

THINK OUTSIDE OF “THE BOX”:
UNDERSTANDING
MULTIRACIAL COLLEGE
STUDENTS

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Overview



Agenda

- Introduction and interest in topic
- Multiracial trivia quiz
- Overview of session
- General multiracial information
- Study: methods and results
- Discussion
- Implications
- Conclusion and questions

Learning Outcomes



As a result of this presentation, participants will:

- Gain information about the findings of the study
- Develop a greater understanding of multiracial identity in the college context
- Increase awareness of critical incidents experienced by multiracial college students
- Consider the implications for serving multiracial students on their respective campuses

Multiracial Population



- For the first time, the 2000 Census allowed respondents to mark more than one racial category
 - ▣ Over 7 million (2.4%) Americans identify themselves as multiracial; Almost 1/2 of multiracial people are under the age of 20—lowest median age of any racial group in all but 5 states
- Since 1970, monoracial births have increased 15% and multiracial births have increased 260% (*Root, 1996*)
- The numbers of interracial marriages are roughly doubling with each decade (*About.com*)

Multiracial Identity Models

Root's Resolutions of Biracial Identity (Root, 1990)

- Four paths which all can lead to a positive biracial existence, as long as the person is not denying any part of their heritage.
- Strategies are not mutually exclusive and may occur simultaneously, or an individual may move among them
 - Acceptance of the identity assigned by others—Passive identification with the ethnic identity society views the individual or his/her family
 - Identification with both racial groups—Identifies with both/all racial groups that comprise heritage
 - Identification with a single racial group—Actively chooses to identify with a racial/ethnic group
 - Identification as a new racial group—Identifies with other biracial persons in a way that they may not feel to any racial group

Research Study

Research Questions

- a) How do multiracial students understand their racial identity?; b) What critical incidents shape that understanding?; c) What significance do these incidents have for students?

Methods

- Qualitative study—data were collected through: a) Interviews; b) Journals; c) Material artifacts; and d) Focus groups

Sample

- Institutions: a) Mid-sized, regional comprehensive university and b) Small, private liberal arts college
- Students: 14 multiracial students (7 at each site)—11 women, 3 men; 18-23 years old; 6 sophomores, 1 junior, and 7 seniors

Negotiating Multiracial Identity

- Sometimes I think in developing identity and trying to figure out who you are, it might be a little more challenging for somebody who is biracial or multiracial because, do I incorporate both or all of my races in my identity? Or do I identify with the one race that I look closest to? (Vanessa)
- In some ways, being mixed like me is tough I think. You can't do both. You can try to incorporate both in your life. But for example, if you do only Thai stuff, you're ignoring your Jewish side, my Jewish side. But if you only do Jewish stuff, then you're ignoring the Thai side. . . . You just gotta pick and choose, incorporate both, fuse different cultures, ethnicities, at least for me that aren't traditionally fused together. (Mark)

“Double Not Half”



- “I always say I’m half Chinese and I’m half German. But that’s not how I feel about it. That’s not what I really think about it. It is that I’m part of these two things, not that I’m half part of something.” (Elizabeth)
- “Being multiracial, for me, it’s like being an individual, being myself. It’s like all or nothing. I’m not going to choose one . . . I can be all of them at once if I want to be. I can be one of them at a time. But for the most part, I’m all of them every day.” (Carmen)

Issues of Legitimacy



- “I think that’s part of being racially identified—it’s knowing your history. Like I feel like in order to identify with those three cultures, I need to know something about them.” (Natalie)
- “I know I’m not an imposter, but it’s always in the back of my mind in situations.” (Ruth)

A Unique Asset



- “Not only can I have a Bar Mitzvah and can go to a conference on Jewish diversity, but I can also go to Thailand and almost—not assimilate—but fit in, based on my appearance and many markers. Existentially, it’s a privilege I think from that perspective.” (Mark)
- However: “We’re not the new ambassadors to the world. Just because we have a bunch of mixed kids in America does not mean discrimination is going to end. . . . We’re going to be fighting racism for the rest of our lives.” (Elena)

Race on Campus



- “You can tell that race is definitely an issue and that race is important when you’re here. Just by if you’re in the dining hall and you look at who is sitting with who.” (Anne)
- “On campus, people expect you to identify in one of those groups. People want you to. When I came here, I didn’t really have big issues with that because I didn’t take part in [the Black Student Organization], but people noticed. I got asked why didn’t you come to this meeting? Why aren’t you at this talk?” (Natalie)

Exploring Critical Incidents

Incident Categories	Sub-categories
Confronting race and racism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Realizing the saliency of race• Understanding race and racism through an academic lens• Encountering racism
Responding to external definitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dealing with racial ambiguity• Choosing one race• Standing out and singled out
Defending legitimacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Questioning academic legitimacy• Challenging racial legitimacy• Defending historical legitimacy
Affirming racial identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Possessing racial/cultural knowledge• Sharing similar experiences• Finding validation and belonging

Critical Incidents



Confronting Race and Racism

- Receiving information from multicultural organizations
- Mixed race courses
- Racial jokes by peers who thought it was “safe”
- Hate crimes

Responding to External Definitions

- What are you? questions
- Check one box
- Standing out/Singled out

Critical Incidents



Defending Legitimacy

- Acceptance into institution questioned by peers
- Challenges by peers, faculty, and staff based on appearance, cultural knowledge, etc.

Affirming Racial Identity

- Knowing more about cultural background than they realized or learning more through websites, language classes, projects, etc.
- Finding a multiracial friend or others with similar experiences
- Participating in multiracial or cross-racial student organizations

Reflections on the Process



- I'm glad that I did this. . . . It just stimulated my mind to learn more, who I am and what I am." (Tia)
- "You don't really take the time after every single thing that happens to you to think about what does this mean, how does it affect my identity? But in a way I kind of liked this, it kind of forced me to, I don't know, relate it to me personally. It was a good experience overall." (Vanessa)

Reflection



Large Group Discussion

- What are your reactions to the results?
- How might these results apply to your own campus?
- What is something that you can do in your work to ensure that your unit/institution supports multiracial students?

Implications



- ❑ Examine our biases and assumptions about multiracial students
- ❑ Do not force students to choose
- ❑ Examine and discuss ways office or institution categorizes students
- ❑ Encourage students to explore their identity
- ❑ Provide opportunities for reflection on the impact of students' experiences in college
- ❑ Support multiracial organizations (if they exist)
- ❑ Include multiracial issues in professional development/programs
- ❑ Gather and make available resources that reflect multiracial experience (websites, magazines, reading lists, etc.)
- ❑ Listen to students and continue to learn

Conclusion



- Summary
- Questions?
- Resources
- From the *Mentor: Academic Advising Journal*
 - ▣ *Because advisers really are front-line personnel entrusted with assisting students toward success, “both the institution and the student will be served in a more effective and positive way when advisers are properly trained on how to interact with students of different backgrounds” (Masterson, 2007).*

THANKS FOR YOUR ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION!!

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