

VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM:
AN EXAMINATION OF FAMILY SOCIOLOGY SYLLABI

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ABSTRACT. Family is a term undergoing both deconstruction and construction. Both individual faculty and textbook publishers must address the ways that they want to approach issues in family sociology courses. Do they want students to problem-solve intimate relationships? Raise awareness of families and diversity? Deconstruct “the” family? Or analyze the multiplicity of ways families are created and sustained? This paper explores how faculty members answer these questions in their family sociology syllabi. Our data for this paper was collected from voluntary submissions of syllabi from faculty members throughout the United States. We analyzed the data using techniques in the tradition of Wolcott (1994), locating the underlying concepts and themes. Through an exploration of sociology of the family syllabi, we identify overall course orientations, dimensions of variation, and contrasting themes that are used by instructors of family courses.

Creating a course or revising a course is hard work. There are so many decisions to make, and, let’s be honest, rarely enough time to do it. So we ponder questions such as, Around which themes should the course focus? What data will be analyzed? What theoretical perspectives will we use? What kinds of assignments will be required? How many? These decisions are often made singularly, but in truth, each influences the others. Our research explores the concepts and themes that underlie those decisions through an examination of syllabi of family sociology courses. These syllabi were collected as part of a larger project to compile pedagogical materials for publication by the Teaching Resource Center of the American Sociological Association (ASA) (Macheski, Lowney, Capece, Warner, & Laughlin, 2004). The purpose of this article is to help inform decision-making as instructors design courses in family sociology.

Family sociology courses have the potential to impact how students think about families, how they live their own lives, and how they address policy issues. What is taught may also

KEY WORDS. Family sociology, Teaching, Diversity, Textbook, Syllabi

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reflect how the field thinks about families, the paradigms we use to understand them, and the issues that are considered important. These issues are both pragmatic and political. A number of scholars (Bryant & Coleman, 1988; Dunham, Cannon, & Dietz, 2004; Glen, 1997a; Hall & Stolley, 1997) have set out to discover what is taught through content analyses of major marriage and family texts. All were concerned that what is taught about families is biased toward a particular view of families, and/or that by leaving out important information or by presenting issues in certain ways what students learn about families is limited.

The debate regarding what is taught about families was accelerated by the release of Norval Glenn's (1997b) "Closed Hearts, Closed Minds." This report reviewed twenty textbooks and critiqued many of their ideological foundations, touching off a storm of controversy that played out in both in the mass media and within our discipline. Because Glenn questioned the pedagogical value and accuracy of textbooks, his critics argued that he had "misrepresented scholarship to foster covert politics" (Stacey, 1998). The debate, with rejoinders from authors whose texts Glenn criticized, was highlighted in the January edition of *Footnotes*, the newsletter of the American Sociology Association (1998).

We were somewhat startled to find the quite limited number of pedagogical articles that have been published since the controversy of the late 1990's. Instead, the bulk of the articles we found critique the role of the media in covering this debate about sociological content (e.g., Dwyer & Youngblade, 1998; Fox, 1999; Furstenberg, 1999; Stacey, 1999). These articles concern themselves with how media attention further shapes these intellectual debates, oftentimes reducing complex relationships into simple facts and rigid dichotomies.

What might this silence about teaching family sociology mean? One possibility is that the debate was so acrimonious that few are brave enough to enter into or revisit such an ideological

minefield. Another possibility worth examining, however, is that the discipline has resolved the debate “in the trenches” by individual faculty members as they construct their family sociology syllabi.

And so we wondered, how would our colleagues address the textbook problem? Would we see evidence that the textbook debate was shaping course content? We had some lively conversations trying to predict what we would find when we began to analyze the submissions. However, no textbook or set of readings dominated instructor’s choices. We discovered a complex array of reading choices being used in classrooms around the nation. In addition, we discussed the importance of context—the conditions and framework that structure the ways in which readings are used. We determined that it would be more useful to review the syllabi themselves with an eye to understanding (a) the perspective from which the instructor approached the course and (b) the instructors’ goals for the students, whether implied or directly stated.

