

Current Sociological Theory

meeting:	T 5:00-7:45 pm	Professor:	Dr. Dawn T. Robinson
Classroom:	Baldwin 114A	Office:	217A Baldwin Hall
Office Hrs:	Tues & Wed 2:00-3:00 pm and by appointment*	Phone:	542-8948
		e-mail:	sodawn@uga.edu

*I also welcome brief drop-in visits at your convenience. However, please make an appointment for more involved meetings. You can make an appointment email, phone, or by catching me before or after class. E-mail is also a great way to ask quick questions, or to share brilliant insights.

Overview:

This seminar will begin with an introduction to the basic considerations for theory construction and analysis. Next, we will survey some of the various manifestations of theorizing in current sociological thinking. The course will emphasize the *current* in its coverage of Current Sociological Theory. Our readings will focus on theories that inform research appearing in sociology's top journals and books published by top university presses within the last five years. We will trace the modern roots of these theories and give special attention to the logical analysis of these theories. We will cover a diverse array of sociological topics and ideas, but our coverage will by no means be comprehensive. Students will become familiar with some of the core ideas and key debates in contemporary sociological theory. Perhaps more importantly, they will hone their logical and analytic skills in preparation for developing their own sociological theories.

Evaluation:

I. Class contributions (40% of course grade):

The success or failure of this class for all participants will rest largely on the contributions of each individual participant. Accordingly, class contributions will constitute a substantial portion of your course grade. Your class contributions come in the following forms.

In class discussion. Naturally, you are expected to complete all assigned readings before class and to actively participate in class discussions. The aim of this class is to get students to engage core sociological ideas that dominate sociological theory as well as to develop their own skills as theoretical sociologists. The best way to do this is to come to class each week ready to engage one another, and myself, in a dialogue. In a class of this size that means coming to class with multiple things to say. That way, when someone else "scoops" your insight, you will be prepared with back up brilliance to share.

Weekly bulletin board postings. As a way of jump-starting our in-class discussions, we will begin our dialogue each week online. The first few weeks those postings will be assignment based. Assignments will be given each week for the following week. Beginning on week 5, you will also post commentaries or responses each week on readings, the theoretical orientations they adopt, the methodologies used, the conclusions drawn, and their implications. In any given week you will be assigned to post "Commentary" or "Response." On the days you're assigned to post Commentary, you should complete the assigned readings and then post a critical/analytic commentary on the readings for the week. This commentary should be integrative when possible, and can apply to the ideas, arguments, methodologies, findings, of any or all of the readings for the week. On the days you are assigned to post *Response*, you should complete the assigned reading, read the *Commentaries* posted that week, and respond to one or more of the posted *Commentaries*. In your *Response*, you should take the role of the

author(s) and provide a thoughtful reaction to the posted critique(s). You are encouraged to respond to one another's comments and responses by following up their threads. The course will be more interesting if we participate actively throughout the week. *Comment* and *Response* schedules will be posted online. As with all in-class and online discussions, you should maintain a professional and respectful tone in your postings. All commentaries are due by Friday at 5:00 pm and all responses are due by Tuesdays at 10:00 am. Everyone should read all comments and responses and bring them to class on Tuesday evening.

Oral presentation of Analytic Review. Each student will read a book that constitutes relatively recent contribution to sociological theory and review it for the rest of the class. Guidelines for the written reviews are below. Each student will be assigned a specific week to review the book for us orally in class.

Plan to make these presentations brief -- approximately 5-10 minutes. Give us a brief summary/overview of the book and then provide your critique. Here are some questions you may want to address in your critique: What were the author's (s) objectives? How well did s/he/they meet them? Were there any clear strengths of this book? What were they? Were there any clear weakness of this book? What were they?

What does this book contribute to our understanding of identity or of the relationship between identity and action? Would you recommend this book to the members of this course? The oral presentations are due as listed on the course schedule (to be determined after the first week of class).

II. Analytic (Book) Review. (25% of course grade)

As you might expect, there is a considerably wider literature in Current Sociological Theory than we could possibly cover together this semester. As a way of broadening our breadth of experience, however, each of you will choose one book to review for the rest of the class. The written book reviews will be compiled into a single, bound volume for each of us to have as resource after the course is over. I will bring a list of recommended books to class. I would like each student to choose a book that s/he had not already read.

