Interactive workshop (45 minutes)

Title: Metaphors, health and the gendered landscape: Implications and opportunities.

Facilitators:
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Introduction:

The landscape of health and illness, for men and women it is suggested is experienced differently (Carpenter, M. in Annadale and Hunt, 2000), and is pervaded by metaphor. Metaphor both expresses and shapes the way we think about and take action in our lives including matters related to health. In their seminal work on metaphor and it’s role in our lives, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) state that:

“...In all aspects of life...we define our reality in terms of metaphors and then proceed to act on the basis of metaphors. We draw inferences, set goals, make commitments, and execute plans, all on the basis of how we in part structure our experience, consciously and unconsciously, by means of metaphor.”

In line with the rise of the biomedical model of health it can be argued that a mechanistic and adversarial view of the body and the biological nature of our existence has become a dominant paradigm, which is reflected in the metaphors we use in relation to health. We often talk in terms of the body as a machine and health as dependent on the proper functioning of the machine. The mind and body are perceived as separate and we are inhabitants of our own bodies – ‘ghosts in the machine’ (Hutchinson, 2004). In line with mechanistic metaphors we ‘do’ body maintenance and we use professionals with expert knowledge of the machine to do machine maintenance checks and repairs. Health services can be likened to garages where we go to be repaired and get our faulty human bodies back on the road again (Hutchinson, 2004). We also use military metaphors that make health and disease as originating from outside ourselves, and outside our control. It is suggested that we fight wars on cancer and we battle against disease (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

The metaphors we use can be argued to be gendered and both a framework and a cage in relation to thinking and action. In this workshop we invite participants to explore their own metaphors of health, based on gender, (Watson, 2000) and the significance of metaphor in relation to models of health. The social construction of gender (An Ghaill, 2000) will also be considered, and how this may affect the metaphors used by us. Appropriate ‘signposts’ for potential health education, and the promotion of health, within a gendered framework (Holroyd, 2002) will also be explored, in relation to emergent themes.
Understanding Masculinities
Open University Press
Buckingham

Reinforcing the pillars: Rethinking gender, social divisions and health
Gender Inequalities in Health
Open University Press
Buckingham

Silent cries. Reflection on men’s health promotion
Jones, L. et al The challenge of promoting health: Exploration and action
Macmillan
Basingstoke

Health, health education and physiotherapy practice,

Metaphors we live by.
The University of Chicago Press,
Chicago.

Male bodies: health, culture and identity
Open University Press
Buckingham