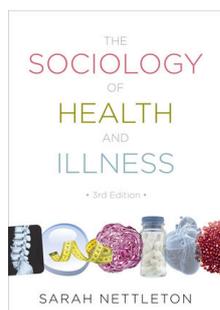


Book Review



Nettleton, Sarah

The Sociology of Health and Illness (3rd Ed.)

Polity Press, Cambridge, 2013, pbk.

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344pp

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Sarah Nettleton's *The Sociology of Health and Illness* has become a classic textbook in medical sociology. This third edition is a welcome update, addressing the key topics that one would expect from a sociology text. Nettleton pays attention to the ever-changing relationships between health and illness in contemporary society. This covers tensions in the doctor/patient relationship; the diverse experience of illness and disability; and the role of patient organisations in influencing the policy agenda. In addition, the book has been brought up to date by reference to more recent research and, in recognition of the growing body of work around technology and innovation, now includes a new chapter focusing on emerging health technologies.

The first chapter provides an outline of the biomedical model and its challenges, with subsequent chapters focusing on a specific topic. A chapter on 'the social construction of medical knowledge' is followed by excellent accounts of 'lay health beliefs, lifestyle and risk', 'chronic illness and disability' and the 'sociology of the body'. After addressing 'lay professional interactions', 'social inequalities' and 'health care work', the remaining chapters look to the future in terms of 'UK health policy' and 'health technologies'.

This latest edition contains important updates to the last, published five years ago, reflecting the rapid changes in the field. The most significant alteration is the addition of the aforementioned chapter exploring the sociology of innovative health technology. This chapter highlights three technological advances, bio-economies, medical imaging and developments in genetic knowledge. Here Nettleton deftly draws on the contributions of prominent authors (including Webster, Law, Mol, Waldby, Rose, Hedgecoe, Mitchell and Hacking) in order to describe the implications of these developments and how they have been conceptualised.

Each chapter demonstrates Nettleton's depth and breadth of knowledge and her extensive research experience. In recognition of the changing nature of medicine, this book skilfully manages to combine recent accounts and theories with classic texts and the range of research drawn upon is particularly impressive. One of the most interesting features of this book is that Nettleton does not just refer to the work of other authors, but, on several occasions, includes excerpts from their original data. The inclusion of 'real world' examples, demonstrating the complexities of doctor-patient interactions, or the consequences of diagnosis, for example, is useful to allow readers to appreciate the practical application of theory. One minor criticism, however, is that, on occasion, reference to more recent empirical examples, rather than older and less well known research, might have been more

persuasive.

While this book is highly appropriate for undergraduate social science students, it is also perfectly suited to postgraduate researchers who might need a solid starting point in order to investigate a particular line of enquiry. This text would also be attractive to medical students or health professionals new to sociology who require an overview of the field. By offering a comprehensive updated account, coupled with the fact it can be used at different levels of education, this is an essential book for inclusion on a medical sociology reading list. As a sociology text and reference, this book represents good value for money.

Although, as joint reviewers, we disagree about how easy it is to 'dip in' to this book (one of us felt the writing could be larger with more headings included) we both can report that, once you start reading, it is difficult to stop. This is a highly engaging book, drawing on useful examples and the writing is clear and accessible - which is certainly no mean feat, given the sometimes complex nature of the material and perspectives in which Nettleton is addressing. This book is successful in achieving the aim of providing a comprehensive in-depth account. It is accessible enough to offer concise summaries of key perspectives while, at the same time, providing sufficient depth for the reader to come away feeling they have a firm grasp of the main arguments.

Overall this book is to be highly recommended. It produces a rich and colourful account of medical sociology which will inspire those new to the field, as well as those who want to refresh their knowledge.