

SOCL 7201, Spring 2018

Foundations of Social Theory 2

Instructor

Laura K. Nelson

Email: l.nelson@northeastern.edu

Twitter: @LauraK_Nelson

Office hours: Wednesdays, 10AM-12PM (or by appointment), Renaissance Park 935

Course Description

Meetings: Wednesdays, 5:00pm - 7:30pm, Ryder Hall 202

Readings:

The following books are required:

- Peter L. Berger. 1963. *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Pierre Bourdieu. 1980. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Michel Foucault. 1978. *History of Sexuality: Vol I*. Vintage Books.
- Michel Foucault. 1995. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage Books.
- Charles Lemert and Ann Branaman, eds. *The Goffman Reader*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Donald N. Levine, ed. *Georg Simmel: On Individuality and Social Forms*. University of Chicago Press.
- Patricia Hill Collins. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousnesses, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.
- Franz Fanon. 1967. *Black Skin White Masks*. New York: Grove Press.

The rest of the readings are available online or on Blackboard. I provide the link to some of the readings in the syllabus; others are available on Blackboard. If you are having problems accessing these readings let me know as soon as possible.

Overview:

The course provides a broad theoretical foundation on which students can pursue further intellectual study and empirical research. We will place a special emphasis on the connection between social theories and their privileged methods. Important topics include, among others, patterns of social interaction and socialization, the strengths and weaknesses of the taken-for-granted, the concept of social space and social trajectories within it, commonalities and differences between various forms of domination, and the constitutive power of expert knowledge. There is no way to cover all of modern and contemporary social theory in one semester, and it would be pedagogically irresponsible to try to do so. We will cover a number of the major schools of thought, focusing on contemporary American and European sociology, but the ultimate goal is to help you learn how to read and explore theory on your own. We will discuss the specifics of the readings, digging deep into the theories, but we will also discuss strategies around how to read theory and how to approach theory-building through empirical research.

Be prepared to read around 200 pages of dense theory per week. I treat teaching social theory the same way I treat teaching other skills such as statistics: reading theory is a skill that needs to be taught, practiced, and perfected. While you all know how to read, I am not assuming you know how to read theory. I recommend everyone read “Chapter 3 Appendix” [here](#) (reading also on Blackboard) before the course begins, and also check in with it periodically as the course progresses. This appendix details a few reading strategies designed to maximize your time with the material.

Course Requirements

Grading and Assignments

10% attendance and participation

60% four reflection papers (max 2 double-spaced pages), worth 15% of your grade each

30% final paper (max 7 double-spaced pages)

Course Schedule

Session	Date	Theme	Notes
Week 0	Jan. 10	invitation to sociology	
Week 1	Jan. 17	self and society: Simmel	
Week 2	Jan. 24	self and society: Cooley, Mead, & DuBois	
Week 3	Jan. 31	social structures: Goffman	reflection paper #1 due
Week 4	Feb. 7	social structures: Goffman & Fanon	
Week 5	Feb. 14	feminisms: Scott & Collins	
Week 6	Feb. 21	power/domination: Gramsci & Althusser	reflection paper #2 due
Week 7	Feb. 28	domination/liberation: Habermas & Fraser	
Week 8	March 7	spring break: no class!	
Week 9	March 14	liberation	
Week 10	March 21	habitus: Bourdieu	reflection paper #3 due
Week 11	March 28	disciplinary power: Foucault	
Week 12	April 4	biopower: Foucault & Butler	
Week 13	April 11	wrap-up and synthesis	reflection paper #4 due
Week 14	TBD	final papers due	Final Paper due

Course Structure

This course meets once a week. I may give some background information to frame the discussion, but this is primarily a discussion-based seminar. It is important that you complete the readings before each class and come prepared to discuss the material. During these discussions there will be space to critique the material. It is important to respect one another's thoughts, give everybody the space to talk, and address our comments at the ideas and not the person. I will come prepared with orienting questions. At the beginning of each class I will also have you write down two or three discussion questions that we will use to structure each class period. I recommend you write down questions as you read and bring them to class each day.

