

## Politics of Health

Sociology 422:04  
MW 2:15-3:35pm  
118 Hickman

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Health is one of our most basic desires and one of our most commodified goods. We race for cures, rally for affordable and accessible healthcare, debate the ethics of various treatments, and pass laws meant to keep our publics healthy. Health is both widely sought after and wildly controversial. It's not even clear what we mean when we talk about "health" or what constitutes a "disease." This course takes up several of these controversies, including: whose interests the health care system serves and who they *should* serve; whether we can share the benefits of good health more equitably across social class, race and gender; the politics of defining what is and what isn't a disease; reproductive and sexual politics; and conflicts surrounding group versus individual rights in public health initiatives. Along the way, we will cover topics like "Obamacare," health inequalities, vaccination programs, obesity, health social movements, and medicalization.

### EXPECTATIONS & REQUIREMENTS

This is a seminar course. The quality of our discussions depends on your full participation in class. All reading must be completed before the class for which it is assigned.

The workload for this class is not light. But students who productively participate, come to all class meetings, critically engage with the material, and thoroughly complete all assignments can expect to do well. The materials for this course and class discussions may raise as many questions as they answer, and my emphasis is as much on thoughtful engagement with course material as on complete mastery. Some of the readings are technically challenging, some may be upsetting, and all are presented with the goal of helping us critically address taken-for-granted ideas about health. A diversity of perspectives and opinions is welcome and encouraged. At the same time, it is essential that you read carefully and critically, ask good questions in class and in written assignments, participate productively in discussion, and generally contribute to a thoughtful, inquiring, and respectful atmosphere. You should feel free to approach me for assistance or to voice concerns.

I will keep the class updated on any course schedule changes, but if you are absent, contact fellow students or see me during office hours. I will do my best to respond promptly to questions via email, but I strongly urge you to refer to class emails, materials on sakai, and above all the online version of this syllabus for information about assignments and requirements. You are responsible for keeping up with class requirements, including the completion of all readings and assignments by their due date.

## REQUIRED READINGS

The syllabus mostly consists of articles that are available on the course website (sakai).

The following books are also required. They are available from the Rutgers Book Store, but you are free to purchase it elsewhere. It is also on reserve in the Douglass Campus library:

Alice Dreger. 2005. *One of Us: Conjoined Twins and the Future of Normal*. Harvard University Press.

Randy Shilts. 2007. *And The Band Played On*. St Martin's Griffin

## ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

Students must fulfill the following requirements:

- 1) Attendance – 10% of grade  
The quality of this class depends on your full participation. You may miss up to three classes for any reason. Additional absences will affect your grade.
- 2) Participation – 15% of grade  
Participation requires more than just your physical presence. I expect you to *engage* in class discussions. What does it mean to engage? In addition to raising your hand and contributing to discussions, you should listen actively. Cell phones, laptops, and other devices distract both you and your classmates.
- 3) Response Memos - 25% of grade  
Each student is responsible for submitting ten response “memos” over the course of the semester. In the interest of keeping these short and sweet, I have instituted a “three-two-one” format. Each memo should list three things that you learned in the reading; two things that either surprised you or that you disagreed with and a short explanation of why; and one well-crafted question that you would like the class to consider as a group. Each memo will be given a grade from 1-10. Remember, these memos constitute a significant portion of your grade.

You may choose to respond to whichever ten readings you please, but 6 memos must be completed by spring break.

**Please upload these responses in the “assignment” section of sakai by 9am on the day that the reading is due. Late memos will not be accepted.**

- 4) Research papers – 50% of grade  
A central theme woven throughout this class is that diseases are not just biological; they are also cultural entities that are often politically contested. Over the course of the semester you will write a series of short (2-3 double-spaced pp)

research papers that will use a disease of your choice to explore this idea. You can choose just about any disease. Here are some good examples: Type 2 diabetes; fibromyalgia; heart disease; anorexia; depression; attention deficit disorder; epilepsy; Alzheimer’s Disease; multiple sclerosis; etc etc. Whatever you choose, please clear your topic with me via email by February 2nd.

These are *research* papers and will require that you read and write about academic work on your topic. I have organized a visit with the sociology librarian on Feb 2<sup>nd</sup> to introduce you to relevant databases. You will be required to adequately reference your papers (we will go over how to do this in class). These are also formal papers and I expect them to be written well and copy-edited.

