Sociological Methodology: Interpreting Changing Cultures

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Professor

Dr. Richard Reichard

**Assignment #3**

Requirements

1. Topic Selection and Approval:

a. Email your topic and a rough outline to Dr. Reichard for feedback and approval

well in advance of the assignment due-date deadline. (president@ogs.edu)

b. Schedule a meeting with Dr. Reichard to review feedback. (president@ogs.edu)

c. After receiving approval of the topic and rough outline, submit a rough

draft to Dr. Reichard in advance of the turn-in deadline (president@ogs.edu). He will provide the

feedback necessary for preparing the final paper.

2. 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?

The Christian Community’s Response to Trauma Education

Introduction

This paper explores both theological and sociological dimensions of the social problem of trauma, mental health and wellness education in the Christian community and the responses of the Christian church, Christian counseling centers, Christians who work in mental health departments, and Christian Schools. How are these community institutions supplying helps to those in their community who suffer from trauma, especially school age children? Does the Christian community, starting with the church have responsibility to partner with those in distress? If so, what is their response to meet the needs? How will they help them to live in society today? Romans 12:1, 2 admonishes Christians to, “…therefore brothers, by God’s mercies, present your bodies as living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God. Do not be conformed to this world. Be *transformed* by the *renewing of your mind*, that *you may prove* what it is will of God, (The Amplified Bible, 1971), italics mine.

This world social problem can only be addressed as a Spiritual problem in our Christian communities.  It is the triune God revealed in Scripture that wipes away the tears of trauma survivors and this God alone who comforts and heals humanity (Wendell 2022). To appropriate change, knowledge and education of this problem is necessary with renewal and transformation of Christians’ mind through Jesus Christ.

1. Interpretation of the Problem

This past week, I had the privilege of meeting with a lady who has a bachelor’s degree in secondary education, a master’s degree in education, and a master’s degree in social work. This young woman, a former missionary in Nigeria, has a passion for helping young people and adults with living an abundant life in Jesus Christ. Through her own brokenness and trauma as a young child, she believes her calling is in helping others break brain synapses of wrong beliefs with the knowledge of Jesus, scriptures, and right thinking and believing.

In answering my questions of interview, she further believes the church disregards issues of mental health because they do not know how to help parishioners. Some may embrace these ones, but do not want to talk about it. Again, from lack of knowledge. Then, there are a few who refer these precious ones to Christian counselors who have training in researching the scriptures and experiential therapy. Schools have an overwhelming need for trauma care. Our diverse communities do not understand each other many times and bring their own familial difficulties and unmet needs to others who cannot help, because they do not have the knowledge. (L. Olajimbiti, Personal Communication, May 12, 2024).

The need is great in the area of mental health and wellness for our citizens in the world today. Those who spend hours each day with children, especially teachers, grow tired with many behavioral issues because of children’s trauma. Over 40% of our classrooms have students with trauma, yet there is little training for teachers. Many students cannot learn academically each day when their emotional needs have not been met. They do not feel safe from obstacles at home, with family, and the community.

The Christian School should be the knowledgeable institutions since they are the learning centers. But many staff do not have training, nor a guidance counselor. Teachers have many expectations, and no one had a course in college about these issues along with research and study. “In order to “get to” the academics, we need to begin by pouring into our students’ social-emotional wellbeing and supporting them through life’s challenges. Too often we underestimate the effects that traumatic events have on our students in grades pre-K through 12th. We expect them to push their issues aside while at and school and to “just learn”; but this is impossible when the traumatic baggage they carry and/or their lack of social-emotional competencies are not in alignment, (Anderson, 2022).

Unfortunately, many community health centers may help with free resources for schools, but are not able to come immediately, because of staffing. Christian Counseling centers would be great resources, however, their appointments are only for 6-8 months out because of the great trauma needs since Covid 19.

1. Sub-concepts Identification (underlined)

Research must be done in trauma, mental health and wellness, and knowledgeable training must be given in churches, schools, and communities. Most people do not know about this yet, or do not want to know. Once an institution understands what trauma involves, it is important to let others know how to recognize trauma in children and adults. For churches, “Children who experience trauma are more likely to experience other mental health disorders and often reject the religious and spiritual institutions of their upbringing. While cognitive-based therapy and other traditional psychological methods are crucial to the care of these children, incorporating their spirituality can be a helpful adjunct for their healing,” (Westerfield & Doolittle, 2022).

