

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.

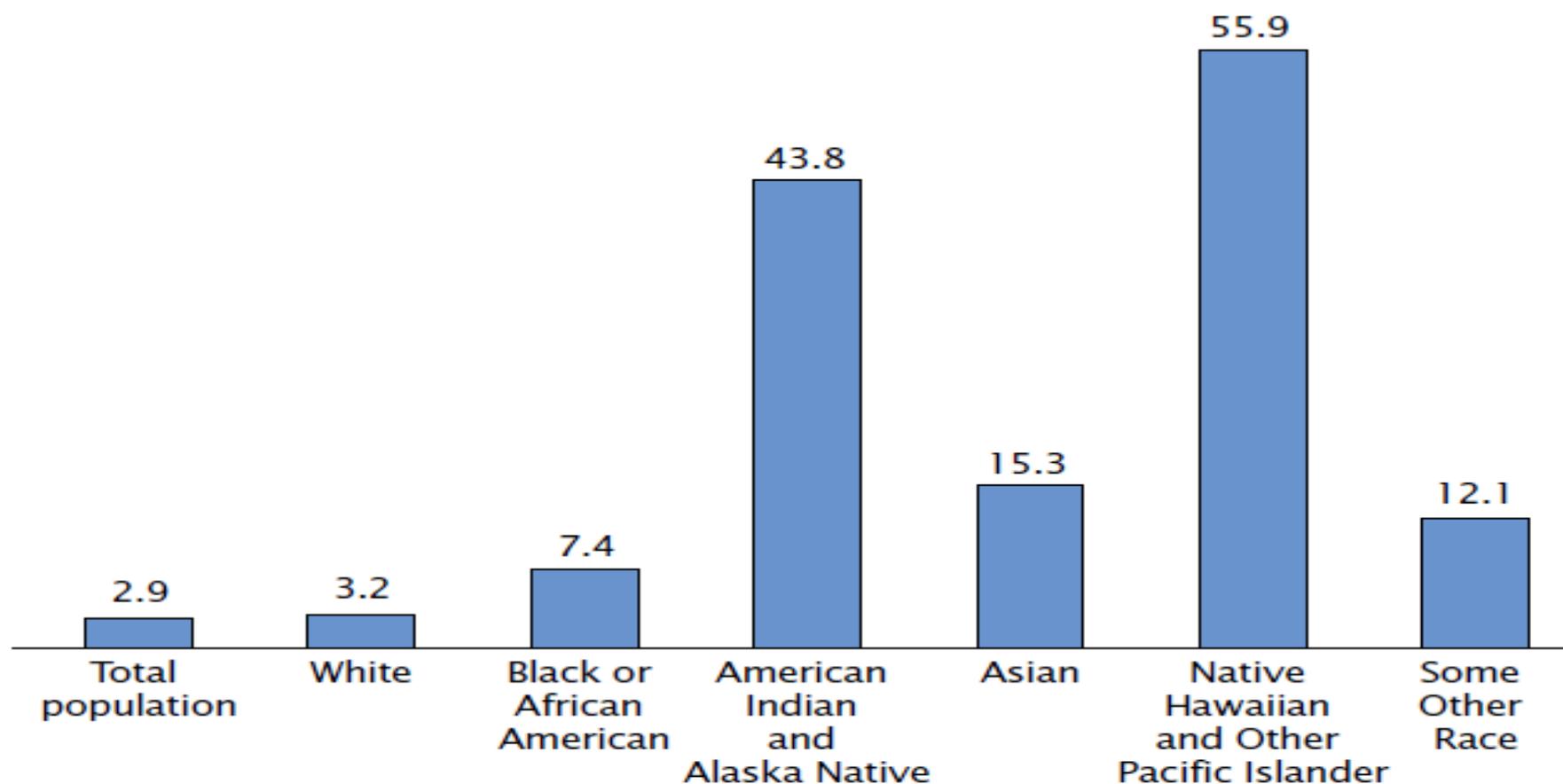
US Census 2010

- 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)



