Children, Parenting, and Education in a Cross-Cultural Perspective

Course Description

Childhood is often portrayed in the United States as an idyllic and innocent time of life. However, beneath this portrait we can find a more dangerous and carefully-negotiated story. Using a multitude of sources ranging from anthropological theory to biographical essays, this class will explore the ways in which childhood is culturally constructed, bounded, and spoken about. We will consider how children are disciplined, taught, and constrained; the ways in which adults conceive of childhood and how these affect the lives of children; whether children are considered "people," and how culturally-constructed images of childhood are presented to children. Texts will include Scheper-Hughes and Sargent’s Small Wars: The Cultural Politics of Childhood; personal essays on childhood, and anthropological, sociological, and education studies articles about childhood, parenting, and education.

Using the disciplines of social science, we will consider the ways in which children and childhood differ across cultures, what those cultural differences mean, and what childhood means in a larger cultural and developmental sense. We will examine the concept of education, both formal and informal, and examine how children are taught, what children are taught, and how these things are culturally constructed. One of the main themes of this course will be the discussion of discipline and ways in which children are taught their "place in the world." Among the issues we will discuss are race, class, and gender; ways in which children are policed and punished and why; the creation of fully-acculturated adults from "raw" children; and how adults teach children what they should be and reflect upon the experiences of their own childhoods. How do ideas about childhood and proper parenting differ in different cultures? Is the concept of childhood itself a cultural construction? What factors affect the experience of children and how children are considered by adults? Can we draw any cross-cultural conclusions about childhood?

Required Readings: Books will be available at the bookstore and on reserve at the library. For purchasing, I recommend trying the Advanced Book Exchange, at http://www.abebooks.com, a consortium of independent used booksellers which I have found very useful in the past for finding multiple copies of used books (in varying conditions and prices).

Additional required articles--marked in the syllabus with the word reserve in bold print--will also be available to students via the library and via our course website. These articles are essential to the course. A link to the library reserves is available via our course website.

Required Books (will also be on reserve in the library):


**Recommended Books:**


**Reserve readings available through the library and on our course site. (Listed on the syllabus)**

**Course Requirements:**

Attendance and participation in class discussion: 15%

In-class assignments/reading responses 25%

Midterm Essay 25%

Final Essay 35%

**General Requirements:** Class attendance and participation are both essential to this class. For this reason, unexcused absences will impact your grade; the discussion we do in class cannot be replicated by simply doing the reading. Also, this is a seminar class, and so it is necessary to do the reading beforehand to participate in the discussion. It also makes the class more engaging if we have things to talk about. Although this is not a writing intensive course, the papers are another vehicle for you to reflect on the reading topics and to introduce your own ideas; creativity, critical thinking, and good analysis are all highly encouraged. *Please note that reading must be completed before class.*

**Required Statement: Four-Credit Course (with three hours of class-time per week)**

Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.). *Please note that you may need to spend more than 9 hours of study time depending the varying amount of reading, writing, assignments, etc. per week.*

No cell phones, pagers, or other communication devices will be permitted in class, unless you are an EMT or other medical professional on call. Laptops will also not be permitted without my prior consent. *Students observed using cell phones will be marked absent; this will have an effect on the final course grade.*

**Specific Assignments:** *Please note that more detailed assignment sheets will be available on our website in the folder marked "Class Assignments."

In-class assignments/reading responses: Students will either bring assignments to class or will do short class exercises responding to the reading. These exercises will vary from a short writing exercise about the reading, to assignments asking the students to collect examples of toy advertising or respond to online discussions. **Extension days may not be used for these assignments.**

Midterm and Final Essay: Students will be asked to write short (5-6 page) essays based on the course reading. Prompts for these essays will be posted on our class website ahead of time.
**Email Policy:** Emails will be answered within 24 hours, except for weekend days (when I cannot guarantee to check my email as regularly). I do not check email between the hours of 9 pm and 8 am. Please keep emails short and to the point; longer commentary may be better discussed during office hours.

**Written Work:** Assignment sheets will be made available on the class website, and due dates are specified in the syllabus. Written work submitted later than fifteen minutes after the beginning of class on the due date will be lowered by a third of a grade for each day late, except in cases of illness or emergency. **All sources MUST be cited.** Please use **in-text citation.** For example:

> American teenage girls seem to be in a liminal state, for "as a society, we discarded the Victorian moral umbrella over girls before we agreed on useful strategies and programs--a kind of 'social Gore-Tex' to help them stay dry" (Brumberg 1997: 201).

**Works Cited:**


NOTE. Proper anthropological citation utilizes the LAST NAME of the author, the YEAR of the publication date, and the PAGE number, in that order (Chicago in-text citation). **I will also accept MLA citation.**

Be sure to include the works cited page. All papers must be word-processed, spellchecked, double-spaced, and possess reasonable margins and page numbers. I highly encourage you to proofread as grammar and punctuation are essential parts of writing well, and writing is one of the main tools of the social sciences. Clear and readable prose is also highly esteemed! **We will be using LATTE to turn in papers this semester.**

**Latedays/Extension Days:** I use a system with my upper-level classes that works like this: You are granted one week (seven days) of extension at the beginning of the semester. You do not have to ask ahead of time to use these days, you may simply exercise this privilege of being a little flexible about due dates. You may divide them up however you wish -- turn one paper in a week late, or three papers in each two days late. Please note the following rules:

1. You may divide your days up however you wish.
2. When you turn in any paper that uses latedays/extension days, you MUST note at the top of the paper that "X extension days" or "Y latedays" were used. **Otherwise I will mark your paper as late, assuming that you do NOT wish to use your latedays.** You may not retroactively use latedays.
3. Papers must be turned in electronically to the class website; this will timestamp your papers automatically. **Email may only be used in the event you cannot reach the class website.**
4. **Weekend days count.** For example, if you turned your paper in on a Monday after it was due on a Tuesday, you would need to use six latedays, not four.

