

Sociology of Mental Illness
Sociology 307
MW 6:00-9:55pm
Summer 2009 5/27/09-7/01/09
Murray Hall: Room 213 CAC

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Office Hours: by appointment
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Course Description: At first blush, mental health appears to be a quintessentially personal phenomenon: mental health and mental illness seem to be intensely private experiences outside of the realm of sociological analysis. After all, who but psychologists and psychiatrists are truly equipped to understand mental health and illness? In this course, I aim for us to not only understand the role of sociology in the study of mental health, but to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of social life on our mental well being. You will be introduced to the major concepts and techniques of understanding mental health and illness from a sociological perspective.

This course is interdisciplinary, in that it includes material from many fields. But there is **a coherent organizing theme: the need to understand mental illness in a broad social context.** Too often psychopathology is studied as a discrete entity, with little regard to its social origins and to the institutions of social control involved in mental illness.

The goal of this course is to critically examine how history, institutions, and culture shape our conceptions of mental illness and the mentally ill. Along with a critical examination of sociological, psychological, and biological explanations of mental illness, we will consider the variety of social factors that contribute to the rates and the experiences of mental illness. To this end, we will cover epidemiological research, the role of stigma, stratification and inequality, and the effects that psychiatric and psychological treatments- both positive and negative-have on patients, families, and society at large.

Required Texts:

*Horwitz, Allan and Theresa Scheid. 1999. *A Handbook for the Study of Mental Health: Social Contexts, Theories, and Systems.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

*Sheehan, Susan. 1981. *Is There No Place on Earth For Me?* New York: Vintage.

*Wahl, Otto. 1995. *Media Madness: Public Images of Mental Illness.* New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

These texts are available at New Jersey Books on 108 Somerset in New Brunswick. Copies of each can also be found on Amazon and Half.com

We will do a lot of other reading in this class. Articles and assignments will be posted on the course Sakai website. Please note that **connectivity problems are not a sufficient excuse** to not have readings done prior to the class. If you are having a hard time accessing Sakai, please let me know ASAP and connect with a fellow student to access the readings.

Grading: I follow Rutgers University's grading scale:

- A: 90-100 pts
- B+: 86-89 pts
- B: 80-85 pts
- C+: 76-79 pts
- C: 70-75 pts
- D: 60-69 pts
- F: below 60 pts

Grades will be based on the following class exercises:

Take-home question and presentation to class:	10
Film Comparison:	20
Book Review:	20
Midterm:	25
Final Exam:	25
Total:	100

I do not take attendance. However, test questions will include material from lecture, as well as from readings, your fellow student's take-home question presentations and in-class exercises and films, so you are unlikely to pass the tests unless you attend every course and take scrupulous notes. I will not post powerpoint slides on Sakai before the class period. If you miss your in-class presentation day, there is no make-up unless you have a documented excuse. No late work will be accepted without a documented excuse. **I do not negotiate grades.** If you are having a problem with the coursework, **please come see me** early in the course.

Course Format: As an intensive summer course, we have eleven meetings of almost 4 hours each. Although the time frame is condensed, the content is not. The sociology of mental illness is a broad and complex field, and while we cannot attempt to cover all of it, we will be reading and writing intensively in the topic areas that we do cover. Therefore, we have a lot to work on in every class session, and I expect each of you to come prepared (i.e.: have read all required readings, done required homework or presentation prep, etc). For everyone's sake, I will not be lecturing for 3 ½ hours every day; your participation is critical. Daily sessions will be a combination of lecture, student presentations, small discussion groups, and films. Most days we will go for the full class period- please do not ask to be let out early.

Assignments: There are 3 major assignments in this course.

Take-home questions and class presentations: Every day at the end of class I will hand out 3-4 questions for research and presentation for the next class session. You are expected to select one question during the course (i.e.: four students each day will select a question). For the week you select a question, research the assigned topic (I expect you to use sources in addition to Wikipedia!) and develop an informed and thoughtful point-of-view about the topic. While your point of view does **not** need to be consistent with mine or that of the readings, I do expect your opinion to be informed by classroom materials. Some questions will be in a “pro” or “con” format (ie.: argue “for” or “against” a position), and some will be stand-alone topics. Please submit a 1-2 page summary of your findings and viewpoints on Sakai by midnight of the day of your presentation. Come prepared in the next class session to present your findings and argument to the rest of the class. This assignment is worth 10 points.