We begin with a very brief summary of the concerns, issues, and trends identified by the textbook reviews published in academic journals. We then turn to our examination of the twenty-three course syllabi submitted to us as general courses in family sociology. We identify the patterns and trends found here. We offer no suggestions about what “should be.” Instead, we summarize the issues and options regarding course content and use our findings to guide several “blueprints” for different types of family sociology courses

Literature Review

There is a paucity of literature on syllabi for family sociology courses. We found no publications that reviewed or analyzed course syllabi. Therefore, the current study can best be situated within the more prevalent literature that examines marriage and family sociology

textbooks. Reviews of the presentation of marriage and family in texts have focused on the underlying assumptions about family (Mann, Grimes, Kemp, & Jenkins, 1997); their adequacy and balance in preparing students to participate in public debates about family issues (Glenn, 1997a, b); and the presentation of minorities (Bryant & Coleman, 1988; Shaw-Taylor & Benokraitis, 1995); women (Low & Sherrard, 1999); step-families (Coleman, Ganong, & Goodwin, 1994); the elderly (Stolley & Hill, 1996); abortion; and adoption (Fisher, 2003, Hall & Stolley, 1997). In some way, all ask, which model of the family is being supported? The dialogue centers around two issues: (1) assumptions about families and (2) integration.

Assumptions about Families

The reviews by Mann et al. (1997) and Glenn (1997a, b) each suggest that hidden assumptions about families guide textbooks, but that these assumptions are not likely to be overtly stated by the authors. They suggest that these assumptions can have an insidious influence, hiding their political implications and limiting what is presented. The assumptions identified by these authors, however, are quite different from each other and may even be somewhat contradictory.

Mann et al. (1997) used a thematic content analysis to examine the degree to which family sociology texts have shifted over a 30-year period from Parsonian structural functionalism toward more critical theories. They concluded that, despite considerable more discussion of diversity, inequality, and issues of power and conflict within and between families, recent textbooks have not used newer critical theories as a basis for discussion of general topics, leaving them theoretically “undeveloped” and “eclectic.” Thus, according to Mann et al., the ghost of Talcott Parsons remains a silent framework guiding much of what is discussed, leaving the textbooks vulnerable to nuclear family biases without discussion or awareness of them.

In contrast, Glenn (1997a & b) suggests that most textbooks have a “liberal” bias, that they are based on negative, “anti-marriage” assumptions. Glenn concludes that most textbooks present only one ideological side of family issues, focusing on problems while omitting the positive aspects of marriage and failing to adequately address the effects of family on children. He contends that the data used to support these presentations of families are often flawed and that studies he considers “key” are left out. While Mann et al. (1997) focus on the theoretical basis of textbook discussions, Glenn’s (1997a, b) analysis focuses on content and the ways data are presented with no specific discussions of the theories that guide textbook discussions.

Each of these reviews suggests that textbooks could be improved if authors made their biases known. This would require more self-reflexivity on the parts of authors and accountability for the real-world consequences of how material is presented. Mann et al. (1997) call for “more attention to how [text] narratives correlate with the lived experiences of increasingly diverse local and global populations” (p. 342). Glenn (1997a) asks for a “well-written, adequately reviewed, ideologically balanced book that is not highly adult centered and [gives] adequate coverage to the most important family issues facing the nation today” (p. 208).

Integrating Discussion of Minorities in Texts

The reviews of how minorities are presented in family textbooks (Bryant & Coleman, 1988; Shaw-Taylor & Benokraitis, 1995), step-families (Coleman, et al., 1994), the elderly (Stolley & Hill, 1995), and adoption (Fisher 2003; Hall & Stolley, 1997) explore whether these groups are integrated in discussions throughout texts or are treated as special topics or isolated in separate chapters. Similarly, Low and Sherrard (1999) look at the portrayal of women in textbook photographs. Each begins with the assumption that their topics should be addressed and examines how much coverage the topics received and how and where they were presented. All

conclude that despite increased attention to many of these topics, the traditional middle class nuclear family remains the standard against which they are addressed.

For example, Shaw-Taylor and Benokraitis (1995) found that between 1986-1990, only 2.1% of marriage and family textbook space was devoted to minorities and that many of these references were still presented from a deviant perspective, whereby non-white families are compared with white middle-class norms. They found few instances in which minority families were explained in context of their own values and experiences. Discussions tended to be problem-centered, with little discussion of institutional racism. A recent study of family sociology textbooks (Dunham, et al., 2004) illustrates that this problem has not been eliminated.

