

Fieldwork Assignment: Illness Narrative

Using Arthur Kleinman's "Eight Questions", conduct an ethnographic interview with someone you know about an experience of "illness" in their life. Keeping our discussions of medicalization in mind, "illness" can be expanded to include any experience that has been medicalized. It can be something currently on-going, recent, or that happened long ago. The experience can be physical or mental—as mundane as a cold, as transformative as a birth, or as serious as a brush with death. As long as the person and the culture they exist in recognized the experience in some way as an illness, it can be used for the interview.

These illness narratives are for our own learning and to practice the methods of ethnography, so we must follow the ethics of ethnographic research. We will review in class, but key concepts are **informed consent, anonymity/confidentiality, and rapport**.

Kleinman's Eight Questions:

You should follow the eight questions **in spirit** while adjusting the questions based on what you know about the person and their experience before conducting the interview. You may need to change the tense (past/present) and you should fill in words like "the problem" and "the sickness" for what the interviewee calls their illness or experience. Beware that interviews go off track, and you should let them! The questions do not need to be asked in order – and the respondents answers may end up covering more than one question.

1. What do you call the problem?
2. What do you think has caused the problem?
3. Why do you think it started when it did?
4. What do you think the sickness does? How does it work?
5. How severe is the sickness? Will it have a long or a short course?
6. What kind of treatment do you think the patient should receive?
7. What are the chief problems the sickness has caused?
8. What do you fear most about the sickness?

Format:

All papers should be double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt font, with 1-inch margins on all sides. Please include an **anonymized** transcript of the interview – this does not need to include time stamps or every single "um" and "uh". It should just indicate the speaker and capture what they are saying. You can use Google docs or any other talk-to-text service to get the gist of it recorded, then go back and check for errors. Keep in mind a 15 minute interview will end with a transcript of around 3-4 pages. If you are transcribing the old-fashioned way, expect to spend about an hour doing so. If the interview goes on much past 15-20 minutes, you can choose what portions to submit for length.

You will then complete a 1-page analysis of the interview. Note what was surprising or interesting about the interview process and about the person's answers. Identify the person's explanatory model of illness, their understandings of the etiology of illness, what medical system(s) they used, what forms of knowledge they accessed and/or trusted, and what practitioners they consulted or were treated by. Submit the transcript and analysis in one file.