

Sociology 418/818
Social Inequalities in Health
Professor Deborah Carr
Spring 2019
Tuesdays 12:30-3:15 p.m., Soc 252

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 10 a.m. – noon, and by appointment

Course Overview: In the United States and worldwide, stark health disparities persist. Race, social class, gender, sexual orientation, age, nativity status, where we live, and a range of other social, economic, psychological, and environmental factors affect how long we live, how we die, the quality of health care we receive, and our access to the goods and services that help us to maintain good health. This course provides an introduction to the study of the social determinants of health and illness. We will explore how health disparities are defined and measured, and examine issues such as how the structure of society affects who gets sick and who gets care when they are sick. Although we will focus primarily on health disparities and related issues in the United States, we will also discuss global health disparities and policy efforts to eliminate such disparities. The course will be a combination of lecture, class discussion, and media use. Students will have opportunities to engage deeply with the course material through response memos, class discussion, and an independent writing project. By the end of the semester, students should be able to: 1) define health disparities and provide specific examples of current health disparities, both within the United States and globally; 2) discuss the mechanisms through which social inequalities affect health status, health behaviors, and both access to and experiences within the health care system; 3) describe methodological issues and debates that arise in the study of health disparities; and 4) thoughtfully discuss and debate the issues of health care access and reform in the rapidly evolving United States context, with a particular focus on under-served populations.

Course Readings:

Berkman, Lisa, Ichiro Kawachi, and M. Maria Glymour. 2014. *Social Epidemiology, 2nd Edition*. NY: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19-939533-0. (Also available online at [BU Libraries](#)).

Carr, Deborah. 2014. *Worried Sick: How Stress Hurts Us and How to Bounce Back*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. ISBN: 978-0813565378. (Also available online at [BU Libraries](#)).

The two required books are available for purchase at Barnes & Noble (660 Beacon Street). Required articles are available online via Blackboard. Occasionally, I will also upload to Blackboard current news articles pertaining to course material, yet these current events readings are supplemental and recommended only. Students are encouraged to share with the class timely articles that are relevant to class content.

Overview of Course Requirements and Grading:

The course is organized as a seminar, and will blend lecture and discussion. During the first half of each class, I will provide a lecture clarifying key concepts and an overview of the week's readings. The remaining time will be dedicated to in-depth discussion of the week's topic. On weeks when a response memo is due, the memo's guiding question will be the starting point for class discussion.

Course grades will be based on: (a) five response memos of 2-3 pages each; (b) mid-term exam; (c) final independent research paper; and (d) class participation.

1. Five response memos (25 percent of grade; 5% each).

Students will write five response memos over the course of the semester. These memos will reflect both one's comprehension of the weekly readings, and one's creativity and thoughtfulness in assessing the causes, consequences, and possible solutions pertaining to health inequalities. The memos will be 2-3 pages each (double-spaced), and should be uploaded to Blackboard 24 hours prior to class on the due date. Memos will be due on: 2/5, 2/26, 3/26, 4/23, 4/30.

2. Midterm exam (25 percent of grade).

An in-class exam will assess students' comprehension of the readings, and ability to integrate and contrast findings and concepts from across the class readings, lectures, discussions and media. The exam will be closed-book and will comprise both definitions/short answers and a longer multi-part essay question. A study guide will be distributed one week prior to the exam. The mid-term will be held on April 9.

3. Participation in class discussion (10 percent of grade).

This grade reflects class attendance and participation in discussion. Students should read carefully so that they come to class with insightful comments and questions. Students who read materials that are not on the syllabus, or who have professional/educational experiences that are germane to the course material should feel free to contribute their expertise to the discussion.

4. Final research paper or proposal (40 percent of class grade).

Each student will write an original research paper or research proposal (15 pages, double spaced). Paper topic and methodology will be chosen in consultation with the instructor. Final class papers are due no later than Wednesday May 8 at noon. I will not accept papers submitted after that deadline.

Students should select the paper format that best meets their own educational and professional goals, although I offer the following broad suggestions:

Undergraduate student papers should identify a research question or puzzle, review relevant prior studies, and draw conclusions about the persuasiveness of the literature – especially when scholars hold two or more competing perspectives on the topic. The paper conclusions should discuss the implications of the research for public policy or health care practice.

Graduate student papers should define a research question, review relevant prior studies, and either: (1) analyze suitable data, and present the findings and their implications (research paper) or (2) propose a detailed strategy and justification for conducting an original research project

(research proposal). Students are encouraged to use this class project to develop a master's thesis, honors project, conference paper, dissertation prospectus, or journal article. For students planning to conduct secondary data analyses, many data sets with rich measures on social factors and health are available through University of Michigan's Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu>). Among these data sets are the Adolescent Health Study (Add-Health), General Social Survey (GSS), Midlife in the United States (MIDUS) and many others. IPUMS Health Surveys is another large depository of health data that is easily accessed and analyzed (<https://ihis.ipums.org/ihis/>). Information on accessing data sets will be made available during the early weeks of the seminar.

