

# Section on Mental Health

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## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Greetings Section Members,

I hope everyone enjoyed the annual meeting in San Francisco, and, of course, I hope to see you next year in Chicago. I'll start with the bad news, before moving to the good.

Although our section is thriving in many ways, our membership has declined. Our section currently has 334 members, down from 447 last year. This decline is sufficiently precipitous to drop us below the 400 threshold necessary for an additional annual meeting session. If your membership has lapsed, or if you have a student whose membership you'd like to sponsor, now is the time to (re)join the section.

Even with fewer allocated sessions, I expect vibrant meetings next year. Please look to the call for papers when it's published, but here's a preview. In addition to the usual program committee section session, we're busy organizing two thematic sessions. One is titled "New Dimensions of Difference: Underexplored Variation in Mental Health" and will be organized by Ning Hsieh of the University of Chicago. The other is titled "Stress, Stigma, Services, and Institutions: Connection 'Solitudes'" and will be organized by Christian Ritter of Northeast Ohio Medical University. The ideas behind these sessions are really terrific and we fully expect many excellent submissions. We will also hold a reception, once again co-sponsoring with the section on medical sociology, our "best friend" within the ASA. In addition, Virginia Hiday and Susan Bell have proposed a workshop on reviewing for medical sociology and mental health journals. This is a great idea for a workshop and I encourage you to attend. In my experience, the reviews in the sociology of mental health and medical sociology tend to be outstanding and reliable—and this keeps the quality of our output very high—but I'm sure we could all benefit from hearing from experts, novice and seasoned reviewers alike.

We also plan to hold a memorial session for Leonard Pearlin. By the time the annual meeting rolls around, it will have been over a year since his passing, but his memory lives on. Carol Aneshensel will be leading the planning and, from what I've learned thus far, it will be a combination of memorial, reflection, and forward-looking celebration of his enduring influence. In short, I'm confident it'll be a fitting tribute to the man, his legacy, and his support of our section. I'd like to thank Carol and Bill Avison in advance for organizing the memorial, as well as Sally Hillsman for enthusiastically supporting our efforts.

I hope your new academic year has started well. I look forward to working with you all over the coming year!

Jason Schnittker, Mental Health Section Chair

## Publications Committee and Journal Publications Committee: Report to the Council

### Annual Report

Report from the Publications Committee of the Sociology of Mental Health Section

The Publications Committee prepared a State of the Journal report for the Publications Committee of the American Sociological Association in November 2013 that was approved by the Council of the Section on the Sociology of Mental Health. To date, four volumes have been published. We reported an 8.5% increase in submissions between 2011-12 and 2012-13. The mean editorial lag (the number of days from submission to editorial decision) during the same time period dropped from 21.4% to 44 days. The acceptance rate over the entire operating period of the journal was 20.9%. The journal has a surplus in its operating budget. The number of subscriptions as of November 2013 was 6,594, a 2.4% increase from 2012. Data on the number of downloads indicate 37,374 during the first five months of 2013, a 14.1% increase from the same months in 2012. Elaine Wethington was nominated as the next editor. This nomination was approved by the ASA. In December 2013, The ASA Committee on Publications read and discussed the "state of the journal" report on SMH and unanimously approved it. The Committee also specifically acknowledged Bill Avison's outstanding service as inaugural editor

Ruth Hankin, Chair Publications Committee

## Secretary-Treasurer Report to the Council

### Annual Report

Good news, we are in the black! The Pearlman fund is going strong, as is the section journal Society and Mental Health! Over the last couple of years we saw a fairly substantial dip in our operating costs due to the section covering journal costs for student members. Unfortunately, we were forced to discontinue that practice and our student membership dues are down as a result. This year, thanks to our increase in book royalties and our combined reception with Medical Sociology, we are back in the black. Special thanks to the

editors and authors of our section's books (Carol Aneshensel, Alex Bierman, Jo Phelan, Teresa Scheid, Tony Brown, Mark Tausig, Rudy Fenwick, Bill Avison, Jane McLeod, Bernice Pescosolido, Scott Scheiman and Blair Wheaton) for generously donating the proceeds of their books to the section. The council is currently working on strategies to raise money so that we can assist students with membership costs in future years.

