Comprehensive Examination
Day 2 - Relationships and Health

Fall 2007

Answer two of these “two hour” questions, but do not answer both 2 and 4.

1. Summarize major findings and theoretical explanations for the relationship between marital status and physical health, with a focus on gender differences in this relationship. In your answer, (1) be sure to include some discussion of changes in the link between marital status and health over the past several decades; (2) explain why gender has been so important (politically, academically, and for policy) in this field of study; and (3) discuss what this might tell us about the larger context of gender, the family, and power in the United States today.

2. Traditionally, research has compared the married to the unmarried in studying the impact of intimate relationships on health. In your answer, (1) describe what is known about the link of cohabiting, gay, and lesbian relationships to health; (2) discuss theoretical reasons that these different types of relationships, in comparison to legal heterosexual marital relationships, might translate into similar or different consequences for individual health; and (3) explain how and why research on gay and lesbian couples, as well as cohabiting couples, inform theory on marriage, gender, and health.

3. Over the last several decades, a number of sociologists have argued that sexuality and sexual reproduction have become “medicalized.” These scholars contend that the medical discourse of disease and treatment is now the dominant or “hegemonic” approach to treating mental and physical disorders relating to sexuality. In your answer, (1) examine the ways in which this medical discourse is “gendered” (in other words, how do doctors and medical research scientists use gender to identify and diagnose sexual illness?); and (2) be sure to discuss how this medical model is linked to the persistence (or undermining) of gender inequality.

4. A great deal of research in the sociology of gender emphasizes differences between men and women. Studies of gender inequality in the family, in particular, tend to derive their conclusions from comparisons between husbands and wives. In your answer, (1) discuss some of the major findings of this approach; and (2) explain how including the experiences of LGBT family members has complicated our understanding of gender inequality in the family.