

Sociology 314: 03/04
Contemporary Sociological Theory
FALL 2015

Professor: Richard Williams
M/TH 10:55-12:15
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Office Hrs. M (2:15-3:15) and by appointment

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Course Description and Objectives

The purpose of this course is to give you a structural understanding of the theories that contemporary sociologists use as conceptual tools for the study social life. By treating theories as tools we are able to move away from thinking of them as if they need to be thought of as at war with each other. Rather, it allows us to treat theories as ideas that are more or less appropriate for the study of specific aspects of social life. The lecture sessions focus on helping you to grasp the historical background and general sense of the specific theories. In the recitation section you will have the opportunity for discussions of details from the readings while relating them to your everyday life in contemporary society.

By the end of this course you will have learned how to analyze social life from a multiplicity of theoretical perspectives. In doing so we will focus on how different theories take distinct approaches to studying society from a MACRO (institutional) or a MICRO (individual) level while also focusing on either VALUES (concern with others) or INTERESTS (concern with self) as motivations for human behavior. In addition, you will gain familiarity and hopefully comfort with using sociological concepts in your everyday life as a way to address issues as complex rather than merely as battles between right and wrong.

Educational research indicates that students learn best by doing. Therefore, during some lectures and recitation sessions we will assign short exercises to be done in the moment, sometimes individually, sometimes as part of group interactions. We believe that using these exercises to think about the theoretical ideas as they arise in class will greatly benefit you in mastering the material during the semester.

As is now common at Rutgers, we will be using the SAKAI course website. The web address is <https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal>. If you are registered in the course you already have access to the site. Use your Rutgers username and password to login. This site will provide everyone with important information about the course such as the syllabus, readings, assignments, announcements and further explanations of course issues. It will also allow for discussions and chat (real-time interaction) for class-related interactions.

Week I

Thursday: September 3rd: *Food for Thought*

Introduction: you are already doing theory

Read before coming to class

<http://nyti.ms/1KGCGLU>:

Holmes, J. 2015. "The Case for Teaching Ignorance," The New York Times Aug. 24.

Tuesday: 9-08 (Monday classes held)

Sociology: A distinct way of understanding the world

Early and contemporary sociological takes on the changing world

****(Early)**: Durkheim, E. "Anomic Suicide," Chapter 5 of his *Suicide*.

- What appears to be an *individual* act has significant *social* underpinnings

(Late): An Interview with Beck, Ulrich: "The Cosmopolitan Turn," in Gane, N. *The Future of Social Theory*.

- What has been understood as *national* is now *global*

Week II

Th: 9-10

Historical background of the conceptual roots of contemporary theories

** Hollinger, "Modernity, The Enlightenment, and the Social Sciences"

Delaney, Chapter 1: "Examining Social Theory"

M: 9-14

We get underway with a look at the functionalist perspective

Functionalism: the classical basis of the MACRO/VALUE intersection

#Delaney (40-45)

**Durkheim, "Social Facts" as the proper subject matter of sociology

** Davis, K. and W. Moore. "Some Principles of Stratification"

Week III

Th: 9-17

Functionalism: Parsons [MACRO/VALUE]

Delaney (45-53)

**Parsons, T. "The System of Modern Societies"

*Sklair, Leslie (1970). "The Fate of the 'Functional Requisites' in Parsonian Sociology"

The British Journal of Sociology, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Mar., 1970), pp. 30-42

M: 9-21

An Early Functionalist adjustment: Merton [ADDING INTEREST TO MACRO/VALUE]

#Delaney (53-59)

*Gans, H. "The Positive Function of Poverty," *AJS*, Vol. 78, #2

Week IV

Th: 9-24

ESSAY#1 posted to Sakai Drop-box

A Neo-Functionalist reflection on Functionalism [Macro and Micro/ Value and Interest]

#Delaney (59-69)

*Alexander, J. and P. Colomy. 1985. "Toward Neo-Functionalism," *Sociological Theory*, 3:2 (August): 11-23.

