

16. Social Change

Objectives

- Compare and contrast modern and traditional societies
- Identify and evaluate theories of social change
- Analyze and evaluate factors that influence social change

Vocabulary

convergence theory	macro-change	neo-evolutionary theory	sensate culture
divergence theory	micro-change	principle of imminent change	social change
equilibrium theory	modernization		social differentiation
ideational culture			unilinear process

Background

In this chapter, students learn how and why social change takes place. The chapter analyzes social change from functionalist, conflict, and interactionist perspectives; discusses common causes of social change; describes the process of social change; and analyzes the roles of individuals in social change.

In treating theories of social change, students learn about functionalist perspectives, including the ideas of Auguste Comte, Herbert Spenser, Ferdinand Tönnies, Emile Durkheim, Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, Pitirim Sorokin, and Talcott Parsons. Students also look at Karl Marx as an example of a conflict perspective and survey the general ideas of the interactionist perspective. They discover that no perspective is complete and that all theories of social change have their strong and weak points.

Students then identify and analyze six factors that contribute to social change: environment, population, social structure, technology, modernization and economic development, and human action. Specific examples from American history and from everyday life show the relevance of these factors to our society today.

Students analyze the complex consequences of even micro-changes through the chapter's sidebars about replacing stone axes with steel in a traditional society and about replacing other forms of communication with computers in our modern society. In both cases, students learn that social changes can ripple through society in unexpected ways.

Students also examine three processes of social change: invention, discovery, and diffusion. They explore the connections between cultural and technological change and look at some of the major social changes that are challenging our society.

At the end of the chapter, students examine four roles of individuals in social change, distinguishing among supporters, resisters, passives, and adaptives. Students also analyze how the roles of a given individual might change over time.

Further Resources

- Cieri, Marie and Claire Peeps, eds. *Activists Speak Out: Reflections on the Pursuit of Change in America*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001.
- Colomy, Paul. *The Dynamics of Social Systems*. New York: Sage Press, 1992.

For Discussion

Review

1. What is the difference between a traditional society and a modern society?
2. Who are eight sociologists who have looked at social change from a functionalist perspective?
3. What are some technological developments that have caused social change?
4. What are four different roles that individuals play in social change?

Critical Thinking

1. What are some elements of traditional societies that are still present in the United States and in other modern societies?
2. Which of the three functionalist perspectives comes closest to your view, and why?
3. What are some positive and negative ways in which personal computers are creating social change? Give reasons for your views.
4. What are some examples from American history of how conflict has led to social change?
5. Based on the trends you see around you today, what social changes do you expect to occur in the future? Support your opinions with concrete examples.

Activities

1. Social Change: A Global Perspective

Assign each student a different country to research, or divide the class into continental or regional teams. Have students use almanacs, U.S. State Department and United Nations publications, and other reliable sources to list the major social changes that are taking place within each country or region. Reports should include predictions on where these social changes might lead.

2. American Individualism and Social Change

Ask students to identify individuals from American history whose lives have created great social changes. Have students read biographies of those people as well as books and articles about their influence in society. Reports to the class should include the mechanisms and techniques that these individuals used to spread social change. This activity can also be related to science by having students research Thomas Edison and other inventors.

3. Internet: Interpersonal Debates

Organize a classroom debate of this resolution: Use of the Internet is changing social interactions in mostly positive ways. Discuss how the Internet might create negative and positive social changes. Before the event, pose the issue as an Internet opinion poll and invite students in the school to email their opinions to the class.

4. Special Sources: Social Changes in the Ads

Have students find old magazines, mail-order catalogs, and other materials that contain product advertisements. Ask them to find examples of ways in which the advertisements reflect the social changes that have taken place within the society. Students should identify both micro-changes, such as changes in dress, and larger trends, such as the shift to ever more comfortable clothing for work.

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As you read Chapter 16, write an answer to each question below.

1. Explain the difference between the convergence and divergence theories of social change. What big idea do the two theories have in common?

2. According to functionalists, what are three explanations for social change?

3. What are the differences between the conflict and interactionist perspectives of social change?

4. What are six factors that can cause social change?

5. What factors in our society are leading to a social change away from total privacy?

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Find the best answer for each item. Then circle the correct answer.

1. What is the sociological theory that modernization is making societies more alike?
 - a. divergence theory
 - b. convergence theory
 - c. functional evolution
 - d. cyclical theory
2. Which is the sociological theory that modernization will not erase older cultures?
 - a. divergence theory
 - b. convergence theory
 - c. conflict perspective
 - d. equilibrium theory
3. Which idea emphasizes the interdependence of society's institutions in creating social change?
 - a. convergence theory
 - b. neo-evolutionist theory
 - c. equilibrium theory
 - d. cyclical theory
4. What is the term for a gradual, long-term change in society?
 - a. macro-change
 - b. micro-change
 - c. equilibrium
 - d. synthesis
5. What is the term for a change within a small social institution such as the home?
 - a. macro-change
 - b. micro-change
 - c. neo-evolutionary
 - d. interactionist
6. What is the change from a traditional society to a modern society?
 - a. unilinear process
 - b. conflict perspective
 - c. equilibrium
 - d. modernization
7. Which idea holds that societies become more complex as social differentiation increases?
 - a. cyclical theory
 - b. conflict perspective
 - c. neo-evolutionary theory
 - d. unilinear process
8. What is a significant shift in the pattern of social and cultural behavior, relationships, institutions, and systems?
 - a. convergence
 - b. social change
 - c. ideational culture
 - d. sensate culture
9. What is a functionalist neo-evolutionary term for the increasing specialization of society?
 - a. equilibrium
 - b. social structure
 - c. class
 - d. social differentiation
10. What is a change that proceeds in one direction?
 - a. unilinear process
 - b. convergence
 - c. interactionist perspective
 - d. macro-change

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Read each description, and write the letter of the correct term on the line.

1. In traditional societies most people _____.
 - a. depend on machines and electrical appliances
 - b. have few opportunities for economic improvement
 - c. value efficiency and productivity
 - d. are rational and scientific
2. In modern societies most people _____.
 - a. value cooperation over competition
 - b. work in agriculture
 - c. work in industry
 - d. do daily work as it has always been done
3. According to Auguste Comte, society at the _____ stage is governed by spiritual explanations.
 - a. metaphysical
 - b. positivist
 - c. traditional
 - d. theological
4. Comte, Spenser, Toynbee, and Marx all agreed that _____.
 - a. societies progress through stages
 - b. industrialization is the highest stage of development
 - c. social differentiation creates complexity
 - d. society changes to maintain balance
5. Pitirim Sorokin distinguished between ideational cultures and _____ cultures.
 - a. scientific
 - b. sociological
 - c. technological
 - d. sensate
6. According to Karl Marx, the ultimate goal of social change is _____.
 - a. a large middle class
 - b. a power struggle between classes
 - c. a classless society
 - d. a totalitarian government
7. Functionalist theories of social change tend to ignore the role of _____.
 - a. institutions
 - b. stability
 - c. conflict
 - d. religion
8. Population growth and migration are two _____ events that can lead to social change.
 - a. technological
 - b. demographic
 - c. democratic
 - d. neo-evolutionary
9. According to Ogburn, the three processes that produce change are invention, discovery, and _____.
 - a. equilibrium
 - b. interactivity
 - c. decline
 - d. diffusion
10. People who "go with the flow" when a social change takes place are known as _____.
 - a. adaptives
 - b. supporters
 - c. resisters
 - d. passives

Essay Question

What do you think should be the role of education in social change? Support your opinions with examples from your community.