

ASA

# SOCIOLOGY OF MENTAL HEALTH

Newsletter – Winter 2025

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## Inside the Issue

- 2026 ASA Conference Section Sessions 1-2
- 2026 Section Awards Announcement 3
- News From Section Members 4
- Job Opportunities 5
- Scholar Feature: In Conversation with Allan V Horowitz 6-9

## Section Websites

[https://www.asanet.org/asa\\_sections/sociology-of-mental-health](https://www.asanet.org/asa_sections/sociology-of-mental-health)

<https://www.kent.edu/sociology/asa-mental-health-section>

## Section Bluesky Profile

<https://bsky.app/profile/asasmh.bsky.social>

Prepared by

Teresa L. Scheid, Cynthia Emami, Gabriel Varela, & Zhe Zhang

Please send updates or questions to [zhe.zhang@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:zhe.zhang@vanderbilt.edu).

# 2026 ASA Conference Section Sessions

## Title: Resilience in Challenging Times: Insights from the Sociology of Mental Health

**Organizer:** Courtney S. Thomas Tobin, University of California, Los Angeles

**Abstract:** In challenging times marked by persistent inequities and new social pressures, communities continue to cultivate resilience and mental well-being in powerful ways. This session invites papers that explore resilience, flourishing, and other positive dimensions of mental health, particularly in the face of structural adversity. We welcome theoretical and empirical contributions examining how individuals and communities resist, adapt to, or transform social conditions that threaten mental well-being. Submissions may address topics such as coping strategies, collective resilience, cultural strengths, or structural supports that foster flourishing, especially among marginalized populations. All methodological approaches and perspectives are encouraged.

## Title: Revitalizing the Sociology of Suicide

**Organizer:** Amy Johnson, Lehigh University

**Abstract:** This session invites papers that examine suicide through a sociological lens. We welcome work on suicidal ideation, attempts, and mortality, as well as other life-threatening behaviors such as addiction and risk-taking. In keeping with the theme of ASA 2026, papers that engage with ideas for building a more equitable society are encouraged, as are papers that discuss what sociology can offer suicide prevention.

## Title: Sociology of Mental Healthcare

**Organizer:** Daniel Tadmon, University of Notre Dame

**Abstract:** This session will showcase scholarship on the organization, delivery, and experience of mental health treatment. We welcome papers that examine how social processes and inequalities shape access to care, treatment experiences, and outcomes, as well as research investigating the social life of psychiatric, psychotherapeutic, or other interventions. We are especially interested in papers with a focus on understanding what mental health treatment does, for whom, and with what effects, in an era of growing need and systemic change.

## Title: Sociology of Mental Health Section Open Call Paper Session

**Organizer:** Alexander Vosick Barnard, New York University

**Abstract:** This session is open to all papers that deal with mental health, broadly defined. Papers ranging from topics as diverse as the social determinants of distress and resilience, the social construction of diagnostic categories, the political economy and organization of mental health services, and more are encouraged. All methodological approaches are welcome.

# 2026 ASA Conference Section Sessions

## Title: Sociology that Advances Equity in Mental Health

**Organizer:** Myles Moody, The University of Alabama at Birmingham

**Abstract:** In this era of political turmoil, what can sociology do to ensure that equity in mental health is more widely distributed? This session includes papers that expand our knowledge of mental health inequities and contribute to more equitable outcomes. We invite submissions that explore how structural stigma, intersectional inequalities, community and population-level determinants of mental well-being, and other structural and social factors shape mental health across diverse communities. The session is especially interested in work that highlights marginalized perspectives, questions dominant frameworks, or indicates pathways toward systemic change in mental health care, research, and policy.

## Dates to Remember

- **November 4, 2025** Submissions open
- **February 25, 2026, 9:00 p.m. EST** Deadline for submissions
- **Early April, 2026** Acceptance Notification
- **August 7-11, 2026** Annual meeting

# 2026 Section Awards Announcement

## Leonard I. Pearlin Award for Distinguished Contributions

**Description--** This award is given for distinguished contributions to the sociological study of mental health. Thanks to a 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 should include a CV of the nominee and a letter of support describing the nominee's contributions to the sociology of mental health. Nominations should be sent to the Awards Committee Chair for the Mental Health Section, Marisa Young at [myoung@mcmaster.ca](mailto:myoung@mcmaster.ca) by **January 15, 2026**.

