Inequality and Health

UCLA Fielding School of Public Health

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Policy-Making is like a symphony

- "Even in Constantinople or Grand Cairo where plague and cholera are decimating the population, it is doubtful whether [publicly organized sewerage] would be desirable."
 - signed, "A. Ratepayer."
- "Suffering and evil are nature's admonitions; they cannot be got rid of; and the impatient efforts of benevolence to banish them from the world by legislation, before benevolence has learned their object and their end, have always been more productive of evil than good."
 - The Economist Magazine, 1848, on the advisability of a public sewer system

Policy-Making is like a symphony

- In a democracy, nobody wants to be a jerk.
- Ethics is like the bass section of the symphony

1: Inequality is a social phenomenon.

+ 2: Inequality has big effects

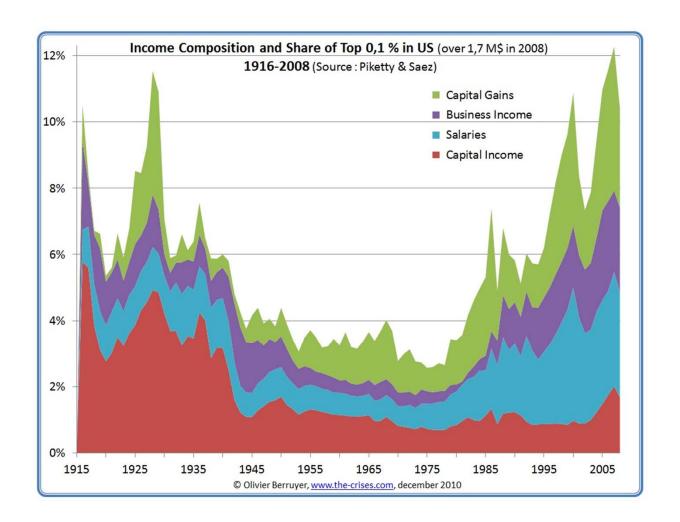
on human health.

= 3: We can improve health by changing inequality.



What has happened to Inequality?

And why?



