PSYC 843:
Causal Explanation in Socioemotional Developmental Theory

Overview of course

Systematic explanations of what transpires between birth and death is *developmental theory*. Inherent in these, or indeed any, theoretical explanations are assumptions and expectations of *cause* – why and how particular behaviours emerge in particular ways at particular times. For this course, we will focus specifically on social and emotional theory and causal explanations of development in roughly three sections. First, we will consider the topic broadly, covering various perspectives on causation, theory, and development. In the second section, you will share the theoretical models that currently support your research and consider various approaches to developmental and theoretical causes. In the last section, we will work together to understand the connection between theory and method and how to develop theory from a body of findings. Overall, the purpose of the course is to enhance your understanding of causal theory and be better at applying it to your research endeavors and program requirements.

Course Requirements

Readings. All material for the course can be found online with a few exceptions (these will be distributed by the instructor via onQ). Everyone is expected to read all of the assigned readings before class and be prepared to discuss each in detail. A lack of preparation will be duly noted and factor into the participation portion of your grade.

Participation (15%). This is a seminar and we are **co**-creating a critical discourse about developmental theory and how to consider causal processes. I expect you to engage not just with me but with each of your fellow classmates. Thus, all students are expected to attend every class and contribute to the discussion. If for any reason you are unable to attend class you must notify me via email before class (failure to do so will be considered an unexcused absence). In general, you will not be graded on the content of your questions/comments during discussion but on your effort and indications that you have, in fact, read the day's material. That is to say, there are no dumb questions. However, as much as you should focus on contributing to the discussions, please be aware of dominating the discussions, preventing others from chiming in. On the flip side, if you are typically more quiet, please use this safe intellectual space to contribute a little more than you have in the past. We really do not want to miss out on everyone's perspectives and questions. If you have ***any*** issues or concerns about your participation (or anything else for that matter), please do not hesitate to contact me.

Theory Critique (15%): Each student will make a brief 10-minute presentation on a theory that is central to your research domain. In the presentation, you will summarize the theory and provide substantive critique as to why it is insufficient or inadequate. Please upload your presentation with a reference list slide at the end to onQ prior to class.

Your Graphical Causal Model (10%): You will make a 5-minute presentation of one (or more) graphical causal models that form the beginning of your final paper idea (see below). The reading for that day will describe these in more detail so you know how to use them.

Final Paper Proposal (15%): You will make a brief 5-10 minute presentation outlining your idea for your final paper.

Final Paper Outline (15%): Before class on the day that you present your final paper proposal, you will submit an outline (emailed to instructor) detailing the structure and arguments of your final paper.

Final paper (30%): The final paper needs to meet the following criteria: (1) it must be developmental (any age period), (2) it must be about social and/or emotional development; (3) it must address causation in some way; and (4) at least one theory is focal. These criteria are broad so that you can fit the task strategically towards what you are currently working on or will be soon. You will have opportunities to develop this idea through 3 previous assignments (graphical model, proposal, and outline) and get feedback from the class as well as instructor. DUE Monday APRIL 6th at noon.

A couple of thoughts about your final papers and work in this course...Be strategic and make this course work for you. Do not just write a paper because it is required but try to figure out how to make this a resource for future endeavors. Possibilities include (but are not limited to): the origin of a chapter or journal submission, the source of a form of knowledge translation, the basis of a grant proposal, clarifies thinking about your comps project, or helps you think more deeply about your research. Whatever the case, don't let your work in this course become a file folder on your computer that you never open after April 2025.

Grading. Grades will be given in letter form and the proportions will be applied to the numeric equivalent based on Queen's guidelines. Roughly:

A+ means that you have excelled beyond expectations and provided a piece of work that was virtually flawless and at a level commensurate with professional expertise.

A means that you have met the requirements of the assignment and have provided cogent well-supported arguments.

A- means that you have almost met the requirements but that there were some aspects that were illogical, unsupported, or sloppily done.

B+ means that you phoned it in, essentially failed to meet even the most minimum requirements and/or have shown little to no critical thinking effort.

Participation	15%
Theory Critique	15%
DAG presentation	10%
Paper Proposal	15%
Paper Outline	15%
Final Paper	30%

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week	Topic	Reading	Assignment
1: 1/7	Intro		
2: 1/14	What is causation?	Grosz et al. (2020)	
3: 1/21	What is theory?	Fried (2020)	
4: 1/28	What is development?	Witherington & Heying (2015); Adolph et al. (2008); Hill (2021)	
5: 2/4	Your pet theories		Theory Critique
6: 2/11	Description, Prediction, Causation	Hamaker et al (2020)	
7: 2/18	**NO CLASS**	**READING WEEK**	
8: 2/25	Graphical Causal Models	Rohrer (2018)	Your DAGs
9: 3/4	Matching developmental theory to method	Richters 1997; Foster 2010a (Foster, 2010b; Widaman et al 2010)	
10: 3/11	Computational and Bayesian modeling	Van de Schoot et al. (2014); Stein & Pollak (2024)	
11: 3/18	Paper proposals		Paper Outline
12: 3/25	Agent-based modeling	Steenbeek & Van Geert; Robinaugh et al. 2021	
13: 4/1	Creating Theory	Boorsboom et al 2021	
4/6			Final Paper