

WOMEN, MADNESS AND SANITY

WMNST 522

FALL 2007

ESTHER ROTHBLUM

Class Meeting Times: Wednesdays 7-9:40 p.m.
Classroom: AH 2127

Professor: Esther Rothblum

Office: AL 313

Office Hours: Wednesday 9:30-11:30 am

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The best way to reach me is via email--I am happy to reply to emails any time. You can also talk to me before or after class.

Course Description:

This course will survey theoretical and service delivery issues related to women and mental health. Particular issues to be addressed include sexism, heterosexism, and racism in the social construction of madness, theories of women's psychological development, issues of diagnosis and psychopathology, women's particular treatment needs, as well as traditional and feminist approaches to psychotherapy with women.

Women have been diagnosed, treated, committed to institutions (or burned at the stake) for symptoms of madness. For the most part, those holding the power to label, treat and commit have been middle/upper class, heterosexual males of European descent. The feminist movement and the emergence of a feminist psychology and psychotherapy are still struggling to develop a feminist understanding of women who do not conform to societal standards of sanity.

In this course we will focus on the historical and cultural factors and behaviors that have been associated with madness in women as well as on women's efforts to recover sanity and make sense of female experiences.

Course Organization:

I will be lecturing about research and theory in women's mental health each week. I will post key concepts on Blackboard. The focus will be on how traditional and feminist mental health professionals understand women's mental health issues.

We will then spend half the class discussing class readings, which have been selected to present first-person accounts and literature about women and madness. We will also view films and other media to understand how women have depicted as mad versus sane across time.

Student Learning Goals and Objectives:

Student learning goals for this course have been aligned with the overall goals for a Women's Studies major.

At the end of this course, the student should be able to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the way that mental health professionals have defined women's mental health problems
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the ways that women's lives are shaped by large social structures
3. Evaluate multiple perspectives within the field of psychology and feminist theory
4. Write and speak articulately about women's mental health, and demonstrate critical thinking skills
5. Produce a research paper or class discussion with a clear focus and argument on women's mental health.

Required Readings:

The following books are available at KB Books and Aztec Books:

Rebecca Shannonhouse (2003). *Out of Her Mind: Women Writing on Madness*. NY: The Modern Library.

Laura Brown (1994). *Subversive Dialogues: Theory in Feminist Therapy*. Perseus Books.

All additional readings are available on electronic course reserve.

Instructions for accessing course readings electronically

- Get on the website ecr.sdsu.edu
- Click on "electronic reserves and reserve pages"
- You can then search for this course under instructor name or course number
- Click on "Course reserve pages by instructor"
- Scroll down to "Rothblum" and click "search"
- Click on this course number, which is wmnst 522
- It will ask for the password, which is "silicon"
- Enter the password and then click on "accept"
- You will get a list of all course readings
- For most of the readings, you can just click on the symbol to the left and then click again, and you will be in the adobe acrobat version of the article. You can read it on line, print it out, etc.

-A few of the articles have a funny symbol of a globe to the left. When you click on those articles, you first get a page called “document info.” Click on the place that says “click here for more information.” When you get the next page, wait a few seconds, and the article will appear. If it doesn’t, look for a place that says “pdf full text” and click on that.

-Let me know if you find any missing pages or have difficulty reading the articles.

Students With Special Needs

Students who need accommodation of their disabilities should contact me privately to discuss specific accommodations for which they have received authorization. If you have a disability, but have not contacted Student Disability Services at 619-594-6473 (Calpulli Center, 3rd Floor, Suite 3101), please do so before making an appointment to see me.

Academic Misconduct

Section 41301 of Title V of the California Code of Regulations defines academic misconduct as “Cheating or plagiarism in connection with an academic program at a campus.” According to the SDSU Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities, “Examples of cheating would include using unauthorized notes or study guides during an exam, unauthorized collaboration on coursework, stealing course examinations or materials, falsifying records or data, and intentionally assisting another individual in any of the above.” Some examples of plagiarism include submitting work that was written by someone else or using someone else’s ideas without referencing that source in a footnote or bibliography. When using exact quotes, be sure put these quotes within quotation marks.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

I. Class participation (15% of total grade)

It is important to develop the ability to critically evaluate material and to communicate your ideas to others. In addition, this course depends heavily on collective discussion and interpretation of the readings, films, and lectures. You will be graded on class participation depending on the extent to which your comments and reflections in class contributed to and enhanced general knowledge of the course materials and added to the learning experience of the class as a whole.

Note that this is a significant portion of your total grade. I will be emailing all students feedback about level and quality of class participation on October 10, halfway through the semester.

