

# Section on Mental Health

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## From the Chair's Desk: Scott Schieman, University of Toronto



Greetings and "warm" wishes from Toronto! This winter issue is the first of two newsletters that you'll receive during my tenure. The second (summer) newsletter will arrive before we convene for the August ASA meetings in Philadelphia. I will also continue to post time-sensitive announcements via our section's listserv.

Before I introduce the newsletter, I would first like to thank my predecessor, Kristi Williams,

for her service to the section last year and the incredible support she has provided to me during our transition. I would also like to thank all of the current members of council for their dedication and support—and a special thanks goes to our newsletter editor, Richard Adams, for his ongoing service and dedication to our section. Along with graduate student editor, Struther Van Horn, Richard continues to provide a valued service, and they have both done an amazing job!

This newsletter has several important announcements. First, you'll find a recap of the Mental Health Section 2016 Award winners: David R. Williams (the Leonard I. Pearlin Award for Distinguished Contributions), Anna S. Mueller and Seth Abrutyn (Best Publication), and Jennifer Caputo (Best Dissertation). Congratulations to them on their achievements! You will also find the text from Jason Schnittker's introduction of David Williams for the Pearlin Award. Next you'll see a range of announcements, including a call for paper submissions for the ASA conference, graduate students on the market, and the call for nominations. Please consider nominating yourself, a colleague, or a deserving graduate student for one of these awards.

Having reached more than 300 members by the ASA deadline of September 30th, our section has been allotted two open sessions and a roundtable session. Two aspects of my vision for our section this year involves (1) reflecting on the state of our section and thinking about its past and current directions and (2) developing and enhancing connects with other ASA sections. In that spirit, I have organized one session for invited papers titled: "The Sociological Study of Stress: Applications, Elaborations, and Critiques." A second session for invited papers is titled: "Developing and Testing Creative Synergies between the Sociology of Mental Health and Organizations, Occupations, and Work," organized by Jonathan Koltai and Atsushi Narisada.

*From the Chair's Desk (continued)*

Jennifer Caputo has graciously agreed to organize the "Sociology of Mental Health Refereed Roundtables (Open Topics)." In addition, there will be an invited panel to discuss the following: "Is the Sociology of Mental Health at a Crossroads? Some Historical Reflections and Where We Go from Here." The logistics are still in the works, but my hope is to reflect on provocative questions, generate stimulating discussion, and inspire new directions of scholarship.

In closing, I am honored to be serving as the Mental Health Section Chair this year. During the past two decades, the members of this section have contributed a great deal to my development as a person and scholar. Those who have been responsible for the development of the Mental Health section are a special group—they have created a vibrant and dynamic community for scholars at all stages of their careers. In my short tenure as Chair, I will work with council and section members to sustain and advance this tradition. Currently, I am coordinating plans for membership retention and expansion, along with new initiatives for the ASA meetings in Philadelphia. I will provide more details about these plans in the coming weeks and months.

I look forward to seeing you later this year at the meetings in Philadelphia. Until then, please enjoy the contents of this newsletter and have a wonderful winter term.

All the best for 2018!

Scott

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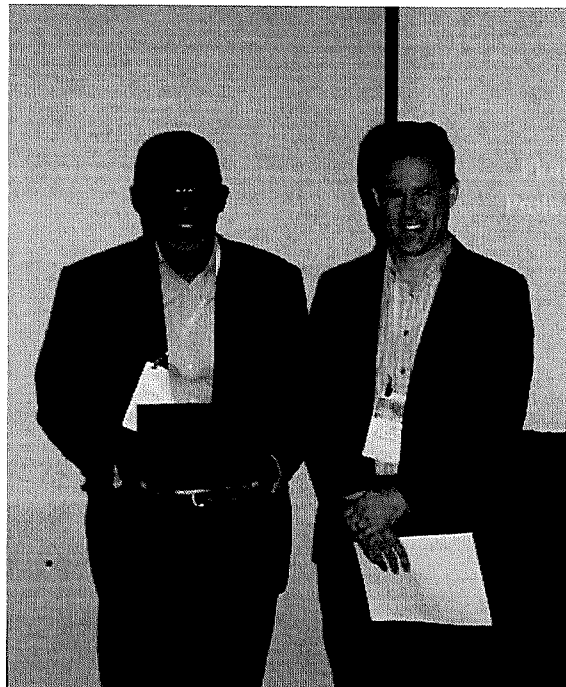
University of Toronto