Each student will submit to Blackboard a brief (2-3 page) proposal by the start of class on March 5. This brief proposal should describe your research question, the data or method to be used, and the analyses to be undertaken. Please also provide 2-3 references that form the basis of your work. I will provide feedback to help you target relevant readings and refine the scope of your work. You are encouraged to meet with me early in the semester to discuss your research ideas. Extended office hours will be held on February 19, to facilitate one-on-one consultations.

Summary of Grading, Due Dates, and Course Grade Guidelines

Five response papers	Due 2/25, 2/26, 3/26, 4/23, 4/30	25% (5% each)
Mid-term exam	4/9	25%
Research paper or proposal	Proposal due 3/5, paper due 5/8	40%
Class participation		10%

Final Course Grade	Final Average
A	94-100
A-	90-93.99
B+	87-89.99
B	84-86.99
B-	80-83.99
C+	77-79.99
C	74-76.99
C-	70-73.99
D+	67-69.99
D	64-66.99
D-	60-63.99
F	Below 60

UNIVERSITY AND DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES

Academic misconduct: Boston University policies state that academic misconduct may involve: cheating; fabrication; facilitating academic dishonesty; plagiarism; denying others access to information or material. Any instances of academic misconduct will be reported to your dean. Plagiarism is using someone else's words without giving the author proper attribution. Undergraduates taking this course are subject to the BU University Academic Conduct Code (<http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>), while graduate students must abide by the GRS Conduct Code and Academic Discipline Procedures (<http://www.bu.edu/cas/students/graduate/forms-policies-procedures/academicdiscipline-procedures/>).

Class conduct: The BU Sociology Department encourages the free exchange of ideas in a safe and productive classroom environment. Students and faculty must act with mutual respect and courtesy. Behaviors that distract students and faculty are 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 the instructor. Courteous expression of disagreement with the ideas of the instructor or fellow students is, of course, permitted.

Schedule and Disabilities Accommodations:

Students are expected to attend class. Student athletes must provide the professor a game schedule for the semester, signed by the coach, to be eligible for an excused absence. If there is a religious holiday that requires your absence, please notify me within the first two weeks of class so that we can make arrangements for your absence. Unexcused absences are reflected your participation grade. In the event of an absence, please notify me in advance and seek notes from one of your classmates. I will not provide class notes to absent students.

Students with temporary or permanent disabilities seeking accommodation should contact BU's Disability Services office at 19 Deerfield Street, Boston, MA 02215 (telephone 617-353-3658 Voice/TTY; email: access@bu.edu). Students requesting accommodations must follow the procedures outlined at <http://www.bu.edu/disability/>. If you require such accommodations, please notify me within the first two weeks of class.

Diversity Statement: The BU 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.

TENTATIVE TOPICS & READING SCHEDULE

January 22. Introduction and Course Overview

Braveman, Paula A., Shiriki Kumanyika, Jonathan Fielding, Thomas LaVeist, Luisa N. Borrell, Ron Manderscheid, and Adewale Troutman. 2011. "Health Disparities and Health Equity: The Issue is Justice." *American Journal of Public Health* 101: S149-S155.

Martin, Nina and Renee Montagne. 2017. "Nothing Protects Black Women from Dying in Pregnancy and Childbirth." *Pro Publica* (December 7, 2017).
<https://www.propublica.org/article/nothing-protects-black-women-from-dying-in-pregnancy-and-childbirth>

January 29. What Are Health Inequalities and How Do We Study Them?

BKG. Chapter 1 (Pp. 1-16).

Galea, Sandro, Melissa Tracy, Katherine J. Hoggatt, Charles DiMaggio, and Adam Karpati. 2011. "Estimated Deaths Attributable to Social Factors in the United States." *American Journal of Public Health* 101: 1456-1465.

Kawachi, Ichiro, S. V. Subramanian, and Naomar Almeida-Filho. 2002. "A Glossary for Health Inequalities." *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* 56: 647-652.

Link, Bruce G., and Jo Phelan. 1995. "Social Conditions as Fundamental Causes of Disease." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* (Extra Issue): 80-94.

Rashid, Marghalara, Vera Caine, and Helly Goetz. 2015. "The Encounters and Challenges of Ethnography as a Methodology in Health Research." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 14: 1-16.

February 5. Socioeconomic Disparities in Physical Health (Response memo #1 due)

BKG. Chapter 2 (Pp. 17-62).

BKG. Chapter 4 (Pp. 126-152). *Skim only*.

