

SSSP SOCIETY & MENTAL HEALTH

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



Doug Engelman, PhD.
2023-2025 Society & Mental Health Division
Chair, University of North Carolina
Wilmington

A NOTE FROM THE (SOON TO BE) CO-CHAIR:

As we approach the lead-up to the SSSP Annual Conference in Montreal, and the culmination of our first year leading the division, I am happy to report significant progress we have made as a division. Most noteworthy, we are thrilled to be partnering with three other SSSP divisions; Disability, Educational Problems, and Health, Health Policy and Health Services in hosting conference 2024 sessions, along with one of our own. We are also casting a wider net through two new social media platforms, Threads and Instagram. I encourage all division members to 1) attend the annual conference and visit our sessions, 2) submit their creative ideas for content to Emma Tubens, Asst. to the Chair, to further enhance our social media presence. We need your passion and your voices!

With the hopes of creating a more robust leadership team, we are going to move forward with the election of a co-chair. In the coming weeks you will be hearing from SSSP with candidate and election process information. Please engage in this process! Finally, we're organizing a virtual business meeting for July 11th. The divisional meeting serves as a forum to discuss concerns of the division, evaluate our nominees for Co-chair, suggest sessions for next year's program, plan special activities of the division, and strategize on how to better serve our members. I hope you will attend.

IMPORTANT UPDATES

Our annual business meeting will be held virtually on July 19th at 4:00pm eastern. Zoom link to follow.

Our division will be transitioning to a Co-Chair model soon. There will be more updates to follow as candidates finish their statements. Information about voting will follow.

Make sure you have booked your room and registered for the Annual Conference in Montreal in August.

Check out the entire Conference schedule here.

The SSSP Anti-Harassment committee is hosting it's virtual discussion on July 24, 2024, from 3:00-5:00 EDT. If you would like to attend please register here.

All proposed By-Laws Amendments passed during the election on July 8, 2024. If you would like to review them, click here.

We want to hear from YOU! What would you like to see in the next newsletter issue? Have something to celebrate amongst peers? Found a great article you think is worth sharing? Let us know! Please send any ideas to the Assistant to the Chair, Emma Tubens at etubens.smh.sssp@google.com

SESSIONS FOR OUR DIVISION | ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Addressing the Mental Health Crisis in K-16

- “The Paradox of Adversity: Analyzing the Effect of Adverse Childhood Experiences on First-generation Postsecondary Education Enrollment and Retention,” Daniel Noriega, Chapman University and Rashad Freeman, Indiana University Bloomington
- “Inside the Classroom: How Does Internet Usage, Early School Day Routines, and Classroom Design Impact the Mental Health of Students?” Jacob R. Bahnick, University of North Carolina Wilmington, Winner of the Society and Mental Health Division’s Student Paper Competition
- “Developing Trauma-informed Teachers: Cultivating Resilience in Educators through Mentorship,” Maureen P. Hall, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
- “Youth and Suicide in American Cinema: Silence and its Repercussions,” Alessandra Seggi, Villanova University

CRITICAL DIALOGUE: The Changing Impact of Technologies on Mental Health

- “‘Better Safe Than Sorry’: Prepping, COVID-19, and the Influence of Masculine Norms. Is This Something New?” Andrew Thomas Silliker, The Pennsylvania State University
- “Digital Disparity and Mental Health Equity: The Mental Health Impacts of Cyberbullying among Adolescents,” Yuying Shen, Norfolk State University
- “Doom Scrolling: How Does Constant Exposure to Violent and Traumatic Media Impact Our Worldview and Mental Health?” Spencer Boatwright, University of North Carolina Wilmington
- “Exploring Dating App Usage and Addiction,” Laura S. Hatvany, University of North Carolina Wilmington

Shared Identity Making and Mental Illness

- “Childhood Trauma and the Impact on Mental Health Later in Life,” Marissa Button, University of North Carolina Wilmington, Honorable Mention in the Society and Mental Health Division’s Student Paper Competition
- “Impact of Social Media Websites Targeting Individuals with Eating Disorders,” Savannah Moriarty, University of North Carolina Wilmington
- “Overlooked: Hoarding as Trauma-tainment,” Liz Wilcox, Boston College

Student Mental Health on Campus: Who Isn’t F*cking Crazy?

