

## Comprehensive Exam in Medical Sociology, Fall, 2021

The questions below constitute the qualifying exam for medical sociology. To complete the exam, you must answer one question from each of the three sections below in an essay format. Each answer should be a self-contained essay **approximately 8–10 pages long** (i.e., 2,000–2,500 words).

Although you must cite to referenced work in each essay, one comprehensive bibliography for all three questions will be sufficient. You may consult materials from the reading list you've been provided, as well as any other scholarly sources you've read during the exam period. This **qualifying exam is to be completed in two weeks**. The evaluation of the exam will take two weeks. You will be notified of your performance by email. Make sure that the office has your up-to-date contact information. Please use the identifying student number that you have been assigned at the top of your exam. The exams are graded confidentially, and numbers only will be used to identify the author of the exam. See the Graduate Handbook for any further details.

### Answer one of the following:

1. The medical clinician-patient relationship is an important component of the healthcare delivery system. Describe the primary theoretical frameworks used to understand the clinician-patient relationship. Which of these frameworks is the most useful for understanding this relationship? Provide support for your answer.
2. Talcott Parsons used the "doctor"-patient relationship to illustrate components of his larger theoretical framework. Describe Parsons' understanding of the clinician-patient relationship, especially the asymmetric relationship between clinician and patient. Based on your reading and understanding of the literature, assess whether his conceptualization of the clinician-patient relationship is still a viable conceptual tool for medical sociology.

### Answer one of the following:

3. A central premise of sociological research on health is that social inequality (broadly-defined) contributes to health disparities generally observed in the population. In particular, cumulative inequality theory offers insight as to why such disparities may increase over the life course. To better illuminate how cumulative inequality theory can help sociologists better understand health disparities, first explain the central tenets of this theory. Next, describe the current state of sociological knowledge regarding health disparities, paying special attention to research that focuses on health disparities over the life course. What questions remain unresolved in the literature? Finally, explain how cumulative inequality theory can advance future research within the area of health disparities over the life course.
4. Research in the last two decades has changed the conventional, normative understanding of aging. Please answer the following three questions. First, what are the major features of the conventional, normative understanding of aging? Second, what improvements in knowledge, medicine, and technology have changed this conventional, normative understanding of aging, and in what ways? Finally, are there any disparities in the implications of such improvements across ethno-racial and socioeconomic groups? Explain and discuss these differential implications.

### Answer one of the following:

5. Imagine you are planning a substantial study, such as a doctoral dissertation, within the field of mental health research. What are your major research questions? Develop a research design for your study.

What aspects of this design is unique to studying mental health? What are the theoretical considerations? What will be the empirical aspects of your study? What variables will you use and where will you find the data sources for them? What are some of the pros and cons of your proposed data? What are some of your preliminary hypotheses? What do you see as the likely contribution of your work to the field?

6. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation helped the world to see the importance of paying attention to social determinants of health as drivers of health disparities. Please describe social determinants of health and health disparities. Please give two examples that involve intersecting oppressions (e.g., Black women in segregated neighborhoods with cancer). Heiman and Artiga (2018) discuss health and health equity. What would health equity look like in your two examples?