

## Mental health and society PSYC3200 seminar 1

This seminar activity will take place in week 4

The task in this seminar involves thinking about public attitudes to mental ill health and identifying how authors in the field have conceptualised some of the issues involved in the debate. It is intended that by the end of this you should be aware of the nature of societal opinion and the various forms it might be manifested, for example public opinion, television, films, newspapers and so on. It is hoped that you will be able to critically understand how the mass media may inform public opinion – it's not always as obvious as it sounds.

It is also intended that students should appreciate the potentially stigmatising effect of having a psychiatric diagnosis.

### Getting us in the mood: a little directed reading

It is worthwhile also comparing your findings and impressions with those of previous researchers on the subject. There are some items (available in the brown library <http://www.brown.uk.com/liblist.htm> ) which will be of assistance in this which you should read before the tutorial:

Anderson , M. (2003) 'One flew over the psychiatric unit': Mental illness and the media *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 10, 297–306.

Cutcliffe, J.R. & Hannigan, B. (2001) Mass media, 'monsters' and mental health clients: the need for increased lobbying, *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 2001, 8, 315–321

Hannigan, B. (1999) Mental health care in the community: An analysis of contemporary public attitudes towards, and public representations of, mental illness, *Journal of Mental Health*, 8, (5), 431-440

Philo, G., Secker, J., Platt, S., Henderson, L. McLaughlin, G. & Burnside, J. (1996) Media images of mental distress, In Heller, T., Reynolds, J., Gomm, R., Muston, R & Pattison, S. (Eds.) *Mental Health Matters*, London: Macmillan/OUP.

There are more items at <http://www.brown.uk.com/stigma.htm>

For the purposes of this session we can define mental ill health quite widely and include such things as alcohol and drug problems, possibly including being a sex offender (I suppose it would come under the paraphillias), or having learning difficulties, as well as the classics of e.g. schizophrenia, depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders and so on.

### Activity 1 The words we use

Think of all the words you can in everyday language that relate to conditions of the mind or the nervous system. Maybe it would help to spend five minutes writing a few down. Then share them with the rest of the group.

### Activity 2 What's in the mass media?

**News**

**Soap operas**

## **Celebrities, supermodels and famous people.**

### **Films**

To what extent are the themes we have identified in the mass media similar to what's been found in the literature so far? In what ways do they differ? What can we add to the discussion of media images of 'mental illness' as a result of our activities? What other avenues are there for research in the future? Thinking about the relation between one's own research and the background literature is an important part of writing up research and is a useful skill for coursework and final year project work

### **Activity 3 The concept of stigma.**

1) What is stigma? What words or phrases would you use to give another person a sense of the issue?

2) What kinds of social problems do people with mental health problems face according to the literature? What other examples can you add from your own experience or what you've seen in the media?

3) What has been tried in order to reduce the degree of stigma and discrimination faced by people with mental health problems in the UK? Can you remember seeing any of this stuff over the last few years? To what extent might it be effective? Why or why not?

4) What problems have been identified with the concept of stigma itself? Why does it not appeal to some stakeholders - researchers, practitioners or 'sufferers'? What should replace it?

### **Final activity. What should we do about it?**

Imagine that you were an adviser to say, a mental healthy charity or pressure group like Mind, a professional body representing e.g. psychologists, psychiatrists or nurses. Or even a government department. What would you try to do to help the situation of people with mental health problems? Is it possible to change attitudes, or change people's behaviour? Why or why not?