"One is not born a wo[man], one becomes one." – Simone de Beauvoir

Course Concentration

The vital focus of this course centers on an introduction to sociological perspectives on gender and gender inequality in society. The two themes that are emphasized throughout the course include: 1) the social construction of gender at the level of individuals, interactions and institutions; and 2) the importance of understanding gender in the contexts of its intersections with race, class, sexuality and nation.1

I. Perennial Questions:

While alternative disciplinary approaches to gender will considered, (such as biological and psychological), this course will primarily examine gender as a social and structural construct. The course will begin with central debates in gender studies and sociology, (e.g., the merits of biological explanations of gender), and how various feminisms, (first, second and third waves), have re/shaped theoretical and empirical studies of gender. We will then move into specific topics, such as popular culture and health. This course will center on the following guiding questions: Is gender shaped by nature, nurture, or both? How have feminists (and feminisms) influenced the study of gender? Is gender inequality inevitable? What do race, class, and sexuality tell us about gender? How is gender done at individual, interactional and institutional levels? How/can gender be “undone?”

1 These themes echo the orienting theoretical focus of Emily Kane’s perennially lauded “Gender and Society” courses, taught at Bates College, Lewiston, ME.
A Critical Race Feminist Lens:

To help interrogate these topics and questions, this course will be guided by four central themes from critical race feminism (CRF), which asserts the following:

1) Social Identities are historically and culturally specific and change over time.

2) Race, class, gender and sexuality are not separate identities that are easily distinguishable from one another. These social identities intersect and reinforce each other. For example, once cannot talk about race without examining its implications for gender and vice versa.

3) CRF acknowledges the importance of laws, policies and institutions in the perpetuation of inequality.

4) Finally, CRF is skeptical of concepts such as objectivity, neutrality and meritocracy. Therefore, ideas of equality must be critically examined.

II. Historical Perspective:

In the first assigned reading, sociologist C. Wright Mills outlines the “sociological imagination,” which highlights the connections between history, social structure and personal biography. This course nurtures the sociological imagination through its socio-historical foundation, its emphasis on multiple perspectives, and an examination on how history and social structures converge to impinge of the life chances of different types of people.

Further, given the broad topical scope of “Gender and Society,” we will always situate gender in historical context. Likewise, this course underscores how gender, as a social identity, is political, situational, socio-cultural and temporal—thus always inseparable (in construction and connotation) from other social identity categories, (e.g. race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, age, and so forth). Notably, we will grapple with the extent to which biological and socio-cultural re/definitions of gender de/stabilize taken-for-granted assumptions, (e.g. gender perceived as an innate and fixed category), particularly as bolstered and re/inscribed by biological and social “facts.”

III. Methodology:

Methodologies are the theories that are used to guide research. The course materials are purposely eclectic and draw from a wide range of sources and methods. We will utilize the work of both “positivist” scholars who often obtain quantitative data from social surveys and controlled experiments as well as more “interpretive” researchers who frequently derive qualitative data from fieldwork and interviewing. Moreover, we will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of particular methodologies, alongside the gender politics at work that influence how we determine such demarcations (between “strong” and “weak” scientific and social scientific methodologies), and why. Subsequently, alongside our more mainstream academic sources, as often prescriptive and more privileged within the academy, we will simultaneously consider less-traditional social science informed research and related topics of inquiry, as based in creative arts and literature and popular cultural venues, and in often lending to more subversive and expansive styles and compositions of both authorship and audience.
IV. Cultural Diversity:

Attention to cultural diversity will be a salient feature of this course. We will discuss a range of racial and ethnic groups and their relationships to gender and power, with heightened attention to how categories both stabilize and destabilize other categories. For instance, we will consider how historically race was used to determine whether a female was deemed a “sub-human” (black) slave versus a (white) “True Woman,” alongside the ensuing effects that continue to fuel racism (and raced and classed experiences of gender inequality) today. Thus, we will constantly be mindful of how all females have not and do not experience gender inequality in the same ways, neither historically nor contemporarily. Likewise, not all males experience gender privilege and inequality evenly. Consequently, we will not only be looking at distinctions between groups, but also within groups.

Please note: this course does not satisfy the official university cultural diversity requirement.

V. Writing Component:

There is a strong writing requirement in this course. Throughout the semester you will be compelled to use your “sociological imagination” in essays for three exams, in-class writing reflections and assignments, and through the completion of a semester-long “Connections Portfolio,” in which a major course component will be to include weekly critical and analytical, sociologically strong and imaginative written responses to the readings of the week. (The components of the “Connections Portfolio” will be further detailed in an addendum I will distribute to the class).