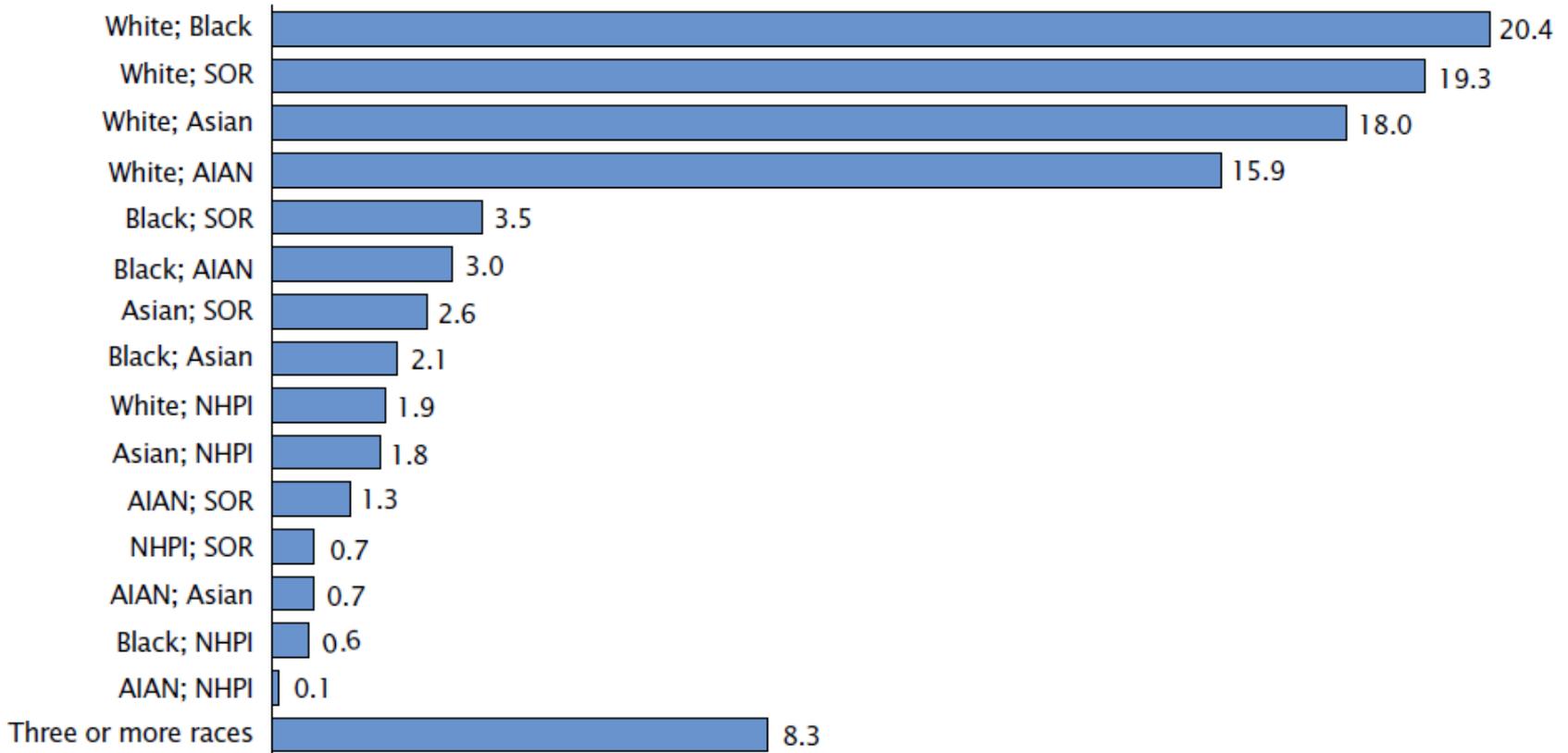
Note: Specified race group refers to the alone or in-combination population.

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)



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.

