

Sociology 864: Contemporary Sociological Theory

University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Fall 2021

Professor: Dr. Emily Kazyak
Email: ekazyak2@unl.edu

Office Hours: M 1:30-2:30pm; Th 11:30-12:30pm
Office Location: 725 Oldfather Hall

Course Meeting Time and Location: Mondays 2:30-5pm, 707 Oldfather Hall

Course Description and Objectives

The primary objective of this class is to introduce you to key perspectives in contemporary sociological theory, with an emphasis on the “cultural turn” and “postmodern turn.” We consider a variety of microsociological theories, including phenomenology and symbolic interactionism, which provide conceptualizations of the relationship between “macro” and “micro” levels of the social world. We then cover contemporary theorists who offer new approaches to the question of structure and agency. Finally, we consider contemporary theoretical approaches to the study of inequalities and differences. We cover theories that address class, gender, sexuality, and race as well as ones that advocate for an intersectional approach. I also want students to understand how sociologists engage with theory in research. To that end, throughout the class, we will read empirical examples that relate to the theories covered.

Along with covering major contemporary theoretical perspectives (and related research), we will also engage in questions about the relationship between theory and research and about the politics of doing sociological research and theorizing. Sociologists have differing perspectives about the role of theory in research and about how to justify knowledge claims. We begin the class considering some of these questions. We end the course by returning to these larger questions and consider the politics of disciplinary research and theory and the link between contemporary and classical theories.

Course Materials

Morris, Aldon. 2015. *W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology*. University of California Press.

All other required readings are available online on our Canvas site.

Course Format

This course will be a seminar format and will be discussion based. Our class time is your opportunity to engage with and clarify the readings, many of which are not easy. You are expected to come to class having done all the required readings and being prepared to discuss them. Please note that this class requires a lot of reading each week and plan accordingly.

Required Use of Face Coverings

An individual in this course has a documented need for face coverings to be required in this course. Without divulging personal or identifying information, such a documented need might be that a member of their household is unable to be vaccinated or has a health condition that makes

vaccines less effective for them. As a result, the College of Arts & Sciences has determined that face coverings will be required in this course. If you are unwilling to comply with this requirement, please visit with your advisor about different sections or possible alternative courses that you might take in lieu of this one.

Course Assignments

Your grade in this class will be determined by your performance on the following:

1) Weekly discussion questions 2) Presentations on empirical research 3) Final paper

Weekly discussion questions (30%)

Since this is a discussion-based class, coming to class prepared to participate will play a large part in how well you do in this class. Your preparation will be assessed through weekly discussion questions. Each week you will be responsible for writing at least one discussion question that engages with the theoretical readings of the week. The discussion questions are due Mondays by 1:30pm and are submitted in Canvas. Your discussion questions are worth 30% of your overall grade.

Presentations on empirical research (30%)

Over the course of the semester, you will be responsible for presenting on three pieces of empirical research (either a journal article or a chapter from a book). The presentations are worth 30% of your overall grade.

Final paper (40%)

For the final paper, you will be provided with question prompts and you will pick two to answer. The final paper will be 20 pages total (double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt font, 1 in margins): the answer to each question should be 10 pages. The final paper is worth 40% of your overall grade.

Grading Scale

A + = 97-100%	B + = 87 – 89%	C + = 77 – 79%	D + = 67 – 69%
A = 93 – 96%	B = 83 – 86%	C = 73 – 76%	D = 63 – 66%
A – = 90 – 92%	B – = 80 – 82%	C – = 70 – 72%	D – = 60 – 62%
F = 59 % or below			

Academic Honesty

Academic honesty is essential to the existence and integrity of an academic institution. The responsibility for maintaining that integrity is shared by all members of the academic community. The University's [Student Code of Conduct](#) addresses academic dishonesty. Students who commit acts of academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary action and are granted due process and the right to appeal any decision.

Accommodations

The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can discuss options privately. To establish reasonable accommodations, I may request that you register with [Services for Students with Disabilities](#) (SSD). If you are eligible for services and register with their office, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so they can be implemented in a timely manner. SSD contact information: 117 Louise Pound Hall; 402-472-3787. If you need an accommodation that falls outside of the purview of SSD, please do not hesitate to contact me directly; I'm happy to work with you to help you develop a plan to best meet your learning needs.

