

Fall 2009
920:523:01
Monday 9:50am-12:30pm
Room: LSH A256

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SOCIOLOGY OF HEALTH AND ILLNESS

Course Description

The sociology of health and illness (also known as medical sociology) is a broad field examining the social production of health, wellness, illness and mortality. We cannot understand the topics of health and illness simply by looking at biological phenomena and medical knowledge, but, instead, we must also consider a variety of social, political, economic, and cultural forces. We will survey the central topics in the field with an emphasis on the following themes: the structural and cultural dimensions of health; health inequalities; the profession of medicine; the experience of illness; and attempts to reform healthcare. Throughout the course, we will apply sociological theory and the recent scholarship of anthropology, history and social and cultural studies of science to make sense of contemporary issues in medicine.

Course Logistics

This is a seminar course. The quality of our discussions depends on your full participation. Students must fulfill the following requirements:

1) Over the course of the semester, each student will be expected to write a single page memo responding to each week's readings. These comments will be pasted into the discussion section on sakai the day before class (Sunday) by 6pm, so that everyone has time to read each other's comments by Monday morning. Comments may be informal, but they must be a critical response. Memos will be graded as 'check,' 'check plus,' or 'check minus.' You can take four exemptions from writing these memos. If you choose to take an exemption, please let me know by email.

These memos should help you focus your ideas in a way that can contribute to our collective conversation during class time. In general, each memo should include both a synthetic analysis of some dimension of the course readings that you found compelling and warrants further discussion and two to three well-crafted questions for the class to consider as a group. These memos ought to address readings within that particular week, but you may also compare that week's readings to themes and theories discussed earlier in the semester. This is also a good opportunity to raise questions and concerns about the substance of the readings. Finally, these memos are a great opportunity to develop a killer set of notes.

These memos are worth 20% of your grade.

2) Students taking the course for credit are expected to submit a 15-20 page paper on a topic related to this course. The paper can be analytical, critically reflecting on a substantive issue related to the sociology of health and illness or you may choose to write

a research proposal, drawing on theoretical perspectives and existing empirical work to identify an interesting and until now unsolved empirical question.

In order to get approval for your topic, you must submit a 2-3 page memo describing your project, complete with a brief bibliography by October 19th, after which you are expected to make an appointment to discuss this paper with me further. Of course, I'm happy to discuss this with you in advance. **Final paper is due on December 16th.** Late papers are strongly discouraged.

The paper is worth 70% of your grade.

4) Students will present their research in progress in class on the last day of class.

The presentation is worth 10% of your grade.

Required Texts

Anne Fadiman. 1997. *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

David Mechanic. 2006. *The Truth about Health Care: Why Reform is Not Working in America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Peter Conrad, *Sociology of Health and Illness*, Eighth Edition. Worth Publishers.

Charles Bosk, *Forgive and Remember: Managing Medical Failure*, 2nd edition (Chicago 2003)

Kristen Barker, *The Fibromyalgia Story: Medical Authority and Women's Worlds of Pain*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Course Schedule

Week 1 (9/8/09): Introduction

Week 2 (9/14/09): Cultures of Medicine

Anne Fadiman. *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, Chapters 1-9, 11, 13-15, 17

Week 3 (9/21/09): Health inequalities

Chapters 1-2, 4-5, SHI

Chloe Bird. 1999. *Gender matters: An integrated model for understanding men's and women's health*.

David Williams. 1999. *Race, socioeconomic status and health: The added effects of racism and discrimination*

Week 4 (9/28/09): The social production of illness

Chapters 7-9, SHI

Bruce J. Link and Jo Phelan, "Social Conditions as Fundamental Causes of Disease," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 1995. 80-94.

Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler. 2007. The Spread of Obesity in a Large Social Network Over 32 Years. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 357:370-9

Week 5 (10/5/09): Biomedical dominance and transformation

Paul Starr, p. 3-29, 79-144
Chapters 17, 19, SHI

Week 6 (10/12/09): (Bio)medicalization and the social construction of disease

Chapters 37-38, SHI
Adele Clarke, et al. 2003. Biomedicalization: Technoscientific transformations of health, illness, and US Biomedicine. *ASR*. 68(2).
Elizabeth M. Armstrong, ◆ Diagnosing Moral Disorder: The Discovery and Evolution of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, ◆ *Social Science & Medicine* 47, no. 12 (1998): 2024-2042.
Jennifer R. Fishman. 2004. The Commodification of Female Sexual Dysfunction *Social Studies of Science*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 187-218.

Week 7 (10/19/09) Health Care Reform

Guest speaker: David Mechanic. We'll meet at IHHCPAR, 24 College Ave.

David Mechanic. 2006. *The Truth about Health Care: Why Reform is Not Working in America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Atul Gawande. 2009. "The Cost Conundrum." June 1st. *New Yorker*.

Week 8 (10/26/09) Medical Training

Bosk, Forgive & Remember

Week 9 (11/2/09) Medical Practice

SHI 29, 30, 32
Renee R. Anspach, Deciding Who Lives: Fateful Choices in the Intensive Care Nursery (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 55-84 (Chapter 3: "Predicting the Future: Why Physicians and Nurses Disagree").
Kathryn M. Taylor, Physicians and the Disclosure of Undesirable Information, in *Biomedicine Examined*, ed. Margaret Lock and Deborah R. Gordon (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988), 441-463.

Week 10 (11/09/09) Experiencing Illness

Kristen Barker, *The Fibromyalgia Story*, selections
Arthur Frank. 1995. *The Wounded Storyteller: Bodies, Illness and Ethics*. Chapter 4, "The Remission Society." Pp. 75-96.
Charles Rosenberg. 2002. The tyranny of diagnosis: specific entities and individual experience. *Milbank Quarterly*. 80(2).

Week 11 (11/16/09) Meanings and Metaphors in Illness

Susan Sontag. 1978. *Illness as Metaphor*. Doubleday Press.

Dorothy Nelkin and Susan Lindee. 1995. *The DNA Mystique*. Chapter 1 "The Powers of the Gene," pp. 1-18.

Emily Martin. 1994. *Flexible Bodies: The Role of Immunology in American Culture from the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS*. Pp. 1-81, 91-112

Week 12 (11/23/09) Conceptualizing Difference in Medicine

Anne Eckman. 1998. "Beyond the Yentl Syndrome: Making Women Visible in Post 1990 Women's Health Discourse." in *The Visible Woman: Imaging Technologies, Gender and Science*. Eds Treichler, Cartwright, Penley.

Steven Epstein. 2007. *Inclusion: The Politics of Difference in Medical Research*. Chapter 7.

Troy Duster. 2005. Race and Reification in Science. *Science*. 307: 1050-1051.

Burchard, Esteban et al. 2003. "The Importance of Race and Ethnic Background in Biomedical Research and Clinical Practice," *New England Journal of Medicine* 348:1170-5.

Catherine Lee. 2009. "Race" and "ethnicity" in biomedical research: how do scientists construct and explain differences in health? *Social Science and Medicine*. 68(6):1183-90.

Week 13 (11/30/09) To be determined by class

Ideas: Social movements in health

Lay expertise

Medical technology

Reproduction

The body

Bioethics

Genetics

Medical decision-making

Risk, uncertainty and testing

Week 14 (12/7/09) Presentations