

Buchanan, N. T. & Settles, I. H. (2006). Minority Status. In Y. K. Jackson (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Multicultural Psychology* pp. 307. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Although the designation of minority group status would seem to imply that a group is smaller in size relative to other groups in society, this is not necessarily the case. For example, in South Africa, Blacks are considered a minority group but make up 80% of the population. Nevertheless, White South Africans hold much of the wealth and power in that society despite being a numerical minority. Thus, the principal factor that characterizes a group as having minority status is limited social power relative to the majority group, which is presumed to have higher social status and greater power to discriminate against others.

Often, minority groups possess characteristics that are assumed to indicate their inferiority and are used to justify their devalued position. For example, in the United States, people with darker skin tones are often perceived more negatively (e.g., as less intelligent, less attractive, more aggressive, and lazier) than lighter-skinned people. However, it is important to emphasize that these are stereotypes, not valid notions. It is the social belief that these factors are important that facilitates their use in maintaining inequality between majority and minority groups. The characteristics that serve as the basis for such group distinctions are socially defined and vary across cultures and over time.

Holding minority group status has important psychological implications. For example, rates of mental illness are typically higher for minority groups than for majority groups. This is thought to be the result of minority group members' devalued social position, which leads to increased exposure to factors that contribute to mental illness, such as stress, discrimination, hostility, and prejudice. These factors may also make it difficult for minority group members to deal with both stressful daily hassles and more severe crises. For example, they may have limited access to health care, fewer available coping resources, and fewer advocates in the political, legal, and social realms. However, minority group members also report larger social support networks and increased resilience, which may buffer the effects of these difficulties.

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*See also* Acculturation; Model Minority Myth

#### FURTHER READING

Maddox, K. B., & Gray, S. A. (2002). Cognitive representations of Black Americans: Reexploring the role of skin tone. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28, 250–259.

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## MINORITY STATUS

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In 1945, sociologist Louis Wirth defined a *minority group* as a group of people who collectively receive unequal, differential treatment by others in society. Generally, a minority group is one in which members have less power and hold a subordinate or devalued status in society; as a result, they are oppressed, discriminated against, and have fewer opportunities to fight these experiences. Minority status is commonly used to describe racial and ethnic groups (e.g., African Americans and Latinos); however, minority status may describe any socially oppressed group, such as women, homosexuals, religious minorities, and the poor.

In the United States, the designations of majority and minority group status correspond to population. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Caucasian Americans, who are considered the majority group, compose 69.3% of the population. African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans represent 12.3%, 13.2%, 4.3%, and 0.8% of the population, respectively. These groups are defined as minorities in terms of both their group size and their unequal access to power and resources (e.g., money, education, housing, employment, and political influence).