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Shaping my thoughts and beliefs

Many things influence a person's sociological imagination from the time they are born. The sociological imagination is "a way of thinking that enables people to understand the impact of culture, society, and group membership on their behavior," (Lauer WOS 2), the sociological imagination, especially mine, is shaped by agents of socialization which are peers, family, school, and the media, all of them can determine the beliefs, opinions and the way in which a person thinks (Mills WOS). The interaction of race, gender, and class in my life has made a big impact on my sociological imagination. Being white has given me parity that members of another race may not receive. Gender "refers to the social male and female, as a distinct from sex, the biological male and female," (Lauer WOS 3). As a female, gender has exposed me to double standards that are unfair, and many hurdles to overcome. "Social classes are groups that are unequal with regard to things valued in a society, such as income, power, and prestige," (Lauer WOS 3). Class has shaped my life in that my family is part of the lower class causing frustration, embarrassment, and struggles.

Race can influence what opportunities are available to me and if I will receive these opportunities. It can determine if others will trust me or what type of job I might be qualified for. Belonging to the white majority means that I have a high level of parity allotted to me according to the colonial model. It also means that as a part of the majority I will probably receive an adequate education because in this country the legal system, education system, job requirements

and more are tailored to the majority and how we function. As a member of the majority, people of color are more likely to perceive that I would participate in discrimination which is defined as “arbitrary, unfavorable treatment of people in a different racial/ethnic group,” (Lauer WOS 142) or prejudice behavior which is “a negative attitude towards those in a different racial/ethnic group that justifies discriminatory behavior,” (Lauer WOS 142). Being white has given me more opportunities and resources, especially in the legal system.

In the legal system there are many laws that favor whites over blacks. For example in 1986 and 1988 the federal government passed new laws to discourage the use of crack cocaine. In the mid 1980s “crack was portrayed as a violence inducing, highly addictive plague of inner cities,” (The Sentencing Project WOS 328). With the new laws in place powder cocaine is considered less harmful than crack cocaine. This is because “crack is always smoked and gives a fast, intense high. Powder cocaine is usually snorted, which gives a slower and less intense high. Supporters of the 100:1 quantity ratio say that the intensity of the high created by crack makes crack more addictive than powder and makes its users more violent prone,” (The Sentencing Project WOS 328). Not only are powder users able to use more but because of the way that they are perceived, as less violent, they receive less jail time if any. This has led to discrimination based on race and income levels because crack cocaine is cheaper than powder cocaine, so crack is more likely to be found in poor urban black neighborhoods. This is just one set of laws that on a daily bases give the white majority the upper hand and provides loop holes to them. I do not use

cocaine but this example occurs on many occasions in society where as a part of the majority I do or would receive better treatment in the legal system.

Race and class usually go hand in hand when it comes to education. An example of this can be seen in most big urban cities especially New York. In School District 10 the schools are under funded, crowded and located in poor ethnic neighborhoods (Kozol WOS 261). For example Public School 261 is located in an old abandon rollerskate rink that has a capacity of 900 yet has 1300 students going there while 60 kindergarten students must be bused to other schools, and on top of that there are no windows in this school to let in fresh air (Kozol WOS 261). This school cannot afford books for all the students or enough teachers to teach the classes. These classes are capped at thirty-two but another adult can be put in the room to increase the size of the class. Because of lack of budget there is a lack of space “on the top floor of the school, a sixth grade of 30 children shares a room with 29 bilingual second graders. Because of the high class size there is an assistant with each teacher. This means that 59 children and four grown-ups – 63 in all – must share a room that, in a suburban school, would hold no more than 20 children and one teacher,” (Kozol WOS 262). And the library only has 700 books in it that are worn out and out of date. While across town at P.S.24, a school in a prominently white upper-middle class neighborhood has manicured lawn, all the class rooms have windows and fresh air, students all have books, class sizes are small, and there are special programs for those who are gifted. This school can hold 1000 yet has only 825 students. Part of this is because “The poorest districts in the city get

approximately 90 cents per pupil from these legislative grants, while the richest districts have been given 14 dollars for each pupil,” (Kozol WOS 268). As a society we all must be educated because only with education can we have access to the proper tools we need to form our sociological imagination. As I white student I have enjoyed a better education that challenged me because my school was in a district that had money in spite of the fact that I come from a lower class family situation. With the example of the differences between the schools in New York when it came to race class also had a lot to do with it since race influences class a majority of the time.

