

Medical Anthropology (4)

Sick role (patient role) in detail

- Sick role: Social expectations for the behaviors of a person diagnosed as suffering from a malady (eg. being excused from work or school).
- Patient role: Special kind of sick role, social expectations for the behaviors of a patient diagnosed as suffering from a disease at any medical facility. Changing by not only the social context but also epidemiological situation.
- Parsons (1951) popularized the "sick role" and social analysis of illness behaviors and suggested that the sick role leads to exemptions from responsibilities and/or responsibilities
 - "Exemption from performing certain normal social obligations or responsibilities"
 - "Release, to a certain degree, from responsibility for one's condition and only peripheral responsibility for recovery if medical advice is followed"
 - "A temporary legitimations of the sick role and the expectations that the sick person has the obligation to recover and leave the sick role status as rapidly as possible"
 - "An obligation to comply and cooperate with medical orders"
- The experience of sickness (= the social response to one's experience of illness) usually follows distinguishable stages
 - Experience of symptoms
 - Assumption of the sick role
 - Medical care contact (~ as patient role)
 - Dependent patient stage
 - Recovery or rehabilitation stage
- Becoming sick is a social process, where the one's perception of and responses to "impaired well-being" are usually shaped by the behavior of significant others (incl. not only physician, but also family, friends, employers, and so on). Cultural, social and personal factors may affect the one's willingness to accept the sick role. Some don't want to accept the sick role, others like to accept it as release from obligations. "The social benefits of the sick role may make patients ambivalent, wanting to maintain their sickness rather than eliminate it because of beneficial effects"
 - Primary benefit: Attention and concern from others, especially beneficial for the people in marginal status with weak social support
 - Secondary benefit: Exemption from responsibility, including work. Sometimes a patient can alleviate blame for the one's fault as the result of malady.
 - Tertiary benefit: Others receive benefits from a patient's sickness (e.g., being a helper). (cf. "Münchhausen syndrome by proxy", see http://www.medicinenet.com/munchausen_syndrome_by_proxy/page2.htm)

<Debate>

- Theme for 8 May is "When the one suffered from illness and once accepted a patient role, should the one play expected sick roles in the community until the one becomes regarded as recovered by the community?"
- Please do the debate between "YES, the one should continuously obey the sick role" and "NO, the one may quit the sick role by the one's decision".