

**SOC 495 Population Politics:  
Redefining Marriage in the Modern World  
University of Michigan, Winter 2023**

**Instructor:** Prof. Yun Zhou (zhouyun@umich.edu)

## 1 Course Description

How have people fought for their right to marry or challenged the expectation of marriage? How has marriage, as a social institution, evolved? What can trends and patterns of marriage sorting tell us about historical and contemporary inequalities? How has marriage, as a social institution, shaped the human experiences of inclusion, dignity, and freedom—or the lack thereof?

Intersecting the studies of social movements and social demography, this course interrogates the demographic trends and mobilizations for the legal right to marry by considering marriage in its relation to race, gender-sexuality, and border/nation. We bring together the sociology of family, rights, and citizenship. By tracing how marriage is (re)defined in the modern world, this course connects history, politics, laws, and population dynamics.

We adopt a global perspective, focusing on the United States and a range of countries both in the Global North and the Global South.

## 2 Learning Objectives

This course is intended for a wide range of students who might be interested in learning about social demography, gender and family systems, population policies, and laws and politics. There are no prerequisites for this course.

**The central pedagogical goal is to foster critical connections between course material and lived experiences.** To this end,

- We will learn through dialogues—discussions with your professor and peers, conversations with the readings, and interview collection (more on this in the *Requirements and Assessments* section).

- In addition to course readings and lectures, we will center the critical engagement with a collection of multimedia reportage, oral histories, documentaries, and films.
- We will read works that have used a variety of methodological approaches. You are expected to develop the ability to interpret data (quantitative and qualitative) in order to build and critique arguments.

### 3 Course Material

All required readings are electronically available through either the course site, or the UM library.

## 4 Requirements and Assessments

### 4.1 Attendance (5%)

Participation is critical for a class like ours. **In-person participation is expected for SOC 495.** Of course, COVID-19 continues to bring uncertainty and disruptions. If the situation calls for, we will make adjustments to our meeting modality as needed.

Unless otherwise noted, all readings in the syllabus are **required**. You are expected to come to class having completed them. Our weekly meetings are extensions from, rather than recaps of, the readings.

Starting Jan 11<sup>th</sup>, **each unexcused absence will result in the loss of 0.5 pt.**

### 4.2 Office hour check-in (10%)

Office hours offer a great space to build intellectual connections and get support, whether you have questions about the course or simply want to chat. I invite everybody to **at least one** brief office hour check-ins, **by the end of March**.

**Office hours are not meant to be evaluative**—meaning that you don’t have to worry about “sounding smart” for your professor, and you receive the full 10% as long as you show up, before the end of March. If you feel more comfortable setting up the meeting as a group (2-3 people), you are welcome to do so as well. In addition, you are welcome to set up any number of additional meetings beyond the first check-in.

To set up a meeting, use the link on our course Canvas page. If none of the available time slots works for you, please reach out to me to discuss alternative plans.

### 4.3 Short reading reaction (20%)

You are expected to complete all readings assigned for that week. Lectures will not summarize or recap the readings, but will build upon them. Starting Week 4 (Jan 23<sup>rd</sup>), for **any four weeks**, submit to the course site a brief response to the readings **at least one day before the Wednesday session (i.e., by Tuesday midnight)**. A brief response can be 1) one or two paragraphs of your thoughts on the material; 2) one or two questions that you want to see discussed in class; or 3) a combination of 1) and 2). You are free to choose **any four dates**.

You will be evaluated based on the thoughtfulness of your responses: A thoughtful response does not simply summarize/recap the readings, but reflect on them (e.g., asking questions, connecting them with world events or other readings). A thoughtful response is concise, coherent, and to-the-point.

Because there is flexibility built in already (i.e., you can choose which weeks that you want to write the response), **no extension** will be granted. In extenuating circumstances (e.g., sickness, caring for a sick loved one, etc.) that you are unable to turn in responses for multiple weeks, please reach out to me to discuss alternative plans. You are welcome to write additional responses and I am happy to engage you in discussions and provide feedback—however, only the **first four** submissions count toward your final grade.

Reading response due dates: Your choice of four weeks, by Tuesday midnight.

### 4.4 Interview collection and presentation (65%)

This semester, you are expected to **interview five people about their views, beliefs, and/or experiences of a certain aspect that is related to marriage**. For example, you may consider interviewing five people about their attitudes toward same-sex marriage, or how they themselves made the decision to marry, or what marriage means to them, etc. You may want to carefully consider who your interviewees are—e.g., how their identities and life experiences shape their views and how you may want to select your respondents. **Your office hour check-in would be a great opportunity to brainstorm your interview project with me.**

Aim for 20-40 minutes for each interview. After each interview, you are expected to **submit a one-page memo, summarizing the key findings of the interviews**—e.g., what surprised you, how the interview findings connected with our lecture and course material, etc. **Each interview memo accounts for 10%.**

Beginning Week 13 (Apr 3<sup>rd</sup>), you will present your interview findings to the class in the form of a **15-minute research presentation**. Your **presentation accounts for 15%** of the course grade. The order of the presentation will be randomly determined. This means that while you have the freedom in scheduling your interviews, all five interview memos should be submitted before (Apr 3<sup>rd</sup>).

