

Writing a  
Sociology  
Honors Thesis

Professor Patricia Ewick

# **Writing a Senior Honors Thesis**

Patricia Ewick

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## Learning Module 1: What is a proposal and why is it necessary?

Before undertaking any large project that requires lots of resources (time, effort, money, materials), it is necessary to plan. You wouldn't start to build a house without a blueprint, or bake a cake without a recipe, or paint a picture without a sketch. The reasons are manifold and obvious. A plan ensures that our project is "doable." It ensures that we allocate our resources appropriately. It helps us avoid costly errors by anticipating problems and obstacles before they occur. It keeps us on track when we feel lost in the minute details of the task.

What is true of houses and cakes and paintings is also true of scholarship. You are about to undertake the largest and most challenging intellectual endeavor of your undergraduate education. You will be spending an entire year (or more) thinking about, researching, and writing a thesis. It will require hours of work every week (and weekend, breaks, and vacations). At times you will be frustrated, exhausted and a little disheartened. At other times, you will be energized, elated and confident. At the end of the process, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are an independent scholar. But, in order to achieve this goal, you will need a plan. We call that plan a **research proposal** (our version of a blueprint, recipe or sketch). This guide aims to help you develop a proposal that will assure you (and the Sociology faculty) that your research is doable, that you have and use your resources wisely and that when you lose your way there are signposts (or breadcrumbs) to help you get back on track.

Below I have given you some advice on how to put your proposal together. Your individual faculty advisor or professor will also help you develop a proposal. Regardless of the variations in subject or method, however, every proposal should include the following:

1. A clear statement of your thesis (or research question) – See Learning Module 2 (Formulating a Research Question and Developing a Thesis.)
2. A brief review of the research literature – See Learning Module 3 (The Literature Review: Standing on the Shoulders of Giants.)
3. A methodological design – See Learning Module 4 (Methodology: Nuts and Bolts.)

The final proposal should be approximately 5 pages and should be accompanied by a preliminary bibliography.

## Learning Module 2

### Formulating a Research Question and Developing a Thesis

For most students, the hardest part of a research paper is **deciding on a research question**. There are a few reasons why it is so difficult. Most importantly, it is because a student typically doesn't know much about an area or topic at the beginning. Now you might think that your lack of knowledge at this point would make it *easier* to come up with a question (since you have no answers, only questions). It is not. It is a cruel irony of life that in order to know what we don't know (and what might be worth knowing), we have to know a fair amount. It is a *cruel* irony, not an insurmountable one.

#### Some strategies for defining a research question:

1. **You are not totally clueless about everything in the world.** You have (presumably) taken some sociology courses and (presumably) have learned something in each of them. To discover a topic about which you know (and care) enough to get started, review your curriculum. Think about each course you have taken and what books, lectures, readings or discussions made you think, and maybe question. If you have your syllabi, read over them to refresh your memory. If not, most are available in the Sociology office. Sometimes it is a single thought, line or table in a book that opens the door to a project. It may be the author didn't pursue, but piqued your interest. So check out your books. What did you underline, highlight or scribble in the margin? (This is one reason we cringe when students resell their books the day after the final!)
2. **If you are clueless, there are lots of clues in the library.** If your lack of familiarity with a field is still impeding your ability to come up with an important and doable research question (more on those qualities below), get familiar. Read. You think you want to do a project on school tracking, glass ceilings, or religious conversion, etc. but you don't know enough to ask the right questions, then spend some serious time reading the research literature. The purpose of this review is less to get lost in the tiny details, data, conclusions, than it is to get a sense for the "lay of the land." At this point read the literature purposively to get a sense of the intellectual terrain. What authors, books or articles are cited a lot? Who are the classic theorists who seem to set the stage for current research? What is considered common knowledge? What are the hot debates among scholars? Who is at the center of these debates? A lot of this information is to be found in the bibliography, and in the author's own review of the literature where he or she "sets the stage" by naming names and defining debates.
3. **You don't have to do all the work.** At the end of most books and articles, many authors suggest some questions that are raised — but not addressed — by their research. Check out the conclusions to a few articles to see what sorts of questions are deemed important by the community of professional scholars in the field. There is a good chance you will have to adapt the question to fit your resources (or time, expertise, personnel, money), but it is a good place to begin. Another place to look for ideas is in the methods sections of published work. We know that the method we employ (surveys, in-depth interviews, observational studies) shapes what we are able

to observe (the kind of “data” we have). Could you address a similar or related question, but employ a different method? Could you study a different sample? This should not be mechanical, simply for the sake of varying the demographics of the sample. There should be some plausible theoretical justification for expecting the new sample would yield different results.

