

Documenting Mental Illness (WST 392)

Prof. Lisa Diedrich

Fall 2022 Tu-Th 3:00-4:20

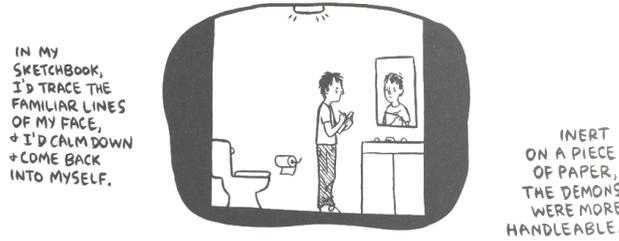
Office hours: Tu 4:30-5:30 & W 2:30-4:30 or by appointment

Please email to schedule an appointment

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“Colonialism forces the colonized to constantly ask the question:
‘Who am I in reality?’”

—Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*



—Ellen Forney, *Marbles*

“A simple place to start is here: we’re sensitive. We feel things hard and fast. We feel things quiet and deep. We feel things huge and open. We feel things heavy and slow.”

—The Icarus Project, *Navigating the Space Between Brilliance and Madness*

Mental illness often comes into public consciousness in the United States through the specter of violence, such as in the many horrific mass shootings where the shooter’s mental health is questioned. The media frenzy that accompanies these tragic events presents a picture of mental illness that is at best limited and at worst harmful. Indeed, statistics show clearly that people who are mentally ill are more likely to be victims of violence than to commit violence. In this course we will explore mental illness as a category of analysis that comes into being through a multiplicity of discourses, practices, and institutions. We will look at a variety of case studies about the experience and event of mental illness in diverse situations and communities, and as presented in a variety of genres and forms—psychological and sociological analyses, documentary and feature films, graphic and prose memoirs, and through interviews with people who deal with mental illness in their daily lives. We will explore how certain social situations—including, colonialism, incarceration, police violence, sexual violence, and trauma—produce “nervous conditions” that can be disabling. We will look at historical and contemporary diagnoses of and treatments for mental illness, as well as forms of activism, including patient-centered advocacy, anti- and radical psychiatry, and the Mad Pride and neurodiversity movements. Our goal is to expand and complicate our understanding of the biopsychosocial politics of mental illness, as well as to think broadly and creatively about effective, and even radical, ways to treat mental illness and generate personal and social health and well-being.

Learning Outcomes:

This course fulfills the Stony Brook Curriculum (SBC) requirements to “understand relationships between science or technology and the arts, humanities or social sciences (STAS)” and “to respect diversity and foster inclusiveness” (DIV). Upon completion of this course, students should be able to demonstrate proficiency in the following skills:

1. Explore mental illness as a biopsychosocial phenomenon. Identify how power operates in the diagnosis of and treatment for mental illness in different historical and cultural situations.
2. Analyze scientific, medical, political, and aesthetic responses to mental illness and neurodiversity.
3. On the discussion board, students will post, comment, and share. This will require that students read and summarize course materials, analyze and assess key arguments, engage with their classmates, and connect class discussions and materials to current events and everyday experiences.
4. Use a variety of methodological tools (including discourse analysis, annotation, visual cultural analysis, and interviewing) to analyze different cultures of mental health and illness.
5. Enhance group communication skills through discussions, small-group work, presentations, and debates.

Required texts that you will need to purchase or borrow:

- Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (New York: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 2004).
- Ellen Forney, *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me: A Graphic Memoir* (New York: Gotham Books, 2012).
- Una, *Becoming Unbecoming* (Brighton: Myriad, 2015).

