

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

SOCI 202 Sociological Theory

Class: MW 11:00–12:15

Car Barn 202

Fall 2011

Department of Sociology

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Office Hours: Mon 12:15–1:30, Tue 2–3

Objectives

What explains the differences between rich and poor? Why do people in different societies behave differently? What can be explained by individual choice and what cannot? What does religion do? These are some of the questions that the field of sociology began with. This course is an introduction to sociological theory, encompassing both the “classical” sociological works of Durkheim, Marx, Simmel, and Weber, who merged empirical and normative interests in their arguments about social change during the 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as contemporary theoretical developments. Our goals are twofold: a) to understand the arguments the authors make, and b) to see how these arguments relate to current issues and events in our own society. To this end, many weeks include writings from one of the theorists on a particular theme and a news item or two. The news item is meant to inspire you to see how these social theories can be used to explain phenomena that we are familiar with.

The goal of this class is that you learn how to think like a sociologist. This means, first, that you understand what theory is, which in turn requires understanding the difference between theory, hypothesis, and empirical data. It means that you will have the ability to think backwards and forwards through each of these: that is, for each piece of empirical data that you see, you might be able to think of several theories that could possibly explain it. Conversely, for every theory that you encounter, you will be able to think of hypotheses and empirical data that would confirm or disprove it. I will introduce you to these in the first class, but you will continue to develop your mastery of them throughout the term. By the end, I hope that your ability to distinguish between them will feel almost instinctive.

Thinking like a sociologist also means that you see how events are rarely isolated phenomena, but have causes and effects on social life. When you read or hear of any news, my goal is that you be able to think about some of the possible explanations for the event, how it might affect other things, and how it might be part of a cycle or ongoing back-and-forth social process.

Structure

We will begin with an introductory lecture examining the historical context that led to the rise of sociological theory. Then, we will proceed to sessions dedicated to classical theorists— Durkheim, Marx, Weber, and Simmel. We then move to contemporary bodies of theory: functionalism, conflict theories, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, exchange theory, rational choice theory, feminist theories, structuralism, and poststructuralism.

Requirements

- 1) Weekly memos (200–800 words, 70% of the final grade). Please post your memos each week on the SOCI-202 blog at Georgetown Commons (<https://blogs.commonsgeorgetown.edu/soci-202-fall2011/>), **due by 9:00 PM every Tuesday**. These memos will answer questions on the readings that I will pose to you. Please answer the memo questions *in your own words*. The other questions will ask you to compare theorists and to relate theories to current news (*make sure you address each of them in separate paragraphs*). You are also encouraged to bring up your own observations and questions. In particular, I am excited every time you connect theory with your own empirical observations (on campus, in your own life, or in other classes) and current events, so please incorporate and discuss news items (if there is an online article, please post the link). I am not at all interested in the beauty of your prose; instead, I am looking for evidence that you are mentally processing the readings for yourselves and linking the theories to empirical observations. I will do a mid-term evaluation of your weekly memos after Memo #5 (due Oct 4).

There is a pdf file with instructions on how to post your memos to the course blog (handed out today and will be emailed to you). Please post them as “private.” Each week, I will choose some of the best memos and make them “public” on the course blog. Each memo is worth about 6 points in your final grade. Please post all of your memos here (including the first one) so that they are all in one place (memos not posted will not receive credit).

Policy on late memos: There is a time stamp on the postings. The deadline is strictly at 9:00 PM, so I suggest that you post it at least an hour or two beforehand. If you turn it in at 9:01 PM, it will count as a late memo, no exceptions. If you post the memo by Friday of the same week, you will receive half the points you would have received if it were on time. Memos posted between Friday at 9:01 PM and the end of the term (Tuesday, Dec. 16, at 9:00 PM) will receive one-third of the points it would have if it were on time.

Policy on missing memos: If you do not post a required memo, you will receive a 0 for it. It is your job to know which memos you have posted and which you are missing.

- 2) Final paper (15–20 pages, 15% of the final grade). You will use pieces of your memos, revising and editing them in relation to an overarching theme (e.g. power, money, morality) for your final paper. You will be consolidating the knowledge you have amassed, but you will not be writing everything the night before. Please email these to me as a pdf file by Tuesday, Dec. 13, at 9:00 PM.

