

Sociology 34
Health Disparities

Winter 2022
Dartmouth College
Emily Walton

Hour: 12, MWF 12:50-1:55pm

Location: TBD

Office Hours: Blunt 306B, Tuesdays 12:30-1:30pm and by appointment

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Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place.

-- Susan Sontag

Description of the course

What does it mean to dwell in “the night-side of life”? In this course, we will use our sociological imaginations to examine the role and meaning of health and illness in modern US society. Social, economic, and political forces powerfully influence who gets sick, the types of diseases that affect them, the treatments that are available, and the outcomes of those treatments. We will explore key social determinants of health, including socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, neighborhood environments, social relationships, gender, and healthcare. We will discuss explanations for the relationships between these factors and various health outcomes, as well as related policy ideas. Students will spend a substantial amount of time developing their own specific interests in this field, culminating in a research paper that analyzes the relevant literature and discusses research-based policy solutions to a specific health disparity.

Course objectives

By the end of the course, students can expect to:

- Describe multiple aspects of the social environment that matter for health and identify the ways they contribute to health disparities.
- Critically evaluate evidence for social determinants of health and identify key gaps in knowledge.
- Apply a theoretical framework to understand one social determinant of health through research experience in a specific topic area.

Required reading

All the required readings are posted in electronic format on the course Canvas site. The reading load in this course is high, commensurate with an upper-level course. I expect you to read all course material before class on the day that we are discussing it.

Course requirements

Journal Club (20 pts)

(10 pts for facilitating one discussion and 10 pts for attending and actively participating in all discussions). We will form ten permanent groups of about seven students each. On journal club days, you will meet during the class period for discussions related to articles that apply or extend the week's conceptual topic. Each week, one student will serve as discussion leader. Discussion leaders should reserve a room in the library or provide a zoom link for the meeting. Discussion leaders should come prepared with:

1. Questions that help us come to a common understanding of the readings' main arguments.
2. Outside information related to the topic. This can take the form of recent news articles, websites, examples of organizations that are taking up these issues in the real world, or other related materials that add depth to our understanding of the reading.
3. Questions that reflect on the greater implications of the findings.

The discussion facilitator should post these discussion questions and supplementary materials to your group discussion on Canvas at least an hour before class.

Response Memos (20 pts)

Plan to write four Response Memos on journal club days (5 pts each). There are seven journal club discussions, so you may choose to skip three Response Memos for whichever discussions you want. Each memo should be a one-page, single-spaced, critical, synthetic response to *all the readings* for the day you choose. I suggest that you spend less time summarizing the main arguments, and more time analyzing common threads you discover across readings. Please upload an electronic copy to Canvas *before class* on the day the readings are being discussed.

Behavior Modification (25 pts)

Behavior is an important (proximal) determinant of health. The behaviors you engage in can either be a benefit (e.g., exercise) or detriment (e.g., smoking) to your health. Therefore, behavior modification to reduce unhealthy behaviors or promote healthy ones is a large part of public health discourse.

- Choose one health-related behavior that you would like to modify. The behavior you choose is completely up to you. For at least one week, try to modify your behavior, and keep detailed daily notes on your progress and any challenges you may face. In the end, I want you to reflect on the social and structural factors that may have facilitated or hindered your ability to accomplish your goals.
- You will then write a short paper (3-5 pages) reflecting on your experience. You should first briefly describe the behavior and the effect you expect the modification will have on your health. You should then reflect on the success or failure you had, and what factors and circumstances facilitated or hindered your attempt. Relate your personal experiences with behavior change to the larger social and structural context surrounding your actions. I am looking for insightful, critical reflections on your experience. Your paper should be double-spaced, 12-point font, with standard margins (1 inch on each side).

Health Equity Research Project (35 pts)

Choose a topic that has piqued your interest in this course, something about which you would like to learn more. You should read and critically analyze at least 7 academic, peer-reviewed articles, and create a novel, synthetic argument about your topic. In support of this project, you are responsible for:

- A one-page proposal (5 pts) describing your topic and your research approach.
- An annotated bibliography (10 pts) summarizing the content of the articles you read.

- A 5-minute presentation (20 pts) in which you present your oral argument to your journal club. I expect you to present a coherent and novel argument to your group regarding your take on the findings from your research – without the use of slides or notes. Your presentation should be arranged like a paper, containing an introduction (with your thesis), claims with supporting evidence, and a conclusion (where you may make some policy or future research suggestions). Please record and upload a video of your live presentation to the assignment on Canvas.

