Pain and Gender


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Abstract

This book presents an empirical research study which illustrates how sociological theories within the field of health and illness can greatly enhance the understanding of the complexities of pain perception. The relationship between beliefs about pain and the social characteristics of the individual is explored, with a focus on the role of gender in the process. There is an emphasis on the meaning and lay understanding of the phenomena of pain to which recent developments in the sociology of health and illness, particularly in the area of emotions and the body, offer potential theoretical and methodological frameworks. The findings of the study reflect the particular experiences of adult men and women living in a multi-ethnic inner-city area but also provide a basis for developing new approaches to the understanding of pain, and the relationship between pain, gender, culture and embodiment.

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Gender differences in pain perception have also been extensively studied in the laboratory, and ratings of experimentally induced pain also show some sex disparity, with females generally reporting lower pain thresholds and tolerance than males. However, there is little consensus on whether these apparent differences reflect the way men and women respond to pain, differing social rules for the expression of pain, or biologic differences in the way noxious stimuli are processed.