

SOC 2960Z
Social Theory Now
SPRING 2019

Instructor: Dan Hirschman

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Time and Location: 9:00am-12:00pm Fridays, Maxcy 108.

Office Hours: 2:00-4:00pm Fridays, Maxcy 209, sign up [here](#).

Overview & Objectives

Most courses in social theory cover either “classical theory” (stopping around WWII) or “contemporary theory” (stopping in the early 1990s). This course offers a broad overview of recent trends and new directions in social theory. It focuses on works published since 2000 by sociologists and by theorists that have been influential in sociology. The course covers conversations in “metatheory” around mechanisms and fields, science studies approaches to the body and nature, diverging interpretations of the place of culture, debates around race and racism, and critical perspectives including feminist theory and postcolonial theory. This course is intended for students with significant prior exposure to social theory, at approximately the level of the PhD sequence SOC 2040-2050 (though it could be taken concurrently with 2050).

Note: This syllabus is a draft and subject to change!

Requirements

Attendance and Participation: You are required to attend and participate in class. If you are unable to attend class (for health, family obligations, religious obligations, etc.), please let me know in advance.

Readings: This course is a doctoral seminar. As such, it carries a substantial reading load. You are expected to read all assigned material before coming to class. We will devote most of our class time to exploring the readings.

Presentations: In most weeks, one or two students will lead the class discussion, beginning with a short presentation. These presentations should be 15-20 minutes, and include a handout with a summary of key terms and claims made in the readings, but may also include activities, videos, etc. We will discuss expectations for the presentations in class.

Response Memos: Each week (other than the first), you are expected to write a structured response memo approximately 500 words long. This memo should do two things. First, it

should attempt to summarize the major argument (as you see it) of one of the week's main readings. Second, it should identify a particular passage or topic that you would like to discuss further and offer a question or commentary about that passage or topic. Each memo is due at 5pm on the day before the associated class meeting.

Respect: There are many ways to interpret the course readings and many competing views on the topics we will discuss, and I hope we will debate many contrasting viewpoints during the course of the semester. To facilitate good discussion, please keep in mind that we are debating ideas, not each other as individuals. This type of debate might take the form of "I disagree" instead of "you are wrong." Please keep the difference in mind so that we can engage in useful and vigorous discussion!

In the context of a graduate seminar, respect takes on an additional, specific meaning. In graduate seminars, there is a tendency to try to show off by "name dropping" (or, read more sympathetically, to make exciting intellectual connections to material outside of the immediate scope of the class). This tendency can lead to stifled discussions and alienation as students who are unfamiliar with a particular thinker or concept are forced out of the conversation. Thus, as a rule, if you want to introduce a term or theorist that we have not explicitly discussed in the class, you must fully explain who the theorist is/was or the meaning of the concept, and then why that theorist or concept is relevant to our discussion. The goal here is not to prevent bringing in outside material, but to make sure that we can have a productive conversation by building a shared vocabulary — one of the central purposes of a graduate seminar.

Create Your Own Syllabus: In additions to writing memos and the final paper, you will also be expected to construct your own undergraduate social theory syllabus that incorporates recent sociological theory. You have two options for this assignment: you can construct a one semester class that weaves together classical and contemporary theories or you can construct a one semester class focused on contemporary theory that is intended to follow a standard course on the classics (Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Du Bois). This syllabus will be due in Week 12, when we will discuss teaching undergraduate social theory.

Final Paper: The course has one major writing assignment. You will have your choice of writing a detailed literature review about a particular theorist, or a theoretical exploration (of the style published in journals like *Sociological Theory*). You might also choose to draft a practice prelim answer, focusing on more recent work. The topic will be of your choosing, with approval. We will discuss expectations for the final paper early in the term. A draft of the final paper will be due before the last day of class. The final draft will be due at the end of term.

Time Expectations: You are expected to work approximately 180 hours total to complete this class. Over 13 weeks, students will spend 3 hours per week in class (39 hours total). The required readings for each class are expected to take approximately 8 hours per week (104 hours). Weekly response memos should take about an hour each (12 total), preparing for an in-class presentation should take about 5 hours, and the final paper should take approximately 20 hours total.

Grading

Your grade has four components.

Participation: 15%

Attending class is a necessary but insufficient condition for full participation. You must also engage with the readings and your colleagues, and do so respectfully. If you have concerns about your participation, please raise them with me in office hours before the end of the term.

Presentation: 10%

Each student will be expected to present approximately once, depending on the size of the class.

