

## 1 Introduction

A rise in interracial relationships and increased globalization has ushered in an era of great diversity within the United States. For example, while only 3 percent of married adults in the US were in interracial relationships in 1967, this proportion rose to 11 percent in 2019, including 19 percent of newlyweds (Parker & Barroso, 2021). Similarly, immigrants and descendants of immigrants are projected to account for 88 percent of the total US population growth over the next forty-five years (Pew Research Center, 2015a). This greater diversity includes growing segments of the population that identify as Multiracial or Multicultural, and has engendered greater societal acknowledgment of these groups. Indeed, the Multiracial population grew by 276 percent between 2010 and 2020 (Jones et al., 2021). Here, we use “Multiracial” and “Multicultural” as terms encompassing Biracial and Bicultural individuals. We acknowledge these terms capture very diverse populations, and these groups should not be understood as monoliths. Our goal is to spur additional research to better understand within-group variation of these two rapidly growing demographics through this summary.

Multiracial people are often defined as those whose parents identify with different racial groups (Atkin et al., 2022; Rockquemore et al., 2009). For example, a person with a Black-identified parent and an Asian-identified parent would be considered Multiracial. Some researchers also specify that Multiracial people must self-identify as Multiracial to be considered part of this population. However, Multiracial people’s identifications vary, such that some people identify with multiple groups, or as Multiracial, while others identify with only one racial group (Rockquemore et al., 2009; Song, 2021). Moreover, people may also show within-person variation in their identification, changing their identity based on the situational context, or throughout their lifetime (Pew Research Center, 2015b). Because there is no one “correct” way to identify, this identity malleability can create unique research challenges that make researchers contend with nuanced considerations of race, identity, and who is considered Multiracial (see Section 3.1).

Multicultural people are often defined as those who are regularly exposed to and identify with at least two cultures (e.g., first- and second-generation immigrants). Culture is a system of expectations and perspectives shared by a social group that is shaped and passed between members through implicit (e.g., nonverbal approval or disapproval) and explicit means (Boyd & Richerson, 2005; Shweder & Sullivan, 1993). Human groups naturally form their own cultures partly to promote order among members (Boyd & Richerson, 2005; Dunbar, 1998; Geertz, 1973), but also to create a social identity that binds the

group together and differentiates them from other groups, providing a sense of belonging that is critical to well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2012; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Any person whose sense of self and related experiences are influenced by the norms, values, and beliefs (i.e., culture) of multiple meaningful social groups could be considered Multicultural (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007). In reference to a group itself, “culture” can refer to countless types of social categories, and empirically has been studied in many different forms, including not only the more familiar categories of ethnicity and nationality, but also race, religion, socioeconomic status, region, institution, and other meaningful groups (Cohen, 2009; Heine, 2015). Using this broad lens, most people are in some sense bi-, tri-, . . . *n*-cultural (Pekerti et al., 2015). This could serve as a potential bridge between monocultural and Multicultural people. However, much of the past research on Multicultural people has focused on individuals who identify with two cultures. Typically, these have been one mainstream culture (i.e., the culture of the majority group in a given society) and one heritage culture (i.e., the culture of one minority group in a given society), although more recent work has expanded the scope to consider people with more than two cultures (e.g., Downie et al., 2004; Ferguson et al., 2014) and combinations of multiple minority and majority cultures (e.g., West et al., 2021).

### 1.1 Conceptual Overlap

Given the fast growth of Multiracial and Multicultural populations, research on the psychological and social experiences of these groups has increased (Garay & Remedios, 2021). It is important to note that there may be overlap between these populations both in demographics and self-identification (McFarland & Fingerhut, 2011). For example, a researcher might consider a participant to be both Multiracial and Multicultural based on their operationalization of these terms, or participants themselves may self-identify as both Multiracial and Multicultural. However, most research has either investigated the psychological experiences of Multiracial and Multicultural people separately or has not meaningfully distinguished between the two. The research that has treated these two populations as separate fails to capture how some experiences of identifying with two groups within one identity domain may be shared across domains and not be specific to either holding multiple racial identities or multiple cultural identities. In contrast, research that does not distinguish between these two often operationalizes Multiracial and Multicultural in ways that conflate race and culture. This may obscure nuanced differences in the experience of race and culture.

