SR 968-22

Sociological Methodology**:** Interpreting Changing Cultures

Susan Flores-Edwards

Omega Graduate School

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Professor

Dr. Joshua Reichard, DPhil, PhD, EdS, CCS

**The Essay** – This paper should be approximately 5-7 double-spaced pages in

length and may be longer. Provide an appropriate (and interesting) title for your

essay. Write a short paragraph introducing the reader to the topic you will explore in

your paper (i.e., This paper explores both theological and sociological dimensions of

the obesity epidemic in the United States...). Then, follow the steps listed below:

(Develop each in paragraph form, and clearly explicate all concepts you will develop.)

Follow this pattern and organize your work under headings, or using the numbers

for the parts of the assignment listed below:

a. Identify a few concepts to be used for the interpretation of the problem you

have chosen. (i.e., for a topic dealing with obesity, you might choose “hunger”

or “emptiness.”) Define/explicate this concept(s), explaining how it will be

employed in your analysis.

b. Identify sub-concepts that are related to the concepts you have chosen in #1.

(i.e., for obesity sub-concepts might include, “gratification,” “satisfaction,” etc.)

Define/explicate these sub-concepts, explaining how they offer additional

analysis of your chosen problem. This extends your analysis beyond #1,

offering additional depth and nuance.

c. Identify several biblical passages or concepts that provide meaning for

these concepts and sub-concepts? (Perhaps something that addressed “food

and drink that satisfy” ... or other passages that deal with such matters as

being “filled with the spirit, “gluttony,” “fasting,” “feasting,” etc.) Drawing on

these passages, and related theological ideas, explain their connection to the

d. concepts/sub-concepts you have employed in your analysis of the problem.

Note: this is not simply attaching Bible verses that “inspire” or “shed light on...”

Rather, the emphasis should center on the conceptual and analytical. (I’m

not as interested in “normative” [Christians must... Christians should...]

approaches.)

e. Identify secular (i.e., sociological) studies that utilize or address these

concepts and sub-concepts. (Supersize Me [a movie], The McDonaldization

of Society by George Ritzer, Studies on anorexia or bulimia, etc.) Use these

to develop your analysis sociologically. You can think of this as a very short

“literature review.”

f. Explain how your analysis aids /offers insight into contemporary life/society.

(i.e., the burgeoning fast-food industry, Western society’s focus on efficiency

and calculability, etc.) Where is your chosen problem “visible” in contemporary

society... what contemporary illustrations can you identify and briefly interpret

using some of the analysis developed in #1- #4)?

g. How does your analysis make a contribution to Christian thinking on the

topic/problem? (For example, understanding the relationship between

appetite, indulgence, and a life of the Spirit, and then extending these ideas to

areas other than just obesity and food.) What fresh new idea(s) can you offer

to fellow Christians?

h. How does your analysis make a contribution to sociological thinking about

this issue? Can you offer a new sociological insight or two derived from your

analysis?

**Unveiling the link between Marijuana Use, Mental Illness, and Youth Incarceration**

A considerable cohort of adolescents and young adults (AYA) with untreated depression turn to marijuana, fostering substance abuse. Nearly 20 million individuals aged 12 years or older indicate recent cannabis use, with 8 million reported daily or near-daily consumption (Sherman & McRae-Clark, 2016).

Adolescents seek the hope that society deems derivative of this drug, yearning for a sense of belonging and purpose that seems to elude them in the midst of a chaotic world. However youth marijuana use causes the onset of psychosis and aggressive tendencies, potentially fueling criminal behavior and subsequent incarceration (Berenson, 2019).

Research demonstrates the bidirectional relationship associated with marijuana use (Wallis et al., 2022). Marijuana use can lead to depression, as young individuals dealing with this condition often turn to marijuana to manage their symptoms. Additionally, studies indicate a connection between marijuana use, violence, and criminal behavior before incarceration (Sabia et al., 2021).

Consequently, a greater focus should be placed on addressing the mental health of adolescents and young adults, as well as providing comprehensive care and support for cannabis use disorder, (Mennis et al.,2023) rather than resorting to punitive measures within the juvenile system that pipeline into adult prisons (Brooks et al., 2023). Robles- Ramamurthy & Watson (2019) argues that shifting the focus towards rehabilitation rather than punishment could significantly change a minor's life trajectory for the better.

