Introduction

Paula Gardner,[1,4] **Jonathan M. Metzl,**[2] **and Bradley E. Lewis**[3]

The *Journal of Medical Humanities* devotes this issue to "cultural studies of psychiatry." By "cultural studies," we mean an interdisciplinary method that contextualizes representations and practices within the social and political relations of their emergence and function. Cultural studies scholars draw from an extensive theoretical legacy including critical theory, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, post-structuralism, post-modernism, feminism, race studies, gay and lesbian studies, post-colonial studies, film theory, and science studies.[5] Because these theories are complicated and loaded with new concepts, the theoretical commitment required for appreciating cultural studies work can be extensive. Scholars at Open University in Britain have simplified matters somewhat by assimilating many of these theories into a single "circuit of culture model."[6] Though other scholars use different approaches, the model is a useful way to organize key issues in cultural studies and will thus serve as the basis of our introduction to cultural studies here.

The circuit of culture model articulates the dynamics of "cultural reproduction," meaning the ways social and political relations of a given social group tend to reproduce themselves. In non-totalitarian societies, this cultural reproduction happens through consent as much as through direct force. However, consent is never static—it must be constantly negotiated and renewed through a circuit of culture that includes the *production* of cultural representations, the *consumption*

---

[1]Assistant Professor, Department of Communication and Theater Arts, Bridgewater State College, Bridgewater, MA.

[2]Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Women's Studies, Director, FIPSE Medicine and Culture Program, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

[3]New York University, New York, NY.

[4]Address correspondence to Paula Gardner, Assistant Professor, Department of Communication and Theater Arts, Bridgewater State College, Bridgewater, MA 02325.

[5]For collections of cultural studies work see During, 1999, Grossburg, Nelson and Treichler, 1992, and Story, 1994. For some recent overview treatments of cultural studies theory and scholarship see Turner, 1990, Easthope, 1991, Story, 1993; Kellner, 1995, Barker, 2000 and Best and Kellner, 2000.

[6]The "circuit of culture model" is worked out in a series of textbooks created at Open University for their Culture, Media, and Identities series. For further references to that series, see *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*, 1997, by du Gay et al.

of these representations, and the creation of *subjective identifications* based on the resources of those representational practices. The subjective identifications created by the circuit of culture (which are felt to be natural and obvious to those in both subordinate and dominant power positions) feed back into the circuit perpetuating the power relations of cultural producers.

A leading inspiration for the circuit of culture model comes from Stuart Hall's article "Encoding/Decoding" (Hall, 1980, p.110). Hall is former director of the Birmingham Center for the Study of Contemporary Culture and his work has been a touchstone for much cultural studies work. While some scholars focus on consumption and its products, Hall argues that the moment of *production* initiates the cultural circuit. Production, Hall explains, introduces and releases meaning-laden representations, practices and artifacts into the circuits of culture where they are then consumed and propagated. Production encodes the frames of reference embedded in the producer's local practices and technical skills into these circulating textual artifacts that go on to become "professional ideologies, institutional knowledge, definitions and assumptions, assumptions about the audience, and so on" (p. 129). If the producers are part of the dominant cultural order, production also encodes the larger maps of social reality (through which "elite"segments of society impose and reinforce dominant classifications of the social and political world) into cultural artifacts. These hegemonic social maps have a "range of social meanings, practices, and usages, power and interest 'written in'" (p. 134). Though these dominant social maps are "neither univocal nor uncontested," they create a pattern of preferred meanings, which have the producer's "institutional/political/ideological order imprinted in them" (p. 134).

Hall understands the moment of *consumption* as the moment when textually encoded artifacts are read and decoded. Before an artifact "can have an 'effect,' satisfy a 'need,' or be put to a 'use,' it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded" (p. 130). The producer's encoded meanings and the consumer's decoded meanings are not necessarily the same. The potential difference or gap between encoding and decoding gives the two "determinant" moments in the circuits of culture (production and consumption) their relatively autonomous standing. Like production, consumption also relies on frames of reference embedded in the local and larger political context of the reader. If these frames of reference differ, the decoded message will be different from the encoded one.

Three hypothetical reading positions exist for Hall: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional. In the *dominant-hegemonic* position, the cultural artifact is decoded "in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded" (p. 136). The reader uses the same local and social codes as the producers and thus accepts the preferred meanings and the paradigm of the producers. This creates the illusion of "perfectly transparent communication" (p. 136). The *negotiated* position is a hybrid position in which the reader uses the same larger social codes as the producers, but he/she uses alternative local codes. Thus, he/she accepts the producers' overall definition of the situation but makes exceptions for her own

particular circumstances. The *oppositional* position is, for Hall, the most resistant position. Here the reader uses alternative codes in both the local and larger social context, and reads the cultural artifact against the grain in a "globally contrary" way (p. 138). He/she reads it as inapplicable in her situation, and thus rejects the larger socio-political maps that the artifact represents and reinforces.

From the perspective of the circuit of culture model, cultural studies scholars analyze and articulate the "maps of social reality" embedded in cultural representations and practices in order to de-authorize dominant-hegemonic readings. This challenge expands the possibilities for negotiated and oppositional readings. Alternative readings yield alternative subjective experiences and sub-communities, thereby breaking up and diffracting dominant social reproduction patterns. As such, the goal of cultural studies work may be broadly defined as emancipatory, in that the point is to break up sedimented and naturalized aspects of social reproduction that are most oppressive to the goals of self, society and State.

