

Final Paper

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Introduction

Many societies such as the United States, can be considered a multiculturalist society. Multiculturalism can be defined as how individuals, groups, and entities “understand and respond to the challenges associated with cultural diversity based on ethnic, national, and religious differences” (Song, 2020). These types of societies are inhabited by a plethora of races, ethnicities, religions, and nationalities which form a singular yet complex population (International Federation of Library Associations, 2020). However, the functioning of multiculturalism is highly dependent on the ability of society members to co-exist with members of differing racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. This makes co-existence imperative to the overall wellbeing and functioning of daily life. Differences and similarities in mores, taboos, norms, and laws pertaining to individual cultures creates friction in some cases, as well as unity among different ethnic groups in other cases. This is further proven in the melting pot, salad bowl, and ethnic stew theorems of sociology, as they provided a basis for explanation regarding how certain demographics are able to co-exist, while others fail to co-exist in some cases (Berray, 2019). In many cases failure to co-exist creates hostility, acts of hate, and racism that is fueled by an ongoing systematic racial crisis experienced in the United States. This essay will analyze various components of culture from a sociological perspective, and discuss how these aspects are directly controlled by education. Furthermore, it will be noted how government authorities and advocacy groups can mitigate inequalities related to social justice in the United States, and provide a liberal social platform for future generations.

The Influence of Norms on Cultural Perceptions

In order to understand the exact influences regarding the development of a culture, it is important to understand the concept of “norms”. Norms can be defined as “A standard or pattern

of social behaviour that is accepted in or expected of a group” (Oxford University Press, 2020). The closely associated concepts of folkways, mores, taboos, and laws influence the how cultural standards are taught, practiced, and evolved, given that the daily behaviors and actions taken by society members are directly and indirectly influenced by these concepts.

Nomenclature of Sociological Norms

Folkways

Folkways in society are “norms without any moral underpinnings” (Griffiths et al., 2015, p. 59). These are often unwritten “rules” that must be followed and abided by all members of society. The consequences are often marginal as the “deviator” may simply be viewed as rude. For example, a common folkway in society is an individual giving up his or her seat on a public transportation system for an elderly person. In terms of normative semiotics, the stimulus or semiotic signal of an elderly person standing without a seat would inflict the normative response of offering the elderly person the seat. Although failure to do so would be seen as rude, this is short term repercussion which carries no significant long-term consequence or legal punishment.

Mores

Mores in society are “norms that embody the moral views and principles of a group” (Griffiths et al., 2015, p. 59). Deviances from mores often carry harsh social and societal consequences. Depending on the caliber of the “deviance” and the society in which the infraction takes place, the offender may also face legal consequences. For example, engaging in copulatory activities before marriage in nations governed by Sharia Law is considered both a severe moral and legal infraction. Violators are subjected to harsh religious and legal penalties if caught. However, similar behavior between two consenting individuals in the United States (disregarding religious norms) is permitted. In some European nations, adolescents are given a comprehensive

education in secondary school encouraging the safe practice of these activities. An additional example in regards to western culture would be wearing a bathing suit to a religious service. Although this would not be illegal, it would be considered very shameful and embarrassing.

Taboos

Taboos in society are “inviolable, sacred; forbidden, unlawful” (Oxford University Press, 2020). Offenders face severe social and legal penalties. Examples would include attraction to young children or the eating of human flesh. Actions considered taboo are often unforgivable and result in lifetime legal and social consequences.

Laws

Laws in society are a written set of formal norms. “Formal norms are the most specific and clearly stated of the various types of norms, and they are” (Griffiths et al., 2015, p. 58). However, specific deviances from the law must be analyzed and dealt with on an individual basis. For example, murder and jaywalking are both violations of the law. However, societal norms would result in severe social and legal penalties for the murderer, while the jaywalker would most likely receive no legal and no social penalty. Additionally, a judge’s proper use of discretion when reviewing cases is an example of normative semiotics. Sentencing a serial killer to probation and a jaywalker to lifetime imprisonment would be morally incorrect, and the judge would be subjected to severe social consequences.

