

## **SOC 426/526 & WS 426/526: WOMEN AND MENTAL ILLNESS (4 Credits)**

Winter 2007 11:30-12:35 MWF; 371 Cramer Hall

### **Professor Thompson**

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“A serious historical study of the female malady should not romanticize madness as one of women’s wrongs any more than it should accept an essentialist equation between femininity and madness. Rather, it must investigate how, in a particular cultural context, notions of gender influence the definition and, consequently, the treatment of mental disorder.” – Elaine Showalter

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

For feminist scholars, mental illness is both a significant and a very complicated issue. On the one hand, psychological theories about what makes a woman mentally “healthy” are often deeply embedded in traditional, patriarchal assumptions about proper feminine behavior and social roles. This fact has led some feminists to argue that women labeled as mentally ill may simply be rebelling, in covert and confused ways, against the unreasonable demands of society. On the other hand, the idea that our society is “toxic” for girls and women, encouraging self-destructive behaviors and mental distress, has played a prominent role in the women’s movement. Thus, feminist scholars often draw on psychological theories and models in their own explanations of what is wrong with current society and how it should be fixed.

This course will examine the multiple meanings of women’s mental illness in the United States from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, through end of the 19th century, and on to the present. We will draw on a broad range of psychological, historical, sociological, and literary writings on mental illness. Although the primary focus of the course is on non-biological explanations for mental illness, the course is not intended to be anti-psychiatric or anti-medical. We will take seriously current theories that much mental illness is the result of organic problems and can be treated with medications. However, we will also aim for a more complicated understanding of what mental disease means and how it functions within particular, gendered social contexts. Topics include psychoanalysis, the relationship between mental illness and women’s family roles, mental illness and women’s creativity and self-expression, and the effect of gendered notions of “abnormal” on juvenile/criminal justice responses. A major theme of the course will be the intellectual and political dangers inherent in drawing a line between “normal” and “abnormal” women.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students in this course are likely to have very different backgrounds and interests, and very different levels of experience in women's studies. I encourage everyone to share their own knowledge and experience—both academic and personal—with the rest of the class. One goal of this type of cross-disciplinary course is for students to learn from each other, and to broaden their intellectual perspectives to include disciplinary approaches that they might not otherwise have considered.

By the end of the quarter, you will be acquainted with a wide range of theoretical approaches to mental illness. The goal is to recognize and explore the crucial issues that feminists face in conceptualizing mental illness and mental health. These issues include:

- the political nature of psychological and psychiatric knowledge
- the historical relationship between psychiatric practice and the control of women's lives
- the gendered nature of mental illness—that is, the way that both diagnostic labels and symptoms have been implicitly characterized as either male or female
- the effect of social structures and social interaction on gendered forms of mental illness
- the consequences of gendered psychiatric labeling on the social control of men and women

## REQUIRED TEXTS

- **The following books are available at the PSU bookstore:**
  - Pauline M. Prior. Gender & Mental Health. 1999. New York University Press.
  - Charlotte Perkins Gilman. The Yellow Wall-Paper. 1996. The Feminist Press.
  - Meri Nana-Ama Danquah. Willow Weep for Me: A Black Woman's Journey Through Depression. 1998. Ballantine/Random House.
- **In addition, there is a course packet of required readings available at Clean Copy (1704 SW Broadway Avenue, 503-294-3999) [referred to throughout this syllabus as "CP"]**

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- 10% Active class participation. Students must come to lecture prepared to discuss the day's readings; group discussion write-ups and individual exercises.
- 20% Exam #1. Historical images of gender and mental illness and theoretical explanations for gender differences.
- 20% Exam #2. Current psychiatric labeling and the sociological causes of mental illness.
- 20% Paper. Applying class material to an analysis of Willow Weep for Me.
- Your paper must be handed in at the beginning of class on the day it is due. PLEASE NOTE: My policy is to deduct 10% for EVERY DAY late (NOT every class day). This deduction starts immediately at the end of our scheduled class time on the due date.

30% Final examination or Final paper. The final exam is cumulative, but focuses on the consequences and social control of mental illness. Alternatively, students may choose to write a 9-12 page paper on proposed research related to gender and mental illness. Specific paper requirements are listed on the last page of this syllabus. Graduate students are required to write the paper, but it is optional for undergraduates. Those who write the paper will not take the final exam.

