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Sociology, Racism



Olivia Lohmann Honors English Final Draft Racism: The Ever Raging Conflict

A few years ago, my fellow seventh graders and I were standing around, waiting for the bell to ring. We weren't doing much of anything aside from chattering back and forth with each other. A third grade class happened to walk by my grade with their teacher, all in single file line. While the little kids passed us, one of the seventh graders said "hello" to all of the tiny people that proceeded by. A little girl, which looked to be of African American descent, strolled past my grade along with the rest of her class. When the social seventh grader saw the little girl walk past she commented, "N****r girl". Maybe none of my other classmates heard her make that derogatory remark, but I highly doubt it. Even when my fellow student was confronted for her obscene language, she didn't think what she did was wrong; to her that was common language. Racism, as well as derogatory terms, has been active since the dawn of time. In 1986, Eldridge Cleaver said, "Let us recall that the white man, in order to justify slavery and, later on, to justify segregation, elaborated a complex, all — persuasive myth which at one time classified the black man as a subhuman beast of burden." Slavery has been abolished in the United States, but it is still evident in other countries. In 2001, Africa was found shipping out men, women, and children by boat to become modern day slaves. Throughout history, as well as today, there were not just white slave owners, or slaves. With the owning of slaves, as well as what Eldridge Cleaver said, races and ethnicities were considered to only be part human. From the allegations placed upon people of different races, hateful terms sprouted that were, and still are, used to categorize people. The N — word is not the only hateful term for a band of people, but it is one

of the most common in the U. S. and has been around since the 17th century. When my mom used to work at an early development agency she had a poster hanging in her office that read, " No Child is born a Racist". Basically, what that poster was saying is prejudices are acquired. If you grow up in a community or have a home life that belittles other people based on their heritage, then chances are, that's the type of attitude you will grow to have as well. Randall Robinson said, " One doesn't decide on bigotry or altruism the way one chooses a college major. The twig is bent early and keeps its shape throughout. There are of course exceptions, but I suspect, without benefit of survey data, that they are few. " Derogatory terms have become, in some ways, acceptable in this day and age. They aren't held to the offensive standard they deserve. Just walking around my town and school I can hear derogatory terms used in people's everyday speech. Not only that, but they can be heard in songs all over the world. A common use of disrespectful, derogatory terms today is in a joking form, as if the true meaning of the words don't remain. There are even some dictionaries that classify derogatory terms as " socially acceptable" in particular parts of the world. TV shows will now openly say offensive terms. Jersey Shore lost several sponsors for saying the word " Guido" in almost every episode they produced. It's not just Jersey Shore that makes racial comments; there are tons of other shows, as well as channels, which spew out hateful remarks and thoughts. Politicians from the past, as well as the present have made underlying statements that border on racism and sometimes, that cross the line. A good example would be the latest Stabenow commercial that was aired during the Super Bowl. It stereotyped Asian — American's as job

stealing immigrants that can barely speak English. Though the commercial was made in an attempt to get a leg up in a political election, it was in extremely bad taste. One of the republican candidates that is running in this upcoming presidential election, Newt Gingrich, has made quite a few borderline comments. One of them stated the children who attend schools in poverty stricken areas should work as the janitor at their learning facility. Also, another republican presidential candidate, Mitt Romney, stated - out of context - that he didn't care about the poor. That may not seem like a derogatory comment, but about 71% of the poverty in the United States is made up of people from Hispanic and African American decent. There is prejudice all over the world, but at times it seems as though it's more prominent in certain areas, including the Upper Peninsula. When asked what she thought about that statement, Shirley Brazzo, from the NMU Multicultural Education and Resource Center, said: " Yes, as a whole, because we don't have a lot of diversity in the UP, except for Native Americans. And, the further you get away from the universities, the fewer people of color there are. Because people don't know someone of another race, they believe the stereotypes about them, instead of learning about an individual. " I conducted an interview with the woman at the NMU Center for Native American Studies, April Lindala, a Native American woman that has lived in Michigan for 40 years. Me: Have you ever been subjected racism? If so, in what ways? April: Yes. It depends on how you look at this — because there is direct racism from one human to another and indirect from external influences (e. g. media) to the individual than there is internal oppression (i. e. when someone from the race you are represented within turns against

