

Samantha Gilbert

April 12, 2012

Issue Brief: Bi/Multiracial Identity and Women's and Gender Issues in the U.S.

Key Words:

Feminism, Racism, Sexism, Identity, Intersectionality, One-drop rule

Description:

This issue brief will focus on an analysis of bi/multiracial Americans' views on various women's and gender issues, especially the intersection of racism and sexism, feminism, and reproductive rights.

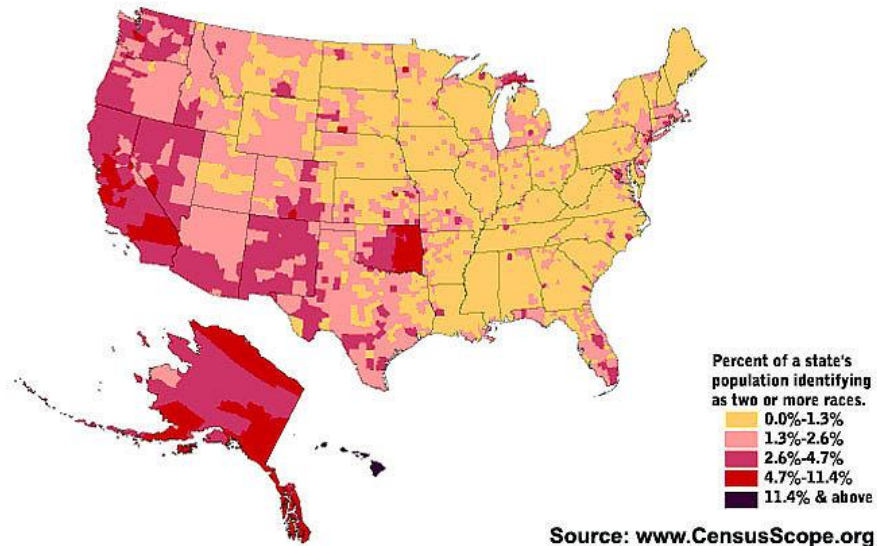
Key Points:

- A woman's feminist perspective is related to her ethnoracial identification. Therefore, it is extremely difficult for bi/multiracial women to subscribe to a specific feminist perspective.
- The idea that "intersectionality," when biological, social and cultural characteristics of identity interact with each other to create systemic social inequality, is pervasive in American society.
- There is no general consensus amongst the various ethnicities and races as to what an "American woman" wants in terms of reproductive rights because the average American woman does not exist.
- Are American society's oppressors "men" or "racism"? For many bi/multiracial American women, the answer to this question is "both."

Brief:

The United States is one of the most diverse nations in the world. Although, it was founded by white Europeans, by the year 2010, approximately 36% of the U.S. population self-identified as non-white. High rates of immigration contribute to this trait that also leads to increased rates of interracial marriage, especially among second-plus generation Americans. In fact, 15% of all new marriages in the United States in 2010 were interracial. Intermarriages composed 8.4% of all marriages in the U.S. 2010, up from a mere 3.2% in 1980. Noticeably, intermarriage produces bi/multiracial offspring – the future of America – a multicultural America.

Despite America's diversity, Americans are still discriminated against based on race. However, this racial discrimination is not evenly distributed



between the genders. More than that, sociologists have hypothesized that intersectionality, the intersection of “various socially and culturally constructed categories [like gender, race and sexual orientation] interact on multiple levels to manifest themselves as inequality in society,”¹ plays a role in American society. This would explain bi/multiracial American women’s difficulties in establishing a cohesive identity.