Kristen Marcussen, Secretary-Treasurer

## Mental Health Section 2014 Award Winners

The **Leonard I. Pearlman Award** for distinguished contributions was presented to **Jane McLeod** at Indiana University, Bloomington. As noted in the nomination letter, Dr. McLeod is a major figure in the Sociology of Mental Health and in the discipline, more generally. She is past Chair of the ASA Sections on the Sociology of Mental Health, Children and Youth, and Social Psychology. Her research has had a substantial impact on the sociology of mental health, where she is most widely known for her findings on the negative educational consequences of children's emotional and behavior problems and the effects of poverty on mothers' parenting practices, which predicts their children's mental health outcomes. She is the past winner of two "Best Publication" awards from our Mental Health Section (1994 and 2008). A second theme in McLeod's research agenda explicates the social structure and personality perspective in social psychology, with an emphasis on the construction and reproduction of social inequality. Finally, her work on the stress process challenges researchers to attend more closely to the ways in which the meanings of stressors are constructed in interpersonal interaction, connecting macro-level culture and structure with meso- and micro-level processes that reproduce social inequalities in stress experiences and physical and mental health outcomes.

The award for **Best Publication** was presented to Mieke Beth Thomeer, Debra Umberson, Tetyana Pudrovska for their 2013 article, "Marital Happiness and Depression: A Gendered and Relational Perspective" in

Society and Mental Health, Vol 3 (3): 151-169. **From the awards committee:** There's a lot of talk about the value of using mixed methods, but the approach remains relatively rare. Thomeer, Umberson, and Pudrovska use the approach to great effect in their paper "Marital Processes around Depression: A Gendered and Relational Perspective." They first show that depression in wives affects depression in husbands, but that depression in husbands does not affect depression in wives. They then reveal the importance of cultural scripts regarding gender in explaining this difference. The paper represents an excellent integration of theory and methods, yielding an important finding.

The award for **Best Dissertation** was presented to Eric Grollman for his work, "The Continuing Significance of Discrimination: Multiple Forms of Discrimination and Health." **From the awards committee:** Grollman's Indiana University dissertation unpacks the relationship between discrimination and health, exploring many dimensions of this relationship. He examines how multiple and simultaneous forms of discrimination matter for health. He also shows how the effects of discrimination vary by the question wording. And he explores the relationship between discrimination and sexual health. His dissertation represents a compelling deep dive into the literature and yields important discoveries at every turn.

### **Study of Mental Health Inequalities**

#### **Jane McLeod**

In my Pearlman Award address, I shared some thoughts about how we might extend the study of mental health inequalities by drawing from key insights in sociology and sociological social psychology about the nature of inequality and the processes through which it produced, maintained, and resisted. My comments were offered in the spirit of Len Pearlman's (1989) call to ground research on social stress in social arrangements and his own deep alliance with social psychology.

Inequality is a topic that continues to receive significant attention from sociologists of mental health. In our research, we use mental health as one indicator by which to gauge the

implications of disadvantage for individual well-being, in the hope that we can intervene so as to improve the lives of disadvantaged persons. We face two key challenges when doing so. First, our understanding of whether and when social disadvantage is associated with mental health is incomplete and what we know about group differences in mental health is not always consistent with a simple story of social disadvantage. For example, although blacks are socially disadvantaged relative to whites, blacks do not consistently report higher levels of distress and do not have higher rates of most mental disorders. Second, we do not yet know enough about why mental health inequalities exist for our research to be actionable, to borrow Chloe Bird's (2014) term. For research to be actionable, it must yield deep knowledge about how inequality operates in the specific local contexts with which decision-makers are concerned.