## Award for Best Article in Mental Health

**Description--** This award is given for the best-published article in the area of the sociology of mental health. To be eligible for the award, the publication must have appeared in print between August 2024 and August 2026. The awards committee will also conduct a search of works published in the past two years for potential candidates for this award. Letters of nomination for this award should be sent to the Awards Committee Chair for the Mental Health Section, Marisa Young at [myoung@mcmaster.ca](mailto:myoung@mcmaster.ca), by **February 1, 2026**.

## Award for Best Dissertation in Mental Health

**Description--** This award is given for the best doctoral dissertation in the area of the sociology of mental health. To be considered for this award, the dissertation must have been defended within the two academic years (2024-2025 and 2025-2026) prior to the annual meeting. While not required, a letter from your dissertation advisor would be helpful. Please send a letter of nomination and a dissertation synopsis or a paper based on the dissertation to the Awards Committee Chair for the Mental Health Section, Marisa Young at [myoung@mcmaster.ca](mailto:myoung@mcmaster.ca), by **March 1, 2026**.

## Graduate Student Paper Award

**Description--** This award is given to a current graduate student member of the section for the best published or unpublished article, book, or chapter in the area of mental health. To be considered for this award, the paper must have been completed within the two academic years (2024-2025 and 2025-2026) prior to the annual meeting by a current graduate student as the first author. Papers authored by more than one student is 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 to the Awards Committee Chair for the Mental Health Section, Marisa Young at [myoung@mcmaster.ca](mailto:myoung@mcmaster.ca), by **April 1, 2026**.

# News from Section Members

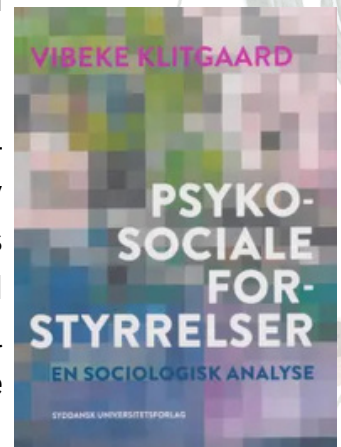
## New Publications

- From **Haoming Song**, Case Western Reserve University

- Song, Haoming. "Structural stigma and mental health among lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults: Policy protection and cultural acceptance." *Social Science & Medicine* 373 (2025): [117985](#).
- Song, Haoming. "Revisiting Marriage and Physical and Mental Health Among Partnered Gay and Lesbian Adults." *LGBT Health* (2025): [23258292251385566](#).
- Song, Haoming, and Yuanchang Zhao. "Perceived Social Isolation Among Older Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Heterosexual Adults: The Role of Relationship Status." *Research on Aging* (2025): [01640275251383545](#).

-From **Vibeke Klitgaard**: I have a new book published by a Danish university press, Syddansk Universitetsforlag. An English translation of the abstract can be found below.

**Description**--The book is based on two years of participant observation and 24 qualitative interviews in two community psychiatry daycare centers in two very different socio-economic districts in the City of Copenhagen. The book focuses on the patients' communication and behavior in the two daycare centers and the stigmatization they face from their social environment. Psychosocial disorders have the same three-part structure as somatic diseases: the involuntary element, function reduction and suffering. But unlike somatic diseases, which come from the body, psychosocial disorders take place in the medium of meaning. Patients' communication and behavior are analyzed in relation to the level of meaning they create, introducing "meaning disordered" as an analytical tool. In the daycare centers, there was ample opportunity to observe major psychosocial disorders, such as incomprehensible psychotic expressions, hallucinations, massive delusions, non-stop speech streams, paranoid delusions, bizarre communication and behavior etc. Their symbolic content may change gradually with the development of society, but they still appear as meaning disordered phenomena.



**Vibeke Klitgaard** holds an MA in cultural sociology from the University of Copenhagen with a thesis on the history of psychiatry in 1988. Admitted to the "École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales" in Paris, with a project on phenomenological psychiatry in 1975. Employed on the 'Evaluation project for community psychiatry in the Municipality of Copenhagen' in 1989. Enrolled as a doctoral student at the Department of Sociology, Lund University, in 1995. At the same time included on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' contingency list with many assignments to international organizations over a number of years. Swedish doctoral thesis on district psychiatry completed in 2021.

# Job Opportunities

- **Hiring - Endowed Chair of Public Policy (Knight Professor of Public Policy), University of North Carolina at Charlotte**

**Description--**The College of Humanities & Earth and Social Sciences (CHESS) at UNC Charlotte invites applications for the Knight Distinguished Professorship of Public Policy, a full-time, tenured faculty position to begin August 10, 2026. Sociologists are eligible.

