Defining and Contesting Illness - Pregnancy

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With the topic of the week being Defining and Contesting Health- Pregnancy, I was interested in this weeks readings. The first reading by Barbra Clow discusses the popular use of thalidomide during pregnancy while Shannon Jette’s paper focused on physical fitness and pregnancy. Thalidomide was a popular drug as it was found to relieve symptoms of morning sickness and calm the woman’s nerves due to “medical ideas about the origins of pregnancy symptoms [and] personal anxieties about childbirth and parenting”.[[1]](#footnote-1) In their article Jette draws on a number of medical texts and journals to explore the “production of knowledge about the active pregnant body. [[2]](#footnote-2) Both papers deal with pregnancy and although one looks at drugs and the other looks at physical activity, they both share the theme of medical, and societal views of health and pregnancy.

While reading Clow’s article, I found it intriguing that some medical professionals viewed pregnancy as an illness and due to that way of thinking tended to lead to the prescription of tranquilizers or the belief that the woman should be treated rather than the morning sickness. In reading Jette’s article, I was surprised that some professionals did not believe that physical activity was good for pregnant mothers to participate in as it would “result in a redistribution of blood flow to the woman’s working muscles and away from the uterus lading the fetus to compete oxygenated blood, essential substrates, and heat dissipation[[3]](#footnote-3)

To help me with my research project, I found an article called, “Children who drill, seldom are ill – Drill Movement and Sport: The Rise and Fall of a ‘FemaleTradition’ in Ontario Elementary Physical Education- 1850s to 2000” written by Nancy R. Francis and Anna H. Lathrop. I acquired this paper while completing my pre-research search and also found some extra sources, both primary and secondary, in the author’s bibliography. Francis and Lathrop’s paper argues that “a male-centered physical education agenda eclipsed a female-centered tradition” though a curriculum that involved dance, gymnastics, and games. I believe it will be useful as it describes the type of physical activity males and females received in schools.[[4]](#footnote-4) For example, Francis and Lathrop state, “Men received instruction drill and woman received instruction in calisthenics for at least two hours a week.”[[5]](#footnote-5) This paper also mentions the Ryerson system and the *Syllabus for Physical Training* which is something I am interested in learning more about as it could be beneficial to my research.

Bibliography

Clow, Barbara. “‘An Illness of Nine Months’ Duration’: Pregnancy and Thalidomide Use in Canada and the United States,” in Feldberg, Ladd-Taylor, Li and McPherson, Women, Health, and Nation, Montreal” McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003: 45-66.

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1. Barbara Clow. “‘An Illness of Nine Months’ Duration’: Pregnancy and Thalidomide Use in Canada and the United States,” McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003: 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Shannon Jette. “Exercising Caution: The Production of Medical Knowledge about Physical Exertion during Pregnancy”, Canadian Bulletin of Medical History, 28, 2 (2011): 300. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Nancy R. Francis and Anna H. Lathrop. "Children who drill, seldom are ill." Drill, Movement and Sport: The Rise and Fall of a 'Female Tradition'. *Historical Studies In Education* 23, no. 1 (Spring2011 2011): 61 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)