

Unit Essay Revisions

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SOCL 401: Sociological Theory

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UE1

Summary:

The changes I have made to the first unit essay are in the first question. I previously had left out Herbert Spencer as a key early figure in sociology. To fix this, I added a section explaining who Spencer was and his sociological contributions. Additionally, I fixed a small grammatical mistake when referring to Martineau. After reviewing, I am satisfied with the remaining pieces of my writing; I do a good job of explaining what sociological theory is and how it differs from theories of other disciplines.

Comte, Martineau, & Spencer: Early Figures and their Sociological Contributions

Since the 19th century, sociology has analyzed and evaluated behaviors, attitudes, and actions of society. Auguste Comte (1798-1857) is tabbed as the creator or founder of the term 'sociology.' Comte was a French man who grew up in a catholic family. Regardless of his educational opportunities and privileged upbringing, he had a hard time fitting in with his peers. Comte's views and beliefs were influenced by thinkers of the Enlightenment, which is the time period in which he grew up. Comte's turmoil-filled life, being accused of plagiarism by his mentor, having marital issues, being ostracized by various religious groups, and eventually attempting suicide, also played a role in shaping his beliefs and ways of thinking. Comte wanted to create a naturalistic science of sociology to be able to explain past developments and predict future behaviors of society (Coser, 2003, p.3). Comte is famous for writing *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, which explains the perspective of positivism. He also explored social dynamics, developed the law of three stages, and more using the method of inquiry.

British Woman Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) later edited and translated Comte's book so well that Comte eventually preferred her version of his own book (Wynn, 2016). Martineau, who was very progressive for her time, was an impressive writer and abolitionist. She was an English dissenter who enjoyed reading and challenged herself to find new perspectives or ways

of thinking. There were three factors that played big roles in shaping her ways of thinking: Her early life as a Unitarian, where she also lost hearing, creating overall unhappiness; traumatic events in her early adult life, including the suicide of her fiance; and her realization that she should use her writing abilities to educate members of society. Through Martineau's sociological writing contributions of feminism, morals and manners, and more, she aimed to create a science of society where people can make personal and political decisions based on their understanding of factors and principles that influence social life (Lengermann & Niebrugge, 2007, p. 31).

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), like Martineau, was a Dissenter. He had no formal education; his only education was being homeschooled by his father, where there was a large emphasis on science. Spencer lived around the same time period as Martineau, where their contextual experiences were similar. He was also very much influenced by the work of Comte, but he denied the claim. Spencer was focused on evolutionary changes in social structures and institutions. Spencer helped establish sociology as a scientific discipline by the idea that societies evolve like any other phenomena; sociology is a science that analyzes and finds the laws and rules that dictate the actions of people in society. He used the concept of growth, structure, and differentiation to view society. Other key concepts he used include militant and industrial societies, functionalism, social darwinism, and survival of the fittest.

What is Sociological Theory?

Sociological theory discusses and analyzes why people act and behave in certain ways in society; it is a set of assumptions and predictions of our society. Sociological theories have paradigms, which are ways to understand and make sense of the world. Ideas and beliefs of sociological theories are developed through experiences, past theories and works, collected data, and more. Any theory developed can never be proven because the future of society will never be

set in stone; society is constantly changing, and the future can only be predicted. As said by Steinheimer, sociological theories are “explanations about an aspect of society that we are interested in learning more about” (Steinheimer, 2020, p. 1). There are no “right” or “correct” theories. Instead, some theories are more accurate and consistent than others. Theories are constantly changing and used in different ways. Oftentimes, theories are not used and applied how they were intended to be by their creators. Due to unpredictable change in society, theorists will continue to refine and refute theories over time.

Sociological theories are focused on social phenomena, broken up at three levels: The micro level, the meso level, and the macro level. The micro level studies interactions at the individual level, like in families and relationships. The meso level analyzes groups of people and makes connections between individuals and groups; this includes organizations, communities, political parties, ethnic groups, and more. The macro level studies groups from a large, holistic stance, studying society as a whole; nations, legal systems, and economies are evaluated at this level. Without sociological theory, we would not have any foundation of understanding as to why society behaves in certain ways.

