Rutgers University
School of Social Work
Ph.D. Program

Theory Development in Social Work Practice (16: 910: 687)
Wednesdays, 3:00-5:40 (with exceptions as noted in syllabus)
Spring 2017

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I.	*Course Description*

This course focuses on the fundamental relationship between theory and research, with attention to how theories are developed, how they evolve, and how they may most appropriately guide social science research and be applied to different types of research questions and designs in social work. Students will be introduced to a variety of research traditions and will engage with theories used across social science disciplines as well as applied fields which, like social work, take an interdisciplinary approach to theoretical conceptualization. Students will also gain experience evaluating the application of theories to their own areas of study, developing the critical skills necessary to draw upon and use theory in their own work.

II.	*Course Objectives*

1. To understand the concept of a social science theory;

2. To understand concepts in the philosophy of science as these shape and inform the use of theory;

3. To understand theory development and social work research as these relate to current debates about knowledge-building for social work;

4. To develop skills to think critically about theory;

5. To develop skills in conceptual analysis;

6. To develop awareness of how personal perspectives influence theory selection, development, and testing.

III.   *Course Format and Requirements*

While each seminar session may differ somewhat in discussion methods employed, most sessions will begin with a more general discussion of the topic or theory, followed by critique of the assigned empirical articles through group discussion.   Students are expected to take an active role in class discussion, including taking responsibility for leading discussions about selected articles and contributing to discussion when other students are taking the lead. (please note that the list of scheduled readings is tentative and may be modified; I will notify you in the event that I make substitutions or additions)

1. Participation in and Leadership of Class Discussions (20% of grade)

Participation grade will include mandatory submission of a weekly reading reflection (all weeks) and leadership of the class discussion of one article per week in Weeks 7-12.

The <u>weekly reflection memo</u> (half of a single spaced page) is designed to help you prepare to be an active participant in class discussion. This brief response should capture items that stood out to you as important in an argument; and could also contain a personal reaction, a discussion of how the reading is relevant to your own substantive area of interest, or application of the reading to some aspect of social work research, practice, or policy. In addition, your memo should involve generating 2-3 questions for class discussion. These questions could be about things that puzzle you; things you think are missing or absent from an author's presentation; could compare or contrast ideas from previous class discussions with the current reading; or could query the authors' intent, assumptions, or interpretations. A copy of these reflections should be emailed to me the night before our class (Tuesday nights) and brought with you to class to enrich discussion.

On weeks 7-12, each student will be assigned to facilitate discussion of one of the assigned empirical research articles. As part of this leadership role, please be prepared to begin discussion by summarizing the primary problem or question posed by the study; theoretical assumptions; key concepts; and methodological approach. Subsequently, lead the class in a discussion of to what extent the authors were successful in applying the theoretical approach to the problem and delineation of the approach's strengths and limitations.

2. **Theory Formulation Memos (1-2 pages, single-spaced, see exception on final memo, 5 total) (80% of grade)**

With these memos, you are expected to select a research problem or question and *analyze how theory is used to explore that problem, in the context of a specific discipline or literature*. The problem you select should remain consistent across memos. If, for example, you are proposing to do a study of youth violence in schools, you will analyze how different theoretical and disciplinary literatures theorize the problem and how the research strategy links to the theory proposed to account for it.

The memos must situate the <u>problem within a theory(s)</u>. Here, it is important to note that it is 'theoretical' precisely because it leads us to some expectable outcome, even though the theory may in the end fail to offer an adequate explanatory account.   It is theoretical because it is useful and can persuade the reader to understand something about what is going on within a practice or policy domain.

Many if not most social work students conduct research across disciplines or areas of knowledge. When you do this it is a good idea to examine the areas of overlap among theories or differing literatures.   In the final memo, you are asked to discuss your own approach to your identified problem and to discuss rival theoretical claims that can be resolved by additional or different kinds of empirical work.

Memos 1-4 are due by the end of the day (5:00) on the Friday following our Wednesday seminar (submit to Professor Angell by email). Memo 5 is to be presented informally in class on 12/7 and is due in final form on 12/14.

