Women and Health: Course Perspective & Organization

This course takes a critical, interdisciplinary approach to understanding women’s health. The course is organized into six modules with each module covering a topic area that is relevant to women and health. The topics covered in this course are:

Module 1: The Medicalization of Women’s Health
Module 2: Representing Gender and Women’s Health
Module 3: The Politics of Reproduction
Module 4: Diversity and Experiences of Health and Health Care
Module 5: The Social Determinants of Women’s Health
Module 6: Gender, Work, and Health

Course Objectives

Through engagement with course materials and facilitated in-class discussions, students will:

- gain a critical awareness of the social and political forces that shape women’s health;
- articulate the links between constructions of gender and health, with a particular focus on women and women’s bodies;
- consider how medical and popular knowledge about health is implicated in the social reproduction of gender difference and gender roles;
- develop a deeper understanding of how women’s experiences of health and health care vary according to social position, including social class, race, age, Indigeneity, and sexual identity;
- learn about the gendered dimensions of health inequities, nationally and internationally;
- broaden their understanding of women’s “choices” in relation to their health and reproduction.
Through class discussion and completion of written assignments and papers students will also gain a number of practical skills. Specifically, students will:

(i) develop their ability to read and analyze scholarly and popular texts closely and rigorously;
(ii) learn to question and analyze critically how women’s health issues are framed in the popular media;
(iii) gain experience developing and applying a critical perspective to issues in women’s health;
(iv) participate in informed discussions and critical dialogues about issues relevant to women’s health in an interdisciplinary group setting; and
(v) develop greater reflexivity (self-awareness) of their own understandings of health, its determinants and its relationship to gendered constructions and experiences.

Required Texts and Course Packages
There is no required text book for this course. All readings will be put on OWL. Students will be required to read and write a critical book review of *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, which will be made available at the campus bookstore.

Prerequisites
The prerequisite for this course is registration in second year or higher. Students are responsible for ensuring that they have successfully completed all prerequisites. Lack of prerequisites may not be used as the basis for appeal. Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Philosophy: Engaged Pedagogy

“Engaged pedagogy begins with the assumption that we learn best when there is an interactive relationship between student and teacher. As leaders and facilitators, teachers must discover what the students know and what they need to know. This discovery happens only if teachers are willing to engage students beyond a surface level. [...] When we see the classroom as a place where teacher and students can share their ‘inner light’ then we have a way to glimpse who we are and how we might learn together” (hooks, 2010, pp. 19-20)

In keeping with this teaching philosophy, the Instructor will strive to cultivate an inclusive learning environment so that every student has an opportunity to bring something to the class discussion.

The success of this class is dependent on the Instructor and the students coming to class prepared to discuss assigned readings. The Instructor will come to each class prepared to give a lecture and an overview of the key themes and background that are relevant to the week’s topic and to facilitate group discussions. Students are expected to have completed the readings prior to class each week, to bring notes they have made on the readings to class, and to contribute to class discussion on a regular basis. Making notes on readings will assist the student in their written assignments and in preparing for exams.
In this sense, learning is a **co-responsibility** that requires the active participation of all those involved—teachers, teaching assistants and students.

- It is the responsibility of the professor to come to class prepared to lecture on course material, to facilitate student discussion and their engagement with course material, and to address and respond to students’ questions about course material in class and during specified office hours.
- It is the responsibility of the teaching assistants to attend class, assist the professor in the preparation and grading of exams and papers and to address students’ questions about course material during the year and before exams.
- It is the responsibility of students to prepare for class by completing required course readings before class, to attend class regularly and listen to the lectures, take notes in class, and to ask questions about course material in class and on OWL.

**Recognition of First Nations Territory**

Western University is situated on the traditional land of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenausaunee, Lenape and Attawandaron peoples who have longstanding relationships to the region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. In close proximity to Western, there are three local First Nations communities: the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region of southwestern Ontario, there are 9 First Nations and a growing Indigenous urban population. Western recognizes the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America) to the development of Canada.

