Course Description – Spring 2013

Meetings 9:30-12:30
Tues May 7
Tues May 14
Tues May 21
Tues June 4
Tues June 11
Tues June 18
Tues June 25
Tues July 2
Thurs May 9
Thurs May 20
Thurs June 27
Thurs July 4

MACS 331

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Course Objectives:

This course concerns theorizing in the study of human development and family relationships. The term “theorizing” is used rather than “family theories” or “theories of human development” because we are interested in the activity of the practicing social scientist as a consumer and producer of theory. The course focuses on three main objectives: to promote the basic skills of critically analyzing theory, using theory, and creating theory. An overriding objective is for the course is for participants to examine and articulate their own assumptions and stances regarding the process of knowledge construction. A second objective is to begin to develop the guts to theorize. The first 9 sessions concern the level of meta theory, the last 3 sessions concern the level of substantive theories used by participants in their own approach to the phenomena they are studying.

1. Critical Analysis. Here we look at major dimensions of theory including epistemology, ontology, as well as a theoretically informed approach to methodology. Essentially these constitute three different choices for researchers to theoretically justify their approach to a research endeavour or as their position as a researcher.

It is impossible to treat all of these comprehensively because each is complex, ever changing and heavily contested in the sciences. Nevertheless, the course will provide an introduction to the ideas that are now at play in the literature. My choices are to be cursory regarding epistemology and to emphasize ontology and the importance of theory in methodology. This means that we will be taking for granted knowledge of traditional epistemological approaches (i.e. positivism, interpretivism, critical theory, postmodernism etc.) that should be familiar from your qualitative methods and interdisciplinary perspectives courses and instead focus on additional ways of positioning oneself as a scientist.
An ontological approach (what is the nature of the phenomenon) overlaps with but does not always lead to the same conclusions as an epistemological approach (How and what can we know). For one thing, ontology involves an interest in the nature of causality, and, as Aristotle pointed out there are a variety of ways for understanding causality (e.g. efficient, formal and final). Our approach to ontology begins by considering Pepper’s World View metaphors of mechanism, organicism, and contextualism and then will consider emerging integrative approaches that attempt to transcend the either/or implications of Pepper’s analysis. Dialectics will be discussed as an entry point to emerging integrative approaches such as, relationalism, perspectivism and critical realism and new materialism and dynamic systems theory.

During the past decade there has been a growing critique of methodology in which a central concept has been the centrality of phenomena in scientific enquiry. We will examine some of these critiques and emphasize the concept of a methodology cycle in knowledge construction.

2. Using Theory. Traditionally, using theory was a matter of logical deduction and the generation of propositions for testing causal predictions. We emphasize a range of activities that focus on the interpretive processes of the researcher in gaining understanding of a phenomenon. This will mean exploring different functions of theory and the researcher’s stance with regard to the “methodology cycle” or the “recursive cycle of knowing.”

3. Constructing Theory. Theorizing is a relatively unacknowledged aspect of the research process that makes use of the interpretive skills and creativity of the researcher. Here, there is little precedent... because no one really teaches this stuff. Theory construction is regarded by the hypothetico deductive view of science as a mysterious process that science can test but not teach. However, theories are developed by people and several processes and strategies regarding this creative process have been described.

One of these is abduction, the third mode of inference and a counterpart to induction and deduction. Abduction in particular is implicated in the process of generating novel ideas and hypotheses. The second tool is metaphor, which is presented as a semiotic mediating device. Most theoretical constructs at all levels of analysis have metaphoric roots and it is important to know the uses and limitations of these in theory construction. The third tool is concept mapping and mind mapping which are technologies for facilitating the processes of planning, analyzing ideas, generating ideas, and drawing connections between them. Participants in the course will be using concept-mapping software to organize and analyze the concepts presented in each week’s readings.

Concept Mapping/Mind mapping Software

You will be required to obtain and use concept mapping and mind-mapping software, as you will be presenting concept maps as part of every session. There are many useful packages to choose from and I include some links to show you the variety available. They include commercial packages and freeware. In order to have a common ground we will be using INSPIRATION software. A one month free trial version can be downloaded.

Also I include some links regarding the use of mind mapping as a conceptual analysis and theorizing tool.

http://unimelb.academia.edu/MartinDavies/Papers/433992/Mind_Mapping_Concept_Mapp
http://www.slideshare.net/gofull/80263/59

http://dmc.umn.edu/activities/mindmap/


http://www.slideshare.net/gofull/80263

Evaluation:

The final grade for the course will be based on 3 components:

- 25 % Routine seminar contribution and concept maps
- 25 % Reflexive Statement: Thurs June 25 1 mark per day after that
- 15 % Theorizing presentation
- 35 % Theorizing paper: Fri. July 19 (1 mark per day after that)

Routine seminar contribution and concept maps. The grade for routine seminar contribution is designed to reflect the level of your performance and contribution to class discussion on a weekly basis. Although we recognize that students come to the class with a range of verbal propensities, we see the articulation of thoughts and arguments as an important skill to be developed as part of your academic program.

