

Health

4 Credits, Semester 3, MA Gender Studies 2020

Monday: 2 pm to 4 pm

Thursday: 11.15 am to 1.15 pm

Course Coordinator: Shubhra Nagalia

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What the course attempts to do:

What do we understand by the concept called 'health?' In today's time when the many discourses of health have become the governing logic of our daily lives, our social interaction and state power how do we understand the concept? Is health a question of life and death? The recent trail of death and destruction that the pandemic is leaving all over the globe has certainly framed health as questions of life and death. Modern medicine's promise of curing all that is pathological or dysfunctional that had enabled a certain way of understanding the human body is being tested severely in the face of stark repetition by every scientist today that they don't have the answers and very little is known about the nature of the virus. The critiques and sacrifices of health care workers, predominantly women and people of marginal social groups have thrown poignant but firm questions at the ability of science and policy to address the health of societies. Methods to contain the virus have compelled us to look at and question the potential of health discourses to become caring and controlling, liberating and surveilling.

Can we ask some questions, in the context of the pandemic, about the ways in which modern medicine has set up its institutions, health care and systems of health care delivery. We will explore critiques, by scientists, public health and feminist activists and scholars, of this conceptual

understanding of health and health care systems. The course would like to explore the link between technology and health in a time when technology has found a larger than life power in our political economies, social life and indeed health. What are the new-er modalities of administering health that are premised upon technological control.

The course will also take into account critical issues in public health and will foreground women, especially the more vulnerable strata of women, to mark an entry point into debates around science, modern medicine, illness, well-being and offer critiques and alternatives to the current challenges of envisioning a people oriented health care system. It will look at ways in which bio-medical discourse produces race, gender, caste and class and differentially structures women and men's experiences of health.

The attempt is to study questions of health, norms, knowledge production, and institutions through the ways they are produced by and produce selves and marginality. We would study the problematisation of modern medicine, feminist critique and resistance to medical practices and knowledge, and the ways in which the health of certain populations – like women, gay men, and the poor – comes to be tied to their subjection and the continuation of structures of power/knowledge. Throughout the course we shall emphasise the formation of subjects, subjectivity, communities and populations around and by discourses of health and allied norms. The course will be framed by discussions around the ongoing pandemic to situate historical debates.

Unit 1: Introduction to the contemporary discourses of Health during the Pandemic

- The science/epidemiology of the virus: Can it be sexed?
- Eradicating Disease or Expanding Surveillance/Control
- Signposts of the virus: women, laboring poor, Dalits
- Economy versus Health: Logics of lockdowns

Unit 2: Health and Health Care Systems

- Race, gender and caste: who are health care workers?

- A pamphlet; Rise of modern medicine and displacing women healers
- Social Determinants of Health; a public health perspective
- Developmental medicine: an answer to the call of the sick?

Unit 3: Morbidities: Women as consumers of health care

- Demographic indicators and health statistics: examining differentials between genders and within women
- Declining sex ratio
- Maternal mortality
- Nutritional status and nutritional discrimination against girls and women
- Access and utilization of health services
- Diseases: communicable, non-communicable (TB/Anemia/BMI/Osteoporosis/Depression)

Unit 4: Social Determinants of Health

- Corona virus kills men more: which men are dying?
- Race, Class and Caste: Signposts of the killing trail of the virus
- Beneficiaries of healthcare: sex workers?
- Migrant workers and their movement towards home

Unit 5: Controlling Bodies: Reproduction, Technology and Health

- Shift in the rhetoric from population control to reproductive rights
- Reproductive technologies and Medicalisation of women's bodies

- Surrogacy

Unit 6: Critiques and Alternatives: Building Alternative Knowledge and Approaches to Healing

- Women as healers: reclaiming knowledge
- Our bodies; our experience: journey towards evolving alternative knowledge
- Non-controlling technology: towards a liberatory role of bio-data collection?
- Risk, Culture, Governmentality

Unit 7: The Ethics of Care

