Sociological Imagination: Poverty

Poverty has been one of America's biggest problems since our country was founded. Even after many reforms and policies like the Affordable Care Act or the Social Security act we still see this trend and it doesn't seem to get any better. There are many causes of poverty like individual behaviours and circumstances for example work ethic or lack of skillsets. Community conditions are also a cause of poverty something relatable would be underfunded schools or living in a crime-riddled community. Exploitation is a factor many people don't regard however it is very prominent in these minority communities. Sweatshops are a prime example of exploitation and many of these people without an education end up working here and earning almost anything for slave work. Lastly, economic structures and especially politics play a part in the cause of poverty. We still live in a country where the minimum wage isn't a universal thing. Each state has their set wage which is enforced by the politicians making those decisions. Poverty isn't an easy problem to solve it involves everyone working together to make a change however, there are many ways to start helping this problem from getting worse.

One of the biggest misconceptions we have about our country is that we all have an equal opportunity and that everyone is equal. However, if you really look deeper into things, we can see that is not the case. There is a big gap between the rich and the poor and not just that but gender as well. There is a huge wage gap between the rich and the rest of the country and to be more exact there is a huge gap between the rich whites than the rest of the county. From figure 8.1(Distribution of the Property of Americans) in the textbook, we see that the wealthiest 1 per cent of Americans own 36 per cent of the nation's wealth. That tells us that some way the county wealth isn't being distributed evenly. There is definitely an inequality of income in the United States. This place also part in the social class ladder we have in our country. Many people believe that this concept of a hierarchy was left back in the medieval ages however to this day there is still a division in class and prestige. Your social class in the United States is defined by your education and income. If you have some high school education and make about $12,000 a year according to figure 8.5(The U.S. Social Class Ladder) you are in the underclass. The largest social class is the working class where you have a high school education however the jobs aren't anything to be excited about. Only 1 per cent of our population are in the highest social class which is the Capitalist class. To make things worse our county also has a racial caste system. In this system your place of birth and your race marked you forever. For example, if you were white even though you were uneducated and poor you would still have a higher status than someone of another race. This makes it harder for someone to come up classes because they will also be seen as different and basically premaritally scared.

Looking at race when talking about poverty is very important as many of the issues of poverty affects some racial groups more than others. In the United States the race with the highest percentage of poverty is Native American, African American follows and as well as Latinos. The lowest percentage without surprise is white with only 12 per cent. If we take the claim that education is the cause of poverty, we do see that high school dropouts have the highest rate of poverty. However, that claim doesn't touch on the fact that in some community's education is hard to come by. Not only might it not be accessible but if it is available it is super expensive. If we look at these poverty-stricken communities, we see that the schools aren't up to par with a school you would find in a rich white community. When I was in high school, we had 4 textbooks

for each class. We couldn’t even fathom how the schools across the city had not just books for everyone in class but also extras to take home. So yea good education is hard to come by when you live in these conditions which makes it even harder to make money. So, you make it into a college now what? Now you have to pay for classes which aren’t the cheapest things then also books. At this point you may also not just sustain yourself but also your family. You may be a single mother in college which makes it even harder to have an opportunity to make it out. In fact, according to the documentary Poor Kids nearly half of the kids with a single mom live in poverty and today 1 in 5 children live in poverty. While you’re in school you might be in constant stress keeping up with loans or financial aid and in many cases, students will drop out and be placed on the unwanted social status.

When we apply the different sociological theories to poverty, we are able to see this topic in different perspectives which can help us have a better understanding and maybe come up with some solutions. When we apply the functionalist theory, we see that basically our society can be defined by the phrase “survival of the fittest.” This meaning the more qualified will become more successful by qualified I mean educated. Today most jobs require some level of education and the higher education you have the more money you will earn. In a country that really revolves around technology it is important to have people who know how to use this technology which means education is becoming more and more important. Looking at poverty through the conflict theory we get the more elite centred of poverty. We see that the elites control the wages and maintain the most power throughout time. Through this theory we see the emphasis on the class systems. The elite love to exploit the weak in order to stay on top of the pyramid and will use any method to keep others down. Finally, when we apply the symbolic theory, we see that it mostly affects people living in poverty. The symbolic theory mostly focuses on the stereo types many people in poverty face. For example, people who are labelled “poor” are stigmatized as lazy or irresponsible. These “traits” are then passed onto their children and the cycle continues. Coming up with realistic solutions to helping this problem dissolve isn’t as easy as you might think. However, I believe one of the easier solutions would be to raise minimum wage and making it universal to all states. This gives everyone an equal opportunity to make a living where they want without having to relocate to a different state. Another solution would be to support pay equity. At the moment there is a gender wage gap which creates more problems having equal pay will remove some of those problems and again will create more equality. In conclusion I believe working together will be the most important thin to do if we want to help reduce the amount of people living in poverty.