
Expository Writing 20: Gender & Mental Health

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Course Website:

Class Times: T/Th 10:30-11:45 & 12-1:15

Class Location : One Bow Street Rm 317

Office hours: Th 2-3pm, One Bow Rm 234

Overview of the course

This course will consider the complex questions that emerge where gender and mental health meet. We will take an interdisciplinary approach to tackling these questions, drawing on work in clinical psychology, social theory, feminist and historical analyses of clinical science, and patient accounts of living with psychopathology.

In Unit 1, we will ask *how* gender is related to illness. We will consider competing theories about the relative import of biological sex differences; gender norms and socialization; gender-based inequities, stressors, and trauma; and over-pathologizing women and gender-expansive individuals. Students will then read historical records of female patients who reported abuse, focusing on Freud's case studies of hysteria, and think about how Freud's case conceptualizations influenced the field's thinking about the origins of (white female) psychopathology.

In the second unit, we will think about the role of diagnosis in clinical psychology, investigating the extent to which labeling distress and impairment can be validating or injurious to the patient. We will read about developmental psychopathology (theories of where disorder comes from), assessment and intervention (how to respond to it), historical perspectives, and current day patient accounts. Throughout this unit, we will think about how our ideas about diagnosis, patient credibility, and clinician expertise may help and harm patients. Students will read about a real patient (in Rachel Aviv's *Strangers to Ourselves*) and take a clinical position on whether she was helped or harmed by being treated as insane.

We will end by asking what history can teach us about conducting clinical science in a patriarchal but post-binary world. We will consider, for example, how historical treatment of women's trauma informs the #MeToo movement and how clinical science and practice might adjust to better study and serve gender-expansive individuals.

Throughout the semester, we will practice the following approaches to writing and to creating and maintaining an intellectual environment:

Approaches to writing

Writing is a process. You will take notes on your reading, write and revise response papers, compose drafts of your essays, and fully revise those essays. This continued process of drafting and revision is the primary work of this class and is the main way your writing grows

stronger. Inspiration is the moment we all hope for in our writing, and it comes most readily when that inspiration is earned—when you have dedicated sustained effort to that process of reading, thinking, questioning, drafting, and revising. This course will ask you to be reflective about that process and about what you want to accomplish in each assignment: in your cover letters about each essay and in your reflection letters at the beginning and end of the term.

Writing is thinking. That evolving writing process also allows you to develop your thinking with greater depth and meaning. Writing is one of the best ways to figure out your ideas, so you should expect your ideas and arguments to evolve during the writing process.

Writing is a conversation. When you write, you are often in conversation with the sources you are writing about. You are likewise in conversation with your audience. You will express your ideas in your response papers, drafts, and revisions, and your audience from this course will be responding to those ideas, telling you what their strengths are and where they can grow stronger. In addition to the feedback you get from your classmates, you will have conferences with me (these conferences are a required part of the course), and you will receive extensive written feedback from me throughout the semester.

Approaches to creating and maintaining an intellectual environment

This course takes as its subject matter historical topics and current debates that are often emotionally charged. This speaks to the scientific, clinical, and ethical import of holding these discussions even as it can make them more challenging to engage in. Therefore, as a member of this class community, you are committing to be part of the co-creation and maintenance—alongside your instructors and peers—of a safe and rigorous intellectual environment. What does that mean?

A safe and rigorous intellectual environment is guided by:

- Intellectual curiosity and integrity;
- Scientific skepticism and rigorous evaluation of ideas, methods, and practices;
- Willingness to acknowledge the biases that emerge from our own unique backgrounds to inform the perspectives we speak from;
- Commitment to grounding questions and statements wherever possible in evidence;
- Cultivation of the self-awareness necessary to recognizing when our responses are reactive or inadvertently hurtful;
- Talking with the instructor or seeking outside support if class material or discussion elicits overwhelming emotions; and
- Engaging fully in class activities that grow our own knowledge while holding space for contributions by colleagues whose voices are not typically centered.

By joining this class, you are joining a community of individuals committed to creating the safe and rigorous intellectual environment described above.

Course Units

Unit 1: Does gender make us sick? (If so, how?)

Writing skills: Thesis, evidence, analysis

Throughout the first unit, we will be considering the points of intersection between gender and mental health. Specifically, we will ask *Does gender make us sick? And, if so, how?* We will read empirical as well as conceptual articles that propose different explanations for gender-based disparities in mental health diagnoses. These explanations include biological sex differences, gendered socialization, gender-based inequities/stress/trauma, and clinicians' over-pathologizing of women and gender-expansive individuals. We will discuss how these authors formulate theses, use evidence, and make arguments to support their positions. We will then read Freud's case study of Dora, and, in your Unit 1 Essay, you will have the chance to think about how Freud's case conceptualization influenced the field's perspectives on gender and psychopathology.

Unit 2: Do diagnoses help or harm?

Writing skills: Analysis, argument, what's at stake?

