



STOCKHOLMS UNIVERSITET
Sociologiska institutionen

Modern sociological theory, 7,5 hp Course plan, spring 2021

Decision

The Syllabus is approved by the board of the Department of Sociology at Stockholm University 2013-12-19.

General information

The course consists of 7,5 ECTS credits and is at the advanced level.

Course code

SO7021

Entrance qualification

A Bachelor's degree.

Content

The aim of this course is to give an overview of modern sociological theory and a deeper understanding of some modern sociological perspectives. "Modern sociological theory" refers to the period after the decline of functionalism around 1960 and until today. This course covers some of the important fields and perspectives in recent sociology, including e.g. cultural theory, rational choice, structural analysis, and organizational theory.

Learning outcomes

After accomplishing this course, participants are expected to:

In terms of knowledge and understanding:

- Have knowledge about the principal lines in the development of modern sociological theory.
- Understand the meaning of central concepts and theories in modern sociological theory.
- Be able to identify important similarities and differences between modern sociological theories.
- Know how modern sociology has been shaped by classical sociology.

In terms of accomplishment and competence:

- Be able to account for, and to analyze, the content of central texts by modern sociologists in a clear, well put and well-argued manner.
- Be able to use relevant parts of modern sociological theory to analyze social phenomena.

In terms of values and evaluation:

- To be able to critically assess modern sociological theories in terms of their merits and limitations.

Instruction

The course is provided at half-time basis over 10 weeks, from January 18 to March 19 2021. Participants meet about once a week during 9 weeks.

The instructor will give a lecture the first class, but the remaining classes will primarily center on student presentations and discussions. During these classes, a group of student will give a presentation of aspects in the course readings (first hour), followed by a discussion of the course readings based on questions provided by another group of students (second hour). The structure of the last hour will vary, but generally include in-class assignments, discussions, and/or concluding remarks from the instructor.

The classes rely on active student participation and all students are therefore expected to have read the required literature before each class and actively engage in discussion. It is also good to always bring the required literature for each class to the class.

The organization of groups and tasks will be assigned by the instructor during the first class. In order to arrange this, **attendance at the first class is crucial**. If a student plans to take the course, but is unable to attend the first class, an e-mail **must** be sent to the head instructor before 8 am on Monday 18 January in order to be included in one of the groups.

Attendance is required for all classes. Absence must be compensated by assignments. If the first class is missed, the student has to provide a short summary (2-300 words) of Abend's article. If any of the later classes (2-9) is missed, the student has to submit short summaries (200-300 words) of each of the articles/chapters for the missed class. All supplementary assignments should be submitted together with the course paper by March 19 17:00. A student who misses more than three lectures will not be graded.

If the paper and supplementary assignments are not handed in on time, there is an opportunity to hand in by 15 October or at the deadline for the paper when the course is given next time.

Examination

To pass, students are required to participate actively during the discussion, participate in the evaluation of a group presentation and together with the group, provide questions for one class. Examination is in the form of two assignments: a course paper and an oral presentation.

Course paper

The student is expected to write a short paper. The length should be 3000-4000 words and formatting should be 1,5 spaced, Times New Roman 12 point. Deadline for the course paper is Friday 19 March 17:00.

The topic of the paper is free, as long as the paper discusses questions in *close* relation to the course contents. It is possible to address a theoretical question related to the topic of the student's master's thesis, or to start from a question discussed during a class. For example, the paper could use different theories or a few concepts to critically examine how they contribute to further understanding of a specific social phenomenon of interest, and/or compare which theory that is most suitable to address the phenomenon at hand. The paper could also take

some area from one of the classes and analyze it from the perspective of another (e.g. what the assumptions of power/agency are cultural sociological concept/theory Z based on?).

To pass, the paper must include discussion of literature from at least two of the classes and of at least two of the books (not related to the same class), in the list of suggested readings, using explicit references. The selection of books must add up to at least 600 pages, i.e. choosing to read some of the shorter books means that the student will have to read more than two. The paper must also include some kind of comparison of the literature. If the paper builds on what the student presented during her/his part of the group lecture or group discussion, it must be substantially developed, including a deeper analysis and argumentation. If there is a considerable overlap with the lecture, the paper will be considered as self-plagiarism.

Voluntary assignment to assist the decision on topic

To assist in the process of figuring out a topic for the course paper, there is an assignment about half way through the course. The deadline is Monday February 22 17:00. This assignment should include information about the preliminary questions of the course paper, a couple of sentences describing the topic, and information about which readings that will be discussed (including both which articles and books that are selected for reading). Please note that this is the principal opportunity to discuss the topic of the paper with the instructor.

Student lectures – guidelines and requirements

During the student lecture, the members of the group should present the course literature for the class during about 45 min.

The presentation could be structured according to the readings (e.g. one student presents some aspects of one text, another student presents aspects of another text etc.) or thematically (e.g. one student presents one or several core themes of the readings each). Present some specific theme or a few key concepts or specific comparisons across the readings. It should be a substantial account of the ideas. Less is more! In presenting these issues, it is also good to say something about basic questions such as what the assumptions, level and scope of the theory is. It is also very good if you could provide an example or two of the theoretical ideas.

