

## **Theory of Positionality and Identity**

### **Class/economics:**

There is a saying by Benjamin Franklin that states, “In this world, nothing is certain except death and taxes.” The only 2 things guaranteed are by nature, and one created by humans speaks volumes to how ingrained money is into our society. Nothing has shaped my outlook and identity quite as directly as money and class. I grew up in a picturesque suburban neighborhood with my mom, dad, 2 older brothers, a backyard, and a tire swing, but the picture did not show everything. Growing up, money was always a concern. The housing market crashed in 2008 when I was turning 5 years old. My parents did what they could to protect my brothers and me from what was happening, but it slipped through the cracks.

I noticed that my dad was suddenly home all day. When I got home from school, he always had brownies, and I knew it was odd that he didn't leave to go to work anymore. I didn't know what my dad did for work before, but I knew he didn't do it anymore.

I noticed my mom went to work at a big place answering phones. I knew it was weird; it wasn't like the jobs she had worked before, and she never seemed excited about it. I didn't understand why she had to work there, but I knew she had to for a while. I noticed how every few weeks, my mom would take over the living room, lay down a piece of black felt, take pictures of my old clothes, and sell them on eBay. I wasn't allowed in while she did, because I kept touching things, and it was important she got the photos.

Things finally changed in 2012, but at that point, I was 9, and I realized much more about what was happening. I noticed my dad going back to work, how happy it made him, and recognized what it meant for him not to be working in those years. I saw my mom had moved to

a job she would be excited to tell us about, and how she was no longer stressed about selling all my old clothes on eBay.

I realized what had happened later, and upon that realization, I connected it to how I handle money now. I knew my dad was the most unhappy when he wasn't working. I knew that when we had money, there was less stress, and that my mom was always excited when she got something on sale or saved money. I later learned how spreading money so thin was the only way I could keep my childhood. I learned about the credit cards that were maxed, the mortgages taken, the food stamps used, and the savings and retirement drained.

Once I understood what money did, as soon as I was old enough, I started working. From August 2019 to now, the longest I have gone without a job was the first four months of freshman year, and even then, I was applying for jobs. The few times I went without work for more than two weeks, I was anxious and constantly checked my banking accounts anytime I spent money.

To me, if you can work, you do work. I get intense emotions about every angle of work. If someone needs money/work and does not have anything blocking their path from working, yet doesn't, I get angry when they complain about money. Who are they to complain about money when they don't have it because they are choosing not to get a job? If someone doesn't worry about money and doesn't work, I am jealous that they don't have to think about it, and annoyed that they can't understand my mindset. If someone doesn't worry about money and work, I am jealous; they are just working because they want extra money, not to afford groceries. For those who work and have to work, I get angry knowing how much of their lives are tied to that job, knowing what it means to lose it. There is no way of having work or not having work that I positively view. I can never be happy working, but I feel worse when I am not doing it. I check

all my accounts, debit and credit, once a day, and cannot understand why people don't do the same.

My friends tell me that I am weird about money and jobs, and I realize that not everyone has the same mindset as I do. I have started checking myself when talking about work and money, but even I don't know what it means to be 'normal' about money. It is something that is constantly on my mind and affects how I interact with the world around me. I am hyper-aware of my class, and how easy it is for it to all disappear.

### **Race:**

For many summers, I went to a day camp my mom worked at. I had friends who came for most summers, and one of them that I knew the best and longest was a girl named Serenity. She was one of the few friends at camp I hung out with outside of camp during the summer, since she lived in Texas with her mom during the school year. She was black, and she was the only black kid in our whole group of 30 kids. On one ice cream Friday with 3 other groups at 10 years old, we stood in line for ice cream. After we had gotten our ice cream, we got asked what toppings we wanted.

A counselor from another group who was handing out sprinkles turned to Serenity and asked: "You want fried chicken with that?" Causing Serenity to run to the hill and begin crying. We all rushed over to her and began to comfort her. She was unable to speak, just crying into her legs, folded to her chest. We sat rubbing her back, trying to make her feel better, but none of us knew what to say to her.

