

Medical Anthropology (11) "**Political economy and critical medical anthropology**"

based on Chapter 8 (pp.295-335), In: Winkelman M "Culture and Health: Applying Medical Anthropology", Jossey-Bass, 2009.

POLITICAL ECONOMY APPROACH TO HEALTH

Politics apparently play roles in health. Why do Americans, who pay more than any other country for health care, not have the best health in the world? Partly due to the difference of politics.

Critical medical anthropology is an example of political-economic approaches to health. It assesses the effects of social conditions on health. Economic resources are general mechanisms through which social conditions produce the distribution of diseases and health disparities. Conversely, social organizations and communities can combat risks through social networks, and support can enhance health and recovery.

Critical medical anthropology emphasizes the need to identify how economic and political processes have effects on health and well-being through the production and allocation of health resources and services as well as other factors to affect risks and protective factors (nutrition, housing, ...). A central principle of critical medical anthropology is **community involvement**. Medicalization of social distress is a process by which biomedicine has come to manage a wide range of life circumstances by classifying them as medical problems, even if they are not diseases in the conventional sense (e.g., NEW TYPE DEPRESSION – so called *shingata-utsu* in Japan).

CRITICAL MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

The power of medicine to control our personal lives has driven the development of critical medical anthropology as an explicitly political opposition to the societal power of biomedicine and its associated industries. Pesticide poisoning as the production of disease, the adverse effect of vaccination, ... are examples.

Critical medical anthropology criticizes medical ecology's approach for emphasizing ecological – and social balances, and criticizes medical ecology's characterization of health as a function of the population's adaptation to the environment. In this context, biomedicine is capitalist medicine (ignores poor people who cannot pay for medicine, market's requirement to balance between demand and supply). Pharmaceutical industries may produce diseases (Wall Street Journal [Armstrong, 2007] Pfizer was accused of providing doctors with a deliberately misleading educational program as part of marketing strategy to prescribe Lipitor as a treatment for high cholesterol levels for millions of patients who did not need it; Recently similar issues were reported in Japan).

SOCIAL CONDITIONS AS CAUSES OF DISEASE AND HEALTH

Contextualization: a determination of life circumstances and the economic and political forces that play a role in shaping individual exposure, providing information about the social and cultural factors that have the effects of placing groups of people at risk.

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND SUPPORT

MACROLEVEL SOCIAL EFFECTS ON CLINICAL HEALTH

CHANGING HEALTH THROUGH PUBLIC POLICY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

<Debate of next week>

- ~~Capitalism is recommendable for biomedicine? (Please consider USA, Japan, Cuba and China's situation)~~ ← too vague
- Are "Drug-wars" among the competitive pharmaceutical companies justifiable or not?
 - Prop side: Yes
 - Opp side: No