## **COURSE POLICIES AND FRIENDLY REMINDERS**

- Late Assignments/Missed Exams. Assignments, exams, and readings should be completed by the beginning of class on their due date. Late work is penalized 10% per day. Please document any family or medical emergency and notify the professor or TA before class (email preferred).
- Class Notes. If you must miss class, copy the notes from one of your classmates. Then see the TA or professor to clarify anything you do not understand.
- Documented Disability. If you are a student with a documented disability and registered with the Disability Resource Center, please contact me immediately to facilitate arranging academic accommodations.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Course schedule subject to change with reasonable notice

### Date                      Required Readings

#### ***PART I: HISTORICAL IMAGES OF GENDER AND MENTAL ILLNESS***

##### Week 1

Jan 7 **Course Introduction: Welcome!**

Jan 9 **Witches: Weakness & “Evil” Women**

**Read:** CP “Witchcraft – wickedness or women hatred?” Chapter 3 in Women’s Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness? by Jane Ussher

Jan 11 **Victorian Era: Weak/Passive/Dependent Women & the “Rest Cure”**

**Read:** Gilman “The Yellow Wallpaper” Pp. 9-36

##### Week 2

Jan 14 **Victorian Era...to Freud**

**Read:** CP “Almost Beside Herself: The Case of Dora” Chapter 6 in Crazy for You: The Making of Women’s Madness by Jill Astbury

Jan 16 **Freud, Hysteria, and “Dora”**

**Read:** CP “Almost Beside Herself: The Case of Dora...What Freud Wanted from Dora...” Chapter 6 in Crazy for You: The Making of Women’s Madness

Jan 18 **“Madwives” in the 1950s**

**Read:** CP “Women, Trouble, and Madness” Chapter 1 in Madwives: Schizophrenic Women in the 1950s by Carol Warren

##### Week 3

Jan 21 **NO CLASS: MLK, Jr. DAY**

#### ***PART II: THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS FOR GENDER DIFFERENCES***

Jan 23 **Mental Illness as a Social Product: Positivist Theories**

**Read:** CP “Sex Differences in Vulnerability to Undesirable Life Events” by Kessler and McLeod (1984), *American Sociological Review* 49:620-631

Jan 25 **Mental Illness as a Social Construct: Social Constructionist Theories**

**Read:** [1] Prior 5 “Gender and Normality” Pp. 77-95  
[2] CP “The Role of Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder in the Subjectification of Women” by Ussher (2003), *Journal of Medical Humanities* 24:131-146

##### Week 4

Jan 28 **Mental Illness as a Social Product or Social Construct**

**Read:** CP “Mental Illness as Social Product or Social Construct: A Contradiction in Feminists’ Arguments?” by Busfield (1988), *Sociology of Health & Illness* 10:521-542

Jan 30 **EXAM #1, covering material through January 28**

***PART III: GENDER AND CURRENT PSYCHIATRIC LABELING***

Feb 1 **Defining Mental Disorder**

**Read:** Prior 2 “Defining Mental Disorder”

Pp. 15-33

Week 5

Feb 4 **Prevalence of Mental Disorder**

**Read:** Prior 3 “The Population at Risk”

Pp. 34-50

Feb 6 **Depression, Mood, Personality, Somatoform, Impulse-Control, & Anxiety Disorders**

**Read:** [1] Danquah “Willow Weep for Me”

Pp. 11-23

[2] Danquah “Between Starshine and Clay”

Pp. 25-48

Feb 8 **Dissociative Identity Disorder & “Recovered Memory”**

**Read:** [1] CP “Am I a Boy or a Girl? Multiple Personality as a Window on Gender Differences” by Rivera (1988), *Resources for Feminist Research* 17:41-46

[2] Danquah “Home”

Pp. 49-95

Week 6

Feb 11 **Eating Disorders and Body Image**

**Read:** CP “Making ‘a Way outa No Way’” Chapter 1 in *A Hunger So Wide and So Deep* by Becky Thompson

Feb 13 **Schizophrenia, Psychosis, and Substance-Related Disorders**

**Read:** [1] Danquah “Ghosts at the Edge of the Swamp”

Pp. 97-168

[2] Danquah “Possibilities”

Pp. 169-248

***PART IV: GENDER AND THE CAUSES OF MENTAL ILLNESS***

Feb 15 **Stress/Multiple Roles**

**Read:** [1] CP “Sex Differences in Distress: Real or Artifact?” by Mirowsky & Ross (1995), *American Sociological Review* 60:449-468

[2] Danquah “The Infinite Power of Change”