Grading

I follow the grading conventions as defined by the Organization, Regulations, and Courses (ORC) at Dartmouth. https://www.dartmouth.edu/reg/transcript/grade_descriptions.html

- A Excellent** mastery of course material (student performance indicates a very high degree of originality, creativity, and excellent performance in analysis, synthesis, critical expression, and independence)
- B Good** mastery of course material (student performance indicates a high degree of originality, creativity, and good performance in analysis, synthesis, critical expression, and independence)
- C Acceptable** mastery of course material (student performance indicates some degree of originality, creativity, and acceptable performance in analysis, synthesis, critical expression, and independence)
- D Deficient** in mastery of course material (student performance indicates some degree of originality, creativity, and deficient performance in analysis, synthesis, critical expression, and independence)
- E Serious deficiency** in mastery of course material (student performance clearly lacking originality, creativity, and seriously deficient performance in analysis, synthesis, critical expression, and independence)

I will determine your final letter grade according to the following percentage breakdown:

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Percent</u>
A	95-100%	C+	77-79.9%
A-	92-94.9%	C	73-76.9%
B+	89-91.9%	C-	70-72.9%
B	83-88.9%	D	60-69.9%
B-	80-82.9%	E	< 60%

Please note the following about grades: 1) I do not round grades; 2) I do not negotiate grades unless an error was made.

Important Notes

Attendance

It is my expectation that you will attend each class meeting—and that you will arrive to each class on time and stay for the duration. I will circulate an attendance sign-in sheet at the beginning of each class

meeting; it is your responsibility to make sure you sign it each day. There are no opportunities to make up missed in-class participation work. If you miss more than three days of class, your course grade will decrease by one whole letter grade (e.g., A to B), and decrease by one step (e.g., B to B-) for each additional absence. In the event that you miss a class for any reason, you are responsible for getting notes from another student. As a general policy, I do not make my notes available. After you review your classmate's notes, I would be happy to meet with you to talk about the material or answer questions about anything that is unclear. If you anticipate missing class meetings because of athletic team participation, religious observances, or some other reason, please arrange a meeting with me at the start of the term and bring documentation of the expected conflicts.

Late work

Unexpected things will come up over the course of the term. To ensure you don't wind up in a difficult position, plan ahead: start your assignments early and finish them in advance of the deadline. Please speak with me at the beginning of the term if you anticipate any circumstances that might affect your ability to get your work in on time. Response Memos are designed to help you prepare for in-class discussion, so we can make the most of our time together; therefore, they will not be accepted late.

For the papers (and all their components), the maximum grade you may earn will be reduced by one letter grade for each day late. In other words, if you turn your assignment in 1-24 hours after the deadline, the maximum grade you can receive is a B; if you turn your assignment in 25-48 hours after the deadline, the maximum grade you can receive is a C; if you turn your assignment in 49-72 hours after the deadline, the maximum grade you can receive is a D. I will not accept your assignment after 72 hours.

Extensions will only be given if a deadline was missed because of extreme circumstances beyond your control. For example: severe illness requiring a doctor's visit or hospitalization, or death in the family. Generally not feeling well, forgetting about the deadline, having computer problems, needing to help your friend or family member with something, scheduling conflicts with interviews, appointments, or exams in other classes, etc. are not considered extreme circumstances. If you believe you are eligible for an extension, it is your responsibility to notify me before missing the deadline and explain in writing why your circumstances warrant an exception.

Accommodations

Students requesting disability-related accommodations and services for this course are encouraged to schedule a phone/Zoom meeting with me as early in the term as possible. This conversation will help to establish what supports are built into my course. In order for accommodations to be authorized, students are required to consult with [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) and to request an accommodation email be sent to me. We will work together with SAS if accommodations need to be modified based on the learning environment. If students have questions about whether they are eligible for accommodations, they should contact the SAS office. All inquiries and discussions will remain confidential. (student.accessibility.services@dartmouth.edu; 603-646-9900)

Wellness

The academic environment at Dartmouth is challenging, our terms are intensive, and classes are not the only demanding part of your life. There are a number of resources available to support your wellness:

- Undergraduate deans (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~upperde/>)

- Counseling Center (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~chd/>)
- Student Wellness Center (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~healthed/>)
- [Dartmouth Mental Health Union](#) and their Peer Support Program in Collis
- Sexual Assault Peer Alliance (SAPAs) <https://students.dartmouth.edu/health-service/counseling/outreach/sexual-assault-peer-alliance-sapas/active-sapas>

Communication

My office hours are for you. You are welcome to come in and talk with me about anything during my posted hours. I am also available by appointment if my office hours do not coincide with your schedule. I regularly check e-mail during the school day (9am-4pm) and will make every effort to reply to messages as soon as possible. I expect students to regularly check their Dartmouth e-mail and Canvas pages for class announcements and updates.

