

Race and Ethnicity – What’s the Difference?

Though there are similarities between race and ethnicity, there are also a number of differences, which demand that we examine race and ethnicity separately. Especially when working with immigrant youth of color, their examination of identity may be very nuanced and complex as they struggle to find both a racial and ethnic identity. According to research, as the number of generations increases in the family, racial identity takes on more importance than ethnic identity for multiethnic youth.

Race	Ethnicity
Defines a group member’s position in a societal hierarchy	Does not define a definite place in a societal hierarchy
For most people, is not mutable	Is mutable for all people
Does not define a single culture	Defines a single culture
Implies a knowledge of racism and own-group racial stereotypes	Implies knowledge of own-group culture
Determined by law and custom	Determined by in-group desires
For most people, acts across generations	For most people, virtually disappears after three generations
Can generally be recognized by out-group members	Can rarely be recognized by out-group members
Does not require the person to do anything to belong	Requires some familiarity with group’s culture to belong
Does not require the infusion of immigrants or visit to homeland to persist	Requires an ongoing infusion of immigrants or sojourns to a homeland to persist

Adapted from Janet E. Helms, “Toward a Methodology for Measuring and Assessing Racial as Distinguished from Ethnic Identity,” in *Multicultural Assessment in Counseling and Clinical Psychology*, ed. G. R. Sodowsky and J.C. Impara (Lincoln, NE: Buros Institute of Mental Measurements, 1996), 143-92.