Counseling & Psychological Services

UNL offers a variety of options to students to aid them in dealing with stress and adversity. [Counseling and Psychological & Services \(CAPS\)](#) is a multidisciplinary team of psychologists and counselors that works collaboratively with Nebraska students to help them explore their feelings and thoughts and learn helpful ways to improve their mental, psychological and emotional well-being when issues arise. CAPS can be reached by calling 402-472-7450. [Big Red Resilience & Well-Being](#) (BRRWB) provides one-on-one well-being coaching to any student who wants to enhance their well-being. Trained well-being coaches help students create and be grateful for positive experiences, practice resilience and self-compassion, and find support as they need it. BRRWB can be reached by calling 402-472-8770.

Diversity & Inclusion

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln does not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, color, national origin, sex (including pregnancy), religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, veteran status, marital status, and/or political affiliation.

READING SCHEDULE

***Please note this schedule is tentative. I may make a change to the schedule to better meet the needs of the class. Additional or alternative readings may be announced in class.**

Week 1: Introductions

August 23: Introductions and Syllabus

Week 2: What is Sociology? What is theory? What is the relationship between theory, epistemology, and research?

August 30

“The Nature and Types of Sociological Theory”

Abend, Gabriel. 2008. “The Meaning of ‘Theory.’” *Sociological Theory* 26: 173-199

Reed, Isaac. 2008. “Justifying Sociological Knowledge: From Realism to Interpretation.”

Sociological Theory 26: 101-129.

One empirical article of student's choosing that has a clearly identified theoretical framework

Week 3: No Class Meeting

September 6: Labor Day; No Class Meeting

Week 4: What is Sociology? What is theory? What is the relationship between theory, epistemology, and research?

September 13

Romero, Mary. 2020. "Sociology Engaged in Social Justice" *American Sociological Review*
DOI: 10.1177/0003122419893677

Hoang, Kimberly Kay. 2017. "Are Public Sociology and Scholar-activism Really at Odds?"
Contexts 15(2):18-19

Abend, Gabriel. 2006. "Styles of Sociological Thought: Sociologies, Epistemologies, and the Mexican and U.S. Quests for Truth." *Sociological Theory* 24: 1-41.

Week 5: Micro Sociological Theories

September 20

Claudio E. Benzecry and Daniel Winchester. 2017. "Varieties of Microsociology." Pp. 42-74 in
Social Theory Now, Eds. Claudio E. Benzecry, Monika Krause, & Isaac Ariail Reed.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Blumer, Herbert. 1969. "Symbolic Interactionism" (excerpt)

Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckman. 1966. "The Social Construction of Reality" (excerpt)

Empirical examples:

Martin, Karin. 1998. "Becoming a Gendered Body: Practices of Preschools." *American Sociological Review*. 63 (4): 494-511.

Westbrook, Laurel and Kristen Schilt. 2014. "Doing Gender, Determining Gender: Transgender People, Gender Panics, and the Maintenance of the Sex/Gender/Sexuality System."
Gender & Society 28 (1): 32-57.

Sweet, Paige. 2019. "The Sociology of Gaslighting." *American Sociological Review*. Online first
DOI: 10.1177/0003122419874843

Shapira, Harel and Samantha J. Simon. 2018. "Learning to Need a Gun." *Qualitative Sociology*

41: 1-20.

Week 6: Structure & Agency

September 27

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1994. "Structure, *Habitus*, Practices" (excerpt)

Giddens, Anthony. 1979. "Agency, Structure" (excerpt)

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

Hays, Sharon. 1994. "Structure and Agency and the Sticky Problem of Culture" *Sociological Theory* 12 (1): 57-72.

Empirical examples:

Young, Alford. 1999. "The (Non)Accumulation of Capital: Explicating the Relationship of Structure and Agency in the Lives of Poor Black Men." *Sociological Theory* 17: 201-227.

