

Reflective sociology

Sociology



The last six weeks have challenged my preconceived ideas about sociology and the role that it plays in society in the popular and social media, my values, behaviours and belief system. What I hope to highlight throughout this reflective essay is what I have learnt and how that has shaped my new thought process and reinforced old thought patterns. Week one I learnt about the Sociological imagination where to quote C Wright “ The sociological imagination enables us to grasp the connection between history and biography.” (Henslin et al. , 2011).

Upon further reflection of the reading material in Sociology a down to earth approach there was one particular story that really resonated with me. It was the illustration about expecting parents being given the opportunity to test their unborn baby for certain genetic abnormalities and how the uptake on this opportunity increased from 17% in 1999 to 44% in 2004. In the book “ Sociology the Basics” we see that one of the guidelines for creating a sociological Imagination is to be biographical.

Between 1999 and 2004 my wife and I tried tirelessly to have a baby trying all sorts of methods from natural, herbal, spiritual to medical. Eventually in 2004 through prayer and IVF we conceived a baby girl. We were asked at the half way mark of the pregnancy if we wanted to take the above mentioned test, but for us it was a no brainer, a combination of our faith, my wife’s history being adopted and the fact that we so desperately wanted to have that child meant that regardless of the result of the test we would be keeping the baby and so based on history and biography decided not to take the test.

We now have two healthy, beautiful and somewhat cheeky IVF daughters. In week two we looked at Social Structures (Macrosociological perspective) and Social Interaction (Microsociological perspective) (Henslin et al. , 2011), scrolling through Facebook this wee. I was very surprised by how much commentary I found around the subject matter of suicide. A subject close to my heart, I attempted suicide in August and have been dealing with the after effects of a failed attempt with friends and family.

I began to ask questions, why do people attempt and commit suicide? Why do different cultures have higher rates than others for example Polynesians in Australia and New Zealand? Could it be that the Polynesians feel isolated by their loss of their roots or “ family based culture” as they are submerged into a more European lifestyle culture? Why are physicians and certain other professions more successful in their suicide attempts than other professions? Was it their accessibility and knowledge of means and ability that aided in the success of their attempt?

I have my faith and I have a loving family so from a social structure point of view I was out side of the norm of someone who attempts suicide. From a social point of view I was the class clown the funny man and the encourager on Facebook, in person and in large group settings so that was also outside of the norm as well. But what most people didn't know was that I am “ Bipolar” and as such required mood stabilising medication for my chemical imbalance.

Combine the effects of not taking that medication with a great deal of circumstantial issues like losing a 19 year job and heavy debt thinking and that by activating my life insurance would be the best way to provide for the

family that I love and you have my logic and sociological reasoning why I attempted to take my life. In Emile Durkheim's book "Suicide" he refers to 3 types of suicide Anomic (feeling of isolation), Altruistic (spurred on by a greater cause – religious) and thirdly and what was most likely my scenario Egoistic where someone becomes detached from society. (Crossman, A)

A man with an experience is never at the mercy of a man with an argument and the more I research around the subject matter of suicide the more I want to help those who may be going through what I have been through and what I have put my family through I am now proactively trying to establish a suicide prevention program in the industry in which I have recently been made redundant and am talking in men's groups about my story and the need for blokes to start talking, manning up and looking out for their mates.

Week three sees the introduction of the fathers of sociology Auguste Comte, Herbert Spenser, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Georg Simmel. Karl Marx and Durkheim are the two that really resonate with me, Durkheim due to his theories around the subject of suicide and how that subject is particularly personal with me and also Karl Marx theory around class inequality.

Karl Marx believed that man's basic needs were food and shelter and the evolution of these basic needs led to capitalism, after the industrial revolution we see there being two distinct classes of people the workers and the capitalist and the effect that this ultimately has on social aspect of society. Marx looked at the unequal power struggle in this theory and how that conflict would lead to socialism and eventually communism and it was then that he co-wrote with Engels in 1848 "The Communist Manifesto".

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I can really see the same picture that Marx was looking at, even in today's society in Australia we see the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, but more evident in third world countries where there are polar opposites in wealth and power. This subject has actually spilled out into my conversation at different locations, talking at a bar with a guy about the possibility that Jesus was a communist really made me think.

I am a Christian and as such this thought had never entered my thinking but then I began to look at Scriptures and saw many examples of Jesus confronting the capitalists of his times. Throwing over the tables of the money changers in the temples, acknowledging the poor for giving despite their lack, highlighting how hard it was for a rich man to enter into heaven “ And again I say to you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Mathew 19 verse 24 KJV).

