

Social and Cultural Change

Social change refers to any significant alteration over time in behavior patterns and cultural values and norms. By “significant” alteration, sociologists mean changes yielding *profound* social consequences.

Social change refers to an alteration in the social order of a society. Social change may be driven by cultural, religious, economic, scientific or technological forces. More generally, social change may include changes in nature, social institutions, social behaviours or social relations.

Social change in sociology the alteration within the social structure, characterized by changes in cultural symbols, rules of behaviour, social organizations, or value systems.

How Change can occur?

While technology, population, environment factors, and racial inequality can prompt social change, only when members of a society organize into social movements does true social change occur. The phrase **social movements** refers to collective activities designed to bring about or resist primary changes in an existing society or group.

Wherever they occur, social movements can dramatically shape the direction of society. When individuals and groups of people—civil rights activists and other visionaries, for instance—transcend traditional bounds, they may bring about major shifts in social policy and structures. Even when they prove initially unsuccessful, social movements do affect public opinion.

Models of Social Change

Evolutionary theory

According to **evolutionary theory**, society moves in specific directions. Therefore, early social evolutionists saw society as progressing to higher and higher levels. As a result, they concluded that their own cultural attitudes and behaviors were more advanced than those of earlier societies.

Identified as the “father of sociology,” Auguste Comte subscribed to social evolution. He saw human societies as progressing into using scientific methods. Likewise, Emile Durkheim, one of the founders of functionalism, saw societies as moving from simple to complex social structures. Herbert Spencer compared society to a living organism with interrelated parts moving toward a common end. In short, Comte, Durkheim, and Spencer proposed **unilinear evolutionary theories**, which maintain that all societies pass through the same sequence of stages of evolution to reach the same destiny.

Contemporary social evolutionists like Gerhard Lenski, Jr., however, view social change as multilinear rather than unilinear.

Multilinear evolutionary theory holds that change can occur in several ways and does not inevitably lead in the same direction. Multilinear theorists observe that human societies have evolved along differing lines.

Functionalist theory

Functionalist sociologists emphasize what maintains society, not what changes it. Although functionalists may at first appear to have little to say about social change, sociologist Talcott Parsons holds otherwise. Parsons (1902–1979), a leading functionalist, saw society in its natural state as being stable and balanced. That is, society naturally moves toward a state of *homeostasis*. To Parsons, significant social problems, such as union strikes, represent nothing but temporary rifts in the social order. According to his **equilibrium theory**, changes in one aspect of society require adjustments in other aspects. When these adjustments do not occur, equilibrium disappears, threatening social order. Parsons' equilibrium theory incorporates the evolutionary concept of continuing progress, but the predominant theme is stability and balance.

Critics argue that functionalists minimize the effects of change because all aspects of society contribute in some way to society's overall health. They also argue that functionalists ignore the use of force by society's powerful to maintain an illusion of stability and integration.

Conflict theory

Conflict theorists maintain that, because a society's wealthy and powerful ensure the status quo in which social practices and institutions favorable to them continue, change plays a vital role in remedying social inequalities and injustices.

Although Karl Marx accepted the evolutionary argument that societies develop along a specific direction, he did not agree that each successive stage presents an improvement over the previous stage. Marx noted that history proceeds in stages in which the rich always exploit the poor and weak as a class of people. Marx's view of social change is proactive; it does not rely on people remaining passive in response to exploitation or other problems in material culture. Instead, it presents tools for



individuals wishing to take control and regain their freedom. Unlike functionalism and its emphasis on stability, Marx holds that conflict is desirable and needed to initiate social change and rid society of inequality.

Causes of Social Change:

1. Technological and Economic Changes: (Agriculture advancement, industrialization)
2. Modernization: standardizing as towards modern tools (Life Style, Technology)
3. Urbanization: Moving population from rural areas to urban (Cities) areas.
4. Bureaucratization: Extreme emphasize on rules and regulation, impersonality.
5. Conflict and Competition: War: due to religion, ethnic tensions, competition for resources. Gender and Women's Movement: equal pay, property: Today; day care, occupational segregation.
6. Political and Legal Power: Elected Official (Government) & Unelected Officials (Corporative Force)
7. Ideology: Religious Belief, Political or Regional Conviction.
8. Diffusion: Spreading the ones cultural to another culture.
9. Acculturation: the process in which a minority is absorbed into the majority and entirely loses its distinctiveness.

Social order It refers to a set of linked social structures, social institutions and social practices which conserve, maintain and enforce "normal" ways of relating and behaving.

Social progress is the idea that societies can or do improve in terms of their social, political, and economic structures.

Sociocultural evolution is an umbrella term for theories of cultural evolution and social evolution, describing how cultures and societies have changed over time.

Goals of Social Change Activity

Resistance — action to defend or protect established everyday life from new, outside oppression and return things to normal.

A society is considered more "free" the more that people are safe from new oppression. Typically, groups that have thrown off their oppressors or have achieved a certain level of privilege resist any change that might restrain their freedom. Resistance can therefore be quite reactionary.

Liberation (Empowerment) — action to overcome on-going, traditional oppression and achieve the full measure of everyday rights and opportunities promised in the social charter ("social\ justice"). A society is more "just" the more that every person can obtain the freedoms that others enjoy.

Democratization (Enfranchisement) — action to spread decision- making power broadly to everyone affected by those decisions. A society is more "democratic" the more that people can influence and decide the important issues that affect them without extraordinary effort (that is, through their daily routine).

Humane-ization — action to ensure that society will defend or protect the rights of everyone in society, especially those who cannot do so on their own behalf (such as those who are ignorant, powerless, sick, frail, mentally incompetent, young, or unborn). A society is more "humane" or "altruistic" the more that every person is protected and supported through the routine, everyday activities of others (including societal institutions).

Cultural Change

The belief that culture is symbolically coded and can thus be taught from one person to another means that cultures, although bounded, can change. Cultures are both predisposed to change and resistant to it. Resistance can come from habit, religion, and the integration and interdependence of cultural traits.

Cultural change can have many causes, including: the environment, inventions, and contact with other cultures. Several understandings of how cultures change come from Anthropology. For instance, in diffusion theory, the form of something moves from one culture to another, but not its meaning.

Contact between cultures can also result in acculturation. Acculturation has different meanings, but in this context refers to replacement of the traits of one culture with those of another.