

FRESH(WO)MAN SEMINAR
“Reproductive Technologies: Global Perspectives”
Anth 011a
MW 9-10:15
Fall 2011

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Office Hours: Monday 11-1 pm

Course Description

This fresh(wo)man seminar explores how reproductive technologies are changing lives around the globe. Since the introduction of oral contraceptives in the early 1960s, the past 50 years have seen the rapid innovation and globalization of many other reproductive technologies, for both men and women, and spanning the life course from birth to menopause. As reproductive technologies have evolved over time, so have the social, cultural, legal, and ethical responses to them. Reproductive technologies are a key symbol of our times, representing the growing prominence of biotechnologies in the configuration of individual, familial, and collective identities around the globe.

This fresh(wo)man seminar will introduce students to the growing scholarship on the anthropology of reproduction. The focus of the course will be on reproductive technologies, including childbirth technologies, prenatal diagnostic technologies, contraception, abortion, assisted reproductive technologies, hormone replacement therapy, and reproductive technologies that engender “harm” (i.e., female circumcision and ultrasound-assisted female feticide). Such reproductive technologies have direct and indirect effects in many areas of social life, including the domains of kinship, marriage, family, gender, religion, biomedicine, and population demography. Sometimes helpful, sometimes harmful, such technologies have both generative and destabilizing impacts at the interface of science and society. Thus, reproductive technologies are “good to think with,” especially for new college students whose lives may be significantly affected by the uses of these technologies in the new millennium.

In this student-led seminar, we will think, talk, and write about women’s and men’s reproductive lives as portrayed in eight key books, all of them anthropological ethnographies. Through such reading, students in this course will gain broad exposure to a number of exigent reproductive health issues around the world, not only in the United States, but also in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. In addition, students will carefully assess the methods used by feminist ethnographers who conduct fieldwork in local cultural contexts. Does local-level, field-based, humanistic anthropological inquiry contribute something “value-added” to public policy debates about reproductive technologies such as abortion? This is a question that we will be asking throughout the semester, as we read, discuss, and watch a series of riveting documentaries, newscasts, and Hollywood films.

Course Assignments

- 1) **Keeping Up, Being There, Breaking the Silence**: This seminar is intended to be a twice-a-week feminist reading group, where we engage each other, courteously and constructively, in a thoughtful and reflexive conversation about the impact of reproductive technologies on the lives of women and men around the globe. Together, the class will read eight books, watch five films, and take a class field trip. Your major assignment in this seminar is simply being there each Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, with reading assignments completed, in order to “break the silence,” individually and collectively, about many important issues of reproductive health. Everyone is expected to participate in these conversations, which are intended to be very friendly and welcoming, but nonetheless thought-provoking and rigorous. You will be evaluated in this seminar in large part on your classroom engagement over the course of the semester. **30% of the total grade**

- 2) **Leading Seminar Discussions**: Each participant in this seminar will lead the discussion once during the course of the semester. We will decide this schedule on the first day of class. As discussion leader, you are expected to *briefly* (no more than 10 minutes) summarize the book in an informal but structured manner. (Please, no reading of prepared written comments. Also, no chapter-by-chapter summaries. Just highlighting of major arguments, themes, and issues.) Please withhold any critical comments for the classroom discussion that follows. Pedagogically, we need to find the value in each book, rather than only looking for faults. As part of your role as discussion leader, you should print out for each member of the class a list of what you consider to be the 5-6 key questions for discussion raised by the book. One question should be methodological in nature, 2-3 should revolve around major arguments/themes/content, and 1-2 should be policy oriented. Your job is to systematically cover these questions during the course of the discussion, as well as run the seminar more generally. **20% of the total grade**

- 3) **Two Book Reviews**: During the course of the semester, each student will write two, 2-page, single-spaced book reviews, focusing on two books from different sections of the course. The book review should provide a) a compelling introductory paragraph, b) a brief description of the book’s setting and methodology, c) descriptive summaries of the book’s content (major arguments, themes, issues), d) analysis of the book’s major strengths, e) analysis of the book’s major weaknesses, and f) potential audiences, including academic disciplines. These short book reviews are preparation for the longer comparative book review. Book reviews are due at the beginning of class, on the morning in which the book is first being discussed. Do not review the book for which you are leading the seminar discussion. **20% of the total grade, 10% each**

- 4) **Final Comparative Book Review Essay**: Each participant in this seminar will write one, final 15-page, double-spaced paper, comparing two of the books read in class, neither of which have been covered in your previous book reviews. This review

should be written in *Reviews in Anthropology* format; instructions and an example are attached. The essay should summarize and critically review both books, but the essay should also be explicitly synthetic, examining the books' similarities and differences and attempting to outline some common theme(s). References to other books are allowed in the essay, but not required. This essay is due *no later than Wednesday, December 7. 30% of the total grade*

Books: All books are available at the Yale Bookstore, and are on reserve in the Bass Library.

Schedule of Readings, Films, and Field Trips

Preface

Aug. 31, Introduction to the Seminar

Part I. Pregnancy and Childbirth, American-Style

Sept. 7, Documentary Film, "The Business of Being Born"

Sept. 12, Robbie Davis-Floyd, *Birth as an American Rite of Passage*, Introduction and Part I

Sept. 14, *Birth as an American Rite of Passage*, Part 2

Sept. 19, Rayna Rapp, *Testing Women, Testing the Fetus: The Social Impact of Amniocentesis in America*, Ch. 1-5

Sept. 21, *Testing Women, Testing the Fetus*, Ch. 6-11

Part II. The Politics of Contraception and Abortion

Sept. 26, Motion Picture, "If These Walls Could Talk," Parts 1 & 2

Sept. 28, "If These Walls Could Talk," Part 3 and Discussion

Oct. 3, Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania*, Ch. 1-4

Oct. 5, *The Politics of Duplicity*, Ch. 5-8

Part III. “Assisting” Reproductive Bodies

Oct. 10, Documentary Film, “Beautiful Sin”

Oct. 12, Documentary Films, “Eggsploitation” and “Made in India”

Oct. 17, Marcia C. Inhorn, *The New Arab Man: Emergent Masculinities, Technologies, and Islam in the Middle East*, Prologue, Introduction and Ch. 1-4

Oct. 19, *The New Arab Man*, Ch. 5 – 8, Conclusion, Appendix

Oct. 24, Alexander Edmonds, *Pretty Modern: Beauty, Sex, and Plastic Surgery in Brazil*, Introduction, Parts I and II

Oct. 26, *Pretty Modern*, Part III and Conclusion

Part IV. Reproductive Harm and Endangerment

Oct. 31, Elisabeth Croll, *Endangered Daughters: Discrimination and Development in Asia*, Whole Book

Nov. 2, Documentary Film, “Rites”

Nov. 7, Ellen Gruenbaum, *The Female Circumcision Controversy: An Anthropological Perspective*, Introduction and Ch. 1-4

Nov. 9, *The Female Circumcision Controversy*, Ch. 5-8

Part V. Reproductive Endings and Beginnings

Nov. 14, Documentary Film, “Menopause and Beyond: New Wisdom for Women”

Nov. 16, Documentary Films, “20/20: Women, Sex and Satisfaction,” and NOVA, “The Truth about Impotence”

Nov. 28, Margaret Lock, *Encounters with Aging: Mythologies of Menopause in Japan and North America*, Prologue and Ch. 1-6

Dec. 5, *Encounters with Aging*, Ch. 7-Epilogue

Finale

Dec. 7, Final Papers Due and Class Party!