you). However, it should be noted that there is racism, but also prejudices. As far as my own experience...being a child growing up in and around Detroit...in some cases, I wasn't dark enough to hang with the African — American children and not light enough to hang with the Caucasian students. As a teenager, I went to a predominantly white school and so I faced a lot of prejudice... but it was subtle...nothing outright racist. Since college it's been mainly subtleties...overall institutional racism is rampant in the professional world so while I have no specific instances of direct racism off the top of my head, I do consistently experience internalized oppression. Me: What, personally, offends you? April: Direct racism — from one human being to another. Indirect racism — from the media...there are tons and tons of examples, internalized oppression, and prejudices of all kinds. Me: Why do you think people still have a tendency to make racist comments? April: There are several answers to this question. They could be uneducated, or people in power who know they can get away with such behavior. Maybe they have never met anyone from other groups other than their own. They're attempting to lift themselves up by putting others down. They are attention seekers. They have been influenced by a bias and prejudice media that often frames a story around stereotypes. Or, they are simply mean human beings and find it easier to be mean than to be nice. I met a young white woman who had been raped by a Mexican man. This is a very tragic situation for this woman and as an advocate for women's rights and safety, I was appalled of her situation. However, she said she would never trust another Mexican. I felt bad because one of my student employees was the happiest-go-lucky guy in the world, loved to make people laugh, and great with youth. But...he is of

Mexican ancestry, very dark skin and hair, often profiled at airports (before 9-11). I told the woman I felt bad for her because she would never meet this other student who was so positive and full of life because of her prejudice beliefs. Internally I asked myself -- What if she had been raped by a white man? This is similar to the terrorists and profiling of Arab men. No one profiles white man with blond hair and a crew cut, but Timothy McVeigh who blew up the federal building in Oklahoma in 1994 fit that description (white man, blond hair with a crew cut). Me: Do you find that the content of learning is based on the social structure in which a personality develops? April: Absolutely...and there are a million variables to this. For example, the Indian boarding schools, students were “ learning” in a very threatening educational environment wrought with violence and abuse and manipulation. Students who attended those schools would have a very different experience than those students who have a very safe environment...students who are empowered, engaged in learning rather than abused as a process for learning. Another example, and I’ve seen this, students who come from affluent school districts have more opportunities for learning in a safe environment than those students who live in poverty stricken areas where they are worried about the next meal and having a home to live in. When a parent has to work two or three jobs, they will not be able to be a part of their child’s education. If a family is affluent, the child may be helped by a parent or tutor; their lives do not matter on survival for basic needs. Schools are where children and young adults spend most of their days, it is their learning environment. In L’Anse Area Schools there is direct, as well as indirect, racial slurs that can be heard by both students and teachers. There

are a variety of examples that portray the indignance of people in my school as well as community. The first day of school, the 3 kids sitting in front of me on my bus were talking when I heard one of them say, " We have a n****r in our grade this year". Without even knowing who the person was, without having ever met them, this kid was spouting off how horrible it was going to be having someone of a different color in their grade. Simply the color of a fellow human being is what made a student hate another. I'm one of the only, if not the only, Russian Jewish student that is in attendance at my school and since about third of fourth grade I've had to dodge attacks against my ethnic background. This year in fact, my classmates were going around and calling each other " stupid Jews" and swapping jokes back and forth, ex. How are pizzas and Jews similar? They're both afraid of the oven. The hurtful message that these so called jokes carry are completely overlooked. I would bet that three quarters of the people that make statements like that actually have no idea about the meaning and definition behind what they're saying. If you walk into a local store, bar, or walk down the street, chances are you will hear or see some type of racial slur or derogatory phrase. That's not just in my community, it's everywhere. Although derogatory terms and racial slurs have been around forever and continue to exist, that doesn't make them right in any form or context. Hopefully, one day, we will be able to embrace everyone that makes up our unique world instead of belittling and diminishing people for the " fun" of it.