M: 9-28

Conflict Theory: Classical Basis [MACRO/INTEREST]

#Delaney (70-74)

Marx, K. 1845. The German Ideology. Part I: Feuerbach. Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlook <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm#a1>

**Weber, M. "Types of Legitimate Domination (pp. 212-216)

Week IV

Thursday: October 1st

Conflict Theory: Marx and Simmel

#Delaney (74-82)

*Turner, J. 1975. "Marx and Simmel Revisited: Reassessing the Foundations of Conflict Theory"
Social Forces, 53:4 (618-627)

*Coser, L. 1957. "Social Conflict and the Theory of Social Change," *British Journal of Sociology (BJS)*: 8(3): 197-207

M: 10-05

Conflict Theory: C. W. Mills

#Delaney (82-88)

**Mills, C. W. From "The Structure of Power in America"

Domhoff, G. William 2005. Power Structure Research and the Hope for Democracy

http://sociology.ucsc.edu/whorulesamerica/theory/power_structure_research.html

Week VI

Th: 10-08

Conflict Theory: Dahrendorf

#Delaney (88-93)

**Dahrendorf, R. "Social Structure, Group Interests, and Conflict Groups"

M: 10-12

Conflict Theory: Randall Collins and Review

#Delaney (93-104)

*Collins, R. 1971. "Functional and Conflict Theories of Educational Stratification"
American Sociological Review (ASR): 36 (December: 1002-1019)

Week VII

Th: 10-15

Symbolic Interactionism: Classical Basis [MICRO/VALUE]

#Delaney (105-111)

** Mead, G. H. 1934. "Play, the Game, and the Generalized Other"

M: 10-19

Symbolic Interactionism: Mead and Blumer

#Delaney (111-120)

**Blumer, H. "Society as Symbolic Interaction"

Week VIII

Th: 10-22

ESSAY #2 uploaded to Sakai Drop-box: (Oct. 21 for IN-CLASS DISCUSSION)

A chance to build participation points

M: 10-26

Symbolic Interactionism: Goffman

#Delaney (120-126)

** Goffman, E. "Introduction," from his, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*

Week IX

Th: 10-29

Symbolic Interactionism: Hochschild and Review

#Delaney (126- 133)

****Hochschild, A. "Exploring the Managed Heart"****Monday November 2nd*****The claim that INSTINCTS are the basis of social order****(Rational Choice) Social Exchange Theory: [MICRO/INTEREST: Instinct]*

#Delaney (134-137)

***Hechter, M. and S. Kanazawa. 1997. "Sociological Rational Choice Theory,"**
Annual Review of Sociology (23: 191-214)**Week X**

Th: 11:05

Social Exchange Theory: Homans

#Delaney (137-145)

***Homans, G. 1958. "Social Behaviors as Exchange,"** *American Journal of Sociology (AJS)*
(63):6 (May: 597-606)

M: 11-09

Social Exchange Theory: Blau

#Delaney (145-150)

****Blau, P. "Formulation of Exchange Theory."****Week XI**

Th: 11-12

3rd ESSAY posted to Sakai Drop-box*Social Exchange Theory: Cook and Review*

#Delaney (150-159)

****Cook, K. "Power in Exchange Networks"**

M: 11-16

The claim that RULES are the basis of social order*Ethnomethodology: Garfinkel*

#Delaney (160-173)

****Garfinkel, H. "Studies of the Routine Grounds of Everyday Activities"****Week XII**

Th: 11-19

Ethnomethodology: Beyond Garfinkel plus Review

#Delaney (174-178)

Steven R. Thomsen, et al. "Ethnomethodology and the Study of Online Communities: Exploring
the Cyber Streets." <http://informationr.net/ir/4-1/paper50.html>West, C. and D. Zimmerman, 1987. "Doing Gender" *Gender and Society* (1): 2 (June: 125-151)

M: 11-23

Modern and Postmodern Theory

#Delaney (259-264)

Th. 11-26: Thanksgiving (No Class)

Week XIII

M: 11-30

Modern and Postmodern Theory

#Delaney (264-271)