Uniqueness of Sociological Theories

As previously stated, sociological theories are meant to provide a paradigm to elaborate and make sense of broad phenomena and social realities. This is not seen in other theories. Not seen in scientific theories, scientific theorists use an iterative process to perfect their theories. Sociological theories are typically much more critical than scientific theories. Theories of science are rather objective and do not require assumptions to be made in the way sociological theories do. Edles & Appelrouth explain their differences by saying that scientific theories provide theories “to uncover what *is*, not what *ought to be*” (2010, p. 3). They are saying that

scientific theories are more present and immediate, whereas sociological theories are predictive in upcoming situations. Sociological theories are dynamic and ever-changing, where they can be argued and discussed in depth; scientific theories are much more black and white. Sociological theories differ depending upon location and time; they are not universal. Because humans are heavily influenced by their social surroundings, a theory may accurately apply to one community in society and not work in another area. The lack of structure and commonality in sociological theories compared to theories in the hard sciences tends to push many people away from learning. In turn, this topic attracts many because of its dynamic and gray structure. Sociological theory takes critical thinking, analysis, experience, and time to understand. It is a topic that can take time to make sense because it must be observed and learned from multiple perspectives, or points of view (Edles & Appelrouth, 2010). Sociological theory is a topic that will always be needed because society will continue to shift in unprecedented ways as long as it lasts.

UE2

Summary:

Other than some grammatical and word choice fixes, I did not change any content from the second unit essay. If I had to make it longer, I would add more examples of how DuBois' theories are prevalent in current and past American society.

Note: Red means I have deleted the highlighted word.

Historical Background & Major Concerns of W.E.B. DuBois - What Motivated his Interests?

W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963) was an American sociologist, professor, and civil rights activist. He helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and American Sociology. DuBois was born just a few years after the emancipation proclamation (1863) and the American Civil War (1861-1865). DuBois, a black man, grew up surrounded by racial injustices, discrimination, and other civil rights issues as the societal norm. After the Civil War, racial violence and issues grew. Segregation laws between races continued to be put in place across the country, and lynchings of Black people were not something to be known as uncommon. Between 1882 and 1901, the years of DuBois' late childhood and early adulthood, roughly 150 lynchings annually (Edles & Appelrouth, p. 326). Additionally, Jim Crow laws existed for the majority of his adult life, from 1896-1954. The Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968) was another historical event towards the end of his life. Growing up amid this time period, DuBois' sociological perspectives and way of thinking were heavily challenged and influenced. DuBois was the first African-American to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard University, but nevertheless was ignored by other American sociologists and white Americans because of his race; White reviewers would not look past the "bitterness" and

“hateful” stance that described his pieces of work (p. 326). Additionally, the sociological work and historical contributions of DuBois and Atlanta University were not considered important by society, and White sociologists’ racist pieces were supported and praised (Wright II). The historical events surrounding his life, as well as many other court cases and laws regarding racial injustice, are what sparked DuBois to develop his theories and concepts regarding issues of race and other sociological concepts in the United States as well as in other countries around the world.

W.E.B. Dubois’ Contributions

W.E.B. DuBois was so notable because of his sociological contributions towards Black people, who were at this time completely silenced and oppressed. W.E.B. DuBois He is credited with creating and developing the following key concepts: Double consciousness, the veil, the negro problem, the color line, race as socially constructed, multi-methods, critical theory, and critical race theory. Double consciousness is the idea that African Americans experience two different identities: One being Black and one being American. This concept says they struggle conforming to either Black culture or American culture, which is dominated by White people (Kaufman).

Like double consciousness, the concept of the veil also explains the Black experience in America. The veil mentions how Black people have darker skin than White people, suggests how Black people are not seen as true Americans by White people, and explains how Black people struggle to see themselves outside of their American expectations (Savory).

DuBois’ concept of the color line refers to the racial segregation and discrepancies between White and Black people. It was mentioned in his piece, “The Philadelphia Negro” (1899). In this reading, DuBois notes many different ways in which Black people were being

discriminated against by White people. Additionally, the concept that race is a social construction was influenced by DuBois. This means that race is categorized and based on biological characteristics including skin color, hair type, eye shape, and more. The social construction of race is a way for some to demonstrate power over others, and therefore has led to major consequences socially.

Current Relevance in DuBois' Theories and Concepts

DuBois' theories, concepts, and other contributions are very much relevant in today's society. The research done by DuBois and the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory, including studies like DuBois' *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), and *Social and Physical Condition, of Negroes in Cities* (1897) was "groundbreaking" and has influenced how sociologists do research today. These studies are where DuBois developed and expanded on many of his theories and concepts (Gonzales).

Racism and issues of race are very much alive in America as well as many other countries around the world. DuBois' concept of double consciousness is something many Black Americans experience in modern day America. For example, a Black person who has dreadlocks, which are associated with Black culture, may be denied a job from a company because they are not complying with "general standards" of appearance; these standards were created by White people. This person struggles with making a decision because they want to stay true to their Black culture, but they may have to cut them off if they want to be successful in a White-dominated American society.

