THEORY.ORG.UK TRADING CARD

**Anthony Giddens**
British social theorist, born 1928. Prolific output. Theory of ‘structuration’ solved problem of whether individual acts, or major social forces, shape society, by asserting that it is the human agency which continuously reproduces social structure. This relationship means individuals can bring change. In the 1980s, Giddens fashioned theory on how selves find meanings, and create narratives of identity, in modern society.

**STRENGTHS**: Social analysis mixing classic and modern

**WEAKNESS**: Inadequate postmaterialist rest attack

**SPECIAL SKILLS**: Appreciation of impact of feminism

---

**THEORY.ORG.UK TRADING CARD

**Judith Butler**
American theorist, born 1956. Key figure in queer theory due to book Gender Trouble (1998), which argued that idea of two ‘biological’ sexes is just as socially constructed as gender is. Feminist discussion of men and women as separate groups – and all women as one coherent group – has only served to maintain this problem. Butler calls for proliferation at radical gender performances to subvert assumptions.

**STRENGTHS**: Crossgender, reconstructive critical skills

**WEAKNESS**: Hypersensitivity to personal attacks/irony

**SPECIAL SKILLS**: Offers radical lifestyle models

---

**THEORY.ORG.UK TRADING CARD

**Michel Foucault**
French thinker, 1926–1984. Earlier work noted how social order is maintained as people learn to keep checks on themselves. Later work saw self-identity as an active project, influencing queer theory. In The History of Sexuality, Foucault suggests power is not a fixed property held by certain groups, but is fluid and present in all interactions. Where power is exercised, resistance develops: this is a productive relationship.

**STRENGTHS**: Model of power: affects and analytic

**WEAKNESS**: Confusion of binary identities/sexuality

**SPECIAL SKILLS**: Happily rejects old models, creates new ones

---

**THEORY.ORG.UK TRADING CARD

Psychologists
Whilist fine when dealing with the clinical analysis and treatment of the brain within a biological–medical paradigm, psychics often attain knowledge of social realities of people life as psychological insight, ignoring the social variables which lead to the construction of particular interactions. See, for example, the useless analysis of social–human and mental behavior, or ‘media effects’, peddled on cheap TV shows every week.

**STRENGTHS**: Resistance to postmodern self-doubt

**WEAKNESS**: Doctrinaire theories thick people

**SPECIAL SKILLS**: Ancinet assurance of social factors

---

**THEORY.ORG.UK TRADING CARD

Postmodernity
Ambiguous, controversial concept. Postmodernism is characterised by a collapse of faith in meta-narratives (grand explanations) – see someone in postmodernism; nothing is fixed, and old certainties – from faith in science, or Marxism, or belief in a stable self – are gone. Consumerism provides satisfaction. Globalisation both universalises and individualises. Giddens and Butler discuss these symptoms but say it’s just ‘late modernity’.

**STRENGTHS**: Recognisable contemporary social analysis

**WEAKNESS**: May not fully describe a wholly new era

**SPECIAL SKILLS**: Virtually utopian-ness

---

**THEORY.ORG.UK TRADING CARD

Erving Goffman
American sociologist, 1922–1983, whose readable classic The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959) saw social interaction as ‘performances’ by individuals, which vary according to context, usually intended to please the current ‘audience’. Not merely micro-level social psychology, this book suggests how identities and impressions are reproduced on a grand scale (see Giddens and structuration, card #1).

**STRENGTHS**: New model of social action, really explored

**WEAKNESS**: May be too cynical. In my behaviour ‘real’

**SPECIAL SKILLS**: Accurately invented postmodernism

---

**THEORY.ORG.UK TRADING CARD

Theodor Adorno
Secular thinker, 1903-1969, Member of the Frankfurt School. Argued that popular media is the product of a 'culture industry' which keeps the population passive, preserving dominance of capitalism at the expense of true happiness. Mass media is schematised, and the pleasures it offers are literary – the result of ‘false gods’ which the culture industry creates. Argument is elitist, but that doesn’t mean it’s wrong necessarily.

**STRENGTHS**: New culture to be as important as economics

**WEAKNESS**: Heaven a result of cultural and popular contexts

**SPECIAL SKILLS**: Extreme anti-capitalist argument

---

**THEORY.ORG.UK TRADING CARD

Psychoanalysis
Multipurpose perspective, invented by Freud 1890–1939. Puts sex-based drives at the heart of everything, horribly abused by unimaginative film theorists and others who apply a stupid version of it to pop culture. Melanie Klein’s ‘Detachment’ and Pragmatism argues that the semi-conservative theory could be usefully appropriated by radicals, although Mitchell herself clearly loved Freud too much to use him very freely.

**STRENGTHS**: Unlimited focus on power of sexuality

**WEAKNESS**: Not everything can be explained by sex

**SPECIAL SKILLS**: bags impact on 20th century thought

---

**THEORY.ORG.UK TRADING CARD

Tracey Emin
British artist, born 1963. Uses all aspects of her life in her work, turning intimate autobiography into broader statements about everyday life, troubles and sex. Powerfully independent and yet desperately attached to friends and family, and her own past. Emin’s work reflects dilemmas of individual autonomy versus forces of society, history and memory. Also raises questions about selling one’s self for success.

**STRENGTHS**: Accessible, emotional art about life

**WEAKNESS**: Prolifically exploiting public’s desire vulnerability

**SPECIAL SKILLS**: Marketing high/impact stories of self

---