Unit Essay Revisions

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SOCL 401: Sociological Theory

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Unit Essay 1 Revision

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SOCL 401: Sociological Theory

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Summary of Revisions: For this Unit Essay, I made several revisions. After re-reading my paper, I changed the wording in several places. This helped get my point across and make my claims stronger throughout the paper. However, I spent most of my work in the sections relating to early theorists and their contributions. This was where I lost points, but after re-reading it the sentences were very short, making minimal claims. I explained the contributions I stated originally, and added more that I felt were necessary to describe the theorist and their work. Overall, the changes I made helped the paper read better, make more sense, and make stronger claims relating to the contributions of individual theorists.

Unit Essay 1 Revision

Sociology is a relatively new field of science. Auguste Comte first coined the term to study human society, interactions, and behavior (Allan & Daynes, 2017). Over the years, new research and information has added to the discipline. Several theorists have been credited with the creation and building the foundation of sociology. Marx, Durkheim, and Weber are names that may come to mind when thinking of the discipline of sociology. However, other theorists made early contributions to the field. These contributions, though significant, were often overlooked and kept from the recount of the history of the discipline.

A sociological theory is a way to view to world and to make sense of social phenomenon occurring from a particular standpoint (Edles & Appelrouth, 2010). Each theory takes a certain perspective to explain social occurrences, differentiating theories from one another. In sociology, theories include understanding and applying past events to help us better understand the present and even the future. The history of what has happened is important in understanding currently occurring events. By analyzing the past through sociological theories, we also know that it is necessary to understand the context of social phenomenon (Sternheimer, 2018). When

developing theories, theorists emphasize and use their current socio-historical events to create their theory. Events that occur during the theorists' lives influence their thinking and the theories that come from it.

Sociological theories help sociologists to make sense of data they collect during research. Theories can connect the data to the social world and find practical applications that can help society develop. Additionally, sociological theories can help in understanding the different inequalities that are present in our society. Constructs like race, gender, and social class are influential in the study of sociology and have been utilized by theorists in creating their theories (Lengermann & Niebrugge, 2007; Wynn, 2016). Overall, sociological theories help us to make sense of our social world and how we fit into it, including human behavior and specific social events that may occur.

Sociological theories are unique from other scientific theories. Natural science theories rely on the objectivity that the scientific method provides (Edles & Appelrouth, 2010). While the scientific method can be used to study society, sociological theories rely on moral assumptions (Edles & Appelrouth, 2010). This is a feature that tends to not be associated with science because objectivity is the preferred method of acquiring knowledge. However, sociologists seek to understand how society works and how society can be improved to create a more equal social order (Edles & Appelrouth, 2010). These moral assumptions will guide sociologists' study of the behavior they believe to be the proper way to behave. Different sociological theories will be guided by different moral assumptions, based on the perspective the theory is viewing social phenomenon from.

Another characteristic that makes sociological theories unique from other scientific theories is that they tend to be evaluative rather than predictive. Natural science theories want to

predict future occurrence of events. However, society is always changing so no theory would ever be able to accurately predict future social events. The context, individuals, and interactions of social events will never be consistent therefore predicting events would be difficult, if not impossible.

The way these theories explain events also differ. Natural science theories seek to discover universal laws that apply across all situations and time to explain some phenomenon that occurs naturally (Edles & Appelrouth, 2010). It is assumed that these natural occurring events will remain relatively consistent overtime. However, society and humans within it are not consistent over time. Society is dynamic and always changing (Edles & Appelrouth, 2010). Because humans, their behavior, and their social interactions are always changing, theorists will never be able to create a universal law that can apply across all time and situations to describe society. The subject matter of these two scientific areas is fundamentally different, and therefore they cannot be studied the same way.

Several theorists work have been minimized and overlooked in the historical counts of the discipline of sociology. One of those theorists was Auguste Comte, who was in fact the first individual to use the term sociology. Comte described society through social dynamics and social statics. Dynamics relate to the ever-changing aspects within our society, while statics are the aspects of society that remain constant over time (Allan & Daynes, 2017). Comte was raised to believe in education for all, which can be see though his contributions to the field, namely his work in positivism. Positivism centers around knowledge and the idea that the human mind is limitless in its potential to gain knowledge (Allan & Daynes, 2017). This knowledge will progress though three stages: theological knowledge to understand why, metaphysical knowledge as a transition, and finally positive knowledge to understand how something works (Allan &

Daynes, 2017). Comte also wanted to provide methods to study society. He proposed four scientific methods to study society in a naturalistic manner. These were: observation, comparison, experimentation, and the historical method (Allan & Daynes, 2017). These methods can still be utilized today to study social phenomenon.

