

# **The Evolution of Sociology: A Deeper Look into Its Impact**

Gracie Trainum

Department of Sociology, Longwood University

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Dr. Pederson

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### Abstract

This paper dives deeper into the field of sociology and how it has evolved over time. The Industrial Revolution began in the 1760s and sparked the beginning of an area of study that would eventually become something so commendable. Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer left admirable contributions and their theories and beliefs are further discussed. A sociological theory is specific and complex and is defined by a testable set of ideas that helps us better understand the social world. Sociological theories differ from other scientific theories and provide much value to people in society. Through an evaluation of personal experiences, I discussed the importance and impact of sociology on society.

*Keywords:* Sociology, Industrial Revolution, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, theory, complex, society

### **The Establishment of Sociology**

The field of sociology has greatly evolved over time. Many contributions have been provided by certain figures, making it the dynamic discipline it is. Prior to the impactful work of Auguste Comte, who is known as the “Father of Sociology”, the Industrial Revolution began in the 1760s, forcing the urbanization of many areas. In effect to this process, cities began to form, and people confined themselves to one area. This brought along quite a few negative occurrences such as overcrowding, excessive pollution, and poverty (Pederson, 2022). The uncontrolled amounts of people made the accessibilities to adequate resources difficult. These challenges created a push for change within the political system, encouraging more of a democracy system. Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, colonization has evolved in many ways. People began to obtain private property and there was an increase in agriculture which created a high demand for labor. The increasing settlement of people brought along many new ideas and cultures. As people interacted, they realized not everyone understands the world the same. This sparked Auguste Comte’s creation of the Positivism philosophy, which stated that every belief can be reasonably justified. He left much contribution to the area of study as he was the one responsible for creating the term “sociology”, which he used for the first time in 1838 (Allan & Daynes, 2017).

Aside from the work of Comte, Herbert Spencer had a significant impact in the theory of sociology. He was one of the first people to see society from a sociological viewpoint (Pederson, 2024). Not only did he understand the complexities of a society, but he understood that society runs off many moving systems, and not merely based on people. His explanation is to the point—he wants to identify ways in which society works and what causes it to change. Herbert Spencer was raised by his father and uncle, who both followed the utilitarianism philosophy of Jerme

Bentham. They did not teach Spencer a formal curriculum and instead he grew his knowledge independently through organizations such as the X Club and the Athenaeum (Allan & Daynes, 2017). This is how he created his idea of social evolution and functionalism. He believes nature impacts everything, and just like organisms, societies need to adapt to survive (Pederson, 2024). Following his beliefs on evolution, he created the theory “Social Darwinism”, which is one of his most renowned theories. His view of society and its various levels impacted the work of many sociologists following his time.

### **Sociological Theory**

Theories are not strictly opinions, they are intricate, research based, and carefully analyzed. They provide us with an understanding of the essence of society and social behaviors and relationships. While no theory is identical to another, many theorists are influenced by the work of others and may use prior work to further study or build off. According to Wagner and Berger (1985), there has been considerable growth of theoretical progress since the beginning of sociology. Living in such a complex society, it can be difficult to understand the intricacy of the world, and theories aim to provide us with a better understanding of our nation. Aside from the positive impacts, theories bring challenges too. According to Jonathan Turner (2006), modern sociology is viewed as a hyper differentiation of theories. Theories have evolved over time and there is too many competing for an “attention space” in society.

There is a big difference when it comes to a belief versus a theory. A theory is testable and broadly applied (Pederson, 2022). If it cannot be, then it becomes a personal belief or can be viewed as a hypothesis. Without necessary research, there is no validity, therefore making it hard for an idea to be justified. Aside from certain misconceptions, the creation of theories involves a complicated process. The theory process will begin as a hypothesis and then that hypothesis will

be tested. If the hypothesis is not valid, then the researcher will start the process again with a new hypothesis. This does in fact happen in many cases which is why the process is so complex and time consuming.

### **What Makes Sociological Theory Different**

Sociological theory not only provides a more critical analysis but is more relevant and useful to people in society. Additionally, these theories are constantly changing to fit society whereas many scientific theories are created once and are expected to be used long term. Sociology is unique because it includes a look at a variety of other disciplines and institutions relevant amongst individuals. Some of these disciplines may include psychology, criminal justice, healthcare, history, economics, education, and other sciences. Scientific theories are specific and direct whereas sociological theory includes scientific research within it.

Since learning about sociological theories, I apply them daily. Especially being on a college campus, I am constantly making connections between behaviors and patterns that I witness which provides me with a better understanding of the functioning of the world around me. Not only do I understand how society functions, but I see what behaviors society thrives off. Speaking from personal experience, I do not commonly use other scientific theories, nor do I feel like they impact my daily life. Knowing how to think sociologically makes me a better person because I now base my decisions on the common good. If everyone viewed the world with a sociological eye, then the quality of our world would flourish which is why I believe sociological theory stands out among all other scientific theories.

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