The concept of the veil is prevalent in American society today. Many Black Americans continue to struggle with their identity as an American, especially when they do not feel accepted by their fellow White Americans. An example of a microaggression regarding this concept is

when a White American asks a Black American where they are from. The Black **American** then responds with “America.” The White person shoots back and says, “No, where are you really from?” **They are** alluding to the fact that Black people are not native to the United States (neither are Whites). This can give Black people a feeling of not belonging to their own country.

UE3

Summary:

The changes I have made in the third unit essay pertain to length of the essay, providing sources, and fully answering Question 3. I provided examples of the four kinds of capital using a source from course material. I also added information from a source in the second question to define cultural capital in further depth. After revising, each response is now fully answered with four total sources. Each response now has at least 250 words.

Who is Pierre Bourdieu? What were the major sociological concerns of this theorist?

Pierre Bourdieu is a late French theorist who lived from 1930-2002. He was a university graduate in Algeria who studied philosophy and sociology. He served in the French military in 1955 in the Algerian War of Independence. Bourdieu is known as one of the most influential sociologists of the 20th century; he is one of few sociological theorists that lived recently, who has had such a large impact on ideas and concepts of society.

Bourdieu aimed to comprehend why social inequalities continue through generations, how people retain wealth, and why the lower class accepts the upper class as those who are above or “elite.” Through his goal of understanding, Bourdieu wanted his work to free people of society from oppressive conditions, educate others about how our society is structured, and explain how society could be structured and organized in more efficient, less oppressive ways. Bourdieu was a major critic of the world of politics and media. His ideas and concepts have continued to remain strong in educational institutions.

Bourdieu grew up and lived during times of hardship and oppression for many. He grew up around the Great Depression, World War II, the decolonization of multiple countries, cultural shifts, including the baby boom after the end of World War II and artistic movements such as cubism, dada, and surrealism; and political changes, including civil unrest. Growing up around

times like these sparked Bourdieu to want to comprehend wealth and social inequalities. His sociological contributions benefited others fields of study, including political science and history (Truong & Weill).

What were Bourdieu's key theoretical contributions?

Bourdieu developed four kinds of capital: economic, social, symbolic, and cultural. Capital varies; some kinds of capital are tangible, some can be bought, some are given through experiences, and some hold knowledge. Capital is used to produce various levels of social class. It can be inherited from the past and continued over time. Economic capital includes material resources controlled by one. This form of capital is essential in a capitalistic society, as it creates a level of social class. Economic capital plays a role in creating social inequalities. This could include owning a home or stocks in the stock market. Symbolic capital is the ability to use symbols to create social realities. Symbolic capital gives people prestige; it creates a feeling of power issues or imbalances. For example, referring to someone as “professor” or “coach” creates a power dynamic. Social capital relates to who you know and are connected to. Cultural capital relates to how we act, talk, walk, and dress, in order to make sense of society. Not all cultural capital is the same. **Cultural capital is seen in three forms: in the embodied state, in the objectified state, and in the institutionalized state (Bourdieu, 1986).** Bourdieu developed the term habitus; it refers to the dispositions, attitudes, and values that shape an individual's perceptions of the world. Habitus differs depending on the environment in which someone lives in, and leads to inequality. It is a feel of how you should behave in society. It is less a set of social rules, and more so a skill one possesses when acting with others. Habitus is much like a language; it has rules and structure, but when you are speaking with someone else, whether it is a friend, family

member, or someone you do not know, you develop different things to say depending on the context, all while sticking to the structural rules (Ramsey, 2023).

How do you see Bourdieu's work as helping to understand society today?

Bourdieu's work helps us understand society by defining various concepts of society. His four kinds of capital help us understand how social classes are produced and are continued over time. For example, money is a type of economic capital. Money provides people with power and status. This is seen in politics where wealth leads to political influence and pull. Additionally, those who are wealthy and commit crimes have the ability to hire high quality, expensive lawyers to reduce severity as well as pay bail. An example of social capital is someone who has inside connections will sometimes get a job over someone who is much more qualified. An example of cultural capital may be wearing nice clothes or speaking in a proper manner; this varies depending on the culture. More specifically, an example of cultural capital in the embodied state is having access to a plethora of knowledge and books that others may not have; an example in the objectified state is only owning Apple products instead of Nokia; an example in the institutionalized state is having an undergraduate or doctorate degree, giving someone prestige or social status over someone with only a high school degree (Sociology Live!, 2015). An example of symbolic capital is having the blue check mark on a social media app for verification to show the importance or notability of an account. In regard to habitus, we are able to understand why or how someone has come to act the way they are because of their social class, or vice versa. Bourdieu's impact on society will continue on through generations.

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