The Knight Professorship of Public Policy serves as a catalyst for studying critical regional needs in Charlotte and other rapidly growing urban areas in the southeastern United States. Such needs include, but are not limited to, transportation, growth management, economic development, health, education, economic mobility, sustainability, and environmental issues, especially energy policy. The Knight Professor will have an appointment within an appropriate CHESS Department and will act as a faculty affiliate to the UNC Charlotte Urban Institute. The Urban Institute is a non-partisan, applied research and community outreach institute at UNC Charlotte, seeking solutions to the social, economic, and environmental challenges facing our region. The Knight Professor will also be a core member of the interdisciplinary Public Policy Ph.D. program, teaching and mentoring doctoral students. <https://jobs.charlotte.edu/postings/65556>

- **Postdoc Opportunity at the VA Portland Health Care System**

**Description:** We are pleased to share a postdoctoral fellowship opportunity at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Portland Health Care System. Applications are due in early January. This fellowship is well-suited for scholars interested in mental health research, offering strong funding, substantial autonomy, and robust institutional support. Section members are also encouraged to explore postdoctoral opportunities at their local VA medical centers, many of which offer fellowships with a strong focus on mental health.

**Contact for more information:**

Kate LaForge, PhD (she/her)

Health Services Fellow

HSR&D Center to Improve Veteran Involvement in Care (CIVIC)

VA Portland Health Care System

[Kate.Laforge@va.gov](mailto:Kate.Laforge@va.gov)

# Reflections on the Sociology of Mental Health - In conversation with Allan V. Horowitz

by Teresa Scheid, University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Professor Horwitz was already a leading “giant” in the Sociology of Mental Health when I was a graduate student. He won the Pearlin Award in 2006, The Leo Reeder Award in 2016, and the James Greenly Award in 2017; all of them lifetime achievement awards. He has also been recognized by his home institution, Rutgers University, receiving the Board of Governors Award for Outstanding Research Accomplishments in 2003; the Scholar -Teacher Award in 2010, and the Daniel Gorenstein Memorial Award in 2013. The awards all attest to his outstanding record of scholarly achievements in terms of grantsmanship, publications, invited talks and lectures, editorial boards, research review boards, and leadership roles.

One of Dr. Horwitz’s great strengths is his ability to synthesize and frame current intellectual streams, with both theoretical and empirical depth and breadth, providing a lens on the past and a path to the future. Allan continues to serve as an exemplar, guiding the direction of the discipline with his theoretical and empirical writings. I am sure every reader to this newsletter has cited his work, but do take time to look over his extensive vita. His publications cover the broad array of mental health scholarship and provide insights into how the discipline has progressed, showing both steady advancement in our knowledge base (i.e. normal science) and path-breaking paradigm shifts. Allan’s dissertation research began with a fairly simple question, “how do people get into psychiatric treatment?” As with all dissertations, the availability of data was an issue, and Allan drew on Simmel’s theoretical insights to speculate about the role of social networks and his dissertation research contributed to what is now a well established research trajectory in mental health research.

I always found inspiration from Dr. Horwitz’s talks and remember with a smile his admitting that learning to put his diagrams and figures into PowerPoint was a major accomplishment – which it was “back in the day” - before power point templates made the job much easier. However, my clearest memory was of the first mental health dinner I attended, following a day of mental health sessions at the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) meetings. At that time, there was no ASA section for mental health and mental health scholars found their home in the SSSP, many of whom assumed leadership positions in both the ASAs and the SSSPs. The SSSPs have always been a welcoming place for graduate students and junior faculty to present their work and receive feedback from established faculty, an important form of professional socialization and mentorship. I was working with Dr. Virginia Hiday on her NIMH funded study of deinstitutionalization and had presented a paper and was invited to the mental health group dinner by Dr. Hiday. I do not remember the place, but it was a long table with a dozen or so notables, including Dr. Horwitz who was seated next to me. Luckily, I had something to talk about as I had written a review for one of his earliest books, *The Social Control of Mental Illness*, based on Donald Black’s theoretical framework. Dr. Black served on Dr. Horwitz’s dissertation committee and was an important mentor in shaping Allan’s understanding of relationships between theory and empirical data that both verifies and extends theoretical postulates (see the 1990 book *The Logic of Social Control*).