Klass, Perri. 2013. "Poverty as a Childhood Disease." *The New York Times* (May 13, 2013).

Pampel, Fred C., Patrick M. Krueger, and Justin T. Denney. 2010. "Socioeconomic Disparities in Health Behaviors." *Annual Review of Sociology* 36: 349-370.

Rodriguez, Javier M. and Cristian Capotescu. 2018. "Poor People Die Younger in the U.S. That Skews American Politics." *Washington Post* (May 31, 2018).

February 12. Socioeconomic Disparities in Mental Health

Carr. *Worried Sick* (Pp. 1-109).

Scelfo, Julie. 2015. "Suicide on Campus and the Pressure of Perfection." *The New York Times* (July 27, 2015).

Choose one of the following two:

Kilgannon, Corey. 2018. "When the Death of a Family Farm Leads to Suicide." *The New York Times* (March 17, 2018).

Salam, Reihan. 2018. "Taxi-Driver Suicides Are a Warning." *The Atlantic* (June 5, 2018).

February 19. No class (Monday schedule)

Extended office hours from 12:30-2:30 pm. Please make an appointment to consult about your class paper topic.

February 26. Gender and Health (Response memo #2 due)

- Beauboeuf-Lafontant, Tamara. 2007. "You Have to Show Strength: An Exploration of Gender, Race, and Depression." *Gender & Society* 21: 28-51.
- Hankivsky, Olena. 2012. "Women's Health, Men's Health, and Gender and Health: Implications of Intersectionality." *Social Science & Medicine* 74: 1712-1720.
- Read, Jen'nan Ghazal, and Bridget K. Gorman. 2010. "Gender and Health Inequality." *Annual Review of Sociology* 36: 371-386.
- Springer, Kristen W., Jeanne Mager Stellman, and Rebecca M. Jordan-Young. 2012. "Beyond a Catalogue of Differences: A Theoretical Frame and Good Practice Guidelines for Researching Sex/Gender in Human Health." *Social Science & Medicine* 74: 1817-1824.
- Warraich, Haider Javed and Robert Califf. 2017. "Men Still Die Younger Before Women. Is Toxic Masculinity to Blame" *The Guardian* (June 26, 2017).

March 5. Sexuality, Gender Identity, and Health

- Bjorkman, Mari, and Kirsti Malterud. 2009. "Lesbian Women's Experiences with Health Care: A Qualitative Study." *Scandinavian Journal of Primary Health Care* 27: 238-243.
- Lam, Kristin. 2018. "Some Americans are Denied 'Lifesaving' Health Care Because They Are Transgender." *USA Today* (December 11, 2018)
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/12/11/transgender-health-care-patients-advocates-call-improvements/1829307002/>
- Meyer, Ilan H. 1995. "Minority Stress and Mental Health in Gay Men." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 36: 38-56.
- Russell, Stephen T., and Jessica N. Fish. 2016. "Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Youth." *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* 12: 465-487.

March 12. No class (enjoy spring break!)

March 19. Global Health Disparities: An Overview. Guest lecture by Joseph Harris (Assistant Professor of Sociology, Boston University)

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 2011. "Ten Great Public Health Achievements--Worldwide, 2001-2010." *MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 60(19): 814-818.
- Harris, Joseph. 2017. *Achieving Access: Professional Movements and the Politics of Health Universalism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. Introduction (pp. 1-18), Chapter 2 "Thailand: Chasing the Dream of Free Medical Care for the Sick" (pp. 35-62) and Chapter 4. "South Africa: Embracing National Health Insurance—In Name Only" (pp. 89-122). Book available online at [BU Library](#).
- Marmot, Michael, Jessica Allen, Ruth Bell, and Peter Goldblatt. 2012. "Building of the Global Movement for Health Equity: from Santiago to Rio and Beyond." *The Lancet* 379: 181-188.

March 26. Racial Disparities in Health (Response memo #3 due).

BKG. Chapter 3 (Pp. 63-114).

Binswanger, Ingrid A., Nicole Redmond, John F. Steiner, and LeRoi S. Hicks. 2012. "Health Disparities and the Criminal Justice System: An Agenda for Further Research and Action." *Journal of Urban Health* 89: 98-107.

Gee, Gilbert C. and Chandra L. Ford. 2011. "Structural Racism and Health Inequities: Old Issues, New Directions." *DuBois Review* 8(1):115-132.

Geronimus, Arline T., Margaret Hicken, Danya Keene, and John Bound. 2006. "'Weathering' and Age Patterns of Allostatic Load Scores among Blacks and Whites in the United States." *American Journal of Public Health* 96: 826-833.

Hamblin, James. 2017. "Why Succeeding Against the Odds Can Make You Sick." *The New York Times* (January 27, 2017).