Your written presentation should be a more formal and elaborated version of your oral review. These should be written in the style of professional book reviews – with an additional component. For examples of conventional book reviews, see *Contemporary Sociology* and *American Journal of Sociology*. You'll notice that these reviews usually contain a brief summary, an evaluation of strengths and weaknesses, and a recommendation. Your task is similar with the added charge of providing a brief analytic review of the theoretical arguments. All of the written book reviews will be compiled and bound into a volume for future reference for course members.

Reviews should be brief (approximately 900-1200 words). Include a separate cover page. References may not be necessary, but if you include any please place them in a separate section at the end, entitled "References." The written review is due on September 23.

III. Synthetic (Literature) Review. (35% of course grade)

For your final paper students will submit a “synthetic” literature review. This should be a critical review of a specific theoretical literature in sociology. Your paper should present an analyze the development of concepts, theoretical arguments, and where relevant, methodology, relevant to a particular concern or set of concerns in sociology, highlighting major turning points and the debates among scholars surrounding them in a chronological sequence. Your paper should focus on both analysis of arguments and synthesis of ideas relevant to your review topic/question. Your review should focus on a topic or question that is broader than a research question, but narrow enough to be accomplished thoroughly in within a 20 page length limit. The format for these papers will follow the guidelines for submission to the Annual Review of Sociology. These guidelines will be available in a separate handout.

Course Materials

I. Readings

There is one shared required book for this course:

Cohen, Bernard. P. 1989. *Developing Sociological Knowledge: Theory and Method*. Nelson Hall.

This book is available at the University Bookstore and through a variety of online sources. For our purposes, the 1980 edition will work as well.

In addition, you will each be responsible for purchasing the book you review for the course. The remaining readings are available online. Manuscripts, articles, and book chapters that are not readily available through the UGA online library resources will be available as pdf files through the course website. Check the online syllabus for information about locating the various readings.

II. Course Website

On the course website you will find the expanded course syllabus, guidelines for preparing mini-projects, instructions for assignments and activities, links to course related information, a bulletin board for posting weekly contributions, and more. *You should check the course website every week.* Please forward your WebCT mail to the email address of your choice. To access the course web site, go to the following url: <https://webct.uga.edu/www/> Log on using your UGA myID and password. This course should appear as one of your courses. If you successfully log on and do not see this course listed, please email me so that I can make sure you are registered. If you follow the above procedures but cannot successfully log on, then check this website for help: <https://webct.uga.edu/www/student/guide/#login-mywebct>

Tentative Course Reading Schedule

There will be several changes, edits, additions, and substitutions to the list below. I will give you an updated reading list as this information becomes available. Please go to the course website for the newest information about course readings and assignments and for direct links to many of the readings.

Date	Topic	Readings
8/19	Introduction; Course Overview	
	Theoretical Methods, Part I : Foundations of scientific thinking	
8/26		Popper, Karl. 1974. <i>The Problem of Induction</i> . Popper, Karl. 1974. <i>The Problem of Demarcation</i> . Popper, Karl. 1934. <i>Falsification versus Conventionalism</i> . Copi, Irving & Carol Cohen. 2009. <i>Introduction to Logic</i> . Pearson/Prentice-Hall. Selections from Chapter 3 - Language and Definitions Chapter 6 - Categorical Syllogisms Chapter 7 - Syllogisms in Ordinary Language
	Theoretical Methods, Part II	
9/2		Cohen 1-9, Freese & Sell, <i>Axiomatic Theories in Sociology</i> , Part I
	Theoretical Methods, Part III	
9/9		Cohen, 10-17 Wagner, David G. and Joseph Berger.1985. "Do Sociological Theories Grow?" <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> 90(4): 697-728. Smith-Lovin, Lynn. 1999. "Core Concepts and Common Ground: The Relational Basis of Our Discipline" <i>Social Forces</i> 78(1-23)

Agency and Structure

9/16

Emirbayer, Mustafafer and Ann Mische. 1998. "What Is Agency?" *American Journal of Sociology* 103(4): 962-1023.

Mustafa Emirbayer, Jeff Goodwin. 1994. "Network Analysis, Culture, and the Problem of Agency" *American Journal of Sociology* 99(6): 1411-1454

Mayhew, Bruce. H. 1980. "Structuralism versus Individualism: Part 1, Shadowboxing in the Dark." *Social Forces* 59(2): 335-375.

