

**Duke University**

**Department of Sociology**

**GRADUATE QUALIFYING EXAMINATION**

**MEDICAL SOCIOLOGY**

**August 31, 2006**

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 1, 2006, when all examinations have been completed.

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- I. Medical sociology is sometimes criticized as being atheoretical. Your job is to prove the critics wrong. First, select a theory used in medical sociology and state its central premises and propositions. 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. Although not all research questions can be addressed using mixed methods, many – probably most – can. First, select a research topic in medical sociology that can be studied using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Second, describe the research question and briefly summarize major findings to date and the methods upon which those findings are based. Third, and this should be the most detailed part of your answer, design a study to investigate this research question using the both qualitative and quantitative approaches. We recognize that the study design cannot be detailed, but provide basic information on sampling, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation. Most importantly, describe how quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection complement each other in shedding light on the research question.
  
- 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. Mortality is an outcome that is central to both medical sociology and demography. Although there has been substantial cross-fertilization across these two subfields, there are important differences in the ways that medical sociologists and demographers study mortality. First, describe the major differences in the theories and methods that medical sociologists and demographers employ in studying mortality. Second, select one study from each subfield that is a clear example of that subfield. Briefly describe each study and justify your choices.
- C. The distinction between disease and illness was first introduced by Irving Zola more than 50 years ago. What is the nature of this distinction? What are the theoretical foundations upon which the distinction rests? Describe an empirical study that demonstrates the consequences of taking this distinction seriously. Finally, select a study in which this distinction was not taken into account. Briefly describe the study and speculate about any problems that result from this omission (or explain why the omission was not a problem).
- 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?