

(Actually) Thinking Differently

Neurodiversity in Historical and Contemporary Contexts

[Date]

[Institution]

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Art by: shisei11

Course Information

Format: Hybrid – Synchronous in-person and online

Instructor: Dr. Ben Mitchell

Pronouns: He/they

Office:

Office Phone:

Office Hours: By appointment

Email:



(Image credit: Life by Selena Photography)

Throughout the term Dr. Mitchell will be available to chat through email, Brightspace, and Zoom. Except where we have arranged to meet beforehand, please expect at least a day response time. In the event of unforeseen class cancellations or changes, please refer to the course's Brightspace page for updates. I encourage students to contact me for assistance as needed for course related questions and guidance.

Course Description

There have always been people who think and act differently, but the idea that neurological diversity is a fundamental part of human diversity was greatly reinforced in autistic online spaces in the 1990s. This concept was eventually shortened to the term neurodiversity. Just as biodiversity is a measure of ecological richness, neurodiversity reflects the range of ways brains and nervous systems can differ from person to person and the cultural and social meanings we give to such differences. Those who diverge from normative expressions of neurology, the “neurodivergent” have been gaining more visibility and collective power through a growing neurodiversity movement. It is expressed in our advocacy organizations, our art and culture (such as the “autism creature/TBH/Yippee” illustrated by shisei11 in this syllabus), and in a growing own-voice expertise movement in research that asserts “nothing about us without us.”

This course will explore historical and contemporary topics from the neurodiversity movement, from earlier accounts of madness, genius, and mental illness to the current neurodiversity paradigm. Psychiatric survivors, MAD pride activists, and other own voice advocates do not always agree with the neurodiversity paradigm, and this course will also explore tensions within and amongst different groups, as well as consider different forms of expertise between medical professionals and neurodivergent people themselves.

Content Note

This course deals with some sensitive topics. Trigger warnings will be provided at the start of each lecture.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the course, students will demonstrate the ability to:

- Analyse discourses surrounding neurodiversity and disability with sensitivity and understanding
- Conduct research involving information, cultural, and scientific literacy
- Reflexively-assess and practice skills that will further their career and life goals
- Collaborate in communities of learning

Course Pre-requisites

None.

Course Structure

Generally, classes will be divided between an hour of lecture, an hour of discussion, and an hour of co-working time.

Week 10 readings and topic: Neurodiversity is a “big tent” idea, containing many more experiences than could fit into a single course. Time will be set aside to collectively discuss what topic students would like to learn about for the week 10 class and your instructor will find readings and material for discussion.

Required Texts

- With the exception of some documentaries, all texts will be available digitally through the course’s Brightspace page or otherwise accessible online. See the bibliography of this syllabus for select source citations.
- Note: It’s ok to not understand everything in these texts. You’re students, the point is to learn and ask questions when you do not understand how a term is being used or what point is being made.
- Except when otherwise noted, students can choose any two readings (including podcasts and video essays) to read for each class.

Course Schedule

Week	Topics	Deadlines	Readings (Any two readings per class except where otherwise noted)
1	The social and medical models of disability	Sign up for discussion lead by the end of the week	No readings this week
2	Madness		<p>Joinson, <i>Vanished in Hiawatha</i>, selections (academic book)</p> <p>Kanani, "Race and Madness" (literature review)</p> <p>Pietikäinen, <i>Madness: A History</i>, selections (academic book)</p> <p>Peterson (ed), <i>A Mad People's history of Madness</i>, selections (academic book)</p> <p>All in the Mind, A Cultural History of Insanity (podcast)</p> <p>Science Gallery Bengaluru, Mad People's History Lecture (video lecture)</p>
3	Genius and eccentricity	Have met with instructor for your brainstorming session by the end of week	<p>Carroll, <i>Science and Eccentricity</i>, selections (academic book)</p> <p>Chaplin and McMahon (eds), <i>Genealogies of Genius</i>, selections (academic book)</p> <p>Mitchell, <i>Friedrich Nietzsche and the Meaning of Life</i>, selections (academic book)</p> <p>Bridging the Gaps: A Portal for Curious Minds, A History of the Concept of Genius from Antiquity to</p>

