

Teaching Tool for Imagined Femininity: Pain Over the Life Cycle

Chloe Bozak, BSW (Thompson Rivers University)
bozakchloe@gmail.com

Hannah Valihora, BA Candidate (Thompson Rivers University)
hvalihora@tru.ca

with

Estel Malgosa, PhD (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)
estel.malgosa@uab.cat

Bruna Alvarez, PhD (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)
mariabruna.alvarez@uab.cat

Introduction

We have created this teaching tool to support educators using the article "[Imagined Femininity: Pain Over the Life Cycle](#)," featured in this Spring 2023 issue of *NEOS*, by Estel Malgosa and Bruna Alvarez in their classes. The teaching tool includes reflection questions, prompts for discussion, comments from the authors, and follow up assignment ideas to encourage a rich engagement with the article. Educators are welcome to share the authors' comments with the students or they can use them to inform their contributions to the discussion with the class. This teaching tool is relevant to a wide range of disciplines including but not limited to social work, politics, sociology, anthropology, nursing, social psychology, health psychology, gender studies, and more.

Preparation

Have students read the article in advance and encourage them to consider the following questions as they read:

- How does the article relate to your understanding of femininity and pain?
- How is the link between pain and femininity constructed or enforced in society? Think about the media, the medical system, public discourse, education, schools, and more.
- What has your own experience been with education regarding the female body? Were female experiences framed to you as positive, as negative, or not at all in your early education?
- As a child, what did you associate with femininity? Do you recall pain as part of the construction of femininity in terms of your understanding?

Author Comments: I think that if we lived in a society where menstruation was highly valued, our perception of 'pain' and 'discomfort' would be totally different. We always say that there are things that can be uncomfortable (like having large breasts) but, instead, they are socially

valued as positive. Linking femininity and pain makes female bodies resign themselves to feeling pain, thereby normalizing disorders and pathologies, preparing them for the 'sacrifice' of motherhood, or they could also normalize having painful or pleasureless sexual relations. For example, a study by the Spanish Women's Institute (2022) shows how 60% of young women have had sex without sexual appetite.

Discussion:

Allow time for an in-class discussion using the following questions as prompts for small or large groups.

- How do children participate in the discourse surrounding femininity and pain, and how might this be catalyzed by a lack of education surrounding the female body?
- The article mentions that there is a high likelihood that a proportion of the participants had begun menstruating despite none of them mentioning it. How does the fact that none of the participants mentioned their own menstrual experience speak to discourses surrounding the female body?
- The article mentions that children are more likely to resist hegemonic representations of femininity when they have access to information about their bodies and their sexuality. How do you think children are educated about sexuality and their bodies today? Who do you think educates them?
- How might the framework of sexual health or sexual education classes be altered to foster change in the discourse and knowledge surrounding femininity and pain?
- How does the discursive link between femininity and pain potentially impact female-bodied people?
- What is your knowledge of feminized chronic pain conditions such as endometriosis, adenomyosis, polycystic ovarian syndrome, pelvic inflammatory disease, dysmenorrhea, and dyspareunia? If your understanding of any of the aforementioned conditions is limited, consider exploring their pathology and symptomology further.

Author Comments: First of all, I would like there to be sexuality education with a gender perspective and focused on children (for example, RSE has not yet been implemented in Spain). This should incorporate pleasure in sexuality as a central element, making visible the vulvas and the clitoris. Also, when working on reproduction, talk about the clitoris, otherwise we talk about male ejaculation (pleasure) and female ovulation (menstruation/pain). I think that

menstruation could be treated as a health cycle and explain different experiences. I think that menstrual education and reproductive education could be included in sexuality education.

Follow up:

As a follow up to the class discussion, ask the students to write a short essay or post to a discussion forum using one of the following prompts:

- How did your perspective of femininity change based on the article and class discussion?
- How does this article build upon or parallel other ideas, readings, theories, or discussions that we have encountered in this class so far?
- What are the potential implications of what is represented in this article for female-bodied people? Where and how would you like to see change?
- What has been your personal experience with understanding of femininity and links to pain?

As an additional or alternative follow up assignment, have the students anonymously write down one thing they wish they would have known as a child regarding femininity and pain. You can then compile what the students wrote down so they are able to read each other's ideas.

References

Malgosa, Estel and Bruna Alvarez. 2023. "Imagined Femininity: Pain Over the Life Cycle." *NEOS* 15 (1).

Author Biographies

Chloe Bozak recently graduated with her Bachelor of Social Work from Thompson Rivers University located on the unceded and ancestral territory of the Secwepemc peoples. She is interested in many areas of social work, but she is especially interested in law and policy. Specifically, she is interested in how people who are affected by specific laws and policies can inform said laws and policies as the experts of their own experience. Chloe is hoping to further her education in the area of social justice and to end up in a space where she is able to utilize both her social work education and her passion for law and policy.

Hannah Valihora is a fourth year Bachelor of Arts Candidate at Thompson Rivers University, within Secwépemc'ulucw. She is a double major in sociology and psychology and will graduate in June of 2024 with distinctions in both research and co-operative education. Valihora is passionate about exploring how identity interacts with feminized illness diagnoses, and how the implementation of feminist theory and practice may improve such

patient outcomes. Valihora is also interested in utilizing feminist theory as a pedagogical praxis to impart a greater ethics of care in education, healthcare, and qualitative research practices. Following the completion of her BA, Valihora will pursue her MA in Sociology, further intending to complete a PhD in her respective field.

Estel Malgosa (<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0727-5392>): I have just finished the PhD program in Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), for which I have obtained a scholarship. Since 2017 I coordinate, together with Bruna Alvarez, the SexAFIN project in which my doctoral thesis is framed. In my thesis, focused on sexuality and childhood, I try to understand how boys and girls from public schools in the province of Barcelona (Spain) construct, live, and narrate sexuality; how the gender with which they identify influences their narratives; and how adults talk (or not) with them about sexuality. I combine my thesis and the coordination of the project with the upbringing of my 3-year-old daughter and a new little person who is on the way.

Bruna Alvarez (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9069-4573>): Ph.D. in Anthropology and professor at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), the University of Barcelona (UB), Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) and tutor for the Degree in Anthropology and Human Evolution at the UOC. I am a member of the AFIN Research Group of the UAB, where I carried out research on maternity, reproduction, and sexualities. I finished my PhD in 2017 on maternity policies in Spain when my children were 8 and 6 years old. After an intense maternity experience (research and parenting) I worked on assisted reproductive technologies and coordinated research on children and sexuality. Currently, I am trying to consolidate my academic career, while my children grow up and my family includes more members.

Author contact: Chloe Bozak, BSW (Thompson Rivers University) bozakchloe@gmail.com; Hannah Valihora, BA Candidate (Thompson Rivers University) hvalihora@tru.ca; Estel Malgosa, PhD (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), estel.malgosa@uab.cat; Bruna Alvarez, PhD (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), mariabruna.alvarez@uab.cat

To cite this article: Bozak, Chloe, and Hannah Valihora with Estel Malgosa and Bruna Alvarez. 2023. "Teaching Tool for Imagined Femininity: Pain Over the Life Cycle." *NEOS* 15 (1).

To link this article: <https://acyig.americananthro.org/neosvol15iss1spring23/bozak-valihora/>