ANTH 230 – Women’s bodies: A biosocial approach

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:00 pm to 4:15 pm

Instructor: Claudia Valeggia, claudia.valeggia@yale.edu, 10 Sachem St, room 230. Office hours will be scheduled by appointment.

This course is not your regular lecture class. It is indeed a journey, an exploration of female reproductive lives from an evolutionary and biosocial perspective. We will focus on physiological, ecological, and social aspects of women’s development from puberty, through reproductive processes such as pregnancy, birth and lactation, menopause and aging. We will also explore variation in female life histories in a variety of cultural and ecological settings. As a community of learners, we will share our own knowledge of women’s biology and experiences. Examples will be drawn primarily from traditional and modern human societies. We will encourage critical thinking at all times with the hope that discussions in this class become useful when making decisions about your lives as citizens, potential parents, health care providers, health care recipients, and policy makers.

Course requirements: Grading will rest on two non-cumulative exams (20% each), two critiques (10% each), journal writing (15%), a final review paper (20%) and class participation (5%).

The exams will consist of short answers, and essay questions. Midterm I will be given on Tuesday June 12 and Midterm II on Thursday June 28.

The critiques consist of a short (2 page) critical discussion of a media article (popular magazine, newspaper, popular/lay website) related to women’s reproductive biology or health. The idea is to examine the main points or claims of the article and go to the primary sources to evaluate the validity of those claims. The 1st critique is due on Friday June 8 and the 2nd on Friday June 22nd, both at 5 pm.

The journal: please bring a composition notebook to class. You will use this journal to write down anything you find relevant to this class. Your thoughts, your questions, your emotions while reading a paper or watching a class video, things you disagree with, topics you don’t understand, etc. I will ask you to show me this journal as a way of assessing your engagement with the class and also getting your feedback. Your journal entries are strictly confidential and won’t be judged in any way by its content. The grade is only to keep you motivated to do it for the entire session. I will collect the journals on Tuesdays and give them back to you on Thursdays.

For the final review paper, you will have your choice of a number of possible topics that will give you a more in depth understanding of the biology of women. The paper is to be written as a scientific review of the chosen topic and must contain the following sections: Abstract, Introduction, Current ideas on the topic, Recommendations for future research, Conclusions, and Literature reviewed. Length of the paper: max. 10 pages. The review paper is due on Tuesday June 26. A more detailed set of guidelines will be posted on Canvas.
Schedule of meetings and readings

Readings There will be no required textbook. We will be reading selected articles and chapters from other sources which will be posted on the course’s Canvas site. Please follow the schedule to know which articles you have to read each week.

Week 1: May 29 and 31
Introduction to the course

From conception to puberty
- Trevathan’s Chapter 1 – Are we grown up yet?

Puberty: Physiological and evolutionary bases

Puberty around the world
- Wyman, LC and Bailey, FL (1943) Navaho Girl's Puberty Rite. New Mexico Anthrop 6/7(1):3-12.

Week 2: June 5 and 7

1st critique due Friday June 8 at 5 pm
Female Anatomy

Establishment of mature cycles: The ovarian cycle

Week 3: June 12 and 14
Tuesday June 12: Midterm I – In class written exam, which will take 1.5 hours of class
The evolution of menstruation

Menstrual taboos: a cross-cultural and evolutionary overview


Female sexual arousal

Shibley Hyde & Delamater Chapter on Sexual Arousal

Pavlicev & Wagner (2016) The evolutionary origin of female orgasm

Zuk (2006) The case of the female orgasm


Optional readings


**Week 4: June 19 and 21**

2nd critique due Friday June 22 at 5 pm

Conception

Trevathan Chapter 3 ABML


Pregnancy: Physiological changes, gestation stages, pregnancy loss, prematurity

Trevathan Chapter 4 ABML


Birth/Evolutionary obstetrics

Chapter 5 ABML


Birth around the world

Week 5: June 26 and 28
Tuesday June 26: REVIEW PAPER DUE
Thursday June 28: Midterm II – In class written exam, which will take 1.5 hours of class

Postpartum and Breastfeeding
• Chapters 7 and 8 ABML

Reproductive Aging