

SOCI 1111 –*The Sociology of Mental Illness*

Spring 2024

MWF 10:15 – 11:15 AM

Instructor: Jason Schnittker

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Course Webpage: I will be posting the lecture notes on the web using *Canvas*.

Course Description:

This course is designed to give a general overview to how sociologists study mental health and illness. We will be concerned with describing the contributions of sociology and exploring how these contributions differ from other disciplines. This will be done in three parts: we will discuss (i) what “mental illness” is and controversies regarding how it is classified, (ii) precisely how many Americans are mentally ill given how we define that concept, (iii) how social factors (e.g. race, gender, class), social arrangements (e.g. social networks), and biology lead to mental illness, and (iv) how we as a society respond to and treat mental illness. Near the end of class we will discuss cross-national differences in mental illness, though most of the class will focus on the US.

Throughout the course, we will be concerned with uncovering the assumptions behind different definitions of mental illness and exploring their political, social, and legal implications.

Readings:

Two books will form the bulk of our reading. We will read select chapters from the *Handbook*, as well as from *The Diagnostic System*.

1. Scheid, Teresa L. and Eric Wright (editors) 2017. *A Handbook for the Study of Mental Health: Social Contexts, Theories, and Systems (Third Edition)*. New York: Cambridge University Press,
2. Schnittker, Jason. 2017. *The Diagnostic System: Why the Classification of Psychiatric Disorders is Necessary, Difficult, and Never Settled*. New York: Columbia University.
3. Other readings are available on *Canvas*.

Some of the readings will be more difficult than others. Some involve statistical methods and models, and a good deal of fine-grained data. While these data are important, we will focus on the articles' substantive conclusions. I intend to instruct students on how to “read” statistics properly, as an informed consumer of knowledge. If you would like to learn more about their methods, we can talk about them more during office hours or, if necessary, during class.

Course Requirements:

1. Class attendance and regular participation in discussions. Periodically I will solicit comments regarding the pace and topics. I will make adjustments as necessary.
2. Five assessments. Each assessment will count for a fifth of your final grade. The assessments will be in class. They will not be cumulative. No assessment will be dropped from the average.

Schedule of Topics:

I retain the right to make minor adjustments to this schedule depending on class interest and the speed in which we cover topics.

Note that exams are scheduled for the week in which they will take place. Most exams will fall on Wednesday, though you should also expect an occasional Friday exam.

(B) Denotes Scheid and Wright Edited Book
(E) Denotes Electronic Article, available under Modules on Canvas
(Schnittker) Refers to *The Diagnostic System*

Week	Topic/Reading
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January 19	Introduction: Course Procedures and Thematic Overview Horwitz, Chapter 1 (B)
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22-26	Defining, Measuring, and Describing Mental Illness Schnittker, Chapter 1-3
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29-31 February 2	Current and Ongoing Controversies in Psychiatric Classification Schnittker, Chapter 4, 9-10
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5-9	Social Reactions to Mental Illness Link and Phelan, Chapter 19 (B)
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ASSESSMENT #1

12-16	Labeling Theory and Modified Labeling Theory Thoits (E)
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19-23 The Social Epidemiology of Mental Disorders: Life Events and Stress

Thoits, Chapter 7 (B)

Wheaton and Montazer, Chapter 9 (B)

26-28 Socioeconomic Status

March 1 Eaton and Muntaner, Chapter 12 (B)

Kahneman and Deaton (E)

ASSESSMENT #2

11-15 Race and Gender

Rosenfield, Kato, and Smith, Chapter 13 (B)

Williams, Costa, and Leavell, Chapter 14 (B)

18-22 Age, the Life Course, and Mental Illness

Mirowsky and Ross, Chapter 17 (B)

25-29 Social Networks and Social Support

Brown and Ciciurkaite, Chapter 10 (B)

ASSESSMENT #3

April 1-5 Social, Biological, and Genetic Intersections

Schwartz and Corcoran, Chapter 6 (B)

8-12 The Organization and Use of Mental Health Services

Pescosolido and Boyer, Chapter 20 (B)

King, Jennings, and Fletcher (E)

15-19 Mental Illness and Criminal Justice

Hiday and Ray, Chapter 23 (B)

Link et al, Real in Their Consequences (E)

ASSESSMENT #4

22-26 Global Mental Health

Schultz (E)

29 Global Mental Health (continued)

May 1 Kessler and Bromet (E)

ASSESSMENT #5