

Field Course

Sociology: Main questions and building blocks

First term, Tuesdays 15:00-17:00, Seminar Room 2

Given by:

Juho Härkönen - Arnout van de Rijt - Herman van de Werfhorst

Course description

This course addresses key questions, theoretical approaches and readings in sociology as a core social science discipline. Sociology is a very disparate discipline but this course approaches it by focusing on key theoretical approaches and questions that cut through much of good sociological research. The focus of the course is on asking theoretical questions and thinking sociologically. The course comes in two parts: a ten week seminar series and an exam of a (longish) reading list of some key texts in sociology. The seminar and the readings are structured under five themes: core principles and sociological theory building, Social structure and agency, Social integration and social cohesion, Differentiation and inequality, and Social change and continuity. By the end of the course, the participants are expected to have developed an understanding of sociological thinking and some key sociological fields and central works therein.

Learning Objectives

1. Be familiar with many major questions and themes in the discipline of sociology
2. Be familiar with important classics as well as recent studies in sociology
3. Have acquired a base of readings that will allow you to begin to conduct independent research in sociology.

Structure

- We have weekly meetings, in which two professors take the lead with a brief presentation of the core issues at stake.
- Researchers must read all core readings plus one additional reading of their choice. Please read the readings carefully.
- Researchers put 3 discussion points in the collective document on Brightspace. Please add your name to your bullet points.

- Researchers also write two 3-page response papers, during weeks of their choosing. Together with the discussion points the response papers feed classroom discussion.
- Researchers are required to attend regularly: Missing more than 2 sessions means failing the course.
- The course has the structure of a seminar; group discussion is the norm, and active participation expected.
- First-year researchers doing their field exam in sociology will do a **take home exam in January**, details of which are to be announced.

1. Core principles and sociological theory building.

3 October 2023

In this session we outline the basic aims of the course, and discuss core principles of sociological scholarship. We discuss methodological (as opposed to ontological) individualism, the macro-micro problem (a.k.a. structure and agency), and the formulation of research problems. We furthermore discuss the need for simplicity of theories, and discuss critiques of the formation of theories based on rational choice-like argumentations.

Core readings:

Coleman, J. S. (1986). "Social Theory, Social Research, and a Theory of Action." *American Journal of Sociology* 91(6):1309–35.

Goldthorpe, J. H. (2016). *Sociology as a Population Science (chapter 3: the individualistic paradigm)*. Cambridge University Press. (available online at the EUI library)

Lamont, M. (2017). *Prisms of Inequality: Moral Boundaries, Exclusion, and Academic Evaluation. (Essay for the Acceptance of the Erasmus Prize)*. Praemium Erasmianum Foundation.

Ultee, W. (2015). "Problem Selection in the Social Sciences: Methodology." Pp. 49–55 in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition)*, edited by J. D. Wright. Oxford: Elsevier.

Watts, D. J. (2014). Common sense and sociological explanations. *American Journal of Sociology*, 120(2), 313-351.

Guiding question:

One could discern three basic lines of argument in these texts: (a) sociology should theorize from a (sociologically informed) rational choice model; (b) sociology should be analytical but not following an approach to start from intelligible actors like rational choice models do; and (c) Sociological theories should start from power differences. Which argument(s) do you find in which paper?

Additional readings:

Merton, R.K. (1957). *Social theory and social structure*. Glencoe: Free Press.

Jasso, G. (1988). Principles of Theoretical Analysis. *Sociological Theory*, 6(1), 1-20.

Lieberson, S., & Lynn, F. B. (2002). Barking up the wrong branch: Scientific alternatives to the current model of sociological science. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28(1), 1-19.

2. Structure and agency I: Agency

“Economics is all about how people make choices. Sociology is all about why they don't have any choices to make” (Duesenberry 1960). Two major themes running through the history of sociology is the question of the origins of individual behavior on the one hand, the nature and constraining power of social structures on the other. Structural perspectives – e.g. structural functionalism, stratification – view individuals as being forced into certain behaviors through socialization, cultural scripts, or limits to opportunity. Agentic orientations – methodological individualism, interactionism – grant individuals the autonomy to act and construct their lives and worlds. These two sessions discuss the relationship between the two: Why do people act as they do, to what extent is action constrained by structures, and how do structures come about and change?

10 October 2023

Agency: A central tension in sociological theories of agency is between rational, purposeful and goal-oriented action on the one hand and habitual and non-conscious on the other. In this session, we discuss cases of both variants as well as “dual process” models that have emerged to theorize situations in which the former or the latter are dominant.

Core readings:

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Pp. 52-65.

Hechter, M., & Kanazawa, S. (1997). Sociological rational choice theory. *Annual review of sociology*, 23(1), 191-214.