II. Weekly journal about the class readings (45% of total grade)

The readings are important part of this course. You will be required to submit a journal entry each week that consists of a brief (about 1 page, typed, double-spaced) evaluation of each reading for that week.

Journal entries are due at the beginning of each class starting on September 5. You can also email journal entries to me, as long as the email reaches me before class time.

Journal entries should not just consist of a summary of the reading. Instead, they should evaluate the reading. For example:

1. What does this reading indicate or suggest about the ways in which the meaning of madness or sanity varies for women in different social, historical, political, and cultural contexts?
2. What does the reading suggest about the relationship between madness and (a) feminism, (b) anti-racism, and/or (c) social movements?
3. What assumptions or assertions does this reading make about the social position of women compared to men?
4. Select a significant concept, idea, or argument from this reading and use it as a basis for (re)interpreting (a) an experience in your own life, or (b) observation(s) you have made regarding contemporary society. How might this concept, idea, or argument change the way you interpret that experience or observation?
5. How do the ideas in this reading relate to ideas you have encountered in other women's studies courses or other courses you have taken at SDSU?

Points: 1 for each reading (there are 45 readings in all during the semester).

Points will be taken off if the entries do not cover all readings for that week, if the entries are not related to the above questions, or if the entries do not indicate you have done the readings. There will no credit for late entries.

III. Term Paper (20% of total grade)

The purpose of the term paper is to gain a more in-depth knowledge of a topic related to women, madness and sanity. The term paper can cover either a topic from the course syllabus in greater detail, or a topic not covered in class more generally. A term paper should consist of (a) a general introduction describing the area and why it is important for women, (b) a review of the relevant literature, with your evaluations and comments, and (c) a lengthy conclusion in which you integrate the literature, provide suggestions for future scholarship, and state your opinions about the area as it relates to women, madness and sanity. The term paper should be 8-10 pages in length (15 pages for graduate students). It might be helpful to check with me about the topic you wish to cover and for suggested readings. The term paper must be sensitive to cross-cultural issues; you cannot focus only on white, U.S. women. The term paper should incorporate 4-6 scholarly sources (books, book chapters, or academic journal articles) and 2-3 internet sources (web sites, electronic data bases, or other resources). Other sources (e.g., attendance at a relevant cultural event, interview with mental health activist) are optional. The term paper is due on November 14 at the beginning of class (or via email before class). Half a letter grade will be deducted for each day that the paper is late.

A brief overview of your term paper is due on October 10 at the beginning of class. This should include a short (1/2 page) overview of your topic and a preliminary bibliography.

IV. Final Open-Book Exam (20% of total grade)

The purpose of the exam is to demonstrate that you can integrate the course material (readings, films, lectures, student presentations, and discussions) in a comprehensive and meaningful way.

A list of essay exam questions will be distributed in class on November 14. Students will have some choice of exam items, and the exam is open book. The final exam items are due at the beginning of the last class (December 5) or via email before that class. Half a letter grade will be deducted for each day that the exam is late.

V. Extra Credit Class Film Presentation (5% added to final grade)

There are hundreds of television commercials, YouTube film clips, documentaries, films, and other media that reflect women's madness and have implications for what a "normal" woman should be like. For this extra credit option, students can:

- a. Find a media clip (about 5-10 minutes in length)
- b. Let me know the topic and when you would show it in class
- c. Show the media clip in class and spend a few minutes describing the context before and after the clip

Important: Do not select media clips that portray graphic scenes of violence; many students have been traumatized by sexual or physical violence and should not be exposed to more scenes of violence.

SYLLABUS

August 29

INTRODUCTION: WHAT ARE MADNESS AND SANITY?

Class film: A QUESTION OF SILENCE

September 5

HISTORY OF WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH AND ITS TREATMENT

Readings:

Out of Her Mind: The Yellow Wallpaper, 1892, by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Out of Her Mind: On Behalf of the Insane Poor, 1843, by Dorothea Dix

Subversive Dialogues: Chapter 1, Toward a Subversive Dialogue with the Reader

The Combahee River Collective (1982). A Black Feminist Statement. In *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*. Old Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press.

September 12

WOMEN, DIAGNOSIS AND POWER

Readings:

Subversive Dialogues: Chapter 5, Naming the Pain: Diagnosis and Distress

Subversive Dialogues: Chapter 8, Feminism and Ethics

Gerd Brantenberg (1977). Bram, the director, and her family. From *Egalia's Daughters: A Satire of the Sexes*. Boston: The Seal Press.

