

**Re-imagining Mental Health
and Illness:
Spiritual Care as *Looking***



**What we believe about the world
will determine how we look at it;**

**How we look at the world will
determine how we name it**

**How we name something in the
world will determine how we
respond to it**

Spirituality:
An expansion of our Healthcare
Imagination

What Exactly Are Mental Health Problems

And who says that they are what they are?

Mental Illness

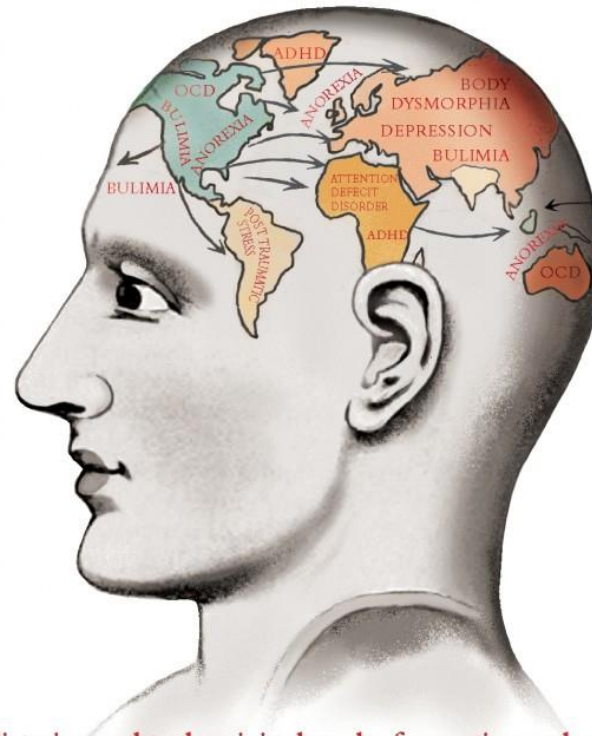
- What do we mean when we call someone mentally ill?
- Its only relatively recently that *illness* has been the primary definitional language used to describe what we now call 'mental illness.'
- Previously we would talk of alternative realities (demons, visions, dreams etc)
- Now we talk about diagnoses and symptoms *as if* they were nothing more than the "side effects" of broken biology.

The problem with accepting the terminology of “mental illness” as the only explanatory framework is that it reduces significant types of experience to "mere pathology."

The awareness, the consciousness, the experiences of people with mental illness is overpowered by assumptions of meaninglessness.

CRAZY LIKE US

The Globalization of the
Western Mind



**'A blistering and truly original work of reporting and analysis,
uncovering America's role in homogenizing how the world defines
wellness and healing.'** Po Brosnan, author of *Nurture Shock*

E T H A N W A T T E R S

I'm dealing with depression. **Stupid names don't help**



Mental
Illness is a
disruption
of our
stories

What are mental illnesses?

- A rupture in the stories we tell about ourselves and that are told about us.
- Diagnoses are a set of stories that have medical, social and spiritual power.
- Symptoms are plot lines that are deeply connected to an individual's personal and cultural
- Such stories represent and relate to a deeply meaningful set of human experiences that are open to a multitude of different interpretations.




**Giving people back
their stories**

**Spirituality as
a way of
looking**



The spiritual meaning of medication

- *Non compliance* **or the** reclaiming of citizenship and one's spiritual personhood



**Grieving for lost
friends**

Luhmann on Hearing Voices

- Comparative studies of psychotic experience in America, Chennai (India) and Accra (Ghana)
- The US patients almost all self-identified as ‘schizophrenic’ and used the diagnosis to talk about their condition; they knew the ‘textbook’ definitions of the condition and ideas about hereditary illnesses. **The patients know that ‘hearing voices’ is a sign you’re ‘crazy,’ so they often try to conceal their experiences.** They dislike hearing voices and try to deny their existence.
- For Westerners, ‘hearing voices’ is clearly indicative of “insanity” and therefore carries the cultural weight of such an understanding.

Hearding Voices in America

- The voices themselves are generally unknown.
- All of the subjects heard 'horrible voices, telling them that they were worthless and should die.'
- Sometimes voices told them to torture others or 'go to war,' or that the sufferer should commit suicide or was destined for a horrible end.
- one patient referred to her 'suicide voice.'

Hallucinations in India

- The patients heard an ‘audible God’ who actually advised them to ignore other ‘evil voices.’
- Voices didn’t necessarily mean that you were ‘crazy’; instead, **the local explanation of the condition often referred to the subject being under ‘spiritual attack’ by either spirits or witches.** To be the victim of a witch carried less stigma than to have a mental illness, and people generally didn’t talk about ‘schizophrenia’
- Some of the voices were familiar people — family, kin, employers — and half the patients reported that they heard primarily or only positive voices, telling them to do good or offering advice. Even when individuals in Accra heard aggressive or critical voices, they also reported hearing ‘good’ voices that told them to ignore these negative influences.

Hearing Voices in India

- Patients who were diagnosed with schizophrenia, tended to hear **‘annoying relatives who told them to get dressed and clean up.’** Kin form the lion’s share of voices, sometimes criticizing them, sometimes advising them and keeping them company, consoling, or helping to motivate patients.
- **Some of these voices are reassuring, even playful.** Luhrmann says that the playful voices can even become imaginary companions.
- Indian families also don’t treat people with schizophrenia as if they have a soul-destroying illness.

Hearing Voices in Africa

- **In Accra, positive voices are central to the experience;** in the US, they are treated as an aside, peripheral to their primary condition. In Accra, people even said that the voices had ‘kept them alive.’

What might make the difference?

- People are encouraged to have different types of opportunities when they start hearing voices.
- Theory of mind
- When the research team asked American patients whether the voices were 'real,' the question was easy for US subjects to answer; they recognized the distinction between 'real' voices and voices 'inside your head,' in part because **the mind was understood to be a closed space.** Having some other agents in your mind was clearly a sign of illness or dysfunction, so the voices were 'extremely disconcerting.'



**Dementia: A
problem of
memory?**

Spiritual Care and Mental Health Problems

The Art of Being Hospitable



The Rhythm of Hospitality: Guesting and Hosting

Slow spirituality; slow care

- Exporting time
- The compression of time: the problem with 1 minute fairy tales, DSM and managed care
- Care as timefulness
- Practising Sabbath
- The practice of the present moment

**Included but
not *Belonging* :**

George's story



*“I never realised that I was accepted just
as I am without healing... I just thought
I was a bad Christian”*



To Belong You Need To
Be Missed