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Comparative Project

The state of California is currently facing a major issue related to gender equality in terms of the lack of equity in terms of gender pay or the existence of a large gender pay gap. But also in terms of California's homelessness issue which effects women to a greater extent than men. The idea floated around is that decreasing the pay gap between men and women would make a huge difference in homelessness in the state. It is not just about higher pay but about more equal pay between men and women. It is said that it would decrease homelessness in women in California by 40%. This is because looking at equity is important for every woman and every person in California. That is because this pay gap effects everybody even the women who are not homeless and the men who are making so much more. The economy of California is not gender neutral and it requires a gendered view on it so that economic recovery can occur. Because of the pandemic many women are struggling to return to or find work and it also managed to worsen the already poor pay gap that existed in the state. One of the solutions to this that California is looking at is pay transparency. To see where the gap is the worst as well as being able to bring conversation and solutions to these areas. Most measures aim at women in general but there are differences in pay gape by race like Latina women who have a greater pay gap from men than white women do. Because of this it is necessary to look at inequity through an intersectional lens so that change can be beneficial for all and not just some. Housing affordability is another issue that effects women where children of homeless mothers are 40% more likely to be homeless themselves and California realizes the importance of looking at the whole person and everything that makes them up to solve issues of poverty and homelessness.

Starting off with Patricia Hill Collins and her Black Feminist Theory. She is known for raising up the oppressed where the purpose for much of her theory is to fight against oppression. As a black woman she studied black feminist thought and elevated it to greater heights. She emphasizes how black women and black feminism “has remained dynamic and oppositional under changing social conditions.” (Appelrouth 881). One of the major foundations of Collins’ theory or in black feminism is the idea of intersectionality. Intersectionality focuses on the idea that a person has to take a look at every aspect of an individual when informing decisions on public policy and laws, or just in bringing about change in society in general. This is majorly important for black feminists who face discrimination across “intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation” which makes it very necessary for them to understand every aspect of society. Nobody is made up of just one identity and every form of identity must be accounted for. Looking at the issue here of the gender pay gap and homelessness, an intersectional approach is needed. The representative for California in this issue discussed the pay gap but she also discussed the fact that there are further differences within gender in the pay gap. The example used was that of Latina women who have a larger pay gap from men than white women do. Therefore, it is important to look at this issue of inequity from all sides. In the “Closing the Gender Pay Gap” recording Holly Martinez says, “to understand what are all the ways in which we can create upward mobility for every woman through the intersectional lens of race and gender,” and this demonstrates the idea of intersectionality where you cannot just look at this issue and women as just one homogenous mass. It needs to be looked at from a intersectional lens so everyone benefits but also so nobody or no group gets left behind.

Intersectionality flows into the second aspect of Collins’ theory which is that of resistance against oppression. In the article which discusses gender pay gap it also discusses the

idea of introducing pay transparency for the purpose of seeing where women are getting paid the least. But this has the alternative benefit of allowing all women to see that they are getting paid less and they are not alone in this struggle. This knowledge that one is not alone allows for not only for women to be aware of their shared struggle with being oppressed, but it also sparks a desire to fight this oppression as a group. This is where the resistance to oppression aspect comes in. This knowledge is important to black feminist though because as Collins discusses “historically, racial segregation in housing, education, and employment fostered group commonalities that encouraged the formation of a group-based, collective standpoint” which allowed for a way for black women of differing backgrounds and experiences to form a “collective body of wisdom” for resistance which is the effect pay transparency will have (Appelrouth 893). As discussed in the article by Alkadry on page 742, women are not only paid less but they are placed in positions with less authority. It further states, “there is a positive relationship between number of subordinates and salary.” Which in addition to that is there is less power in the hands of women to increase pay or bring about change which is where collective resistance from those at the bottom is important because there is not enough women “at the top” or in power.

A third aspect is that of flexible solidarity. Which is the idea that there needs to be collaboration between different social justice projects despite differences. As stated by Collins “African-American women intellectuals have advanced the view that Black women’s struggles are part of a wider struggle for human dignity, empowerment, and social justice.” (Appelrouth 903-904) Which is to say it is important for Black feminists to work with other groups that are also oppressed instead of focusing on their differences because they are all in the same boat. Which is where both the pay transparency and intersectional approach to the issue of gender

equity and homelessness comes into play. The pay transparency allows for both sides to see the oppression more clearly and the intersectionality allows for a united view of the issue needed for flexible solidarity between oppressed groups.

Now it is time to discuss Charlotte Gilman and her ideas on gender and economic independence. Gilman's theory is centered around "the political and economic factors that influence that produce and reproduce gender inequality," which was important for challenging the standing ideas of the time that gender differences were biological. (Appelrouth 415) One aspect of Gilman's work is the idea that the traditional division of labor is detrimental to women. The traditional division of labor places women in the home and dependent on the man which makes her economically dependent on a man. In the article it mentions that "children of homeless mothers are 40% more likely to be homeless themselves," which shows that being homeless as a woman is more impactful because it affects her children due to the fact that the mother is the one who cares for the child and the home while the man is independent from both while the mother is not. This goes with the second aspect of women not having the same economic independence as men because women are more likely to depend on men because of traditional divisions of labor. This dependence prevents many women from having upward mobility which would benefit individual women and women as a collective. Which is necessary for the issue of homelessness where it is caused by the pay gap where economic dependence causes women to be trapped by men and unable to make the necessary upward movement in the economy to bring about change as well as if they lose the one they are dependent on it leads to homelessness and poverty for them and their children.

A third aspect of Gilman's theory is that of compensation for taking care of the home and children which would be in a way a counter to the gender pay gap for some. If there was

compensation for taking care of children and the home the mother would be less likely to be dependent and would not need the balance working and taking care of her children. Or going further on this idea Gilman discusses “that if women were actually compensated for their work in the home (and not given the status of their husband), poor women with lots of children would get the most money (for they do the most work), while women with no children and those who do no work in the home (i.e., those who have nannies, maids, etc.) would get no compensation.” (Appelrouth 425) This would be beneficial in bringing closer women who are able to be economically independent with those who have historically been economically dependent and as a whole lessen (but not solve) the pay inequity between genders.

To conclude, different theoretical frameworks allow us to look at social issues from different perspectives. These different frameworks/perspectives come from the various backgrounds of the theorists who will be more likely to focus on different aspects of an issue based on what they find most important. Their backgrounds allow them to also give different views as to why a social issue occurs and how to solve or improve it whether because of their personal experience facing this issue or because of their outside perspective on the issue. Using Collins and Gilman as examples. Collins is a black woman and in turn this influences her framework by making it a black feminist one. Within the issue of gender pay gap it manifests in the form of seeing that this issue must be looked at from an intersectional lens as well as having a resistance component to bringing about change. While Gilman comes from an era where economic dependence on men by women was even worse than it is today. So much of her theory looks from the perspective of being economically free or making women equal to men economically. Because of this she looks at the issue of the gender pay gap and homelessness

from the lens of needing to reduce female dependence or compensating them because those are the reasons why these issues exist.

Bibliography

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