

ANTHROPOLOGY 740: BIOCULTURAL SYNTHESIS

Term1, 2019

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Lecture: Mondays, 1:30 to 4:30 pm,
CNH 307

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Course Description

In 1998, with their book entitled "Building a New Biocultural Synthesis", Alan Goodman and Thomas Leatherman challenged Biological Anthropology to broaden its theoretical scope to include political economy and political ecology – in short to become a more critical sub-discipline within Anthropology – reflexively analyzing the historical and cultural influences on our theory and methodology.

In this seminar, we begin by critically examining the roots of the biocultural approach by exploring various theoretical frameworks from biological and medical anthropology that address the interplay between biology, culture, and health. We will then continue to explore emerging themes and uses of biocultural frameworks in health studies and biological anthropology. We cover a wide variety of the following theoretical approaches and topics: critical perspectives in medical anthropology, the environment, bodies and embodiment, race and racism, life history and life course theory, and the developmental origins of health and disease.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Understand the fundamentals of the biocultural approach with a critical appreciation of its assets, deficits, and trajectory
- Identify and appreciate a variety of theoretical frameworks that are related to or subsumed under the biocultural approach and apply them to their own areas of research
- Clearly articulate the theoretical frameworks most appropriate and useful for their research using both verbal and written formats

Required Readings

Most articles and book chapters are available online from Mills library. The few readings that are not available online will be sent to you as pdfs by email in advance of the class. **Please note that this is a provisional list - some readings and seminar topics may change depending on class interest.**

Class Format

The course is organized as a seminar. There will be no formal lecture; participants will be expected to have done the appropriate readings, set the agenda and contribute to the discussion. On the final day of class we will hold a mini-research symposium.

Course Evaluation – Overview

1. class participation (15%)
2. facilitation of one seminar (10%), date to be negotiated on first day of class

3. course readings reflection paper (10%), due October 7, 2019
4. paper proposal (5%), due October 21, 2019
5. presentation (25%), in class on December 2, 2019
6. final paper (35%), due December 16, 2019

Course Evaluation – Details

Class participation (15%)

You are expected to come prepared to class having completed all assigned readings with notes, questions, and comments ready to share with the rest of the class. The level of your participation (contribution to the discussion and degree of preparedness) will be taken into account in assigning the final grade.

Facilitation of one seminar (10%), to be negotiated in first class

You will lead one seminar/class discussion, chosen on the first day of class. You will be expected to provide the class with some background information about the authors of the chapters/articles, explain and fundamental terms, pose questions to the class that provoke consideration and discussion of the readings, and listen and engage fellow students in a discussion about the readings.

Course readings reflection paper (10%), due October 7, 2019

You will write a short reflection paper (3 pages, double-spaced maximum) based on any 3 of the course readings (your choice) that we have read to date. The aim of this assignment is to help you to synthesize and reflect on the course readings and to give me a sample of your writing on which I can give you some critical feedback.

Paper proposal (5%), due October 21, 2019

The paper proposal is to be a formal proposal (2 pages, double-space max.) that will give me an opportunity to give you feedback on your proposed paper/research proposal including both a thesis statement and an outline of the paper. Please include a minimum of 5 references (beyond course readings).

Presentation (25%), in class December 2, 2019

The final presentation will be based on your final research paper. The symposium will be held on the last class. It will be presented in conference style (total length 20 minutes with 15 minutes for presentation and 5 minutes for questions) using PowerPoint or Prezi.

Final paper (35%), in class December 16, 2019

Participants are to develop a research term paper around one or more of the themes and theoretical frameworks addressed in the course. This can be related to your own research interests and may even take the form of a research proposal if that is useful to you. Papers will be 20 pages (double-spaced) in length, not including references and appendices.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 (September 9)

What is biocultural anthropology and how does it fit into Anthropology?

Readings:

Zuckerman, Molly K. and Martin, Debra L. 2016. *New Directions in Biocultural Anthropology*. Hoboken New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons. Introduction, pp. 7-28. Book Available as an ebook in Mills Library.

Goodman, Alan H. 2013. Bringing culture into human biology and biology back into anthropology. *American Anthropologist* 115(3): 359-373.

Wiley, Andrea S and Cullin, Jennifer M. 2016. What do anthropologists mean when they use the term biocultural? *American Anthropologist* 118(3): 554-569.

Notes: Please come to the first day of class prepared to discuss these articles.

Week 2 (September 16)

Biology/health and its intersection with political economy and power

Readings:

Farmer, Paul, 2004. "An Anthropology of Structural Violence." *Current Anthropology* 45(3): 305-325.

Singer, M. 2004. Critical Medical Anthropology. In *Encyclopedia of Medical Anthropology: Health and Illness in the World's Cultures*. Vol. 1:23-30. Carol Ember and Melvin Ember, (eds). New York: Kluwer.

Low, Setha M. and Engle Merry, Sally. 2010. Engaged Anthropology: Diversity and Dilemmas. *Current Anthropology* 51(2): S203-S225.

Week 3 (September 23)

The body and embodiment

Readings:

Krieger, N. 2004. Embodiment: A conceptual glossary for epidemiology. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 59: 350-355.

Scheper-Hughes, N and Lock, M. 1987. The mindful body: A prolegomenon to future work. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 1 (1): 6-41.

Torres Colón, Gabriel A. 2018. Racial Experience as Bioculturally Embodied Difference and Political Possibilities for Resisting Racism. *The Pluralist* 13(1): 131-142.

Week 4 (September 30)

Sex and gender

Readings:

Mascia-Lees, Frances E. 2016. The Body and Embodiment in the History of Feminist Anthropology: An Idiosyncratic Excursion through Binaries. In *Mapping Feminist Anthropology in the Twenty-First Century*. edited by Ellen Lewin and Leni M. Silverstein. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Stone, PK. 2016. Biocultural perspectives on maternal mortality and obstetrical death from past to present. *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 159: S150–S171.

