

Name _____



This week's readings by John Curra and Ethan Watters critically assessed the integrity of modern psychiatry, the validity of the DSM, and relative nature of mental disorders. As Watters observes, the biomedical approach to mental illness promised better understanding, better treatment, and greater understanding. But alas, the biomedical approach has increased, not lessened, stigma since people regard brains made ill through biomedical or genetic abnormalities as more thoroughly broken and the mentally ill as more dangerous.

We may actually treat people more harshly when their problem is described in disease terms – that’s the implication in Professor Sheila Mehta’s research. Perhaps that helps make sense of another contradiction in how we treat people with mental illness. While we were medicalizing deviance, in actuality, society was criminalizing mental illness and imprisoning those who suffered from mental disorders.

There are more people diagnosed with serious mental illness confined to prisons and jails, subject to the most stressful living conditions, and continually punished for symptoms arising from their illness, than there are in mental hospitals and asylums.

1. Images in the video suggest that those with mental illness who are in jail or prison deserve less mental health treatment and care. Do they?
2. Yet, the mental health treatment provided in prisons might be better than what one gets in the community? How could this be?
3. Why would prison authorities send patients with diagnosed serious mental disorders into solitary confinement or segregation? Is worsening the mental health of those in jail or prisons appropriate? torture?
4. Back to front: Why do we accept that perhaps a quarter or more of all people incarcerated suffer from serious mental illness?