Sample Syllabus: 5%

Each student will be expected to design a sample syllabus for a one semester undergraduate theory course.

Response Memos: 20%

Each of the 12 memos will be graded out of 10 points. If you get 100 points, you receive the full 20% towards your final grade (no extra beyond that). Theoretically, 10 perfect memos would suffice and most students should be able to miss one or two weeks without seriously impacting their grade.

Final Paper: 50%

The final paper is worth 50% of your grade.

Grade Appeals: If you feel that an *error* has been made, you may appeal your grade to me within *one week* of receiving your grade. To appeal your grade, you must provide a written explanation of the error you believe has been made, and I will re-grade the assignment. Please be advised that there is no guarantee that I will raise your grade; in fact, it is possible that I may lower it. For this reason, you should appeal a grade as a last resort when you feel *certain* that you have been graded unfairly.

Administrative Issues

Academic Integrity: Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct are unacceptable. Information on the University's academic code is available [here](#). Any student who plagiarizes will fail the course and may face other sanctions imposed by the University.

Accommodations for Learning: Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform me early in the term if you have a disability or other condition that might require accommodations or modification of any of these course procedures. You may

speak with me after class or during office hours. For more information, please contact [Student and Employee Accessibility Services](#) (phone: 401-863-9588, email: SEAS@brown.edu). Students in need of short-term academic advice or support can contact one of the deans in the Dean of the College office.

Cell Phones and Laptops: Turn off your cell phone and store it during class. If you might need to receive a call during class for some reason, put your phone on vibrate and step out quietly as needed. Similarly, please store your laptop during class except perhaps when you are using it to look up something specific in a reading. Research suggests that using a laptop during class impedes both your learning (because it encourages inefficient verbatim note-taking) *and* the learning of students around you (e.g. [Sana et al. 2013](#), [Patterson & Patterson 2017](#)), though the implications of this research are somewhat disputed ([Lockhart 2017](#)). There will be breaks during each class where I will encourage you to check your devices. Otherwise, please refrain from using them. If for any reason you feel you need to use a laptop to take notes, please talk with me after the first class.

General Advice

PhD programs can be overwhelming. For a very useful perspective, I recommend Fabio Rojas' [Grad Skool Rulz](#), an ebook based on a series of blog posts. Rojas is a successful sociologist and scholar of higher education who writes in a breezy style about everything from course work to choosing advisors to getting tenure. I have arranged to place a copy of these Rulz on our Canvas site under "Additional Materials."

Required Texts

The following are books you might want to own, and which we will read substantial portions from. The approximate price of each text is listed new, and they may be available used for a substantial discount. Some may also be available for free electronically through the library. The books are listed in the order you will need them.

- Mol, Annemarie. 2002. *The Body Multiple*. (\$24 new)
- Latour, Bruno. 2005. *Reassembling the Social*. (\$29 new)
- Reed, Isaac Ariail. 2011. *Interpretation and Social Knowledge*. (\$25 new)
- Ahmed, Sara. 2017. *Living a Feminist Life*. (\$26 new)
- Rojas, Fabio. 2017. *Theory for the Working Sociologist*. (\$27 new)

The rest of the readings will be available on the course Canvas site as pdfs and/or as links.

Course Outline

Class 1: What's new in sociological theory? (1/25)

- Lizardo, Omar. 2014. "The End of Theorists: The Relevance, Opportunities, and Pitfalls of Theorizing in Sociology Today." ASA Coser Lecture, available [here](#).
- Benzecry, Claudio, Monika Krause, and Isaac Ariail Reed. 2017. "Introduction: Social Theory Now." Pp. 1-17 in *Social Theory Now*.
- Healy, Kieran. 2017. "Fuck Nuance." *Sociological Theory* 35(2):118-27.

Class 2: The Ontological Turn (2/1)

- Mol, Annemarie. 2002. *The Body Multiple*.

Class 3: Actor-Network Theory (2/8)

- Latour, Bruno. 2005. *Reassembling the Social*.
- Lezaun, Javier. 2017. "Actor-Network Theory." Pp. 305-336 in *Social Theory Now*.

Class 4: Culture, Interpretation, and Causality (2/15)

- Reed, Isaac Ariail. 2011. *Interpretation and Social Knowledge*.
- Hirschman, Daniel and Isaac Ariail Reed. 2014. "Formation Stories and Causality in Sociology." *Sociological Theory* 32(4):259-282.