Notably, these fields have been most integrated in the context of identity socialization, where researchers have observed that people, especially younger populations, do not necessarily differentiate between their racial and cultural identities, and the developmental trajectory of identity socialization is similar for race and culture (Cross & Cross, 2008; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2013). This has culminated in the merging of racial and ethnic socialization into a metaconstruct referred to as ethnic-racial socialization, which has been studied among monoracial racial minorities and Multicultural people (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2013).

## 1.2 Present Review

However, this integration has not been applied to *Multiracial* and *Multicultural* identity experiences and processes. Therefore, the present work outlines research areas that have been studied among both Multiracial and Multicultural populations, but have often been examined completely separately. For each section, we integrate existing findings to highlight similarities and differences between Multiracial and Multicultural antecedents, processes, and outcomes, and underscore opportunities for future integration and comparison. Consistent with critical race theory's call to challenge ahistoricism and center analyses related to race within a historical context (Harris, 2016; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), we begin by reviewing the historical tradition and antecedents of research with Multiracial and Multicultural populations. Within this historical context, we then review the methodological approaches used in both traditions to understand researchers' processes in this work. Next, we compare research on socialization, identity negotiation, and discrimination between Multiracial and Multicultural populations, as these topics have received wide attention across disciplines and are central outcomes of the multiracial and multicultural experience. Within each section, we review the literature on each population broadly across psychological, sociological, educational, and social work disciplines, among others, and integrate the findings, first for Multiracial populations and second for Multicultural populations. Each section concludes with a systematic comparison and integration across populations, with the goal of elucidating areas of overlap and distinction to encourage nuanced consideration of multiraciality and multiculturalism in future research.

This Element integrates the existing literatures focusing on Multiracial and Multicultural people to highlight both similarities and differences between these populations, and the methods used to study them. We believe all researchers, even those whose research specialization does not include the study of these populations, have much to learn from the study of Multiracial and Multicultural

populations. Given cognitive, academic, and societal preferences for singular and fixed understandings of identity, the experiences of Multiracial and Multicultural people are unique and demand that we extend our thinking of identity to be broader and more flexible. This Element will demonstrate how, compared to monoracial and monocultural people, the history of Multiracial and Multicultural people in the US is unique, how these populations in particular pose distinct research challenges, and how Multiracial and Multicultural people may be socialized about race differently, in addition to discussing how negotiating multiple racial and cultural identities leads to unique experiences of discrimination. By acknowledging these differences, and focusing specifically on the overlap between these two populations, we will highlight how the boundaries of research on race, culture, and identity must expand to accurately understand and represent the diversity of experience in the US. Furthermore, the quick growth of these populations underscores the importance of this research, as growing numbers of people continue to be underrepresented and poorly understood in academic research. Finally, this Element holds important implications and applications for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers as the Multiracial and Multicultural populations in the US continue to grow. For example, this work would be informative to decision makers involved in processes such as designing and interpreting the US census, making health care more equitable, and legislating citizenship (Sanchez et al., 2020; Verkuyten, 2018).

## 2 Historical and Theoretical Foundations

Understanding the contemporary experiences of the Multiracial and Multicultural communities in the US requires contextualizing the present through a historical perspective (Harris, 2016). Because research on the experiences of Multiracial and Multicultural people has been influenced by societal perceptions of these populations, it is important to first examine how multiraciality and multiculturalism have been conceptualized and treated throughout US history to understand the historical and theoretical foundations of this work.

Although a relatively new topic in psychology, other social sciences have a longer tradition of considering the unique experiences of people who straddle multiple worlds of race and culture. For example, venerated sociologist and historian, W. E. B. Du Bois observed the “double consciousness” experiences of Black Americans in the late 1800s and early 1900s, whereby the separation and hierarchy of their Black versus mainstream American cultural worlds was internalized as a rift in the self, a “two-ness” that threatens to pull the individual apart (1903). Placing Du Bois’ phenomenon in its sociohistorical context of

post-civil war, pre-civil rights in the US also evokes consideration of the role of broader societal attitudes and beliefs in shaping the multiracial and multicultural experiences. Such insights help root current psychological work in the perspectives and lived experiences of Multiracial and Multicultural people, drawing on accounts of what it is like to negotiate multiple races and cultures, rather than assuming what it may be like from an outside observer perspective. Understanding current work requires examining the impact of the sociohistorical context on Multiracial and Multicultural populations and research with these groups.

