



Sociology 591

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES IN SOCIOLOGY

Fall 2022

Prof. José A. Padín
Department of Sociology

Thursdays, 2:00-5:00 pm
Cramer Hall 265

Office Hours:

Sign up for a spot in the sign-up sheet on Canvas

Thursdays, 12-1 — In person, Cramer 217-G

Fridays, 10-11 — Zoom video, link on Canvas

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a course focused, first, on refining our ability to use of theory and secondly, on theory across a variety of “levels” (micro, macro), and a variety of “domains” (class, political economy, status, race, gender). Theories are an indispensable part of a scientific agenda and invaluable compass to guide empirical investigation.

Beyond this, I will not elaborate further the role and value of theory in this introduction, as I want us to develop those ideas jointly, and anything I write here will preempt, or stifle, an open exploration.

Proficiency in the use of theory, sociological or otherwise, requires concentrated time, effort, and commitment to practice. For this reason, I want you to think of this course as an 11-week theory practicum: we survey different theories, but we go beyond getting the flavor of a theory, and beyond labelling and classifying theories into “camps” (those two things turn out to be not very helpful); we will explore the internal logic of theoretical arguments and learn how to “play” with them to develop insightful and intriguing propositions about interesting issues; and learn how to build half of the bridge between theory and empirical research by deriving researchable hypotheses from the theories).

What This Course is Not

This course is not survey of “theoretical schools,” notable individuals, or history. Although that is a common format for theory courses, especially in undergraduate courses, and it can be a useful way of making a first acquaintance with ideas, it not a very useful way of learning how to *use* theory.

COURSE MATERIALS

Most of the required reading is available as .pdf files available through our library or the Canvas site for our course.

You will need to get a copy of one book:

Cecilia L. Ridgfield. *Status: Why is it Everywhere? Why Does it Matter?* (2019, Russell Sage)

EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

This graduate seminar is a commitment to a community of colleagues. These are essential norms for our community (and we can develop others after we meet):

1. Timeliness: Attend all class meetings, arriving on time, for the full meeting; submitting work schedule.
2. Conscientious preparation: Come prepared to class, having completed the reading and having done some writing.
3. Active and democratic participation in discussion.
4. Supporting one another in and out of class.
5. Seeking ways to build on the valuable contributions of others.
6. Connection: Meet and work with others out of class, including at me. I want to have at least 3 one-on-one meetings with each of you over the course of the term.

Required Assignments

1. Theory reflection journal (40%)

Get a notebook and start a journal to write reflections on what you read (the reading assignments, and some listening assignments) and on class discussion. Yes, a notebook is old school! There are significant advantages.

Write at least 2 journal entries a week containing your reflections on the readings:

- One set of reflections on the readings before class
- A second set of reflections shortly after our class meeting, while class discussion is still fresh.

I will collect your journal notebooks two (2) times during the term:

- By 3pm, Monday, Oct. 31, drop your notebook in my mailbox.
- By 3pm, Monday, Dec. 5, drop your notebook in my mailbox.

Practice a lot drawing diagrams to supplement and illustrate what you write you your reflections. Why? To understand theoretical arguments, to play with them, and to figure out ways of connecting several different theories, it is very, very helpful to draw diagrams of the causal relationships in each, and then build more complex diagrams that combine different theories into one visual.

2. 9 weekly brief analytical papers (40%)

- 2-page, double-space, analytical brief
- Draft due in class (in person)
- Final revision due the following Monday, by 5pm (electronically)

Each brief paper should have a paragraph dedicated to each of these questions:

1. What is the common concern of all the readings?
2. What are the core concepts (explanatory building blocks) offered by each reading?
3. What is the main causal argument of one of the readings?
4. How would I connect or synthesize that causal argument with what I understand in the other readings?

Suggestion: Supplement your two pages of writing with a diagram, or diagrams, that help visualize your argument, especially in relation to parts 3 and 4 of the assignment.

2. Final Paper (20%)

12-15 pages in length (double-space)

The goal of this paper is to propose and develop theoretical arguments that synthesize ideas across readings from different weeks.

Due: 3pm, Tuesday, December 6.

Instructions to be discussed in class. There is a grade penalty for missed classes, and a cumulative grade penalty for late assignments.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Readings may subject to change, and if so, there will be fair advance notice.

