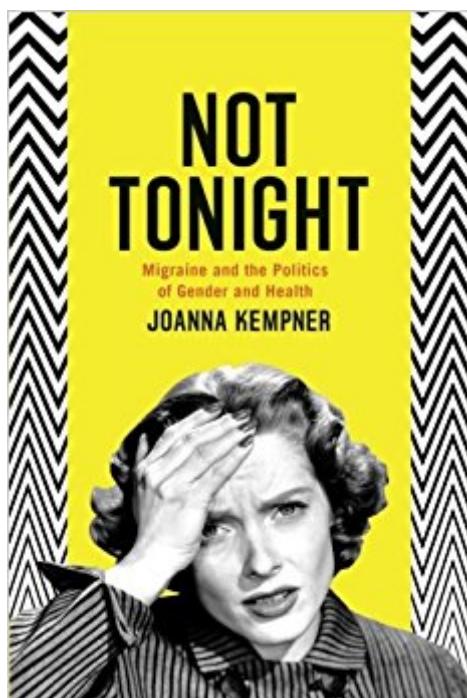


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# Not Tonight: Migraine And The Politics Of Gender And Health



## Synopsis

Pain. Vomiting. Hours and days spent lying in the dark. Migraine is an extraordinarily common, disabling, and painful disorder that affects over 36 million Americans and costs the US economy at least \$32 billion per year. Nevertheless, it is frequently dismissed, ignored, and delegitimized. In *Not Tonight*, Joanna Kempner argues that this general dismissal of migraine can be traced back to the gendered social values embedded in the way we talk about, understand, and make policies for people in pain. Because the symptoms that accompany headache disorders—like head pain, visual auras, and sensitivity to sound—lack an objective marker of distress that can confirm their existence, doctors rely on the perceived moral character of their patients to gauge how serious their complaints are. Kempner shows how this problem plays out in the history of migraine, from nineteenth-century formulations of migraine as a disorder of upper-class intellectual men and hysterical women to the influential concept of "migraine personality" in the 1940s, in which women with migraine were described as uptight neurotics who withheld sex, to contemporary depictions of people with highly sensitive "migraine brains." *Not Tonight* casts new light on how cultural beliefs about gender, pain, and the distinction between mind and body influence not only whose suffering we legitimate, but which remedies are marketed, how medicine is practiced, and how knowledge about disease is produced.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An important contribution to our understanding of the multi-dimensional process through

which society perceives and construes pain and disability. Her study of headache and especially migraine powerfully demonstrates the way in which gender, stakeholder interests (including those of status-oriented physicians and profit-oriented pharmaceutical manufacturers), and the very elusiveness of pain interact to create that social entity we call migraine—*an entity that shapes attitudes, self-perceptions, and access to care*. Carefully researched and engagingly written, this study should be of interest to anyone concerned with the social aspects of medicine. And anyone who suffers from the curse of headache pain. (Charles E. Rosenberg Harvard University)  
“This insightful and eloquent account of our evolving understandings of migraine, from a condition of weak-nerved women, to a “real” neurobiological disease, does far more than document the cultural framing of headache. Kempner illuminates the complex, tangled relationship between medicine, morality, and meaning making in contemporary American society as she demonstrates that despite its biomedicalization and a shift from thinking of migraine as “all in the head,” to a genuine brain disease, migraine remains a disorder of personhood—and a particularly gendered one at that. The acuity of her sociological analysis is matched by her compassion for migraine sufferers and their fellow travelers on the quest for legitimacy and a cure. (Elizabeth Mitchell Armstrong Princeton University)  
Kempner’s incisive work analyzes migraine medicine and its gendered subtext as practitioners sought to make sense of the mind/body actions or interactions causing the common, yet devastating pain of sufferers. The book is beautifully written, with a moving preface in which Kempner locates herself as a fellow migraine sufferer as well as ethnographic observer. (Linda Blum Northeastern University)  
Kempner expertly illustrates how social legitimization of an illness is a multifactorial process and that effective recognition of a disease, which provides the basis for serious advances in research and treatment, can only result from a broad acknowledgment that persons who suffer from it are worthy of such interventions. (Medical Anthropology Quarterly)

Joanna Kempner is assistant professor of sociology and an affiliate of the Institute for Health, Health Care Policy, and Aging Research at Rutgers University.

As a migraine sufferer, I had read numerous books (Heal Your Headache, The Magnesium Solution, The Migraine Brain, etc) in a desperate effort to improve my condition. But many of those books left me feeling overwhelmed by complicated diets and trigger avoidance therapies, and made me feel as if my migraines were MY fault. Not Tonight helped me see all of those books, and everything I

had heard from well-meaning but ultimately uninformed doctors, in historical/cultural perspective. This in turn empowered me to demand better treatment. It has helped me to stop blaming myself for my migraines, and to start seeking out people who would support me in finding a solution. This book is an absolute must-read for migraine sufferers everywhere.

Wonderful informative book. I get to meet and film the author on Saturday. Very Comprehensive coming from a Migraine sufferer.

As a headache patient and advocate, I fell in love with Kempner's book, *Not Tonight*. She authentically weaves the reader through a 300 year timeline exposing the gritty layers migraine patients have experienced over time and offers up a "why". Her research and insights as a sociologist highlight how absent of scientific solutions, medicine sought to define migraine using gender. An hysterical woman of weak constitution disease. We learn how today, migraine is routinely overlooked and marginalized based on these outdated but deeply embedded cultural practices. The thoroughness in which Kempner convincingly spreads culpability in the stigmatizing of migraine patients serves to emphasize prevalence. Unbelievably, in the 21st century, as we strive to unravel the complexities of the brain, patients and researchers continue to await societies legitimization of migraine as a neurobiological condition.

A fabulous look at how research and medicine is shaped by cultural biases. This is easy and entertaining reading for all.

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