Films:

- *Crooked Beauty: Navigating the space between brilliance and madness* (Ken Paul Rosenthal, 2010; 33 minutes). Available at: <https://vimeo.com/28315394>
- *13th* (Ava DuVernay, 2016; 100 minutes)
- *Kings Park* (Lucy Winer, 2012; 108 minutes)
- *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Masks* (Isaac Julien, 1997; 71 minutes). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQhwK0QM1gA>
- *Torrey Pines* (Clyde Peterson, 2016; 60 minutes) Available at: <https://vimeo.com/176881503>

Course Delivery Mode and Structure:

This course meets in person but will have some asynchronous components using Blackboard. For the week of November 15 and 17, we will not meet in person. That week students will participate in an online annotation exercise.

Classroom etiquette: A good classroom atmosphere depends upon the behavior of both the instructor and the students. So, we need to respect each other and be courteous to each other.

Laptops: I permit the use of laptops for notetaking and to consult electronic versions of reading materials. Using your laptop for other things during class time is not allowed—searching the web, checking social media, etc. is distracting to you and others!

How to Be Successful in this Course: As the instructor, my focus is to help you do well in this course. I want to make sure you have every opportunity to learn and to achieve a satisfactory experience engaging with your classmates and exploring new ideas and ways to think about mental illness. Here are some tips for the successful completion of the course:

1. **Read the syllabus carefully and check it frequently.** Keep track of when assignments are due and be aware of when there is more (and less!) reading.
2. **Keep up with the readings, films, and other materials for the course. Be an active reader, viewer, and listener!** Bring the current readings to each session and be ready to discuss those readings with questions, comments, and criticisms. Some of the readings will be difficult: spend time reading carefully and thinking critically about what you have read! One way to engage in discussion is to bring up specific passages in the text that are interesting, confusing, provocative, etc. Take notes during class. I also recommend that you use the questions posted on Blackboard to help you engage with the material and join in discussion.
3. **Complete all the assignments.** Please be sure to sign up at the beginning of the semester for your blog post. Students have a choice for their final project and will submit a proposal in advance. It's important to be aware of deadlines and plan for your assignments.

Blackboard: This class is on Blackboard (<http://blackboard.stonybrook.edu>), and students are expected to consult Blackboard regularly for updates on readings and assignments. I will post questions on the readings on Blackboard and will also email students through Blackboard with reminders and follow up from class discussions. We will utilize the Blackboard Discussion Board feature for our blogging, commenting, and sharing activities, as well as for our annotation exercise. Make sure that the email listed for you on Blackboard is the one you use, and if you need assistance with Blackboard, contact helpme@stonybrook.edu or call 631-632-9602.

Email: It is your responsibility to make sure that you read your email in your official University email account. To schedule a meeting during office hours, please email me first. If you use Blackboard's **email tool** from the course site, it will automatically include your full name, course name and section when you send me an email. **Please allow between 24-48 hours for an email reply.** Your Stony Brook University email must be used for all University-related communications. All instructor correspondence will be sent to your SBU email account. **Plan on checking your SBU email account regularly for course-related messages.** To log in to Stony Brook Google Mail, go to <http://www.stonybrook.edu/mycloud> and sign in with your NetID and password. If you need technical assistance, please contact Client Support at [631-632-9800](tel:631-632-9800) or supportteam@stonybrook.edu.

Student Accessibility Support Center Statement: If you have a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact the Student Accessibility Support Center, 128 ECC Building, (631) 632-6748, or at sasc@stonybrook.edu. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation are confidential.

Students who require assistance during emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and the Student Accessibility Support Center. For procedures and information go to the following website: <https://ehs.stonybrook.edu/programs/fire-safety/emergency-evacuation/evacuation-guide-people-physical-disabilities> and search Fire Safety and Evacuation and Disabilities.

Critical Incident Management: Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students' ability to learn.

Academic Integrity: Do not plagiarize, which is defined as “to take and use as one’s own the thoughts, writings, or inventions of another” (*The Oxford English Dictionary*). This means you have plagiarized if, for example: you copy part or all of another student’s paper, use another student’s paper from another class or semester, or if you download part or all of your paper from the internet and claim it as your own, or if you copy from a book and do not quote or cite the author. I take plagiarism very seriously. If you plagiarize, you will be turned in to Academic Judiciary. If you are confused about what constitutes plagiarism, come talk to me about it.

