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Race and Ethnicity in American Politics

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The Interaction of Socioeconomic Status and Biracial/Multiracial Identity

Keywords: Biracial/Multiracial/Mixed-Race Identity, Socioeconomic Status, Minority, Census Representation, Cohesion

Description: This brief delves into socioeconomic status as a major cleavage within the mixed-race identity category, and as key to understanding the distinct seat that this identity category takes in the context of racial minorities.

Key Points: (1) Socioeconomic status varies significantly across the spectrum of mixed-race identities. (2) “Two or More Races” as a U.S. Census population group does not necessarily lend agency to combating socioeconomic marginalization. (3) Socioeconomic status has a major effect on racial identification—both personal identification, and (4) socially imposed identification.

Related Websites:

<https://multiracialnetwork.wordpress.com/>

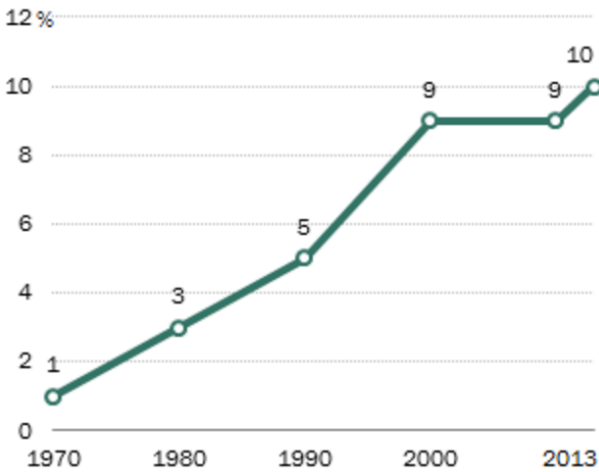
<http://www.apa.org/topics/socioeconomic-status/>

<http://www.asanet.org/journals/asr>

Brief:

Multiracial Babies on the Rise

% of children younger than 1 year old who are multiracial, among those living with two parents



Note: In this analysis, "multiracial" is based on the race of the child's parents. If a child has two parents who are of different races, or if at least one of the child's parents is multiracial, the child is also identified as multiracial. Analysis is limited to children living with two parents to maintain comparability across time. In 2000, the Census Bureau altered the race variable to allow for people to identify as multiracial. See Chapter 1 for more details.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of the 1970, 1980, 1990 and 2000 censuses and 2010 and 2013 American Community Surveys (IPUMS)

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In 2000, the U.S. Census added "Two or More Races" as a population group.

Previously, biracial and multiracial identities lacked federal recognition. This addition introduced a new means through which to statistically analyze racial identity and its many intersections. "Since the introduction of the Census 'mark one or more' race question in 2000 (Perlmann and

Waters 2002), the number of self-identified multiracial individuals has grown by 33 percent, from 6.7 million in 2000 to over 9 million in 2010. This group has also been hailed as one of the fastest growing

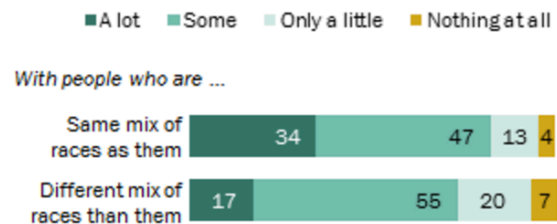
race/ethnic groups, projected to expand to more than 16 million individuals by 2050 (U.S. Census 2009)" (Bratter, Howell, Essenburg). The two-or-more-race category makes up a minority racial identity in the United States. However, when analyzed in relation to socioeconomic status, biracial and multiracial identities by and large function distinctly from the other minority racial groups identified by the Census.