Parker-Pope, Tara. 2013. "Tackling a Racial Gap in Breast Cancer Survival." *The New York Times* (December 20, 2013).

Williams, David R., and Michelle Sternthal. 2010. "Understanding Racial-Ethnic Disparities in Health: Sociological Contributions." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 51: S15-S27.

April 2: Social Relationships, Isolation, and Health

BKG. Chapter 7 (Pp. 234-289).

BKG Chapter 8 (Pp. 290-319).

Brooks, Arthur, 2018. "How Loneliness is Tearing America Apart." *The New York Times* (November 23, 2018).

Shulevitz, Judith. 2013. The Lethality of Loneliness. *The New Republic* (May 13, 2013).

Umberson, Debra, and Jennifer Karas Montez. 2010. "Social Relationships and Health: A Flashpoint for Health Policy." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 51: S54-S66.

April 9. In-class midterm exam. (Study guide posted on 4/1).

April 16a. Neighborhoods, Place, and Health in the United States

Diez Roux, Ana V., and Christina Mair. 2010. "Neighborhoods and Health." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1186: 125-145.

Goodnough, Abby, Monica Davey and Mitch Smith. "When the Water Turned Brown." *The New York Times* (January 23, 2016).

~~Hilmers, Angela, David C. Hilmers, and Jayna Dave. 2012. "Neighborhood Disparities in Access to Healthy Foods and their Effects on Environmental Justice." *American Journal of Public Health* 102: 1644-1654.~~

~~Montez, Jennifer Karas, Mark D. Hayward, and Douglas A. Wolf. 2017. "Do U.S. States' Socioeconomic and Policy Contexts Shape Adult Disability?" *Social Science & Medicine* 178: 115-126.~~

Talbot, Margaret. 2017. "The Addicts Next Door." *The New Yorker* (June 5 & 12, 2017).

April 16b. Disparities in Death & Dying

Carr, Deborah. 2019. "Is Death the Great Equalizer? Disparities in Death and Dying." Pp. 179-209 in *Golden Years? Social Inequality in Later Life*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Umberson, Debra, Julie Skalamera Olson, Robert Crosnoe, Hui Liu, Tetyana Pudrovska, and Rachel Donnelly. "Death of family members as an overlooked source of racial disadvantage in the United States." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114, no. 5 (2017): 915-920.

April 23. Immigrant and Refugee Health in the United States (Response memo #4 due)

Acevedo-Garcia, Dolores, and Lisa M. Bates. 2008. "Latino Health Paradoxes: Empirical Evidence, Explanations, Future Research, and Implications." Pp. 101-113 in *Latinas/os in the United States: Changing the Face of America*, edited by Havidan Rodriguez, Rogelio Saenz, and Cecilia Menjivar. New York: Springer.

Castañeda, Heide, Seth M. Holmes, Daniel S. Madrigal, Maria-Elena DeTrinidad Young, Naomi Beyeler, and James Quesada. 2015. "Immigration as a Social Determinant of Health." *Annual Review of Public Health* 36: 375-392.

Human Rights Watch. 2018. *Code Red: The Fatal Consequences of Dangerously Substandard Medical Care in Immigration Detention*. Washington, DC: Author.

McNeely, Clea A., and Lyn Morland. 2016. "The Health of the Newest Americans: How U.S. Public Health Systems Can Support Syrian Refugees." *American Journal of Public Health* 106: 13-15.

Tavernise, Sabrina. 2013. "The Health Toll of Immigration." *The New York Times* (May 18, 2013).

April 30. Health Care Policies and Practices: A Path to Diminishing Disparities? (Response memo #5 due).

BKG. Chapter 12 (Pp. 452-477)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 2011. "Ten Great Public Health Achievements--United States, 2001-2010." *MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 60(19): 619-623. (Scan only).

Dovidio, John F., and Susan T. Fiske. 2012. "Under the Radar: How Unexamined Biases in Decision-Making Processes in Clinical Interactions Can Contribute to Health Care Disparities." *American Journal of Public Health* 102.5: 945-952.

Farmer, Paul. 2013. "General Anesthesia for the (Young Doctor's) Soul? Brown Medical School, Commencement." Pp. 7-19 *To Repair the World: Paul Farmer Speaks to the Next Generation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Newkirk, Vann R. II. 2018. "The American Health-Care System Increases Income Inequality." *The Atlantic* (January 19, 2018).

Syed, Samina T., Ben S. Gerber, and Lisa K. Sharp. 2013. "Traveling towards Disease: Transportation Barriers to Health Care Access." *Journal of Community Health* 38: 976-993.

Wilensky, Gail R. 2017. "The Future of the ACA and Health Care Policy in the United States." *JAMA* 317: 21-22.

GOOD LUCK WITH FINALS AND HAVE A WONDERFUL SUMMER BREAK!