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A Critique of a Theoretical Model:

*Hurt People Hurt People* by Dr. Sandra Wilson

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Writing from personal experience, Dr. Wilson (2001) believes that, “what we learn in our families shape every area of our lives.” When children grow up in hurtful homes, they do not learn the basics of healthy relationships (Wilson, 2001, p. 124). Parents, who abuse and neglect their children in the many ways that Dr. Wilson describes, become bad examples for our children’s future relationships. It has been documented that 30% of parents who were abused as children will grow up abusing and neglecting their own children (Narang, D. S., & Contreras, J. M., 2000). This observational learning perpetuates the hurting people who hurt other people. There is much truth in that statement. As sin-broken human beings, we can all relate to a personal perspective having been on both ends of receiving and giving hurt to others. In her book *Hurt People Hurt People*, Dr. Wilson discusses and describes these hurts as “actions, words, and attitudes that are intentional and unintentional, visible and invisible, hands-on and hands-off, other perpetrated and others self inflicted” (p. 9). These wounds or injuries are typically described as physical, sexual, emotional, mental, verbal or spiritual neglect or abuse.

Wilson’s premise is that everyone is a hurt person in some form who at sometime in his or her life ends up hurting another person. However, people with “these unseen wounds will inevitably wound another person when he or she tries to function in areas that affect the unresolved hurts, often making things worse” (p. 10). Unfortunately, the people who are hurt the worst are usually the ones that are the closest to them who they [should] deeply love and trust (p. 10). Someone who is victimized in childhood is set up for repeated victimization as an adult (p. 124).

With an emphases on family systems and a cognitive behavioral approach, Dr. Wilson explains that children, because of their lack of ability and reasoning capabilities are unable to

think for themselves. It gives parents more ammunition that they have the right to control their children to the extremes. In unhealthy families, some parents will go as far as saying that to be a part of this family you will do as I say. It is not until children get older, when they develop the ability to question their parent's actions. This only comes with time, education, and experience.

In the first half of her book, Dr. Wilson discusses the variety of ways that we are hurt by other people such as by liars and thieves, our own choices, unprepared and unavailable parents, and other unseen wounds. The second half of the book, Wilson outlines what people will need so they can stop the hurting or reduce the hurt that he or she feels by outlining processes for change. She emphasizes that in order to change, we must admit to our own choices. We cannot change other people's choices, only our own.

### *Unseen Wounds*

One of the first wounds Dr. Wilson discusses is unseen wounds. Her premise is that victimizers are victims themselves. As sin-broken human beings, we all experience painful suffering to some degree in our lives. For example, sexually victimized young people are more apt sexually victimize other young people. They have developed the belief that it is ok to sexually hurt other young people who are as vulnerable as they are. These perpetrator-victims no longer have a normal curiosity as other young children (p. 10).

Our deepest wounds come from those that we love and trust the most (p. 10). This is why in sexual assault crimes, family members are often investigated first. Dr. Wilson writes from her personal experience as a victim herself. Her father attempted to kill her and her mother when she was pregnant. Later in her childhood, she was abused by her alcoholic step-father as well as witnessed the abuse on her mother. Her mother was hurt by her ex-husband, and then by her next husband when she re-married. This brought about her premise that we tend to seek comfort in

those that hurt us. We tend to be in denial because we think that they can change. In reality, we cannot change their behavior. We can only change our behavior if we are able to admit to it.

### *Unprepared and Unavailable*

"Due to their limited cognitive abilities, children are physically and intellectually different from their parents and other adults, leaving them vulnerable to abuse and neglect." (Wilson, 2001, p. 36) Adults develop the misbelief that children are inferior to adults and thus give them the right to control and manipulate them. This is not what God intended. We are responsible for providing a safe environment for our children. Children come to trust the world that they are in at a very early age. Parents with personal problems and poor priorities can create emotional problems in their children (p. 38). These children begin to believe that the world is not trustworthy and therefore God is not to be trusted, and tend to keep these beliefs well into adulthood. This is typical of young mothers who give birth while still in adolescence. These young mothers often do not have a good support system to provide parental support for the young child. These children are often disowned by their parents for disgracing their family.

### *Childhood Fantasies*

Wilson describes the hurt that comes from childhood fantasies. It is the fantasy of a child as seeing themselves as the center of the universe and believing that they possess powers that can cause events as well as control how people act and feel. If a child cries, the parents will come running with a bottle and a dry diaper. If a child cries again, the parents would then come to place them in their crib for a nap. Children also develop the fantasy that good things will happen to good people and bad things to bad people. When they see events to the contrary, they will tend to work harder at becoming perfect so that those outcomes will not happen to them. Children will

develop the belief that “my parents will accept me only if I work harder to please them, but never seem to earn their full acceptance and love” (Wilson, 2001, p. 78).

