Sociology of Mental Health and Illness (920:631)

Spring 2014
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This course serves as a general introduction to the sociology of mental health and illness. The first part of the course, presented by Professor Horwitz, focuses on the basic theoretical assumptions of social constructionist approaches to the study of mental illness and their differences with other approaches to this topic. The second part, presented by Professor Rosenfield, focuses on current theoretical approaches in the sociology of mental health and the social inequalities and stigma associated with mental health problems.

Most of the reading will be posted on the course’s sakai site. Discussion questions should also be posted to this site.

Course grades are based on three requirements: 1) leading two discussion sections (one in each part of the course) over the course of the semester (10%); 2) class participation (20%); and 3) a research paper on a course-related topic of the student’s choosing that the instructor has approved (70%). Students will discuss their ideas for this paper in class on March 11 and present an oral summary of the paper on April 29.

Learning Goals:
• Acquire a broad understanding of the most important theoretical and empirical approaches taken regarding the connections between mental health and illness and social factors
• Learn to critique the major assumptions of each major approach and understand their strengths and weaknesses
• Understand the development of the current diagnostic system in psychiatry and related mental health professions, its connection to social factors, and its usefulness for various social interests
• Critically analyze the conceptual and empirical underpinnings of at least one major psychiatric diagnosis
• Identify at least one significant new research questions related to the study of the sociology of mental health and illness

Several methods will be used in this class to measure achievement of these objectives:
• Participating in in-depth weekly discussions of assigned readings
• Leading the discussion for two seminars
• Writing a final research paper or research proposal

The outline of topics and dates is:

1-21 Overview of the course and discussion of student and instructor interests. No readings.

1-28 Four Basic Approaches to the Sociology of Mental Illness


Recommended


2-4 Creating Mental Illness: The Case of the DSM


Recommended


2-11 Creating Depression and Anxiety


Recommended


2-18 Creating Other Categories of Mental Disorder


Recommended


2-25 Creating Biological Psychiatry I: Psychotropic Drugs

Guest Lecturer – Amy LeClair


Allan V. Horwitz and Jerome C. Wakefield. 2007. The Loss of Sadness, Ch. 9.

Recommended


3-4 Creating Biological Psychiatry II: Genes


Allan V. Horwitz and Jerome C. Wakefield. 2007. The Loss of Sadness, Ch. 8.


Recommended


3-11 Oral Student Presentations of Ideas for Papers

3-18 Spring Break

3-25 The Stress Theory of Mental Illness


R. Jay Turner; Blair Wheaton; Donald A. Lloyd. 1995. The Epidemiology of Social Stress American Sociological Review 60:104-125

Recommended

Ronald C. Kessler. Sex Differences in DSM-III-R Psychiatric Disorders in the United States: Results From the National Comorbidity Survey. JAMWA 53:148-158


4-1 Social Psychological Approaches


Recommended


3-29 Social Inequalities and Mental Health: On Social Class


Recommended


4-5 Social Inequalities and Mental Health: On Gender and Race/Ethnicity


Recommended


4-12 Stigma and Labeling Theory


Recommended

Phelan, Jo C; Link, Bruce G; Stueve, Ann; Pescosolido, Bernice A. 2000. “Public conceptions of mental illness in 1950 and 1996: What is Mental Illness and is it to be Feared?” Journal of Health and Social Behavior. 41:188-207.


Bruce G. Link and Jo C. Phelan. 2001. “Conceptualizing Stigma.” Annual Review of Sociology. 27:363-385


4-26 Student Reports of Final Papers