<u>Memo 1:</u> In this memo, you must identify an object of study (i.e., your question, problem, what you want to explain/understand) and identify one empirical study of this problem situated within the disciplines of ***anthropology or sociology***. Consider using the Annual Reviews of Sociology and Anthropology to begin your search.   Here, your objective is to explore how the study you have identified uses a ***theory or theories*** from one or more of these disciplines. In thinking and writing about the theories identified, consider to what extent was theory stated explicitly or implicitly and applied appropriately. How appropriate did the theory seem to be in relationship to the issue, problem or concept addressed in the article? If theory was absent or stated implicitly, how and which theory (if appropriate) might have enhanced the study? What is your rationale? To what extent were the methods consistent with or appropriate for testing the theory? Provide examples to support your comments (e.g., to illustrate the ways in which the authors did or did not demonstrate theoretical and methodological congruence).

<u>Memo 2:</u> In this memo, you will continue to work with the object of study identified (and now refined) in memo 1 and locate the identified problem within the discipline of **psychology**. Identify a good example of a psychological study of your topic; consider using the Annual Reviews (psychology and clinical psychology) to begin your search. Here, your objective is to describe how your problem has been (or might be) considered theoretically by yet another human science. How might this discipline require you to rethink or reformulate your question? Describe and explain. In thinking and writing about the theories identified, consider to what extent was theory stated explicitly or implicitly and applied appropriately. How appropriate did the theory seem to be in relationship to the issue, problem or concept addressed in the article? If theory was absent or stated implicitly, how and which theory (if appropriate) might have enhanced the study? What is your rationale? To what extent were the methods consistent with or appropriate for testing the theory? Provide examples to support your comments (e.g., to illustrate the ways in which the authors did or did not demonstrate theoretical and methodological congruence).

Memo 3: In this memo, you will continue to work with the object of study identified (and now refined) in memos 1 and 2 and locate the identified problem within the perspective of either **political science or economics**. Identify a good example of a study of your topic.   Here, your objective is to describe how your problem has been (or might be) considered theoretically by political scientists or economists. How might this discipline require you to rethink or reformulate your question? Describe and explain. In thinking and writing about the theories identified, consider to what extent was theory stated explicitly or implicitly and applied appropriately. How appropriate did the theory seem to be in relationship to the issue, problem or concept addressed in the article? If theory was absent or stated implicitly, how and which theory (if appropriate) might have enhanced the study? What is your rationale? To what extent were the methods consistent with or appropriate for testing the theory? Provide examples to support your comments (e.g., to illustrate the ways in which the authors did or did not demonstrate theoretical and methodological congruence).

 Memo 4: In this memo, you will continue to work with the object of study identified (and now refined) in memos 1-3 and locate the identified problem within the perspective of an **applied discipline – such as public policy or public health**. Identify a good example of a study of your topic.   Here, your objective is to describe how your problem has been (or might be) considered theoretically by applied social scientists. How do they approach the problem differently from the more basic social sciences? How might this perspective require you to rethink or reformulate your question? Describe and explain. In thinking and writing about the theories identified, consider to what extent was theory stated explicitly or implicitly and applied appropriately. How appropriate did the theory seem to be in relationship to the issue, problem or concept addressed in the article? If theory was absent or stated implicitly, how and which theory (if appropriate) might have enhanced the study? What is your rationale? To what extent were the methods consistent with or appropriate for testing the theory? Provide examples to support your comments (e.g., to illustrate the ways in which the authors did or did not demonstrate theoretical and methodological congruence).   .

Memo 5: (note: this memo should now reflect a thorough integration of the ideas discussed in all of the memos, limited and refined, 5-7 pages, single-spaced). In this final memo, you will continue to work with the object of study identified in memo 1 (and their further refinements) and situate the problem within a *theoretical* literature in **social work.** Here, your objective is to use the social work literature to further explore how your object of study might be explained or differently understood.   In this final memo, you must carefully address the following question: how have social work researchers contributed (or not) to the broader understanding of the problem identified in the above memos? Are there ways in which the perspectives converge or diverge? Describe and explain. As in the first five memos, you must briefly describe how your problem has been (or might be) considered in social work. In thinking and writing about the theories identified, consider to what extent was theory stated explicitly or implicitly and applied appropriately. How appropriate did the theory seem to be in relationship to the issue, problem or concept addressed in the article? If theory was absent or stated implicitly,

how and which theory (if appropriate) might have enhanced the study? What is your rationale? To what extent were the methods consistent with or appropriate for testing the theory? Provide examples to support your comments (e.g., to illustrate the ways in which the authors did or did not demonstrate theoretical and methodological congruence).

