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The Income Gap Crisis

Interpersonal communication is highly imperative for social justice because in order to achieve equal access to wealth, wellbeing, and overall justice that this concept hopes for, people and communities need to learn how to effectively navigate communicative differences to work through prejudice and road blocks towards the goal of equity. Without the skills derived from interpersonal communication, the possibility of communicating with people who share different values or communicative techniques consequently would be significantly diminished and would prohibit the ability of social justice to occur. The social issue of the income gap and income inequality in the United States is an ongoing and important issue that needs to be focused on and discussed more throughout our society. In general, the income gap explains the large gap between the salaries of the richest people in the country compared to the salaries earned by the poorest. This is a problem within the United States because this gap is quite large, allowing for little upward mobility between social classes. This stagnation within social classes permits for little progression within our country because it allows the same types of people with similar demographics to hold power.

While reading “Interpersonal Communication” by Julia T. Wood, there were some clear themes that helped bridge the connection between interpersonal communication itself and social justice. In Chapter One, Wood refers to the needs all humans require in order for survival and sustainability, one of which includes safety needs (Wood, 13). Within safety needs, communication enables our security and protects us from dangers and harm because it allows us to advocate for our wellbeing. This relates to the income gap because we need income in order to obtain basic necessities such as housing, food, and medical care that are essential for our

survival; those with income inequality have to work twice as hard to ensure these things. Interpersonal communication is therefore imperative to insight urgency for the creation of resources and services to make the attainability of safety needs easier, especially for marginalized groups. Additionally, in Chapter Two, Wood emphasizes the generalized other which is typically comprised of a society which includes differences in culture, race, sex and gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, and socioeconomics (Wood, 57-61). This relates to income inequality because typically women, minority races, and minority sexualities are more prone to be negatively affected by the gap. Therefore, this social justice issue not only prohibits a society with a generalized other, but actively discourages the success of those who do not fit the “status quo”. Interpersonal communication is desperately needed to extinguish the idea of the “status quo” to begin with and to create more understanding between people of their differences in order to celebrate them. Lastly, the themes reflected in the text entitled “Persuasion in Society” by Jean Jones and Herbert Simons about leading social movements is related to the income gap because when discussing the strategies to lead a social movement expressivism is listed, which is the idea that institutions cannot change unless people change (Jones; Simons, 474). This relates to the income gap because those benefiting from this gap first have to recognize its problems before any change is actually possible. Therefore, it is apparent that without the focus on the improvement of interpersonal communication between those in the majority groups and those a part of the minority, there will be a lack of urgency to fix the income gap due to the ignorance present when people are not affected by the issue itself.

There are many accounts of the social justice issue of the income gap in articles and academic journals across numerous databases. In an article in the *Chicago Tribune* titled “Growing Greed, Income Gap Threatens America” by Bernard Vaughan, there is an emphasis on

how the income gap is worsening in America, and the effects this may have on our country's future. Vaughan details many accounts of the worsening income gap focusing on how “the average after-tax income of the top one percent had reached \$1.3 million, while the bottom twenty percent averaged only \$17,800” which exposes the exponential rate at which minority races, sexes, and sexualities are actively being denied equal access to resources due to income disparities (Vaughan, 2). This highlights the ongoing increase separation in our country, with the growth of those in the lower economic class being halted while upper economic classes continue to progress.

Furthermore, there has been a significant amount of research specifically pertaining to the income gap and how it affects women negatively. In “The Gender Gap in Income and the COVID-19 Pandemic” by Karina Doorley, Cathal O’Donoghue, and Denisa M. Sologon, there is a focus on the income gap and how women are disproportionately affected while incorporating the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Since women are typically paid less due to income inequality, it was determined that “women were more likely to suffer job and income losses as a result of the pandemic” compared to men in most countries (Doorley; O’Donoghue; Sologon, 4). Not only does this condemn women to less opportunities due to lower financial fortune, but simultaneously proves their jobs are more susceptible to vulnerability in a crisis. This implies society's promotion of men over women because most companies chose to keep their men and fire their women, therefore showing a subconscious bias towards gender. Interpersonal communication may be effective in addressing this subconscious bias in order to confront one’s deep-rooted discrimination and bias head on.

Additionally, “Class, Race, and the Spousal Income Gap: The Effects of Family Income, Educational Attainment, and Race-Ethnicity on the Husband-Wife Income Ratio in the United

States" by Julio Huato and Kathryn Zeno combines gender and race to determine how different races and ethnicities are disproportionately affected by the preexisting gender gap. Throughout the article it was found that “non-White husbands, especially Blacks, are strongly associated with significantly lower spousal gaps” meaning that the two genders have more similar income numbers (Huato; Zeno, 3). Although this may seem like a positive outcome in respect to the gender gap, it actually represents the existing discrimination present within our economic system. Therefore, this data shows that rather than the gender gap decreasing, the racial gap of income inequality is still a significant issue.