Film Comparison: We will watch two films in class, “Man on Wire,” and “A Beautiful Mind.” Both films depict genius men who are both, arguably, a little “mad.” One has a diagnosis of a mental illness, and one does not. In this paper, I want you to grapple with the social meanings of what it means to be mentally ill. How do family members and friends relate to the mentally ill? Is there any one thing that defines mental illness? What makes the mentally ill different from everyone else? This paper should be no shorter than 8 pages. Detailed instructions will appear on Sakai. This assignment is due to be posted on Sakai by **6pm Wednesday June 24th**. This assignment is worth 20 points.

Is There No Place on Earth For Me Analytic Review: Read Sheehan’s book in full (It’s quick reading, and enjoyable). In a 5-7 page paper, please evaluate the content of the autobiography from a sociological perspective. Take the “story” out of the personal/psychological and into the sociological. Use concepts from the class to evaluate the narrator’s story. Detailed instructions will appear on Sakai. This assignment is due to be posted on Sakai by **6pm Monday June 29th**. This assignment is worth 20 points.

Exams: There are two exams in this course- one at midterm and one at the end of the course. These exams will be composed of multiple-choice and short answer questions and will cover concepts covered in the readings, in-class discussion, lecture, films, and student presentations. The final exam is not comprehensive- it will only cover the material covered in class since the midterm.

Class Schedule:

Please note: All readings are expected to be completed prior to the course period in which they are listed. A typical class period will require about 40-50 pages of reading. If you did not get a chance to read the readings for the first day, please read them by the second class session. Selections marked with an * appear on Sakai, selections marked with a # are from Wahl, all others are from the Horwitz & Scheid reader.

Conceptualizing Mental Illness**Wed, 5/27 DAY 1**

Themes: What is mental illness?
How is mental illness sociological?

Readings: *Approaches to Mental Health and Illness- Horwitz & Scheid pp 1-12*
**The Promise, C Wright Mills*
**This syllabus!*

Other: Start reading *Is There No Place on Earth for Me?*

Mon, 6/1 DAY 2

Themes: Measurement of mental disorders

Readings: *The Measurement of Mental Disorder, Jerome Wakefield pp 29-57*
The Prevalence of Mental Illness, Kessler and Zhao pp 58-78

Film: *Man on Wire*

Wed, 6/3 DAY 3

Themes: Psychological approaches to mental illness

Readings: *Psychological Approaches to Mental Illness, Christopher Peterson pp 104-120*

Mon, 6/8 DAY 4

Themes: Biological approaches to mental illness

Readings: *Biological Approaches to Psychiatric Disorders, Schwartz pp 79-103*
**Reading the Book of Life NYT*
**The Biological Foundations of Diagnostic Psychiatry, Allan Horwitz pp 131-157*

Wed, 6/10 DAY 5

- Themes: Sociological approaches to mental illness
Stigma
- Readings: *Sociological Approaches to Mental illness, Peggy Thoits pp 121-138*
The Labeling Theory of Mental Disorder, Link & Phelan pp 361-376
**The myth of mental illness, Thomas Szasz (6 pages)*
- Exercise: Prep for Midterm

Mon, 6/15 DAY 6

- Exercise: **Midterm Today!**
- Film: Beautiful Mind

Wed, 6/17 DAY 7

- Themes: The stress paradigm
- Readings: *Stress and Mental Health: A Conceptual Overview, Leonard Pearlin pp 161-175*
The Nature of Stressors, Blair Wheaton pp 176-197

Social Correlates and Responses to Mental Illness

Mon, 6/22 DAY 8

- Themes: Race, Ethnicity, Gender and Mental Illness
- Readings: *Socioeconomic Stratification and Mental Disorder, Eaton & Muntaner pp 259-283 (24 pages)*
Race & Mental Health, Williams & Harris-Reid pp 295-314
Gender & Mental Health, Sarah Rosenfield pp 348-360
**Before Spring Break, the Anorexic Challenge NYT*
**Disparities seen in Mental Care for Minorities NYT*

