citation and write a few sentences under each entry, explaining why it is so useful).

**Optional workshops on essential essay elements and mechanics** (during Week 12): The teaching fellow will hold another series of workshops, addressing how to shape your paper around a strong thesis and structure, as well as how to make it appear professional and scholarly by making use of proper formatting and citation methods.

**First drafts due--** (Week 13)

The following are general themes that might lead you to a focus for the final project. The list is far from exhaustive:

adoption	Halloween rituals
affairs	immigrant rituals
alcoholism	infertility
baby food	in-laws
babyproofing	kissing
baby showers	love songs
babysitting	marital advice/marriage counseling
bachelor/bachelorette parties	marriage proposals
birth control	matchmaking
“blended” families	mental illness
buddy movies	obituaries
bullying	orphans
ensorship	pet keeping
chaperones	puberty
children in wartime	pornography
children’s literature or toys	physical education
college life	pregnancy testing
cooking	returning veterans
cross dressing	romantic comedies
daycare	school lunches
discipline and punishment	siblings
divorce	sickness
domestic labor	sororities and fraternities
domestic violence	STDs
dorm life	sweet sixteen parties
drug use	swingers
etiquette manuals	S & M subcultures
family vacations	transgender/transsexual identities
hair	widows

## Grading and Expectations for the Final Project:

**Final projects for this course should draw specifically on course lectures and assigned sources as well as on your own independent research.** Your goal is not simply to summarize and regurgitate the ideas of others, but rather to craft an original essay that builds upon the work we have done together over the course of the semester. You should support your thesis with detailed evidence and analysis that is sustained throughout the entire essay in a clear and cogent manner.

Your argument should be a historical rather than political or philosophical one; your job is to make claims about what Americans thought and did (and why) at a particular time, NOT what you personally think about certain beliefs or policies. Try to imagine and uncover the historical conditions lead people to think in particular ways at particular moments.

**Note: In order to avoid charges of plagiarism, it is essential that you carefully attribute the sources of all of your knowledge.**

Essays will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- **An “A” range essay** is both ambitious and successful. It presents a perceptive and independent argument backed up by well-chosen evidence, a creative and compelling use of sources, and sensitivity to historical context. It demonstrates that the writer has grappled seriously with the issues of the course, has done a close, critical reading of the texts, and has synthesized the readings, lectures, and well-chosen, clearly-attributed outside sources.
- **A “B” range essay** is one that is ambitious but only partially successful, or one that achieves modest aims well. It may demonstrate many of the aspects of A-level work, but falls short in organization and clarity, the formulation and presentation of its argument, or the depth of source analysis. It demonstrates a command of course material, proper attribution of sources, and an understanding of historical context and contains flashes of insight, but lacks consistency or depth in the argument.
- **A “C” range essay** has significant problems in articulating and presenting its argument, or seems to lack a central argument entirely. Oftentimes, C-range papers offer little more than a summary of information covered in the course, or they might prove insensitive to historical context, contain factual errors, unclear writing, poor organization, or insufficient evidence.
- **A “D” essay**, in addition to displaying the shortcomings of a C-range paper, also fails to grapple seriously with either ideas or texts, or fails to address the expectations of the assignment. A D essay suggests seriously insufficient command of the course material.
- **An “F” essay** falls short in the manner of a “D” essay. It is also often significantly shorter than the assigned length, does not demonstrate even a glint of potentially original thought, and suggests a lack of effort or no competence in the material at hand.