Soc 117b – Sociology of Science, Technology, and Medicine  
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2-3:20pm  
Lown 201 (& section rooms TBA)

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Introduction

Our lives are shaped by science, technology, and medicine in many, varied ways. This course draws on both historical and contemporary case studies to examine how science and medicine enter into our ideas about who we are as individuals and members of social groups, our understandings of health and illness, our ideals regarding what constitutes a good life, and our chances for realizing those ideals. This semester, the course will focus on four central categories of human life and social organization and their interactions with biomedical science and technology: 1) birth; 2) self; 3) gender; 4) inequality.

This course satisfies the Oral Communications (OC) component of the general university requirements.

Learning Goals:

In this course, students will

1. Explore diverse sociological perspectives on science, technology, and medicine;
2. Gain insight into core sociological concepts -- including identity, gender, race, medicalization, and embodiment -- as they can be applied to and developed within studies of science, technology, and medicine;
3. Consider how dimensions of social organization shape individual experiences and social understandings of science, technology, and medicine;
4. Critically examine the language of biomedical science and its effects;
5. Develop oral communications skills via in class exercises, assignments, and individual and small group presentations, which will enhance students’ abilities to
   a. communicate and listen effectively in a range of contexts.
   b. critically evaluate orally presented information and arguments.
   c. consider specific techniques for using language as a communication tool.
6. Engage in reflective processes which that connect theory, practice, and the synthesis of new ideas.
Course Format and Requirements

1) Attendance and Respectful Participation

This course covers a lot of material, and attendance to both lecture and journal clubs is expected. Consistent absences will be noted and reflected in your final grade. Laptops are allowed but ONLY for taking notes or examining readings. Other observed uses of your laptop will result in a reduction of your participation grade. You are also expected to bring readings, along with your notes on the readings, to class. Please be sure to do the reading thoroughly before the class for which it is assigned.

I expect that you will be respectful of others in class. Examples include arriving on time, not leaving early, listening when others speak, not monopolizing discussion time, and not having side-discussions. Please turn cell phones and pagers off.

2) Engagement with Readings

Each student will write least one question about the readings each unit. These questions should be posted to LATTE in one of the following three “Question Forums”:

1) Clarifying Questions Forum – is the place to post questions about matters of fact, definition of terms, the history of an artifact, etc. from the readings. Some examples of clarifying questions might include: “What is the BMI?” or “What year were the BMI categories revised?” or “What are some groups that contest the idea that the BMI is a good health measure?”

2) Challenging Questions Forum – is the place to post questions that challenge (or point to the limitations) of the definitions, methods, conclusions, or other aspects of the readings. Some examples of challenging questions might include: “Why did the authors accept the BMI as a health indicator, rather than looking at body fat composition?” or “What are the limitations of interviewing only middle class white women about their experiences of weight loss programs?” or “How can the authors conclude that gender shapes the experience of cardiac rehabilitation if they don’t include men and women in their study?”

3) Reflecting Questions Forum – is the place to post questions that invite your classmates to reflect on how the readings might make them think differently about themselves, their families, their experiences of health & illness, their coursework at Brandeis, or their career plans. Some examples of reflecting questions might include: “For class today, we read about how women in aerobics classes emphasize “becoming stronger” over “getting skinny.” In what ways, if any, does this make you think differently about your experience of group exercise classes, at Gosman or elsewhere?” or “New research shows that the built environment makes a significant contribution to health disparities in obesity. If this is true, what are its implications for your career plans?” or “Given what we’ve learned about the stigmatization of people who are overweight, what steps might the Brandeis student body take to encourage healthy eating without contributing to this stigmatization?”

Please be sure to post a question to each forum at least once during the semester (& you are welcome to post more often!). The due dates for your questions are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BIRTH</td>
<td>January 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELF</td>
<td>February 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENDER</td>
<td>March 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INEQUALITY</td>
<td>April 9</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

We encourage – but do not require – you to respond to your classmates’ questions on LATTE.
3) Leading Journal Club Meetings and Talking Points Memo

At the conclusion of each set of readings, we will meet in “journal clubs.” These small groups will give you an opportunity to enhance each other’s understanding of a specific category/theme (e.g., birth, self, gender, inequality) by providing an overview of readings other than those we did together as a class. The journal clubs will also provide you with a forum for doing a short presentation in front of a small group, as part of the OC component of the course.

For your presentation, you can select any article from the peer reviewed literature in science, medicine, bioethics, social science, or public policy (we will talk more about what this means!). I encourage you to draw on your strengths in selecting the article. Choose something interesting to you, related to your major, or personally compelling! A list of possible readings is included at the end of the syllabus, but you are encouraged to go beyond this list to find articles, as well. You are always welcome to bring relevant newspaper articles to class, but for this assignment, you cannot use a newspaper article.

