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Racialization and the Social Construction of Marginality

Chapter Summary

Chapter eight addresses racialization and marginality as social processes. Critical race sociologists view racialization as a performance and social construction, rather than a reflection of biological qualities. Sociologists recognize the tremendous consequences of race as a social construct, to shape the opportunities and chances that people have in life. Racism is the unequal treatment of people based racialization – the way that people are categorized according to arbitrary, visible characteristics such as hair colour, skin colour or facial features. Racism, discrimination and prejudice manifest in various ways, including institutionally, unconsciously, and overtly.

The study of racialization and ethnicity is central to sociological work. Qualitative and quantitative methodologies yield different types of knowledge about this topic. Functionalists argue that ethnic identity provides social connectedness in an individualistic society. Conflict theorists focus on how dominant groups benefit economically and politically by excluding and marginalizing minority groups. Symbolic interactionist theorists focus on the process by which ethnic differentiation is constructed through labelling and derogatory slurs. Feminist theorists examine the intersectionality of racialization, class, sexual orientation and gender.

Racialization shapes who we associate with, the jobs we have, the places we live, and the life chances and opportunities that we have. Racialization practices can include institutional, expressed, internalized, and overtly discriminatory forms. Canada has a long history of legal practices and immigration policies that have negatively affected racialized Canadians. The Truth and Reconciliation Committee represents one way forward in terms of social inclusion and reconciliation among Indigenous groups in Canada and their colonizers.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Can you think of any examples of how crimes are reported differently based on the race of the suspect? If so, why might this be the case?
2. How might a symbolic interactionist approach help us to understand racialized images in popular culture and television?
3. What are the key goals of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee? What are some political, social, and economic barriers to achieving these goals?
4. Can you think of social movements that have addressed issues of racism and marginalization? What tactics have these movements used? Were they effective? If so, why? If not, why not?

Multimedia Resources

The 13th: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V66F3WU2CKk>

This documentary addresses prisoning in the American context. The documentary showcases scholars, such as Cornel West and Angela Davis, who discuss the intersection of racism, capitalism, and mass incarceration of Black people in America.

Sociology of Race & Ethnicity: <http://journals.sagepub.com/home/sre>

This is an academic journal that publishes scholarly works that address an array of issues relevant to racialization, marginalization, ethnicity and inequality.

Ethnic and Racial Studies: <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rers20/current>

This is a peer-reviewed sociology journal that publishes works on the topic of race, ethnicity, migration and forms of ethno-nationalism.

Rios, V. (2011). *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*. NYU Press.

This book by sociologist Victor Rios is based on years of research in Oakland, California. The book addresses the violence, exclusion, marginalization, and mass incarceration that face the young men living in this area.

Hunters and Bombers: https://www.nfb.ca/film/hunters_and_bombers/

This documentary by Canadian scholar Hugh Brody addresses the conflict between the Innu people and members of the Canadian military over the use of low flying planes over the Innu's hunting terrain.

Noah, Trevor. (2016) *Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood*. Spiegel & Grau.

In this book, and in his work more generally, comedian Trevor Noah describes his lived experience under Apartheid in South Africa.