Why do we do this? Collecting your own interviews provides a hands-on fun way to connect the course material with people's lived experiences.

Interview memo due dates: You are encouraged to submit the memo as you complete each interview. All five memos should be submitted before Apr 3<sup>rd</sup>. Late submission will result in a 2-pt deduction per late day for every entry. (Say, you submitted two memos in March, and three memos on Apr 4<sup>th</sup>—you will lose 6 pts in late submission penalty.)

## 5 Grade Composition and Conversion

Attendance	1*5%= <b>5%</b>
Office hour check-in	1*10%= <b>10%</b>
Short reading reaction	4*5%= <b>20%</b>
Interview memo	5*10%= <b>50%</b>
Interview presentation	1*15%= <b>15%</b>

### Letter grade conversion:

A+ 97% and above	A 92-96%	A- 88-91%
B+ 85-87%	B 81-84%	B- 78-80%
C+ 75-77%	C 71-74%	C- 68-70%
D+ 65-67%	D 61-64%	D- 58-60%
E 55-57%	F 54% and below	

## 6 Support, Resources, and Inclusive Learning

### 6.1 Writing support

I strongly encourage everyone to utilize the services provided by the Writing Center. You could meet with a writing consultant to improve your assignments.

## 6.2 Inclusive learning

The university and I are committed to fully include all students. Diverse perspectives are a valuable asset in the learning process—they strengthen our engagement with and understanding of the course material.

Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) can provide support services and academic accommodations to students with disabilities. Please inform me and contact SSD as soon as possible to request any accommodations.

If religious observances conflict with any course activities, please let me know early in the semester.

Additional resources on inclusive teaching can be found here:

<https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/home/campus-resources-2/>

**Please reach out to me if you need support and resources, particularly in light of the pandemic.**

## 6.3 Difficult and challenging topics

Some topics in this course may feel especially challenging, contentious, or frustrating to engage with. As a class and as a community, part of the learning process is finding our own path to and language for productive engagement with difficult topics. Again, please reach out to me if you need support and resources.

# 7 Course Schedule

### PRELUDE

#### Week 1 Welcome to the Course

1/4 Introduction

### ACT I FORMS OF FAMILIES

*What counts as a family, and who gets to decide? What role does marriage play in the reproduction of inequality and exclusion?*

#### Week 2 Who Marries Whom & Why Do We Care?

## 1/9 The Changing Faces of Families

## 1/11 Marriage and the (Re)production of Inequality

- Pew Research Center. 2021. “In Vice President Kamala Harris, we can see how America has changed.” <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/02/25/in-vice-president-kamala-harris-we-can-see-how-america-has-changed/>
- Smock, Pamela J, & Christine R Schwartz. 2020. “The demography of families: A review of patterns and change.” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 82(1): 9-34.

## Week 3 Marriage Across Racial/Ethnic Boundaries

## 1/16 MLK Day No Class

## 1/18 In-class Screening & Discussion: *The Loving Story*

## Week 4 Complicating Intermarriage

## 1/23 Is There a Status Exchange?

- Pew Research Center. 2017. “Intermarriage in the U.S. 50 Years After Loving v. Virginia.” <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2017/05/18/intermarriage-in-the-u-s-50-years-after-loving-v-virginia/>
- Qian, Zhenchao, & Daniel T. Lichter. 2018. “Marriage markets and intermarriage: Exchange in first marriages and remarriages.” *Demography* 55(3): 849-875.

## 1/25 Who *Can* Marry Out?

- Celeste Ng. 2018. “When Asian women are harassed for marrying non-Asian men.” *The Cut*. (Personal narrative)
- Srinivasan, Amia. 2021. “Coda: The politics of desire.” in *The Right to Sex: Feminism in the Twenty-First Century*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

## Week 5 Marriage, Border, and Citizenship

## 1/30 Citizenship and Exploitation

- Cole, Jennifer . 2014. “Working mis/understandings: The tangled relationship between kinship, Franco-Malagasy binational marriages, and the French state.” *Cultural Anthropology* 29(3): 527-551.

- Jackson, Suzanne H. 2007. "Marriages of convenience: International marriage brokers, 'mail-order brides,' and domestic servitude." *University of Toledo Law Review* 38(3): 895-922.

## 2/1 In-class Screening & Discussion: *Heartbound*

### Week 6 Queering Marriage in Comparative Perspective I

## 2/6 Patterns of Same-Sex Marriage in the U.S.

- Pew Research Center. 2021. "On some demographic measures, people in same-sex marriages differ from those in opposite-sex marriages."  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/07/07/on-some-demographic-measures-people-in-same-sex-marriages-differ-from-those-in-opposite-sex-marriages/>
- Moore, Mignon R. 2008. "Gendered power relations among women: A study of household decision making in Black, lesbian stepfamilies." *American Sociological Review* 73(2): 335-56.