This all seems more mechanical and less creative than it is. It sounds as if you can go to the end of any article and book and choose a topic. Most of the time you can't. You need to do some imaginative creative intellectual work. The creativity comes in when you start to see the problems others have written about from a different perspective.

For instance, let's say after reading over your syllabi you remember that you were really interested in Rosenhan's article “Being Sane in Insane Places” when you read it in Intro or Deviance. In this article, the author reports the results of an “experiment” he conducted where 8 supposedly (by all indicators) sane people were instructed to gain admission to a psychiatric facility by claiming to have heard voices say “empty.” But once inside, they were instructed to be their normal selves. The point of the experiment was to see if psychiatric professionals are capable of recognizing sanity. Apparently, they are not very good at it. Almost all of the pseudo-patients had a difficult time demonstrating their sanity persuasively to any of the staff. In two cases, Rosenhan had to intervene to secure their release.

Now this is a famous and dramatic study. You might think you have nothing to add to the ideas. What you might do, however, is to think about Rosenhan's general point (not the specifics of his experiment). It has something to do with **professional training and the assumptions and blindspots that that training produces**. Maybe even more generally, it is simply about how we interpret the world depending on our expectations (i.e., people in mental hospitals are insane). Accordingly, we filter out or reinterpret contradictory evidence to “fit” our expectations. Perhaps you could either think of a different setting where people make fateful decisions (juries, families making serious medical decisions, air traffic controllers, NASA) and investigate through the literature if the process is always the same. You might even devise your own experiment to test the hypothesis. The process I am suggesting is to find the general in the specific and see if you can design a study around that, one that would be more in keeping with your interests and resources.

What's a “good” research question?

1. **It must be empirical.** “Empirical” means that your question must be answerable through the use of our senses, or, to put it another way, through the collection of evidence or data about events or phenomena in the world. Oddly, this quality of scientific questions is sometimes referred to as “falsifiability.” Being falsifiable is a good thing. It simply means that in principle a statement (or hypothesis) could be shown to be either false or true through the examination of empirical evidence.

What are examples of statements that are not falsifiable? Value statements, those that express a preference or an opinion, are not falsifiable. For instance, “*The U.S. should not use capital punishment*” is not falsifiable. It is an opinion and whether you hold it

depends upon your values, not on facts. There is no conceivable evidence that you could find that would prove the statement to be true or false. In contrast, the following statements are falsifiable. “*Capital punishment deters crime*” Or “*Sixty five percent of Americans support capital punishment.*” Each case is making an empirical statement about events in the world.

2. **It must ask about causes.** This is a bit heavy handed since we rarely are in a position to find the cause(s) of some event or phenomenon. We could rephrase this quality to say “**your question should address why, how or with what consequence something happens.**” “*How many people die in heat waves every year?*” is a descriptive question. “*What do the demographics of heat wave deaths tell us about social life in the late twentieth century?*”(Eric Klinenberg’s book Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy found that deaths are overwhelmingly of poor elderly who are isolated and die alone in their apartments, a feature of social ecology that was not true 50 years ago. He also suggested that the demographics explain why we do not think of heat waves as natural disasters, despite the fact that more people die annually from heat than from all other disasters combined.
3. **It must be focused.** Scientific questions should be answerable in light of time, money, and personal constraints. Avoid biting off more than you can chew by asking a question that is humanly impossible to answer. Often these questions are lazy questions: “*What are the causes of crime?*” This is a big question with hundreds of possible causes to investigate. Be more precise in formulating your question. Instead of “*what causes crime?*” try asking, “*What is the relationship between school performance and juvenile delinquency?*” or even more precise, “*What is the relationship between early school performance and adolescent use of illicit drugs?*”
4. **It must be “important.”** By important (significant might be a better word), we mean it extends the state of knowledge in the field. It might mean, but does not have to mean, that the answer to the question would be of practical importance. In tracing the connection of your project to existing scholarship, you should think about specific ways you might position your work: does it challenge general opinion within the literature?; explore a contradiction?; shed light on a broader or more specific phenomenon?; will it test a theory in a way that has not been fully tested? Much of this will be further developed in your literature review.