In this memo, you should also begin to think about your own theoretical and methodological commitments; that is, how best to study this problem. This final memo should result in a more complex understanding of the problem and move you toward actual research.   This memo is due in final form on 12/14.

Course Schedule and Readings (which will be made available on sakai)

Session 1 (9/7). Introduction
The 'Science Crisis' in Social Work

Brekke, J.S. (2012). Shaping a science of social work. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 22 (5), 455-464.

Flexner, A. (2001; reprinted). Is social work a profession? *Research on Social Work Practice*, 11 (2),152-165.

Austin, D.M. (1983). The Flexner myth and the history of social work. *Social Service Review*, 57(3), 357-377.

Van de Ven, A.H. (2007). *Engaged scholarship: A Guide for Organizational and Social Research*. New York: Oxford. Chapter 1: Engaged Scholarship in a Professional School.

Note: class will not be held on 9/14

Session 2 (9/21). Philosophy of Social Science (meet early – 1:00-3:30)

Blaikie, N. (2007, 2nd ed). *Approaches to social inquiry*. Cambridge, UK: Polity. Chapters 1-3. (for background)

Grix, J. (2002). *Introducing students to the generic terminology of social research. Politics*, 22, 175-186.

Longhofer, J., & Floersch, J. (2012). Critical realism: Science and social work. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 22(5), 499-519.

Gergen, K.J. (1985). The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American Psychologist*, 40(3), 266-275.

Session 3 (9/28): Meet early

What is theory/why is it needed?

Alford, R.R. (1998). *The craft of inquiry*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapter 3: The Construction of Arguments.

Abend, G. (2008). The meaning of theory. *Sociological Theory*, 26, 173-199.

Sutton, R. I., & Staw, B. M. (1995). What theory is not. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 371-384.

Merton, R. (1949). *Social theory and social structure*. New York: Simon and Schuster, The Free Press. Pp. 39-53: "On sociological theories of the middle range. "

Carpiano, R. M., & Daley, D. M. (2006). A guide and glossary on postpositivist theory building for population health. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 60(7), 564-570.

Session 4 (10/5). Explanatory/Positivist Approaches

Shadish, W.R., Cook, T.D., & Campbell, D.T. (2002). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for generalized causal inference*. New York: Houghton Mifflin. Chapters 1 and 14.

Palinkas, L. A. (2014). Causality and causal inference in social work: Quantitative and qualitative perspectives. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 24(5), 540.

Guo, S. (2015). Shaping Social Work Science: What Should Quantitative Researchers Do? *Research on Social Work Practice*, 25(3), 370-381.

Empirical examples: choose one and be prepared to discuss

- Fraser, M.W., Day, S.H., Galinsky, M.J., Hodges, V.G., & Smokowski, P.R. (2004). Conduct problems and peer rejection in childhood: A randomized trial of the Making Choices and Strong Families programs. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 14(5), 313-324.

- Hoeve, M., Blokland, A., Dubas, J.S., Loeber, R., Gerris, J.R.M., & van der Laan, P.H. (2008). Trajectories of delinquency and parenting styles. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 36, 223-235.

Recommended:

Holland, P. (1986). Statistics and causal inference. *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 81, 945-960.

Session 5 (10/12). Interpretive Approaches

Required Readings:

Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," 3-30, in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic, 1973).

LaRossa, R. (2005). Grounded theory methods and qualitative family research. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, 837-857.

Clark, V. L. P., Schumacher, K., West, C., Edrington, J., Dunn, L. B., Harzstark, A., ... & Miaskowski, C. (2013). Practices for embedding an interpretive qualitative approach within a randomized clinical trial. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 7(3), 219-242.

Whooley, O. (2010). Diagnostic ambivalence: psychiatric workarounds and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 32, 452-469.

Galanek, J. D. (2013). The cultural construction of mental illness in prison: A perfect storm of pathology. *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*, 37(1), 195-225.

Session 6 (10/19: meet early – 1:00-3:30). Critical/Historical Approaches

Leitner, H., Peck, J., & Sheppard, E. S. (Eds.). (2007). *Contesting neoliberalism: Urban frontiers*. Guilford Press. Chapter 1: Contesting urban futures: Decentering neoliberalism.

Fairbanks, R.P. (2011). 'Bodies is what makes it work': Statecraft and urban informality in the Philadelphia recovery house movement. *Ethnography*, 12, 12-39.