The Specific Effect of Norms on Culture

It is evident that the aforementioned nomenclature is complex and open to interpretation and debate. Furthermore, it is also evident that it’s complexity can result in these concepts being interpreted differently by members of different cultural groups. In most instances, the normative way to interpret these terms are taught to individuals from a young age via education. From a

sociological perspective, this also highlights the importance of educational institutions employing faculty from diverse backgrounds, and for curriculums to promote cultural diversity and exploration. By solely exposing young individuals to local norms and ways of life, it enables xenophobia and ethnocentrism, which contribute to racist ideologies and tendencies. For example, an individual belonging to a conservative upper middle-class family residing in a white community may not be exposed to different cultures and backgrounds. Thus, the individual may not be accepting of norms practiced in other parts of the world. For instance, in the United States it is acceptable to publicly embrace loved ones. However, in some countries, this is frowned upon and can lead to legal civil consequences as it would be considered taboo and a violation of the law. This is not necessarily a “bad” aspect for people residing in those countries, but it is different. Similarly, that same individual may discriminate against individuals from other countries speaking a different language, because it is unfamiliar or not “normal” to witness. Lastly, non-verbal communication has the potential to inflict conflict and offense on an individual. Certain hand gestures may be seen as polite in some cultures, but rude in other cultures. Although the hand symbol of “Peace” may be acceptable in the United States, some cultures may take offense to this gesture where it is seen as the equivalent to gesturing one’s middle finger. If educators fail to teach that student about worldwide societies and cultures, it is likely that he or she would be close-minded to people not from the same demographic, potentially creating a racist and xenophobic mindset and way of thinking. This further leads to a phenomenon known as the “cultural divide”. This phenomenon refers to a usually virtual barrier that segregates individuals and communities with differing opinions and understandings of norms, folkways, taboos, and laws (Prentice & Miller, 2001).

Culture is a Language

Different ethnic groups and cultures will naturally have differing standards and opinions regarding ways of life, rituals, and associated taboos, norms, mores and laws as proven in the previous section. The culmination of all aspects of a culture form a unique “language”, which can be associated as a symbolic representation of the specific group. Druzin, (2013) mentions that “Different groups boast divergent normative rules just as they possess different languages. Communities of people essentially speak different norm languages” (p. 269). This is overstated by the “Melting Pot” and “Salad Bowl” theorems of sociology, which help reiterate how cultures interact with each other in a specific society.

Melting Pot

The melting pot theorem is an ideology that conveys that individuals that immigrate to the United States assimilate into the “American” belief system. For example, some parents believe that teaching their child the native language of their country will lead to decreased opportunities, discrimination, and lead to an eventual socio-economic disadvantage. A parent deciding that their child will learn only English, despite the fact that bilingual members of the workforce make an average of five to twenty percent more per hour than their monolingual colleagues (Kennesaw State University, 2016), not dress in clothing representative of their cultural background, and not associate with their heritage is an example of a Melting Pot. The child will eventually assimilate into an “American” lifestyle., hence some sociologists noting a trend of a global melting pot. (Bertsch, 2013) mentions that “Many social scientists believe that the world is converging toward a single core global culture, citing interracial marriages, religious conversions, and global travel as primary reasons that people of one culture are adopting behaviors and practices of other cultures” (p. 134).

Salad Bowl

The salad bowl theorem is an ideology that conveys that individuals who immigrate to the United States maintain their individual culture and that each individual culture is a distinct “part” of a salad. This concept may be used to explain demographical statistics when analyzing a geographical area. For example, in New York City this would explain the Latin-American enclave in the Corona neighborhood of Queens, the East-Asian enclave in the Flushing neighborhood of Queens, or the South-Asian enclave in the Richmond Hill and Briarwood neighborhoods of Queens (Fessenden & Roberts, 2011). Although each of these communities will have a distinct, culturally influenced atmosphere, they are all the “parts” of the larger “salad” of Queens, New York. Bertsch (2013) also notes that members of different cultures may perhaps “not want to assimilate because, in doing so, they might lose valued cultural characteristics from their countries of origin.” (p. 133), further supporting the theorem of the Salad Bowl.

The Sociology of Racism

As one can understand, cultures often assimilate with each other under the melting pot theorem forming a singular demographic as previously mentioned. Concurrently, it is also essential that cultural groups preserve, protect, and practice their beliefs as seen in the salad bowl theorem to permit for the advancement and to protect the historical significance of each respective culture. However, failure to co-exist and holding negative opinions about other cultures and their associated practices often leads to societal tensions and uncertainties when individuals and groups have “language barriers” (referring to lack of cross-cultural understanding). A prime example is the 2020 racial unrest in the United States following the death of George Floyd, and the protests against police brutality by the “Black Lives Matter”

movement. In this case, there is little cross-cultural understanding between non-black police officers and black civilians, resulting in racial disparities in the criminal justice system. This exemplifies a lack of cross-cultural understanding between different demographics which overstate underlying racial issues in the United States further hindering the advancement of multiculturalism. One may argue that increased exposure to different cultures from a young age in educational settings may mitigate this issue (Tatum, 1994), similar to the previous examples of public displays of affection and sensitivity regarding foreign languages.