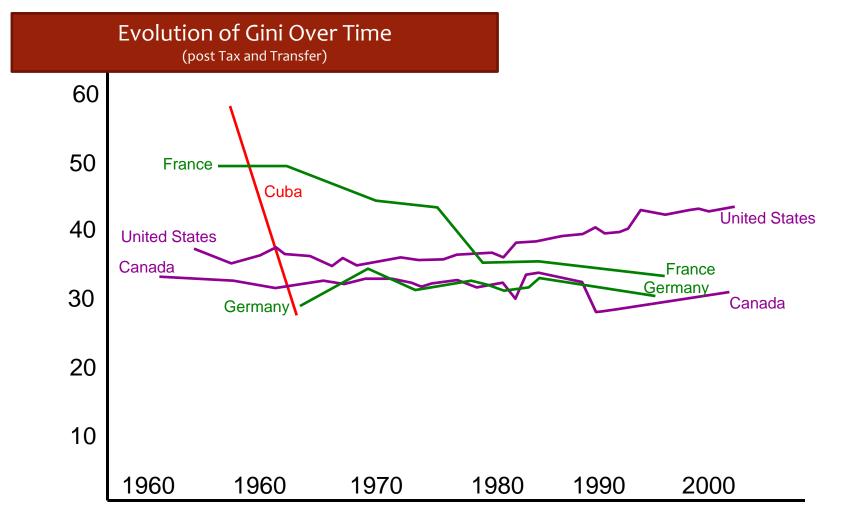


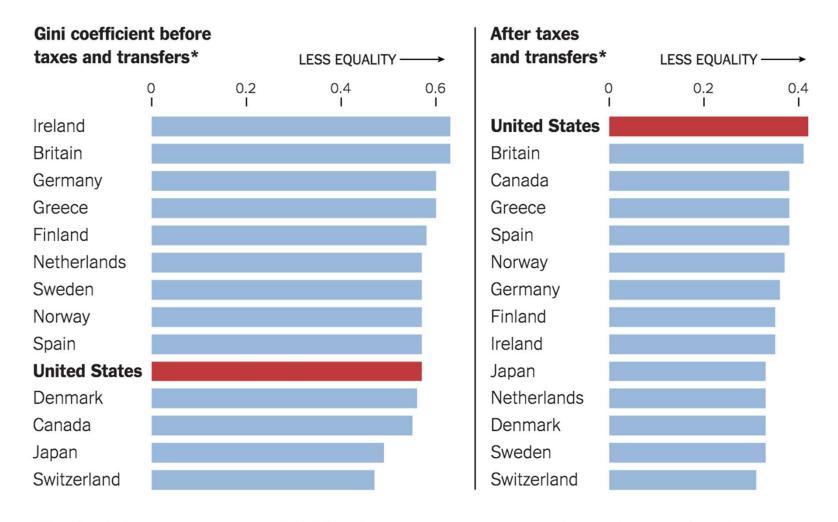




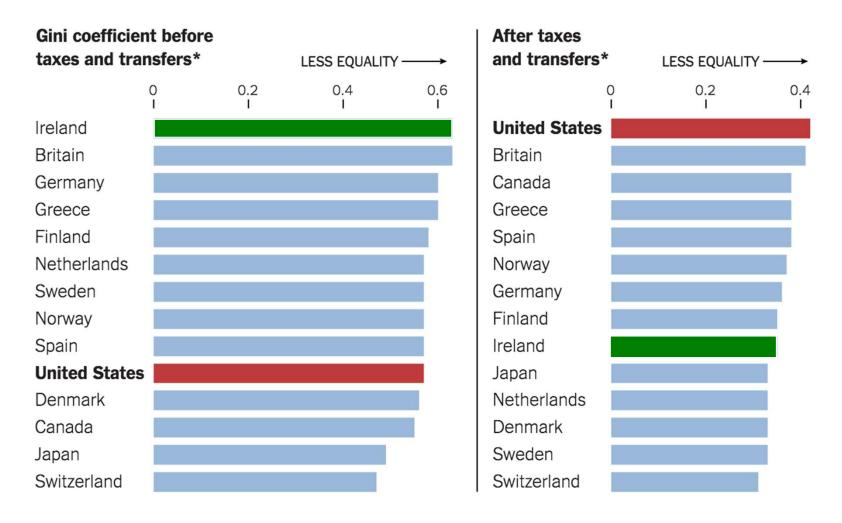




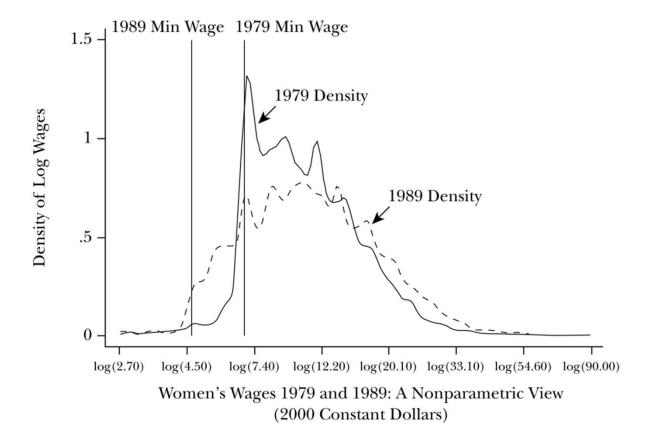




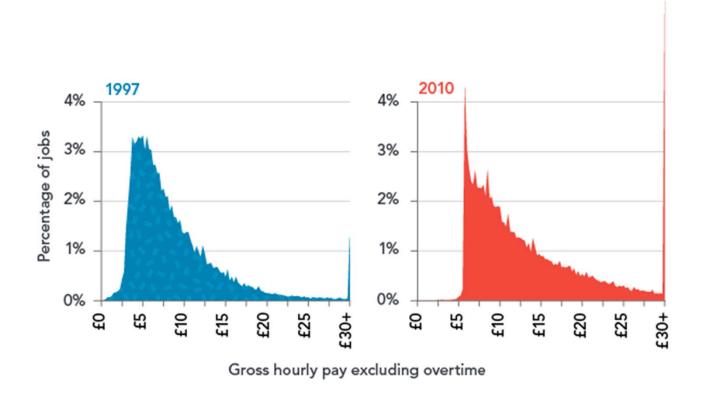
^{*}Transfers include programs such as Social Security, unemployment insurance, food assistance and housing allowances.



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Gross hourly pay excluding overtime in the UK before (1997) and after the introduction of the National Minimum Wage (2010)

