

## SC 07801 Sociology of Health and Illness

Fall 2006

T Th 4:30-5:45, O'Neill Library 247

**Instructor:** Dana Cervenáková

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**Office Hrs:** Tu Th 4p -4:30p in O'Neill 200 (Connors Family Learning Center); and **by appointment.**

**“I have always felt that the action most worth watching is not at the center of things but where edges meet. ... There are interesting frictions and incongruities in these places, and often, if you stand at the point of tangency, you can see both sides better than if you were in the middle of either one.”**

Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, Preface, xi

**“The tragic aspect of blindness does not inhere in the condition nor can it do so. In nature it is absent. It is an entirely civilized idea. The world in which a man [sic] finds himself creates the tragedy for him and in him”** Chevigny, *My Eyes Have a Cold Nose*. Preface, xi.

### Course objectives

This course will provide an introduction to the major themes of sociology of health and illness. Throughout the course we will explore *the ways in which the definitions, meanings and experiences of health and illness are shaped by cultural, political, and economic factors*. We will critically examine the philosophy, organization, operation of the medical care system as well as how this shapes the definition and treatment of illness. We will also examine how individuals and communities may resist dominant definitions of illness and treatment. Representative readings and films will provide the basis for inclass discussions, exercises, assignments, and exams.

The following issues will be addressed in this class:

### Perennial questions

The perennial questions raise issues about the nature of society, individuals, progress, and social action. In this course we will look at the issues raised by the perennial questions through the topic of health and illness. We will examine the ways in which definitions, meanings and experience of health and illness are cultural products and how these three are closely intertwined. We will also look at how institutions shape the definition, meaning and treatment of illness as well as how patients resist or accept dominant definitions and treatments of illness. Finally, we will explore how concepts of progress apply to health and illness in the United States in comparison to other countries and we will think about what an ideal system of health care might be.

### Historical perspective

In this course we will also examine health and illness from a historical perspective. Through class readings and films we will trace the development of “doctoring” as a profession as well as look at how the organization of medical work has changed overtime. In addition, we will examine how definitions of disease have changed over the course of the twentieth century.

### Cultural Diversity

Experience of health and illness varies according to one's upbringing, geographical location, racial, gender, ethnic, or economic position. Thus, throughout the course we will be examining how cultural differences shape an individual's understanding of health and illness. We will be looking at cultural diversity within the United States as well as national differences between the United States, Canada and a number of European countries.

### Methodology

This course will include both qualitative and quantitative studies. In this course we will also pay attention to developing good research skills together with writing and analytical proficiency that are crucial in becoming a good sociologist. At the beginning of the course we will devote some time to elaborating on and practicing what a research paper in sociology requires and how it is formed. We will be working on developing critical thinking skills in order to cultivate an understanding of what the readings present and most of all what they mean in the large sociological context. No text will be accepted at face value; multiple points of view will be introduced and encouraged.

### Course requirements

- 1) **Class attendance** – students are expected to attend all classes.
- 2) **Class participation** – students are expected to actively participate in class by asking questions, offering comments and exchanging their ideas regarding the material with class mates and the instructor.
- 3) **Assigned readings and assignments** – students are expected to complete all readings and take-home assignments before the class for which they are assigned.  
*This class is reading intensive. Without knowledge of the readings you will not be able to participate fully.*
- 4) **Midterm** – Essay questions
- 5) **Final** – Take home essay exam
- 6) **Term Project** – details outlined in separate guidelines
- 7) **Term Project Presentation** – details outlined in separate guidelines

### Grading

Final grades will be determined as follows:

- Section Participation 15%
- Midterm 15%
- Final 15%
- Term Project 30%
- Term Project Presentation 25%

### Academic Honesty

You are responsible for adhering to the statement of academic honesty in your Student Handbook. They are also posted online under: [www.bc.edu/integrity](http://www.bc.edu/integrity)

### Disability, Specific Needs Statement

If you have a disability or specific needs you would like me to know about so that I can make appropriate accommodations for you, please, let me know at the beginning of the semester.

### Required Readings

Conrad, P. (ed.) **The Sociology of Health and Illness: Critical Perspectives**. 2004

Fadiman, Anne. **The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down.** 1998  
Groopman, Jerome. **The Measure of Our Days.** NY:Penguin Books, 1997.  
Simon, Rachel. **Riding the Bus with My Sister.** Plume. 2003.  
**WebCT** – class readings in the SEMESTER COURSE READINGS folder

Documentaries and films.

## **NOTES**

# **I. INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY OF HEALTH AND ILLNESS**

**Models of Medicine: Biomedical vs/and Social:**

**Week 1**

## 9/5 T Introduction

9/7 Th *Conrad* AVAILABLE ON WEBCT under SEMESTER COURSE READINGS

- Introductions: pp. 1-6;
- McKinlay & McKinlay, "Medical Measures and the Decline of Mortality" p. 7  
*Weitz*
- Judith Lorber, "Believing is seeing: Biology as ideology," p. 12.