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**Creating and maintaining a respectful learning environment**

**Etiquette in the Classroom**

In order to maintain a respectful and productive learning environment, it is essential that students arrive at class ready to listen and attend to lectures and films. **Disrespectful and disruptive behaviour during class will not be tolerated and will affect one’s participation grade.** Disrespectful and disruptive behaviour includes the following: texting or talking on mobile phones, chatting on or browsing Facebook or other social media sites, persistent talking during lectures or films, wearing headphones, emailing, and/or surfing the Internet for non-class purposes. Students observed to be engaging in this behaviour during class will be asked to stop. If disruptive behaviour persists, the professor will use her discretion and judgment in deciding how best to deal with the situation. On the first day of class, all students in the class will be invited to share their views on this policy. Student viewpoints will be considered in deciding upon appropriate consequences for disruptive behaviour in the classroom.

**Etiquette for Online Communication**

Students should direct questions concerning the course to their assigned TA using OWL message. The TA will field questions and will forward those questions or concerns to the Instructor as they see fit. Responses to students’ emails will be made as promptly as possible. If a student does not receive a response from the TA within 48 hours, a second email is acceptable as a polite reminder of the student’s question or concern. If you need to contact the course instructor, please do so by sending an OWL message. Please do NOT email the Instructor except for in cases of emergency when it is not possible to access OWL.
Support Services
Registrar’s Office: http://www.registrar.uwo.ca
Student Development Centre -- http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/
Student Support Services: https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login
Services provided by the USC: http://westernusc.ca/services/
Academic Support and Engagement: Academic Support & Engagement - Western University (uwo.ca)
Student Health -- Health & Wellness - Western University (uwo.ca)
Ombudsperson Office -- http://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/
If you are in emotional or mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western Mental Health Support - Health & Wellness - Western University (uwo.ca) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. To help you learn more about mental health, Western has developed an interactive mental health learning module, found here: Health & Wellness - Western University (uwo.ca)
For immediate help in the event of a crisis, phone 519.661.3030 (during class hours) or 519.433.2023 after class hours and on weekends.

University Policies
Accommodation Policies
Students with Disabilities
Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: Academic Calendar - Western University (uwo.ca)

Self-Reported Absences
Students will have up to two opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the term, provided the following conditions are met: the absence is no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student’s final grade. Students are expected to contact their instructors within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence, unless noted on the syllabus. Students are not able to use the self-reporting option in the following circumstances:
- for exams scheduled by the Office of the Registrar (e.g., December and April exams)
- absence of a duration greater than 48 hours,
- assessments worth more than 30% of the student’s final grade,
- if a student has already used the self-reporting portal twice during the academic year

If the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence are not met, students will need to provide a Student Medical Certificate if the absence is medical, or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate grounds for the absence in question. All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office.
of a student’s Home Faculty. Contact your Faculty academic counselling office to obtain more information about the relevant documentation.

For Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see: Academic Calendar - Western University (uwo.ca)

For the Student Medical Certificate (SMC), see: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

Accommodation for Late/Missed Assignments and Tests
It is the expectation that students will submit assignments by, and write tests and/or examinations on, the assigned dates. Students may proactively request permission from the Instructor (via OWL message) to submit assignments up to two days past the assigned date so that they can manage times of intense workload. Students who submit assignments late without obtaining academic consideration or making a prior agreement with the Instructor will be penalized 3% for every 24-hour period past the assignment deadline.

The University recognizes that a student’s ability to meet their academic responsibilities may, on occasion, be impaired by extenuating circumstances, including short-term illness or injury. Reasonable academic consideration is a cooperative process between the University, the student, and academic staff. All participants in the process must act in good faith, and fulfil their respective obligations, if it is to succeed.

Students who experience an extenuating circumstance (illness, injury, or other extenuating circumstance) sufficiently significant as to temporarily render them unable to meet academic requirements, may submit a request for academic consideration through the following routes:

(i) Submitting a Self-Reported Absence form provided that the conditions for submission are met (see above);
(ii) For medical absences, submitting a Student Medical Certificate (SMC) signed by a licensed medical or mental health practitioner in order to be eligible for Academic Consideration; or
(iii) For non-medical absences, submitting appropriate documentation (e.g., obituary, police report, accident report, court order, etc.) to Academic Counselling in their Faculty of registration in order to be eligible for academic consideration. Students are encouraged to contact their Academic Counselling unit to clarify what documentation is appropriate.