Throughout the second unit, we will think about how clinicians form (and have historically formed) their ideas about a patient: How do they arrive not only at a diagnosis but at an understanding of the origins, cause, or function of a patient's distress or impairment? We will read an account of a Black woman diagnosed with bipolar disorder and psychosis in Rachel Aviv's *Strangers to Ourselves* (2022) and consider the extent to which this patient really was "insane"—and whether it would have been more helpful to view her behavior as pathological or adaptive. A background question in the unit will be: In forming case conceptualizations, to what extent should we as clinicians *trust patients as the authorities on their own experiences* versus *trusting in the theoretical and empirical knowledge that we bring as "experts"*?

Unit 3: Where do we go from here?

Writing skills: Developing a question, identifying and using sources, structure

In this final unit, we will build on what we've learned so far about the explanations for gender-based disparities in mental health diagnoses and about the development of our clinical thinking and methodology as a field to ask, *Where do we go from here?* Specifically, we will consider: What progress have we made in assessing trauma, distress, and impairment? What theoretical frameworks and methodologies have endured? (And what problems still plague us?) What changes might improve patient experience, promote scientific progress, and move us toward a more just and equitable society? In this unit's central writing assignment, you will select from a set of topics concerning the intersection of gender and mental health and compose a research essay informed by multiple sources.

Course Policies

Evaluations (Grading)

Essay 1: 20%

Essay 2: 30%

Essay 3: 40%

Preparation & engagement: 10%*

**Preparation* can be demonstrated through regular attendance; participation in class that shows you've completed and are thinking deeply about the readings; participation in conferences that shows you've read and are thinking about my feedback on your draft; asking questions about assignments in advance; etc.

**Engagement* may involve participation in full- and small-group in-class discussions and exercises; asking questions and participating in conversation during one-on-one conferences; providing thoughtful feedback to peers prior to and during workshops; etc.

*In other words, talking in class during full-group discussions is not the only way to earn a strong preparation and engagement grade.

Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Attendance

The Writing Program attendance policy is intended to make sure that you get everything you can out of your Expos course. Because Expos has fewer class hours than some other courses; because the course is largely discussion-based; and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential to your learning in the course.

While I of course encourage you to be present every day in class, you are allowed two unexcused absences for the semester with no consequence. Some absences (religious holidays and medical situations) are automatically considered excused; some family circumstances may also be counted as excused absences. You are expected to notify me ahead of time about those absences unless circumstances make that impossible. If you miss a third class for unexcused reasons, I will ask you to meet with me to discuss your plan for catching up with any missed work, as well as issues that may be affecting your attendance or that might require attention or support from your advisers or from other College resources. If you miss a fourth class, your Resident Dean will be notified about those absences, so that your Dean can give you any support you may need to help you get back on track in the class. Missing four classes—the equivalent of two full weeks of the semester—puts you at risk for missing crucial material necessary to complete your work. Unless there is a medical or other emergency issue preventing consistent engagement with the class, students who miss four classes will receive a formal warning that they are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.

In the case of a medical problem, you should contact me before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours; you should also copy your Resident Dean on that message. In the case of extended illness, you may be required to provide medical documentation. Absences because of special events or extracurricular involvement are not excused absences. If such circumstances lead you to want to miss more than two unexcused absences, you must petition the Associate Director of the Writing Program for permission.

Harvard College Writing Program Policy on Completion of Work

Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, you must write all of the assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course (not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind). If you are unable to complete your work on time due to medical or family issues, please contact me before the deadline to discuss both the support you might need as well as a possible new arrangement for your deadline. Communication about your situation is essential so that we can determine how best to help you move forward. If we have not already discussed your situation and you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in that essay unit, you will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements and asking you to meet with me and/or your Resident Dean to make a plan for catching up on your work. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work. If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date, and if you have not documented a medical problem or been in touch with your Dean about other circumstances, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.

Policy on Deadlines and Extensions

Expos is a course that builds sequentially: the class exercises and response papers prepare you for the draft; your work in the draft lays the foundation for a strong revision; the skills and strategies you learn in Unit 1 remain essential in the new challenges of Unit 2. Because of this sequential work, keeping up with the course deadlines is necessary to your continued learning. For this reason, I grant extensions only in exceptional circumstances.

As a first-year student, part of what you are learning is how to manage your time, to balance your academic and extracurricular responsibilities, and to build habits of working that allow you to complete long and complex assignments independently. These are challenges that every student in the class faces this semester, and issues arising from these challenges typically do not warrant an extension. However, situations can arise that go beyond these typical first-year challenges. If you find yourself dealing with medical issues, family emergencies, or extraordinary situations that genuinely interfere with your work, please let me know. I won't need to know personal details, but we can meet to make a plan to help you move forward in a way that supports you as a scholar and a person in light of the circumstances you are facing. In these situations I also urge you to reach out to your Resident Dean, your proctor, or your adviser so that you have the necessary support in all of your courses.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you think you will require some flexibility in deadlines or participation in the course for reasons of a documented disability, please schedule a meeting with me early in the semester so we can discuss appropriate accommodations. (To be eligible for such accommodations, you need to have provided documentation to the [Disability Access Office](#) ahead of time. Please let me know if you are unfamiliar with that process.) The Disability Access Office works closely with Expos courses, and we will develop a plan that is appropriate for your needs. Please note that it is always your responsibility to consult with me as the need for those accommodations arises.