Let’s assume that you have narrowed your topic down and have a pretty good idea of what issues are being written about in the field. You are ready to formulate your research question as a thesis statement. Remember this sentence (or two or three) will be the north star of your research. It will orient you to the research literature, shape what information is relevant and what isn’t, influence your methods, and help you make all of the discrete decisions along the way. Spend some time crafting a good one.

What's a good thesis statement?

When you are asked to write a proposal, you are being asked to write an argument – a proposition supported by reasons you believe the proposition to be true. The argument should be summarized in a thesis statement, which should appear at or near the beginning of the paper. (Putting it in at the beginning of your paper does not really represent the flow of your work. The truth of the matter is you cannot really have a thesis until you have already become somewhat familiar with the theory and research that addresses your question to be able to take a position on it. The thesis will probably be refined and reformulated along the way, after you have conducted your full-blown review of the literature (see below.)

In developing a thesis, you might begin by asking some analytically generative questions about the phenomenon you are studying. The questions will get you started in thinking about the phenomenon from a different perspective.

**1. Studying the Exception.** Sociology tends to be homothetic. This means that rather than explain a particular event, as completely as possible, we seek to discover general causes and relationships. This approach means that we are content with statements of probability (e.g., “Men are much more likely to major in engineering than are women.”) It also ensures that there will always be exceptions to our claims about the world. (e.g., some women do go into engineering.) Researchers often dismiss or ignore these exceptions. Yet, studying the exceptions can be a fruitful way of understanding the general phenomenon itself. (More specifically, figuring out why it is exceptional sheds light on the more general relationship.) You might, therefore, enter into a scholarly debate or discussion by suggesting to study those cases that seem to violate the generality. Perhaps we could learn more why women are so much less likely to choose engineering careers than are men by studying the relatively few women who do make that choice. How are they different? Was their education distinctive in some regard? Did they receive early mentoring? And so on.

A few years ago, a sociology student, Adrien Uretsky ('02), wrote a senior honors thesis on persons who choose to leave ultra-orthodox Jewish communities, “Leaving Orthodoxy: A Study of Religious and Cultural Transformation.” Having read Peter Berger’s work on how highly religious communities erect formidable barriers between their worlds and the secular modern world (for instance, geographically isolating the community, requiring different clothing and rituals) she wondered about the relatively rare cases when a member of such a community scaled those barriers. It certainly doesn’t happen a lot and Berger was probably right about why it doesn’t. Uretsky was intent on discovering the conditions that both motivated and enabled the few to be exceptions. (See Example 1 in Appendix for an excerpt of her introduction.)

**2. An Important Factor is Overlooked.** Events and phenomena are never caused by a single factor. Typically in developing theories researchers try to discover the 2 or 3 major factors that produce a given outcome. Often in reviewing a research area, we can identify some factor that has been ignored or has not received sufficient attention. Sometimes these omissions are a consequence of the theoretical perspectives scholars take. For instance, a structural approach to crime would study the role of unemployment and

differences in educational opportunities to explain differential rates of crime. Someone else might suggest that the peer group plays an important function in mediating these factors. Consider what variables might have been overlooked in the research literature in developing your own thesis. Consider, too, that some structures and processes encompass contradictions, or at least considerable variations.

**3. Something that is widely understood to be natural (i.e., not socially produced) is actually the result of a social process that needs explaining.** We tend to view political activism as something that needs explaining, but not apathy. Are people just naturally apathetic? Or, might political apathy be a result of some process? If apathy is not a natural state, then how is it produced in our political culture?

Sometimes, the absence of something suggests a question, although studying absence can be especially challenging. For many years social scientists accepted the widespread but unstated assumption that whiteness is the absence of race. This is a preposterous idea, but one that reflected the fact that whiteness was socially constructed to be the “norm” (natural) human state. We are now coming to see that whiteness (including the widespread view that it is not a race) is a consequence of cultural, political and economic factors. Try turning others works on their head by explaining their default category: the condition, category, or state that is being naturalized by not being explained.

**4. Don’t confuse the concept of “effectiveness” with the concept of “effects.”** In analyzing social policies or organizations, scholars often assess the degree to which the stated goals or purposes of the policies are met. These have been called “gap studies” in that we seek to identify the gap between the goals and their realization. But to say that something is ineffective doesn’t mean that it has no effects. The effects are often unintended and unacknowledged, but may be significant nonetheless. Pay attention to the stated goals of social actors, but don’t limit your analysis to those goals in your study.

