

ANTH 475
Spring 2005
University of Washington
Mon & Wed 12:30-2:20 pm
Sieg Hall 230

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Perspectives in Medical Anthropology Course Syllabus

<http://faculty.washington.edu/jstaylor/pma/>

About the Course

This course is an introduction to some aspects of the field of medical anthropology. We shall focus especially on theoretical questions of how one frames “illness,” “health,” “healing” or “medicine” as an object of ethnographic study. Much of the course material concerns illness experience and medical practice in the United States.

All of the medical anthropologists whose work we shall read examine illness, healing and medicine in social, cultural and historical context. Within this very broad consensus, however, there remain significant differences in the kinds of questions they ask, and the kinds of insights they achieve. The course is organized in a manner intended to highlight these differences.

We thus begin by reading work that focuses on issues involved in interpretation, with an emphasis on illness *narratives* and *metaphor*. From there we move on to approaches that focus on the *practices* that construct the objects of medical knowledge, as well as the subjectivity of medical practitioners. We then briefly consider anthropological approaches to two specific topics: 1) *conspiracy theories* that often seem to proliferate as diseases spread, and 2) *medical images* that, when viewed ethnographically, may “show” far more than what meets the eye. Next we turn to critical perspectives that emphasize connections among *power and knowledge* in medicine. We then briefly introduce critical questions concerning some of the ways that the concept of “*culture*” is used within medicine, before finally concluding with a discussion of *what we make of all this*.

The readings for this course have been organized to coordinate with three public lectures being given at UW this quarter: Annemarie Mol (April 18), Jose Van Dijck (May 3), and Rayna Rapp (May 9). Dr. Van Dijck will also be visiting our class for one day. Please see the schedule below for details of the talks. To join an e-mail list and receive notice of these and other local events of interest, please visit the webpage for the Critical Medical Humanities group, at <http://courses.washington.edu/cultmed/>.

My goals for students in this course are: 1) to gain a working knowledge of theoretical issues in the field of medical anthropology; 2) to practice applying this knowledge to specific topics; 3) to gain some understanding of current issues in US and world medical systems; and more generally 4) to develop analytical skills that will help us think critically about issues of health, illness, and medicine as we encounter them in our lives and in our world.

Requirements

- 1. Class participation and attendance (10%):** This class will be run in a manner that emphasizes active learning through discussion. You are expected to come to each class session having prepared the day's assignments in advance, and to participate actively. Participation may include in-class writing as well as discussion. Be there, be prepared, be engaged, and be respectful of everyone. Repeated absences preclude your participation, and will therefore adversely affect your grade. Do not submit writing assignments by e-mail, and do not expect me to e-mail you materials you missed by not being in class – this is not a distance learning course.
- 2. E-posts (20%):** You will be asked to e-post responses & comments on the course readings, once each week, in no fewer than 6 different weeks of the quarter. Your comments should address the day's readings, and must be posted no later than 9:30 am on the day of class. These postings will be used to guide and enrich class discussion. Individual postings will not be graded. You are not required to read your classmates' postings, but you may find it helpful and interesting. Please single-space your posting, title it, and sign your name at the end. Each posting should be a short (~150 words) but coherent paragraph that follows one of these two formats:

Close reading (title your posting "Close reading: [name of author/s]"): Identify a passage from one of the readings that either excites you, or stumps and frustrates you; briefly explain how or why it does so; and pose a question that might help move our discussion forward to follow your inspiration, or address your frustration.

Crosstalk (title your posting "Crosstalk: [topic or theme]"): Write a short paragraph situating the day's readings within the context of the course as a whole: what new elements do they bring to our exploration of medical anthropology? Which previous readings do they build upon, which do they forget? How do they speak to themes emerging in class discussion?

To post your contribution, go to the "Perspectives in Med Anth" discussion area, <http://catalyst.washington.edu/webtools/epost/register.cgi?owner=jstaylor&id=6677> which you can link to through the course website.

- 3. In-class essay exams (25% each, 50%):** There will be two in-class essay exams, on April 27th and May 25th. These will ask you to write short essays that demonstrate your understanding of topics, concepts and arguments covered in course readings and during the class sessions. More details will be provided closer to the date of the exams.

- 4. Firsthand Account: description, revision, and discussion (20%, pass/fail):**
Description: The first written assignment for the course is a description of some episode or event that has some bearing on health, illness, and healing, which you either experienced, participated in, or witnessed at first hand. As you consider which episode to write about, bear in mind how we will be using these accounts subsequently; please select an episode that you feel merits sustained reflection, and one you will comfortable sharing with your classmate. Write your account *before you have read anything at all* – just try to clearly and accurately convey the episode in question. This should be roughly 2-3 double-spaced pages in length, and is due at the beginning of class, on the second

class meeting. **Reflection:** At the end of the quarter, you will be asked to revisit this descriptive firsthand account, and write a short and coherent (4-5 page) reflective essay that brings to bear upon your original account some of the ideas, perspectives, questions, and comparative examples encountered in the course of our readings. Detailed guidelines for this revision process will be distributed shortly. This is due at the beginning of class on May 23rd. **Discussion:** In the last class meeting, we shall use the experience paper and the process of revising it as a springboard for a concluding discussion of medical anthropology and the perspectives that it offers. You will be asked to read the papers of a few of your classmates, and to come prepared to contribute to this discussion (some guidelines will be distributed in advance).