Biracial and multiracial identities are often assigned minority standing. It is true that only a small percentage of the United States population identifies as biracial or multiracial, but it is crucial to highlight the great diversity within the biracial and

multiracial category. Those with biracial and multiracial identities do not necessarily experience the degree of socioeconomic marginalization that is experienced by those with other minority-race identities. “In general, most assessments show that multiracial families and those in [interracial unions]...have distinctively better socioeconomic circumstances than monoracial minority families and in some cases, are better off than White families,” and the same circumstances apply to individuals of multiracial or biracial identity. For example, Blacks and Latinos who respectively intermarry across racial lines tend to be better educated, and biracial and multiracial families involving Latino and Asian identity have lower poverty rates than do families in either of these respective minority groups. Explanations regarding this socioeconomic dynamic have suggested that biracial and multiracial families including black spouses experience less racial segregation than do mono-racial Black families, and that those of a mixed-race identity that includes White identity experience “increasing structural parity with Whites and acculturation into the American mainstream norms and traditions” (Bratter, Howell, Essenburg).

Do Multiracial Adults Feel a Common Bond with Other Multiracial Adults?

% of all multiracial adults who have ... in common



Note: Multiracial adults are two or more races (based on backgrounds of self, parents or grandparents). Those who gave no answer are not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center survey, Feb. 6-April 6, 2015 (n=1,555 multiracial adults)

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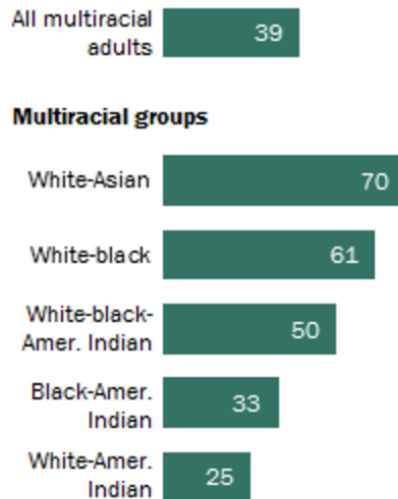
Q20a-b

It is necessary to note that the “Two or More Races” identification does not necessarily lend agency to those seeking to combat socioeconomic marginalization. This is partly due to the fact that such an inherently diverse population group lacks group cohesion. Solidarity is a key factor in the political participation of racial minorities, which gain a sense of oneness through shared perceptions

of discrimination against themselves and against their group, and through shared opinions on political and social issues (McClain and Stewart 78). A shared history of discrimination is present among those of mixed-race identity, but racial cleavages within this identity group, and the corresponding variance in socioeconomic standings, impede substantial political cohesion. For example, mixed-racial identities such as White-Asian do not require such agency, as do mixed-racial identities comprising more severely marginalized racial categories.

4-in-10 Have Mixed-Race Background and Say They're Multiracial

% of adults with a background including two or more races who consider themselves "multiracial"



Note: Based on adults with two or more races in the backgrounds of self, parents or grandparents. Multiracial subgroups are non-Hispanic and mutually exclusive. Sample sizes are: 118 white-black, 88 white-Asian, 907 white-Amer. Indian, 128 black-Amer. Indian, 106 white-black-Amer. Indian.

Source: Pew Research Center survey, Feb. 6 April 6, 2015 (n=1,555 multiracial adults)

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As much as racial identity affects socioeconomic status, socioeconomic status affects identification. Those of mixed-racial heritage are more likely to identify as White or as of mixed-race identity if they are of higher socioeconomic status, and conversely are more likely to identify with a specific minority group if they are of lower socioeconomic status. "For the growing mixed-race population, racial labeling choices are intimately linked to social group attachments, identities, and income" (Davenport). This reverberates the notion that racial identification indicates both felt oppression and a desire for agency.

A similar phenomenon occurs with social perception of racial identity. Even though race is widely understood to be a social construct, racial categories are enforced due to shared histories of oppression. While

organization based on race has given agency to oppressed groups, it also reinforces associations drawn between racial groups and specific socioeconomic statuses. Out of the racial groups with which they identify, those of biracial or multiracial identity who are of lower socioeconomic status are likely to be perceived as members of the group that has historically been the most severely oppressed. Oppositely, those who are of higher socioeconomic status are likely to be perceived as members of the group that has historically been the least oppressed (Sanchez, Garcia). In any case, it can be concluded that mixed-race identities are unique in their respective socioeconomic statuses, and that socioeconomic status, in turn, reinforces the identity of mixed-race individuals.

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