Another theorist whose work has been overlooked was Harriet Martineau. Martineau was concerned with feminism, mainly interested in how women should be included in the study of sociology because they have a different view of society than the men that dominated the field. Her feminism aimed to bring about social change, limiting and eradicating the inequalities that separated women from men. Through her work, she held that the idea of gender was a social construction, providing more support for the claims to address these inequalities. Like Comte, Martineau was also interested in providing methods to study sociology. Martineau's explanation came from morals, manners, things, and the discourse of persons. Morals are beliefs held throughout a society, while manners are how individuals act and behave in accordance with those morals (Allan & Daynes, 2017). Martineau believed that you must analyze the agreement or disagreement between these two concepts to understand society and how it will change. To measure morals and manners, she used things (as in literal things or objects) and the discourse of person (the interactions between people) to see the potential connection or disconnect between society's morals and individual's manners. Martineau was ultimately curious on how society and democracy would continue to progress over time.

Finally, Herbert Spencer was another theorist whose work has been minimized in the history of the discipline. Spencer was particularly interested in how societies change and evolve over time. He examined the growth, structure, and differentiation that occurs as societies evolve and develop (Allan & Daynes, 2017). Growth relates to more people becoming part of a society,

structure is how the institutions within society change to reflect this growth, and differentiation relates to how societies change to have different demographic characteristics within them. Spencer was interested in how societies self-regulate and organize within themselves, proposing two types of society. Militant societies are more strict with set guidelines, while industrial societies are more peaceful. Finally, he used the positivism look and sought to explain society as a naturally occurring event in the environment (Allan & Daynes, 2017). Building off his ideas, we can gain a better understanding of society in general.

Overall, sociological theory can be helpful in explaining social events. Sociological theories are unique to the discipline. Society is always changings so it cannot be studied in the same way as natural science. Overtime, sociological theory has evolved and developed, but Auguste Comte, Harriet Martineau, and Herbert Spencer were early theorist who laid the groundwork for how we understand sociology today.

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Unit Essay 2 Revision

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SOCL 401: Sociological Theory

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Summary of Revisions: After re-reading this Unit Essay, I made several changes in sentence structure and wording. This helped to make the sentence clearer and get my point across. I also fixed several spelling and wording errors so that they were correct. When re-reading, I noticed by answer to the major concerns of Weber was weaker than my other answers in the essay. I noticed this, before realizing that is what I lost my points on. I revised the paragraph to more accurately reflect his concerns about sociology according to our lectures and readings.

Unit Essay 2 Revision

Max Weber was a German sociologist who made significant contributions to the field of sociology. He lived during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with most of his work published during the early 1900s (Allan & Daynes, 2017). Weber's main concern was to create an interpretive form of sociology to understand the subjective meanings behind individual's behavior (Allan & Daynes, 2017). Understanding the meaning behind social behaviors impacts our social interactions and the broader society. By seeking to understand this area, Weber sought to understand social change and how society came to its current state. Weber also wanted to know how to create the most effective and efficient society. Rationalization is the process of making conscious choices to reach efficiency as a society (Allan & Daynes, 2017). Weber claims that how individuals make sense of social occurrence is the most important part of sociology, but social events are always tied to people (Sternheimer, 2018). Ultimately, Weber was interested in examining how social interactions and behaviors impact society.

Despite past work by theorists such as Comte, Weber created new understandings of sociology compared to other sciences. He saw social science different from natural science in what the researchers determine needs to be studied. Research methods was not the only way these sciences were different. However, Weber did create the idea that value neutrality was

needed to conduct research. This means noticing how your own values as a researcher could cause bias and overcoming these biases to engage in research and fully understand another's perspective. Finally, Weber rejected the positivist perspective of sociology. He believed that through research, there could be generalizable laws relating to human behavior within society. By understanding these concepts, there would be a greater understanding of the broader society and how to incite change.

Weber made several important contributions to the study of sociology. One of these contributions was the creation of the concept of verstehen. Verstehen is a German term that Weber used in sociology to mean "understanding". Weber claimed verstehen to be an empathetic understanding of the meaning behind behaviors from the view of individuals performing the behavior (Allan & Daynes, 2017; Raskoff, 2011). This concept is very important because it includes taking the perspective of the individual to understand the meaning. How individuals attribute meaning to different social actions is highly subjective, so considering different perspectives adds to the understanding of the broader social world. As sociologists consider the different perspectives, combining the meanings as individuals assign them to the social world help in establishing a systematic account of the social world in general.