A sociology student interned at a local battered women’s shelter. The shelter functioned quite effectively to provide a secure home to women in danger (official goal.) In order to do this, however, the student discovered the shelter had to enforce extremely strict rules about residents’ behavior. The shelter imposed curfews, prohibited resident children from playing in the neighborhood (to avoid attracting attention), and enforced strict rules of decorum in the home. The student concluded that the shelter functioned (unintentional effect) in a way that was similar to a minimum security prison.

Sharon O’Toole explored the varying success of rape crisis centers in realizing some of their goals, and in adopting new goals over time. (See Example 4 in Appendix.)

**5. Historical changes and trends raise new questions or invite a reconsideration of an old question.** Some sociological issues may be fairly settled (meaning there is widespread consensus over how and with what consequence it occurs). These “settled”



matters can become problematic due to social changes. Pay attention to such changes and reconsider some “old” questions.

Most sociologists of religion agree that religious identity is acquired early in life through socialization into religious beliefs and institutions as it is practiced in the family. In the latter half of the twentieth century, interfaith marriage became increasingly common and Kate VanDerzee, *Sociology '02*, considered the significance of this trend for the issue of religious identity. How people in interfaith families acquire religious identity became an unsettled question which she explored in her paper. (See “Religious Options: Children Growing Up in Interfaith Families,” Example 2 in Appendix.)

**6. There is an unsettled question or controversy that needs examination.**

Disagreement invites analysis. Disagreements may be among scholars over the interpretation of some matter. It may be a debate among citizens, or politicians about something. The fact that people see the world differently and that these differences *matter* means that there is work to be done by sociologists. What is the genesis of the debate? Who are the participants? What is at stake? How is the controversy sustained over time?

Mike Metivier, *Sociology '03*, analyzed the debate between neo-liberal and free market policies in Chile in terms of their ideological dimensions. Although these stances are articulated in the discourse of objective science, Mike discovered politics and ideology lurking. The introduction to his thesis, “Selective Perception, Ideology, and the Pursuit of Interests: Conflicting Analyses of the Neo-Liberal Development Program in Chile 1973-1989,” appears as Example 5 in Appendix.

This list of analytically generative questions is partial. It is meant only to inspire and instruct you in developing your own analytic strategies and approaches. As always, consultation with your professors and advisors is the best way to develop and sharpen our thesis.

**Caution!!!! Yet Another Cruel Irony:**

**All of this work so far will appear as one or two paragraphs in your initial proposal. Like Olympic ice-skating, it will seem to the reader/viewer that this is easy and you just whipped it off the top of your head. The weeks of reading, reviewing, formulating and reformulating questions will be obvious only to you, and anyone else (the entire sociology faculty) who has ever gone through it.**

## **Learning Module 3**

### **The Literature Review: Standing on the Shoulders of Giants**

Issac Newton once observed that if he was able to see so far it was because he was “standing on the shoulders of giants.” It is to that quote, not the rock band, that we refer. Science and scholarship are collective activities. At best, we each contribute a little, building (or standing) on the stock of knowledge that others have developed. The literature review is a description of where you are standing, on whose shoulders, as you begin.

In your proposal, the review should be one or two pages. In the final product, the review will very likely constitute an entire chapter. At this point, you need to summarize the major issues, debates and recent findings in the field in order to situate your project. Your proposal should include a preliminary bibliography.

Often our “reading” and presentation of the literature will reflect our own thesis statement. You will construct the review to “set up” your own project. You will select those works that most closely address your interest and upon which you most heavily rely for methodological or theoretical support. Part of our construction is to end the review with the question or questions that you are planning investigate. By adding a bit to the stock of knowledge, you are growing the giant.

The work you did earlier in formulating your question will be very useful in deciding what to summarize. You should know what the important points are, and correlatively, what details you can leave out for now. For more detailed information on writing and organizing a literature review (Lee Cuba, [Writing in the Social Sciences](#).)

## **Learning Module 4**

### **Methodology: Nuts and Bolts**

Planning is nowhere more essential than in regard to methods of data collection. This part of the project entails the most resources. Mistakes are costly. You don’t have to spend 3 months interviewing people only to realize that you forgot to ask the one critical question during your interview. Typically, we don’t have a second chance to go back and fix our methodological mistakes. For this reason, it is very important to be as precise as possible about what you are going to do, where you will get whatever evidence you need, how long it will take, and what you will do with it once you have obtained it. Although the methodological issues you face will vary from project to project, some issues you should address in this section of your proposal include:

- 1. Mode of observation.** Since you are asking an empirical question, you need to think about what information or data will allow you to answer or illuminate the question. Will you collect data yourself? If so, through what means? A mail out survey? An in-depth interview? Will you inspect primary source documents such as a court docket, or early twentieth century child rearing pamphlets published by the Department of Labor? Will you examine data someone else has already collected such as census data or FBI statistics on crime? In some cases, students will be writing a more theoretical paper, such as comparing two theorists notion of power (Foucault and Marx). You should think, in these instances, of the principal texts you will be using and interpreting.