Sewell, William H., Jr. 1992. "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation." *American Journal of Sociology*, 98(1) 1-29

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*Comments:* Aikens, Houston, Lewin, Barr, James, May  
*Response:* Bunch, Clark, Jenkins, Lei, Palmer, Ruff, Shank

## Exchange and Rational Choice

**\*\*Book Reviews Due\*\***

9/23

Homans, George C. from 1958. "Social Behavior as Exchange" *American Journal of Sociology* 63:6(597-606).

Blau, Peter. from *Exchange and Power in Social Life*

Coleman, James S. (1988). "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital." *American Journal of Sociology* 94(Supplement): S95-S120.

Macy, Michael W. and John Skvoretz. 1998. "The Evolution of Trust and Cooperation between Strangers: A Computational Model." *American Sociological Review* 63 (5):638-660.

Matsueda, Ross L., Derek A Kreager and David Huizinga. 2006. *American Sociological Review* 71(1):95-122.

Molm, Linda D., Jessica L. Collett, and David R. Schaefer. 2007. "Building Solidarity through Generalized Exchange: A Theory of Reciprocity." *American Journal of Sociology* 113:205-242.

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Blair-Loy, Mary. 2005. *Competing Devotions: Career and Family Among Women Executives*. Harvard University Press.

Reviewer: **Ashley Barr**

Comments: Aikens, Houston, Lewin, Bunch, Jenkins, Palmer
Response: Barr, James, May, Clark, Lei, Ruff, Shank

Relational Analysis

9/30

Breiger, Ronald L. 1974. "Duality of Persons and Groups." *Social Forces* 53(2):181-190

Feld, Scott L. 1981. "The Focused Organization of Social Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 86(5):1015-1035

Gibson, David R. 2005. Taking Turns and Talking Ties: Networks and Conversational Interaction." *American Journal of Sociology* 110(6): 1561-1597

Granovetter, Mark. 1985. "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness." *American Journal of Sociology* 91(3): 481-510.

Ronald S. Burt, Ronald S. 1997. "The Contingent Value of Social Capital." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 42(2):339-365

Watts, Duncan J., and Steven H. Strogatz. 1998. "Collective dynamics of 'small-world' networks." *Nature* 393, no. 3: 440. MAS Ultra - School Edition, EBSCOhost (accessed 8/15, 2008).

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Burt, Ronald S. 2005. *Brokerage and Closure*. Oxford.

Reviewer: **Daniel Shank**

*Comments:* Barr, James, May, Bunch, Jenkins, Palmer

*Response:* Aikens, Houston, Lewin, Clark, Lei, Ruff, Shank

10/7

*no  
meeting*

*see alternative meeting date below*

## Institutional and Cultural Theories

10/9  
Thurs  
2-4:30pm  
G-1

Jeffrey Alexander. 2004. "Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy," *Sociological Theory*

Fligstein, Neil. 1996. "Markets as Politics: A Political-Cultural Approach to Market Institutions." *American Sociological Review* 61:656-673

Paul. J. DiMaggio & Walter. Powell, "The iron cage revisited" institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields", *American Sociological Review*, 48 (1983), 147-60.

Hallett Tim, H. 2003. "Symbolic Power and Organizational Culture." *Sociological Theory* 21(2): 128-149.

Swidler, Ann. 1986."Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 51(2): 273-286.

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Carter, Prudence L. 2005. *Keepin' it Real: School Success Beyond Black and White*. Oxford University Press.

Reviewer: **Jamie Palmer**

Edles, Laura Desfor. 2002. *Cultural Sociology in Practice*. Blackwell Publishing.

Reviewer: **Matt May**

Comments: Aikens, Houston, Lewin, Clark, Lei, Ruff, Shank

Response: Barr, James, May, Bunch, Jenkins, Palmer

Structuralism

10/14

Noah Mark 2003. "Culture and Competition: Homophily and Distancing Explanations for Cultural Niches" *American Sociological Review* 68:319-345.

Uzzi, Brian and Jarrett Spiro.2005. "Collaboration and Creativity: The Small World Problem," *American Journal of Sociology* 111:447-504.

Krackhardt, D. 2007. "Heider vs Simmel: Emergent Features in Dynamic Structures." *Statistical Network Analysis: Models, Issues, and New Directions*. Pp. 14-27. <http://tinyurl.com/3tuw43>

Black, Donald. 2000. "Dreams of Pure Sociology." *Sociological Theory* 18(3):343-367

Sawyer, R. K. (2002). "Durkheim's Dilemma: Toward a Sociology of Emergence." *Sociological Theory* 20(2): 227-247.