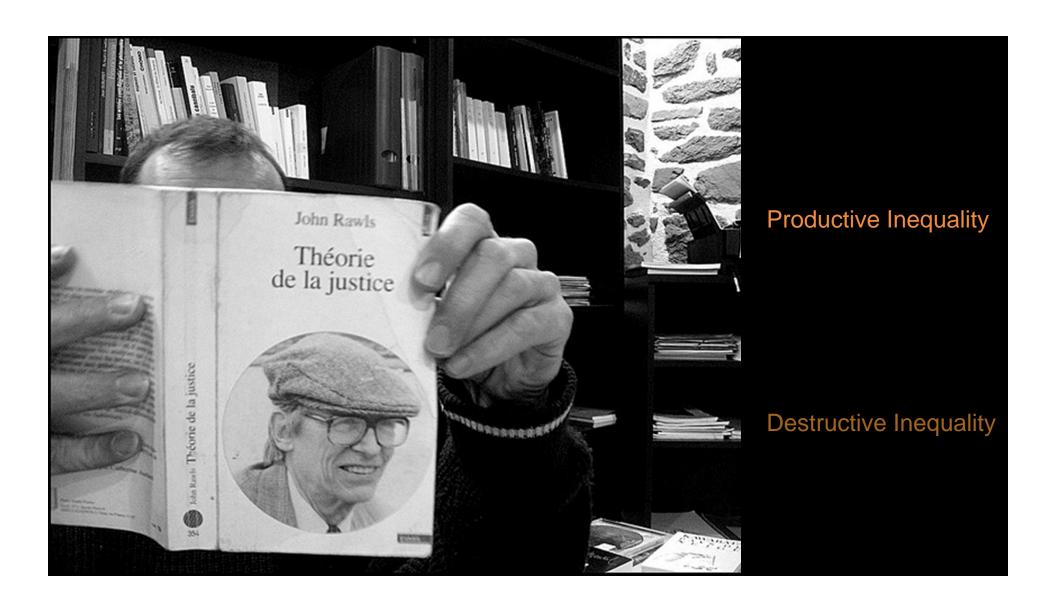


Note: Current prices. Source: Low Pay Commission, ASHE

Resolution Foundation resolutionfoundation.org

Income Inequality is a policy variable.

So what is the right level?



Health as a Measure of Well-Being



Correlates with Happiness



Part of Gross National Well-Being

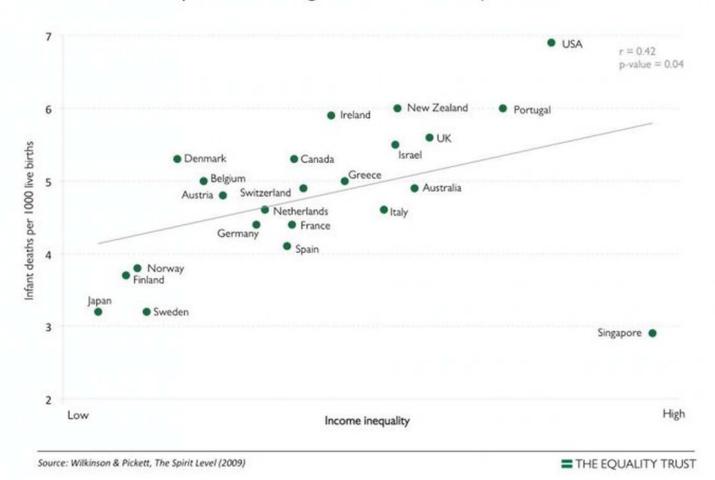


Both Instrumental and Intrinsic

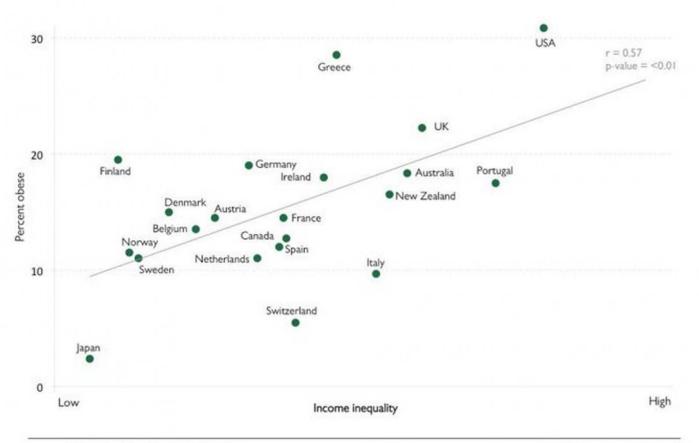


Easily Measured

Infant mortality rates are higher in more unequal countries



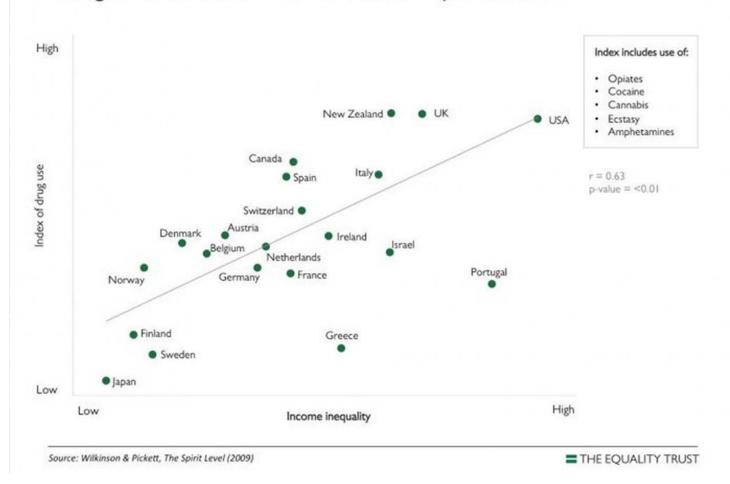
More adults are obese in more unequal rich countries



