

Week Three Reading Responses
Burhanuddin Mogul
HSS 404 039

The Medicalization of Society by Peter Conrad
Chapters: "Medicalization", "Shifting engines of medicalization"

Throughout these two chapters, Conrad is concerned with the increasing prevalence of medicalization in our world. Between 1950 and 2006 the number of physicians has nearly doubled and various problems have fallen under medical jurisdiction. Conrad starts off by stating how medicalization occurs due to authority of medical professionals, social organizations and interprofessional activity. These factors were studied between the 1970's and the 1980's. In the chapter "Shifting engines of medicalization" Conrad clarifies that those earlier factors may still be there but there are new factors that now have a higher impact. The rise of biotechnology, consumer mindset and managed care organizations all have shifted what drives medicalization. Biotechnology, specifically pharmaceuticals, has had a massive impact on medicalization. Drugs such as Paxil, Viagra and Prozac were able to medicalize issues such as anxiety, ED and depression. Now in 2024 we still see this occurring with the rise of Ozempic, the medicalization of obesity was already occurring with managed care as mentioned by Conrad when they talk about managed care, but this new advancement in biotechnology further pushes the medicalization of weight loss. All of the new factors of medicalization brought up in the chapter have an overlapping theme, that of the commodification of health. Biotechnology is able to medicalize issues by marketing those issues as common medical maladies, the way SAD and GAD were advertised to sell Paxil. Medical structures are starting to see patients as clients, and patients themselves are seeing medical institutions as goods that they can buy, consumer mindset has shifted the power of authority from medical professionals to consumers. This process medicalizes different healthcare professions such as cosmetic surgery, and mental states of being such as ADHD, as there becomes a demand for a medical solution. Managed care itself shifts the attention of medical institutions from patient care to profit, which partially medicalized obesity as seen by offering liposuction procedures instead of funding patients for issues that are result of obesity.

Naming and Framing: The Social Construction of Diagnosis and Illness by Phill Brown

Phill Brown's article covers a "new" method of social construction specifically for the sociology of diagnosis and illness. Brown proposes "a synthesis of symbolic interactionism and structuralist/ political-economic approaches" (Brown 36). Brown mentions that this method of social constructionism can already be found in medical sociology but Brown formulates it in the article. Before Brown walks us down this new model, they walk us through three key forms of social constructionism found in medical sociology. The most prevalent one being that

social problems are products of the actions of individuals or groups taking about a specific condition. The problem that Brown highlights with this approach is that is concerned with the actual condition but rather just the talk surrounding it. Woolgar and Pawluch mention that selective realism is a core of constructionism, meaning that the condition itself needs to be taken into account at times for its construction. European postmodern theory along with Latour's sociology of science are the other two forms of social constructionism found in medical sociology.

Brown justifies the need of his new system as both structural concepts and interactions concepts are needed to understand the breakdown of diagnosis and illness. One can understand diagnosis without understanding the social constructs involved with the creation of the diagnosis and one cannot understand an illness without understanding the direct experiences of the illness. Another key point to medical sociology is that of social causation, both causation and construction are needed.

The need for constructing diagnosis is that diagnosis is fundamental in understanding illness. Diagnosis gives power to various different individuals, patients are relieved with the knowledge of what is wrong with them, doctors know how to go about helping their patients, larger groups of people can have their suffering legitimized, and on the more negative side, larger powerful groups have the ability to use diagnosis to control people. Not only is constructing diagnosis important but so is illness as being able to socially construct illness will help in its framing and acceptance without stigma.