



Issues in Health Care: Deviance, Medicalization, and Social Control

SOC 7370 (A01)

Winter 2012, 3 credit hours

Instructor:	Dr. Christopher J. Fries, PhD
Time & Place:	Mondays from 2:30pm – 5:30pm; 335 Isbister Building
Email:	CJ_Fries@umanitoba.ca
Telephone:	474-7871 (with voice mail)

In the twentieth century doctors are in the process of inventing a society, not of law, but of the norm. What governs society are not legal codes but the perpetual distinction between normal and abnormal, a perpetual enterprise of restoring the system of normality. This is one of the characteristics of contemporary medicine.

- Michel Foucault, 1974, English trans., 2004, p. 13 -

As Foucault has pointed out, the institution of medicine is about much more than providing health care. Medicine is a key apparatus of social control in advanced liberal societies such as Canada. Sociologists have been studying medicalization—the extension of scientific-medical authority into areas of social life including the tendency to view undesirable conduct as “illness” requiring medical intervention—for decades. What are the consequences of medicalization for society and how we understand ourselves? In which ways are the engines of medicalization shifting? How is medicalization part of larger cultural developments in the societies of the West? What role do the “psy” disciplines play in a medicalized framing of the self? These questions and debates, among others, will be examined in this seminar through the detailed and critical consideration of three recent texts concerning the sociological and philosophical consequences of medicalization.



Vince Li, about whom David Asper wrote the following editorial:

Now that Li has been judged not guilty by reason of insanity, there is a sense that somehow the bad guy “got away” with a horrible crime just because he was insane. The emotional response is heightened when we hear psychiatrists argue that one day Li may be “cured” of his mental health demons, rendering him ostensibly fit to live a normal life. We immediately imagine exposing other innocents, perhaps ourselves, to a future psychotic episode. But as emotionally difficult as the Li case was, it was simple in one respect: All of the evidence overwhelmingly showed that, by any measure or definition in law, the accused was in fact insane. This week’s judgment was therefore correct. National Post, March 6th, 2009



Carol deDelley, mother of murder victim Tim Mclean commenting outside the courthouse:

“My son died of an illness he didn’t even have.” “I don’t think mental illness ought to absolve you of your responsibilities for your behaviour,” Carol deDelley said yesterday. “Once the crime has been committed I still believe they need to be held responsible, otherwise what sort of a message are you sending?” CP March 6th, 2009.