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The Intersection of the Bi/Multiracial Population and Women/Gender Issues

Key Words:

biracial, multiracial, women, gender, discrimination, gender-wage gap

Description:

This issue brief focuses on the intersection of the bi/multiracial population and women/gender issues. In addition to discrimination in the workplace, a persistent gender-wage gap, and a society still dominated by men, bi/multiracial women face the additional barriers of racial discrimination and discrimination based on physical features.

Key Points:

- Bi/multiracial women have the potential of being placed in a position of “double jeopardy” in which they must contend with discrimination based on race and physical features in addition to the same discrimination all women face.
- In the 2000 Census, 6.8 million people self-identified as “Two or More Races”. In the 2010 Census, that number grew to 9.0 million people.
- Bi/multiracial women experience discrimination based on physical features as they are often misidentified and/or feel as though they do not fully belong in any group.
- Bi/multiracial women face a significant disadvantage when pursuing employment and wage equality as the gender-wage gap is even more severe for non-white women.

Issue Brief:

In “Counseling Biracial Women: An Intersection of Multiculturalism and Feminism,” University of Memphis Associate Professor Nancy Nishimura (2004) argues “the racist and sexist historical, political, economical, and social institutions that underlie American society have the potential of placing biracial women in a position of double jeopardy” (Nishimura 1). While all women face discrimination in the workplace, a persistent gender-wage gap, and a society still dominated by men (primarily white men), bi/multiracial women face the additional barrier of racial discrimination. As the numbers of bi/multiracial women continues to grow, it is imperative that we consider the broader implications of this “position of double jeopardy.”

In 2000, the U.S. Census offered participants the option to self-identify as “Two or More Races” for the first time, resulting in a count of 6.8 million bi/multiracial people. In 2010 this continued and that number grew to 9.0 million people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). While the data is limited given the relative newness of including this option on the Census questionnaire, it can be argued that the steady increase in the bi/multiracial category will likely persist. As this total number increases, so will the number of women in this category, making the study of the intersection between the bi/multiracial population and women/gender issues increasingly important.

Table 1.

Total Population by Number of Races: 2000 and 2010

(For information on confidentiality protection, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/doc/pl94-171.pdf)

Number of races	2000			2010			Change, 2000 to 2010	
	Number	Percentage of total population	Percentage of Two or More Races population	Number	Percentage of total population	Percentage of Two or More Races population	Number	Percent
Total population . . .	281,421,906	100.0	(X)	308,745,538	100.0	(X)	27,323,632	9.7
One Race	274,595,678	97.6	(X)	299,736,465	97.1	(X)	25,140,787	9.2
Two or More Races	6,826,228	2.4	100.0	9,009,073	2.9	100.0	2,182,845	32.0
Two races	6,368,075	2.3	93.3	8,265,318	2.7	91.7	1,897,243	29.8
Three races	410,285	0.1	6.0	676,469	0.2	7.5	266,184	64.9
Four races	38,408	—	0.6	57,875	—	0.6	19,467	50.7
Five races	8,637	—	0.1	8,619	—	0.1	—18	—0.2
Six races	823	—	—	792	—	—	—31	—3.8

(X) Not applicable.

— Percentage rounds to 0.0.

Note: In Census 2000, an error in data processing resulted in an overstatement of the Two or More Races population by about 1 million people (about 15 percent) nationally, which almost entirely affected race combinations involving Some Other Race. Therefore, data users should assess observed changes in the Two or More Races population between Census 2000 and the 2010 Census with caution.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, *Census 2000 Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File*, Table PL1; and *2010 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File*, Table P1.

Bi/multiracial women experience many forms of discrimination, but one pervasive form in their category is discrimination based on physical features. Nishimura argues “physical features, especially skin color and hair texture, are key racial markers. Interestingly, Western culture judges attractiveness based on a White phenotype (light skin, straight hair, narrow features)” (Nishimura, 136). Depending on the racial make-up of the bi/multiracial woman, this standard can be “double-edged” as her “physical features can be both an asset and a source of confusion” (Nishimura, 2004). This confusion can lead to bi/multiracial women being misidentified and/or feeling as though they do not fully belong in any group. While further studies need to be completed to fully quantify the effects of this, initial research shows that this may potentially lead to self-esteem issues and depression.



[image from engagefamilyminute.com]



[image from womensenews.org]

In addition to discrimination based on physical features, bi/multiracial women also face discrimination that affects most women regardless of race. Perhaps the clearest example of gender inequality still being pervasive in the United States is the gender-wage gap. “For more than a decade now, the comparison between the median earnings of full-time employed men and women in the U.S. has remained a stubborn 77%—that is, women earn roughly 77 cents on the dollar when stacked against the paychecks of white men” (Casserly, 2013). As unsettling as that statistic is, the gap is even wider when applied to non-White women. As a bi/multiracial woman,

one is likely to find one's self at a significant disadvantage when pursuing employment and wage equality.

While there are many intersections between the bi/multiracial population and women and gender issues, the discrimination based on gender and physical features and the gender wage-gap are two of the most prominent. Also, the feeling of not fitting neatly into any one category can be difficult for these women. Overall, "biracial women face many challenges as they strive to establish themselves as members of a diverse society that is also impacted by both sexist and racist influences" (Nishimura, 143). As the bi/multiracial population grows, the need to fully understand this intersection will grow as well.

References:

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