Social forces: "troubles" or "issues"?

Experience, Personal Experience

Many, if not all personal experiences, are directly or indirectly affected by dominant social forces and are common experiences among many people. In other words, what many see as " troubles", are often actually " issues". Being aware of the relationship between personal experience and the wider society is what is known as having a " sociological imagination" (Lemert, 2012, p. 15). People often fail to be conscious of the connection between the troubles in their personal lives and the bigger picture surrounding prevalent issues. Thus, they lack a sociological imagination (Mills, 1959, para. 3).

There is a significant difference between " troubles" and " issues". Troubles are private matters, matters that can either be fully accounted for by an individual's character or matters that can be chalked up to fate. Either way, it is a matter that they feel guilty for and have to deal with on their own. In contrast, issues are public matters, matters that are widespread and systemic/structural (Lemert, 2012, p. 15). When one lacks a sociological imagination, they are unable to differentiate between the two. In order to further demonstrate this concept and bring it to life, I will share an example. In the professional field of Child and Youth Care, which is my major of study, a worker will encounter children facing adversity in many different ways. For example, one could encounter a girl who wishes to look thin. In order to achieve this, she becomes anorexic, causing severe health problems.

Now, if she analyzes this as a " trouble", she will conclude that it's her personal insecurity and that the deterioration of her health is her own doing. However, if she uses her sociological imagination and analyzes it as a " trouble", she would come to the realization and conclusion that it's the obsession of society in general, surrounding having a thin body, that has

indirectly affected her. It is the unrealistic beauty standard in media, which represents society, that portrays beautiful and desirable girls as thin. This kind of representation affects many people, whether directly or indirectly, as it happened in the case of this particular girl. If there were only a few individuals going through a similar problem, then it would be logical to consider it an individual or personal problem.

However, when it comes to many individuals suffering from the same problem or very similar problems, then it becomes a social issue. In this case, it's a social issue, as anorexia is a very prevalent disorder. It is very important to be aware of the difference between troubles and issues by using your sociological imagination because otherwise, one may end up being falsely conscious of their social position (Mills, 1959, para. 8). For example, this girl would have blamed herself and as a result, felt inferior. When one is aware of the connection their problem has to issues, it helps them be mindful of the situation, lessens the psychological impact, and makes it easier to seek help/solve the problem.