So it set me on a course of wonder, was Jesus a communist? I still came back to the verse that Jesus came into the world to save the lost whether they be rich, poor, ruler or follower, when I look at today's churches they are filled with different cultures rich, poor and otherwise. So while Jesus may have had communist moments during the time he was on the planet, I believe that communism was not his motivating theology as he changed the world those two thousand years ago. Week four we looked at the link between culture and socialisation.

Culture is how we interact with society based on life experiences, values and behaviours that we have been brought up with. As a teenager I was an alcoholic and suffered with depression and spent some time in different

psychiatric institutions where I partook in group sessions with rape victims, drug addicts, sexual assault victims and other victims of society, this experience taught me a great deal consequently that experience has given me a great deal of empathy for those who “ look” non-functional in society, yet who’s behaviours may have resulted from quite horrific circumstances.

My culture background, circumstance and environment were some of the elements that led me to the institutions that I frequented, but it is the learnings out of those experiences for me that showed the link to socialisation in my case. In particular the last time I spent 3 months in a psychiatric hospital I learnt social norms, acceptance and empathy for others.

Integration back into society was difficult but the one thing that eased the burden was another agent of socialisation as I joined a local church and learnt further social norms and combining all of these experiences, 25 years on I am what can be termed a productive member of society, real life evidence of the link between culture and socialisation. Week five we looked at the different class systems and how they relate to sociology and society.

The British system shows how the rich get richer while the poor get poorer. Most books, Television and movie plots or even historical accounts relate to a class system of sorts. For example Robin Hood, Pygmalion, To the Manor Born etc. And when we see someone trying to rise above their class status and succeed we call that a Cinderella story but these stories are few and far between.

The interesting point to note in regards to Australian class battles is that as discussed in the book "Sociology: A Down to earth Approach" Australia started out as a colony of convicts and working class settlers and there was respect in that, they had escaped the English class system and were equals in a foreign land. That pride in being an underdog still is prevalent in today's society, even as I performed on Australia's Got Talent (AGT), the producers recognised my working class status was more appealing to the general Australian public and so we went with that story.

Even others who were extremely talented in the show, they highlighted their "sad" story for example the young man who eventually won they focused on his stutter and cancer stories and not the fact that he was already a professional musician with the band CBD, another story of a country singer who had a bad motor cycle accident and should have died they focussed on that and not the fact that he had many albums out.

So many of the acts on the show had these similar stories, there was so much "stand alone" talent that the stories were not necessary however we see that even the AGT production team understand Australian culture and the fact that they love seeing those manufactured underdog stories a distinct link to our rich history of how the class system began here.

Week six we delved into the interesting and somewhat contentious area of race and ethnicity, contentious because weather you admit it or not there is always a little bias when it comes to race and ethnicity no matter where you are from. Growing up in South Auckland New Zealand where there were a plethora of different Polynesian races as well as European races teams were picked on Ethnicity and if you were in the middle (I was a half cast) you were

usually picked last. According to diffen and other sources, race and ethnicity can be distinguished by a simple viewpoint.

Race can be identified by the way a person looks for example eye colour, nose, skin colour, while ethnicity can be identified by culture, belief systems, language and so forth. Pondering race and ethnicity and bias, I tried to look at it from a sociological point of view. Why do people have bias towards other people groups? Is it a lack of understanding of that people group? Or is it their perceptions based on past experience?

When I first came to Australia I was told many horrible things about Aboriginals from Australians living in New Zealand, so when I arrived in Australia I had that perception in my mind and sure enough the Aboriginals that I came across were in fact as I had perceived them to be. But the longer I lived here I realised that many of my features were like that of an Aboriginal and I started to get roles in telemovies and mini-series where I portrayed an Aboriginal. I am constantly being asked if I am Kurri or Murri and being shown what the true heart of the Aboriginal people and the honour systems of their elders.

I have so much respect for the aboriginal people now because of my personal experience with them, that my initial pre conceived ideas have been totally dismissed and I feel that from a sociological point of view, every race and ethnicity have their fair share of people that let their society down setting up negative stereotypes, if we all took time to absorb a culture that is not our own we may just find the grace to live not only in tolerance but in harmony with the rest of our multicultural society.

Sociology has a large role to play in society, the last six weeks I have questioned my values and belief systems and yet I still have strong beliefs in regards to my faith, culture and ethnicity. But the pondering has lead me to the question of how can we make our crumbling and degenerative society better? How do we see people reach their full potential and not be dictated by their class, race, culture, faith or political stance in becoming the person they were designed to be.