### *Liars and Thieves*

Dr. Wilson believes that parents who neglect and abuse their children are liars and thieves (p. 47). When children are born into this world, they believe that they will have ample supply of food, water, shelter, and love. Many parents, such as adolescents, are unprepared for the major responsibility that awaits them. The result is a child who constantly lives in fear, distrust, anger, and insecurity.

Dr. Wilson used an example of a child whose father paid a substantial amount of money into a company retirement plan which he and his mother never got to see. There are two ways to look at this depending on your worldview. One way is to look at it as if the father did intend to put extra money away in the hopes that if something did happen to him, his family would be taken care of. However, his father, for some unknown reason, forgot to name a beneficiary to the retirement plan, thus leaving the family in a unavoidable financial position. The other viewpoint is that the father did not care about his family and cared only about himself by putting extra money away for his own retirement and financial goals. This second viewpoint would then lead us to believe that this was an unhealthy family. The first viewpoint is one of a healthy family that is marred by an unavoidable financial crises.

Dr. Wilson mentions of a situation where parents use their children and adolescent children to take over the leadership roles of the family as inexcusable and irresponsible (p. 49). Again, this depends on one’s worldview. In our society, where there is an increase in the two income household in order to make ends meet, many children are placed in these types of situations. For example, there can be a situation where both the father and mother are both

working and a ten year old child is at home taking care of his younger siblings. Dr. Wilson may call this irresponsible, but others may call this a valuable lesson in responsibility of the child.

The parents may have sat down with their ten year old child and told them that “due to our financial situation, both mommy and daddy have to work,” and are given clear guidelines as to what to do in the case of an emergency. In healthy families, children are taught at a young age to learn their own phone number and how to call 911 in the event of an emergency. This is all in an effort to provide that safe and stable environment for the child. By writing from a victim’s role, since she herself was a victim, Dr. Wilson takes a negative viewpoint in many of these situations. There are two sides to every story. However, this is not to take away from the fact that there are parents that are so unprepared and irresponsible to leave their children home alone with no parental supervision and/or training in what to do in the event of an emergency.

### *Childhood Choices*

Dr. Wilson talks about three questions that every human being answers from the moment of birth.

1. Can I be safe?
2. Can I be me?
3. Can I be accepted?

The first question focuses on the classic trust v. mistrust as defined by Erik Eriksson. From an early age, people need to be able to trust the world and the people in it; otherwise, they will learn to protect themselves from danger (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2006, p.30). The second question focuses on whether it is safe to express oneself. McMinn (1996) argues that before we can have a healthy relationship with God and others, we must first have a healthy relationship with ourselves. We must be able to determine if it is safe to express ourselves

honestly. When a child says that “just being me isn’t good enough to get approval and love” is a misbelief that when said repeatedly becomes their truth.

### The Process of Change

Dr. Wilson’s premise when it comes to the process of change is that making and consistently practicing new choices produces change. New choices combined with consistent practice will bring about substantial change (p. 87). However, we must be able to let go of our old choices in order for change to occur (p. 88). This involves the often painful revisiting of childhood choices that we have made. Keep in mind, that we can only change our choices. We cannot change the choices of our parents and other people. Our choices that we have made in the past can be forgiven and put behind us and have significance because they now become part of God’s healing story. God can use the pain that is meant for our harm for his glory.

One of the first steps in the change/healing process is to admit that we have a problem. This is nothing new. In order for an alcoholic to get the help they need, they have to admit that they have a problem. The famous phrase in an alcoholic’s anonymous meeting is “I my name is blah, and I am an alcoholic.” We have to admit and take personal responsibility for the choices that we have made, as we can only change our choices not the choices of others. This will help to put an end to the vicious cycle of hurt.

Part of this change process is inviting Christ into their life and allow him to control and guide the process of change, because this process can get painful. “Letting go of old ways before we firmly grasp the new is terrifying.” (p. 96) The Holy Spirit brings comfort and security because one no longer has to feel left alone, abandoned and unworthy of love. God is the only person that has the ability to give true love. He is the truth and brings life to those who seek Him. The next step is for the person to “purposefully” identify, engage and extend their support system

into a helping network. The enemy likes keeping hurting people isolated and alone but it is vitally necessary to be part of a community of what Wilson calls “sincerely struggling changers”. The person needs to see their body as clean from all past abuse and allow the blood of Jesus to cover all their sin. The next suggestion she gives is to begin treating the body with respect by getting enough sleep, proper nutrition and sufficient exercise and scheduling “me time” that involves self-care (119-120). Finding a safe place to heal emotional wounds is essential. Individual counseling and group work that allows for healthy emotional expression can bring health and healing to all involved.