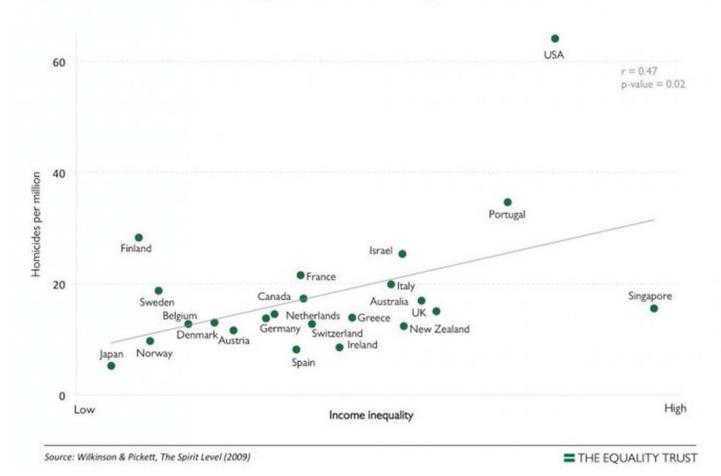
Source: Wilkinson & Pickett, The Spirit Level (2009)

THE EQUALITY TRUST

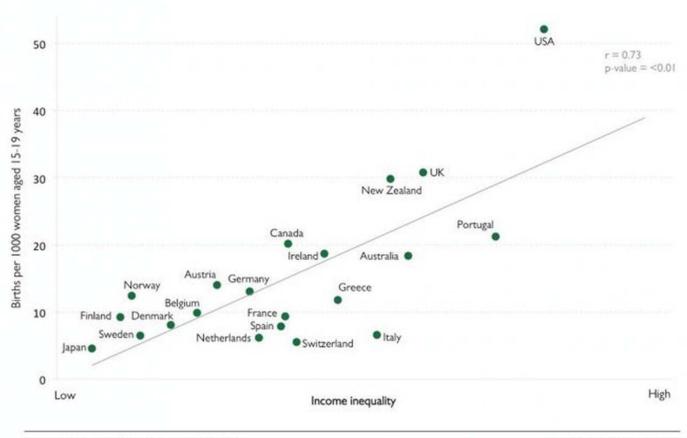
Drug use is more common in more unequal countries



Homicide rates are higher in more unequal rich countries



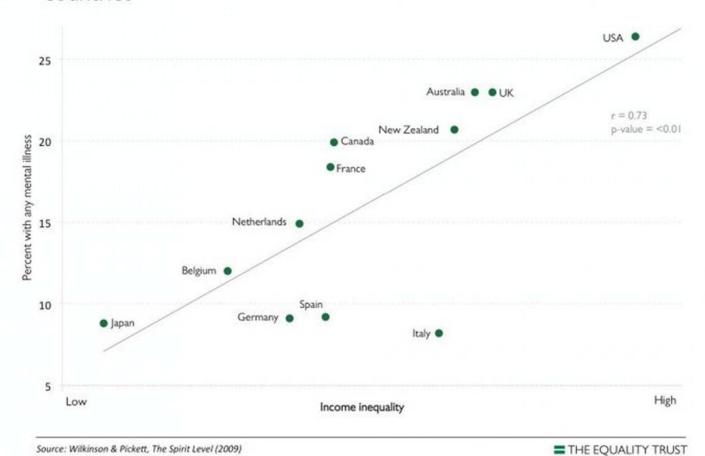
Teenage birth rates are higher in more unequal rich countries