University statement on Academic Integrity: Each student must pursue their academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person's work as your own is always wrong. Any suspected instance of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Academic Judiciary. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty, please refer to the academic judiciary website at <http://www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary/>

Course Evaluations: Each semester Stony Brook University asks students to provide feedback on their courses and instructors through an online course evaluation system. Feedback from course evaluations helps me determine what texts, assignments, pedagogical practices work well or not. Course evaluations also help our department continue to deliver a rigorous, exciting, and comprehensive curriculum in Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies that prepares students for a diverse range of career and graduate and professional school options.

Course Policies

Late Work: All assignments have due dates outlined in the schedule below. If, for some reason, you cannot meet a particular deadline, you will have the option of turning in late assignments for partial credit. Please contact me by email if you cannot meet a deadline, so we can discuss when and how you can complete the assignment.

Religious Observances: If you have religious observances that conflict with scheduled assignments, please contact me at least one week beforehand so we can plan an alternative schedule for you to complete any class activity or assignment you missed.

Understand When You May Drop This Course: It is your responsibility to understand when you need to consider [withdrawing from a course](#). Refer to the [Stony Brook Academic Schedule](#) for dates and deadlines for registration.

Incomplete Policy: Under emergency/special circumstances, you may petition for an incomplete grade. Circumstances must be documented and significant enough to merit an incomplete. If you need to request an incomplete for this course, contact me for approval as far in advance as possible.

Course Materials and Copyright Statement: Course material accessed from Blackboard, SB Connect, SB Capture or a Stony Brook Course website is for the exclusive use of students who are currently enrolled in the course. Content from these systems cannot be reused or distributed without written permission of the instructor and/or the copyright holder. Duplication of materials protected by copyright, without permission of the copyright holder is a violation of the Federal copyright law, as well as a violation of Stony Brook's Academic Integrity.

Student resources

Academic and Major Advising: Have questions about choosing the right course? Contact an advisor today. Phone and emails vary-please see website for additional contact information; website: <https://www.stonybrook.edu/for-students/academic-advising/>

Interested in becoming a WGSS major or minor?

Email me or visit the WGSS website:

<https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/wgss/>

Academic Success and Tutoring Center (ASTC): The ASTC provides free academic support services for all undergraduate students, including one-on-one tutoring, small group tutoring, academic success coaching, and public speaking seminars. Learn more about these services and additional campus resources at www.stonybrook.edu/tutoring.

Further Resources: Another helpful resource for students who need any kind of help while at Stony Brook (academic, financial, health, etc.) is the "For Students" section linked from the Stony Brook homepage: <http://www.stonybrook.edu/for-students>

Counseling and Psychological Services: CAPS staff are available by phone, day or night. <http://studentaffairs.stonybrook.edu/caps/>

SBU Libraries: access to and help in using databases, ebooks, and other sources for your research.

- Research Guides and Tutorials: <http://guides.library.stonybrook.edu/>
- Getting Help: <https://library.stonybrook.edu/research/ask-a-librarian/>

Writing Center: Writers of all skill levels and at any stage of the writing process are invited to make appointments at the Writing Center. Writers can bring in anything they're working on, be it a creative piece, a personal statement, or a paper for class. Tutors will help writers brainstorm, organize, focus, and develop their written work.

The Writing Center aims to meet all writers' needs, but in the interest of helping writers rather than helping papers, we do not function as an editing service. Tutors may choose to address some grammar and punctuation issues, but only at advanced stages of the writing process. When we do address sentence-level concerns, we discuss fundamental concepts as opposed to making editorial corrections. Make an appointment at: <https://sunysb.mywconline.com>

Questions? Feel free to contact me to discuss the course at any point during the semester. Make an appointment to meet with me, send me an email, or see me after class.

