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Sociology 101

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**Research Questions**

For this project I wanted to examine social perceptions Respectability Politics versus the mechanics of the actual movement. To do this, I was guided by the following research questions:

Q1: How does one define respectability politics?

Q2: Are there aspects of respectability politics that denote a tendency for class condescension amongst oppressed groups?

Q3: Are there components of respectability politics that prove to be beneficial to a given community?

Q4: What components of respectability politics make it more prevalent among members of certain groups who are of higher social status/socioeconomic class?

Q5: In social movement scenarios, why do the public favor groups that display activities that are permissible through respectability politics

**Hypothesis**

I believed that after doing my research I would find that the general population would define suitable protests as ones that are as least disruptive to common everyday life as possible. I also hypothesized that social attitude “curbing” would be more prevalent within members of the sample who identify as minorities than members of the sample who did not identify as minorities.

**Methodology**

To conduct my research, I utilized quantitative data in survey style questions.

**Survey Questions**

Q1. What race do you identify with?

Q2. What is your gender?

Q3. Have you ever had to speak on behalf of ALL members of your race/ethnicity?

Q4:Is there an individual that represents your race politically/socially in American Politics?

Q5: Do you think passive resistance (hunger strikes/sit-ins) is a more productive form of protest than active resistance (combat/marches)?

Q6:. Does any kind of violence(rioting/looting) invalidate a social movement?

Q7: What is more suitable dress for a protest on police brutality? (a picture of black men in sagging pants vs. a picture of black men in suits

Q8: What is more suitable to wear at a protest for female rights? (abortion/wage gap/etc.) (a picture of women in western business attire vs. a picture of women in bathing suits)

**My Sample Group**

I distributed survey amongst 44 participants of high school age or higher. Of these 44 people, 9 identified as White/Caucasian,17 identified as asian, 9 identified as Black/African American, 8 identified as Hispanic/Latino, and 1 identified as other. I chose these specific groups because it is within these groups that respectability politics either are heavily prevalent, have been heavily prevalent, or are virtually nonexistent and would thus serve as a baseline for statistical responses. The specific perceptions of the groups who have been influenced by respectability politics or be inclined to view it positively serve a microcosm for national sentiments and perceptions.

***To my question of : “What race do you identify with?”***

* ***20.45% of responders identified as White/Caucasian***
* ***38.64% of responders identified as Asian***
* ***0% of responders identified as Native American/Pacific Islander***
* ***20.45% responders identified as Black/African American***
* ***18.18% of responders identified as Hispanic/Latino***
* ***2.27% of responders identified as other***

***My Analysis***

***This particular question served as a means of identification for following questions. In terms of the diversity of respondents, it allowed me to created a valid comparison of responses across a majority of recognized races.***

***To my question of: “What is your gender?”***

* ***47.73% of respondents identified as male***
* ***50.00% of respondents identified as female***
* ***2.27 of respondents identified as other***

***My Analysis***

***Like the previous one, this question was used in order to examine cross sections of questionnaire results in the following questions. From a statistical perspective, it may be useful to note that the results reflect national and global gender ratios almost precisely, however, the opinion of nonbinary in this particular questionnaire may have proved more useful.***

***To my question of: “Have you ever had to speak on behalf of ALL members of your race/ethnicity?”***

* ***74.29% of participants who identified as people of color responded yes while 11.11% of white participants responded yes.***
* ***25.71% of participants who identified as people of color responded no while 88.89% of white participants responded no.***

***My Analysis***

***As depicted by the data gathered, the “ambassador” phenomenon is a sensation felt more often with people color than of white people. This is most likely due to the prevalence of Caucasian ethnocentrism, the tendency to assume one’s culture and way of life represents the norm and are superior to other culture’s way of life, and its transformation into the basis for western perceptions of society. The fact that individuality is a give-in amongst white populations, whether it be in the unanimous recognition of different caucasian nationalities (i.e Italian vs. German), or the independence in the evaluation of the literal individual, is a byproduct of whiteness being recognized as a template, capable of diversity and deviation in sense of identity. In contrast, people of color are often times conglomerated into massive, vague “others”, despite an intense motivation for cultural distinction within that designated group (i.e Pakistani vs. Indian / Haitian vs. Dominican). The caucasian identity has been inflated in a sense to a point in which it is not proportionate to the numerical, objective rate of diversity as compared to other racial identities, occupying a greater cultural space than all of the other world’s ethnicities combined in the western perspective in what could be described as a racial “homunculus” comparative. Unfortunately, when this level of ambiguity is described to groups at large, the actions of some become entangled with the identity of all, bringing forth the kind of environment for respectability politics to seem logical. Understanding this, it seems logical that a group would turn to a person of color regarding issues or concepts that are believed to be intrinsic to the ascribed culture.***