I will provide more details about each of these papers as the time comes, but here are the deadlines and a summary of what each paper will entail:

#	DUE DATE	TITLE	DESCRIPTION
1	2/2	Topic	Choose a diagnosis. Email me for approval. No grade will be given for this assignment, but it is necessary to get my approval before moving forward.
2	2/11	Diagnosis	Describe your chosen disease in medical terms. What are its symptoms? How is it diagnosed? What, in very basic terms, are the available treatments? 10% of grade.
3	3/6	History	When and how did medical doctors begin writing about this disease? Do medical doctors agree that this disease is, actually, a disease? When did they agree? What did doctors used to call this disease? Did they used to think that this disease was something a bit different? You might look for hints by looking up the name of the disease in the Oxford English Dictionary, which provides the etymology of diagnoses. If you’re studying an infectious disease or a non-Western disease, when did this disease come to the attention of the West? If these questions don’t seem to “fit” your diagnosis, come and see me. 10% of grade.
4	3/30	Epidemiology	Who gets the disease? (Race, Gender, SES?) What are the risk factors? Are there geographic/cross cultural differences? What might these epidemiological factors tell us about the disease? 10% of grade.
5	4/20	Disease Politics	Identify three major stakeholders involved in the politics of this disease and describe the kinds of work that they do. 10% of grade.
6	5/8	Public Policies	Identify a public policy that could significantly help people who have this disease. What does this policies aim to do? What would this policy “cost”? Who is advocating for this policy? Who might oppose this

			policy? 10% of grade.
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## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I follow the Rutgers University's policy on academic integrity. You can familiarize yourself with this policy at this website: <http://teachx.rutgers.edu/integrity/policy.html>. Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated and I am obligated to report such conduct and violations of this policy to the Undergraduate Director of the Sociology Department and the Dean of your colleague.

## CLASS CONDUCT AND GROUND RULES

The Department of Sociology encourages the free exchange of ideas in a safe, supportive, and productive classroom environment. To facilitate such an environment, students and faculty must act with mutual respect and common courtesy. Thus, behavior that distracts students and faculty is not acceptable. Such behavior includes cell phone use, surfing the internet, checking email, text messaging, listening to music, reading newspapers, leaving and returning, leaving early without permission, discourteous remarks, and other behaviors specified by individual instructors. Courteous expression of disagreement with the ideas of the instructor or fellow students is, of course, permitted and strongly encouraged.

## DIVERSITY STATEMENT

The Rutgers Sociology Department strives to create an environment that supports and affirms diversity in all manifestations, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, social class, disability status, region/country of origin, and political orientation. We also celebrate diversity of theoretical and methodological perspectives among our faculty and students and seek to create an atmosphere of respect and mutual dialogue. We have zero tolerance for violations of these principles and have instituted clear and respectful procedures for responding to such grievances.

## COURSE ORGANIZATION

Jan 21: Introduction to the course

### PART I: WHAT IS HEALTH?

Jan 26: What is Health?

Jonathan Metzl, 2010. Introduction: Why "Against Health"? In *Against Health: How Health Became the New Morality*, 15–25. New York: New York University Press.

Richard Klein, 2010. "What Is Health and How Do You Get It?" In *Against Health: How Health Became the New Morality*, 15–25. New York: New York University Press.

Jan 28: What is a disease?

Peter Conrad and Miranda Waggoner. "Medicalization." In *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Health, Illness, Behavior, and Society*. Ed. William C. Cockerham, Robert Dingwall, and Stella R. Quah. 2011.

Robert Aronowitz, 2001, "When Do Symptoms Become a Disease?" *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

**Email me your topic for approval!**

Feb 2: Library Session with Triveni Kuchi in the Douglass Library

Feb 4: Is fatness a disease?

Andrew Pollack, "A.M.A. Recognizes Obesity as a Disease." In *The New York Times*. 18 June 2013. Web. 06 Aug. 2014.

Abigail Saguy, "Chapter 1 Introduction." In *What's Wrong with Fat? The War on Obesity and Its Collateral Damage*. New York: Oxford UP, 2013.

Feb 9: Fat rights movement

Le'a Kent, *Fighting Abjection: Representing Fat Women*.

Paul Campos, *Our Imaginary Weight Problem*, *New York Times*

Hall, Carolyn. 2014. "6 Things I Don't Understand About The Fat Acceptance Movement." *Thought Catalog*. Accessed August 13.