Week 1: Socratic Dialogue: What is Sociological Theory? What is it Good for? How Should it be Used?

For our first class meeting we will engage in a “Socratic dialogue” to probe and refine the ideas we have about sociological theory, what it is, how to use it, and we will share examples from our experience.

Come prepared to contribute to a rich dialogue!

Before class, also listen to the following audio conversation with philosopher C. Thi Nguyen, [“Are We Measuring Our Lives in all the Wrong Ways?”](#) This conversation is the February 25, 2022 podcast of the Ezra Klein Show. You can click on the title above, or find the podcast on your favorite platform.

Week 2: Class

Allen Wood, *Karl Marx* (2nd Edition), chs. 1-4

This is an introduction to basic concepts in the Marxian theory of society, by a philosopher whose primary interest to help us develop clarity and sharpness, and to help us abandon habits of fuzzy thinking.

Fromm, Erich. 1970. "Marx's Contribution to the Knowledge of Man", Ch. 3 in *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis*. Greenwood, Conn.: Fawcett.

This is a brief and suggestive proposal making the case for building social psychological concepts and propositions around the Marxian theory of class.

Week 3: Class Structure

Allen Wood, *Karl Marx* (2nd Edition), chapter 6, "Classes"

Erik O. Wright. "Class Analysis," chapter 1 in *Class Counts* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Erik O. Wright. "Understanding Class: Towards an Integrated Analytical Approach," *New Left Review* 60: 101-116 (2009)

Week 4: Class Formation, Class Conflict, and the Organization of Class Power

Hal Draper, "Trade Unions and Class", in *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, Volume II: The Politics of Social Classes*, (Monthly Review: 1978), pp.81-114.

Draper reviews the history of the union movement to cull analytical models of how the organizations of the working class evolve in a variety of directions ("class formation"), some of which paradoxically undermine the power of that class and lead to new forms of stratification.

Przeworski, Adam. 1985. "Party Strategy, Class Organization, and Individual Voting," pages 99-106, 126-129 in *Capitalism and Social Democracy*. New York: Cambridge.

Przeworski presents a theory of why the changing class structure of capitalism creates constraints that transform the political parties of labor.

Week 5: The State and Citizenship Under Capitalist Conditions

Fred Block, "The Ruling Class Does Not Rule: Notes on the Marxist Theory of the State", in *Revising State Theory*, (Temple: 1987), pp. 51-68.

Ralph Miliband, "State Power and Class Interests", *The New Left Review*, 138 (March-April 1983), pp. 57-68

Optional (highly recommended bedside reading):

Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains* (2017, Penguin Books)

Week 6: Status and the Social Structure of Inequality

Cecilia L. Ridgefield. 2019. *Status*, chapters 1-4.

Week 7: Status and the Social Structure of Inequality

Cecilia L. Ridgefield. 2019. *Status*, chapters 5-7.

Week 8: Patriarchy and Gender Stratification

Engels, Frederick. 1973. Selections from *On the Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*.

DeBeauvoir, Simone. 1989 [1952]. "Introduction", and "The Point of View of Historical Materialism," *The Second Sex* New York: Vintage Books.

Zillah Eisenstein. 1999. "Constructing a Theory of Capitalist Patriarchy and Socialist Feminism," *Critical Sociology* 25 (2/3): 196-217.

Week 9: Racial & Ethnic Stratification

Bonacich, Edna. 1976 "Advanced Capitalism and Black/White Relations in the U.S.: A Split Labor Market Analysis", *American Sociological Review* 41.

Fredrickson, George. 1988. "Social Origins of American Racism", pp. 189-206 n *The Arrogance of Race*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2009. *Racism Without Racists*. 3rd edition. Lanham, Md. : Rowman & Littlefield. (chapters 1-2)

Mamdani, Mahmood. 2001. "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43(4): 651-664.

Week 10: Intersections of the Autonomous Structures of Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Racism

Hill Collins, Patricia. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought*. 2nd Edition. Boston: Unwin Hyman. **Chapters 4, 5**

Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta. 2016. From #Blacklivesmatter to Black Liberation.

Optional: **Chapter 2**

Required: **Chapters 3 and 5**