

WOMEN, MADNESS AND SANITY

WMNST 522

FALL 2015

ESTHER ROTHBLUM

Class Meeting Times: Tuesday/Thursday 12:30-1:45 pm  
Classroom: Life Sciences South LSS 365

Professor: Esther Rothblum

Office: AL 317

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

Telephone: 594-6662

Email: [erothblu@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:erothblu@mail.sdsu.edu)

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:

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.

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.

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, research and literature about women and madness. We will also view films and other media to understand how women have been 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 exam essays with a clear focus and argument on women's mental health.

### Required Readings:

The following book is available at KB Books and Aztec Books:

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

All additional readings are available on Blackboard under Course Documents.

### Message from Student Disability Services

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at [\(619\) 594-6473](tel:6195946473). To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.

### 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 to 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 8, halfway through the semester.

### II. Weekly journal about the class readings: 30% 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 Tuesday class starting on September 1. Emailed journal entries will not be accepted.

For each journal entry, please do the following:

1. When you read the article, find two main points that you think the author emphasizes. Main points would be ones you would use if you were to describe the purpose of the article to others.
2. Write one paragraph about each main point. Even if the author uses technical language, describe the main point in such a way that it is easy to understand.
3. Evaluate what this reading indicates or suggests about the ways in which the meaning of madness or sanity varies for women in different social, historical, political, and cultural contexts.

Points: 1 for each reading (there are 30 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. Midterm Open-Book Exam: 25% of total grade (15% for graduate students)

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 Thursday, October 8. Students will have some choice of exam items. The midterm exam is due at the beginning of class on Tuesday October 20.

IV. Final Open-Book Exam: 30% of total grade (20% for graduate students)

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 December 8. Students will have some choice of exam items, and the exam is open book. The final exam items are due via email on the final exam day for this class—Thursday December 17 at 12:30 pm. Half a letter grade will be deducted for each day that the exam is late.

V. Class Lecture for Graduate Students (5% for prospectus + 15% for class lecture)

Each graduate student will give a class lecture on a topic related to this course. Please confirm topics with me by September 17 and submit a short (1/2 page) overview of your topic and a preliminary (1/2 page) bibliography on that day at the beginning of class. This will count as 5% of your grade. The class lecture itself will count as 15% of your grade.

VI. 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 or else several commercials and/or ads that add up to at least 5 minutes)
- 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 25 and 27

INTRODUCTION: WHAT ARE MADNESS AND SANITY?

Class film: A QUESTION OF SILENCE

September 1 and 3

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

September 8 and 10

WOMEN, DIAGNOSIS AND POWER

Readings:

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.

Gerd Brantenberg (1977). Bram, the Director, and Her Family and 'the Sons of Democracy.' From *Egalia's Daughters: A Satire of the Sexes*. Boston: The Seal Press.

September 15 and 17

FEMINIST THEORIES OF DISTRESS

Readings:

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.

September 22 and 24

WOMEN AND DEPRESSION

Readings:

Out of Her Mind: *The Bell Jar*, 1963, by Sylvia Plath

Out of Her Mind: *Willow Weep For Me*, 1998, by Meri Nana-Ama Danquah

.

September 29 and October 1

WOMEN AND ANXIETY

Readings:

Out of Her Mind: *Black Swans*, 1996, by Lauren Slater

Margaret Dean Daiss (May/June 1993). Teaching My Daughter To Fight: Where Does Pacifism End and Self-Defense Begin? *MS Magazine*, 94-95.

October 6 and 8

WOMEN, SEXUAL ACTIVITY, AND GENDER  
IDENTITY

Readings:

Beverly Greene (1994). Lesbian women of color: Triple jeopardy (pp. 389-427). In L. Comas-Diaz and B. Greene (Eds.) *Women of color: Integrating ethnic and gender identities in psychotherapy*. NY: Guilford Press.

Leslie Feinberg (1998). We Are All Works in Progress. *Transliberations: Beyond Pink or Blue*. Boston: Beacon Press.

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 13 and 15

WOMEN AND SUBSTANCE USE

Readings:

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.

October 20 and 22

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.

October 27 and 29

WOMEN AND STRESS

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.

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