Many articles not only address how the income gap affects minority groups currently, but also how the progression of this issue may affect our country in the future. In an article within the *Population Bulletin* titled “Poverty in America: Beyond Welfare Reform: Widening Income Gap” by Daniel Lichter and Martha Crowley, there is a unique insight about the possible future implications that the income gap may cause within our country. Surprisingly, not only can the income gap cause the disadvantage of minority groups but may “lead to cultural and geographic isolation” due to “the affluent and even the middle-class distanc[ing] themselves from economically disadvantaged Americans” therefore creating a possible cultural balkanization (Crowley; Lichter, 16). Not only does this imply that minority groups will have fewer and fewer places where they can afford to live but also that major cities and urban areas may start to become almost fully white and male. This may lead to the expulsion of diversity within our country, therefore exterminating the diversity of viewpoints as a consequence allowing an almost totalitarian society to possibly develop.

This extinction of diversity is not an outlandish idea, with many marginalized groups already starting to feel the effects of isolation. In an article entitled “Comparing Income Poverty

Gap and Deprivation on Social Acceptance: A Mediation Model with Interpersonal Communication and Social Support” by Yin Zhang, there is a vast discussion about how the income gap has caused poorer people in the country to feel less socially accepted because of our failure to accurately interpersonally communicate with different social groups that receive little to no social support. There is a focus throughout the article not on the presence of fixing income inequality but rather accepting its existence and trying to create support for those of less financial wealth by highlighting that “interpersonal communication and social support play a mediating role in enhancing social acceptance for poor people” (Zhang, 10). The grave emphasis on the need for interpersonal communication is very important towards promoting the facilitation of an integrated society. Without interpersonal communication, there is an isolation of communities within our country therefore aiding the feeling of abandonment and disapproval of poorer people in the country.

Income inequality is still a very vibrant issue in our climate today, especially with the COVID pandemic still affecting unemployment rates. The conversation today about the income gap has mainly been centered around how the pandemic has caused a disproportionate number of minorities to lose their jobs in comparison to white males. If anything, the social justice issue of income inequality is more present than ever with the pandemic exposing how prevalent the issue really is in our society. Not only this but this disproportionate amount of minority races, sexes, and sexualities being terminated meant a loss of career during the pandemic therefore demoting them to minimum wage jobs. This may have the effect of causing a feeling of degradation because those who lost careers went from working consistently to struggling to find a low wage job. Furthermore, the loss of a job may mean that single mothers cannot support their children, people may lose healthcare and be vulnerable during a health crisis, and could result in people

being evicted due to their inability to pay rent. This issue may be improved with interpersonal communication because it allows us to communicate with groups negatively affected by this income inequality in order to determine what workers' rights laws are needed to protect minority groups in the workforce. Additionally, the use of interpersonal communication prohibits the possible isolation of any one group from society and actively prevents social exclusion. Lastly, interpersonal communication, if done correctly and with the intent to improve conditions, can allow those in power within government and private industries to listen to the concerns of those affected by the income gap therefore spreading accurate information to those who can affect change.

There is a substantial desire to continue to pursue avenues that can help close the income inequality gap due to its impact on minority groups. Personally, I was fortunate enough to grow up in a house where all my immediate needs, and more, were met. Because of this, my mother stressed the importance of helping people who were disadvantaged in order to fight discrimination and stereotyping that has provided misfortune to minority ethnic, racial, gender, and sexuality groups. For years, I volunteered for the Scotland Storm, a nonprofit organization which focuses on reducing redlining in our education system which so frequently takes advantage of the income gap in order to suppress the minority groups affected. The Scotland Storm was created to provide educational support for children from the Scotland neighborhood, an underserved local community, in hopes of reducing the educational gap by providing free tutoring and summer camp programs. Consequently, the children received individualized educational supports providing them a chance at future success. The Scotland Storm sought to emphasize the importance of education through tutoring, after school activities, and summer opportunities in order to ensure their success. Working with this organization was one of the

most fulfilling activities I participated in in my middle and high school years, and it helped me understand the responsibility we all have to reduce income inequality and redlining.

It is quite apparent that income inequality and the income gap is negatively affecting societal diversity and precipitating the discrimination of minority groups. Although many strategies have been discussed over time, I believe that revisioning how we utilize the resources appropriated to schools needs to change. For example, the community one lives in should not determine the wealth of the school inside the respective community itself. Government funds need to be allocated equitably within every school to provide equal education to all. Whether this means providing a baseline of funds schools cannot exceed or providing more government funding to schools in less economically fortunate areas, something needs to change to close the income gap. Overall, it is clear that these changes need to start with education because education is the foundation of enabling upward mobility and reducing inequity.

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