

# CONTEMPORARY THEORY

a/k/a Sociology 502

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*Term: Spring, 2001 (9:00 am – 12 noon, Tuesdays)*

Room 190, Wallace Hall

**Purpose:** This 12-week seminar surveys the field of contemporary social theory, exposing you to major approaches, themes, thinkers and debates. There are several ways one could organize such a course: as a historical narrative of issues and debates; as an introduction to a set of important books or important thinkers, around varying approaches to theory and theory construction (from metatheory to cumulative theoretical research programs), or around key theoretical dilemmas (theories of action, mechanisms bridging micro and macro, comparative history). This seminar does a little bit of each, providing a tasting menu that will, I hope, provide at least superficial literacy and equip you to probe more deeply the ideas and approaches that you find most stimulating and useful. The focus throughout is on the *instrumental* value of theory, as a means of improving research. There are many ways that theory can do that – by making one question taken-for-granted assumptions and thus liberating one from conventional habits of mind, by exercising the imaginative faculties, by clarifying presuppositions that form the implicit ground for research, by presenting models for thinking about problems, and even by suggesting empirical propositions.

**Eligibility:** This seminar is required of first-year graduate students in Sociology. It is open to any graduate student in Sociology or other social-science department or the Woodrow Wilson school, and to senior-year sociology majors. Others may apply to instructor for admission.

## Requirements

**A. Read thoughtfully in advance and participate.** Students are expected to do the reading thoroughly *before* the class meeting for which it is assigned, and to participate actively in class meetings. (Some of the readings are very demanding, and the amount of reading in some weeks is quite substantial, so be sure to leave enough time.) Emphasis is on mastering, responding critically and creatively to, integrating the seminar's material, and, especially, extracting from the material ideas or approaches that are useful to you in your own work. Try to extract something of value from each assigned reading, even as you evaluate it critically.

**B. Three memoranda.** During each 4-week period of the course (i.e.g, weeks 1-4, 5-8, and 9-12), you are required to submit (preferably as an e-mail attachment) one memorandum of approximately 1000-1200 words on the week's readings. (**No credit will be given for memoranda handed in late**, as part of the point is to prepare you to participate actively in seminar discussions.) Please view memoranda as writing/thinking exercises, *not* as finished products. Use them to engage the week's materials, respond with questions, criticisms and new ideas they suggest, put into words impressions that seem worth developing, and think about how the readings might contribute to your own intellectual projects. Memos also provide a means by which I can give you ongoing individualized feedback. If you want to do more than the three that are required, I'll provide feedback on those, too.

**C. Two brief presentations.** Each student will make 2 brief (10-15 minute) presentations to the seminar on new topics and supplementary readings of particular interest. A list of presentation topics is attached to this syllabus. Presenters will meet with me before their presentation to review presentation strategies.

**The good news:** No term paper or research project is required, nor is there a final examination.

**Readings:** Two copies of each week's set of readings will appear in the seminar box in Sociology Department mailroom at least one week before seminar.

# CONTEMPORARY THEORY

After a brief list of general references, topics and readings assignments are listed by week. Required readings come first, followed by week-specific reference resources. Readings associated with particular presentation topics appear on the separate topics list.

Reference resources for course as a whole:

The following are useful secondary sources on some of the materials included in the required reading.

- Giddens, Anthony and Jonathan Turner, eds. 1987. *Social Theory Today*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Useful collection of essays on particular theoretical movements, including many of those covered in this course.
- Rule, James B. 1997. *Theory and Progress in Social Science*. New York: Cambridge. Interesting critical discussions of functionalism and neofunctionalism, network analysis, rational-choice theory, and feminist theory.
- Stinchcombe, Arthur L. 1987. *Constructing Social Theories*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press. Deservedly a classic, this lucid and engaging exposition of several forms of theory-building, is a bit dated (it was first published in 1965) but still unsurpassed. Includes causal, functional, demographic, and historicist forms of explanation.
- Turner, Jonathan H. 1974 *The Structure of Sociological Theory*. Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press. A good systematic introduction to the major theories of the third quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including functionalism, conflict theory, microsociology, and exchange theory.
- Cohen, Ira J. 2000.. "Theories of Action and Praxis." Chapter 3 (pp. 73-111) in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Bryan Turner. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

