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CAS SO100-B4

31 March 2020

A Reflection on Privilege and My Own Life

As Khan stated, the phenomenon of privilege has a significant impact on society. I want to develop a discussion based on my own experiences. I will explain how elite educational institutions shaped and concerned me, and I will provide some examples on issues I encountered to backup my discussion.

From kindergarten to university, all schools I attended were private schools. Although China is now the second wealthiest country in the world, attending private schools in all stages is still very costly. I had friends who received education from both top and average public schools in China, and it was apparent that the student-faculty ratios in their schools were worse than mine. Moreover, public schools, regardless of being the top or average, rarely recruited foreign teachers onsite helping students to practice speaking English due to a tight budget. As a result, most people around me ended up with proficient and fluent English. In contrast, our peers in public schools were less skillful in this aspect. Moreover, during Friday and Sunday, when parents came to take their children home or send them back to school, there were proportionally more luxurious cars, such as Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Jaguar, than public schools. Most students had abundant and expensive extracurricular activities, such as international summer camps and leadership programs.

I had a secondary school experience similar to St. Paul's. My school always ranked top 3 in my city, and it was one of the most expensive ones as well. Many students' parents were senior government officials, business owners, or senior executives of companies. The majority of students had an innate sense of confidence, and there was even a sense of superiority in some of them, which was similar to students in St. Paul.

In a previous lecture, the professor asked us to self-categorize ourselves to different social classes, and over half of the class considered themselves as at least the middle class. It showed that most BU students belong to at least the middle class. Furthermore, I had a stronger sense of being privileged in Questrom. Most finance students consider themselves as the elite of Questrom and joke around with other marketing students.

Moreover, in BU, especially in Questrom, hard work is a default criterion for students who are ambitious. In my freshman year, a classmate who was frequently late for classes was an example of this. Our finance professor said, "if you can't come to 8-am class on time, why do you come to a business school?"

Talking about the ideology that explains my success, I think that people are biased, and they often made attribution errors. For example, the self-serving bias is "a tendency for individuals to attribute their own successes to personal strengths (such as talent) and their failures to external circumstances (such as bad luck)."¹ Biases played an essential role in explaining why people from the middle class or above, including myself, tend to attribute success to hard work and talent while ignoring external factors, such as their parents' social status.

¹ "A Dictionary of Media and Communication", Oxford University Press, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100453472>

My educational experience enabled me to see, understand and approach hierarchy differently. At the early stage of my life, I believed firmly that inequality was totally the rich's fault. However, my understanding completely changed over time. I had a high school classmate from an underdeveloped town, and he received full financial aid that covered both tuition and living expenses. However, he frequently utilized his special identity to delay homework submission and ended up being expelled. He had no choice but to go back to his town and finished high school there. I do not know where he is now, but it is hard to believe he is doing as well as other classmates who finished studying in my high school. The inequality is a complicated result, and we can not attribute the responsibility solely to people who are on the higher end of the hierarchy.

In terms of "ease" experience, I experienced more discomfort during middle school. At that time, teachers and students all considered being good at natural science subjects, such as math, physics, and chemistry as a standard for being an elite student. They disregarded other liberal subjects, such as literature and music. I loved literature, but I was not good at natural science subjects, which made me more easily unattended in classes. This highly concentrated bias towards natural science subjects derived from the fact and belief that students of this kind would contribute most to modernizing China. Moreover, one of the reasons why China developed rapidly for several decades was that educational institutions put enormous emphasis on natural science subjects that contributed most to technological development, such as aerospace or nuclear technology. I still remembered the moment that over eighty percent of my middle school classmates said "I want to be a scientist" during our first "Dream Forum".

The “ease” is a naturalization of privilege, and it was inscribed on my body in an unconscious process. In the book, behaviors, such as that Carla faking her role was considered an innate characteristic. Noticeably, the real influence of factors, like class, race, and gender, will be covered up if we attribute these characteristics to an individual. As I described earlier, I learned a lot from my classmates, and my neighborhood was mostly middle-class or upper-class. This environment naturally developed me to be proficient, calm, and easy in certain social occasions, such as interviewing with multiple senior managers of a company , etc. During my school time in China, people around me signified their “ease” by demonstrating their skills or certification in Piano or knowledge of private auction. Surprisingly, most of them believed that it was totally their talent or efforts that helped them make such achievements.

Khan was not an elite in terms of race, but he was an elite in terms of educational achievement and social status. The major difference between us was background. Although my parents were not wealthy in their early time, they were certainly in a better social position compared to Khan’s parents, which made it hard for me to realize that my parent’s resources were also something significant, which put me into an advantageous position today.

In conclusion, based on my experience with elite educational institutions, they concentrated students with privilege and constructed an exclusive platform for them to interact and mutually benefit. There are certain problems within those institutions, but it was fundamentally difficult to resolve. And, more remarkable, education is just the tip of the huge iceberg called privilege.