2. **Measurement instrument.** How are you going to operationalize your concepts given the above mode of observation? In other words, if you were studying gender differences in the experience of divorce, what aspects of “experience” would you measure? What questions would you ask to gain access to someone’s “experience”? Discuss whether you anticipate problems in measuring any of these concepts. (Some concepts are easy to measure – sex or age; some are notoriously difficult, the effectiveness of a treatment program, for instance.)
3. **Analytic design.** Describe the time dimension of your research (is it cross-sectional or longitudinal?); identify your units of analysis; describe the study population.
  - A. **Sample:** How will you select a sample of subjects? How will you contact members of you sample? What sort of a response rate do you need? Expect? How many people will comprise your sample? Will there be equal numbers of women and men? Is it important for your sample to be varied by ethnicity and race?
  - B. **Ethical Issues:** What are the relevant ethic issues raised by your research? How will you minimize any negative effects on your respondents? Discuss informed consent, confidentiality, debriefing (if relevant), or sharing the results with your subjects. For any research involving human subjects you will need permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB).
  - C. **Appendix: Budget and Time Line:** Estimate any costs involved in conducting the research. If you propose to do a mail out interview with a sample of 100, for instance, you would need to itemize postage expense. Also, make up a schedule, or time line, indicating what tasks will be performed and estimate how long each task will take.

## **APPENDIX TO MODULE 2** **EXAMPLES OF THESIS STATEMENTS**

**Example 1** from Uretsky, Adrien. “Leaving Orthodoxy: A Study of Religious and Cultural Transformation.”

“In The Sacred Canopy, sociologist Peter Berger explored the challenges of maintaining sectarian religion in a modern society that is becoming increasingly secular. Secularization theory predicts that as scientific innovations and alternatives to religious thinking gain widespread esteem, the authority of religion for understanding the world will decline. As a result of the existence of diverse ways of defining the world, Berger likens pluralistic society to a marketplace where they are many competing systems of thought. The metaphor of a marketplace addresses all institutions such as religion, medicine and family. Berger explains: “The pluralistic situation is above all, a *market situation*. In it, the religious traditions become consumer commodities” (Berger 1967:138).

Total institutions then are faced with a particular kind of conflict in a pluralistic market setting that promotes and caters to choice. When confronted with the challenges of modernity, Berger asserts that the more a religious group's beliefs contradict secular beliefs and practices, the more defined the barriers they must establish to preserve their desired isolation. Orthodox Jewish communities are an example of a religious group that attempts to maintain a fundamentalist (rigid adherence to religious beliefs) belief system and practice in a pluralistic marketplace.

The social and physical boundaries that Orthodox groups erect serve many essential functions for the religious group. Mainly, these boundaries keep the community united by tightly bonding members together. Such unity can prevent members from straying from the religious group and adopting another competing religious belief system. In their study of identity transformation organization, sociologists Greil and Rudy refer to groups that construct strong boundaries as "social cocoons" because they "coat themselves with a protective covering to protect the process of transformation going on within from interference from the outside" (Greil & Rudy 1984:263).

Sociologists have studied the way in which tightly bonded groups sustain these barriers when they are confronted with a society that values free choice and fluidity of belief systems (Kanter 1972; Berger 1967; Greil & Rudy 1984). After gaining a sense of the mechanisms religious groups employ to successfully protect their members under a "sacred canopy," some sociologists have further examined what happens when methods of insulation fail (i.e.: Albrecht & Bahr in the Mormon church and Ebaugh in Catholic Convents). In this paper, I will examine the general literature on leaving fundamentalist religions in order to understand a process that sociologists of religion have only tangentially addressed, the process of leaving Orthodox Judaism."

