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SHE/HER/HERS

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**HISTORY 47005/WGSS 39000:
WOMEN AND HEALTH IN AMERICA**

SPRING 2025
BEERING 2291
T/TH 4:30-5:45 P.M.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course examines the historical relationship between women and health by exploring a number of critical themes that have affected women's health in the United States. Particular emphasis will be on reproductive health care, mental health, and women's bodies.



COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This course encourages students to recognize, most fundamentally, that women's health has a history, and that its history is embedded in culture. We will analyze the ways in which societal assumptions about gender, health and sickness—along with race and class-- help to determine the course of treatment. We will also analyze the role of primary sources in contributing to our understanding of women's health.

COURSE OUTCOMES

By the end of the class, students will be able to:

1. Identify long-term trends in the history of childbirth, including the rise of hospital birth and the continued problem of high infant and maternal mortality rates
2. Conduct an oral history interview on childbirth
3. Connect contemporary concerns regarding women's health to historical precedents
4. Understand the varied approaches to mental health diagnosis and treatment over the past two centuries
5. Appreciate how the female body has been objectified, pathologized, and treated over the course of U.S. history

*This course meets requirements for Purdue's Medical Humanities Certificate. Students interested in the Medical Humanities certificate should review the [website](#) and contact their academic advisor for more information.

This syllabus is subject to change and will be updated on Brightspace as needed.

REQUIRED BOOKS (AVAILABLE AT THE BOOKSTORE OR AT AMAZON.COM):

1. Peggy Vincent, *Baby Catcher; Chronicles of a Modern Midwife*
2. Kate Moore, *The Woman They Could not Silence: The Shocking Story of a Woman who Dared to Fight Back*
3. Susanna Kaysen, *Girl, Interrupted*
4. Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*
5. Roxane Gay, *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body*

1 additional reading will be posted on Brightspace: Knott, "This Giving Birth"

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

<i>REQUIREMENTS</i>	<i>DATE</i>	<i>% of final grade</i>
Childbirth interview and analysis	Feb 13 by 3 p.m. on Brightspace	20
midterm	March 13 in class	20
reading quizzes	2/13, 3/11, 4/8, 4/17, 4/29	25 (5 points each)
Final paper	5/7 by 11:59 p.m. on Brightspace	20
Attendance/participation		15

94-100% = A

91-93 = A-

73-77 = C

71-73 = C-

88-90	= B+	68-70	= D+
83-87	= B	63-67	= D
81-83	= B-	60-62	= D-
78-80	= C+	< 60%	= F

Important Notes:

My policies are simple:

- Attend class.
- Put away your phone.
- Close your laptop.
- Take notes with pen and paper.
- Do the reading on time.
- Do the assignments on time.
- Be respectful.
- Use common sense.
- Do your own work.
- Do not plagiarize or cheat. If you do, you risk failing the course.
- Do not use ChatGPT or other AI writing software.
- Late papers will be penalized one-third grade per day [example: an A paper that is one day late becomes an A- paper]

***Email etiquette:** Outside of class or office hours, communicate with your professor by email. State the reason for your email in the subject line (ex: “question about essay”). Include a full salutation (ex: “Dear Professor”), and closing with your full name (ex: “Sincerely, Robert Owen”). Please use full sentences, correct grammar, and punctuation.

***Electronic Devices in the Classroom:** Please do not use electronic devices during class. No iPhones, iPads, or laptops. If you want to take notes, use pen/pencil and paper. If we are discussing the reading and you only have access to it on a laptop or iPad, let me know in advance.

SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Please note: Reading assignment in parentheses should be completed before the designated class. Be prepared to answer questions in response to that day’s reading assignment.

Week One: Introductions: Health as history
 Tues Jan 14 Introduction

Thurs Jan 16 A Midwife's Tale

PART I: CHILDBIRTH/REPRODUCTION

Week Two

Tues Jan 21 Childbirth in early America
(read Knott, "This Giving Birth," available on Brightspace)

Thurs Jan 23 No Class
(read *Baby Catcher* Part 1)

Week Three

Tues Jan 28 19th c. Gynecology and midwifery
(read *Baby Catcher* Part II)

Thurs Jan 30 19th c. medical education
(read *Baby Catcher* Part III)

Week Four

Tues Feb 4 Sims and medical ethics
(read *Baby Catcher* Part IV)

Thurs Feb 6 Business of Being Born
(read *Baby Catcher* Part V)

Week Five

Tues Feb 11 Business of Birth
(read *Baby Catcher* Part VI)

Thurs Feb 13 Birth Stories/ reading quiz
(finish *Baby Catcher*)
*Childbirth interview paper due by 3 p.m. on Brightspace

Part II: Mental Health

Week Six

Tues Feb 18 History of the Asylum
(read *The Woman They Could not Silence* prologue and part 1)

Thurs Feb 20 The "cult of true womanhood"
(read *The Woman They Could not Silence* part 2)

