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Intro to Sociology

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Response to Race, the Power of Illusion, The Difference Between Us

Race is a huge topic of discussion in our society. As described in our textbook, race is, “a socially defined category based on real or perceived biological differences between groups of people.” (Ferris & Stein, 2014, p. 217) It invokes different emotions, generalizes different people, and causes discrimination. The idea of race has been something that’s enriched communities as well as torn them apart due to a perceived difference between people. There are those who embrace their “race” in order to fit into certain groups or societies, getting certain privileges or different cultural exposures. Others may try to break out and want to associate with another race in order to be treated differently and be around people that are unlike them. After saying this, racism seems to be more of a social behavior that has developed to categorize people based on physical traits. In *Race, the Power of Illusion, The Difference Between us*, it expands on the idea that racism is just a way that people group together, make judgements, and create generalizations on people in order to create a structured society and its many different faces.

In the movie, it was shown that, no matter what “race” you are, people that seem different from you are actually very similar genetically. There were some high school students that were putting this to the test by using a DNA sequencer test, which laid out what their genetic code was. When the students had processed them, they compared their DNA strings to fellow students who were either similar physically or as different as possible. The results shocked to the students, as they thought they would be drastically different because of their physical attributes. Besides a few mutations, everyone was incredibly similar genetically. This goes to show that no matter what “race” you may be, you aren’t very different from anyone else besides what color your skin may be, what your eyes may look like, what jawline you may have, etc. I found it to be very interesting that people are as similar as they are, regardless of what they look like, as I’m sure many other people found it phenomenal. It seemed that people were trying too hard to try to make a genetic distinction between races, but they were unsuccessful besides just showing a few mutations.

The reason for people trying to find a distinction arose from people wanting to sort people in an orderly structure. This segregated people to certain groups that made them want to associate with each other more than with anyone that was “a different race.” In turn, racism began to develop, making people feel higher than other races and discriminating against them as a result. Practices like slavery and elitism in relation to race became prominent after people started to segregate the groups of races in countries all around the world. An example of this is the conquest of white, English settlers that came to America to colonize it as an English colony. They encountered a new race, the Native Americans, and gained prejudices against them because of not only how different they looked from the English, but also because of their social practices that formed between their race specifically. The settlers thought that they were savage and tried to “reform” them to be like the colonists, tried to enslave them to do their work, or exterminated them, as the settlers felt that they were the superior “race.” In regards to slavery, it led from the Native Americans being enslaved to Africans being captured in Africa, being brought back to work on fields and plantations for those same colonists. This, in turn, led to a lot of social inequality and discrimination within America that still lasts to this day.

Even though we live in a new age in America that has abolished slavery and has made great leaps to make all races equal, there is still a lot of discrimination and unrest between them. There are still people who support racist ideals that believe that the white/Caucasian race is the most superior and deserves the most privilege. This can make it hard for people of any other race besides white, making them a target for people to discriminate against which puts them in a minority group. When individuals are a part of a minority group, they “belong to a social category and suffer from unequal treatment as a result of that status,” (Ferris & Stein, 2014, pp. 221-222) thus creating a disconnect from the dominant race and giving less privileges to those in that minority group. It can make it hard for people of other races to get jobs, get through school, be a part of communities, and even just walking down the street. They may not get the job because they may be too different from the boss or may be thought as a lesser being because of what they look like. Someone of color may not get the necessary education in order to release the person’s full potential because they may be a kid that’s “different” or “a kid that looks like trouble” because of their physical attributes. Communities could shun individuals that don’t “fit in” because of “where they come from,” only allowing those that are just like them to be a part of the group. For anyone who isn’t a part of the majority group, it is just more difficult to do most of anything that involves privilege.

Our society as a whole has created this idea of race to create social order, and yet, it creates a lot of inequality which can, in turn, create disorder in this day in age. People protest racist behaviors and try to push society to change its “system” for grouping people together based on how they look like. Just like in the 1960’s with racism protests, people are trying to push for a better, more equal world to live in together. They are opposed by those who stay with more conservative views that want to keep the institutionalized racism in place, reaching back to the settling of our nation. However, with enough people and enough of an effort, this can be overthrown and be abolished, creating a place where people that “look different” will be able to have equal opportunity and fairer treatment.

# References

Ferris, K., & Stein, J. (2014). *The Real World.* Canada: W. W. Norton.