Students seeking academic consideration:

• are advised to consider carefully the implications of postponing tests or midterm exams or delaying handing in work;
• are encouraged to make appropriate decisions, based on their specific circumstances, recognizing that minor ailments (e.g., upset stomach) or upsets (e.g., argument with a friend) are not normally an appropriate basis for a self-reported absence;
• must communicate with their instructors no later than 24 hours after the end of the period covered by either the self-reported absence or SMC, or immediately upon their return following a documented absence;
• are advised that all necessary documentation, forms, etc. are to be submitted to academic counselling within two business days after the date specified for resuming responsibilities.
For Western University’s Policy on Academic Consideration for Student Absences, see: Academic Calendar - Western University (uwo.ca)

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is provided here: https://multiculturalcalendar.com/ecal/index.php?s=c-univwo

Attendance Policy

Attendance will be recorded. Persistent absenteeism (3 weeks or more/term) may be rendered grounds for failure in the course in accordance with the policies of the Department of Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies and the School of Health Studies. Persistent absenteeism will result in you being contacted by the instructor, who may request a meeting. Continued absence after this point will be reported to the Undergraduate Chair.

Turnitin

All required papers will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com http://www.turnitin.com.

Scholastic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: https://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#Page_20

Health and Wellness

As part of a successful undergraduate experience at Western, we encourage you to make your health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on-campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students receive membership in Western’s Campus Recreation Centre as part of their registration fees. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. Please check out the Faculty of Music web page (http://www.music.uwo.ca/), or the McIntosh Gallery (http://mcintoshgallery.ca/). Further information regarding health and wellness-related services available to students may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca/.

If you are in emotional or mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western Mental Health Support - Health & Wellness - Western University (uwo.ca) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. To help you learn more about mental health, Western has developed an interactive mental health learning module, found here: Health & Wellness - Western University (uwo.ca)
Grade Descriptions
The university-wide descriptor of the meaning of letter grades, as approved by Senate:

- **A+** 90-100  One could scarcely expect better from a student at this level
- **A** 80-89  Superior work that is clearly above average
- **B** 70-79  Good work, meeting all requirements and eminently satisfactory
- **C** 60-69  Competent work, meeting requirements
- **D** 50-59  Fair work, minimally acceptable.
- **F** below 50  Fail

Evaluation

**Participation** (10% total: 2 X 5%)
Participation includes regular attendance and thoughtful contributions during class or online in relation to required course readings. Guidance for what constitutes a thoughtful contribution will be provided in class. Attendance will be recorded each week.

**Critical Thinking Practice Drills:** (24% total: 3 X 8%)
Students will complete critical thinking practice drills in order to build and “flex” their critical thinking muscles. Two written reflections on these drills will be submitted in term one (October 6, November 10) and one written reflection will be submitted in term two (February 9). Each submission will be approximately 3-4 typed pages (excluding attachments). Detailed instructions and a grading rubric will be provided in class and on OWL.

**Critical Book Review:** (16%, due March 30)
Students will read and review the book *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot. Students will critically reflect on the themes of the book and relate them to relevant course concepts. Detailed instructions and guidance will be provided in class and on OWL.

**Exams:** (50% total: 2 X 25%)
The December exam will cover material from September to December. The April exam will cover material from January to April. Dates and locations of exams are set by the Registrar’s Office. All material covered in class (including regular and guest lectures, films and other learning materials) is testable.