Pp. 249-269

Week 7

Feb 18 **Marriage, Divorce, Child-Rearing, and Housework**

**Read:** CP “Gender, Household Labor, and Psychological Distress...” by Bird (1999), *Journal of Health & Social Behavior* 40:32-45

Feb 20 **Violence/Abuse/Neglect Victimization**

**Read:** CP “The Impact of Childhood Abuse and Neglect on Adult Mental Health...” by Horwitz et al. (2001) *Journal of Health & Social Behavior* 42:184-201

Feb 22 **Social Class/Income/Employment**

**Read:** CP “The Costs of Sharing: Wives’ Employment and Husbands’ Mental Health” by

Rosenfield (1992), *Journal of Health & Social Behavior*  
33:213-225

Week 8

Feb 25 **EXAM #2, covering material from February 1 through February 22**

***PART V: GENDER AND CONSEQUENCES/ SOCIAL CONTROL OF MENTAL ILLNESS***

Feb 27 **Treatment Approaches**

**Read:** [1] Prior 4 “Approaches to Treatment” Pp. 51-76  
[2] CP “The Use of Psychiatric Medications to Treat Depressive Disorders  
in African American Women” by Jackson (2006), *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 62:793-  
800.

Feb 29 **Psychiatric Treatment: Inpatient & Outpatient**

**Read:** Prior 7 “Mental Health Services” Pp. 116-137

Week 9

Mar 3 **Crime & Mental Disorder**

**Read:** Prior 9 “Crime and Mental Disorder” Pp. 158-176  
\* **NOTE:** *Willow Weep for Me* analysis papers are due at the beginning of 3/3 class \*

Mar 5 **Perceptions of Men & Women**

**Read:** CP “Gender and Reactions to Psychological Problems...” by Schnittker (2000),  
*Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 44:224-240

Mar 7 **Juvenile Justice System**

**Read:** CP “Deinstitutionalization or Trans-Institutionalization? Girls & the Mental  
Health System” Section in *Girls, Delinquency, and Juvenile Justice*  
by Chesney-Lind and Shelden

Week 10

Mar 10 **Criminal Justice System**

**Read:** [1] CP “Mental Illness and Women Prisoners” Section in *Ill-Equipped: U.S. Prisons  
and Offenders with Mental Illness* by Human Rights Watch  
[2] CP “Andrea Yates and the Criminalization of the Filicidal Maternal Body” by West and  
Lichtenstein (2006), *Feminist Criminology* 1:173-187

Mar 12 **Legal Responses to Mental Illness**

**Read:** Prior 8 “The Law and Mental Disorder” Pp. 138-157

Mar 14 **Discussion & Review**

**Read:** Prior 10 “A Final Word” Pp. 177-180

**THURSDAY, MARCH 20 FINAL EXAMINATION: 12:30-2:20pm**

**Sociology 426/526 & WS 426/526 Women and Mental Illness Paper Assignment:  
Analysis of Willow Weep For Me, Due Monday, March 3<sup>RD</sup> at the beginning of class**

This paper focuses on the book by Meri Nana-Ama Danquah, Willow Weep for Me. This book recounts the author's experiences with depression and the mental health system. Her experiences raise questions about the causes of mental illness and how to best respond to mental illness once it occurs.

Your goal in this paper is to relate Danquah's experiences to the course material on gender and mental illness. The paper assignment asks that you write descriptively about Danquah's experiences, but that you also go beyond mere description to discuss the ways in which her experiences relate to more general questions about the causes of mental illness, the effects of mental illness labeling, and the best means for reacting to and/or preventing mental illness from occurring in the first place.

Specifically, you should consider the following questions and write a 5-7 page paper that addresses them. You do not need to answer the questions in their given order. In fact, the best papers will integrate the answers to the questions into a coherent paper. **To receive full credit, each of the following questions *must* be addressed in your paper:**

1. In your opinion, was Danquah's depression *caused* by social factors or was it a *social construction*? Provide evidence from the book and from class to support your response.
2. How did race, culture, gender, and SES affect Danquah's self-concept and the reaction of others to her and her illness?
  - How do stereotypes of mental illness (and those who are typically labeled "mentally ill") affect reactions to labeled mental illness? How do these stereotypes affect the self-concept of people who are labeled mentally ill?
3. By the end of the book was Danquah "cured?" If so, what factor(s) contributed to her "cure?" If not, explain what factor(s) indicate that she is still mentally ill.
  - What effect did the mental health system have on Danquah?
4. What (if anything) could have been done to prevent Danquah's illness (or her mental illness labeling if you choose to believe she's not "really" mentally ill)?
5. Why do you think Danquah chose to write this book? What is her main point?

