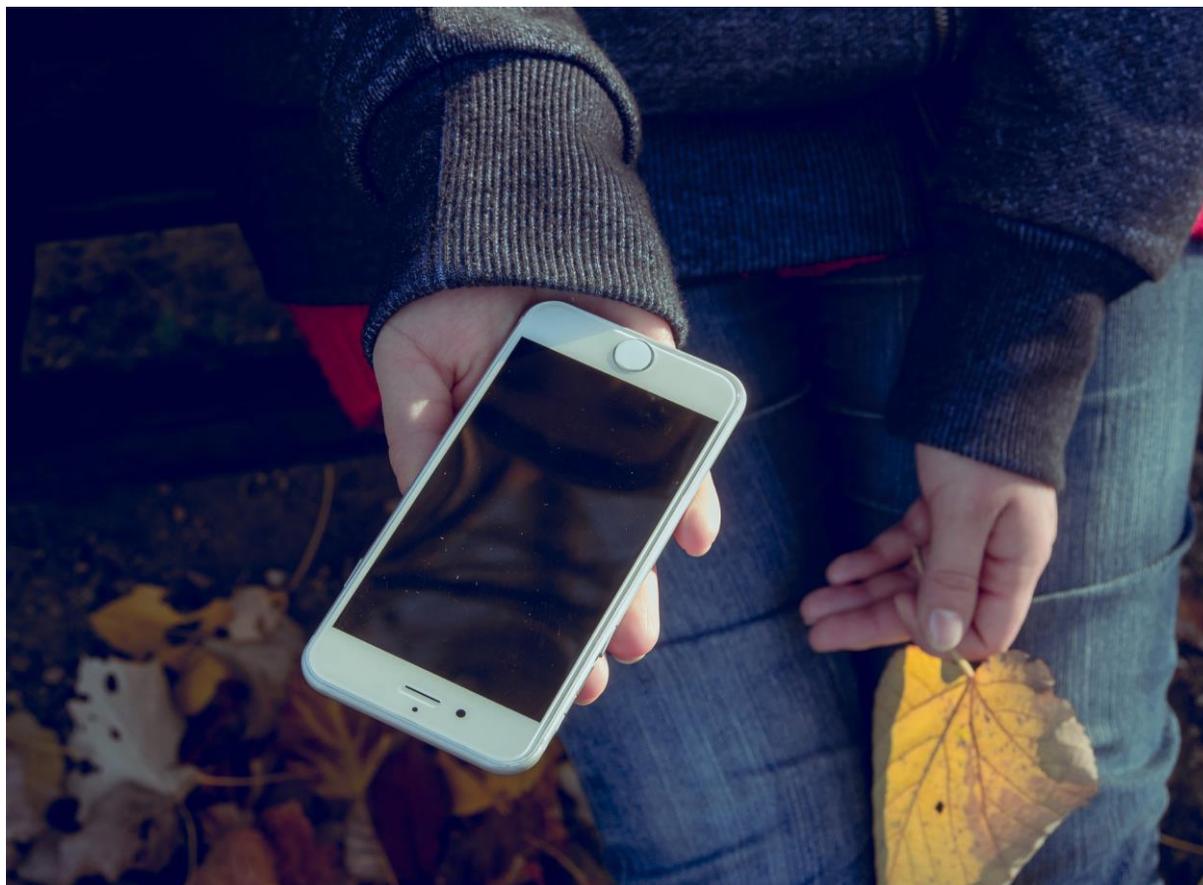# Developing theory: guidance on theorising

An annotated bibliography

Authors

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This annotated bibliography provides a roadmap for understanding theory and guidance on theorising. It has been designed for researchers and research users and provides essential texts on each of the areas.

Citation: Livingstone, S. and Stoilova, M. (2021). Developing theory: guidance on theorising. An Annotated Bibliography. CO:RE – Children Online: Research and Evidence.

This section offers methodological and conceptual guidance on theory – what is theory, approaches to developing theory, key challenges in theorising and how to overcome them.

Banaji, S. (2016) *Global Research on Children's Online Experiences: Addressing Diversities and Inequalities*. **Global Kids Online.**

Banaji explores existing inequalities between research and theory from the Global North and the Global South, and criticises the processes of power and privilege that underpin the research process.

Dankasa, J. (2015). Developing a theory in academic research: A review of experts' advice. *Journal of Information Science Theory and Practice*, **3(3), 64–74.**

Clearly articulating new theories from research remains a challenge. Dankasa explains the concept of a theory and the different components that make up a theory, and offers suggestion as to what makes a good theory based on collated advice from scholars.

Dawes, S. (2017). What is media theory? *Media Theory*, **1(1), 1–17.**

Setting out the aims of the newly established *Media Theory* journal, Dawes argues that the theorisation of 'media' needs to consider its different forms and boundaries, as well as the boundaries of 'media theory'.

Donsbach, W. (2006). The identity of communication research. *Journal of Communication*, **56(3), 437–448.**

Donsbach argues that scholars are limited in their ability to keep an overview of their disciplines as the field grows much faster than any scholar could process, hence the difficulty in offering a synopsis or claiming novelty. Furthermore, the scope of any such claims carries a bias.

Fazi, M.B. (2017). The ends of media theory. *Media Theory*, **1(1), 107–121.**

Fazi discusses what 'theory' might mean in relation to media and media studies, offering reflections on the role of theory in general, and on the role of media theory specifically, showing its continued relevance.