**Example 2** from Van Derzee, Kate. "Religious Options: Children Growing Up in Interfaith Families."

"Over the past four decades, intermarriages between people of different races, ethnicities and religions have been increasing at rapid rates. For instance, interracial marriage rates between black and white Americans have soared. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 1992 there were approximately 246,000 black/white married couples. Births of children with one black parent and one white parent climbed from 8,758 in 1962 to 26,968 in 1981, and in 1992, there were approximately 52,232 biracial children born (Funderburg 1994:11). Demographers estimate that black/white marriages constitute about 20 percent of all interracial marriages; therefore, it can be estimated that there are approximately one million mixed-race [not just black/white] people in this country (Gillespie 1994:6). Another example of the increase of intermarriages can be found by examining how Japanese married outside their ethnicity. Before World War II, antimiscegenation laws in California made it illegal for Japanese to intermarry, but by the 1970s, intermarriage rates among third generation Japanese-Americans increased to approximately 60 percent, including 50 percent with non-Asian (Fugita et al. 1991: 131).

Not only have interracial marriages become more common in the past few decades, but the rates of interfaith marriages have also been increasing. In the 1920s, not more than two in

one hundred Jews married Christians in America; however, by the early 1980s, nearly four out of ten did (Mayer 1987:7). In the 1990s, the rates of Christian/Jew marriages leveled off at just over 50 percent (Schaper 1999:16). According to some social scientists, “the theories of secularization suggest that the trend of interfaith marriage will grow in the future” (Kosmin 1994:243).

In her book Ethnic Options, sociologist Mary Waters insists that studying intermarriages is important because they are good indicators “of changes in the nature and perception of ethnic boundaries. If boundaries become less salient to people, it is likely that you will see an increase in the level and trend of marriage across these boundaries” (Waters 1990:102). Similarly, sociologist Egon Mayer notes how there has been “a shift in the balance of the forces of tradition and those of love and personal preference in the process of mate selection” in our society (Mayer 1987:7). People are becoming more individualistic, and the boundaries that were once so integral to people are fading in importance. Social scientist Barry Kosmin argues this point as well. “In the process of industrialization and urbanization, religious beliefs have become less important in governing people’s lives. Thus, as members of religious groups become less devoted to their own religion, it can be expected that the social boundaries between them will decline” (Kosmin 1994: 243).

In addition to these cultural shifts, the demise of legal obstacles has also shaped the rise in interracial marriages. The 1967 Supreme Court decision on the case of *Loving v Commonwealth of Virginia* ruled that all miscegenation laws were unconstitutional. Richard Loving and his new bride returned to his native state of Virginia in 1958 where Loving, a white man, was promptly arrested for marrying a black woman. His marriage went against the state’s antimiscegenation law. Instead of going to jail, he and his wife took advantage of a suspended sentence with the condition that they leave Virginia and not return for 25 years. Feeling like they had done nothing wrong, the Lovings sued the state. Their case became a nine-year battle that ended in the US Supreme Court in 1967. The Court’s decision declared unconstitutional all laws against intermarriage in Virginia and fifteen other states (Gillespie 1994:6). Given these relatively recent legal barriers, it is not surprising that interracial marriages were so infrequent. Now that the legal obstacles are gone, the rates are increasing at rapid rates.

The rising rates of intermarriages bring up the question of how children of these marriages construct their identities. To address this issue, I will explore the religious and ethnic identities of children with one Jewish and one Christian parent. Under what circumstances do the children identify with one parent’s religion, both parents’ religions or neither religion? Do children’s identities change over time and in different circumstances?

It is clear that interfaith parents have several different choices about how to raise their children. Parents can raise their children in one culture, to which the other parent may or may not convert, or they can raise them in both cultures. The other options are to select a third neutral culture or raise them with no particular religious or cultural traditions at all. Some parents chose one strategy for one life moment and another for another (Schaper 1999:17). Parents’ decisions affect how their children construct their religious and ethnic identities.”

**Example 3** from Baxter, Valerie. “The Values and Politics of Tracking in the Worcester Public Schools.”

“A Worcester School Committee member characterizes tracking as one of the most controversial issues in education. He states, “there’s a good deal of just honest, healthy disagreement among good, decent, honest people about this business of ability grouping and tracking” (Mills, 12/15/92). His perception of the issue may have been reinforced by the lack of consensus among researchers on the dynamics and effects of grouping practices. Two experts in the field of tracking came to the conclusion that “we actually have very little evidence on precisely what it is about students’ track placements that matters” (Alexander and Cook 1982, p. 627). Despite the lack of a precise understanding of tracking and ability grouping, many academics and local school personnel have formed strong opinions on either side of the issue, generating an often heated debate. This thesis focuses on the controversies surrounding tracking and ability grouping through a survey of current research and a detailed analysis of the tracking debate in the Worcester public school system.”