<http://thoughtcatalog.com/carolyn-hall/2014/04/6-things-i-dont-understand-about-the-fat-acceptance-movement/>

Chastain, Ragen. 2014. "6 Answers To Your Questions About The Fat Acceptance Movement." *Thought Catalog*. Accessed August 13.

<http://thoughtcatalog.com/ragen-chastain/2014/04/6-answers-to-your-questions-about-the-fat-acceptance-movement/>

Feb 11: Pathologizing sexuality

Liahna Gordan, *Wankers, Inverts, and Addicts: The Scientific Construction of Sexuality as a Social Problem*.

Tiefer L (2006) Female Sexual Dysfunction: A Case Study of Disease Mongering and Activist Resistance. *PLoS Medicine* 3(4): e178.

doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0030178

Feb 16: Disability Rights and the Definition of Normal  
Alice Dreger, *One of Us*, Chapters 1&2

Feb 18: Disability Rights and the Definition of Normal  
Alice Dreger, *One of Us*, Chapters 3&5

Feb 23: Lives Worth Living  
Andrew Solomon, "Down Syndrome," in *Far from the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity*.

Dorothy Roberts, "The Social Immorality of Health in the Gene Age: Race, Disability and Inequality."

Feb 25: Writing workshop  
Reading to be announced  
-Writing a strong thesis statement  
-Referencing properly

## PART II: WHO GETS SICK AND THE POLITICS OF INEQUALITY

Mar 2: Inequality -- SES  
Phelan, Link, and Tehranifar, 2010, "Social Conditions and Fundamental Causes of Health Inequalities: Theory, Evidence, and Policy Implications."

House, "Understanding Social Factors and Inequalities in Health: 20th Century Progress and 21st Century Prospects."

"Poverty as a Childhood Disease," in the *New York Times*, 2013

" ," in the *New York Times*, 2005

Mar 4: Medicalizing Domestic Violence  
Guest lecturer, Lisa Smith, Coordinator for Domestic Violence Services  
Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance

Mar 9: Inequality – Gender  
Jen'nan Ghazal Read & Bridget Gorman, 2010, "Gender and Health Inequality."  
(skim)

Kristen Springer, Stellman, and Rebecca Jordan-Young, 2012. "Beyond a Catalogue of Differences: A Theoretical Frame and Good Practice Guidelines for Researching Sex/Gender in Human Health."

"Why Do Women Live Longer Than Men?" in *Time Magazine*

Mar 11: Inequality – Race

David Williams & Michelle Sternthal, 2010, “Understanding Racial-ethnic Disparities in Health: Sociological Contributions.”

“Tackling a Racial Gap in Breast Cancer Survival” in the *New York Times*, 2013

SPRING BREAK! SIX RESPONSE PAPERS MUST BE SUBMITTED BY NOW

Mar 23: Class cancelled

PART III: HOW DOES WHO GETS SICK MATTER?

Mar 25: Politics of AIDS

Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On*, selections

Mar 30: Politics of AIDS

Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On*, selections

Part IV: MEDICAL DISENFRANCHISEMENT

Apr 1: The Social Construction of Race

Movie: *Race: The Power of an Illusion*

Apr 6: Reproduction and medical disenfranchisement

Roberts, Dorothy. 1997. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty*. New York: Pantheon. Pages 56-103.

ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

Apr 8: Health Social Movements

Maren Klawiter, “Racing for the Cure, Walking Women, and Toxic Touring”

Apr 13: Developing Lay Expertise

Steven Epstein, “The Construction of Lay Expertise: AIDS, Activism, and the Forging of Credibility in the Reform of Clinical Trials”

Apr 15: Embodied Health Movements

Kristin Barker, “Electronic Support Groups, Patient-Consumers, and Medicalization: The Case of Contested Illness”

Part IV: WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT IT?

Apr 20: Affordable Health Care

David Mechanic, “Setting Fair Limits,” *The Truth About Healthcare*

Kaiser Family Foundation, *The Uninsured: A Primer*

Apr 22: Improving Population Health  
Movie – Unnatural Causes

Apr 27: Improving Population Health  
David Mechanic, “Treating Individuals or Populations,” *The Truth About Healthcare*

Apr 29: Resisting Vaccines  
Jennifer Reich, Neoliberal Mothering and Vaccine Refusal Imagined Gated Communities and the Privilege of Choice

May 4: Discussing Diagnoses  
A roundtable discussion of our ongoing assignments

**Final paper due May 8th**