

Name (Last, First): _____

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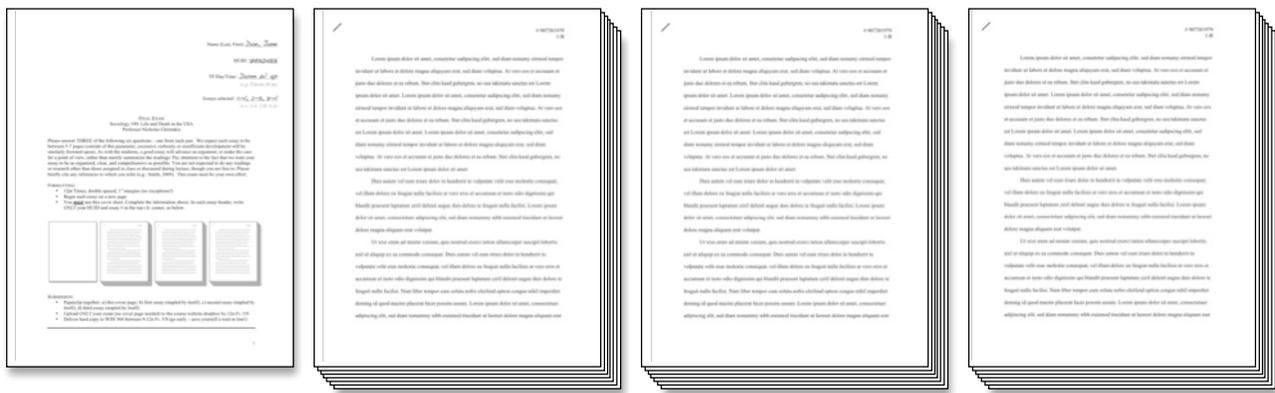
Essays selected: _____
(e.g. 1-A, 2-B, 3-A)

FINAL EXAM
Sociology 190: Life and Death in the USA
Professor Nicholas Christakis

Please answer **three** of the following six questions, **one from each pair**. We expect each essay to be between 5-7 pages (outside of this parameter, verbosity or insufficient development will be similarly frowned upon). A good essay will advance an argument, or make the case for a point of view, rather than merely summarize the readings. Pay attention to the fact that we want your essay to be as organized, clear, and comprehensive as possible. Remember, your exam will be evaluated with reference to three criteria: (1) organization, (2) argument, and (3) evidence. Some of the questions make use of readings from outside the course, but citations are provided. You are not expected to do any other readings or research other than those assigned in class or discussed during lecture, though you are free to. A good answer, however, will indeed refer to several readings in order to support your argument. Please briefly cite any references to which you refer (e.g.: Smith, 2009) and supply a list of references you cite or rely on at the end of each of your answers. A good answer also answers all parts of the questions (that is, be sure not to overlook any of the sub-questions). This exam must be your own effort.

FORMATTING:

- 12pt Times New Roman, double spaced, 1” margins
- Begin each essay on a new page; use page numbers.
- You **must** use this cover sheet. Complete the information above. In each essay header, write **ONLY** your HUID and essay # in the top right hand corner, as below.



SUBMISSION:

- Paperclip together: a) this cover page; b) first essay (stapled by itself); c) second essay (stapled by itself); d) third essay (stapled by itself)
- Upload **ONLY** your exam (no cover page needed) to the course website dropbox by 3 pm Fr. 5/8
- Deliver hard copy to WJH 568 between 9-12n Fr. 5/8 (go early – save yourself a wait in line!)

1A The epidemic of obesity in the US has spurred responses from the public health and medical community. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued guidelines for school-based programs aimed at preventing obesity. While the effectiveness of such programs is still debated, Veugelers et al found that students from schools participating in a well designed program exhibited significantly lower rates of overweight and obesity, had healthier diets, and reported more physical activity than students from schools without a program. As a separate development, bariatric operations (major abdominal surgery to treat “morbid obesity,” which is a BMI>40) has become increasingly common in the US; the number of such surgeries performed annually for severe obesity increased from 16,000 in the early 1990s to 103,000 in 2003. A meta-analysis (a specific type of statistical analysis that compares findings across multiple studies) showed that bariatric surgery is effective in getting patients to lose weight and in reversing medical problems associated with severe obesity, such as diabetes (Buchwald et al).