*Assignments must be submitted in class and on OWL. Assignments will NOT be accepted by email.*
# Class Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week #</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sept 8</td>
<td>The politics of “women’s health”</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sept 15</td>
<td>The medicalization of female sexuality</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Sept 22</td>
<td>Women and medicalization</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Oct 6</td>
<td>From medicalization to healthism</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Oct 6</td>
<td>The corporatization of women’s health</td>
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<td><strong>CRITICAL THINKING PRACTICE DRILL # 1 DUE</strong></td>
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<td><strong>MODULE 2 – REPRESENTING GENDER AND WOMEN’S HEALTH</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Oct 13</td>
<td>Representations of gender and health in the biomedical sciences</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Oct 20</td>
<td>Representations of gender and health in popular culture</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Oct 27</td>
<td>Appearance-related health issues in the media: Cosmetic surgery</td>
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<td><strong>fall reading week (nov 1-7)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>MODULE 3 – THE POLITICS OF REPRODUCTION</strong></td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Nov 10</td>
<td>The politics of birth</td>
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<td><strong>CRITICAL THINKING PRACTICE DRILL # 2 DUE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Nov 17</td>
<td>Reproductive “choice”</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Nov 24</td>
<td>Race and reproductive “choice”</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Dec 1</td>
<td>Reproductive technologies</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Dec 8</td>
<td>Exam Review</td>
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<td><strong>Study Days: Dec 9; Exams: Dec 10-21</strong></td>
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<td><strong>MODULE 4 – DIVERSITY AND EXPERIENCES OF HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jan 5</td>
<td>Critical book review – part 1</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Jan 12</td>
<td>Intersectional approaches to health care</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Jan 19</td>
<td>Indigenous women’s experiences of health care</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Jan 26</td>
<td>African-Canadian women’s experiences of health care</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Feb 2</td>
<td>Sexual diversity and experiences of health care</td>
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<td><strong>CRITICAL THINKING PRACTICE DRILL # 3 DUE</strong></td>
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<td><strong>MODULE 5 – THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF WOMEN’S HEALTH</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Feb 9</td>
<td>Violence against women</td>
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<td><strong>CRITICAL THINKING PRACTICE DRILL # 3 DUE</strong></td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Feb 16</td>
<td>Structural violence and social suffering</td>
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<td><strong>spring reading week (feb 21-25)</strong></td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>March 2</td>
<td>Critical book review – part 2</td>
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<td><strong>MODULE 6 – GENDER, WORK, AND HEALTH</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>March 9</td>
<td>Challenging gendered constructions of work and work safety</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>March 16</td>
<td>Domestic labour in the global economy</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Mar 23</td>
<td>Globalization, gender, and health</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mar 30</td>
<td>Exam Review</td>
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<td><strong>CRITICAL BOOK REVIEW DUE</strong></td>
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<td>Study Days: Apr 2-3; Exams: Apr 4-30</td>
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*Study Days: Dec 9; Exams: Dec 10-21*

*CRITICAL THINKING PRACTICE DRILL DUE*

*Study Days: Apr 2-3; Exams: Apr 4-30*
## Required Readings

All required readings are posted on OWL.

### TERM 1: SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER, 2021

## MODULE 1: THE MEDICALIZATION OF WOMEN’S HEALTH

### Week 1 – September 8

**Introduction: The politics of “women’s health”**


**Group Discussion**

### Week 2 – September 15

**The medicalization of female sexuality**


**Film:** Orgasm, Inc., Liz Canner

### Week 3 – September 22

**Women and medicalization**


**Film:** The Pill
Week 4 – September 29
From medicalization to healthism


Week 5 – October 6
The corporatization of women’s health


*Film*: Pink Ribbons, Inc.

**MODULE 2: REPRESENTING GENDER AND WOMEN’S HEALTH**

Week 6 – October 13
Representations of gender and health in the biomedical sciences


Week 7 – October 20
Representations of gender and health in popular culture


**Week 8 – October 27**

**Appearance-related health issues in the media: Cosmetic surgery**


**November 1-5 – fall reading week**

**MODULE 3: THE POLITICS OF REPRODUCTION**

**Week 9 – November 10**

**The politics of birth**


*Guest presenter: TBD*

**Week 10 – November 17**

**Reproductive “choice”**


*Film: The Business of Being Born*
Week 11 – November 24

Race and reproductive “choice”


Film: The Last Abortion Clinic, Frontline

Week 12 – December 1

Reproductive technologies


Film: Making Babies, National Film Board of Canada

Week 13 – December 8

Exam Review
## TERM 2: JANUARY – APRIL, 2022

### MODULE 4: DIVERSITY AND EXPERIENCES OF HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1 – January 5</th>
<th>Critical book review – part 1</th>
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Week 4 – January 26  
African-Canadian women’s experiences of health care


**COVID article**

*Film*: Remember Africville  

Week 5 – February 2  
Sexual diversity and experiences of health care


**MODULE 5: THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF WOMEN’S HEALTH**  

Week 6 – February 9  
Violence against women


*Film*: Finding Dawn, National Film Board of Canada
Week 7– February 16

Structural violence and social suffering


February 21-25 – spring reading week

Week 8– March 2

Critical Book Review – part 2


MODULE 6: GENDER, WORK, AND HEALTH

Week 9 – March 9

Challenging gendered constructions of work and work safety


Karen Messing. Excerpts from Benty out of Shape: Shame, Solidarity and Women’s Bodies at Work.

Gender and the intensification of emotional labour in service industry

Week 10 – March 16

Domestic labour in the global economy


Week 11 – March 23

Globalization, gender, and health


Film: Maquilapolis, California Newsreel

Week 12 – March 30

Exam Review