The paper that you write for this assignment should be 5-7 pages in length, typed, and double-spaced. You will be graded on the technical quality of your writing, the clarity and accuracy of your arguments, and the coherence of your paper. The **primary consideration** in grading will be your ability to successfully tie class material to the book. Thus, as an example, a discussion of the cause(s) of Danquah's depression would be incomplete without a discussion of whether mental illness is a social product or a social construction. When you refer to the Danquah book or to class notes/readings, be sure to provide a citation [e.g., (Jackson 2006), or (class notes 2/13/2008), or (Danquah 1998, p. 105)]. You are not required to use any outside references (i.e., books/articles that are not read/discussed in class), but are welcome to do so.

**Sociology 426/526 & WS 426/526 Women and Mental Illness Optional Paper Assignment:  
Gender and Mental Illness Research Proposal, Due Thursday, March 20<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 pm**

This paper is optional for undergraduates; you may write the paper in place of the final exam. This paper is required for graduate students. For those choosing this option, your goal is to choose a particular topic related to gender and mental illness and to develop a plan for furthering scientific knowledge in this area; specifically you will need to summarize current knowledge, understand its limitation(s), and create a means of addressing any voids, drawbacks, or confusion. This paper needs to be tied to theory/theories of gender and mental illness; thus, you will need to explicitly explain mental illness as a social product or social construct and to link your proposed research to the particular theoretical perspective you take. You may choose any topic you want, but it must focus on gender and mental illness. Some examples might include gender differences in the effect of marriage, employment, income, children, race, culture, education, expectations, or victimization on mental illness. Or you might focus on recent social changes in the perceptions of women and the effect of these changes on views of women and madness.

While I list specific requirements below, it is my hope that this paper helps you pursue or develop *your own* career/research interests; thus, I am willing to accept modifications to the paper requirements **provided you clear them with me first**. Your 9-12 page double-spaced typed paper is due March 20 at 4:00 pm.

I. **Introduction** [1-2 paragraphs]

- Summarize the problem, target group, theoretical rationale, and plans for your own proposed research. It is usually easiest to write this part last, rather than first.

II. **Current State of Knowledge** [2-4 pages]

- What do we currently know about this topic?
- What *don't* we know? What limitations are there in the current knowledge?
- For example, if your topic is gender and bipolar disorder, you might explain that we currently know \_\_\_\_\_ about gender differences in bipolar disorder, but that we don't know much about the effect of race (or social class, or culture, etc.) on gender differences.
- I want at least 7 *academic* sources (i.e., texts and journals). You may also cite government publications, program literature, and personal interviews with academics or practitioners.
- Try to make a critical, unbiased evaluation of existing sources. Don't "oversell" your approach.

III. **Theoretical Rationale of Your Proposed Research** [2 pages]

- Summarize the theory you use. In your own words, explain what the theory has to say about gender differences in mental illness. You may draw on theories from social work, psychology, or other disciplines, but connect these ideas to the sociological theories in this class.
- What does this theory have to say/suggest about the limitations in the current knowledge? Thus, if you're studying gender and bipolar disorder, and find limitations in the knowledge about the effect of race, what kind of hypothesis would a social product theory suggest about the effect of race? Or if you are using a social constructionist perspective, how would this view the effect of race?

IV. **Research Narrative** [2-3 pages]

- Describe how you would address the current limitation in social science knowledge in concrete terms. Each will vary, but you might discuss interviews you would conduct with psychiatrists,

participant observation you would carry out in a psychiatric facility, surveys you would send to psychiatric social workers, or analysis of pharmacists' psychotropic drug records.

V. **Objectives and Evaluation** [1 page]

- State measurable outcomes (e.g., comparison of race data for psychotropic drug prescriptions, length of confinement in psychiatric facilities).
- Outline a strategy to measure results (e.g., comparison of means, multiple regression, case notes, content analysis, etc.).

VI. **Conclusion** [1 page]

- Briefly summarize your research proposal and make your final pitch for the potential contribution/significance of this research.

VII. **Bibliography** [1 page]

- I would like to see about 7-10 sources referenced.
- Credit all sources (names, dates, titles, page numbers, etc.) so I can refer to them if necessary.

You must communicate your ideas **clearly** to make an effective research proposal. You will be graded on *clarity* and the *specificity* and *appropriateness* of the literature and research design, as well as the overall logic and internal consistency of your arguments.