

FNST 600 Theoretical Positioning Proposal & Final Paper

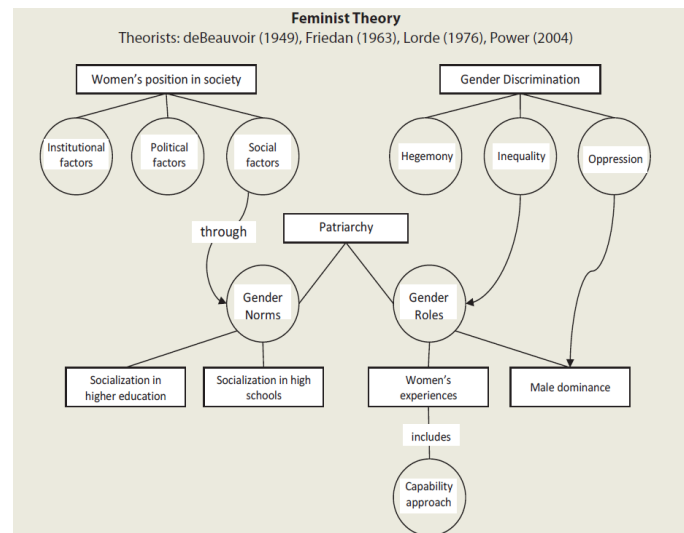
Introduction: What is a Theoretical Framework?

You have been using data and theory your entire life (to navigate life), albeit in a less systematic and rigorous way than what we have been practicing this semester. Because you are already versed in such practices by virtue of being a part of the social world—and because you have honed these skills over and over again through this class—you should approach this paper not as a dreaded final assignment, but instead, as an opportunity to demonstrate just how socially adept you have become. So, the theoretical framework is one of the most important aspects in the research process. Without a theoretical framework, the structure and vision for a study is unclear, much like a house that cannot be constructed without a blueprint. By contrast, a research plan that contains a theoretical framework allows the dissertation study to be strong and structured with an organized flow from one chapter to the next. The importance of theory-driven thinking and acting is emphasized in the FNST discipline. It is with the intention that YOUR research adds to the theoretical body of knowledge in the field by making an original contribution, as well as having a transformative impact in Aboriginal communities.

The theoretical framework is the “blueprint” for the entire dissertation inquiry. It serves as the guide on which to build and support your study, and also provides the structure to define how you will philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically, and analytically approach the dissertation as a whole. Theory is a structure that guides research by relying on a formal theory constructed by using an established, coherent explanation of certain phenomena and relationships. It is not simply a string of concepts, but a way to identify and construct for the reader your epistemological and ontological worldview and approach to your topic of study. Thus, the theoretical framework provides structure to the entire dissertation/paper. It provides a common world view or lens from which to support one’s thinking on the problem and analysis of data.

Theories come from a multitude of sources in each discipline, and there are always more being created and applied across fields. For example, there is a plethora of options within the realm of Indigenous/ FNST Studies for selecting a theoretical framework. Because Indigenous studies is cross-disciplinary, you can use or rely on numerous theories ranging from classical theory and criticism; medieval theory; renaissance & neoclassical theory; romanticism; marxism; psychoanalysis; formalism; reader response; structuralism & semiotics; (post)structuralism & deconstruction; Feminism; Queer theory; critical-race theory, postcolonial/ethnic/cultural studies; Indigenous theory. You may also include others such as situational and behavioral theories; systems or developmental theory; cognitive theory; intersubjectivity theory; change theory; identity formation and transformational theory. Do not use them all in your research, of course! This non-exhaustive list should provide you with the diversity of theories that are out there for you to explore, use, adapt to your work. Some of them may not be fitting with your topic or within Indigenous studies; some you can try to connect to your area of research quite effectively.

See the example of the concept map to the right aligned with the feminist theory to better understand the development of a theory through some possible research components.



Choosing the Right Theoretical Framework for You

The theory selected for your study offers a conceptual basis for understanding, analyzing, and designing ways to investigate a problem. Thus, you need to know how you will define and approach your research problem and provide a rationale for how and why you are conducting your study in order for the reader to get a sense for where you stand on the problem itself. It is important to examine your own epistemological beliefs when selecting a theoretical framework. Our beliefs are influenced by assumptions, values, and ethics, which are all personal. Selecting an appropriate theoretical framework for your dissertation research is an important and necessary process as it requires a deep and thoughtful understanding of your problem, purpose, significance, and research questions. It is imperative that all four constructs—the problem, purpose, significance, and research questions—are tightly aligned and intricately interwoven so that your theoretical framework can serve as the foundation for your work and guide your choice of research design and data analysis (and all this will tie in in your MA thesis!)