## 2.1 Multiracial People throughout US History

Multiraciality is not a novel phenomenon, as Multiracial people have been part of the early history of the US and other countries. This section focuses on the history and psychological theorizing about Multiracial people in the US because specific historical circumstances (i.e., the role of slavery in racial definitions) have led to most research on the multiracial experience focusing on US Multiracial people, especially Multiracial people who have White ancestry (Garay & Remedios, 2021; Ifekwunigwe, 2004; Nobles, 2000; Song, 2021). As such, we do not generalize these historical foundations to other countries.

The multiracial experience in the US has been shaped by historical and current sociopolitical forces. Although racial mixing began as early as colonial settlers interacted with Native Americans, controlling race and racial identification was key to owning property, gaining wealth, and maintaining slavery and segregation (Carter, 2013; Davis, 1991). For example, Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia* advocated against racial mixing, and anti-miscegenation laws banning interracial marriage were enacted in the seventeenth-century colonies (Davis, 1991; Wallenstein, 2004). Ultimately, thirty states had anti-miscegenation laws (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d.). States varied in which racial groups they prohibited from marriage, underscoring the prejudicial motivation that targeted specific racial minorities based on their regional representation (Browning, 1951; Sohoni, 2007).

Despite this legislation, interracial relationships continued, including those between White indentured servants and freed Black people in the Upper South, and those forced onto enslaved Black women by White slave owners in the Lower South (Davis, 1991). Because the Multiracial offspring of these relationships complicated determinations of who was free and who was enslaved, attitudes toward racial mixing often mirrored attitudes toward slavery (Carter, 2013). The racial hierarchy was further threatened by the end of slavery. Thus, to justify and maintain the White supremacist hierarchy, Multiracial identity

was scrutinized and controlled through the US census (Bennett, 2000; Hochschild & Powell, 2008). Between 1850 and 1930, the US census experimented broadly with racial categories, leading to inconsistent and unstable population estimates during these years (Hochschild & Powell, 2008). For example, in 1850, the scope of the US census expanded from enumerating free and enslaved people to gathering more detailed information about each person to support racist arguments justifying the enslavement of Black people. As a result, the category “mulatto” was included, which was identified by skin tone and used to demonstrate the purported negative consequences of racial mixing (Hochschild & Powell, 2008). By 1890, subcategories of “mulatto” appeared on the census, categorizing people based on their fraction of “Black blood” (Hochschild & Powell, 2008).

These categories were dropped from the census after 1920 because they were deemed statistically unreliable, and because of political pressure. For example, Du Bois advocated against a separate census category for Multiracial people, as he believed that it would weaken solidarity within a White supremacist system. Consequently, the one-drop rule became uniformly accepted in the 1920s (Davis, 1991). The one-drop rule, also referred to as hypodescent, categorized people who had any Black ancestry as Black, though it eventually spread to categorize anyone who had non-White ancestry as members of their racial minority group (Davis, 1991; Sohoni, 2007; Thompson, 2012). This categorization persisted during the Jim Crow period, serving to enforce segregation (Davis, 1991).

Despite consistent politicization of Multiracial identification, Multiracial people often resisted attempts to control their identity. For example, many Multiracial people passed as White, or incorporated themselves into White community permanently or briefly, in order to secure better jobs and increase their safety (Daniel, 1992). Passing may have only been accessible to Multiracial people with ambiguous phenotypic presentation. A legal challenge to anti-miscegenation laws brought forward by a Black and White interracial couple led to the end of bans on interracial marriage in the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court ruling (Lombardo, 1988). Since then, public opinion toward interracial marriage has become more positive, with as many as 87 percent of respondents to a Gallup poll approving of marriage between Black and White people (Saad, 2017). Multiracial people’s resistance is also seen through advocacy for formal recognition of Multiracial people in the US census in the 1990s (Thompson, 2012). For example, 500,000 people selected two or more responses in the 1990 census in protest of the instructions forcing only one choice (Wallman et al., 2000). Despite political pressure from civil rights activists such as Jesse Jackson, who argued that allowing multiple racial

identifications would dilute the Census Bureau's ability to document racial disparities, Multiracial activists from organizations such as RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally) successfully lobbied for the allowance of selecting multiple racial options on the census (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002; Snipp, 2003). This change began with the 2000 census (Williams, 2006).