VI. Creating a Personal Philosophy:

This course will challenge you to critically examine yourself within social order, as well as the following: how you benefit from and/or are oppressed by your social location; your ideas of gender, freedom and social justice; your vision for yourself and society in the future; and the best ways to realize that vision considering the very real social constraints that bind us all, (albeit unevenly). Hopefully this will encourage working for the betterment of humankind in both theory and practice, and within and across academic and activist arenas. Subsequently, from a more culturally competent standpoint, informed by gender and as nuanced by race class, sexuality and so forth, many of us might discover we have been forced (or further forced) out of a social somnambulism of sorts, as we better awaken to the reverberations of gender and inequality in micro, meso and macro arenas in our everyday lives—with fastidious focus on myths of meritocracy and corollary perpetuations of inequality as dependent upon hegemonic scripts of “The American Dream.”

VII. Course Expectations and Evaluation:

1) Class participation comprises 15% of your overall grade.

This is a reading and participation intensive course. If you miss a class, you are responsible for getting notes from a classmate. Readings are due on the date they are listed. Come to class ready to discuss them. A strong participation grade includes: regular and engaged class participation in lectures, “current events,” small group discussions and in-class writing assignments and reflections.
Please be aware that within class discussions there can be a tendency to over-generalize one’s own personal experiences to the overall population. This tendency is especially striking in courses that address gender, race, and social dynamics. These topics seem to elicit statements such as: “Well, where I’m from it’s not like that” or “That’s not my experience, so that’s not true.” However, once more, this course is positioned firmly in C. Wright Mills’ “sociological imagination,” which highlights the connections between history, social structure, and personal biography—and relationships between (personal) ‘troubles’ and (public) ‘issues.’ Class participation should do so as well.

2) The “Connections Portfolio” comprises 30% of your total grade.

A “Connections Portfolio,” as another venue to show that you are actively engaged with the course readings and classes, will be an ongoing assignment that you work on, as you incorporate critical analyses of and reflections on the readings, both separately and taken together. Moreover, alongside more traditional writing responses, (e.g. essay format, article response)—less traditional forms (that highlight personal creativity and application), used to illuminate your engagement with the course, is also greatly encouraged. (E.g. you might incorporate connections to current events, popular culture, everyday activities and/or events at Boston College, art, advertisements, music lyrics, newspaper clippings, Facebook exchanges and so forth.) A strong Connections Portfolio will include a moderate balance between more and less traditional response formats.

3) Three writing intensive, essay-based exams will comprise 55% of your grade.

Exam One is worth 15% of your grade. Exam Two, (or your Midterm Exam), is worth 20% of your grade. Exam Three, or your Final Exam, is worth 20% of your grade.

Grading Overview and Due Dates:

15% - Class Participation

30% - Connections Portfolio: (Due: May 2)

15% - Exam One: (Due: February 17th)

20% - Exam Two/Midterm Exam: (Due: March 30th)

20% - Exam Three/Final Exam: (Due: May 8-15th, TBA)

100% - Total Score

IX. Academic Integrity:

Academic integrity is a standard of utmost importance in this course. Guidelines for academic integrity in written work are posted on the Boston College website at:

http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/polisci/integrity.html
If you have any questions pertaining to the academic integrity guidelines, please come and talk with me for clarification. If you are caught violating Boston College’s policies on academic integrity, you will receive a failing grade for the assignment and the appropriate Dean will be notified in accordance to the rules set forth by Boston College.

**IX. Disability Statement**

Boston College is committed to providing reasonable accommodations and integrated access for students with disabilities to all available academic, social, and recreational programs and activities. Appropriate support and referral services are provided by the Disability Services Office, which serves students with hearing, visual, mobility, medical, and psychiatric disabilities. If you have a disability, please let me know at the beginning of the semester so I can work with the Disability Services Office to determine the appropriate accommodations that we can make for you. Further information about the Disability Services Office can be obtained from the Boston College website at: 

[http://www.bc.edu/offices/odsd/disabilityservices.html](http://www.bc.edu/offices/odsd/disabilityservices.html)

**X. Required Readings:**


*Readings denoted with an asterisk are from the required reading list.

The remaining readings can be obtained from Ereserve Reading or through general Online Access as specified below:

**Ereserve Readings:** To access e-reserve readings: 1) go to the libraries home page, 2) click on “more catalog search options,” 3) click on “Course/On-line Reserves,” and 3) Search by my last name, Barko.

**Online Access:** There are also several sources that you are asked to obtain from the worldwide web; for these articles the syllabus will note you should access online.)