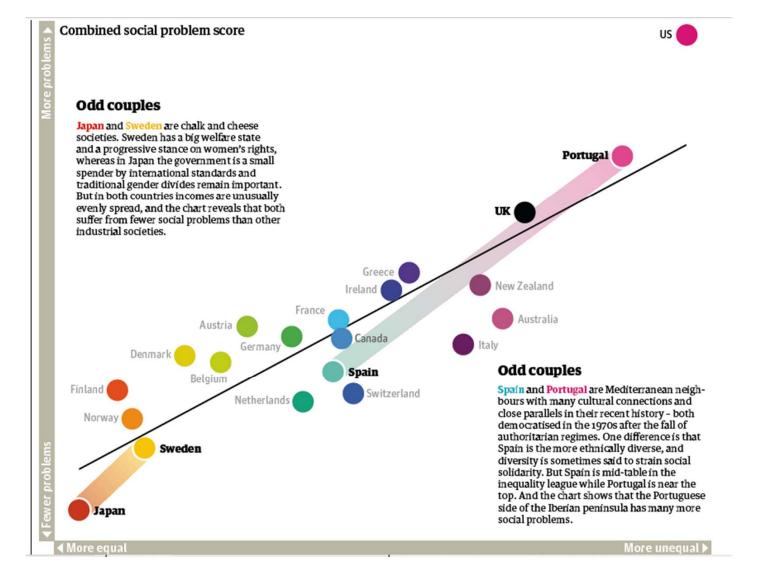


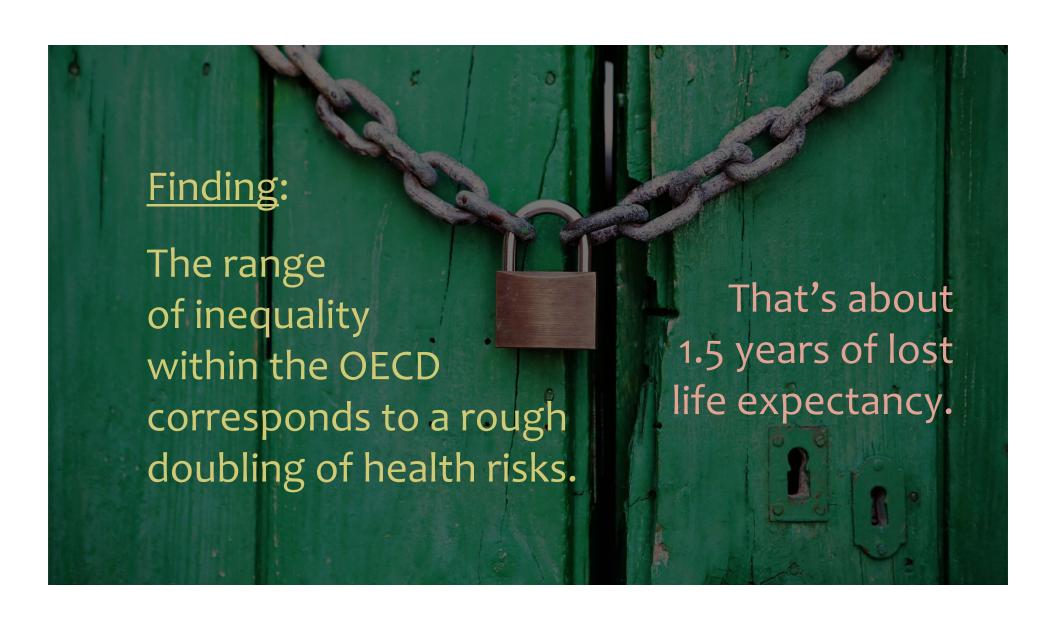
Source: Wilkinson & Pickett, The Spirit Level (2009)

