

Class inequality has been around as long as society itself, a never-ending cycle that few can escape. There are thousands of reasons this phenomenon exists, however, one can be explained through the ideas of Marx's "Commodity Fetishism", Mantsio's "Class in America", and the idea of Collective Consciousness. "Commodity Fetishism" is the given value of an item not based on its actual worth for the materials and labor but on what it means to society. The paper "Class in America" describes what the government considers to be the "middle class" and that is not representative of the wealth in it, rather it is loosely defined and damaging the people on the lower end of the spectrum. The idea of the Collective Consciousness is what society determines to be the norm. The combined norms demonstrated by the social price of an item, and loosely defined class, are both enabled by the collective consciousness, creating great disparities in the lower class, removing the ability to bring themselves out of economic despair.

Loosely defined classes in America have led to an inequality of opportunity. In Mantsio's study, he demonstrates the drastic lifestyle differences between people in different social classes, some are living paycheck to paycheck while others enjoy lavish private school education and expensive luxuries. When people are categorized into the same label while simultaneously having drastic lifestyle differences it creates an inequality on those in the lower spectrum through false representation. False categorization creates an incorrect perception of the true economic conditions that "middle-class" people are living in. For example, take a case of a family similar to those on the lower end of the spectrum from Mantsio's case. A family lives paycheck to paycheck, yet are considered to be "middle-class". This family would then not be deemed in needing of help through government policy as they are nowhere near the conceived "poverty line" and are instead grouped with people who can afford private school education. Having an

fact they do. Creating a narrative that the country is better off, and therefore there is no movement to create a system that better represents the true quality of life.

Commodity fetishism creates a fiction of the quality of products leading to inequality towards the lower classes. This concept explains the significance that a capitalist society puts on the image of an item, the item becomes more than just its purpose. For example, say a parent from a family from the lower end of the spectrum of the “middle class”, sees an ad for a perfume with their favorite celebrity. They then fixate on this particular item for its endorsement created by a public figure rather than the scent itself. This item then becomes greater than its intended purpose. This would be fine if the higher end of the spectrum fixates on an item and decides to buy it, but for the lower-end, it is not the same. These products are often expensive and gain social value for their high price tag. Frequently people spend beyond their means to afford a luxury created by this commodity fetishism for its reputation. This concept affects all classes but specifically fixates its impact on lower classes as they have similar social standards of increased reputation through luxurious items, however, more often than not, can not afford them.

The collective consciousness creates the norms that hide the concepts of “Class in America” and “Commodity Fetishism”. The Collective Consciousness creates a social standard for a population. Meaning whether the standard is a truth or not is irrelevant, rather it is what everyone believes to be true. This connects to the Class in America, through the fact that the class system that has been set up is a version of the collective Consciousness, and has the ability to change if the people accept a new truth. However, with class, it has also been collectively decided it is taboo to talk about income leading to further stagnation of the issue. Commodity Fetishism is the people who collectively create the idea that certain items have a prestige beyond

considered “off-brand”. The people collectively decide that it is more socially impressive to have a “name brand” version of something and that they are seen as better when they have it. These combined factors lead to families like those in the lower middle class to continuously suffer through the collective beliefs of the population.

The people who currently live in Western society are continuously oppressed by the collective beliefs and motivations considered to be the standard. However, with any belief, there is potential for change. It has been shown that progress can be made through a combined effort, the civil rights movements and feminist movements have shown that it is possible to shift the collective standard significantly. For this to happen with the class system, it is necessary to remove the taboo of addressing class and promote a newfound sense of awareness in the general population. The willingness to talk about these disparities, and expand knowledge of where products come from can begin the necessary change that the class system needs to lift people up to a position where they can truly have equal opportunity.