Hansen, H., & Roberts, S. (2012). Two tiers of biomedicalization: Methadone, buprenorphine, and the racial politics of addiction treatment. *Advances in Medical Sociology*, *14*, 79-102.

Campbell, M. C., & Schoenfeld, H. (2013). The transformation of America's penal order: A historicized political sociology of punishment. *American Journal of Sociology*, *118*(5), 1375-1423.

Session 7 (10/26)

Comparative Approaches Applied to a Common Problem (suicide)

Nock, M.K., Borges, G., Bromet, E.J., Cha, C.B., Kessler, R.C., & Lee, S. (2008). Suicide and suicidal behavior. *Epidemiologic Reviews*, 30, 133-154. (everyone read/skim for background)

Empirical articles on which students will lead discussion:

Niederkrotenthaler, T., Voracek, M., Herberth, A., Till, B., Strauss, M., Etzersdorfer, E., Eisenwort, B., & Sonneck, G. (2010). Role of media reports in completed and prevented suicide: Werther v. Papageno effects. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 197, 234-243.

Wadsworth, T., & Kubrin, C. E. (2007). Hispanic Suicide in US Metropolitan Areas: Examining the Effects of Immigration, Assimilation, Affluence, and Disadvantage. *American Journal of Sociology*, 112(6), 1848-1885.

Roen, K., Scourfield, J., & McDermott, E. (2008). Making sense of suicide: A discourse analysis of young people's talk about suicidal subjecthood. *Social Science and Medicine*, 67, 2089-2097.

Van Orden, K. A., Witte, T. K., Gordon, K. H., Bender, T. W., & Joiner Jr, T. E. (2008). Suicidal desire and the capability for suicide: tests of the interpersonal-psychological

theory of suicidal behavior among adults. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 76(1), 72.

Braswell, H., & Kusher, H.I. (2012). Suicide, social integration, and masculinity in the U.S. military. *Social Science and Medicine*, 74, 530-536.

Session 8 (11/2). Anthropological and Sociological Traditions

Carpiano, R. M. (2006). Toward a neighborhood resource-based theory of social capital for health: Can Bourdieu and sociology help? *Social Science & Medicine*, 62(1), 165-175.

Desmond, M. (2012). Disposable ties and the urban poor. *American Journal of Sociology*, 117(5), 1295-1335.

Waldram, J. B. (2008). The narrative challenge to cognitive behavioral treatment of sexual offenders. *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*, 32(3), 421-439.

Carr, E. S. (2006). "Secrets keep you sick": Metalinguistic labor in a drug treatment program for homeless women. *Language in Society*, 35(05), 631-653.

Martin, J. K., Pescosolido, B. A., Olafsdottir, S., & McLeod, J. D. (2007). The construction of fear: Americans' preferences for social distance from children and adolescents with mental health problems. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 48(1), 50-67.

  Memo 1 due on the Friday following class

Session 9 (11/9; meet early 1-3:30)

Psychological Tradition

Harris, J.L., Bargh, J.A., & Brownell, K.D. (2009). Priming effects of television food advertising on eating behavior. *Health Psychology*, 28(4), 404-413.

Raver, C.C., Jones, S.M., Li-Grining, C., Zhai, F., Bub, K., & Pressler, E. (2011). CSRP's impact on low-income preschoolers' preacademic skills: self regulation as a mediating mechanism. *Child Development*, 82, 362-378.

Sabin, J.A., & Greenwald, A.G. (2008). The influence of implicit bias on treatment recommendations for 4 common pediatric conditions: Pain, urinary tract infection, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and asthma. *American Journal of Public Health*, 102, 988-995.

Selby, E. A., Anestis, M. D., Bender, T. W., & Joiner Jr, T. E. (2009). An exploration of the emotional cascade model in borderline personality disorder. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 118(2), 375.

Oyserman, D., Gant, L., & Ager, J. (1995). A socially contextualized model of African American identity: Possible selves and school persistence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69(6), 1216.

Memo 2 Due on the Friday following class

Session 10 (11/16): Political Science and Economics

John, L.K., Loewenstein, G., Troxel, A.B., Norto, L., Fassbender, J.E., & Volpp, K.G. (2011). Financial incentives for extended weight loss: A randomized, controlled trial. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, *26*(6), 621-626.