*The Deepest Well*, by Dr. Nadine Harris, is a phenomenal learning text in which ACES (Adverse Childhood Experience’s) is taught. These have long term health impacts and bring much trauma to children and adults.

“While outcomes of the pandemic and other tragedies continue, policymakers must make resources available to support community mental health and enact policies that directly address trauma…in the burden of these crises. In so doing, they can strengthen the social fabric and ease the mental and physical health burden of these trying times (Silver, et al. 2021).

1. Biblical Passages/Concepts

A familiar passage and story of the infirmed man who could not make it to the pool of healing water is found in John 5:5-15. Jesus asked him, do you want to be well? This is a familiar thought in those who are sick, especially with mental unwellness. They just want to be made well.

Next, is 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christi, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” When unbelievers believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, they have essentially died with Him and experience newness of life (His life, Colossians 3: 3, 4). Those believers who are experienced with trauma believe they are not experiencing newness of life.

Jesus says in John 10:10, “…I am come that they might have life, and have it to the full.” Is a life with trauma, ACE’s and mental health challenges, an abundant full life?

As a reminder of helps to the problems of trauma and mental health wellness, those of us who want to bring solutions to the social problem may use these verses. Isaiah 6:1 states, “He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness the prisoners, to comfort all who mourn, to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.” Look at all the joy, peace, and love we can bring to the oppressed in Spirit and mind, Christianly in Churches, and Christian Schools.

Another verse of great value to the person of helps in this social crisis, is 1 Corinthians 12:26, “We are the body of Christ.” Will we go and help? Do we believe that traumatized Christian brothers and sisters are part of our Body?

Lastly, to join the thought of the verse in the previous paragraph, 1 Corinthians 12: 12-26 exhorts us to realize, “While our presentable parts need no special treatment, God has put the body together giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” Now, how will we live and proclaim the truth of the Gospel?

1. Scriptural Analysis of Problem

The struggle of trauma, mental health and wellness confronts each of us in society today, not only in our Christian communities, but in our teaching and admonishing one another. From the beginning of sin in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were tempted to not believe God, and the moment they gave in to the temptation, trauma and mental health problems arose. Deep feelings of shame and guilt continued through their family heritage. And no one knew how to handle it. Old Testament taught doing for God was obedience, so that He would bless and help. Many times, when disobediences occurred, consequences of great depth surfaced and many died, never understanding the love of God.

Jesus Christ was and is the answer to redemption when all went wrong in the world. In the New Covenant, He came to take all the sin, we committed and all that was committed to us, in His body once and for all times. So that we would never have to bear sin any longer. We will sin, His forgiveness covers it all!

How will we now live in this world of citizens who have trauma, especially for those of us who want to see and be intentionally purposeful to make a difference in Christ to this world, that needs His healing?

1. Secular Sociological Studies Identification

Functionalism: “Functionalism studies social phenomena in terms of their consequences for the larger system of which they are a part,” (Heddendorf & Voss 2010, p. 53). At the start of my studying in Sociological Methodology, I was drawn to Functionalism. I addressed the three pivotal basic questions for my personal life: Structures or persons? Consequences or causes? Stability or change? If I were taking this course 20 years earlier, I would have thought more on a functionalistic mind. However, I am changed. I am relational person. The more I realize God’s love for me, the more I do not lean toward functionalism.

However, I do see that trauma, and mental health issues in Christians today and possibly, why, it is something not to talk about in the church today. Can Christians accept that culture, science, and Christianity can overlap? Did New Testament writers speak of culture when they referred to this world? Does sociology and scripture speak to social issues? Yes! Functionalism can explain what holds a social structure together. Christian principles can be used to test validity of social theories. Hidden threads of theory can be found in scripture (Heddendorf & Voss, p. 71). But, now, I want to find a theory I may better identify with.