Week	Topics	Deadlines	Readings (Any two readings per class except where otherwise noted)
			<p>the Modern Time with Professor Darrin McMohan (podcast)</p> <p>Open Agenda, Darrin McMahan, “Deconstructing Genius” (podcast)</p>
4	<p>From “idiots, imbeciles, and morons” to intellectual disabilities</p> <p>AND</p> <p>Research skills workshop</p>		<p>Carey, <i>On the Margins of Citizenship</i>, selections (academic book)</p> <p>Jarrett, <i>Those They Called Idiots</i>, selections (academic book)</p> <p>McDonagh, et al. <i>Intellectual Disability: A Conceptual History</i>, selections (academic book)</p> <p>Trent, <i>Inventing the Feeble-minded</i>, selections (academic book)</p> <p>Noncompliant Podcast, Dr. Jackie Ryan on inclusive research & service models for intellectually disabled Canadians (podcast)</p> <p>L'Arche Greater Washington, My Voice: Amplifying the Voices of People with Intellectual Disabilities in the Medical System (video)</p> <p>Talking History with Phillipa Vincent-Connolly, In Conversation with Dr Simon Jarrett (podcast)</p>
5	Anti-psychiatry and MAD Pride	Model Analysis Due	<p>Beresford and Russo (eds), <i>The Routledge International Handbook of Mad Studies</i>, selections (academic book)</p> <p>Burstow, <i>The Revolt Against Psychiatry</i>, selections (academic book)</p>

Week	Topics	Deadlines	Readings (Any two readings per class except where otherwise noted)
			<p>Burstow, "Feminist Antipsychiatry Praxis - Women and the Movement(s)," (academic article)</p> <p>Frazer-Carroll, Micha. 2023. <i>Mad World</i>, selections (journalistic book)</p> <p>Milaney, et al. "The Modern Day Asylum," (academic article)</p> <p>Pilling, <i>Queer and Trans Madness: Struggles for Social Justice</i>, selections (academic book)</p> <p>Judith Heumann LLC, Mad Pride & Psychiatric Survivorhood with Vesper Moore (video podcast)</p> <p>Radicals in Conversation, Mad World: The Politics of Mental Health (Podcast)</p> <p>The Leftist Cooks, You're Probably Mentally Ill (video essay)</p> <p>Psychiatric Survivors Speak Out (video recording [low recording quality])</p>
6	The Neurodiversity Movement		<p>Dekker, "A Correction on the Origin of the Term 'Neurodiversity'," (own voice essay)</p> <p>Kapp (ed), <i>Autistic Community and the Neurodiversity Movement</i>, any one or two chapters (academic book)</p> <p>Price, <i>Unmasking Autism</i>, selections (popular social psychology and own voice account)</p> <p>Eidle, History of the Neurodiversity Movement, any one or two videos (video lectures)</p>

Week	Topics	Deadlines	Readings (Any two readings per class except where otherwise noted)
7	Autism and ADHD		<p>Garcia, <i>We're not Broken</i>, (journalistic book), selections</p> <p>Horton-Salway and Davies, <i>The Discourse of ADHD</i>, selections (academic book)</p> <p>Rosqvist, et al., "Intensity and Variable Attention: Counter Narrating ADHD, from ADHD Deficits to ADHD Difference," (academic article)</p> <p>Sheffer, <i>Asperger's Children: The Origins of Autism in Nazi Vienna</i>, selections (popular history)</p> <p>Sinclair, "Don't Mourn for Us," (activist essay)</p> <p>Waltz, <i>Autism: A Social and Medical History</i>, 2nd edition, selections (academic book)</p> <p>Autistamatic, "What Is Autism? Autism & Society" (video essay)</p> <p>Ember Green, What Actually is Autism? (video essay)</p> <p>Thought Slime, Oops! I have ADHD! (video essay)</p> <p>Thought Slime, Spider-Man and neurodivergence! (video essay)</p>
8	Bipolarity, Schizophrenia, DID, and Trauma	Preliminary Work 1 Due	<p>Hawkes, <i>When Quietness Came</i>, selections (own-voice book)</p> <p>Horwitz, <i>PTSD: A short history</i>, selections (academic book)</p> <p>Lester, "The Community of Ella," (Scientific America article)</p>

