

How badly does it hurt? Research examines the biomedical diagnosis of pain

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Is the science of diagnosing pain causing a number of pain sufferers to defend their honor? Research out of the University of Cincinnati is examining the diagnosis of pain that evades scientific testing, and the additional emotional suffering that can result for the patient.

The research by Elizabeth Sweeney, a doctoral candidate in UC's Department of Sociology, was presented today at the 105th annual meeting of the American Sociological Association in Atlanta. The paper, "Defining Reality: How Biomedical Researchers Determine the Existence of [Pain](#)," analyzed more than 20 articles randomly selected from the peer-reviewed international academic journal, *Pain*®, the official publication of the International Association for the Study of Pain.

Sweeney examined the journal's content to determine how pain is measured and defined in terms of type of pain, location of pain, its causes, severity, duration, response to treatment, methods of detection and symptoms. Because of these evidence-based diagnostic tests, the paper states that sufferers of [chronic pain](#) - conditions that frequently cannot be localized or pointed out on a scan or test - are often put in the position of defending the legitimacy or the reality of their condition.

Examples of these chronic pain sufferers of unexplained or "contested" illnesses can include patients with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS), [fibromyalgia](#) and Gulf War Syndrome.

"It is apparent from this research that the missing link in much of biomedical research is any viable attempt to understand the subjective experience of pain," Sweeney writes.

"A diagnosis, simple though it may seem, constitutes not only the legitimacy of one's illness, but also the validation of one's sanity and honor - evidence that the patient is not psychologically unstable and is not 'faking' it," says Sweeney.

The paper details that the journal, *Pain*, which for more than 30 years has focused on the study and research of pain, is considered one of the world's premiere sources of biomedical research on pain. The articles that were analyzed were published between May 2008 and May 2009.

Demonstrating the challenges that pain and chronic pain pose to Western medicine, Sweeney concludes that deconstructing [biomedical research](#) on pain will better pave pathways of understanding in diagnosing and treating chronic pain sufferers.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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