**Source:** https://study.com/academy/lesson/race-and-ethnicity-definitions-social-minority-vs-social-majority.html

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This lesson introduces concepts important **to** understand**ing** race and ethnicity. First, a distinction is made between 'race' and 'ethnicity.' Next, the idea of a social minority is defined, along with distinction and subordination. Finally, U.S. trends regarding minority influence are outlined.

**Introducing Race and Diversity**

If I asked you to tell me your race, what would you say? How about if I asked you for your ethnicity? What about your nationality? How are these concepts different from each other? When you think about your answers, are the *groups you fit into* (= blend in) considered a 'majority' or a 'minority' in your country and culture?

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| Racial Diversity |
| Physical traits like skin color or facial features reflect racial diversity |

Throughout the history of humanity, people have put value on these categories and made meaning out of them. This lesson is going to cover concepts including race, ethnicity, majority versus minority status, and current trends in the United States regarding racial patterns of change.

**Race Versus Ethnicity**

Let's start by making a distinction between the concepts of 'race' and 'ethnicity.' Some people get confused about what the difference is, or they may not even be sure if there is a difference between these two ideas.

First, the definition of **race** is a socially meaningful category of people who share biologically transmitted traits that are obvious and considered important. This definition has several parts to it, so let's break it down. First, we said that race is a 'meaningful category of people.' Different races are groups that are simply made up by people who decided that they are important. Examples include 'Caucasian,' 'African American,' 'Latino,' and 'Asian.'

Another part of the definition was 'who share biologically transmitted traits.' Really, for race, this means skin color. Skin color also usually has other stereotypical traits that go with it, such as hair color, certain facial features (like the size of your nose or the color of your eyes), height, and so on. But for most cultures, skin color seems to be the most important trait when it comes to race.

So what is ethnicity? In contrast to the idea of race, **ethnicity** simply means a shared cultural heritage. So ethnicity could be 'Egyptian,' 'Swedish,' 'Mexican,' or 'Jewish.' The ethnicity of 'Jewish' is interesting because it refers to both a particular group of people from a biological, genetic perspective, but it also refers to a religion and all of the cultural richness that comes from that religious tradition. Many other ethnicities share both genetic traits and, often, religious or cultural holidays or traditions that tie the group together.

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| Jewish Ethnicity |
| The term Jewish has both biological and religious or cultural meanings |

While sometimes the categories of 'race' and 'ethnicity' can be confusing, keep in mind that the basic distinction between race and ethnicity is that race is biologically determined, whereas ethnicity is culturally determined.

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