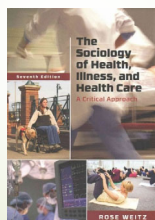


## Chapter 5:

## The Social Meanings of Illness

(How and Why we define something as an illness)



What do we mean by the word "illness?"

Who determines what is an illness?

Who is affected by what is considered an illness and what is not?

The definition for illness is determined both medically and socially.

What would you guess the "medical model for illness" considers when defining a condition as an illness?

- illness is caused by a unique biological condition
- illness is a physical condition that is not "normal"
- illness is not a political or moral issue

What would you guess the "social model for illness" considers when defining a condition as an illness?

- there are social influences that can result in a condition being considered an "illness"
  - morals can play a part in defining an "illness" such as masturbation was at one time considered an illness
  - behaviors that are considered bad may be defined as abnormal and consequently an illness (e.g. nymphomaniac)
  - some groups (e.g., pharmaceutical firms) may consider a particular behavior as an illness for profit, such as sleep disorders, restless leg syndrome, (what about Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder—ADHD)?
  - some groups (insurance companies) may not acknowledge a legitimate illness in order to avoid paying for a cure (Lyme disease)

What does medicalization of an illness refer too?

- the process through which a behavior or health condition becomes defined as an illness or medical problem (e.g., "restless leg syndrome")
- an illness is sometimes defined as a behavior or condition that does not meet social norms

How might history be related to what is defined as an illness?

- a particular condition can be considered an illness at one point in history and not an illness in another
- examples of conditions changing from an illness to a non-illness: sexual preference (e.g., homosexuality)
- examples of conditions changing from NOT considered an illness to being considered an illness: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); sleep disorders; obesity

### Medical Practice as Social Control

How can medicalization of a condition or behavior be an advantage for medical doctors?

- can increase their patient load resulting in more money
  - example: ADHD has increased the patient load of pediatricians
- increases their control of what is considered "normal" and "appropriate" and what is considered an illness

How can medicalization of a condition or behavior be an advantage for patients/consumers?

- can allow them to get reimbursed for a condition or behavior that they would otherwise need to pay for with no insurance assistance
  - example: Lyme disease (symptoms range from digestive problems to constant pain)
- People acknowledge that the person does have a legitimate illness

How can medicalization of a condition or behavior be an advantage for the pharmaceutical industry?

- economic interest in selling a drug as a treatment for profit
- pharmaceutical firms are typically owned by share holders (e.g., part of retirement portfolio of millions of people) who seek to make a profit by holding shares
- the board of directors of the pharmaceutical firm answer to share holders and so must find ways for the firm to make money

How can medicalization of a condition or behavior be an advantage for political groups?

- a political group can define an adversary's political beliefs as a mental illness and consequently have those with the belief put into a "secured" mental institution

So, what are some unintended consequences of medicalization?

- the power of doctors increases and the power of other authorities (judges, police, religious leaders) diminishes.
- Can create stereotypes
- puts more life experiences under medical control
  - example: is women battering a social or medical problem; treatment or jail)
  - example: forced cesarean delivery vs natural birth and use of midwives; is giving birth a medical condition or natural process

Medicalization has created a "potentially ill" category (e.g., osteopenia).  
Who benefits from this?

- allows pharmaceutical firms to sell drugs to people who might become ill
- Medical doctors
- the number of "potentially ill" persons with at risk conditions are growing
  - example: osteopenia is a new condition that is described as a precursor to osteoporosis (thin bones; lack of calcium)

The "rise of de-medicalization."  
What would you guess this is? Who might be behind this movement.

- Insurance Companies
- consumer groups argue against certain conditions being considered an illness or medical condition.
  - example: some women want to use midwives but some insurance companies may only cover MDs
  - example: homosexuality was considered a medical condition but advocates against this view have "demedicalized" it

What information do genes provide that relates to illness?

- identification of certain genes lets the patient know sh/e will get a particular sickness such as Huntington's Disease
- usually the identification of genes lets the patient know that they are more susceptible to a particular disease than most people
  - stress has been found to "turn on" certain genes that cause diseases
  - this is referred to as an **epigenetic effect**

What do we mean by the "sick role" (hint: social expectations)?

- the "sick role" refers to social expectations of:
  - how society views sick people and
  - how sick people should behave
- society's view: sickness is beyond one's control
- society's view: one has a legitimate reason for not fulfilling one's work and other obligations
- expected behavior: the sick person should follow medical advice of certified physicians

What factors contribute to a person's decision to seek out medical assistance?

- symptoms are very visible
- severity/frequency of symptoms
- symptoms disrupt normal activity (need MD approval to stay home)
- can't find another explanation other than an illness
- family and friends recommend seeking help
- ease/cost of accessing health care
- trust in medical establishment
- Believe treatment will help

Once receiving medical attention, what factors contribute to the individual following medical recommendations (or not)? That is, why does a person follow or not follow recommendations?

- Why follows advice: believe they need to do something to overcome the illness; believe the illness poses a serious risk and believe compliance will reduce risk
- Why doesn't follow advice: has significant barriers to compliance (e.g., medication is not affordable, drug side effects; lacks transportation; doesn't understand what to do)

In Sickness and in Wealth  
(show first 30 mins):

<http://iii.library.unt.edu/record=b6353144~S12> .

What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness | Robert Waldinger (12:46 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8KkKuTCFvzI>

How economic inequality might affect a society's well-being (health) (8:22 mins)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFpida\\_dvTvs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFpida_dvTvs)

Top 10 FATTEST COUNTRIES in the World (13:00)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oc29wEdRTH8>

Youtube, "We Are The World"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZiORpNSELas>

■ YouTube on health care, ranked 37 (3 minutes)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yVgOI3cETb4>

■ Youtube, "We Are The World" (7 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZiORpNSELas>

Sick around the World (Night Line, 25 mins GB and Japan, 35 includes Germany)

<https://www.pbs.org/video/frontline-sick-around-the-world/>

Are You Fat In China? (12:00)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TR\\_G5FbAdj8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TR_G5FbAdj8)

On-line: Big Bucks Big Pharma (46 minutes) to Show in Class:  
(copy into browser, will take you to UNT media lib where can request it on line)

<http://iii.library.unt.edu/search~S6?Xbig+bucks+big+pharma&SORT=D/Xbig+bucks+big+pharma&SORT=D&SUBKEY=big+bucks+big+pharma/1%2C2%2C2%2CB/frameset&FF=Xbig+bucks+big+pharma&SORT=D&1%2C1%2C>

Sick around the World (Night Line, 25 mins GB and Japan, 35 includes Germany)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebqzq\\_-usNE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebqzq_-usNE)

Kahoot

<https://create.kahoot.it/#login?next=>