Reproductive Politics in the United States

Professor Rachel Roth
MIT Course Number: WGS.S10
Spring 2013
Undergraduate Level Course

NOTE: "I taught this course as an elective at MIT. Because students are so busy with their STEM classes, a colleague recommended I assign 50-75 pages per week. This shorter-than-usual parameter influenced my choice of readings. Other professors may want to assign longer articles or books by some of the authors whose short pieces we read."

Course Meeting Times
Seminars: 1 session / week, 3 hours / session

Prerequisites
MIT students must get the instructor's permission.

Course Overview
Throughout the semester, we will examine the ways that class, race, and sexuality affect women's experiences of reproduction, and the role of the state in shaping those experiences, now and over the course of the last century. Many of our topics fit into two broad areas: conflicts over the control of childbearing (sterilization abuse, birth control, and abortion) and conflicts over who deserves to be a mother, especially when the mothers in question face social stigma and lack political power. Other topics include the global market in reproductive services and conflicts over pregnant women's conduct and what status to accord to fetuses. Class materials will include court opinions, government documents, news stories, op-eds, first-person narratives, web sites, documentaries, and reports as well as academic scholarship.

Requirements

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<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>PERCENTAGES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance and active participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two 4–5 page papers</td>
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<td>Final paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
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There is no final exam in this course.

Course Materials


Logistics

- Please sign up for the [Daily Women's Health Policy Report](https://www.dailywomenhealthpolicyreport.com). This will help us to keep up with news about reproductive politics and health policy.
- You may also be interested in the [Guttmacher Institute](https://www.guttmacher.org), which has research articles, data, and monthly updates on state policies governing reproductive health and rights.
- The class chose how to spend the last two weeks of the semester:
  OR
Suggest topics of interest. (The Spring 2013 class chose this option and added readings on the experience of gay fathers and transgender parents.)

**Academic Integrity, Collaboration, Resources**

Every student is expected to do his or her own work and must turn in original papers written specifically for this course. Students are encouraged to discuss the reading outside of class. You may find it helpful to exchange drafts of your papers and give each other feedback, or to visit the Writing and Communication Center. If you get feedback from another student, acknowledge that person’s contribution in your paper.

Engaging with and giving credit to the ideas, words, and research findings of others is an important part of scholarly writing and academic integrity. If you have questions about when to cite a source or what counts as plagiarism, ask!

**Assignments**

- Attendance and active participation—our class meetings will be devoted primarily to discussion, so everyone’s informed contributions are vital.
- Two 4–5 page papers on the assigned reading, one before Spring break.
- One paper proposal.
- One 8–10 page final paper, in draft and final form.
- One presentation to the class about the final paper.

I will meet with students individually to refine paper topics and to go over drafts.

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<th>TOPICS</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction to Course Themes and Requirements</td>
<td>No readings</td>
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Eastman, Crystal. "Now We Can Begin: What’s Next?" (1920). Reprinted by about.com  
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**Documentary:** *Angel For Hire*. Directed by Nina Goodby and Mary Flynn. 2011.  
**Cohen, Elizabeth.** "Surrogate Offered $10,000 to Abort Baby." *CNN*. March 6, 2013. |
| 8     | Poor Single Mothers | **Documentary:** *Take it from Me*. Directed by Abt, Emily. Color, 75min. 2001.  
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"*Incarcerated Women (PDF).*" fact sheet. The Sentencing Project.  
(WBUR interview with Marc Mauer of the Sentencing Project. WBUR has a link to Mauer's new report on the changing racial dynamics of women's imprisonment, if you are interested in learning more.)  
(You can skip ahead and read pp. 80–8 if pressed for time, begin reading at "Mothering from the Inside" and read the two case studies and conclusion.)  
(Selections, including first–person accounts of pregnancy and mothering from prison and of advocacy work by: Kimberly Burke, Tabitha and Christy Hall, Kebby Warner, Kathy Boudin, Joanne Archibald, Sophia Sanchez, Kemba Smith)  
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Massachusetts House Bill 1433, an Act to Prevent Shackling and promote safe pregnancies for female inmates  