

Taking SIDES

**Clashing Views on
Controversial Issues in
Health and Society**

Second Edition

Eileen L. Daniel

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Controversial Issues in
Health and Society**



Second Edition

Edited, Selected, and with Introductions by

Eileen L. Daniel

State University of New York College at Brockport

**Duskin Publishing Group/Brown & Benchmark Publishers
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To Mom and Dad with thanks

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PREFACE

This book contains 40 articles arranged in 20 *pro* and *con* pairs. Each pair addresses a controversial issue in health and society, expressed in terms of a question in order to draw the lines of debate more clearly.

The questions that are included here relate to health topics of current concern, such as AIDS, abortion, environmental health, and drug use and abuse. The authors of these articles take strong stands on specific issues and provide support for their positions. Although we may not agree with a particular point of view, each author clearly defines his or her stand on the issues.

This book is divided into seven parts, each containing related issues. Each issue is preceded by an *introduction*, which sets the stage for the debate, gives historical background on the subject, and provides a context for the controversy. Each issue concludes with a *postscript*, which offers a summary of the debate, some concluding observations, and suggestions for further reading on the subject. The postscript also raises further points because all issues have more than two sides. At the back of the book is a listing of all the *contributors to this volume*, which gives information on the physicians, professors, journalists, theologians, and scientists whose views are debated here.

Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in Health and Society is a tool to encourage critical thought on important health issues. Readers should not feel confined to the views expressed in the selections. Some readers may see important points on both sides of an issue and may construct for themselves a new and creative approach, which may incorporate the best of both sides or provide an entirely new vantage point for understanding.

Changes to this edition This second edition of *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in Health and Society* includes some significant changes from the first edition. Eight completely new issues have been added: *Is There a Health Care Crisis in the United States?* (Issue 1); *Should the Government Require U.S. Medical Schools to Produce More Primary Care Doctors?* (Issue 2); *Is Gun Control a Public Health Issue?* (Issue 5); *Does Health Care Delivery and Research Benefit Men at the Expense of Women?* (Issue 12); *Is AIDS a Major Threat to the Heterosexual, Non-Drug-Abusing Population?* (Issue 13); *Is Yo-Yo Dieting Dangerous?* (Issue 14); *Is the Gulf War Syndrome Real?* (Issue 16); and *Does Exposure to Electromagnetic Fields Cause Cancer?* (Issue 18). For four of the issues retained from the previous edition, the issue question has been significantly modified and both selections have been replaced in order to focus the debate more sharply and to bring it up to date: Issue 6 on healthy behavior; Issue 8 on secondhand smoke; Issue 9 on the disease model of addiction; and Issue 15 on vitamin C. For the issues on physician-assisted suicide (Issue 3), health care

for the elderly (Issue 4), positive mental attitude (Issue 7), drug legalization (Issue 10), and chiropractors (Issue 20), one or both of the selections have been replaced to provide new points of view. In all, 31 of the 40 selections are new.

A word to the instructor *An Instructor's Manual With Test Questions* (multiple-choice and essay) is available through the publisher for instructors using *Taking Sides* in the classroom. Also available is a general guidebook, *Using Taking Sides in the Classroom*, which discusses teaching techniques and methods for integrating the pro-con approach of *Taking Sides* into any classroom setting.

Acknowledgments Special thanks to John, Diana, and Jordan. Also, thanks to my colleagues at the State University of New York College at Brockport for all their helpful contributions. I was also assisted in preparing this edition by the valuable suggestions from the adopters of *Taking Sides* who filled out comment cards or returned questionnaires:

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Eileen L. Daniel
State University of New York College at Brockport

INTRODUCTION

Dimensions and Approaches to the Study of Health and Society

Eileen L. Daniel

WHAT IS HEALTH?

Traditionally, being healthy meant being absent of illness. If someone did not have a disease, then he or she was considered to be healthy. The overall health of a nation or specific population was determined by numbers measuring illness, disease, and death rates. Today, this rather negative view of assessing individual health and health in general is changing. A healthy person is one who is not only free from disease but also fully well.