## Week 1 (February 6): Intro – Visions of theory

### Required:

- Camic, Charles and Neil Gross. 1998. "Contemporary Developments in Sociological Theory: Current Projects and Conditions of Possibility." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24: 542-76.
- Alexander, Jeffrey. 1987. Pp. 11-46 in "The Centrality of the Classics." Pp. 11-57 in *Social Theory Today*, ed. Anthony Giddens and Jonathan Turner. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Schelling, Thomas C. 1998. "Social Mechanisms and Social Dynamics." Pp. 32-43 in *Social Mechanisms*, ed. Peter Hedstrom and Richard Swedberg. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Turner, Jonathan H. 1987. Pp. 156-65 in "Analytical Theorizing." Pp. 156-94 in *Social Theory Today*, ed. Anthony Giddens and Jonathan Turner. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Jasso, Guillermina. 1988. "Principles of Theoretical Analysis." *Sociological Theory* 6:1-20.
- Collins, Randall. 1989. "Sociology Proscience or Antiscience." *American Sociological Rev.* 54: 124-39
- Abbott, Andrew. 1988. "Transcending General Linear Reality." *Sociological Theory* 6: 169-86.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa. 1997. "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology." *American Journal of Sociology* 103: 281-317.
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## Week 2 (February 12): Parsons, the problem of action, and functional analysis

### Required:

- Parsons, Talcott. 1949 [1937]. *The Structure of Social Action: A Study in Social Theory with Special Reference to a Group of Recent European Writers*. NY: Free Press. Part I, pp. 3-128; chapter 12, pp. 451-72.
- Parsons, Talcott and Edward A. Shils. 1951. "Values, Motives and Systems of Action." Pp. 47-189 in *Toward a General Theory of Action*, edited by Talcott Parsons and Edward A. Shils. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Parsons, Talcott. 1961. "An Outline of the Social System." Pp. 30-79 in *Theories of Society*, ed. T. Parsons, E. Shils, K. Naegle and J. Pitts. New York: Free Press.
- Parsons, Talcott. 1959. "The School Class as a Social System." *Harvard Educational Review* 29: 297-318.

### Reference resources for week 2:

- Camic, Charles. 1989. "'Structure' after 50 Years: The Anatomy of a Charter." *American Journal of Sociology* 95: 38-107.
- Alexander, Jeffrey. 1983. *Theoretical Logic in Sociology*, volume 4: *The Modern Reconstruction of Classical Thought: Talcott Parsons*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press. Chapter 2, "The Early Period," pp. 8-45.

Camic, Charles. 1987. "An Historical Reinterpretation of the Early Parsons." *American Sociological Review* 52: 421-39

### Week 3 (February 19): Microsociologies: Ethnomethodology, Phenomenology, Goffman

**Required:**

- Heritage, John. 1987. "Harold Garfinkel." Pp. 224-72 in *Social Theory Today*, ed. Anthony Giddens and Jonathan Turner. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Garfinkel, Harold. 1963. "A Conception of Experiments with 'Trust' as a Condition of Stable Coordinated Actions." Pp. 187-238 in *Motivation and Social Interaction*, ed. O.J. Harvey. NY: Ronald Press. 6440.436 Psychology library
- Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday. Pp. 1-46.
- Hacking, Ian. 1999. "Are You a Social Constructionist?" *Lingua Franca* (May-June): 65-72
- Goffman, Erving. 1967. *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*. New York: Pantheon., pp. 1-95.
- Collins, Randall. 1981. "On the Microfoundations of Macro-Sociology." *American Journal of Sociology* 86: 984-1014

**Reference resources for Week 3:**

- Heritage, John. 1984. *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*. New York: Polity Press.
- Atkinson, Paul. 1988. "Ethnomethodology: A Critical Review." *Annual Review of Sociology* 14: 441-65.
- Maynard, Douglas W. and Steven E. Clayman. 1991. "The Diversity of Ethnomethodology.." *Annual Review of Sociology* 17: 385-418.
- Collins, Randall. 1981. "Three Stages of Erving Goffman." Pp. 219-54 in *Sociology Since Midcentury: Essays in Theory Cumulation*. New York: Academic Press.
- Wuthnow, Robert, James Davison Hunter, Albert Bergesen, and Edith Kurzweil. 1984. "The Phenomenology of Peter Berger." Pp. 21-76 in *Cultural Analysis: The Work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault and Jurgen Habermas*. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

