

Multiracial Students

Student Population/Overview

- Multiracial students come from two parents who hold different racial ancestries (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)
- Considered very complex, the multiracial population in America is steadily growing, having changed considerably since 2010. It was measured at 9 million people in the 2010 U.S. Census and is now 33.8 million people in 2020, a 276% increase. (Jones, et al., 2021). As a result, the number of multiracial students on college campuses is predicted to increase (Okamoto, 2020, p. 2).

Relevant Terms / Definitions

- **Multiraciality** - a broad term referencing or pertaining to multiracial or mixed-race identity, categories, groups, or phenomena (Guillermo-Wann & Johnston, 2012, as cited in Johnston-Guerrero et al., 2020).
- **Monoracism** - the systemic social oppression that targets individuals who do not fit into monoracial categories or groups (Harris, 2016; Johnston & Nadal, 2010, as cited in Johnston-Guerrero et al., 2020).
- **Microaggressions** - brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color (Heilman, 2022).

Diversity within the Population

- Multiracial students are not monolithic. They might have different identities within their multiracial identities (Johnston-Guerrero, 2020, p. 32)
- In considering this variance, investigations using four years of data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) showed that there are differences in engagement among multiracial students from different racial heritage groups and across institutional types, illuminating diversity among multiracial students and institutional diversity as a factor in student engagement. (Renn as cited in Johnston-Guerrero & Wijeyesinghe, 2021, p. 23).

Historical Background Trends, Statistics, Current Issues, & Concerns/Challenges

- Limited and imprecise data on multiracial people have rendered multiracial college students an underexplored group (Mitchell & Warren, 2022). Specifically, data on multiracial people suffers from the following:
 - Historic exclusion of multiracial categories in survey research
 - Analytical decisions which obscure or omit multiracial people in empirical research
 - Collapsing multiracial individuals into one of their racial components
- Between 2010 and 2018, the college enrollment of multiracial students increased by 120%, from 294,000 to 647,000 students (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).
- Recent qualitative research on multiracial college students indicates that they face a number of challenges during college, including racial microaggressions, the policing of racial categories, and feelings of isolation from monoracial groups (Mitchell & Warren, 2022, p.5).
- Multiracial individuals also tend to score worse on measures of mental health than monoracial people, experiencing elevated levels of depression, lower rates of satisfaction, and higher rates of suicidality (Mitchell & Warren, 2022, p.2).

Students' Collegiate Experience (social and academic realm, curricular and co-curricular)

- Multiracial people enroll in college at significantly lower rates and are less likely to earn bachelor's degrees relative to other racial groups (Mitchell & Warren, 2022, p. 1).
- However, once in college, multiracial students have the opportunity to build their own identities outside of the racial identification of their parents, often for the first time. This transition allows students to explore the fluidity of race (Mitchell & Warren, 2022, p.3).
- This exploration is still challenging since the policing of racial boundaries by monoracial people often leads to a sense of racial homelessness and social displacement in multiracial students (Mitchell & Warren, 2022, p.2).
- Seven themes were identified representing unique forms of prejudice and discrimination specific to multiracial participants in college: (a) racial essentialization, (b) invalidation of racial identities, (c) external imposition of racial identities, (d) racial exclusion and marginalization, (e) challenges to racial authenticity, (f) suspicion of chameleons, (g) exoticization, and (h) pathologizing of multiracial individuals (Museus et al., 2016).
- Multiracial students also struggle claiming multiracial oppression (Johnston-Guerrero, 2020, p. 31)

Issues of Development

- During personal development, multiracial students are a particularly vulnerable group that struggles to find community on campus, faces exclusion for failing to be monoracial "enough", and has their multiracial identity denied by both their white and nonwhite monoracial peers (Mitchell & Warren, 2022, p.6).

- There are several multiracial identity development models and theories that speak to these issues experienced by multiracial students. Notable ones include:
 - Wijeyesinghe (2001) offered the factor model of multiracial identity (FMMI), which posited racial ancestry, cultural attachment, early experience and socialization, political awareness and orientation, spirituality, physical appearance, social and historical context, and other social identities as the ecology in which choice of racial identity occurred for multiracial people (Renn as cited in Johnston-Guerrero & Wijeyesinghe, 2021, p. 20).
 - Renn's (2003, 2004) articulation of five patterns of mixed race identities remains another model in wide circulation. The five patterns (monoracial identity, multiple monoracial identities, multiracial identity, extraracial identity, and situational identity) provide a robust description of how mixed race college students experience and express racial identities. (Renn as cited in Johnston-Guerrero & Wijeyesinghe, 2021, p. 20).
- While exploration and affirmation are important components of positive racial identity development, multiracial youth seem to spend more time in the exploration stage, and many do not even reach the affirmation stage (Campbell, 2020, p. 3).
- One's identity development and exploration should never be a negative experience but due to society's discomfort with being unable to racially categorize everyone, mixed-race people suffer the most (Okamoto, 2020, p. 6).

