

SOC 3510, WEEK 6, 9/27

# LABELING THEORY AND STIGMA



*MAKING STRESS WORK FOR YOU?*

# REFRAMING STRESS



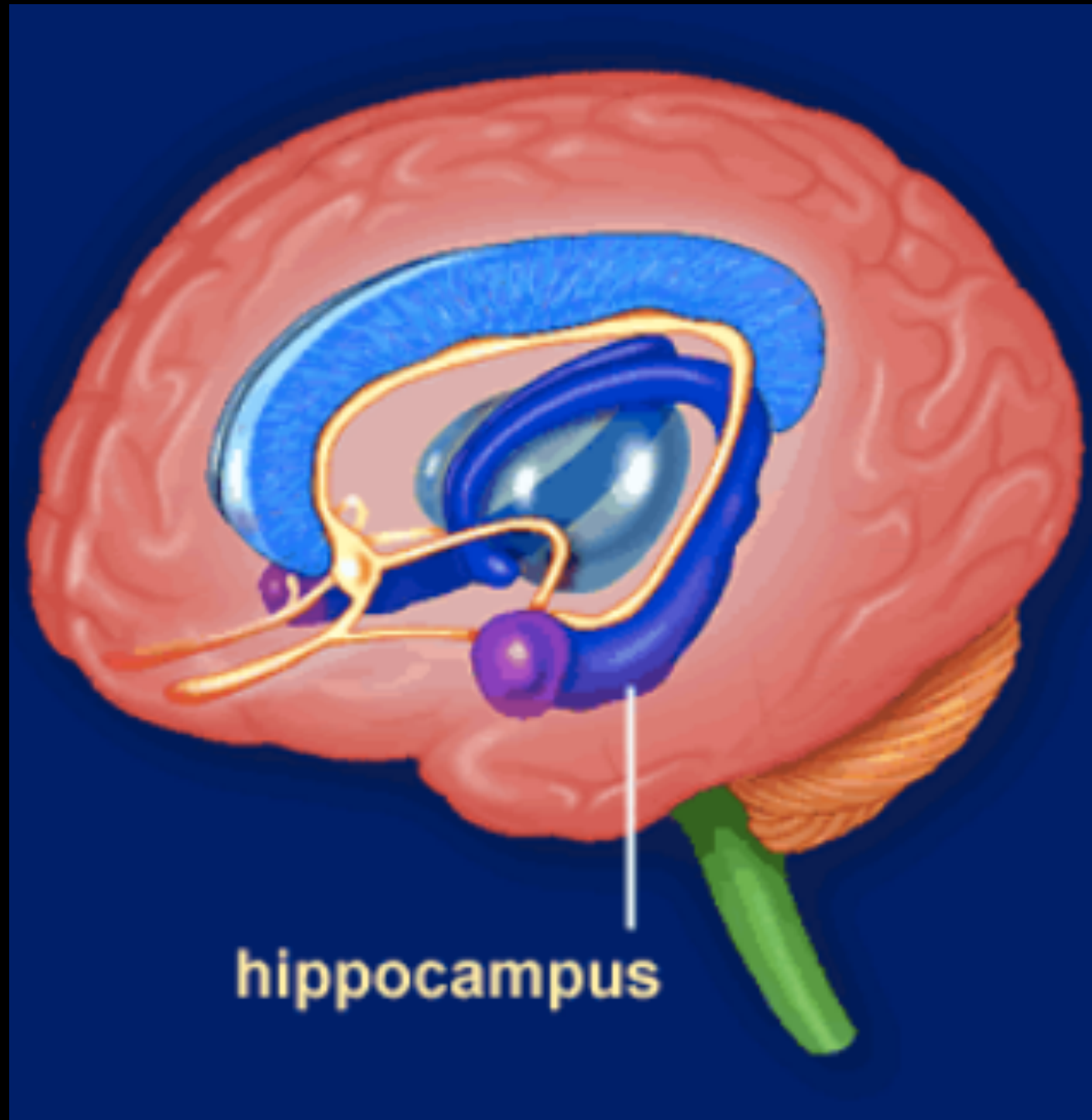
In what ways is stress good?

Can all stressors be fixed/helped?

Why/not? Examples?



STRESS EFFECTS  
MEMORY



"The greatest  
weapon against  
stress is our ability  
to choose one  
thought over  
another."

William James



LABELING THEORY  
AND  
SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

# SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ILLNESS

- Illness is shaped by culture (varies by time and place)
  - Including what illness is, how it's experienced, and professional beliefs about its diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis
  - Dominant belief system in the US today?