Bauman, Z. *Identity* (pp. 9-32)Thursday December 3rd***Modern and Postmodern Theory: Foucault and overview*

#Delaney (282-289)

**Rajchman "Foucault's Art of Seeing"

Week XIV

M: 12-07

4th ESSAY posted to Sakai Drop-box*Theorizing future societies*

#Delaney (320-332; 350-356)

**Stevenson, N. 2010. "New Media, Popular Culture and Social Theory," in Elliot (ed.)
Routledge Companion to Social Theory

** Hart, W. E. 2011, "Mind, Self and Facebook: Towards a Postmodern Sociology"

Th: 12-10 (Last day of classes)

Picking up loose ends and drawing conclusions

Besnier, J-M 2014. "Is the digital revolution a fraud?"

(URL) <http://www.cuberevue.com/en/is-the-digital-revolution-a-fraud/1097>

Face-to-Facebook:

(URL) www.Face-to-Facebook.net/theory.php**5TH ESSAY posted to Sakai Drop-box by NOON Thursday 12-17****Grading**

You will be graded on the 4 factors listed below. The grading is based on the assumption that, beyond doing well on the essay assignments, you will maximize your attendance and participation in lectures and in section.

| | |
|------------------------|----|
| -Class Participation | 10 |
| -Section Participation | 15 |
| -Response to readings | 15 |
| -Essays (5x12) | 60 |

| | |
|-------|-----|
| TOTAL | 100 |
|-------|-----|

NO ASSIGNMENT WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER THE DUE DATE

| | | |
|----|----|-----|
| A | 90 | 100 |
| B+ | 85 | 89 |
| B | 80 | 84 |
| C+ | 75 | 79 |
| C | 70 | 74 |

(The dead zone: no one wants to go here)

Responses to the readings

In order to assure reading: Prior to the beginning of EACH lecture, you are required to place a comment or question about one of the days' readings in your Sakai drop box. **THE FIRST COMMENT/QUESTION IS DUE ON Thursday September 10th**

Comment/Question: Treat your comment/question as something YOU want to know more about or something you find interesting.

All comments and questions are not equal:

- Those that are consistently obvious (a mere statement of what is in the reading or a question that can be answered merely by reading again, googling the issue or reading more) will be measured as an indication that you are willing to accept the minimum response points for the semester
- Those engaging in a broader discussion, attempt to engage a range of responses based upon the theory under study in addition to theories we have dealt with, will be viewed as striving for the maximum response points for the semester
- There will be room (during office hours) for addressing disagreements about the level at which the comments/questions have been judged

What you bring to class can be the basis for your participation in section.

ATTENDANCE

Starting on Thursday September 10th, each student will be granted 2 class and 2 section absences without repercussions. I would suggest that you save your absences for later in the semester when you might truly need them.

Arriving on time to lectures and sections

You are expected to arrive on time (with reasonable space due to "life"). Anyone who consistently arrives late to lecture or section will have their participation points lowered based on discussions between the professor and the TA.

Essay Dates

Th: 9-24

ESSAY#1 posted to Sakai Drop-box

Th: 10-22

ESSAY #2 uploaded to Sakai Drop-box: (March 12th for IN-CLASS DISCUSSION)

A chance to build participation points

Th: 11-12

3rd ESSAY posted to Sakai Drop-box

M: 12-07

4th ESSAY posted to Sakai Drop-box

5th ESSAY posted to Sakai Drop-box by NOON Th. 12-17

Readings**#= BOOKSTORE****Delaney, T. *Contemporary Social Theory***

***= JSTOR:** Can be accessed by logging into Rutgers Libraries and going to *FIND ARTICLES*, then to INDEXES AND DATABASES, then to **J** under “By Title.” You are then guided into JSTOR. On the JSTOR Search page click on “Article Locator,” highlighted in red on the right side of the grey box. Type in the name of the article as indicated on the syllabus and the article should popup.

****= SAKAI/RESOURCE**

****/* URLs file in RESOURCE/SAKAI**