**Class Participation and Courtesy:**

--I require and expect all students to treat each other with courtesy. Courtesy includes being prepared, being on time, and being respectful of the material and your colleagues’ work with it.
--Harassment, whether physical, sexual, or verbal, will not be tolerated in this class. We may be discussing some sensitive and sometimes upsetting topics; I expect this classroom to be a safe space for students to express their views.

--It is possible to disagree respectfully: rather than telling people that they are wrong, do what is called "reflecting" before responding. For example, "You seem to be saying that X is Y," (reflection) "however, I have a different opinion, which is that X is Z, because of A." Also, be sure not to disagree with people (i.e. "you are wrong,") but with their actual statements ("I do not agree with X equalling Y").

--Speak up in class. I don't expect every student to volunteer an opinion in every class, but your opinions count -- be sure to share them in most classes. As an adjunct to this, share the floor! Let others speak (and if you are afraid that you will forget your point, write it down).

--Respect confidentiality. If you want to adduce examples which do not come from the texts, don't give names: we will be discussing sensitive subjects (this goes as well for your papers, if you are giving personal experiences or doing fieldwork). A friend gave me this excellent advice for talking about issues, and not individuals: "plots, not characters."

--Use "I statements" for your opinions rather than assuming that what you think should be universal. This can also be helpful for distinguishing between personal opinion and facts which can be backed up by documented scholarly evidence.

--Expressions of bias are hurtful even if unintended. However, even if you did not mean to step on my foot, it's best if you move when I tell you that it hurts. Similarly, when someone says something that another person finds biased and hurtful, it's best to cease and apologize, even if that's not what the first person intended. Intent is not magic and will not prevent bias from happening; we all carry around unconscious misogyny, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, racism, and a host of other prejudices because of how society is. I encourage all students to try to be graceful about listening when their bias is brought up (and I promise to do my best, myself).

If you have any problems or questions, I encourage you to bring them to me, or to the Director of Studies of the Anthropology department.

Regrade Requests: In the event of a grade dispute, I will re-evaluate the entire work according to my grading rubric. A higher grade is not guaranteed.

Academic Integrity: Academic integrity is expected of all students. All work turned in must be the work of the student whose name appears at the top of the paper, except where you have specifically requested and received permission for a collaborative effort. All students are expected to cite their sources fully (whether from texts, interviews, or online). If you have any questions on when or whether to cite, please do not hesitate to ask. You may not turn in work for this class which you have previously turned in for other classes. Plagiarism will be dealt with according to the Academic Honesty Policy; plagiarized work will result in a failure of the class and further sanctions, at the discretion of Brandeis University, may result.

If you are a student with a documented disability on record and wish to have accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately with your letter from Academic Services. All communications will be kept confidential.

Credits: Many thanks to Hanne Blank, whose proposed class courtesy rules have been invaluable to the creation of this syllabus.

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Schedule of Readings and Due Dates

**Week 1: Introduction to Course**
8/29  No reading: introduction to the course

**Week 2-3: The Anthropology of Childhood and the Classics**

9/2  No class; Brandeis holiday


**Weeks 4-5: Inuit Emotional Education**
Warnings: Intimate descriptions of child-adult interactions, including teasing, discussion of genitalia, and “scary” childhood games.


9/19 & 9/24  No class; Brandeis holidays

9/25  Brandeis Monday: NO CLASS due to campus schedule conflict

Instead of class, please view the film *Innocence* on our LATTE site.

10/1 No Class; Brandeis holiday

**Weeks 6-7: Parenting in Cross-Cultural Perspective**

Warnings: discussions and descriptions of infant death and suffering, Scheper-Hughes; ableism and ableist talk from informants, Gammeltoft and Park & Chung


**Weeks 7-8: A Gender Education**

Warnings: descriptions of homophobic, sexist, and violent language and interactions between children, Keddie, Phoenix et al., and Sedaris.


**Week 9: School, Gender, and Adolescence**

**Warnings:** discussion and descriptions of homophobic language and sexual assault.


**Midterm Essay Due**

**Week 10: Serious Play**

**Warnings:** discussion of highly racist stereotypes, Bernstein.


**Week 11-12: Savage Inequalities: Race and Education**

**Warnings:** discussion of physical, emotional, and sexual violence against children in school: Whalen, Alexie, IN-CLASS FILM.


  **in-class film:** Weyer, Hannah. 2002. *Escuela.* Women Make Movies


  **In-Class Film:** Richie, Chip. 2008. "Our Spirits Don’t Speak English." Rich-Heape Films.


**Weeks 13-14: Class and Poverty; Compassion and Exploitation**

**Warnings:** discussion and descriptions of poverty and violence: Bourgois, Morrison; discussion of child murder and sex work, Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman; extreme child abuse, including murder, Joyce.


Thanksgiving Recess 11/21-11/25


**Week 15: Child Labor: Opposed to Education?**

**Warnings:** discussion of poverty and physical danger to children: Okyere, Raj Giri, ten Brinke.


**Week 15-16: Violence in Childhood**
**Warnings:** discussion of physical, emotional, and sexual violence to children and infants:

ALL readings (seriously, these are grim).


**Final Essay Due**