Academic Honor

I assume you will follow intellectual honor and integrity in this class. For more guidance on the Honor Principle, see: <https://student-affairs.dartmouth.edu/policy/academic-honor-principle> Students must do their own work—they will write their own papers and exams, prepare their own presentations, and cite the original sources of any material they draw on for their papers. Any student who submits work which is not his or her own, or commits other acts of academic dishonesty is subject to disciplinary action, up to and including suspension or separation. For a broad overview on the practice of citing sources, see <http://dartmouth.edu/writing-speech/learning/materials/sources-and-citations-dartmouth>.

Classroom Responsibility and Courtesy

All students are expected to have a voice in our class dialogue. Class participation involves thinking carefully, listening, and posing questions to others as much as it is about sharing your ideas. This requires us to be present, set aside distractions, and focus our attention on engaging with one another. Please put your cell phones on vibrate, do not text, and do not use your laptop during seminar discussions.

The tone with which we engage one another is also extremely important, and should come from a place of mutual respect and understanding. You are free to disagree with the views raised in the material or by others in the class, but must do so with a reasoned critique based on a complete consideration of their argument. Your own argument should be supported by sociological evidence rather than personal opinion or anecdotes. Disrespectful behavior such as talking while others are talking, dominating the floor, or engaging in personal attacks will not be tolerated. You are expected to treat one another and me with respect at all times.

Additional Support for Learning

Student Center for Research, Writing, and Information Technology (RWIT): At RWIT, you can meet one-on-one with an undergraduate tutor to discuss a paper, research project, or multimedia assignment. <https://students.dartmouth.edu/rwit/>

Academic Skills Center (ASC): The mission of Dartmouth's Academic Skills Center is to assist students in achieving academic success through a wide variety of services and programs. The Center is available to all students who wish to improve their academic skills and ability to learn, thereby maximizing their academic experience and allowing them to achieve greater academic performance and personal fulfillment. <https://students.dartmouth.edu/academic-skills/>

Course Plan and Readings

Week One (Jan 5-7)

Wednesday Introduction to the course

- Gladwell (2008), *Outliers*

Friday Health, disease, and equity

- Sen (2002), “Why Health Equity?”
- Braveman et al. (2011), “Health Disparities and Health Equity”

Week Two (Jan 10-14)

Monday Socioeconomic gradient in health

- *Unnatural Causes*, Episode 1: “In Sickness and In Wealth” (watch before class)
- Adler and Newman (2002), “Socioeconomic Disparities in Health”
- Leonhardt and Thompson (2020), [“How Working-Class Life Is Killing Americans”](#)

Wednesday Fundamental Cause

- Link and Phelan (1995), “Social Conditions as Fundamental Causes of Disease”

Friday Small group discussion 1: Fundamental cause applied

- Montez, Hayward and Zajacova (2019), “Educational Disparities in Health”
- Lutfey and Freese (2005), “Fundamentals of Fundamental Causality”
- Response Memo 1 opportunity

Week Three (Jan 17-21)

Monday NO CLASS, Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Wednesday Health behaviors

- Pampel, Krueger and Denney (2010), “Socioeconomic Disparities in Health Behaviors”
- Mirowsky and Ross (2015), “Education, Health, and the Default American Lifestyle”
- Creswell and Kaplan (2019), “How Juul Hooked a Generation on Nicotine”

Friday Small group discussion 2: Behavioral interventions

- Verplanken and Wood (2006), “Interventions to Break and Create Habits”
- “Atomic Habits”, (Ten Percent Happier podcast, listen before class)
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/ten-percent-happier-with-dan-harris/id1087147821?i=1000468718795>
- Ehrenreich (2018), “Why are the Poor Blamed and Shamed for their Deaths?”
- Marantz (1990), “Blaming the Victim”
- Carroll (2019), “Health Facts Aren’t Enough”
- Response Memo 2 opportunity
- Begin Behavior Modification

Week Four (Jan 24-28)

Monday The stress process

- McEwen (1998), “Stress, Adaptation, and Disease”
- “What Does Toxic Stress Do to Children?” (Ezra Klein podcast, listen before class)
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/09/opinion/ezra-klein-podcast-nadine-burke-harris.html>