Keep the conversation going, use our course hashtag: #DocuMI22. I will use this hashtag on Twitter to post articles and commentary related to course themes. Students are encouraged to do the same on Twitter, Instagram, and other social media. Some other hashtags to explore to get you started: #StopTheStigma, #EndTheStigma, #WhatYouDontSee, #Neurodiversity, #HearingVoices, #PTSD. If you come across a new hashtag relevant to the class, please share on the Sharing Discussion Board thread.

Course Schedule (+ links for some readings)

Aug 23: Welcome and introductions to Documenting Mental Illness

Read the syllabus carefully before class!

Aug 25: Navigating the space between brilliance and madness

Review questions to guide you as you watch the film

Film screening (in class): *Crooked Beauty: Navigating the space between brilliance and madness* (Ken Paul Rosenthal, 2010; 33 minutes)

Mental illness, policing, and incarceration: Teresa Sheehan, Kalief Browder, and the Trayvon Generation

Aug 30: Sandra Allen, "The Trials of Teresa Sheehan," *Buzzfeed News* (July 9, 2015). Available at: <http://www.buzzfeed.com/sandraeallen/the-trials-of-teresa-sheehan-how-america-is-killing-its-ment#.xyDkjwNDg>

Sep 1:

1. Jennifer Gonnerman, "Before the Law," *The New Yorker* (October 6, 2014). Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/10/06/before-the-law>

2. Elizabeth Alexander, "The Trayvon Generation," *The New Yorker* (June 15, 2020). Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/06/22/the-trayvon-generation>

Recommended: Watch 13th (Ava DuVernay, 2016; 100 minutes). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krfcq5pF8u8>

Racism and trauma: Graphic storytelling

Sep 6: Ebony Flowers, "My Lil Sister Lena." Available at:

<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2019/07/24/my-lil-sister-lena/>

Sep 8: Ebony Flowers, "My Lil Sister Lena" cont.

In class group work: Annotation as Method of Visual Analysis discussion

Total institutions: "forcing houses for changing persons"¹

Sep 13: Read Dmitri N. Shalin, "Goffman and Mental Illness: *Asylums* and 'The Insanity of Place' Revisited"

Sep 15: Susan Stamberg, "'Architecture of an Asylum' Tracks History of U.S. Treatment of Mental Illness." Available at:

<https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2017/07/06/535608442/architecture-of-an-asylum-tracks-history-of-u-s-treatment-of-mental-illness>

Total institution case study: documentary film

Sep 20: Film screening: *King's Park* (Lucy Winer, 2012; 108 minutes)

Sep 22: *King's Park* cont. and discussion

Colonial war and mental disorders: "But the war goes on"²: testimony

Sep 27: Film screening: *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Masks* (Isaac Julien, 1997; 50 minutes)

<https://tubitv.com/movies/599062/frantz-fanon-black-skin-white-mask>

¹ Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (New York: Anchor, 1961), 12.

² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2005 [1961]), 249.

Sep 29: Frantz Fanon, excerpt from “Colonial War and Mental Disorders,” chapter 5 of *The Wretched of the Earth*

<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2274-colonial-violence-and-mental-disorders-an-extract-from-frantz-fanon-s-the-wretched-of-the-earth>

Colonial war and mental disorders case study: fiction

Oct 4: Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (pp. 1-121)

Oct 6: Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (pp. 1-121) cont.

Oct 11: Fall break no class

Oct 13: Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (pp. 122-208) cont.

Oct 18: Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (pp. 122-208) cont.

The figure of the “crazy artist”: graphic medicine

Oct 20: Ellen Forney, *Marbles* (chapters 1-4)

Explore the Graphic Medicine: Ill-Conceived & Well-Drawn Exhibition at the U.S. National Library of Medicine website, Curated by Ellen Forney

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/graphicmedicine/collection-detail.html?imgid=2&imgName=OB12411-md>

Oct 25: Ellen Forney, *Marbles* (chapters 5-9)

Oct 27: Ellen Forney, *Marbles* cont.

