An Invitation to Social Theory

Professor Andrew J. Perrin
TAs: Brionca Taylor and Nathan Dollar

Sociology 250
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Today’s Course

I. Your professor and TAs
II. Why Theory?
III. Central Proposition
IV. The Theory Cycle
V. Questions for Social Theory
VI. What Does it Mean to Think Theoretically?
VII. Theory in Everyday Life
VIII. The Theory Arc
IX. Plans and business for the course
Your Professor

- 14 years at UNC
- Publications
- Chair of ASA Theory Section
Your TAs

[Image of two individuals]
Contrast to economics: theoretical claims about human and institutional behavior are widely accepted within the discipline.

There are very few widely-accepted tenets of behavior in sociology. Good sociological research therefore builds theory as an integral step.

Theory guides and encourages the asking of big questions and the systematic approaches to considering them.
Central Proposition

The fundamental unit of human behavior is the group.
The Theory Cycle

Macrotheory

Microtheory

Analysis/Interpretation

Mesotheory

Empirical Tests

Hypotheses

Empirical Tests

Mesotheory

Analysis/Interpretation

Microtheory

Macrotheory
The Theory Cycle
Simplified Version

1. **Theory**
2. **Hypotheses**
3. **Empirical Tests**
4. **Analysis/Interpretation**
Questions for Social Theory

1. Who are we?
2. What can we know?
3. What can we do?
4. Who’s in control?
5. Why do things happen?
6. (Why) do we care?
What Does it Mean to Think Theoretically?

- Nothing is simply “natural” or “human nature”
- Everything comes from somewhere
- What can the patterns we observe tell us about the systems of which they are a part?
Theory in Everyday Life

Example 1: The iPod
Theory in Everyday Life

Example 2: Elysium

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSAS79fBVxs
Example 3: Racial Coding

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A Short Exercise

On an index card, write:

- Your name
- Your class year
- Your major
- A six-word biography of yourself
- The strangest place or situation you’ve been in