Coverage of step-families has increased dramatically during the 1980's and early 1990's, with some textbooks granting it an entire chapter (Coleman, et al., 1994). Yet this information remained "ghettoized," not integrated into the discussion of other family issues. Like minority families, the content remained problem-centered with little emphasis on possible positives. According to Fisher (2003), who found a similar pattern about adoption in textbooks, nearly twenty percent of the textbooks did not address adoption at all, and many of the other references were casual references instead of sustained analyses. The issues identified by Stolley and Hill (1996) regarding the elderly are similar. Coverage of the elderly is segregated from other family issues with little presentation of diversity in terms of race, class, or gender. These authors called for an integration of examples from all types of families throughout the books, "normalizing" step-families and other marginalized families and expanding discussion of family issues beyond middle age.

All of the above reviews of family texts except Glenn's (1997a, 1997b) report that a deeply embedded nuclear family model continues to guide the presentation of family issues. Mann et al.

(1997) and Hall and Stolley (1997) conclude that these texts continue to support a functionalist view of the traditional family. They found that examples of families who do not fit the nuclear family model were seldom integrated into general discussions, but treated separately and in contrast to the dominant model rather than presented from their own perspective. Gays and lesbians were seldom addressed at all (Mann et al., 1997).

Most of the reviewers advocated an expanded notion of family to include a larger diversity of experiences. Rather than questioning the direction of changes impacting families, they appeared concerned that texts reflect them. Glenn (1997a), however, said he believed “some recent family changes in the United States are reason for concern” (p. 198). Not surprisingly, reviewers’ ideological beliefs about families were not separate from their analyses of the texts. All, however, appeared concerned that the issues of interest to them were presented in problem-oriented ways that did not address positives and that some assumptions about families were not made explicit.

Method

Data Collection

Syllabi were collected as part of a larger project oriented toward editing a volume of teaching materials (Macheski et al., 2004). Every four years the ASA commissions a revision of a volume of teaching materials about family sociology. One or more of the authors have edited the last four editions (Macheski et al., 2000, 2004). This volume is a popular resource for instructors teaching family sociology courses. Contributions for the most recent revision were solicited in a number of ways. We sent out letters of invitation to contributors of past volumes and to all members of the American Sociological Association Family Section. In addition, we posted calls for materials to professional newsletters and on numerous listservs, including

Teaching Sociology, the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy, and the National Counsel on Family Relations. Over 60 people responded with stacks (almost a full file drawer) of syllabi, exercises, assignments, and articles about teaching family courses. Within these submissions were found 23 general sociology of family syllabi. These 23 syllabi constitute the sample used in this analysis.

Description of Sample

Although the data collection procedures were based upon self selection, the syllabi submitted encompass a wide range of teaching contexts. The institutions where these courses were taught included the full gambit of academic settings from research I institutions, four year public universities, private liberal arts universities, to two year schools and even a military academy. Class size, as supplied by the instructors ranged from relatively small (10-15 students) to larger (50-60 students). These students came from a correspondingly broad range of academic and social backgrounds, from sociology majors to students taking a general elective course. Courses were populated with divergent groups of students from typical college student age and middle class origins to mostly female nontraditional age and diverse ethnic composition.

Analytical Procedures

Wolcott (1994) notes that analysis is the stage of an investigation in which the researcher attempts to “expand and extend beyond a purely descriptive account with an analysis that proceeds in some careful, systematic way to identify key factors and relationships among them” (p. 10). We analyzed the syllabi using techniques from the tradition of narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993).

We used a thematic analysis by highlighting recurring patterns that appeared throughout the data. Riessman (1993) defines thematic analysis as a process wherein researchers look for

particular themes that figure importantly and repeatedly in the data; these themes begin to cohere in ways that allow meaning to be drawn from the whole of the data base.

We also used a number of Taylor and Bogdan's (1984) suggestions for identifying themes. Three of us, each holding somewhat different ideological views regarding families, examined each of the twenty three general family sociology syllabi submitted for this collection. Separately, each of us created a brief description of each syllabus as the first level of analysis. The brief description of each syllabus was based upon the goals and perspectives stated or implied in the course descriptions, overviews, and/or objectives. To deepen this analysis, we also examined readings and the course schedules. These brief descriptions were brought to a meeting and discussed by the three evaluators. Following the review of each individual syllabus, a few key words or phrases describing it were identified through discussion of the team members; for example, a syllabus might have been labeled as "macro focus, traditional family, multicultural examples infrequently used, little relation to students' lived experiences." Only those descriptors agreed upon by all three evaluators were included in the final brief description.