- “Family Relations and Mental Health: How Do Divorce, Single Parenthood, and Disconnected Extended Family Impact Mental Health?” Abigail Kozak, University of North Carolina Wilmington
- “Recovery and Potential for Student Transformation: Fieldwork on Collegiate Recovery Programs,” Samantha A. McIntyre, University of Tennessee, Knoxville
- “The Consideration of Race in the Organization of Campus Mental Health Services,” Hana Gebremariam, Temple University



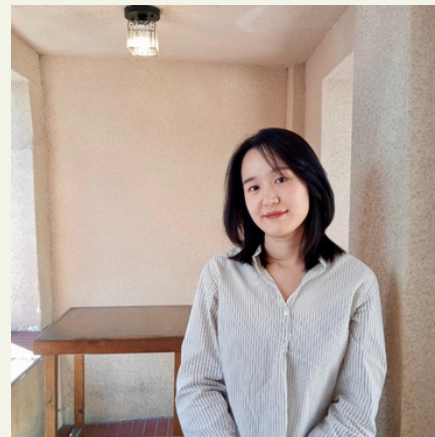
MEMBER HIGHLIGHTS AND CONGRADULATIONS

Congratulations to division member Loren Beard and their cohort mate Kyung Won Choi on a recent publication! Visit this [link](#) to find out more about their research on mental health conditions of youth in the child welfare system.

Abstract: The children's mental health landscape is rapidly changing, and youth with mental health conditions (MHCs) are overrepresented in the child welfare system. Mental health is the largest unmet health need in child welfare, so MHCs may affect the likelihood of system reentry. Concerns regarding mental health contribute to calls for expanded supports, yet systems contact can also generate risk of continued child welfare involvement via surveillance. Still, we know little about how expanded supports at the state-level shape child welfare outcomes. Using the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS), we examine the association between MHCs and system reentry within 36 months among youth who reunified with their families in 2016 (N = 41,860). We further examine whether this association varies across states and White, Black, and Latinx racial and ethnic groups via two- and three-way interactions. Results from multilevel models show that, net of individual and state-level factors, MHCs are associated with higher odds of reentry. This relationship is stronger for youth in states that expanded Medicaid by 2016 and with higher Medicaid/CHIP child participation rates. The results also show evidence of the moderating role of state-level factors, specifically student-to-school counselor ratio, diverging across racial and ethnic groups. Our results suggest a need for systems of care to better support youth mental health and counteract potential surveillance.



Loren Beard is a Sociology PhD Candidate at UChicago who uses mixed methods to address how the state governs the family, and how the family navigates the state. In this article, Loren and Kyung Won Choi (Dept. of Sociology, UChicago) use national administrative data and multilevel models to show how state systems can surveil, rather than support, foster youth diagnosed with mental health issues.



Kyung Won Choi is a PhD Candidate in the Dept. of Sociology at the University of Chicago. In her dissertation, she leverages quantitative methods to study how social relationships shape health and health behaviors among older adults. Her research has also been published in the *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, *Social Science & Medicine*, and *Research on Aging*.

INSIDE LOOK ON MENTAL DISORDER

Below you will find an interesting essay to peruse. It was written by someone who is learning how to cope with and better understand his mental disorder. This paper details how an individual with Schizophrenia views the world during psychosis. Please give it a read!

Schizophrenia

By Chad Horn

Introduction

I wrote the paper because it hurt to think I was living in a world in which I was responsible for everything, my feelings were the end all be all, and everything going on around me was a result of me. My perspective was all I could see. Today I can see where this kind of mindset came from and there are still certain principles I wrestle with today. The first being I don't agree with the concept of mental illness as we are all people and therefore every emotion/ thought we have is inherently human, and I think the concept of mental illness is really just a gauge of how well an individual socializes. And I feel the group conscience has decided that any traits which seem to interfere with the group, or the direction in which we are going. Has been deemed mental illness, being that we are social creatures, fair enough.

My perspective a couple of years ago was about the same as it is now. However I used to be resentful of society, as I felt they had outcast the mentally ill or at the very least stigmatized them. And I think as a result I believed that only my perspective was right, and truly the only one of value. As "mental illness" runs in my family it was very easy to justify my perspective. In the time in which I only ever valued my perspective I realized how powerful

perspective was and as long as I believed it to be true it was. I still believe in the power of perspective today but today I am willing to consider others' perspectives as well. I am willing to check myself against the group. In many of these episodes I went thru I was exploring the power of perspective, and I don't think I was wrong in doing so. But I started to find more peace when I was willing to factor other peoples' perspectives in as well.

My Story

I'm not educated enough to do a "proper" introduction, but I'll try my best to set this up as well as I can. I wrote this paper in the first couple weeks I got out of rehab for a methamphetamine addiction, among other substances. Writing this really helped guide my mind out of that paranoia - what I believe to have been schizophrenia. Whether it was substance induced or not is up for debate, but regardless, writing helped. During my time here I talked to our LCDR(Licensed drug counselor) a lot about my process of dealing with my mental state. One point she repeatedly brought up was my self-awareness thru these episodes and how impressive it was. I don't know what to attribute that to, but it was excruciating painful at times. At worst, my whole world was a lie, and peaceful at best.