Being well, or wellness, involves the interrelationship of many dimensions of health: physical, emotional, social, mental, and spiritual. This multifaceted view of health reflects a holistic approach, which includes individuals' taking responsibility for their own well-being.

Our health and longevity are affected by the many choices we make every day: Medical reports tell us that if we abstain from smoking, taking drugs, excessive alcohol consumption, and eating foods that contain too much fat and cholesterol, and if we exercise regularly, our rate of disease and disability will significantly decrease. These reports, while not totally conclusive, have encouraged many people to make positive lifestyle changes. Millions of people have quit smoking; alcohol consumption is down; and more and more individuals are exercising regularly and eating low-fat diets. While these changes are encouraging, many people who have been unable or unwilling to make these changes are left feeling worried or guilty over continuing their negative health behaviors.

But disagreement exists among the experts about the exact nature of positive health behaviors, which causes confusion. For example, some scientists claim that overweight people should make efforts to lose weight, even if it takes many tries. Other researchers claim that dieting itself can be more dangerous than being overweight. Who do you believe? Experts disagree on a wide variety of topics, including the health risks of being exposed to electromagnetic fields from power lines or appliances, whether or not chiropractors are legitimate health providers, and the role of vitamin C in preventing cancer and heart disease.

Health status is also affected by society and government. Societal pressures have helped pass smoking restrictions in public places, mandatory safety belt legislation, and laws permitting condom distribution in public schools. The

government plays a role in the health of individuals as well, although it has failed to provide even minimal health care for many low-income Americans.

Unfortunately, there are no absolute answers to many questions regarding health and wellness issues. Moral questions, controversial concerns, and individual perceptions of health matters all can create opposing views. As you evaluate the issues in this book, you should keep an open mind toward both sides. You may not change your mind regarding the morality of abortion or the limitation of health care for the elderly, but you will still be able to learn from the opposing viewpoints.

WELLNESS, BEHAVIOR, AND SOCIETY

The issues in this book are divided into seven parts. The first deals with health and society. Issue 1 debates whether or not there is a health care crisis in the United States. The importance of this issue is clear: approximately 35 to 40 million Americans have no health insurance; there has been a nationwide resurgence in infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis; antibiotic-resistant strains of bacterial infections threaten thousands of Americans; and those enrolled in government programs such as Medicaid often have difficulty finding physicians who will accept them as patients because reimbursements are so low and the paperwork is so cumbersome. On the other hand, Americans continue to live longer and longer, and for the majority of the population, the health care available in the United States is among the best in the world. Issue 2 deals with a related topic: whether or not the disproportionate number of medical specialists as compared to primary care physicians has caused a crisis in health care costs and a high demand for general practitioners. Issue 3 deals with whether or not physicians should participate in the deaths of hopelessly ill patients. Although many people agree that doctors should not prolong the lives of terminally ill patients, particularly if doing so goes against the patients' wishes, do elderly people who want to live as long as possible deserve special consideration? In Issue 4, Daniel Callahan, the director of the Hastings Center, argues that the increasing proportion of health care dollars that is going to the elderly should be curbed because it is a major contributor to the high cost of health care. Physicians Ezekiel J. Emanuel and Linda L. Emanuel disagree with Callahan, claiming that there would not be a significant saving if health care for the elderly were rationed. The fifth controversy in this section is about the epidemic of gun-related deaths and the potential benefits of more stringent gun control. Many doctors and public health officials claim that homicide involving guns is increasing in the United States and that this trend is escalating health care costs and diminishing quality of life. They feel that gun control would help reduce the number of shootings and deaths. Opponents argue that under gun control, only criminals would have access to guns, not law-abiding citizens. They also contend that doctors should leave the gun control issue to criminologists.

MIND/BODY RELATIONSHIP

Part 2 discusses two important issues related to the relationship between mind and body: Should Healthy Behavior Be Mandated? and, Can a Positive Mental Attitude Overcome Disease? Over the past 10 years, both laypeople and the medical profession have placed an emphasis on the prevention of illness as a way to improve health. Not smoking, for instance, certainly reduces the risk of developing lung cancer. However, the current U.S. health care system places an emphasis on treatment rather than prevention, even though prevention is less expensive, less painful, and more humane. In Issue 6, microbiologist Michael F. Jacobson claims that the emphasis on treatment has neglected prevention. Physician Faith T. Fitzgerald argues that overpromotion of prevention and blaming the sick for causing their own illnesses by smoking or overeating is not productive. Not everyone, she adds, is capable of making positive lifestyle changes.

