In this reading-intensive, “writing flag” seminar, students will explore the experience of American women, in sickness and in health. Students will learn about medical and biological views of woman and women’s health and the social context of those views. For the majority of humankind, health and illness exist in a social (and historical context). We will strive to understand how the views of medical science and social science intersected with women’s experience. And, of course, there was no such thing as a universal “woman’s experience.” Class, race, and ethnicity influenced women’s circumstances and the ways women’s health and ill-health was experienced and understood.

We will consider these occurrences or issues in women’s lives and how these events affected women’s health (or illness) or affected particular understandings of women’s health:

- Menarche and Menstruation
- Sexuality
- Fertility and Birth Control
- Childbirth
- Mental Illness
- Disease, specifically Breast Cancer

**Assigned Reading:**
- A few articles will be posted on Blackboard or available through JSTOR

**Grading:**
- 70% of course grade will be based on writing assignments. Your writing assignments will be graded according to this criteria:
  1) clarity of expression,
  2) ability to articulate a point a view,
  3) organization, and
  4) adherence to generally accepted canons of grammar and punctuation (which have to do with clarity of expression).*
- 30% of the course grade will be based on classroom participation. You are expected to have read and considered the assigned readings before class. You are expected to share your thoughts and questions about the readings in class. The classroom participation grade will be based upon
  1) participation in large group (whole class of 20) discussions
  2) participation in small group discussions
  3) performance on weekly, short, in-class quizzes about the reading assignments.

*I will NOT be using the +/- grading system in reporting your course grades. Rather, your grade in this class will be A, Excellent; B, Very Good; C, Average; D, Poor; F, Failing. I will use plusses and minuses in grading your essays.*
Writing Assignments:
  • Double-spaced; single spaced for bibliography
  • Indent for new paragraph. Double-space (not triple) between paragraphs.
  • Sent to me via email
  • Sent to me as a WORD document.

1st Essay: 3-5 pages, First Draft due in class, Thursday, 2/14; Final Draft due Sunday, 2/17; 17.5% of course grade.
2nd Essay: 3-5 pages, due Monday, 3/18, 17.5% of course grade.

Final Essay: 10-12 pages, due Monday, 35% of course grade.

*If you are insecure about your writing abilities, I hope that this class will help you to become a better writer. I will be “generous” with my comments on your writing assignments: what worked and what did not work or was not clear. If you want to “brush up” on your writing skills, here are some resources that you will find helpful:
  • William Strunk and E.B. White, The Elements of Style.
  • Jan Venolia, Write Right: A Desktop Digest of Punctuation, Grammar, and Style
  • The UT Undergraduate Writing Center: http://uwc.utexas.edu/
The UWC offers free, individualized, help with writing for any UT undergraduate, by appointment of on a drop-in basis.
  M-Th 9 am–7 pm; F 9 am-3pm
  • The UWC has online handouts that discuss many writing issues: sentence structure, subject and verb agreement, passive voice, punctuation, and more. Go to: http://uwc.utexas.edu/handouts.

FINAL ESSAY: 10-12 pages, Research and Analysis

Your final essay should combine research and analysis found in literature of popular culture regarding one or two topics related to women’s health. Your assignment is to compare and contrast the discussion your find in one historical era with that of a later historical era.

For example:
1. Compare articles about menstruation or premenstrual tension found in women’s magazines from the 1950s with articles found in women’s magazines from the 1970s or later.

2. Compare articles about childbirth found in women’s magazines of the 1960s with articles found in women’s magazines of the 21st century.

3. Compare articles about female sexuality, or about sexual dysfunction (eg. “frigidity”) found in women’s magazines of the 1950s and 1960s with articles about female sexuality written in the late 20th century or early 21st century.

4. Other topics could include: breast cancer, sexually transmitted diseases, birth control, abortion, breastfeeding, mental illness, etc.

You should try to find at least two articles from an earlier period to compare to at least two articles found in a later period.

Possible sources include, but are not limited to, the following:
You may also consult sources that are listed in the footnotes of articles that you have read, but the point of this assignment is that you should analyze and interpret at least 4 historical sources whether from the 1920s, the 1960s, or the early 2000s.

---

**CLASS SCHEDULE: Reading Assignments and Essay Assignments**

**Th, 1/17**  
**Class Introduction**  
*Illness as a Physical Experience; Illness as a Social Construct*

**Sex and Gender; Biology and Culture**

**Th, 1/24**  


**Menarche and Menstruation**

**Th, 1/31**  
How has the human female’s experience and understanding of menstruation changed over time and how is it different in different cultures?

