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21A.215 Medical Anthropology
Fall 2008

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INTRODUCTION

Sept. 3, 2008

Housekeeping

- A. Pass around list for students to fill out
- B. Books to buy
 - 1. Farmer, Luhmann, Kleinman, Scheper-Hughes, Fadiman
 - 2. Other readings on course website
 - a. If you have trouble accessing the readings, let me know right away and I'll post them in rtf format, too
- C. Nature of course
 - 1. No prerequisites
 - 2. Lots of discussion
 - 3. Fairly easy written assignments, but a lot of reading
 - a. As it says on the syllabus, you *must* do the reading
 - b. **Reader responses** are due each week—a few sentences, a paragraph, nothing you can't do in 15 minutes, after doing the readings
 - 1) They can be about any of the reading for that week
 - a) But they have to be about the reading—not about lectures, your thoughts, etc.
 - b) Post them on the course website "Forum" section before the class that has that reading assigned
 - c) You can interact with each other—respond to something someone else has written
 - c. Study questions will be posted on course website
 - a) You'll be asked to discuss any one in class at random

II. Thrust of Course

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- A. Next Monday's class will introduce the content of the course
- B. We'll begin reading the Fadiman book
 - 1. Is very readable, and introduces many of the issues we'll be discussing during the semester
 - a. In fact, it plunges you into them
 - 2. The syllabus may look like too much reading
 - a. I don't think it is, but in any case, students have told me to assign larger amounts of reading in the beginning, before everything started getting real scary
- C. Then we'll explore the anthropological perspective on health and disease looking at some cross-cultural materials
 - 1. Look at causation (magic, witchcraft—symbolic causation)
 - 2. Look at the classic concerns in medical anthropology
 - a. For instance, about the role of ritual in healing, morality, keeping the world in balance (preventive medicine)
 - b. The links between religion (what *is* religion??) and ideas about health and disease in a given culture
 - 3. And you'll be introduced to the art and science of healing, cross-culturally
 - a. Shamanic practice, for instance—mentioned in the Fadiman book
 - b. Symbolic healing
 - 4. Always with the goal of making links to modern medicine as practiced in the West
 - a. For example, what does shamanism share with modern medicine and how do these two healing systems differ?
 - b. I would like class to participate as much as possible whenever cross-cultural issues come up and you have something to contribute from your own culture

- 1) For example, one student brought newspaper articles on witchcraft accusations in his country—Nigeria
- 2) Another student knew something of the Ayurvedic tradition
- 3) Another student spoke of her parents healing her with traditional Chinese herbal medicines

D. Then we'll look at some theory: "Theoretical Frames"

1. Easier to understand after you've had some orientation to just what medical anthropology is all about
2. For example, we'll begin talking about the notion of "the cultural construction of disease"
 - a. You may be dealing with this topic in your first written assignment

E. We then look at issues of meaning

1. What illness/disease/sickness means to the ill/sick/diseased and their families, and what it means to Western health care practitioners
2. And introduce a theme present throughout the course:
 - a. That we need to examine science as a system of knowledge, and understand how it is operationalized in medical science and applied in clinical medicine
 - 1) Examine the concept of biomedicine: what it is, what metaphors it uses, how it is passed on to the new generation, etc.
 - b. In short, we will hold this branch of science up for scrutiny
 - 1) We will not simply assume that it is "the truth," but we will deconstruct it, examine it, as it were, under the microscope
 - 2) This is going to be a challenge for some of you
 - c. We will explore biomedicine's foundations
 - 1) For example, mind-body dualism

- F. We will continue to discuss cross-cultural cases throughout the course, but from this point on, all of them will be illustrations of some kind of penetration by western medicine into a traditional healing system
- G. We'll be looking at psychotherapy and its relation to "somatic," "physical" medicine as well
 - 1. Throughout the course, but particularly when reading the Luhmann book
 - 2. Which I'm assigning mainly for its treatment of medicine as an institution
 - a. And its attention to the preparation of physicians: interns, residents
 - b. Students have liked it in previous years—it's about people only a little older than they
- H. What does examining biomedicine as an institution consist of?
 - 1. You can see from the titles of the readings what sorts of questions we'll ask, what contrasts we'll make
 - a. For example, what is the difference between "curing" and "healing?" for you?
 - 2. We'll discuss not just biomedicine narrowly defined, but our general cultural assumptions about the body, about how to live in a healthy way
 - 3. We will be critiquing certain aspects of modern medicine
 - a. With the goal of understanding how it is embedded in the larger society
 - 1) Discussing very briefly some of the competing systems
 - a) Homeopathic medicine, chiropractic, etc.
 - b. Learning some social science concepts
 - 1) Such as the nature of institutions in general
 - 2) About the social science notions of social control, social role, hegemony, stigma (in both the readings and a film about leprosy), ideology, function

4. And looking briefly at some of the more problematic areas of medicine...where it is not so successful or where policy, in particular bioethical policy haven't kept up with technological changes
 - a. For example, chronic disease (the Kleinman book)
 - b. And organ harvesting
- I. We'll then look at health, disease and healing in the larger social context
 1. Western medicine in the international context
 2. Social, political, economic factors affecting health status globally
 3. We'll read the Farmer book
- J. Then we'll spend a week on chronic conditions
- K. Followed by a brief look at gender, sexuality and reproduction, in particular new reproductive technologies
 1. Infertility clinics, contraception, prenatal testing
- L. The Schepers-Hughes book takes us back to the international arena
 1. Like Farmer's book, it examines an area of the Third World
 2. Human reproduction in an extremely poor part of the world—northeast Brazil
- III. Now we'll go around the room, and students will introduce themselves.
 - A. Name, major, year. Why are you taking the course? Previous experience with anthropological topics? What topics would you like to discuss? Are you planning for a career in health care?