

Home life key to changes in ethnic identity, researchers find

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Researchers at the University of Liverpool have found that domestic factors such as marriage or moving house are more likely to be associated with changes in ethnic identity compared to some social factors.

Sociologists analysed data from UK censuses and found that people were less likely to change their ethnic identity if they had 'stable' domestic circumstances.

They found that those who had married or re-married between censuses were more likely to change their ethnic identity than those who had remained married for the ten-year period between censuses. These factors had more influence on changes in ethnic identity than social factors, such as social mobility, employment or education.

Professor Robert Moore, from the University's School of Sociology and Social Policy, said: "When a person achieves independence, moves into a mixed ethnicity household or marries between censuses, they are more likely to change their ethnic identity. On the other hand when one stays in the same domestic setting and owns property the likelihood of changing ethnic identity is much less. Stable domestic circumstances are associated with stable ethnic identity."

Researchers, who presented their findings at a meeting in the House of Lords, also found that in some ethnic groups larger numbers of people tended to change their identity. They found that white ethnic groups

were least likely to change their ethnicity, with less than 1% changing their group since 1991. People in the Black Caribbean group, however, were more likely to change their ethnic identity, with 20% of respondents changing between censuses.

Professor Moore added: “In some groups it appeared as though ethnic identity was changing; with closer analysis we found that these changes related to changes in the census itself. Some people changed their ethnic identity to a category used in the 2001 census which they felt described their ethnicity more accurately than those used in 1991 for example.

“To social scientists ethnicity is about identity - how we and those closest to us see ourselves. The census, however, uses more ‘administrative’ categories of the kind needed to monitor the impact of equality policies. People may know how to fill in the form but the categories may not reflect how they really see themselves.”

Source: University of Liverpool

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