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Collins, Randall. 2008. *Violence: A Micro-sociological Theory*. Princeton University Press.

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Reviewer: **Jackson Bunch**

*Comments:* Barr, James, May, Clark, Lei, Ruff, Shank

*Response:* Aikens, Houston, Lewin, Bunch, Jenkins, Palmer

## Group Process Theories

10/21

Skvoretz, J. (1983). "Salience, Heterogeneity and Consolidation of Parameters: Civilizing Blau's Primitive Theory." *American Sociological Review* 48(3): 360-375.

Ridgeway, Cecilia L. 1991. "The Social Construction of Status Value: Gender and Other Nominal Characteristics" *Social Forces* 70(2): 67-386

Ridgeway, Cecilia. L. And Shelley J. Correll. 2006. "Consensus and the Creation of Status Beliefs." *Social Forces* 85(1): 431-454.

Mark, Noah, Lynn Smith-Lovin and Cecilia Ridgeway. 2008. "Why Do Nominal Characteristics Acquire Status Value? A Minimal Explanation for Status Construction." *Manuscript*

Edward J. Lawler. 2001. "An Affect Theory of Social Exchange". *American Journal of Sociology* 107(2):321-352.

Fararo, T. J. and J. Skvoretz (1986). "E-State Structuralism: A Theoretical Method." *American Sociological Review* 51(5): 591-602.

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Heise, David R. 2006. *Expressive Order: Confirming Sentiments in Social Actions*. Springer Press.

Reviewer: **Jesse Clark**

Comments: Bunch, Jenkins, Palmer, Clark, Lei, Ruff, Shank

Response: Aikens, Houston, Lewin, Barr, James, May

Interpretive Sociology: Narrative and Dramaturgical Approaches

10/28

Griffin, Larry J. (1993). "Narrative, Event-Structure Analysis, and Causal Interpretation in Historical Sociology." *American Journal of Sociology* 98(5): 1094.

Maines, David, R. 1993. "Narrative's Moment and Sociology's Phenomena: Toward a Narrative Sociology." *The Sociological Quarterly* 34(1): 17-38.

Ewick, P. and S. Silbey (2003). "Narrating Social Structure: Stories of Resistance to Legal Authority." *American Journal of Sociology* 108(6): 1328-1372.

Snow, David A., Rens Vliegthart, Catherine Corrigan-Brown. 2007. "Framing the French Riots: A Comparative Study of Frame Variation." *Social Forces* 86(2): 385-415

Larry J. Griffin, 2007. "Historical Sociology, Narrative and Event-Structure Analysis: Fifteen Years Later," *Sociologica* doi: 10.2383/25956.
<http://www.sociologica.mulino.it/doi/10.2383/25956>

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Richards, Patricia. 2004. *Pobladoras, Indigenas, and the State: Conflicts over Women's Rights in Chile*. Rutgers University Press.

Reviewer: **Taylor Houston**

*Comments:* Aikens, Houston, Lewin, Barr, James, May

*Response:* Bunch, Jenkins, Palmer, Clark, Lei, Ruff, Shank

## Critical Theory

11/4

Agger, Ben. 1991. "Critical Theory, Poststructuralism, Postmodernism: Their Sociological Relevance." *Annual Review of Sociology* 17(1):105-131.

Smith, Dorothy E. 1990. *Excepts from The Conceptual Practices of Power*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2000. "Black Feminist Epistemology" from *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1981. "The Rationalization of the Lifeworld." from *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

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Comments: Aikens, Houston, Lewin, Bunch, Jenkins, Palmer

Response: Barr, James, May, Clark, Lei, Ruff, Shank

Evolutionary Sociology

- 11/11 Freese, Jeremy, Jui-Chung Allen Li and Lisa D. Wade. 2003. "The Potential Relevance of Biology to Social Inquiry." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29(1): 233-256.
- Freese, Jeremy and Brian Powell. 1999. "Sociobiology, Status, and Parental Investment in Sons and Daughters: Testing the Trivers-Willard Hypothesis." *American Journal of Sociology*, 104(6):1704-1743.
- Kanazawa, Satoshi. 2001. "Comment: Why We Love Our Children." *American Journal of Sociology*, 106(6): 1761-1776
- Freese, Jeremy and Brian Powell.2001. "Making Love out of Nothing at All? Null Findings and the Trivers-Willard Hypothesis." *American Journal of Sociology*, 106(6): 1776-1788.

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Sewell, William H., Jr. 2005. *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*. University of Chicago Press.

