

**WOMEN AND AGING**  
**AS/SOCI 4680 3.00**  
**Monday 11:30-2:30 pm**  
**Fall 2010**

**Room: Ross South Rm 104**

---

**Course Director:** Nancy Mandell  
**Office:** 2060 Vari Hall  
736-2100 x77999  
email: [mandell@yorku.ca](mailto:mandell@yorku.ca)

**Office Hours:** Mondays: 10:00-11:30 am (By appointment only)

**Course Objectives:**

1. to become familiar with different theoretical approaches to women and aging
2. to critically assess fundamental concepts in the life course perspective
3. to apply basic concepts to everyday life
4. to practice critical reading and writing skills through assignments

**Books:**

- a) Mandell, Nancy, Susannah Wilson and Ann Duffy. 2008. *Connection, Compromise and Control: Canadian Women at Midlife*, Toronto: Oxford.
- b) Wallis, Velma. 1993. *Two Old Women: An Alaska Legend of Betrayal, Courage and Survival*, Fairbanks/Seattle: Epicenter Press.
- c) Course Kit to be purchased in the bookstore.
- d) PDF files to be downloaded from the course web site (see url below).

**Winter Assignments:**

**3 critical discussion papers = 25% each (3 x 25% =75%)**  
**seminar presentation = 15%**  
**class participation = 10%**

**Critical Discussion Papers:**

**Choices and Topics:**

There are a number of critical questions listed under each week in the syllabus. Students are required to choose one question and answer it.

**Students must answer three papers** from among the following **four** sections:

**First Paper:** one question from Week 1, 2 or 3 (Due Week 4, **Oct 4/10**)

**Second Paper:** one question from Week 4, 6 or 7 (Due Week 8, **Nov 1/10**)

**Third Paper:** one question from Week 8, 9 or 10 (Due Week 12, **Nov 22/10**)

**Fourth Paper:** one question from Week 11, 12 or 13 (Due Week 14, **Dec 13/10**)

**Instructions on how to write an essay:** will be handed out in class

**Instructions on how to present a seminar:** will be handed out in class

**Grading Scheme:** will be handed out in class

**Penalty for Late Work**

The penalty for late work is one percent for day out of 100% for each day late, including weekends and holidays. Exceptions to the lateness penalty may be submitted to the course director with receipt of official and explicit documentation such as a physician's note, a police

report, a death certificate or note from a funeral director. Problems such as computer problems, scheduling conflicts or workload do not constitute valid reasons.

**Web Site and Listserv for the Course:**

There is a web site for this course that can be accessed at: <http://www.yorku.ca/mandell/>

On the course site, students will find the syllabus, dates for assignments, PDF files of articles and pertinent messages.

A list serve has been established for this course. It is called [soci4680@yorku.ca](mailto:soci4680@yorku.ca)  
**Sign up immediately for the list serv** as all messages will be sent to you in this way.

**How do I SUBSCRIBE to this listserv?**

Address your email message to [listserv@yorku.ca](mailto:listserv@yorku.ca).  
In the body of your email message, issue the command:  
SUBSCRIBE listname LastName FirstName

**For Example:**

where SUBSCRIBE is the command you issue to subscribe to a list.  
listname is the name of the list to which you want to subscribe = soci4680  
LastName FirstName is your last and first name = Mandell Nancy

**Example of an Email:**

**To:** [listserv@yorku.ca](mailto:listserv@yorku.ca)

**Subject:** subscribe

**Message in Body of Text:** Subscribe soci4680 Mandell Nancy

**Problems Signing Up?**

If there are any other questions like how to unsubscribe students can go to  
<http://www.cns.yorku.ca/computing/internet/listservuser.html> and find the information.

**Academic Dishonesty:**

Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious offenses which carry severe penalties. Students are responsible for understanding the nature and consequences of these offenses as contained in the **Senate Policy on Academic Honesty** (see <http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/legislation/senate/acadhone>). The policy is published in the **Calendar of Undergraduate Programmes**. Copies may also be obtained from the Office of the Dean of Arts. Also, please see attached sheet on Academic Dishonesty at the end of this Syllabus.