As Jacobson claims, we can be responsible for much of our own well-being by practicing positive health behaviors. Marc Barasch, in Issue 7, argues that we can also control our health by maintaining a positive mental attitude. He claims that the mind can influence the body by affecting the immune system. A positive mental attitude can boost the immune system, which, in turn, can help fight disease. Ellen Switzer counters that there is no concrete proof that people can prevent or slow a disease's progress by maintaining a positive mental state. Blaming people for causing their own diseases through negative states of mind, she argues, ignores the real causes of disease.

SUBSTANCE USE AND ABUSE

Part 3 introduces current issues related to drug use and abuse. Millions of Americans use and abuse drugs that alter their minds and affect their bodies. These drugs range from illegal substances, such as crack cocaine and opiates, to the widely used legal drugs alcohol and tobacco. Use of these substances can lead to physical and psychological addiction and the related problems of family dysfunction, reduced worker productivity, and crime. Particularly because of crime involving illegal drugs, many experts have argued for the legalization of drugs, particularly marijuana. The logic is that if drugs were legalized, the enormous profits from illegal drug sales would not exist, drug dealers would be out of business, and law enforcement officials could therefore focus on other areas of crime.

The drug crisis in America is often related to changes in or a breakdown of traditional values. The collapse of strong family and religious influences may affect drug usage, especially among young people. It has been argued, however, that some people, regardless of societal or familial influences, will use drugs based on some inherent need or inherited factor. This is particularly true in relation to alcoholism. For some time, experts have maintained that addiction to drugs and alcohol is an inherited disease because it appears to

run in families. Other experts disregard the disease model of addiction and argue that drug abuse and excessive drinking are voluntary behaviors that are within an individual's control.

Also in this section is a debate on secondhand smoke. Some studies have shown that nonsmokers who are forced to breathe tobacco smoke run a higher risk of developing lung cancer and other diseases that are primarily related to smoking. The tobacco industry and some journalists respond that the Environmental Protection Agency has altered the data on the relationship between passive smoking and health and that secondhand smoke is not nearly as dangerous as actually smoking.

SEXUALITY AND GENDER ISSUES

The issues in Part 4 debate topics related to gender and sexuality. A particularly divisive topic is the use of abortion to end an unwanted pregnancy. Mary Gordon believes that abortion is acceptable and argues in Issue 11 that it is not an immoral choice for women. Jason DeParle, in opposition, discusses why liberals and feminists do not like to talk about the morality of abortion. The abortion issue continues to cause major controversy. More restrictions have been placed on the right to abortion as a result of the political power wielded by the pro-life faction. Pro-choice followers, however, argue that making abortion illegal again will force many women to obtain dangerous "back alley" abortions. Complicating the issue has been the recent killings and shootings of doctors and other personnel involved with abortion.

Issue 12 is a debate over whether or not our health care system favors men at the expense of women. Although women on average live longer than men, many women claim that they have been excluded from pharmaceutical tests and other medical research and that they receive inferior care when they see doctors. Reporters Leslie Laurence and Beth Weinhouse, arguing from this viewpoint, contend that women have been ignored in medical research, are not adequately treated for heart disease (a leading cause of death among women), and are not taken seriously by their doctors. Physician Andrew G. Kadar disagrees with this premise. He claims that women see their doctors more frequently than men, are hospitalized more often than men, and continue to outlive men by several years.

Issue 13 focuses on whether or not AIDS is a serious risk to the heterosexual, non-drug-abusing population. William B. Johnston and Kevin R. Hopkins feel that as heterosexuals become more sexually active, their risk of contracting AIDS increases. They argue that unless the heterosexual population drastically alters its sexual habits soon, a widespread AIDS epidemic is inevitable. Michael Fumento, on the other hand, believes that the AIDS epidemic has peaked and that heterosexual transmission has actually decreased. According to Fumento, the general population was *never* at a high risk for contracting the disease.

