

David Karp  
Spring, 2006

McGuinn 426  
617-552-4137  
karp@bc.edu

## The Sociology of Mental Health and Illness

### Overview

The purpose of this seminar is to consider what a sociological perspective brings to our understanding of mental health and illness. The goal throughout will be to critically examine how our conceptions of mental illness and the mentally ill are shaped by history, institutions, and culture. In particular, we will examine the ways in which a medical model has triumphed in defining the causes and cures for mental illness. Along with a critical examination of the medicalization of mental illness, we will consider the variety of social factors that contribute to the rates and to the experiences of mental illness. Although we will consider mental illness from multiple viewpoints (social scientists, families, medicine, communities, government) a focus throughout the semester will be on the way that ill persons themselves talk about their experiences. Patients' perspectives have been slighted in the professional literature. Since one critical mandate of sociology is to give voice to the experiences of those whose voices and experiences have been too often marginalized, the reading will be tilted towards first-person accounts of illness careers. Students will be expected to participate in weekly discussions, to offer written critiques of the readings, to carry out research on a topic of their own interest, and to present their findings towards the end of the semester.

### Readings:

Kay Redfield Jamison, *An Unquiet Mind*  
David Karp, *The Burden of Sympathy*  
Suzanna Kayson, *Girlhood Interrupted*  
Arthur Kleinman, *Psychiatry Reconsidered*  
Lauren Slater, *Prozac Diary*  
Otto Wohl, *Media Madness*  
*Course Packet of Articles*

### Grading:

- |  |     |
|--|-----|
| 1. Term paper (15 pages)   | 40% |
| 2. Two short (5 pages each) point of view papers                         | 30% |
| 3. Participation throughout the semester, including discussion questions | 10% |
| 4. Participation as discussion leader for a week's reading               | 10% |
| 5. Presentation of final projects  | 10% |

## **Term Paper**

The term paper is meant to complement the materials read and issues discussed in class and will be in the vicinity of 15 pages. Choose a topic or issue of interest to you that relates to the sociology of mental illness. The paper must use a minimum of 12 scholarly references. While you are free to use materials from popular magazines, movies, newspapers, TV shows, interviews, or observation, the core of the paper should be based on the references. Scholarly references may be either books written by social scientists or articles appearing in professional journals. The purpose of a literature review paper is to summarize and analyze existing facts, theories, concepts, or controversies surrounding the topic of your choice. Below are a few plausible topics for the library research paper:

Epidemiology of depression, manic-depression or schizophrenia

The meaning of psychiatric diagnoses

The development of the DSM

The history of different treatment modes for mental illness

Causes and consequences of deinstitutionalization

Involuntary commitment

The history of a state's mental health system

The place of the mentally ill in the community

Pharmaceutical companies and the treatment of mental illness

The marketing of medications

The evolution of biological psychiatry

Stress and college students

Gender and mental illness

Mental illness and the elderly

The economics of mental health treatment

Mental illness and adolescence

Homelessness, mental illness, and deinstitutionalization

Family care giving to the mentally ill

Critical analysis of the anti-psychiatry movement

Mental illness and stigma

The role of support groups in managing mental illness

Students will be expected to present the findings of their research during the last two to three classes of the semester.

## **Point of View Papers**

In addition to the term paper students will be obligated to write two 5 page essays on the reading assigned for one of the sections on the syllabus. The purpose of this paper will be to think critically about the themes and questions raised by the reading. Students should consider what they learned from the reading materials, the issues that most intrigued them in the writing(s), questions left unattended to in the book or articles read, and plausible issues for class discussion. During the first class of the semester students

will be expected to commit themselves to writing on the materials for two sections of the syllabus. The goal will be to get a reasonably even distribution of choices so that at least one or two students will be writing on each section of the syllabus. In the spirit of seminar discussion, students will be expected to briefly outline their thoughts in the point of view papers at the outset of the appropriate class and to raise questions for collective conversation.

## **Course Outline**

### **I. Introduction: Sociological Perspectives on Mental Health and Illness**

- course goals
- requirements
- the perspective of the course
- the idea of mental illness
- sociological, psychological, anthropological, biological perspectives
- class discussion on the ideas of deviance, mental illness, and insanity

Reading: No reading until week two

### **II. The Medical Model and Its Critics**

- The making of the DSM
- The triumph of biology
- The anti-psychiatry movement
- Labeling theory of mental illness
- The myth of mental illness?