Wednesday Reduce our stress day ☺ No class

Friday Small group discussion 3: Minority stress and status

- Meyer, Schwartz and Frost (2008), “Social Patterning of Stress and Coping”
- Schieman (2019), “Ordinary Lives and Stress”
- Response Memo 3 opportunity
- End behavior modification

Week Five (Jan 31-Feb 4)

Monday Institutional racism

- Jones (2000), “Levels of Racism”
- Massey (2004), “Segregation and Stratification”
- Hammonds and Reverby (2019), “Toward a Historically Informed Analysis”
- Kendi (2020), “Living and Dying in the Slaveholders’ Republic”
- In class: we will watch a segment of *The House We Live In*
- Behavior modification paper due

Wednesday The interpersonal and intrapersonal burden of racism

- Kwate and Meyer (2011), “On Sticks and Stones and Broken Bones”
- Viruell-Fuentes (2011), “It’s a lot of Work”

Friday Small group discussion 4: Racism

- Kendi (2019), “The Greatest White Privilege Is Life Itself”
- Siddiqi et al. (2019), “Growing Sense of Social Status Threat”
- Wezerek (2020), [“Racism’s Hidden Toll”](#)
- Kihlström and Kirby (2021), “We Carry History Within Us”
- Response Memo 4 opportunity

Week Six (Feb 7-11)

Monday Neighborhood context

- Chang (2018), “Living in a Poor Neighborhood Changes Everything”
- Sharkey and Faber (2019), “Where, When, Why, and For Whom?”
- Keene and Padilla (2010), “Race, Class, and the Stigma of Place”

Wednesday Legal violence

- Cervantes and Menjivar (2020), “Legal Violence, Health, and Access to Care”

- Asad and Clair (2018), “Racialized Legal Status”

Friday Small group discussion 5: Macro-Level Inequality

- Seamster and Purifoy (2020), “What is Environmental Racism For?”
- Green (2019), “Flint’s Children Suffer”
- Flowers (2020), “Mold, Possums and Pools of Sewage”
- Response Memo 5 opportunity

Week Seven (Feb 14-18)

Monday Women’s health

- Homan (2019), “Structural Sexism”
- Criado-Perez (2019), “The Deadly Truth about a World Built for Men”
- Health Equity Research Project proposal due

Wednesday Masculinity

- Courtenay (2000), “Constructions of Masculinity”
- Victor (2020), “Coronavirus Safety Runs into Masculinity”
- Ewert (2021), “A Country Boy Can Survive”

Friday Small group discussion 6: Intersectionality

- López and Gadsden (2016), “Health Inequities, Social Determinants, and Intersectionality”
- Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2007), “You Have to Show Strength”
- Villarosa (2018) <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/11/magazine/black-mothers-babies-death-maternal-mortality.html>
- Felner, Dudley and Ramirez-Valles (2018), “Anywhere but Here”
- Response Memo 6 opportunity

Week Eight (Feb 21-25)

Monday The sick role

- Trillin (1981), “Of Dragons and Garden Peas”
- “The Kingdom of the Sick”, (Kate Bowler podcast, listen before class) <https://katebowler.com/podcasts/suleika-jaouad-the-kingdom-of-the-sick/>
- Glenton (2003), “Striving for the Sick Role”
- Health Equity annotated bibliography due

Wednesday Medicalization

- Loe (2008), “The Prescription of a New Generation”
- Schwartz (2016), “Generation Adderall”
- “81 Words”, (This American Life podcast, listen before class) <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/204/81-words>

Friday Small group discussion 7: Physician-Patient Interaction and Social Construction

- Conrad and Barker (2010), “The Social Construction of Illness”
- Timmermans (2020), “The Engaged Patient”

- Manzer and Bell (2021), “We’re Just a Little Biased”
- Response Memo 7 opportunity

Week Nine (Feb 28-Mar 4)

Monday Health care in the U.S.

- Carroll (2017), “The Real Reason the U.S. Has Employer-Sponsored Health Insurance”
- Please watch film before class, “Money Driven Medicine: Inside the Medical-Industrial Complex”

Wednesday Health care reform

- Gawande (2009), “The Cost Conundrum”
- Light and Terrasse (2017), “Immigrant Access in the Affordable Care Act”
- Interlandi (2019), “Why doesn’t the United States have universal health care?”

Friday Research presentations in small groups

Week Ten (Mar 7)

Monday Course wrap-up

- Woolf (2009), “Social Policy as Health Policy”
- Kolata and Tavernise (2019), “It’s Not Just Poor White People”
- Bye, Ghirardelli and Fontes (2016), “How Americans’ Views Differ”

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