

Medical Anthropology

Entry Requirements

This course is open to anyone interested in gaining a critical understanding of health, illness and healing through the examination of current debates in social and medical anthropology.

Course Overview

In this course we will investigate human experiences of health, disease and healing. In all human societies there are many views of 'health', 'well-being', the way people cope with the experience of 'illness' varies from one group of people to another. We shall explore what 'health', 'well-being' mean and how these ideas are constructed in different cultures. What does it mean to be healthy or ill? How do people in western and non-western cultures treat and understand illness? What happens when different medical systems and 'health beliefs' interact with one another? We will evaluate these issues by making special reference to the body, gender, economic and political factors and drawing knowledge from ethnographic research. Particular emphasis will be placed on how formal and informal medical systems can be used to improve our understanding of culture and the meanings associated with 'well-being' and how healing, rituals, and beliefs systems underpin how different cultures make sense

Course Aims

The aims of this course are to

1. Provide a good understanding of how anthropological perspectives have been applied to exploring notions of health, illness, sickness and the body from a cross-cultural perspective.
2. Enable students to evaluate medical systems critically
3. Examine how gender and different notions of the person create differing cultural expectations for health and health care.
4. Examine how health, sickness and the body are affected by the wider political economy.
5. Provide a supportive framework for students to develop aural, study and written skills.
6. Provide familiarity with online research tools used by medical anthropologists, such as the eHRAF database.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course students should be able to:

1. Evaluate critically definitions of health, well-being, illness, disease from a cross-cultural point of view.
2. Identify cross-cultural differences in perceptions of health-care, health and the body from a theoretical point of view.
3. Identify western and non-western bio-medical and cultural approaches to health and the body and to be able to critically evaluate different cases from an ethnomedical, ecological, critical and applied perspectives.

4. Critically discuss differences between formal and informal health care systems, and the implications of the political economy of health upon these.
5. Describe the methods used by medical anthropologist to investigate the human experience of illness and health.
6. Demonstrate their improved written and communication skills through their course work.

Teaching Methods

These include formal lectures and group discussion with the use of visual and textual materials. It also includes critical discussions on case studies. Each week is designed to build on previously introduced themes and to offer a supporting learning environment from where to further critical skills and discussion.

Students will be supported by the tutor in group work and presentations. Each theme will be supported with a handout that will include topics, a breakdown of key ideas, quotes and a reading list for each theme. Each handout will also have thinking questions for students to use for group discussion and personal reflection.

Topics that we will cover include:

- An overview of approaches to medical anthropology
- What do health, disease, and illness mean?
- Health care policies (e.g., formulated by WHO)
- Disease aetiology and healing in cross-cultural perspective
- Culture, the body and gender
- Healing, belief systems (auspiciousness, inauspiciousness)
- Food, health and identity
- Western medicine as ethnomedicine
- Medical pluralism
- Lay understanding of medicine, behaviour, and decision making
- Trans-cultural or ethno-psychiatry: issues of mental health
- Culture-bound 'syndromes'
- The ecological approach in medical anthropology
- The critical approach to medical anthropology
- Applied medical anthropology
- AIDS in the developing and developed worlds
- Sexuality and Reproductive Technologies

Module Structure:

1. Introduction: Anthropological Perspectives on Medicine
2. Definitions: Ethnomedicine- Health and Illness Across Cultures
3. Further Developments in Ethnomedicine
4. Medical Anthropology in the West
5. Ethnopsychiatry: Normality and 'Abnormality' in Cross-cultural Perspective
6. Critical and Applied Medical Anthropology
7. Bodies and Emotions
8. Women, Health and the Body
9. Food, Drink and Health
10. Healing, the role of Shamans and Healers in different cultures
11. Stress, Misfortune and Inauspiciousness
12. Student's presentations

13. Case Study: AIDS in Developing and Developed Countries
14. Case Study: Witchcraft and Mental Health

Assignments

Two written pieces of work:

1. A reflexive diary 1,000 words
2. A short piece of research. The first essay will involve a short piece of research: you will either (a) interview 2-3 acquaintances about their experiences or beliefs about an illness and/or their use of healing systems, or (b) observe a consultation with a healing practitioner (perhaps accompanying an acquaintance to a consultation – but be sure to get permission from all parties involved to attend and write about your observations!), and write an ethnographic description of your findings. 1,000 words
3. An essay (see below)

