

Sapiro, Chapter 6
Normal Gender: Health, Fitness, Beauty

- 1. Definitions of health/sickness (especially mental health) resemble definitions of normal/abnormal: contingent, but nonetheless influential.**
 - a. body temperature as example of tyranny of "normal"
 - b. "health" here defined as physical, mental, and social health
 - c. chapter will emphasize how institutions frame women's health

- 2. Gender-based norms in women's health care. (Many of these constitute men's projection of their own problems onto women's bodies.)**
 - a. Practitioners and institutions have framed what is normal for women.
 - b. Uniquely female body parts identified as sources of problems; physicians have been eager to cut them off.
 - i. ovaries cause emotional instability
 - ii. clitoris is bad and must be removed/access denied
 - iii. uterus is cause of hysteria (epidemic hysterectomies)
 - iv. breasts: epidemic radical mastectomies; relative lack of research into breast cancer, which is a big killer of women
 - c. Reproduction "medicalized," seen as source of health problems
 - i. menstruation (menstrual taboos; beliefs about PMS; beliefs about menopause; medically unprovable but persistent myths about "raging hormones").
 - ii. pregnancy treated as illness - the so-called "medical model of pregnancy and childbirth. The mother's body property of state; destructiveness of c-sections and episiotomies.
 - d. Family life can be mentally unhealthy for women
 - i. Friedan and the "problem that has no name."
 - (1) Jessie Bernard - women and men experience marriage differently
 - (2) Arlie Hochschild - the second shift
 - (3) Gove, Style and Hughes study finds in 1990 that married women have the highest rates of mental disorder.
 - ii. domestic violence affects women disproportionately - single largest cause of injury to women in the US
 - (1) Every year, 3.8% of children are beaten
 - (2) Domestic violence occurs between partners in 16% of couples
 - (3) 20% of women treated in ERs are victims of domestic violence; 30% of women's ER visits are occasioned by domestic violence.
 - iii. causes of domestic violence? Stress, interacting with
 - (1) lack of other coping mechanisms
 - (2) cultural views of family violence - "who can I beat if I can't beat my wife?" and acceptability of spousal violence, including marital rape
 - (3) men's learned tendency to use violence to solve problems (women in contrast tend to learn to turn anger inwards)

- e. Employment outside the home affects mental and physical health
 - i. combining roles is tricky; since women still do the second shift, their work responsibilities are more burdensome
 - ii. protective laws are borderline sexist; oftentimes men could also be injured, but are allowed access to all jobs. Moreover, women are not barred from traditional feminine (and low-paying) jobs that are hazardous to their health.

3. Beauty, Fitness, Health

- a. "Ideal shape" is determined by culture - historical changes in fashionable shape and size of women's bodies
- b. women's beauty is constructed - makeup, plastic surgery, constricted clothing
- c. women feel intense social pressure to fit into cultural norm of ideality - weight, body part size
- d. diet and exercise used as forms of control of body size, but until recently women not encouraged to exercise
- e. skin color culturally determined fashion

4. Five critiques of "beauty" practices

- a. double standard of beauty - physical appearance important for women but not men
- b. beauty and women's fashion industry is expensive and time-consuming
- c. choice and control - our choices are guided by industry, not personal preference
- d. physical and mental-health effects of beauty culture are negative
- e. beauty culture perpetuates inequality

5. Health-care practice: double standard for men and women

- a. Health defined differently for men and women;
- b. physicians tend to consider women's health problems emotionally related
 - i. more psychotropic drugs are prescribed to women
- c. profession and medical school infantilize and ignore women
 - i. 1996 Women's Health Equity Act designed to study and fund research on major killers (AIDs, breast cancer, heart disease) and women's employment in health fields
- d. healthcare is expensive; women tend to get less of it because their incomes are lower

6. Women In and as Activists about Healthcare

- a. Medical profession historically appropriated by men (away from women who were serving as midwives and herbalists). Anthropologists and historians argue that witch-persecutions of 14th-17th centuries partly resulted from this process.
- b. stratification between male doctors/nurses
- c. women and men perform differently as healthcare providers
- d. activists have long been trying to improve health care for women
 - i. Margaret Sanger and birth control
 - ii. Boston Women's Health Book Collective
 - iii. National Black Women's Health Project
- e. stereotype of "Dr. Mom" makes women responsible for health care/nursing
- f. women make more doctor visits, but why?