

My presentation today will be breaking down the model of success that is present in neoliberal capitalist societies such as our own. To start, I would like to ask a question: How many people here want to be successful?

So you might be curious about the question, What does it take to succeed? This is an important topic to explore because the idea of success is something that everyone strives for: it motivates and drives us to achieve. In addition, it's necessary to investigate the causes of success-- where it originates, the steps leading to it, and the people who actually have obtained success. I plan to take a closer look at what exactly defines "success", how certain people came to their success, and it's fundamental roots of as the hallmark of achievement in a capitalist society.

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To set up a foundation for what I will be talking about today, I've outlined the important terms that I use in my research, as well key pillars that I will be discussing throughout my presentation. However, I would like you to keep in mind the term "Successorship" as you think about these concepts.

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Neoliberalism: is defined as a modified form of liberalism tending to favor free-market capitalism

Capitalist: is defined as a wealthy person who uses money to invest in trade and industry for profit in accordance with the principles of capitalism.

I will be using these terms throughout my presentation as a reference for the type of society we live in, and how this affects the success system that is ingrained in the American social structure.

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Money is always associated with success because it's a quantitative way to measure one's achievement in life. We can count it, and it's tangible. Money also has a direct correlation to advantages that stem from a wider range of opportunities available, and the ability to pursue those opportunities in a financially secure way.

This being said, The more money one has, the more opportunities are opened up for them. Money and wealth are direct results of one's career and job; if one has a high paying job, they make more money. In order to get a high paying job, one must have an education. So, education results in money, which, as stated before, is a quantitative measure of a person's success as defined by neoliberalism.

Power is an additional key pillar to success. Power can come through politics, social standing, or career choice. From this conclusion, it can be determined that not everyone has access to power. A white person, for example, is more inclined to succeed through power and wealth than a black

person, simply because of racial prejudice. This is an example of a disadvantage that people have and cannot control. These systems exclude certain individuals in their route to success based on things that dictate their lives and cannot be changed. People who have disabilities or come from minority groups have a smaller chance at achieving success through wealth and power because of the stigmas set against them by society.

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To take a step back from these concepts, defining class is also a key factor in determining a person's likelihood to achieve success in their life. Class can be defined by four factors: Education, inheritance, race, and gender. For example, The National Partnership of Women and Families provided information on the the actual evidence of this gap, stating "In the 25 states with the largest numbers of Latinas working full time, year-round, pay for Latinas is around 42 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men in those states." In addition, academic Robert Manduca of Harvard University states " In 1968, shortly after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, the median family income of African Americans was 57 percent that of whites. In 2016, after almost 50 years of anti-discrimination legislation, attempts to equalize access to education, and cultural change, it was 56 percent." A 2018 Center of American Progress report titled "Why a job is not enough" found that "Latinx workers are more likely to hold full-time jobs than white workers, but their median wealth is only 14.6 percent of the typical white family's wealth." Another CAP report concluded that "the median wealth for African American households with a college degree equaled about 70 percent of the median wealth of white households without a college degree." These are just a few of the divisive pieces of data that separate the privileged from the underprivileged.

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The American success story all originated in this idea of "The American Dream." Reflecting on what we just learned about money and power, is equality of opportunity available to every American? Through my research, I realized I couldn't redefine the American dream as a simple definition: but rather a system. As shown in this diagram which represents the self replicating system of american success, we see inputs of education, race, gender, and inheritance: all uncontrollable variables that people are born with, and society dictating which of these traits are preferred. At the bottom are the outputs of success: money, power and successorship. And to the side, I have placed variables that function as inputs and outputs to the system: Money and power.

So how does this system work? The inputs of the systems are things that make it easier to become successful, or rather, things that don't make it more difficult to be successful. Being educated, white, male, or coming from an upper-middle class background are factors that simply make success easier to reach. The outputs of the system are the benefits of financial reward and

power. And of course, the ability to replicate the system, which is successorship. This system is the reality of the American Dream.

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For a case study to prove these findings, I thought: who is the most powerful person in the US?