Policies: Assignments are due when they are due. If truly extraordinary circumstances make it impossible for you to meet a deadline, talk to me as early as possible. Otherwise, assignments completed late will be graded down accordingly, in fairness to students who have met the deadline. All written work must be completed in order to receive a passing grade for the course.

Texts: A course packet of photocopied articles containing all required readings has been prepared specifically for this class, and is available for purchase at RAMS copy shop on University Ave.

Class Schedule and Assignments

Week 1 Introductions

- 3/28 Introduction (no readings assigned)
3/30 Firsthand Account: Description due
Jeremy MacClancy, "Introduction: Taking People Seriously"
Margaret Lock, "Medical Knowledge and Body Politics"

Week 2 Imposing Narrative Order on Disordered Experience

- 4/4 Gay Becker, "Metaphors in Disrupted Lives: Infertility and Cultural Constructions of Continuity"
Arthur Frank, "Becoming Ill"
4/6 John Aggergaard Larsen, "Finding Meaning in First Episode Psychosis"
Linda Layne, "'How's the Baby Doing?'"

Week 3 Struggling with Narratives

- 4/11 Rayna Rapp, "Refusing Prenatal Diagnosis"
Rayna Rapp, "Cell Life and Death, Child Life and Death: Genomic Horizons, Genetic Diseases, Family Stories"
4/13 Carolyn Rouse, "'If She Is a Vegetable, We'll Be Her Garden'"
W. Ladson Hinton and Sue Levkoff, "Constructing Alzheimer's: Narratives of Lost Identities, Confusion, and Loneliness in Old Age"

Week 4 Making the Objects – and the Subjects – of Medicine

- 4/18 Annemarie Mol, "Missing Links, Making Links: The Performance of Some Atheroscleroses"
Robert Nelson, "The Ventilator/Baby as Cyborg"

Lecture: Annemarie Mol, "Professionalism in Practice: On the Non-Linear Character of Health Care,"
3:30 pm Communications 226

- 4/20 Byron Good, "How Medicine Constructs Its Objects"
Jonathan Kaplan, "First Cut: Learning Surgery Under Apartheid"
Film: "Still Life: The Humanity of Anatomy"

Week 5 Powers of Narrative, Narratives of Power

- 4/25 Karen Kroeger, "AIDS rumors, imaginary enemies, and the body politic in Indonesia."
Charles Briggs, "Theorizing Modernity Conspiratorially: Science, Scale, and the Political Economy of Public Discourse in Explanations of a Cholera Epidemic"

- 4/27 In-class examination #1

Week 6 Medical Images and What They Show

- 5/2 Joseph Dumit, "Traveling Images, Popularizing Brains"
Janelle Taylor, "A Fetish is Born: Sonographers and the Making of the Public Fetus"

5/3 Lecture: Jose Van Dijck, "Body Voyages: Medical Imaging in Science and Fiction"

7:00 pm, Kane Hall

5/4 Special Guest: Professor Jose Van Dijck

Jose Van Dijck, "Mediated Bodies and the Ideal of Transparency," "The Operation Film as a Mediated Freak Show," and "Bodyworlds: The Art of Plastinated Cadavers"

Week 7 Power/Knowledge I: Medicine, the State, and Suffering-As-Usual

5/9 Nancy Scheper-Hughes, "Nervoso: Medicine, Sickness, and Human Needs"

Lecture: Rayna Rapp, "Genetic Citizens on the Biological Horizon,"

7:00 pm, Communications 226

5/11 Paul Farmer, "On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below"

Sarah Horton, "Different Subjects: The Health Care System's Participation in the Differential Construction of the Cultural Citizenship of Cuban Refugees and Mexican Immigrants"

Week 8 Power/Knowledge II: Biopower

5/16 Michel Foucault, "The Examination" and "Lecture One"

Lorna Rhodes, "The Game of Hot Shit"

5/18 Steve Ferzacca, "'Actually I Don't Feel That Bad': Managing Diabetes and the Clinical Encounter"

Sarah Pinto, "Development Without Institutions: Ersatz Medicine and the Politics of Everyday Life in Rural North India"

Week 9 The Use and Abuse of "Culture" in Medicine

5/23 Firsthand Account: Reflection due

Vilma Santiago-Irrizary, "Culture as Cure"

Janelle Taylor, "Confronting 'Culture' in Medicine's 'Culture of No Culture'"

5/25 In-class examination #2

Week 10 What We Make of All This

5/30 Memorial Day Holiday, NO CLASS

6/1 read the reflections of the classmates in your group

Final discussion