Final project proposals due

Schizophrenia in Japan: ethnography

Nov 1: Karen Nakamura, *A Disability of the Soul: An Ethnography of Schizophrenia and Mental Illness in Contemporary Japan* (chapter 1, pp. 1-33)

Nov 3: Karen Nakamura, *A Disability of the Soul: An Ethnography of Schizophrenia and Mental Illness in Contemporary Japan* (chapter 6, pp. 163-201)

Watch: Eleanor Longden, “The Voices in My Head,” TED Talk, August 2013

https://www.ted.com/speakers/eleanor_longden

Gender violence and shame: graphic trauma

Nov 8: Una, *Becoming Unbecoming* (Brighton: Myriad, 2015).

Nov 10: Una, *Becoming Unbecoming* (Brighton: Myriad, 2015) cont.

Watch: Chanel Miller, [“I Am With You”](#)

No words: stop-motion animated film

For the week of Nov 15-17, we will not meet in-person. Students will watch the film *Torrey Pines* and participate in an online annotation exercise and discussion

Nov 15:

1. Watch: *Torrey Pines* (Clyde Peterson, 2016; 60 minutes)

<https://vimeo.com/176881503>

2. Watch: Art Zone: Seattle artist Clyde Petersen's coming-of-age story in stop-motion animation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LObiMKaOtH0>

Nov 17: Asynchronous group work: Annotation as Method of Visual Analysis exercise and discussion

Nov 22: Annotation exercise discussion

Nov 24: Happy Thanksgiving! Please read and explore the Icarus Project's *Navigating the Space Between Brilliance and Madness*

Illness politics: "voices from uncharted territories"³

Nov 29: The Icarus Project, *Navigating the Space Between Brilliance and Madness*

http://nycicarus.org/images/navigating_the_space.pdf

Dec 1: The Icarus Project, *Navigating the Space Between Brilliance and Madness* cont. and wrap up!

Dec 9: Final projects due on Blackboard before midnight.

Course Requirements

1. Annotation as method of visual analysis group discussion (20 points): Twice during the semester, students will be organized into small groups to practice annotation as method of visual analysis. Each group will be assigned one image from a text, and they will be required to annotate it. The two texts are Ebony Flowers's graphic story "My Lil Sister Lena" and Clyde Peterson's stop-motion animated film *Torrey Pines*. On September 8, we will do an ungraded in-class annotation exercise. The week of November 15 and 17, students will do a graded asynchronous annotation exercise on Blackboard. **Students will post their notes and interpretations on Blackboard before midnight on Thursday, November 17. Please also comment on two other posts before 6pm on Sunday, November 20.**

How to annotate: Generally, we annotate by writing directly on a text or image. Because our discussion will be virtual not in-person, students are not required to write directly on the image. What you will do is a two-part process—note taking and interpretation. First, you will study the image carefully. You will take notes

³ The Icarus Project, *Navigating the Space Between Brilliance and Madness* (available online at: http://theicarusproject.net/files/navigating_the_space.pdf), back cover.

on what you see and feel as you look at the image. This is descriptive work. Describe the image in detail. These notes do not need to be full sentences or paragraphs. You will want to look and look again. That is, don't simply look and take notes in one sitting, but spend time studying, then do something else for a period of time (sleep on it, go for a walk, watch a film, listen to music), and return later to look again.

After you feel like you have fully annotated or described the image, then give us some thoughts on what ideas or feelings the image is attempting to show. In a short paragraph (3 or 4 sentences), interpret the image. Key concepts from the course and other course materials will help you do this interpretative analysis.

You will post both your notes on and your interpretation of the image. Once you have posted your own notes and interpretation, you will be able to see what other members of the group have posted. You will want to comment and respond to 2 other posts.