***To my question of “Is there an individual that represents your race politically/socially in American Politics?”***

* ***40.00% of participants who identified as people of color responded yes while 44.44% of white participants responded yes.***
* ***60.00% of participants who identified as people of color responded no while 55.56% of white participants responded no.***

***My Analysis***

***Charles Rangel, Reverend Al Sharpton, and Reverend Jesse Jackson a few of the more contemporary in a long list of political figures who represented the interests of the black community. While the data reflects nearly identical rates of racial identification in politics amongst whites and people of color in this particular survey, the truth is America has yet to have figures who represented the interests of the white community who haven’t been perceived as supremacists or racists. By the very definition of race, it is a near impossible feat for a handful of figures to be able to represent the interests of a group of people, qualified merely on the basis of skin color. There is no unanimous cultural movement or socioeconomic zone that binds African Americans or any other race together in a form of categorization other than pigmentation, so it seems illogical that one would be able to represent this entire cultural, religious, moral spectrum without appearing contradictory in the process. From a political perspective, the mentioned individuals, with their at times conservative views on topics such as crime and abortion, would be less equipped than a given Democratic representative, to represent African American communities, who identify as Democratic, with a percentage hovering around 80% for the last two decades according to Pew Research. The notion behind the presence of these figures is that the African American community is not only a homogenous entity, but one that requires a singular source of leadership in order to be viewed of as political equals. This same notion extends forth for other minorities when groups within them engage in deviant behavior, such as the case in the recent string of terrorist attacks conducted by proclaimed muslims, in which worldwide condemnation of said attacks was led followers of the abrahamic religion. This kind of behavior wouldn’t be necessary if the Islamic community didn’t feel the need to blatantly and repeatedly distinguish their identity from the acts of an extreme minority within their ranks due to the overgeneralization that comes with the social ambiguity of being a minority.***

***To my question of “Do you think passive resistance (hunger strikes/sit-ins) is a more***

***productive form of protest than active resistance (combat/marches)?***

* ***71.43% of participants who identified as people of color responded yes while 44.44% of white participants responded yes.***
* ***28.57% of participants who identified as people of color responded no while 55.56% of white participants responded no.***

***My Analysis***

***As illustrated by the data, the concept of passive resistance as superior to active resistance is trend most noticeable among people of color. Passive resistance forms one of the cornerstones of respectability politics. The methods towards achieving racial equality was a major point of dissention between groups during the American Civil Rights Era, creating what we recognize as the two camps of the time represented by figures and groups such as Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the NAACP, and the Black Panther Party. While one group stressed representation and image, the other stated that equality supercedes image, and it needed to be achieved, regardless of the public opinion of the tactics. The NAACP even went as far as to cherry pick their cases that they brought before the Supreme Court, as they did with Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896, a case in which a man who would most likely be considered white by contemporary standards was used to champion Black civil rights, or with the case of Rosa Parks, in which they chose a more “presentable” figure than the individual who first refused to get up for a white man on a bus, Claudette Colvin, a dark skin teenager who was pregnant out of wedlock. In the article “Before Rosa Parks, A Teenager Defied Segregation On An Alabama Bus”, the author describes how Claudette was not conducive to the motivations of the NAACP, with Colvin herself saying “I knew why they chose Rosa, they [NAACP] thought I would be too militant for them. They wanted someone mild and genteel like Rosa.”This were examples of respectability politics being used as a function of Control Theory, in that to appeal to the dominant members of society, they sought to champion members of the black community who conformed to their norms, from physical characteristics to religious adherence, adopting their societal norms in order to gain their respect. In so doing, they also attempted to bypass the shortcomings of Differential Justice, hoping that emulating white culture and traditions would allow them to achieve more preferential court rulings.***

