Medicalization, Normalisation, and Performance Edge - Teachers’ Attitudes about ADHD Medication Use and the Influence of Race and Social Class

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Abstract

Little qualitative sociological research has investigated teachers’ attitudes supporting or opposing medication use for Attention-deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and how these attitudes vary by social class and race. This study aims to fill that gap by conducting a thematic analysis using qualitative data gathered from 34 semistructured interviews with elementary school teachers in a medium-sized metropolitan area. Emergent themes in support of ADHD medication use include severity of ADHD symptoms and academic normalcy. Emergent themes in opposition to ADHD medication use included personality change and medicalization. In addition, African American teachers and teachers from lower-class areas were less approving of medication use for ADHD. In contrast, white teachers and teachers from upper-class areas were more in favour of medication use. I conclude with a discussion concerning attitudes for medication use in relation to teachers’ race and neighborhood-level social class, medicalization, and medical mistrust.