Sociological Methodology: Interpreting Changing Cultures

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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.)

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...”

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?

Despite the national push in schools to improve “career readiness” amongst students, there is still a significant number of high school graduates that do not know what path to take or what major to choose before starting their college career. The uncertainty impacts choosing a college, then navigating campus life while still trying to figure it out. The University of Northern Iowa (2023) noted “about 80% of students change their major at least once and, on average, students change their major up to three times in their college careers”. For the Christian community, the bigger yet related issue is student’s loss of faith (i.e., deconversion) during college. In an effort to reverse the 70% deconversion rate statistic among Christian students on college campuses (Barna Study, 2020), this paper explores the theological and sociological aspects of “vocational calling” in the United States.

a. The following are concepts that interpret the issue, as well as their definitions and explanation of use of terms:

* **Deconversion.** Defined: The loss of one’s faith during the college years. It results in one or more actions (e.g., stopping church attendance, not reading the bible, and could include no longer believing in God). The loss of faith may or may not include the replacement with another form of religion.
* **Disciple.** Defined: Training on how to share Christ with peers in a socially and culturally sensitive way to plant seeds instead of more aggressively imposing one’s views on another person. The premise is that students, trained to disciple in this way, will have a better foundation, increased confidence, and will conversely impact the deconversion statistic. That is, they will bring others to Christ instead of walking away.
* **Mission Field**. Defined: The place one goes to intentionally be salt and light, as well as to evangelize. Today’s mission field is different from the traditional mission field that more strategically went overseas to reach unreached people groups. Today’s mission field is the office, school, or other places where they can be seen as salt and light (i.e., planting seeds) to ultimately share Christ with others. Teaching Christians from a young age to see their life as a “mission field” will build a foundation where outreach is a part of life.
* **Vocational Calling.** Defined: Discovery of a career path through an assessment developed by Larry Burkett. Assessment results help individuals understand their vocational calling. Used to narrow down the search for a career from statistics gathered by the Department of Labor (e.g., 750 occupations, 400 industries, and 12,000+ job titles). Using Burkett’s computer generated results significantly helps find the needle in the haystack. Colleges have significantly increased the number of majors offered which can overwhelm students that are good at everything or are uncertain of what to do for the rest of their life. Discovering vocational calling is the first step towards fulfilling your life’s purpose.
* **Business As Mission.** Defined: A discipline of Christian Business that uses a quadruple bottom line, is built upon biblical principles, and initially applied to entrepreneurship overseas, but is being implemented in the USA too. It is a way to manage a company offering faith at work options (e.g., bible study, prayer) and volunteer opportunities to lift up the community in some capacity (e.g., ESL classes, big brother/sister outings). The business also interacts with customers, stakeholders, and those within the industry in a manner that honors God.

b. Sub-concepts related to the concepts above include:

* **Purpose.** Defined: Driver to achieve and an outcome of discovering one’s career path. Also, a degree of motivation that builds confidence and perseverance to get through difficult times. Having purpose increases the likelihood of success and reduces stress and vulnerability to deconversion.
* **Biblical Principles.** Defined: Principles found in the bible on how to view and go about work. Different from secular principles of working for money and status.
* **Self- Confidence.** Defined: A measurement that correlates to the deconversion statistic. Greater degree reduces stress and vulnerability to deconversion. In contrast, lower degree results in increased stress and greater vulnerability to deconversion.
* **Strategic Career Plan.** Defined: A plan with several components (goals & objectives, programs, internship opportunities, professional organizations, budget sheets, retirement information) that collectively guide a student on their career journey. This is a tool that when used will increase confidence in the chosen career path while simultaneously decreasing deconversion.

c. Biblical passages:

* **Deconversion:** Acts 6:2 “So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.” Deconversion, also known as “Mission Drift”, occurs when “the business side of the BAM Company becomes so demanding of time, energy and resources that, in the urgency of daily business demands, the mission and CD efforts get short-shrift and can easily, albeit unintentionally, drift away or simply disappear altogether. The result is a lost or seriously compromised “M” in their BAM efforts.” (Johnson, 2022, p. 141).
* **Disciple:** Matthew 28:19 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. Churches should be equipping Christians to disciple in a socially and culturally sensitive way that is inviting to non-Christians. Doing so will increase the confidence that results because “disciple-makers often feel ill-equipped to effectively make disciples” (Smith, M.J., 2024, p. xi).
* **Vocational Calling:** 1 Peter 4:10-11 “Each one of you should use whatever gifts he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms”. The foundation of this area of research is that God has gifted each of us with spiritual and vocational gifts. He calls us to use these gifts to serve others. Instead of asking “what do you *want* to do”, we need to ask, what are you *called* to do? Building a Career Development Program around this is key to more fulfilled careers, improved work experiences, and increased success in college.
* **Business As Mission:** Deuteronomy 8:18 “But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.” There are so many scriptures about business because we are supposed to work. However, the church has not put as much emphasis on work and teaching biblical principles of work. Instead they focus on tithing and giving, which may initially be fruitful, but eventually the giving returns to a minimum because our focus on work is money for living instead of wealth for the kingdom. The concept of business/wealth and tithing go hand in hand, but each needs to be taught and taken to heart to be understood.
* **Purpose.** Jeremiah 29:11. “For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future”.
* **Self- Confidence.** Hebrews 10:35-36 "So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised"

d. The following are concepts/sub-concepts employed in my analysis of the problem:

* **Deconversion.** Students are not equipped when they get to college to defend against the serpent that slithers the campus looking for those in need, are lonely, and stressed out. Students are drawn to fun, friendship, and the new independence away from home. Students describe deconversion as “eventually a liberating experience that evoked feelings of freedom, relief, and happiness” (Fazzino, 2014, p. 266).
* **Disciple & Mission Field**. “The ability to interact positively with people of different national, social, ethnic and religious backgrounds, as well as those of different genders is critical…” (Chong, M., et al, 2022, p179). When churches implement my new career paradigm, they will teach students to view college and their career as a “mission field”; and teach how to disciple in a culturally and socially sensitive manner.
* **Vocational Calling.** Churches will help students discover their vocational calling and their spiritual gifts, which is at the core of my new career paradigm. This foundation will shift the college experience resulting in the inverse of the deconversion statistic, where 70% come to Christ during their college experience. Knowing one’s calling will become a 21st Century Competency, because as Chong (2022) found, **“**students …in the Singapore education system are expected to have 21st-century competencies, and student outcomes include the need for civic literacy, global awareness and cross-cultural skills” ( p. 165).
* **Business As Mission.** BAM is more complex than traditional business because it includes a Christian component beyond being loving others. BAM is actively pouring into your customers, staff, and the community where the business is planted. It is time for BAM to be a part of every Christian business, as well as in the heart of every person that works. My career development paradigm will integrate biblical principles, use BAM procedures, and modify BAM for workers because BAM was created for the Entrepreneur.
* **Purpose.** **“**The fact that educational decision-making can be challenging, especially at a relatively young age, also is reflected in an increasing number of adolescents who are postponing this choice by taking one or multiple gap years before starting a major in higher education” (Van der Aar, L., et al, 2022, 341). Knowing one’s calling instills purpose, which can reduce the need for a gap year, as well as enable students to preserve their faith during college.
* **Biblical Principles.**  The bible mentions finance in more than 2000 scriptures. Finance is obviously more important than we realize. While churches focus on finance, the other component of finance is work. The proposed career development paradigm will research churches and the subject of work and calling (i.e., vocational and spiritual) because statistics is a necessary part of this work.
* **Self- Confidence.** “self-concept clarity and social self-evaluations positively predicted social adjustment to college and academic performance 6 months after training” (Van der Aar, L., et al, 2022, 341). Knowing one’s calling before starting college will increase confidence and reduce anxiety, resulting in the ability to preserve one’s faith until graduation .
* **Strategic Career Plan.** A program that includes developing a strategic career plan establishes a foundation for students to build upon. Ephesians 6:11, states, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil". The strategic career plan is part of that armor and it will help our students protect themselves against deconversion.

e. Identify sociological studies that utilize or address these concepts/subconcepts:

* **Deconversion.** Fazzino (2014) found that “unlike denomination switching, deconversion occurs when individuals reject their beliefs, cease participation, and have no foreseeable plans to re-convert” (p. 250). Today, according to the Barna Group, 70% of college students experience walking away from their faith (i.e., deconversion). This statistic is up from 59% in 2011, around the time that Fazzino’s deconversion study was published.
* **Mission Field**. The Mission Field is traditionally the field for the missionary, who feels called to serve God by sharing Christ with others. However, today the new career paradigm will put forward the thought that every sphere in our lives should be seen as a Mission Field. College, work, and our community are places where we spend time. It is a time we should be salt and light to others. This secular equivalent would be good deeds, random acts of kindness, or pay it forward.
* **Vocational Calling.** “Work as a job,” whereby work merely becomes “a way of making money and making a living,” as well as “work as a career” whereby “work traces one’s progress through life by achievement and advancement in an occupation” (Wightman, S., et al, 2023, p 948). God has a plan for us and has designed us uniquely to serve the Kingdom.
* **Strategic Planning.** “Strategic planning is the cornerstone to institutional growth and stability. A good plan sets the course and trims the sails. It gets everyone moving in the same direction because there is a shared sense of vision, goals are agreed on, and achievement is constantly being measured. Leadership keeps the plan alive, thereby focusing institutional action on achieving the plan” (Johnson, 2022, p. 11). Johnson, a BAM pioneer developed

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

The new career paradigm will increase career satisfaction and simultaneously reduce the need to change later in life. This is important because “there is a range of obstacles to occupational changes in later working life such as reduced envisaged pension entitlements, risk of wage loss, fear of insufficient qualifications, work identity, age stereotypes, being in a safe employment position or high security needs” (Garthe, N., & Hans, M. H. 2022, p. 2394).