Eventually, another counselor came over and asked why Serenity was so upset. I stood up and whispered to him, trying to make sure she couldn't hear it again, repeating what was said to

her. We watched as he listened to what I said, walked over to the counselor, and punched him in the face.

There was a single moment of stillness, where everyone turned to look at what was going on, and then suddenly the rest of the counselors jumped into action, gathering their groups to move them, while some stayed to separate the guys.

We all scrambled to move Serenity away, still not speaking, but her tears had stopped. When we told her what had happened when she was looking away, she smiled. The counselor who commented on Serenity was not fired; he returned for multiple summers after that with nothing more than a slap on the wrist. The counselor who punched him was sent home that day, but still finished out the summer, not returning for another summer due to his hatred of management. Serenity came back to camp for multiple summers and even worked there for a few years.

The whole incident was something I didn't know how to handle or react to. At the time, I didn't know what to do because I was so uneducated on the subject, but even now, I still don't know what I would have told my younger self to do. The counselor who threw the punch was the only one who acted, so I partly admire that he was willing to do something; however, his violent answer didn't solve anything long-term. He ended up being the one who left, and the one who commented continued to work. At the time, I did all I thought I could, which was to comfort my friend, but even I didn't know what to tell her. Saying for her to ignore it felt weird, but I didn't know what to say. It was a situation that I wasn't taught how to handle, and for a while, I never did anything to teach myself how I should have. I was passive about race issues when I was younger, believing that since I was young, I couldn't do anything. This then led to me being uneducated on the topic when I was older and having to research how to handle issues. I still feel

unsure about how to handle issues, as I always feel nervous that I am saying the wrong thing or doing something wrong. I have the privilege of not having to deal with the issues directly, and while I want to be a support, I am nervous because I do not know how to do it. I try my best to support in ways I know I should (donations, petitions), but I don't take risks to support because I get nervous I will do something wrong in my best efforts.

***2026 Reflection:** When re-reading this section, I am shocked to see what has and has not changed for me. These stories are still pivotal to the formation of many of my values that have stayed consistent. One of the main reasons this has not changed greatly is that this section is mainly talking about parts of my past that inform my views, rather than making more current stances. This section paints the picture of the causes I care about and my personal ties to them, but I did not use these sections to make any strong stances about positionality or identity, but rather to explain my personal positionality. These are two stories from my past, so it makes sense they have not changed. I now view this paper as an introduction to my thoughts and beginning stages on the issues my project addresses, showing the starting point of where my thoughts began.*

### **Theory of Social Change:**

Although I believe in fighting all areas of oppression, Class and Race are two areas I am most passionate about fighting for due to my experiences/direct interaction with them. I have witnessed firsthand how these issues hurt people I care about, creating a passion for these topics. I have already begun taking steps to address them, but I know I need to make bigger steps and take larger risks using my skills to help with the fight against the oppression.

I have a passion for youth work (I've been working with youages from age 2-8 since I was 13). Youth work was the first job I ever had, and it continues to be a field I pursue. Part of creating social change is making sure the change is permanent, and to do that, the information and change need to be ingrained/taught to the younger generation. For change to truly work, it needs to happen and be maintained, and to keep it maintained, it needs to be something people are educated on. I plan on using my passion for youth work and my skills in the field to help keep the education on these issues going, and to properly educate. As time passes, people tend to look back on issues and simplify them further, and make them seem solved, but I plan on combating this by being accurate and true in my teachings.

I also work a lot with the arts (theater and dance minors, studio art hobbyist), which can be a very helpful way of teaching/communicating to youths about issues. People tend to simplify the issues when talking to kids because they believe young children cannot 'handle it'; however, that is not true. It is important to be truthful about these issues to kids, and although it is not always easy to explain, my artistic background can help with this education. The issue with educating kids on this topic is not that they cannot handle/understand it; it is that they need to be educated on it in a way they understand.

