

Theorizing in Sociology and Social Science
7,5 ECTS credits

Instructor

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1. Decision

The Syllabus is approved by the board of the Department of Sociology at Stockholm University 2011-04-28.

2. General information

The course consists of 7.5 ECTS credits and is at doctoral student level. The class will be taught in English or, if all the students know Swedish, in Swedish.

3. Course contents

The aim of this class is to teach doctoral students how to theorize in sociology and social science. The emphasis is on the students learning how to theorize themselves as opposed to simply learning what theoreticians have said on different topics. Theorizing is a practical skill that can be learned, similar to the skill of using methods. For each class the students will read some literature plus have a task in theorizing. Each class consists of lecture and discussion of the assigned text(s); a break; and a presentation and discussion of the exercises. For each class the student should write 1-2 pages on the theorizing task. Apart from the assignments for each class, and participating actively in the class discussions, the student will write a final paper, describing how she or he has learnt to theorize during the course, emphasizing and discussing advances as well what remains to be done. This autoethnography should be 10-15 pages.

4. Learning outcomes

After accomplishing this course, participants are expected to:

In terms of knowledge and understanding:

- Have developed a skill in theorizing in sociology and social science.
- Understand the basic steps in the process of theorizing.
- Be able to identify their own strengths and weaknesses in theorizing.
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In terms of accomplishment and competence:

- Be able to theorize at a basic level.
- Be able to further develop their capacity to theorize on their own.

In terms of values and evaluation:

- To be able to critically assess existing theories in terms of their merits and limitations from the perspective of theorizing



5. Instruction

Readings should be done for each class. Each class will consist of a lecture and discussion of the general reading for the day (45 minutes); break (15 minutes); and general discussion of the students' attempts to theorize based on the exercise- reading for the day (1 hour). Some modification in this pattern may be made depending on the number of students who will take the class.

6. Examination

Passing the course will depend on carrying out the assignments for each meeting, participation in the discussion and producing a paper. The paper should be in the form of a presentation and analysis of the student's progress in theorizing, including and commenting on the three exercises. The paper should be 10-15 pages (or longer) and explicitly refer to earlier exercises in theorizing.

7. Schedule – Classes each day 1 p.m. – 4 p.m.

Wednesday May 31, 2017 E355

1. Introduction. What is Theory?

Read: Robert K. Merton, "What is Sociological Theory?" *American Journal of Sociology* 50(1945):462-73 (JSTOR); Gabriel Abend, "The Meaning of 'Theory'", *Sociological Theory* 26(June 2008):173-99 (JSTOR).

Exercise: Write one page on what you consider theory to be and do so BEFORE you do the reading for this class. We will then discuss your view and that of the others in class.

Friday June 2 D263

2. What is Theorizing?

Read: Richard Swedberg, "“Before Theory Comes Theorizing or How to Make Social Science More Interesting,” *British Journal of Sociology* 67,1(2016):5-22. (JSTOR; also available on my webpage at Cornell University, Department of Sociology).



Exercise: Pick a topic and focus in on some aspect that interests you; try to name it and construct or use a concept or two; build the theory out (a process? a typology?); and try to come up with an explanation. (Exercise # 1)

Wednesday June 7 B800

3. Explanation and Speculation

Read: John Lave and James March, Chs, 1, 2 and 3 in *An Introduction to Models in the Social Sciences* (1975; pp. 1-43). Available on the web unless you want to buy and own the book, which is excellent: (<http://www.rochester.edu/college/psc/clarke/214/LaveMarch.pdf>)

Exercise: Pick a topic that interests you and study/observe it as much as you have the time (on the web, in reality etc). Once this has been done, give it a name and turn it into a concept – but don't supply an explanation yet (Part 1 of Exercise # 2; this exercise has 2 parts).

Friday June 9 B900

4. The Craft of Theorizing and the Use of Imagination

Read: “Appendix: On Intellectual Craftmanship” in C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*. Available on the web unless you want to buy and own the book, which is excellent: (https://archivingthecity.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/mills_on_intellctual_craftmanship.pdf)

Exercise: Continue with your topic from last meeting: build the theory out and try to come up with an explanation (Part 2 and the last part of Exercise # 2).

Monday June 12 B800

5. The Construction and Use of Concepts

Read: Richard Swedberg, “On the Heuristic Role of Concepts in Theorizing,” Pp. 23-38 in Vol. 1 of Håkon Leiulfstrud and Peter Sohlberg (eds.), *Theory in Action*. Leiden: Brill, 2017 (will be handed out in class).



Exercise: Pick a topic that interests you and study/observe it as much as you have the time (on the web, in reality etc). Once this has been done, give it a name and turn it into a concept – but don't supply an explanation yet (Part 1 of Exercise # 3; this exercise has 2 parts).

Tuesday June 13

B900

6. The Use of Visualization in Theorizing

Read: Richard Swedberg, “Can You Visualize Theory? On the Use of Visual Thinking in Theory Pictures, Theorizing Diagrams and Visual Sketches,” *Sociological Theory* 24, 3(2016):250-75. (JSTOR; also available at my webpage at Cornell University, Department of Sociology).

Exercise: Continue with your topic from last meeting: build the theory out and try to come up with an explanation (Part 2 and the last part of Exercise # 3).

Thursday June 15

B900

7. Summing Up; and How to Write the Autoethnography

Read: No reading.

Exercise: Write 1-2 pages on what you consider to be the hardest part of theorizing for you.

10. Literature

If the two texts by March-Lave and Mills are not available on the web, you should buy these books (see below). Note that these books can be bought from Amazon (which also sells secondhand copies). Cheaper copies are also often available from the main site for secondhand bookstores in the United States, abebooks (www.abebooks.com). Perhaps some of these books are also available on similar Swedish sites, such as antikvariat.net. The book by Swedberg is optional but helpful to read along the course.

Lave, Charles and James March. *An Introduction to Models in the Social Sciences*. University press of America, 1993.

Mills, C. Wright. *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford University Press, 1959, 2000.



Swedberg, Richard. *The Art of Social Theory*. Princeton University Press, 2014.

Also Highly Recommended (but not required)

Abbott, Andrew. *Digital Paper: A Manual for Research and Writing with Library and Internet Materials*. University of Chicago Press, 2014.

Abbott, Andrew. *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. W.W. Norton, 2004.

Becker, Howard. *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think about Your Research While You are Doing It.*, University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Stinchcombe, Arthur. *Constructing Social Theories*. University of Chicago Press, 1968, 1987.