The Minority / Majority

The concepts of “majority groups” (the socially dominant group) and “minority groups” (the socially subordinate group) from a sociological standpoint have great significance to how individuals are classified, treated, and represented in a specific society. According to Griffiths et al. (2015), these classifications refer to “the concept that the dominant group is that which holds the most power in a given society, while subordinate groups are those who lack power compared to the dominant group” (p. 227). A prime example of this notation are the socio-economic disparities that generally exist among individuals of color, which can be classified as the racial minority group in the United States. For example, the symbolic “American Dream” is much harder to be attained by black and Hispanic families due to institutionalized racism. Because of this, these racial groups face multi-generational and continuous housing, education, and financial disadvantages which lead to long term socio-economic disparities (Martinovich, 2017). If society was able to eliminate these titles by promoting the integration of all racial groups into all aspects of society, one would notice a drastic yet positive change in the socio-political structure of the United States. This could be potentially actioned by the incorporation of multiculturalism into education.

Systematic Racism as a Consequence of Cultural Divide

Specifically referring to the cultural divide between black Americans and other racial / ethnic groups in the United States, the associated gap has existed since the beginning of United States Transatlantic Slave Trade, in which 12.7 million African individuals were kidnapped and forcefully “shipped” to the United States for manual labor (Solly, 2020). Therefore, many black Americans are drastically affected by direct and indirect forms of racism (racial slurs, hate crimes, police brutality, unlawful arrest, etc.), with many forms of racism existing as a result of issues regarding cultural diversity and tolerance. This concept is known as “systematic racism” which can be defined as “the policies and practices entrenched in established institutions, which result in the exclusion or promotion of designated groups” (Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre, n.d.). Griffiths et al. (2015) alludes to this by noting that this classification “refers to the way in which racism is embedded in the fabric of society. For example, the disproportionate number of black men arrested, charged, and convicted of crimes may reflect racial profiling, a form of institutional racism.” (p. 228). However, racism does not always present itself in obvious and visible ways such as an unlawful arrest or hate crime. This can include systematic issues that often result in “domino effect” reactions, leading to multigenerational inequalities that span decades.

Consequences of Systematic Racism

Systematic racism has volatile consequences for minority populations and the overall advancement and representation of the minority group(s) throughout society. For instance, due to economic disparities, African-American students are less likely to have access to college-ready courses due to being assigned to schools with less qualified teachers and lack of funding (United Negro College Fund, 2020). Furthermore, the United Negro College Fund (2020) also notes that

educational instructional time is limited due to the higher likeliness of African-American students receiving school-issued suspensions or being incarcerated than their non-minority peers. This results in lower rates of college enrollment among young African Americans compared to their peers in the white demographic (Marcus, 2018). Marcus (2018) also indicates that this already lower percentage of enrolled students tend to enroll at less elite schools, finish their bachelor's degree in more than four years, and have extreme amounts of student debt compared to white students which economically disadvantages African-American students who successfully complete a bachelor's degree. Given these educational and economic disparities, minority students have difficulty finding economically sustainable jobs, while keeping in mind hiring discrimination that African-Americans are already subjected to. Bulatao et al. (2004) notes that because of these issues "Blacks and Hispanics are less likely to have insurance coverage from a private employer" (p. 92), which increases the likelihood of enrollment on Medicaid. Supplementing these issues, Bulatao et al. (2004) explains that individuals enrolled on Medicaid "receive less adequate care than average, suggesting a socioeconomic dimension to poor care" (p. 97).

Law Enforcement

From a systematic point of view, law enforcement associates such statistics with crime, which results in police brutality, unlawful searches, and unlawful arrests. The legal justice system is unfortunately biased against minority individuals, which results in higher incarceration rates among African-American individuals who may not have access to elite legal counsel. Upon release from incarceration, individuals may be plagued with a criminal record which promotes the continuous cycle of systematic racism. It must be noted that some aspects that African-Americans have with law enforcement mimic those of interactions during the transatlantic slave

trade. (Turner et al., 2006) mentions that “a legally sanctioned law enforcement system existed in America before the Civil War for the express purpose of controlling the slave population and protecting the interests of slave owners. The similarities between the slave patrols and modern American policing are too salient to dismiss or ignore. Hence, the slave patrol should be considered a forerunner of modern American law enforcement” (p. 186). These are prime examples regarding the basis of the 2020 Black Lives Matter Protests, and how systematic racism must be ended. These notations further overstate and account for much of the negative experiences that African-American individuals have with law enforcement on a daily basis.