Computer-based interventions have proven effective for individuals with depression and CUD, using techniques like computer-assisted instruction and cognitive-behavioral therapy. N-acetylcysteine shows promise in treating cannabis use disorders by normalizing brain processes (Sherman, McRae-Clark, 2016).

DMC, or Disproportionate Minority Contact, highlights the unequal treatment of specific minority groups within the juvenile justice system, that concerns race and ethnicity. For instance, Blacks and Latinx individuals face higher arrest rates and greater entanglement in the juvenile justice system (Brooks et al., 2023). Moreover, many young individuals from marginalized groups find themselves in the juvenile justice system due to undiagnosed mental health issues like depression or cannabis use disorder (CUD). Cort (2017) stated that more than 4.2 million individuals in the United States, aged 12 and above, meet the criteria for cannabis use disorder. This eye-opening finding sheds light on the prevalence of this issue and underscores the importance of addressing substance use disorders beginning in vulnerable communities.

Public and self-stigmatization surrounding depression and cannabis use can significantly impede progress towards seeking and receiving effective treatment options. This societal stigma creates barriers that prevent individuals from openly addressing their mental health concerns (Stein et al., nd; Dempsey et al., 2019) or substance use disorder (Earnshaw, 2020) , ultimately hindering their journey towards recovery and well-being. Their satisfaction fades due to false hope in using marijuana as a coping mechanism for their challenges.

Young individuals facing mental health challenges often grapple alone with self-stigma and societal exclusion. “Mental illness is often associated with negative connotations and, therefore, people become discouraged to seek help” ( Stein et al., p.3, 2024). The internalized bias and self-discrimination, known as personal stigma, can lead to diminished self-esteem within these marginalized communities (Kaushik, Kostaki, & Kyriakopoulas, 2016). As highlighted by Mckeague (2015), individuals with mental health issues often bear the weight of feeling different, resulting in negative self-perception. Recent research indicates that those with mental health conditions encounter more stigmatization, even in online spaces, compared to individuals with physical ailments (Dempsey et al., 2019).

The concept of "McDonaldization" within the penal system fosters immediate retribution that impedes young individuals from achieving their educational, career goals and impeding substance use disorder and mental wellness need. This, in turn, perpetuates a cycle of low socioeconomic status (SES). Sin can lead to a disconnect between good intentions and actual results (Heddendorf &Vos, 2010). The juvenile justice system, aiming to safeguard society from youthful offenders, relies on subjective judgment. However, the repercussions for young individuals who fail to receive proper intervention and strive to achieve future aspirations through correctional facilities can be profound.

Youth involved in the justice system- Justice Involved Youth,  (JIY) face lower high school graduation rates, heightened unemployment, increased homelessness, and eviction rates compared to the general population. Furthermore, research established a connection between detention and a rise in recidivism rates (Ramamurthy & Watson, ). According to (Kemp et al., 2023) Justice-involved youth (JIY) face higher substance uses risks than non-JIY, with marijuana linked to reoffending, posing a notable concern.

Most marijuana possession arrests target adolescents and young adults, with a disproportionate impact on young black males, resulting in severe legal consequences for this demographic (Ammerman et al., 2015). Individuals with internalizing disorders are more prone to receive assistance than those with substance use disorders when seeking help (Luna et al., 2024). The U.S. justice system institutionalizes young individuals with mental health issues, directing them towards carceral pathways to care, significantly affecting their mental well-being (Stein et al., nd ).

Psychoeducation plays a pivotal role in educating adolescents and young adults about the complexities surrounding depression and cannabis use disorder. Understanding Mental Health Literacy (MHL) involves recognizing mental disorders, identifying symptoms, knowing risk factors, using self-help strategies, accessing professional help, seeking information, and fostering positive attitudes to seek assistance (Chow et al., 2024).