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Donald Trump is an example of what achieving the American Dream supposedly looks like. He is a well educated, affluent, geopolitical leader. In Fact, Trump benefits from “Societal natural selection” which has proven that it is preferable to be a white, educated, affluent male in neoliberal capitalist societies. He exerts the power he has inherited through the successorship of whiteness and patriarchy unto women he deems as lesser than him.

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But I’ll let him speak for himself when it comes to what Trump has to say about women. In reference to Carly Fiorina, a Republican presidential nominee for 2016, Trump can be quoted stating: "Look at that face. Would anybody vote for that? Can you imagine that, the face of our next president? I mean, she's a woman, and I'm not supposed to say bad things, but really, folks, come on. Are we serious?"

In regards to the #MeToo movement, Trump was quoted in a 2018 interview with Bob Woodward stating: “You've got to deny, deny, deny and push back on these women. If you admit to anything and any culpability, then you're dead. ... You've got to be strong. You've got to be aggressive. You've got to push back hard. You've got to deny anything that's said about you. Never admit.”

The reason that I chose to use Donald Trump as my main case study is because it’s so striking: He is considered to be the hallmark of success, the pinnacle of societal dominance, and the figurehead of our country. This is our president.

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Other examples of success are Phil Knight and Jeff Bezos, two influential businessmen who I chose to analyze because they fit in the mold of the American success story. Jeff Bezos uses the exercise fallacy, or power defined as the exercise of it, by overworking employees to the point of extreme exhaustion: all because it’s in his best interest for the capitalist nature of his company. In The New York Times article, *Inside Amazon: Wrestling Big Ideas in a Bruising*

*Workplace*, Jodi Kantor and David Streitfeld analyze the working conditions of Amazon employees, white collar and blue collar. They determined that the overworked employees were being forced into unsafe work so that the company wouldn't fall behind in productivity. The article discussed the fifty five hour work weeks, competitive compensation, and unsafe work environments. To quote, "In Amazon warehouses, employees are monitored by sophisticated electronic systems to ensure they are packing enough boxes every hour. Amazon came under fire in 2011 when workers in an eastern Pennsylvania warehouse toiled in more than 100-degree heat with ambulances waiting outside, taking away laborers as they fell"

Phil Knight is also a shining example of the exercise fallacy. While in terms of capitalism and neoliberalism he is a role model of excellence, his success is only built off the backs of others. This issue became extremely important when Nike faced allegations of international sweatshops manufacturing their goods. In 2000, Knight had been planning to make a 30 million dollar donation to the University of Oregon, which was then rescinded. Why? Because of a student backed workers rights monitoring program. Nike's statement read "The University of Oregon, despite its unique relationship with Nike and Phil, is free to align itself with the Workers Rights Movement. However, it does not mean that we are required to support those efforts with which we have fundamental disagreements." Nike admitted that they disagree with *workers rights*. The concern of worker's rights is not a priority with Nike, because the desire to make money is greater than the desire to provide safe environments for their workers. This is key to understanding Knight's use of the exercise fallacy-- his execution of such affects the underprivileged in order for him to maintain his success through power over the powerless and wealth accumulated from the exploitation of workers.

Knight and Bezos are additionally examples of the vehicle fallacy because they gained their resources and means by being born with natural advantages that have lead them to their privilege within the system as they have been born into whiteness and patriarchy with access to higher education.

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To tie all of these ideas together, it's clear that the system of success is based around successorship. The preferred traits of the system such as whiteness, masculinity, power, and wealth continue this self replicating motif of successorship in neoliberal capitalist societies. It's a distinct pattern that we can identify from observing it's recurring effects time and again. This is how the system of successorship works. The power and wealth aspects of success are passed down through the system by white, male successors, and by excluding others from this system. The access to "success" is kept in a tightly knit loop protected by how others are categorized by society. If these are the themes that we see in American society, how do we break the cycle? How does the self replicating, closed system of success become universal? The concept of successorship as a way to sustain stereotypes and deprivation of minorities through the tools of

wealth and power only emphasize the methodic weathering of “The American Dream” in neoliberal capitalist societies.

Thank You