Final Essay Questions

Choose one of the following to write your final essay for this course

1. Describe a situation in which two or more different medical systems exist in the same setting (e.g., biomedicine and one or more complementary/alternative therapeutic systems; or local systems of healing and international public health campaigns). To what extent are these medical systems compatible with one another? Are there difficulties encountered as a result of competing medical systems?
2. In the lecture on ethnopsychiatry we discussed the problems with distinguishing between 'normal' and 'abnormal' states of mental health. Do you think that there are similar problems with distinguishing normal or optimal health in other (i.e., non-psychiatric) areas, as well? Justify your answer.
3. Write an essay on the relationship between sickness and cultural practice using two ethnographic examples.
4. Biomedicine is not the only perspective from where to understand health issues. Discuss
5. Discuss Scheper-Huges and Lock idea of the 'three bodies'.
6. Looking at Gay-y-Blasco, work on *gitano* women's bodies, how is gender relevant to understanding health and social identity?
7. Discuss the relationship between healing and beliefs systems.
8. How does the belief in 'inauspiciousness' in Japan affect health recovery?
9. Why is shamanism regarded as an important example when looking at health systems?

10. Discuss the gender differences in Shamanistic practice. Does gender matter in health issues?
11. Discuss the role of Ethnopsychiatry
12. What is the contribution of anthropology to health practitioners?
13. Immunisation programs are not the way to resolve health problems around the world. Discuss
14. Discuss the differences of the impact of HIV/AIDS in industrialised and developing countries in relation to political economy.
15. How is the concept of 'culture' misused in medical care?
16. Scientific rationality and western biomedical models are reductionist when considering the relation of body to culture. Discuss.

Reading

Readings will be available through circulation, library lending and online. Students are expected to read key articles for each topic and to use these to participate in class and for the preparation of essays. Each lecture will be provided with a reading list and a additional reading list will also be available.

Reading list:

- Anderson, R. (1992). The Efficacy of Ethnomedicine: Research Methods in Trouble. In *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Ethnomedicine* (Ed, Nichter, M.) Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, Amsterdam, pp. 1-17.
-
- Brown, P. J, Barret, R. L. and Padilla, M.B (1998) *Medical Anthropology: An Introduction to the Fields* (Ed, Brown, P.J.) Mayfield Publishing Col, Mountain Vieww, CA, pp.10-19
- Bowie, F (2005) *An Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction* (Chapter on Shamanism/Women and health). Blackwell Publishing.
- Caplan, P (1987) *The Cultural Constructions of Sexuality*. Tavistock.
- Currer, C & Stacey, M (1993) *Concepts of Health, Illness and Disease: A comparative perspective*. Leamington Spa Berg (Edtn. 2000)
- Coward, R. (1993).The Myth of Alternative Health. In *Health & Wellbeing: A Reader*(Eds, Beattie, A., Gott, M., Jones, L. and Sidell, M.) The Macmillan Press Ltd, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, pp. 94-101.
- Dougherty, M. C. (1991).Anthropologists in Nursing-Education Programs. In *Training Manual in Applied Medical Anthropology*(Ed, Hill, C. E.) American Anthropological Association, Washington, pp. 161-179.

- Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (1937) *Witchcraft, Oracles & Magic Among the Azande*, Clarendon Press, Oxford., Chapter I. IV, 'The notion of witchcraft explains unfortunate events,' sections I-III (p. 63-70).
- Farmer P and Kleinman A (1998) AIDS as human suffering. In *Understanding and Applying Medical Anthropology* (Ed, Brown, P. J.) Mayfield Publishing Co., Mountain View, CA, pp. 333-342.
- Farmer, P (1995) Culture, poverty, and the dynamics of HIV transmission in rural Haiti. In *Culture and Sexual Risk: Anthropological Perspectives on AIDS* (Ed. Brummelhuis H and Herdt G) Gordon and Breach Publishers, Luxembourg, pp. 3-28.
- Farmer, P. (1998). Social Inequalities and Emerging Infectious Diseases. In *Understanding and Applying Medical Anthropology* (Ed, Brown, P. J.) Mayfield Publishing Company, Mountain View, CA, pp. 98-107.
- Frankenberg R (1993) *Knowledge, Power and Practice: The Anthropology of Medicine and Everyday Life*. S Lindebaum and M Lock (eds) University of California Press. (Chapter 10)
- Gay-y-Blasco, P (1999) A 'Different' Body? Desire and Virginity Among Gitanos *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Sep., 1997), pp. 517-535 (available through JSTOR)
- Geertz, C. (1977). Curing, Sorcery, and Magic in a Javanese Town. In *Culture, Disease, and Healing: Studies in Medical Anthropology* (Ed, Landy, D.) Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., New York, pp. 146-154.
- Glick, L. B. (1977). Medicine as an Ethnographic Category: The Gimi of the New Guinea Highlands. In *Culture, Disease, and Healing: Studies in Medical Anthropology* (Ed, Landy, D.) Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., New York, pp. 58-70.
- Good, B. and Good, M.-J. D. (1993). "Learning Medicine": The Construction of Medical Knowledge at Harvard Medical School. In *Knowledge, Power & Practice: The Anthropology of Medicine in Everyday Life* (Eds, Lindenbaum, S. and Lock, M.) University of California Press, Berkeley, pp. 81-107.
- Gorman E (1986). The AIDS epidemic in San Francisco: Epidemiological and anthropological perspectives. In *Anthropology and Epidemiology* (Ed. Janes C Stall R and Gifford S) D. Reidel: Dordrecht, pp. 157-172.