Multicultural Education

The Importance

Education is an imperative aspect to the development and sustainment of modern-day societies. From a sociological standpoint, it provides a platform for the instruction of a society's norms, values, and beliefs (Griffiths et al., 2015), while also allowing for the cross cultural exposure that is necessary to form functioning, open-minded members of society. Mitra (n.d.) notes that “people of diverse ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds come together and interact so closely and continuously” (p. 25) in an educational setting, which allows for strengthened and formulated relations between different groups. This further highlights the importance of a multicultural education. If society fails to recognize the long-term societal issues mentioned in this essay, it will escalate tension and create new issues regarding cultural relations for an infinite period of time. The University of Washington (n.d.) mentions that the ultimate goal of a multicultural education is to “create equal educational opportunities for all students, including those from different racial, ethnic, and social-class groups”. Furthermore, by exposing children to multicultural aspects from a young age, it will enable them to be more productive,

well-rounded members of society. This could potentially be supplemented by mandatory general education classes regarding multiculturalism in post-secondary education. This will benefit all aspects of society from a legal, medical political, social, environmental, and corporate standpoint. Young adults who come from particularly segregated communities and educational settings should ideally engage in social action work or projects, ideally based on the strength of his or her own self-efficacy.

The Logistics

Classroom Education

The associated benefits of a multicultural education would only be possible if a society synthesized a formulated plan of action to incorporate these aspects gradually into educational curriculums. To implement such instructional methods local and state education departments would need to mandate and incorporate multicultural aspects of education into the curriculum. Yilmaz & Boylan (2016) argue that “Programs or lessons provided at schools can be transformed and schools that can meet students’ needs or class diversity within schools can be provided so that multicultural education is practiced on other educational levels and in the educational system generally” (p. 12), which would provide “students a strong tool to combat unintentionally or intentionally taught biases” (Cepeda, 2017). Research that analyzed the incorporation of multicultural elements into an elementary school curriculum found that in general, the students reacted positively and learned useful information that will benefit them as they mature into adulthood (Stane, 2013). Although Stane (2013) that the reaction and efficiency depended on the methodology of the instructional style, it does provide a positive and useful benchmark regarding the benefits of a multicultural education.

The Community and Social Advocacy

A plethora of social justice organizations, groups, and businesses could potentially benefit from a multicultural education. Firstly, the incorporation of multicultural aspects into a n education system's curriculum would gradually increase the tolerance, diversity, and understanding of institutions and organizations. This could, potentially increasing the rates of college enrollment, especially among underprivileged and minority students further diversifying student bodies. By increasing post-secondary accessibility and graduation rates among underprivileged and minority students, these individuals would be more likely to work in careers that require a degree in his or her field of study. Over the course of several decades, one would witness both the workforce and segregated neighborhoods begin to diversify, truly making the United States a multicultural society.

Conclusion

It is evident that the United States is not a picturesque example of a multicultural society. Although it does indeed fit the definition of a multicultural society, many aspects and ways of life severely disadvantage the individuals and groups that have historically and presently contributed to its multiculturalism. One of the only ways in which society can mitigate socio-political disparities regarding cultural representation into society is via the implementation of a multicultural education. This would have to be incorporated into the curriculum of all age groups in primary, intermediate, secondary, and post-secondary institutions. If governmental organizations and departments of education gradually implement and enforce this type of education, the socio-political climate of the United States would drastically change over several decades, which would have a positive impact on all members of society.

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Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre. (n.d.). Forms of Racism. Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre. Retrieved November 21, 2020, from <http://www.aclrc.com/forms-of-racism>

This article was written by a prominent civil rights advocacy group based in Alberta, Canada. The article explains the differences between individual racism (personal assumptions and prejudices against another race) as opposed to systematic racism (the policies and practices embedded in a society that cause racism).

This article was helpful in creating the systematic racism section of this essay as it offered a clear description of systematic racism, as well as specific examples of how it pertains to overall racism and racial tensions in a society.

Beauchamp, Z. (2020, July 7). What the police really believe. Vox. <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2020/7/7/21293259/police-racism-violence-ideology-george-floyd>

This article was written by a prominent media organization known for its progressive agenda and ideologies. This article explained the ideologies of police behavior in the United States, and how it contributes to racism in a society. Therefore, it was helpful to this essay by offering supporting evidence regarding how police brutality effects African-American individuals in the United States.

This article was written in the midst of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests following the death of George Floyd. Therefore, it offered a perspective on the protests occurring throughout the country, as well as counter-protesters supporting the Blue Lives Matter movement.

Bulatao, R. A., Anderson, N. B., National Research Council (U.S.), & Panel on Race, E., and Health in Later Life. (2004). Understanding racial and ethnic differences in health in late life: A research agenda. National Academies Press.

