

A group of diverse young people, including men and women of various ethnicities, are sitting on a sand dune. They are all looking upwards with expressions of surprise, joy, and excitement. Some have their hands over their mouths, while others are pointing or gesturing. The scene is set against a clear, bright sky, suggesting a sunny day at the beach.

LERMA

GEN Z DECONSTRUCTED

The Shifting Tides of Race & Diversity

PUBLISHED IN JULY 2020



It's been two years since we examined the U.S. Millennial generation in our Millennials Deconstructed research study that was designed to better understand the key differences among ethnic segments within the generation and examine the implications their perspectives and lifestyles potentially have on marketing initiatives. At the time, we knew another younger generation, Gen Z, was already on the rise, which would represent the next cohorts of consumers to influence our country's society, politics, and consumer purchasing.

To understand this younger generation, we have continued our ongoing collaborative research partnership between LERMA/ and The University of Texas School of Advertising and Public Relations that started in 2016 to gain a more thorough understanding of the complexities of today's highly diverse multicultural society. We replicated the same research methodology amongst Gen Z at the end of 2019 to compare the younger generation to our initial findings on Millennials in regard to more crucial aspects like life aspirations, priorities, and politics, as well as more everyday subjects like dating.

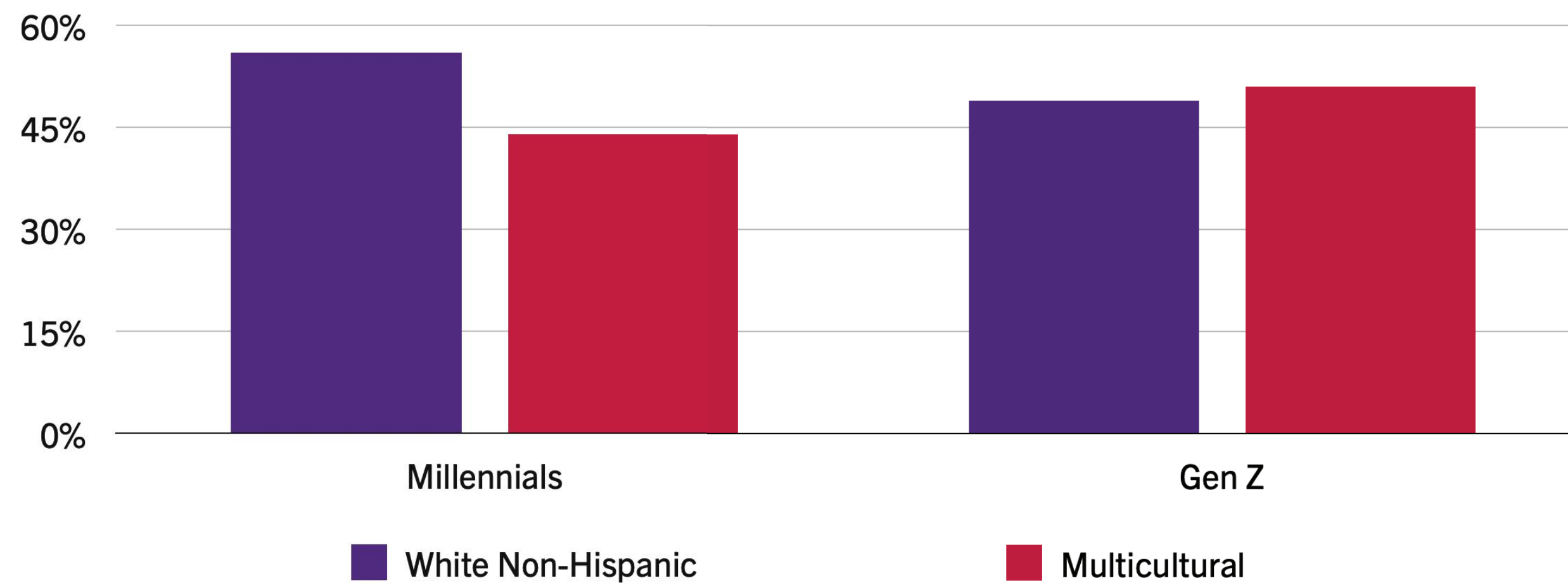
What we didn't know at the time was that a worldwide pandemic would turn life as we all know it upside down, with perhaps the greatest long-term impact being on the lives of these younger generations. As such, we completed a follow-up addendum study in May 2020 to understand how COVID-19 was impacting their lives.