Memos in the second half of the class will begin your task of writing the paper. For your final paper, please choose one recent news item of your own (or you can describe something you observed) and discuss how at least 5 different theorists would explain it, and what studies we've read that might shed insight on it. You will be asked to think aloud about the overarching theme (e.g. power, money, morality) that you will choose for your final paper. When you are writing about the studies we've read, you may use pieces from your weekly memos where you summarize what you've read. Then, offer your own reflections about which theory makes the most sense to you and why (as well as which theories are weaker in your estimation, and why). Final papers are due as a pdf files emailed to me by Tuesday, Dec. 13, at 9:00 PM. Any papers emailed with a time stamp starting 9:01 PM will be considered late, so it is advisable to plan on emailing them two hours beforehand. No exceptions.

Policy on late papers: If you turn in a paper by Friday, Dec. 16 at 9:00 PM, you will receive at least half credit, so it is worth doing even if you miss the deadline. Papers turned in starting at 9:01 PM on Dec. 16 will receive a 0. No exceptions.

Policy on missing final papers: If you do not turn in a final paper, you will receive a 0 for it.

- 3) Class discussion (15% of the final grade). I will be using something like the Socratic method during class discussions, meaning that I will be directing a series of questions to one student at a time, chosen at random by me before class begins. The questions will be identical or similar to your weekly memo questions, so if you have done the readings and written a memo that answers each of the questions I pose, you will be prepared. The lowest grade I will give for participation if you are present in class when I happen to call on you is a C; therefore, even if you are not prepared, you will benefit from attending.

Expect to be called on with a series of questions around 5 times during the term (about every other week). Everyone will have an equal number of opportunities to answer questions, but it will be random (in other words, not everyone will go once before going again), so if you were called on in the last class, you still could be called on again in the next one. Your grade will depend on your attendance in class and for the quality of your preparedness.

Policy for missing class: Please email me beforehand if you are going to be missing class. If you are not present when I call on you, and I have not received an email, you will get a zero for your class participation for the day. Your weekly memo will be due according to the class schedule. You are allowed 2 absences, no exceptions other than a serious medical condition for which I may require a doctor's note.

Your blog, final paper, and discussion grades will be graded on a 100-point scale: 100 is

an A+, 96 is an A, 92 is an A-, 88 is a B+, 84 is a B, 80 is a B-, 76 is a C+, 72 is a C, 68 is a C-, 64 is a D+, 60 is a D, 54 is a D- and 50 is an F.

If you are having trouble with readings or have any questions at all, please come to office hours. If you can't make those times, email me to make an appointment. I will always be happy to help answer any questions you have, or even go through the material together.

Readings

Books are listed in the order that you will need them. I will post all other articles on my blog at the Georgetown Commons.

Durkheim, Emile. [1897] 2006. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. New York: Penguin Books. Print copy on reserve; e-book available (one reader at a time). You may read other editions as well. Previews are available for two Google ebook versions.

Kivisto, Peter. 2010. *Social Theory: Roots and Branches, 4th Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Print copy on reserve.

Weber, Max. [1904]2002. *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company. Print copy on reserve; e-book available (one reader at a time).

Goffman, Erving. 1961. *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. New York: Anchor. Print copy on reserve.

Elias, Norbert. 1978. *The Civilizing Process*. Oxford: Blackwell. Print copy on reserve.

Schedule

Wed, Aug 31. A Historical Sketch of Sociological Theory: The Early Years

Tue, Sep 6. Memo #1 due.

Readings:

- Durkheim, Emile. *Suicide*.
 - Introduction (pp. xi–xxiv)
 - Book Two: Social Causes and Social Types (pp. 145–277)
- Tavernise, Sabrina and Waqar Gillani, “Suicide Bombers Strike Sufi Shrine in Pakistan,” *New York Times*, July 2, 2010.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/03/world/asia/03pstan.html>
- Chen, Pauline, “Medical Student Distress and the Risk of Doctor Suicide,” *New York Times*, October 7, 2010.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/07/health/views/07chen.html>

Questions:

- 1) Summarize theory, hypothesis, and empirical data of Durkheim's *Suicide* (one sentence each).

- 2) What are the four types of suicide? What are the differences between them?
- 3) What would Durkheim say about suicide bombers in Pakistan? (see article)
- 4) What would Durkheim say about the rate of suicide among doctors in our society? (see article)
- 5) Optional: Make observations, ask questions, or relate to any news you've seen.