Forsyth, P. (2018). 'What theory is not' revisited. *Journal of Research on Organization in Education*, **2, v–x.**

This article provides guidance on how to link theory and evidence.

Glynn, K. (2020). *Critical Media Theory*. **Oxford Bibliographies. doi:10.1093/obo/9780199791286-0333.**

Glynn provides a brief discussion of the origins and historical development of critical media theory, as well as its key schools of thought and theorists.

Gottfried, P.N. (2016). Faculty Mentor Insights on Dissertation Literature Reviews: Critical Components and Professional Practices for Scholarship. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

This is a discussion of how academic mentors guide their doctoral students in creating the conceptual and theoretical framework for their dissertations.

🔓 **Harrington, A. (2011).** *Social Theory*. **Oxford Bibliographies. doi:10.1093/obo/9780199756384-0054.**

This provides a brief introduction to social theory, its scope, key concerns and classical theorists.

🔓 **Holmström, J. (2005). Theorizing in IS research: What came before and what comes next?** *Scandinavian Journal of Information Systems*, **17(1), 167–174.**

This article offers a discussion of how to update existing theories and handle theoretical contradictions.

🔓 **Home, R. (2017). Going south and engaging non-Western modernities.** *Media Theory*, **1(1), 65–73.**

This article points to the importance of understanding the complex contexts of the Global South and how they demand rethinking theories based on the Global North, but also what counts as media or media relations.

🔓 **Leeds-Hurwitz, W. (2012). These fictions we call disciplines.** *Electronic Journal of Communication/La Revue Electronique de Communication*, **22(3–4).**

This article argues that academic disciplines are social constructions – shaped by the scholars and shaping scholars back. It explores how disciplines have become taken for granted, and argues that conceptualising disciplinary boundaries as fluid can enhance our thinking, and that the juxtaposition of ideas or tools from different domains encourages new ideas.

🔓 **Leeds-Hurwitz, W. (2021). The role of theory groups in the lives of ideas.** *History of Media Studies*, **1 (October).**

This article offers a discussion of how theory groups can facilitate the development of ideas, and multidisciplinary approaches and help create joint understandings around key ideas.

🔓 **Manghani, S. (2017). Open theory.** *Media Theory*, **1(1), 162–167.**

This article offers a playful guide on how to create theory, and on the processes of thinking, situating and writing, and making that happen as part of theorising.

🔓 *Media Theory* **(2017), 1(1).**

This issue offers a good theoretical overview of classical and new media theories. Other issues of the same open access journal might also be of interest.

🔓 **Miller, D. (2021). A theory of a theory of the smartphone.** *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, **24(5), 860–876.**

Miller criticises the practices of elitism and exclusion behind theorising, and proposes a 'de-fetishised' theory via an example of theorising the smartphone.

🔓 **Mitchell, W.J.T. (2017). Counting media: Some rules of thumb.** *Media Theory*, **1(1), 12–16.**

Mitchell offers a discussion of what media theory is and how to theorise it. He suggests that media needs to be theorised according to several reference frameworks, including image/music/text (drawing on the work of Barthes), a model of communication, medium, time and pace.

🔓 **Munger, K., Guess, A.M. & Hargittai, E. (2021). Quantitative description of digital media: A modest proposal to disrupt academic publishing.** *Journal of Quantitative Description: Digital Media*, **1.**

As an introduction to the rationale for this new journal, this article criticises existing research that tends to reflect mainly dominant theories and conventional wisdom.

🔓 **Park, D.W., Pooley, J. & Simonson, P. (2021). History of media studies, in the plural.** *History of Media Studies*, **1.**

This editorial introduction discusses the historical development of media studies and the concept of 'media', and argues for decentring knowledge-making.

🔓 **Raetzsch, C. (2017). 10 propositions for doing media theory (again).** *Media Theory*, **1(1), 179–186.**

In this article, Raetzsch interrogates how digital media shape our perceptions, and questions what is commonly understood. The text offers 10 propositions on how to understand and do media theory, including that media theory is transnational, interdisciplinary and applied, and has a context, motivation and position.

🔓 **Rivard, S. (2021). Theory building is neither an art nor a science. It is a craft.** *Journal of Information Technology*, **36(3), 316–328.**

Rivard argues that researchers mistakenly hold the romantic view that theory is the result of a deductive process and should be flawless, while the outcomes of theorising are, in fact, often incomplete and require perseverance. Rivard offers a spiral model of theory building and proposes design principles.

🔓 **Sutton, R.I. & Staw, B.M. (1995). What theory is not.** *Administrative Science Quarterly*, **40(3), 371–384.**

This article discusses the importance of theory for social science and identifies several principles of what theory is not in an attempt to create guidance on how to create theory. [See also DiMaggio, P.J. (1995). Comments on 'What theory is not.' *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40(3), 391–397.]

🔓 **Swedberg, R. (2012). Theorizing in sociology and social science: Turning to the context of discovery.** *Theory and Society*, **41, 1–40.**

This article proposes a general structure of theorising that relies on exploring empirical evidence, creativity and (again) iteration. The basic steps of this model include observation, conceptualising and developing an early-stage theory with tentative explanations, and justification that puts the tentative theory to the test.

🔓 **Weick, K.E. (1995). What theory is not, theorizing is.** *Administrative Science Quarterly,* **40(3), 385–390.**

This article is a discussion of what theory is and its characteristics, including good and weak theorising.