September 19

RACE, CLASS AND RELIGION

Readings:

Subversive Dialogues: Chapter 3, Theorizing From Diversity

Out of Her Mind: The Book of Margery Kempe, 1436

Out of Her Mind: The Woman Warrior, 1976, Maxine Hong Kingston

Oliva Espin (1987). Psychological impact of migration on Latinas: Implications for psychotherapeutic practice. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 11(4), 489-503.

Sabine Lang (1999). Lesbians, Men-Women, and Two-Spirits: Homosexuality and Gender in Native American Cultures. In Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia Wieringa (Eds.) *Same-Sex Relations and Female Desires: Transgender Practices Across Cultures*. NY: Columbia University Press.

October 17

WOMEN, EATING AND BODIES

Readings:

Jill Sager (1985). Five Reasons I Play Wheelchair Basketball. In Susan Browne, Debra Connors and Nanci Stern (Eds.) *With the Power of Each Breath: A Disabled Women's Anthology*. Pittsburgh: Cleis Press.

Pamela Gross (1993). A Separation of Self. In L. Newman (Ed.) *Eating Our Hearts Out*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press.

Esther Rothblum (1994). I'll Die For the Revolution but Don't Ask Me Not to Diet: Feminism and the Continuing Stigmatization of Obesity. In P. Fallon, M.A. Katzman, and S.C. Wooley (Eds.) *Feminist Perspectives on Eating Disorders*. NY: Guilford Press. Available on my website at:
http://www.rohan.sdsu.edu/%7Erothblum/doc_pdf/weight/IIIIDiefortheRevolution.pdf

October 24

WOMEN AND SUBSTANCE USE

Readings:

Dorothy Parker (1929). Big Blonde. In Rebecca Shannonhouse (Ed., 2003). *Under the Influence: The Literature on Addiction*. NY: The Modern Library.

Linda Yablonsky (1997). The Story of Junk. In Rebecca Shannonhouse (Ed., 2003). *Under the Influence: The Literature on Addiction*. NY: The Modern Library.

Kate Braverman (1998). They Take a Photograph of You When You First Get Here. In Rebecca Shannonhouse (Ed., 2003). *Under the Influence: The Literature on Addiction*. NY: The Modern Library.

Charlotte Davis Kasl (November/December 1990). The Twelve-Step Controversy. *MS Magazine*, 30-31.

October 31

NO CLASS--HALLOWEEN

Even though there is no class this week, there are readings on the topic of WOMEN AND STRESS, and journal entries are due via email.

Readings:

Donna Kate Rushin (1983). The Bridge Poem. In Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua (Eds.) *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*. NY: Kitchen Table Women of Color Press.

Juliet Schor (1991). The Overworked American. Chapter 1 in *The Overworked American*. NY: Basic Books.

Arlie Hochschild (1997). Family values and reversed worlds. In *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*. NY: Metropolitan Books.

An Interview With Elaine Robidoux by Bobbie-Jo Goff (1985). Life Has To Go On... In Susan Browne, Debra Connors and Nanci Stern (Eds.) *With the Power of Each Breath: A Disabled Women's Anthology*. Pittsburgh: Cleis Press.

November 7

WOMEN, SCHIZOPHRENIA AND PSYCHOSIS

Class film: THE SNAKE PIT

Readings:

Out of Her Mind: The Snake Pit, 1946, by Mary Jane Ward

Out of Her Mind: Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl, 1951, by "Renee"

Out of Her Mind: Faces in the Water, 1961, by Janet Frame

November 14

WOMEN AND "PERSONALITY DISORDERS"

Readings:

Paula Caplan (1991). Taxonomy of Delusional Dominating Personality Disorder (DDPD). *Feminism & Psychology, 1*, 173-174.

Susan Philips & Nancy Harm (1998). Women Prisoners: A Contextual Framework. *Women & Therapy, 20(4)*, 1-9.

Gabrielle deGroot (December, 1998). A Day in the Life: Four Women Share Their Stories of Life Behind Bars. *Corrections Today*, pp. 82-84, 86, 96.

November 21 NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING

November 28 MADNESS IN GIRLS

Class film: GIRL, INTERRUPTED

Readings:

Out of Her Mind: By Her Own Hand, 1991, by Signe Hammer

Out of Her Mind: Girl, Interrupted, 1993, by Susanna Kaysen

Mary Pipher (1994). *Reviving Ophelia* (pp. 146-151, 157-165). NY: Putnam.

December 5 TREATMENT AND MISTREATMENT OF WOMEN

Readings:

Out of Her Mind: Ten Days in a Madhouse, or Nellie Bly's Experiences on Blackwell's Island, 1887, by Elizabeth Cochrane

Subversive Dialogues: Chapter 2, Feminism in feminist therapy theory

Subversive Dialogues: Chapter 7, The master's tools: The dilemma of dealing with patriarchy