

Book Review



Social Medicine
Health For All

Vivir con dolor crónico [Living with Chronic Pain]

by Anabella Barragán Solís

Reviewed by Bernardo Adrian Robles Aguirre

To speak of pain is to speak of human individuality; the study of chronic pain requires a holistic view of the complex matrix of ways we see, feel and perceive otherness. It is no accident that anthropology has explored this area and offered novel and unique ways of understanding and interpreting a topic that is so broad and yet so individual.

In *Living with Chronic Pain* Dr. Anabella Barragán Solís uses her training as an anthropologist to dissect the kaleidoscopic ways of experiencing chronic pain. Doing so she accepts that chronic pain—in its identity, references, membership, and ownership—implicates both the suffering individual and their social group.

Pain is a human experience and therefore involves the body. It disrupts the individual and intimate, turning them into a particular form of suffering. It enters into the daily routine, taking it over, and giving it an entirely new meaning. The sense of well being is now covered with fear

Bernardo Adrian Robles Aguirre,
Ph.D. National School of Anthropology and History, Mexico City.
Email: brwrpiec@yahoo.com

and uncertainty. Chronic pain has many ways to enter the body as it transforms itself into symptom, disease, divine retribution, or daily punishment.

Throughout the book we find stories of pain both unconquered and yet malleable, fragile yet strong, singular yet multiple. Yet none of these facets go unexplored. The experience of living with pain is indivisible, unique, and particular to the sufferer and tends to limit and restrict their subjectivity. This is carefully described by the author using the results of both quantitative and qualitative research. She portrays the lifestyles of patients, families, and physicians who are involved in the experience of living with chronic pain.

The book reflects Dr. Barragan's work over more than a decade at the Pain and Palliative Care Clinic of the General Hospital of Mexico. She conducted over 150 interviews which served to establish the typologies used to understand the phenome-

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non of pain and its relation to cultural and social redefinition.

Through these interviews the researcher listens and gives voice to the patients. She captures and details their pleasures, afflictions, defeats, and joys. She feels that the experience and perception of pain is constructed in specific social contexts. Pain is conditioned by ethnic group, educational level, occupation, family, culture, genetics, and personal experiences.

The author discovers that pain has its own language, unique and intimate. It can be understood through the variety of ways it is expressed. These can manifest themselves non-verbally (moans, screams, cries, silences), with body language (excretions, cry-

ing, facial contortions) and verbally through metaphors (pain is heartbreaking, monstrous, abominable, etc.).

It should be emphasized that *Living with Chronic Pain* allows us to discover that pain is reflected in our entire lives. Social contradictions and the new meanings we attach to our environment set the stage for our experiences of seeing, feeling, and experiencing chronic pain.

Anabella Barragán Solís, *Vivir con dolor crónico*, First Edition., Libros de la Araucaria, Buenos Aires Argentina 2008, ISBN 978-987-1300-14-3.

Dr. Barragan Solis has a Ph.D. in Anthropology and is a full time research Professor in the Licenciatura Program in Physical Anthropology at the National School of Anthropology and History in Mexico City. Her email is anabsolis@hotmail.com

