

In Memoriam Peter Conrad

April 12, 1945- March 3, 2024

Peter Conrad passed away on March 3, 2024 at his home in Lincoln, MA. He has been my dear friend and close colleague since we met in 1979. I had just finished my dissertation and Peter had started teaching at Brandeis, where he spent his whole career. Peter has long been one of the leading medical sociologists here and abroad, and his impressive scholarship was matched by his unparalleled support for colleagues and students at all levels of sociology. For decades we shared a room at the American Sociological Association annual meetings, staying up late at night sharing thoughts of the day's meetings, hall conversations, job market possibilities for our students, stories of the friends we'd chatted with that day, and book ads and brochures we came across for future teaching and research use. Peter made sure to connect his students with faculty members who could help them think over a course paper or dissertation topic. I've had several occasions where I introduced my students to Peter and he developed collegial interactions with them and always asked me how they're doing. I never failed to be amazed at how many people Peter knew as we traversed the conference hotels. During the days we'd make sure to take time to walk around the conference city, taking in the architecture, food, scenery, and people.

Peter did groundbreaking work in elaborating the concept of the medicalization of social problems. Though he wasn't the first to coin the term, that core concept in medical sociology today is a hallmark of Peter's creativity as he extended it to ever more theoretical and analytical pathways. He integrated disparate notions from a variety of theoreticians and linked the concept to the phenomena of social control and power. He grounded medicalization in extensive research in interesting substantive areas, and he developed conceptual gradients and dimensions of the process of medicalization and demedicalization. In his later years, he greatly updated medicalization in the "The Shifting Engines of Medicalization," his 2004 Leo G. Reeder Award lecture that was then published in the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. He followed that with The Medicalization of Society: On the Transformation of Human Conditions into Treatable Disorders which synthesized medicalization research that Peter had worked on for three decades by then.

Peter was a leading scholar in the experience of illness. His work on hyperkinesis and epilepsy are widely cited as core articles in that field. Peter's dissertation became his first book in 1976, Identifying Hyperactive Children: The Medicalization of Deviant Behavior, setting his career off to a quick uphill start.

Peter's books with Joseph Schneider, Having Epilepsy: The Experience and Control of illness and Deviance and Medicalization, are widely read, and his reader, Sociology of Health and Illness is a standard text, now in its tenth edition. Peter's co-editorship of the Handbook of Medical Sociology transformed it into a very up-to-date, creative intellectual contribution. Peter wrote or edited 16 books and monographs. His approximately 120 articles appeared in the best journals in medical sociology and related fields: *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, *Social Science and Medicine*, *Social Problems*, *Hastings Center Report*, *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* and *American Journal of Sociology*. Many are very widely read, cited, and reprinted. I have had the pleasure of co-authoring

two pieces with him, one on rationing medical care and another on the relationship between states' safety laws and injuries, and it was gave me further evidence of his thoughtful conceptualization and analytical sharpness.

Peter's intellectual curiosity has led him to many topics. Often they stemmed from his long-term commitment to the study of medicalization and illness experience, where he has been one of the discipline's fundamental theorists and researchers. He spent several years studying corporate health promotion as an extension of medicalization. Peter also took up the issue of increased prescribing of psychotropic drugs to children. His work on enhancement examined the legal, moral, ethical, and medical aspects of personal enhancements such as athlete's use of steroids, parents' use of growth hormones for their children, and cosmetic surgery such as breast augmentation. Peter's study of media presentation of genetics, funded by NIH's Human Genome Project, provided excellent work on the social construction of genetics. Peter examined the implications of genetic determinism, such as attempts to "discover" genes for alcoholism and homosexuality. He co-edited Sociological Perspectives on the New Genetics as a monograph issue of *Sociology of Health and Illness* and co-edited The Double-Edged Sword: Social Dimensions of Genetics in a Diverse Society. Peter was one of the pioneers in sociological analysis of genetic issues, creating a body of work that spurred medical sociologists to take up varied research on genetics.

Peter often revisited earlier work, such as an article on ADHD in adults that extended his major scholarship on hyperactivity in children and his late-career work on the globalization of ADHD. He has continually returned to the theoretical development of medicalization, writing review pieces to update and revise that central framework. Peter also had a long-term interest in international health. He carved out wonderful sabbaticals abroad, such as one in Indonesia where he studied epilepsy, motorcycle helmet use, and emergency medicine. From all his trips abroad he put together a great co-edited volume Health and Health Care in Developing Countries.