To focus on the first crisis of identity, bi/multiracial Americans are often forced to choose between their multiple racial identities. Only beginning with the 2000 U.S. Census could a



person self-identify as “two or more races.” By the 2010 U.S. Census, nearly 7 million Americans (3% of the population) identified as bi/multiracial. Unfortunately, in practice, the racial identification of bi/multiracial Americans is chosen without their consent. The one-drop rule has been prevalent in mainstream American society since the early 19th century. One of the most prominent examples of this is President Barack Obama, who is

referred to as the first *black* president, even though he is biracial—the product of a white, European American mother and Kenyan father. On the opposite end of the spectrum, bi/multiracial Americans may prefer to identify with the white side of their heritage, if possible, not because they are ashamed of their colored side, but because they know that they will be given a better opportunity for equality and success if they can “pass” as white.

The gender dichotomy affects bi/multiracial American women uniquely. Although the U.S. has come extremely far in terms of gender equity in the past century, it is still a man’s world, but more than that, it is most often a white man’s world. These women face two identity crises caused by the intersection of racism and sexism, both of which lead them to feel a sense of overwhelming oppression by a majority that neither accepts nor understands their mixed identity. This is proved by studying Second-Wave Feminism: the women’s rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. During this time period there was a sharp division between mainstream feminism, termed “white feminism” after its white, upper-middle class advocates, and womanism/black feminism, the feminism of women of color who asserted that freedom would never be established until sexism, class oppression *and* racism were eradicated. Due to this, many women of color still often feel that crimes perpetrated against them, especially rape and battering, are overlooked because of the politics of the situation – they cannot solely be dealt with as “race crimes” or “gender crimes.”



Because of bi/multiracial American women's mixed identities, these women face the question as to who the true "enemy" is: racism or sexism? While not reducing the significance of racism's prevalence in America, in a 2008 op-ed Gloria Steinem wrote "So why is the sex barrier not taken as seriously as the racial one? The reasons are as pervasive as the air we breathe: because sexism is still confused with nature as racism once was."² It is with this sentiment in mind that bi/multiracial feminists face opposition from both men and white women.

Political socialization refers to the process of how humans form their political beliefs and attitudes. It notes that family and the attitude of the person's collective generation are primary influences in acquisition of a person's political orientation. Views on reproductive rights such as birth control and sexual health, are often related to religion, a belief system that is usually inherited through one's family, which while often identified with a specific ethnoracial group, is not bound by it. For example, "70% of all Latino eligible voters who identify as Democrats are Catholics"⁴ despite that Democrats express a pro-choice philosophy, and the Catholic Church is intrinsically opposed to abortion. Therefore a person's views on reproductive rights are not directly correlated with his/her racial identity, mixed or otherwise. Furthermore, the breakdown of abortions by race is relatively similar with "non-Hispanic white women account[ing] for 36% of abortions, non-Hispanic black women for 30%, Hispanic women for 25% and women of other races for 9%."⁵ This advances the point that abortion is an issue that affects all ethnoracial groups.

Works Cited/General References:

- 1) Change.org; June 10, 2009;
<http://news.change.org/stories/intersectionality-101-sexism-racism-speciesism-and-more>
- 2) Gloria Steinem; January 8, 2008;
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/08/opinion/08steinem.html>
- 3) Pew Research Center; April 25, 2007;
<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/461/religion-hispanic-latino>

4) Guttmacher Institute; August 2011;
http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb_induced_abortion.html

Image Citations:

- 1) Location of Multicultural Americans in the U.S. Map
http://knowledge.allianz.com/demographics/migration_minorities/?664/multicultural-us
- 2) Multicultural American Picture
<http://www1.salon.com/news/feature/2000/02/15/census/index.html>
- 3) Womanism Symbol
<http://transgriot.blogspot.com/2010/09/beyonce-if-feminists-dont-want-you-we.html>

Relevant Websites:

- 1) Kimberlé Crenshaw; Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color; July 1991;
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1229039?seq=1>
- 2) Pew Research Center
<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/02/16/the-rise-of-intermarriage/>
- 3) U.S. Census Bureau
<http://www.census.gov/>
- 4) Center for Disease Control and Prevention; Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities
<http://www.cdc.gov/omhd/populations/Multiracial.htm>