## 2.2 History of the Study of Multiracial People

### 2.2.1 *Deficit Perspective*

The study of Multiracial people often parallels the sociopolitical zeitgeist surrounding this population (Kahn & Denmon, 1997). Multiracial identity development models began from a deficit perspective, positing that Multiracial people had a fragmented sense of self and were heavily marginalized (Brandell, 1988; Gibbs & Moskowitz-Sweet, 1991; Herring, 1995; McRoy & Freeman, 1986; Park, 1928, 1931; Stonequist, 1937; Thornton, 1996). Because most of this research studied Multiracial people with Black and White ancestry, the prevailing view concluded that it was problematic for someone to incorporate these two groups, given the perceived vast differences in values and attitudes (Thornton, 1996). Within this bipolar view, people could only identify with either one racial group or the other. Maintaining ties to only one group was perceived to be a healthier approach than maintaining ties with both groups (Thornton, 1996; Wardle, 1987). Nonetheless, the marginal man hypothesis posited that Multiracial people are on the margins of *both* racial groups they identify with, and are never fully accepted into either (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1937). Evidence to support this view was often drawn from clinical samples (Shih & Sanchez, 2005; Thornton, 1996).

### 2.2.2 *Equivalent Approach*

While the deficit approach focused primarily on the struggles Multiracial people may face, painting them as inevitable and insurmountable, other theories evolved that incorporated a more diverse range of experiences (Cross, 1987; Porter & Washington, 1993). These were modeled after monoracial identity development models, and incorporated Erikson's (1968) perspective that adolescence is a time to seek stability (Field, 1996; Kerwin et al., 1993). Thus, the next phase of Multiracial identity development models often compared outcomes between Multiracial adolescents and their monoracial counterparts (Campbell & Eggerling-Boeck, 2006; Cooney & Radina, 2000; Grove, 1991; Johnson & Nagoshi, 1986). These studies positioned differences among Multiracial populations as deviant from the monoracial developmental norm.

This work often showed small or no differences between monoracial and Multiracial people (e.g., Campbell & Eggerling-Boeck, 2006), thus negating the deficit perspective from earlier eras.

### *2.2.3 Variant Approach*

Identity development models specific to Multiracial people were developed to expand upon the equivalence approach (Collins, 2000; Kerwin et al., 1993; Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990; Wijeyesinghe, 2001; Williams, 1999). This era of research acknowledged Multiracial people as a separate racial group that required unique theoretical understanding (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). The models developed to understand Multiracial identification generally describe a multistep or multifactor process that begins with confusion and conflict between one's multiple identities, and concludes with acceptance and integration of the multiple groups. While some conclude with a Multiracial identity (e.g., Kich, 1992; Poston, 1990), others acknowledge that racial identity may vary by person (Wijeyesinghe, 2001). This theorizing coincided with growing numbers of people who identified with multiple backgrounds and the advancement of the multiracial advocacy movement (Wijeyesinghe, 2001).

### *2.2.4 Ecological Approach*

The models from the variant approach have evolved to include ecological approaches by specifying that the stages are not necessarily linear and may be influenced by the external environment (Csizmadia, 2011; Rockquemore & Lazloffy, 2005; Rockquemore et al., 2009; Root, 2003; Tomishima, 1999). The ecological view also proposes that Multiracial identity is variable across the population (Rockquemore et al., 2009). For example, some Multiracial people identify with a singular identity, while others may identify with both groups, identify as "Multiracial," or alternate between different identity options (Rockquemore et al., 2009). In addition to variation within the population, identity also changes over the course of a lifetime and is influenced by contextual factors (Rockquemore et al., 2009). The ecological approach considers these many sources of variation.

