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CYES Praxis

Theory of Change

Oppression has been a constant force, shaping and changing lives. From the early systems like slavery, and repeated occurrences like racism, sexism, anti-semitism, classism, and more, oppression does not end. Oppression is not just on this scale, even the small, subtle microaggressions that happen in everyday life. Marginalization and discrimination help maintain the legacy of oppression. Areas that I have been drawn to in the past are things such as issues in low-income families, after-school activities, and food security, intersecting with each other. All these areas of oppression I have a personal connection with.

In my previous paper on the critical theory of social inequity, I talked about how I worked at a before-and-aftercare program. Along with my time working as a counselor at a summer camp. As an aftercare teacher, I was tasked with taking care of and supervising around 13-20 kids, ages kindergarten to second grade. These two jobs showed me a real passion that I have for working with youth. In school, I would struggle to learn and had to do extra classes and work to catch up with my classmates. This time, I was on the other side of learning, and I think the kids took to my teaching methods.

As these opportunities to work with youth arose, I was given the chance to coach a summer basketball team. Growing up, I was always around sports and took a leadership role with the team. This allowed me to be able to read people and understand which coaching styles work best for what players. Occasionally, a player would need tough love, while another might need a careful approach. When I was offered this coaching job, I took it with gentle hands, and I knew

that this was a chance for me to get a different perspective on sports. It was an automatic connection. I knew that coaching was something that I wanted to do my whole life. It truly developed into a passion, and I want to pursue it further.

Regarding challenges surrounding food security, I have always been interested and invested. How the issue of food security is handled in and around education, in particular, is something personal to me. I remember one time that I came to school hungry, and I was visibly upset, and my friend checked in on me. He asked why I didn't eat breakfast. I didn't want to tell them that I didn't have much food at home, so I just made a joke about how food was overrated and I didn't want it. What they didn't know was that my dad was working three jobs at the same time. As an ed-tech during the day, driving kids home after school, and then occasionally working the night shift at L.L. Bean. There were days when he would work 16 hours just to make sure his kids had the same opportunities as their classmates. There were other areas where the money needed to go, so occasionally, food would be limited. Most of my knowledge of food security comes from my lived experience. My journey has differed from others. Despite some of my family's struggles, it never affected my trajectory. This is why I am interested in how food security has impacted people in an different area than my own.

Focusing more on how food security is represented and handled in education, there are programs put in place to help aid this. These programs are usually designed to give access to free or reduced lunch for kids during the school day. Above that bare minimum, I think that the education system needs to do more about food and nutrition education. Being able to challenge knowledge about the nutrition system and healthy eating habits. One way that schools and programs can do this is by having a culinary course where students learn to cook and understand what healthy options are out there. This was not something that my school did, and I would have

benefited greatly from it. Additionally, schools should do a better job of promoting food pantries and donating. People who are fortunate enough to have a bigger supply of food should have more resources for outreach. If there is a way for communities that come from privilege to use it to benefit the oppressed in terms of food security, they should. Programs need to be put in place to help food security in schools.

Low-income challenges are an area of oppression that intertwines with other areas of oppression. I am fascinated by looking into how much low-income issues impact the other sectors of oppression. It has a relationship with food security, racism, and power, along with other things. These connections between low-income families and communities with other areas of oppression are very noticeable in everyday life. For most of my life, my family and I have been on the cusp or considered a low-income family. There have been times of struggle in my family. We lived paycheck to paycheck for the majority of my life, and there was a serious concern about food, money, and overall living situation. Similarly, most families who live paycheck to paycheck know what it is like to be around people who have not experienced this issue. Both of my parents have been teachers or ed-techs for my whole life. My dad is in his 53rd year of teaching, he has been a principal, vice principal, administrator, college professor, and high, middle, and elementary school teacher. Despite his experience, he is making less than some substitute teachers at his school. He is living on his own, but doesn't make enough money to live on his own, and he does anyway. One idea that we thought of to fix this is a retirement complex. The issue with this is that he does not qualify because he makes too much money. To summarize, he does not make enough money to sustain his living situation, but he makes too much money to qualify for this housing. This is more than an issue with my dad. It is a systemic problem that harms low-income families.

Another area that I want to focus my attention on with my positionality is making sure I am doing things for the right reasons. To clarify, I want any kind of work I do to benefit all involved, not just myself. A lot of the issues that I discuss in this major do not come from my lived experience. If I come from a place of privilege, I can not have a pre-established bias. I need to understand my privilege and acknowledge what comes with it in the world. In these spaces, I need to recognize that privilege and choose to be an activist and ensure that I am providing the youth I work with what they need.

Overall it is difficult to come to a conclusion when reviewing all that was talked about in this paper. I am not sure where I am in my journey of social change. All I know is that I need to continue to realize my privilege and positionality. I need to combine my passions with the areas of oppression.