Grade rubric for asynchronous annotation exercise (20 points):

- Notes (8 points)—How detailed is your description of the image?
- Interpretation (8 points)—Your notes should help you analyze and interpret the image. How insightful/creative/original is your interpretation?
- Comments (4 points)—Your comments should be analytical and thoughtful, not simply “I agree with so and so” but why you agree/disagree.

2. Blogging (50 points total): This assignment is multi-faceted and has 3 components: posting, commenting, and sharing. Students will write and post a blog entry (200-250 words each—posted on the Discussion Board site on Blackboard), in which you discuss the readings assigned for one of the days in the week ahead. Students will also comment at least twice on a post by a classmate and share at least once a news article or other item they have come across outside the class that relates to the themes of the class.

Blog posts (25 points):

Students will sign up for a blog post at the beginning of the semester. Blog posts should be 250-300 words and include:

- 1) A succinct summary of the readings
- 2) A thoughtful analysis and assessment. Some questions to consider in your analysis: What are the author's main arguments? Do you agree or disagree with them and why? How does the material relate to course themes and to earlier class discussions? What new concepts or terms are introduced? What do you find interesting and/or confusing about these terms and concepts?
- 3) At least two discussion questions that will help generate a conversation about the reading.
- 4) Respond to comments on your post.

Blogs should be posted before 6 p.m. on the Sunday before the text is discussed—feel free to post earlier than this. Late submissions will be penalized.

Comments (3 x 5 points): Students are also expected to comment (50-100 words) on three posts by classmates. (This is the minimum requirement. You should feel free to engage more!) Comments are due before 6pm on Mondays. Your comments should be analytical and thoughtful, not simply “I agree with so and so” but why you agree/disagree. You should also try to read as many blog entries by your classmates as possible—this will help you understand the readings better—different people notice and focus on different things. We learn more from each other than we do on our own.

Shares (2 x 5 points): Please share with the class twice during the semester an article or some other item of relevance to the themes of the class (e.g., a news story, feature article, academic article, film or book review, comic, hashtag or conversation on social media, etc.). You will briefly summarize what you share (50-100 words): tell the class how this connects with our readings and discussions (be specific). For example, does it offer a story or situation that demonstrates a key concept or theme we have discussed in class? Does it offer a different perspective on the experience of illness, disability, and/or care?

3. Documenting Mental Illness project (30 points): three options—choose one!

1. Interview: Students will conduct a 30-minute interview with a person or friend or family member of a person diagnosed with a mental condition, a mental health care practitioner or educator, or a person involved with mental health activism or advocacy. Students will transcribe the interview and write a 2-page reaction to the interview process.

2. Comic: Students will create a comic about an issue related to course themes. This could document a personal experience or that of someone you know; it could portray experiences of a particular diagnosis, treatment, or other forms of care; about the impact of trauma and violence on individuals or communities; or about the racial, sexual, and class politics of mental illness. The comic must be at least 4 panels. Students will write a 2-page artist’s statement discussing their comic.

3. Zine: Students will create a zine related to course themes. The zine should include a combination of visual and written texts. The zine might include personal stories, original artwork, collage, short interviews, advocacy and activist statements. The zine must be at least 8 pages. Students will write a 2-page statement discussing the form and content of their zine.

Project proposals (1-page) are due on Blackboard by the end of the day on Thursday, October 27. Proposals are worth up to 5 points towards the total 30 points. Please explain which project you intend to do and provide a short rationale for your project. For the interview project, you will explain who you are interviewing and why, and submit 10 questions that will help frame your interview. For the comics project, describe the experience or event your comic will document and explain why you think

this experience or event is important to document in this form. For the zine project, give the name of your zine and describe the main components that you will include. How will you produce your zine and who is the audience for it?

Final projects due on Blackboard before midnight on December 9.



[Image description: A line drawing from Una's graphic narrative *Becoming Unbecoming* of a young girl with long dark hair and bangs in a simple dress and black flats with one arm raised above her head holding an empty speech balloon.]