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But I wouldn't trade the progress I made for anything because I feel a part of something today, rather than being the end all be all. My goal when writing this was to help others like me or contribute to a conversation that could. I've put off properly printing it for so long in fear of being wrong, but how can I be this is my experience, I would love to be able to help even just one more soul break free. Now I've had delusions that the radio, TV, other media, and any other forms of communication such as peoples body language, words or really anything with an opportunity to be read (even my own memories) somehow relate to me, usually in a dramatic fashion.

I can only recognize they are delusions and dramatic now that I am in the headspace to step out of them and analyze them. I don't necessarily like the term delusions for multiple reasons, so I'll refer to them as messages. These messages have come from many sources and have many different meanings; the FBI has been watching me, I am God, Jesus, or the Devil, the Neo of the simulation, I need to complete this task or somebody I love will suffer, the opposite as well, if I do this somebody will suffer, and so on. These messages can come from anything, no matter how menial it may seem to the outside world. I can't say these thoughts are always negative, in fact they often present with some sort of benefit, such as "If you smoke this cigarette your girl will die" which is a great motivator to stop smoking cigarettes. Usually, when presented with these thoughts they helped me

accomplish something I thought I should do or prevent me from doing what I shouldn't. At the very least gave me the comfort of knowing I did the best I could, given my position or circumstances.

At best all these decisions only contributed to my EGO (caps for emphasis).I've read our ego is our sense of self, and mine was wildly distorted. Now the common denominator in all these messages are me, myself, and I, or something I feel directly relates to me. I position myself in a place where I inherently have more value or less value, such as believing I am the Devil, and others are talking about my perceived mistakes, or I am God and others are talking about my achievements. Even if it's just detracting all intended meaning from someone or something else and assigning it to myself. This is ego at work. I believe ego is a self-defense mechanism/ motivator which communicates with you through these messages, and while I believe this self defense mechanism definitely had its purpose in protecting me, my ego became so distorted it became the thing that was killing me. If deeply analyzed, I believe most, if not all messages were driven by fear.

Control seems to be a big factor in ego and schizophrenic/paranoid episodes where I receive messages. My feelings/brain either controls the narrative or thinks it has control over the narrative and tries to persuade me into believing that it has control. Or they push a dialogue where my paranoid feelings are right, and taking control makes sense, or at the very least is moral. Such as smoking a cigarette and thinking my girl would be killed as a result, which can be explained by me wanting to be her hero and I wish that I could control her safety.

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Or not smoking while I'm fiending for nicotine seems like a fair trade. Because I wished I had control over her life and with her living so close to death it was hard to accept that I don't and still is.

I find whenever I am stressed that I cannot control a situation, everything someone else says or does, or any of the other ways the messages crop up I felt I was putting the pieces together and reading between the lines of a situation, and how to control/ handle it but also the consequences of not controlling a situation. Now I know controlling others is wrong, but the brain has a brilliant way in which it illustrates, I'm not controlling everything and just myself in the here and now, and that I'm justified for doing so, But the sense of self can be warped to extremes by the imagination, time and hallucination. Usually, I've only been able to recognize after the fact what I was trying to control. Such as my last drug trip in county jail.

Hallucination: My Savior Complex

I was drawing a mural for my girl kind of as a blessing or prayer to keep her safe on the outside

during her addiction, and when someone threatened to erase it, therefore threatening my girl as my mural was an extension of her at that point. I almost got into a fight with him. I didn't because I was scared, and my ribs were fucked up. But as a result of not fighting for my girl when I feel I should've, everyone else then started saying things relating to my girl being killed, at least that was the undertone.

So, I went back to fight this guy, but everyone jumped in to stop me at that point it seemed to me because they were trying to get in the way of me protecting my girl. Regardless, after they stopped me, I heard her being raped next door to us, when food was served, I believed she was in the food, and it seemed like everyone else knew that too and ate her remains to spite me for being afraid of getting into that fight. So, after eating I made myself vomit, and my cellmate did so as well with a look of guilt on his face. During this episode there were countless other messages about her being killed. As the trip progressed I deviated further and further from "reality" one point I was God and everyone in the room was talking to me as such, and the definition of God and my capabilities changed as the need to rationalize it did. As well as having a justification for how me being God and my girl being dead could co-exist, as no god truly in control would choose to live in a universe where their significant other is dead.

