

Regimes of Inequality

The Political Economy of Health and Wealth

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Why are effective policies to reduce HI so hard to make, even when there is political will?

My thesis:

The way that politicians *framed* what the problem of inequality was beginning in the 1990s

- the policy solutions that they could use
- their ultimate inability to reduce inequality

Put another way:

- HI problem frame is a rhetorical shift to cover up for inaction on underlying socioeconomic inequality
- But medicalizing inequality has made it harder to address



Politicians made (motivated) mistakes:

- Thought reducing poverty would be enough to eliminate HI. It wasn't.
- Chose to talk about HI *in place of underlying* SES (and ethnic) inequalities, because the former seemed less politically threatening.
- Didn't anticipate how medicalizing inequality changed the policy-making environment
 - wicked problem
 - coordination issues
 - multi-level governance in a time of shrinking fiscal resources → retrenchment

What should they have done?

- Act directly on socioeconomic inequality through labor market regulation, taxation, and, if necessary, social benefits
- May seem politically difficult, but it's technically much easier than tackling HI, and much more likely to yield both policy and political results.



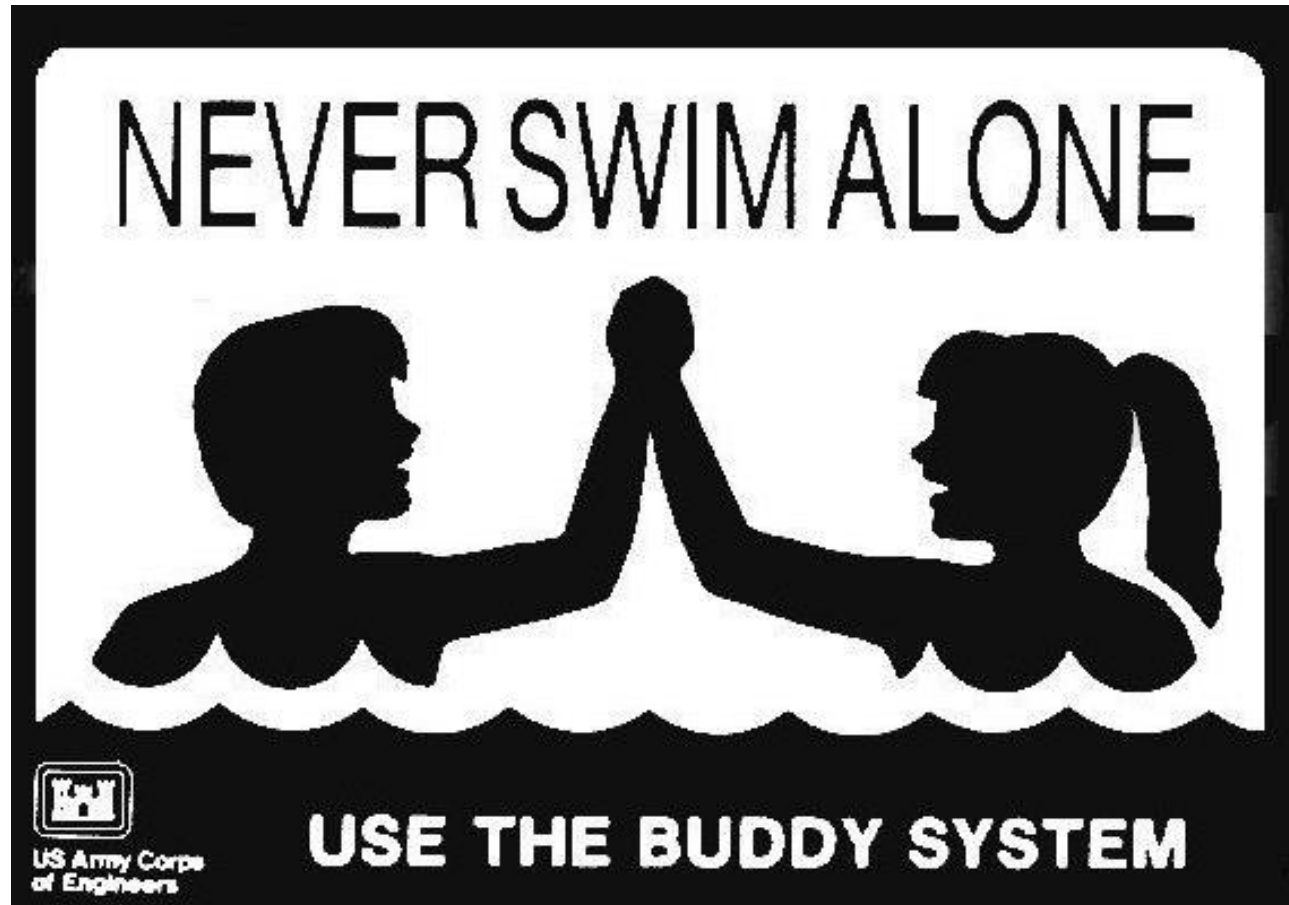
How I got to my findings:

- Health inequality becomes a “social problem” at varying times and in varying ways in different countries.
- Use this variation to (1) observe that reframing inequality affects efforts to deal with it, and (2) understand how and why that causal connection exists

Methods

- Cases
 - England, France, Finland
 - “Method of agreement”
- Analysis
 - ***Process tracing*** of efforts to reduce health inequalities
 - Interviews with health researchers, policy-makers, politicians
 - Documentary analysis
 - Archival research
 - Interviews
 - Participant observation

Can anyone do this?



- In theory, yes. But it's harder than it looks...
 - Don't try this at home!
 - Do TEAM UP with someone trained in methods of political analysis

A science, not (only) an art

- Epistemological underpinnings
- Theoretical/ontological underpinnings
- Specified scope conditions
- Careful documentation



Epistemological underpinnings

- How do we know causation when we see it?
 - NOT Neyman-Rubin/potential outcomes/RCT framework
 - Causal process observations

Theoretical/ontological underpinnings

- Guides to the nature of the things that we are observing
 - The other HI: Historical Institutionalism
 - Constructivism

Scope conditions

- Case selection sets “inner” and “outer” bounds for generalization
- Need to know your context

Careful documentation

- Establishing universe of content, sampling procedures
- Systematic, replicable content analysis
- Detailed writeups of ethnographic and “meta-data”