

Privilege: the making of an adolescent elite at st. paul's school

Sociology



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Even though Jason came from a wealthy background, he had to learn afresh how to behave in school and become a paulie (p. 93). Students from their first day in school go through certain rituals such as seated meals, religious services, and dressing lessons to break the barriers existing in a hierarchical society and be at ease or comfortable. Failure to embody ease means non-achievement of the elite status. In these events, students interact with seniors and faculty members hence learning new things from them such as table etiquette and manner of dressing.

In this case, Khan assumes the American culture of hard work and merit. As such, corporeal ease is not inherited but earned through practice. The way to signal this elite status according to Khan is to display ease and openness in all social contexts. If not, one is assumed to not have “got it” (94-97). For example, even though Carla was from a privileged background and knew the elite mannerisms, she rarely interacted with others hence felt formal, distant, or forced hence different from the rest of the students. For her, the school vision of teaching “how the world works” was unfair to her as it neglected her background and assumed universality (p. 113). However, the Americans embraced this vision and became pallies. This ease is the “true mark of privilege that is essential to be elite” (p. 112). St. Paul’s school thus gives students the cultural resource to attain this privilege through repeated experiences; there are no boundaries based on wealth and particular knowledge rather St. Paul’s creates an even field for all. What mattered for Khan is what happened in school and the outside world.

Questions

1. Does the socio-economic background of a student affect the acquisition of privilege?
2. How has the view of the elite changed?

Chapter 4: Gender and the Performance of Privilege

The embodiment of privilege or ease is crucial in St. Paul's boarding school as it enables one to develop a sense of belonging to the school and acquire the elite status. However, it is the practice of this privilege that determines if one is behaving rightly or not in different social contexts. The question that needs answering though is; does gender have an impact on the practice of privilege? Do boys and girls have the same experiences? Khan in this chapter argues that the performance of privilege is affected by sexuality (pp. 114-151). White boy's sexuality is assumed to be natural, girls on the other hand struggle on how to express or manage their sexuality. On one hand, they are expected to control their sexuality and on the other, this control is regarded as not being at ease. As such, boys and girls have different struggles in trying to belong to the school with girls being at a disadvantage. The manner of dressing does differentiate some girls from the rest; besides being at ease with their sexuality is a condemned act.

The essence of privilege is ease though the American culture values relentless hard work. A paulie is thus expected to be a hard worker besides following the school culture (p. 115). However, girls are never at ease since

they have to work so hard to be pleasing hence losing comfort in the process. For example, the way Mary Fisher was going about her duties though she was showing how hardworking she was, was all wrong as it brought a lot of discomfort and queer behavior not portrayed by others. She succeeded in her work but she did not enjoy the privilege. As such, according to Khan “ there is a link between embodiments of privilege and displaying right corporeal marks of belonging and sexuality” (114-151). It is hard for girls to act easily across diverse situations, unlike boys due to social expectations.