

# Preface

This volume commemorates the 20th Anniversary of the American Sociological Association (ASA) Section on the Sociology of Mental Health. Jay Turner reminded us of this upcoming anniversary with a suggestion he made at end of the Section's business meeting during the ASA's annual meeting in Las Vegas in 2011. He suggested that something should be done to commemorate the event. I had just been installed as the incoming Chair of the section, and I assured the members in attendance that something would be done, but I was unsure just what that would be.

About one month later, Bob Johnson sent an email to me suggesting that the Section anniversary be commemorated with a volume of papers reviewing progress in mental health sociology and laying out critical research problems for the future. The volume would be sponsored by the Section, and all remuneration would be contributed to the Section. I agreed that it was a great idea. With guidance from Karen Edwards, Director of Publications for ASA, and approval from the Section Publications Committee, we developed a proposal for the ASA Publications Committee that was approved in early December 2011. Bob recruited two additional editors, Jay Turner and Bruce Link, two sociologists who are responsible for much of the progress in the sociology of mental health over the past 40 years.

The chapters in the current volume document select theoretical transformations and refinements of the field from the issues that animated our studies in the 1970s and 1980s to a new set of problems and challenges. The sociology of mental health was founded by scholars interested in showing how social integration, urban life, and social class were related to psychological problems. Chapters in this volume show how these fairly straightforward issues have been transformed into a set of questions about complex processes linking stress, social relationships and support, neighborhoods, societal reactions and other factors to mental health, mental disorder and other outcomes. One of the most energetic debates in sociology in the last 45 years was between advocates of the labeling theory of mental illness and those supporting a psychiatric perspective. As is clear from the chapters in the present volume on stigma, on stress, and on recovery from mental illness, this debate resulted in a considerable refinement of the issues, and created a new

set of research problems. Another controversial issue in the 1970s was whether and how gender was related to mental health and illness. As can be seen by the chapter on gender and marital status in the present volume, this issue too has been transformed from relatively simple questions about sex roles and marital roles into ones involving social identities, varying distress styles, sociocultural and socioeconomic contexts, multiple dimensions of mental health, the nature of intimate relationships, and other factors.

As a group, this set of papers not only traces significant changes in the sociology of mental health, but also testifies to the health of the field itself and to the wisdom of the section founders. Along with the recent establishment of the section journal, *Society and Mental Health*, and the publication of the second editions of two handbooks on the sociology of mental health (Scheid and Brown 2010; Aneshensel et al. 2013), this volume shows that there are many questions to answer, but there is progress to be had, and there are ways to move forward.

Michael Hughes

## References

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