

SOC 218a: INEQUALITY AND HEALTH

Fall 2014
Tuesdays, 2-5pm
Pearlman 203

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Introduction

More than 150 years ago, Rudolf Virchow founded the journal *Medical Reform* in Germany and proclaimed that preserving health and preventing disease required “full and unlimited democracy” rather than “mere palliatives.” Echoing this sentiment, physician and demographic historian Thomas McKeown proposed that pronounced mortality declines observed since the 18th century were largely the result of broad economic and social changes, rather than targeted public health or medical interventions. While portions of the McKeown thesis remain contested, contemporary researchers maintain that *social conditions are fundamental causes of disease*. Underlying this claim are the observations that social conditions are related to health, independent of both the actual health outcomes under examination and the mechanisms through which social conditions are related to health. That is, even as epidemiological profiles of the leading causes of death and the intermediary processes related to death and disease change across time and across populations, the larger *social causes of health disparities* remain virtually unchanged. Social conditions such as poverty, social isolation, and segregation as well as ascribed characteristics of gender and race are predictive of a battery of contemporary chronic diseases and causes of premature death.

This course will analyze studies of health outcomes, the social conditions that are related to the health of populations, and some of the mechanisms through which these patterns are produced. These research topics are not constrained to a single discipline but represent a confluence of interdisciplinary research streams covering the diverse fields of public health, social demography, medical sociology, public policy, health economics, and anthropology. For each topic, we will read both qualitative and quantitative research, with the goals both of understanding key findings and considering the strengths and weaknesses of these different ways of studying inequality and health.

Learning Goals

Students in this course will

1. Develop understanding of key theories, debates, and knowledge gaps regarding social determinants of health and the production (and maintenance) of health inequalities in the U.S.;
2. Critically reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative approaches for theorizing, measuring, and crafting policy to address inequality and health;
3. Develop their own research agenda on the social causes of inequalities in health and illness.

Course Requirements

Your course grade will be based on four requirements:

1. Summaries of assigned readings
2. Leadership of class discussion
3. Attendance and class participation
4. Completion of a research paper or grant proposal on inequality and health

Weekly readings and Response Papers: Required readings for each week are listed in the course outline below. You are expected to complete the required readings and be prepared to discuss them before the class. It may help guide your reading to consider the following questions:

- What are the main questions the author(s) is posing?
- What is the methodology? (data source, analytic approach)
- What are their underlying assumptions?
- What are the main conclusions?
- What are the major contributions of this work to the literature?
- In what ways is this work unsatisfying, inconsistent, incomplete?
- What additional questions does this work raise?

Every other week, one half of the class will write response papers on the week's readings. We will divide responsibilities for response papers on the first day of class, being sure that students have the opportunity to write responses to both quantitative and qualitative readings. **Response papers should be posted to LATTE at least 24 hours prior to our class meeting**, as they will become the basis for our class discussion.

Your response paper should synthesize and critically evaluate key theoretical, methodological and/or substantive contributions of the readings. This may consist of identifying questions that the readings provoke; critiquing problematic assumptions, logic, and measurement; discussing theoretical and empirical advances; and considering ideas for future directions (see suggested foci above). Response papers should generally be no longer than one single spaced typed page. To facilitate class discussion, prior to the beginning of class, all students should review the response papers submitted by other seminar participants, which will be available in a designated "forum" on LATTE.

Attendance and class participation. Students are expected to attend class and to have completed the reading before the course begins so that we can engage in an intellectual discussion about the current topic area. Although some students will be assigned to lead the discussion each week, all students are expected to carefully read and evaluate all required books and articles. The success of the course in providing stimulating ideas and advances for your graduate work, and for the class as a whole, depends on your careful reading of materials and thoughtful contributions to discussion each week.

Leading Discussion. Each student is expected to lead the discussion once during the semester. This involves preparing an overview of the topic, drawing on required readings, supplemental materials & classmates' response papers. You will create a list of at least five discussion questions for the group based in this information. Successful formats in the past have included a 20-30 minute presentation/overview of the suggested supplemental readings and their relevance to the topic and/or a short video (not more than 15 minutes), followed by leading the rest of the class discussion based on both the required readings and the issues introduced by the suggested readings. Dates/topics will be assigned after receiving preferences during the first class meeting.

Research proposal or paper. Each student must complete a research proposal or empirical research paper related to the topic of inequality and health. Research proposals should be no longer than 15 pages; papers should be no longer than 20 pages (double spaced, references excluded).

Research proposals should consist of a statement of the research question and rationale for posing the question, a description of the guiding theoretical or conceptual framework, a review of the relevant literature, and a description of the data and methods that you propose to use to study the question posed. I am happy to talk with you about which NIH or NSF requests for proposals might be best suited to your research interests, so that you can use this assignment to draft a proposal that you could turn in to a funding agency.

Empirical research papers should be written as you would write a journal article. Each paper should include the following sections: introduction, literature review/background, methods, results, discussion/conclusion. You can choose either to 1) work toward a paper that you could submit for presentation at a professional association meeting (ASA, ESS, or another meeting) and eventually for publication, or; 2) develop a thesis or dissertation proposal.

