

Social Theory

Sociology 1365

Spring 2015

Tuesday and Thursday 9:00 am-12:15 pm

2200 WW Posvar Hall

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Office hours: Tuesday 12:15pm-1:15 pm and by appointment.

Course Description:

Social theory is the basic foundation of the discipline of sociology. We ask the following questions: What is Theory? How does it relate to our lives? What is its utility? This course will examine both “classic” and “contemporary” developments of social theory through the examination of stratification and power, culture, social order, pragmatism and revolutions, in addition to more contemporary issues such as theories of deviance, symbolic interaction, feminist theory, critical race theory, queer theory, and neoliberalism.

This course will cover social theory in pre-modern, modern, and a global perspective. Major theoretical traditions will be explored. Other topics examined will include the development of global capitalism and the relationship between markets, the state, and civil society. An array of theoretical perspectives will be covered in this course including those of prominent scholars such as Marx, Weber, Simmel, Durkheim, Mead, James, Dubois, Parsons, Merton and Blumer. Also, contributions of notable women and scholars of color will be examined including those of Anna Julia Cooper, Jane Addams, Simone de Beauvoir, Franz Fanon, Dorothy Smith, Patricia Hill Collins, and Judith Butler.

By the end of this course you should be able to identify the major theorists of sociology and how their theoretical traditions are both relevant and applicable to your everyday life.

Learning Goals/Course Objectives:

The course is intended to help you develop your analytical and critical thinking skills.

You will be asked to move beyond your own experience and perspectives to *sociologically analyze and evaluate over-simplified explanations of past and contemporary issues as they appear in our readings.* Learning in this course will occur in a variety of ways: critical reading, investigating empirical evidence, and active class participation. With that in mind, the course objectives for this class include:

- Identify and examine basic assumptions of classic and contemporary works of sociological theory
- Examine different meanings of theory, how theories are developed and evaluated
- Examine the relationship between agency and social structure

- Examine theoretical origins and influence of contemporary sociology which includes issues related to race, class, gender, sexuality, deviance, and social movements.

Required Readings:

Lemert, Charles, ed., *Social Theory* [5th Edition]

*All additional readings will be available on Courseweb.

Course Requirements:

Participation (100 points)

Discussion Leading (Twice @ 50 points each = 100 points)

Weekly Close Readings (5 @ 50 points)

Take-Home Exam (50 points)

Final Presentation (20 points for proposal and 100 points for presentation)

370 possible points

Your point value grade will be converted to a percentage grade, meaning:

Grading Scale:

A+ = 98-100 percent	C+ = 77 to 79 percent
A = 93 to 97 percent	C = 73 to 76 percent
A- = 90 to 92 percent	C- = 69 to 72 percent
B+ = 87 to 89 percent	D+= 67 to 68 percent
B = 83 to 86 percent	D= 63 to 66 percent
B- = 80 to 82 percent	D-=60-62 percent
F = less than 60 percent	

Participation:

Because this is a **six-week** course, your participation in this class is crucial! Participation in this class includes, but is not limited to: **(1) *Coming to class.*** I will take formal attendance at each class meeting. While you are adults and the decision to participate in this course is yours, if you are not here to participate, your grade will suffer. In my experience, students who regularly attend classes have a better experience of the course, get the most out of the experience, and tend to get better grades. Like most things in life, you will get out of this course what you put into it. **(2) *Reading the required texts.*** Again, you will get out of this course what you put into it. The readings for each class may seem daunting – but given the short duration of the term, it would behoove you to not get behind on the reading. **(3) *Regularly contributing to class discussions*** (talking in class). Please note that your ability to contribute to class discussions is directly correlated with your class attendance **and** your complete reading of the assigned texts. Not every comment/question must be brilliant and insightful; questions and “thinking aloud” are important to the learning process. I **cannot** stress enough how important contributing to class discussions will be to you, other students, and me as the instructor. Speak up!