NUTRITION AND HEALTH

Is it healthier to remain overweight than to diet repeatedly? Will taking large doses of vitamins, particularly vitamin C, improve health? These questions are discussed in Part 5, which deals with nutrition and dieting. Millions of Americans are dieting, many going on one diet after another in an effort to achieve a lean figure. Does constant dieting increase one's risk of heart disease and other medical problems? And does it become harder to lose weight the more frequently one diets? These questions are explored in Issue 14.

Will taking megadoses of vitamins help prevent many serious diseases, such as cancer and heart disease? New research indicates that the current recommendations for many vitamins, including vitamin C, are inadequate for our changing lifestyles. People today are under considerable stress, are exposed to increasing amounts of environmental pollutants, often use drugs, and frequently eat away from home. These factors may make it impossible for individuals to meet their needs for vitamins via diet alone. While vitamins prevent deficiency diseases, it appears that specific vitamins may also be beneficial in the treatment and prevention of certain illnesses, such as cancer and heart disease, and may prolong life by several years. Experts warn, however, that the large doses often recommended to prevent disease can have side effects or be toxic and that it is still safest simply to eat a balanced diet that includes plenty of fruits and vegetables.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Debate continues over fundamental issues surrounding the environment: human needs and the future of the environment. The debate becomes more heated as environmental issues move closer to human concerns, such as health, economic interests, and politics. In Issue 16, for example, the debate focuses on whether or not troops stationed overseas during the Persian Gulf War were exposed to harmful environmental or chemical substances during combat that caused the health problems many of the soldiers are currently suffering. Issue 17 discusses the safety of pesticide usage on fruits and vegetables. The Alar (a chemical growth regulator for apples) scare in the mid-1980s, in which it was widely reported that a by-product of Alar is a carcinogen, convinced many Americans that the apple supply was not safe and that an apple a day could cause cancer. At the same time, nutritionists as well as the Department of Agriculture were urging people to eat more fruits and vegetables to help *prevent* cancer. Another major issue is the alleged risk of exposure to electromagnetic fields (EMFs) given off by power lines and appliances that use electricity. Reports linking exposure to EMFs with leukemia and other cancers have made headlines. In Issue 18, Paul Brodeur argues that EMF exposure presents a genuine danger and that the power industry has gone to great lengths to cover it up. Gary Taubes maintains that there is no real proof that EMFs present a health risk.

MAKING CHOICES FOR THE HEALTH CARE CONSUMER

Part 7 introduces questions about particular issues related to choices about health care services. The questions here are, Should All Children Be Immunized Against Childhood Diseases? and, Are Chiropractors Legitimate Health Providers?

At the turn of the century, millions of American children developed childhood diseases such as tetanus, polio, measles, and pertussis (whooping cough). Many of these children died or became permanently disabled because of these illnesses. Today, vaccines exist to prevent all of these conditions; however, not all children receive their recommended immunizations. Some do not get vaccinated until the schools require them, and others are allowed exemptions. More and more, parents are requesting exemptions from some or all vaccinations based on fears over their safety and effectiveness. The pertussis vaccination seems to generate the biggest fears. Reports of serious injury to children following the pertussis vaccination (usually given in a combination of diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus, or DPT) have convinced many parents to forgo immunization. As a result, the rates of measles and pertussis have been climbing after decades of decline. Is it safer to be vaccinated than to risk getting pertussis? Most medical societies and physicians believe so, but Richard Leviton, in Issue 19, argues that many vaccines are neither safe nor effective.

Current views of chiropractors and the practice of spinal manipulation are discussed in Issue 20. Due to demand by the public, chiropractors are achieving new legitimacy, despite the efforts of traditional medicine to discredit them. Traditionalists view chiropractors as a notch above quacks, but at the same time, more and more people are turning to spinal manipulation for relief from their backaches, headaches, and other conditions.

Will the many debates presented in this book ever be resolved? Some issues may resolve themselves because of the availability of resources. For instance, funding for health care for the elderly may become restricted in the United States, as it is in the United Kingdom, simply because there are increasingly limited resources to go around. An overhaul of the U.S. health care system to provide care for all while keeping costs down seems inevitable; most Americans agree that the system must be changed. Other controversies may require the test of time for resolution. Several more years may be required before it can be determined if electromagnetic field exposure is positively linked to cancer. The debates over the effectiveness of megadoses of vitamins may also require years of additional research.

