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 LATTE.

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.

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

Time Investment: A four credit course like this one is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours study time (on average) per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, preparation for exams, research, meeting with TAs, etc.)

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.
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 26-Sept. 9)
   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. 13-Sept. 27)
   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. 30]

IIIa. Hans Rosling, Gap Minder, A new way to measure life & health (Oct. 7)

IIIb. TBA (Oct. 9) (Toxic Bust?)

Occupational Health: “Song of the Canary” (Oct. 13)

III. Death, Community and Society (Oct. 18)
   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. 21-25)
   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,, 583-9

V. Illness in Culture and Community (Oct. 28)
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. 28)

VI. The Social Meaning of Illness (Nov. 1- Nov. 8)
   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. 11-15)
   A. Symptoms and Defining Illness
   B. Changing meaning of AIDS
   C. Subjective Experience of Illness
   D. Illness Careers and Coping
   E. Treatments and "compliance"

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

Field Project 2: Experience of Illness Due Nov. 18 in class]

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

Readings:
VIII. Disease in a Global Perspective: HIV-AIDS (Nov. 24)
   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. 2)
   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. 4).
   A. From Health Movements to Activism: HIV and Breast Cancer
   B. Jon Palkfreman, film on Vaccine controversy

Readings
SHI, pp. 600-615
Gamson, “Silence, Death and the Invisible Enemy AIDS, Activism and Social Movement Newness,” (LATTE)

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

Office: Pearlman 102, x62635
Office Hours: Thursday 1:00-2:00, Friday 11:00-12:00 and by appointment
Email: Conrad@brandeis.edu (Best way to reach Professor Conrad)
TAs: There will be 4 TAs for this class. Students will be assigned to TAs by the second day of class.