Barry, C. L., Brescoll, V. L., & Gollust, S. E. (2013). Framing childhood obesity: how individualizing the problem affects public support for prevention. *Political Psychology*, 34(3), 327-349.

Thomas, J. L., & Bond, K. D. (2015). Women's Participation in Violent Political Organizations. *American Political Science Review*, 109(03), 488-506.

Berger, L.M. (2005). Income, family characteristics, and physical violence toward children. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 29(2), 107-133.

Sykes, J., Križ, K., Edin, K., & Halpern-Meekin, S. (2015). Dignity and dreams: What the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) means to low-income families. *American Sociological Review*, 80(2), 243-267.

Recommended only - for background:

Becker, G.S. (1992). The economic way of looking at life. Nobel lecture printed in *Economic Sciences*.

Stone, D. A. (1989). Causal stories and the formation of policy agendas. *Political Science Quarterly*, 281-300.

Kahnemann, D. (2003). Maps of bounded rationality: Psychology for behavioral economics. *American Economic Review*, 93, 1449-1475.

Memo 3 Due on the Friday following class

Session 11 (11/23)

Applied Disciplines: Public Policy and Public Health

Allen, J. A., Vallone, D., Vargyas, E., & Healton, C. G. (2009). The Truth campaign: Using counter marketing to reduce youth smoking. In B.J. Healey & R.S. Zimmerman (eds.), *The New World of Health Promotion, New Program Development, Implementation and Evaluation*, pp. 195-215.

Hatzenbuehler, M. L., Keyes, K. M., & Hasin, D. S. (2009). State-level policies and

psychiatric morbidity in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations. *American Journal of Public Health*, 99(12), 2275-2281.4:50, 1-15.

Turney, K., Kissane, R., & Edin, K., (2012). After Moving to Opportunity: How moving to a low-poverty neighborhood improves mental health among African American women. *Society and Mental Health*, 3(1), 1-21.

Kwate, N. O. A., Yau, C. Y., Loh, J. M., & Williams, D. (2009). Inequality in obesigenic environments: fast food density in New York City. *Health & Place*, 15(1), 364-373.

Moving to Opportunity for Fair Housing Demonstration Program, Final Impacts Evaluation (read Chapter 1 and Chapter 8).

Recommended for background:

Phelan, J.C., Link, B.G., & Tehranifar, P. (2010). Social conditions as fundamental causes of health inequalities: Theory, evidence, and policy implications. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 51, S28-S40.

        Memo 4 due on the Friday following class

Session 12 (11/30): Applied Disciplines: Social Work

Moylan, C. A., & Lindhorst, T. (2015). Institutionalizing an ethic of coordinated care for rape victims: Exploring processes of legitimacy and decoupling in sexual assault response teams. *Social Service Review*, *89*(1), 138-165.

MacKenzie, M. J., Nicklas, E., Waldfogel, J., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2012). Corporal punishment and child behavioural and cognitive outcomes through 5 years of age: Evidence from a contemporary urban birth cohort study. *Infant and Child Development*, 21(1), 3-33.

Marsiglia, F. F., Kulis, S., Hecht, M. L., & Sills, S. (2004). Ethnicity and ethnic identity as predictors of drug norms and drug use among preadolescents in the US Southwest. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 39(7), 1061-1094.

Smith, Y. (2014). Rethinking decision making: An ethnographic study of worker agency in crisis intervention. *Social Service Review*, 88(3), 407-442.

Han, W. J., Miller, D. P., & Waldfogel, J. (2010). Parental work schedules and adolescent risky behaviors. *Developmental Psychology*, 46(5), 1245.

Session 13 (12/7): Implications of Theory for Strategies of Inquiry

Jaccard, J., & Jacoby, J. (2010). *Theory construction and model building skills*. New York: Guilford. Appendix 12A: Inferring theoretical relationships from the choice of statistical tests.

Astbury, B., & Leeuw, F.L. (2010). Unpacking black boxes: Mechanisms and theory building in evaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 31, 363

Pawson, R. (1996). Theorizing the interview. *British Journal of Sociology*, 47, 295-314.

Timmemans, S., & Tavory, I. (2012). Theory construction in qualitative research: From grounded theory to abductive analysis. *Sociological Theory*, 30,

Session 14 (12/14): Students will make informal presentations of their final memos to one another (15-20 minutes per student).   Final memos are due in class (please also send me a copy by email).