

## SICK OF HEALTH: WHEN WELLBEING TURNS INTO BETTER THAN WELL

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Ignas Devisch – Helsinki, 11/01/14

- Health ~ poverty/education: the more education/income, the longer you live (life expectancy) and the more years you live healthy
- Public debate about health: more focus on individual responsibility
- Lifestyle diseases: individual is the one to blame
- More private insurances (diseases are putting pressure on the system)
- How about Finland?

## Health – social work

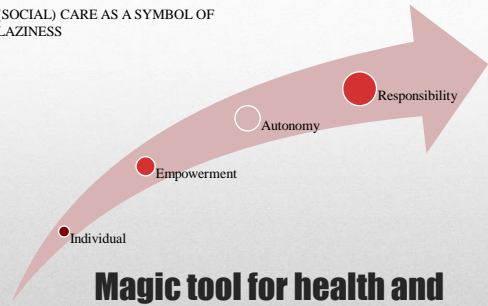
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- Health is at the centre of our daily talks
- Advertisements, supermarket or lifestyle magazines
- Being healthy has become a target for all of us
- Though no direct obligation to be fit and healthy and yet, a sort of moral appeal
- But: who has the means to be healthy?
- The model worked with: the independent, rational, autonomous and well educated citizen

## Pressure to live healthy

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(SOCIAL) CARE AS A SYMBOL OF  
LAZINESS



## Magic tool for health and care?

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- Health care: investment driven system
- Medical overconsumption
- Increasing scans and screenings, taking of pills and more vague descriptions of disease labels
- e.g. US: CT scans from 3 M (1980) to 62 M(2006)
- This costs a lot of money
- No public debate about that, why?

## Health - neoliberalism

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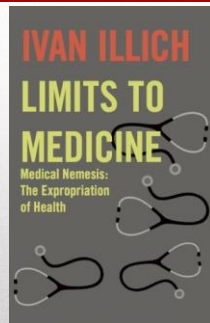
- Link between poverty and health
- Lifestyle diseases: the poorer, the more prevalence
- Is lifestyle really a personal choice?
- Healthy choices take more effort (time, money, etc)

## Health debate=social debate

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Debate seventies on  
MEDICALIZATION

How about today?



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## Sick of Health:

medicine as an answer to each problem?



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### Medicalization

- The process by which human behavior, more and more is considered and analysed as a medical given. As a consequence, our daily activities are a mere object of medical consideration

### Overdiagnosis

- When the treatment is worse than the problem (to declare someone sick while he is not)

### Pharmaceuticalization

- Medication as the most direct way of tackling all of our problems
- Taking pills without being sick

## A few concepts

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Sick of health: the flipside of looking after health: health as a daily obsession

- Side effects: overdiagnosis, too many screenings,
- Medicalization e.g. orthorexia nervosa
- We overuse the system 'voluntarily' (people ask doctors for pills or labels)
- We are not forced to, and yet, we medicalize our lives

## Flipside

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Are we getting more sick because our behavior turns us into an unhealthy life, or are we worried because we have to be healthy?

- Complex given of many factors
- On the one side: we are facing major health problems (diabetes, obesity, etc): **SOME OF US SHOULD START WORRYING**
- On the other side: looking after health becomes an obsession: **SOME OF US SHOULD STOP WORRYING**

## Sick of health

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- Question 'am I healthy?' turns us into patients: we are sick, until proven otherwise
- Those who are well (healthy) but still worried
- Flipside of prevention
  - Increasing anxiety: afraid to become ill
  - *Medical* definition of disease coincides with *social* definition of disease, for instance being bold or not having the perfect teeth, becomes an illness
  - Social topics become medical issues: medicalization of unaccepted behavior/looks

## 'The worried well'

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- Economical context of health care: patients become consumers, clinicians producers
- The more health production, the better our health?
- Quantity or quality?
- Health industry: first you sell the disease, then the medicine
  - Health counselors, screenings, ...
  - <http://www.presscan.co.uk/>
- Health has become a norm in western Europe:
  - Insurances, mortgages ask for healthy condition
  - Average norms without ending point (cf. statistics: averages evolve because we try to catch them)
- When are we enough healthy?

## Health industry

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Sickness and health

- Healthy until proven otherwise
- From bad to better

Better than well

- Sick until proven otherwise
- From good to best

## New starting point

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- New targets and ideals: to become better than well
  - Ideal: fit, well trained body
  - While overweight and obesity are still increasing
  - Gap between ideal and reality is huge
- Society: tailored to individual success or failure:
  - Peter Sloterdijk: we have learned ourselves not to be satisfied with the status quo
  - Not doing more= wrong attitude: 'losers'
- Health becomes a moral issue: healthy (good), unhealthy (bad)

## Society (1): 'better than well'

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- Is health an individual matter or a societal matter?
- Causes of medical disorders are situated into the individual, and not in society
- Societal perspective is crucial: we talk about depression, anxiety disorder, autistic disorders, ADHD (and not: pressure, increasing demand of flexibility; etc)
- 'Transient mental illnesses' (Ian Hacking): each society produces its own diseases (e.g. hysteria in 19th C, ADHD today)

## Society (2): individual versus collectivity

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- Meritocracy
  - Society is organised around merit and quantifiable deliveries
  - Personality and identity are a 'work in progress'
- DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders)
  - More vague descriptions of more aspects of our behavior
  - Daily emotions (grief, shyness) become disorders
  - E.g. Prolonged Grief Disorder

## Society (3): meritocracy

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