

Social Problems Term Paper

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Nagel, J. (2022). *Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture*.

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The article addresses the most important issues related to the basis of ethnic identities. It touches upon the cultural and social elements that contribute to creating ethnic identities and the conflicts around these identities. Ethnic identities are facilitated by internal and external factors to certain groups that identify themselves based on a distinct culture. The said culture can be a product of a distinct identity based on language, religion, appearance, ancestry, or region (Nagel, 2022). All these aspects can contribute to the establishment of certain patterns of behavior that translate into culture when transferred across generations. The authors have discussed certain examples of ethnic conflicts to illustrate the myriad of factors involved in creating a distinct ethnic identity and ethnic mobilization.

Ethnicity is not problematic in itself, but it can give rise to issues related to identity conflict, which often lead to political dissent between certain ethnic groups. The concept of ethnic identity can also lead to the development of certain systems of suppression directed toward ethnic minorities. Therefore, it is important to understand the social issues surrounding ethnic identity and the relationship between these issues and the construction of ethnic identity (Nagel, 2022). The article does not limit itself to external or internal factors; rather, it views ethnicity from a perspective of both factors to offer a better, holistic vantage point to comprehend ethnicity and issues surrounding ethnic identities. The politicization of these identities has also been discussed in terms of external and internal factors that make representation and equality challenging for certain social groups while affording others a place of privilege.

Social structure is central to ethnic identities, experiences, and conflicts. Society imbibes the patterns that lead to the development of distinct cultures around ethnic identities. If a group believes themselves to be different from others based on their history, regionality, language, ancestry, or appearance, this may drive or be driven by social structure. If the society has organized itself in a way that has created political turmoil in certain regions, the most vulnerable groups in these regions will define themselves differently from others due to a shared experience of the events that have followed the prolonged armed or diplomatic conflict. On the other hand, the already existent social groups may begin to express their ethnic differences differently based on the political and social structure that either facilitates or restricts them from their freedom. Yet, there are those who have been created by the very social structure they have been exposed to. Social structure makes the issues of suppression, identity, representation, and equality dynamic and omnipresent. It also imbibes certain practices that become a part of the social structure itself. These practices can be based on biases, motivating different ethnic groups to hold their identities even more sacred to their existence and create their ethnic discourses by mobilizing themselves. The biases lurking in social structures can allow inequality to become a reason for various vulnerable social groups to seek an ethnic identity and/or create or highlight intergroup conflicts.

According to structure-functionalism, the problems of ethnic identities and conflicts result from socialization due to social institutions. When the biases become institutionalized, society marginalizes certain social groups based on the differences between them and the majority. This propels these groups to develop their own identities and strive for the proliferation and acceptance of these identities. Over time, these groups create their own social and cultural values and norms that they transfer across generations, attempting to alter the social institutions.

From a conflict perspective, ethnic identities and conflicts are a product of class struggles over resources. The elite, to whom the means of production belong, marginalize and oppress certain social groups to the extent that these groups form their distinct realities. To overthrow the elite's hegemony, these groups strive to gain access to the resources they have been deprived of by fashioning and reinforcing their ethnic identities and cultures. From a symbolic interactionist viewpoint, ethnicity is a matter of construction of social meanings as different groups interact. These groups establish certain criteria of belonging on the basis of ingroup versus outgroup biases that lead to the formation or reinforcement of distinguishable identities. Intergroup conflict emerges when all the ingroups and outgroups strive to propagate their narratives based on their shared identities. The conflict can also result from biases held against each other rather than dehumanizing the opponents.

Structural change in the form of equality can be introduced so that all ethnic identities are accepted and encouraged. The implicit or explicit biases lurking in the social structure need to be addressed to make ethnic identities devoid of negative insinuations. Identity needs to be understood by social institutions and various social groups to be a matter of equality. The cultural norms need to be based on sociocultural values of morality. When the social structure changes, it can allow equality to prevail, rooting out and preventing issues related to ethnic identities and conflicts. Social structure can contribute positively or negatively to eradicating ethnic conflicts. Social structures create more folkways that allow certain social groups to oppress others, creating more conflicts.

References

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