Each student will do one journal club presentation. Depending on the final size of the class, there will be approximately 3 presentations in each journal club meeting. This means that 1) students need to coordinate amongst themselves to make sure that each student is presenting a unique reading; 2) each student’s presentation should be no more than 15 minutes long (so that there is time for Q&A). You are encouraged – but not required – to meet as a group before doing your presentations to your journal club.

Additionally, you are required to provide your classmates (approximately 10 in each club) with a “talking points memo” of the article you are presenting in journal club. In no more than 3 pages, this memo should provide:

1) The full citation for the article
2) A summary of the article that describes
   a. What are the key findings? What about these findings is intriguing, important, surprising? What do they make you think about or see differently?
   b. What research was done to produce these findings?
   c. How does this article connect with the theme/category and readings that we’ve discussed together in class?
   d. Why is this an important article (For us as a class? For future research? And/or for policy?)?

Memos must be posted to LATTE at least 24 hours *before* the journal club meeting, so that the other members of your journal club have time to familiarize themselves with the topics that will be presented the following day.

NOTE: The reading for any journal club day consists of the memos written by your classmates. Please come to journal club having read the memos and prepared to ask questions of the presenters. I reserve the right to give quizzes in journal club, if it seems like these memos are not being read.

4) Experiential Learning Groups

Each journal club group will meet once with Daniel, during the designated journal club time. More forthcoming in a separate handout; look forward to the opportunity to engage with the course material from an EL perspective!
5) Interview Assignment and Presentation

This course asks you to apply what you are learning in class to events you may observe in the world, including your own experiences and those of people you know. Consequently, you will both write a paper based on an interview and, in groups, you will present your analysis to the class.

Interview Paper – Due March 21

The purpose of the interview is to learn about another person’s experience of science, technology, and/or medicine. Towards this end, you will interview someone who has used or been the recipient of practices that derive from biomedical knowledge or technology (broadly defined – medical advice, pharmaceuticals, medical testing or technology, surgery, etc.), whether as a researcher, clinician, or patient. Your goal in this interview is to learn about science, technology, and medicine from the perspective of the person whom you are interviewing.

In class, we will discuss strategies for successful interviewing, development of interview questions, and data analysis. In general, however, you are expected to develop a list of interview questions before conducting the interview (and also to ask additional questions depending upon the respondent’s responses and context). Your interview should last about an hour (though it could go longer), which is about the amount of time it will take you to gather all the information you need for this analysis. If your first interview is much shorter than 60 minutes, you need to choose a different respondent and/or develop more interview questions. The interview should be recorded (tape and digital recorders can be checked out at the Getz Multimedia Lab; see: http://lts.brandeis.edu/teachlearn/multimedia/index.html) or you should take detailed notes throughout, to maximize the amount of verbatim material that will be available for your analysis. Your respondent(s) should be chosen carefully, as their stories of their life experiences will be the empirical foundation for your analysis.

Minimally, your interview should address these broad domains of experience:

- In what situation did your interviewee experience biomedical information or technology? What is the story of the experience?
- What specific information or technology was a part of this experience?
- How did she learn about this information or technology? How did she gain access to it? How was her situation communicated to her, and by whom?
- What feelings does she have about her experience of this information or technology? Was it positive? Negative? Neutral? And for what reason(s)?
- What advice might she offer to improve the experience of others in similar situations? If she has taken any steps to improve this experience for others, please describe them.

Your analysis will draw directly on your respondent's account and I expect you to use direct quotes from the interview, as evidence for your analysis. However, you must also draw on 4 or more course readings to frame and analyze your respondent’s experiences and perspectives. You are not merely retelling your respondent’s story, but using the material from the course – and your sociological imagination – to locate his/her individual experiences in a broader social structural context.

Your interview papers will be due at the beginning of class. I will NOT accept these assignments through e-mail. I only accept hard copies. Your papers are to be typed, double-spaced, using a 11-12-pt. Times New Roman font, with one inch margins, and must include page numbers, proper use of citations, and bibliographies.
6) (Group) Interview Presentations – April 18, 23, and 25

In groups, you will present key themes from your interview papers to your classmates. These presentations will include information about your choice of interview subject, the content of your interview, and – most importantly – your sociological analysis of your data. Presentations will be at the end of the semester, so you will have the opportunity to integrate the semester’s readings into your presentation. You will get some time in class to work on this presentation, but you should be prepared to work together as a group outside of class, as well.

