SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

SUMMARY OF TOPICS

Part I: Reproduction and Identities

  - Theorizing Reproduction
  - Birth, as a Rite of Passage and as Site of Control and Resistance
  - Reincarnation, reproducing the Culture of Infancy
  - Reproductive Insecurity: Worrying about Human and Social Reproduction
  - Infertility, Gender Identity, and Stigma

Part II: Reproduction and Agency

  - New Reproductive Technologies
  - Menstruation and Emenagogues
  - Contraception and the Contingent Life Course
  - Infant Mortality: Risks and Tragic Choices
  - Abortion: Reproductive Rights and Choices

DAY BY DAY

PART ONE: REPRODUCTION AND IDENTITIES

Week 1

T  Mar 29  Introduction

Th Mar 31  Theorizing Reproduction

*In what ways are human and social reproduction distinctive, and in what ways do they relate to each other? What is the relationship between human reproduction and social identities? What is the relationship between human reproduction and gender stratification?*


[Highly recommended for those with an interest in anthropological demography:]


Week 2

T  Apr 5  Birth

Guest speaker: Monica McCleary, CNM, Health Partners

*In what ways do the experience and social organization of birth serve as a rite of passage? In this segment we explore the role of birth, especially first births, in the creation and transformation of identities. We will also examine the profession of midwifery, and have a visit from a certified nurse midwife later in the term.*

Birth

Continuing our exploration of the role of birth in the creation and transformation of identities, what other identities—cross-cutting with gendered identities—are formed through the birthing process? How is birth a site of control, hegemony, and resistance? Does this change when alternatives to hospital birth are created within the American context?

Davis-Floyd, R. (1992) Birth as an American Rite of Passage (finish)

Film (all films shown in class unless otherwise indicated): Hope Reborn: Empowering Families...


Week 3

Infancy

Moving our focus from mothers to babies, how does birth, quite literally, serve as a “passage” between different identities? How do religion and practical action combine to reproduce Beng identities?


Th Apr 14

Infancy

Why is stranger anxiety so rare in Bengland? What do “memories” or wrjgbe tell us about the colonial and post-colonial experience?


Week 4

Reproductive Insecurity: Worrying about Human and Social Reproduction

What are the relationships between theories of human reproduction and such basic aspects of social identity as kinship? Do these theories reflect or create gender relations?


Th Apr 21

Reproductive Insecurity

How is insecurity concerning human reproduction related to insecurity regarding the reproduction of particular social and cultural forms, of a sense of cultural distinctiveness and group identity? What are the dimensions contributing to reproductive insecurity? What are the fault lines in society when members of a group debate these topics?


Topic statement and preliminary bibliography due
**Week 5**

**T Apr 26**  **Infertility in Women's Experience**

_What are the relationships among infertility and the sociological concepts of stigma, gender identity, and patriarchy?_


*(begin)*

Film: _The Price of Change_ (20 minutes) (on Egypt, fertility, and contraception; when viewing, try to compare how reproduction figures into honor/shame, gender identity, and patriarchy in the rural and urban settings in this film and in Inhorn’s book)

**Th Apr 28**  **Infertility in Context(s)**

_How is infertility perceived as a threat to ethnic, religious, and national identities? Is infertility a neglected area of public health concern?_


*(finish)*


**Midterm Break**

**PART TWO: REPRODUCTION AND AGENCY**

**Week 6**

**T May 3**  **New Reproductive Technologies**

_How do institutions shape the personal experience of “searching for babies” in Egypt and the U.S.? Do personal experiences have the potential to shape institutional arrangements in medicine? Can they make us rethink notions of agency and choice? Do new technologies for assisted reproduction revolutionize kinship and gender ideologies by liberating gender from the constraints of the body (sex)? Or, do they preserve the status quo of gender-sex and biology-kin prescriptions even in the absence of “cooperating” reproductive biology?_


Film: _Baby, It's You_


**Th May 5**  **Fertile Ideas: Procreation and Menstruation**

_How are ideologies of menstruation related to those regarding procreation? What role does menstruation have in ideas regarding fertility, kinship, and gender?_


Film: Period Piece


Book review due

Week 7

T May 10  Contraception, Maternal Morbidity, and Aging

When and why do women contracept in high fertility societies? What is the concept of choice, with regard to whether to conceive and when, socially constructed? What are the interests at stake regarding local, national, and international social relations? What do local interpretations exist regarding contraception and reproductive biology?


Th May 15

How does the concept of bodily hardship revolutionize demographic and medical concepts of natural fertility, reproductive life span, and aging? Can it also revolutionize notions of culture and agency with regard to reproduction? What do the value of looking at extremes and exceptions in rethinking maternal morbidity and mortality?


Week 8

T May 17  Infant and Maternal Mortality: Risks and Tragic Choices

In Ansaph’s book we can discern several "voices," each of which implies differing agency. These voices and the perspectives they reveal are shaped by the institutional context of the NICU, just as couples’ experience of contraception and NRTs was shaped by institutional contexts in our previous readings from North America and Africa. How do the institutional contexts of the two hospitals shape life and death decisions? How do they create different sets of knowledge upon which these decisions are based?


Theoretical focus statement due

Th May 19

To place Tuesday’s questions in a stratification framework, how are knowledge, and the ability to have it, distributed among different kinds of social actors? Can we understand decisions regarding who receives the medical care to insure survival for birthing mothers and seriously ill newborns in a stratified reproduction framework? What do we gain and lose by this approach?


**Week 9**

**T May 24**  
**Abortion**

*Abortion has been the focus of women's struggle for reproductive choice and reproductive rights in the U.S. in recent years. What different voices can we discern regarding the risks of reproduction and women's disproportionate burden? How does the issue of abortion bring the relationship between human reproduction and assumptions about gendered roles in social reproduction into sharp relief?*


**Th May 26**  
**What similarities and differences do you discern between Ginsburg's life history approach to abortion decisions and activism, and Bledsoe's life course approach to understanding birth spacing decisions?**


Film: Abortion Stories (selection in class)

**Week 10**

**T May 31**  
**Final Project Presentations**

**W June 1**  
**Final Project Due**, no later than 1:00 p.m. in my office, Leighton 234

??Have a Wonderful Summer??

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