

Discussion Questions and Exercises for *Mad at School*

1. In the first line of *Mad at School*, Price asks, “If you are crazy, can you still be of sound mind?” In what ways does the book call the terms *crazy* and *sound mind* into question? After reading the book, how would you answer this question?
2. Throughout *Mad at School*, Price mentions celebrities and other well-known figures who have been labeled with various mental disabilities, including John Forbes Nash, Sherlock Holmes, Seung-Hui Cho, Herschel Walker, and Brooke Shields. Select a news article that focuses on one of these popular figures and his/her disability label(s). Conduct a rhetorical analysis, asking questions such as: What label is placed upon this person, and does the label come from the person him/herself or is it applied by someone else? What is the tone of the depiction? How are rhetorical devices such as headlines, juxtaposition, or pronouns used to create a particular impression of the person and his/her disability? What cultural narratives (such as “overcoming” or “psycho killer”) can you perceive in the article?
3. *Mad at School* is organized around a series of sites that are important in academic culture: classrooms; conferences; job searches; published writings *by* academics; published writing *about* academics; and the liminal space occupied by independent scholars. Drawing upon your own experience as a member of academic culture, what additional sites do you think could be added to this study to strengthen its analysis of mental disability?
4. Price argues that language and naming are key implements used to enforce relations of power and privilege around mental disability. In the section “Naming and Definition” (pages 9-20), Price examines a number of terms used to designate mental disabilities, and explains why she most often uses “mental disability.” After reading this section, describe which term(s) resonate most with you, and why.
5. “Naming and Definition” explains that *mental disability* is Price’s choice for an umbrella term that emphasizes coalition and collective action. However, any term that claims to incorporate a large group of disparate people is a risk. What risks are inherent in the choice to create and use an umbrella term? What does this approach sacrifice that might be recovered with focus on a more specific group or term? (This question may be usefully studied in conjunction with works that take up a particular diagnostic category, such as Meri Nana-Ama Danquah’s *Willow Weep for Me: A Black Woman’s Journey Through Depression* (One World, 1998); Lennard Davis’s *Obsession: A History* (U of Chicago P, 2008); Merri Lisa Johnson’s *Girl in Need of a Tourniquet: Memoir of a Borderline Personality* (Seal P, 2010); James Wilson’s *Weather Reports from the Autism Front* (McFarland & Co., 2008).)

6. Throughout *Mad at School*, a number of images are presented which Price reads rhetorically. These include the “autism clock” and its parody (page 17); dancer Katherine Mancuso performing *Invisible in Disabled Country* (page 39); the cover of the DVD *Shots Fired on Campus* (page 165); and a bookstore display sign that reads “Memoirs of Affliction” (page 177). First, select one of these images and suggest a rhetorical analysis different from the one Price offers. What elements of the image would you select to support your alternative analysis? Second, select an image yourself that you believe sends an important rhetorical message about mental disability. Make a copy of the image and conduct a rhetorical analysis of it which in some way refers to, expands upon, or critiques Price’s theory of mental disability.
7. In chapter 1, Price offers a re-reading of seminal rhetoric/composition texts, demonstrating the ways in which they ignore or “abhor” (page 8) mental disability. Select another important rhetoric/composition text and add it to the analysis of “rationality” and/or “the critical.” In what ways does it participate in, and/or resist, the abhorrence Price describes?
8. Price’s introduction to critical discourse analysis mentions a number of linguistic features under study, including pronouns, active/passive voice, genre, definition, intertextuality, and interdiscursivity. First, explain what each of these means. Second, select a text (popular or academic) that pertains to mental disability and conduct a discourse analysis of it. What linguistic *or* visual features seem most prevalent? How do these features contribute to an overall argument (which may be implicit) about mental disability?
9. Chapter 2 of *Mad at School* describes kairotic space, which Price defines as “the less formal, often unnoticed, areas of academe where knowledge is produced and power is exchanged” (page 60). Make a list of all the kairotic spaces you have been in during the past 24 hours. How easily did you function in each of these spaces, and why? In what ways was mental disability present, or not present, in these spaces? How might you go about re-designing one of these spaces to improve access for disabilities of many kinds, including mental disability?
10. *Productivity* is a topos that has been critiqued from many standpoints, including feminist studies, disability studies, and critical race studies. How does conventional academic discourse define “productivity”? In what ways is productivity entangled with other ideals such as morality and personhood? How do these entanglements change, or not change, in cultural contexts other than U.S. higher education?
11. The fourth chapter of *Mad at School* is a study of scholarly and popular representations of two people who committed school shootings, Seung-Hui Cho and Steven Kazmierczak. Price argues that in these representations, “madness operates . . . as a *mechanism* through which the shooters are placed in a space of unrecoverable deviance” (pages 144-45). This is a controversial stance for a number of reasons: first, the events

are very recent and involved significant trauma for many people; second, many (if not most) people believe if one commits a mass murder, one must be mentally ill. What is your own response to Price's argument? Do you think she has adequately justified the existence of this chapter in the book, despite the pain it might cause? Do you think the evidence she presents convincingly complicates the commonsense link between mental disability and violence?

12. In chapter 5, Price conducts a close analysis of a single discursive feature: pronouns. Select another discursive feature (such as active/passive voice, genre, definition, intertextuality, or interdiscursivity) and conduct a re-reading of one of the texts under study (*A Mind Apart: Travels in a Neurodiverse World* by Susanne Antonetta; *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir* by Lauren Slater; and "Her Reckoning: A Young Interdisciplinary Academic Dissects the Exact Nature of Her Disease" by Wendy Marie Thompson). What additional insights about this work emerge when the scope of critical discourse analysis is broadened?
13. Price argues that the metaphor of "coming out" is flawed, because "the inability (or disability?) to disclose can take many forms. One example in the area of mental disability is the common response to the announcement „I have depression’: „Oh yes, I get depressed too”" (page 179). Select an example from your experience when you were attempting to "come out" about something that proved difficult to disclose. What were the barriers to disclosure? In what ways could this rhetorical exchange have been made more accessible for you and your audience?
14. In the small qualitative study that comprises chapter 6, Price describes her approach as an "interdependent qualitative research paradigm" (page 205). What are the features of an interdependent qualitative research paradigm? What research traditions does it draw upon? In what ways does it differ from conventional qualitative or quantitative research? Which disciplines are likely to be most accepting of such a paradigm, and which are likely to be least accepting? What risks and benefits do you perceive in following such an approach? How do key disability-studies topoi including access, in/ter/dependence, and "crip time" play roles in this research approach?
15. The conclusion of *Mad at School* suggests a number of areas for further research, including the racial politics of mental disability; postcolonial and transnational studies of madness; and the intersection of queerness and mental disability. Which of these areas do you think is most urgent for researchers to explore? Why?