



HSS 250: The Social History of Mental Illness

Hans Pols (Homepage)

Taught at the University of Pennsylvania, 1995, 1996

Themes

This course will explore the social construction of mental illness throughout American history, from the eighteenth century until the present time. It will consider changing definitions of insanity, as well as conceptions of the sane and normal, changing attitudes towards the mentally ill, and the development of institutional, medical, and cultural responses to the mentally ill. The course will start with the establishment of mental asylums in the 18th and 19th centuries in America as the prime method of dealing with mental illness. The rise of psychiatry as a medical specialty in relation the asylum care will be investigated as well.

For this century, changing conceptions of mental illness, psychological problems, and the mind will be studied. The last few weeks will be devoted to more or less contemporary topics: the popularity of prozac and other pharmacological means to influence emotion and behavior; the repression of traumatic memories, as well as false memories and suggestive psychotherapy; and the current wave of multiple personality disorder. Each of these issues will be explored in historical context; we will search for patterns and explanations of change. A critical question to bear in mind is to which extent mental illness is socially constructed, how does society arrive at its concepts of and attitudes towards both emotional and behavioral disturbance as well as notions of adjustment and normality?

Required reading

Susan Sheehan, *Is there no place on earth for me?* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982.

Elaine Showalter, *The female malady: Women, madness, and English culture, 1830-1980*. New York: Pantheon, 1985. [Sold out; copies of selected chapters will be made available.]

Bulkpack.

The books are available at the Penn Book Center, 3726 Walnut St. The bulkpack is available at Wharton Reprographics, 400 Steinberg Dietrich Hall.

The final grade will be based on:

Two take-home exercises done during the course (both 15%)

A final take-home exam (short paper) (40%)

Class presentation (20%)

Participation (10%)

1. Sept. 10. Orientation

Orientation, first (overview) lecture.

Video: Anatole Litvak, *The Snake Pit*, 1948.

There are several interesting movies that have mental illness and/or mental hospitals as their theme, for example: *One flew over cuckoo's nest*; *An angel at my table*; *I never promised you a rose garden*; *Psycho*; *Awakenings*; *Rain man*. What function do mentally ill people have in Hollywood movies?

2. Sept. 17. Mental illness as experience

Based on the movie and the book, we will discuss the experience of mental illness and changing definitions of mental illness. The following questions are central: To which extent is mental illness defined by social, and to which extent by medical categories; what determines changing social reactions to mental illness; what is the healing effect (if any) of mental hospitals; why has the mental hospital become so central in our approach to the problem of mental illness?

Sheehan, *Is there no place on earth for me?*

Further reading:

There is a great number of autobiographical and literary accounts in which mental illness figures prominently. To mention a few:

Susanna Kaysen, *Girl, interrupted*. New York: Vintage, 1993.

Hannah Greene, *I never promised you a rose garden*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1964.

Sylvia Plath, *The Bell jar*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

3. Sept. 24. The place of psychology and psychiatry in American society

A long time ago, it was said that madmen could roam free through society. Physicians were not particularly concerned with their care; nor was their any movement to promote their incarceration. Initially, the mad were locked up together with the idle, vagrants, criminals, and other non-productive individuals. Later, physicians singled out the mentally ill as being properly cared for in an asylum under medical jurisdiction. This week we will investigate these transitions.

Thomas Szasz, "The origins of psychiatry: The alienist as nanny for troublesome adults," *History of Psychiatry* 6 (1995): 1-19.

Martin L. Gross, "The new seers." In: *The psychological society*. New York: Touchstone, 1978.

Presentation:

Michel Foucault, *Madness and civilization: A history of insanity in the age of reason*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Vintage, 1988, or. 1961. Chapter on "The great confinement."

Further reading:

Gerald N. Grob, *The mad among us: A history of the care of America's mentally ill*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

David J. Rothman, *The discovery of the asylum: Social order and disorder in the new republic*. Boston: Little Brown, 1971.

Andrew Scull, *The most solitary of afflictions: Madness and society in Britain, 1700-1900*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1993.

Other works by Thomas Szasz: *The myth of mental illness*, revised ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1974; *The manufacture of madness*. New York: Dell, 1971.

4. Oct. 1. Early treatment methods: Moral and somatic

Moral treatment, the first effective method of asylum management, had been developed by Pinel and Tuke. Its roots were religious rather than medical. In America, it coexisted with more somatically oriented therapeutic regimes. During this week, we will investigate how moral treatment replaced brutal and heroic forms of treatment; how the principles of moral treatment were implemented; how it functioned in practice; and how the medical profession adopted it for its own ends.

Andrew Scull, "The domestication of madness." In: *Social order/mental disorder*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989. Showalter, *Female malady*, chapter 1.

Andrew Scull, "Moral treatment reconsidered." In: *Social order/mental disorder*.

Video fragment: The madness of King George.

Presentation:

Foucault, *Madness and civilization*, chapter on "The birth of the asylum."