Reading: Kleinman, first half; Course packet, 1-3

### **III. Culture, Illness, and Medicine**

- the idea of cultural relativism
- the value of an anthropological approach
- illness in cross cultural perspective
- mental illness in cross cultural perspective
- western medicine and illness

Reading: Kleinman, second half; 3 references for your term paper

### **IV. Discussion of Students' Research Proposals**

Reading: total of six references pertaining to your research paper

## V. The Experience of Mental Illness

- manic-depression
- schizophrenia
- borderline personality disorder

Reading: Course packet, 4-6 and one of the following two memoirs:

Jamison, *An Unquiet Mind*  
Kaysen, *Girlhood, Interrupted*

## VI. The Meanings of Medication

- Medication and the self
- Resistance trial commitment, conversion, disenchantment
- Is It Me or my Meds?: An overview
- Drugs and cultural identity

Reading: Lauren Slater, *Prozac Diary*; Course packet, 7-8

## VII. Suicide

- The epidemiology of suicide
- Cults and suicide
- Culture and suicide
- Policy implications

Reading: Wohl, *Media Madness*, first half; Course packet, 9-13

## VIII. Stigma

- Goffman's on stigma
- The effects of stigma
- The stigma of mental illness
- Media and stigma

Reading: Wohl, second half; Course packet, 14-17

## IX. The Mental Health System

- The idea of total institutions
- Goffman's Asylums
- Affects of institutionalization
- Deinstitutionalization
- Community services?

Reading: Karp, *The Burden of Sympathy*, first half; Course packet 18-19

X. Caregiving

- The care giving conundrum
- Questions of obligation
- Managing Emotions
- Parent, child, sibling, spouse
- Caring in America

Reading: Karp, second half

XI. Student Reports

- Presentation of student research
- Class discussion of research
- Policy implications of research completed

**COURSE PACKET REFERENCES**

1. Szasz, T. "The myth of mental illness." *THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGIST* 15 (1960): 133-138,
2. Cohen, P. *THEY SAY YOU'RE CRAZY* (Addison-Wesley, 1995, DOH-98979695), pp 33-82
3. Brown, P. "Diagnostic conflict and contradiction in psychiatry." *JOURNAL OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR* 28 (1987): 37-50.
4. Karp, D. "The dialectics of depression." *SYMBOLIC INTERACTION* 17 (1994): 341-366.
5. Kramer, P. *AGAINST DEPRESSION* (New York: Viking, 2005), Chapter 3 entitled "What if?", pp. 30-41.
6. Shenk, J. "Lincoln's Great Depression." *THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY* (October, 2005): 52-68.
7. Karp, D. "Taking anti-depressant medications: Resistance, trial commitment,, conversion, disenchantment." *QUALITATIVE SOCIOLOGY* 16 (1993): 337-359.

8. Karp, D. *IS IT ME OR MY MEDS? LIVING WITH ANTIDEPRESSANTS* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), Chapter 6 entitled "Teens Talk" (pre-publication copy).
9. Pearlin, L. "The sociological study of stress." *JOURNAL OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOR* 22 (1989): 241-256.
10. McIntosh, J. "Epidemiology of suicide in the United States." In A. Leenaars (ed.), *LIFE SPAN PERSPECTIVES ON SUICIDE* (Plenum Publishing Corp., 1991), pp. 55-69.
11. Harrary, K. "Jonestown 13 years later." *PSYCHOLOGY TODAY* (March/April, 1992): 62-66, 87-88.
12. Axell, A. and H. Kase, *KAMIKAZE: JAPAN'S SUICIDE GODS* (London: Longman, 2002), ch. 3 entitled "The first official human bomb." Pp. 46-54.
13. Schneidman, E. "Suicide as psycheache." *JOURNAL OF NERVOUS AND MENTAL DISEASES* 181 (1993): 147-149.
14. Jack, D. 1991. *SILENCING THE SELF: WOMEN AND DEPRESSION* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), chs. 2 and 3, pp. 29-88.
15. Goffman, E. *STIGMA* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), Chapter 1, "Stigma and Social Identity," pp. 1-40.
16. Bogdan, R. and S. Taylor. "Toward a sociology of acceptance: The other side of the sociology of deviance." *SOCIAL POLICY* (1987): 34-39.
17. Hesse-Biber. S. 1996. *AM I THIN ENOUGH YET?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), chs. 5 and 6, pp. 58-79.
18. Goffman, E. *ASYLUMS* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), "The moral career of the mental patient," pp. 127-169.
19. Rosenhan, D. "On being sane in insane places." *SCIENCE* 179 (1973): 250-258.





Filename: SC507\_Karp.doc  
Directory: C:\Documents and Settings\COJULUN\My  
Documents\1STAFF ASSISTANT\Syllabi\Spring 06  
Template: C:\Documents and Settings\COJULUN\Application  
Data\Microsoft\Templates\Normal.dot  
Title: David Karp  
Subject:  
Author: David Karp  
Keywords:  
Comments:  
Creation Date: 3/22/2003 8:43 PM  
Change Number: 30  
Last Saved On: 10/28/2005 3:17 PM  
Last Saved By: Boston College  
Total Editing Time: 716 Minutes  
Last Printed On: 1/13/2006 9:57 AM  
As of Last Complete Printing  
Number of Pages: 8  
Number of Words: 1,418 (approx.)  
Number of Characters: 8,083 (approx.)