Implications for Higher Education

- In the landscape of higher education, while many schools have directed efforts toward diversity and equity initiatives to support minority students in predominantly white institutions, much of the messaging around these programs unintentionally excludes multiracial students who may not identify with opportunities coded for monoracial groups (Mitchell & Warren, 2022, p. 14).
- Structural or institutional racism (and monoracism) operates within the historical, compositional, and organizational dimensions of campus climate (i.e., institution level), and impacts multiracial students at the interpersonal level. For example, if multiracial students are not considered members of monoracial groups for purposes of affirmative action and financial aid at the institutional level, they may feel marginalized at the interpersonal level. Or, if curricular offerings largely reinforce monoracial norms and thus render multiraciality invisible at the institution level, not seeing oneself reflected in the curriculum may impact multiracial students' sense of validation and belonging, perceptions of campus climate, and racial identity development at the interpersonal level. (Guillermo-Wann as cited in Johnston-Guerrero & Wijeyesinghe, 2021, p. 147).
- To combat monoracism, college campuses need to have specific spaces designed for multiracial or multiethnic students to gather. If a mixed-race student decides to commit their education to a particular college campus, it is essential that they know how to navigate and access spaces where they feel welcomed, safe, and comfortable. (Okamoto, 2020, p. 13).

Strategies for Advising / Working with This Group

- It is important to avoid contributing to the cycle of monoracial socialization. Advisors must not assume that every student identifies with one race, and need to strive to create spaces for multiracial students to engage their lived experiences with racism and monoracism. Examples of such spaces include multiracial student organizations and affinity groups within class discussions (Johnston-Guerrero, 2020, p. 31)
- It is essential to ask and challenge multiracial students to think about their race through both a monoracial lens and a multiracial one. Such reflection could open lines for further identity exploration and learning about systems of oppression (Johnston-Guerrero, 2020, p. 31).
- If a multiracial student experiences microaggressions, it is also helpful to remind them that (a) they do not always need to educate the person who microaggressed them, (b) they do not need to address every microaggression, (c) leaving the situation is okay, and (d) if microaggressions are persistent and impact their wellness or learning, other resources on campus are available for reporting these concerns (Johnston-Guerrero & Wijeyesinghe, 2021, p. 196).
- Staff and administrators working directly with multiracial students should be aware of: intersectionality and providing additional perspectives on power, privilege, and empowerment, as well as the danger of reinscribing other oppressions (Johnston-Guerrero & Wijeyesinghe, 2021, p. 196).
- Multiracial students should also have multiple options for self-identification and the option to change that identification, as supported by data which shows 56% of biracial students changed their racial identification during four years in college (Harper, 2016, as cited in Johnston-Guerrero & Wijeyesinghe, 2021, p. 25).
- Finally, multiracial groups in university counseling centers, developing outreach strategies, and creating deeper understanding of the complexities of biracial student experiences are helpful for multiracial students (Renn as cited in Johnston-Guerrero & Wijeyesinghe, 2021, p. 25).

References

- Campbell, Ashlea (2020). "Educational Experiences of Multiracial Students: A Literature Review," *Journal of Educational Research and Innovation*: Vol. 8: No. 1, Article 1. Available at: <https://digscholarship.unco.edu/jeri/vol8/iss1/1>
- Heilman, M. (2022). The Racial Elevator Speech: How Multiracial Individuals Respond to Racial Identity Inquiries. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 8(3), 370–385. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23326492221098949>
- Johnston-Guerrero, M.P., Tran, V.T., & Combs, L. (2020). Multiracial Identities and Monoracism: Examining the Influence of Oppression. *Journal of College Student Development* 61(1), 18-33. doi:10.1353/csd.2020.0001
- Johnston-Guerrero, M. P., & Wijeyesinghe, C. L. (Eds.). (2021). *Multiracial experiences in Higher Education: Contesting Knowledge, Honoring Voice, and Innovating Practice*. Stylus Publishing, LLC. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/iub-ebooks/detail.action?docID=6521274>
- Jones, N., Marks, R., Ramirez, R., Rios-Vargas, M. (12 August 2021). 2020 Census Illuminates Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Country. United States Census Bureau. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/08/improved-race-ethnicity-measures-reveal-united-states-population-much-more-multiracial.html>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Multiracial. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved November 11, 2022, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/multiracial>
- Mitchell, S., & Warren, E. (2022). Educational Trajectories and Outcomes of Multiracial College Students. *Social Sciences*, 11(3). <https://doi-org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/10.3390/socsci11030101>
- Okamoto, Haley K. M. (2020) "Mixed Plate: Exploring Multiracial Student Identities Within Higher Education," *PSU McNair Scholars Online Journal*: Vol. 14: Iss. 1, Article 4. <https://doi.org/10.15760/mcnair.2020.14.1.4>
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2001, Spring 2011, and Spring 2019, Fall Enrollment Component. 2019, See Digest of Education Statistics 2019, Table 306.10. Available online: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_306.10.asp

Other Recommended Resources

- Campion, Karis. 2019. "You Think You're Black?" Exploring Black Mixed-Race Experiences of Black Rejection. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42: 196–213.
- Clayton, Kristen A. 2020. Biracial Identity Development at Historically White and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. *Sociology of Education* 93: 238–55.
- Spicer-Runnels, A. D. (2021). Dismantling Invisibility in Multiracial College Students: The Impact of Social and Academic Integration on Student Persistence. *In Research Anthology on Empowering Marginalized Communities and Mitigating Racism and Discrimination* (pp. 1069-1088). IGI Global.
- Museus, S. D., Lambe Sariñana, S. A., Yee, A. L., & Robinson, T. E. (2016). A Qualitative Analysis of Multiracial Students' Experiences with Prejudice and Discrimination in College. *Journal of College Student Development*, 57(6), 680–697.
- Renn, Kristen A. 2000. Patterns of situational identity among biracial and multiracial college students. *Review of Higher Education* 23: 399–420.