Another important concept Weber contributed to sociology was that of ideal types. An ideal type is a mental conception of a categorization of a social phenomenon. This is used to analyze social phenomenon based on some characteristics that are commonly found in this phenomenon (Allan & Daynes, 2017). The ideal type is not meant to be comprehensive of every possible characteristic a social phenomenon could demonstrate, but just the major characteristics that are usually observed with the social phenomenon. Weber believed ideal types were used to create objective knowledge even with subjective experiences being an important part in

understanding social occurrences (Allan & Daynes, 2017). Most of the time, even if there is an ideal type of a social phenomenon, the true state of the event will vary from that ideal type.

Finally, Weber made contributions in different types of authority and bureaucracy. Authority relates to the reasoning people provide for claiming power in social situations and structures. There are three types of authority as described by Weber. First, charismatic authority is when the personality of the leader is why they claim power (Allan & Daynes, 2017). Then, traditional authority is respecting the tradition and the methods of what has always been done to have power (Allan & Daynes, 2017). Finally, rational-legal authority is power that is allowed by the law and positions given in society (Allan & Daynes, 2017). While authority relates to power of individuals, a bureaucracy is the organized and routine ways in which society interacts and completes activities (Allan & Daynes, 2017; Poling, 2021). Bureaucracies rely on authority, as they have a structure with laws, procedures, and order that must be followed. The aim of a bureaucracy is to reach a goal which leaders determined through hierarchal authority, using the correct methods set through the organization (Poling, 2021).

Although Max Weber's work in nearing 100 years old, many of his concepts are still used in studying sociology today. The concept of bureaucracy is still very important today as it is applied to groups and institutions. For example, Longwood University can be examined as a bureaucracy. An institution like Longwood has rules and procedures that have a set order to be completed in. Additionally, authority figures play a role by being the ones to choose right from wrong by creating policies for the university. Longwood University has an effective and efficient way of completing work and keeping order. Additionally, verstehen is used to understand the subjective meanings. A group may have different values, beliefs, and practices than another group. Looking in from the outside, individuals may not understand these practices. But looking

at the behaviors for the perspective of the acting group can help us understand how society works. For example, if a researcher is curious about why a political group behaves the way they do at rallies or protests, they can observe and discuss with the individuals in that group to learn their motivations. By gaining this deeper understanding and being empathetic, even if they do not agree with the views, the researcher can understand the broader social phenomenon of the world in which they live. Weber's contributions to sociology continue to provide analytical tools for researchers to use to understand individual and broad social phenomenon.

In conclusion, Max Weber was an influential sociologist. He made several key contributions to the field, including the concepts of verstehen, ideal types, and bureaucracy. Even though is work has been around for almost 100 years, the staying power persists. Sociologists and researchers continue to use Weber's concepts to understand the world around them.

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Unit Essay 3 Revision

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SOCL 401: Sociological Theory

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Summary of Revisions: I re-read this Unit Essay and made changes to some sentences to make it flow better and easier to read. I also changed some wording to make my points clearer. However, looking at the rubric I noticed I did only cite three different pieces of course material. But there were no other course readings relating to symbolic interactionism. Therefore, I used a reading from the beginning of the course to create a stronger connection to the usefulness of symbolic interactionism in real-world settings. With this additional reading, I used symbolic interactionism as a way to look at the study of sociology at its beginning (applying sociology to sociology!).

Unit Essay 3 Revision

Symbolic interactionism is a well-known theoretical tradition within sociology. A sociological theory is a group of ideas and practices that develop from multiple research projects that provide a way to explain social phenomenon (Sternheimer, 2020). Symbolic interactionism is one of those theories that are used by sociologists to understand social behavior. This theory mainly deals with the meanings individuals assign to physical objects in the social world. Two main sociological theorists were credited with the creation of symbolic interactionism as we know it today. By understanding the basic claims of this theory, we can apply it to behavior today.

The main concerns with this theoretical tradition are meaning, language, thought, social interactions, symbols, and a definition of a situation. These six factors are important in the overall understanding of symbolic interactionism. To begin, meaning is some emotion or feeling that is conveyed between people about an object for a certain reason (Allan & Daynes, 2017). Through conversation and interactions, individuals will create a meaning to give an object. That meaning is largely individualized based on individual's experiences. Language is the way humans communicate with one another, the unique gestures and words that humans use to share

the experiences and meaning (Allan & Daynes, 2017). Humans are a uniquely social species that communicate to share their meanings. Thought is the way individual's understanding of symbols and situations changes through different roles (Allan & Daynes, 2017). The way people's minds work and change their thoughts makes it very difficult to understand and study human behavior.