Hitlin, S. & Elder, G.H. (2007). Time, self, and the curiously abstract concept of agency. *Sociological Theory* 25(2): 170-91.

Vaisey, S. (2009). Motivation and justification: A dual-process model of culture in action. *American journal of sociology*, 114(6), 1675-1715.

Additional readings:

Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American journal of sociology*, 94, S95-S120.

Breen, R., & Goldthorpe, J. H. (1997). Explaining educational differentials: Towards a formal rational action theory. *Rationality and society*, 9(3), 275-305.

Jerolmack, C. & Kahn, S. (2014). Talk is cheap: Ethnography and the attitudinal fallacy. *Sociological Methods and Research* 43(2): 178-209.

Swidler, A. (1986). Culture in action: Symbols and strategies. *American sociological review*, 273-286.

3. Structure and agency II: Structure

17 October 2023

This week we look at agency's counterpart: structure. Everyone says "structure" but what is it and how does it work? How does structure constrain and enable agency? How does it come about and change?

Core readings:

Blau, P. M. (1977). A macrosociological theory of social structure. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83(1), 26-54.

Sewell, W. H., Jr. (1992). A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation. *American Journal of Sociology*, 98(1), 1–29.

DiMaggio, P. J. & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review* 48(2): 147-160.

Additional readings:

Chase, I. D. (1991). Vacancy chains. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 17(1), 133-154.

Erikson, E., & Bearman, P. (2006). Malfeasance and the foundations for global trade: The structure of English trade in the East Indies, 1601–1833. *American Journal of Sociology*, 112(1), 195-230.

Bruch, E. E., & Mare, R. D. (2006). Neighborhood choice and neighborhood change. *American Journal of sociology*, 112(3), 667-709.

Centola, D. (2015). The social origins of networks and diffusion. *American Journal of Sociology*, 120(5), 1295-1338.

4. Social integration and social cohesion I: Order

24 October 2023

How are social groups organized and what keeps them together (or leads to disintegration)? We start by discussing the classic by Talcott Parsons, who tried to bridge the micro and the macro in his AGIL schema, aiming to explain the existence of social order from a structural-functional perspective. Finally we discuss two particular forms of (dis)integration, namely related to immigration and suicide.

Core readings:

Horne, Christine, and Stefanie Mollborn. 2020. "Norms: An Integrated Framework." *Annual Review of Sociology* 46(1):467–87.

Kogan, I. (2006). Labor Markets and Economic Incorporation among Recent Immigrants in Europe. *Social Forces*, 85(2), 697–721.

Parsons, T. (1961). An outline of the social system. In T. Parsons, E. A. Shils, K. D. Naegle, & J. R. Pitts (Eds.), *Theories of society*. The Free Press.

Portes, A., & Zhou, M. (1993). The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 530, 74–96.

van Tubergen, F., te Grotenhuis, M., & Ultee, W. (2005). Denomination, Religious Context, and Suicide: Neo-Durkheimian Multilevel Explanations Tested with Individual and Contextual Data. *American Journal of Sociology*, 111(3), 797–823.

Additional readings:

Collins, R. (2014). *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton University Press. (chapter..)

Drouhot, L. G. (2021). Cracks in the Melting Pot? Religiosity and Assimilation among the Diverse Muslim Population in France. *American Journal of Sociology*, 126(4), 795–851. <https://doi.org/10.1086/712804>

Kosyakova, Y., Kristen, C., & Spörlein, C. (2022). The dynamics of recent refugees' language acquisition: How do their pathways compare to those of other new immigrants? *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 48(5), 989–1012. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2021.1988845>

Lamont, M. & Molnár, V. (2002). The study of boundaries in the social sciences. *Annual Review of Sociology* 28: 167-95.

Wimmer, A. 2008. Elementary strategies of ethnic boundary making. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31(6): 1025-55.

Telles, E.E. & Sue, C.A. 2009. Race mixture: Boundary crossing in comparative perspective. *Annual Review of Sociology* 35:129-46.

5. Social integration and social cohesion II: Networks

31 October 2023

One way society is held together is through meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships between its members. When viewed together these relationships form social networks, the structure of which can be studied and related to individual and population-level outcomes. Long before Facebook and the movie “Social Network”, social networks were already a flourishing field of study in sociology. More recently they have become part of an interdisciplinary field of “network science”. We review major theories in this area.

Core readings:

Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360-1380.

Feld, S. L. (1982). Social structural determinants of similarity among associates. *American sociological Review*, 797-801.

Watts, D. J. (1999). Networks, dynamics, and the small-world phenomenon. *American Journal of Sociology*, 105(2), 493-527.