That initial dinner meeting led to an ongoing discussion of theoretical debates, which we continued over the course of our recent Zoom conversations. Allan is not a fan of rigid epistemological assumptions and cautions us to “not think of things as absolutes.” Instead, we need to consider the social context which plays a crucial role in determining and modifying the scope conditions of any theoretical postulate. For example, in considering the ongoing debate over what outcome sociologists of mental health should assess, Dr. Horwitz stated it is “not either categorical or continuous” and that neither fits neatly into psychological practice. This is important for those scholars studying new forms of therapy and the role of reimbursement mechanisms on treatment outcomes. The social context for the understanding of mental health is certainly undergoing a seismic change as “everyone is talking about mental health, especially children’s mental health, and social media.” Sociology is at the forefront, with “the understanding that mental health is less an individual issue and that it is more of a socio-cultural issue.” At the same time our access to secondary sources of data is being derailed, which may lead back to earlier periods of firsthand data collection and immersion in the field.

I asked Dr. Horwitz what the important exemplars were in his own work and he were quickly brought up Emile Durkheim. Durkheim’s contributions to our understanding of the social context of mental health emerged during a similar period of major transformation and social change. During such times, new forms of knowledge and social structures will emerge, as they will today. Allan provided the example of our renewed understanding of the concept of trauma as a social fact with historical, cultural, and social antecedents and consequences. I was reminded of earlier works in the Sociology of Mental Health on community trauma and solidarity. Allan calls on all of us to read (or reread) the classics, including not only Durkheim, Simmel, and Weber, but subsequent generations of scholars (for example George Herbert Mead, Robert Merton, and C. Wright Mills) for theoretical insights into our current experience of mental health and distress.

At a dinner a few years later, Dr. Horwitz spent a great deal of time “quizzing” me about my teaching and research and I would learn later that he had written one of my tenure letters. After my promotion we began to collaborate on the first edition of *The Handbook for the Study of Mental Health* with Allan taking the lead in obtaining the contract with Cambridge and eliciting authors for the 31-chapter volume, which remains a “Who’s Who” in the discipline, many of whom have continued to revise their chapters for subsequent editions. The first edition also earned a considerable sum in royalties which were given to the newly founded ASA section on Mental Health and used to support graduate student memberships. Allan wrote the introductory chapter to the 3rd and 4th editions, titled “An Overview of Sociological Perspectives on Definitions, Causes, and Responses to Mental Health Distress” around which you could teach a whole graduate course. He then wrote the forward to the 4th edition, which I quote at length, because it exemplifies Dr. Horwitz’s tremendous impact on our discipline.

The chapters in this volume demonstrate the great value of a sociological approach to mental health. For the past several decades, mental health professionals, epidemiologists, policy-makers, advocacy groups, and the media have typically conflated studies of mental disorder and of mental health, combining these two separate phenomena into a single entity and calling both mental disorders.” Instead of showing how individual problems reflect social conditions, the result was to reduce social problems to individual pathologies that come to be treated with medication or therapy. The fundamental message of the sociology of mental

health, in contrast, is that much distress results from stressful social arrangements but is not a mental disorder. The chapters in this volume epitomize the advantages of studying mental health as a societal phenomenon that is distinct from mental pathology but is an intrinsic aspect of social life.

Dr. Horwitz continued to build on his considerable depth and breadth in the understanding of the sociology of mental health in an extensive record of journal articles in leading scholarly outlets, both within and outside sociology. At the same time, he began to expand his exemplary record by publishing 12 scholarly books. Probably his most notable citation in Sociology is the 2002 *Creating Mental Illness* (University of Chicago Press). That book won the best publication award from the Mental Health Section and was a finalist in the British Sociology's Best Publication Award. I remember a conversation with Allan about that book, where he admitted he began from the assumption that the biological case for mental illness was reasonably strong, but in thoroughly reviewing the scholarly literature across a variety of disciplines, he found the basis for the social construction of mental illness to be quite compelling. Five years later he and Jerome Wakefield published *The Loss of Sadness: How Psychiatry Transformed Normal Sadness into a Psychiatric Disorder*. This book was reviewed in the New York Times Book Review, an achievement in that the audiences for their book had an impact well beyond Sociology. *The Loss of Sadness* won the American Publishers Best Book Award in 2007 and has been translated into seven languages. *The Loss of Sadness* was followed by *All We Have to Fear: Psychiatry's Transformation of Normal Anxiety into a Mental Disorder*. This book also has a compelling message about the importance of social context in understanding mental health problems and is even more relevant today in the midst of our collective angst. I often use the quote from the book citing Miles Davis, "if you aren't nervous you are not paying attention." We live in an age of not just anxiety, but fear and future scholars will need to address the changed social context shaping that fear and they will find many useful insights in *All We Have to Fear*. I have assigned all three books to my mental health graduate students who come from counseling and social work backgrounds and Allan's core insights about how we assign illness labels to normal social reactions have had a tremendous impact on their understanding of mental health.