- Green, E (1999) Engaging indigenous African healers in the prevention of AIDS and STDs. In *Anthropology in Public Health* (Ed. Hahn R) Oxford University Press, pp. 63-83.
- Gruenbaum, E. (2000). Is Female "Circumcision" a Maladaptive Cultural Pattern? In *Female "Circumcision" in Africa: Culture, Controversy, and Change* (Eds, Shell-Duncan, B. and Hernlund, Y.) Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, pp. 41-54.
- Henriksson B and Månsson S (1995) Sexual negotiations: An ethnographic study of men who have sex with men. In *Culture and Sexual Risk: Anthropological Perspectives on AIDS* (Ed. Brummelhuis H and Herdt G) Gordon and Breach Publishers, Luxembourg, pp. 157-182.
- Heurtin-Roberts, S. and Reisin, E. (1998). Health Beliefs and Compliance with Prescribed Medication for Hypertension Among Black Women - New Orleans 1985-86. In *Understanding and Applying Medical Anthropology* (Ed, Brown, P. J.) Mayfield Publishing Co., Mountain View, CA, pp. 248-250.
- Helpman C.G. (2000) *Culture, Health and Illness*. Chp 1. Arnold. Hodder-Headman Group.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1998). The Sorcerer and His Magic. In *Understanding and Applying Medical Anthropology* (Ed, Brown, P. J.) Mayfield Publishing Co., Mountain View, CA, pp. 129-137.
- Lewis, I M (1971) *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit and Shamanism*. Harnondsworth Penguin.
- Moerman, D. (2002) *Meaning, Medicine, and the 'Placebo Effect'*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Chapter 5, 'Formal factors and the meaning response.'
- Nurge, E. (1977). Etiology of Illness in Guinhangdan. In *Culture, Disease, and Healing: Studies in Medical Anthropology* (Ed, Landy, D.) Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., New York, pp. 138-146.
- Parker R (2001) Sexuality, culture, and power in HIV/AIDS research. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30: 163-179.
- Rivers, W. H. R. (2000). Medicine, Magic and Religion (1924). In *Cultural Psychiatry and Medical Anthropology* (Eds, Littlewood, R. and Dein, S.) The Athlone Press, London, pp. 43-58.
- Rubel, A. J. and Hass, M. R. (1996). Ethnomedicine. In *Medical Anthropology: Contemporary Theory and Method* (Eds, Sargent, C. F. and Johnson, T. M.) Praeger, Westport, CT and London, pp. 113-130.

- Sargent, C.F, Johnson, T.M. (1996) *Medical Anthropology: Contemporary Theory and method*. Praeger, Westport, CT and London, pp.293-324
- Scheper-Hughes, N. (2002).Min(d)ing the Body: On the Trail of Organ-Stealing Rumors. In *Exotic No More: Anthropology on the Front Lines*(Ed, MacClancy, J.) University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp. 33-63.
- Scheper-Hughes, N. and Lock, M. (1987) The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, **1**, 6-41.
- Schoepf BG (2001) International AIDS research in anthropology: Taking a critical perspective on the crisis. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30: 163-179.
- Singer, M. (1995) Beyond the Ivory Tower: Critical Praxis in Medical Anthropology. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, **9**(1).
- Singer, M., Valentin, F., Baer, H. and Jia, Z. (1998) Why Does Juan Garcia Have a Drinking Problem? In *Understanding and Applying Medical Anthropology*(Ed, Brown, P. J.) Mayfield Publishing Co., Mountain View, CA, pp. 286-302.
- The online eHRAF tutorial, http://www.yale.edu/hraf/tutorial_intro.htm
- Wojcicki JM, Malala J (2001) Condom use, power and HIV/AIDS risk: sex-workers bargain for survival in Hillbrow/Joubert Park/Berea, Johannesburg. *Social Science and Medicine* 53 (1): 99-121.