# WHEN DO SYMPTOMS BECOME A DISEASE? (ARONOWITZ 2001)

- Move away from symptom/clinician-based diagnosis to biological mechanism- or anatomy-based diagnosis
  - The case of asthma
  - "...physiologic, psychological, and social processes are uniquely combined in any single person to constitute illness." p. 808



# LABELING THEORY (CLASSIC)

- What these disorders and syndromes have in common is a break from the norm of health
  - Illness = deviance; therefore relative and a social construction
  - What is illness for one social group may not be so for others
  - Becker & Lemert & Scheff: deviance is the consequence of the social definition of the act by others
    - Disease = biological state
    - Illness/Sickness = social state

# DIAGNOSTIC PROCESS

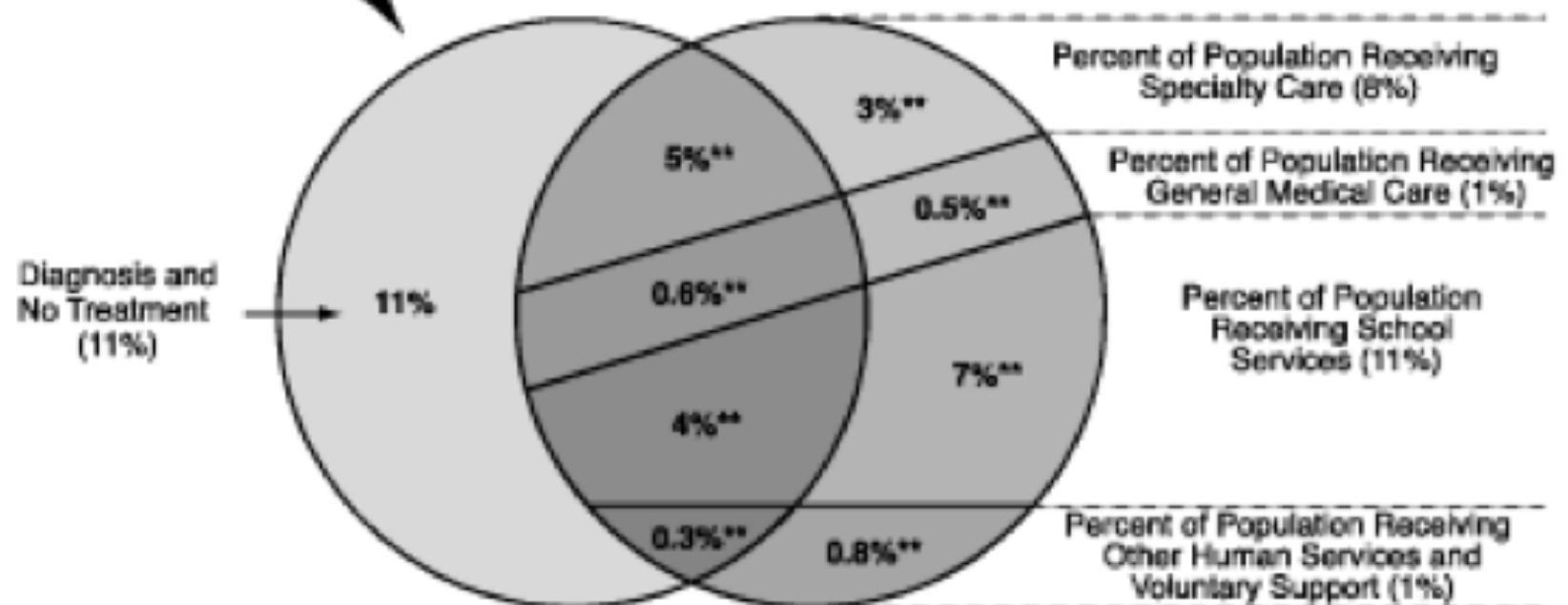
1. Person experiences a subjective feeling of sickness
2. If person goes to the doctor, the physician gives an exam and orders diagnostic tests
3. Physician comes to a conclusion about the patient's disorder given the results of the tests and perhaps symptoms presented and is "diagnosed"
  - Receives official label of illness
4. Leads to social reactions toward the labeled

# SOCIAL FACTORS AFFECTING LABELING

- Relational distance
- Cultural distance
  - Rosenbaum & Prinsky 1991
- Cultural stereotyping
  - Loring & Powell 1988

Percent of Population (21%) With  
Mental/Addictive Disorders  
(In one year)

Percent of Population (21%) Receiving  
Mental Health Services  
(In one year)



\*\* For those who use more than one sector of the service system, preferential assignment is to the most specialized level of mental health treatment in the system.

Source: Shaffer et al., 1996



# STIGMA OF PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPY (SIBICKY AND DOVIDIO 1986)

- Showed interactional consequences of being known to be in psychological treatment
- Subjects perceived those in therapy to be less open, secure, sociable, competent and more reserved/cold

# STIGMA OF PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPY (SIBICKY AND DOVIDIO 1986)

- Subjects behaved quite negatively towards (pseudo-) patient
- (Pseudo-) patients felt more uncomfortable and came to behave in ways that fulfilled these negative conceptions

# CLASSICAL LABELING THEORY

- For classical labeling theory, illness and health are socially constructed and relativistic
- Label, esp. if internalized (part of one's identity), prompts/compels/sustains, in a self-fulfilling manner, the disease/disorder it's meant to describe
- Critiques?