Week Seven

Tues Feb 25 Gaslight
(read *The Woman They Could not Silence* part 3)

Thurs Feb 27 Gaslight p. 2
(read *The Woman They Could not Silence* part 4)

Week Eight
Tues Mar 4 Origins of Psychiatry
(read *The Woman They Could not Silence* part 5)

Thurs Mar 6 Postpartum depression and other “nervous disorders”
(read *The Woman They Could not Silence* part 6)

Week Nine
Tues Mar 11 Discussion and reading quiz

Thurs Mar 13 MIDTERM

Week Ten
Tues Mar 18 SPRING BREAK

Thurs Mar 20 SPRING BREAK

Week Eleven
Tues Mar 25 Female Sexuality in the 20th c.
(read *Girl, interrupted* pp 1-42)

Thurs Mar 27 The Snake Pit
(read *Girl, interrupted* pp 43-82)

Week Twelve
Tues April 1 The Snake Pit p.2
(read *Girl, interrupted* pp 82-122)

Thurs April 3 Psychiatric treatments in the 20th c.
(read *Girl, interrupted* to end)

Week Thirteen
Tues April 8 Discussion and quiz

Part III: Bodies

Thurs April 10 Menstruation
 (Read *The Body Project* chs. 1-2)

Week Fourteen

Tues April 15 Sexuality and Birth Control
 (Read *The Body Project* ch 3-4)

Thurs April 17 Discussion and quiz
 (Read *The Body Project* ch 5-6)

Week Fifteen

Tues April 22 When the body doesn't fit the norm
 (read *Hunger* parts 1&2)

Thurs April 24 History of #MeToo
 (read *Hunger* part 3)

Week Sixteen

Tues April 29 Discussion and quiz
 (read *Hunger* parts 4&5)

Thurs May 1 NO CLASS

Final paper due: Wednesday May 7 by 11:59 p.m. via Brightspace. Details will be provided by the last week of the semester.

- **ASSIGNMENTS:**

- QUIZZES: Each time we finish a book, class will consist of a quiz followed by a discussion of the reading. Each quiz will consist of 5 short answers; each answer is worth 1 point.
- CHILDBIRTH INTERVIEW AND ANALYSIS: due by 3 p.m. on feb 13 via Brightspace. Further details below.
- MIDTERM: On March 13, we will have an in-class midterm exam. Please bring a blue book. The midterm will consist of an essay question related to lectures and readings. **NO MAKE-UP EXAM WILL BE GIVEN WITHOUT PRIOR PERMISSION FROM INSTRUCTOR.** In other words, if you miss the midterm, and you have not received permission from me to take it at a different time, you will not receive credit.
- FINAL PAPER: due May 7 by 11:59 p.m. on Brightspace. You will get a specific essay question at least one week in advance. Essay should be approximately five pages in length, double-spaced, 12-point font. It will draw on readings and lectures from class.

- ATTENDANCE and PARTICIPATION count for 15% of your grade. I will take attendance at the BEGINNING of class. You will not receive attendance credit if you are more than 10 minutes late to class. You are expected to regularly participate in class discussions.

DETAILED EXPLANATION OF ASSIGNMENTS:

Childbirth interview and analysis (20%)

Due: Feb 13 by 3 p.m. on Brightspace

Length: five pages 12-point font, double spaced

This first paper asks you to collect a birth-giver's story from the last two or three decades: to create a recent primary source of your own. You might choose to interview your parent, a friend, a neighbor, or a colleague: any person who has given birth, and with whom you have sufficient trust to ask intimate questions.

Gain as much detail as you can, beginning with the ABCs of any primary source: Who was birthing? When, and where? Then ask, what was their experience of birthing? Let the person direct their own account, and then follow up with questions based on what you already know may be of relevance. (Why did the person choose their particular venue for birthing? What education about birthing had their received? Did they receive pain relief? What emotions were attached to birth? etc etc).

After the interview, write up your notes into a series of paragraphs. In the opening paragraph, be sure to include basic information such as the time and place of the birth, and some biographical details (age, ethnicity or race, family, etc) about your interviewee. Give them a pseudonym (a false or pretend name) if you wish to protect their identity.

To the extent that you can, briefly compare your subjects' experience to something we've covered in class (lectures, readings, or films). I'm intentionally flexible about this, because your subject's story will dictate what you can compare it to. The bulk of the paper should really be your subject's story (but written from your perspective and with your interpretation -- you are the historian here!). Think of the other sources (i.e. readings, lectures, films) as tools to help you with your analysis. The bulk of the paper (say 80-90%) should really focus on your subject's particular story. Feel free to write creatively (i.e. you don't need to include a lot of sophisticated academic jargon), and write in the first person (i.e. "I interviewed 'X' and find 'X's' story really important because . . .")

