

Challenging Assumption: Mixed Racial Identity and Beyond

Emma D. Drawing from Kerry Ann Rockquemore et al.'s work titled "Racing to Theory or Retheorizing Race?"

Understanding the Struggle to Build a Multiracial Identity Theory in *Journal of Social Issues*.

Currently, 'race' is understood to be a social construction that was developed to create difference between the so-called 'races' where there really weren't any differences. However, though 'race' has never been a representative classification of peoples, there remains a large number of people who identify as mixed-race or multi-racial, and racism is woven into our communities and institutions.

Let's take a look at some categories found in Kerry Ann Rockquemore's paper "Racing to Theory or Retheorizing Race?" which deconstructs the seemingly all-encompassing term of 'race' into more useful categories, keeping in mind the erroneous origins of the term itself.

Racial Identification:

- Racial identification is described as an **outsider's understanding**, or organization of an individual, most often through a judgment of physical appearance.
- Racial identification goes hand in hand with **forming assumptions** about said person's disposition (inherent qualities) based on their grouping.
- And so, racial identification is able to influence how someone is **treated** by others in their environment.
 - For example, someone of mixed ancestry who is White passing may be treated with less hostility by law enforcement officials than someone who is identified as Black.

Racial Category:

- Described as the categories that are **available to be chosen by an individual in specific contexts**.

- These divisions are created for **identification/classification** purposes by universities, government agencies, employers, and more.
- As racial categories are meant to be a reflection or interpretation of how 'race' is currently understood in society, racial categories are subject to change in light of new knowledge or as a result of public demand.
- **Be careful:** Choosing a category on a document does not necessarily mean that an individual *identifies* with that category - they are only choosing from what is available to them.

Racial Identity:

- This is an individual's **self understanding**.
- Research with a focus on people with mixed-ancestry has found the following four patterns associated with racial identity:
 - Racial identity is **diverse**. Blended identities, a shifting between identities, a rejection of racial identity entirely, or exclusivity with one category are all common and valid.
 - Racial identity is **fluid** and **dynamic**, often changing across the course of a person's lifespan.
 - There is **no 'end point'** or **ultimate goal** within identity development.
 - The parameters of racial identity are tied to social, political, and cultural **contexts**.

Why are these distinctions important?

While there are similarities between the aforementioned racial categories, understanding their differences in application are key to avoiding mistakes of assumption. It is entirely possible that information given by an individual (in the form of racial categories) or assumed by outsiders (racial identification) be entirely different from the person's self-understanding. It would be beneficial, then, for researchers, policymakers, and community members alike to spend time with these categories and consider the ways they might be confused, as well as the harm that might stem from use and misuse.

Bibliography: Rockquemore, K., Brunsma, D. L., Delgado, D. J. (2009). *Journal of Social Issues*, 13-34. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2008.01585.x>