

Section on Mental Health

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FROM THE NEWSLETTER'S DESK, Dr. Teresa Scheid, University of North Carolina at Charlotte

We all hope 2021 is a better year than 2020, and hopefully some recovery from the collective PTSD we have all experienced. I first want to thank Richard for the many years as the Newsletter Editor. I am also grateful for his continued support of the section by maintaining our webpage and production of the newsletter through Kent State University. I especially appreciate the continued assistance of Katie Gary who will cover up my own technological inefficiencies!

Let me describe my plans for the future of the Newsletter, with a more general goal to make it a platform for an exchange of ideas and "conversation" especially now that we no longer have the in-person interaction of our departments and the ASA meetings to communicate.

To that end, I will use the Newsletter in 2021 to advance conversations about COVID and Mental Health, as well as issues related to innovative approaches graduate student research amid a pandemic.

The spring issue (targeted for April) will address COVID and Mental Health. I regularly receive updates from the American Psychological Association, The American Association of Public Health, and Mental Health America with information about the negative impact of COVID on mental health with increased isolation, loneliness, depression, anxiety, and most worrisome, suicide. These are all important consequences of a major social stressor, and while not surprising, very troubling.

What can sociologists bring to our understanding of the relationship between COVID and mental health? We already have an important paper published in the December issues of JHSB by Alex Bierman and Scott Schieman which draws on Canadian data to examine changes in psychological distress between December 2019 and March 2020 (see below). While preliminary, the authors point to the importance of social integration – a sociological insight the authors trace to Durkheim's research.

The 2021 ASA sessions (see below) address challenges to research as well as COVID and Mental Health and I hope the spring issue will help everyone think about the relevance of sociological research to understanding the relationship between COVID and Mental Health.

In the summer issue, with anticipation of a better job market, I want to highlight graduate student research and provide space for graduate students approaching the job market to introduce themselves to us as well as for those students working on their dissertations to elicit feedback and guidance from Section Members. Accordingly, the summer issue will feature updates on the section's plans for mentoring and mentorship within the confines (or opportunities) of a virtual ASA meeting.



116th ASA Annual Meeting
August 6-10, 2021



CALL FOR PAPERS

Section Session: Sociology of Mental Health—Challenges in Mental Health Research

As the body of mental health research grows, so do challenges of collecting data on representative samples; testing old and developing new theoretical models; and defining mental health. This session highlights papers that focus on the creative ways of using social science data (primary and/or secondary) to advance mental health theory across any of these elements or recognizing new challenges to the study of mental health. We welcome papers that have an interdisciplinary focus or utilize diverse methodologies in the study of mental health.

Section Session: COVID-19 and Mental Health

How can we ignore this pandemic? We cannot. For mental health scholars, COVID-19 has revealed the complexity of comorbidity. We welcome papers that focus on those diagnosed and recovering from COVID-19 as it relates to subsequent mental health problems. Papers may also include research that describe the emotional impact of COVID as countless individuals have shared their stories ranging from mourning the loss of a loved one, feelings of gratefulness to those who supported them through the recovery process, to adjusting to a previous mental health diagnosis in the context of life changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. We seek papers that advance theoretical and/or methodological approaches to the study of physical-mental health comorbidity in individuals and families.

Mental Health Awards Ceremony

CHAIR: ELAINE WETHINGTON
(ew20@cornell.edu).

Leonard I. Pearlin Award for Distinguished Contributions. (Nominations accepted for 2022; Given the rescheduling of the ASA meetings due to COVID in 2020, we delayed the Pearlin Award and in 2021 Dr. Phyllis Moen will officially receive the award and provide the talk at the 2021 Mental Health Section Awards Ceremony).

This award is given for distinguished contributions to the sociological study of mental health. Thanks to the generous donation from Leonard Pearlin, the mental health section of the ASA has created this annual award. The award honors a scholar who has made substantial contributions in theory and/or research to the sociology of mental health. Nominations for 2022 should be sent to the Awards Committee Chair for the Mental Health Section by February 10, 2022. Nominations should include a CV of the nominee and a letter of support describing the nominee's contributions to the sociology of mental health.

Award for Best Publication in Mental Health

This award is given for the best published article, book or chapter in the area of the sociology of mental health. The publication date needs to have been within the last two years. Letters of nominations for this award may be sent to the Awards Committee Chair for the Mental Health Section by March 1st. The awards committee will also conduct a search of works published in the past two years for potential candidates for this award.

Award for Best Dissertation in Mental Health

This award is given for the best doctoral dissertation in the area of the sociology of mental health. The dissertation should have been completed within the previous two academic years. While not required, a letter

from your dissertation advisor would be helpful. Please send a letter of nomination and a paper based on the dissertation (or dissertation synopsis) to the Awards Committee Chair for the Mental Health Section by April 1.

Graduate Student paper award in the area of the sociology of mental health.

This award will be given to a current graduate student for the best published or unpublished article, book or chapter in the area of mental health. The paper should have been completed within the academic years of 2019-2020 by a current graduate student. Papers authored by more than one student are acceptable, but papers coauthored with faculty are not eligible. Section Members are encouraged to submit nominations. Self-nominations from graduate student members of the section are also welcome. Please send a letter of nomination and a paper by May 1 to the Awards Chair.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

GOOD NEWS!

Congratulations to Phyllis Moen, for winning the 2020 Pearlin Award. We are looking forward to her presentation at the virtual awards Ceremony in 2021.