*Note: The instructor reserves the right to incorporate and/or modify reading assignments throughout the course.*
XI. Reading Schedule:

Week 1: Introduction to the Course: The Sociological Imagination and Gender

Jan. 16: MLK Day (No Classes)

Jan. 18: First Day of Class—No Readings


*AND*


Week 2: Social Constructions of Gender and Competing Conceptual Approaches


*Access Online:* [www.visibleworld.net/cupajane/articles_people/martin.pdf](http://www.visibleworld.net/cupajane/articles_people/martin.pdf)

*AND*


*AND*


*AND*
“Gender in Interaction and Institutions,” (Ch. 3), pp. 59-94 in Wharton.*

**Week 3: Theories of Gender Inequality: Intersectionality**


*AND*


*AND*


**Week 4: Expanding on Social Construction and Intersectionality**


**Feb. 8:** Yen Le Espiritu. 2001. “‘We Don’t Sleep Around Like White Girls Do’: Family, Culture, and Gender in Filipina American Lives,” *Signs* v.26(2), pp. 415-440.

Week 5: Gender, Family and Education


AND

“Gender, Childhood, and Family Life,” (Ch. 5), pp. 135-188 in Wharton.*

AND

Access Online: http://colorlines.com/archives/2012/01/massachusetts_gov_patick_signs_transgender_equality_bill_into_law.html

Feb. 15:


AND


Feb. 17: Exam I*

Week 6: Gender and Education (cont.); Work

Feb. 20: “Gendered Jobs and Gendered Workers,” (Ch. 6), pp. 189-222 in Wharton.*

AND

Access Online: http://colorlines.com/archives/2012/01/association_of_black_women_historians_wants_you_to_know_the_help_is_distorted.html


**AND**

“Anti-Purity Ball: Jessica Valenti on Fighting Sexualization.” 2012. *Anderson Cooper.*
*Access Online:* [http://www.andersoncooper.com/2012/01/19/anti-purity-ball-jessica-valenti-on-fighting-sexualization/#.Tx4xd0ePMgI](http://www.andersoncooper.com/2012/01/19/anti-purity-ball-jessica-valenti-on-fighting-sexualization/#.Tx4xd0ePMgI)

---

**Week 7: Gender, Sex and Sex Work**


**AND**

“Sex” pp. 131-178, in *The Beauty Myth.***


**AND**

Schmich, Mary. 2011. “At the center of NU’s sex storm: The wonky, bespectacled professor at the center of the furor says, 'I'm feeling the nail through the skin right now.'” *Chicago Tribune.*


---

**March 5-7th:** *Enjoy Spring Break!*
**Week 8: Gender, Patriarchy, Capitalism, Disordered Eating and Identity Re/constructions**


AND


AND

Tartakovsky, Margarita. 2012. “Wanting To Be Thin Doesn’t Cause Anorexia But It’s Still Damaging.” *PsychCentral*


AND


AND


*(Note: We will have class with guest author, Dr. Patricia Leavy, on Monday.)*

**Week 9: Popular Culture; Gender and Violence**

Mar. 19: Leavy, Patricia. (2011). *Low-Fat Love*; Have the book *COMPETED* for today for Q&A with guest author Patricia Leavy! *Come to class with questions for Dr. Leavy.*

**AND**


**Week 10: Gender and Violence (cont.); Reproduction as Crime**


Mar. 30—**Exam Two**

**Week 11: Gender and Violence (cont.)**


**AND**


April 6: No Class—Easter Break

Week 12: Gender And Health

April 9: No Class—Easter Break


AND

View and take notes: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (CDC), “Inclusion of Women and Racial and Ethnic Minorities in Research.”
Access Online: http://www.cdc.gov/od/foia/policies/inclusio.htm


AND

View and take notes: “Gender Disparities in Health and Mortality—Population Reference Bureau.”

AND


Week 13: Gender Rebellion/Subversion

April 16: No Class—Patriots Day/Boston Marathon


Week 14: Deconstructing Difference/Undoing Gender


April 25: “Deconstructing Gender Differences and Inequalities.” (Ch. 7), pp.225-243 in Wharton.*

April 27: “Women’s Rights are Human Rights”; “Gay Rights are Human Rights”

Watch and take notes: Hillary Clinton in Beijing, China - September 5, 1995
Access Online: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sk3nzRt7p94 (20 minute speech)

AND

Watch and take notes: Secretary Clinton's Historic Speech on LGBT Human Rights, December 6, 2011
Access Online: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MudnsExyV78 (30 minute speech)

Week 15: Class Wrap-up, Concluding Thoughts and Review

April 30: Class Conclusions and Review

May 2: Class Conclusions and Review Continued; Note: Portfolios are Due.

May 4-May 7: Boston College Study Days, No Classes.

May 8-15th: Final Exam*** will be held this week, specific date/time TBA