“Only through the concrete understanding of particular worlds of suffering and the way they are shaped by political economy and cultural change can we possibly come to terms with the complex human experiences that undermine health.” – Arthur Kleinman

“The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise.” – C. Wright Mills

COURSE CONCENTRATION
This course explores interactions between gender, health and inequality. Viewing gender (and race, class, sexuality and other identities as inseparable) and as inextricably linked to discussions of health and inequality, this course will discuss social constructions of these categories and how they are connected. For example, what does health even mean and who decides? Are unequal health outcomes due to life chances or life choices? How do we understand nature/nurture debates? While emphasis will be given to sociological approaches, health will be explored holistically and theories will be integrative (e.g. including psychology, biology and epigenetics). Applied topics range from mental and physical paradigms of health, alongside environmental and contested illnesses in a “post-natural” world.

Through critical and creative thinking and sociologically sophisticated analyses, we will explore how (seeming) dichotomies of structure and agency; freedom and constraint; self and society; and individuals and institutions are not separate and static, but instead in constant temporal and contextual communication and negotiation. Some key topics explored in focusing a variety of multi-theoretical perspectives will include: intersectionality and health; race, class, gender and knowledge production; illness and the environment; medicalization and social control; and activism and social change.

Two themes that are emphasized throughout the course include the following:

1) understanding and applying a Sociological Imagination to topics of gender, health and inequality at the level of individuals, interactions, and institutions;

2) the importance of utilizing a Critical Race Feminist lens in exploring how conceptions of self and society always intersect one’s positionality, (i.e. social position/location), e.g. as influenced by race, class, gender, sexuality, nation—and one’s personal biography within history at large.

I. Perennial Questions:
In echoing the work of C. Wright Mills’ “promise” and noting how “[n]o social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey[,]” we will continually explore the following Millsian inquiries: 1. What is the structure of this particular society as a whole? 2. Where does this society stand in human history? 3. What varieties of men and women now prevail in this society and in this period?

Indeed, this course will likewise emphasize some of the subsequent guiding questions: How do we understand social constructions of gender, health and inequality? How do conceptions of health and illness change over time and place? How are categories of health and illness embedded in cultural assumptions? Are health disparities based on race, class and gender matters of life and death? “How do macrolevel institutional contexts and microlevel individual experiences shape knowledge production, and thus how we understand health, illness and inequality” (Schulz and Mullings 2006)? “How does the suffering of individuals contribute to collective understandings, and how much of individual experience is not captured by cultural meanings” (Farmer 1999)? How is personal health also political? How/can inequalities in health outcomes be reduced or eliminated?
A Critical Race Feminist Lens:
To help interrogate these topics and questions, this course will additionally be shaped by **four central themes** from critical race feminism (CRF), which assert 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 one of the first assigned readings, 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 on the life chances (and influence life choices) of different categorizations/constructed factions of people.

Further, given the broad topical scope of our course, we will always situate our themes and discussions in historical context. Likewise, this course underscores how our understandings of ourselves and our individual identities, shared relationships, societies, structures and institutions are inescapably 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, dis/ability, age, and so forth).

Notably, we will grapple with the extent to which biological and socio-cultural re/definitions of health, self, and society de/stabilize taken-for-granted assumptions about ostensibly innate and fixed categories, particularly as bolstered and re/inscribed by **social facts** that we take to be Real.

III. Methodology:
Methodologies are the theories that are used to guide research. The course materials are purposely eclectic and draw from a 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 socio-cultural politics at work that influence how “we” determine such demarcations (between “strong” and “weak” scientific and social scientific methodologies), and why. We will explore how and why “we” determine particular forms of research and corresponding metrics to confer strong or weak measures of validity and/or reliability—and simultaneously, entertain how we might take for granted the “Truth” of research science more broadly.

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, literary, and popular cultural venues—as unexpected origins for social justice movement, and as channels to potentially more subversive and expansive styles and compositions of both authorship and audience.

IV. Cultural Diversity:
In echoing the sentiments of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1963): **“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”** attention to cultural diversity will be a salient feature of this course. We will discuss a range of geographical, racial and ethnic groups and their relationships to health, self, society and power—with heightened attention to how categories both stabilize and destabilize other categories. For instance, we will consider how historically social categories (e.g. identities and institutions) are always mutable. (E.g. if all “men” are created equally—who does/not constitute man/men?) Correspondingly, how do race, class, gender and sexuality matter in these identity re/constructions and/or justifications for health in/equality?
Notably, we will constantly be mindful of how all “Americans,” and/or individuals at large, have not and do not experience inequality in the same ways, neither historically nor contemporarily. We will always be looking at similarities and distinctions within and across groups, while always interrogating seemingly monolithic groups of Americans and conceptions of American society as ubiquitous, unchanging and Real.

