

Portfolio Piece 1: Social Inequality

Social inequality exists for a plethora of reasons, most of which are rooted in the “Haves” doing all they can to keep their privilege. In the United States, the wealthiest 1% of population owns 40% of the nation's wealth, while the bottom 80% only owns 7%¹. Because of this, most people don't have access to the same education and financial resources that the upper class and privileged do, creating a barrier that makes it so the bottom 80% will stay at the bottom and the cycle of oppression continues. Essentially, if the “Haves” speak out or take action against social inequality they will lose their privileges and power. The “Haves” have the power to dismantle oppressive systems, but do not jump to speak out against a system that allows them to have privilege, money and power over the “Have-nots”. By the “Haves” intentionally not changing anything in order to stay in power it continues a cycle of oppression and inequality where they can provide their children with resources and opportunities like test-prep courses for SAT's, college counselors and private schools and colleges which in turn makes them better candidates to get the powerful, well-paying jobs like CEO, politician, or business owner. These resources and opportunities are not as readily available to anyone who is not white and already wealthy (the “Have-Nots”), which means not all families can always afford to prepare and then send their children to private schools and colleges, especially as the price of higher education goes up and value of a bachelor degree goes down. This in turn affects future educational opportunities, jobs

¹ Wealth Inequality.” *Inequality.org*, 2016, inequality.org/facts/wealth-inequality/.

they can get and the amount of money they make, thus perpetuating the cycle of oppression that the “Haves” maintain with their silence.

Social inequality is assuming the best intention of white and/or wealthy people while doing the opposite for those who aren't white or wealthy based off of stereotypes, something our current government and justice system do. With the current political state of Donald Trump, social inequalities and ignorance are a lot more visible and tangible, especially towards people of color and first-generation immigrants. It is important to note that institutionalized discrimination and racism has never gone away, this is not new. Currently, we can clearly see people in the dominant group (white, wealthy, Christian or male) taking every opportunity to try to criminalize and take legitimacy away from “Have-nots” and others who speak up and call out social inequalities. An example of this is can be seen with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a woman of color currently serving as representative for New York in the House, who takes unapologetic strong stances and calls out social inequality, which threatens those “Haves” in power. In the first few months she was in office she had already had to prove herself time and time again as other conservative, often white and male politicians used things like a video of her simply dancing in college to attempt to discredit her work and take legitimacy and respect away from her. Meanwhile, Brett Kavanaugh who is a rich, white, Christian, male “Have”, was accused of sexual assault in a public case but nonetheless still endorsed to be on the Supreme Court by the same politicians who smeared Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez for simply dancing. Social inequality is marginalized groups being held to a different standard than the white men who are immediately accepted and validated, instead of questioned and accused. It is school suspension rates being disproportionately higher for students of color, leading to the problems in our legal system where people of color are regularly incarcerated on crimes that white people walk free from.

The wealth gap almost seems to blind the rich, many of whom perpetuate the popular trope that poverty is connected to work ethic, in turn putting the blame on families for not working hard enough to escape poverty instead of the oppressive structure working against them. This ideology completely ignores the systems in place that keep poor family's poor and allow the rich to profit off of them. It ignores the wage gap between white men, women and people of color. It ignores the economic, social and often racial privilege the top 1% has and focuses on the perceived personal faults of those in poverty. By perpetuating these presumptions, it supports a culture of elitism and exclusion and creates a social hierarchy where the lower and lower-middle classes are looked down upon with disdain. This ideology is then passed down from parents to children and then to their children, maintaining it for generations to come. However, this is not something that the United States alone experiences, but something many countries do².

Social inequality can also be seen on a smaller and less visible level as well. While it can be on a structural level where policies, laws, culture or media work against people of color, it can also be seen on institutional, interpersonal and internalized levels. Within the educational sites I work in I've seen examples of minimization and indifference by those with power. This leads directly to social inequality and directly affects students. I've seen social inequality take the form of a teacher making internalized assumptions about their students of color based on siblings they had in past or other preconceived notions. I've also seen examples at schools where applications for afterschool programs are only available online and only in English, causing a barrier for those who don't speak English as a first language and assuming all families have easy access to a computer and way to get the completed forms to the school office, which is not always accessible. As a white woman, I have definitely participated in perpetuating social

² "Global Inequality." *Inequality.org*, 2015, inequality.org/facts/global-inequality/.

inequality regardless of whether or not I intended to. Staying silent in the face of inequality of others is furthering social inequality, because white faces and those in the upper class have power, ability and the privilege to turn a blind eye to the hierarchy we live in and the injustice people of color and people in poverty struggle through daily. Silence is what continues to advance social inequality and allows Trump and others like him to continue their bigotry, xenophobia, harmful policies and ideologies. It does not matter whether or not I as a white woman intended to perpetuate social inequality as my silence still speaks volumes.

Overall, social inequality can take a number of faces, ranging on a scale from Donald Trump's blatant xenophobia to silence when you have the privilege and power to speak out against injustices. Social inequality has the deepest effects on people of color and people living in poverty, and until the ideology of blaming and silencing the people our society leaves voiceless is seen as wrong and "Haves" actively work to deconstruct the oppressive systems, the cycle of oppression will continue.

4/23/2020

Rereading this a year later, I question my use of the words "Haves" and "Have-Nots". Specifically, I question why I chose to use such racially coded words but never talk explicitly about race, culture or language. Considering my praxis design, this is interesting, and I can't help but wonder what my reasoning was for never explicitly stating the connection between "Have-Nots" and race, language and culture. Early on in my studies, I conceptualized social inequality as heavily encoded within socio-economic status, a focus of the paper. My thinking revolved around resources and access to resources such as college counselors and SAT prep courses and the effect of them. I also focused in on the dangers of silence saying, "staying silent in the face of inequality of others is furthering social inequality".

Now that I am reading my theory of social inequality a year later, I can see where my theory has changed, strengthened and shifted. While I agree with the bulk of what I had written in past I want to push back on the notion I seemed to have adopted that the “Have-Nots” are powerless. When I say, “until the ideology of blaming and silencing the people our society leaves voiceless is seen as wrong and “Haves” actively work to deconstruct the oppressive systems, the cycle of oppression will continue.” I assume that the “Have-Nots” (low income, people of color, immigrants, LGBTQ, English learners etc.) have no voice and all the voices belongs to the “Haves”. While power and being heard are interconnected each other as well as with Whiteness, privilege and systems of oppression, the “Have-Nots” are not voiceless or helpless. They do not need saving. This idea of being voiceless takes all agency away from “Have-Nots”. In reference to my project, when I sat back and let the students create curriculum, have a voice and decide the direction of our conversations and collective learning I was presented with incredibly thoughtful and creative projects and lessons I would not have come up with myself. We must challenge oppressive systems, but as a collective.

From when I first wrote this to responding to myself now, there are some enduring principles that have stayed true and I will continue to carry with me in future, the biggest being the danger of silence. A big takeaway from my theory is that by not thinking about, bringing into conversation and recognizing inequality, we are contributing to it, whether intentional or not. Another principal is being self-reflective and self-critical of my own role within systems of oppression and constantly challenging myself to improve and not settle for being “good enough”, “culturally sustaining enough” or “anti-racist enough”. Social inequality is everywhere and by not acknowledging that, questioning coded language, reflecting and being deliberate in your work and teaching you contribute to it. By not acknowledging your own

privilege and positionality you are complicit to a system that thrives off of silence and avoidance due to a feeling of discomfort around talking about race, class, culture, language and the “Haves” and “Have-Nots”.