Pfeffer, Carla. 2012. "Normative Resistance and Inventive Pragmatism: Negotiating Structure and Agency in Transgender Families." *Gender & Society* 26: 574-604.

Lopez, Henry Steven, Christine L. Williams, and Catherine Connell. 2010. "Looking Good and Sounding Right: Aesthetic Labor and Social Inequality in the Retail Industry" *Work & Occupations* 37(3): 349-377.

Week 7: Postmodernism

October 4

Foucault, Michel. 1972. "Truth and Power" (excerpt)

Foucault, Michel. 1975. "Discipline and Punish" (excerpt)

Giddens, Anthony. 1990. "The Consequences of Modernity" (excerpt)

Seidman, Steven. 1994. "Knowledge and Power: The French Poststructuralists." Pp. 215-252 in *Contested Knowledge*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Empirical examples:

Moon, Dawne. 2005. "Discourse, Interaction, and Testimony: The Making of Selves in the U.S. Protestant Dispute Over Homosexuality." *Theory & Society* 34(5):551-577.

Elliott, Sinikka and Sarah Bowen. 2018. "Defending Motherhood: Morality, Responsibility, and Double Binds in Feeding Children." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 80:499-520.

Puri, Jyoti. 2016. *Sexual States: Governance and the Struggle of Antisodomy Laws in India*. Duke University Press. (excerpt)

Week 8: Culture

October 11

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

Sewell, William H. 2001. "The Concept(s) of Culture" in *Beyond the Cultural Turn*.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." Pp. 3-30 in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Decoteau, Claire Laurier. 2017. "Learning to See Otherwise." *Ethnography*, 18, 1 (Special Issue: Between Theory and Social Reality in Ethnography): 68-75.

Empirical examples:

Mencken, F Caron and Paul Froese. 2019. "Gun Culture in Action." *Social Problems* 66 (1):

Scherrer, Kristin S., Emily Kazyak, and Rachel Schmitz. 2015. "Getting 'Bi' in the Family: Bisexual People's Disclosure Experiences." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 77 (3): 680-696.

Brown-Saracino, Japonica. 2018. *How Places Make Us: Novel LBQ Identities in Four Small Cities*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (excerpt)

Week 9: FALL BREAK

October 18: Fall Break: No Class Meeting

Week 10: Theorizing Class

October 25

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. "The Forms of Capital." (excerpt)

Lamont, Michele and Annette Lareau. 1988. "Cultural Capital: Allusions, Gaps and Glissandos in Recent Theoretical Developments." *Sociological Theory*. 6 (2): 153-68.

Bottero, Wendy. 2004. "Class Identities and the Identities of Class." *Sociology* 38: 985-1003.

Empirical examples:

Bettie, Julie. 2000. *Women Without Class: Girls, Race, and Identity*. University of California Press (excerpt)

Lareau, Annette. 2003. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. University of California Press. (excerpt)

Streib, Jessi. 2015. *The Power of the Past: Understanding Cross-Class Marriages*. New York: Oxford University Press. (excerpt)

Week 11: Theorizing Race

November 1

Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. 2001. "Racial Formation." Pp. 371-382 in *The New Social Theory Reader*, edited by Steven Seidman and Jeffrey Alexander. New York: Routledge.

Winant, Howard. 2000 "Race and Race Theory." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 169-85.

Feagin, Joe & Sean Elias. 2013. "Rethinking racial formation theory: a systemic racism critique." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*

Hill Collins, Patricia. 2004. *Black Sexual Politics* (excerpt)

Empirical examples:

Harris, David and Jeremiah Sim. 2002. "Who Is Multiracial? Assessing the Complexity of Lived Race." *American Sociological Review* 67: 614-627.

Pamela Perry. 2001. "White Means Never Having to Say You're Ethnic." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 30: 56-91.

Andrews, Abigail L. 2018. "Moralizing regulation: the implications of policing "good" versus "bad" immigrants" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41: 2485-2503

Week 12: Theorizing Gender

November 8

Smith, Dorothy. 1990. "The Conceptual Practices of Power"(excerpt)

Risman, Barbara. 2004. "Gender as a social structure: Theory wrestling with activism." *Gender & Society* 18: 429-450.