Because the theoretical framework connects the reader to existing knowledge, the research questions of your study act as the liaison between the existing knowledge and the problem you want to resolve. Ask yourself then, what is the lens

with which you view the world? Is the theory an appropriate fit with the perspective of your work and your research topic? Can the theory be used in conjunction with the research questions being developed? How does the theoretical framework inform your literature review? Does your theoretical framework undergird your conclusions, implications, and recommendations based on the data analysis? In order to select the most appropriate and best-suited theoretical framework for your dissertation research, consider the following guidelines:

1. Begin by identifying your beliefs.
2. Consider several theories that intersect nicely with your epistemological values and broaden your way of thinking about the concepts in your study.
3. Develop a working knowledge of the theories and understand why each theory is important to you.
4. Conduct a brief literature review to find support for your theories.
5. Consult other thesis to review how others have applied the specific theories you are considering.
6. Consider arguments that oppose your beliefs and theories.
7. Apply answers to “how” the theory connects to your problem, the study’s purpose, significance, and design.
8. Select one theoretical framework that provides a solid, descriptive ‘blueprint’ for your reader.

FNST 600 Proposal – 10%

This proposal should be a 3-5pg (max) introduction to your research and the identification of your chosen theoretical framework which you will develop for your Term Paper. It should be brief and concise explanation of how you see the w theories you have selected to be fitting for an examination of your research topic. For example: Does a Marxist-feminist framework explain Indigenous land struggles? Which post-colonial theory/theorists shape your research in education? Can critical-race theory be helpful in improving child welfare in Anishinaabe societies? How does a specific Indigenous theory support your research in Dakelh language, Inuit art or Aboriginal health care? Can deconstruction be helpful in understanding Indigenous governance? How does LaRocque’s examination of colonial discourse help in understanding culturally-appropriate films? Etc.

For this component you are simply introducing me to the topic and your hopes to explore two particular theories. I will provide you with feedback and thoughts to explore further so that you are well-prepared to delve deeper into these theories for your Term Paper. Please provide me with an essay-based, cohesive proposal (not point form):

- i. **A brief statement of your research/thesis topic.**
- ii. **Identification of your chosen theoretical frameworks.** Define each theory, identify key theorists or concepts. Please include specification of any key theoretical principles to be applied to your topic. How do they fit in to your research interests? Feel use one of the theories we are learning about in class and one you learned in other classes, or ones you are familiar with/interested in that are outside the scope of FNST 600. Remember though, this is an Indigenous studies discipline, so make the theory applicable within this context.
- iii. **A short introduction to the literature** that you combed through and upon which you will depend on for your research. Are there gaps, conflicts or controversies in the existing literature? How does the literature support your position and research? Do not provide me with an exhaustive list, but limit 3-5 references that support your research or position.
- iv. **Discussion.** Why is this theory within this research (as you suggested) important? Why should the reader/community/world care? What do you hope to achieve with this work/theory? How does your original work contribute to knowledge-creation?

FNST 600 Term Paper – 40%

One of the central themes we have discussed this semester has been the inseparability of theory and method—understanding and evidence. Theory without data is mere speculation, while data without theory is an incomprehensible mass of observations. Because you are already versed in such practices by virtue of being a part of the social world—and because you have honed these skills over and over again through your assignments, seminars, readings, and in-class discussions—you should approach this paper as an opportunity to demonstrate just how socially adept you have become. With this final paper assignment you have free reign to discuss precisely what interests you (your MA research as indicated in your proposal) and how theory can help inform your thesis & your research. **Students will provide a brief (6-8 min) presentation of their final paper on the last day of class.**

For this component, you will write a 20-25 pg DS paper, where you explain, support and evidence the ideas you presented in your proposal. Please see grading rubric. This will have a thorough analysis of the theory and how it applies to your research; it will also contain a list of resources you looked at to support your position (at least 10 – books & articles) and a strong conclusion completing the effectiveness of your theoretical application to your research project.