

Ethnicity affects identity



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Identity in sociological terms; is how people make sense of themselves as members of particular groups in society. However there many elements that refers to identity such as; gender, race, ethnicity, social class and many others. For example I identify myself by; name, date of birth, nationality, tribe, clan and religious belief. In biological terms I can be identified by my (D. N. A). In society I can be identified as a mother, wife and student. Sociologists say that a sense of self develops from an early stage, children under one year start responding to their names when called by other individuals and in society as children grow up they see themselves as separate individuals in their families.

Identity enables us to see ourselves as others see us, and as humans, we tend to imagine what it is like to be someone else, many television programmes show individuals trying to impersonate others by copying their voice and mannerism, so this clearly shows that the impersonator knows that they are different from the character they are impersonating. “

Postmodernism has made identity an important concept by examining the way in which individuals get their sense of self by identifying with a great range of social groups based on for example; age, gender and ethnicity”.

{Harris S (2000) Sociology Study Guide, Pearson Education Limited}.

Ethnicity hugely affects our identity for it is considered to be natural. It identifies us from past generations. For example black ethnic groups are associated to Africa. By looking at individuals we can tell what their ethnicity is. In other words it is a constructed identity that is tied to a place. Speaking the same language from the countries of origin, sharing the same culture or religion also determines our ethnicity.

Sociologists say that people recognize themselves as part of ethnic groups and feel positively about others who share the same culture. For example; if a Ugandan meets another Ugandan in the streets of Britain, it brings a certain sense of assurance to both parties that they are not alone regardless of being away from their own country of origin.

However, ethnicity affects our identity in so many areas of life. In Britain, ethnicity is mainly associated with minority groups from the former British colonies such as Africa. This kind of categorisation affects identity because it emphasizes on skin colour rather than common culture characteristics. The ability of ethnic minorities in Britain to shape their self identity is also limited by the way in which they are seen and treated by powerful groups. Prejudice and discrimination practiced by other ethnic groups, may make it difficult for others to express their cultural identity fully.

A television documentary about Jews, showed an example of how ethnic groups of Jewish origin went to Russia, in the 19th century, and found it very difficult to settle because of their identity. Individuals tried to: intermarry with other races, change their Jewish names, converting to other religions and learning the Russian language in order to conceal their own identity.

Recently sociologists have observed that intermarriages have risen considerably, “ this affects the identity of individuals because self identity becomes an issue as a child born out of this kind of relationship finds it difficult to conform to both ethnic groups especially if the child is mixed race”. (Moore S, Aiken D, Chapman S (2005) Sociology AS for QCR, Harper Collins Publishers Limited). Sociologist researchers Tizard and Phoenix (1993)

found in their research at that time that sixty percent of the mixed- race children, were proud of their mixed parentage. Today mixed-race relationships are being tolerated by different ethnic groups though in some like Japanese ethnicity it is a practise that is not widely accepted. It has been predicted by some experts, that ethnic minorities would slowly become absorbed; groups are going to abandon their ethnic cultures in order to adopt others. This is being witnessed today in Britain, arranged marriages for people with Indian ethnicity is on the fall in Britain, Indian women are adopting to the dating culture before marriage, whereas in India it is still a tense subject for woman to marry a man of their choice.

Overall, previous generations had pride in their ethnic backgrounds, but because of immigration issues and intermarriages society today are choosing to settle and adapt to the diverse ethnic lifestyles around them.

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