The new wave, Gen Z Deconstructed, consisted of a nationally representative online sample of 2,500 Black, Hispanic, Asian, and White Gen Zers between the ages of 18 and 23, and explored diverse topics that we will be covering in additional upcoming publications: political beliefs and attitudes, media behaviors, communications, gaming, relationships with brands, dating, etc. A series of qualitative one-on-one interviews with Gen Zers and experts in various fields were also conducted following the quantitative study to gain additional insights into survey findings.

Today in 2020, Gen Z represents individuals born since 1997, or those under the age of 23.¹ As we all know, the demographics of the U.S. continue to rapidly shift, so it's no surprise that Gen Z is now the most ethnically diverse generation in U.S. history with more than half (51 percent) being multicultural (compared to 44 percent of Millennials), and as such, their perspectives on diversity and cultural pride are influencing not only their own generation but everyone around them.

The tide has officially shifted – Gen Z is the most diverse generation in U.S. history with more than half of the generation being multicultural.

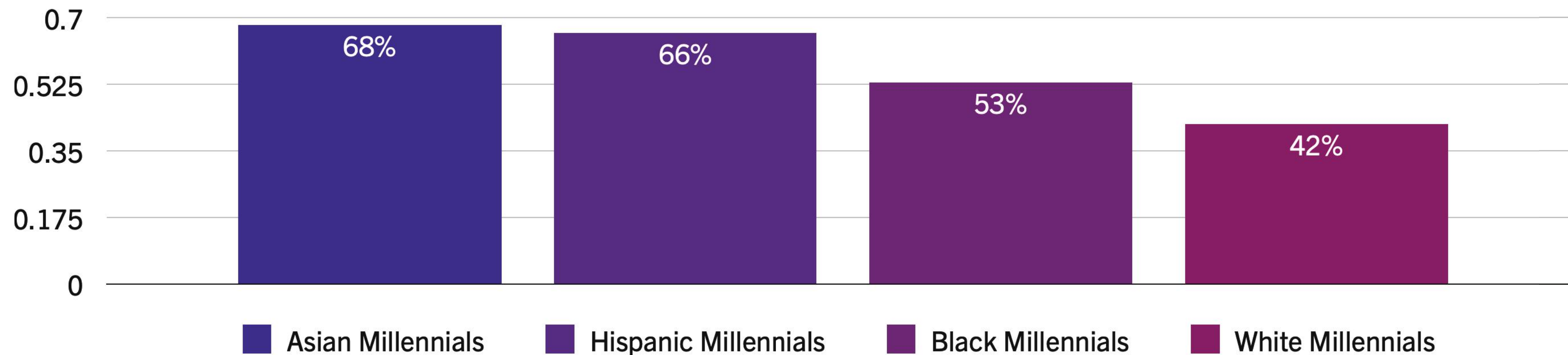
ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF MILLENNIALS VS. GEN Z POPULATIONS



Our last study, Millennials Deconstructed, debunked the myth of the traditional acculturation theory for U.S. multiculturals. Omniculturalism, which we found to be a result of the increasing diversity of our country, was discussed and defined as the new norm: a unified mindset that crosses all ethnicities regardless of race and consists of a pattern of understanding, beliefs, and behaviors that are shared due to being exposed to different cultures. It's about being curious and open to other cultures and having a desire to incorporate aspects of these different cultures into one's own life.