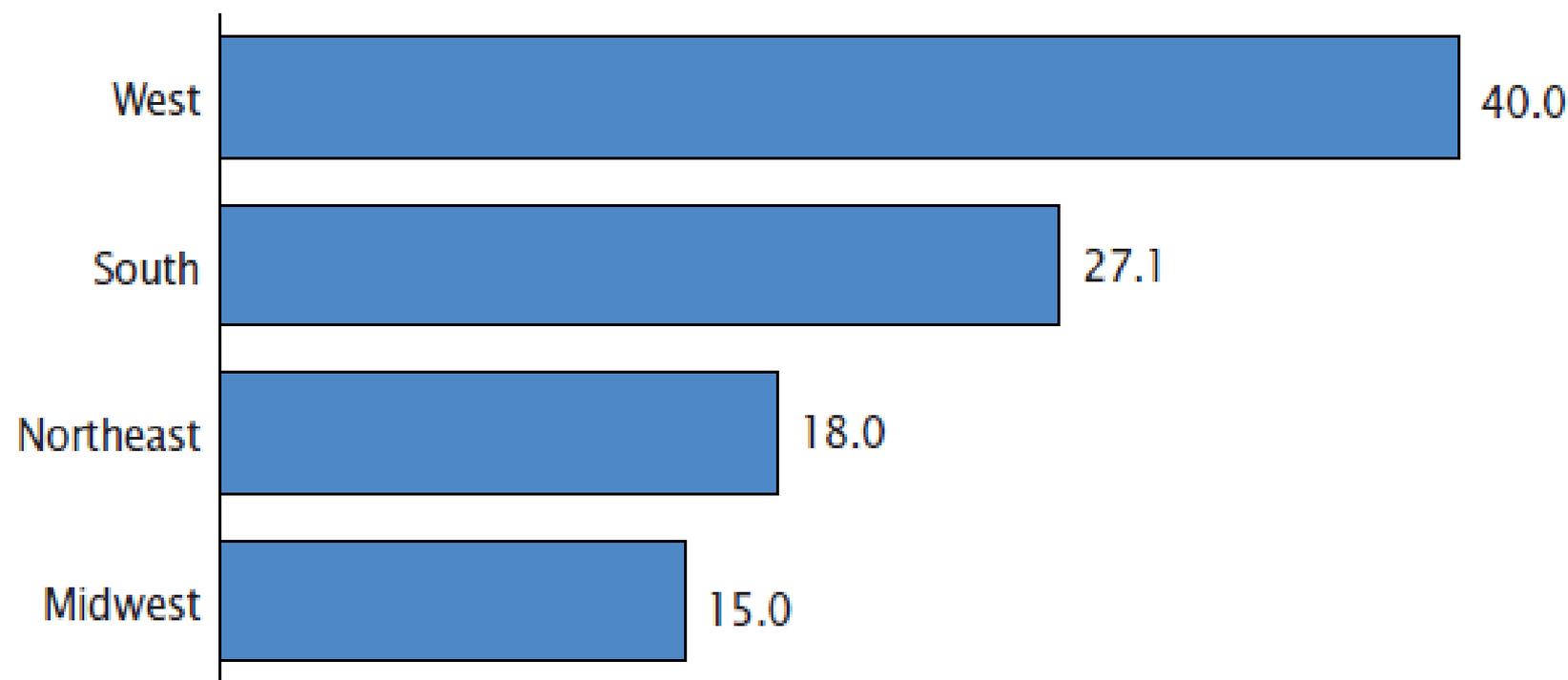
US Census 2000

- 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)



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.