Laptops, cellphones, and other technology use during class

Part of contributing to a safe and rigorous intellectual environment is being *intellectually* (that is to say, *not only physically*) present in class. Because digital devices often hinder engagement

more than they help it, laptops and cellphones should not be used in class except where necessary to access readings or other course materials. If I or others in the class notice that technology use is detracting from engagement, I reserve the right to enforce a technology ban characteristic of the 17th century—with its concomitant use of ink and vellum. (In other words, before you check email in class, think of the animals.)

Policy on Electronic Submissions

You will submit your work electronically this semester (through our Canvas website). As you send or upload each document, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have saved the document in a form compatible with Microsoft Word (i.e., .doc, .docx, etc.). Note that I will not accept documents uploaded as PDFs because I will not be able to comment on them. It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you are sending is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the essay will be subject to a late penalty.

Policy on Collaboration

As in many academic situations, our Expos class will be a setting that involves frequent collaboration—we will develop ideas together through class discussion, peer review, and draft workshops. The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). It is a form of academic integrity to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay; you can do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the *Student Handbook*, “Students need not acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading.” However, all work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden.

Policy on Academic Integrity

One of the essential elements of the Expos curriculum is the work we do on effective source use, appropriate acknowledgement of sources, and expectations for citing sources in academic writing. In each unit, we will work on strategies for working with the ideas of other authors and sources, and for developing your own ideas in response to them. Most forms of academic writing involve building on the ideas of others, contributing ideas of your own, and signaling clearly for readers where each idea comes from. This complex relationship with sources is part of our work through the whole semester, and you should always feel free to ask me questions about this material.

As we become familiar with the expectations of an academic audience, we will also work on strategies to avoid errors in citation and unintentional plagiarism. As with all your courses, the expectation in Expos is that all the work that you submit for this course must be your own. That work should not make use of outside sources unless such sources are explicitly part of the assignment and accurately cited. Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to review by the Honor Council, including potential disciplinary action.

Policy on Course Materials

The work we do together in class—discussions, exercises, workshoping essays—is intended for the members of our class. Students are not allowed to record class and are not allowed to post video or audio recordings or transcripts of our class meetings. (Students needing course

recordings as an accommodation should contact the [Disability Access Office](#).) While samples of student work will be circulated within the course (and all work you do may be shared with your classmates), you may not share fellow students' work with others outside the course without their written permission. As the *Handbook for Students* explains, students may not “post, publish, sell, or otherwise publicly distribute course materials without the written permission of the course instructor. Such materials include, but are not limited to, the following: video or audio recordings, assignments, problem sets, examinations, other students' work, and answer keys.” Students who violate any of these expectations may be subject to disciplinary action.

Policy on Feedback and Conferences

Feedback is central to Expos. As spelled out in each assignment (i.e., drafts and revisions; response papers may receive different forms of feedback), you will receive either substantive written feedback, a conference about your draft, or both. Every writer benefits from having an attentive reader respond to their work, and one of my roles as your preceptor is to provide that response: identifying the strengths of a draft; noting questions and reactions to help you develop your ideas further; and offering clear assessment of your revised work. There are educational reasons for the types of feedback I'll give you: they complement one another throughout the writing process and help you think about receiving feedback from different audiences at different stages of writing. Each form of feedback will help you think about another way you can ask for and receive feedback in future writing circumstances. (Feedback throughout the course also comes in other forms, such as peer review or principles from workshop that you apply to your own essays.)

There are also educational reasons for the amount and timing of the feedback I as your instructor will offer. The goal of all my feedback is that you learn to incorporate the principles I'm identifying into your *own* thinking and your revision, so that eventually you are making more independent decisions in your essays about what a reader needs to understand or what the most effective structure might be. If I as your instructor were to read a draft multiple times, offering several rounds of feedback, I would then in effect be taking over some of those decisions for you, and you would not be gaining the autonomy as a writer that you need to achieve this semester; that dynamic would shortchange the learning that you can accomplish in the course. I do accept a few thoughtful questions by email about specific instances in your revision-in-progress: a follow-up question about whether a thesis is now clearer, or whether some added sentences of analysis make your explanation of evidence stronger. In those instances, you are taking the important step of identifying what in your writing and thinking is *most* in need of targeted feedback, and you are using the Elements of Academic Argument to articulate the specific question you have about something you've tried out in the paper. (When you do want additional feedback, the [Writing Center](#) is a very helpful resource. Here too, you will use that resource better when you arrive with specific and targeted questions.)

There are also important reasons that I schedule one draft conference per student for each essay (in Units 1 and 3). Conferences are important opportunities for thinking together about questions in your argument and strategies for revision. During conference week I am meeting with 30 students and attempting to offer the same level of intensive work to everyone. If I were to grant a second conference to any student, for reasons of equity I would need to offer a second meeting to everyone, which is not possible in our quick-moving units.

Counseling and Psychological Services

Many college students face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. Harvard offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients' cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

Counseling and Mental Health Services at Harvard University Health Services:

<https://camhs.huhs.harvard.edu/>