

Contemporary Theory

Sociology 520

Fall 2011

Thursdays, 2:10-5

Celia Winkler, Ph.D., J.D.

243-5843; SS 323; Cell 218-9564

celia.winkler@umontana.edu

Office Hours: T,Th 12:40-2

and by appointment

This course introduces graduate students and upper-level undergraduates to the study of the theories currently in use in U.S. sociology. The goal of this course is to enable students to become theorists or, at the least, to understand and competently use social theory in their research and their daily lives. As a survey of theoretical perspectives, it is necessarily a little fragmented because the state of theory is fragmented and often marked by deep rifts between camps. Furthermore, there is no neat chronological mapping of theoretical development, as theorists often reach back in time to bring old theories into the present and offer reinterpretations of the "classics." Thus, to examine theory by simply following a timeline is to misunderstand the use and nature of theory.

My take on theory is that each tradition has something to offer, and the best theory is often a blend of traditions. In order to understand and make theory, however, you must first learn to distinguish among the various perspectives. Due to the short time we have together, it is unreasonable to try to cover all aspects of contemporary theory. We will try to introduce you to the basics of several theories, with application to substantive areas of interest to you.

As advanced undergraduates and graduate students, it is expected that you will take responsibility for your own learning. One doesn't really learn until one tries to teach. Furthermore, theory is something that one learns best by doing. Like any new skill, mastering it requires exercise. This course will require considerable reading, considerable outside work, and a lot of initiative.

To summarize, we expect to achieve the following goals:

1. Learn the basic outlines of several of the theories currently used by sociologists;
2. Distinguish between different theorists in similar perspectives;
3. Understand differences and similarities among divergent perspectives;
4. Begin to see the application of theory to concrete social situations;
5. Move toward becoming a theorist.

In aid of these goals, you will be required to:

- a) Regularly check your university email account and Moodle;
- b) Read all the assignments, preferably at least a few days before class so that you have time to think and write about it in your journal;
- c) Attend all class sessions unless illness or emergency makes this impossible, and participate in class discussion;
- d) Organize and lead one class session;
- e) Write four short essays (3 to 5 pages) addressing the question posed;
- f) Write a longish literature review (approximately 8-10 pages for undergraduates, 15-20 pages for graduate students) comparing and critiquing two of the theoretical approaches we address in class, using ASA format.
- g) Record your intellectual journey in your journal.

I agree to:

- α. Hold regular office hours;
- β. Read and promptly (within 24 hours) respond to emails where response is reasonably expected;
- γ. Organize the course and facilitate the class sessions where there are no student facilitators;
- δ. Thoughtfully read, comment on, and grade the written assignments.

Required Reading:

Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckmann. 1967. *Social Construction of Reality*. New York: Anchor Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1995. *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Press.

Goffman, Erving. 1986. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

And articles on Moodle.

You may decide that a textbook would be helpful. I recommend Adams & Sydie, *Contemporary Sociological Theory*.

About Class Facilitation: Each student will facilitate one class session. You may choose to do this with a partner. This is the part of the course you will always remember (if you remember anything at all). You may be as creative as you wish. It's up to you. Please feel free to consult with me in advance if you have problems with the assignment. You are graded on how seriously you take your task (but this is not to exclude humor; humor is always nice).

About the Essays: These should be about 5 pages in length. A score of twenty will be exceedingly difficult to attain. You will be required to address a general topic using at least two of the original source readings from different weeks.

About the Paper: You will pose a question and discuss the relevant literature at length in your paper, centering on a critique of two or more of the theories we examined in class. In fact, you might expand on your short essays. A paper proposal will be due the third week of class, to be read critically by a peer. The revised version will be due to me the fifth week of class.

An annotated bibliography, using ASA citation format, is due the ninth week of class. Ten peer-reviewed works or chapters (from separate books) are required.

The paper MUST show that you have read and analyzed original material from each of your theorists. Secondary works are permissible, but the original is required.

You may submit a rough draft, for which you will be given a provisional grade (that is, the grade you would get if you did no more work). If you want comments on your final paper, you must submit a self-addressed manila envelope with the paper. It may be a good idea to form a writing support group.

About the Journal: This could simply be your notes with reflections on the readings. The purpose of this is to ensure that you are closely attending to the reading and the class discussions. Do not worry about format, etc. The point here is to engage with the material. You may ask for feedback on occasion during the semester to ensure that you are "doing it right."

About the Presentation: Please do not see the presentation as a horrendous, terribly scary task, but as an opportunity to present your work to the class for discussion, comments, and so forth. Others may have suggestions on how to improve your paper.

Timeliness: ...is of the essence. Assignments will lose a full grade for each day they are late. Only in the most dire of circumstances will I accept late work without assigning a penalty. Last-minute computer/printer failure will not be an acceptable excuse. If you need to turn a paper in late, check with me.

Participation/Attendance: Attendance will be taken. For each class you miss, without good cause submitted by email or in writing, you will lose ten points.

Essays 4 @ 20 points each	80
Paper Problem	5
Bibliography	10
Final Paper	100
Journal	15
Facilitation of class session	50
Participation	50
Presentation	10
Total	320

+/- Grading will be used

Contemporary Theory

Sociology 520 * Fall 2011 Calendar

Prof. Celia Winkler

Version 1

Week 1: September 1

Topic: Introductions. What is theory? The Canon

Topic: Sociology as Science or Service? Or something else?