In other work, Peter examined health care institutions and professions, including research on premedical and medical education, the culture of academic medicine, barriers to women's advancement in academic medicine, and bioethics. More recently, Peter started a project on the experience and management of Parkinson's Disease, with a focus on exercise, one of the most important modes of managing Parkinson's. The interest came from Peter's own diagnosis in 2014.

Peter's remarkable body of work was always carefully thought-out and well-written. Peter thought conceptually, finding the broader meaning in some of the most routine elements of social life. He was always theoretical, but in a manner that made his theoretical contributions eminently readable. Taken together, Peter's published research demonstrates the accomplishments of a brilliant career of medical sociology. When Peter retired in 2017 it was the occasion to hold a grand two-conference on medical sociology at Brandeis, and I was honored to chair it. Peter made sure that the top elder scholars were joined by the youngest graduate students and junior faculty in a series of sessions on the key areas of medical sociology.

Peter was a devoted teacher who always spent enormous time designing new and creative courses, and reading extensively to find the best readings for his courses and for the next editions of his text reader and handbook. When Peter talked about his work, the teaching part always shone through, and he was deeply appreciated by his students. He nourished joint research, publishing journal articles with undergraduates as well as graduates. Peter was a great mentor to his students and to many faculty members, and he gave careful, insightful reading of manuscripts. Peter built an interdisciplinary program, Health: Science, Society and Policy and was always so satisfied as he led it to become the largest major at Brandeis University.

In service to the profession, Peter excelled. He served as Chair of the Medical Sociology Section (1989-1990), and one of his proudest accomplishments was to connect medical sociologists with health scholars in other fields, most notably in a panel during his Chair's term on "Crossing the Borders." He also held various offices in the Society for the Study of Social Problems, including President (1995-1996). In the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction, he held offices including Vice President. He was instrumental in founding Boston Area Medical Sociologists, a local/regional monthly study group that created a fertile climate for a number of years. He was widely sought after for lectures and visiting professorships here and abroad. Following a 1997 Fulbright position at Queens University in Belfast, colleagues there created an opportunity for him to return yearly to mentor students and faculty on research design. He delighted in that trip and often spoke of the many connections he kept over the years.

Working with his British colleague Michael Bury, Peter organized an amazing working conference in 1999, "Medical Sociology Toward the Millennium: Continuity and Change in Health and Medicine." Held at the Royal Holloway, University of London, this conference brought together approximately 150 sociologists, primarily from the US and UK, but also from other countries. It was exceptional in its ability to link these two main groups of medical sociologists and allow them to interact, and led to four more international gatherings in the UK, US, Ireland, and Iceland. Many sociologists have spoken fondly of the conferences as key professional and intellectual experiences.

As one more sign of his professional service, Peter served as co-editor of *Qualitative Sociology*, and has sat on editorial boards of an enormous range of journals: *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *Sociological Quarterly*, *Sociology of Health and Illness*, *The American Sociologist* and *Health*.

In all these areas, Peter conducted himself with deep attention, a friendly smile, warm encouragement, and both intellectual and personal respect for others. He was the all-around colleague that makes it a pleasure to be an academic.

Peter provided a major impetus to my "secondary" scholarship in studying the Jewish experience in the Catskill Mountains. At the 1991 ASA meeting in Cincinnati, we shared stories of summer adventures and when he heard my tales of working in the Catskills he said there was a book there. I know Peter had a great eye for uncovering new research

topics, so I took him seriously and discussed this with him a lot, leading me to embark on the book and much more. Ever since he was always interested in the latest happenings in that adventure. That was part of Peter's own passion for discovering ethnic and religious roots, which he did in exploring the genealogy of this family's German Jewish heritage which he published in a limited private edition booklet. He loved sharing the stories of his trip there and his location of relatives.

That was only one of the many personal connections we had. Peter and I shared cross-country skiing and bike riding out the door of his beautiful rural home. We shared dinners and coffees all through the year. Peter was always the sympathetic ear for any personal troubles, the joyful listener about the lives of my children and later my grandchildren, and the proud raconteur of his life as a parent and grandparent. I will miss him so much. Peter leaves behind his wife Ylisabyth Bradshaw, daughter Rya Conrad-Bradshaw, son Jared Conrad-Bradshaw, and grandchildren Rafi, Sela, and Avi. And he leaves behind a lot of love for all those who knew him.

There will be a Celebration of Life at Brandeis in June, date to be determined.