### Week 4 (February 26): Individualism and rational choice

**Required:**

- Homans, George Caspar. 1964. "Bringing Men Back In." *American Sociological Review* 29: 807-28.
- Coleman, James. 1990. *Foundations of Social Theory*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press. Pp. 1-54, 65-71, 91-108, 119-299.
- Miller, Dale. 1999. "The Norm of Self-Interest." *American Psychologist* 54: 1053-60.

**Reference resources for week 4:**

- Symposium on Coleman. 1992. *Theory and Society* 21: 263-83 (1992).
- Symposium on Coleman. 1990. *Contemporary Sociology* 19: 783-88.
- Frank, Robert H. 1992. "Melding Sociology and Economics: James Coleman's *Foundations of Social Theory*." *Journal of Economic Literature* 30: 147-70.
- Macy, Michael and Andreas Flache. 1995. "Beyond Rationality in Models of Choice." *Annual Rev. of Sociology* 21: 73-92.
- Hechter, Michael and S. Kanazawa. 1997. "Sociological Rational Choice Theory." *Annual Rev. of Sociology* 23: 191-214.

### Week 5 (March 6): Structuralism & role theory: Nadel, Blau & White

**Required:**

- Nadel, S.F. 1957. *Theory of Social Structure*. London: Cohen and West, pp. 1-124.
- Blau, Peter M. 1977. *Inequality and Heterogeneity: A Primitive Theory of Social Structure*. NY: Free Press. Chapters 1-6, pp. 1-153.
- White, Harrison C., Scott A. Boorman and Ronald L. Breiger. 1976. "Social Structure from Multiple Networks: I. Blockmodels of Roles and Positions." *American Journal of Sociology* 81: 730-80.

### Week 6 (March 13): Conflict theory: Marxism and social closure

**Required:**

- Wright, Erik Olin. 1997. *Class Counts*. NY: Cambridge Univ. Press, pp. 1-39, 43-55, 79-111, 115-45, and 185-233, 251-76.
- Abercrombie, Nicholas and Bryan Turner. 1978. "The Dominant Ideology Thesis." *Brit. Journal of Sociology* 29:149-70.
- Burawoy, Michael. 2000. "Marxism After Communism." *Theory and Society* 29: 151-74.
- Collins, Randall. 1971. "Functional and Conflict Theories of Educational Stratification." *American Sociological Review* 36:1002-1019.
- Murphy, Raymond. 1988. *Social Closure: The Theory of Monopolization and Exclusion*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-42.

-----Spring Break-----

**Week 7 (March 27): Practice Theory: Bourdieu and Giddens**

**Required:**

- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Trans., Richard Nice. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Pp. 3-41, 53-65, 66-70, 80-92, 112-21.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1998. "The Economy of Symbolic Goods." Pp. 93-123 in *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. "The Forms of Capital." Pp. 241-58 in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J.G. Richardson. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1984. *The Constitution of Society*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press. Introduction and pp. 1-37, 41-51, 60-68, 162-63, 169-93, 281-310.

**Reference resources for week 7:**

- Giddens, Anthony. 1993. *The Giddens Reader*, ed. Philip Cassell. London : MacMillan, Pp. 1-36 and 88-176.
- Held, David and John B. Thompson. 1989. *Social Theory of Modern Societies: Anthony Giddens and His Critics*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Cohen, Ira. 1989. *Structuration Theory: Anthony Giddens and the Constitution of Social Life*. London: Macmillan 1989.
- Cohen, Ira. 1998. "Anthony Giddens." In *Key Sociological Thinkers*, ed. Rob Stones. New York: New York University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre and Loic J.D. Wacquant. 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*. Trans. Matthew Adamson. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Loic Wacquant. 1998. "Pierre Bourdieu." Pp. 215-28 in *Key Sociological Thinkers*, ed. Rob Stones. New York: NYU Press.
- Loic J.D. Wacquant. 1989. "Towards a Reflexive Sociology: A Workshop with Pierre Bourdieu." *Sociological Theory* 7:26-63.
- Swartz, David. 1997. *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Calhoun, Craig J., E. LiPuma, Moishe Postone, eds. 1993. *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