Other controversies may never resolve themselves. There may never be a consensus over the issues of abortion, gun control, physician-assisted suicide, or the disease model of addiction. This book will introduce you to many ongoing controversies on a variety of sensitive and complex health-related topics. In order to have a good grasp of one's own viewpoint, it is necessary to be familiar with and understand the points made by the opposition.

CONTENTS IN BRIEF

PART 1 HEALTH AND SOCIETY 1

- Issue 1. Is There a Health Care Crisis in the United States? 2
- Issue 2. Should the Government Require U.S. Medical Schools to Produce More Primary Care Doctors? 20
- Issue 3. Should Doctors Ever Help Terminally Ill Patients Commit Suicide? 34
- Issue 4. Should Health Care for the Elderly Be Limited? 46
- Issue 5. Is Gun Control a Public Health Issue? 70

PART 2 MIND/BODY RELATIONSHIP 83

- Issue 6. Should Healthy Behavior Be Mandated? 84
- Issue 7. Can a Positive Mental Attitude Overcome Disease? 96

PART 3 SUBSTANCE USE AND ABUSE 115

- Issue 8. Is Secondhand Smoke a Proven Health Risk for Nonsmokers? 116
- Issue 9. Should Addiction to Drugs and Alcohol Be Considered a Disease Rather Than a Behavioral Problem? 136
- Issue 10. Should Drugs Be Legalized? 152

PART 4 SEXUALITY AND GENDER ISSUES 165

- Issue 11. Can Abortion Be a Morally Acceptable Choice? 166
- Issue 12. Does Health Care Delivery and Research Benefit Men at the Expense of Women? 186
- Issue 13. Is AIDS a Major Threat to the Heterosexual, Non-Drug-Abusing Population? 208

PART 5 NUTRITION AND HEALTH 223

- Issue 14. Is Yo-Yo Dieting Dangerous? 224
- Issue 15. Can Large Doses of Vitamin C Improve Health? 244

PART 6 ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES 263

- Issue 16. Is the Gulf War Syndrome Real? 264
- Issue 17. Are Pesticides in Foods Harmful to Human Health? 286
- Issue 18. Does Exposure to Electromagnetic Fields Cause Cancer? 302

PART 7 MAKING CHOICES FOR THE HEALTH CARE CONSUMER 327

- Issue 19. Should All Children Be Immunized Against Childhood Diseases? 328
- Issue 20. Are Chiropractors Legitimate Health Providers? 348

CONTENTS

Preface	i
---------	---

Introduction: Dimensions and Approaches to the Study of Health and Society	xii
--	-----

PART 1 HEALTH AND SOCIETY	1
-------------------------------------	----------

ISSUE 1. Is There a Health Care Crisis in the United States?	2
--	----------

YES: Nancy F. McKenzie, from "The Real Health Care Crisis," <i>The Nation</i>	4
--	---

NO: Irwin M. Stelzer, from "What Health-Care Crisis?" <i>Commentary</i>	9
--	---

Nancy F. McKenzie, executive director of Health/PAC, maintains that health care in America has gone well beyond the crisis point. Irwin M. Stelzer, director of Regulatory Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute, argues that although there is some need for reform, overall, the health care system in the United States is based on reasonable costs and the provision of high-quality care.

ISSUE 2. Should the Government Require U.S. Medical Schools to Produce More Primary Care Doctors?	20
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YES: James Nolan, from "Why We Need Government Regulation: A Conversation With James Nolan, MD," <i>The Internist: Health Policy in Practice</i>	22
---	----

NO: Richard A. Cooper, from "Regulation Won't Solve Our Workforce Problems," <i>The Internist: Health Policy in Practice</i>	26
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James Nolan, physician and chair of the Department of Medicine at the State University of New York at Buffalo, argues that government regulation of medical schools would help meet the need for primary care physicians. Richard A. Cooper, dean of the Medical College of Wisconsin and director of its Health Policy Institute, strongly objects to government regulation of the educational process.

