The Ethnography Aspect: The Effects Poverty has on Children’s Development

English for Social Science

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**The Issue**

Throughout my life, I have personally experienced being a low-income child. As a kid, you don’t understand why the world is set up the way it is, you adapt to it and accept it. It wasn’t until I started maturing that I realize my financial status. I developed my own perspective on how poverty affected children’s development from my experiences. I based my paper on this topic because I am an insider member that was trying to acknowledge how money affected me personally; I can identify myself as a low-income child. Writing the research paper helped me understand the outcomes that occur when raised in a low-income home. Reading the statistic and articles enlighten me; however, the research didn’t surprise me. For instances, low-income children don’t have access to the same quality of resources that high-income parents tend to provide for their kids. These can include: a quality home & community, health care, early learning programs, & child care (Ripke, Crosby, 2002). On the other hand, retaining this information strengthens my perspective on how crucial your financial status plays a role into shaping you into the individual you will become. The ethnography process was fun; I had asked two close friends if I can conduct an interview based on the topic and gain their views on how poverty affected them.

**The Set Up**

It was a cloudy day on a Friday evening; I had told two of my good friends if I was able to interview them for my paper on how poverty affects child development and their future prosperity. Even though they were unaware of it, they were one of the reasons I chose this topic. We have scheduled to meet up at Queen Center Mall as we always do whenever we make plans. I was the first to arrive at the mall and headed towards the lounge area on the second floor that was located in between Pink and Kay’s Jewelry. As I sat down in one of the chairs and charged my laptop, I decided to prepare and strengthen the questions. A few minutes later, I have received a phone call from Mayky, one of the interviewees and told them where I was located. They proceeded to head towards my direction. About ten minutes passed by until they found me, and we dabbed each other up. Mayky is a 6’1 ft dark-skin Dominican with a lean fit physique. Mayky was wearing black sweats and a denim jean jacket on top of a regular black shirt. As for Josh, a 5’4 ft Dominican- Puerto Rican light skin guy with a scrawny body type, his clothing consisted of gray sweats with a white hoodie that had the word crybaby in the front and a young image of Johnny Depp. They were still puzzled on how the interview process was going to be, especially Josh since it was last minute. I had told Josh that I was going to ask him questions about what it is like to be “broke.” He started laughing and responded, “boy, do I have a lot to say about being broke.”

It was 9:00 pm, the mall was about to close, and we didn’t know exactly where to go to conduct the interview. I had suggested that we walk and talk, jotting down their responses and my reactions on my phone. As we head out, going towards the parking lot exit, we came across a red buggy car, the ones that parents pay hourly to put their child in as they roam through their shopping spree pushing their toddler. Being immature young adults, we all were thinking the same thing; we all wanted to get in and get pushed by the other. Joshua jumped on it, Mayky followed and started navigating the buggy car, heading it upwards a small hill and then riding it down while Josh was in the passenger’s seat. They were having fun and ended up leaving my eyesight. Eventually, I caught up; this time I wanted to get pushed around. I get on the car stroller and surprisingly the seat was comfortable enough that I took out my laptop and started conducting the interview. Mayky had more muscular strength compared to Josh, so he decided to push me out of the parking lot and into the streets. As usually we always do something dumb and careless. As I whipped out my questions, I had told Mayky and Josh that I wanted nothing but honesty in their responses and if they can, to be detailed and elaborate on their answers. They understood and told me they were going to “go in” on their answers because they wanted to help me get a good grade on my paper. I proceed with the first question, “how was your childhood?”.