Please **avoid**, at all costs, to read aloud from the pieces you have read and/or to summarize the content as a whole of each text or, inversely, loosely reflect on what you find interesting.

The presentation should be approximately equally divided between all the students of the group so that each group member presents one part. It is necessary for the group to meet before the class to discuss how to set up the presentation. The group is very welcome to use PowerPoint, but it is not required. (If the presentation is based on a written manuscript, have in mind that about 700-900 words correspond to about 15 min of speech. If the presentation is based on a PowerPoint, allow a few minutes per slide.)

If a student is scheduled to give a part of a lecture, but cannot attend the class in the last minute, the student should provide fellow group members with sufficient material for them to fill in the gap. The student must also provide a manuscript of his/her part of the lecture, about 700-900 words, to the course instructor. This assignment should be submitted together with the course paper by March 19 17:00.

Questions and discussions – guidelines and requirements

Before classes 2-9, a group of students should provide a list of 3-4 questions to be discussed during the class. The complete list of questions should be sent by one of the group members to the instructor **at the latest at 9:00** the day before the class (or on the Friday, if the class is scheduled on a Monday), all at once.

It is good if the group meets before the class to formulate as relevant questions as possible. Formulate questions that can generate elaborate discussions, rather than questions to which the answers can be found explicitly and easily in the readings (i.e. avoid questions like “how does X define Y?” if the answer to this question can be succinctly found in a few sentences in an article by X). Fruitful questions can be formulated in different ways, but the list should preferably include some question comparing the readings (e.g. what are the pros and cons of X’s concept of Y compared to Z’s Y-concept?) and some question that applies theories or concept to a social phenomenon (e.g. how would the theory of X explain/understand the social phenomenon Q?).

Evaluation

The course work is graded on a scale including seven grades, A, B, C, D, E, Fx and F. The course grade will be determined by the course paper (75%) and lecture (25 %).

The course paper is evaluated on three dimensions, on a scale from insufficient to good. The lecture is evaluated on one dimension, on a scale from insufficient to good. (The questions for group discussion are not graded, but must be submitted to pass the course as must be the evaluation of a group presentation).

	Lecture	Course paper: Extent	Course paper: Argumentation	Course paper: Comparison
Good	Analytical review of the literature Relevant examples	Extensive and deep account of the course literature	Critical and convincing interpretation and argumentation	Clear discussion of important differences and similarities of the theories/ concepts
Pass	Clear, sufficiently extensive review of relevant aspects	Clear account of the course literature	Reasonable interpretations and argumentation	Identification of important differences and similarities in the theories/ concepts
Insufficient	Irrelevant, inaccurate or unclear review Reading from the course literature	Unclear account of or insufficient use of the course literature	Unreasonable interpretations Lack of arguments	Unclear comparison of concept or theories

Everything that is required for “Good” presupposes what is mentioned for “Pass”. Please note that “Good” on one or more dimensions cannot compensate for “Insufficient” on one or more aspects. All aspects must be at least “Pass” for not failing the course. For A both graded assignments must be evaluated as “good” on all dimensions. For B no more than one dimension of the graded assignments must be evaluated as “pass”. For C no more than two

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dimensions of the paper or the other assignments must be evaluated as “pass”. For D one dimension of the paper or one of the other assignments must be evaluated as “good” For E all assignments must be evaluated as “pass” on all dimensions.

For Fx no more than one dimension of the paper or of the other assignments must be evaluated as “insufficient”. For F two or more dimensions of either the paper or the other assignments must be evaluated as “insufficient”

If something is missing in a submitted assignment, it must be supplemented and resubmitted within 14 days of the result becoming available to the student.

If a student receives F or Fx, or is unable to hand in assignments on time, next time to submit the assignments is 15 October.

Schedule: Classes and reading requirements

Attendance is compulsory for all classes and all students must read the required readings before each class. The schedule is available here

<https://cloud.timeedit.net/su/web/stud1/ri157575X63Z06Q6Z06g5Y50y6006Y39Q06gQY6Q55727.html>

Please note that it is not yet decided whether classes takes place at the university or over Zoom

Important: If a student plans to take the course, but is unable to attend the first class, an e-mail **must** be sent to the head instructor before 8 am on Monday 18 January in order to be included in one of the groups who will work together on the group assignments.

Introduction, 18 January

Required reading

Abend 2008, Merton 1945.

Microsociology, 25 January

Required reading

Blumer 1966; Goffman 1961; Collins 2004.

Suggested reading

Collins, R. (2004) *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 438 p.

Goffman, E. (1974) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Penguin Press. 257 p.

Rationality and Action, 29 January

Required reading

Boudon 2003; Coleman 1986; Elster 1982.

Suggested reading

Coleman, J. (1998) *Foundations of Social Theory*. Harvard University Press. 993 p.

Structure, 8 February

Required reading

Blau 1977; Feld 1981; Giddens 1984; Merton 1938.