Joan Jacobs Brumberg, “‘Something Happens to Girls’: Menarche and the Emergence of the Modern American Hygienic Imperative,” in Leavitt.


Sexuality

Th, 2/7

Do Women Experience Their Sexuality Differently at Different (Historical) Times? Is Female Sexuality Viewed Differently at Different Times?


Herbert Gutman, “Marital and Sexual Norms Among Slave Women,” from A Heritage of Her Own: Toward a New Social History of Women, eds. Elizabeth Pleck and Nancy Cott, 1979, on Bb.

First Essay: 1st draft due 2/14; final draft due 2/17.

3-5 page essay, using what you have learned from discussion and assigned readings on one of the following topics:

1. How did 19th century views about menarche and menstruation reflect contemporary ideas about womanhood?
2. What explains the 19th century view of female sexuality? What was "passionlessness?" What is Degler’s argument about female sexuality in the 19th century? Is it possible that a "pose" of passionlessness could coexist with women’s experience of sexual passion?
3. Compare and contrast ideas 19th century, early 20th century, late-20th century, and present-day attitudes in the U.S. about female sexuality.
Th, 2/14
Marylynne Diggs, “Romantic Friends or a ’Different Race of Creatures’? The Representation of Lesbian Pathology in Nineteenth-Century America,” in Leavitt.


**Peer Review of First Essay:** Bring a print copy of your first essay. The class will divide into groups of two so that everyone can receive comments from a classmate about their essay.

Fertility and Birth Control

Th, 2/21  **Fertility and Birth Control in Human History**
Seaholm: A Brief History of Efforts to Limit Reproduction


Andrew Tone, “Contraceptive Consumers: Gender and the Political Economy of Birth Control in the 1930s,” in Leavitt.


Video: “Margaret Sanger”

Th, 2/28  **Fertility and Birth Control in the Twentieth Century**


VIDEO, “The Pill”

Th, 3/7  **Abortion**
Seaholm: A Brief History of Abortion


Th, 3/14 NO CLASS: Spring Break

Second Essay: Due Monday, 3/18
3-5 page essay on some aspect of the history of birth control or other efforts to control fertility.
1) You may write a review of how cultural attitudes and the technology of birth control changed between the last decades of the 19th century and the 1970s.
2) You may write a critical review of the “birth control movement.” What problems did the early birth control movement seek to address; what problems, or issues, did this movement ignore. Considering the interest in birth control since the 1960s, how do you evaluate the progress of the movement?

You should send your essay to me in a WORD document via email.

Pregnancy and Childbirth

Th, 3/21 Childbirth Through the Ages and in America
Seaholm: A Short History of Human Childbirth


Marie Schwartz, (slave women ad childbirth)


Th, 3/28 Childbirth in Modern America
Seaholm: The Introduction of Anesthesia and the Discovery of Antisepsis


VIDEO, “A Baby is Born”

Th, 4/4  **Childbirth, Midwifery, Breastfeeding, None of it?: Old-fashioned or Modern?**


Video: “The Business of Being Born”

Guest Speaker: midwifery and breastfeeding

**Women and Mental Illness**

Th, 4/11  **Hysteria, Neurasthenia, and other “Disorders”**

Seaholm: Hysteria: “the wandering womb,” “pelvic congestion,” or neurosis?

Elaine Abelson, “The Invention of Kleptomania,” in Leavitt

Nancy Theriot, ““Diagnosing Unnatural Motherhood: 19th Century Physicians and ‘Puerperal Insanity,’” in Leavitt

**Menopause and Aging**

Th, 4/18  **What is normal as women grow older? Can women age gracefully? What would that look like?**


**Meeting in PCL with Research Librarians: How to find sources for your final essay. Location TBA**

Discussion of possible topics for final essay.
The Dreaded Disease of the 20th Century: CANCER

Th, 4/25  The Reproductive Cancers
Seaholm: Disease, Mortality, Morbidity in Human History

Nancy Tomes, “Spreading the Germ Theory, Sanitary Science and Home Economics, 1880-1930,” in Leavitt

Susan Garfinkel, “‘This Trial Was Sent in Love and Mercy for My Refinement’: A Quaker Woman’s Experience of Breast Cancer Surgery in 1814,” in Leavitt


Th, 5/2  Breast Cancer, Controversies re Treatment, the Women’s Health Care Movement

Barron Lerner, The Breast Cancer Wars

FINAL ESSAY DUE Friday, May 10, 2013