Wed, 6/24 DAY 9

- Themes: The commodification of mental illness
Mental illness in the media
- Readings: *#Chapter 1-3, Chapter 6 Wahl*
- Exercise: Pharmaceutical Advertisements
- Due: Film Comparisons

Mon, 6/29 DAY 10

Themes: Treatments for mental illness
Readings: *Mental Health Systems and Policy, Scheid & Horwitz pp 377-391*
Mental Illness and the Criminal Justice System Hiday pp 508-525
**The Rise of Anti-Depressant Drug Treatments, Horwitz & Wakefield pp 179-188*
Film: The New Asylums
Exercise: Review for Final
Due: Is There No Place on Earth for Me Review

Wed, 7/1 DAY 11

Themes: Wrap-Up
Exercise: **Final Exam!**

Classroom Policies

Be respectful of me, of your classmates, of the university personnel and facilities. This means, at a minimum, turning off your cell phones and minimizing disruptive behavior in class, generally paying attention in class, arriving on time, and staying for the full class period.

Please choose your words carefully. The classroom must be a place in which everyone can participate. This means that every person must feel safe enough to express their opinions without fear of ridicule or intolerance. Remember that in good discussions, people critique ideas and not other people. The more heated the political issue we discuss, the more important it is to keep this in mind. Please use inclusive (non-sexist) language, when speaking and in your written work. This means, at a minimum, not using “man” to refer to all humans, and not using “he” exclusively to refer to all people. If you have questions about what inclusive language is, please consult a current style guide or ask me.

Academic Integrity. Cheating and plagiarism are serious academic offenses. Academic dishonesty includes (but is not limited to) such behavior as **quoting** or **paraphrasing** without complete citation, collaborating with others on assignments or exams without the explicit permission of the instructor, submitting work for more than one course without the instructors’ permission, and presenting another's work as your own. Penalties range from a failing grade for the assignment to permanent expulsion from the University, depending on the severity of the offense. As an instructor, I am **obligated** to report all suspected violations to the suspected student’s Dean; the Dean’s Office then makes recommendations. In other words, as soon as I suspect it, it is entirely out of my hands. Don’t put me, or yourself, in this position. See the full policy (<http://teachx.rutgers.edu/integrity/>) for details. I may use the online service turnitin.com to identify possible plagiarized papers. Please ask me if you have any questions.

Makeup Exams. For in-class exams, I allow make-ups **only in very rare circumstances**. Oversleeping, missing the campus bus, getting a flat tire, etc. are NOT valid reasons for a makeup. Makeup exams consist of long-answer essay questions, and the bar is set high. It is not to your advantage to take a makeup exam in this class. See me as soon as possible if you know you will miss the final exam.

Contacting me. The best way to contact me is via **email**: kburrows@sociology.rutgers.edu. Please read the syllabus thoroughly before emailing me with questions about the course. Don't email me an hour before class starts to ask me questions about the reading or exams; not only will I not have time to respond to you before class, but I will also know you put off the assignment until the last minute. When you email, please put the name of the course (e.g., "Mental Illness") in the subject heading and include your full name in the email. Otherwise, I won't be able to tell your email apart from the spam I delete without opening. I welcome anonymous emails with suggestions, critiques, or comments about the course, but I will not respond to such anonymous emails.

Sakai. We will use Sakai in this course for additional readings, announcements, and for posting and turning in assignments. Please let me know ASAP if you have any trouble accessing this site.

Office hours. Although I do not have regularly scheduled office hours, I am always available to meet with you before or after class. I generally arrive in the classroom about a half-hour before class. However, I am always available for more extensive discussions about the class material, your performance in the class, or any other topics. If you would like to have a more extensive conversation with me, please email me and we can set up a mutually acceptable time.

Classroom Accessibility. Please come see me no later than the third class if you have special learning needs. I will work with you to make the classroom and the material accessible. A great resource is the RU Learning Centers, where you can contact the Disability Coordinator for your school. Their website is <http://lrc.rutgers.edu/disabilities.html>.

Acknowledgements: Much of this syllabus has been pilfered and adopted from others at Rutgers, most notably Dena Smith and Allan Horwitz.

I reserve the right to make changes to this syllabus, as I see fit or necessary for the course.