Congratulations to Alex Bierman and Scott Schieman for their December 2020 JHSB article and Policy Brief on the impact of COVID on Psychological Distress.

Congratulations to Owen Whooley for winning the 2020 Eliot Friedson Award for his book: On the Heels of Ignorance: Psychiatry and the Politics of Not Knowing. University of Chicago Press (2019). Original data includes archival research and interviews to reconstruct the history of American Psychiatry from 1844 to the present with an analysis of how psychiatry has reconstructed itself. Kristen Barker, who nominated the book for the both the Medical Sociology and

the Mental Health Section awards describes the book as follows (I am drawing from her letter which I received as the Awards Chair last year):

On the Heels of Ignorance begins from a simple premise: the history of American psychiatry is a history of ignorance. Combining insights from the sociology of mental health and the burgeoning field of ignorance studies, On the Heels of Ignorance examines psychiatry's professional endurance, despite its failure to make meaningful inroads into understanding the nature of mental distress. Drawing on extensive archival research and contemporary interviews, Whooley reconstructs the history of American psychiatry from 1844 to the present day to illuminate what he calls psychiatry's "collective management of ignorance." In other words, psychiatrists did not ignore their ignorance. Rather in the face of constant crisis, intense pressure, and persistent ignorance, psychiatry repeatedly reinvented itself. These reinventions have been dramatic, involving wholesale reimaginings of the identity of the profession, the nature of its knowledge, and the conceptualization of what constitutes a mental illness.

On the Heels of Ignorance not only speaks to the longstanding interest of sociologists of mental health regarding the dynamics of knowledge, power, and psychiatric authority. It also pushes this conversation forward by highlighting the importance of something all too often neglected in our research on mental health, namely ignorance and the dilemmas it poses for mental health professions.

I also want to thank Owen for his nomination of Jason Schnittker's book in 2019 which won the Section Best Publication Award that year. Jason Schnittker. 2017. The Diagnostic System: Why the Classification of Psychiatric Disorders is Necessary, Difficult, and Never Settled. Columbia University Press.

Owen reviewed the book in *Contemporary Sociology* (47,6) and found the book to be "sober, clear, and even handed.. providing an indispensable work in the Sociology of health and illness, one that brings a much yearned for breath of fresh nuance to a topic riddled by breathless polemic (pg. 746-7).

Forthcoming with an Early Discount:

Early Discount on "Ties That Enable: Community Solidarity for Adults Living with Severe Mental Health Problems" By T.L. Scheid and S. Megan Smith. Due in August, Rutgers University Press.

Ties that Enable is written for students, providers, and advocates seeking to understand how best to improve mental health care – be it for themselves, their loved ones, their clients, or for the wider community. The authors integrate their knowledge of mental health care as researchers, teachers, and advocates and rely on the experiences of people living with severe mental health problems to help understand the sources of community solidarity. Communities are the primary source of social solidarity, and given the diversity of communities, solutions to the problems faced by individuals living with severe mental health problems must start with community level initiatives. "Ties that Enable" examines the role of a faith-based community group in providing a sense of place and belonging as well as reinforcing a valued social identity. The authors argue that mental health reform efforts need to move beyond a focus on individual recovery to more complex understandings of the meaning of community care. In addition, mental health care needs to move from a medical model to a social model which sees the roots of mental illness and recovery as lying in society, not the individual. It is our society's inability to provide inclusive supportive environments which restrict the ability of individuals to recover. This book provides insights into how communities and

system level reforms can promote justice and the higher ideals we aspire to as a society.

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While we are talking about books, The Handbook for the Study of Mental Health (3rd edition) is still generating funds for the Section. While royalties have decreased somewhat, "The Handbook" is still doing fairly well, with earnings of just over \$ 1,700.00 for the 2020 year (we get a check in May and another in November). The proceeds benefit the section and since we no longer have to pay for a reception, this money can be used to support section awards and graduate student research. Please keep using the Handbook in your upper level undergraduate and graduate level courses!

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Call for Contributions to the Next Newsletter

The Newsletter Editor, Teresa Scheid, would like to hear from section members about good news or events that can appear in the next Newsletter. Some possible topics include:

- Graduate or post-doctoral students on the market and would like to be profiled.**
- Upcoming conferences, calls for papers, grant opportunities or special issues of journals.
- Newly published books by section members. Please include publication date and publisher information.
- Congratulatory information (e.g., promotions, new jobs, awards, honors, grants).

Call for Abstracts for the American Public Health Association Meetings, October 23-37 (Denver, but On-line)

The Focus is on Creating The Healthiest Nation: Strengthening Social Connectedness.

This call has obvious sociological relevance as the focus is on the relationships between Health and Social Supports.

Submissions Open January 4th and Close March 21. Abstracts should be 250 words and include learning objectives.

<https://www.apha.org/>

SMH

SOCIETY AND MENTAL HEALTH

[The Journal of the ASA Section on the Sociology of Mental Health](#)

Editor: Susan Roxburgh, Kent State University
 Past Editor: Elaine Wethington, Cornell University

Editorial Scope of SMH: Society and Mental Health publishes original articles that apply sociological concepts and methods to the understanding of the social origins of mental health and illness, the social consequences for persons with mental illness, and the organization and financing of mental health services and care. Its editorial policy favors manuscripts that advance the sociology of mental health and illness, stimulate further research, inform treatments and policy and reflect the diversity of interests of its readership.

Manuscripts must be submitted electronically at
<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/smh>

For more information about the Journal contact:

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AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Section on Mental Health

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