**Mental Health Section 2017 Award Winners**

Leonard I. Pearlin Award for Distinguished Contributions. This Award carries the name of the highly influential and deeply respected mental health sociologist Leonard Pearlin. It goes to a scholar who has made substantial contributions to the sociology of mental health in theory and/or research. In 2017 the award went to **David R. Williams**, Florence Sprague Norman and Laura Smart Norman Professor of Public Health at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and Professor of African and African American Studies and Sociology at Harvard University.

Congratulations to David Williams!

David Williams and Jason Schnittker



The award for Best Publication. This award is given for the best published article, book or chapter in the area of the sociology of mental health. In 2017, the award went to **Anna S. Mueller** (University of Chicago) and **Seth Abrutyn** (University of Memphis) for their 2016 article, "Adolescents under Pressure: A New Durkheimian Framework

for Understanding Adolescent Suicide in a Cohesive Community" (American Sociological Review 81(5): 877-899).

Contratualtions to Anna Mueller and Seth Abrutyn.

Kristi Williams, Seth, and Anna



**Jennifer Caputo** (Indiana University and Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research) is the recipient of the 2017 Dissertation Award for her paper entitled "Parental Coresidence Histories and Psychological Well-Being among Contemporary Young Adults."

Congratulations Jennifer Caputo



There are more photos of sessions on the section's website. Check them out.

#### **Jason Schnittker's Introduction of Pearlín Award Winner, David Williams**

Today I have one of the easiest tasks at the ASA: introducing someone who needs no introduction. And there is no case that needs to be made: David Williams is fully deserving of the Pearlín Award.

Williams is currently Florence Sprague Norman and Laura Smart Norman Professor of Public Health in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Harvard's T. H. Chan School of Public Health. At Harvard University, he also holds the title of Professor of Sociology. Before that he was on the faculty of the Department of Sociology at the University of Michigan for 14 years.

Williams has made many contributions to the study of health, with a particular and enduring focus on mental health and stress. His work is broad and influential, and he is prolific. He has published over 400 articles and in the time it takes me to offer my comments he's probably published another.

It's surely a testament to his talent that Williams has been influential virtually from

the start of his career. He received his PhD in sociology in 1986 from the University of Michigan and four years later published one of his first (of many) major hits, "Socioeconomic Differentials in Health: A Review and Redirection," appearing in *Social Psychology Quarterly*. A few years later he published, "U.S. Socioeconomic and Racial Differences in Health: Patterns and Explanations," in the *Annual Review of Sociology*. This review represents one of the first comprehensive reviews of that ever-expanding literature and has been cited over 1,600 times. His *Social Psychology Quarterly* article was an important forerunner of the fundamental cause approach and taps into one of the deepest strains of sociological analysis. Williams is steeped in the social structure and personality approach, which is evident in these articles, as well as his later work, and does much to implicate his focus on mental health.

Other work by Williams has been influential, albeit in different ways that increase the power of his portfolio. For one, he has been especially effective in expanding the influence of sociology into other disciplines. For instance, he has been instrumental in elevating the study of social class in epidemiological health research. Social class has long, of course, been a hallmark of sociology, but Williams has been instrumental in insisting that when other people use the concept they use it well. Articles in this vein include, "Measuring Social Class in U.S. Public Health Research: Concepts, Methodologies, and Guidelines," published with co-authors in the *Annual Review of Public Health*. He has taken his ideas to psychology, as well, publishing (again with co-authors), "Racism as a Stressor for African Americans: A Biopsychosocial Model" in *American Psychologist*. This article has been cited more than 2,000 times.

