SR-968 Sociological Methodology

Quinton Egon

Omega Graduate School

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Professor

Dr. Reichard

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**Assignment 3**

This essay, a call to action, features a summary of the lesson plan’s lecture by Dr. Reichard, which states that the entire academic discipline of sociology rests on three main theoretical foundations (camps) in the sociological field. Those three fields representing the “soft science” of sociology are functionalism, conflict/critical theory, and symbolic interactionism. It also expounds on the four essential elements in the lesson plan while mentioning “God’s Word” and the work to be done by Christian institutions and scholars to level the playing field in America.

With the support of Christian scholars embarking on a Christian scientific-based social change theory, a unique and modern approach integrating faith across disciplines can transform societies, including America, into a state of unprecedented improvement. Regardless of our political persuasion or sociological position, this application of Christian principles, a beacon of hope and optimism, demands our attention and consideration (Allen, 2014).

As defined by McIntyre (2014), “Sociology is the scientific study of interactions and relationships among human beings” (McIntyre, 2014. P. 2). Furthermore, it is essential to note that sociology, or human behavior, can be messy, especially if viewed through a lens containing faith and science (Foster, 2021). One aspect of human group behavior (although it can be studied and perhaps better understood) via sociology that remains consistent is its unpredictability (Spillman, 2022). This unpredictability is a key factor that we, as sociologists (in the making), must grapple with in our studies. As stated (in summation) in the lesson plan’s lecture by Dr. Reichard, The entire academic discipline of sociology rests on three main theoretical foundations (camps) in the sociological field. Those three fields representing the “soft science” of sociology are functionalism, conflict/critical theory, and symbolic interactionism. In synopsis, functionalism is a sociological theory that views society as a complex system of interrelated parts, each serving a specific function to maintain stability and order. Functionalists are usually conservative. They believe societal dynamics, such as poverty and wealth, are needed to maintain equilibrium. Again, functionalists would be classified as conservative. That being the case, I would suggest that most Republicans are functionalists. The contrast to the functionalist would be the conflict/critical theorist. Conflict critical theorists emphasize the role of power and inequality in shaping social relationships, highlighting how competition and conflict between groups drive social change. It is based on Marxism. The assumption is that the oppressed must revolt against the oppressor and, through conflict, achieve social justice. People occupying this category tend to be more liberal and progressive. In some circles, they may even be classified as revolutionists. In terms of political reference, they are likely to be under the umbrella of a Democrat or perhaps an Independent. Functionalist and Conflict Critical Theorists essentially complement each other. Functionalists' and conflict/critical theorists' approaches to “societal management” act as mechanisms (so to speak) to keep society somewhat balanced. The third category, symbolism or symbolic interactionism, is a sociological theory that focuses on how individuals construct and interpret their reality using symbols and interactions, emphasizing the importance of social behavior. Symbolic interactionism stands alone, apart from functionalism and conflict/critical theory. Furthermore, it is an excellent approach to understanding religion. When speaking about religion, especially in America, which was to be guided by Christian values/principles. Although we are arguably the best country in the world, we still have work to do to reach our full potential. Perhaps the best way to do that is to truly embrace methods for “Christian” social change/improvement. During my earlier collegiate years, while attending seminary, one of my best professors always said, “Make sure you keep an extra room in your house, the room for improvement!” Here in America, especially now more than ever, there is a need for a God-led social improvement movement.

Going back to the three main theoretical foundations of the sociological field. As a Christian scholar studying sociology, according to my values, I would be classified in all three camps (Spillman, 2022). If I were to put a percentage on each one, it would be as follows. My approach would be 20% as a functionalist (Ormerod, 2020, Abstract), 30% as a conflict/critical theorist (Fuchs, 2021), and 50% as a symbolic interactionist (Meltzer et al., 2020). Although I am a foundationalist by nature and often view things through a conservative worldview lens, I am also a minority with a solid understanding of American history. Without a revolutionary approach toward societal change/improvement, minorities would be farther behind than they are today. Without the hard push for social justice via the conflict/critical theorist approach (if you will), I am not sure slavery and other notable injustices would have been addressed (Siregar, 2022). My fifty-percent symbolic interactionist approach can be directly tied to my spirituality and belief that if we all put God first, society would fall harmoniously into place, creating an environment/culture where we all can thrive. Since this world suffers from sin, creating such an environment is much easier said than done (Heddendorf & Vos, 2010).