How can we change our approach to research in order to better achieve our goals? Studies of mental health inequalities continue to rely primarily on the stress process framework for explanation. We can extend the analytical potential of that framework by focusing on specific contexts within which inequality is experienced, by considering which types of stressors are more common among the groups we consider socially disadvantaged (not all are, e.g., Hatch and Dohrenwend 2007), and by acknowledging which stressors are most consequential for mental health (those that threaten valued goals and ideals, self-conceptions, and self-evaluations).

Specifically, I suggest several questions from sociological research on stratification that could help us understand unexpected patterns of mental health inequalities. These include questions about the measurement of socioeconomic stratification (e.g., big classes v. micro classes, subjective v. objective class) and about the role of intersectionality in shaping well-being. I also advocate for the analysis of "generic" social psychological processes through which inequalities are produced, maintained, and resisted within proximate social environments. I consider the role of two such processes—status/devaluation

processes and identity processes—in mental health inequalities. Status processes produce mental health inequalities by influencing people’s abilities to succeed in socially-valued pursuits, by generating stressors (i.e., discrimination), and by reducing mastery. Similarly, identity processes are relevant to mental health inequalities by shaping the identities to which we have access (e.g., full-time worker), our abilities to confirm role-based identities, the amount of role conflicts we experience, and our interpretations of stressors. These concepts help us develop more specific predictions about the types of stressors that are implicated in mental health inequalities.

In sum, I suggest that, in order to develop complete explanations for mental health inequalities, we must draw widely from scholarship on the nature of inequality, and on the processes through which inequality is produced, reproduced, and resisted in specific institutional and interactional contexts. I identified lines of research that extend that engagement and strengthen our connections with our parent discipline. I assert that this engagement will allow us to develop more concrete recommendations for reducing mental health disparities and improving the mental health of people in socially disadvantaged positions.

<sup>1</sup> Generic processes “occur in multiple contexts wherein social actors face similar or analogous problems” (Schwalbe et al. 2000; p. 421). In other words, although the specifics of these processes take different forms in different historical, institutional, and interactional contexts, the general processes are trans-situational and widely observable.

### Nominations Being Accepted For 2014 Mental Health Section Awards

#### 1) **Leonard I. Pearlin Award for Distinguished Contributions**

The ASA Sociology of Mental Health Section solicits nominations for the Leonard I. Pearlin Award for distinguished contributions to the sociological study of mental health. The award honors a scholar who has made substantial contributions in theory and/or research to the sociology of mental health. Thanks to a generous donation from Leonard Pearlin, the section

has created this annual award. Section members are encouraged to submit nominations and self-nominations are welcome. Please consider your colleagues whose contributions merit special recognition of their accomplishments. Please send nominations and a CV of the nominee by January 15, 2015 to Bruce Link, 722 West 168th Street, Room 1609, New York, NY 10032 or by e-mail to [bg11@cumc.columbia.edu](mailto:bg11@cumc.columbia.edu).

#### 2) **Award for Best Publication in Mental Health**

The ASA Sociology of Mental Health solicits nominations for the Best Publication Award. 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 between 2013 and 2015. In addition, the awards committee will conduct a search of published works for candidates for this award. Section members are encouraged to submit nominations and self-nominations are welcome. Please consider your colleagues whose work merits this recognition. Please send a letter on nomination for the award by April 1, 2015 to Bruce Link, 722 West 168th Street, Room 1609, New York, NY 10032 or by e-mail to [bg11@cumc.columbia.edu](mailto:bg11@cumc.columbia.edu).

#### 3) **Award for Best Dissertation in Mental Health**

The ASA Sociology of Mental Health section solicits nominations for the best doctoral dissertation in the area of the sociology of mental health. The dissertation should have been completed within the academic years of 2013-2014 or 2014-2015. Section Members are encouraged to submit nominations. Self-nominations are also welcome. Please send a letter of nomination and a paper based on the dissertation (Or dissertation synopsis) by April 1, 2015 to Bruce Link, 722 West 168th Street, Room 1609, New York, NY 10032 or by e-mail to [bg11@cumc.columbia.edu](mailto:bg11@cumc.columbia.edu).

