

Fieldwork Assignment: Ethnography of a Medical Controversy

In this fieldwork assignment, you will locate a recent topic related to health and use the frameworks of medical anthropology to “read like an anthropologist”.

Remember, “ethnography” means “writing culture”: your goal in this assignment is **not** to undercover the scientific truth of a controversy or decide who is correct. Your topic is the controversy itself: what does the fact that we want to discuss this thing tell us about how we think about health, medicine, and healing?

Your paper should cite at least three sources. Your main “data” will come from **at least two** non-academic sources that outline the controversy: including popular news or journalistic articles, social media posts, popular media representations (movies, TV, radio, music), and/or advertising. You will also include **at least one academic** source that looks at your topic or a closely-related topic from an anthropological perspective.

Write a 2-3 page analysis of the social and cultural assumptions and logics underlying your controversy. What ideas about knowledge, expertise, culture/society, science, identity, etc, are imbedded in these reports or discussions? I am less interested in your opinion, and more interested in seeing how you can identify what cultural processes and logics are at work in these articles and debates.

Possible Topics:

Vaccine controversies; breast-feeding debates; can we find a gene for XYZ debates; is XYZ diet healthy, why/why not?; abortion laws; what causes autism/ADD/ADHD?; should we get routine screenings (mammograms/pap smears/annual exams) and why/why not?; do mental health issues cause violence?; can yoga/meditation/homeopathy heal XYZ disease?; OR anything else you find interesting (so long as it is related to health/healing/medicine).

Format:

All papers should be double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12-pt font, with 1-inch margins on all sides. At least two full pages, please.