

Lecture Outline: Medicalization

Introduction

- Defining medicalization
- Medicalization & women – the life cycle

Part 1 – The Actors

- Female Midwives
- Male Obstetricians

Part 2 – Tools, Methods & Location

- Forceps
- Caesarian Sections
- Pain Control
- Hospital Birth

Part 3 – Redefining Birth

- Resistance in the hospital
- Natural Childbirth

Conclusion:

- The Deviant Female Body

Defining Medicalization

- key concept in medical sociology
- ‘normal’ health condition redefined as a medical condition
- process of colonization/ power dynamic
- the female lifecycle & medicalization

Impact of medicalization?

- women & physicians
- power & new medical specialization
- the compartmentalized body
- ownership of health

The Actors: Female Midwives

- tradition of women attending childbirth – to 14th century
- Legitimacy through relational authority
- midwives as healers.

The Actors: Male Obstetricians

- male obstetricians, 17th-19th century
- birth - 'natural' or potentially pathological?
- Obstetrics as a specialization

The Actors: Male Obstetricians

Full-term infant in utero

Engraving by Jan van Rymdyk, in William Hunter, *Atlas of the Gravid Uterus*, 1774.

Tools, Methods & Location: Forceps

- **‘tools’ used in birthing process in Greco-Roman times**
- **obstetrical forceps 17th century invention**
- **technological monopolies**

Tools, Methods & Location: Imaging Technology

- **ultrasound technology - 1960s**
- **fetal monitors - 1960s**
- **power & intervention**

Tools, Methods & Location: Caesarian Section

- **history**
- **current statistics for c-sections:
26% in US; 22.5%
in Canada, 22% in
UK, 47% in China**

Too Posh to Push?

Tools, Methods & Location: Pain Control

- history
- Queen Victoria

Tools, Methods & Location: Hospital Birth

- shift by 1930s
- routine procedures & birthing position
- bureaucratization & management of birth

Redefining Birth: resistance in the hospital

- **anthropologist
Emily Martin**
- **female strategies**
- **female perceptions**

Redefining Birth: natural childbirth

- 1960s – natural childbirth: Grantley Dick-Read, Ferdinand Lamaze, Frederique Leboyer, Michael Odent
- Pre-natal education
- hospital changes

Personal Choice & Personal Power

BC's Home Birth Movement, 1970-90

Megan Davies
York University

“We hadn’t taken to the woods just for a change of scenery and a different way of life. We expected to get closer to nature, to each other and our feelings... and develop entirely new ways of being and experiencing the world... free of the cities, of capitalism, of racism, industrialism, they had to be for the better.”

Mark Vonnegut , *The Eden Express*

Kootenay Quilt

Detail

“For me midwifery was about personal choice and personal power. Everything you do, you do naturally – whole food, kerosene lamps, outhouses... When you look to the medical or educational system or any system to have all the answers for you, I think you end up with less freedom.”

Leslie Campos, home births 1979, 1989,
1991

“To be somewhere where I could be myself... there is something about personal growth and becoming - becoming a bigger version of yourself. This is my choice. This is me having this baby and taking responsibility for the choices and who I become through the process that is really important.”

Lisa Farr, home birth 1981

*Responsible Home-Centred
Childbirth*



A PARENTS' MANUAL

Kootenay Childbirth Counselling Centre



Responsible Home-
Centred Childbirth

Published by the
Kootenay Childbirth
Counselling Centre

“Home is a temple. And when you have your child at home with the music you want, & the candles you want, & the pace you want, & the people you trust more than anything... it is completely un-violated, sacred space.”

Pamela Stevenson, home birth 1978

Blessing Way Ceremony:

About 10 years ago, this ceremony sprang up in our culture as a kind of new age baby shower, but with an intimate & powerful focus on the birthing family. This concurred with a general trend to embrace & create traditions as a way of understanding & celebrating changes or passages & events in our lives.

Whose Body?

“Disintegration starts and the entire lining... begins to slough... The endometrial arterioles dilate, resulting in hemorrhage through the weakened capillary walls...”

“The mechanisms which guide the remarkable cellular transformation from spermatid to mature sperm remain uncertain... Perhaps the most amazing characteristic of spermatogenesis is its sheer magnitude...”

Arthur Vander, *Human Physiology*, 1980