

Waiting as Method



Caption

"You wouldn't think I was retired the amount of time I spend at the VA. Part of it is the turnover they have. No one wants to treat us, especially the older guys. We spend forever waiting for an appointment, and then a follow-up and then the moment you mention something involving Agent Orange it's like they lose your file." --J, Vietnam Veteran

"I probably had a relatively normal relationship with my children compared to most of the guys here. I knew about the connections between AO and birth defects but we thought we were in the clear because none of my children seemed to have any effects. But my granddaughter was born without any legs, and we're now thinking that two of my daughters' thyroid and fertility issues might be related." --G, Vietnam Veteran

Patients, particularly those with chronic disease conditions, spend extensive periods of time waiting. Waiting for appointments, waiting for test results, waiting for insurance approvals, waiting for symptoms, the waiting room is a physical instantiation of these waiting practices, where a diagnostic liminality is quite literally embodied. For toxic subjects who have known or presumed exposure, waiting also takes on complicated political and social dimensions in the wait for science and the wait for recognition.



Morgan, Alli. 2019. "Waiting as Method."

In "Toxic Capture: Rendering Difficult Subjects Visible." In *Visualizing Toxic Subjects*, curated by James Adams and Kim Fortun. The Center for Ethnography. May.

<https://tinyurl.com/y3by3mna>

Design Statement

This image conveys the experience and affective dimensions of toxic subjects as they seek recognition within biomedical, military regimes of care. The image is representative: it conveys the kinds of spaces toxic subjects inhabit while also being emotive and empathetic, drawing viewers into the weightiness of the waiting room as a physical and psychological space. Like Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Mother" Depression-era photographs, the image works to launch the viewer into intimate but uneasy relation with the subject.

Project Statement

This essay explores how "toxic injury" and "toxic stress" have emerged as categories for clinical and juridical claims making. I am particularly interested in the ways that claims of toxic injury grant recognition and access to resources while at the same time reproducing marginality in difficult-to-diagnose conditions. Given the ways in which toxic subjects are rendered invisible by dominant understandings of transmission, injury, and time, new forms of visualization and reading are called for. The images I include seek to illustrate the various tools patients and clinicians use in order to render toxic conditions visible in both clinical and legal domains.