Next, the entire team sorted syllabi into groups according to the similarity of the words and phrases used to describe them. No specific number of groups or labels for them were predefined, these emerged organically as our review process continued. During our repeated readings of these textual submissions (e.g., syllabi, readings, class assignments, etc.), we kept track of "themes, hunches, interpretations, and ideas" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 131). As Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggest, we included even tentative impressions at this stage of our analysis.

Through this process key themes began to emerge. For example, the syllabi that we reviewed, seemed with almost no exceptions, to take for granted that "family" can be imaged in a variety of ways. Few contributions spent a significant amount of time debating this point; rather

it was an assumption around which almost all courses were designed.

After the initial analysis, we began a series of researcher conversations to discuss potential themes. These conversations were structured by awareness that the strongest themes should be ones that were repeated several times and appeared to be important because they were themes that shaped the syllabi in significant ways. Between conversations, we returned to the syllabi to explore each other's perceptions. The last collaborative process finally yielded several common themes and dimensions of variation.

The last level of analysis involved assigning names or labels to these common themes and dimensions of variation, clarifying the ways they differed, and defining these differences in a meaningful way analytically.

Reading written submissions such as what we received, be it a syllabus, an in-class exercise, a term-long research project, a suggestion for a video, and the like, is quite different than witnessing the complex interactions in an actual classroom. While we would have preferred to watch how the professors who submitted their ideas wove together theory, applications, audio-visuals, and their assigned readings into a dynamic mix in their actual classrooms, we were, obviously, unable to do so. Rather, we were confronted with written documents which likely provided merely the skeletal outline of what was to happen. We believe that the syllabus gives us an excellent picture of the professor's vision for the class, its goals, and its flow – it best captures the social context of that particular course. Thus our article centers on an analysis of these syllabi.

One key component to a syllabus, which can shape how the class proceeds, is the readings which the faculty member assigns. Thus we decided, for one kind of analysis, to turn our focus to the texts that faculty contributors chose. How can their selections for reading

material about families give us a glimpse into what happens in classrooms? What patterns in reading selection were there?

Results

Readings Assigned

The most obvious pattern was that few faculty members relied on only one text. Only one fourth (26%) of all the submissions for the lower level marriage and family or family sociology courses used standard textbooks as the sole assigned reading for the course. Most of these assigned only one textbook, although there were two syllabi that required students to read two textbooks. The text that was used most often (by three faculty members) was the Skolnick and Skolnick text (although faculty used various editions). The other textbooks were used by only one faculty member each.

Another common pattern was to use a standardized textbook and some kind of supplemental reading; thirty-nine percent of the submissions used this pattern. Often that was a reader/anthology, but others chose to assign a course packet of articles. No faculty, however, assigned only a textbook and a monograph.

The faculty who used textbooks (singularly or with other types of readings) seemed to view them – as opposed to other kinds of readings – as providing an overview for students. For instance, many syllabi which used both textbooks and other readings, had one or more chapters of these standardized textbooks assigned each week by faculty. While we cannot know for sure why they made these choices, it makes sense to conjecture that textbooks best define key concepts in family sociology and offer cogent explanations of major theories. That is to say, for those faculty who used both textbooks and other readings, the textbooks laid the groundwork for the more specialized readings that we found faculty using (i.e., journal articles, anthologies, or

monographs).

After setting aside those syllabi that used textbooks exclusively (26%), it became apparent that faculty members draw on a wide range of reading sources in their classes. Two faculty required a textbook, monograph, and reader for their courses, while thirty-five percent did not use a textbook at all, requiring some other combination of readings instead. For instance, one faculty member required two monographs, and no textbooks. One required multiple monographs (eight of them!) plus a course packet. Two more faculty members required two monographs and a reader, while another yet another faculty member required only a course packet of readings placed on reserve in the university library.

Examining the non-textbook readings that faculty members assigned, it was clear that many of these readings exposed students to definitions of family and to families that went beyond the traditional models. Diversity (across ethnic, racial, class dimensions as well as internationalizing the examples of families) appeared to be the norm among these additional readings. While it is impossible to know how often these diverse examples were discussed in class and the exact purpose of assigning the readings, it seems fair to conjecture that faculty members were trying to show diverse family models with many of these readings.

Clearly, based upon an examination of these submissions, no common text or set of readings dominate family sociology courses. Selection of course readings appeared to be highly individual. Further analysis of the syllabi led to an identification of common themes and dimensions of variation that presumably underlie these choices.