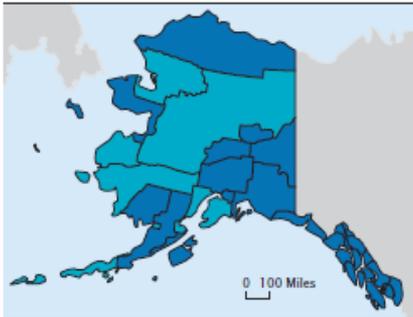
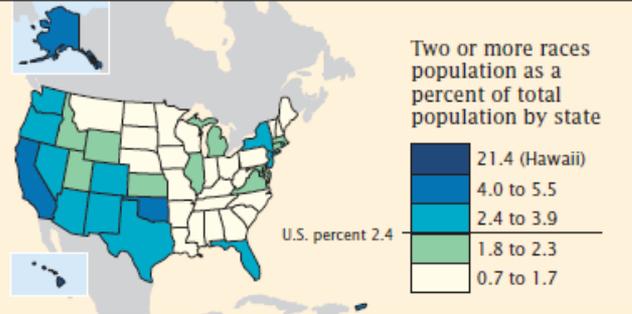
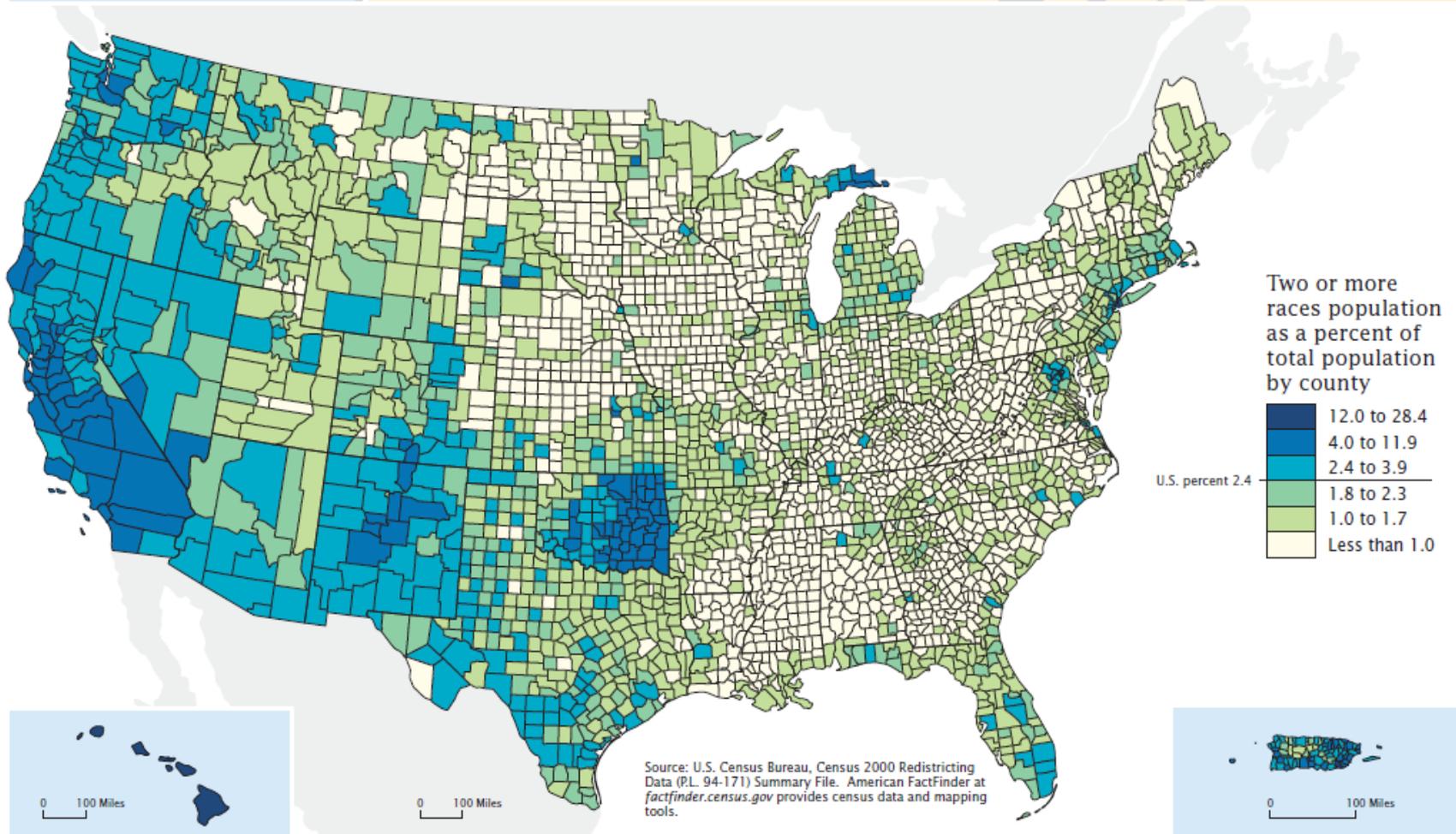
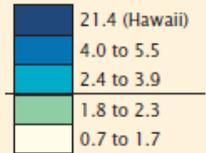


Figure 3. Percent Two or More Races: 2000

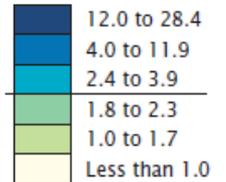
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Two or more races population as a percent of total population by state



Two or more races population as a percent of total population by county



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Redistricting Data (PL 94-171) Summary File. American FactFinder at factfinder.census.gov provides census data and mapping tools.

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 parents 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.

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Questions and Thoughts?

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