**Writing Help**

The Writing Department on the third floor of the Ross Building provides individual assistance for undergraduates to help with their written work. By enrolling with the Writing Department you will be assigned a specific instructor to work with. In particular there are two excellent graduate students with academic expertise in Sociology, Jennifer Johnson and Elisabeth Rondinelli, who you might request. However please remember that the Centre deals with over 2000 students each year so you might be assigned to another instructor depending on scheduling. Try to enroll in September before the Centre gets terribly busy. This is a friendly and extremely helpful resource that all undergraduates can use to help them improve their work.

The Writing Department  
Campus Building: Ross Building, S329  
Telephone: (416) 736-5134  
<http://www.yorku.ca/laps/writ/>

## LECTURE SCHEDULE

### Women and Aging

#### Soci 4680 3.0

Fall 2010

#### WEEK 1

Monday, September 13, 2010

#### INTRODUCTION TO AGING STUDIES

What are the theoretical approaches to aging studies? Outline a sociological approach to aging with specific attention on a life course perspective.

#### *Required Readings:*

1. Mandell, N., Wilson, S. and Duffy, A. 2008. **Chapter 1 “Midlife under siege: baby boomers redefine aging”**, pp. 1-22 in N. Mandell, W. Wilson and A. Duffy. *Connection, compromise and control: Canadian women at midlife*, Toronto: Oxford. Buy book.
2. Mandell, N., Wilson, S. and Duffy, A. 2008. **Chapter 2 “Structure, culture and agency in the study of midlife women”**, pp. 23-44 in N. Mandell, W. Wilson and A. Duffy. *Connection, compromise and control: Canadian women at midlife*, Toronto: Oxford. Buy book.
3. Gibson, Diane. 1996. **Broken down by age and gender: “The problem of old women”** redefined. *Gender and Society*. Vol 10, No. 4. 433-448. PDF file.
4. Marshall, Lori. 2006. **“Aging: a feminist issue”**, *National Women’s Studies Association Journal*, 18(1), vii-xiii. PDF file.

#### **Critical Questions:**

1. What is aging? Provide a specific example of how it is a useful category in analyzing themes in your own life?
2. Sociologists see contemporary life as riddled with ambivalence. Define one example of structured ambivalence and provide an example of how this applies to you.
3. Outline four characteristics of a postmodern life course. Provide specific examples.

#### WEEK 2

Monday, September 20, 2010

#### GENDERED AGING

What is a feminist approach to aging? How are aging identities constructed? To what extent do gender, race, class, ability and sexuality shape these identities? What is intersectionality and how does it affect our understanding of aging?

#### *Required Readings:*

1. Mandell, N., Wilson, S. and Duffy, A. 2008. **Chapter 3 “Midlife women and the women’s movement”**, pp. 43-65 in N. Mandell, W. Wilson and A. Duffy. *Connection, compromise and control: Canadian women at midlife*, Toronto: Oxford. Buy book.
2. King, N. (2006). **“The lengthening list of oppressions: Age relations and the feminist study of inequality”**, pp. 47-73 in T. M. Calasanti and K.F. Slevin (eds). *Age matters” Realigning feminist thought*. New York and London: Routledge. Course kit.

3. Overall, Christine. 2006. “**Old age and ageism, impairment and ablesism: exploring the conceptual and material connections**”, *National Women’s Studies Association Journal*, 18(1), 126-137. PDF file.
4. Estes, C.L. 2003. “**Theoretical perspectives on old age policy: A critique and a proposal**”, pp. 219- in S. Biggs, A. Lowenstein and J. Jendricks (Eds). *The need for theory: Critical approaches to social gerontology*. Amityville, N.Y.: Barwood Publishing Company. Course kit.

**Critical Questions:**

1. Define the women’s movement. How has it shaped your life course? How has it affected the ways in which your parents have raised their children? Refer specifically to the areas of education, paid employment and mother-daughter relationships.
2. What is a feminist perspective on aging? What specific issues does it raise? How does it suggest we ought to deal with these issues?
3. Define intersectionality. How does it relate to feminist perspectives on aging? Use a contemporary example to support your argument.

**WEEK 3**

**Monday, September 27, 2010**

**RACIALIZED AGING.** In addition to being gendered, aging is also racialized. How is aging different for various groups of women?