Required Reading

M: Weber, "Science as a Vocation"

M: Burawoy, "Public Sociology"

Recommended Reading:

M: Connell, R.W., "Why is classical theory classical?"

M: Feagin and Vera, "Improving Human Societies: Reassessing the Classical Theorists"
--- "U.S. Sociology from the 1890s to 1970s"

Week 2: September 8

Choosing class facilitators

Topic: Functionalism: Parsons, Merton, Agnew

Required Reading:

M: Parsons, "Toward a General Theory of Action"

M: Merton

"On Sociological Theories of the Middle Range"

"Paradigm for Functional Analysis in Sociology"

"Manifest and Latent Functions"

"Social Structure and Anomie"

M: Agnew, "Foundation for a General Strain Theory of Crime and Delinquency"

Essay 1, due 9/22: Compare and contrast Structural Functionalism and Exchange Theory. How are each appropriate to the era in which they were developed? What questions do they address? What concepts are used? What is the level of analysis? Despite their obvious differences, are there any similarities?

Assignment: Journal

Week 3: September 15

Topic: Exchange Theory: Homans & Blau

Required Reading:

M: Homans, "Social Behavior as Exchange"

M: Blau, *Exchange & Power in Social Life*, Chapters 4 & 5, "Social Exchange" and "Differentiation of Social Power"

M: Blau, "A Circuitous Path to Macrostructural Theory"

Assignment: Journal

Paper Problem to peer.

Week 4: September 22

Topic: Critical Theory and the response to Fascism—Horkheimer, Adorno, and Habermas

Required Reading:

M: Horkheimer, "Tasks of an Institute for Social Research"

M: Adorno, "Introduction to the Authoritarian Personality"

M: Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory*, Chapters 9 & 10, "Introduction to Habermas" and "Discourse, Science and Society"

Essay 2, due 10/13: Compare and contrast the different approaches to modern marxian theory. In answering this question, weigh relative utility in different contexts. Use the context in which the author is writing. Next, choose one of these theories, and build on it to apply to a contemporary situation. For example, if an author is discussing jazz music, one might apply the theory to the hip-hop music industry.

Assignment: Journal

Essay 1 Due

Peer review of paper problem.

Week 5: September 29

Topic: Conflict and Neomarxism—Dahrendorf, Lukacs, Gramsci

Required Reading:

M: Dahrendorf, *Toward a Theory of Social Conflict*

M: Lukacs, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" in *History and Class Consciousness*

M: Jay, "The Two Holisms of Antonio Gramsci"

Recommended:

M: Thompson, Michael. 2011. "Ontology and Totality: Reconstructing Lukács' Concept of Critical Theory." Pp. 229-250 in *Georg Lukacs Reconsidered: Critical Essays in Politics, Philosophy and Aesthetics*. New York: Continuum.

Assignment: Journal

Paper problem to instructor

Week 6: October 6

Facilitators:

Topic: Neomarxism, continued

Burawoy and Wright, "Sociological Marxism"

Acker, "Class, Gender, and the Relations of Distribution"

Goldfrank, "Paradigm Regained? The Rules Of Wallerstein's World-System Method"

Walby, "Complexity Theory, Systems Theory, and Multiple Intersecting Social Inequalities"

Assignment: ***Journal***

Week 7: October 13

Facilitators:

Topic: Symbolic Interaction: Blumer, Goffman, Hochschild

Required Reading:

M: Blumer: What is Wrong with Social Theory?

M: Blumer, TBA

Essay 3, due 11/3: Compare and contrast symbolic interaction and phenomenology. What do they add to sociology that might have been missing in the theoretical perspectives we've studied to date?

Assignment: Journal

Essay 2 Due

Week 8: October 20

Facilitators:

Topic: Symbolic Interaction: Goffman, continued.

Goffman, *Stigma*

Assignment: Journal

Annotated Bibliography

Week 9: October 27

Facilitators:

Topic: Phenomenology & Ethnomethodology: Berger & Luckmann

Required Reading:

Berger & Luckmann: *Social Construction of Reality*

Assignment: Journal

Week 10: November 3

Facilitators:

Topic: Poststructuralism and Postmodernism: Foucault

Required Reading:

Foucault: *Discipline and Punish*

Essay 4, due November 17: On which social theories do Foucault and the feminist theorists draw in constructing their approach to understanding the social world? Do they add anything to our ways of knowing? How might society be “post-structural” and what might that have to do with Foucault and Feminism?

Assignment: Journal

Essay 3 due

Week 11: November 10

Facilitators:

Topic: Feminist Theories: Standpoint. Smith, Hartsock, Harding, Collins.

Required Reading:

M: Hekman, “Truth and Method”

M: Replies by Hartsock, Collins, Harding, Smith

Recommended Reading:

M: de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

M: Friedan, “The Problem That Has No Name”

M: Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism”

M: Collins, *From Black Feminist Thought*

M: Crenshaw, “Intersectionality and Identity Politics”

M: Delphy, “For a Materialist Feminism”

Assignment: Journal

Week 12: November 17

Discussion: Theory highlights and synthesis

Assignment: Journal

Essay 4 due

Week 13: November 24

No class Happy Thanksgiving!

Week 14: December 1

Presentations

Week 15: December 8

Presentations

Finals week: Paper and Journal due no later than Thursday, December 16, 5 p.m. Journal may be placed in my box or submitted electronically on Moodle.