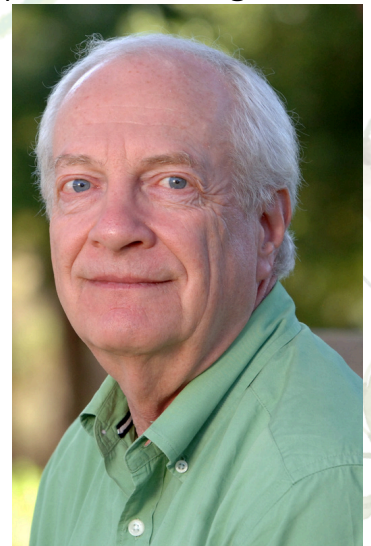
I admit I got behind with Dr. Horwitz's publications given the disruption of COVID, during which he published a book every year: *Between Madness and Sanity: Mental Illness from Ancient Greece to the Era of Neuroscience*, 2020, Oxford; *DSM: A History of Psychiatry's Bible*, 2021, Johns Hopkins University (which was reviewed by both the Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal) and a 2022 book with Johns Hopkins *Personality and Its Disorders*. I provided the titles to give the reader a sense of the tremendous breadth of Allan's knowledge of mental health in its historical, cultural, and social context. He is currently working on what he says is his last manuscript, also to be published by Johns Hopkins, but I have my doubts as to whether that will be his last. The title is *Darwin's Descendants: Evolutionary Theories of Human Behavior and Their Critics*, which argues that neither perspective (evolution and biological or the sociological) can fully explain mental illness. In that book Dr. Horwitz uses numerous examples to show that the relationship between nature and nurture all depends on what phenomenon you are talking about. Some examples include incest avoidance, where biology shapes cultural norms and at the other extreme declines in fertility, where socio-cultural practices are shaping evolutionary trends. Another example is to consider the social origins of courage versus cowardice in terms of evolutionary demands for survival. Dr. Horwitz's writings on

medication show the complex interplay between biology and culture in understanding mental health and its treatment. I asked Allan who he wanted to read the book, and he responded “the NPR crowd.” I look forward to it being reviewed on not only NPR, but in the New York Times Review of Books. Let’s all read it and maybe have an on-online book club with Allan leading us through the discussion.

Retirement is what we can all look forward to with time to focus on the big ideas and projects and not have to deal with administering grants or completing research without adequate support while also learning to teach online or wondering if our students rely upon AI to do their reading and writing. Instead, along with Dr. Horwitz, we can continue to explore the larger debates that shape not only our discipline, but the social understanding of mental health. I am looking forward to reading what may or may not be the last book he publishes, and to reading what he considers to be his best book *What’s Normal: Reconciling Biology and Culture*, 2016 with Oxford University Press.

I would also like to provide a little “social context” to Dr. Horwitz’s stellar scholarly achievements. What is impressive is that Dr. Allan continued his strong record of scholarship while serving in a number of labor-intensive administrative positions: Chair of the Sociology Department (three times), ongoing administration of the Institute of Health Policy and the NIMH PhD Mental Health training grant (with Dr. David Mechanic), and Dean of Social and Behavioral Sciences in the Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences. What many may not fully appreciate is that Allan also served as the primary parent for three adolescent daughters who were an endless source of both joy and consternation. No surprise that his professional and personal experience provided keen insights into his clear identification of the social context of mental health, not to mention teenage angst.

An enduring aspect of Dr. Horwitz’s career has been his mentorship of graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, and junior faculty who have gone on to become leading exemplars themselves. Over 80 postdoctoral fellows developed strong research records as a consequence of their time at Rutgers, many of whom have subsequently become leaders in their respective disciplines. The Rutgers postdoctoral program was truly interdisciplinary and trained not only sociologists, but historians, psychologists, psychiatrists, public policy experts, and social workers. An important backdrop to all of these many demands on his time is that Allan is always thoughtful and present: listening, reading, learning, writing and finding ways to engage those around him in the day-to-day joys of a meal shared, time with friends and family, an outing to the museum, and ongoing travel. He continues to read widely, with both a fiction and a non-fiction book on the night table and also reading to children at the local library. He has certainly made the Sociology of Mental Health a leading academic discipline with widespread recognition beyond Sociology as well as enriching the lives of so many around him.



**Allan V. Horwitz, Professor Emeritus  
Rutgers University**