

SOCIOLOGY 660: THEORIES OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY. FALL 2003. Dr. Mady W. Segal
Class: Tuesdays 3:30-6:10 P.M. Room 4111 Art/Sociology Bldg.
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Office hours: By appointment.
(I'll usually be in my office on Tuesdays from 1:00-3:00 P.M. and Thursdays from 1:00-4:00 P.M.)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is a graduate level seminar in the Department of Sociology, University of Maryland, College Park. It is an introduction and overview of theories in sociological social psychology. It is organized to acquaint the students with the range of historical and current theoretical perspectives in the field and, to a lesser extent, empirical research in social psychology. Emphasis is on students' theorizing, that is, actively processing, assessing, integrating, and applying theory for use in social research.

The Sociology Department Social Psychology specialty area members develop this course at least partly collectively. This is the core course in preparation to do research and teach in the area and to prepare for the Ph.D. specialty area exam in Social Psychology; it is also one of the options for students preparing for a specialty (and exam) in Theory.

The description of the course in the Graduate Catalog is reasonably accurate: Prerequisite: undergraduate training in sociological research methods, statistics, and theory or equivalent. An introduction to some of the theories in social psychology that are particularly useful to sociologists. Topics to be covered include theories of cognitive consistency, social exchanges, symbolic interaction, role theory, group processes, and collective behavior.

COURSE GOALS

This course is designed as a survey of major theories in sociological social psychology. The goal of the course is for students to be able to do the following for each theory covered:

SUMMARIZE the major elements and characteristics of the theory (including assumptions, terms, tenets, scope, units of analysis, behaviors analyzed).

DESCRIBE the development of the theory (including modifications, extensions, and refinements, and how these came about).

IDENTIFY the theorists associated with the theory and **COMPARE** and **CONTRAST** their approaches.

APPLY the theory to various social situations.

DESCRIBE how the concepts of the theory can be operationalized and how the hypotheses could be tested in research.

ANALYZE the relationship between the theory and other theories.

EVALUATE the validity and usefulness of the theory in explaining social behavior.

COURSE ORGANIZATION AND STRATEGY

Here's the strategy for the course. (Note that more than one step may take place within a single class session.)

We are concerned primarily with the interaction between theory and research. This means that this interaction will be a focus of our discussions in class. You should also discuss how theory and method relate to each other in your assignments.

We will begin with an introduction to theory in general and to Social Psychology in general. (What is theory? What important concepts and terms regarding theory constitute our basic language for discussing theory? What is Social Psychology? What kinds of questions does it seek to answer? What are some of the different sub-areas within the field? What have been some of the major developments, issues, and crises in the field?)

Next we will explore an area of research in Social Psychology; we will begin with the study of Interpersonal Attraction. We will do this by reading a paper or two on research in the area.

Next we will read about and discuss a particular major theory [Social Exchange Theory] in Social Psychology that can be applied to the research area. We will discuss the theory in the abstract. We will also apply it to the research area (as well as to other research areas). Applications to research are of two kinds: those that test the theory and those that use the theory to understand some social phenomenon or area of study.

We will then explore another research area [Parenthood].

Then we will read about and discuss another theory [Social Learning Theory] - that can be applied to this new research area, as well as the previous one.

We will continue this process, adding new theories and research areas.

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS AND REQUIRED WRITTEN WORK

Assignment Type 1: DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF THE THEORY

For each class, while doing the reading, prepare to discuss in class answers to the following questions about each theory (and write down the answers to at least 3 of these questions).

Responsibility for leading the discussion each class session will rotate among students. For 2 classes during the semester, you will prepare answers to these questions in writing and present them, possibly with a partner in the class, to the class. Since there is too much here to present it all, you will need to be selective and present (both in writing and orally) what you think would be most useful to get our discussion rolling. Be sure to include a balance of description and analysis. (Your written version of the answers should be between 3 and 5 double-spaced typed pages with font 12 point or larger and margins at least 1" and will be handed in.) We will develop a schedule for these during Class 2.

Description

1. What are the assumptions of the theory?
2. What are the major terms used and what is the definition of each?
3. What are the major tenets (propositions, hypotheses, etc.) of the theory?
4. Who are the theorists associated with the theory?
5. What is the scope of the theory? That is, to what areas of social life is it applied, to what life stages, etc.?
6. What are the units of analysis?
7. What behaviors are analyzed? (That is, what behaviors, emotions, etc. does it highlight?)

Analysis

8. What understanding is provided by the theory that we would not have without it?
9. In the perspective of the theory, how active is the individual in shaping his/her own behavior? What is the influence of other people on the individual? What is the influence of the group? What is the role of social structure? What is the role of affect?
10. What is the role of reinforcement? That is, how is reinforcement seen as affecting behavior?
11. What is the relative emphasis given to external (observable, overt) behavior as compared to internal (subjective) processes?
12. What criticisms of the theory have been made? How valid do you think they are?

Assignment Type 2: QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

For 2 classes during the semester, you will write down and present in class questions for discussion. Identify what in the reading brought each question to mind. Is something missing in the theory? Are there contradictions? Do the questions come from other sociological theories or research? Do the questions derive from other disciplines?

For each day we begin a new theory, approximately two students will have this responsibility. We will develop the schedule for the semester during Class 2.

(Your written version of the questions should be between 1 and 2 double-spaced typed pages with 12-point or larger font and margins at least 1" and will be handed in.)

Assignment Type 3: ANALYTIC APPLICATION

You are required to hand in 1 Analytic Application. Preferably, hand it in at the class after the one where the theory is discussed. (There is some flexibility in this last requirement.)

Look at Questions 2 through 8 of the take-home examination. Do the application of one theory as specified in one of these questions. (You do not have to do the comparisons among theories specified in the question.)

Here are some pointers for how to do an analytic application:

Start with the theory and let it guide you to the questions to ask about the situation or area and insights into it. Don't start with what you think you know about the situation; doing this makes you miss ideas that are not obvious but which the theory would point you to.

When you analyze a situation that is not specific, do not make it specific. Rather, analyze the questions that the theory would lead you to ask for each specific instance. For example, if the question asks about the study of interpersonal attraction, do not fill in specifics about a particular couple and apply the theory only to those specifics. Instead, specify the kinds of issues the theory would identify as important to consider and questions to ask.

Assignment Type 4: RESEARCH APPLICATION

Do the following assignment once during the semester. (You may substitute 1 Research Design paper for this.) Preferably, hand it in at the class after the one where the theory is discussed. (There is some flexibility in this last requirement.)

Find a recent (preferably within the past 5 years) empirical work (e.g., a journal article in a major sociological journal, such as *Social Psychology Quarterly*) that uses the theory, either explicitly or implicitly.

In writing, describe the work. This includes the population (sample selection, size of sample, descriptive characteristics, etc.); setting and data collection (experiment, interview type, role of observer, etc.); dependent variables (if applicable: theoretical concepts and how operationalized); independent and control variables (if applicable: theoretical and operational); hypotheses or research questions (confirmed, disconfirmed, partially confirmed or puzzling, generated); and conclusions.

Describe how work uses the theory (builds on it, tests it, or uses the theory as background to make specific predictions or explain findings). Describe how important concepts are operationalized and analyze the validity and reliability of the measures. Specify what propositions are tested. Summarize the findings and discuss how the work adds to our knowledge of the validity or applicability of the theory. Specify why you think this empirical work is important enough for you to have done this analysis.

Be sure to choose a study that is a good example of research. Do not choose an article for which you have more criticism than positive comments. Be sure that the article contributes something to our knowledge.

The best way to find a good article is to look through recent issues of journals (best ones to use are: *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *American Sociological Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*, and *Social Forces*). Through this process you also gain familiarity with what is being published in the major journals. Do NOT try to find an article by using computerized indexes such as *Sociofile*. Your selection should be made after you have examined several articles to see which would be best to analyze and write about.

The length of this paper should be between 3 and 5 pages (typed, double space). The length will depend on a number of factors, such as how broad a test of the theory the research is.

