

The Psychological & Medical Anthropology Seminar Series Presents:

Disabling Rehabilitation: Performing Disability and Therapeutic Citizenship in Russia



Dr. Cassandra Hartblay

Cassandra Hartblay is a postdoctoral scholar for the UC Collaboratory for Ethnographic Design and lecturer in the Department of Communication and Department of Anthropology at UCSD. She received her PhD in cultural and medical anthropology from UNC Chapel Hill in 2015, and recently completed a two year term on the steering committee of the Disability Research Interest Group of the Society for Medical Anthropology.

How do people with disabilities understand themselves as social actors and as Russian citizens? When a group of adult Russians in their twenties and thirties with mobility impairments gathered together for a weekly art therapy group, multiple modes of performing competence, citizenship, and selfhood came into play. This presentation traces the story of the art therapy group's rehearsals and subsequent performance of several skits based on the writings of the Russian poet Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin, and describes the social negotiations that unfolded as group members and the facilitating social workers determined what to present and how to present it. In telling this story, I work to unpack how people with disabilities negotiate competing discourses to enact versions of themselves as morally complete citizens. In part, this work examines how notions of therapeutic selfhood move into and take on local meanings in the postsoviet context, and, how this idea is complicated in the context of persistent physical disability, wherein the individual in question is presumed by others to always be a less-than-competent citizen and cultural actor. I argue that therapeutic discourses, by seeking to rehabilitate individuals, individualize the social problem of the stigmatization of disability. Based on ethnographic research in a northwestern Russian city in the fall of 2012, this presentation combines theoretical vantage points from disability studies and medical anthropology to argue that the psychosocial therapeutic model does not effectively interrupt, but rather reproduces, disability as a relational inequality. In this way, attention to the perspectives of people with disabilities themselves recasts our understanding of therapeutic citizenship, and the project of *rehabilitation* as a whole.

Tuesday, February 21, 2017, 12:00pm – 2:00pm
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