Speaking of class discussions, here are some ground rules for class discussion:

I am distributing **these ground rules to help guide future class discussions**¹. Everyone in this class has an individual social location and a personal perspective to go along with that location. To facilitate class discussion, I encourage you to think about how everyone's perspective is shaped by their social location. I would like each of you to think in terms of the relationship between society and the individual when contributing to class discussions, or in other words, adhere to a sociological imagination. Please follow the following guidelines:

- Recognize that various axes of our social location – our gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, etc. – accord us different amounts of power and prestige in society.
- Acknowledge that sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism and other forms of institutionalized oppression exist.
- Acknowledge that we are all systematically taught misinformation about our own group and about members of other groups. This is true for members of privileged and oppressed groups.
- Agree to not blame others or ourselves for the misinformation we have learned, but accept responsibility for not repeating misinformation after we have learned otherwise.
- Agree not to blame victims for the conditions of their lives.
- Assume that people – both the people we study and the members of this class – always do the best they can.
- Actively pursue information about our own groups and those of others.
- Share information about our own groups with other members of the class and never demean, devalue, or in any way put down people for their experiences.
- Agree to combat actively the myths and stereotypes about our own groups and other groups so that we can break down the walls, which prohibit group cooperation and group gain.
- Create a safe atmosphere for open discussion. If members of the class wish to make comments that they do not want repeated outside of the classroom, they can preface their remarks with a request that the class agree not to repeat their remarks.

Discussion Leading:

You will be responsible for pairing up with another student and leading two in-class discussions. What this means is that you will be responsible for covering the reading of the day and facilitating a discussion among your peers. You can feel free to bring in outside materials (although I'm sure no one will want more reading) and are free to show videos and/or play games, do a skit etc. The more creative your presentation, the more fun you may have doing it and your peers may have participating. Please keep in mind that these are worth a significant portion of your grade.

While you may contact me if you run into issues with your discussion leading, as adults you are responsible for working cooperatively with your partner. Please do not

¹ These ground rules are adapted from the following source:
Weber, Lynn. "Ground Rules for Course Discussion." *Women's Quarterly* 18 (Spring/Summer 1990): 126-134.

overburden your partner by not doing the reading, not helping them plan the discussion leading, or not showing up for the discussion.

A sign up sheet will be made available the first day of class for you to sign up for discussion leading. Switching or changing discussion days is between you and your peers.

Weekly Close Readings:

Each week you will be responsible for a 250-300 word essay based on one or several texts in the reading, the meaning of which you attempt to describe. The close readings are guides to the central issues of the readings. There will be 5 close readings at 10 points each. They will be due at the beginning of class every Thursday in hard copy.

Take-home Exam:

The take-home exam is just what it says, an exam you take home with you to complete. The exam will be made available on Courseweb but must be turned in on the last day of class in hard copy.

Final Presentation:

Instead of a final exam or paper you will have one last opportunity to share with your peers what you have learned in this class. Your presentation should be similar to a close reading, in that you will go in-depth with a concept that we have covered in class. You may use media and/or current events to connect your topic to something larger happening in the world/your every day life.

For this presentation you must first write a proposal about what you want to present on. On the last day of class you will present about your topic for 10-12 minutes.

Tip: The readings and current events are both worthwhile places to find material for weekly close readings.

Life happens. If you have to miss class (for any reason) please contact me. Because this is a six-week course, every day we meet is equivalent to a week of class – for this reason if you miss more than **2** class meetings you will not pass the class.

Tip: If you are concerned about your performance in the class, the best course of action is to **talk to me immediately** so we can discuss strategies for improvement. Do not wait until the end of the term!

**There will be no makeup exams.
There will be no (additional) extra credit.
I will not accept late assignments or exams².
I will not accept written assignments/exams via email.**

² Again, Please contact me if you experience a personal or family emergency. I am strict about late assignments, but not inflexible. If you do have an issue, please do not wait until the last minute to contact me – if you wait until the end of the course to explain excessive absences, I cannot help you.

Tip: if you know that you are going to miss class the day an assignment is due you must find a way to get the assignment to me before the deadline.

Extra Credit:

One opportunity for extra credit exists. This opportunity involves using a theory, or theories learned in class to examine a current event. This assignment should be three pages and is worth 10 points. This assignment can only be completed once.