**Required Readings:**

1. Reyes, A. 2002. “**I’m not mad, I’m postcolonial, a woman, and a mother**”, pp. 1-31 in Angela Reyes (ed). *Mothering across cultures: postcolonial representations*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Course kit.
2. Dulllemen, Christine. 2006. “**Older people in Africa: new engines to society**”, *National Women’s Studies Association Journal*, 18(1), 99-105. PDF file.
3. Wray, S. “**Women making sense of midlife: Ethnic and cultural diversity**”, *Journal of Aging Studies*, Vol. 21 2007, pgs. 31-42. PDF file
4. Statistics Canada. 2007. Chapter 7 “**Immigrant seniors**” pp. 271-295 in *A portrait of seniors in Canada*, Ottawa: Statistics Canada. Course kit.

**Critical Questions:**

1. In addition to being structured, ambivalence is also gendered and raced. Define this term. Describe how it applies to you. Refer to specific examples in the area of mothering and intimacy.
2. Define racialization. How does race structure women’s experiences of old age?

**WEEK 4**

**Monday, October 4, 2010**

**HISTORICAL DISCOURSES OF AGING**

How do historical conditions shape women’s experiences of aging? In this section, we concentrate on one native story and use it as a basis to compare and contrast different discourses on aging women.

### **Required Readings:**

1. Wallis, Velma. 1993. *Two Old Women: An Alaska Legend of Betrayal, Courage and Survival*, Fairbanks/Seattle: Epicenter Press. Buy book.

### **Critical Questions:**

1. Write a critical book review of *Two Old Women*. Be sure to include a brief synopsis of the story. Focus on three main themes and relate these to course material.

**\*\*\*First Paper Due (based on Weeks 1, 2 and 3)\*\*\***

## **WEEK 5**

### **Reading Week**

**Monday, October 11, 2010 No Classes this Week: Fall Reading Week**

**\*\* Go see the ROM exhibit before it ends Oct 11<sup>th</sup>\*\***

## **WEEK 6**

**Monday, October 18, 2010**

### **AGING AND EMBODIMENT**

What is the relationship between bodies and identities? How we adorn, maintain and present our bodies is one way we construct social identities. Ageing, for example, involves a complicated regime of disciplining the body to conform to cultural standards of “appropriate” ageing. Gender identities, for example, are closely tied to cultural norms of bodily appearance. In this lecture, we examine the close association between bodily maintenance and aging identities.

### **Required Readings:**

1. Altabe, Madeline. 1996. “**Ethnicity and body image: quantitative and qualitative analysis**”, 153-159. PDF file.

<http://www.btinternet.com/~negativecharisma/bodies/altabe.pdf>

2. Hurd, Laura C. 2001. “**Older women’s body image and embodied experience: an exploration**”, *Journal of Women and Aging*, 12(3/4), 77-97. PDF file.

3. Laz, Cheryl. 2003. “**Age embodied**”, *Journal of Aging Studies*, 17(4), 503-519. PDF file.

4. Slevin, Kathleen F. 2006. “**The embodied experiences of old lesbians**” pp. 247-268 in T. M. Calasanti and K.F. Slevin (eds). *Age matters” Realigning feminist thought*. New York and London: Routledge. Course kit.

5. Twigg, Julia. 2004. “**The body, gender, and age: feminist insights in social gerontology**”, in *Journal of Aging Studies*, Vol.18(1), 59-73. PDF file.

### **Critical Questions:**

1. In Western discourse, aging bodies are seen as sites of loss and decline. Compare and contrast two different discourses on aging bodies and provide contemporary examples.
2. Critique this statement: Bodies are personal billboards that are seen as accurate reflections of self-identities”. Be sure to discuss the beauty myth, body concealment practices and public presentations of self.
3. Body theory provides a framework for analyzing ageism. Define one theoretical approach to studying embodiment. Apply this theoretical framework to an understanding of ageism. Use specific examples.

## WEEK 7

Monday, October 25, 2010

### AGING AND CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS

Using material read to date, students will analyze the images and approaches to aging represented in the film *Being Schmidt*.