Williams has also been particularly influential in pushing the relevance of stress in health disparities research. Although the relevance of stress is plain within sociology, it has been somewhat neglected in otherwise allied fields. Williams has made a point of correcting this. In 2005, Williams and Pamela Braboy Jackson published an article in *Health Affairs* outlining the social sources of racial disparities in health. In this article, he returned to, among other things, his long-standing interest in stress, making the case for stress as a critical mechanism for a broad range of health disparities.

One of his strongest statements on stress appears in "Racial Disparities in Health: How Much Does Stress Really Matter?" published in *Du Bois Review*. Despite the skepticism betrayed by the rhetorical question of the title, this article advances the idea that, yes, racial disparities in health are a reflection of exposure to stress, at least in part. In carefully evaluating the impact of stress, this article combines a host of measures for a variety of different stress domains, spanning instruments developed by Leonard Pearlin and James House (among others), and combining them with instruments developed by Williams himself.

Within the vein of stress research one of Williams' most important contribution is perhaps the development and refinement of the Everyday Discrimination Scale, which remains one of the most popular instruments for studying perceived discrimination. This instrument has been applied extensively to the study of mental health, but it has also helped to bridge the stress literature with other fields and with other outcomes, including research on cardiovascular disease.

In all these ways, Williams combines extraordinary insight and empirical care, as well as an interest in broadening the impact of what we as sociologists do, something

characteristic of Pearlin as well. There are other parallels. Although the title of the instrument he developed is the Everyday Discrimination Scale, it is no accident that those of us who use it frequently refer to it as the Williams Scale, not, of course, unlike how people refer to the Pearlin Scale.

Williams has also been involved in the collection of several large data sets. Perhaps the most significant was the National Study of American Life, which remains the largest study of mental disorders focused on African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans in the US. He also directed the South African Stress and Health Study, which is the first nationally representative study of psychiatric disorders in that country and, indeed, in all of sub-Saharan Africa.

Among his many service activities Williams has served on numerous editorial boards, including the Journal of Health and Social Behavior, Society & Mental Health, American Sociological Review, Social Problems, and Social Psychology Quarterly (twice).

Just as Williams has been an influential scholar his entire career, so too has he been an inspirational mentor. In anticipation of delivering these remarks, I contacted folks who worked with David. Finding extraordinary testimony about him was not at all hard, including from prior Pearlin Award winners. Williams, for instance, was in Jane McLeod's prelim exam study group at Michigan. According to Jane his generosity was evident even then. "He brought positive and productive energy to the task, and kept our small group on an even keel during a very stressful time." Then, as now, Williams was eager to learn and eager to share.

David Takeuchi, another former Pearlin winner, adds the following, which is especially remarkable given the impact of

David's scholarship: "David's outstanding scholarship is only surpassed by his exemplary generativity, warm collegiality, and wise counsel that extends to faculty, researchers, students, and community members. It is rare to attend a meeting in the social sciences and public health without finding people who have worked with or mentored by David and who share warm stories about David's influence on their scholarship, career and lives."

Williams has also been generous with the ASA. Williams was a member of one of the early ASA Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) cohorts (Cohort 11—there are now 44). According to the current director of that program, Jean Shin, David has distinguished himself by giving back to the program many times over. He has mentored and helped MFP Fellows in their research and career development, served on the selection committee for MFP, and contributed generously to the MFP Leadership Campaign—conducted by ASA back in 2009 when the program's NIH funding was nearing its end.

For all his seriousness of purpose, two other things came up in my investigations that are worth highlighting. First, Williams is famous for maintaining a balanced life, even with all his prodigious professional output. Second—and the real bonus insight here—Williams is known among friends and family as something of a prankster. When things go missing, or something seems off, friends know where to look.

In the end, it is clear that we all turn to Williams for many reasons: for his work, for his instruments, and for his wise professional counsel. Williams is truly a well-balanced scholar, a real source of inspiration in a very broad research community.

Congratulations, David Williams, on receiving the Pearlin Award.