

American Mental Health

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What does it mean to be psychologically healthy? How have notions of normal consciousness and aberrant mental states changed over the past century? How do these distinctions intersect with constructions of gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity across the same time period? This seminar will consider evolving concepts of cognition, wellness, and pathology in twentieth- and twenty-first-century America. These years have seen tremendous change in the science as well as popular understandings of mental health. We will think about each of these conceptual fields, and about the frequent discord that exists both within and across different frameworks of normality and disorder.

To think about these cross-disciplinary dynamics, we will pair works of American literature and popular media from the late 19th through 21st century with academic scholarship. We will dwell especially on the resonance and divergence between the models of health and illness developed by these texts. We will think about the historical and cultural contexts of each of these texts and consider their social and political implications. Throughout, we will consider the promises and perils of psychological diagnosis and of interpreting human minds—others' and our own.

As the final course in the English series at Menlo College, this class is designed to encourage students to engage in original research and writing. Course assignments will support students in producing a final thesis that features original research in its engagement with one or more course concerns.

Prerequisites: Students must have earned a C- or better in English 102.

Required course texts

- Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892)
- Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945)
- Joan Didion, *Play It As It Lays* (1970)
- Kay Redfield Jamison, *An Unquiet Mind* (1997)
- David O. Russell, *Silver Linings Playbook* (2012)
- Scholarly excerpts to be posted to MOLE

Assignments and grading

- Participation 15%
- Reading responses (4 total) 10%
- Literature review 10%
- Research paper draft 20%
- Final research paper 45%

Participation

The success of our seminar depends on the active participation of every student. Accordingly, participation constitutes a large portion (15%) of the final grade for the course. I will calculate it as follows: I will not keep track of the number of times you contribute to discussion; I will attend to the evidence that you actively, regularly engage with the material, share your insights and questions with the class, participate in constructive peer editing during workshops, and incorporate all of these thoughts as well as my feedback into the course assignments.

I have a no-screens policy in class. If I see you on your phone during our meetings, it will drastically affect your participation grade. The chance to attend to one subject for a sustained period of time, with a community of other people, is a rare opportunity; take advantage of it.

Reading responses

Responses to each of our four primary texts **should be uploaded to MOLE and emailed to me no later than thirty minutes before the final day of discussion.** These 1-2 page responses should include a well-formulated, argumentative, focused thesis (a.k.a. debatable claim), ample, pertinent textual support (a.k.a. close reading), and a compelling analytical structure. These responses are meant to help you formulate your thoughts about the reading and also to identify points of interest and potential evidence for your own research; as with all intellectual property you generate in this class, you should feel free to re-engage your thoughts and claims in subsequent assignments.

Like all course assignments, reading responses must also be typed, double-spaced, MLA- or APA-formatted with a proper heading, margins, and Works Cited. If you have questions or concerns about these expectations (or about anything else), I'm happy to talk any time.

Major course assignments

The details of the three major course assignments—the literature review, research draft, and final thesis—will be discussed as the due dates approach. I will not answer content-related emails in the 24 hours preceding major assignment deadlines (trust me, this policy benefits everyone involved). **Each major assignment is due in hard copy at the beginning of seminar and must be uploaded to MOLE before you arrive that day.** Major assignments cannot be submitted via email. Late assignments will be penalized one third of a letter grade for every day past the deadline, including weekend days. After five days, you will receive a zero for the assignment (note, however, that you must complete all assignments to pass the class). **The thesis must be submitted on Friday April 28; no late papers will be accepted.**

Calendar

Week 1 (1/17-20): What is mental health? (And other intrinsic concepts like “the mind,” “consciousness,” and “health”)

- Foster Wallace, “This is Water”
 - You must read the essay; optional: listen on YouTube.
- *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, “Consciousness” Parts 1 and 2 (“History of the Issue” and “Concepts of Consciousness”)

Weeks 2-3 (1/23-2/3)

- Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper*
- Lutz, *American Nervousness, 1903* (excerpt)
- Writing assignment due Week 3: reading response

Weeks 4-6 (2/6-24)

- Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*
- Metzel, *The Protest Psychosis* (excerpt)
- Writing assignment dues Week 6: reading response AND annotated bibliography

Week 7 (2/27-3/3)

- Writing assignment: literature review

Weeks 8-9 (3/13-24)

- Didion, *Play It As It Lays*
- Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (excerpt)
- Writing assignment due Week 9: reading response

Weeks 10-11 (3/27-4/7)

- Jamison, *An Unquiet Mind*
- Russell, *Silver Linings Playbook*
- Writing assignment due Week 11: reading response

Weeks 12-13 (4/10-21)

- Writing assignment: research paper draft

Week 14 (4/24-28)

- Writing assignment: final thesis

Academic Integrity Policy

“Menlo College expects that students will do their own work and that their quizzes, tests, examinations, lab work, research papers, essays, projects, internships, and all other assignments honestly reflect their own learning and knowledge in the course. [V]iolations of this policy [include]: copying from another student during an exam; having another person write a paper [on a student’s behalf]; any form of plagiarism or cheating; etc. Students found in violation [of the policy] are given a failing grade on the assignment. Students found in violation during a final examination, final project, or related final evaluation [or] assignment will receive a failing grade for the course” (*Menlo College Academic Procedures Manual*, 17).

Also note that a student who fails a course as a result of violating this policy will not be allowed to withdraw from the course, and that all violations of the Academic Integrity Policy will be recorded through the Office of Academic Affairs. Repeat offenders will be subject to disciplinary action as determined by the Academic Dean. Such disciplinary action will normally result in the expulsion of the offending student from Menlo College.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is unacceptable. I define plagiarism as presenting someone's words, ideas, or any other work that can be considered intellectual property as if it was your own. If you use someone else's work without quoting or citing completely, you have committed plagiarism. Do not copy and paste text from any source without quotation; do not paraphrase without citation or adapt information from Cliff's Notes or Wikipedia; do not submit versions of the same paper more than once—all of these are considered plagiarism.

If you have questions about whether you may be inadvertently committing plagiarism, there are many resources available to help you. You may visit any of the centers listed below. I am also always happy to talk about these or any concerns.

Resources

On campus:

- The Writing and Oral Communication Center:
 - All students are required to visit the Writing Center to workshop the research rough draft. Written confirmation of this appointment must be attached to your submitted draft.
 - Students who make additional appointments at the Writing Center over the course of the term and who document these sessions with written confirmation from the Center will receive a 24-hour extension on the assignment due date.
- Bowman Library:
 - The librarians are wonderful, helpful people. I encourage you to make use of this excellent resource throughout the term.
- Academic Success Center (ASC):
 - The ASC, located between the Bookstore and the Library, is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 6pm. Students may drop in for assistance at any time, but appointments are recommended.
 - The ASC also runs a drop-in Peer Tutor Lab from 2:30 to 5pm, Monday through Wednesday and 7pm to 9pm Sunday through Wednesday.

Online:

Be wary of online sources, especially Wikipedia. Always consult more than one source and look for consistency. Here are a few reputable sites for cross-checking purposes:

- CCTC's Grammar Site: cctc.commnet.edu/grammar/index
- Purdue University's Online Writing Lab: owl.english.purdue.edu
 - Includes MLA and APA formatting and style guides
- Google Scholar: scholar.google.com
 - Features a variety of critical commentary (books, journal articles)