It will take a concerted value-based (ideally, Christian-led) effort to construct a society where all people regardless of race, creed, or color reach their full potential. Not so long ago, people of a particular color were shackled and treated as if they were less than humans (Rasmusson, 2024). Also, according to yesterday's headlines in the Desert Sun, the local newspaper. The infamous court case Brown Vs. The Board of Education has hit its 70-year mark. As Cheryl Brown Henderson, the daughter of the namesake plaintiff in the landmark Brown v. Board of Education, said in the article, “I always like to say that schools were the battle, but society was the target” (Desert Sun, May 17, 2024, p 9A). Ongoing strategic targeting of social change has to be the norm if we want to level the playing field in America, giving meaning to everyone's existence (Spillman, 2022).

Strategically changing America will start with changing people's mindsets; we must broaden our sociological lens. Morrison said it best when he penned, “In looking at society from the perspective of what he called the overlapping social spheres of religion, economy, politics, and law, Webber was among the first to assert that a theory of society could be obtained only by looking at the casual influences of various social spheres, which he conceived of as forming different departments of life (Morrison, 2006, p.5). Social spheres can be diverse. I realize that society demands a separation of church and state (which I agree with). However, we must be mindful that all facets of society overlap and are interconnected.

As is inferred throughout the document, there is plenty of room for improvement in America. Although politics has been mentioned, this paper is not about politics; having said that, there is room for change in the United States, and politics unquestionably come into play. America is still the greatest country in the world. We have had our ups and downs but have shown resilience. America is still the greatest country in the world, although we are in unprecedented times with a former President being on trial. We are still the best country in the world, as college students are protesting the war, and some are being locked up, possibly jeopardizing forgoing their senior year festivities, including graduating ceremonies. We are still the greatest country in the world, although we have a history of mistreating certain classifications of fellow Americans. As stated in an April 25th Desert Sun Article titled, Palms Springs Mayor explains why the council offered $4.3M in section 14 compensation. The compensation is for reparations for things done years ago to the black community residing in their city. Perhaps many classifications of people should be compensated for past wrongdoings, but we still live in the most incredible country. America is not perfect and should strive to improve. If we all work individually to become better Americans, then we can start looking at working collectively to make America greater than it has ever been. The goal of all Americans should be to help America reach its full potential, and when America reaches its full potential, all Americans will be in a better place. As Christian social scholars, we are not just part of society; we hold a unique position. Our faith is a personal belief and a catalyst for profound and transformative social change. When embarking on social change, we take a spiritual-led approach and apply science based on logic and observation (Babbie, 2017). When integrated with conviction and purpose, our faith can shape the world around us. We are not mere observers but active agents of change, guided by our faith. This realization should motivate us and instill a sense of responsibility and purpose in our academic and professional pursuits. Furthermore, we should use the knowledge we have acquired and will acquire to become world changers. As stated by McIntyre, “Sociologists are trained to find answers to questions about people's behavior. We are especially interested in understanding the effects people have on one another”(McIntyre, 2014, p.1).

My journey through seminary and other Christian universities has been driven by a desire for a morally balanced education compelling in secular business and church leadership. A study by (Covrig) affirms, “For centuries, Christians have fostered faith in themselves and others through prayer, evangelism, discipleship, and education. Christian tertiary institutions, including the ones we are part of, play a vital role in this faith-nurturing process” (Covrig et al., 2022, abstract). According to my research and understanding, Christian universities' primary mission is to equip graduates for success in their respective fields while ensuring they remain rooted in Christian values. This strategic integration of faith and professional development prepares graduates for their careers and equips them to spread the gospel (Matthew 28:16-20).

Faith integration should not just be a part of Christian institutions, but it should be the lifeblood that courses through their veins. Although God’s word will never change, religion has been changing. Therefore, the Christian scholar must constantly study modern theology, which means knowing how “His Word,” written over two years ago, is relevant and applicable today (Forster, 2021, p. 847). This strategic integration of faith is about personal growth and driving constructive social change and will not occur without confrontation and conflict (Allen, 2014). As the author Siregar writes, “Conflict and social change are a couple that influence each other. Conflict inevitably drives social change. Social changes also inevitably lead to conflict” (Siregar, 2022, Abstract).

Driving constructive, faith-integrated change is undoubtedly challenging, but our goal is clear. We aim to strategically infuse Christianity into the very fabric of our society, empowering Christ-led individuals to work together for the betterment of all. As Christian scholars, each of us has a unique role, and our contributions are significant and crucial in this collective effort.

By employing the methods of Christian Social Change, which utilize an interdisciplinary faith-integrated approach, we can envision a society, particularly America, that surpasses its current state and becomes better than ever. This potential for societal improvement, rooted in applying Christian principles, although it may take tons of work to see it through, is a beacon of hope and optimism that we must not overlook.

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