Keeping this condensed description of cultural studies in mind, the phrase "cultural studies of psychiatry" means, most simply, the application of cultural studies analysis to psychiatry. This scholarship teases out the political and cultural dimensions of psychiatric representations and psychiatric practices. For example, a cultural study of psychiatry uncovers the political and cultural preferences that are encoded in particular psychiatric artifacts, and explores the possibilities for negotiated and oppositional readings. Like the broad intentions of cultural studies, the point is to critique how these political and cultural forces operate, and to create increased autonomy and emancipatory possibilities of identification and connection for those who are hailed into oppressive dimensions of psychiatric systems as producers, consumers, or clinicians.

The term "psychiatry" is something of a misnomer here, because the domain of interest does not exclusively focus on psychiatry. Indeed, a primary goal of cultural studies of psychiatry is to deconstruct psychiatric discourse as having priority over all other discourses of emotional suffering and healing. One approach to this problem is to use a more general term like "psy complexes:" psychiatry, psychology, and related disciplines of mental health and illness. But even this is limited because it still denotes professional disciplines at the expense of non-professional possibilities and options. Cultural studies inquiry could also be employed to address psychic life in a variety of other representations and practices. For example, Jane Ussher's article in this issue contrasts Western professional discourses of "premenstrual disorder" with Eastern models of selfhood. Ussher demonstrates how it is possible to revalorize intense emotional reactions not as pathology but as "coming into one's senses."

The editors of this special issue have brought together a series of cultural studies of psychiatry articles. Employing a variety of interpretive and critical methods, the papers consider phenomena that are more commonly approached from a quantitative biological, psychological, or social science perspective. The pieces converge on many fronts, sharing the belief that knowledge is temporal and

situational. So too, the papers sustain the belief that new discourses arise where psychiatric knowledges are transferred through various venues, producing new cultural practices that might successfully challenge accepted truths. While some authors focus on discursive psychiatric products or find fault with the western consumer capitalist model, others locate rich examples of resistance. At the same time, the articles share a common interest in how discourse illustrates the value ascribed to psychic life in Western culture and work to understand the impact of psychiatry's practices on individuals and the society as a whole.

In addition to Jane Ussher's article discussed above, Marie Leger and Toby Miller describe the preponderance of Ritalin prescriptions for children as a moral panic—the latest product of consumer-capitalist culture offering transcendence for the middle class. Joe Dumit addresses how brain science, specifically imaging and other technologies, provide "explanations" sufficient to translate suffering into symptom locally and temporarily, resulting in the current recognition of new sociomedical disorders such as Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) in judicial, industrial, non-governmental and other spheres. Brad Lewis addresses the personal and political ramifications of technomedicine, Prozac specifically, outlining possibilities for destabilizing biopsychiatric assumptions and for organizing resistances. David DeGrazia provides an analytical philosophy critique of Lewis's claims, which Lewis rebutts.[7] Prozac is also the jumping off point for Jonathan Metzl's historical and psychoanalytic exploration of the connection between "normal" and "heteronormal" assumed in the construction of women "patients" in advertisements for psychotropic medications between 1964 and 2001. Paula Gardner reveals how a broad selection of consumer discourses on depression produce distorted sound bites that misrepresent depression as a brain illness and thereby coerce a broad population of consumers into antidepressant use. Finally, Mady Schutzman teases out a relationship between language and psychiatric disorder. She creatively contrasts the disorder of Ganser Syndrome with turn of the century comic routines that parody nonsensical language.

Our aim in bringing this work together is not to invalidate "psy" research and representation or to provide definitive knowledges of these topics. Rather, we seek to interrogate the complex cultural impact of psychiatry's representational practices and discourses. Perhaps the key message of this issue is that even ostensibly objective psy research encodes larger social and political maps of reality into its diagnoses, treatments, and textual representations. The point is to reveal the representational possibilities and options for lived experience that are obscured by

---

[7] Editor's note: Even though DeGrazia and Lewis first presented their response and rebuttal at a panel for the American Philosophical Association in December before 9/11, both authors use Afghanistan and the Taliban as examples in their discussion of the "science wars." These articles were not changed to reflect the events of 9/11, but the coincidence of DeGrazia and Lewis' Taliban example for the science wars arising shortly before a real war in Afganistan highlights the far reaching effects of the tensions they discuss, and highlights the need for an eventual truce in the science wars.

over-reliance on clinical science, and to expose dominant representational practices to alternative possibilities for consumption. A series of choices emerge with a cultural studies position, generating theoretical and practical challenges to the seemingly "natural" effects of dominant psy research. Reading against the naturalness of such assumptions, we mean to ultimately expose an arena of possible choices for consumers, consumer groups, practitioners and society as a whole, and make these choices accessible. For this to be a genuine expansion, much more cultural studies type work will be necessary over time. The editors hope that this issue instigates new venues for scholars of psychiatry to collaborate, contest and debate.

REFERENCES

Barker, C. (2000). *Cultural studies: Theory and practice.* London: Sage Publications.

Best, S., & Kellner, D. (2001). *The postmodern adventure: Science, technology, and cultural studies and the turn of the millennium.* New York: Guilford Press.

du Gay, P., Hall, S., Janes, L., Mackay, H., & Negus, K. (1997). *Doing cultural studies: The story of the Sony walkman.* London: Sage Publications.

During, S. (1999). *The cultural studies reader* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Easthope, A. (1991). *Literary into cultural studies.* London: Routledge.

Grossburg, L., Nelson, C., & Treichler, P. (1992). *Cultural studies.* London: Routledge.

Hall, S. (1980). Encoding decoding. In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe, & P. Willis (Eds.), *Culture, media, language* (pp. 128–139). London: Routledge.

Kellner, D. (1995). *Media culture: Cultural studies, identity, and politics between the modern and the postmodern.* New York: Routledge.

Story, J. (1993). *Cultural theory and popular culture.* New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Story, J. (1994). *Cultural theory and popular culture: A reader.* New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Turner, G. (1990). *British cultural studies: An introduction.* Boston: Unwin Hyman.