

UE Revisions

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Based on the feedback that I received on my first unit essay of the semester, I mistakenly omitted several different contributions from each of the three sociologists I chose to write about. However, I made sure to include as much information as possible in my remaining two unit essays and got grades that I am much more proud of, so I do not feel as though I have to make revisions on those. Therefore, for my first unit essay, I made a few key changes to my paragraphs on Comte, Martineau, and Spencer to ensure that I included all of the necessary information. For Comte, I talked a bit more about his methods of inquiry and the law of three stages as I had previously left those out or had talked about them very vaguely. For Martineau, I left out a bit more information as I primarily focused on her research on morals and manners. I talked more about her contributions of “things and discourse of persons”, impartiality, sympathy, critique, domination, and feminism. For Spencer, I added more on his contributions of social Darwinism, survival of the fittest, growth, structure, and differentiation as I mainly talked about his beliefs on evolution within society.

UE 1

Sociology has been a growing practice in past years, but many early sociologists had to work incredibly hard in order to establish the legitimacy of sociology as a social science discipline. Some of these early sociologists include Auguste Comte, Harriet Martineau, and Herbert Spencer. Auguste Comte is often given credit for creating the word sociology, which he referred to as “social physics” originally, and for providing us with the beginning of the framework for this new social science (Allan & Daynes, 2017, Chapter 1). He also proposed four different scientific methods of inquiry in which sociologists could draw their knowledge and research from, known as observation, experimentation, comparison, and historical method. Within his findings, he hoped to be able to explain the past evolutions within society, as well as the future developments (Coser, 2003). He did so with his theory on knowledge, known as positivism, in which he stated that logic, data, and science were the only ways that society could be understood and explained.

Comte also focused on the importance of both the stable forces and the changing forces within society, which he called social statics and stable dynamics, and how they both allow for societies to grow and create order and function (Coser, 2003). He believed that society evolves in three stages which he referred to as the theological stage, the metaphysical stage, and the scientific stage, and that each stage must be destroyed in order for society to progress. He believed that this transitory process could be applied to many different aspects of life and society.

Harriet Martineau was another significant sociologist who aimed to better understand interactions within society by using the study of sociology. She did so by focusing specifically on morals and manners within society, or the factors that explain the ways in which people behave

in society and the noticeable patterns of behavior among people in society (Lengermann & Niebrugge, 2007). She believed that these actions were both influenced by physical objects with meanings and the interactions among people. She also argued that both morals and manners could not exist on their own and that they had to coexist in order for these concepts to have meaning (Lengermann & Niebrugge, 2007). When studying morals and manners, she emphasized the importance of impartiality, critique, and sympathy, which are now major contributions to research methods.

She stated that finding representations of these morals and manners was important in understanding why people act in certain ways, and could be explained by “things” and “discourse of persons”. In her work, “things” could be defined as objects in society which embody the common good, and “discourse of persons” as the verbal or non-verbal languages and interactions between people (Lengermann & Niebrugge, 2007). Throughout her research on morals and manners, she found that there was domination within groups in US society and that slavery, the treatment of women, and the fetishizing of wealth were prime examples. She was heavily inspired by Comte’s work on positivism, and even received praise from Comte himself for her work, but her work was often overlooked due to her gender (Allan & Daynes, 2017, Chapter 7). Martineau was also a feminist and believed that the presence and lived experiences of women played a critical role in sociology, research, and social change.

Herbert Spencer was also influenced by Comte’s work, but unlike Martineau, he denied Comte’s ideas. He focused on evolution within society and believed that was the concept that best explained changes within past societies and future societies (Coser, 2003). He also proposed that there were two different kinds of societies - militant and industrial. He believed that society was a system, and that the type of society one became was dependent upon how societies

regulated and governed themselves. As a result, he believed that as society evolved, so did the individuals living within them, and he applied his concept of social Darwinism in that only those who were the most “fit” would thrive, therefore leading to “survival of the fittest”. He is also often credited for laying down the groundwork for the functionalism theory and his evolutionary stages were those of growth, structure, and differentiation (Allan & Daynes, 2017, Chapter 2).

Karen Sternheimer (2020) defines sociological theory as a constantly growing collection of explanations or ideas about a certain part of society that we are intrigued by. Sociological theories are often a way in which we can make sense of the world that we are living in (Edles & Appelrouth, 2010). They can also help to determine who has power and what is considered important based on the time period. Unlike a hypothesis, a theory is often based on past observations and research. A hypothesis differs in that it is an educated guess that is typically based on observations about something involving personal experiences (Sternheimer, 2020). Sociological theory is important in that it provides us with a framework to help us understand the world better and it can also help us understand the ways in which people interact within society. Sociological theories are constantly being reformed and built upon based on the times that society is living in and what is going on in the world around us. Therefore, sociological theories can show that there is not one set law or way of thinking about society and the people that interact within it.

Sociological theory is similar to other scientific theories in that they each focus on something that can often be measurable and observable. However, sociological theory differs from other scientific theories in multiple ways. Firstly, sociological theories are not always intended to be proven or predictive (Sternheimer, 2020). Newton’s Law of Motion theory, for instance, is a scientific theory that can be predictive. There is typically no right or wrong answer

in sociological theory. Sociological theories are constantly being added to by other sociologists and other research. Additionally, theories in sociology are focused on society as a whole in comparison to other natural sciences (Edles & Appelrouth, 2010). Since society itself is always changing and growing based on different time periods and cultural events, theories are also constantly changing and evolving. On the other hand, theories in other natural sciences often create something that can be tested, and therefore these theories can often be proven or disproven (Edles & Appelrouth, 2010). Secondly, other scientific theories often avoid personal thoughts and assessments and focus solely on the science. Within sociological theory, personal thoughts and assessments are strongly encouraged and often necessary as these theories often involve criticisms and judgements (Edles & Appelrouth, 2010).

Works Cited

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