Other Important Information:

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

...In other words, do not cheat, help others cheat, or plagiarize. Academic integrity is not limited to these points, but these are the most important elements. They will be strictly enforced in this course. Do your own work. Figure out what you want to say and say it in your own words. Cite your sources when you quote or paraphrase. When in doubt about whether you are plagiarizing ask yourself: *Are these my original words or thoughts?* If you are unsure, go back and read the text to be sure. If what you wrote is not originally yours, cite.

Disabilities:

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services(DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890, drsrecep@pitt.edu. (412) 228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

Reasonable Accommodation:

Please notify me of any absences for **religious observances** or **official university athletic activities** as soon as possible in order to make appropriate adjustments for assignments you may miss.

Email policy in course syllabi:

Each student is issued a University e-mail address(username@pitt.edu) upon admittance. This e-mail address may be used by the University for official communication with students. Students are expected to read e-mail sent to this account on a regular basis. Failure to read and react to University communications in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. The University provides an e-mail forwarding

service that allows students to read their e-mail via other service providers (e.g., Hotmail, AOL, Yahoo). Students that choose to forward their e-mail from their pitt.edu address to another address do so at their own risk. If e-mail is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to official communications sent to their University e-mail address.

Technology in the Classroom:

Because this is a very small class, I do ask that you severely limit your use of technology in the classroom. I know that this will be difficult because we – in our everyday lives – navigate through the world using laptops, tablets, and cell phones. I know that social media calls us from all of these devices 24-hours of the day. Although not using technology will be hard, I hope that you understand the purpose of this restriction: not only will I be presenting to the class, your classmates will too. Out of respect for my efforts to instruct you as well as your classmates efforts (time and hard work) to plan discussions for you – just don't use them unless it is absolutely vital. Exceptions include when technology is needed in your discussion leading and when you are prompted to by me.

Course Schedule

Week 1: May 12 and 14: Introductions and “the Canon”

Tuesday: Course introduction and introductions to Sociology as a discipline and introduction to theory.

Thursday: Lemert (pp. 1-17). Marx (p. 28, pp. 29-33, 34-36, 41-47). Weber (pp. 79-82, 83-87, 88-97). Durkheim (pp. 56-68). Connell (optional on CW)

Week 2: May 19 and 21:

Tuesday: Addams (pp. 54-56). Simmel (pp. 139-142). Cooley (pp.142-143). Mead (pp. 161-164). Dubois (pp. 126-130), Cooper (pp. 134-139)

Thursday: Parsons (pp. 156- 158, 231-233). Merton (pp. 174-183, 236-239). Myrdal (188-190). Dubois (pp. 183-187). Ghandi (pp. 203-204).

Week 3: May 26 and 28

Tuesday: Gramsci (pp. 201-203). Althusser (pp. 245-249). King (pp. 263-266). Mills (pp. 266-269). César (pp. 261-263). Fanon (pp. 273-277). Foucault (pp. 311-314, 353-357).

Thursday: Erickson (pp. 253-255). Goffman (pp. 255-257). Lacan (pp. 257-259). Bourdieu (pp. 329-333). Riesman (pp. 249-253). West (pp. 383-390)

Week 4: June 2 and 4

Tuesday: de Beauvoir (pp. 259-261), Friedan (pp. 271-273). Smith (pp. 294-297). Chodorow (pp. 305-308). Audre Lorde (pp. 333-347). hooks (CW). Collins (pp. 403-411). Allen (pp. 427-429)

Thursday: Hartsock (pp. 375-378). Stein and Plummer (pp. 361-363). Spivak (400-403). Anzaldúa (pp. 411-416). Weeks (pp. 416-419). Butler (pp. 419-426). Sedgwick (pp. 429-433)

Week 5: June 9 and 11

Tuesday: Habermas (pp. 363-367). Giddens (pp. 367-372). Alexander (pp. 378-380). Anderson (pp. 488-491). Kristeva (pp. 493-496). Wilson (pp. 496-499).

Thursday: Gates (pp. 390- 393). Wallerstein (pp. 448-450). Bauman (pp. 450-453). Hoffman (pp. 455-459). Hall (pp. 459-464). Sassen (pp. 467-471). Sen (pp. 471-475).

Week 6: June 16 and 18

Tuesday: Current event articles on Courseweb. For this day we will try to wrap up how we can use theory to inform our everyday lives.

Thursday: Final Presentations and class wrap-up. Take-home exam due.