How I Rationally Understand Hallucinations

I would need a couple pages to describe everything that I experienced in that one day, but I'm going to focus on the key points I provided and why I think things played out the way they did for me that day. Now first I think its important to highlight I did crystal meth before the trip started this doesn't affect the principles of what I'm about to lay out but I do believe it affects the intensity of what I experienced. In this moment not only do I feel as tho my girl is now in danger, but my sense of self worth has plummeted. The only thing I can now focus on is the fact I need to fight this guy over this mural this is now the only idea of any value I have in my life, so everything everyone saying is now in the context of my girl.

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So when I try to fight the man who threatened my mural and no one lets me (as they see I'm not in sound mind or body, both of which are two concepts that are irrelevant to me at this point) I take that as I have failed at protecting my girl and my reality plays out as such. And at this point my reality is so unbearable as my girl has been tortured raped and killed I detach even further, and that's where I get to the point where I am god. Now I'm not unable to see the inconsistencies in the logic, and I wasn't then either, in order for me to believe somethings real it still has to make sense but, if I don't factor in anyone else's perspectives it only has to make sense to me, in times of high stress it's a lot easier to ignore everyone else's perspectives. Which makes anything I'm willing to believe possible, possible. I tried to align reality with my feelings - not the other way around. I only now have the luxury of calling it a trip because I can recognize it for what it was. What I meant earlier by one's sense of self is warped and what you have control over as an extension can be explained in the trip that landed me in jail. This is why it is so dangerous to place myself in a space above others or listening to the messages with absolute certainty as I think these are just feelings. For example, in another trip (hallucination) I saw/heard the cartel was after me and my family, because I had a valuable piece of information and they were upset with me because when I told them what it was (spoke it out loud by myself) it wasn't that valuable, so they went to go kill my family. Instead of going to help I ran and as a result I was constantly told during this trip,

(again I can only see as a trip after the fact), that I needed to kill myself in order to save my family. Every time I didn't listen to the messages, I was punished by watching my family members get murdered, which seems like a matter of self-control. I kill myself; they live. The reason why these trips got so dangerous for me was I started hallucinating physically, now I believe that my brain still had a basis in reality so it could see the inconsistencies in a lot of what I was experiencing but being that confirmation bias is really the concept that holds this paper together, physical hallucinations and reality are one in the same. If your holding an apple how many people have to tell you it's an orange before you WANT to believe them. I'd like to break down the logic of these episodes in two parts the first being feelings-deep down I think I felt guilty about the position I was putting my family in by associating with the cartels even in the small capacity I was I knew what they were capable of and the kind of damage they could inflict on my loved ones, so my brain rationalized the idea of me having to kill myself to keep them safe.

Logically the only thing that holds any of these trips together is confirmation bias. Confirmation bias is one of our most powerful mechanisms for survival. If we are looking for something we do an amazing job of finding it. Mix this with a large ego and sky is the limit. When having a large ego, we place ourselves in a place of inherently more, or less value, and have no issue finding evidence to support that. And all these paranoid hallucinations take the path of least resistance when communicating with us. All these messages/ hallucinations approach me in way which I already feel makes sense, logically, morally, no matter how painful, never have I been unable to understand them.

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And it's been vital to recognize they reflect my feelings. Once I recognized that is all they are, I was able to start analyzing them and dealing with them healthily. The messages always align with my sense of reality and what's happening in my world, more accurately what I think should be happening. That way I have little to no work to do to rationalize it and to confirm this is what's happening.

From Hallucinations to Reality

The longer I stay in the belief I have control over others or others have control over me the longer I distort my reality, or my understanding of it. Once I started to accept all of my feelings as true, every thought as fact there is no room for reality, and my brain will do everything it possibly can to find and create evidence to support this "reality" I have created. While in fear your higher brain functions shut down and therefore, I believe, the function of rationalizing your feelings with reality.

I've only ever been able to analyze these episodes and what they were trying to convey thru that paranoia after the fact, where I am in a mindset unhindered by fear and loss or excitement, which I feel can stem from fear of not being good or strong enough. Most, if not all of these episodes or just slight paranoia has something to do with my discomfort in the idea of having no control over anything other than myself. That is why the hallucinations always portray the opposite, centering around the idea of having control over someone else and why that's beneficial in that instance, or how someone else has control over me. These messages always seem to stick out and be of great importance, by my definition. Anytime there was a message it had to do with me or my current situation, which I believe shows it is reflection of my values. In short, I think the psychotic episodes that I call schizophrenia manifest themselves when I try to align reality with my feelings. When I experience an episode, I now understand that it is my feelings trying to talk to me.