

ONE PHENOMENON, MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES: A CASE STUDY OF SUICIDE

COURSE OVERVIEW

While different scientific disciplines have seemingly parsed up the world into their respective fields of inquiry, few—if any—phenomena fit under the purview of any single discipline. More commonly, they invite us to explore and understand them through different lenses and from multiple points of view—an endeavor well exemplified by the department of Comparative Human Development itself.

This class will explore this variety of lenses using the case study of suicide. Specifically, we will take ‘suicide’ both as an object of our inquiry, as well as a tool with which we will ask more general questions regarding the different ways we can orient to the world, and produce knowledge about it. We will read diverse literatures and discuss some primary sources as we consider ‘suicide’ from the perspective of social and medical sciences, philosophy, law and even art. We will be asking: What is ‘suicide’ and what do we know about it? How does it exist in the world, and in different literatures? What do particular perspectives seek to find out about it and why? What kinds of questions do they ask? What methods and processes do they use, and what kind of theories (if any) do they rely on? What kind of assumptions do they make in the process? What do they tell us about suicide, and what can they tell us about other phenomena of interest?

My goals for the class are therefore also two-fold. One is for the students to develop a complex and highly contextualized picture of a particular phenomenon, suicide, as well as related concepts of deviance and mental health in general. The second one is to build on the student’s skills of critical reading and inquiry with which they’ll be able to engage with a variety of other materials, inside and outside the classroom. Both the weekly assignment and the final assignment will create a space for students to investigate a phenomenon of their own interest from multiple perspectives. Furthermore, the weekly assignments will provide a basis for the class discussion on different kinds of research and different ways of knowing.

ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT:

Final grades will be determined as follows:

20%: Class attendance and participation

40%: Weekly assignments

40%: Final assignment

Weekly Assignments:

During Week 1, the students will pick a particular topic of interested issue they are interested in e.g. juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, diabetes etc, or suicide. Throughout the quarter, during the six weeks most topically relevant to the student and their interest, they will find an article

Final Assignment:

I will work with students to form a longer writing assignment that would be the most useful and interesting to them. The default assignment will be a final paper comparing and contrasting several different approaches to suicide or a topic of their own choosing.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1 **An introduction**

Class 1: Introduction to the class

Additional reading:

SAVE. (n.d) About Suicide, from <https://www.save.org/about-suicide/>

Class 2: Definitions: What is 'suicide'?

Silverman, M. M., Berman, A. L., Sanddal, N. D., O'Carroll, P. W., & Joiner, T. E. (2007). Rebuilding the Tower of Babel: a Revised Nomenclature for the Study of Suicide and Suicidal Behaviors *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 37(3), 248–277.

Hacking, I. (1995). The looping effects of human kinds.

Week 2 **Epidemiology**

Class 3: Suicide prevalence and Risk Factors

Nock, M. K., Borges, G., Bromet, E. J., Cha, C. B., Kessler, R. C., & Lee, S. (2008). Suicide and Suicidal Behavior. *Epidemiologic Reviews*, 30(1), 133–154.

World Health Organization. (2014). Preventing suicide: A global imperative. World Health Organization, selections

Class 4: Production of Epidemiological Data

Timmermans, S. (2007). "The Fifty-One percent rule of Suicide" In Postmortem: How medical examiners explain suspicious deaths. University of Chicago Press. Pp. 74-112

+ In Class: ICD-10 codes, CDC death reporting

Week 3 **Clinical perspectives**

Class 5: Psychological models of suicide

Cavanagh, J. T. O., Carson, A. J., Sharpe, M., & Lawrie, S. M. (2003). Psychological autopsy studies of suicide: a systematic review. *Psychological Medicine*, 33(3), 395–405.