## Mental Health Section Sessions for the 2015 Meetings

New Dimensions of Difference: Underexplored Variation in Mental Health

Ning Hsieh University of Chicago

This session will focus axes of variation that have been neglected in the sociology of mental health, including cross-national differences, differences by sexual orientation, differences among some racial/ethnic minorities, and other overlooked features of social status.

Stress, Stigma, Services and Institutions: Connecting Solitudes. Christian Ritter  
Northeast Ohio Medical University

William Avison argues that three major research areas in the sociology of mental health can be characterized as "solitudes" (SSSP, 2014). Stress, stigma and services researchers tend not to incorporate concepts from the other areas. Making such connections has the potential to advance the field. Submissions are sought for papers that identifying connections between stress, stigma, and services within the context of institutions in order to better understand processes affecting mental health.

## Graduate and Post-Doctoral Students on the Job Market



### **Jennifer Caputo**

My research explores how social structures influence the well-being of individuals, with a special emphasis on inequality. This interest is exemplified in my dissertation, which explores gender

differences in symptoms of psychological distress using the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). The analyses in my dissertation: (1) provide a descriptive profile of gender differences in distress in Add Health, (2) assess gender differences in the relationship between contemporary adult social roles and distress, and (3) explore how mismatches between

adolescent expectations for adulthood and current achievements affect distress, as well as gender differences therein. The dissertation elaborates existing work on gender and psychological distress in three ways. First, I use four outcomes to capture a range of ways individuals express distress (including depressive symptoms, alcohol abuse, hypertension and sleep problems). Second, I explore racial/ethnic and socioeconomic differences in the relationship between gender and distress, which have generally been overlooked. Third, prior work focuses on gender differences in distress in the general population, but recent changes in the structure and meaning of gender for contemporary young adults mean that these patterns do not necessarily extend to this cohort and need examining.

My other research projects are similarly focused on inequalities in adults' health and well-being. A paper based on my thesis (with Robin Simon) explores functional limitation status and gender differences in the emotional benefits of marriage using two longitudinal samples of adults in midlife. Published in the Journal of Health and Social Behavior in 2013, the study shows that the relationship between marriage and mental health varies by functional limitation status, gender, and the outcome explored. Dr. Simon and I are investigating health inequalities associated with another major social role in two papers examining parental status differences in health. I am also working on projects exploring the relationships between discrimination and caregiving at midlife and later health and mortality (with Eliza Pavalko and Melissa Hardy). Jennifer Caputo, Indiana University  
Dissertation: "Gender Differences in Psychological Distress among Contemporary Young Adults in the U.S." Email: [caputoj@indiana.edu](mailto:caputoj@indiana.edu)

**Please Encourage Membership in our Section! Be Sure to Renew YOUR Membership. Remember to recommend our section to graduate students.**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS****Books**

A new book (sponsored by the MH Section)

Johnson, Robert J., R. Jay Turner and Bruce G. Link (editors). 2014. *Sociology of Mental Health: Selected Topics from 40 Years*. Springer.

<http://www.springer.com/social+sciences/book/978-3-319-07796-3>

In addition, there is a call for submissions to Springerbriefs in Sociology on topics not covered in the above monograph. Here is a link to the website. Authors may send their monographs or proposals to Robert Johnson at [rjohnson@miami.edu](mailto:rjohnson@miami.edu). Here is a link about the series <http://www.springer.com/series/10410>

**Articles**

Pickersgill M (2014) Debating DSM-5: diagnosis and the sociology of critique. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 40(8): 521-525 [Special section on 'Responses to DSM-5'] <http://jme.bmj.com/content/40/8/521>

**GRADUATE STUDENT PERSPECTIVES****How to Successfully Obtain Internal and External Funding**

Lora A. Phillips Lassus

Graduate school is full of requirements and obligations that can easily take up a majority of your time. In this context, it can feel infeasible and even undesirable to commit time to grant and fellowship applications that are neither required nor guaranteed. However, the benefits of being awarded funding provide a strong incentive to make the time. Beyond the more apparent benefits of financial assistance and prestige, receiving funding often eases many of the time burdens associated with graduate school. Thus, although applications require a large up-front time commitment, obtaining funding can actually increase research productivity and speed up time to graduation.