■ THE EQUALITY TRUST

The prevalence of mental illness is higher in more unequal rich countries

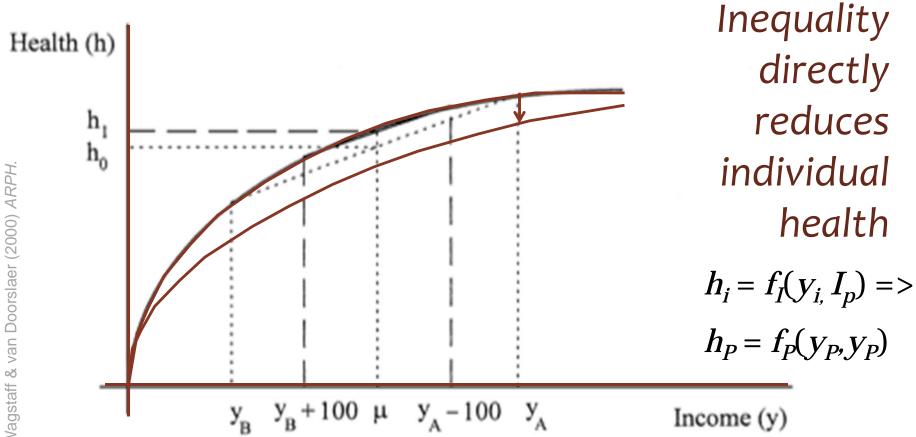




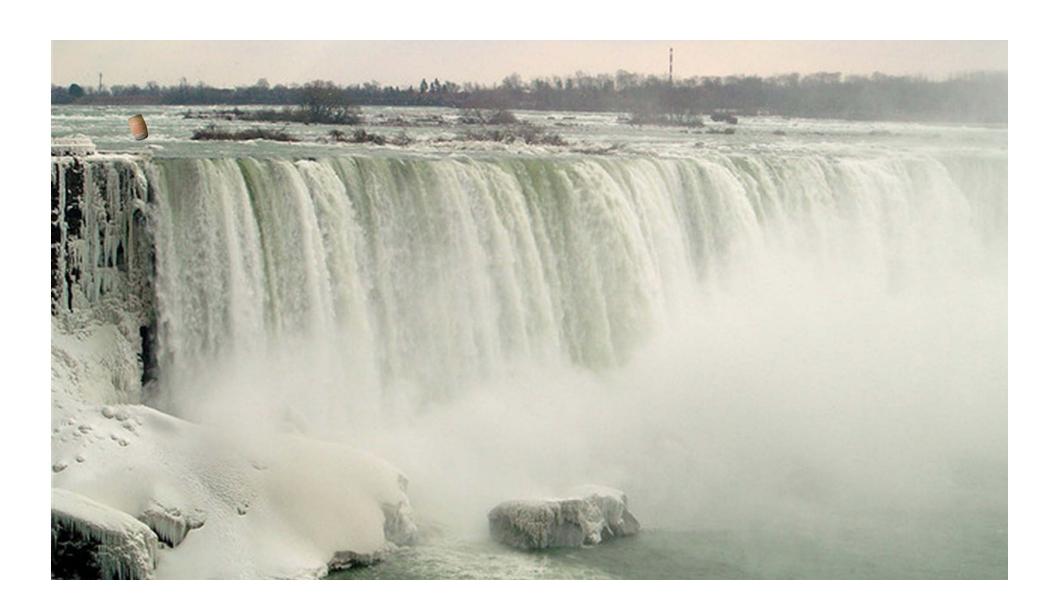


What about Inequality causes Poor Health?

And how?



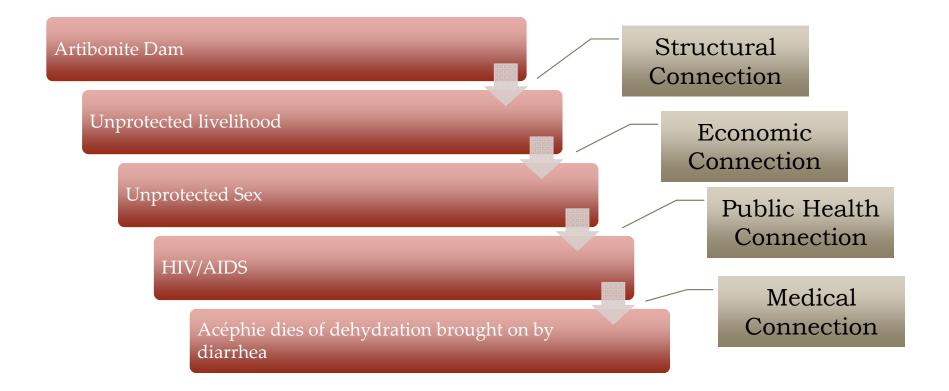




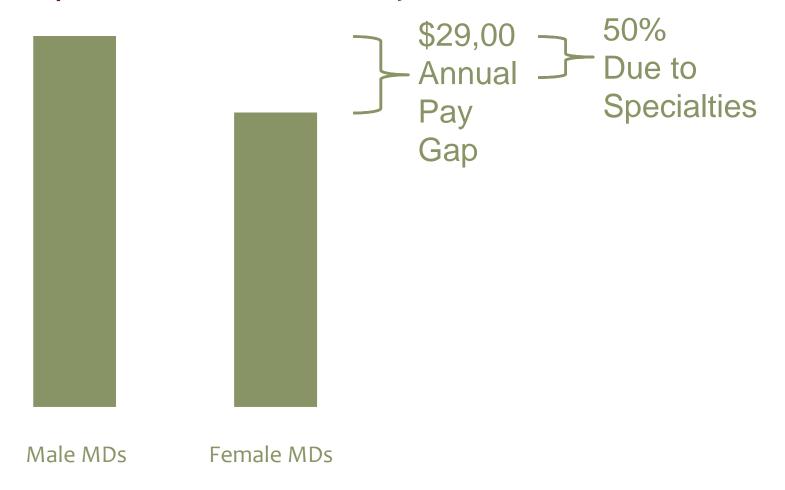
Income Inequality is a symptom of a set of rules that works for the few and not for the many.

١.

Control Over Resources



Compensation for New Physicians











Technical



Price of Generic Drugs in US relative to OECD average, adjusting for GDP/capita:

1:1

Price of Patent Drugs in US relative to OECD average, adjusting for GDP/capita:

2:1

Compensation for Primary Care
Physicians, net of practice & training
costs in US relative to OECD average,
adjusting for GDP/capita:

1:1

Compensation for Specialty Physicians, net of practice & training costs in US relative to OECD average, adjusting for GDP/capita:

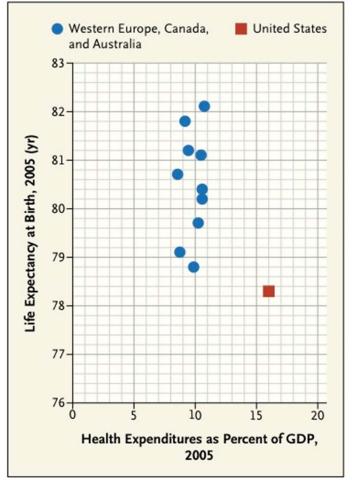
2:1

\$750 Billion/year

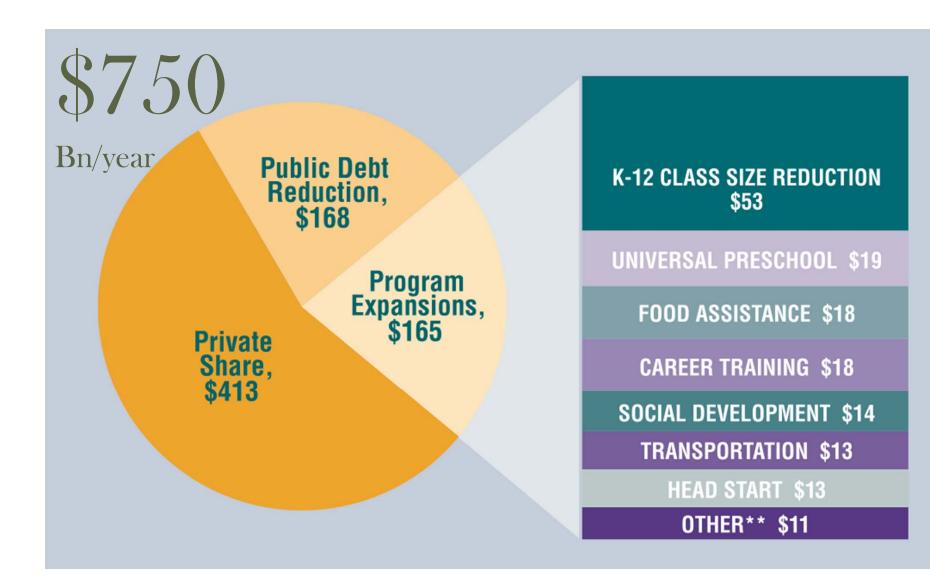


Medical spending in the US crowds out

other expenditures on social goods including primary, secondary and higher education, economic development and maintenance of critical infrastructure.



V. Fuchs and A. Milstein (2011) New England Journal of Medicine



Excessive Inequality in Control Over Resources Impairs Health

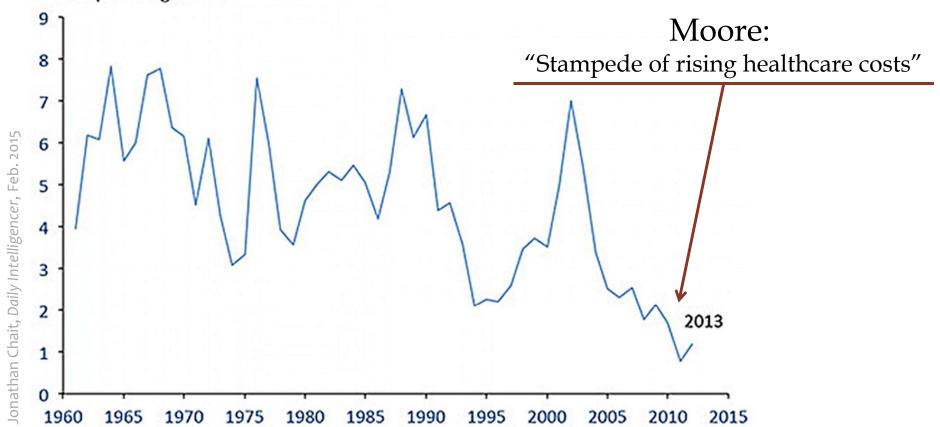
II.

Control Over Discourse



Growth in Real Per Capita National Health Expenditures





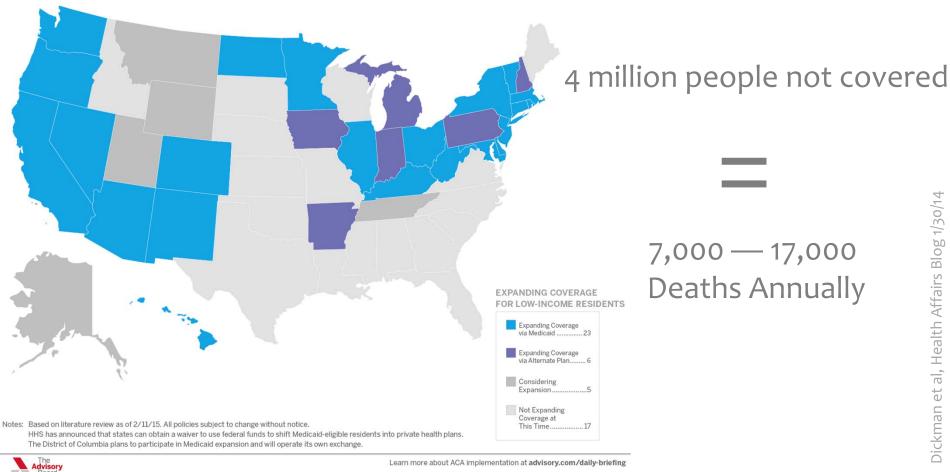
Note: 2013 is a CMS projection.