Note: If you are currently working with a local community based organization, you may use this assignment to develop a research or policy proposal that addresses a social determinant of health that has been identified as important by the community partner. Please talk with me within the first month of class (i.e., in advance of the October 10 paper assignment), should you wish to pursue this option.

Below are deadlines for the intermediate and final products required for the research proposal/paper.

- a. One page project description that describes your research question and its significance.
Due October 7, in class

- a. Final research proposal/paper.
Due by 2pm on December 9
*** please turn your paper in to my office (not my faculty mailbox)

I encourage you to meet with me individually to discuss your research proposal/paper topic.

Course Policies

Policies for Written Work

All written papers are to be typed using a 11-12-pt. Times New Roman font, 1 inch margins, and must include page numbers, proper use of citations, and bibliographies. I place a high premium on careful research and clear organization and writing.

Written assignments are due at the beginning of class. **With the exception of the Response Papers that are due on LATTE 24 hours before each class meeting, all papers must be turned in as hard copies.** If you have an emergency and are unable to complete an assignment, you must speak with me as soon as possible, so we can discuss how you will complete the assignment. Do not assume that you may hand in all of your assignments at the end of the course, or that you will be granted an extension.

****All written work must be completed to receive a passing grade in this class****

Academic Integrity

You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University's policies on academic integrity (see <http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdje/ai/>). I will refer any suspected instances of alleged dishonesty to the Office of Student Development and Conduct. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in sanctions including but not limited to failure in the course, failure on the assignment in question, suspension from the University and/or educational programs.

Reasonable Accommodations

If you are a student who has academic accommodations because of a documented disability, please contact me and give me a copy of your letter of accommodation in the first two weeks of the semester. If you have questions about documenting a disability, please contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in the Academic Affairs Office (x63470, brodgers@brandeis.edu).

The following books are available in the bookstore and on reserve in the library:

Connell, Catherine. 2014. *School's Out: Gay and Lesbian Teachers in the Classroom*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

[note: the publication date for *School's Out* is November 14, 2014. We'll read it "hot off the press," which means not being able to order it just yet!]

Goffman, Alice. 2014. *On the Run: Fugitive Life in An American City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Harding, David. 2010. *Living the Drama: Community, Conflict, and Culture Among Inner City Boys*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Holmes, Seth. 2013. *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Newman, Katherine. 2000. *No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City*. New York City: First Vintage Books/Russell Sage Foundation Edition.

Shim, Janet. 2014. *Heart-Sick: The Politics of Risk, Inequality, and Heart Disease*. New York City: NYU Press.

All other readings will be posted on LATTE.

Schedule of Sessions and Assigned Readings

September 2 Course Introduction and Overview

- Carter-Pokras, Olivia, and Claudia Baquet. 2002. "What is a 'Health Disparity'?" *Public Health Reports* 117(5): 426-34.
- Williams, David R., Mohammed, Selina A., Leavell, Jacinta, and Chiquita Collins. 2010. "Race, Socioeconomic Status, and Health: Complexities, Ongoing Challenges, and Research Opportunities." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1186: 69-101.
- Braveman, P. A., Kumanyika, S., Fielding, J., Laveist, T., Borrell, L. N., Manderscheid, R., & A. Troutman. 2011. "Health Disparities and Health Equity: The Issue is Justice." *American Journal of Public Health* 101 (S1): S149-155.

TOPIC 1 THEORIZING INEQUALITY AND HEALTH DISPARITIES

September 9

- Williams, David R. and Michelle Sternthal. 2010. "Understanding Racial-Ethnic Disparities in Health: Sociological Contributions." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 51: S15-27.
- Neckerman, Kathryn, and Florencia Torche. 2007. "Inequality: Causes and Consequences." *Annual Review of Sociology* 33:335-57.
- Schnittker, Jason and Jane D. McLeod. 2005. "The Social Psychology of Health Disparities." *Annual Review of Sociology* 31:75-103.
- Small, Mario Luis, Harding, David J., and Michele Lamont. 2010. "Reconsidering Culture and Poverty." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 629: 6-27.
- Bowleg, L. 2012. "The Problem with the Phrase 'Women and Minorities': Intersectionality - An Important Theoretical Framework for Public Health." *American Journal of Public Health* 102(7), 1267-1273.
- Krieger, Nancy. 2005. "Embodiment: A Conceptual Glossary for Epidemiology." *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 59(5): 350-55.

September 16

- Shim, Janet. 2014. *Heart-Sick: The Politics of Risk, Inequality, and Heart Disease*. New York: NYU Press.