Additional readings:

Cook, K. S., & Emerson, R. M. (1978). Power, equity and commitment in exchange networks. *American sociological review*, 721-739.

Blau, P., & Schwartz, J. (1984). *Crosscutting social circles: Testing a macrostructural theory of intergroup relations*. Routledge.

Granovetter, M. (1985). Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness. *AJS*, 91(3).

Feld, S. L. (1991). Why your friends have more friends than you do. *American Journal of Sociology*, 96(6), 1464-1477.

McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L., & Cook, J. M. (2001). Birds of a feather: Homophily in social networks. *Annual review of sociology*, 27(1), 415-444.

Bearman, P. S., Moody, J., & Stovel, K. (2004). Chains of affection: The structure of adolescent romantic and sexual networks. *American journal of sociology*, 110(1), 44-91.

Burt, R. S. (2004). Structural holes and good ideas. *American Journal of sociology*, 110(2), 349-399.

Centola, D., & Macy, M. (2007). Complex contagions and the weakness of long ties. *American journal of Sociology*, 113(3), 702-734.

Small, M. L. (2017). *Someone to talk to*. Oxford University Press.

6. Differentiation and inequality: Principles of stratification and social class

7 November 2023

Who gets what and why is a central question in sociology. This session covers two topics: the principles of stratification and social class. How do sociologists approach the question of social stratification? Social class has been considered one of the most important stratifiers in industrial society. How has class been theorized in sociology?

Core readings:

Grusky, D. 2001. *Social Stratification: Class, Race and Gender in Sociological Perspective*. 2nd Edition. Westview Press. Pp. 3-54.

Wright, E.O. (2005). *Approaches to Class Analysis*. Cambridge University Press. Pp. 1-80, 180-92.

Weeden, K. A., & Grusky, D. B. (2005). The Case for a New Class Map. *American Journal of Sociology*, 111(1), 141–212. <https://doi.org/10.1086/ajs.2005.111.issue-1>

Additional readings:

Breen, Richard, and Jan O. Jonsson. 2005. "Inequality of Opportunity in Comparative Perspective: Recent Research on Educational Attainment and Social Mobility." *Annual Review of Sociology* 31(1):223–43. doi: [10.1146/annurev.soc.31.041304.122232](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.31.041304.122232).

Conley, D. & Lareau, A. 2008. *Social Class: How Does It Work?* Russell Sage. Pp. 3-24.

Erikson, R. & Goldthorpe, J.H. 2002. Intergenerational inequality: A sociological perspective. *Journal of Economic Literature* 16(3): 31-44.

Hout, M. & DiPrete, T. A. (2006). What we have learned: RC28s contributions to knowledge about social stratification. *Research on Social Stratification and Mobility* 24(1): 1-20.

Lersch, P. M., Schulz, W., & Leckie, G. (2020). The Variability of Occupational Attainment: How Prestige Trajectories Diversified within Birth Cohorts over the Twentieth Century. *American Sociological Review*, 85(6), 1084–1116. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122420966324>

Wright, E.O. (2005). *Approaches to Class Analysis*. Cambridge University Press.

7. Differentiation and inequality II: Gender inequality

14 November 2023

Sex/gender is a pervasive social category that structures everyday life and divisions of labour and produces inequalities between individuals located in these gendered categories. How pervasive are these divisions, which forms do they take and where do they come from?

Core readings:

Becker, G.S. 1986. Human capital, effort, and the sexual division of labor. *Journal of Labor Economics* 3(1): S33-S58.

Charles, M., & Bradley, K. (2009). Indulging Our Gendered Selves? Sex Segregation by Field of Study in 44 Countries. *American Journal of Sociology*, 114(4), 924–976.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/595942>

England, P. (2010). The Gender Revolution: Uneven and Stalled. *Gender & Society*, 24(2), 149–166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243210361475>

Ridgeway, C. (1991). The social construction of status value: Gender and other nominal characteristics. *Social Forces*, 70(2), 367-386.

Additional readings:

Bittman, M., England, P., Sayer, L., Folbre, N. & Matheson, G. 2003. When does gender trump money? Bargaining and time in household work. *American Journal of Sociology* 109(1): 186-214.

Damminger, A. 2019. The cognitive dimension of household labor. *American Sociological Review* 84(4): 609-33.

England, P., Levine, A., & Mishel, E. (2020). Progress toward gender equality in the United States has slowed or stalled. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 117(13), 6990–6997. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1918891117>

Grusky, D.B. & Charles, M. Is there a worldwide sex segregation regime?

Hook, J. 2010. Gender inequality in the welfare state: Sex segregation in housework, 1965-2001. *American Journal of Sociology* 115(5): 1480-1523.