**The Interview**

Mayky asserted himself and he described it as painful. Growing up, he only had two pairs of shoes, four pairs of pants and three shirts that he would repeatedly wear throughout the seven days in the week. He didn’t have a lot money to buy brand clothing, have a gym membership, or eat healthy nutrition’s food. Not only will past experiences shape them but their nutrition as well, receiving poor nourishment at the brain’s vital formation years because of economic deprivation, relates to lack of critical thinking and retention of information in the child’s following years. (Ripke, Crosby, 2002) Growing up most of his clothing would be hand-me-downs from his brother and cousins, and he wouldn’t care, he would take it. However, at times he would resort to stealing at a young age because he couldn’t obtain materialistic items, what really effected Mayky was being obese most of his childhood, because of his physical appearance he would get bullied constantly in school. It wasn’t until he started making jokes about himself and making his classmate laugh that the hatred and bullying stop. He learned to laugh and have a sense of humor, and eventually, people started to like Mayky’s personality. At this point, I asked Mayky if I can record because his feedback was a lot to retain. As I was setting up my phone to record, Mayky started freestyling on the response he had given. Mayky enjoys rapping and going to the studio to record, it is one of his artistic dreams that he would like to achieve. I interrupted and asked Mayky to put my phone into the top right-side pocket of his blue denim jacket. It was able to record the journey that we were embarking. The interview didn’t feel like an interview anymore; it turned into a deep conversation about our childhood experiences. As an insider, I was able to relate to many of Mayky’s claims and experiences, especially the statement he gave me on stealing and receiving hand-me-downs. He finished by saying, “When you grow up not having money, you learn to appreciate things; you learn to adapt and strive.”. He then told Josh, “Now take it,” letting go of the buggy. Josh thought he meant to take the mic; but, Mayky meant the car stroller as well, it wasn’t only his turn to answer but to push me around. Josh started by saying that his experiences were similar to Mayky’s but not quite. He explained that growing up with nothing benefited him; it gave him the knowledge to repair and fix things that were broken. He gave the example of his bike, whenever he damaged his bike, he wasn’t able to buy a new bike, he didn’t even have the option to pay someone else to fix it. It taught him to learn how to fix things because he didn’t have the money to throw it away and get a new one. He ended by saying that “Not growing up with that type of money, shows loyalty, it shows you that you don’t need that type of money to repair things, you become humble.” I was pleased that they were expressing themselves because I was getting to know aspects about them that I didn’t know, I was getting to know their story.

**Mayky’s and Josh’s Child Version**

I proceeded to ask them to describe the child version of themselves. Joshua started the conversation by stating that he was a reckless child. He would always end up in trouble; however, at a young age, people gave him the benefit of the doubt. He expressed that there were no mistakes he made as a child that impacted him because everyone would let it “slide.” It wasn’t until he grew up and made some unwise decisions with the law and school that he had to learn from his mistake. He said that his mistakes helped him learned to not commit the same mistakes again, saying, “You can’t just do the same mistake five times and expect a different outcome.” He finished by describing himself as a careless child that didn’t care about school; all he cared about was hanging out and chilling with his friends. As soon as Josh was done talking, Mayky quickly jumped into the conservation and described the child version of himself as a dumb kid that didn’t have a set goal and mindset. He elaborated on how he didn’t have a strong vocabulary and on his ignorance of money and the streets. As a young kid, he didn’t know how money worked back then; he just knew it kept getting acquired. Mayky was insecure because he was obese and that he never had the confidence he does now. He would have difficulty approaching a girl and had to overcome that challenge. When a child does not retain and develop the social and emotional skills to advance in their early ages, they are more likely to have difficulties learning it later on (Knitzer, 2007). Mayky then changes the direction of the conversation by saying that although he was dumb, he was very appreciated.

**Lack of Resources**

I asked them if they were ever deprived of any resources because they lacked money. Josh started off by saying he always participating in a community team, he was in Bayside Rangers, a football team. However, after breaking his arm he had to quit playing the sports because he needed surgery. He couldn’t afford receiving medical assistances for his arm, he was devasted because football was huge part of his childhood. When I heard this, it reminded me of when I dislocated my kneecap. I needed surgery because my right knee kept popping out when I would put pressure on my right leg. Only a people who I am close to know that I fell into a dark period in my life after that incident because I had to give up on soccer. Soccer was my distraction to my problems; it was a stress reliever and it was my happiness. I expressed myself to Josh and he felt the pain in my story. He told me his mother was upset because she encouraged Josh at a young age to purse the sport and knew the talent Josh developed through intense practice. Mayky joined and shared that not many know that he is artistic. He revealed that his middle school teachers would take him out of class to design the walls for the school. He would enjoy it because he didn’t get to attend class. His middle school teachers wanted him to attend a specialized art school. However, the portfolio and fees costed Mayky $65, and at the time that was a lot of money for his mother to provide. Mayky’s mom has never been interested in Mayky’s hobbies or passions, she didn’t support him. The teachers tried their best to submit the portfolio, but it never made it on time, as an alternative they decided to enlist him to the High School for Arts and Business; a small public school. Several studies have shown that there is a direct linear relationship between the family’s income and children’s success rates (Knitzer, 2007). Joking Mayky said “The best they could do for me was Arts and Business, my grades weren’t good but I was really good at art, they were like maybe he will thrive in that school, so they put me there and I became a pothead” We all started laughing because Mayky always joked about his past experiences. The inability to obtain these resources and skills can cause complications such as high levels of stress, diabetes, and substance abuse. (Knitzer, 2007)