ISSUE 3. Should Doctors Ever Help Terminally Ill Patients Commit Suicide?	34
---	-----------

YES: Timothy E. Quill, from "Death and Dignity: A Case of Individualized Decision Making," <i>The New England Journal of Medicine</i>	36
--	----

NO: Herbert Hendin and Gerald Klerman, from "Physician-Assisted Suicide: The Dangers of Legalization," <i>American Journal of Psychiatry</i>	39
--	-----------

Timothy E. Quill, M.D., describes a physician-assisted suicide and asserts that doctors have roles other than healing and fighting against death. Physicians Herbert Hendin and Gerald Klerman argue that there is a great potential for abuse if physician-assisted suicide is legalized.

ISSUE 4. Should Health Care for the Elderly Be Limited?	46
YES: Daniel Callahan, from "Setting Limits: A Response," <i>The Gerontologist</i>	48
NO: Ezekiel J. Emanuel and Linda L. Emanuel, from "The Economics of Dying: The Illusion of Cost Savings at the End of Life," <i>The New England Journal of Medicine</i>	59

Hastings Center director Daniel Callahan believes that medical care for elderly people should not involve expensive health care services that serve only to forestall death. Physicians Ezekiel J. Emanuel and Linda L. Emanuel argue that cost savings due to limitations in medical care at the end of life are not likely to be substantial.

ISSUE 5. Is Gun Control a Public Health Issue?	70
YES: Jerome P. Kassirer, from "Guns in the Household," <i>The New England Journal of Medicine</i>	72
NO: J. Neil Schulman, from <i>Stopping Power: Why 70 Million Americans Own Guns</i>	77

Physician Jerome P. Kassirer argues that guns, particularly guns in the household, are a major public health threat. Journalist J. Neil Schulman argues that the issue of gun control is not an epidemiological concern but a criminological one.

PART 2 MIND/BODY RELATIONSHIP	83
--------------------------------------	-----------

ISSUE 6. Should Healthy Behavior Be Mandated?	84
YES: Michael F. Jacobson, from "Prevention's the Issue: Your Money or Your Life Style," <i>The Nation</i>	86
NO: Faith T. Fitzgerald, from "The Tyranny of Health," <i>The New England Journal of Medicine</i>	90

Michael F. Jacobson, the director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, claims that federal policies emphasizing healthy behavior would reduce health care spending. Physician Faith T. Fitzgerald argues that there is a need to reassess the role of preventive medicine, which she feels should not try to control people's behavior for their own good.

ISSUE 7. Can a Positive Mental Attitude Overcome Disease? 96

YES: Marc Barasch, from "A Psychology of the Miraculous,"
Psychology Today 98

NO: Ellen Switzer, from "Blaming the Victim," *Vogue* 107

Author Marc Barasch asserts that some people can cure themselves of disease by maintaining an optimistic, upbeat attitude. Freelance writer Ellen Switzer argues that state of mind does not significantly affect the outcome of an illness.

PART 3 SUBSTANCE USE AND ABUSE 115

ISSUE 8. Is Secondhand Smoke a Proven Health Risk for Nonsmokers? 116

YES: Editors of *Consumer Reports*, from "Secondhand Smoke: Is It a Hazard?" *Consumer Reports* 118

NO: Jacob Sullum, from "Just How Bad Is Secondhand Smoke?"
National Review 129

The editors of *Consumer Reports* argue that there is sound scientific data proving that secondhand smoke causes lung cancer and other illnesses. Editor and journalist Jacob Sullum argues that there is no evidence that secondhand smoking carries the dangers associated with actually smoking.

ISSUE 9. Should Addiction to Drugs and Alcohol Be Considered a Disease Rather Than a Behavioral Problem? 136

YES: George E. Vaillant, from "We Should Retain the Disease Concept of Alcoholism," *Harvard Medical School Mental Health Letter* 138

NO: Joann Ellison Rodgers, from "Addiction: A Whole New View,"
Psychology Today 142

Physician George E. Vaillant maintains that alcoholism should be treated as a disease and not as a behavioral problem or character flaw. Journalist Joann Ellison Rodgers argues that the theory that alcoholism and drug addiction are diseases is outdated.