The process of change is a lifelong and sometimes arduous journey that is oftentimes painful. In order to know where one is on this journey, Dr. Wilson developed a chart called the Healing Overview and Progress Evaluation (H.O.P.E.) chart. This chart is designed for identifying ones progress through the three stages of recovery (p. 121).

In unhealthy families, children develop wrong assumptions about relationships. Observational learning states that what we learn in our families shapes every area of our lives. If a child observes their dad hitting his mom in a non-violent, playful, he may grow up thinking that it is ok to hit other people in a more violent way. Learning what a healthy relationship looks like is necessary. Wilson describes it as one that has mutual respect for the two individuals; the people respect each other as well as themselves as individuals. Each person has a right to his or her own opinion and ideas and manipulating the other person into agreement has no place. The relationship is based on truth and each person is seen as an imperfect human being. There is also mutual responsibility, which allows each individual to be responsible for his or her choices.

### Concrete Response

The book *Hurt People Hurt People* has the potential be a major influence in my career as a counselor. I am better able to understand that we are all sin-broken hurt human beings who hurt other people. I can be able to empathize with both victims and victimizers in a new perspective. We have to be able to forgive those that hurt us as well as receive forgiveness from those that we hurt. Submit yourself to God, cleanse your hearts, and you will be set free. Through my trials and tribulations, God has showed me how he could take my mess and turn it into a ministry message. God has to shake us in order to wake us. All the tears and pain that I endured were for a greater purpose, just like the pain and suffering Jesus endured for me. No life is without enduring hardships and trials as it is with these hardships and trials that strengthen us and allow us to place more trust in God to see us through to where we need to go.

Being interested in substance abuse, Dr. Wilson's book as given me some insight into addictive behaviors. Addictions serve as an emotional aesthetic. Children who fail to learn how to express their emotions appropriately will enter adolescence and adulthood seeking substance or activities that will suppress their feelings. Any activity, event, or behavior that takes over our life is an addiction. Addictions have side effects such as greed and adding pain rather than alleviating it. Some people who are addicted to methadone can be seen crying about their maladaptive behavior. Deep down inside they want to change, but don't know how to.

Dr. Wilson's book and Dr. Hawkin's Concentric Circles both reveal and gives insight that there are many different systems that influence us at an early age and throughout adulthood. Many times deep wounds and deep hurts affect the restoration project in a person's life and that person will close themselves off to those that want to help. She helps us to understand that these

hurting people need encouragement and hope that someone cares before they can ever believe in an invisible God that cares.

## References

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**GRADING GUIDELINE FOR THEORY CRIT1QUES**  
**COUN 507/PACO 600 Theology and Spirituality in Counseling**

The following represents an additive template for grading. Instead of beginning with 100 and losing points for errors, you begin with a 0 and earn points for your work in determining your grade, three questions will be asked.

QUESTION VALUES TOTAL 100 POINTS

<b><i>HOW DID IT RUN THE COURSE?</i></b>	Question Value: 35 Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submitted with correct cover sheet located on Blackboard and Grading Guideline for Theory Critiques pasted correctly? <span style="float: right;">Score: <u>5 points</u></span></li>   <li>• Evidence of proof reading? <span style="float: right;">Score: <u>15 points</u></span>            (Minimal typographical, grammatical, punctuation errors, no Unnecessary pages, paragraphing/sentence structure is proper and Without awkwardness, body length is not more than 4 pages)</li>   <li>• Followed current APA Guidelines (headers, margins, spacing, Numbering, font, referencing titles correctly with initials, italics, And appropriate use of lower case letters, etc.)? <span style="float: right;">Score: <u>15 points</u></span></li> </ul>	
<b><i>HOW DID IT HANDLE THE SOURCE(S)?</i></b>	Question Value: 15 Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citations are properly referenced? (A minimum of 4 Appropriate citations per author under review) <span style="float: right;">Score: <u>10 points</u></span></li>   <li>• APA Reference list? <span style="float: right;">Score: <u>5 points</u></span></li> </ul>	
<b><i>DOES THE WRITING HAVE FORCE?</i></b>	Question Value: 50 Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content reveals an organized interaction that specifically Addresses the assignment with clarity and coherency? <span style="float: right;">Score: <u>30 points</u></span></li>   <li>• Clear, insightful, rich interaction with subject matter? <span style="float: right;">Score: <u>10 points</u></span></li>   <li>• Conclusion reveals thoughtful summarization and application? <span style="float: right;">Score: <u>10 points</u></span></li> </ul>	

**Grade:** \_\_\_\_\_