Status and Stratification, 12 February

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Required reading

Breen & Goldthorpe 1997; Sorensen 2000, Weeden 2002 (focus reading on p. 55-72 and p. 90-95, not necessary to read methods and results).

Power, 19 February

Required reading

Emerson 1962; Foucault [1976] 1980; Lukes 2005; Smith 1990.

Suggested readings

Lukes, S. (2005) *Power. A Radical View*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2nd edition. 190 p.
Smith, D. (1990) *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge*. Boston: Northeastern University press. 235 p.
Sundberg, M. (2020) Differences in Secondary Adjustments among Monks and Nuns. *Current Sociology*. Online first.

Organizations and institutions, 26 February

Required reading

Acker 1990; Ahrne 2017; Meyer & Rowan 1977.

Suggested readings

March, J. & Simon, H. (1993 [1958]) *Organizations*. Blackwell publishers. 2nd edition. 300 p.

Culture, 5 March

Required reading

Bourdieu 1989; Swidler 1986; Zerubavel 1996.

Suggested readings

Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. London: Routledge. 606 p.
Pugh, A.J. (2009) *Longing and Belonging: Parents, Children and Consumer Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 301 p.

Modernity and Globalization, 12 March

Required reading

Beck 2002; Habermas 1981; Go 2013; Sassen 2000.

Suggested reading

Habermas, J. (1981) *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Boston: Beacon Press. 457 p.

Literature (required)

Abend, G. (2008) The Meaning of 'Theory'. *Sociological Theory* 26(2):173-199.

Acker, J. (1990) Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender and society* 4(2): 139-158.

Ahrne, A. (2017) "The Organization of Action" in Leiufrud, H. and Sohlberg, P. *Concepts in Action. Conceptual Constructionism*. Leiden: Brill.

Beck, U. (2002) The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies. *Theory, Culture & Society* 19(1-2): 17-44.

- Blau, P. (1977) A Macrosociological Theory of Social Structure. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83: 26-54.
- Blumer, H. (1966) Sociological Implications of the Thought of George Herbert Mead. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 71: 535-544.
- Boudon, R. (2003) Beyond Rational Choice Theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 29: 1-21.
- Bourdieu, P. (1989) Social Space and Symbolic Power. *Sociological Theory*, 7: 14-25.
- Breen, R. and J. H. Goldthorpe (1997) Explaining Educational Differentials: Towards a Formal Rational Action Theory. *Rationality and Society*, 9: 275-305.
- Coleman, J. S. (1986) Social Theory, Social Research, and a Theory of Action. *American Journal of Sociology*, 91: 1309-35.
- Collins, R. (2004) *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, Brief excerpt.
- Elster, J. (1982) The Case for Methodological Individualism. *Theory and Society* 11 (4): 453-482.
- Emerson, R.M. (1962) Power-Dependence Relations. *American Sociological Review* 27(1): 31-41.
- Feld, S. (1981) The Focused Organization of Social Ties. *American Journal of Sociology* 86 (5): 1015-1035.
- Foucault, M. ([1976] 1980) "Lecture Two: 14 January 1976" in *Power/Knowledge*. Brighton: Harvester Press, 93-108.
- Giddens, A. (1984) "Elements of a Theory of Structuration" in *The Constitution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 1-40.
- Go, J. (2013) For a postcolonial sociology. *Theory and Society* 42(1): 25-55.
- Goffman, E. (1961) "Role Distance" in *Encounters*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, pp. 82-152.
- Habermas, J. (1981) "The Rationalization of the Life World." Pp. 119-26, 136-45, 147-8, 150-2 from Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action, vol. 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Lukes, S. (2005) *Power. A Radical View*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2nd edition. Brief excerpt.
- Merton, R. (1938) Social Structure and Anomie. *American Sociological Review*, 3(5): 672-682.
- Merton, R.K. (1945) Sociological Theory. *American Journal of Sociology*, 50 (6):462-473.
- Meyer, J. W. & Rowan, B. (1977) Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83, 340-363.

Sassen, S. (2000) Women's Burden: Counter-geographies of Globalization and the Feminization of Survival. *Journal of International Affairs* 53(2): 503-524.

Smith, D. E. (1990) The Conceptual Practices of Power. From Smith, D. (1990) *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge*. Boston: Northeastern University press.

Sorensen, A. B (2000) Toward a Sounder Basis for Class Analysis. *American Journal of Sociology* 105:1523-1558.

Swidler, A. (1986) Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies. *American Sociological Review*, 51: 273-286.

Weeden, K. A. (2002) Why Do Some Occupations Pay More Than Others? Social Closure and Earnings Inequality in the United States. *The American Journal of Sociology* 108:55-101.

Zerubavel, E. (1996) Lumping and Splitting: Notes on Social Classification. *Sociological Forum*, 11: 421-433.

The book chapters and book excerpts will be compiled and sold at Akademibokhandeln. The journal articles, including Ahrne's chapter, can be downloaded from the internet.

Teachers

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