### *2.2.5 Critical Race Approach*

Finally, a critical race perspective has emerged. The field of "mixed race studies" began with the publication of three influential edited collections: *Racially Mixed People in America* (Root, 1992), *The Multiracial Experience* (Root, 1996), and *Race and Mixed Race* (Zack, 1994). Root's (1996) "Bill of



Rights” for Multiracial people demonstrated their resilience in the face of sociopolitical control over their identities, and has ushered in greater acceptance of this population (Charmaraman et al., 2014). This publication was foundational to the multiracial movement that advocated for the freedom to choose one’s identity, as seen through the advocacy for multiple choice options on the census (American Psychological Association, 2006). Later waves of mixed race studies consider the role of political and economic power structures in shaping definitions of Multiracial identity, extend beyond the Black/White binary, and incorporate additional social identities (Ifekwunigwe, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunσμα, 2002; Williams-León & Nakashima, 2001). Moreover, MultiCrit theory has drawn from critical race theory to create a critical theoretical perspective that is specific to multiracial experiences (Harris, 2016). The core tenets of MultiCrit challenge ahistoric approaches that ignore relevant sociopolitical historical context, acknowledge the convergence of outside interests in shaping Multiracial people’s experiences, and center Multiracial people’s narratives to challenge White supremacy (Harris, 2016). This work also focuses on Multiracial people’s experiences of discrimination, particularly as they navigate a society designed for monoracial people (Johnston & Nadal, 2010).

### 2.3 Multicultural People Throughout US History

The early twentieth century was characterized by mass migration in the US, leading the foreign-born population to account for 12–15 percent of the US population between 1880 and 1930 (Birman & Simon, 2014; Grieco, 2014). The Chinese population within the US tripled between 1860 and 1890, and the Japanese population grew from 2,000 people in 1890 to over 70,000 in 1920 (Sohoni, 2007). Alongside this influx of immigration came legislation restricting immigration and naturalization, which excluded these populations from full participation in mainstream culture (Sohoni, 2007). For example, the 1875 Naturalization Act only allowed naturalization for White and African Americans, and the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act restricted immigration from China (Sohoni, 2007). In order to classify the growing immigrant populations, by 1930 there were US census categories for Mexican, Filipino, Hindu, and Korean (Snipp, 2003). Though immigration decreased by the 1970s, the “Second Great Wave” of immigration began after the 1970s, leading to a 400 percent increase in the foreign-born population by 2010 and comprising 14.8 percent of the population by 2019 (Batalova et al., 2021; Grieco, 2014).

Within this zeitgeist, social scientific research began studying immigrant populations, primarily using the framework of acculturation (Birman & Simon, 2014). Indeed, beginning as early as 1918 with Thomas and

Znaniecki's publication of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, theories of multiculturalism were rooted in acculturation research, which examines how people adapt individually, interpersonally, and at a group level as a result of continuous and direct contact with others from diverse cultural groups (Berry et al., 2006; Redfield et al., 1936; Rudmin et al., 2017). Early models of acculturation posited that only "primitive" people acculturate after encountering "advanced" people, while those "advanced" people do not acculturate (Rudmin et al., 2017). Later models noted that acculturation is a bidirectional process where both local and immigrant populations may acculturate (Kunst et al., 2021; Redfield et al., 1936). Models of Multicultural people's identity usually proposed that individuals maintained (1) a singular cultural identity (either their mainstream or their heritage group; e.g., an Ecuadorian immigrant to the US identifying only as Ecuadorian or only as American) or (2) both mainstream and heritage cultural identities (see Ryder et al., 2000; e.g., an Ecuadorian immigrant to the US identifying as Ecuadorian and American, or as Ecuadorian-American). Later multiculturalism theories focused on people who identify with both mainstream and heritage cultural identities and provided insight into the processes people use to maintain their two cultures.

## 2.4 History of the Study of Multicultural People

### 2.4.1 Additive Models

Acculturation has typically been conceived as either a unidimensional or a bidimensional process. In the unidimensional framework of acculturation, one would move from membership in their heritage culture (separation) to membership in their majority culture (assimilation) or vice versa (Birman & Simon, 2014; West et al., 2017). In this way, the unidimensional model conceived of cultural identity as a zero-sum experience in which one must lose one cultural identity to identify with another cultural group (e.g., Gordon, 1964; Suinn et al., 1987). In contrast, the bidimensional model conceived of one's cultural adaptation along two parallel lines of majority and heritage cultural involvement, respectively. In addition to the assimilation and separation identity patterns, it is also possible to display a marginalized orientation, or disidentify with both groups. Finally, the most studied configuration is integration, or biculturalism, in which one simultaneously maintains membership in both heritage and mainstream cultural groups (Berry, 1980, 1997; Berry et al., 2006; Ryder et al., 2000). In this model, cultural identification is seen as bidimensional in that one can have a second identity without losing the first, but it is still ultimately additive because the sum of identification with each culture determines one's identity.