SOC 513: Perspectives on Mental Health
Monday, 6:00–9:00 p.m. in Room 206 of Tarbutton Hall

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Course Subject and Objectives:

This course entertains two broad questions within which numerous models, theories, and empirical studies are employed. First, what is the nature and burden of mental illnesses and the benefits of mental health? Second, what are the causes of mental illnesses and mental health? This course employs a bio–psycho–social causal model of health. It therefore examines mental health and illness in terms of their proximal (biological), medial (psychological), and the distal (sociological) causes. This course is intended to train students to be theoretically-driven, interdisciplinary scholars of ‘public’ mental health.

Requirements:

(1) Two in class reviews (40% of grade). You get to choose a week’s topic from the seminar schedule under which you want to find an outside article to review. I will assign your second review by choosing a week’s topic for you. In both case, you should find and article (ideally empirical articles as chapters are often very hard to review) that is not already assigned for that week’s reading. You must choose an article that “fits” that week’s topic and it should be made clear how or why that article is relevant from your review and presentation. You will be graded on your presentation as well as my assessment of your actual review. You do not have to send the actual review to the class, bring a copy only for me. A good review consists of a summary of the article, identification of its strengths (e.g., how does it help make the point(s) of that week’s topic) and weakness or limitations (be constructive here), statement of how this reading fits with others and the topic of that day’s seminar, and identification of new questions stemming from the article, and thoughtful question (or set of questions) for leading the discussion. DO NOT SIMPLY READ YOUR REVIEW TO THE CLASS; rather, think of this assignment as a formal presentation (yes, you can and should prepare slides to provide as handouts and other aids for your presentation) and an opportunity to create thorough notes of important empirical articles to be used later (e.g., by Sociology students taking prelims). My evaluation will be based on thoroughness, thoughtfulness, and the clarity with which you present and explain the paper (reason for the study, background or theory, measurement, main findings, and how it extends our understanding of that week’s subject matter).

(2) Paper (40% of grade). The objective of the research paper is to allow you to investigate a topic for your own rationale. I do not want you to recycle papers done for previous seminars UNLESS you change that paper substantially (you must alert me to the fact that you plan to work from another paper already graded in another course if that is your plan).

I want to encourage you to think of pulling together a publishable empirical paper for this semester (BUT THIS IS NOT A REQUIREMENT!). For example, I have two nationally representative, longitudinal data sets from which most of you can find variables that reflect your research interests. The first is the Child Development Supplement of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, which is
a study of adolescents, ages 12 to 18, with measures of their family, schools, and neighborhoods. This study includes my measure of mental health and the Child Depression Inventory. The second study is the Midlife in the United States (MIDUS) national study of adults ages 25 to 74 in 1995 and the 10-year follow up of the same individuals in 2005. Links to both of these data sets can be found at my faculty webpage in the Department of Sociology webpage (the MIDUS link is entitled “MacArthur Foundation Research”), which provides the content of the surveys.

The first draft should be no longer than 4,000 words (this does not include tables, figure, or references). The font should be 12pt. with one-inch margins all around and double-spaced. A single page contains 250-275 words; using 275 as the upper limit, this means that a 4,000 words draft consists of 14.5 pages of text.

(3) Peer review (20% of your grade). Pretend that Dr. Keyes is the editor of a journal in which you are submitting your paper for review. Please email me your paper before the 2nd to last (i.e., April 18th) seminar meeting. I will then model this process after the actual process of peer review for publication. I will email your paper to at least 2 seminar members for review (those reviews must be independent; do not collaborate or talk to each other about your review), along with instructions and a review form. Dr. Keyes will provide you with notes about good reviews. The reviewers are to provide typed and detailed review comments within a week and submit the complete review by email to Dr. Keyes by or immediately following the last seminar meeting. After the last seminar meeting, I will grade the reviews and send a review letter and instructions back to the author of that paper.

Your final drafts of your papers must be submitted along with a letter of resubmission that details where in the manuscript and how you responded to the specific comments and suggestions of your outside reviews. You must also justify cases where you do not do what was recommended in the reviews. Your final papers can be expanded by 1,500 words to accommodate reviewer suggestions.

Final Papers due (email only in emergency) are due no later than 5pm one week after our final meeting on April 25th.


Schedule

January 25: What is mental illness? Who and where are the mentally ill?
(1) Chs. 1 and 8 from E. Fuller Torrey, 2008. The Insanity Offense.
(4) NPR report on “A First Rate Madness” by Nassir Ghaemi:
February 1: Mental Illness and Psychiatric Epidemiology: Progress and Pitfalls

February 8: Mental Health: Is It Really More Than the Absence of Mental Illness?

February 15: Biological Approaches and the Medicalization of Mental Illness
(2) “Americanization of Mental Illness” by Ethan Watters at http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/10/magazine/10psyche-t.html

February 22: Sociological Approaches to the Etiology of and Response to Mental Illness


February 29:
The Sociological Stress Processes and Mental Illness

March 7-11:
Spring Break

March 14:
Stressors and Social Psychological Processes


March 21:
Social Stratification and Mental Health and Well-Being


March 28:
The Paradox of Race and Mental Health
April 4: Gender and Mental Health

April 11: Social Connection, Social Integration and Mental Health

April 18: Social Roles and Mental Health

April 25: Towards Integration: Studies Linking Bio-Psycho-Social Levels
