Many Americas: A Model of Social Context and Its Impact on Deaths of Despair

This presentation briefly report on the development of a reliable, and validated measure of social context would provide a unifying influence on research on numerous behavioral domains. The research program has identified four characteristics of counties in the U.S. that account for variability in several forms of mortality. This presentation focusses on the identification of six types (classes) of counties, reviewing (1) the methods used to identify them, (2) important differences between them, (3) their geographic distribution, and (4) differences in mortality rates related to despair (drug and alcohol use and suicide). Finally, we extend the model to recently published estimates of premature mortality in Black and White America.

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Joseph Fitzgerald received his Ph.D. in Life-Span Developmental Psychology from West Virginia University in 1974. He taught at Wayne State from 1979-2019. He was an international fellow at Aarhus University (Denmark) from 2008-2011. His teaching interests included life-span development, psychometric methods, and systems of psychology. He served a variety of roles in the Psychology Department and was Associate Dean of the Graduate school from 1990-1996.