HEALTH. COMMUNITY & SOCIETY: THE SOCIOLOGY OF ILLNESS

Required Readings will be drawn from the following books and articles. The books are available for purchase at the university bookstore and the articles will be placed on library reserve.

Books:
Susan Sontag, ILLNESS AS METAPHOR/AIDS METAPHOR, Pantheon (1990)

Articles: (articles are available on LATTE; you will need to learn how to access them)
Thomasina Borkman, "Self-help Groups at the Turning Point" AMERICAN JOURNAL OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY, 1990
Peter Conrad and Deborah Potter, “From Hyperactive Children to Adult ADHD: Observations on the Expansion of Medical Diagnoses,” SOCIAL PROBLEMS, 2000
Keith Humphreys, “Individual and Social Benefits of Mutual Aid Self-Help Groups,”
Introduction

This course focuses on sociological aspects of health and illness (mostly the latter). Since other Sociology (19Ob) or HSSP (HS 104) courses will focus on an analysis of the medical system and the social organization of medical care, these topics will not be examined here.

The course readings are listed below and are divided into sections. Read the articles with a critical eye, trying to understand and evaluate the author's thesis. You may read at a comfortable pace, but I expect you to have read the appropriate readings for a section by the time we begin discussing it. This will make the course a richer experience for all. Should you wish to explore a topic further, ask your professor for suggestions in recommended books and other sources.

There will be two take-home essay exams (mid-term and final) and two short "fieldwork" assignments (to be distributed later). The take-home exams will be based on readings, lectures and class discussion, while the "fieldwork" assignments should allow you to use your creativity and sociological imagination. In terms of grading, each take-home essay and the two "fieldwork" assignments will each count about one-third. For students who wish to do larger assignments, some negotiation with the instructor may be possible.

There is also a Community Engagement option, coordinated by Jen Mandelbaum and Heather Freidman. It is described at the end of the syllabus. Students can earn two credits for completing this option. This has a capacity of about 20 students and is open to sophomores, juniors and seniors. Contact Heather (hfried@brandeis.edu) or Jen (jibmandel@brandeis.edu) directly if you have questions or are interested in participating.

Academic Integrity is expected in this class and breaches (e.g. plagiarism) will be dealt with severely and negatively impact a student’s grade.
Course Learning Objectives

1. To provide an Introduction to range of sociological perspectives on disease and illness.
2. To embed diseases and illness in social and historical context, not only as biophysiological phenomena.
3. To examine specific social and sociological factors in disease production.
4. To introduce approaches to examining the subjective aspects of illness experience
5. To familiarize students with terms such as epidemiology, upstream, sick role, medicalization, and other sociological concepts.
6. To give students an opportunity to gather and analyze small amounts of data in the two field projects.
7. To see both local and global aspects on illness, particularly with HIV/AIDS.
8. Overall, to understand disease and illness in a new and broader way.

Course Outline and Readings*

*Dates on syllabus are tentative (usually within one class meeting) since Fall semester calendar is affected by numerous holiday and day changes.

I. Illness and Society (August 29-Sept. 13)
   A. Disease and Illness: Historical Insights
   B. Sociological and Sociomedical Approaches to Illness
   C. Limitation of Modern Medicine
   D. Shifting Patterns of Disease and Illness

Readings
Dubos, MIRAGE OF HEALTH (all)
SHI, pp. 1-23

II. The Social Production of Disease (Sept. 17-Oct. 4)
A. Social Epidemiology
   1. Gender
   2. Social Class
   3. "Stress" and Life Events
B. Occupational Health and Disease
   C. Stress and Social Support

Readings (see next page)
A. SHI, pp. 24-57
B. SHI, pp. 78-107
   Berman, "Why Work Kills" or "Abrams, “A Short History of Occupational
   Health” (LATTE, read one or the other)
C. Tesh, Chapter 5 (SHI, 78-87)

[Field Project: Health and Everyday Life due Sept. 27]

III. Death, Community and Society (Oct. 8)
A. A Social Autopsy of Excess Deaths
B. The Social Construction of a Disaster

Readings
A. Kleinenberg, pp. 1-184
B. Kleinenberg, pp. 185-242

IV. Politics of Prevention (Oct. 11-15)
A. A. The "Wellness Revolution": Lifestyle and Prevention
   B. Case of Obesity
   C. Refocusing Upstream

Readings
Tesh, HIDDEN ARGUMENTS, Chaps. 1-4
SHI, 468-78 482-86,, 583-95

V. Illness in Culture and Community (Oct. 22)
A. Culture, Illness and Care
B. Intervening in Cultural Worlds
C. Cultural Brokerage

Readings
Fadiman, all
SHI, 394-408

(Take home mid-term due in class Oct. 25)
VI. **The Social Meaning of Illness** (Oct. 25-Nov. 5)
   A. The Sexual Politics of Illness
   B. The Cultural Resonance of Illness
   C. Medicalization of Society

   **Readings**
   Sontag, all
   Conrad and Potter, "From Hyperactive Children to Adult ADHD:...," (LATTE)
   SHI, pp. 123-56, 299-321, 495-517

VII. **The Experience of Illness: The Social Psychological Level** (Nov. 8-15)
   A. Symptoms and Defining Illness
   B. Subjective Experience of Illness
   C. Illness Careers and Coping
   D. Treatments and "compliance"

   **Readings**
   SHI, pp. 177-210,
   Dow and Essex, all

**[Field Project 2: Experience of Illness Due Nov. 19 in class]**

VIIa. Illness on the Internet (Nov. 22)
   A. A transformation in illness and medicine?

   **Readings:**
   SHI, pp. 519-38, (also review pp. 180-96)

VIII. **Disease in a Global Perspective: HIV-AIDS** (Nov. 26)
   A. Film: Global AIDS
   B. Paul Farmer’s perspective

   **Readings:**
   Two articles from NEJM, 2004 (LATTE)
   Paul Farmer, “Structural Violence.” SHI, pp. 69-77
IX. Self-care and Its Challenges (Dec. 3)
   A. The Rise of Self-help Movements
   B. Types of Self-help: Supportive, Transforming and Political
   C. Self-care: Autonomy or Abandonment

Readings
Borkman, "Self-help Groups at the Turning Point" (LATTE)
Humphreys, “Individual and Social Benefits of Mutual Aid Self-Help Groups,” (LATTE)
Kronenfeld, “Self-care as a Panacea for the Ills of the Health Care System” (LATTE).

X. Health Movements and Activism (Dec. 6).
   A. From Health Movements to Activism: HIV and Breast Cancer

Readings
SHI, pp. 600-615

[Take home final is given out on last day of class and due 7 days later]

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NOTES: If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.
Community Engagement On the local level, students are given the option to become directly involved with the health issues and prevention opportunities in Waltham, at the Joseph M. Smith Community Health Center, the Emerson Rehab & Nursing Center, and the Healthy Waltham: Waltham Health Coalition (participation opportunity pending). Those who participate will be trained by specific clinic members, related to location and chosen project. This year’s involvement opportunities include: health literacy training, walking group and exercise group leadership roles, teaching weekly citizenship classes, health assessment surveying of community members, unnatural causes and health topic training, and raising awareness around ethnic/racial health disparities. Students will learn about a variety of health issues affecting people in Waltham, advise people on prevention techniques and healthy practices, and provide assistance to individuals attending the clinic. All students involved are required to participate between 3-5 hours per week. Throughout the semester times will be scheduled for students to present their experience and reflections in an oral/written form. Students will receive two credits for participating in this extended engagement. This is completely independent from the requirements of Sociology 191.