Working with Multiethnic Youth and Families

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Definitions

- Multiracial: People who are of two or more racial heritages. It is the most inclusive term to refer to people across all racial mixes; includes biracial people.

- Multiethnic: relating to, or including, several ethnic groups. Some people use the term interchangeably with the term multiracial, though these terms do not mean the same thing. (Root & Kelley, 2003)
Definitions

- Defining what it means to be multiracial is complicated.
- There is also evidence that many multiracial people identify differently in different situations.
- Harris and Sim (2002) study; Add Health Data Set
  - Questionnaires that were completed at school and later interviews at home with the same youth.
    - 6.8% identified multiracially at school
    - 3.6% identified multiracially at home.
US Census

• Multiracial children are one of the fastest growing segments of the US population.

• The 2000 Census was the first time in 210 year history of the Census that citizens of the United States could select multiple racial categories for self-identification apart from Hispanic ethnicity in a census.

• It was also mandated in 2000 that by January 1, 2003 virtually all agencies that received federal aid must allow for multiple race identification when requesting racial data.
US Census 2010

• The overwhelming majority of the total population of the United States reported only one race in 2010.

• 97% of all respondents (299.7 million) reported only one race, with the largest group reporting White alone.

• People who reported more than one race numbered 9.0 million in the 2010 Census and made up about 3% of the total population.
Figure 2.
Percentage of Major Race Groups Reporting Multiple Races: 2010

(For more information on confidentiality protection, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/doc/pl94-171.pdf)

Note: Specified race group refers to the alone or in-combination population.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, Table P1.
Figure 3. 
Percentage Distribution of People Who Reported Multiple Races: 2010
(For more information on confidentiality protection, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/doc/pl94-171.pdf)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race Combination</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White; Black</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White; SOR</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White; Asian</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White; AIAN</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black; SOR</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black; AIAN</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian; SOR</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black; Asian</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White; NHPI</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian; NHPI</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIAN; SOR</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHPI; SOR</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIAN; Asian</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black; NHPI</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIAN; NHPI</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three or more races</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: People reporting multiple races represented 2.9 percent of the total population. Black refers to Black or African American; AIAN refers to American Indian and Alaska Native; NHPI refers to Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander; SOR refers to Some Other Race.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, Table P1.
US Census 2010

- Nearly half of all people who identified as American Indian and Alaska Native reported multiple races

- American Indian and Alaska Native and White (majority); American Indian and Alaska Native and Black as well as American Indian and Alaska Native and White and Black were also common combinations among this population.
US Census 2000

• Information calculated for 2000 Census that has not yet been calculated for 2010 Census

• The multiracial population is much younger than the single race population.
  – About 42% or 2.9 million of the multiracial population was under the age of 18
  – About 25% of the population reporting one race was under the age of 18.
Figure 2.

Percent Distribution of the Two or More Races Population by Region: 2000

(For information on confidentiality protection, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/pl94-171.pdf)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, Table PL1.
US Census 2000

- There were 14 states where the Two or more races population exceeded the US rate of 2.4%: Hawaii, Alaska, California, Oklahoma, Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, **New Mexico**, Oregon, Washington, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Texas.
Figure 3. Percent Two or More Races: 2000

Two or more races population as a percent of total population by state:
- 21.4 (Hawaii)
- 4.0 to 5.5
- 2.4 to 3.9
- 1.8 to 2.3
- 0.7 to 1.7

Two or more races population as a percent of total population by county:
- 12.0 to 28.4
- 4.0 to 11.9
- 2.4 to 3.9
- 1.8 to 2.3
- 1.0 to 1.7
- Less than 1.0

Identity Development

• A major focus of the existing literature has been on how multiracial people develop their identity

• A common theme in the mental health literature is that difficulties of multiracial adolescents are a product of identity problems typical of adolescence and the demands of living in a racially polarized society.

(Kelley, 2006; Root and Kelley, 2003; Whaley & Francis, 2006)
Identity Development

• The earliest theories of multiracial identity:
  – Deficit models
  – Stonequist’s (1937) marginal person theory
  – Gibbs (1987) theory conceptualized multiracial children as particularly vulnerable to: conflicts about their mixed heritage identity; conflicts about their social marginality; conflicts about separation from their parents; and conflicts about their educational or career aspirations.
Identity Development

• Root’s (2003) ecological approach:
  – Encompass the full and complex interaction of the immediate environments (family, friends, neighborhood) and broader contexts (class, geographic region, generational/societal acceptance) as well as identity across the lifespan and dynamic concurrent identity choices.

(Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995)
Root’s Ecological Framework of Racial Identity Development

• Recognizes a number of micro and macro level dimensions as influences on the multiracial person.
  – Regional and generational history of race and ethnic relations
  – Family
  – School
  – Neighborhood
• Root’s ecological model emphasizes the potential variety of ethnic/racial self identity choices open to the child.
• Identity is fluid.
Developmental Concerns: Children

• May oscillate between strong identification with one parent’s cultural background.
• Young children begin to understand their personal and group status within the greater community (society).
• Friendship influenced by dual racial background and by child’s awareness of this heritage.
• School is a primary place to acquire a sense of social group belonging and to practice the skills necessary for making and keeping friends.
• Race and ethnic self-representations undergo cognitive developmental changes similar to other aspects of self-representations.

(Kelley, 2006; Root & Kelley, 2003)
Developmental Concerns: Children

• By age 10, children are able to use racial and ethnic categories to classify themselves (racial/ethnic self-identification) and other people (racial/ethnic classification) accurately and reliably.

• By middle childhood children understand the permanence of their ethnicity and/or race, called ethnic/racial constancy.

• Children in a multiracial family may have different racial identities from one another.

• Some children from multiracial families report teasing, whispers, and stares when with their family.

(AACAP, 1999)
Developmental Concerns: Adolescents

- Gain a deeper grasp of the factors that define racial and cultural identity and an awareness of racism in its historical and societal context.
- Dilemma of not wanting to choose one parent over the other, yet wanting to belong to a peer group.
- Issues of dating and race.
- Role of gender during adolescent development years. Multiracial girls may experience more difficulty during adolescence, on the one hand, because they are viewed as “exotic” in a way boys are not.
- Greater cognitive abilities and social contexts also encourage multiracial adolescents to begin to consider the integration of identities.
  - “Who am I?”; “Who do others see me as?”; “Where do I belong?”; “Who do I want to be?”
  - Multiracial adolescents may experiment with different ways to answer these questions.
- Role of peer groups.
- Multiracial identity becomes more integrated when individuals enter late adolescence/young adulthood.

(Brown, 1995; Root & Kelley, 2003; Benedetto & Olisky, 2001)
Behavioral Health of Multiracial Youth

• Few empirical studies
• Research (AACAP, 1999) has shown that multiracial children:
  – Do not differ from other children in self-esteem, comfort with themselves, or number of psychiatric problems.
  – Tend to be high achievers with a strong sense of self and tolerance of diversity.
• Positive multiracial identity is linked to good psychological health (Renn, 2008).
• Multiracial families are no more at risk than monoracial families (Kelley, 2006).
Behavioral Health of Multiracial Youth

• Self-esteem is one aspect of psychological adjustment that has received substantial attention in the literature.
  – Results are mixed, but in general, self esteem does not seem to be lower among multiracial people.
• Existing research has shown that many multiracial youth represent an “at-risk” population that deserves closer study.
  – A 1998-2000 study by the Oregon Alliance of Children’s Programs found that mixed race youth had higher rates of physical and sexual abuse than any other race.
  – Multiracial youth were also entering the Oregon Juvenile Justice System at unprecedented rates.

(Kelley, 2006; Root & Kelley, 2003)
Behavioral Health of Multiracial Youth

- Zane and Berger (2008)
  - Study concluded that biracial Asian Americans are twice as likely as monoracial Asian Americans to be diagnosed with a psychological disorder.
  - 34% of biracial individuals in a national survey had been diagnosed with a psychological disorder, such as anxiety, depression, or substance abuse, versus 17 percent of monoracial individuals.
Behavioral Health of Multiracial Youth

• Udry, Li, and Hendrickson-Smith (2003)
  – Data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health
  – Studied 3,439 multiracial adolescents ages 12-18
  – 1) Multiracial adolescents had significantly more emotional and behavioral problems than their counterparts who self-identify with a single race/ethnicity.
    • Multiracial adolescents had Higher levels of depression, more health problems such as sleep problems, skin problems, headaches, aches/pains, and greater levels of smoking and drinking.
  – 2) Results were the same regardless of the particular combination of ethnic/racial identities used in the comparison.
Concluding Thoughts

Things to remember when working with multiracial/multiethnic youth:

• Consider multiple identities and identification as multiracial
• Acknowledge children’s dual heritage.
• Accept multiple (possibly simultaneous) identifications
• Frequently changing self-perceptions and attitudes towards race
• Importance of gathering multiple self-reports of racial identity in different situations as a way to gain a more accurate picture of a multiracial person’s self identity.
• Family meanings of race and ethnicity
• Actively learning about personal and family histories
• Providing role models to multiracial adolescents
• Understand identity development as a process and identity as a changing thing
Concluding Thoughts

• On the one hand, when multiracial youth encounter adjustment, behavioral, or mental health difficulties it may or may not be related to being multiracial.

• On the other hand, the experience of being multiracial and multiethnic may affect or shape the ways in which challenges are met or addressed.

• Overall, it is important to avoid making assumptions, but be open and willing to explore the possibilities.
References


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