Class 5: Culture and Cognition (2/22)

- Vaisey, Stephen. 2009. "Motivation and Justification: A Dual-Process Model of Culture in Action." *American Journal of Sociology* 114(6):1675-1715.
- Lizardo, Omar and Michael Strand. 2010. "Skills, Toolkits, Contexts and Institutions: Clarifying the Relationship between Different Approaches to Cognition in Cultural Sociology." *Poetics* 38(2):205-28.
- Lizardo, Omar. 2017. "Improving Cultural Analysis: Considering Personal Culture in Its Declarative and Nondeclarative Modes." *American Sociological Review* 82(1):88-115.

- Lamont, Michèle, Laura Adler, Bo Yun Park, and Xin Xiang. 2017. “Bridging Cultural Sociology and Cognitive Psychology in Three Contemporary Research Programmes.” *Nature Human Behaviour* 1(12):866-72.

Class 6: Field Theory (3/1)

- Martin, John Levi. 2003. “What Is Field Theory?” *American Journal of Sociology* 109(1):1-49.
- Fligstein, Neil and Doug McAdam. 2011. “Toward a General Theory of Strategic Action Fields.” *Sociological Theory* 29(1):1-26.
- Eyal, Gil. 2013. “Spaces Between Fields.” Pp. 158-182 in *Bourdieu and Historical Analysis*.
- Krause, Monika. 2017. “The Patterns in Between: ‘Field’ as a Conceptual Variable.” Pp. 227-250 in *Social Theory Now*.

Class 7: Mechanisms (3/8)

- Gorski, Philip. 2009. “Social ‘Mechanisms’ and Comparative-Historical Sociology: A Critical Realist Proposal.” Pp. 147-194 in *Frontiers of sociology*.
- Gross, Neil. 2009. “A Pragmatist Theory of Social Mechanisms.” *American Sociological Review* 74(3):358-79.
- Hedstrom, Peter and Petri Ylikoski. 2010. “Causal Mechanisms in the Social Sciences.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 36(1):49-67.
- Aviles, Natalie B. and Isaac Ariail Reed. 2017. “Ratio via Machina: Three Standards of Mechanistic Explanation in Sociology.” *Sociological Methods & Research* 46(4):715-38.

Class 8: Theorizing Race and Racism (3/15)

- Fields, Karen and Barbara Fields. 2012. *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*. Introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 7.
- Jung, Moon-Kie. 2015. *Beneath the Surface of White Supremacy*. Chapters 1-2.
- Seamster, Louise and Victor Ray. 2018. “Against Teleology in the Study of Race.” *Sociological Theory* 36(4):315-342.

Class 9: Critical Race Theory & Intersectionality (3/22)

- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989:139-68.
- McCall, Leslie. 2005. "The Complexity of Intersectionality." *Signs* 30(3):1771-1800.
- Davis, Kathy. 2008. "Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful." *Feminist Theory* 9(1):67-85.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 2015. "Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas." *Annual Review of Sociology* 41:1-20.
- Fleming, Crystal. 2018. *How to Be Less Stupid About Race*. Chapters 1-2.

Spring Break, No Class on 3/29.

Class 10: Feminist Theory and Praxis (4/5)

- Ahmed, Sara. 2017. *Living a Feminist Life*.

Class 11: Postcolonial Theories (4/12)

- Bhabra, Gurinder. 2007. "Sociology and Postcolonialism: Another 'Missing? Revolution?'" *Sociology* 41(5):871-84.
- Go, Julian. 2013. "For a Postcolonial Sociology." *Theory and Society* 42(1):25-55.
- Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. 2015. "Settler Colonialism as Structure." A Framework for Comparative Studies of U.S. Race and Gender Formation." *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1(1):52-72.
- Geva, Dorit. 2017. "Globalizing Gender." Pp. 75-104 in *Social Theory Now*.
- Go, Julian. 2017. "Postcolonial Thought as Social Theory." Pp. 130-161 in *Social Theory Now*.

No Class on 4/19. Undergrad Syllabus due by Wednesday, 4/24.

Class 12: Teaching Social Theory Now (4/26)

- Rojas, Fabio. 2017. *Theory for the Working Sociologist*.
- Rojas, Fabio. 2018. "theory for the working sociologist: undergraduate version." Available at [Orgtheory](#).
- Shared syllabi for undergraduate theory courses.

Final Paper first draft due on 5/1 at midnight.

Class 13: Final Paper Workshop (5/3)

Final Paper due on 5/15 at midnight.