WGS.151
Gender, Health, & Society
Professor Brittany Charlton
Course Overview
gender

public health practice

epidemiologic research

health policy

clinical application
Health

Clinical application/medicine

• Science of curing and preventing disease on an individual level

Public health

• Science of curing and preventing disease on a population or community level

Epidemiology

• Root word: epidemic (not epidermis)
  • Epi ("upon") + demos ("the people")
  • Study of the distribution and determinants of disease in humans
• Application to control health problems
  • Create knowledge to improve population health; prevent unnecessary suffering

Health Policy

• Law, regulation, procedure, administrative action, incentive, or voluntary practice of governments and other institutions related to health

MacMahon and Pugh 1970; Aschengrau and Seage 2013; Krieger 1994; CDC
Public Health and Medicine

Medicine
- Primary focus on individual
- Emphasis on diagnosis and treatment, care for the whole patient
- Well-established profession with sharp public image
- Uniform system for certifying specialists beyond professional medical degree
- Numeric sciences increasing in prominence, though still a relatively minor part of training
- Social sciences tend to be an elective part of medical education
- Clinical sciences an essential part of professional training

Public Health
- Primary focus on population
- Emphasis on prevention, health promotion for the whole community
- Multiple professional identities with diffuse public image
- Variable certification of specialists beyond professional public health degree
- Numeric sciences an essential feature of analysis and training
- Social sciences an integral part of public health education
- Clinical sciences peripheral to professional training

Fineberg 1990
Historic Public Health Milestones

• Cholera
• HPV, Pap tests, & cervical cancer
• Smoking & lung cancer/heart disease
• Prenatal folate & neural tube defects
Objectives

1. Describe differences between gender, sex-linked biology, and sexuality as well as critically evaluate their use in health research, social and behavioral sciences, and health policy.

2. Evaluate the breadth of research and research methods in the study of gender and health.

3. Apply theoretical and methodological constructs learned in class to a range of health issues, taking into consideration additional social determinants including social class and race.
Disciplines and Conceptual Frameworks

Week 1
- Biology, History, and Conceptual Frameworks

Week 3
- Gender Analysis

Week 8
- Sex-based Research
Research Methods

Weeks 2, 4, 6, 7

• Design Strategies
  • Characteristics, strengths, and limitations of each study design
  • Focus on trial, cohort, case-control designs

Week 3

• Measures of Disease Frequency and Association
  • Incidence, prevalence
  • Relative and absolute measures of association

Weeks 6 and 10

• Interpretation of Studies
  • Alternative explanations for study findings
    • Chance, bias, confounding
  • Effect modification
  • Association vs. causation
Examples

Week 2
  • Cardiovascular Disease
  • Hormone Therapy

Week 4
  • Pregnancy and Birth

Week 5
  • Sexually Transmitted Infections

Week 6
  • Abortion

Week 7
  • Sexual Orientation
  • Mental Health

Week 8
  • Gender Identity and Expression

Week 9
  • Contraceptives

Week 10
  • Mental Health
Deliverables

1. Class Participation
   A. Discussion Leaders
2. Weekly Reading Reflections
3. Testimony/Opinion
4. Final Project
   B. Write Up
   C. Oral Presentation
Expectations

1. Office Hours
2. Electronic Devices
3. Texts/Readings
Ground Rules

Respect, safety, and language
Sex-linked biology may seem clear

• Yet so much variety

Sex can be determined by

• Social interactions in certain fish

• Incubation temperatures for some reptiles

• Diet quality in mice

Image courtesy of Elias Levy on flickr. License CC BY.
Linguistic and scientific muddiness harmful

- Genetic factor on Y chromosome incorrectly called the “sex” rather than “male” determining factor

- Result: lack of research on female development
Biology

Intersex

- Hypospadias
  - Various causes (testosterone metabolism)
  - Urethra does not run to penis tip
- Turner Syndrome
  - Females lacking 2nd X chromosome (X0)
  - Infertility (ovaries underdeveloped); lack secondary sex characteristics
- Klinefelter Syndrome
  - Males with extra X chromosome (XXY)
  - Infertility; breast development
Conceptual Frameworks

Theories can seem dry and arcane but without
  • Poorly conceived hypotheses
  • Inadequately interpret findings
  • Generate incomplete/wrong answers

Requires abstract thinking
Allow us to tell stories
Early Conceptual Frameworks/Theories

Many early frameworks/theories

• Miasma
  • Corrupted air
  • Putrid, organic matter from decaying filth (excrement, rotting food)
  • Solution: clean up filth

• Contagion
  • Invisible poisons (non-living, non-reproducing)
  • Direct person-to-person contact via
  • Solution: restrict/quarantine

• Germ theory
  • Diseases are caused by microorganisms
  • Louis Pasteur
Explaining Cholera
Miasma vs Contagion

Observations unexplained by both

- **Miasma**
  - Failure of quarantine
  - Simultaneous eruption of cases in different neighborhoods

- **Contagion**
  - Disease migrated with sick people
  - Outbreaks frequently starting in port towns
  - Persistently filthy neighborhoods only sporadically experiencing epidemics
Conceptual Frameworks

Contemporary theories

- Biomedical model
  - “Real” causes: biophysical agents, genes, “risk factors”
  - Exposure largely consequence of individualistic characteristics and behaviors
  - Reductionist

- Health and human rights
  - Presumes all people born free and equal
  - Provides a universal frame of reference for deciding questions of equity and justice
  - Defines what governments can/cannot do to us and should do for us

- Psychosocial
  - Both behavioral and endogenous biological response; stress

- Political economy of health
  - Economic and political determinants; institutions, no biological constructs

- Ecosocial theory
  - Integrates social and biological reasoning
  - More systemic integrated approach capable of generating new hypotheses