## 2/8 Politics of Same-Sex Marriage in the U.S.

- Chauncey, George. 2005. *Why Marriage?*. Chapters 4.
- Stacey, Judith & Tey Meadow. 2009. "New slants on the slippery slope: The politics of polygamy and gay family rights in South Africa and the United States." *Politics and Society* 37(2): 167-202.

### Week 7 Queering Marriage in Comparative Perspective II

## 2/13 Same-Sex Marriage in East Asia

- Zhou, Yun. 2022. "Visualizing gendered attitudes toward same-sex sexual behavior in China over a decade." *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*. DOI: 10.1177/23780231221117401
- Zhu, Jingshu. 2018. "Unqueer' kinship? Critical reflections on 'marriage fraud' in mainland China." *Sexualities* 21(7):1075-91.
- Brainer, Amy. 2019. *Queer Kinship and Family Change in Taiwan*. Rutgers University Press. Read Chapters 1 & 4.

2/15 In-class Screening & Discussion: *All in My Family*

## Week 8 Midterm Reflections

2/20 Politics of Producing Family Knowledge

- Meadow, Tey. 2013. "Queer numbers: Social science as cultural heterosexism."  
<https://socialinqueery.com/2013/08/14/queer-numbers-social-science-as-cultural-heterosexism/>
- Pascoe, C. J. 2018. "What to do with actual people? Thinking through a queer social science method" in *Other, Please Specify Queer Methods in Sociology*, Edited by: D'Lane R. Compton, Tey Meadow and Kristen Schilt. University of California Press.

2/22 Looking Ahead

## INTERLUDE: SPRING BREAK

### ACT II THE PERSONAL AND THE POLITICAL

*How do people, in different social contexts, confront the expectations of marriage, as they navigate selfhood in the modern world? When does the personal become political, and where do public and private spheres merge?*

## Week 9 Politics of Nonmarriage

3/6 Nonmarriage in the U.S.

- Smock, Pamela J. et al. 2005. "‘Everything’s there except money’: How money shapes decisions to marry among cohabitators." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 673: 680-696
- Manning, Wendy, et al. 2019. "Cohabitation and marital expectations among single millennials in the U.S." *Population Research and Policy Review* 38: 327-346.
- Pew Research Center. 2019. "Marriage and cohabitation in the U.S."  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/11/06/marriage-and-cohabitation-in-the-u-s/>

3/8 Left-over or Left-out?



- Raymo, James M., Hyunjoon Park, Yu Xie, & Wei-jun Jean Yeung. 2015. "Marriage and family in East Asia: Continuity and change." *Annual Review of Sociology* 41: 471-492.
- Hong, Leta. 2012. "China's 'leftover' women." *NYT*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/12/opinion/global/chinas-leftover-women.html>
- Rich, Motoko. 2019. "Craving freedom, Japan's women opt out of marriage." *NYT*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/03/world/asia/japan-single-women-marriage.html>

## Week 10 Politics of Divorce

### 3/13 Governing Divorce in Comparative Perspective

- Alexy, Allison. 2020. *Intimate disconnections: Divorce and the romance of independence in contemporary Japan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Read Chapters 1, 3.
- Killewald, Alexandra. 2016. "Money, work, and marital stability: Assessing change in the gendered determinants of divorce." *American Sociological Review* 81(4): 696-719.
- Michelson, Ethan. 2019. "Decoupling: Marital violence and the struggle to divorce in China." *American Journal of Sociology* 125(2): 325-381.

### 3/15 In-class Screening & Discussion: *Chinese Dream*

## Week 11 Politics of Parenthood

### 3/20 Reproductive Justice

- Ross, Loretta, & Rickie Solinger. 2017. *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction*, Chapter 4. (Please find the ebook through UM library)
- Viterna, Jocelyn, & Jose Santos Guardado Bautista. 2017. "Pregnancy and the 40-year prison sentence." *Health & Human Rights* 19(1): 81-93.
- Zhou, Yun. 2023. "Toward a feminist re-problematization of China's low birth rate." *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*.

### 3/22 In-class Screening & Discussion: *Loretta Ross Interview*

## **Week 12 Politics of Care**

**3/27** Transnational Motherhood

- Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar. 2001. *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work*. Stanford University Press. Read Chapters 1 & 2.

**3/29** In-class Screening & Discussion: *Chain of Love*

## **ACT III US AND THE WORLD**

### **Week 13 Presentation of Interview Findings**

**4/3** Student presentation

**4/5** Student presentation

### **Week 14 Presentation of Interview Findings**

**4/10** Student presentation

**4/12** Student presentation

### **Week 15 Presentation of Interview Findings**

**4/17** Student presentation & concluding remarks