Week	Topics	Deadlines	Readings (Any two readings per class except where otherwise noted)
			<p>Metzl, <i>The Protest Psychosis</i>, selections (academic book)</p> <p>Twyford-Moore, <i>The Rapids: Ways of Looking at Mania</i>, selections (own-voice book)</p> <p>Wang, <i>The Collected Schizophrenias: Essays</i>, selections (own-voice book)</p> <p>The Entropy System, MORE Systems Of The World Dissociative Identity Disorder (video essay)</p> <p>Longden, The voices in my head Eleanor Longden (recorded TED Talk)</p> <p>Mad in America, Tanya Luhrmann - How Culture Influences Voice Hearing (article and voice recording)</p> <p>The Rings System, What is DID/OSDD? (video essay)</p>
9	Learning disabilities		<p>Jarrett and Tilley, “The History of the History of Learning Disability” (academic article)</p> <p>Limaye, et. al (eds.), <i>Disability as Diversity in India</i>, selections (academic book)</p> <p>Rubery, <i>Reader’s Block</i>, selection (academic book)</p> <p>van Schaik, “Accept the Idea that Neurodiverse Kids Exist,” selections (master’s thesis)</p> <p>OregonRTIi, Our Journey to Self-Advocacy, (recorded panel, start around 17:00)</p>

Week	Topics	Deadlines	Readings (Any two readings per class except where otherwise noted)
10	Open to discussion	Preliminary Work 2 Due	The topic for this day will be determined in collaboration with the class.
11	Neurodivergence in the media		<p>Silberman, <i>NeuroTribes</i>, 235-244; 354-380 (popular history)</p> <p>The Entropy System, Why we Love Moon Knight DID in Media (video essay)</p> <p>Jessie Gender, “Star Trek's Autistic & Neurodiverse Representation” (video essay)</p> <p>Lilliputian Hitcher, Discussion: Bipolar Disorder Media Representation Sucks (video essay)</p> <p>Macabre Storytelling, ADD & ADHD Media Misdiagnosis (video essay)</p> <p>Rowan Ellis, The Infantilised Spectacle of Autistic Representation (video essay)</p>
12	Social media and self-advocacy	Final Project Due	<p>Kent, “Social Media and Disability,” (academic book chapter)</p> <p>Alexander Avila, TikTok Gave Me Autism: The Politics of Self Diagnosis (video essay)</p> <p>Autistamatic, Autism Self Diagnosis: What is it? How & Why? (video essay)</p> <p>Ember Green, Autism Misinfo: Why we still need advocacy ft. @YoSamdySam (video essay)</p> <p>The Rings System, Shame, Silence, and Social Media (video essay)</p>

Course Assessments

(Note: Please submit assignments with a cover page as .doc or .docx files so that I can insert comments)

Assessment	Due	Weight (%)
Participation	End of term	10
Learning Lead	Sign up for week	10
Brainstorming	Week 3	5
Model Analysis	Week 5	20
Preliminary Work 1	Week 8	10
Preliminary Work 2	Week 10	15
Final Project	Week 12	30

Participation

Participation will be broadly interpreted as consistent, thoughtful interaction with the course through the Brightspace page, in class discussion, or through emails and conversations with the instructor. Each week the instructor will post a few questions for consideration to the course Brightspace. Students are encouraged to interact with the question or each other's responses to the question, or bring up their own thoughts and questions. Find some interesting material relevant to the course in your daily life? Why not share it with the group? As long as it is respectful and relevant to course themes your contributions are very much welcome here.

Learning Lead

At the start of term students will pick a date to help facilitate learning in the classroom. For this assignment, students will:

1. Read at least one (1) extra reading for that week beyond the usual two (2)
2. Help facilitate the online discussion on the course's Brightspace page by posting questions and/or responding to other student's comments
3. Start and help facilitate that week's class discussion, sharing their thoughts and helping to encourage their classmates to do the same
4. (Optional): During co-working period, help other **consenting (!)** students with their assignments
5. At the end of class, discuss with the instructor how they would assess student learning for that topic. What do you think some of the most important take away lessons from the day were? How would you define meaningful engagement with the material? Did students engage meaningfully with the material? Why or why not?