Wed, Sep 7. Durkheim: Suicide I

Mon, Sep 12. Durkheim: Suicide II

Tue, Sep 13. Memo #2 due.

Readings:

- Durkheim, Emile.
 - “On Mechanical and Organic Solidarity” (Kivisto ch. 6)
 - “What Is a Social Fact?” (Kivisto ch. 7)
 - “The Human Meaning of Religion” (Kivisto ch. 10)
- BBC, “So what colour was Jesus?” <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/3958241.stm>

Questions:

- 1) Ch. 6: What is the difference between “solidarity” and the “integration” that we talked about last week? What is the difference between mechanical and organic solidarity? Describe examples of both mechanical and organic solidarity in your own life.
- 2) Ch. 7: What is a social fact? What is one social fact that has been “coercive on” your own life?
- 3) Ch. 10: Why does Durkheim disagree with the “radical individualism” that would make religion something purely individual? How would Durkheim explain the BBC article, “So what colour was Jesus?”?
- 4) Optional: Make additional observations, bring up questions, or relate the material to news or events outside of class (include links).

Wed, Sep 14. Durkheim: Social Facts, Social Solidarity

Mon, Sep 19. Durkheim: Religion and Society

Tue, Sep 20. Memo #3 due.

Readings:

- Marx, Karl.
 - “Alienated Labor” (Kivisto ch. 1)
 - “Manifesto of the Communist Party” (Kivisto ch. 3)
 - “The General Formula for Capital” (Kivisto ch. 5)
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. “The Three Instances of Hegemony in the History of the Capitalist World-Economy” (Kivisto ch. 70)
- Greenhouse, Steven and Michael Barbaro, “An Ugly Side of Free Trade: Sweatshops in Jordan,” *New York Times*, May 3, 2006.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/03/business/worldbusiness/03clothing.hQuestion.html>

Questions:

- 1) What is alienation, and how does it happen to those who labor under capitalism?
- 2) What is a commodity, and how is its circulation unique to capitalist society?

- 3) How does Wallerstein (ch 75) draw upon Marx and Engels, and how does he extend his argument?
- 4) According to the perspective of Marx, Engels, and Wallerstein, why are there sweatshops in poorer countries around the world?
- 5) Optional: Bring up questions and observations you have made, and/or news items that are relevant.

Wed, Sep 21. Marx: Alienation and Economy

Mon, Sep 26. Marx: Alienation and Power

Tue, Sep 27. Memo due on the following readings:

- Simmel, Georg. 1898. "The Persistence of Social Groups." *American Journal of Sociology* 3:662–698.
- "Fashion" (Kivisto ch. 16) "Conflict as the Basis of Group Formation" (Kivisto ch. 18) "The Philosophy of Money" (Kivisto ch. 20)
- "What Is Fashion?" PBS.org

Questions:

- 1) How does Simmel define sociology?
- 2) Why isn't fashion necessary in traditional society? Compare and contrast Simmel's argument to Durkheim's arguments about anomie suicide.
- 3) Does the pbs.org article agree with Simmel?
- 4) What relationship does conflict have with unity?
- 5) Compare Simmel's view of money to Marx's.
- 6) Optional: Bring up your own observations and questions, relate to other things you've read or seen.

Wed, Sep 28. Simmel: Individual and Society

Mon, Oct 3. Simmel: Small Groups and Interactions

Tue, Oct 4. Memo #5 due.

Readings:

- Weber, Max. [1904]2002. *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*.
Ch 1, Religious Affiliation and Social Stratification (skim)
Ch 2, The Spirit of Capitalism (read carefully)
Ch 3, Luther's Conception of the Calling (read carefully)
Part II: The Practical Ethics of the Ascetic Branches of Protestantism
Ch 4, The Religious Foundations of This-Worldly Asceticism (skim)
Ch 5, Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism (read carefully)
- "Work-life balance: Tips to reclaim control," Mayo Clinic.
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/work-life-balance/WL00056>

Questions:

Key Words (to know before reading):

- Ascetic: dictionary says "characterized by or suggesting the practice of severe self-discipline and abstention from all forms of indulgence, typically for religious reasons : *an ascetic life of prayer, fasting, and manual labor* | *a narrow, humorless, ascetic face.*"
- Rational: When Weber uses this, he means something different from our

everyday usage of the term (which is similar to “logical”). He is talking about a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of acting. When he talks about “rationalization,” Weber is referring to a systematizing of one’s actions in the sense of increased rigor and methodicalness.