Benjamin Rush (1745-1813), *Lectures on the mind*. Chapter.

5. Oct. 8. Patients and families

With the establishment of large State Asylums, asylum care for the insane became increasingly accepted in American society. More and more patients were committed from the middle of the 19th century on. This led to problems with overcrowding and asylum management.

Nancy Tomes, "A generous confidence: Thomas Story Kirkbride's philosophy of asylum construction and management." In: Andrew Scull, ed., *Madhouses, mad- doctors, and madmen: The social history of psychiatry in the Victorian era*. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1981.

Gerald Grob, "Realities of asylum life." In: *The mad among us*.

Presentation:

Roy Porter, *A social history of madness: The world through the eyes of the insane*. New York: Dutton, 1989. Chapter "John Perceval: Madness confined."

Dale Petersen, *A mad people's history of madness*. Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1982, chapter.

First exercise: take home. Due Oct. 22.

6. Oct. 15 -- Fall break

7. Oct. 22. The female malady

Women have often been considered more susceptible to mental illness and a wide variety of mental complaints. This week we will investigate a number of analyses around this issue.

Showalter, *Female malady*, introduction, chapter 2 and 3. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, "Motherhood as pathology." In: *For her own good: 150 years of the experts' advice to women*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1978.

Presentation:

Mary Elene Wood, *The writing on the wall: Women's autobiography and the asylum*. Urbana, Ill.: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1994. Chapter of choice.

Jeffrey L. Geller, and Maxine Harris, *Women of the asylum: Voices from behind the walls, 1840-1945*. New York: Anchor, 1994. Chapter of choice.

Mary B. Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the selves of adolescent girls*. New York : Putnam, 1994.

Video: *Asylum*. With Gerald Grob.

Further reading:

Phyllis Chesler, *Women and madness*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972.

8. Oct. 29. Therapeutic pessimism and neurasthenia

With the overcrowding of mental hospitals, possibilities for treatment and therapeutics. Darwinian theories on degeneration became popular among psychiatrists. At the same time, neurologists find occupations outside of mental hospitals in the cure of the vague mental complaints of a more affluent clientele.

Showalter, chapter 4, 5, 6: Psychiatric Darwinism. Ralph Harrington, "The neuroses of the railway." *History Today* 44 (1994), 15-21.

Charles E. Rosenberg, "The place of George M. Beard in nineteenth century psychiatry," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 36 (1962): 245-259.

Presentation:

Barbara Sicherman, "The uses of a diagnosis: Doctors, patients, and neurasthenia." *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 32 (1977): 33-54.

Max Nordau, *Degeneration*. New York: Appleton, 1905, chapter 1: "Fin-de-siècle."

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow wallpaper," in: *The Charlotte Perkins Gilman reader*, ed. Ann J. Lane. New York: Pantheon, 1980.

Bonnie Ellen Blustein, "'A hollow square of psychological science': American neurologists and psychiatrists in conflict." In: Scull, *Madhouses, mad-doctors, and madmen*.

Further reading:

Francis G. Gosling, *Before Freud: Neurasthenia and the American medical community, 1870-1910*. Urbana, Ill: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1987.

Janet Oppenheim, *"Shattered nerves": Doctors, patients, and depression in Victorian England*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991.

9. Nov. 5. Freud in America, or, psychiatry as a cure for social ills

Few historians dispute that the United States was the country where psychoanalysis became the most popular and successful. There is, however, less agreement about the nature of psychoanalysis-American-style: for some, it represents the ultimate banalization and commercialization of its roots. For others, American psychoanalysts developed the theory to its natural consequences.

Sandor Gifford, "The American reception of psychoanalysis," in *1915, the cultural moment: The new politics, the new woman, the new psychology, the new art, and the new theater in America*, eds. Adele Heller and Lois Rudnick. New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1991.

Nathan G. Hale, "From Berggasse XIX to Central Park West: The Americanization of psychoanalysis, 1919-1940," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 14 (1978): 299-315.

Fred Matthews, "The Americanization of Sigmund Freud: Adaptations of psychoanalysis before 1917," *Journal of American Studies* 1 (1967): 39-62.

Presentations:

Showalter, chapter 8: "Women and psychiatric modernism."

Mabel Dodge Luhan, *Movers and shakers*. Albuquerque, NM: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1985, or. 1964. Chapter 15: "Dr. Jelliffe."

Lewellys F. Barker, *Principles of mental hygiene applied to the management of children predisposed to nervousness*. New York: National Committee for Mental Hygiene, 1912.

George K. Pratt, "Wives who help their husbands fail," and "Day-dreamers and bluffers." In: *Why men fail*, ed. Morris Fishbein and William A. White. New York: Century, 1928.

"The nervous breakdown," Series of articles in *Fortune Magazine*, 1935.

10. Nov. 12. Trauma and recovery: The war experience

The second World War created a new awareness of the influence of severe psychological stress on mental health. At the current time, the debate has been revived around the new diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which is still controversial.

