

Stigma impacts psychological, physical health of multiracial people

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Policy changes can help to fight stigmas of multiracial Americans, one of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States according to a Rutgers University-led study.

Published in the journal *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, the study finds that such stigmas may be combated by legitimizing multiracial identities. Despite the increasing prominence of multiracial celebrities and leaders such as Barack Obama, Meghan Markle, and Bruno Mars, many multiracial people are physically isolated from their peers, said lead author Diana Sanchez, a Rutgers professor of psychology.

"Multiracial people encounter unique challenges because they straddle multiple [racial groups](#)," said Sanchez. "Sen. Kamala Harris is Black and South Asian, yet social media outlets vary to the extent to which they recognize her multiracial background. This lack of recognition for multiracial populations is common as is the tendency for fellow monoracial group members like South Asian or Black Americans to have trouble including a multiracial person in their group."

Multiracial people who report frequent racial identity denial also indicate more depressive symptoms, more stress, impaired motivation, and lower self-esteem—compared with those who experience denial less frequently, according to research.

Multiracial people experience discrimination and everyday, often subtle, instances of these racist microaggressions that stem specifically from their identity—such as being told that they cannot identify with certain racial identities or that they are not full members of their own racial communities.

The study suggests adopting policy changes that could increase population estimates that would allow for more for distribution of educational and health care resources and improve health care delivery for multiracial populations. Recommendations include:

- Legitimizing multiracial identity by capitalizing the "M" in

multiracial and adjusting guidelines that are set forth by, for example, the American Psychological Association and in writing style guides about race-appropriate language.

- Being explicit about the consequences of listing a multiracial background on business loans and applications. There is a lack of transparency regarding how claiming a multiracial [identity](#) will affect eligibility.
- Fully integrating check-all-that-apply racial measures for data collection. These have psychological benefits for multiracial people by recognizing and validating their identities.
- Minority programs tailored to building community and facilitating positive racial socialization should integrate education for multiracial people by discussing how to respond to questions such as: "What are you?," "Are you sure your dad is really your dad?"

The U.S. Census 2020 marks the third assessment that allows residents to indicate belonging to more than one racial group. The 2010 U.S. Census data revealed that multiracial individuals represent one of the fastest growing [minority groups](#) in the United States, representing, at the time, roughly nine million Americans.

"Many people have argued that Harris's vice presidential nomination may be an opportunity to unite Black and South Asian communities who can jointly celebrate this candidacy, but we will first have to confront the issue that many have trouble with—seeing [multiracial](#) people as legitimate members of their monoracial communities," said Sanchez.

More information: Diana T. Sanchez et al, How Policies Can Address Multiracial Stigma, *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/2372732220943906](https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732220943906)

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