WOMEN, HEALTH, AND ILLNESS
Sociology 531/WS 320
Spring 2011

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed for upper level undergraduate students who are interested in learning about the health issues of American women from a critical sociological perspective. The subject matter we will cover is particularly relevant, for sociology majors and women’s studies students, and for students who plan to pursue careers in medical practice and/or research. The course emphasizes health concerns that are distinctive to women. We will not only make comparisons between women’s health and men’s health, but also compare health disparities among women. A major analytic focus will be an exploration of how lay, medical and research assumptions about women have developed and influenced the existing relationships between women, health and illness, and health care systems.

The coursework and research experience are designed to enable students to:

- Understand the socio-cultural and historical contexts of women’s health;
- Understand the process of Medicalization and how it has transformed the medical treatment of women’s bodies;
- Recognize the impact of race, class, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability upon health status and access to health care;
- Analyze the underlying assumptions, values, and worldviews that are used to interpret data on health needs for women of divergent backgrounds
- Develop experience interviewing respondents
- Increase facilitation and presentation skills

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Read each assigned book and article critically, with a view toward understanding and evaluating the author’s thesis. It is important for you to read the appropriate material before it is covered in class so that you can participate in class discussion and ask questions about topics that may need clarification. I have attempted to balance the reading assignments for each week. However, the nature of the subject matter may mean that you will be expected to do more reading some weeks than others. Therefore, I recommend that you plan ahead. Note that this is a seminar. While I may present short lectures at the beginning of class to elucidate key concepts, you will be expected to actively participate. I will call on students by name regularly to ensure balanced participation.
2. Grades for the course are based on a 200 point total. Your grade for this course will be determined in the following manner:

- Class participation and attendance will count for 50/200 total points. The assessment of your class participation will include a combination of attendance and the extent and quality of your involvement in class discussions. This is NOT a lecture course. Multiple absences from class will lower your grade; active participation in class discussions will increase your grade. In addition, you will each be responsible for generating discussion questions with a partner for at least two class (one week) sessions during the semester. You and your partner will meet with me to go over the readings for your assigned week during my office hours the Thursday prior to your assigned week.

- Each student will be required to complete an interview-based paper that will allow you to perform your own analysis of a women’s health issues. Guidelines will be distributed and discussed in class well before the due dates, and I will provide guidance to make these assignments rewarding educational experiences. The paper will count for 50/200 total points of your grade. You are required to submit the paper electronically through learn@uw, no later than 5 P.M. on the deadline, which is noted on the course outline below.

- There will be two exams (a mid-term and a final). These exams will require you to draw upon your critical understanding of issues raised in the readings and class discussions. Each exam pertains to one section of the course; they are not cumulative. If you are not present for an exam, you will receive a grade of zero. In the rare case of an emergency, I may consider allowing you to make up the exam, but only if you notify me as soon as possible and document the seriousness of the reason for your absence. The midterm exam will count for 50/200 points of your final grade and the final exam will count for 50/200 points of your final grade.

3. I expect honest academic behavior. Plagiarism is academic theft, and will result in severe penalties. Refer to the university’s Academic Honesty Policy for more detailed information on UW policies.

http://students.wisc.edu/saja/misconduct/UWS14.html#definition

4. A handy tool on how to avoid plagiarism can be found at:

http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QPA_plagiarism.html

5. You are responsible for all assignments and announcements, whether or not you were in class on any particular day. It is your responsibility to obtain handouts, assignments, and information you missed while absent from a fellow student. I will facilitate your contact with other students through the establishment of a “buddy system.”
OFFICE HOURS

My office hours this semester will be held on Thursdays from 2:30-4:30 and at other times by appointment in my office, Social Science 8135. Please feel free to come by to ask questions, discuss points from readings or class discussions, or other matters. As a general rule: I will not access emails or phone messages on the weekends or holidays, so please plan accordingly.

SPECIAL NEEDS

If you are a student with a documented disability who will require accommodations in this course, please show me your McBurney passport so that we may develop a plan to address your academic needs.

REQUIRED READINGS

The required readings include three books and articles in the online course reserves. I will also make suggestions for further reading. The following are required:

5. Readings on Learn@UW

Texts for this course are available at A Room of One’s Own
The Online Course Reserves are marked with an askterisk* and are available only through learn@uw

Course Outline

PART ONE – MEDICALIZATION AND GENDER

WEEK 1: January 18, 20
January 18
Introduction to the Class
January 20
Medicalization, Power and Women’s Health
RATCLIFF:
• Chapter 1, “Introduction,” pp. 1-8
• Chapter 2, “Science and Values,” pp. 9-20
LEARN@UW
• Conrad, “Medicalization and Social Control”
WEEK 2: January 25, 27
Sociohistorical Foundations of Women’s Health

January 25
EHRENREICH AND ENGLISH, “Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness”
- Entire

January 27
RATCLIFF:
- Chapter 2, pp. 21-29
- Chapter 3, “Power and the Clinical Setting,” pp. 31-47

WEEK 3: February 1, 3
Medicalization of Women’s Life Events

February 1
RATCLIFF:
- Chapter 12, “The Medicalization of Childbirth and the Midwifery Alternative,” pp. 210-227
LEARN@UW
Riessman, “Women and Medicalization: a New Perspective”