“The underlying main reasons for all voluntary and (job) desired changes are… First, better working conditions…, better salary and occupational career. Second, … better working conditions and better salary… avoiding unemployment… and … to do something new is common.... Last, … avoiding unemployment is common …, only few …aimed to change professions to avoid unemployment” (Garthe, N., & Hans, M. H., 2022, p. 2405).

Sadly, the need for a new career paradigm has implications for all age groups. Students not knowing what career path to choose also find picking a major more difficult as well. “About 80% of students change their major at least once and, on average, students change their major up to three times in their college careers” (University of Northern Iowa, 2023, p1). The Washington Post states that only 27% of adults end up working in their field of study (2013). This result is one reason I chose to study career development for my project. To date, the resolution envisioned is to develop a new career paradigm that results in happier people, better career outcomes, increased job satisfaction, fewer college major changes, and more success. The ultimate goal is to reverse the deconversion rate and inversely bring a significant number of students to Christ.

g. How does your analysis make a contribution to Christian thinking on the topic/problem?

The new career development paradigm will significantly improve the career outlook for the Christian community. For a Christian, that “call” to serve God increases the significance of your purpose. It strengthens a student’s commitment to serve Christ when they leave for college. Knowing what career you are designed for dictates the college major. Two significant decisions that should be made prior to going to college, especially because these decisions can also impact the college choice.

For Christians, biblical principles serve a greater purpose than working without them. The biblical principles are a guide or a code book to working the right way. We must remember that “if God recognizes the importance of business to human society and survival, He must have standards by which He expects businesses to operate, especially those owned and managed by His followers” (Johnson, 2022, p. 8).

It is however, unfortunate, that **“**the church never developed a particular ‘strategy’ or ‘method’ of cultural engagement. Christians weren’t looking for the latest program or innovation to help them cope with or combat the cultural moment. Instead they focused on building the church from within” (Presley, 2021, p7). One consequence is that “disciple-makers often feel ill-equipped to effectively make disciples. Therefore, there is an opportunity to equip (students) as disciple-makers in the local church, who will produce followers of Jesus to mature in the faith” (Smith, M.J., 2024, p. xi). My prayer is that “each student will be better prepared theologically, historically, and socially to express Christianity in activities that not only integrate religion in society but do it through the church in ways that transform society” (Humphrey, R.A., 2011, p 6).

Collectively, I believe the new career paradigm will have a significant impact on the world. Christians know of “calling”, but need this new paradigm to feel the call and to see that it is not just for the pastor. Dik (2023) believes “people who experience a sense of calling (compared to people who do not) say they are more confident they can make good decisions about their careers, more committed to their jobs and organizations, more motivated and engaged, more satisfied with their education and their jobs, and experience a stronger sense of meaning at work” (p. 46).

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?

In 2011, Dave Kinnaman’s book *You Lost Me,* reported the decline in faith among teens and young adults. At that time the statistic was 59%. By 2019, The Barna Group reported that statistic increased to 64%. That is a five percent increase in eight years. Last year, they reported that statistic had risen to 70% in just four years. This is significant because it is a greater increase in lost faith in a shorter amount of time, which should have every Christian parent, church and pastor very alarmed.

The new career development paradigm discussed here is a game changer. I look forward to researching this and developing a doctoral project based on the evidence presented here.

While there is a contrast to secular work, where money and success are key. “A true sense of vocation is rooted in the reality that there is something we must do. Think of your vocation as something you must do—even if it means you will never be famous. You are faithful to your vocation, ultimately, because you resolve to be true to yourself, for only then can you be true to your God” (Smith, M. J., 2024, p131). Remove the reference to God and the secular population could accept this same view.

The beauty of the new career paradigm is that it can also be presented as secular facing. In fact, the paradigm is being designed for either secular or Christian presentations. There are many people groups that can utilize this information. The surveying, data collection, and outcomes of this research are exciting to think about. Hopefully this can help churches build a stronger congregation and increase giving. Minimize stress within the family and for the student, which as stated earlier will send more confident students to college.

This has become my mission. I want to develop this paradigm, test the theory, and if successful, train others to begin a movement that will build the Kingdom and stop the loss of students that currently plagues college campuses.

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