

Gender & Anatomy

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BRIEF OVERVIEW

In studying the history of medicine, we learn how medicine is a social construct and how medical education reflects certain views in culture and society. The representation of women in anatomical and medical textbooks from the past to today has at times included provocative or unsettling imagery. This session invites students to explore and engage with visual representations of gender in the history of medicine through critical analysis and discussion using primary sources.

Different formats are provided along with an activity to help guide analysis and class discussion. This lesson can be taught synchronously in one class session or adapted for asynchronous learning.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- **Engage** with visual literacy (see [Visual Literacy LibGuide](#)).
- **Examine** and evaluate images and texts using primary sources.
- **Discuss** the author (creator), audience, and intended purpose of historical materials.
- **Develop** understanding of how gender has historically and continues to impact health and medicine.

**Please note that this activity entails viewing images that can be upsetting or uncomfortable.*

BEFORE CLASS

- Although this is an online session, we encourage students to get to know more about the Rubenstein Library. Ask students to watch these [short introductory videos](#) that will acquaint them with the Rubenstein Library.
- Have students take a moment to read the [Rubenstein Library's Approach to Classes](#). This is short, but includes points we want students to keep in mind as they work with primary sources now and in the future.
- Direct students to read through this brief blog post, [Venus Revisited by Cara Delay](#) on [Nursing Clio](#), an open access, peer-reviewed, collaborative blog project, to provide brief context.

SESSION OUTLINE

Activity: Image Analysis and Discussion

In this activity, students will work in small groups to select a primary source and complete a short worksheet that will guide their critical analysis of the item. This activity can work for a synchronous (e.g., a Zoom class session that includes breakout rooms) or asynchronous (e.g., a multi-step discussion in an online forum like Sakai) class sessions.

- Have students select [an item](#) or assign an item to each small group. If the class is large, more than one group can work with an item—each group will bring different perspectives to the primary source analysis.
- Next, have students work in their small groups or as pairs to analyze the item using the [Image Analysis Worksheet](#) as a guide. Encourage students to take notes as they work. Feel free to adjust the worksheet questions to better meet the goals of your class.
- Have groups share what they've learned about each item with the entire class. Finally, after the groups share, encourage the class to think about how the primary sources connect, consider common themes, and ask questions of each other in a class-wide discussion. The discussion questions below can serve as a starting point for this larger discussion. Instructors should feel free to alter questions as needed for their specific class.

Discussion Questions

Questions below are suggestions for further discussion. Instructors are welcome and encouraged to include discussion questions relevant to specific readings and topics that meet the goals of your class.

- What's your initial response upon seeing this image?
- Have you seen similar images in other contexts or time periods?
- What does the image leave out?
- How do you think such an image would have been used in teaching medical students?

Suggested Readings

- Londa Schiebinger. [“Skeletons in the Closet: The First Illustrations of the Female Skeleton in Eighteenth-Century Anatomy.”](#) *Representations* No. 14, *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Spring, 1986), pp. 42–82.
- Katharine Park, [Secrets of women : gender, generation, and the origins of human dissection](#). New York : Zone Books ; Cambridge, Mass. : Distributed by the MIT Press, 2006.

Additional Resources

- [Anatomy of Gender](#): From Northwestern University, a companion website to the exhibit *Anatomy of Gender: Arts of the Body in Early Modern Europe* at the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, January 3–March 12, 2006.

QUESTIONS?

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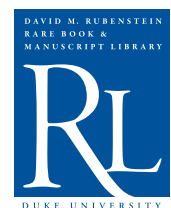
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