In the even that there is more than one student per discussion topic, students are to coordinate with each other to effectively share responsibilities for the day.

If a student does not feel comfortable with public speaking, they can coordinate with the instructor beforehand to find alternative ways to contribute to the discussion.

Brainstorming

By the end of the 3rd week of classes, students are expected to have scheduled to meet with the instructor to discuss their ideas and goals for their course deliverables. Students brainstorming meeting will be graded based on their ability to answer the following questions:

1. What is your desired deliverable (academic essay, personal essay, video essay, let's play, podcast, zines, textile project, etc.)
2. How do you intend to demonstrate your learning?
3. What topic are you particularly interested in exploring with your deliverable?
4. Be able to talk about some potential models for your Model Analysis Assignment.
5. Be able to say what state of development you intend your deliverable to be for the Preliminary Work 1 and 2 Assignments. This will not be a contract, but will inform how these two assignments are graded.

6. Contingency planning: What could you do if things go wrong? Other projects to pivot to in order to salvage your work? What to do in the face of time and energy constraints? Backup plans? Sources of support and help?

If students prefer, this meeting can also be an email exchange.

Model Analysis

For this assignment, students will find two (2) to three (3) examples of work that is in the same genre as their selected deliverable that you think are of particularly good quality and hope to use as helpful models for the kind of work you would like to do. For example: If you are writing an academic article, find academic articles. If you are making a video essay, find video essays. Reflect on these examples and write a 1500-2000 word analysis of them.

In your analysis try to answer these questions:

1. Why did you select each example?
2. What do you personally like about each example?
3. Why do you think each is a good example?
4. What technical skills does this example demonstrate?
5. How does this example fit into the genre as a whole, given the larger landscape of what is out there?
6. How will this example inform your own project?
7. Finally, are there any common structures or themes among your examples? Why might these exist?

Please also provide access to your examples for the instructor to review (i.e. your model articles if you are writing an article, links to websites, video essays, or podcasts, if you are making one of those, etc.).

Preliminary Work Assignment 1 & 2

Each Preliminary Work Assignment will be approximately 1000 words long and answer the following questions:

1. How has your thinking developed since the brainstorming meeting with your instructor?
2. What steps have you taken towards the completion of your project?
3. For Preliminary Work Assignment 1: have a tentative outline and timeline prepared for your work
4. How have you demonstrated the development of your chosen skills? Have there been any complications?
5. What do you need to do going forward to complete the project on time?
6. For Preliminary Work Assignment 2: how did you take into account comments on your Preliminary Work Assignment 1?

Preliminary Work Assignments will also be graded on the degree to which they demonstrate substantial development from previous stages of the project.

If things are not going according to plan, you are welcome to schedule another meeting with the instructor to revise your deliverables for the Preliminary Work 1 & 2 Assignments.

Final Assignment

For students wishing to write an academic paper for their final deliverable, the final assignment will be a 3000 to 4500-word research paper that will present a novel argument relevant to some theme or topic related to the course. It will be based on textual analysis and reflection, and will be graded based on structure, style, the effective use of evidence, how well it shows an active engagement with its sources, and the quality of the thought being expressed within it. It will also be evaluated based on proofreading and consistent citation. Students doing a research assignment are required to use at least ten (10) sources to support their thesis drawn from the primary and secondary literature.

For other deliverables the final assignment will vary in discussion with the instructor, but will generally also involve a less formal written assignment explaining the thought, research, and understanding that went into the project.

Course-specific policies

- When possible, the deadline for late assignments can be re-negotiated as agreed upon by both instructor and student within reasonable parameters.
- For the sake of your learning and future career prospects, the use of large language model-based algorithms (colloquially known as “AI” like ChatGPT or Copilot) is strongly discouraged in this class; however, plagiarism detection software is not being used (your instructor is the plagiarism detection software).

Selected Bibliography

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