

Race rather than the
rule. it is important



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Race is a purely social concept. Ethnicity refers to a shared cultural heritage.

Basic Definitions:

- Race – A group of people who have been identified as having real or alleged physical characteristics. It is the fact that these biological traits are endowed with social meaning that brings them into the realm of the social sciences.
- Ethnicity– refers to people who share common cultural characteristics and ethnic identity; they share a sense of “oneness”, and a shared fate.
- Minority – a group that has less power than the dominant group, has less esteem and prestige, and is often the target of discrimination.

The two major characteristics are distinctive identity and subordination. The sociological meaning of minority does not refer to the numerical size of a group, nor to any specific ethnicity, race, or other real or imagined factors as these factors are relative to a specific society. Consider the following: “A racial group is a socially constructed category of people who are distinguished from each other by select physical characteristics” (Basirico et. al., 2014). Conversely, an ethnic group refers to a group of people who share certain cultural traits, such as a religion, language, or a geographic region.

Key to the concept of an ethnic group, however, is the sense of “peoplehood” that is developed within these groups. Ethnicity refers to selected cultural and sometimes physical characteristics used to classify people into groups or categories considered to be significantly different from others (Identities and Inequalities).

In America today, there are many ethnic groups that are widely recognized. These groups can include: American Indians, Latinos, Chinese, African Americans, European Americans, etc. For some ethnicities, there is no “real”

connection to others in the same grouping. It is possible that there are no shared or recognized traditions or customs. This is the case with many Irish and German Americans. In contrast, some ethnic groups are coherent subcultures with a shared language and body of tradition. Newly arrived immigrant groups often fit this pattern (Identities and Inequalities). Ethnic membership is usually ascribed at birth; when a person is born into an ethnic group it is unlikely that he or she will leave unless there are unusual circumstances.

A person born into Jewish culture may leave and adopt Christianity for example, or an Amish born person may opt to leave the Amish community but cases like this are the exception rather than the rule. It is important not to confuse the term minority with ethnic group. Minority is simply a number, in relation to the number and population of ethnic groups in a population. Even if an ethnic group is a "minority" in the overall population of a country, they may be a "majority" in the town or city in which they reside. For example, think about the Amish population in some towns in Michigan, Pennsylvania, etc. While this ethnic group is a minority in the overall US population, they are the majority population where they live. Race is all about biology and species. Race, in the traditional sense, has more to do with physical characteristics, rather than culture.

However, in this day and age, this traditional definition doesn't fit in with what our reality is, in relation to "race." As humans, we like to divide and define. Sociologists believe that "races" are created by humans, not by biology.

We can no longer define and group people into “ race” based on skin color and/physical traits. We cannot continue to categorize people by “ race” because in this day and age, there is too small a dividing line between “ black”, “ white”, or any other race. Ethnicity versus Race Ethnicity and supposed “ racial” groups are largely cultural and historical constructs. These two categories are now thought of as social divisions rather than actual biology. However, this does not mean that they do not exist. To the contrary, “ races” are very real in the world today.

In order to understand them, however, we must look into culture and social interaction rather than biology. In the US culture today, races have been defined by physical traits that we can quickly identify by looking at a person. Due to this misinterpretation of a social phenomenon, discrimination has become easier in our culture. People can now focus on minute differences in others instead of focusing on what could and is similar.

Diversity Patterns in America When we talk about race and ethnicity, we are focusing on categories and numbers. The most comprehensive information that is presented is the US Census that is gathered every 10 years. Even with how far we have come with technology and information gathering, the Census can still be considered not always or fully accurate. There are populations, think migrant farm workers, who are under counted and/or not counted at all.

This can be due to several reasons, including people choosing to not answer the Census at all. The US Census asks people to self-identify in terms of their race and their ethnicity. There are people who do not realize that

there are distinct differences between these two words. And, while people are allowed to self-disclose, not every person filling out the Census will truly disclose.

For example, there are people who are two or more races and yet would check only one box. Another factor to consider is that the US government provides the categories in which people must choose. The failure to allow people to identify with categories that they themselves subjectively volunteer makes the data less reliable. The Census lumps people into groups based on the information provided but, again, people must choose from what they are given by the government. A person with European descent is guided to choose the "white" category. While at the same time people from Africa are guided to choose the "black" category.

The Census also divides by ethnicity and race. The only ethnic groups on the Census are "Hispanic" and non-Hispanic. But when we look at race, the categories could possibly be endless. Implications for changing patterns in America The US Census takes only numbers into account. In no way does it account for the actual human or family behind the numbers collected. Diversity, race, ethnicity and culture are deeply ingrained in each person who fills out this piece of paper.

What we learn from the Census can create change and even social movements in our country. People can become more aware of their own attitudes and thoughts toward another social group. In the next few decades, what we now consider "minority" groups will no longer be so, in terms of numbers. But how will the current "majority" population react to this shift in

numbers? When the “majority” population become used to being equal? What about the day when the current “minority” population becomes the “majority”? A significant problem faced by most racial and ethnic groups in America involves concerns regarding how they are perceived and treated by others.