**Week 8 (April 3): 2 Leading German Theorists: Habermas & Luhmann**

**Required:**

- Habermas, J. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into the Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989, 1-56, 73-88, 141-80, 236-50.
- Solum, Laurence Byard. 1989. Pp. 55-57 and 86-106 in "Freedom of Communicative Action: A Theory of the First Amendment Freedom of Speech." *Northwestern University Law Review* 83: 54-135.
- Luhmann, Niklas. 1977. "The Differentiation of Society." *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 2: 29-53.
- Luhmann, Niklas. 1987. "The Evolutionary Differentiation Between Society and Interaction." Pp. 112-31 in *The Micro-Macro Link*, ed. Jeffrey Alexander et al. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.
- Luhmann, Niklas. 1989. "Law as a Social System." *Northwestern University Law Review* 83: 136-50.

**Reference resources for week 8:**

- Outhwaite, William. 1994. *Habermas: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Held, David and John Thompson, eds. 1982. *Habermas: Critical Debates*. London: Macmillan.
- Calhoun, Craig J., ed. 1992a. *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Honneth, A., Hans Joas. 1991. *Communicative Action: Essays on Jurgen Habermas's The Theory of Communicative Action*. Trans. J. Ganeles, D.L. Jones. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Wuthnow, Robert, James Davison Hunter, Albert Bergesen, and Edith Kurzweil.. 1984. "The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas." Pp. 179-239 in *Cultural Analysis: The Work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault and Jurgen Habermas*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Ku, Agnes S. 2000. "Revisiting the Notion of 'Public' in Habermas's Theory – Toward a Theory of Politics of Public Credibility." *Sociological Theory* 18: 216-40.
- Habermas, Jurgen. 1996. *The Habermas Reader*. William Outhwaite, editor. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Habermas, Jurgen. 1989. *Jurgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader*, ed. Steven Seidman. Boston: Beacon Press. HM24 .H2613 1989.
- Lee, Daniel. 2000. "The Society of Society: The Grand Finale of Niklas Luhmann." *Sociological Theory* 18: 322-30.
- Knodt, Eva M. 1995. "Foreword" (pp. i-xxxvi) to Luhmann, Niklas. *Social Systems*. Trans by John Bednarz, Jr. w Dirk Baecker. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press.

## Week 9 (April 10): Postmodernism

### Required:

- Foucault, Michel. 1984. *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon.. "What is an Author?" (pp. 101-20) and selections from *Discipline and Punish* (pp. 170-238).
- Lash, Scott. 1990. "Postmodernism: Towards a Sociological Account." Pp. 1-52 in *The Sociology of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge.
- Pescosolido, Bernice and Beth Rubin. 2000. "The Web of Group Affiliations Revisited: Social Life, Postmodernism, and Sociology." *American Sociological Review* 65: 52-76.

## Week 10 (April 17): Evolutionary Theory

### Required:

- Aldrich, Howard. 1999. *Organizations Evolving*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications. Chaps. 2 and 3, pp. 20-74..
- Hannan, Michael T. And John Freeman. 1989. "Competition and the Niche" and "Modelling the Dynamics of Organizational Populations." Pp. 91-144 in *Organizational Ecology*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Carley, Kathleen M. 1999. "On the Evolution of Social and Organizational Networks." Pp. 3-30 in special issue of *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* (v. 16), *Networks In and Around Organizations*, , ed. Steven Andrews and David Knoke JAI Press, Inc. Stamford, Connecticut.
- Gould, Stephen Jay. 1989. "Punctuated Equilibrium in Fact and Theory." *Journal of Social Biological Structure* 12: 117-36.
- March, James G. 1994. "The Evolution of Evolution." Pp. 39-52 in *Evolutionary Dynamics of Organizations*, ed. By Joel A.C. Baum and Jitendra V. Singh. New York: Oxford Univ. Press.