**Example 4** from O’Toole, Sharon. “The Worcester Rape Crisis Program: Theory and Practice in a Feminist Social Change Organization.”

“Rape crisis centers (RCCs) are a fairly recent historical phenomenon. These organizations are a direct outgrowth of the second wave women’s movement in the U.S. and a newly developing feminist agenda beginning in the 1960s. RCCs, which began to appear in the early 1970s, were created in an attempt to find a solution to a little acknowledged problem. Women in the feminist movement seized upon the issue of rape, offering their own previously ignored perspective and new found critique.

The principal goals of these RCCs were often two fold. They set out to provide support and assistance to rape victims as an alternative to the cold and often hostile treatment women usually received when they sought help from the authorities, hospitals, and sometimes even friends and family after a rape. Women organizing around the issue of rape also had the larger, more radical goal of changing a society which, they claimed, allowed for and encouraged rape. This characterization of society was based on an awareness that a minuscule number of rapists were convicted, that many people failed to recognize that rape was possible and the women didn’t enjoy being raped, and that gender role socialization often told males that “real men” were sexually aggressive and didn’t take “no” for an answer while encouraging “nice girls” to be passive and dependant on men for protection.

Over the course of the anti-rape movement, RCCs, as organizations pursuing social change, have met with frustration as well as varying degrees of success in terms of their goals. Despite the fact that many RCCs have not survived, some significant movement goals have been realized. Of those RCCs which still exist, most resemble their original forms very little. My research focuses on the Worcester Rape Crisis Program (WRCP) located in Worcester, MA, which has survived, and realized significant objectives, while sustaining various structural changes since its inception in 1974. This organization is of particular interest, not because of its

strikingly unique history, but because of the wide range of concerns, issues, and problems that it has faced, matters which have been so common to other RCCs.

The history of the WRCP is significant and worth of inquiry because the organization has endured whereas many other RCCs have not, and because it continues to maintain the basic and clearly feminist tenets on which the first RCCs were founded. Some of the organizational changes which have occurred in the WRCP include the transformation from a somewhat hierarchical structure to a collective arrangement and back again to an institution with a more hierarchical form. It has also shifted from an organization with a primarily white composition which dealt mainly with white women to an establishment which took a more multi-cultural approach. It has also included men in the organization.

RCCs are social movement organizations (SMOs), in that they share and strive to realize the objectives of the feminist movement and more specifically the feminist antiviolence movement. These SMOs are of interest and significance in their combining of social change efforts with the provisions of services, often within the framework of a feminist ideology. The particular movement and historical moment from which RCCs emerged, along with the ever changing environment and historical period in which they developed, are important factors to be considered in any attempted understanding of the WRCP's organizational history. Developments in feminist theory combined with changes in the larger society in general, inevitably had an effect on this as well as other RCCs.

This study seeks to answer the general question of how and why the Worcester Rape Crisis Program has been transformed over the past twenty years. More specifically, the focus and principal organizing questions are: How did the rape crisis center's conceptualization of the social problem of rape change and/or remain the same over time? How did that organizational conceptualization relate to the internal structural form of the RCC and its external relations with other institutions (police, hospitals, funding sources, etc.)?

Three major questions which are subsets of my more general queries form the basis of my investigation: How is the RCC's conception of rape as a social problem connected with its organizational transformations (both internal and external ones)? Did the RCC transform its structure to achieve its goals? What effect did feminists goals and theory have on organizational changes?"

**Example 5.** Metivier, Michael. "Selective Perception, Ideology, and the Pursuit of Interests: Conflicting Analyses of the Neo-Liberal Development Program in Chile 1973-1989."

"In recent history there seems to be no alternative to the adoption of economic policies distinct from those with a free market focus. The world economy is becoming more heavily integrated, and the theory of neo-liberalism is becoming more widely acknowledged as the current dominant economic "discourse" (Bourdieu, 1998). Neo-liberalism currently occupies a position of great significance as the chief philosophy behind the development policy recommendations of several industrialized countries, including the United States. This influential status carrier over into the structural adjustment policies of international lending institutions such as the

World Bank and International Monetary Fund where neo-liberal policies are not only recommended but imposed as the necessary conditions in order to obtain a loan.

