

Class matters

How diverse is your social circle?

What makes us different? What makes two people "click" and others don't? Is it just about our personalities? Does race, age, gender or class play a part? If it does what part does it play?

Think about it. How diverse is your friend pool really? Are you really so racially and socially diverse in your relationships and friendships that it doesn't matter? Or do we stick to what feels comfortable. Is it possible that we seek out what we find familiar and stick with that?

It's more than possible. You may find today that you have a mixture of male and female friendships whereas in a different time that would not have been socially acceptable.

But if you take a closer look you'll also find that you may tend to stick to friends closer to your age, race and/or class. What is the deciding factor? Today it's socially acceptable for men and women to be friends. But somewhere within our own cultures we still have that divide. There is a class war. Even if having friends of the same race is acceptable or having friends of different ages and gender is acceptable we still draw the line when it comes to class.

Society plays a big role in how we choose whom we interact with. We tend to be friends with those of our own social status. We either went to school with them, they live in our town or our neighbourhood. It's comfortable. It's familiar. Anyone outside of that may be too alien, their ways not our ways.

It's in our heads, in our comfort levels. We don't want to change or adapt to different ways or ideas. We say we do, but we really don't. If we grew up in a culture that didn't accept males and females to interact you wouldn't be comfortable. If you grew up in a culture that said you couldn't have friends of different races or ages then you wouldn't be comfortable or you might take for granted that it was possible. Society told you (maybe not literally) that it was not ok and to stay on your side of the fence.

While we've managed to break down some walls, we've yet to scale or even pull down that wall between the classes. Who are we kidding? How comfortable would the average white middle class person be hanging out

with someone of a lower class even possibly of ethnic decent. And who are we kidding how comfortable would the average black, urban male feel hanging out at a garden party with a few upper middle class ladies.

It's not about wrong or right or better or worse. It's about comfort levels. It's about understanding and adapting. It's not about tolerance (that's such a negative word) it's about accepting, learning from each other and realizing that there are many ways to live in the world. It's about realizing that there is more than one way to live in the world and to do things.

But lets also be realistic. Our experiences in life as we're socialized in our childhood play a major roll in our personalities, what we can and cannot do. It's

not just about opportunities offered but about how it makes us feel that there is such a huge gap in how we live in this country. Class matters. It matters only as far as the different experiences in our lives shape our way of thinking, seeing the world and even in how we move through the world. It affects our relationships and our understanding of people we see everyday. It affects how we view the world, interact and react to the world.

We have choices. We can change how we react to those around us. We can try to put ourselves into a mindset of understanding and acceptance. We can find it in ourselves to expand our minds and find comfort in our differences.

We judge what we don't understand. Do those that have judge those that don't or do those that don't judge those that have because they feel deprived of what the opportunities afforded upper classes? There is an emotional and mental wall as well as an economic one?

For whatever reason earlier this week I decided to hop on a bus. On the way back home an elderly African-American woman asked me about my piercings. She wanted to

know if it was part of my culture. That was the beginning of an interesting 45-minute conversation.

She wasn't judging me. She wasn't judging my race, ethnicity, or class. She was curious. She was curious about me, about why I was riding the bus, about who I was and why I looked how I liked. She had questioned and wanted to have a conversation. We even had a conversation about how people have forgotten how to sit and speak to each other face to face. She tells me that in her generation people used to speak to each other face to face, there was no texting, no emailing, and no internet.

Her biggest question was about religion and why all the confusion. Why the different denominations, and interpretations. She wanted to know if war had caused all this and

if there was ever a time in the history of the world that we were of one mind, one people, with one language and culture.

The only thing that I could say to that was simple. I didn't know. I don't think any of us really know except that as humans we always find a way to disagree. By meeting her I had the most interesting, stimulating conversation.

At the end of the day my question was why did she single me out? Her response was simply that she could tell by how I was dressed, how I acted and spoke that I didn't belong there. But instead of ostracizing me, judging me or ignoring me she chose to ask questions, try to understand and connect. I found that refreshing. I was in my element.

If I can have a conversation with someone that I can see them in my social circle regardless of age, gender, race or class. I really do have friends from different backgrounds, ages, gender, race and class. I am in my element when my mind is stimulated, regardless of class.

The price of poverty

By Alicia Bayat
Voice Editor-in-Chief

"Cut programs and services for low-and moderate-income families, seniors, and students to pay for tax cuts for the wealthy." Those are the words that stand out in an article in the Progressive Pulse titled Ryan Budget Proposal Would Harm Low-income Families & State Budget in North Carolina.

These words spread across news papers, newswires and the internet will affect many people throughout the U.S. as jobs become scarce, and the economy struggles to recuperate.

Last week the House passed a bill that fundamentally cuts social needs programs for the poor. This will affect food stamps, Medicaid and cut Medicare programs. This will unilaterally affect the most vulnerable in society, children and the elderly.

With a country already in dire straights, a near government shut down and states crippled by severe budget cuts this bill may only serve to further exacerbate North Carolina budget issues.

Individuals and families that fall under these programs already struggle socially and economically to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table. Government programs are created to help temporarily balance out the needs of the most economically vulnerable in society.

In a time of economic crisis it is the time that citizens most need their government's help to stay on their feet and ride out the crisis and this is the time in which it becomes important reinforce these initiatives and to help create jobs and programs that will enable families to survive.

The U.S. government readily poured funds into programs to help middle class families keep their homes. It further infused funds into corporate and bank bail outs.

The majority of the work force, from the individuals that stock your grocery shelves to those that prepare your food everyday will be affected by this new bill. It will make life difficult for those who are already struggling to survive.

This bill will exploit those in the direst need but yet funds tax cuts. What does that mean?

North Carolina jobs are being cut state-wide. How will families survive without help, without jobs and without opportunities?

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Society plays a big role in how we choose whom we interact with. We tend to be friends with those we see everyday. We either went to school with them, they live in our town or our neighbourhood.

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