Reviewer: Scotty Jenkins

*Comments:* Barr, James, May, Bunch, Jenkins, Palmer  
*Response:* Aikens, Houston, Lewin, Clark Lei, Ruff, Shank

## Ecological Sociology

- 11/18 Freeman, John and Michael T. Hannan. 1983. "Niche Width and the Dynamics of Organizational Populations." *American Journal of Sociology*, 88 (6):1116-1145
- Hannan, Michael T. 1998. "Rethinking Age Dependence in Organizational Mortality: Logical Formalizations." *American Journal of Sociology* 104(1):126-164
- Barron, David N. 1999. "The Structuring of Organizational Populations." *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 64(3): 421-445
- McPherson, J. Miller, Pamela A. Popielarz and Sonja Drobnic. 1992. "Social Networks and Organizational Dynamics " *American Sociological Review*, 57(2):153-170

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Comments: Aikens, Houston, Lewin, Clark, Lei, Ruff, Shank
Response: Barr, James, May, Bunch, Jenkins, Palmer

11/25 *no meeting - Thanksgiving*

Emergence, Complexity, & Control

12/2

Emergence:

Schelling's cellular automaton model of segregation.

See: <http://web.mit.edu/rajsingh/www/lab/alife/schelling.html>

Clark, W A. 1991. Residential preferences and neighborhood racial segregation: a test of the Schelling segregation model. *Demography* 28 (1): 1-19. <http://tinyurl.com/63otsh>

Complexity:

Carley, Kathleen. 1991. A Theory of Group Stability. *American Sociological Review* 56 (3): 331-. <http://tinyurl.com/5hunjd>

optional: Browse recent issues of Complexity:

<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/106568389/issue>

Control theories:

Burke, Peter J. 1991. Identity processes and social stress. *American Sociological Review* 56 (6): 836-. <http://tinyurl.com/688n5p>

optional:

Robinson, Dawn T. 2007. "Control Theories in Sociology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 33 : 157-. <http://tinyurl.com/67sfsn>

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*Comments:* Bunch, Jenkins, Palmer, Clark, Lei, Ruff, Shank

*Response:* Aikens, Houston, Lewin, Barr, James, May

Thursday, *Review Papers due*  
12/11,  
10pm

## Choices for Analytic Book Review

Please mark top three choices (1=most preferred, 2= second most preferred, 3=third most preferred) and bottom three choices (13= least preferred, second least preferred, 11=third least preferred) on the left margin next to the books. Place your name at the top of the page.

Adams, Julia. 2005. *The Familial State: Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe*. Cornell University Press.

Black, Donald. 1998. *Social Structure of Right and Wrong*. Academic Press.

Blair-Loy, Mary. 2005. *Competing Devotions: Career and Family Among Women Executives*. Harvard University Press.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2006. *Racism Without Racists*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Burt, Ronald S. 2005. *Brokerage and Closure*. Oxford.

Carter, Prudence L. 2005. *Keepin' it Real: School Success Beyond Black and White*. Oxford University Press.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2005. *Black Sexual Politics*. Taylor and Francis.

Collins, Randall. 2004. *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton University Press.

Collins, Randall. 2008. *Violence: A Micro-sociological Theory*. Princeton University Press.

Edin, Kathryn and Maria Kefalas. 2005. *Promises I Can Keep*. University of California Press.

Edles, Laura Desfor. 2002. *Cultural Sociology in Practice*. Blackwell Publishing.

Hannan, Michael T., László Pólos, Glenn Carroll. 2007. *Logics of Organization Theory: Audiences, Codes, and Ecologies*. Princeton University Press.

Heise, David R. 2006. *Expressive Order: Confirming Sentiments in Social Actions*. Springer Press.

Jasper, James M. 2006. *Getting Your Way: Strategic Dilemmas in the Real World*. University of Chicago.

Richards, Patricia. 2004. *Pobladoras, Indigenas, and the State: Conflicts over Women's Rights in Chile*. Rutgers University Press

Sawyer, R. Keith. 2005. *Social Emergence: Societies as Complex Systems*. Cambridge University Press.

Sewell, William H., Jr. 2005. *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*. University of Chicago Press.

Smilde, David. 2007. *Reason to Believe*. University of California Press

Turner, Jonathan H. 2003. *Human Institutions: A Theory of Societal Evolution*. Rowman & Littlefield.

White, Harrison C. 2008. *Identity and Control: How Social Formations Emerge*. Princeton University Press.