Neo-liberalism is a belief in the ability of a free-market capitalist system to allocate the resources of any society in the most efficient and productive manner while producing higher and higher rates of economic growth. This theory recognizes the private sector as the “primary engine” of economic development (Albo, 2002). Neo-liberal policies are undertaken in order to further the potential for private dealings and commercial exchanges between nations (Shah, 2001). Through the free movement of “goods, resources and enterprises” the potential to “find cheaper resources, [and] to maximize profits and efficiency” increases (Shah, 2001). This endeavor is pursued through the elimination of market restraints that are imposed by governments, obstructions to commercial exchanges such as tariffs, regulations, and controls placed on the mobility of capital and investment (Shah, 2001). Neo-liberals believe that the main function of government should be “to provide the infrastructure to advance the rule of law with respect to property rights and contracts” (Shah, 2001). Other than its role as a legal arbiter, it is believed that government should not involve itself in the commercial domain.

The market is seen as a “self-regulating mechanism” that can only function appropriately without state interference (Shah, 2001). Neo-liberal theory asserts that the market contains internal mechanisms that balance the price structure and produce equilibrium without the need for any form of government intervention (Friedman p.4). Deregulation, “allow[s] the free market to naturally balance itself via the pressures of market demands” (Shah, 2001). Neo-liberals assert that free markets allow for greater efficiency and a more “socially optimal allocation of resources” (Shah, 2001). Because of this optimal distribution of wealth through the market, public enterprises are deemed inefficient (Shah, 2001). They are either privatized or their expenditures are decreased in order to allow for market-based solutions to society’s problems (Shah, 2001).

While neo-liberal policies maintain a dominant position in the economic sphere, they are not without their critics. In sharp contrast to the arguments set forth by neo-liberal scholars, critics accentuate the use of government in order to correct the imbalances of the free-market model which they believe exacerbates economic inequalities and tends to generate greater levels of destitution. To say the least, the question of whether these policies are regarded as favorable to the societies in which they are implemented generates considerable debate (Bello p.42). This debate can be engaged through a case study on the implementation of a neo-liberal development program. Such a case study should take into account the numerous and diverse factors of success and failure set forth by different development theorists to evaluate these programs. Chile, a South American country, retains what many believe to be the “longest running structural adjustment program in the world,” having initiated its economic liberalization in 1974 (Bello p.42, World Bank p.6). The World Bank and International Monetary Fund, integral parts of Chile’s economic transformation towards a neo-liberal development program, have, along with several scholars, declared the Chilean project a success since its inception (Bello p.42). They currently boast that Chile is “widely recognized as having the most open, stable, and liberalized economy in Latin America” (World Bank Group p.1). However, in contrast to the position held by these institutions and other supporters of neo-liberalism, several academics put forth a critique of the very same policies that these international lending institutions promote.



Thus, upon studying the literature available on the social and economic development of Chile one will recognize that the body of literature can be roughly divided into two divergent modes of thought, two competing academic circles with opposing philosophies regarding development. Neo-liberalism is fundamentally linked to the more dominant of the two competing development theories, the modernization which produce an extension of basic needs provisions to larger and larger segments of a population. Given the fact that economic growth can occur at precisely the same time that basic needs provision is worsening (London and Williams; Hicks; Streeten), it is often the case that one school “sees” developmental success at precisely the same time that the other sees failure. There is an inherent tendency for the two sets of theorists to talk past each other or to disagree categorically, as each emphasizes the priority and importance of precisely the outcomes that the other virtually ignores. Moreover, proponents of each school are certain that they are right and their opponents are wrong.

All of this leads me to suggest that each side, despite claims to be engaged in objective social-scientific analyses, is really engaged in an ideological dispute. I will assess this assertion by (a) reviewing the precepts of each school, (b) linking neo-liberalism with modernization theory and the critique of neo-liberalism with dependency theory, (c) examining what constitutes an ideology, and (d) specifying how each school can be deemed ideological rather than scientific. This abstract discussion of theory (or of competing theories as ideologies) will be followed by a case study of recent Chilean development policy (1973-1989). As noted above, Chile has long been influenced by neo-liberal policy implementation. A substantial literature rooted in modernization theory has emerged that views the outcome of these policies as a stunning success. At the same time, however, another substantial literature rooted in dependency theory argues that neo-liberal development policy in Chile has produced significant failure. I will analyze the rhetoric and reality of both literatures. In other words, a thickly detailed analysis of Chilean development history will give me an opportunity to make a critical statement “about theory.”