Common Themes

We found four themes common to all the courses:

1. Diversity. All syllabi in some way mentioned race and class differences. Though they varied

in how issues of diversity were addressed and incorporated into course content, this theme was an over-arching one in most of the syllabi.

2. Change. Most syllabi referred to changes regarding families. Many framed this in terms of a “debate about families.” Others emphasized the impact of change on families.
3. Problems. Nearly all the syllabi made reference to problems and issues confronting families. A portion clearly organized their courses around this framework.
4. Personal application. Nearly all the syllabi expected some kind of personal change on the part of students. The nature of the change (e.g., thinking vs. behaving, micro concerns vs. macro concerns) and how much it was a focus of the course varied considerably.

Dimensions of Variation

We found that the goals and perspectives described on the syllabi varied according to the following four dimensions. Each dimension represents a continuum with each course represented within the range presented.

1. Whether orientation is toward institutional issues or interpersonal issues.

Interpersonal. Only four of the courses were primarily oriented toward interpersonal issues. These courses focused extensively on the interpersonal dynamics within families. They often used language that emphasized personal decision-making. Institutional issues were framed in terms of their impact on personal choices or the power of the individual to impact society.

Institutional. The majority of syllabi submitted for this project focused on families as social institutions. These courses emphasized the contextual nature of family issues and dynamics and emphasized social over interpersonal problems.

2. Whether diverse family forms are acknowledged or integrated.

Acknowledged. While diverse family forms are recognized in these syllabi, the married couple with children still constitutes the central organizing premise for the course topics and readings. This is shown by the centrality of “couple-hood” and children, an implied nuclear model in most topics.

Integrated. Diversity of family form is embedded throughout the course. Selection and discussion of topics imply a de-norming of the nuclear family. For example, in a discussion of parenting, an assigned article might include a discussion of gay and lesbian couples and parenting issues.

3. *Whether multiculturalism is comparative or interwoven.*

Comparative. These syllabi presented ethnic and cultural variation by contrasting other cultures, classes, and groups with the traditional model around which the core of the syllabi appears to be organized. A section or sections of the syllabus focused on increasing awareness of diversity, often with a strong emphasis on cultural context or differences.

Interwoven. These syllabi integrate a multicultural perspective throughout the course rather than in “segregated” sections. Readings, films, assignments, and course organization suggest that “multiculturalism is the norm.” For example, an exploration of work and family issues might use a film featuring an Asian couple as a basis for the discussion.

4. *Whether emphasis leans toward applied or theoretical issues.*

Applied. These courses emphasize what the student will do as a result of the class. They seek to help students “develop a response” to personal and/or social issues. Some emphasize skill development.

Theoretical. These syllabi emphasize teaching students to understand and analyze family dynamics and issues. Goals include cognitive understanding, awareness, and synthesis and

analysis of research information.

Course Orientations

The types of courses described below represent our construction of four orientations for courses based on our analysis of how various syllabi incorporated the themes and variations described above. While no one course is likely to fit any of these types completely, they offer a useful way to characterize the variety we found within family sociology courses.

Personal Problem-Solving. The content of these courses emphasizes the interpersonal over the institutional. Goals address personal coping, decision-making, and communication. There is minimal questioning of the traditional model. Organization tends to be around phases of the family life cycle. Diversity is addressed comparatively and described primarily as “cultural influences.” Students are encouraged to understand the social factors shaping the family so they can problem-solve more effectively. There is a strong emphasis on the application of course content in students' personal lives.

Raising Awareness. Content of these courses emphasizes the intersection between the personal and institutional. While the traditional family model is not overtly questioned, there is a goal of expanding students' ideas regarding families through contextual understanding. Acceptance of differences is emphasized. These courses seek to raise the students' awareness of the changes impacting families over time and place. Awareness of diversity is encouraged, primarily through a comparative approach. Course goals include an applied component such as “increasing openness to diverse beliefs” or “applying insights regarding the family as an institution to American society and your personal experience.”

Deconstructing THE Family. The content of these courses emphasizes the institutional. Assumptions regarding the traditional family are questioned. Course descriptions emphasize

“presenting diverse ideas” or “looking at the family in a new way.” Content typically begins with an expansion of the definition of family. Courses tend to be issues-oriented with critical debate and an exploration of controversial issues common. “Idealistic” models of family may be directly challenged. Diversity is addressed through a mixture of comparative and integrated approaches. Application is directed toward critical understanding of the issues involved in debates about “the family.”

