

Amber Nelson: Biomedicalization and Geneticization of Societal Understandings, Funding and Policy of Mental Health & Illness

In my dissertation, I analyzed how mental health practitioners approached social processes of diagnosis and treatment. However, I did not conduct a systematic analysis of the larger biomedicalization of societal understandings, funding or policy of mental health and illness. This is my starting point here at IAS-STC – to systematically examine the “biomedicalization” and “geneticization” of mental health and illness at the state and non-state institutional levels. Following the work of Raman & Tutton (2010) who argue that biopower is politicized through multiple competing discourses and strategies of governance, I examine state and non-state organizational discourses of mental health and illness via research and project funding and policy initiatives. I examine the departments, discourses, primary projects and funding related to mental health and illness of the following key institutional actors: the National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH), the National Alliance of Mental Illness, the National Council, the Institute of Medicine and Active Minds Inc. I examine the discourses of these organizations and to better understand how they shape the national dialogue about mental health and illness. The goal is to examine the extent to which large state and non-state institutions focus on social environmental, biological, genetic or interactionist explanations of and responses to mental health and illness.