RUBRIC:

This rubric may help you succeed on all written assignments:

20 (A+): Very strong response. Well written. Lively. Well informed and draws on readings. Historically correct.

19 (A): Strong. Clearly written. Draws effectively on readings. Correct throughout.

18 (B+): Strong response. Draws evenly on the readings. No errors.

17 (B): Solid, but may have one weaker element. Clearly written, no errors.

16 (B-): Solid but may include some errors.

14 (C): Hard to read. Includes errors.

IMPORTANT NOTES AND PROCEDURES:

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Attendance Policy:

This course follows the [University Academic Regulations regarding class attendance](#), which state that students are expected to be present for every meeting of the classes in which they are enrolled. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class and lateness will be noted. When conflicts or absences can be anticipated, such as for many University-sponsored activities and religious observations, you should inform me of the situation as far in advance as possible. For unanticipated or emergency absences when advance notification is not possible, contact me as soon as possible by Purdue email or phone. For absences that do not fall under excused absence regulations (see below), this course follows the following procedures:

1. Do not come to class if you are feeling ill, but DO email me at wkline@purdue.edu, with the subject line: xxx [course code] absence. I do not need details about your symptoms. Just let me know you are feeling ill and cannot come to class. If it is an emergency, please follow the University regulations on medical care (see below).
2. Unless it falls under the University excused absence regulations (see below), any work due should be submitted on time via our course Brightspace.
3. If that day's class involves assessed work such as a test or presentation, you and I will plan if and how you can make up the work, following the assignment guidelines. This plan must be done before the next class period, so again, email me immediately when you know that you will miss class.
4. The most important consideration in any absence is how it will affect your achievement of the assignment objectives and the course learning outcomes.

Academic integrity:

Academic integrity is one of the highest values that Purdue University holds. Individuals are encouraged to alert university officials to potential breaches of this value by either emailing integrity@purdue.edu or by calling 765-494-8778. While information may be

submitted anonymously, the more information is submitted the greater the opportunity for the university to investigate the concern. More details are available on our course Brightspace under University Policies and Statements.

Incidents of academic misconduct in this course will be addressed by the course instructor and referred to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities (OSRR) for review at the university level. Any violation of course policies as it relates to academic integrity will result minimally in a failing or zero grade for that assignment, and at the instructor's discretion may result in a failing grade for the course. In addition, all incidents of academic misconduct will be forwarded to OSRR, where university penalties, including removal from the university, may be considered.

Nondiscrimination Policy:

A hyperlink to Purdue's full Nondiscrimination Policy Statement is included in our course Brightspace under University Policies and Statements.

Mental Health/Wellness Statement:

If you find yourself beginning to feel some stress, anxiety and/or feeling slightly overwhelmed, try [Therapy Assistance Online \(TAO\)](#), a web and app-based mental health resource available courtesy of Purdue Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). TAO is available to all students at any time by creating an account on the [TAO Connect website](#), or downloading the app from the App Store or Google Play. It offers free, confidential well-being resources through a self-guided program informed by psychotherapy research and strategies that may aid in overcoming anxiety, depression and other concerns. It provides accessible and effective resources including short videos, brief exercises, and self-reflection tools.

If you need support and information about options and resources, please contact or see the [Office of the Dean of Students](#). Call 765-494-1747. Hours of operation are M-F, 8 a.m.- 5 p.m.

If you find yourself struggling to find a healthy balance between academics, social life, stress, etc., sign up for free one-on-one virtual or in-person sessions in West Lafayette with a [Purdue Wellness Coach at RecWell](#). Student coaches can help you navigate through barriers and challenges toward your goals throughout the semester. Sign up is free and can be done on BoilerConnect. Students in Indianapolis will find support services curated on the [Vice Provost for Student Life website](#).

If you're struggling and need mental health services: Purdue University is committed to advancing the mental health and well-being of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of mental health support, services are available. For help, such individuals should contact [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) at 765-494-6995 during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or by going to the CAPS offices in [West Lafayette](#) or [Indianapolis](#).

Emergency Preparation:

In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances beyond the instructor's control. Relevant changes to this course will be posted onto the course website or can be obtained by contacting the instructors or TAs via email or phone. You are expected to read your @purdue.edu email on a frequent basis.

A link to Purdue's Information on [Emergency Preparation and Planning](#) is located on our Brightspace under "University Policies and Statements." This website covers topics such as Severe Weather Guidance, Emergency Plans, and a place to sign up for the Emergency Warning Notification System. I encourage you to download and review the [Emergency Preparedness for Classrooms document](#).

The first day of class, I will review the **Emergency Preparedness plan for our specific classroom**, following Purdue's required [Emergency Preparedness Briefing](#). Please make note of items like:

- The location to where we will proceed after evacuating the building if we hear a fire alarm.
- The location of our Shelter in Place in the event of a tornado warning.
- The location of our Shelter in Place in the event of an active threat such as a shooting.