September 23 No Class (Brandeis Thursday)

TOPIC 2 SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

September 30

- Subramanian S.V. and Ichiro Kawachi. 2004. "Income Inequality and Health: What Have We Learned So Far?" *Epidemiologic Reviews* 26:78-91.
- Pampel, Fred C., Krueger, Patrick M., and Justin T. Denney. 2010. "Socioeconomic Disparities in Health Behaviors." *Annual Review of Sociology* 36:349-70.
- Link, Bruce G., Phelan, Jo C. and Parisa Tehranifar. 2010. "Social Conditions as Fundamental Causes of Health Inequalities: Theory, Evidence, and Policy Implications." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 51(S1): S28-40.
- Lutfe, Karen and Jeremy Freese. 2005. "Toward Some Fundamentals of Fundamental Causality: Socioeconomic Status and Health in Treatment Design for Diabetes." *American Journal of Sociology* 110: 1326-1372.

October 7

- Newman, Katherine S. 1999. *No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation/Vintage Books.

TOPIC 3 RACE, ETHNICITY, AND DISCRIMINATION

October 14

- Williams, David R. 2012. "Miles to Go Before We Sleep: Racial Inequalities in Health." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 53(3): 279-295.
- LaVeist, Thomas. 2005. "Theories of Racial/Ethnic Differences in Health." Pp. 133-156 in *Minority Populations and Health: An Introduction to Health Disparities in the U.S.* San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Schulman KA, et al. 2002. "The Effect of Race and Sex on Physicians' Recommendations for Cardiac Catheterization." pp. 516-530. In *Race, Ethnicity and Health: A Public Health Reader*. Edited by Thomas A. La Viest.. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Williams, David R. and Selina A. Mohammed. 2009. "Discrimination and Racial Disparities in Health: Evidence and Needed Research." *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 32: 20-47.

October 21

- Holmes, Seth. 2013. *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

TOPIC 4 NEIGHBORHOODS AND ENVIRONMENTAL INEQUALITIES

October 28

Williams, David R. and Chiquita Collins. 2001. "Racial Residential Segregation: A Fundamental Cause of Racial Disparities in Health." *Public Health Reports* 116:404-416.

Sampson Robert J., Morenoff JD, and T. Gannon-Rowley. 2002. "Assessing 'Neighborhood Effects': Social Processes and New Directions in Research." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28:443-78.

Sampson, Robert J. 2013. *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1-3 (pp. 3-70).

Auyero, Javier and Debra Swistun. 2008. "The Social Production of Toxic Uncertainty." *American Sociological Review* 73 (3):357-379.

November 4

Harding, David. 2010. *Living the Drama: Community, Conflict, and Culture Among Inner City Boys*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

TOPIC 5 SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS (AND THEIR DISRUPTION)

November 11

Umberson, Debra, Crosnoe, Robert and Corinne Reczek 2010. "Social Relationships and Health Behavior Across the Life Course." *Annual Review of Sociology* 36:139-57.

Christakis, N.A. and J.H. Fowler. 2007. "The Spread of Obesity in a Large Social Network Over 32 Years." *New England Journal of Medicine* 357: 370-379.

Kawachi, Ichiro, and Lisa F. Berkman. 2000. "Social Cohesion, Social Capital, and Health." Pp. 174-190 in *Social Epidemiology*, Lisa Berkman and Ichiro Kawachi, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schnittker, Jason, et al. 2011. "Incarceration and the Health of the African-American Community." *Du Bois Review* 8(1): 133-141.

November 18

Goffman, Alice. 2014. *On the Run: Fugitive Life in An American City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

There have been many recent reviews of this book. So, rather than have one discussion leader today, we'll each present one reviewer's perspective to the class. Links to reviews are on the LATTE site.

TOPIC 6 GENDER AND SEXUALITY

November 25

Krieger, Nancy. 2003. "Genders, Sexes, and Health: What are the Connections -- and Why Does It Matter?" *International Journal of Epidemiology* 32: 652-657.

Read, Jen'nan Ghazal and Bridget K. Gorman. 2010. "Gender and Health Inequality." *Annual Review of Sociology*. 36:371-86

Welch, Lisa C., Lutfey, Karen E., Gerstenberger, Eric, and Matthew Grace. 2012. "Gendered Uncertainty and Variation in Physicians' Decisions for Coronary Heart Disease: The Double-Edged Sword of 'Atypical Symptoms.'" *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 53(3): 313-328.

Springer, Kristen W. and Dawne M. Mouzon. 2011. "'Macho Men' and Preventive Health Care: Implications for Older Men in Different Social Classes." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 52(2) 212-227.

Mustanski B., Birkett M., Greene G.J., Hatzenbuehler M.L., Newcomb M.E. 2014. "Envisioning an America Without Sexual Orientation Inequities in Adolescent Health." *American Journal of Public Health*. 104(2): 218-25.

Hatzenbuehler M.L., Bellatorre A., Lee Y., Finch B.K., Muennig P., and K. Fiscella. 2014. "Structural Stigma and All-cause mortality in Sexual Minority Populations." *Social Science & Medicine* 103:33-41.

December 2

Connell, Catherine. 2014. *School's Out: Gay and Lesbian Teachers in the Classroom*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

December 9 **Term Papers Due (no class)**