Showalter, chapter 7: Male hysteria

Ellen Herman, "Nervous in the service." In: *The romance of American psychology: Political culture in the age of experts*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1995.

Hans Pols, "'Their mothers' sons': War neuroses, maladjusted veterans, and overprotective mothers." Manuscript.

Susan M. Hartmann, "Prescriptions for Penelope: Literature on women's obligations to returning World War II veterans." *Women's Studies* 5 (1978): 223-229.

Video: *Let There Be Light* (John Huston, 1948), about the treatment of war neuroses.

Presentation:

The schizophrenogenic mother. Readings from Edward A. Strecker, *Their mothers' sons* (1946) and Frieda Fromm-Reichmann on the role of the mother in the family.

Vietnam veterans and PTSD. Wilbur J. Scott, "PTSD in DSM- III: A case in the politics of diagnosis and disease." *Social Problems* 37 (1990)3: 294-310.

Allan Young, *The harmony of illusions: Inventing post- traumatic stress disorder*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Spock and advice to mothers. Nancy Pottishman Weiss, "Mother, the invention of necessity: Dr. Benjamin Spock's *Care for Infant and Child*." In *Growing Up in America: Children in Historical Perspective*, edited by N. Ray Hiner and Joseph M. Hawes.

Second exercise: take home. Discussing "The boy who could not cry," a neo-Freudian radio-broadcast from 1947. Due Nov. 21.

11. Nov. 19. Somatic treatment old and new: From lobotomy to prozac

Prozac is, at this moment, America's favorite psychoactive drug. Its advent coincides with a somatic turn in psychiatric thinking. For some, prozac is a cure-all; for others mere opium for a dissatisfied people. Patients force their physicians to prescribe the drug for them while researchers find ever more applications.

Elliot S. Valenstein, "The treatment of mental illness: Organic vs. functional approaches." In: *Great and desperate cures: The rise and decline of psychosurgery and other radical treatments for mental illness*. New York: Basic Books, 1986.

Peter D. Kramer, *Listening to prozac: A psychiatrist explores antidepressant drugs and the remaking of the self*. New York: Penguin, 1993, first and last chapter.

Peter R. Breggin and Ginger Ross Breggin, *Talking back to prozac: What doctors aren't telling you about today's most controversial drug*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

Video: Moving back into the light. Propaganda video paid for by Eli Lilly, the makers of Prozac.

Presentation:

Valenstein, "Bizarre illnesses, bizarre treatment," and "'Anything that holds out hope should be tried.'" Same source.

Elizabeth Wurtzel, *Prozac nation: Young and depressed in America*. New York: Riverhead, 1994.

Attention Deficit Disorder: Edward M. Hallowell and John J. Ratey, *Driven to distraction* (New York: Pantheon, 1994).

12. Nov. 26. Trauma, repressed/false memories, and Multiple Personality Disorder

The debate regarding the recovery of repressed memories with the aid of hypnosis or intensive psychotherapy is far from over. Counter-claims about manipulative psychotherapists and false memories are abundant. This week we will have a closer look at a number of recent developments in this debate.

Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence, from domestic abuse to political terror*. New York: Basic Books, 1992. Introduction, and "A forgotten history."

Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the soul: Multiple personality and the sciences of memory*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1995. Chapter 1, "Is it real?" Chapter 2, "What is it like?"

Elizabeth Loftus and Katherine Ketcham, *Witness for the defense: The accused, the eyewitness, and the expert who puts memory on trial*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.

Video: *The Three Faces of Eve* (Nunnally Johnson, 1957).

Presentation:

People vs. Franklin case. See: Lenore Terr, *Unchained memories: True stories of traumatic memories, lost and found*. New York: Basic, 1994, chapter 2.

Alien abduction. John E. Mack, *Abduction: Human encounters with aliens*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994, and articles.

Lawrence Wright, *Remembering Satan*. New York: Knopf, 1994.

Propaganda material from the False Memory Foundation.

13. Dec. 3. The psychologization/psychiatrization of American society (?)

Several cultural critics have argued that American society has become atomized and individualized--a process started by the forces of capitalism but strongly aided by the psychological professions. As a consequence, ties to the community and social cohesion have been lost; a predicament for which psychotherapy hardly can offer a panacea. During this last session, we will investigate these claims.

Martin L. Gross, *The psychological society*. New York: Touchstone, 1978. Chapter 1, "The psychological society." Philip Cushman, "Why the self is empty: Toward a historically situated psychology," *American Psychologist* 45 (1990)5: 599-611.

Warren I. Susman, "'Personality' and the making of twentieth-century culture," in *New directions in American intellectual history*, eds. John Higham and Paul K. Conkin. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1979.

Philip Rieff, "Reflections on psychological man in America." In: *The feeling intellect: Selected writings*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990.

Handing out of final examination.

14. Dec. 10.

Questions about exam, course, wrap-up, review of course, etc. (Attendance is voluntary).