February 3
RATCLIFF:
- Chapter 9, “Raging Hormones,” pp. 150-170
LEARN@UW:
- Markens, The Problematic of “Experience”: A Political and Cultural Critique of PMS
- Caplan, “Premenstrual Mental Illness’: The Truth About Sarafem”

WEEK 4: February 8, 10
Medicalization and the Pressure to be Physically Perfect

February 8
RATCLIFF: Chapter 8, “Women and Body Image,” pp. 127-149
LEARN@UW:
- Zimmerman, “The Medical Management of Femininity”*

February 10
LEARN@UW
- Kwan and Fackler, “Women and Size”*
- Kwan, “Disturbances in the Social Body”*
WEEK 5, February, 15, 17
February 15
Catch up from last week

February 17
Contraception and Abortion
• Chapter 11, “Contraception and Abortion,” pp. 191-209
LEARN@UW
• “Taking Sides: Is Abortion Immoral?”*

WEEK 6: February 22, 24
Women’s Reproductive Issues
February 22
RATCLIFF;
• Chapter 13, “Technology-Assisted Conception,” pp. 228-244
LEARN@UW:
• Bell, “’It’s Way Out of my League’: Low-income Women’s Experiences of Medicalized Infertility”*
February 24
• Film: Test-tube Babies

WEEK 7: March 1, 3
Women’s Rights and Social Control
Fetal Technology, and the Production of Fetal Rights
RATCLIFF:
• Chapter 14, “Fetal Quality Control,” pp. 245-260
LEARN@UW:
• Pollitt, “Fetal Rights: A New Assault on Feminism” *
• “Taking Sides: Should Pregnant Women be Punished for Fetal Risk?”*

Selected Case Studies:
• United States Supreme Court, Ferguson v. The City of Charleston*
• United States Supreme Court, Automobile Workers v. Johnson Controls, Inc. *
• District of Columbia Court of Appeals, In Re A.C. *

March 3
Rights and Social Control: The HPV Vaccine
LEARN@UW
• “Taking Sides: Should Vaccination for HPV be Mandated for Teenaged Girls”*
• Chustecka, “HPV Vaccine: Debate Over Benefits, Marketing, and New Adverse Event Data”*

Guest Speaker: JoLynn Henke
WEEK 8, March 8, 10  
FIRST MEETINGS FOR PAPERS (It is imperative that you attend this class)  
Paper Preparation and Midterm  
RATCLIFF: Terry Plum and Evan Sabatelli, “Finding Resources,” pp.323-327

March 8: Interviewing and Research Workshop for Papers  
March 10: MIDTERM

*****SPRING RECESS: March 12-20*****

PART II – HEALTH DISPARTIES

WEEK 9: March 22, 24  
Determinants of Health: Women and Men  
March 22  
LEARN@UW:  
- Lorber, Judith. “Women get sicker, but men die quicker,”*  
- Courtenay, Robert. “Constructions of Masculinity*  
March 24  
BIRD:  
- Chapters 1, 2

WEEK 10: March 29, 31  
March 29  
The Experience of Illness  
LORDE: Read all  
RATCLIFF:  
- Chapter 5, “Cancer”  
March 31  
Film: “Wit”

WEEK 11, April 5, 7  
Social Determinants of Health – Public Policy and SES  
BIRD  
- Chapter 3, 4  
RATCLIFF  
- Chapter 4, “Poverty” pp. 48-64  
- “The Poverty Clinic”
WEEK 12: April 12, 14  
Race, Ethnicity and Health Disparities

April 12  
LEARN@UW  
- Hill, “Cultural Images and the Health of African American Women”*  
- Gonzalez, Rojas, Lindley, “Latinas and Sterilization in the United States”*  
- Glasford and Huang, “Immigrant Women’s Health a Casualty in the Immigration Policy War”*  
- Misra, “Highlights for Women of Color”*  
- Kaiser, “Putting Women’s Health Care Disparities on the Map”*

April 14  
Film: “All of Us”

*PAPERS DUE*

Week 13: April 19, 21  
Social Determinants of Health: Women’s Health and the Social Environment  

April 19  
RATCLIFF:  
LEARN@UW:  
- Tanner-Smith, “Women and Substance Abuse”*  

April 21  
RATCLIFF:  
- Chapter 6: “Occupational Health”  
LEARN@UW:  
- O’Grady, “Early Puberty for Girls: The New ‘Normal’ and Why We Need to be Concerned”*  
- Nagy, “Women’s Health is Environmental Health: Avoiding Common Toxic Exposures”*

WEEK 14: April 26, 28  
Social Determinants of Health – Families and Caregiving

April 26  
LEARN@UW  
- Glazer, “The Home as Workshop”*  
- Macdonald, “When you really need help”*  

April 28  
- BIRD  
  Chapter 5
WEEK 15: May 3, 5
Resistance, Advocacy, and Collective Action

May 3
RATCLIFF:

LEARN@UW
Klawiter, “Breast Cancer in Two Regimes”*

May 5
Final Exam Review