ISSUE 10. Should Drugs Be Legalized? 152

YES: Joseph P. Kane, from "The Challenge of Legalizing Drugs," *America* 154

NO: Gerald W. Lynch and Roberta Blotner, from "Legalizing Drugs Is Not the Solution," *America* 159

Theologian Joseph P. Kane asserts that legalizing drugs will help prevent crime and violence. Gerald W. Lynch, president of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and Roberta Blotner, director of the City University of New York's substance abuse prevention programs, claim that legalizing drugs would increase drug usage and addiction.

PART 4 SEXUALITY AND GENDER ISSUES 165

ISSUE 11. Can Abortion Be a Morally Acceptable Choice? 166

YES: Mary Gordon, from "A Moral Choice," *The Atlantic Monthly* 168

NO: Jason DeParle, from "Beyond the Legal Right: Why Liberals and Feminists Don't Like to Talk About the Morality of Abortion," *The Washington Monthly* 175

Author Mary Gordon believes that abortion is an acceptable means to end an unwanted pregnancy. Editor Jason DeParle argues that the 3 out of 10 pregnancies that currently end in abortion raise many moral questions.

ISSUE 12. Does Health Care Delivery and Research Benefit Men at the Expense of Women? 186

YES: Leslie Laurence and Beth Weinhouse, from *Outrageous Practices: The Alarming Truth About How Medicine Mistreats Women* 188

NO: Andrew G. Kadar, from "The Sex-Bias Myth in Medicine," *The Atlantic Monthly* 199

Health and medical reporters Leslie Laurence and Beth Weinhouse claim that women have been excluded from most research on new drugs and medical treatments. Physician Andrew G. Kadar argues that women actually receive more medical care and benefit more from medical research than do men.

ISSUE 13. Is AIDS a Major Threat to the Heterosexual, Non-Drug-Abusing Population? 208

YES: William B. Johnston and Kevin R. Hopkins, from *The Catastrophe Ahead* 210

NO: Michael Fumento, from "Heterosexual AIDS: Part VII," <i>The American Spectator</i>	215
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William B. Johnston, the vice president of the Hudson Institute, and Kevin R. Hopkins, an adjunct senior fellow of the Hudson Institute, warn that unless people make a serious attempt to alter behaviors that put them at risk for AIDS, the heterosexual population will be facing an AIDS epidemic. Michael Fumento, a former AIDS analyst, claims that AIDS will not devastate white, middle-class heterosexuals.

PART 5 NUTRITION AND HEALTH	223
--	------------

ISSUE 14. Is Yo-Yo Dieting Dangerous?	224
--	------------

YES: Frances M. Berg, from <i>Health Risks of Weight Loss</i>, 3rd ed.	226
---	------------

NO: National Task Force on the Prevention and Treatment of Obesity, from "Weight Cycling," <i>Journal of the American Medical Association</i>	234
--	------------

Nutritionist Frances M. Berg contends that yo-yo dieting, or weight cycling, is associated with an elevated risk of physical and mental health problems. The National Task Force on the Prevention and Treatment of Obesity maintains that there is no convincing evidence that weight cycling has any major effects on health or the effectiveness of future diets.

ISSUE 15. Can Large Doses of Vitamin C Improve Health?	244
---	------------

YES: Patricia Long, from "The Power of Vitamin C," <i>Health</i>	246
---	------------

NO: Victor Herbert, from "Does Mega-C Do More Good Than Harm, or More Harm Than Good?" <i>Nutrition Today</i>	253
--	------------

Patricia Long, a journalist who specializes in health issues, suggests that people would benefit from higher levels of vitamin C than those currently recommended by the government. Physician and attorney Victor Herbert maintains that megadoses of vitamin C may harm more people than they help.

PART 6 ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES	263
--	------------

ISSUE 16. Is the Gulf War Syndrome Real?	264
---	------------

YES: Dennis Bernstein and Thea Kelley, from "The Gulf War Comes Home: Sickness Spreads, But the Pentagon Denies All," <i>The Progressive</i>	266
---	------------