Fausto-Sterling. 2005. The Bare Bones of Sex: Part 1 – Sex and Gender. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30(2): 1481-1526.

Week 5 (October 7)

Risk, resilience, and disease

Readings:

Creary, M.S. 2018. Biocultural citizenship and embodying exceptionalism: Biopolitics for sickle cell disease in Brazil. *Social Science and Medicine* 199: 123-131.

Mendenhall, E. 2017. Non-communicable disease syndemics: poverty, depression, and diabetes among low-income populations. *The Lancet*, March 4, 389: 951-963.

Panter-Brick, Catherine. 2014. Health, Risk, and Resilience: Interdisciplinary Concepts and Applications. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43: 431-448.

Notes: Reading reflection paper due

Week 6 (October 14)

Thanksgiving Holiday

Week 7 (October 21)

Social and cultural inequalities and health

Readings:

Brewis, Alexandra and Wutich, Amber. 2019. "Stigma: A biocultural proposal for integrating evolutionary and political-economic approaches." *American Journal of Human Biology* DOI: 10.1002/ajhb.23290

Hicks, Kathryn and Leonard, William R. Developmental Systems and Inequality. Linking Evolutionary and Political-Economic Theory in Biological Anthropology. *Current Anthropology* 55(5): 523-550.

Nisbett, Nicholas. 2019. Understanding the nourishment of bodies at the centre of food and health systems – systemic, bodily and new materialist perspectives on nutritional inequity. *Social Sciences and Medicine* 228, 9-16.

Notes: Paper proposal due

Week 8 (October 28)

Food and nutrition

Readings:

Himmelgreen, David A., Cantor, Allison, Arias, Sara, and Romero Daza, Nancy. 2014. "Using a biocultural approach to examine migration/globalization, diet quality, and energy balance." *Physiology & Behavior* 134: 76-85.

Wiley, Andrea S. 2007. The globalization of cow's milk production and consumption: biocultural perspectives. *Ecology of food and nutrition* 46: 281-312.

Turner, BL and Thompson, AL (2013) Beyond the Paleolithic prescription: incorporating diversity and flexibility in the study of human diet evolution. *Nutrition Reviews* 71(8):501–510.

Week 9 (November 4)

Local biologies and life course approaches

Readings:

Niewohner, J. and Lock, M. 2018. Situating local biologies: Anthropological perspectives on environment/human entanglements. *BioSocieties* 13: 681-697.

Yoav, B, and Kuh, D. 2002. A life course approach to chronic disease epidemiology: conceptual models, empirical challenges and interdisciplinary perspectives. *International journal of epidemiology* 31: 285-293.

Neely, Abigail H. 2015. Internal Ecologies and the Limits of Local Biologies: A Political Ecology of Tuberculosis in the Time of AIDS *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 105(4): 791-805.

Week 10 (November 11)

Developmental Origins of Health and Disease and Epigenetics

Readings:

Kuzawa, CW and Quinn EA. 2009. Developmental origins of Adult Function and Health: Evolutionary Hypotheses. *Annual Reviews of Anthropology* 38: 131-147.

Lock, Margaret. 2015. Comprehending the Body in the Era of the Epigenome. *Current Anthropology* Volume 56(2): 151-176.

Gowland, Rebecca L. 2015. Entangled Lives: Implications of the Developmental Origins of Health and Disease Hypothesis for Bioarchaeology and the Life Course. *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 158:530–540.

Week 11 (November 18)

Race, racism, and health

Readings:

Kuzawa. CW and Gravlee, CC (2016) Chapter 5. Beyond genetic race: biocultural insights into the causes of racial health disparities, pp. 89-105. In *New Directions in Biocultural Anthropology*. Hoboken New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons. Book Available as an ebook in Mills Library.

Van Arsdale, Adam P. 2019. Population Demography, Ancestry, and the Biological Concept of Race. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 48: 227-241.

Slocum, Rachel. 2016. Race in the study of food. In *Geographies of Race and Food Fields, Bodies, Markets*. Edited By Rachel Slocum, Arun Saldanha, 34. London: Routledge.

Week 12 (November 25)

Your Choice! TBA

Readings:???

Week 13 (December 2)

Mini-symposium

No Readings

Notes: Papers presented in class

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

Please submit all of your assignments by email to the instructor by 11:59 pm on the assignment due date.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Late Assignments

[Insert policy on late assignments]

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

[Insert policy on absences, missed work and illness]

Avenue to Learn

In this course we will NOT be using Avenue to Learn. All communication in this course will be done through email.

University Policies

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University's Policy for [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#).

Religious, Indigenous and Spiritual Observances (RISO)

The University recognizes that, on occasion, the timing of a student's religious, Indigenous, or spiritual observances and that of their academic obligations may conflict. In such cases, the University will provide reasonable academic accommodation for students that is consistent with the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Please review the [RISO information for students in the Faculty of Social Sciences](#) about how to request accommodation.

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This

policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Privacy Protection

In accordance with regulations set out by the Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act, the University will not allow return of graded materials by placing them in boxes in departmental offices or classrooms so that students may retrieve their papers themselves; tests and assignments must be returned directly to the student. Similarly, grades for assignments for courses may only be posted using the last 5 digits of the student number as the identifying data. The following possibilities exist for return of graded materials:

1. Direct return of materials to students in class;
2. Return of materials to students during office hours;
3. Students attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope with assignments for return by mail;
4. Submit/grade/return papers electronically.

Arrangements for the return of assignments from the options above will be finalized during the first class.

Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.