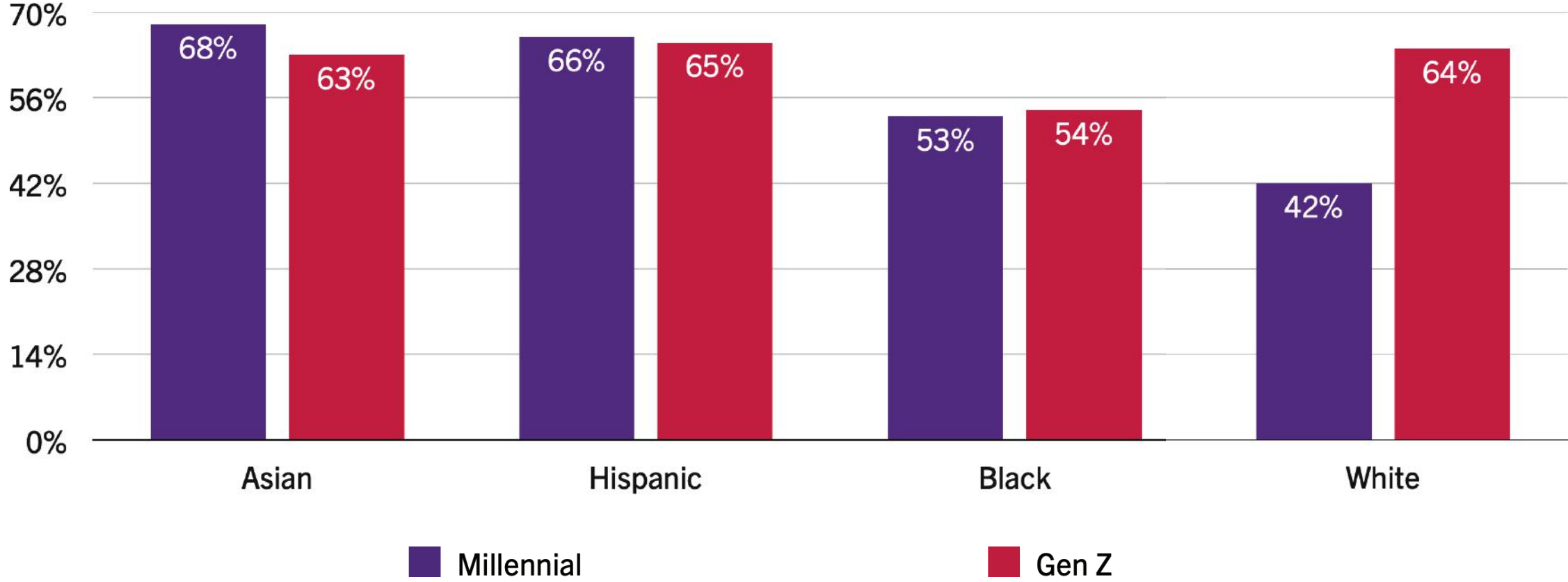
Our Millennial research proved that Omniculturalism prevailed amongst the majority of multicultural Millennials. 63 percent of the generation was Omnicultural.² When broken out by ethnicity, Multicultural Millennials were unsurprisingly more likely to be Omnicultural than non-Hispanic Whites. Looking at each ethnicity, 66% of Hispanic Millennials, 68% of Asian Millennials, and 53% of Black Millennials were Omnicultural.

OUR RESEARCH SHOWS THAT 63% OF THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION POSSESSES THE OMNICULTURAL MINDSET



The new research wave focused on Gen Z adults finds a continuation of this trend among the younger generation with an equal 63 percent overall being Omnicultural.² However, a significant shift is seen among White Gen Z adults that identify as Omnicultural, having increased a whopping 22 percent compared to their older White Millennial counterparts. White Gen Z adults now maintain the same level of being curious, open-minded, and adopting other cultures into their own lives as compared to other ethnicities.

