

Public Abstract

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Title:Selling Wellness: The Cultural Politics of Holistic Health in the U.S.

Currently, holistic health and lifestyle medicine are growing sectors of the U.S. health care market (Fadlon 2005). The term "holistic" entered the U.S. medical discourse in the 1970s and refers to the treatment of the whole person as opposed to the biomedical treatment of the medical condition itself (Whorton 2002). While holistic care has been embraced by various alternative practices including acupuncture, chiropractic, massage therapy, and herbal medicine, some allopathic or biomedical doctors also engage in holistic forms of medical care. The aim of this research is to examine various representations of the practice of holistic health and wellness through the perspectives and experiences of holistic health practitioners and locates these representations within neoliberal, gender, and class discourses. Over the last eighteen months I conducted interviews with holistic health practitioners and field work at professional health conferences, a wellness retreat, and various community health education events. I found holistic health practitioners represent a wellness-centered lifestyle health as a privileged social status, however practitioners continue to frame holistic health and wellness as a possibility for all on individual health choices ignoring the significance of class position. This project has larger significance in the thinking about the organization of health care and implementation of public health policies aimed to address chronic illness.