As a part of the lower class I have learned to look at things quite differently then my peers here at Pacific Lutheran University. Even though my parents make more income then will qualify us a lower class. With that said there are six of us at my dad’s and three of us at my mom’s. I define lower class as a person or family that makes very little income, has very little education, can barley survive on own and let alone with a family. With that said, being in this position I have learned that sometimes it’s better to be unemployed then working because you can receive more financial support because that is they only way the government will help support you. Sometimes we did not have money for food and we never would ask for help because of the old myth about self-reliance in America. Stephanie Coontz wrote about it in “We always stood on our own two feet”. It was frustrating because we always believed that it was shameful to ask for help when it came to survival yet in reality America was built on the government helping its people (Coontz WOS 213-220). I have had to overcome

the obstacles of going to school with students from upper-class families that do not understand what hard work means or why I cannot go out or buy new clothes all the time. As a person from the lower class it is extremely hard to compete in this society with others who are more equipped and have more resources available to them. It has been shown that “chronicity of childhood poverty also [can] have large negative effects on children’s IQ, education achievement, and later adult productivity,” (Lichter 122). With poverty working against me in school I felt that I had to work twice as hard to compete with other students at a chance to impress colleges so that I might have the chance to go. This has made me value hard work and how I view poverty in this world.

Coming from a so called broken family and a mixed family has also affected how class contributes to my sociological imagination this is because in a traditional family the norm is for both parents to help buy items for the family yet in a single headed family you have one parent buying all the items when there is less money available for parents to buy what they need causing single headed households with children to more likely live in poverty. “The breakdown of the traditional nuclear family has meant that an increasing share of children live with an unmarried, typically poor mother,” (Lichter 121) who probably works at a lower wage because females usually get paid less than males. This caused an extreme amount of stress on my parents and us children and “childhood poverty impairs physical growth, cognitive development and socioemotional functioning,” (Lichter 122).

In tradition American society women are expected to stay at home and raise children but as the norms continue to change women must work to help support their family. As a female I am discriminated against by what type of job I can enter into and how much I will be paid. Even though there are laws prohibiting discrimination women are also often ostracized by their male counterparts. As a female I will most likely make less than a male counterpart no matter how much more experienced or education I have for a position. Men receive higher pay on most occasions. An example of this can be found with female doctors, “one of the first things they mention is unequal pay,” (Lowes WSO165). These women face many obstacles since they have to try and balance work and raising children. “Traditionally, they haven’t been considered partner or stockholder material, much less potential leaders,” (Lowes WSO166). And along with this if these women want to work part time so that they can raise there family they are looked down upon by the doctors that come from the generation that used to work around 80 hours a week. In the males mind “part time translated into not truly committed to medicine,” (Lowes WOS 166). With more women working you would think that household work would be divided up evenly but it’s not, women on average have twenty-six hours of house work a week while men do about ten at the most yet these couples are working the same amount of hours each week. “Women feel obliged to hold up their share of the family economy – a partnership men welcome. In return, women believe they’re entitled to their husband’s full participation in domestic labor,” (Rubin WOS 203).

Women are also more likely to be battered or attacked and sexually assaulted than men are. The word battered is used “to describe women who are battered repeatedly by men with whom they live as lovers. Marriage is not a prerequisite for being a battered woman,” (Ferraro, Johnson WOS 173). In families where abuse is present it is most likely that the person doing the abusing was raised in an abusive environment. My father fits this description, he does not hit me usually but he has abused me mentally and emotionally which for a long time made me believe (Sociological imagination) that being a female was a bad thing and it did a number on my self esteem. “Women who depend on their husbands for practical support also depend on them for as sources of self-esteem, emotional support, and community,” (Ferraro, Johnson WOS 173).

I am a white female who is part of the lower class in American Society. I know that as a female I will probably get paid less and so I fight every day for respect from others as a person and not just a female. Being white has allowed me to get a great education that hopefully will empower me. As part of the lower class I know what means not to eat, not having anything new, and having to struggle to survive even though working over sixty hours a week. With the resources that are available to me I am using my education to better my class situation and prove that I am just as capable as a male counterpart. Race, class, and gender interact with each other to affect my life everyday in shaping my sociological imagination, which is who I am.

Works Cited

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