<http://www.nap.edu/catalog/11036.html>

This research publication was written by the Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education of the National Research Council. It explored the various health disparities that individuals of minority racial and ethnic groups face, specifically pertaining to long-term and geriatric issues.

Given that this essay was focused on racial tensions with a specific section regarding systematic racism, the statistics presented in the publication were useful given that healthcare issues can be considered systematic racism. This publication had detailed statistics and research regarding genetics, mental health, physical health, social sciences, economics, and cultural studies.

Griffiths, H., Keirns, N. J., Strayer, E., Cody-Rydzewski, S., Scaramuzzo, G., Sadler, T., Vyain, S., Bry, J. D., Jones, F., OpenStax College, & Open Textbook Library. (2015).

Introduction to sociology 2e. <https://openstax.org/details/books/introduction-sociology-2e>

This is an open sources sociology textbook aimed at undergraduate students enrolled in a introductory sociology course. The textbook provides an introduction to many sociological concepts, as well as real world social problems that are faced in societies.

Given that racism is a prominent topic on sociology, and highly analyzed by sociologists, there are many sections regarding racism. The racism chapter was useful when providing a definition and example to systematic racism in the United States,

Marcus, J. (2018, July 6). Facts about race and college admission. The Hechinger Report.

<https://hechingerreport.org/facts-about-race-and-college-admission/>

This article was written by a nonprofit journalistic organization based at Columbia University in the City of New York that focuses on the advocacy and advancement of education in society.

This article focuses on the overwhelming postsecondary academic disparities faced by members of minority races and ethnicities. The article provided statistics noting that African-American and Hispanic individuals are less likely to attend college, and when they do it is at underfunded schools while the students simultaneously have more debt than white students. This was useful in conveying the main points of this essay regarding socio-economic inequalities faced by African-Americans.

Solly, M. (2020, June 4). 158 Resources for Understanding Systemic Racism in America.

Smithsonian Magazine. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/158-resources-understanding-systemic-racism-america-180975029/>

This article was written by the Official Journal of the Smithsonian Institution regarding systematic racism in America.

This article explained the causes of racism against African-Americans in the United States, and how it has progressed over the decades. The key point that can be concluded from this article is that racism originated with the start of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. During the slave trade and following the release of slaves, there was much policing that had to be done to enforce segregation and freedom “papers” (which alludes to modern day policing) and the inequalities in the criminal justice system.

Thornton, B. (2010). The Murder of Emmett Till. *Journalism History*, 36(2), 96–104. ProQuest Central Essentials.

This journal entry focuses on the history and media response regarding the Murder of Emmett Till.

The Murder of Emmett Till is known to have started the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. To further the historical significance of this tragic event, the parents of Emmett Till decided to hold an open casket funeral (making the child's mutilated face available for viewing). When explaining the history of racism in the United States, this is an undeniable and unforgettable event as he was killed simply for

Turner, K. B., Giacomassi, D., & Vandiver, M. (2006). Ignoring the Past: Coverage of Slavery and Slave Patrols in Criminal Justice Texts. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 17(1), 181–195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511250500335627>

This journal entry focuses on the similarities between slave patrols during the Transatlantic Slave Trade to modern day policing.

Slave patrols during the Transatlantic Slave Trade allude to many modern-day policing practices and discrimination. Furthermore, racial inequalities regarding the criminal justice system result in higher chances of African-Americans being killed by law enforcement and higher chances of long prison sentences.

United Negro College Fund. (2020). K-12 Disparity Facts and Statistics.

<https://uncf.org/pages/k-12-disparity-facts-and-stats>

This article was written a nonprofit organization that engages in philanthropy by providing scholarships for black students and other scholarships at historically black colleges.

This article focuses on the fact that African-American students have less access to coursework and instruction that prepares them for college. These educational disparities also help explain the lack of enrollment and lower rates of performance among African-American students at postsecondary institutions.

United States Department of Labor. (n.d.). Legal Highlight: The Civil Rights Act of 1964 | U.S.

Department of Labor. Retrieved November 18, 2020, from

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasam/civil-rights-center/statutes/civil-rights-act-of-1964>

This highlight from the United States Department of Labor focuses on explaining the legislation introduced in *The Civil Rights Act of 1964*.

This legislation protected individuals from discrimination regarding race, ethnicity, orientation, or religion. Furthermore, it guaranteed equal protection by also abolishing the Jim Crow laws. Despite this legislation enacted in 1964, racial discrimination and associated disparities still are prevalent, signifying that humans are far from the end of living in an unfair and discriminatory world.