Men, in particular, frequently find it challenging to recognize the necessity for treatment (McKenzie, et al., 2022). Change agents providing comprehensive information and guidance on these topics equip (AYA) with the knowledge and resources to make informed decisions and seek appropriate support when necessary. Advancing efforts to boost racial diversity in mental health systems can empower black individuals combat the discrimination they encounter (Coleman-Kirumba et al., 2023). Healthcare providers and organizations can enhance cultural inclusivity on their websites by prompting clients to discuss race, gender, and discrimination during counseling sessions, as suggested by (Coleman- Kirumba et al., 2023). Postmodernism views humanity as existing in a world shaped by images. Individuals who diverge from conventional imagery, like substance users or individuals facing mental health challenges, often face marginalization and exclusion.

Biblical counseling can provide guidance and hope to vulnerable communities dealing with substance use disorders, mental health challenges, and those in incarceration. Research indicates that a significant number of pastors, estimated at 60%, have provided counseling to individuals who were later diagnosed with acute mental illnesses. This underscores pastors' crucial role in offering support and guidance to those grappling with mental health challenges (Clinton, 2019).

According to Cook and Hamley (2020), Christians using scripture to dismiss healing concepts can diminish hope and portray God as uninvolved. Relying too much on punitive texts may harm those with guilt and low self-esteem. Instead, themes of forgiveness, acceptance, and new beginnings in Scripture can bring freedom.

Celebrate Recovery (CR) is a ministry focused on biblical and Christ-centered restoration of relationships with God, oneself, and others. (CR) provides an inclusivity that guides individuals in overcoming challenges through biblical principles. The program integrates eight Beatitudes-based principles and twelve recovery steps, nurtures restoration, and fosters deeper connections with God and others (Clinton, 2019). Cook and Hamley asserts that the Church's pastoral care complements mental health expertise, highlighting the value of spiritual guidance in holistic treatment. Postmodernism views humanity as existing in a world shaped by images (Heddendorf & Vos 2010). Stigma, characterized by social devaluation, not only exacerbates substance use but also obstructs the treatment of substance use disorders (Earnshaw, 2020). Individuals who diverge from conventional imagery-individuals facing mental health challenges, often face marginalization and exclusion. A Christian perspective is grounded in values that bridge the God and human existence (Matthew 10:8).

The relationship between Youth marijuana use, mental health, and criminal behavior is a topic of public health concern, rather than solely an issue of punishment. Hope stems from two cognitive aspects: *agency -* the drive and dedication to assist individuals in achieving their goals, and *pathways* - the belief in one's ability to reach those goals and create new plans when faced with challenges (Davis et al., 2023).

Change agents, acting as *agencies,* can raise awareness among youth to help them achieve their goals and devise new plans amidst challenges like cannabis use disorder and mental health issues. When young individuals embrace new *pathways* for healing and spiritual well-being, they will experience the lasting fulfillment of faith in God (Pslm.16:8).

Chow et al. (2023) found that enhanced knowledge about depression led to decreased self-stigma over time in a study group. Moreover, college students who recognize and understand depression's prevalence destigmatize experiences with the disorder.

The juvenile system needs reconstruction to address discrimination and stigma faced by black youth- the highest population detained for juvenile custody. Social researchers who emphasize the importance of reducing disproportionate minority contact with judges and rehabilitation authorities could help mitigate the harmful effects of discrimination against minority youth (Robles-Ramamurthy & Watson, 2019). To reduce Disproportionate Minority Contact, OJJDP recommends analyzing data from key decision points in the juvenile justice system and tracking race and ethnicity for signs of disparate treatment (Robles-Ramamurthy & Watson).

The church is responsible to its congregation and the broader community to reduce the stigma around mental health. This can be achieved through outreach, education, and partnering with available mental health services (Clinton, 2019). In light of the fruit of the Spirit, fellow Christians can learn that faithfulness is crucial in times of despair. Holding onto God's truth as Job did during his turbulent testing period, Christians are reminded of the darkness on this side of heaven. Yet, we must stay faithful to God, who remains faithful to us.

Heddendorf and Vos (2010) suggests a key sociological concept - Christians should trust in God's plan instead of relying on social programs or theories for security. Placing faith in anything other than God can lead to ideological entrapment.

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