V. Writing Component:
There is a strong writing requirement in this course. Throughout the semester you will be compelled to use your “sociological imagination” through the completion of three exams, (including a take-home midterm essay exam)—in tandem with regular in-class writing reflections, assignments, unannounced quizzes, and through the optional written participation “Connections Portfolio,” where you will include weekly critical and analytical, sociologically strong and “imaginative” written responses to the readings of the week.

→Self-designed writing components presented to and approved by me, as part of your participation grade, will also be considered.

VI. Creating a Personal Philosophy:
Gender, Health and Inequality will encourage you to utilize your sociological imagination in developing a personal philosophy that urges you to see connections between individuals and structures through a quality of mind where it becomes essential to grasp the interplay of individuals and society, of biography and history, and of self and the world (Mills 1959). Moreover, this course will challenge you to critically examine yourself and your health within social order/s, as well as entertain the following issues: how you benefit from and/or are oppressed by your social location; your ideas of self, 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/ “real” social constraints that bind us all, (albeit unevenly). As such, we will consider the extents to which we may dis/agree with “The Thomas Theorem” (1928), which states, that “If [wo]men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.” Consequently, how/do we know what is/not Real? Who gets to decide and who does not?

Taken all together, my hope is that our time together 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 a sociological imagination, and as nuanced by gender, 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 social inequality in micro, meso and macro arenas in the health of 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 25% 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 the following: regular and engaged class participation in lectures, “current events,” small and large group discussions, in-class writing assignments, short written reflections assigned alongside course readings TBA, and unannounced in-class quizzes.

The Connections Portfolio option may also be completed to bolster your participation 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. Furthermore, 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 are 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.) The strongest Connections Portfolios will include a moderate balance between more and less traditional response formats. More specific components, suggestions and expectations for the “Connections Portfolio” are further detailed in an addendum at the end of the syllabus.

→Please come and make an appointment by the end of Week Five (through Friday, February 13th) if you are considering the Connections Portfolio option.
In addition, alternate proposals for class participation credit, as well as exam credit, particularly via evaluative paradigms that you estimate to be more valid measures of your knowledge and engagement with the course material, will be considered at your request. However, do come see me to propose/discuss available options early in the semester.

Finally, 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 identity politics in general. 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, keep in mind that one’s own experience alone does not create and/or debunk socio-cultural trends at large. Thus, 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) Three writing intensive, essay and/or short-answer based exams will comprise 75% of your grade.

- Exam One is worth 25% of your grade.
- Exam Two, (or your Midterm Exam), is worth 25% of your grade.
- Exam Three, (or your Final Exam), is worth 25% of your grade.
  - Note: you will have the choice to complete two comprehensive take-home essay exams and one short answer based in-class exam OR two short answer based in-class exams and one comprehensive take-home essay exam.

Grading Overview and Due Dates:
I. Class Participation (and writing) = 25%: including attendance and participation, quizzes, short writing assignments (in-class and outside of class), and group activities. Students may also choose to undertake the optional written participation/reflection elective via the “Connections Portfolio” assignment.
  - *Please note:* initial appointments to discuss the Connections Portfolio option should be made by Feb. 13th (Fri). Final Portfolios are due April 27th (Mon); (see the end of syllabus for further details).

II. Exam One (in class) = 25%: Date: March 13th (Fri).
III. Exam Two/Midterm Exam = 25%; Take-home Essay; Distributed on Mar. 20th (Fri) and Due on April 8th (Wed).
IV. Exam Three/Final Exam (in class/take-home) = 25%; Date: May 8th (Wed.) 12:30pm.

Total Score: 25% + 25% + 25% + 25% = 100%

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/offices/stserv/academic/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 are a student with a documented disability seeking reasonable accommodations in this course, please contact Kathy Duggan, (617) 552-8093, dugganka@bc.edu, at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities and ADHD, or Paulette Durrett, (617) 552-3470, paulette.durrett@bc.edu, in the Disability Services Office regarding all other types of disabilities, including temporary disabilities. Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations.

X. The Classroom as a Safe Space/Ally:
Please note: Gender, Health and Inequality, SOCY3370.01 is a welcoming, supportive and safe environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) students.

XI. Required Readings:

In addition, please note the following:
1) Required Readings (books): these readings (listed above) are denoted with an asterisk * in the syllabus.
   - These books will be available for purchase through the Boston College bookstore, as well as available through library loan. Some sections from these books are also available through course reserve.

2) Course Reserves (articles): these readings can be obtained from Ereserve/Course Reserve or through general online access as specified below:
   - To access e-reserve readings: 1) go to the libraries home page and click on the QUICK LINK for COURSE RESERVE. 2) After logging in with your BC username and password, your courses will display, or you may search for our Course Number/ID: SOCY3370.01.
   - These readings will be denoted by the phrase “COURSE RESERVE” in the syllabus.