Evaluation will be based on two kinds of contributions.

1) Contribution to class discussion. This includes contribution of discussion points based on readings. Demonstration in class that the readings have been read, relevant personal perspectives and experiences.

2) Contribution of Mind Maps or Concept Maps These should be emailed to the instructor by midnight before each class in an electronic format and should include your analysis of concepts in the readings. Class discussions will emerge using each students concept maps.

Reflexive Statement Paper

One of the aims of this course is to have participants to think about their own identity as a social scientist. Throughout the course you will be challenged to articulate your thoughts and beliefs about how science works, and your practices, and ambitions as a social scientist.

The primary purpose of the reflexive theory statement is for you to become aware of your personal reactions to and interpretations of the readings and develop a personal stance on
what you have learned. What specific ideas appeal or don’t appeal to you. Consider where you have been and what new thoughts occur to you. What puzzles remain to be solved? What are the implications of your positioning for the type of research you would like to do?

The task is to be reflective and up front about what you actually believed to be true initially, identify specific contradictions, and to describe your processes of working through contradictions that arose during the course thus far and to begin to draw a roadmap for your future scientific practise.

I would like you to position yourself as a social scientist at this point in time, knowing that this is always subject to change. The reflexive statement should be attentive to how You are thinking in terms of preferred values, epistemologies, world views and role as a scientist with regard to the methodology cycle. You may use examples and issues from class or write about key problems or insights for you in this course. Use the first person “I” for this assignment. Talk about specific ideas in the articles you have read. Be authoritative in citing specific ideas. Describe why you are accepting or rejecting specific ideas. About 10 pages double-spaced.

**Theorizing Presentation 15% & Theorizing Paper (35%) Due July 19**

During the final weeks of this course we will be theorizing in class on topics of interest chosen by students. One of the aims of the course is to learn how to use theory in practical ways.

1) Choose a topic of interest that is important to the work that you do. This may be related to your future research interests or your specialization paper. Choose one key articles for the class to read as background and have these ready one week prior to your presentation. (be kind).

2) Participants will lead a discussion of their theorizing work. This should include 1) a 20-minute presentation, 2) a 30-minute discussion. A theorizing exercise for the class based on the readings and presentation may be incorporated in the discussion.

The presentation may include the following:
- The nature of the phenomenon you wish to study. What is the research question regarding this phenomenon that you are trying to answer or understand?
- Underlying epistemological, and ontological assumptions and how these have shaped the enquiry
- Key concepts and how are they used (sensitizing? hypothesis testing? measurement?)
- What is positioning for this particular piece of research in the methodology cycle?

3) Write a 10-12-page paper (APA format) that demonstrates your theorizing activity in this area. You should incorporate feedback from the group for this paper.
Schedule of Classes: Dates, Topics and Readings

Session 1: Tuesday May 7       iTheory & Concept Mapping


Concept mapping.

Session 2: Thursday May 9 – 9:30-12:30   Responses to Positivism: Epistemologies of Either/Or


Extra reading for fun.

Ch. 1. Crotty (1998) Introduction: The research process. (pp. 1-17)

Session 3: Tuesday May 14 – 9:30-12:30   Theorizing as a Creative Process: Abduction, Metaphor, and intellectual craftsmanship


Mills, C.W. (1959), On intellectual craftsmanship. Appendix from The sociological imagination. NY:
Extra readings for fun.


Session 4: Tuesday May 21 – 9:30-12:30  Ontologies of Either/Or: World Views of Organicism & Mechanism


Chapter 2  How we are: Mechanistic World View

Chapter 3  Why we are: Organismic World View


Causation. Goldhaber refers to Aristotle's classification of causation. Go to the Web and look up “causation” for more on Aristotle and other conceptions. I provide one link to start.
http://poli.haifa.ac.il/~levi/inference.html

Session 5: Tuesday June 4 – Ontologies of Either/ Or: World View of Contextualism

Extra reading for fun.

Fay, B. (1996). Solipsism. Do you have to be one to know one? In Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science.

Integrative perspectives

Session 6: Tuesday June 11– 9:30-12:30: Methodology Cycles, Researchers and Phenomena


Extra Readings for fun


Session 7: Tuesday June 18– 9:30-12:30 The idea of Dialectics

Dialectics for Kids Explore this website. Also pick your favourite dialectics song. http://home.igc.org/~venceremos/index.htm


Session 8: Thurs June 20 – 9:30-12:30 Relational Epistemology Critical Realism, New Materialism


**Extra reading for fun.**


**Practical Theorizing**

**Session 9 : Tuesday June 25 – 9:30-12:30** Conclusions.
First student presentation
Reflexive statement due


**Session 10 : Thursday June 27 – 9:30-12:30** Three student presentations

**Session 11  Tuesday July 2 – 9:30-12:30** Three student presentations

**Session 12 Thursday July 4 – 1-4pm** Three presentations

Final paper due July 19 by email.