Social interactions are used to build society, providing the motivation for human behavior, which are the sequence of social actions between people (Allan & Daynes, 2017). This helps individuals to understand meaning and respond as expected of them in social settings. Symbols, the basis of symbolic interactionism, are something that represent another object (Allan & Daynes, 2017). Symbols are important to understand how the meanings are important to the individual. Finally, defining a situation is important so that someone knows what behaviors are expected of them and how to abide by the norms given the context of the situation (Allan & Daynes, 2017). This helps understand the other roles in a situation and how an individual fits into the situation. Overall, through social interactions we as humans learn meanings associated with objects. We are able to use the meanings we have learned through socialization to guide our behavior in certain contexts.

Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead were the two sociological theorists who were credited with the formation of symbolic interactionism theory. Cooley's major contribution to the theoretical tradition is the idea of the looking-glass self. This is how an individual can view themselves from the perspective of another individual to see how others perceive will perceive that individual. We imagine how we present ourselves to others, which then informs how we think about how others evaluate us, to finally develop our feelings based on our imagined presentation and evaluation from others. Cooley's work help develop the idea of the self, forming how an individual creates their own identities. Mead furthered Cooley's ideas,

developing further the idea of the self. Mead used the idea of role-taking, when children imitate others around them, to inform how they understand themselves and what is expected of them (Allan & Daynes, 2017). As children play, they develop their sense of self that helps us determine what behaviors are expected of us and the norms that are place on us based on the roles we are in (Allan & Daynes, 2017).

Both Cooley and Mead use the formation of a self as a way to understand and rationalize our individual behavior, a fact that makes us uniquely human (Allan & Daynes, 2017). The way individuals use their current role and norms set to guide their behavior is an idea that Cooley and Mead made big contributions. Mead particularly understood that the "I" is the impulsive self, while the "Me" is the social part of the self (Allan & Daynes, 2017). Using the role you internalize in a particular situation and the expectation you have learned through socialization, you know how to act and what behaviors are appropriate.

I can see Cooley and Mead's work demonstrating this theoretical tradition in many ways. Symbolic interactionism deals with the meanings individuals assign to given objects and social occurrences. However, to understand a social event or object, you must understand your role towards that object. For example, to understand college courses and the meanings behind it, we must consider our role. As a college student, the meaning I give college courses in a graduation requirement, but I also take it to define myself as a student. Through my language, mostly my college application essay, the meaning was conveyed. I understand my role as a student is to learn and listen to the professor. When I attend classes and turn in assignments, I am aware of my concept of self but am also able to put myself in the perspective of the professor. Will my work get an "A"? Am I being a good student? These are questions I may ask myself that relates to both role taking and the looking-glass self-concepts created by Mead and Cooley.

Another example is when I am a tour guide. I know my role and how to use language to convey the meanings I have created (as well as the history) towards each building on Longwood's campus. I interact with other individuals to convey these meanings, hopefully influencing their thoughts as they learn about campus. I know that I am the authority figure in these situations, so I feel more comfortable sharing my experiences. One part of tours that is especially symbolic is the meaning association with the physical symbols of the Crown and Rotunda at Longwood. They represent our secret societies, which is totally different than their physical representation. The major concepts of symbolic interactionism and the work of Cooley and Mead are clearly seen through these two social events that occur regularly in my own life.

A final example of symbolic interactionism is looking at the study of sociology itself. Wynn (2016) describes that sociology has long been dominated by white men. The meaning individual's associate with this statement differ depending on the interactions we have through our lives. Furthermore, individuals will use different language depending on the meaning they understand. This guides our thoughts and actions as we discuss this topic. White, male individuals may define this situation knowing their advantages in the past. They may understand that they have always had this opportunity when it has been denied to others. I came to this conclusion using role-taking. Looking at myself (like the looking glass-self), people would expect me to be frustrated or even upset at the lack of women that have previously been represented in the study of sociology. Through this example, I was able to apply sociological theory to an example of sociology itself, using key concepts from Cooley and Mead.

Overall, symbolic interactionism is an important tool to understand social behavior. It helps us to understand the meaning physical objects have in our social world and how these meanings can be shared. We are able to explain these phenomena and predict behavior for these

individuals should it occur again (Edles & Appelrouth, 2010). Symbolic interactionism is an

important sociological theoretical tradition that is likely to continue to be useful for years to

come.

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