3) Online Access (general worldwide web): There are several sources that you are asked to obtain from the worldwide web. For these articles, the syllabus will note that these can be “Accessed Online,” and will include the hyperlink to the article.

4) Finally, please note that the instructor reserves the right to incorporate and/or modify reading assignments throughout the course.

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XII. Reading Schedule:

**Week 1: Introduction to the Course: The Sociological Imagination**

Jan. 12 (Mon): First Day of Class; Introduction to the course and to the syllabus.


AND

**Week 2: Intersectionality and Health**

Jan. 19 (Mon): NO CLASS (MLK Day)

AND

AND

**Week 3: Multi-theoretical Perspectives to Health**

AND

AND


**Week 4: Race, Class, Gender and Knowledge Production**

AND

***Week 8: Spring Break***
Mar. 2 (Mon): No Class
Mar. 4 (Wed): No Class
Mar. 6 (Fri): No Class

***Week 9: Course Review and Midterm Exam***
Mar. 9 (Mon): Course catch-up and review.
Mar. 11 (Wed): Exam Prep
AND
Optional In-class survey/course feedback.
Mar. 13 (Fri): Exam One, in-class exam.

***Week 10: Illness and the Environment: Contested Etiologies: ***
AND

AND

AND
Exam #2: Take-home essay: Distributed: Mar. 20; Due: Apr. 8th (Wed).

***Week 11: Medicalization and Social Control: Agency and Constraint ***
AND

AND
Mar. 27 (Fri):

***Week 12: Is it Me or My Meds?***


**Apr. 3 (Fri):** No Class/Good Friday

***Week 13: Is it Me or My Meds?: Continued***

**Apr. 6 (Mon.):** No Class/Easter Break


AND

~Exam Two: Due In-Class Today~


AND

***Week 14: Is it Me or My Meds?: Conclusion; Course Review***


AND


AND
* Please bring questions for our guest speaker, Dr. David Karp.

***Week 15: Course Review and Students’ Choice***

**Apr. 20 (Mon):** No Class/Patriot’s Day

**Apr. 22 (Wed):** Course Review and Students’ Choice

**Apr. 24 (Fri):** Course Review and Students’ Choice
***Week 16: Course Conclusions and Review ***

**Apr. 27 (Mon): Course Review**

**Apr. 29 (Wed): Course Review/Last Day of Class**

***Exam Three/FINAL EXAM → Friday, May 8th @ 12:30pm.***

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From the Syllabus:

**The Connections Portfolio, Further Addendum**

From the Syllabus:

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, are 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.

**Number of Entries:**

Aim to write one to three entries per week, with one serving as an ideal minimum if you are using the Portfolio as a large portion of your participation grade. However, both quality and quantity will be considered, with greater emphasis on the former.

- Note that an entry should be in response to the readings assigned for the day.
- Notwithstanding, you are welcome (and encouraged) to include and connect previous readings to a present class day response; however, the central attention for the current entry should surround at least one of the readings assigned for that day.

**I. Responses: Traditional Type:**

Traditional Responses likely echo reflection responses you have submitted in your other classes.

- For example, you might use the following criteria: (a) an introduction that distinctly states your topic and why it is important; (b) responses should have a logical flow with supporting evidence from the readings and lecture; (c) a succinct critique of the pertinent issues; (d) and all papers should be typed (12pt), double spaced, numbered and stapled.

**Note:** Your overarching aim should be on providing some kind of critical analysis, NOT simply a summary of what the author states.

**Further note:** the above is just ONE example of a traditional response format. The above criteria are used as an example for a two-page response paper (from a different course). You might, instead, prefer to write a shorter—or —longer response. The style of your paper can also vary as to best suit your own writing strengths.

***The only requisite criteria to traditional responses include***:

1) a thesis (what is your argument?) and
2) integration with the course material assigned for the day you are writing.

**Some Qs/topics you might address:**

- Highlighting limitations of the work: e.g. contradictions, reductionistic thinking and/or overgeneralizations, weak evidence or lack of evidence. How could the author strengthen his/her work?
- Highlighting strengths: does a current author bolster and/or nuance and/or challenge a previous author we’ve encountered? How/where/why?
- What might be larger implications of a work or series of works—e.g. in activist, academic, political and/or professional arenas?
- Why might a particular thesis or idea resonate so strongly for you in this course and/or alongside your other academic/personal pursuits; why/how—and to what, if any, ends?
- How effectively does the author employ a sociological perspective and/or sociological imagination? Are the author’s politics in line with and/or at odds with the core tenets of critical race feminism (in the syllabus)?