#### *Required Readings:*

1. Woodward, Kathleen. 2006. “**Performing age, performing gender**”, *National Women’s Studies Association Journal*, 18(1), 163-189. PDF file.
2. Lee, Monica, Carpenter, Brian and Meyers, Lawrence. 2007. “**Representations of older adults in television advertisements**”, *Journal of Aging Studies*, 21, 23-30. PDF file.

See: *About Schmidt*

#### **Critical Questions:**

1. Television shows and advertising are constructed on ageist images of men and women. Choose an example from popular culture to illustrate this assertion. Be explicit in your critique.

## WEEK 8

Monday, November 1, 2010

### AGING FAMILIES AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

A key concept developed in the Mandell, Wilson and Duffy text is the concept of structured ambivalence. How are intimate relationships shaped by ambivalence? What distinguishes aging families from ‘younger’ families? What are the key issues facing older relationships?

#### *Required Readings:*

1. Mandell, N., Wilson, S. and Duffy, A. 2008. **Chapter 4 “Families and intimate connections”**, pp. 66-86 in N. Mandell, W. Wilson and A. Duffy. *Connection, compromise and control: Canadian women at midlife*, Toronto: Oxford. Buy book.
2. Connidis, Ingrid. 2006. “**Intimate relationships: learning from later life experience**”, pp. 123-153 in T.M. Calasanti & K. F. Slevin (Eds). *Age matters: Realigning feminist thinking*, New York and London: Routledge. Course kit.
3. Allen, and Walker, 2006. “**Aging and gender in families: a very grand opening**”, pp. 155-174 in T.M. Calasanti and K. F. Slevin (eds) *Age matters: realigning feminist thought*, New York and London: Routledge. Course kit.

#### **Critical Questions:**

1. Does the ideology of romantic love direct women’s intimate attachments? Is so, how?
2. In what ways do family ties both empower and restrain aging women?
3. How do community ties help aging women negotiate the demands of family?
4. Define the norm for intimacy for younger people and then discuss how intimate relationships alter in old age.

\*\*\* *Second Paper Due (based on Weeks 4, 6 and 7)*\*\*\*

## WEEK 9

Monday, November 8, 2010

### AGING AND CARE WORK

A central feature of women's lives is their commitment to and involvement in care work. How does a lifelong engagement in care work shape women's aging? What sorts of care work do aging women take up?

#### *Required Readings:*

1. Mandell, N., Wilson, S. and Duffy, A. 2008. **Chapter 5 “Caregiving: The lifelong compromise”**, pp. 87-109 in N. Mandell, W. Wilson and A. Duffy. *Connection, compromise and control: Canadian women at midlife*, Toronto: Oxford. Buy book.
2. Mandell, Nancy, Wilson, Susannah and Duffy, Ann. 2009. **“Intergenerational care work: mothering, grandmothering and eldercare”**, forthcoming. Course kit.
3. Fine, M. and Glendinning, C. 2005. “Dependence, independence, or interdependence? Revisiting the concepts of ‘care’ and “dependency,”” *Ageing and Society* 25(4), 601-21. PDF file.

#### **Critical Questions:**

1. What is care work? How is it gendered? How is it distributed differently over the life course?
2. Outline the critical issues to discuss concerning aging and care work. Provide examples of each issue. What is the role of the state in this issue?
3. Describe the ways in which the 1950s model of women's role in the family continues to resonate in the lives of contemporary midlife and older women. What strategies do women use to resolve the conflict created by the ‘grip of the past’?
4. Visit the ROM special exhibition “House Calls with my Camera”. Define and evaluate according to the care literature you have read. On until October 11, 2010.  
<http://www.rom.on.ca/exhibitions/special/housecalls.php>

## WEEK 10

Monday, November 15, 2010

### ELDER ABUSE

Violence against women does not end in old age but merely changes shape. In this section, we define elder abuse, discuss its origins and think about how social policy can be enacted to confront this growing problem.

