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The boundaries of the self and the unhealthy other: Reflections on health, culture and AIDS

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Abstract

Most accounts of the cultural stigmas associated with AIDS have not adequately considered the meanings through which the stigmatizing self imagines his/her difference from the stigmatized other. This paper argues that "health" is a key concept in the fashioning of identity for the modern and contemporary middle class and that the "unhealthy" come to be represented as the other of this self. "Healthy" and "unhealthy," however, must be understood both in their biomedical meanings and in their implicit metaphorical meanings. The "unhealthy," "contagious," "sexually deviant," and "addicted-minority" other" all condensed in the negative symbolism of AIDS" have become images which are mobilized as part of a cultural politics of reconstructing the self in conformity with intensified mandates for self-control. The expulsion of "unhealthy" meanings from the self, an act of patrolling the borders of identity, finds its projected physical location in the figure of the



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Keywords

AIDS; culture; self

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