**II. Less Traditional Response Examples:**

- Here you might want to link the readings assigned to Introduction to Sociology with examples/artifacts/evidence you encounter in your everyday life, (which is everywhere!)
- For example, you might cut out a magazine ad, newspaper article; print a Facebook conversation, Twitter thread, clothing label—any artifact where in which you can express some kind of pronounced commentary and connection between the readings and your everyday examples.
• You might also take your own photographs and/or write your own ethnographic descriptions, e.g. encountering a girl/boy
gender binary in a children’s toy section that reinscribes “doing gender” scripts. (Or, perhaps you encounter subversive
counter-examples to challenge “normative” socialization?)
• Conversations amongst friends/strangers (overheard)—with subsequent analysis might be another venue for you to make
connections. Here you would want to type up an informal transcript to the best of your recollection, and then provide
commentary (again, as linked to the course readings).
• Personal poetry, artwork, short stories, etc. are also submission types you might entertain.

***The only requisite criteria to non-traditional responses mirror those for a traditional submission:
1) a thesis (what is your argument?) and
2) integration with the course material assigned for the day you are writing.*

*However here, your thesis/statement/main point can be less (formally) explicit. (For example, a “thesis” in a
poem will likely be much different than a thesis in an essay response.)

• In addition, you want to integrate course material with non-course specific works, (i.e. your everyday
eamples/artifacts/evidence).
• You can also connect our course readings with those from another course and/or alternate academic sources of
your choosing as yet another example of a non-traditional submission. However, do give priority attention to
the current course material you are responding to for that day.

Moderate Balance of More and Less Traditional Responses:
This means that you do NOT have to submit the exact same number of traditional and non-traditional entries, but you should aim for
an approximate ratio no larger than 3:1 (in favor of the style of submission you prefer) for the most credit available from the Portfolio;
i.e. for every 3 traditional responses you submit, include 1 non-traditional response, or vice versa.

Feel free to also balance time/effort. For instance, if for a Monday class you write a lengthy essay (or time-consuming succinct
critical retort); for Wednesday you might write a shorter (less taxing) reflection, connecting a magazine advertisement to “white
privilege” or “hegemonic masculinity” and so forth.

The following are some questions from former students:
Q: Quick question about the Connections Portfolio. As far as the more formally structured entries are concerned, is it alright to bring
in personal experience/opinions/pronouns into the reflection? In past courses I’ve taken, I’ve been able to do this, but every course is
structured differently, so I just figured I would ask!

• A: Yes, this is definitely fine to do--and encouraged. However, just be careful to do so in a sociologically informed way.
E.g. I might use my own experience growing up to relate it to what we discuss in regard to "doing gender," perhaps as an
example that elucidates or conversely challenges the reading. With this, I would want to be careful to 1) link my
experience/argument to topics of our course/readings, and 2) remember that my (perhaps contradictory) experience doesn't
disprove a sociological phenomenon at large, but might raise new questions. For instance, I might talk about playing on all
boys soccer teams growing up and thus not feeling gender discrimination. This would not prove that gender discrimination
doesn't exist; instead, I might ask what variables/factors seemed to create an alternate experience for me. Or, perhaps
further reflection might allow me to realize that while overt discrimination wasn't evident, covert instances were
abound....etc....

Q: I just had a question about the connections portfolios. Do you want us to write an entry for each of the assigned readings?
A: I would aim to create 2-3 portfolio submissions per week. This might mean that you respond to readings for M or M
&W/W&F, etc; or MWF. For a submission, I would focus your attention on the readings assigned for that day. (However
you do not have to include all the readings for that day, and you are not limited to only those readings assigned for that
day—but all/both/at least one reading (say assigned for February 10th) should be part of a connections response for February
10th.

Feedback:
Please come to my office hours, make appointments, and/or email me with questions/sample submissions, etc.
While I do not want to micro-manage your work production and force you to check-in with me a certain number of times throughout
the semester, I encourage you to devise a feedback/extra help schedule with me that suits your own needs as/if needed.

• My mailbox is #20/Barko in 410 McGuinn Hall. This is the sociology graduate lounge, right outside my office in 410A.
Handing me hardcopies of your work (in class or in my mailbox) will likely be the most efficient method to receiving my
feedback on portfolio work—second of course to meeting with me live. You are also welcome to send me your
submissions over email, but the response rate might be slightly slower (depending upon the volume of new inbox
messages).

• I will aim to provide feedback within a week of receiving your work. Depending upon overall volume mass of requests (or
lack there of), it is possible I will be able to offer same day feedback—or need a bit more additional time beyond the week
maximum response aim. If your feedback request is time-sensitive and/or a week has passed (or is nearing) without my
feedback, please feel free to relay and/or remind me of these details.