Questions:

- 1) Identify (on the broadest level) Weber’s theory, hypothesis, and empirical data.
- 2) Why do we work so hard? (What does Weber say?)
- 3) What is the “iron cage”? How are we trapped in it?
- 4) What would Weber say about the Mayo Clinic website?
- 5) What are some examples from your own observations (or news, books, movies, music) of how religion might affect economic things? Or, bring up any real-life examples that relate to Weber’s argument in another way.

Wed, Oct 5. Weber: Religion and the Economy

Mon, Oct 10. Columbus Day (no class)

Tue, Oct 11. No memo due (break!)

Wed, Oct 12. Weber: Religion and the Economy, continued

Fri, Oct 14. You will receive mid-term evaluations of your memos.

Mon, Oct 17. Major themes and comparison of theorists

Tue, Oct 18. Memo #6 due.

Readings:

- Weber, Max.
 - “Bureaucracy” (Kivisto ch. 13)
 - “The Nature of Charismatic Domination” (Kivisto ch. 14)
 - “Class, Status, Party” (Kivisto ch. 15)
- “Essay: What Ever Happened to Charisma?” *Time Magazine*, Oct. 17, 1969.

Key word to know before reading:

Bureaucracy: We often use the word to mean red tape, unnecessary rules and regulations, or paperwork. Weber was talking about a certain structural form, or a way that power was organized in modern society.

Questions:

- 1) What is the basis of authority in modern bureaucracy (the word as Weber meant)? In other words, why does someone have power?
- 2) What are the differences between charisma and bureaucracy as sources of power?
- 3) How do Marx and Weber differ in the way they think about class? Choose one difference and discuss.
- 4) How would Weber analyze the Time magazine article? Do you think that its description of American society in 1969 also applies to our society today? Why or why not?

Wed, Oct 19. Weber: Bureaucracy

Mon, Oct 24. Weber: Power

Tue, Oct 25. Memo #7* due.

Readings:

- Davis, Kingsley and Wilbert E. Moore. 1945. "Some Principles of Stratification." *American Sociological Review* 10(2): 242–249. <http://www.jstor.org/pss/2085643>
- Tumin, Melvin. 1953. "Some principles of stratification: a critical analysis." *American Sociological Review* 18:387–397. <http://www.jstor.org/pss/2087551>

*Starting with this memo, there will be one memo question about your final paper included every week to help you begin writing it.

Questions:

- 1) Why does there "need" to be inequality, according to Davis and Moore? What do they mean by the phrase "functional necessity"?
- 2) How does Tumin criticize Davis and Moore?
- 3) What do *you* think of Davis and Moore's argument? What are its strengths and weaknesses? Can you think of anything in addition to what Tumin talked about? Please use examples to illustrate your points.
- 4) FOR FINAL PAPER: Which theorist or theory have you liked the most so far in this class? Why? What its strengths and weaknesses? How is it relevant? What are some ways it should it be changed to be relevant to understanding the world today?

Wed, Oct 26. Functionalism

Mon, Oct 31. Halloween Exercises.

Tue, Nov 1. Memo #8.

Readings:

- Coser, Lewis. "The Functions of Social Conflict" (Kivisto ch. 36)
- Mills, C. Wright. "Culture and Politics" (Kivisto ch. 37)
- Collins, Randall. "The Basics of Conflict Theory" (Kivisto ch. 39)

Questions:

- 1) What two things does Coser say will predict a group's tolerance for internal conflict? Can you give examples of a group with high and low tolerance for internal conflict?
- 2) Explain how, in some ways, you might be one of the people that Mills writes about that "often carry out series of apparently rational actions without any ideas of the ends they serve..." (p. 221).
- 3) Collins talks about the role that emotions play in conflict. Explain one aspect of this and illustrate with an example.
- 4) FOR FINAL PAPER: Of the themes that we've read about, which one has been most interesting to you? (for example, religion, money, power, social integration, social regulation, conflict, urban life) Why?

Wed, Nov 2. Conflict Theories I

Mon, Nov 7. Conflict Theories II

Tue, Nov 8. Memo #9 due.

