HEALTH HUMANITIES GRAND ROUNDS

"I Am Not My Disease": Visual Storytelling in South Africa and Eswatini

Wednesday, October 2
3:30pm-4:30pm
HHIVE Lab
Gaskin Library
Greenlaw 524

Paul Blom
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“I Am Not My Disease”: Visual Storytelling in South Africa and Eswatini

Paul Blom, PhD Student & Teaching Fellow, ECL
Health Humanities Grand Rounds
2 Oct. 2019
“What I Did During Summer Vacation” by Paul Blom
Program Information

Locations
Johannesburg, South Africa; Mbabane, Eswatini (Swaziland)

Term
Summer

Dates
Saturday, June 1, 2019 to Saturday, July 13, 2019

Language
English

Area of Focus
Social Sciences

Distributional Requirements
Fulfills So distributional requirement

Structure
Study Center

Course Number
AFST 3350/FILM 3340/HLTH 3350

Instructor Jonathan Smith
Lecturer, Yale University
PhD Candidate, Epidemiology

https://studyabroad.yale.edu/programs/yale-summer-session-johannesburg
They Go to Die: http://theygotodie.com/watch/
In general, the premise of epidemiology is that a collection of individual responses speaks for the population’s need. Rightfully, this premise places data at the foundation of public health: the field is grounded in the generations of data produced from our public health research. Data hold the undeniable power to elucidate need and to shape rhetoric, both of which ultimately seek to reduce the burden of disease in the population studied. Yet despite the validity of data, global health machinery often continues to struggle with the very basics of solving our most pressing public health issues; our innovated successes are tempered with the seemingly persistent failures in basic public health concepts. This is in part because epidemiology, by its very nature, looks at successes and failures in global health as a fluctuation of data.

But every number has a story.

Without being reminded of the human component from which our data were derived, the global health community will continue to be unable to bring about the full potential of our data. Through the novel blending of storytelling and data, Visual Approaches to Global Health at Yale University teaches students in global health to reconnect such humanity while maintaining traditional academic rigor.
Course Overview:

Visual Approaches to Global Health is a novel global health course that explores the intersection between public health and visual media, where students will learn to analyze global health issues through the prism of film, media, and storytelling. Students will learn to understand global health and filmmaking not simply as a representative medium, but through the use of aesthetics and emotional narratives that reach a level of professionalism both as academic scholarship and as works of art.
Learning Objectives:

The course seeks to combine academic public health research with visual literacy in order to prepare students to better advance public health issues in a multimedia format. Students are educated on contemporary global health issues, as well as discuss the art of visual literacy in order to strategically advance global health issues.

By the end of the course, each student will possess the skills needed to:

• Identify ways visual media can explain complex global health scholarship and make it more accessible to the general public

• Analyze the research, theory, method of global health policy and epidemiology

• Identify arguments for global health issues in both literature and visual media, and discern methods that are appropriate for each

• Translate complex epidemiological data and research into a narrative, story driven message approachable by a wide audience

• Recognize ethical dynamics and considerations when working with individuals on public health issues
2015 Class
7 students, 1 group, 1 documentary film

Student Matthew Ware’s video reflection on the 2015 course:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=OeXn9ACer5g&app=desktop
Cultural and historical context:
Understanding the stories of people, communities, and nations

Above: South African Constitutional Court
Right: Apartheid Museum
Cultural context and understanding

Top-left and bottom-right: Swazi wedding
Bottom-left: Outside a clinic after playing hoop ball with a kind group of strangers
The patient-expert: Mousa Mkoko & Nozipho Mkoko

http://theygotodie.com/
Epidemic Untreated: Fighting HIV Stigma in Swaziland

Student film project, 2015
Featuring Vusi Matsebula, Sibonginkhosi Mawela, and Dr. Nduduzo Dube

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=7&v=jGa4v--OvaQ
2016 Class

16 students, 4 groups, 4 documentary films:
- Mental health, esp. schizophrenia
- Gender-based violence
- HIV/AIDS
- LGBTQ
TO KEEP A PROMISE

Of hope, health, and possibility, for mothers and children everywhere.

http://tokeepapromise.org/ and https://www.path.org/resources/tell-better-stories/
2019 Class
9 students (above), 2 groups
- Documentary film on HIV/AIDS featuring Thembi (left) with the CDC
- Narrative film on Universal Health Coverage with PATH
“So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence.... To set aside the sympathy we extend to others beset by war and murderous politics for a reflection on how our privileges are located on the same map as their suffering, and may—in ways we might prefer not to imagine—be linked to their suffering, as the wealth of some may imply the destitution of others, is a task for which the painful, stirring images supply only an initial spark” (Sontag Regarding 102-103).

Acknowledging the agency of the individual: empathy, sympathy, compassion, friendship
“...no given set of events attested by the historical record comprises a *story* manifestly finished and complete. This is as true as the events that comprise the life of an individual as it is of an institution, a nation, or a whole people. We do not *live* stories, even if we give our lives meaning by retrospectively casting them in the form of stories. And so too with nations or whole cultures” (White “The Historical Text” 90).

“The photographic image, even to the extent that it is a trace (not a construction made out of disparate photographic traces), cannot be simply a transparency of something that happened. It is always the image that someone chose; to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude” (Sontag Regarding 46).

The power of an individual story: Hector Pieterson (19 August 1963 – 16 June 1976)

See also: Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Picador, 2003. For other examples of iconic images of individuals catalyzing an emotional response by representing a larger issues, see:

“One of our most difficult duties as human beings is to listen to the voices of those who suffer. The voices of the ill are easy to ignore, because the voices are often faltering in tone and mixed in message, particularly in their spoken form before some editor has rendered them fit for reading by the healthy. These voices bespeak conditions of embodiment that most of us would rather forget our own vulnerability to. Listening is hard, but it is also a fundamental moral act; to realize the best potential in postmodern times requires an ethics of listening. I hope to show that in listening for the other, we listen for ourselves. The moment of witness in the story crystallizes a mutuality of need, when each is for the other” (Frank 25).

Interpersonal connections that acknowledge but attempt to transcend or circumnavigate boundaries of community, nationality, socioeconomic status, and health for mutual and collaborative knowledge-building and the respect of holistic personhood, aimed at empowering individuals to communicate their story for the purposes of self-realization and empowerment, advocacy, and the promotion of positive change.
thank you
Let’s Talk

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See also: