

# Contemporary Sociological Theory

## Spring 2010

James 3604 Brooklyn College  
Sociology 702X  
Mondays, 6:30-8:10

Prof George Cavalletto  
office hours after class  
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### Syllabus

**The object of study.** We will begin this semester by examining two distinct types of theories reflective of the social universe of the middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We will read major theorists whose conceptual world offers a “macro” perspective on the era’s large-scale impersonal social structures and their relationship to cultural and psychological realities. And we will examine major “micro” theorists, with their conceptual focus on such issues as the constitution of the self and management of self-presentation.

In the second half of the semester, we will deal with a number of more recent approaches that attempt to interconnect these macro and micro theoretical approaches. We will examine texts from the new fields of the sociology of emotion, feminist social theory, and approaches of theoretical syntheses that systematically integrate micro and macro investigation and theory making. Of particular interest here will be theorists of last several decades who bring into conceptual view what they believe to be radical alterations in the fundamental structures of modernity.

By the end of this course, students should be familiar with crucial concepts and theories that animate the contemporary sociological endeavor. They should be able to apply this knowledge critically to a variety of arenas of social life. They should be able to make connections between theory, research, and actual social behaviors, and to relate these approaches to an array of personal and social policy considerations.

**The method of study.** A principal aim of the course is training students to read critically theoretical and investigative texts of social science and to write about and discuss issues related to these readings intelligently. Thus, *students are required to carefully read each class’s texts prior to class and to complete most of the written homework assignments concerning these readings.*

The success of our joint discussion and thinking about of the texts depends on readings being completed in advance of the class meeting. Even if a student plans not to do a homework assignment on a specific reading, she or he is nonetheless required to complete the reading prior to class and to do so with the homework question in mind, making sure that this question is answered in the text’s margins or at least in the student’s mind.

#### **Term grade will be based upon on the following:**

- **Attendance** — class attendance is critical and required. More than two unexcused absences will cause your grade to be lowered by one notch (A to A-, A- to B+, B+ to B).
- **Homework assignments** — **50% of grade.** Students are encouraged to turn in each week’s homework assignment. But students are required to turn in only *eight* of the eleven of the weekly assignments. Students who turn in more than the eight required homeworks will receive *extra credit*. *No late homeworks will be accepted!*
- **Final examination** — **50% of grade.**
- **Class participation** — Class participation is graded. You can *add up to 4 extra points* to your final grade by intelligent class participation and discussion pertinent to the readings and the issues raised by the readings. Disruptive, disrespectful class behavior will result in a student’s course grade being lowered.

*If your homework assignments are done well, they should prove very helpful in preparing for the final examination, as the final will focus on the same issues addressed by the assignments.*

#### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

BOOK: *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology* – copies at bookstore.

COURSE PACKETS: *All assigned readings will be passed out in class in the form of course packets*

## Assignments

**Feb 1:** Introduction and overview

### **Part I: Macro-Sociology: Social, Cultural, & Psychological Interconnections**

**Feb 8: Marcuse and Adorno—Critical Theory**

- Apppelrouth, “Critical Theory”
- Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*
- Theodor Adorno, “The Culture Industry Reconsidered” and “Free Time”

**Feb 15:** <no class>

**Feb 18 (Thursday): Habermas—The Rise and Fall of the Public Sphere**

- Apppelrouth, “Jürgen Habermas: a Biographical Sketch”
- Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*

**Feb 22: Parsons—Structural Functionalism**

- Garner, “Structural Functionalism”; Apppelrouth “Structural Functionalism”
- Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils, *Toward a General Theory of Action*
- Talcott Parsons, “Certain Primary Sources and Patterns of Aggression”

### **Part II: Micro-Sociology: Managing the Self**

**Mar 1: Goffman—The Dramaturgical Self**

- Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*

**Mar 8: Hochschild—Emotion Management**

- Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*

### **Part III: Micro-Macro Syntheses**

**Mar 15: Smith—A Sociology for Women**

- Dorothy E. Smith, “A Berkeley Education”
- Dorothy E. Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*

**Mar 22: Foucault—Dimensions of Power**

- Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*

**Mar 29, Apr 5:** <no class>

**Apr 12: Bourdieu—Stratified Society, Class, Status, and Agency**

- Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*

**Apr 19: Bourdieu—Social Suffering**

- Pierre Bourdieu et al., *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*

### **Part IV: Social Transformations: Late, Reflexive, Liquid Modernity**

**Apr 26: Giddens—Late Modernity**

- Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*

**May 3: Beck—Reflexive Modernity**

- Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*

**May 10: Bauman—Liquid Modernity**

- Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*

**May 17: review for final**

**May 24: final**