General Editor's Introduction

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you to the first issue of a new feminist journal on women's health in an urbanizing and globalizing world. Whatever the historical differences between the relatively tranquil rural existence and the hustle and bustle of the urban life may have been, they have now reached exponential proportions due to the speed of social change and advance in technology and explosion of information. Against the pressures of an increasingly homogenising urban world, there are accumulating tensions against such a rapid change. Often, women, children and the aged are caught in the middle of this sociotechnical cauldron. This new journal attempts to provide a feminist forum for the study of how pressures in a dramatically changing world impact women's, female youth's and children's health. The health aspects we pursue are loosely defined and abstract, but nevertheless important in their present or future consequences. The journal is equally interested in women's health now versus in the future, or physical, sexual, reproductive or mental dimensions of health, or acute versus chronic conditions that ail women's lives. The coverage will be international and interdisciplinary, and scholarly contributions from academics as well as social activists will be welcome.

In its first issue, the Women's Health and Urban Life journal presents four articles on women's and female children's health. Each article pursues a different realm of health and use a different methodology. The first article traces the link between mental health of children/youth and exposure to violence against mothers. Drawing from in-depth interviews with 39 women who have been able to leave their abusive partners, Sev'e's qualitative work details the general, self-directed and other-directed behavioural problems of children who had witnessed violence against their mothers. The study is not comparative and its convenience sampling does not allow the generalizability of its results. However, all these women and their children live in a major metropolitan centre (Toronto), thus possibly increasing their access to governmental social services but at the same time, possibly decreasing their interpersonal support systems and thus, raising their isolation. Sev'e's work shows the serious effects of witnessing violence which compound the serious effects of violence suffered by the female targets of that violence.

In the second article, Zeytinoğlu, Denton and Davies explore the relationship between casual jobs, work schedules and self-reported musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). Among other causal factors of interest, their quantitative analysis shows that there are statistically significant links between physical work factors, previous injuries, and money problems MSDs. As can be predicted, younger age reduce the likelihood to report MSDs. One interesting finding in this study is the absence of the independent effects of gender on the reported MSDs. On the other hand, and as the authors rightly underscore, the largest proportion of the home care workers consists of women. Thus, the physical and psychological stresses that these less than well monitored and unprotected jobs indeed pose hazards to a much larger number of women than they pose to men. Again, a dimension which is implicit in Zeytinoğlu Denton and Davies's work is that apportioning, segmenting, fragmenting jobs are very much of an invent of the new, rapidly urbanizing world order which has made the more traditional and more interpersonal webs of care obsolete, without benefiting either the care-givers or care-recipients.

The third article is a poignant feminist and historical critique of overmedicalization and biomedical control of a particular stage in women's lives. Abramson's historical review of the rise in biomedical interventions and control of premenopausal and menopausal symptoms leaves little doubt about the manipulative, paternalistic, domineering and economically-driven tactics of the male-biased pharmaceutical and medical establishments. Although Abramson does not utilize this particular analogy, what comes out of her analysis is a gendered version of George Orwell's 1984, continuing to be played on the lives and health of women, without much attempt to the in-depth understanding of either the variation in women's current needs or to the implication for their future health. According to Abramson, women have resisted the steamrolling of a natural stage in their lives by faceless corporations. Nevertheless, the powerful pharmaceutical companies have utilized shifting tactics to break women's resistance to the lucrative replacement hormone therapies. What is not directly explicit in Abramson's analysis but subtly implied is the capitalist systems' ruthless manipulation of living beings which go beyond their attempts to manipulate the menopausal women. In its earlier manifestations, the repeatedly impregnated thousands of mares' involuntary, constant and painful contribution of urine to inject millions of pills into women's bodies and billions of dollars to corporate coffers is the other unpleasant dimension of the hormone therapy debate. The not so complete switch to synthetic alternatives has its own less than certain long-term consequences.
The last article in this issue is about young women’s experiences of pregnancy if and when the pregnancy occurs outside of wedlock or choice. Pietsch pointedly but eloquently unfolds the social and structural attempts to commodify women’s bodies and even to shape women’s thoughts and feelings. The clashes between the social and political constructions of good/bad, right/wrong, duty/obligation, acceptable/not acceptable, natural/unnatural and healthy/unhealthy are jaggedly juxtaposed over powerful personal, genderized and anecdotal recollections in Pietsch’s analysis. What the society considers to be a beautiful experience is fiercely denied to young women who have knowingly or unknowingly challenged the societal rules by “illegitimately” getting pregnant. How women themselves have internalized the societal notions of “control” over female bodies although these bodies try to defy such control are vividly illustrated in Pietsch’s phenomenological and post-structuralist analysis. Underneath it all, women’s alienation from their own bodies and the children these bodies produce is a function of which women are deemed as legitimate bearers and which are not so deemed. Pietsch’s work is an emotional invitation for women to reclaim their bodies, reclaim the experiences of these bodies, although for most, reclaiming the children these bodies once produced may not be an option.

I hope, the readers will find these articles intriguing and thought-provoking and will join the feminist journey that Women’s Health and Urban Life journal launched in the area of women’s and female children’s health. I invite our readers to share their own work with us in the future volumes and issues.

March 17, 2002
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