Coming in as someone who has not faced some of these issues myself, there is a balance I need to maintain. I come from a position of privilege, and I need to use this privilege to help promote and enact social change. I must use the station of privilege, including the fact that I can get a private education from Clark, to make the change. I want to support the best I can and use my privilege to elevate these issues; however, I mustn't take over the issues or make myself the center of the cause. There are ways in the battle against the oppression that I can do that others might not be able to, but it is also important not to take control. I am the type of person who,

when I commit to something, I go all in, but when I do this, sometimes it can take up too much space in the conversation. Although I have ties to these issues, I need to take a step back since I am not the one being the most impacted by them. Helping is important, but it is important for people like me not to take on a white savior complex and make sure we are supporting the cause for the right reasons, not just to wave the guilt we feel about these issues.

When it comes to social issues, I tend to focus more on personal/interpersonal vs structure/policies. I think this focus comes from my background in not only youth work but also my customer service experience. My best skill is interacting with people, not my writing or policy work. My focus on interpersonal/people-driven social changes comes from how I know that it is one of my best skills, so it is one of the ways I can succeed at making change. I know I am not skilled enough, or knowledgeable enough, to go through and analyze tons of policies; however, that doesn't mean I cannot help at all. I can use my more people-focused skills to help spread the message, and help take the overall message and make it consumable for people. I can act as an in-between force, helping with smaller-scale things that are more within my skill set to help support these causes.

Going into the education field changes what can be risked. To make true change, you need to actively challenge bias and beliefs, taking risks to make change there. Yet is a balance that needs to be maintained to be able to keep my position as an educator, yet still stand for what I believe in. Many teachers are forced out of the field for their political beliefs, both in the classroom and outside of it. I want to take risks, but I also need to do them cautiously, as if I were forced out of the education field, my impact could become lessened. There is a thin line that needs to be walked, especially with how early into my career I am. I need to balance my

belief in change and how you need to take large risks to make true change with my ability to take those risks.

***2026 Reflection:** This section highlights one of the biggest changes in my views from this project, which is idealistic ideas vs creating real impact. I think a lot of the fear I show for making big waves comes from an idealistic value that change will happen, and I only need to be a part of it, not the full solution. I thought that educating others would be 'enough' and was clearly shying away from taking a strong responsibility by hiding behind my 'skills' and future career. I viewed change as important, but I put it second to my own needs and comforts. Since working on this project, I have grown to be more confident in working to make change, be willing to put in more work, and put more of myself on the line. Part of making change is not waiting to see what the best course of action is based on what happens to the others who have already acted, but putting the work in, even with the risk.*

### **Theory of Social Inequality:**

We have all been born into a system of social inequality caused by the people who came before us, and continued by people now, including ourselves. The world we live in does not have equal access to resources and power, which leads to a lack of privilege for many communities. This system makes it difficult to move away from inequality, as the forces in power keep the system in place.

An important part of explaining inequities is acknowledging where you come from on these issues. I am coming from the perspective of someone who has not faced intense social inequality. I have had experience with some social inequality, but not to the same extent as many others, so I come from a place of privilege. It is important to acknowledge this privilege as it does affect my analysis, as I cannot directly relate to many forms of social inequality. The forms

of social inequity I do relate to also affect my perspective, as I have personal ties. Almost every person has been affected by social inequality, so it is important to acknowledge my relationship to social inequality, as everyone should when analyzing social inequities. I am a white woman from a middle-class family in Massachusetts. Although I faced economic/class and gender inequalities, it is not to the extent that others have to deal with, and it is important to decenter myself from the discussion of these issues.

***2026 Reflection:** This section, being the shortest, makes sense for my thoughts before beginning the main parts of the project. Throughout this project, juggling my position of privilege when speaking on social inequality was a challenge. I am an outsider coming into a city that faces social inequality, and social inequality is one of the main issues my project fights against, so the fact that I was nervous to put my thoughts into writing shows the growth this project has had on me. I felt I was unable to speak on social inequality, but I was designing my project to address it. This project has given me the courage to make statements and be willing to help with them, even if they are not 'my issue' to speak on. I talk about using my privilege to help communities, but I begin scared to address the issues for fear of mispeaking. Working on my thesis pushed me to make statements and be willing to write down my flaws or blind spots, something that I was unwilling to do in this section.*