Source: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, National Health Expenditure Accounts and Projections.



Where the **States** Stand on Medicaid Expansion

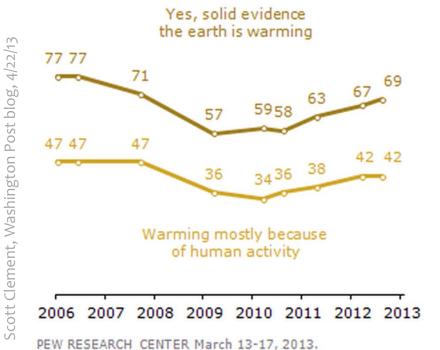
28 States, DC, Expanding Coverage—February 11, 2015



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Is There Solid Evidence the Earth is Warming?



Guardian: \$120 million over 8 years to deny climate change

Guardian:
300,000
deaths per year
due to
climate change

Excessive Inequality in Control Over Discourse Impairs Health

III.

Control Over Preferences

Food Marketing and Diet

- Promotion
- Price
- Place
- Product



Yes, it's a growing phenomenon



Zimmerman & Shimoga (2014). BMC public health

Advertising Study

Results

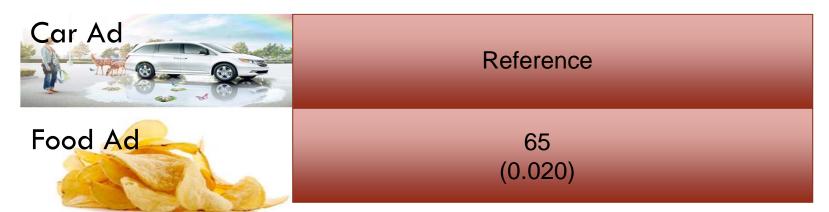
Rate Ratio of Unhealthy Foods Taken (p-value)

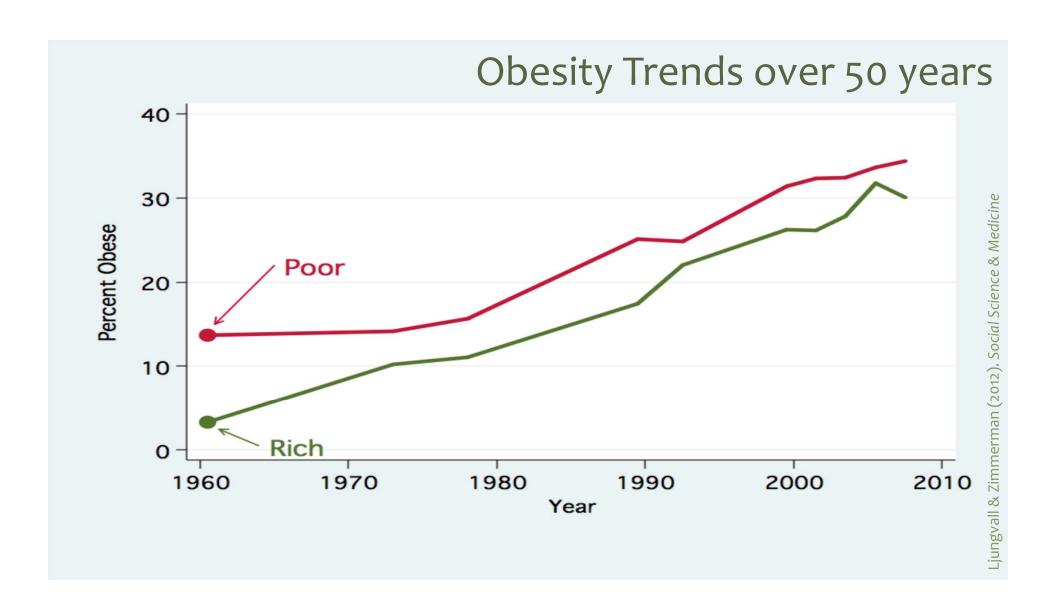


Advertising Study

Results

Calories Taken (p-value)





Excessive Inequality in Control Over Preferences Impairs Health

Control Over Resources Control Over Discourse Control Over Preferences

Money flows through the body toward power.

Income Inequality is a symptom of a set of rules that works for the few and not for the many.

Policy can both reduce and buffer the harm.

1: Inequality is a social phenomenon.

+ 2: Inequality has big effects

on human health.

= 3: We can improve health by changing inequality.