**High Income Friends**

We were tired of the buggy that we decided to leave it near a pile of garbage, from there on we were all on foot. Josh had to do some few errands, he had to meet up with some people. On our way to the different destination I changed the topic of the conversation, I wanted to know if they had any high-income friends and if so, how did they shape an image of high-income people. Mayky was ready to “spill the tea”, he told me about his best friend Elvin. Compared to all Mayky’s friends, Elvin had parents that were house owners, car owners and had their own business. He proceeded on telling me that Elvin would buy him food every day after school. However, after Mayky would receive the money, Elvin would complain and belittle Mayky because he never carried 5 dollars on him. Mayky said “high income people tend to give you something and hold it against you, while people with low income status are humbler and are raised to give and not expect anything back.” At this point Josh was quiet because Mayky was ranting on how Elvin and he would fight because of that reason. However, Josh interrupted and told Mayky that he’s right. Josh was able to relate because he had a best friend named Damien that would hold Josh against all the things, he had done for him. “I would ask because he was my best friend, but he always had to bring up everything I owned him”. Josh told Mayky to save him some answers because Mayky took the words right out of his mouth.

**Future Prosperity**

Currently Mayky works as a janitor for a private white school in Brooklyn. He is content with the job because it isn’t hard labor as his last job at Burger King. Mayky plans to go back to college. He admits that he was not prepare and was unable to handle the workload that college and his previous job put on him. Mayky plans to travel and have his own business, he describes himself as a business man, that is planning on getting his real estate license. As for Josh, although he always been in the streets most of his life getting into fights and smoking, he wants to finish high school but is unsure if he might go to college because school was never for him. But he did share with me that his dream is to become a marine biologist. As of right now they are both enjoying their life because they know that whatever is meant for them will be.

**The Event**

I wanted to know more about how children’s financial status led to other harmful factors in a child’s development, such as the lack of parent’s involvement. Several studies have found that low-income children don’t receive the same nurture and participation from their parents or guardian as higher income children, due to the hours they have to dedicate on to make ends meet and obtain the basic necessities for their child (Knitzer, 2007). The attachment of a parental figure is crucial in the early stages of a child. The field site I choose to attend was the Museum of Natural History. I question whether there would be more high-income children than low-income children in the museum. After interviewing Mayky and Josh, I obtained the idea that many low-income children who are below the poverty threshold don’t have the ability to spend money to enjoy activities as a family. Before going into the museum, I called Mayky to asked if his mom ever took him to the museum or any other fun activities. He told me that she didn’t have time to go out because she would come home from work tired. He recalls that his mom only took him to the zoo once throughout his entire childhood. I was unable to get in contact with Joshua for his response. However, with the background knowledge that I have acquired from the interview and research paper, I entered the museum looking from particular observation. The museum being located at midtown Manhattan, I knew that they were going to be a lot of white, Caucasian families. As I entered the child section, a small square figured room that had an extended narrow hall on the first floor and also had a second floor that was like a balcony. If you were able to go on the second floor you were able to look down and see the view of the first floor. The floors were divided into two ages groups. The first floor had kids that range from the age of 2-8, while on the second-floor kids who were above the age of eight, were allowed upstairs. I roamed throughout the room and encounter only white families and children. A part of me question why the room was not diverse considering that New York City is very diverse. I took into consideration that most of them could be tourist. However, throughout my entire experience in that museum, I did not encounter Hispanic families, I encounter a few families with colors, but it was approximately 2 or 3 families out of the countless families I witnessed. As I was looking at the historical readings on the wall, I saw white-parents playing with their child. They didn’t have their phones in their hands, letting their children play while they are distracted. All the mothers and fathers were interacting and playing along with their child’s imagination. I found it adorable and amusing how some parents are more involve with their child because through personal experience I only visited the museum when it was a class trip, other than that I never attended a museum with my family. I continue to walk around, and there were parents that read to their children on the carpet floor. Some parents were even running around playfully chasing their kids as if they were dinosaurs and the child was a helpless creature. Research reinforces that “the cognitive development of young children is influenced as much by the actual amount of household income as by their parents' activity” (Williamson, Salkie, Letourneau, 2005 P.5).

**It’s a Wrap**

To sum up the entire process, it is clear that due to a family’s low income it leads to other conflictual factors that are necessary for the developmental process of a child. The lack of parental involvement, resources and quality environment all play a role shaping a child. Through Mayky’s and Josh’s story, many can learn that out of a bad situation something positive can be extracted. They both struggle financially but through it all they learned life lessons and the value of being humble even if their situation was never a good one. Mayky learned how to be comfortable in his own skin while Josh learned that money isn’t everything in life. The presence or absences of a skill can deeply influence the overall development of an individual (Bornstein, 1989). Even though Mayky never had a parental role model to teach him about having self-confidence or encourage his artistic nature, he managed to achieve it on his own; although it was difficult. And the same goes to Josh, he never obtains the academic skills at an early age causing him to have difficulties in his schoolwork. What surprised me the most is, even though they have major set-backs, such as dropping out of college, completing high school and criminal charges, they still managed to maintain a positive view towards their future.

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