Assignment Type 5: RESEARCH DESIGN

(This is an optional alternative to the Research Application assignment)

Choose a major hypothesis (or several interrelated propositions) from one of the theories covered in class. Design a research project to test the hypothesis within some specified area of research. Your description should include the operationalization of the major concepts (including considerations of validity and reliability). Discuss how the results of the research will contribute to knowledge in the research area and possibly to revising the theory (e.g., further specification of conditions under which the hypothesis holds).

Assignment Deadlines

The **deadline** dates (at the beginning of class) for the series of assignments is as follows. (It is best to complete the assignments in advance of these dates.)
The first by September 30 (Class 5). (This should be an Analytical or Research Application.)
The second by October 14 (Class 7).
The third by October 28 (Class 9).
The fourth by November 11 (Class 11).

The 4 assignments should cover at least 3 different broad theories. (Note: 2 versions of exchange theory are not 2 different theories.)

The Take-Home Examination is due on December 2 (Class 14).

Do not put your name on any work you hand in. Instead, put your social security number on each. (The purpose of this is to minimize halo effects and other subjective bias.)

Feel free to discuss any assignment with me. All assignments are intended to further learning and are not mysterious, secretive, or tricky.

Deadlines and Exceptions

If you have a legitimate problem with any of the assignments or attending class, please contact me as soon as possible. Legitimate reasons for late work or not attending class include illness, family emergency, documented approved University activity, religious observance, jury duty or court appearance, or personal circumstances that are genuinely unplanned and beyond your control. It is not my usual policy to give grades of Incomplete, so please plan to complete all course work by the end of the semester.

Disabilities

If you have a documented disability requiring special arrangements, please let me know early in the semester. I will do my best to make accommodations.

Grading

Each of the Description/Analysis assignments will count about 10% of your grade, as will the Analytic and Research Applications (for a total of about 40% of your grade). Each of the Questions for Discussion assignments will count for about 5% of your grade). The take-home final examination will count about 30%. Class participation (quantity and quality) will account for the remaining 20%.

We may use peer evaluations for the oral presentations and leading of class discussions. I may also ask you to rate each member of the class on how much he/she contributed to the discussions and to your own learning.

Class meeting dates (Fall 2003)

1. Sept. 2

2. Sept. 9
3. Sept. 16
4. Sept. 23
5. Sept. 30
6. Oct. 7
7. Oct. 14
8. Oct. 21
9. Oct. 28
10. Nov. 4
11. Nov. 11
12. Nov. 18
13. Nov. 25
14. Dec. 2
15. Dec. 9

Summary of Class Sessions and Topics

Class 1: Introduction To The Course. Get acquainted with each other.

Class 2: Introduction. What is theory? What is Social Psychology?
Develop schedule for Description and Analysis leaders and Question leaders.

Class 3: Social Exchange Theory
[need D/A and Q leaders]

Class 4: Continuation of Exchange Theory [and Reference Group Theory - comparative function]
[need D/A and Q leaders]

Class 5: Reinforcement Theories Of Social Learning
[need D/A and Q leaders]

Class 6: Symbolic Interaction
[need D/A and Q leaders]

Class 7: SI (continued)
[Need Q leaders]

Class 8: Identity Theory (and normative function of reference groups)
[need D/A and Q leaders]

Class 9: Role Theory
[need D/A and Q leaders]

Class 10: Attitudes And Attributions. Theories Of Attitudes And Cognitive Consistency Theories
[need D/A and Q leaders]

Class 11: Expectation States Theory
[need D/A and Q leaders]

Class 12: Social Structure And Personality, Life Course Perspective, And Interpretive Theories
[need D/A and Q leaders]

Class 13: Feminism And Post-Modernism
[need D/A and Q leaders]

Class 14: The Sociology Of Emotions
[need D/A and Q leaders] The Take-Home Examination is due

Class 15: Wrap-Up And Catch-Up. Oral Course Evaluation. Integration of theories. Critical appraisal of theories. Possible: discuss take-home examination issues.