Discuss proposed explanations for the obesity epidemic covered in the lectures and readings. How would the two foregoing interventions serve to counteract these explanations (in other words, what are the pathways through which these interventions could reduce obesity)? What do the interventions imply about the role of structure versus agency in the obesity epidemic? How might the differences between these two interventions in terms of this structure/agency dichotomy affect the extent to which they might be socially acceptable?

References:

Buchwald, H., Avidor, Y., Braunwald, E; et al. Bariatric Surgery: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *JAMA*, 2004; 292: 1724-1737

Veugelers P.J. and Fitzgeralds, A.L. Effectiveness of school programs in preventing childhood obesity: a multilevel comparison. *Am J Public Health*, 2005; 95: 432-435

1B In his last lecture, Prof. Christakis made the claim that we may be reaching the “end of medicine.” In the first (shorter) part of your essay, briefly outline why this is plausible, and summarize the argument Christakis made. In the second (longer) part of your answer, argue against this position. Articulate at least three reasons – supported by evidence – as to why, in your opinion, this his is not a tenable position.

2A Identify four people (at least two of whom are older than 23), and interview them (each for 15-30 minutes – which is brief) about their perceptions of the neighborhoods where they live (Harvard Houses do not count as “neighborhoods” here; if you interview any people your age, be sure to ask them about their *home* neighborhoods outside of Harvard). Ideally, these four people would live in different kinds of neighborhoods. In your conversation with them, inquire about what they see as attributes of their neighborhoods that foster and hinder their physical and/or mental health. You might ask them about how attached they feel to their neighborhoods, how safe their neighborhoods are, who else lives in their neighborhoods, what amenities their neighborhoods have, and so on. Then use the collected qualitative evidence to make an argument about the mechanisms by which neighborhoods affect people’s health. A good essay not only summarizes your friends’ answers and quotes from what they say, but also employs ideas, data, and facts discussed in the class (such as the tension between structure and agency, the distinction between compositional and contextual effects of neighborhoods, etc.) to analyze their responses.

2B Although many human enhancements discussed in John Harris’ *Enhancing Evolution* are far in the future, human embryos have been successfully created and implanted in women for over two decades using in vitro fertilization (IVF) technology. At first, this technology and its use gave rise to several moral debates, including whether infertile women and couples should be limited to adoption and/or childlessness as a result of the natural lottery that dealt them the inability to conceive children “naturally.” Today, while IVF is commonly accepted and used by many women and couples, new questions are emerging as other technologies become available that can test embryos for genetic diseases and traits. At present, all pregnant women are offered pre-natal testing for Down’s syndrome and neural tube defects as a matter of course, and they may choose to abort fetuses with such defects. Should women or couples using IVF be able to decide which embryos, from among those they create, they want to implant by using genetic testing? Should parents be allowed to avoid having babies with whatever they perceive as “defects”? Should they be allowed to choose to produce babies with “enhancements”? Discuss how the very definition of what is and is not a “defect” is a form of social construction. Describe how, if at all, the distinction between defects and enhancements might be made. Finally, discuss the extent to which such technology medicalizes the process of reproduction.

3A It has been recognized that binge drinking is a public health problem on college campuses. Imagine that you have been hired by a public health policy firm to advise senior figures at Harvard. Taking advantage of your knowledge of the various kinds of social factors that contribute to this unhealthy behavior, describe two interventions to decrease binge drinking at Harvard. Explain why you believe that they would be effective. Be sure to define “binge drinking” and to discuss the impact on the students and on the broader college environment of the interventions you suggest. Be sure to support each of your arguments with scientific concepts and evidence from the readings. And position your recommendations in some of the broad themes of the course.

3B How would you describe the social capital of your House at Harvard (is it higher or lower than the average House)? Why do you think it is high or low? Provide a definition of social capital. How might you measure it at a Harvard House? That is, provide some examples of the kinds of social capital in the House and how they might be ascertained. What contributes to, and helps determine the amount of, social capital in the House? Keeping in mind the examples of various kinds of health interventions discussed in the readings and in class, provide one example of an intervention that you think might increase the social capital in your House. Finally, explain how the social capital of your House is related to a single health-related behavior (of your choice) that is evinced by students.