

21A.460  
April 14, 2005  
Geurts

What is it that causes illness?

- Is there a different reality, causality that cannot be explained?
- Discussing notions of individuality, perceptions of being. How experience can vary
- Psychosomatic, physiological component of illness

There are multiple modalities for explaining illness:

- *Lwa* in Haiti: personal household spirits that are worshipped in homes and as a community. If the spirit worship practices are abandoned, later generations can still be 'called' by the spirit, or afflicted
- There are categories of illness considered to be spiritual afflictions
- Traditional Western biomedical definitions of illness

Geurts:

Page 206: Interpretation that illness/affliction can be caused by problems in kinship relationships. Discord between parents, jealousy (Janzen) can cause illness. Not really the case that the whole community has control over certain afflictions

Conceptions of disability:

- Disability framed more as a socio-economic barrier rather than an egocentric issue
- The pressure to individuate in the United States may have caused a definition of disability that focuses on person's ability to function in society (as an individual), whereas a society that is more socio-centric would not have as much stigma to 'disabilities' that affect individual's autonomy
- Disability in senses among the Anlo: deafness is seen to throw a person off balance and is considered critical disability, while blindness is not so stigmatized.
- Society is socio-centric, emphasis is on community support, not so much on individual autonomy: hence helping a disabled man move around a public space is an accepted practice, while in United States the common idea is to not intervene in individual's affairs, social stigma attached to not being able to function autonomously
- Family is a more cohesive notion: family is expected to help each other and support members.
- If notions of dependence, interrelatedness is valued, would create different categories of disability

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- In Western conceptions (egocentric), body is clearly bounded, individuated even at the level of corporal body
- Mental illness is more highly stigmatized than body disabilities

- Speaking, the power of words and thoughts, are highly valued, making mental illness a greater burden
- In Haitian Creole, concept of *pwen*. Can throw *pwen* – sharp, energetic component in speech, like cursing, with a metaphysical component

Was Geurts successful? Did she do her job well as an anthropologist?

- Makes point that there are sensory experiences that exist in some cultures that are not experienced in others
- Somatic modes of attention can be different across cultures. These include different perceptions of inner awareness, different conception of ‘senses’
- There are somatic modes of attention that do not map directly onto Western models of experience
- For example, people might convert to Protestantism to remove influences of Vodou, but metaphors of demons, possession, and illness still reinforces its existence and influence
- In understanding particular social concerns, can almost predict points of vulnerability for members of that society

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21A.460J / WGS.620J Medicine, Religion and Politics in Africa and the African Diaspora  
Spring 2005

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