

SYA6126, Section GC15
Tuesday 1:55 – 4:55 pm
205 Rolfs Hall

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Department of Sociology
University of Florida

CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY SPRING 2024

In this seminar we will critically examine some of the major theoretical orientations in contemporary sociological thought and explore the ways these ideas have changed in relation to the structural transformations taking place in the West from the 1950s to the present. Our primary focus will be the connections between the underlying assumptions of key theorists and their conclusions about the nature of social life. The major questions we will address in the course are: Do these perspectives offer valid interpretations of contemporary society? What are some of the strengths and weaknesses in each of these positions? The overriding goal of the course will be to develop new insights into the ongoing trends of today's social world.

The seminar will be organized on the basis of class discussion, lecture, and review of the reading material. Course requirements include: weekly reading responses, class participation, one group facilitation, and a final paper.

My office hours are on Thursday from 2 to 4 p.m.
e-mail address: cgattone@ufl.edu

Required Readings

Craig Calhoun (editor) *Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Wiley-Blackwell, third edition, 2012, ISBN 9780470655665).

C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford University Press, any edition).

Judith Lorber (editor) *Gender Inequality: Feminist Theories and Politics* (Oxford University Press, fourth edition, 2010, ISBN 9780195375220).

There are also required articles and book chapters available on Canvas.

Grades for the course will be determined on the basis of the following four requirements:

Reading Responses

One of the primary responsibilities of seminar participants is to develop a brief written response to the assigned readings each week. This can be in the form of a narrative, an analytical critique, or an essay illustrating the connections between a theme raised by an author and a corresponding social issue. These will be submitted via Canvas and discussed in class. The goal of the response paper is not to summarize the main points of the readings, but to focus on a particular aspect of an author's position and respond to it on the basis of your own concerns and criticisms.

Facilitation

Each student will be responsible for facilitating the discussion of the readings for one session. The goal of the facilitation is not to present an overview of the readings, but to develop an introductory critique of them and raise a few questions to the class as a way to initiate and sustain discussion. Facilitators should prepare their critique and questions in advance of their session and put together a written critique of the readings in the form of a paper (approximately five pages), which should then be submitted in lieu of the individual reading response for that week. This is due the class period of the facilitation.

Class Participation

One of the major goals of the seminar is to encourage students to develop a working understanding of the concepts discussed in class and in the readings. The task of each student in this regard is to prepare critical comments prior to each session and raise them in our weekly conversations. It is thus very important that every member of the seminar contribute to the discussions of these authors and the social issues involved.

Final Paper

The final paper can be organized on the basis of several possible approaches. One is to develop an assessment and critique of an author we have studied, focusing on a single theme in that author's work and forming a critical appraisal of it. Another is to compare a single theme in the work of two authors and provide an evaluation and assessment of each position. Other approaches may be acceptable provided they are approved prior to writing. The subject matter and basic argument of the paper should be submitted in the form of a written abstract consisting of one or two paragraphs. The paper itself should be approximately ten pages in length.

COURSE OUTLINE

- 1/9 Introduction to the Course – The Relevance of Sociological Theory
- 1/16 Structural Functionalism
Talcott Parsons – “The Action Frame of Reference”
“The Place of Sociological Theory” from *The Social System*
Robert Merton – Excerpt from *Social Theory and Social Structure*
- 1/23 Conflict Theory I
C. Wright Mills – “The Power Elite” (pp. 229 – 236 in CST reader)
"The Promise" "Grand Theory" "On Politics"
"On Intellectual Craftsmanship" in *The Sociological Imagination*
- 1/30 Conflict Theory II
Pierre Bourdieu
“From Ruling Class to Field of Power: An Interview with Pierre Bourdieu on *La noblesse d’Etat*”
“Pierre Bourdieu: Intellectuals, Symbolic Power, and Social Change”
Chapter 6 - Gattone

- 2/6 Symbolic Interactionism I
 Herbert Blumer - "Society as Symbolic Interaction" (pp. 78-89)
 "Sociological Analysis and the Variable" (pp. 127-139)
 "What is Wrong With Social Theory?" (pp.140-152)
 in *Symbolic Interaction: Perspective and Method*
- 2/13 Symbolic Interactionism II
 Erving Goffman – Introduction, Chapters 1, 6, 7 *The Presentation of Self in
 Everyday Life*
 Introduction and Conclusion to *Frame Analysis*
- 2/20 Postmodernism
 Jean-Francois Lyotard – Introduction and Conclusion (pp. xxiii - xxv)
 (pp. 3-31) (pp. 71- 82) *The Postmodern Condition*
 Fredric Jameson – “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” (pp. 1-20)
 “Theories of the Postmodern” (pp. 21-32) from *The Cultural Turn*
- 2/27 Poststructuralism
 Michel Foucault – "The History of Sexuality" "Truth and Power"
 "Discipline and Punish" (in CST reader)
 Debate between Noam Chomsky & Michel Foucault
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wfnI2L0Gf8#t=467>
- 3/5 Gender Theory I
 Dorothy Smith – “Women’s Standpoint: Embodied Knowledge versus the
 Ruling Relations” (pp. 185 – 191 in *Gender Inequality*)
 Kimberlé Crenshaw – excerpt from *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings of
 Kimberlé Crenshaw*
 Patricia Hill Collins – “Black Feminism, Knowledge, and Power”
 (pp. 234 – 237 in *Gender Inequality*)

Spring Break, March 9th – 16th

- 3/19 Gender Theory II
 Bell Hooks - "Black Women Shaping Feminist Theory"
Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center
 Judith Butler – “Gender, Sex, and Sexual Performativity”
 (pp. 286 – 289 in *Gender Inequality*)
- 3/26 Theories of Race and Ethnicity I
 Sandra Soo-Jin Lee – “Race and the Science of Difference in the Age of
 Genomics” in *Theories of Race and Ethnicity* (pp. 26 – 39)
 Frantz Fanon “Black Skin, White Masks” (in CST reader)

- 4/2 Theories of Race and Ethnicity II
Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, Introduction (pp. 1 – 15) *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*
Stephen Steinberg - "Preface" and "Dilemmas and Contradictions of Ethnic Pluralism in America," *The Ethnic Myth* (pp. 253-262)

(Abstract of final paper due Friday 4/5)

- 4/9 Critical Theory
Jurgen Habermas – "The Tasks of a Critical Theory of Society" (pp. 374-403)
(from *The Theory of Communicative Action II*)
"Modernity: An Unfinished Project" (pp. 444-450 in CST Reader)
(from: *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity*)
"The Rationalization of the Lifeworld" (pp. 451-468 in CST Reader)
(from *The Theory of Communicative Action II*)
- 4/16 Nations, Nationalism, Empire
Immanuel Wallerstein – "The Modern World System in Crisis" (in CST Reader)
Benedict Anderson – *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 2000, p. 1-8.
Julian Go – Introduction "Social Theory Beyond Empire?" pp. 1-17.
Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory
- 4/23 Projects: Connecting Social Theory and Social Research

(Final paper due 4/28)

Statement of University Policies: All students are required to sign a statement at registration acknowledging that they understand and agree to abide by the academic honesty guidelines of the university. *Disability Policy:* Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office, which will then provide documentation for the student to present to the professor.