Women’s health

Traditionally, women’s health has been centered around reproductive functions, with a tendency to focus on the health of a woman at specific time periods, for example when she becomes pregnant. Recently it has been found that many factors, often interrelated, affect women’s health, i.e. health in women reflects cumulative effects throughout a lifetime, not only those aspects related to the reproductive system.

Leading medical professionals have begun to combine health promoting medicine and psychology together with nutrition, exercise, counseling and education, in an attempt to integrate women’s health concerns beyond the reproductive functions and into general health care. This approach has influenced a movement towards a “women-centered” perspective when looking at women’s health issues. This perspective takes into account “sex”, which refers to women’s unique biology, and “gender”, which refers to women’s unique experience as females in society.

The experiences during a woman’s life can be beneficial or detrimental to her health. Today we realize that the events throughout the life cycle have significant consequences to a woman’s attitude about herself and her appreciation of health behavior. In this course we will examine a number of current issues which directly relate to these experiences. The topics will revolve around the woman’s body and how she perceives it. Each day will focus on another topic area and will include: an historical overview of women’s health, gender specific medicine; puberty, body image and eating disorders; art and the body; contraception and the abortion issue; infertility and technology; pregnancy, childbirth and breast feeding; breast cancer; violence against women; women in uniform and exercise and sports.

Course Objectives

- To understand how historical attitudes of society have both directly and indirectly affected women’s health
- To understand how a woman’s experiences over the life cycle influences her health
- Knowledge, learning and experience will educate and empower the student to become her/his own personal advocate for health

Format of Course

The course will combine both theoretical knowledge with research methods. The theoretical aspect will include reading assignments and other relevant information on health issues over the life span, classroom lectures, guest lectures and field trips to various sites in the Boston community. The research aspect will introduce students to methods and tools needed for qualitative research design. Students will develop an in-depth interview questionnaire, interview informants, transcribe and analyze their interviews. Two progress reports of this research will be submitted during the course. The final project, due on June 22, 2003, will be the analysis of the in-depth interviews based on, and integrated with, the theoretical research. Two written response reports will be required during the course based on current issues in health that are related to the readings in the course.
Reading assignments

Students will be assigned reading material relating to the specific topic areas of lecture and discussion. Readings should be done prior to the class in order to enable stimulating class discussions. Additional reading assignments that are relevant to current issues may be added during the course.

Course Requirements

Due to the nature of this interactive course, class attendance and active participation is an integral aspect of the course. Papers will be graded on writing abilities, clarity, presentation and integration of reading material and class discussions.

Grading of Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and Class Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Response Reports</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Progress Reports</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Project</td>
<td>45%</td>
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</tbody>
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Required reading:


Articles – Available on the BU Library Website
* Articles - to be copied and distributed

Lecture 1 (Wednesday, May 21, 2003)
Topics: Definitions of Health: Gender Specific Research; historical overview of women’s health movement; health policy; advocacy

Development of Projects: Choose topics and groups

Reading Assignments:
Hale, Dianne, *Just Like a Woman*: Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

Film: Killing me softly III

Lecture 2 (Thursday, May 22, 2003)
Topics: Puberty, Body Image and Eating Disorders Anorexia Nervosa; Bulimia Nervosa

Reading Assignments:
Article – Available on BU Library Website: Science Direct

Article – Available on: www3.interscience.wiley.com

**Film:** Voices of Recovery or The Famine Within

**Guest Speaker:** A volunteer from the Massachusetts Eating Disorder Association (MEDA)

**Lecture 3 (Friday, May 23, 2003)**
**Topics: Qualitative Research Design:** Overview of Quantitative-Qualitative models; Qualitative Models of research; Interviewing; Transcribing interviews; Thematic analysis; Coding

**Development of Projects:** Develop interview questionnaire; Choose informants

**Assignments: First Response Paper Due**

**Reading Assignments:**


**Article:**

**Guest Speaker:** Ms. Judy Norsigian, Executive Director, Our Bodies Ourselves

**Lecture 4 (Tuesday, May 27, 2003)**
**Topics: Art and the Body**

**Development of Projects:** Research Proposal Due

**Reading Assignments:**

**Guest Speaker:** Ms. Leslie Sills, Artist and Art Historian

**Field Trip:** Museum Visit – Women and Art

**Lecture 5 (Wednesday May 28, 2003)**
**Topics: Breast Cancer: young women**

**Reading Assignments:**


**Guest Speaker:** Volunteer from the Massachusetts/Rhode Island Young Survival Coalition for Breast Cancer

**Field Trip:** Beth Israel Deaconess Breast Clinic

**Lecture 6 (Thursday, May 29, 2003)**
**Topics:** Infertility and technology: Birth Control: As a political agenda;

**Development of Projects:** Development of questionnaire and pre-test

**Reading Assignments:**
Hale, Dianne, Just Like a Woman: Chapter: 8 pp. 173 – 192


**Articles – BU Library Website: Contemporary Women’s Issues (RDS)**


**Film:** Leona’s Sister Gerri

**Guest Speaker:** Dr. Susan Kahn, Brandies University

**Lecture 7 (Friday 30, 2003)**
**Topics:** Violence against women

**Development of Projects:** Begin interviewing

**Assignments:** Second Response Paper Due

**Reading Assignments:**

**Film:** Family Violence; Breaking the Chain

**Guest Speaker:** Volunteer from the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center – BRACC

**Lecture 8 (Monday, June 2, 2003)**
**Topics:** Pregnancy, childbirth and breast feeding
Development of Projects: Continue analysis of interviews

First Progress Report Due – Summary of Research Project to date

Weekly Reading Assignments:
Hale, Dianne, Just Like a Woman: Chapter 9, pp. 193 – 213


Articles – Available on BU Library Website: Science Direct


Guest Speaker: Ms. Sherry Spacco, Volunteer from Boston Association for Childbirth, BACE

Field Trip: Cambridge Birth Center

Lecture 9 (Tuesday June 3, 2003)

Topics: Women in Uniform

Reading Assignments: To be announced: Topics on Women and the Military, Police, etc.

Guest Speaker: Major Margaret White - Massachusetts Army National Guard

Lecture 10 (Wednesday June 4, 2003)

Topics: Exercise and Sports

Reading Assignments: To be announced: Topics on Exercise and competitive sports and body image,

Guest Speaker: Ms. Lisa Terranova, Fitness Director at Health Works

Field Trip: Visit to Health Works, including tour and ½ hour Spin Class.

Additional readings and resources


Dowling, Collette. 1991. *You Mean I Don’t Have to Feel This Way?*. New York: Bantam.


Web Sites

BU Libraries – Electronic Resources/Social Science/ Sociology
  - Contemporary Women’s Issues
  - Science Direct
  - Women’s Health Issues
  - Other important resources such as Journals, Reference Tools and Research Guides

**PubMed (MEDLINE) - Available on the BU Web**


**Web Newsletters in Women’s Health**

http://www.medscape.com

http://www.worldhealthnews.harvard.edu/

http://www.agi-usa.org

http://healthsmart@drkoop.com