Multiracial Identity and Depression: Testing the Contact and Depletion Hypotheses

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Depression in the United States

- Major Depressive Disorder (Clinical Depression):
  - “A mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest” (Mayo Clinic, 2018)

- Affects more than 16.1 million American Adults

- Median age 32.5 years old

- Higher rates for women than men

- Source: Anxiety and Depression Association of America

- A recent study reported 44 percent of individuals with MDD had episodes lasting over a year, with almost a third of them lasting over two years.
  - Source: Psychology Today
Effects of Depression

- “Leading cause of disability in the U.S. for ages 15 to 44.3”
  - Source: Anxiety and Depression Association of America

- Changes in weight
- Misuse of alcohol or drugs
- Family conflicts
- Social isolation
- Suicidal feelings or attempts
- Poorer performance at school or work
  - Sources: Mayo clinic, Ulifeline
Contributing Factors to Depression

- Biology (e.g., inherited traits, genetics, changes in body chemistry, brain and neurocircuits and neurotransmitters, hormones)
- Health factors or changes in health
- Traumatic or stressful events
- Lack of social support
- Lack of support for certain identities (LGBTQ, Elderly, Unemployed)
Gap in the Literature

- Multiracial individuals

- 3% to 7% of the U.S. population
  - U.S. Census and Pew Research Center

- Expected to be one of the fastest growing racial groups in the coming decades

- Multiple race whites largest multiracial group
Theory

- Multiracial socialization
  - Ideology: Be open to all groups (Meintel 2002)
    - Leads to developing diverse social networks (Bonam & Shih 2009)
      - Results in more interracial and intergroup contact (Cheng & Lively 2009)

- Depletion hypothesis
  - More stress of executive functioning and feeling not a part of any group, leading to a greater likelihood of depression

- Contact hypothesis
  - More interaction, more support and information, leading to less stress and a lower likelihood of depression
Methods

- 2014 General Social Survey
- N = 1237
- Dependent Variable:
  - “Has a doctor, nurse, or other health professional EVER told you that you had...Depression?”
  - Yes=1
  - No=0
Methods

- Independent Variable
  - Multiple race white (self-identify with white and one of the racial minority groups)
    - Yes=1
    - No=0

- Control Variables
  - Latino
  - Age
  - Education
  - Female
  - Income
  - Married
Results from Logistic Regression

- Multiple race whites have greater odds of having depression than whites, African Americans, Asians, and American Indians

- Multiple race white females have greater odds of having depression than multiple race white males
Conclusion

- Empirical evidence supports the depletion hypothesis

- Executive functioning is strained and don’t feel like a member of any one group

- Likely due to racial ideology and racial networks that result in comparatively more interracial interaction

- Solutions?
  - Not racial segregation
  - Improving interracial interactions so that they feel like same-race interactions
    - Change in racial ideologies
    - Knowledge of race relations and interactions
    - Change in discriminatory social structures