Assignments

Attendance and Participation

As this is a discussion seminar, your active participation in class is important and required. Participation is thus 10% of your grade.

Reflection Papers

Four (4) reaction memos, due about once a month. You should use clear and concise language to *summarize*, *probe* or *challenge* the readings. You are encouraged to use the fourth reaction memo as a partial draft of your final essay. Each reaction paper will be marked as $\sqrt{-}$, $\sqrt{}$, or $\sqrt{+}$.

- a) Reaction paper # 1: Compare and contrast Simmel and Mead's conceptualization of social interaction. Due January 31 in class.
- b) Reaction paper #2: Compare and contrast the role of social structure and self-definition in Goffman, Fanon, and Collins. Due February 21 in class.
- c) Reaction paper #3: Compare and contrast the programs of neo-Marxism, the critical school, and other liberation theories. Due March 4 in class.
- d) Reaction paper #4: Free reflections on Bourdieu, Foucault, and Butler. Due April 4 in class. (I recommend using this paper as a partial draft of your final paper)

Final Paper

One final paper (no more than 7 double-spaced pages). You should work on this paper throughout the semester and are required to come discuss the topic with me in office hours at least once. You have two options for this essay (pick only one of these options):

- a) Compare and contrast at least two theoretical schools in light of their classical theory roots. Do the authors build on classical theory? Challenge it? Adapt it? You should use clear and concise language to *summarize* the connections, and then *probe* or *challenge* how authors build on classical theory.
- b) Address an interesting empirical question of your choice and its relationship to theory. The paper should include a substantial description of your empirical case, and contrast at least two possible theoretical explanations for it, using the authors presented in this class.

Questions? Discussion Board, Office Hours, and Email

You are encouraged to come to my office hours to discuss the readings, your reflection papers, or your final paper. **Email should only be used for quick logistical questions or if you need to inform me of a planned absence.** I will get back to emails within 16 working-hours, so plan ahead. My general philosophy is to work hard during the week, and to take weekends off. If you email me on a Friday afternoon or a weekend, I may not respond until the following Monday.

Note on Plagiarism

I encourage you to work together to help each other review the readings and to work through the memos and final paper. However, *all written work must be your own*. I take academic honesty seriously, and you should too.

For more information on your rights and responsibilities as a student see:
<http://www.northeastern.edu/osccr/code-of-student-conduct/>

Readings and Schedule

Part 1: Social structures, the self, and society

Week 0: Invitation to Sociology (January 10)

- Peter L. Berger, 1963. *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*. New York: Anchor Books. Pp. 1-24; 66-150 (Chapters 1, 4, 5, and 6).

Week 1: Simmel (1858-1918) (January 17)

- From Donald N. Levine, ed. 1971. *Georg Simmel, On Individuality and Social Forms*. Pp. 2-35. "How is Society possible?" "The Problem of Sociology", Pp. 143-149 ("The Stranger"); Pp. 251-257 ("Group Expansion and the Development of Individuality"), 324-339 ("The Metropolis and Mental Life"), 294-323 ("Fashion").
- From *From the Sociology of George Simmel*, trans. Kurt Wolff, "On the Isolated Individual and the Dyad" Pp118-125; 135-142.

Week 2: Cooley (1864-1929), Mead (1863-1931), and DuBois (1868-1963) (January 24)

- Charles Horton Cooley, "The Looking Glass Self," In *Human Nature and the Social Order*. Pp. 136-178
- George Herbert Mead. *Mind, Self and Society*. Pp. 1-8 ("The Point of View of Social Behaviorism"); 117-125 ("The Mind"); 135-164, 173-178, 192-209 ("The Self"), 273-281, 303-310, 317-336 ("Society").
- W.E.B. Du Bois. 1994 (1903). *The Souls of Black Folks*. "Of our Spiritual Strivings."

