

## The Rutgers DSW Program

**Module Title:** Considering the Structure and Uses of Social Theory

**Instructor:**

**Residency:** September 2018

**Date:**

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### Module Description:

In these two modules, we will focus on the nature and structure of social theories. Come prepared to think together about the broad frameworks and orientations in which theory is nested, the building blocks of theory, and the inextricable links between theory, practice and inquiry.

In the second module, we will also focus in on an area of theory, and apply the ideas we have discussed to an in-depth discussion of competing theories of human cognitive development.

### Module Objectives:

1. Students will understand the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of social theory, social work practice, and social inquiry.
2. Students will be able to articulate the building blocks of social theory, the qualities of strong theories, and the ways in which theory is used.
3. Students will be able to apply the above to an area of theory that is of most interest to them.

### Required Readings (1-3):

1. Abend, G. (2008). The meaning of theory. *Sociological Theory*, 26, 173-199. This is a hard one – classically sociological in its approach!
2. Carpiano, R. M., & Daley, D. M. (2006). A guide and glossary on post-positivist theory building for population health. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 60(7), 564-570.  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2566228/>
3. Fraser, M., & Galinsky, M.J. (2010). Steps in intervention research: Developing social programs. *Research on Social Work Practice* 20(5), 459-466.

### Recommended Readings:

Some of these are focused on the practical side of things. Some are longer pieces, and it is not expected that you read them prior to the modules. You might try to drop into a couple of these as your time allows.

1. Payne, Malcom (2016). *Modern social work theory* (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.) New York: Oxford University Press.
2. National Cancer Institute (2005). *Theory at a Glance: A guide for Health Promotion Practice*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health: Retrieved from <http://www.sbccimplementationkits.org/demandrmnch/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Theory-at-a-Glance-A-Guide-For-Health-Promotion-Practice.pdf>
3. Center for Theory of Change (2016). *Theory of Change*. Retrieved from <http://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/>

The longer version for the Fraser and Galinsky work is in the book: Fraser, M.W., Richman, J.M., Galinsky, M.J., & Day, S.H. (2009). *Intervention research: Developing social programs*. New York: Oxford University Press.

**Pre-Work:**

1. Select a theory (any theory) and read three primary source works about it.
2. Prepare a 2-3 page (5-6 paragraphs) paper that describes your theory, answering questions such as What is it a theory of? What are its primary tenets? What is it useful for? Why is it relevant to your interests?
3. Prepare a 2-3 minute (4-5 sentence) "elevator speech" that summarizes your theory.

**Assessment: After the Modules**

**Essay:**

In 3-4 pages, apply some of the concepts from the modules to your selected theory, by formulating a pithy "5-paragraph essay."

**Tips:**

- 1) One cannot focus on everything...
- 2) Remind yourself how a 5-paragraph essay is formulated, and follow that format.
- 3) Look up the definition of the word "pithy."