

ANTH 420/520  
Winter 2015  
TR 2-4p  
Condon 203

Instructor: Theresa O'Neill  
Office: 372 Condon x65100  
Office hours: F 1-3p  
e-mail: tonell@uoregon.edu

Culture, Illness and Healing:  
Cultural Approaches to Medical Anthropology

Medical anthropology is a well-established sub-field within anthropology that attends to issues of health cross-culturally. Despite shared interests in health, however, medical anthropologists differ widely in their approaches and interests. Some bring a biological focus to their work, pursuing topics such as paleopathology, the role of disease in human evolution, or subsistence technologies and human growth. Others seek to understand the role of politics and economics in patterns of illness distribution or in the organization of ideas about health. Still others bring a cultural focus to their work, studying illness experience and behavior, ethnomedical systems, or the roles of healers in divergent societies.

This course explores illness and healing from a cultural perspective and asks the following kinds of questions: are some (or all) illnesses "culture-bound"? How can we analyze illness experience? How can we compare healing systems within a society or across societies? What do therapies look like in other cultures? What is the nature of healing?

This course will provide students not only with substantive knowledge about illness and healing in American and other cultures, but also with a cultural framework to understand societal differences and similarities in health and illness. As such, this course will be especially useful to anthropology majors interested in the interface between individuals and their social worlds, as well as pre-med and pre-nursing students.

Required books:

Robert Murphy, The Body Silent  
David K. Reynolds, The Quiet Therapies  
Richard Katz, Boiling Energy

Required readings\* (available on Blackboard):

- C. Geertz "Thick description: toward an interpretive theory of culture," in The Interpretation of Cultures, New York, Basic Books, Inc., 1973, pp. 3-30.
- H. Geertz "Latah in Java," Indonesia: 93-104, 1968.
- C. Ritenbaugh "Obesity as a culture-bound syndrome," Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry 6 (1982):347-361.
- J. Friedl "Explanatory models of black lung: understanding the health related behavior of Appalachian coal miners," Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry 6: 3-10.
- J. Comaroff "The diseased heart of Africa: medicine, colonialism, and the black body," in Knowledge, Power & Practice, S. Lindenbaum and M. Lock (eds.). Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993: 305-329.
- E. Martin "The egg and the sperm," Signs 16(3): 485-501, 1991.
- N. Scheper-Hughes "Culture, scarcity, and maternal thinking," Ethos 13(4): 291-317, 1985.
- K. Finkler "Sacred healing and biomedicine compared," Medical Anthropology Quarterly 8(2): 178-197.
- D. Moerman "Cultural variations in the placebo effect: ulcers, anxiety, and blood pressure," Medical Anthropology Quarterly 14(1): 51-72, 2000.
- T. Kaptchuk, et al. "Placebos without deception," PLoS ONE 5(12), 2010.

\*Other readings may be added as the term progresses.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

- two 5-page essays (30%). The essays are designed to give you a chance to analyze course materials and/or apply key concepts. Each of the essays is worth 15% of the total grade. The format, topics and due dates for these essays will be discussed in class.
- an in-class mid-term examination (20%). The mid-term is designed to test your knowledge of the day-to-day materials of the class, and the format will be multiple choice and short answer. The mid-term is tentatively scheduled for **February 10**.
- a final exam (20%). The final will have a varied format, and will test a combination of basic knowledge of course materials and synthesis of course perspectives. The final exam is scheduled for **12:30pm, Monday, March 16**.
- regular attendance and participation in the discussion groups (30%).

### **COURSE OUTLINE**

(an approximate road map)

#### **Approaches to illness cross-culturally**

*January 6, 8*

Reading: Katz, pp. 1-80; C. Geertz

#### **Culture-bound syndromes**

*January 13, 15, 20*

Reading: H. Geertz; Ritenbaugh

#### **Key concepts**

*January 22, 27, 29*

Reading: Murphy (first half)

#### **Cases**

*February 3, 5*

Reading: Friedl; Murphy (second half)

### **February 10 \*\*MID-TERM EXAM\*\***

#### **Critical medical anthropology**

*February 12, 17*

Reading: Comaroff; Martin; Scheper-Hughes

#### **Health care systems**

*February 19, 24, 26*

Reading: Finkler; Katz, pp. 81-176; Reynolds

#### **Healing**

*March 3, 5*

Reading: Katz, pp. 177-250

#### **Conclusions**

*March 10, 12*

Reading: Moerman; Kaptchuk

### **March 16 \*\*\*FINAL EXAM\*\*\***