Connell, Raewyn. 1995. "The Social Organization of Masculinity" in *Masculinities*.

Mimi Schippers. 2007. "Recovering the feminine other: masculinity, femininity, and gender hegemony." *Theory & Society* 36:85–102.

Hamilton, Laura, et al. 2019. "Hegemonic Femininities and Intersectional Domination." *Sociological Theory*. Online first DOI: 10.1177/0735275119888248

Empirical examples:

Hoang, Kimberly Kay. 2014. "Flirting with Capital: Negotiating Perceptions of Asian Ascendancy and Western Decline in Global Sex Work." *Social Problems* 61(4): 507-529.

Kazyak, Emily. 2012. "Midwest or Lesbian? Gender, Rurality, and Sexuality." *Gender & Society* 26 (6): 825-848.

Polletta, Francesca and Pang Ching Bobby Chen. 2014. "Gender and Public Talk: Accounting for Women's Variable Participation in the Public Sphere." *Sociological Theory*

Week 13: Theorizing Sexuality

November 15

Rubin, Gayle. 1984. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." In Carole S. Vance, ed., *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, 267–319. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Fuss, Diana. 1990. "Inside/Out" In *The New Social Theory Reader*.

Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality* (excerpt)

Seidman, Steven. 1994. "Queer-Ing Sociology, Sociologizing Queer Theory: An Introduction." *Sociological Theory* 12:2: 166-177.

Green, Adam. 2007. "Queer Theory and Sociology: Locating the Subject and the Self in Sexuality Studies." *Sociological Theory*.

Valocchi, Steven. 2005. "Not Yet Queer Enough: The Lessons of Queer Theory for the Sociology of Gender and Sexuality," *Gender & Society* 19:6: 750-770.

Empirical examples:

Burke, Kelsy. 2016. *Christians Under Covers*. Berkeley: University of California Press (excerpt).

Kazyak, Emily and Nicholas Park. 2020. "Doing Family: The Reproduction of Heterosexuality in Accounts of Parenthood." *Journal of Sociology* 56 (4): 646-663.

Carrillo, Héctor and Amanda Hoffman. 2018. “‘Straight with a Pinch of Bi’: The Construction of Heterosexuality as an Elastic Category among Adult U.S. Men.” *Sexualities* 21: 90–108.

Week 14: Theorizing Difference and Inequalities

November 22

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1990. “Black Feminist Epistemology” (excerpt)

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2015. “Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 41: 1-20.

Hae Yeon Choo and Myra Marx Fereee. 2010. “Practicing Intersectionality in Sociological Research: A Critical Analysis of Inclusions, Interactions, and Institutions in the Study of Inequalities.” *Sociological Theory*

Brekhus, Wayne. 1998. “Toward a Sociology of the Unmarked” *Sociological Theory* 28: 129-49.

Empirical examples:

Carlson, Jennifer. 2018. “Legally Armed but Presumed Dangerous: An Intersectional Analysis of Gun Carry Licensing as a Racial/Gender Degradation Ceremony.” *Gender & Society* 32(2): 204-227.

Luna, Zakiya. 2016. “‘Truly a Women of Color Organization’: Negotiating Sameness and Difference in Pursuit of Intersectionality” *Gender & Society* 30(5): 769-790.

McGuffey, Shawn. 2013. “Rape and Racial Appraisals: Culture, Intersectionality, and Black Women’s Accounts of Sexual Assault” *Du Bois Review* 10 (1): 109–130.

Moore, Mignon. 2011. *Invisible Families*. Berkeley: University of California Press (excerpt)

Week 15: The Politics of Theory and Research: What is Sociology? What is theory? What is the relationship between theory, epistemology, and research?

November 29

Morris, Aldon. 2015. *W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology*. University of California Press.

Moore, Mignon R. 2017. “Women of Color in the Academy: Navigating Multiple Intersections and Multiple Hierarchies.” *Social Problems* 61 (2): 200-205.

Week 16: Course Reflections and Conclusions

December 6