#### *Required Readings:*

1. Dauvergne, Mia. 2003. **“Family violence against seniors”**, *Canadian Social Trends*, Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Catalogue No. 11-008. PDF file.
2. Fisher, Bonnie S. and Regan, Sandra L. 2006. **“The extent and frequency of abuse in the lives of older women and their relationship with health outcomes”**, *The Gerontologist*, 46(2), 200- 209. Course Kit.
3. McGeachie. 2007. **Chapter 3 “Family violence against elders”**, pp. 32-36 in Lucie Ogrodnik (ed), *Family violence in Canada: a statistical profile*, Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Justice Studies, Statistics Canada, Catalogue no 85-224-XIE. Course kit.

4. National Council on Aging. 2005. “**Seniors from ethnocultural minorities**”, pp.1-24 in *Seniors on the margins*, Ottawa: The National Advisory Council on Aging. Course kit.

**Critical Questions:**

1. Describe elder abuse, its definition, theoretical explanation and resolution.
2. Imagine you are providing a workshop to a community group on elder abuse. What information would you provide in the workshop? How would you engage your audience?
3. What strategies should community activists use in order to eradicate elder abuse?

**WEEK 11**

**Monday, November 22, 2010**

**THE ECONOMICS OF AGING**

How does women’s participation in the labour force shape how they experience aging? What sorts of constraints does labour force participation place on aging women and what does it facilitate or make possible? Do older women have pensions?

**Required Readings:**

1. Mandell, N., Wilson, S. and Duffy, A. 2008. **Chapter 6 “Women, work and economic security”**, pp. 110-142 in N. Mandell, W. Wilson and A. Duffy. *Connection, compromise and control: Canadian women at midlife*, Toronto: Oxford. Buy book.
2. McDonald, Lynn. 2006. “**Gendered retirement: the welfare of women and the ‘new’ retirement**”, pp. 137-164 in Leroy Stone (ed). *New frontiers of research on retirement*, Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Catalogue No. 75-511XIE. PDF file.

**Critical Questions:**

1. How does women’s participation in the labour force affect their experiences of aging? Provide specific examples in terms of pensions, economic security and occupational segregation.
2. How might the work lives of immigrant, women of colour and lesbians differ from those of midlife women who have followed a more traditional life course?
3. How do midlife women view education and its role in altering their lives? How do these views fit into discourses of ‘drifting’ and ‘luck’?

**\*\*\*Third Paper Due (based on Weeks 8, 9 and 10)\*\*\***

**WEEK 12**

**Monday, November 29, 2010**

**AGING, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

Health issues are a central concern for aging women. What does well-being mean to older women? How do they look after themselves?

**Required Readings:**

1. Mandell, N., Wilson, S. and Duffy, A. 2008. **Chapter 7 “Health and well-being”**, pp. 143-169 in N. Mandell, W. Wilson and A. Duffy. *Connection, compromise and control: Canadian women at midlife*, Toronto: Oxford. Buy book.
2. World Health Organization. 2007. “**Women, ageing and health: a framework for action**” Geneva, Switzerland: *World Health Organization*. .Course kit.



**Critical Questions:**

1. Both young and middle aged women report chronic stress and fatigue as a frequent or daily experience. Provide examples and explain how stress and fatigue alter over the life course.
2. Discuss the relationship between spirituality and aging. Use examples from *Two Old Women* and the other readings.
3. Read a series of articles on healthy aging and discuss the particular social-emotional issues affecting seniors. Refer to the following web site for examples: <http://www.healthzone.ca>

**WEEK 13**

**Monday December 6, 2010**

**Last Class**

**CONCLUSION**

***Required Readings:***

1. Mandell, N., Wilson, S. and Duffy, A. 2008. **Chapter 8 “Ambivalence and an ambiguous future”**, pp. 170-182 in N. Mandell, W. Wilson and A. Duffy. *Connection, compromise and control: Canadian women at midlife*, Toronto: Oxford. Buy book.

**Critical Questions:**

1. Women live their lives along a continuum from traditional to innovative to iconoclastic. Where do you fit along this continuum? How do your choices affect how you will experience aging?
2. What have you learned about women and aging that you did not know before you entered this class? Provide three examples from course material and discuss each example.

**WEEK 14**

**Monday December 13, 2010**

**NO CLASS**

**HAND IN FINAL PAPERS TO RITA KANAREK IN 2060 VARI HALL BY 4PM.**

***\*\*\*Fourth Paper Due (based on Weeks 11, 12 and 13) \*\*\****