

Duke University

**Department of
Sociology**

GRADUATE QUALIFYING EXAMINATION

MEDICAL SOCIOLOGY

August 26, 2004

This examination has three sections. You must answer questions I and II. In Part III, you may select any one question. Your answers should be as complete as possible. They should not exceed a total of fifteen (15) double-spaced pages, excluding the references. You should follow a journal format (e.g., American Sociological Review) for references and citations. You have 24 hours from the time you receive your exam to return it to Claudette Parker as an email attachment.

No discussion of any Qualifying Examination with any other person is permitted until after August 27, 2004, when all examinations have been completed.

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Answer both questions I and II. Answer one of the remaining questions.

- I. For more than 50 years, the health implications of stress and socioeconomic status (SES) have received a great deal of attention in medical sociology. Over time, the theories, methods, and resulting knowledge about the links between stress or SES and health evolved substantially. For the purposes of this question, focus on either stress or SES and either physical or mental health. Describe the ways that the theoretical frameworks used to study the relationships between stress or SES and health have evolved over time. Also describe the ways that theoretical/conceptual development over time has influenced other aspects of research on stress or SES and health (e.g., study design, measurement, data analysis). We are not interested in all the ways that research elements have changed over time, only those that are theory-driven. Finally, provide a critical evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of current theoretical/conceptual frameworks guiding research on stress or SES and health.

- II. Two researchers are interested in the course of depression – that is, how depression changes over time and the social factors associated with changes over time. Both investigators will collect five waves of data: at baseline and at 6, 12, 18, and 24 months after baseline. One investigator wants to examine changes in levels of depressive symptoms over time. The other investigator wants to study transitions in and out of depressive episodes. First, describe the basic research designs and methods and content of measurement that each investigator will need to use. Second, describe statistical analyses that would be appropriate for each investigator's research question. Provide rationales for your decisions.

Answer one of questions III – V.

- III. Both medical sociologists and health policy researchers are interested in health disparities. Medical sociologists have emphasized three primary types of stratification as determinants of health disparities: SES, gender, and race/ethnicity. Select one of these types of stratification. What is known about the extent to which and ways in which it is related to health disparities? What are some of the issues that complicate our understanding of this type of stratification as a determinant of health inequalities? Finally, what are high priority issues for future research on this topic?
- IV. Both social support and social integration have been hypothesized to have protective effects on health. First, define social support and social integration, clarifying their meanings, similarities, and differences. Second, summarize the state of empirical evidence with regard to the effects of social support and social integration on physical or mental health. Third, provide a more detailed discussion of these concepts by selecting two articles that you believe illustrate the power of social support and social integration in understanding health. Provide rationales for your choices.
- V. Efforts to integrate life course principles with stress research have increased dramatically over the past decade. First, describe the ways in which life course principles can contribute to our understanding of the links between stress and illness. Second, select two pieces of empirical research that you believe to be strong illustrations of the integration of life course principles and stress theory/research. Summarize both studies and provide the rationales for your choices.