## Week 11 (April 24): Theories of Gender

### Required:

- Chavetz, Janet S. 1993. "Feminist Theory and Sociology: Underutilized Contributions to Mainstream Theory." *Annual Review of Sociology* 23: 97-120.
- Stacey, Judith and Barrie Thorne. 1985. "The Missing Feminist Revolution in Sociology." *Social Problems* 32: 301-16.
- Smith, Dorothy E. 1990. "Women's Experience as a Radical Critique of Sociology" and "The Ideological Practice of Sociology". Pp. 11-60 in *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Sprague, Joey and Mary K. Zimmerman. "Overcoming Dualisms: A Feminist Agenda for Sociological Methodology." Pp. 255-80 in Paul England, ed., *Theory on Gender/Feminism on Theory*. Hawthorne, New York: Aldine-DeGruyter.
- West, Candace and Don Zimmerman. 1987. "Doing gender." *Gender and Society* 1:125-151.

- Udry, J. Richard. 2000. "Biological Limits of Gender Construction." *American Sociological Review* 65: 443-57.
- England, Paula and Barbara Stanek Kilbourne. 1990. "Feminist Critiques of the Separative Model of Self: Implications for Rational Choice Theory." *Rationality and Society* 2: 156-71.

**Reference Resources for Week 11:**

- England, Paula. 1993. *Theory on Gender/Feminism on Theory*. Hawthorne, New York: Aldine-DeGruyter.
- Chodorow, Nancy. 1978. *The Reproduction of Mothering*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Connell, R.W. 1996. *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity.
- De Beauvoir, Simone. 1989 (1949). *The Second Sex*. H. M. Parshley, trans. New York: Vintage.
- Epstein, Cynthia Fuchs. 1988. *Deceptive Distinctions: Sex, Gender and the Social Order*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1989. *Unruly Practices. Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

## Week 12 (May 1): Society as a Complex System

**Required:**

- Gladwell, Malcolm. 1996. "The Tipping Point." *New Yorker* (3 June): 32-38
- Arthur, W. Brian, Steven Durlauf and David A. Lane. 1997. "Process and Emergence in the Economy." 4-page selection from *Introduction to The Economy As an Evolving Complex System II: Proceedings*. Volume 27 in the Santa Fe Institute Studies in the Sciences of Complexity. Santa Fe: Santa Fe Institute. (Ms. From Brian Arthur's web site, <http://www.santafe.edu/~wba/Papers/ADLIntro.html>).
- Watts, Duncan. 1999. "Networks, Dynamics, and the Small-World Phenomenon." *American Journal of Sociology* 105: 493-527. (Ok to skim technical parts.)
- Tilly, Charles. 1993. Review of *Identity and Control*. *Contemporary Sociology* 22: 307-09.
- White, Harrison. 1992. *Identity and Control: A Structural Theory of Social Action*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press. Pp. 1-41, 48-58, 62-64, 65-70, 75-77, 78-89, 97, 102-11, 114-24, 126-32, 135-36, 200-201, 205-09, 230-67, 281-85, 297-303, 312-16.

**Reference resources for week 12:**

- Review Symposium on *Identity and Control*. *Contemporary Sociology*, 22: 307-16 (reviews by Charles Tilly, Raymond Boudon, Marshall Meyer, and Craig Calhoun). See also useful review by Andrew Abbott in *Social Forces* 72 (1994): 895 ff.
- Anderson, Philip W. and David Pines. 1988. *The Economy As an Evolving Complex System*. Volume 5 in the Santa Fe Institute Studies in the Sciences of Complexity. Santa Fe: Santa Fe Institute
- Arthur, W. Brian, Steven Durlauf and David A. Lane. 1997. "Process and Emergence in the Economy." 6-page selection from Introduction to *The Economy As an Evolving Complex System II: Proceedings*. Volume 27 in the Santa Fe Institute Studies in the Sciences of Complexity. Santa Fe: Santa Fe Institute.
- Gladwell, Malcolm. 2000. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. Boston: Little Brown.