Hermeneutics and Communications

Aliaya Epps

Omega Graduate School

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Professor

Dr. Jim Strecker

Assignment #3 – Essay on Hermeneutics

1. Write a 5-page paper about the need for hermeneutics, or how to intelligently read

the scholarly subject literature and published social research about the topic of your

research interest. Explain why learning how to read scholarly literature is needed to

learn how to do scholarly writing about your research interest. Cite sources from the

seminal course resources and find at least two articles about a topic of your interest.

The student should direct developmental readings from Assignment #2 on the issue of

hermeneutics and a subject of their research interest for this assignment.

Omega Graduate School proposes a novel approach to education. OGS offers a contextualize degree. This format is heavily riddled with the transformative learning theory which puts the student in the driver seat in terms of their learning. OGS also seeks to produce well equipped scholars who have successfully fused their calling and career, leading to agents of social change. In order to accomplish this goal there is a great deal of research involved. The ability to skillfully do scholarly research and writing is vital to success.

The death of George Floyd occurred at the height of the pandemic, sparking national outrage. For me, as an African American woman it caused introspection. The death of George Floyd occurred the same year I was promoted to the equity team at my job. I spent the summer prior to the school year completing the Summer Institute on Equity and Justice in Education at American University. The workshops at the institute armed me with the knowledge to approach racial issues on a systemic level as opposed to the emotional level. When I discussed the aftermath of the Floyd murder with my classes it was astounding their reactions. For the majority of my students they felt helpless; however they struggled greatly to adequately express why. “Black Americans comprise 13% of the US population, yet data suggests that they represent 23% of those fatally shot by police officers. Data on non-lethal encounters with police in the Black community is less available but can understandably result in emotional trauma, stress responses, and depressive symptoms.”( McLeod, 2020). I feel a tug from the Holy Spirit telling me that I was called to help people navigate these traumatic encounters. This tug led me to become a facilitator and curriculum developer for the Taskforce for the Academic Achievement of Equity in Education for Black Boys. “Each additional police killing of an unarmed black American was associated with 0·14 additional poor mental health days (95% CI 0·07–0·22; p=0·00047) among black American respondents. The largest effects on mental health occurred in the 1–2 months after exposure, with no significant effects estimated for respondents interviewed before police killings (falsification test). (Bor,2018) It is extremely difficult to put into words why these atrocities take such a toll on mental health, especially that of Black boys and young Black men. It is something that I believe I uniquely understand. My DEI role limited me to the scope and sequence that the grant allowed. I felt like I was not living up to the true calling that God placed on my heart. This led to the creation of the Dear Black Man Breathe program. The aim of Dear Black Man Breathe is to offer a safe space for collegiate Black men to express their emotions, challenges and the resources to navigate through those challenges. I must admit that the creation of this program was Spirit led. Insert the opportunity to attend Omega Graduate School. Through my studies, not only will OGS help me refine my program, it will turn me into a confident scholar.

That is why it is imperative that I master the art of scholarly writing. There is this one quote I found that provided a blueprint to accomplish that goal. “You establish your side of the relationship with your readers when you adopt one of those three roles—I have information for you; I can help you fix a problem; I can help you understand something better. You must, however, cast your readers in a complementary role by offering them a social contract:I’ll play my part if you play yours. (Booth, 2016). For me, “ I can help you understand something better”, is my ultimate goal. The structure for the developmental readings certainly help me shape my thoughts, and engage readers in a conversation. My ultimate goal with my writing is to have readers evaluate the systems in place and gaps within those systems as opposed to attributing everything to racism. While racism is heavily factored into every aspect of American society, it does not make everyone within the society inherently racist. Thus making my role a conversation of questions for both the reader and I to consider. My aim would be to be a catalyst for critical reflection for my readers.

“I’m working on X because I want to find out Y, so that I (and you) can better understand Z (more about this in 3.4). As your projects advance, develop an opening “elevator story,” a short summary of your project that you could give someone on the way to a meeting.” (Booth, 2018). Again this is how a seasoned scholar should sound. I am pursuing my masters because I want to find out why there is a low retention rate of African American males in college so that I can better understand how to increase retention. I think I still need some more research because it such a multifaceted reason so composing a concise “ elevator pitch” is not something I think I am currently capable of achieving.

*Reading for Comprehension* has a chapter that offers a guideline for evaluating sources. To achieve relevant data it might be helpful if I tailor the questions presented to the topic I am researching. For example, one of the questions asks what is the thesis of the essay? Perhaps I should answer that question. I am looking for societal/ academic issues that impact African American males. Then when I retrieve a source, I can see if that thesis of the essay will add insight to answering that particular question. This approach to my research will afford the ability to have a firmer grip in my scholarly writing. “Every argument presupposes a base, explicit or implicit, something assumed that is not at the moment in question. Our ground-floor assumptions—ones that are so basic that none more basic can be conceived—compose our world view.” ( Sire, 1988). I would like to think that this is where the hermeneutics plays a part. This is related to the previous quote that said scholarly writing should assign a role to the reader. If this quote is stating that every argument presupposes something assumed that is not in the moment in question, causes for analysis. The analysis could evaluate the society and the role the writer has in said society. It can include what are their spiritual beliefs, or the spiritual implications within their writing. Should the reader's implicit bias also be considered when evaluating a source? I am not quite sure. That could be too daunting of a task. Perhaps it could lead to over analyzing and straying away from the topic.

I think my research during the developmental readings lacked how to synthesize information. I think what makes for amateur writing is the disclosure of the total amount of research. I think it is the job of the writer to synthesize the information and present in a concise manner to the reader so that they can have a clear understanding of the problem the writer is presenting in addition to the why. The why draws people in. It has to matter to people, they have to see the benefit in implementing or participating in the solution of the issue.

“Hermeneutic thinkers believe that in most cases understanding as this kind of integration happens unconsciously, because we already move in a familiar cultural environment within which we perceive words and objects in a pre-established context of meaning.” (Zimmerman, 2015). I agree with this to a certain extent. However it can be difficult for this unconscious integration when the material is new. While the benefit of a contextual degree allows me to research and write about a topic I am passionate about; it can be challenging to integrate new information like the concept of hermeneutics into African American mental health. However this one quote gives me great hope. “If hermeneutic philosophers are right in believing that this practical understanding is our primary mode of perception, then the way we perceive the world as meaningful is closer to our experience of art than to a science experiment.” (Zimmerman, 2015).

The beauty of this journey at OGS is that the staff beckons the students to pursue their education and calling with integrity and authenticity. Through this course I have learned techniques that I can implement in future courses. It is both my hope and firm belief that prior to graduation I will be able to present quality scholarly pieces. I aim to engage readers to see the value of aiding African American males in the successful completion of college. I hope to change the narrative of DEI to Imago Dei. We are all creations of the Creator. Whenever we engage in helping we are giving people the opportunity to experience the love of Christ. We too as agents of social change get to experience both the gifts from God and the intrinsic value that comes from dwelling completely and seamlessly in their purpose.

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