

Instructor: Atia Sattar
Writing 150
Health & Healing
Writing Project #1

Writing Project #1: On Medicalization

Purpose: This first writing project will allow you to practice your critical reasoning skills through close analysis of a particular phenomenon. It will also introduce you to the writing process, primarily focusing on its early stages. First, you'll have the opportunity to experiment with *invention* strategies to generate insightful and complex arguments that push beyond a superficial response. Once we've worked through the invention stage, you will create a *rough plan* that will help you build an effective, unified structure (unlike the formulaic and restrictive five-paragraph format to which you may be accustomed).

Premise: "Medicalization" encompasses the processes by which aspects of life that were once considered non-medical come to be defined and treated as medical problems, usually in terms of illness and disorder. One of the earliest examples of this tendency is childbirth. In the 17th century, childbirth went from being the exclusive domain of midwives to an increasingly medicalized sphere governed by obstetricians wielding forceps and other novel scientific instruments. Today, we see this extension of medical jurisdiction to social phenomena that were originally perceived as moral or legal issues, such as addiction, homosexuality, violence, or obesity.

Some scholars refer to our contemporary moment of medicalization as one of "biomedicalization," referring specifically to the incorporation of technoscientific innovation in biomedicine. With its particular emphasis on genes, biomedicalization is concerned with the definition of life and with medical interventions designed not just to extend life and promote health but to enhance our biological selves (through cognitive enhancements or cosmetic surgeries). While proponents of this current trend in medicalization applaud the advances made possible by technologies such as stem-cell research and hormone pills, its critics argue that the body has now become a commodity requiring risk-assessment and pharmaceuticals in order to attain a socially acceptable healthy state.

For this paper, you will consider how notions of health and the processes of medicalization impact one another. Does medicalization necessarily improve our health? Are there ways in which it endangers our wellbeing? Are key aspects determining our health and wellness—such as social inequalities, economic disadvantages, or environmental concerns—overlooked by the mechanisms of biomedicalization?

Writing Task: Choose a particular social phenomenon that is currently being or has previously been medicalized. Then answer the following question in a 6–7 page paper:

What does your chosen phenomenon reveal about the relationship between (bio)medicalization and health?