

A report on race and ethnicity sociology essay



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Racism and Ethnicity are two well known subjects in the academic world. Although not a popular choice of study Racism and Ethnicity can be found in Multicultural education, Sociology, Economics, to name just a few. Although used in the same way, Racism and Ethnicity are very different. The purpose of this essay is to define and provide examples of racism, institutional racism, and individual racism. I will also focus on the impacts that these forms of racism have on those who are on the receiving end of racism.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines racism in two meanings: One, “ the belief that there are characteristics, abilities, or qualities specific to each race” and two, “ discrimination against or antagonism towards other races”. Ethnicity on the other hand has three meanings: One, “ relating to a group of people having a common national or cultural tradition” two, “ referring to origin by birth than by present nationality: ethnic Albanians 3. “ relating to a non-Western cultural tradition: ethnic music. (Oxford Dictionary: rev 2009). The word “ race” has been around for several hundreds of years. At first it was used to describe an extended family through the generations, then as times passed it referred to large groups of people that were not family yet shared the same cultural practices and traditions, values and demographic location. When the Europeans made contact with people outside their homeland (America, Asia and Oceania) they would put people into categories that would show differences between their culture and those who were “ new” to them. These categories according to Pearson were what Banton (a writer on Evolution) called “ Selectionist theories of evolution”. (Pearson: 1990). Banton argued that a person’s “ physical appearance (phenotype) and/or inbuilt genetic makeup (genotype) explained human thought and

action' (Pearson: 1990) and it was then acceptable for people to define people on a " scale of attributes, from inferior to superior, from primitive to superior" (Pearson: 1990) all of which has made many a scientist question the world and how it is breaking up people into different races.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a hierarchy was formed where those who were black (dark skinned) would be at the bottom and those who were white (fair skinned) were at the top. Those who had dark skin were considered less educated or uneducated, simple people who were best suited to jobs that involved physical and manual labour. A white person, notably a white male middle class male, had intelligence, held down a job in managerial role and was financially far better off than those of dark skin. This was known as " racial essence, to determine the abilities of a person or a group" (Study Guide: Unit 6). By the mid twentieth century, the study of genetics was becoming a turning point in humanity. Rather than focussing on a person's skin colour, it became more acceptable that having good access to food, education, clean water, and healthcare contributed to the development in human beings. Pearson (1990), argued ethnicity is " what people do" (Study Guide: Unit 6) and demonstrated this by quoting a set of definitions by Anthony Smith with reference to ethnic communities.

Ethnic communities have:

- a " collective name
- a " common myth of descent"
- a " distinctive shared culture"

- “ an association with a specific territory”

- and a “ sense of solidarity”

This is defined in Pearson’s article as an ethnic community “ as a named human population with shared ancestry, myths, histories, and cultures having an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity” (Pearson: 1990).

Institutional racism focuses on a group of people who are often more “ dominant” than other groups and choose to criticise another group for being like second class citizens in particular “ radically inferior” (Pearson: 1990) that allow a more dominant group to dictate to the less off group “ where they live, what language they speak, what school they attend, what job they acquire, how they are treated by the police and the courts, how they are portrayed by the media, and what form of political and legal representation they have to recourse to” (Pearson: 1990). Thus, those who are part of the more dominant group can dictate how the less dominant group can be used and have the racist beliefs and actions placed upon them. An example of institutional racism is prominent where there are often two or more different ethnicities. In South Africa for example, “ judicial rules and regulations discriminating against black persons are a clear case point (Pearson: 1990). In New Zealand however, there is no such thing as discriminatory legislation and policies and practices are usually unintentional than discriminating towards one another.

Individual racism on the other hand is more personal and is targeted at individuals rather than a group of people. Also known as personal racism, Brislin identifies four types of individual racism:

1. Intense racism - " the belief that certain people are inferior, and hence are perceived as being of low worth.
2. Symbolic racism- Dominant groups " feel the the out group is interfering with important aspects of the culture- creating problems".
3. Tokenism- Dominant groups prove that they have engaged in " token activities to prove that they have even handed the treatment of other races".
4. Arm's length- People engaging " in friendly positive behaviours towards out group members in some social settings but treat them the same out group members with noticeably less warmth and friendliness in other settings".

Brislin(2000).

Kenan Malik argued that individual racism " imprisons those who are subjected to it while strengthening Western cultures". Orientalism, which Malik quotes is a " dualism between the east and the west and the Orient and has helped to define ' other' " which people can see is different and excluded in race relationships.

In summary I have defined and provide some examples of racism and ethnicity and outlined the concepts of institutional racism and individual racism. By focussing on these examples we can be sure that racism affects

people either as a nation or are subjects of individual attacks. By being aware of these prejudices, it is important to understand that we should not feel more superior to one another just because of the colour of someone else's skin. Racism is in many parts of the world and although it appears for many reasons, it should be addressed so not to damage a particular culture or a person's identity.