Reproductive Health & Politics

Anthropology/GFS 103
Pitzer College
Spring 2003
T 7:00-9:30 pm

Prof. Heather Paxson

Course Description:
This course begins from the premise that human reproductive events (conception, contraception, abortion, childbirth, infertility treatment, infant feeding, etc.) are not given by our biological nature, but are informed by cultural beliefs and shaped by social, medical and political institutions. Through cross-cultural case studies, we will examine how reproductive meanings and experiences are affected, in particular, by health-related beliefs and medical technologies, and by national and international population policies that are often directed at controlling the bodies of women. We will explore how reproductive practices provide sites for gender formation, the reproduction of social inequalities, international “development” agendas, and state regulation of national populations.

Course Requirements:
This course will be offered as a weekly seminar. Attendance is crucial. Students will be expected to come to class having done the assigned readings, ready to discuss them. Most weeks I will begin class with a brief stage-setting lecture before turning things over to student presentations and opening up discussion. Working in paired study groups, students will give class presentations and facilitate discussion on the day’s readings once during the semester. A sign-up sheet will be passed around on Jan. 28.

Students will write two papers. The first paper will be a short (5-6 page) argumentative essay based on class readings. The second paper will be a substantive (12-15 page) research paper in which students will be required to take up theoretical arguments in assessing particular ethnographic case studies of their own choosing. Students will present their research findings to the rest of the class during our final meeting.

attendance & participation = 15% of grade
presentation = 20% of grade
short paper = 25% of grade
final project = 40% of grade

Required Texts (on reserve in library and available at Huntley bookstore; you may also find used copies on the web)

Brigitte Jordan, Birth in Four Cultures. Waveland Press.

All other required readings are available as a Course Pack on sale at Huntley Bookstore.
Outline of Readings and Assignments:

1/21 Introduction

birth


mothering


childlessness and infertility treatment

2/18 Marcia Inhorn, *The Quest for Conception* — Ethnogynecology

2/25 Marcia Inhorn, *The Quest for Conception* — Biogynecology


prenatal technologies


PAPER DUE 3/4
Scripps College Humanities Institute: Biopowers: Disease, Ethics, Activism

“HIV/AIDS: Activism and the Global Pandemic”
March 6 4:15 p.m. and March 7 9:00 a.m.
Hampton Room, Malott Commons, Scripps College
attendance to at least some of this event is encouraged

abortion

William La Fleur, Liquid Life, Preface + Parts I and III (skim Part II)

3/18 SPRING BREAK

family planning as ideology


reproduction as politics


4/22 Rhoda Kanaaneh, Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel


5/6 PAPER PRESENTATIONS