Readings:

- Blumer, Herbert. "Society as Symbolic Interaction" (Kivisto ch. 40)
- Goffman, Erving. 1961. *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. New York: Anchor, pp. 1–124.

- Watters, Ethan. "Americanization of Mental Illness," *New York Times*, Jan 8, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/10/magazine/10psyche-t.html?pagewanted=all>

Questions:

- 1) Using the Blumer reading, *but in your own words*, explain how Goffman's work pays attention to symbolic interaction.
- 2) How is Goffman's description of the asylum like someone observing a foreign country (or even planet)? Choose a meaning or symbol that you take for granted in your own life that an outside observer might analyze for its meanings, describe, and explain.
- 3) Would the New York Times article be surprising to Goffman? Explain.
- 4) FOR FINAL PAPER: Regarding the theme that you chose last week, list all theorists we have read who have addressed it. Point out similarities and differences among their arguments (briefly).

Wed, Nov 9. Symbolic Interactionism I

Mon, Nov 14. Symbolic Interactionism II

Tue, Nov 15. Memo #10 due.

Readings:

- Elias, Norbert. 1978. *The Civilizing Process*. Oxford: Blackwell. "Civilization as a Specific Transformation of Human Behavior," Part 2 of *The History of Manners* (pp. 42–178)
- Garfinkel, Harold. "Studies of the Routine Grounds of Everyday Activities." (Kivisto ch. 44)
- Giridharadas, Anand. "How to Greet in a Global Microcosm," *New York Times*, October 15, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/16/us/16iht-currents.html>

Questions:

- 1) Provide an example the way that Garfinkel does on p. 270 of a brief dialogue (give both the colloquy and the unspoken common understandings).
- 2) What kind of proof does Elias use to show how much what is social (external) becomes internalized and second-nature to us?
- 3) What do you think of the New York Times article?
- 4) FOR FINAL PAPER: Choose the news article that you want to analyze for your final paper (you can also use research, art, or music) and write about how it relates to your chosen theme.

Wed, Nov 16. Phenomenology

Mon, Nov 21. Ethnomethodology

Tue, Nov 22. Memo #11.

Readings:

- Homans, George. "Social Behavior as Exchange" (Kivisto ch. 45)
- Emerson, George. "Power-Dependence Relations" (Kivisto ch. 46)
- Miller, Dale. 1999. "The Norm of Self-Interest." *American Psychologist* 54: 1053–60.
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0003066X02005130>

Questions:

- 1) How are Homans and Emerson arguing in terms of self-interest?
- 2) What aspects of social behavior and power are Homans and Emerson missing?
- 3) What are the consequences of misinterpreting the “fact” of self-interest, according to Miller?
- 4) FOR FINAL PAPER: Regarding your theme and the example chosen from outside of class, which theorist so far do you think provides the best explanation?

Wed, Nov 23. Final Paper Workshop.

Mon, Nov 28. Rational Choice Theory.

Tue, Nov 29. Memo #12 due.

Readings:

- West, Candace and Don Zimmerman. “Doing Gender” (Kivisto ch. 50)
- Butler, Judith. “Subversive Bodily Acts” (Kivisto ch. 51)
- Smith, Dorothy. “Sociology From Women’s Experience: A Reaffirmation” (Kivisto ch. 53)
- Belkin, Lisa. “Calling Mr. Mom?” *New York Times*, October 21, 2010.
<http://parenting.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/10/21/calling-mr-mom/>

Questions:

- 1) What does it mean to say that we “do” gender in everyday interaction, according to West and Zimmerman? Provide an example from your own life.
- 2) How do marginal sexual groups tell us something about what is taken for granted as “normal,” according to Butler?
- 3) In relation to Smith, choose one theory that we have read in this class and discuss how it neglected the perspective of women, as well as how it could have been incorporated.
- 4) FOR FINAL PAPER: Regarding your theme, point out similarities and differences between how classical and contemporary theorists have treated it.

Wed, Nov 30. Feminist Theories I.

Mon, Dec 5. Feminist Theories II.

Tue, Dec 6. **Rough draft of final paper due by 9:00 PM** (make sure you include all relevant bodies of theory up to and including Feminist Theory). Email as pdf file.

Wed, Dec 7. Sociological Theory: Synthesis.

Wed, Dec 14. **Final paper due at 9:00 PM.** Email as pdf file.