Conflict Theory: This view describes the sociologist as a prophet, someone who calls for change, (Heddendorf & Voss, p. 73). This is what I believe better fits my position. A revolutionist! My own family as I was growing up and my adult children now, say that I am a non-conformist. They still mention the missionary journey my husband and I took 7 years ago. We have 9 grandchildren at that point and although they said they would support us leaving, our adult children had already become accustomed to our keeping the grandkids for them. Spreading the gospel for us produced conflict for them.

Jacques Ellul, French sociologist, says that revolution is not only desirable, but necessary (Heddendorf & Voss, p. 88). God’s order is a reality. Should not the Christian community be trained in relationships with people? Relationships are what Jesus stresses! How He relates to us. How He has always wanted to help us in all trauma and stresses. It is a necessity in which Christians need to talk with each other. From His righteousness, love, joy, and peace, we can relate to others who are hurting. He says, “…apart from me, you can do nothing.” But, what does that mean in helping others with mental health issues? With realization of life in Christ, our identity, we can be a real hope of radical social science (Heddendorf & Voss, p. 91).

Social Action Theory: C. Wright Mills believed that people needed meaning in life for direction and purpose. Although a humanist, he believed people were goal oriented and motivated by their values (p. 93). This is true and without teaching others’ of our life in the “Vine” of Jesus, it is impossible, although many Christians try.

This is seen when believers are syncretistic, as they choose self and others beliefs

along with Christianity. These beliefs can cause confusion and stress and trauma without

mental wellness will continue. Do we believe we can make a difference today as we

continue to gain knowledge about trauma in our Christian Community?

1. Contemporary Life/Society Analysis

The Christian Community’s Response to Trauma Education is extremely important to society today. It is visible in the church, mental health communities and Christian Schools. The focus on accountability and relationship is huge in this area and training is necessary to meet the demands of nearly 1/3 of our population. To be properly trained, Brain Science and Experiential Therapy need to be understood. “In an attempt to foster effective learning for the students, educators and researchers have been examining the complex relations between psychological, biological, sociological, and cultural aspects of the educative process,” (Saleh & Khine). These studies should continue as all in the education world see this as a major sociological issue today.

However, it is true that some Christian institutions do not want to talk about these issues. Some Christian schools claim they are not counselors and therefore do not want to accept trauma children, to the point that it is a question that is asked at the initial parent interview. I know it is their prerogative to accept who they want, but I wonder if it is a good policy for a “Christian” school to have?

1. Contribution to Christian Thinking

Christian thinkers should want to help or refer those who are traumatized to places that can offer assistance. I believe if Jesus were here in person, He would be seeking out these precious ones. But, He said, if I go, the Comforter/Helper will come (Jesus in the Spirit in all believers). He knows where all the hurting ones are. In the Christian community, many are helping. The information about trauma and care will get out. Will we let Him challenge us to be His hands and feet to go? Will we be bothered by this social issue in our schools today, or will we continue to live in fear and believe we cannot help? Why? Has He called us to help in the Christian community of believers?

1 Corinthians 12: 6-27, a very long passage is definitely scripture to ponder.

How about one-day training conferences along with role playing, in churches and schools? Speakers with experienced trauma and how God helped them to remake their brain synapses by His Word? Of course, the leaders (board members, elders, CEO’s, etc.) of these institutions will need to agree in this decision for their constituents and perhaps participate in this training.

1. Contribution to Sociological Thinking

While studying Sociology Christianly is important, knowing that we have the mind of Christ in our studies is paramount. Are we listening? Living in the life of Spirit of Christ in us dominates what we believe about societal issues. Taking every thought captive as we research as scholar practioners is foundational. It would be grand if one would find the necessity of the Christian Sociological Theory of the Abiding Life in Christ. Living from the flow and nourishment of His DNA. As we are changed in our thinking, the world can be changed one person at a time and stress from trauma can be helped as unlearn the wrong beliefs and replace them with His words to us. This is a process that can be taught with the help of the Holy Spirit and trained Christian advisors, mentors, and counselors. I recently heard a counselor friend exhort, “Trauma isn’t just what happened to you. It’s what’s still happening to you.” Will Christian communities of churches, schools and mental health institutions where many of our Christian counselors work, help us as lay persons?

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