



Racial Incorporation

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What is it?

Racial incorporation illuminates how immigrants learn and adopt ways of presenting themselves through racial labels and descriptions that resonate in the new cultural context. The concept describes how immigrants are integrated into 'new' racist structures. For example, what it means to be white in one country has different historical and cultural meanings in another. As immigrants learn a new culture, they also learn how groups are defined racially and which groups are dominant or subordinate. They then define how and where they fit in among other groups based on this new knowledge and the ideas about race they imported with them. This construction of identity is shaped by material conditions of their interactions with various groups, including legal status, jobs, and neighborhood structures. Some immigrants are able to construct their identities in ways that are accepted and rewarded by the dominant groups. They may have to struggle against stereotypes and identities imposed on them by others.

Who uses the concept?

Sociologists, political scientists, historians and intercultural communication scholars who study race, ethnicity, and immigration theorize how European immigrants became white in the US. Scholars have also addressed the global dimensions of whiteness, examining such topics as how Polish immigrants in South Africa present themselves as whites untainted by apartheid.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

How immigrants are racially incorporated or not can reduce or deepen racial inequality and racism among groups. The concept assumes that all

people negotiate their identities creatively in relation to others, and taking contextual factors into account. This means that dismantling racism and discrimination requires dialogue among and between immigrant, dominant and minority groups, including acknowledgement of differences and cooperation towards equality.

What work remains?

Most work in this area has focused on white immigrants, thus future studies should more broadly examine how different groups of immigrants define themselves racially and how that shapes or challenges racism. Scholars still need to study the variety of relations immigrants establish with other racial groups.

Resources

- Drzewiecka, J. A. & Steyn, M. (2009). Discourses of exoneration in intercultural translation: Polish immigrants in South Africa. *Communication Theory*, 19, 188-218.
- Drzewiecka, J. A., & Steyn, M. (2012). Racial Immigrant Incorporation: Material-Symbolic Articulation of Identities. *Journal Of International & Intercultural Communication*, 5(1), 1-19.
- Goldberg, D. T. (2005). Racial Americanization. In K. Murji & J. Solomos (Eds.), *Racialization: Studies in theory and practice* (pp. 87-103). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Roediger, D. R. (2005). *Working toward whiteness: How America's immigrants became white: The strange journey from Ellis Island to the suburbs*. New York: Basic Books.