## II. CULTURAL DEFINITIONS OF HEALTH AND ILLNESS

### Social Epidemiology:

Week 2

9/12 T *Conrad: Who gets sick*

- Syme, Berkman "Social Class, Susceptibility, and Sickness", p. 24
- Waldron, I. "What do We Know about Causes of Sex Differences in Mortality?"  
A Review of Literature, p. 37

9/14 Th *The case of eating disorders: social aspects*

- Brumberg, J.J. "Anorexia Nervosa in Context", p. 94

### Epilepsy: Clash in Cultural Definitions:

Week 3

Fadiman, Anne. *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*. 1998

- Tu 19st Chapters 1-10
- Th 21st Chapters 11- 19

## III. SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF MEDICINE

### Historical Perspective: Becoming Providers – Cultural Authority and Professional

#### Dominance:

Week 4

9/26 T *Conrad*

- Conrad, P. and J. W. Schneider, "Professionalization, monopoly and the structure of medical practice", p. 170
- Light, D.W. "Countervailing power: The changing character of the medical profession in the U.S.", p. 215

#### **WebCT**

- McKinlay, J.B. and J. D. Stoeckle, "Corporatization and the social transformation of doctoring", p. 175

9/28 Th *Conrad*

- Mechanic, D. "Changing Medical Organization and the Erosion of Trust", p.224
- Wertz, R.W. and D. C. Wertz, "Notes on the decline of midwives and the rise of medical obstetricians", p.162

*FILM – Midwife's Tale*

### Becoming Doctors and Nurses: Professional Socialization:

Weeks 5-6

10/3 T From medical students to doctors

*Conrad*

- The Rise and Fall of the Dominance of Medicine, p. 167-169  
“So you want to be a doctor?” WGBH Production – documentary in class

10/5Th

*Conrad*

- Anspach, R.R. “The Language of Case Presentation”, p. 347  
*Online Course Reserve*
- Hafferty, W.F. “Cadaver stories and the emotional socialization of medical students” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 29 (1988), 344-356.
- *Film discussion*

10/10 T Social Organization of Medical Workers

*Conrad*

- Introduction (pp. 205-207)
- \* Fry, J. Light, D. “The US Health Care System”, p.234
- Reverby, S. “A caring dilemma: Womanhood and nursing in historical perspective”, p. 243.
- Bosk, C.L. and J.E. Frader “AIDS and its impact on medical work: The Culture and Politics of the shop floor”, p. 253.

## **MIDTERM Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> October**

### **IV. BECOMING PATIENTS**

#### **The Sick Role and the Experience of Illness :**

**Week 7**

10/17 T

*Conrad*

- Introduction (pp. 130-133)
- Conrad, P. “The Meaning of Medications: Another Look at Compliance”, p. 150.
- Frank, A. “The remission society”, p.163.

10/19 Th

***WebCT***

- Cassell, E. (1992). The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine. *The New England Journal of Medicine* 306, 639-45.
- Siegel, Bernie. “My experience with cancer”, short excerpt from *Love, Medicine and Miracles*.
- Karp, David. Chapter from *Speaking of Sadness*.

#### **READING TO BE ASSIGNED**

#### **Interaction Between Doctors and Patients:**

**Weeks 8**

10/24 T

*Conrad*

- Mishler, E.G. “The struggle between the voice of medicine and the voice of the

lifeworld”, p. 319.

**WebCT**

- Young, Katherine. “Narrative embodiments: Enclaves of the self in the Realm of Medicine” In J. Shotter and K.J. Gergen (eds.) *Texts of Identity*. Newbury Park CA: Sage, 1989.

10/26 Th

- Groopman, Jerome. (1997). *The Measure of Our Days*. NY:Penguin Book
- **Reflection paper on “The Measure of Our Days” due .**

## **V. EMERGING PERSPECTIVES**

**Week 9 & 10**

### **Disability and Inequality**

10/31 T Library Research Workshop// Writing papers in Sociology  
Disability Studies – Introduction

**WebCT**

- \* Disability Studies – an outline and Overview

11/2 Th Sociology of Disability

**WebCT**

- Disability Studies – an outline and overview
- Tong, Rosemarie. Dealing with Difference Justly: Perspectives on Disability. *Social Theory and Practice*, Fall 1999, v25, i3, pp. 519-528.
- \* Barnes, Mercer, Shakespeare. 1999. Chapter 2. “Understanding Disability”, pp. 10-38.

11/7 T Developmental Disabilities: **Riding the Bus with My Sister**

**WebCT**

- Lecture Notes
- Parmenter, T. “Intellectual Disabilities: Quo Vadis?”, p. 267. From *Handbook of Disability Studies*, eds. Albrecht, Seelman, Bury. Sage: 2001.
- Simon, R. Riding the Bus with My Sister. Discussion of Book

**Week 11**

11/9 Th ***Riding the Bus with My Sister***

- \* Discussion of book continued
- Film clips

### **Western /Eastern Medicines:Dominant and Alternative Trends in Medicine** **Modern Alopathic Medicine**

**Week 12**

11/14 T

Alternative Complementary Medicine

- *Reading to be assigned*
- Films:
- Healing and the Mind (videorecording) Bill Moyers (R726.5 H42X 1993)
  - Love, Medicine and Miracles (videorecording)/Bernie S. Siegel; a production of WGBH for PBS R726.5 S54x 1991

**VI. TERM PROJECT PRESENTATIONS**

**Week 12-15**

**Presentations**

11/16 Th - 11/21 T

**11/23 Th NO CLASS - Thanksgiving holiday**

**Presentations**

11/28 T - 11/30 Th - 12/5 T - 12/7 Th

**12/7 Th**

**Final Presentations;** Tying up the semester

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**TERM PROJECT DUE Thursday 7th December**

**FINAL TAKE HOME EXAM due 11<sup>th</sup> December by 10 am**

**FINAL TAKE HOME EXAM QUESTIONS**

**Handed out: Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> December in class**

**Due date: Monday 11<sup>th</sup> by 10am**

**Send to my email [cervenak@bc.edu](mailto:cervenak@bc.edu)**