Although I do not claim to be an expert, I believe that my experience successfully applying for grants and fellowships has provided me with experience and insight that may be helpful to others. Throughout graduate school I have been awarded a one-year institutional fellowship, an institutional travel

grant, and a three-year external fellowship from the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program (NSF GRFP). My advice draws mainly on my experience applying for the NSF GRFP, but much of it is applicable across a wide range of funding opportunities.

First, some general advice for applying:

- Before doing anything else, read through the call for applications and confirm that you qualify
  - Ask for specific advice from past applicants and recipients, and review general advice available online and in print
  - Contact the funding organization if clarification is needed or if technical issues arise
  - Start pulling together application materials well before the published deadline
  - Follow directions
  - When selecting potential writers for recommendation letters consider things like which faculty know you best, their specific position (i.e., assistant, associate, or full professor), whether they themselves have been funded, and whether they have written letters for other graduate students who were successfully funded
  - Request recommendation letters in person
  - Provide letter writers with clear, detailed instructions and all of your application materials well before the published deadline
- Many grant and fellowship applications require one or more essays, in addition to the application itself. Advice for essays includes:
- Elicit as much feedback as possible prior to submitting, and be willing to edit based on that feedback
  - Make a case for why your research question needs to be answered any why you are the best person to answer it
  - Determine whether the funding organization plans to fund research that is relevant to the discipline, relevant for public policy, or both, and frame your essay accordingly
  - Determine whether application reviewers will be academics from within the discipline, academics from outside of the discipline, laypersons, or some combination,

and provide the appropriate level of conceptual, theoretical, and methodological detail

- If applicable, connect your research to a larger project that you are involved with
- If multiple essays are required, write them so that they stand alone but also provide a coherent, interrelated narrative when read together

Of course, applying for a grant or fellowship does not guarantee that you will be funded. In fact, many awards are quite competitive. This reality should not deter applying. As discussed earlier, when funding is received the benefits far outweigh the costs of applying. In the event that a specific grant or fellowship is not awarded, having applied provides invaluable experience and a body of application materials that can be leveraged when submitting future applications, either for the next round of funding for the same grant or fellowship or for new sources of funding.



**About the Author:** Lora A. Phillips Lassus is a Ph.D. student and NSF graduate research fellow in the Department of Sociology at The Ohio State University. Her research focuses on inequality and mobility, particularly as these

processes are contextualized geographically, historically, and politically.

### **SECTION OFFICERS FOR 2014-2015**

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### **FROM THE NEWSLETTER EDITOR**

I continue to remind everyone that I am always interested in ideas that you have which will improve either the Section's newsletter or website. In addition, please send me information about your activities that you would like to share with section members or information that section members would be interested in knowing. Please put "newsletter" in the title of the email.

Please take moment to look at the MH Section Website. Struther has been working to add content to the "Resources" directory.

Here is a list of other possible contributions for future newsletters:

- Upcoming conferences, calls for papers, special issues of journals, or grant opportunities.
- Reviews of conferences
- Newly published books by section members. Please include publication date and publisher information.
- **Graduate or post-doctoral students on the market and would like to be profiled. Please send your picture, title of your dissertation, email address, affiliation, and a brief statement of your work (200-300 words).**
- Congratulatory information (e.g., promotions, new jobs, awards, honors, grants).
- Short articles on topics that cross boundaries with other sections, such as animal-human interactions and mental health. We ask that you keep submissions brief (no more than 500 words).
- Descriptions of class activities/books/films for use in undergraduate sociology of mental health and illness classes or general tips and strategies for teaching at both the graduate and undergraduate level.

# SMH

## SOCIETY AND MENTAL HEALTH

The Journal of the ASA Section on the Sociology of Mental Health

Editor: Elaine Wethington, Cornell University  
 Past Editor William R. Avison, University of Western Ontario

**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>

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