

Duke University

Department
of Sociology

GRADUATE QUALIFYING EXAMINATION

MEDICAL SOCIOLOGY

September 1, 2005

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 September 2, 2005, when all examinations have been completed.

I. Consider two broad theoretical perspectives in medical sociology: (1) social structure and health and (2) the social construction of illness. Select one of these theoretical traditions; then select a specific theory within that tradition. First, state the central premises and propositions of that theory. Second, critically evaluate the theory (e.g., what are its strengths and weaknesses, how well does it fit the criteria generally used to evaluate theories). Third, select an article that you believe does a good job of articulating and testing the theory. Provide a brief synopsis of the study and a rationale for your choice.

II. It is widely recognized that there is much to be gained by studying sociological research questions using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods. Unfortunately, this seldom happens in practice. First, select a research topic in medical sociology that has been studied primarily (or exclusively) using either quantitative or qualitative methods. Second, describe the research question and summarize major findings to date and the methods upon which those findings are based. Third, describe what research in the other methodological tradition would add to our knowledge of this issue. For example, if research to date has been based primarily on quantitative methods, describe what would be gained by using qualitative methods to address the same issue. Fourth -- and this should be the most detailed part of your answer -- design a study to investigate this research question using the other methodological approach. Thus, if most research has been based on quantitative methods, design a study that would address the research question using qualitative methods. We recognize that the study design cannot be detailed, but provide basic information on sampling, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation.

III. Answer one of the following questions (A-D).

A. One of the major emphases of research in the social construction of illness has been identifying the factors that lead to changes in diagnoses over time, especially the establishment of new diseases or disorders. First, what are the basic steps or processes involved in the construction of a new diagnosis? Second, provide an illustration of this process in action – select a recently established diagnosis and describe how this specific set of symptoms came to be defined as a diagnosis. (We define “recently established” quite broadly, covering the last 50 years or so – the diagnosis should be sufficiently recent that its history can be readily traced in accessible materials.)

B. One of the current “hot topics” in stratification research is whether it is years of schooling *per se* or academic credentials that explain the relationships between education and various outcomes. Little, if any, research on the relationship between education and health has examined the differential effects of years of schooling vs. highest degree earned on physical or mental health outcomes.

First, select either physical OR mental health (or a specific physical OR mental illness) as your outcome of interest. Second, summarize what is known about the relationship between education and the outcome you selected. Pay special attention to how education is measured in research to date. Third, do the results suggest a pattern in which either years of schooling or highest degree performs better in understanding the distribution of your health outcome? If so, describe the pattern and speculate about why one measurement is superior to the other. If the results don't permit identification of a pattern, please make a case for why you would or would not expect to find a pattern in a study designed to investigate this issue.

- C. Both social support and social integration have been examined as resources that help to protect against mental illness. First, define both social support and social integration, emphasizing their similarities and differences. Second, what are the major ways in which social support and social integration have been operationalized in research on mental health? Third, summarize the research findings about the relationships between both social support and social integration and mental health. Finally, based on research to date, what are the similarities and differences between the effects of social support and social integration on mental health?
- D. Research on the relationships between stress and mental health has matured substantially over the past several decades. The evolution of the conceptualization, measurement, and temporal orientation of stress has been a major part of that maturation. First, describe the current state-of-the-science regarding the conceptualization and operationalization of social stress. Second, in what ways has our understanding of the effects of stress on health been advanced by changes in the conceptual and operational definitions of stress?