Reconstructing FAMILIES. These courses also have an institutional focus. They are organized around constructionist ideas. Students are encouraged to discover the ways that the meanings, functions, and definitions of families are created. No particular model of the family is accepted, even as a model against which to measure others. Questioning does not occur through overt debate of contrasting perspectives on the family. Instead these courses step away from the "wars about the family" and focus heavily on how family ideals, expectations, and functions are created within historical, industrial, economic, power, and gender contexts. Diversity is integrated throughout the course. Students are expected to be actively engaged in co-creating the class. There is a strong theoretical focus that is also linked to applied concerns. They may emphasize community involvement or service learning.

Discussion

Family sociology courses vary according to a variety of dimensions. How these courses take shape may have less to do with the text and more to do with the instructor and the supplementary readings that he or she selects. We identified four "blueprints" for courses based on our analysis of the general family sociology syllabi submitted for this project. While many courses would not fit any of these models exactly, they provide a useful frame of reference when approaching the design of a course in family sociology. It may be helpful to consider where your

goals for the students fit. Is your primarily goal helping students develop the knowledge and skills to more effectively solve personal problems? Are you primarily hoping to expand student's awareness about the intersection between personal and societal issues? Do you want students to begin to deconstruct "the" family by expanding the definition of family and engaging in a critical debate about family issues? Or do you want students to reconstruct families, exploring how meanings and functions of families are created and utilizing an integrative view of families in the discussion of family issues?

Despite variation in approaches, our review of how family is presented in textbooks and in course syllabi suggests an increasing interest regarding diversity in families and how to help students address or apply this knowledge. Many courses are also very problem-centered. We must ask whether our focus on problems inadvertently prevents us from addressing family strengths and resiliencies. Many instructors are quite explicit about how their courses will impact what students think and believe about families. Most design courses so that they will help students make their own families stronger and/or address the complex societal issues impacting families. Yet there is no avoiding the reality that family issues are political issues. No matter what we teach there will be political consequences. Because courses will continue to vary in their goals and visions of what constitutes "family," it incumbent upon us to examine what we teach and be accountable for our own biases. As what is taught about families continues to evolve and change over time, we can anticipate that new debates will continue to emerge and that what is taught in the classroom will change more quickly than what is written in the texts.

Limitations of this study include the following: 1.) The self-selecting nature of the sample and 2.) the difference that must of necessity exist between the description of a class (the syllabus) and the lived experience of a class. First, the data were collected as part of a project to

compile syllabi and other pedagogical materials for inclusion in a workbook published by the American Sociological Association to advance the teaching of family sociology in higher education. Instructors selected their own syllabi for inclusion. Many different reasons and motivations may have encouraged or discouraged instructors from submitting their syllabi for consideration in the workbook. For instance, instructors may have felt that unique assignments or delivery methods warranted inclusion. On the other hand, it is possible that other instructors may have felt that their syllabi were so traditional or usual that the very perception of the mainstream nature of their teaching choices may have precluded them from submitting their syllabi for inclusion in the workbook. In any event, it is clear that the sample was shaped by the call for materials to be included in a pedagogical publication.

The second limitation of the study is related to our inability to know much about the context of the teaching or the pedagogical choices made in the syllabi. Syllabi are by definition a textual outline of a course, which may or may not be closely representative of what actually happens in class. How the choice of a text for teaching purposes translates to the classroom context is unique to each instructor and each class. For instance, it is easy to imagine that the same text can be used very differently by different instructors and absorbed (or not) differently by diverse classes of students.

Both of the limitations discussed above relate to implications for future expansion of this research. First, it would be important to expand the scope of the sample. While this study explored syllabi submitted for publication in a pedagogical text, a larger sample size or a sample generated by a call to contribute to a specific research study rather than a call for submission to a publication would expand the scope of the syllabi submitted and, ultimately, what we know about how family sociology is being taught in our universities.

Secondly, it would be helpful to gather a robust understanding of how instructors believe their syllabi shape the classroom experience of sociology students who are learning about families. What experiences do they hope to promote by the selection of specific texts? How do they use texts and assignments to structure overarching concepts about family sociology? Class observations or in-depth interviews with the authors of the syllabi would provide rich context and serve to deepen and complexify an understanding of students' learning in family sociology classes.

*Dr. Carmen Knudson-Martin was co-author on an earlier version of this article published in *Teaching About Families* (2000).

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