Van Orden, K. A., Witte, T. K., Cukrowicz, K. C., Braithwaite, S. R., Selby, E. A., & Joiner, T. E. (2010). The interpersonal theory of suicide. *Psychological Review*, 117(2), 575–600. <http://doi.org/10.1037/a0018697>

Class 6: A question of Measures and diagnoses

Nock, M. K., Park, J. M., Finn, C. T., Deliberto, T. L., Dour, H. J., & Banaji, M. R. (2010). Measuring the Suicidal Mind. *Psychological Science*, 21(4), 511–517.

+ In Class: IPQ-9, Beck Scales, DSM excerpts

With:

Brown, G. K. (2001). *A review of suicide assessment measures for intervention research with adults and older adults.*

Week 4 **Matters of the body**

Class 7: Suicide, genetics and neurobiology

Mann, J. J. (2003). Neurobiology of suicidal behaviour. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 4(10), 819–828.

Mann, J. J., & Currier, D. M. (2010). Stress, genetics and epigenetic effects on the neurobiology of suicidal behavior and depression. *European Psychiatry*, 25(5), 268–271.

Class 8: On Basic Science. Discussion

Nestler, Eric J., and Steven E. Hyman. "Animal models of neuropsychiatric disorders." *Nature neuroscience* 13.10 (2010): 1161.

Week 5 **Sociology**

Class 9: Sociology of Suicide

Stack, S. (2000). Suicide: A 15-Year Review of the Sociological Literature Part I: Cultural and Economic Factors. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 30(2), 145–162.

Stack, S. (2000). Suicide: A 15-Year Review of the Sociological Literature Part II: Modernization and Social Integration Perspectives. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 30(2), 163–176.

Class 10: On Sociological perspectives. Discussion

Excerpts from Durkheim's *Suicide* and Hacking 'The Taming of Chance'
+ In class: Maps, surveys and social determinants

Week 6 **On culture**

Class 11: Case Studies

Canetto, S. S., & Sakinofsky, I. (1998). The gender paradox in suicide. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 28(1), 1-23.

Kitanaka, J. (2008). Diagnosing Suicides of Resolve: Psychiatric Practice in Contemporary Japan. *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*, 32(2), 152–176.

Class 12: Why look at culture?

Benedict, R. (1959). Anthropology and the Abnormal. *An Anthropologist at Work, Writings of Ruth Benedict*, 262-82.

Week 7 **Critical perspectives**

Class 13: Foucault on suicide

Marsh, I. (2010). Suicide: Foucault, History and Truth. 168-192

Class 14: More theory

Excerpts from Canguilhem's *Normal and the Pathological* and Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*

Week 8 Individual experience and lay expertise

Class 15: Case Studies

Kidd, S. A. (2004). "The Walls Were Closing in, and We Were Trapped": A Qualitative Analysis of Street Youth Suicide. *Youth & Society*, 36(1), 30–55.

Paproski, D. L. (1997). Healing experiences of British Columbia First Nations women: Moving beyond suicidal ideation and intention. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*.

Class 16: Expertise and Experience

Collins, H. M., & Evans, R. (2002). The third wave of science studies: Studies of expertise and experience. *Social studies of science*, 32(2), 235-296.

+ In Class: Selected narratives from the *Live Through This* project

Week 9 Law and ethics

Class 17: To intervene or not to intervene?

Feldman, S. R., Moritz, S. H., & Benjamin, G. (2004). Suicide and the law: A practical overview for mental health professionals. *Women & Therapy*.

Hewitt, J. (2013). Why are people with mental illness excluded from the rational suicide debate? *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 36(5-6), 358–365.

Class 18: Broader questions of justice

Excerpts from

Nussbaum, M. C. (2009). *Frontiers of justice: Disability, nationality, species membership*. Harvard University Press.

and

Szasz, T. (2011). *Suicide prohibition: The shame of medicine*. Syracuse University Press.

Week 10 Representations in Art and Literature

Class 19: Representation of suicide

Excerpts from Goethe's *The sorrows of young Werther*, and Asher, J. (2016). *Thirteen reasons why*.

Class 20: Wrap-up