**Tips for Successful Presentations**

When crafting your journal club and small group presentation, please consider the following suggestions re: effective oral communication:¹

- **Clear information** – no matter how lively your presentation may be, the information that you provide needs to be clear enough for your audience to engage with what you are saying. In general, this means including both general statements and specific, concrete details and examples that flesh them out. You may wish to write a script for yourself, or a sketch of your presentation, but either way, you should be prepared to speak in front of the class without reading word for word. In order for your presentation to go smoothly, you will need to practice in front of a friend or two, or in front of a mirror.

- **Audible and lively tone** – your audience needs to be able to hear you in order to receive your communication, and effective speech (as compared to the written word) requires intonation and inflection.

- **Eye contact** – you should look at your audience as you speak, and look at everyone rather than focusing on a single person. Doing this partly involves taking up the space with your presence. Again, it is important to practice this in order to get used to the feeling of being the only one speaking, and having an audience in front of you.

**Additional resources**

- **Visual aids** – it can be helpful to use more than one modality in your presentation. An oral presentation uses sound/hearing but visual aids can add another dimension. Drawing on the board, presenting images of some kind (including graphs or diagrams) can aid you in conveying your ideas and information.

- **Audience engagement** – a sure way to be sure your audience is with you is to create a way for them to participate in the presentation. You may ask questions, involve them in a demonstration or game, and so on. You can also use this engagement to get a sense of how well they are taking in the information/ideas you are providing.

**Course Policies re: Assigned Work**

If you have a personal or family emergency and are unable to complete an assignment, you must speak with me as soon as possible so we can discuss how and when you will complete the assignment. Do not assume that you may hand in all of your assignments at the end of the course, or that you will be granted an extension. Unexcused late questions will receive no credit. Unexcused late “talking points” memos will receive half credit. Unexcused late papers will be marked down ½ grade for each day or part of day for which they are late.

¹ Thanks to Professor Claudia Castenada for these guidelines.
Grades

Final grades will be computed on the following basis:

- Attendance/Participation: 15 points
- Reading Response Questions: (4 questions @ 2.5 points each) 10 points
- Talking Points Memo: 10 points
- Leading Journal Club: 10 points
- Interview Paper: 40 points
- (Group) Interview Presentations: 15 points

Grades will be based on the following distribution:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-99</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>74-76</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-73</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>84-86</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>64-66</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-83</td>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60-63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>&lt;63</td>
<td>F</td>
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**All written and OC projects must be completed to receive a passing grade in this class**

Academic Integrity

You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University’s policies on academic integrity (see [http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/srscs/ai/index.html](http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/srscs/ai/index.html)). My policy is to give a “0” for any assignment that contains plagiarized material. Additionally, I will refer any suspected instances of alleged dishonesty to the Office of Student Development and Conduct. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in sanctions including but not limited to failure in the course, failure on the assignment in question, suspension from the University and/or educational programs.

Reasonable Accommodations

If you are a student who has academic accommodations because of a documented disability, please contact me and give me a copy of your letter of accommodation in the first two weeks of the semester. If you have questions about documenting a disability, please contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in the Academic Affairs Office (x63470, brodgers@brandeis.edu).

Readings

There are three books for this class, available at the campus bookstore and on reserve at the library:


Other course materials will be posted on LATTE.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks 1&amp;2</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 15</td>
<td>Course Overview</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>AND</strong>: Please bring to class one newspaper article (2008-2013) that pertains to science, technology, or medicine. Be prepared to discuss what makes this article interesting to you.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Weeks 3&amp;4</th>
<th>BIRTH</th>
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<tr>
<td>February 7</td>
<td>JOURNAL CLUB</td>
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</table>
Weeks 5&6  SELF


   Prologue

   Chapters 1-4

*** February 18-22 – Winter Break***

   Chapters 5-7

February 28  JOURNAL CLUB

Week 7&8  GENDER


   Introduction

   Chapters 1-3

   Chapters 4-5, Conclusion

March 14  JOURNAL CLUB
Week 9-12  INEQUALITY


*** March 25-April 2 – Spring Break***

April 4  JOURNAL CLUB


**Group Presentations**

April 18  Group Presentations

April 23  Group Presentations

April 25  Group Presentations

April 30  Wrapping Up and Looking Forward
JOURNAL CLUB RESOURCES/RECOMMENDED READINGS

BIRTH


Moreau, Caroline, Bouyer, Jean, Ducot, Beatrice, and Remy Slama. 2010. “When Do Involuntarily Infertile Couples Choose to Seek Medical Help?” *Fertility and Sterility* 93: 737-44.


SELF


GENDER


INEQUALITY


