

## **Women's Health *and the Dynamics of Difference***

Health begins where  
we live, learn, work, and play.

***Social position impacts where and how we live, learn, work and play.***

### Social Determinants of Health

Research shows that the social circumstances in which we are born, live and work – our jobs, schools, built space, transportation, even the quality of civic life – get under the skin and influence:

our behaviors

access to resources

chronic stress levels

and ultimately increasing or decreasing our chances for health.

***All people should have the opportunity to make the choices that allow them to live a long, healthy life, regardless of their income, education or ethnic background.***

### Health Disparity

#### **Women's Health Disparity:**

Differences in women's health outcomes not explained by disease processes, but by potential social and political factors.

The Personal is Political

**How does the concept “the personal is political” relate to health?**

**The choices we make are constrained by the choices we have.**

The intersection of public issues and personal problems.

The impact of public policy and legislation on our lives, our choices, our health.

Politics shape the context of our lives.

Social policy is health policy.

Health in All Policies

Health Impact Assessment

### Terms to Know

Risk of Essentializing:

*Do you really mean “all women?”*

Homogeneous

Heterogeneous

Intersectionality

Interlocking Systems of Oppression

Intersectionality:

The intersection of multiple identities  
A woman is not *only* a woman

Interlocking Systems of Oppression:  
The experience of multiple forms of oppression simultaneously

**Visible v. Invisible** Characteristics/Difference?  
What are visible characteristics/differences?  
What are invisible characteristics/differences?

**Is what we see who we are?**  
Characteristics v. Identity  
Perception v. Truth and Self-Definition  
Assumptions, Categorization, Evaluation

Prejudice, Discrimination, Oppression

Our differences are not the problem; the problem is the meaning we ascribe to and our differential behavior based on our differences.

Heterosexism:  
Individual, group, institutional norms and behaviors that result from the assumption that all people are heterosexual

Homophobia:  
Fear and intolerance of homosexuality and LGBT people

Individual-Level → Policy-Level

Healthy People 2010

Healthy People 2020

Affordable Care Act  
Healthy People 2010:

In 1998, President Clinton announced the “Initiative to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health.”

The Initiative commits the nation to an ambitious goal:

By the year 2010, eliminate the disparities in six areas of health status experienced by racial and ethnic minority populations.

Healthy People 2010:  
6 Areas  
Cancer Screening and Management  
Cardiovascular Disease

Diabetes  
HIV Infection/AIDS  
Immunizations  
Infant Mortality  
Healthy People 2010:  
Progress?  
Out of 195 objectives and sub-objectives:  
24 Progress  
171 Little or No Progress

Reduce/Eliminate Disparity to *Equity*  
*Healthy People 2000*: Reduce health disparities among Americans.

*Healthy People 2010*: Eliminate, not just reduce, health disparities.

*Healthy People 2020*: To achieve health equity, eliminate disparities, and improve the health of all groups.

Health Equity  
Attainment of the highest level of health for all people  
Requires valuing everyone equally with focused and ongoing societal efforts to address avoidable inequalities, historical and contemporary injustices, and the elimination of health and health care disparities

*Healthy People 2020*

Toward Equity: Women & the ACA  
Insurance companies can't deny coverage to women.  
"No more "gender-rating."  
Insurance companies can no longer charge women more based on gender.  
Provider comparison and choice  
Preventative care without co-pays

Socioeconomic Status  
**"The United States economy maintains social hierarchies that systematically shape health and use of health care."**

Breen, 2002

Socioeconomic Status  
In comparison to other high-income countries, the United States has:  
greater income inequity  
AND worse health outcomes.

Terms to Know  
Socioeconomic Status (SES) *encompasses*  
Income

Education  
Occupation

Higher SES = Better Health

The single strongest predictor of our health is our position on the class ladder.

High demand + low control = chronic stress

Those at the top have the most power and resources, and on average live longer and healthier lives.

### *Unnatural Causes*

Individual Choice?

Some attribute health disparities to the individual choices of certain populations.

*“Poor people are unhealthy because they make poor choices.”*

*What is really going on here?*

Some Neighborhoods Have...

Easy access to grocery stores and fresh, affordable produce

3-4 times as many grocery stores in predominantly white neighborhoods than in predominantly Black or Latino neighborhoods

Nice homes, clean parks, safe places to walk, jog, bike, or play

Well-financed schools

Other Neighborhoods...

Have an abundance of fast food restaurants, liquor stores, convenience stores

Don't have clean parks, safe places to walk, jog, bike, or play

Don't have well-financed schools

Do socioeconomic differences explain all health disparities?

Link between SES and Race

“Association between SES and race in the US has its origins in discrete historical events but persists because of contemporary structural factors that perpetuate those historical injustices.”

“It is because of institutionalized racism that there is an association between SES and race in the US.”

*(Jones, 2000)*

Racial Disparity

Income and other social class indicators do not entirely explain racial health disparities.

Example: Infant Mortality

The death of a baby who was alive at birth but died before reaching his or her first birthday.

Example: Infant Mortality

It is a sensitive measure of the overall health and wellbeing of:

Women

Communities  
Nations

Where do we stand?

Black Women & Infant Mortality

Black children are more likely than white children:

To be born small (low birth weight)

To be born early (premature)

To die before reaching one year of age (infant mortality)

Racism and Health

Discrimination

Racism, Sexism and other “isms” get “into” the body.

Direct, negative effects of unfair treatment on mental and physical health have been documented.

Makes people socially and economically vulnerable  
and imposes an added health burden

Psychosocial Stress

Environmental demands that tax or exceed the adaptive capacity of an organism, resulting in physiological and psychological changes that may place the organism at risk for disease.

(Cohen, Kessler, Gordon, 1995)

Chronic stress can be deadly.

Consider the stress of multiple oppressions.

Racism and Health

The health of minority groups is intimately connected to **the high stress states** created by a social system that condones, reinforces and perpetuates racial discrimination.

(Myers, 1982)

Racism and Health

“African-American women -of any class- who reported high levels of experience with racial discrimination were nearly 5 times as likely to deliver underweight babies as those who reported no experience with it.”

Unnatural Causes

What is race?

Race:

A social rather than a biological category; Refers to social groups often sharing cultural heritage and ancestry

Racism:

Institutional and individual practices that create and reinforce oppressive systems of race relations (Krieger, 2003)

3 Levels of Racism (*Jones, 2000*)

**Institutionalized Racism** = differential access to the goods, services and opportunities of a society by race; structural, normative.

**Personally Mediated Racism** = prejudice and discrimination; intentional and unintentional.

**Internalized Racism** = acceptance by members of the stigmatized races of negative messages about their own abilities and intrinsic self-worth

**Earned Mistrust:**

“The medical community has earned the mistrust of communities of color.”

Tuskegee Syphilis Study (1932-1972) is a metaphor for government abuse of Black people.

Medical experimentation on slaves

Sterilization Abuse

**What is Race, Biologically Speaking?**

Race = Subspecies

What is species?

What is a subspecies?

Do humans have subspecies? Why or why not?

Human Variation Across Geography: We are all a subset of African Human Genetic Diversity

Skin Color and Malaria: How our concept of “race” tricks us medically speaking

Race is not real for humans, but racism is very real!