Petersen, T., Penner, A., & Høgsnes, G. 2014. From motherhood penalties to fatherhood premia: The new challenge for gender equality and family policy, lessons from Norway. *American Journal of Sociology* 119(5): 1434-72.

West, C. & Zimmerman, D. H. 1987. Doing Gender. *Gender and Society* 1(2): 125-51.

8. Social change and continuity I: Social change

22 November 2023 (*rescheduled class*)

How and why do societies change and what are driving forces of social change? How predictable vs unpredictable is this change [population and cohort-driven change: quite predictable; modernization theory makes claims of predictability; conflict theory and contingency takes on history underline unpredictability]?

Core readings:

Ermakoff, I. (2015). The structure of contingency. *American Journal of Sociology* 121(1): 64-125.

Cherlin, A.J. (2012). Goode's *World Revolution and Family Patterns*: A reconsideration after 50 years. *Population and Development Review* 38(4): 577-607.

Kirk, D. (1996). Demographic transition theory. *Population Studies* 50(3): 361-87.

Granovetter, M. (1978). Threshold models of collective behavior. *American journal of sociology*, 83(6), 1420-1443.

Alwin, D. F. & McCammon, R. J. 2004. Generations, cohorts, and social change. Pp. 23-49 in Mortimer, J. T. & Shanahan, M. J. (eds.) *Handbook of the Life Course*. Springer.

Additional readings:

Erikson, E., & Bearman, P. (2006). Malfeasance and the foundations for global trade: The structure of English trade in the East Indies, 1601–1833. *American Journal of Sociology*, 112(1), 195-230.

Baldassarri, D., & Gelman, A. (2008). Partisans without constraint: Political polarization and trends in American public opinion. *American Journal of Sociology*, 114(2), 408-446.

Lutz, W. (2012). Demographic metabolism: A predictive theory of social change. *Population and Development Review* 38: 283-301.

Centola, D., Becker, J., Brackbill, D., & Baronchelli, A. (2018). Experimental evidence for tipping points in social convention. *Science*, 360(6393), 1116-1119.

Torche, F., & Abufhele, A. (2021). The normativity of marriage and the marriage premium for children's outcomes. *American Journal of Sociology*, 126(4), 931-968.

Waldendorf, A. (2023). Words of change: The increase of gender-inclusive language in German media, *European Sociological Review*, jcad044

9. Social change and continuity II: The life course

28 November 2023

Individuals live through history and social change. To what extent does social change happen by individuals changing along with the society around them, or does social change happen through new generations replacing old ones? The latter perspective implies that at least after a certain age or life stage, life courses are stable and predictable, whereas the former implies that individual lives are malleable and sensitive to changes around them. Furthermore, individual change can happen through many processes, such as constant development and updating, turning points that redirect the course of life, or cumulative and self-reinforcing processes.

Core readings:

Elder, G.H. 1986. Perspectives on the life course. Pp. 23-49 in Elder, G.H. (ed.) *Life Course Dynamics: Trajectories and Transitions, 1968-1980*. Cornell University Press.

Kiley, K. & Vaisey, S. 2020. Measuring stability and change in personal culture using panel data. *American Sociological Review* 85(3): 477-506.

Laub, J.H. & Sampson, R.J. 1993. Turning points in the life course: Why change matters to the study of crime. *Criminology* 31(3): 301-25.

DiPrete, T. A., & Eirich, G. M. (2006). Cumulative advantage as a mechanism for inequality: A review of theoretical and empirical developments. *Annu. Rev. Sociol.*, 32, 271-297.

Additional readings:

Bernardi, F. (2014). Compensatory advantage as a mechanism of educational inequality: A regression discontinuity based on month of birth. *Sociology of Education*, 87(2), 74-88.

Guhin, J., McCrory Calarco, J. & Miller-Idriss, C. 2021. Whatever happened to socialization? *Annual Review of Sociology* 47: 109-29.

Lersch, P. 2023. Change in personal culture over the life course. *American Sociological Review* 88(2): 220-251.

Salganik, M. J., Lundberg, I., Kindel, A. T., Ahearn, C. E., Al-Ghoneim, K., Almaatouq, A., ... & McLanahan, S. (2020). Measuring the predictability of life outcomes with a scientific mass collaboration. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 117(15), 8398-8403.

Merton, R. K. (1968). The Matthew effect in science: The reward and communication systems of science are considered. *Science*, 159(3810), 56-63.

10. Core principles and sociological theory building (Juho, Arnout, Herman)

5 December 2023

Core readings:

Jasso, G. (1988). Principles of Theoretical Analysis. *Sociological Theory*, 6(1), 1-20.

Coleman, J. S. (1994). *Foundations of social theory*. Harvard university press. (Chapter 1 on Weber and methodological individualism)