

Power, Identity, and Inequality in Medicine

Instructor: Prof. CHEUNG Shoan Yin (she/her/hers)

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Course Hours:

Monday	Lecture	2:30 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.	LDS 214
	Tutorial	4:30 p.m. – 5:15 p.m.	LDS 214

This course is an introduction to the medical humanities, an interdisciplinary field of study that seeks to understand the social context of health and illness beyond the hospital, clinic, and laboratory. In particular, this course will emphasize how issues of power contribute to unequal patterns of risk and disease in our modern society. To do this, students will learn major theories and methods in the health humanities to understand how culture, power, and identity—including race, gender, capitalism, and colonialism— shapes the management of disease and individual illness experience in both Asian and global contexts. A critical concern in this course is whether or not the organization of medical care confronts questions of social justice in medical treatment and public health. Students will also grapple with the question of whether our institutions of medicine and public health function as a form of social control using examples from both past and present.

As an introductory course in the medical humanities, this course assumes no prior knowledge. Students from all academic backgrounds and interests are welcome.

The language for this course will be English only.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, you will be able to:

- Gain exposure to foundational concepts and theories in the medical humanities
- Explain how media shapes public understandings of health and disease
- Situate individual illness experience in the social, political, and cultural contexts of disease
- Analyze how social inequality shapes disease outcomes

Course Assessment

Participation	20%
Short Posts (2)	20%
Illness Narrative	30%
Final Presentation	30%

1. 6 Jan. Introduction: Power, Identity, and Inequality in Medicine

2. 13 Jan. The Medical Gaze

- Dan Blumhagen, “The Doctor’s White Coat: The Image of the Physician in Modern America,” *Annals of Internal Medicine* (1979)
- Byron Good and Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good, “‘Learning Medicine:’ The Constructing of Medical Knowledge at Harvard Medical School,” *The Anthropology of Medicine and Everyday Life* (1993)

Recommended:

- Robbie Davis-Floyd and Elizabeth Davis, “Intuition as Authoritative Knowledge in Midwifery and Homebirth,” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* (1996)

3. 20 Jan. Medicine and Colonialism

- Warwick Anderson, “Excremental Colonialism,” *American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (2006)
- Franz Fanon, “Medicine and Colonialism,” *A Dying Colonialism* (1959)

Recommended:

- Nayan Shah, “Public Health, Race, and Citizenship,” *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown* (2001)

4. 27 Jan. Field Trip: Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences

5. 3 Feb. Lunar New Year

6. 17 Feb. Mental Health

- Sander Gilman, “Madness as Disability,” *History of Psychiatry* (2014)

- Arthur Kleinman, “What is a Psychiatric Diagnosis?” in *Rethinking Psychiatry: From Cultural Category to Personal Experience* (1988)

Recommended:

- Arthur Kleinman, “Do Psychiatric Disorders Differ in Different Cultures?” in *Rethinking Psychiatry: From Cultural Category to Personal Experience* (1988)
- Deborah Lupton, “Foucault and the medicalisation critique,” in *Foucault, health and medicine* (1997)
- Jonathan Metzl, “ ‘Mother’s Little Helper:’ The Crisis of Psychoanalysis and the Milton Revolution” (2003)

7. 24 Feb. Religion and Madness
Film Screening: *Drugs and Prayers: Indian Psychiatry in the Realm of Saints* (2001)

- George Foster, “Disease Etiology in non-Western Medical Systems,” *American Anthropologist* (1976)

Recommended:

- E.E. Evans-Pritchard, “The Notion of Witchcraft Explains Unfortunate Events,” *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (1976)

8. 3 Mar. Reading Week

9. 10 Mar. Structural Violence

- Paul Farmer, “On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below,” *Daedalus* (1996)
- Nancy Scheper-Hughes, “Nervoso,” *Beyond the Body Proper: Reading the Anthropology of Material Life* (2007 [1992])

Recommended:

- Sherine Hamdy and Coleman Nye, *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution* (2017)

- Seth Holmes, “The Clinical Gaze in the Practice of Migrant Health: Mexican Migrants in the United States,” *Social Science and Medicine* (2012)
- Nicholas Bartlett, “Idling in Mao’s Shadow: Heroin Addiction and the Contested Therapeutic Value of Socialist Traditions of Laboring,” *Culture, Medicine, & Psychiatry* (2018)

10. 17 Mar. Religion, Politics, and Healing

- Sherine Hamdy, “Islam, Fatalism, and Medical Intervention: Lessons from Egypt on the Cultivation of Forbearance (Sabr) and Reliance on God,” *Anthropological Quarterly* (2009)
- Sherine Hamdy, “When the State and Your Kidneys Fail: Political Etiologies in an Egyptian Dialysis Ward,” *American Ethnologist* (2008)

11. 24 Mar. Film Screening: *How I Live* (2020)

12. 31 Mar. Ageing and Society

- Patrick Cloos, “Is there a Pathological Way of Ageing? Questioning ‘Alzheimer’s Disease’” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* (2017)
- Alexandra Brandt Ryborg Jonsson, “Medicalization of Old Age: Experiencing Healthism and Overdiagnosis in a Nordic Welfare State,” *Medical Anthropology* (2024)

Recommended:

- Lawrence Cohen, “No Aging in India: The Uses of Gerontology,” *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* (1992)

13. 7 Apr. Global Pharmaceuticals

- Adriana Petryna, “Ethical Variability: Drug Development and Globalizing Clinical Trials,” *American Ethnologist* (2008)
- Kaushik Sunder-Rajan, “Experimental Values: Indian Clinical Trials and Surplus Health,” *New Left Review* 45 (2010)

14. 14 Apr. Final Presentations