Week 3: Goffman (1922-1982) (January 31)

- From Charles Lemert and Ann Branaman, eds. *The Goffman Reader*. Chapter 2 ("Self Presentation"), Chapter 9 ("Social Life as Drama"), Chapter 10 ("Social Life as Ritual" until p111), Chapter 14 ("Frame analysis of Gender").
- Arlie Hochschild, 1990. "Gender Codes in Women's Advice Books," in S. H. Riggins (Ed.), *Beyond Goffman: Studies on Communication, Institution, and Social Interaction*. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter: 277-294.

Week 4: Goffman (1922-1982) and Fanon (1925-1961) (February 7)

- From Charles Lemert and Ann Branaman, eds. *The Goffman Reader*. Chapters 6-7 ("The Mortified Self", "The Stigmatized Self")
- Franz Fanon, 1994. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Pp. vii-23, 17-40, 109-140. New York: Grove Press.

- Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Starr, 2000. "The Case of Race Classification and Reclassification in Apartheid." Pp. 195-226 in *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Week 5: Scott (1941 -) and Collins (1948 -) (February 14)

- Patricia Hill Collins, 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge. Pp. 1-121.
- Joan W. Scott, 1986. "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." *The American Historical Review* 91 (5): 1053-1075.

If you have read this far in the syllabus, congrats! Start a thread on Blackboard (or join an existing thread) and post a picture of your favorite baby animal.

Part 2: Liberation

Week 6: Gramsci (1891 – 1937) and Althusser (1918 – 1990) (February 21)

- Antonio Gramsci, 1971. Part II Section 2, "State and Civil Society." Pp. 445-555 in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, translated and edited by Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. London: The Electric Book Company (transcribed from the edition published by Lawrence & Wishart).
- Louis Althusser, 1970. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In "*Lenin and Philosophy*" and *Other Essays*.

Week 7: Habermas (1929 -) and Fraser (1947 -) (February 28)

- Jurgen Habermas, 1987. *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2*. Pp. 1-76; 113-152.
- Nancy Fraser. 1990. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Texts* (25/26): 56-80.

Week 8: Spring Break! no class (March 7)

If you have read this far in the syllabus start a thread on Blackboard (or join an existing thread) and post a picture of your favorite vacation destination.

Week 9: Liberation (March 14)

- Simone De Beauvoir, 2009. *The Second Sex*. Jonathan Cape: London. "Chapter 10: Women's Situation and Character." Pp. 653-680.
- Franz Fanon, 1963. "On Violence." Pp. 1-62 in *The Wretched of the Earth*. University of Chicago Press.
- Gayle Rubin, 1975. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex," Pp. 157-210 in Rayna Reiter, ed. *Toward an Anthropology of Women*. Monthly Review Press.

- Judith Butler, 1999. “Conclusion: From Parody to Politics.” Pp. 181-190 in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.

Part 3: Discipline, Power, and the Internal Self

Week 10: Bourdieu (1930-2002) (March 21)

- Pierre Bourdieu, 1980. *The Logic of Practice*, Stanford University Press. Pp. 1-141 (Book I).
- Loïc Wacquant, 2011. “Habitus as Topic and Tool: Reflections on Becoming a Prizefighter,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 8(1): 81-92.

Week 11: Foucault (1926-1984) (March 28)

- Michel Foucault, 1995, *Discipline and Punish*. Vintage. Entire.
- Tania Bucher, 2012, “Want to be on the top? Algorithmic power and the threat of invisibility on Facebook.” *New Media and Society* 14(7) 1164–1180.

Week 12: Foucault (1926-1984) and Butler (1956 -) (April 4)

- Michel Foucault, 1978. *History of Sexuality Vol I*. Part I. Skim Part II. Part V. Pantheon Books.
- Judith Butler, 1988. “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory.” *Theatre Journal*, 40(4): 519-531

Week 13: Wrap-Up and Synthesis (April 11)

- Rogers Brubaker, 1985. “Rethinking Classical Theory: The Sociological Vision of Pierre Bourdieu.” *Theory and Society* 14(6): 745-775.