***To my question of “Does any kind of violence (rioting/looting) invalidate a social movement?”***

* ***54.29% of participants who identified as people of color responded yes while 55.56% of white participants responded yes.***
* ***45.71% of participants who identified as people of color responded no while 44.44% of white participants responded no.***

***My Analysis***

***While there is a less apparent trend in the data results then in the previous question, however it still shares the same sentiment that people of color seem to more fervently obscure social movements and reduce them down to the method to which they are brought to national attention. Such was the case with the protests in Ferguson, Missouri, in which protestors, in the wake of the shooting death of teenager by the Police Officer Darren Wilson, engaged in riot behavior, vandalizing shops and vehicles. The public, from the labeling theory perspective, endowed the protestors with a Master Status as anarchists, manipulating the situation as an excuse to destroy private property. Rather than contemplating what could bring about such a widespread demonstration of frustration and anger, the media and society took the events for face value, decrying the symptoms while failing to locate the disease. There is a movement among black proponent of respectability politics to reclaim the title of the “righteous sufferer”, one who takes lashes without a bat of an eye, however the point that they miss is that this kind of demonstration is absolutely necessary in bringing about change. The disruption that this causes in ordinary life is the fuel for political and social change. Violence and active resistance are the primary means by which a group can rally for its own change, passive resistance robs a group of their agency, making their demonstrations ones that blend into the ongoings of everyday life for the most part. The less disruptive they are, the more easily the motives behind the demonstrations can be ignored. This is the theoretical notion, however due to notions such as respectability politics, events like the stated one and those who participate in it are seen as not reaching the prerequisites required for respect and as an extension, empathy.***

***To my question of what is more suitable dress for a protest on police brutality?***

* ***3.03% of participants who identified as people of color responded choosing the image of black men in sagging pants while 28.57% of white participants responded choosing the image of black men in sagging pants.***
* ***96.97% of participants who identified as people of color responded choosing the image of black men in suits while 71.43% of white participants responded choosing black men in suits.***

***My Analysis***

***This data set is the most stark representation of what the legacy of respectability politics is: initiated by the oppressor and perpetuated by the oppressed. The participants who identified as white saw black men who wore sagging pants to a police brutality protest as just as deserving of equality as black men in suits at a much greater rate than people of color did. “Pull your pants up” has been a rallying cry among respectability politics advocates since the inception of the style. The advocates perceive western business attire to be more “suitable” for such events. Sociologically, there are connotations of suits as being professional, serious, powerful in some respects, whereas in reality there are no real bases for these connotations than the origin of the style of dress in whiteness. The identification of people of color in suits as having a more legitimate cause than those who choose to dress another way is a direct insinuation that because they resemble what is valued in the western professional tradition, they should be taken more seriously. So essentially, while the slogan of respectability politics is “respect yourself so others will”, it rings more similarly to “be perceived as similar to the dominant group to earn their respect.”***

***To my question of “Which would be more suitable to wear at a protest for female rights? (abortion/wage gap/etc.)***

* ***100% of participants who identified as female responded choosing the image of women dressed in business attire while 95% of male participants responded choosing the image of women dressed in business attire.***
* ***0% of participants who identified as female responded choosing the image of women dressed in bathing suits while 5% of male participants responded choosing the image of women dressed in bathing suits.***

***My Analysis***

***This survey question is a feminist approach to the previous one, and similar trends were observed. While no women thought that wearing bathing suits was suitable for a protest for female rights, a small, but noticeable amount of men said the converse. This result was particularly surprising to me given the notions of body positivity that are becoming more prevalent in contemporary feminist rhetoric. One could hypothesize that this may be due to the instances of body shaming/ slut shaming, that are seen more prevalently among females than across genders, with the main words used to insult females such as “slut”, “skank”, “whore”, as denoting a connotation of lack of control or respect of one’s body, vernacular that is no doubt present among high school age girls. Another factor compounded by youth are increasing role strains put upon girls by society to be chaste yet alluring simultaneously.***

**Work Cited**

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