OMNICULTURALISM OF MILLENNIALS VS. GEN Z BY ETHNICITY



This proves that with each generation that passes, the U.S. as a whole, regardless of ethnicity, is becoming a more open, curious, diversity-accepting, and culturally hungry society. As diverse segments continue to increase in their population size, so too does their influence on the overall society and the growing recognition of individuals' unique differences, especially within their own generation. In fact, this younger generation has become advocates of "you do you" in your own unique way and on your own terms. This mantra is interesting in that younger generations are typically in the life stage of seeking social acceptance by conforming to certain fashion, ethnic, sexual, and other "norms," yet Gen Z's unique way of "fitting in" is by standing out and being their more authentic selves.

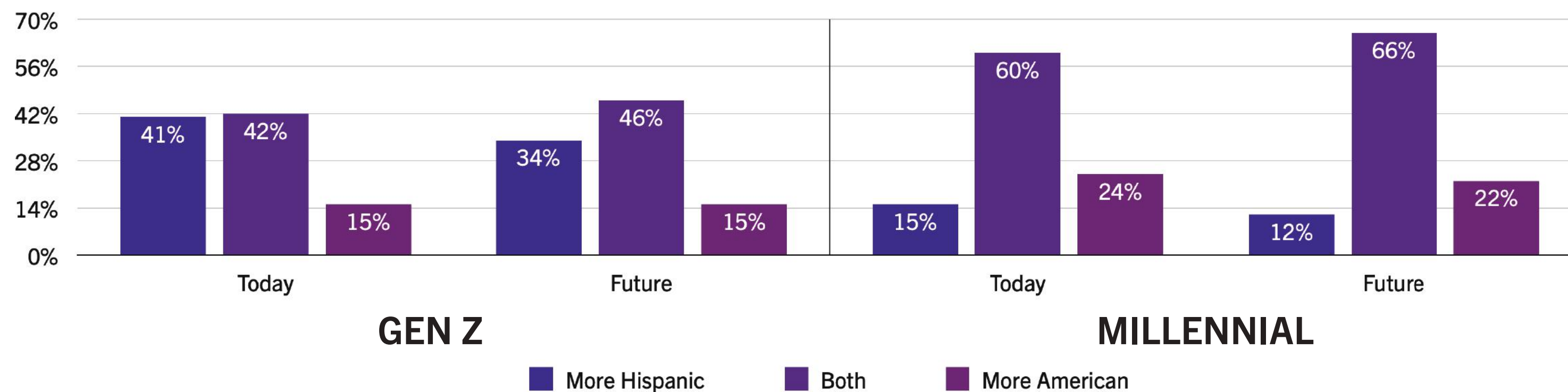


“This generation is much more inclusive and tolerant than past generations,” says Gina Rees, a psychotherapist in Dallas who works directly with Gen Z individuals. “It’s like anything goes with them and they are unabashedly committed to being themselves. Unlike other generations that think, ‘Oh no, we don’t do that...’ Gen Z says, ‘That’s who I am and that’s what I do.’ It’s ‘you do you’ on your own terms.”

Another surprising finding in the new study shows a shift specifically among Hispanic and Asian Gen Z adults compared to Millennials. When asked if they personally identify as more Hispanic or more Asian versus as being more American, both ethnicities claimed to recognize themselves as being more closely aligned with their culture of origin. Different from Millennials, they appear to be more comfortable and prouder of their unique ethnic heritage and are much more open to personally pronouncing it.

More than a quarter (41%) of Hispanic Gen Z adults identify as being more Hispanic, an increase of 26 percent compared to those in the original Millennial study. These Hispanic Gen Z adults are not wanting to dilute their identity of being Hispanic; however, nearly half (46%) would like to be perceived as equally Hispanic and American. As the Hispanic population grows, they are becoming more supportive of each other and confident in their personal cultural identities. They are recognizing the influence and impact they are having as a community on all aspects of culture in the U.S. from food, music, and fashion to sports and beyond. And, they are becoming more confident in owning their Hispanic pride.

HISPANICS - SELF PERCEPTIONS



A similar trend is seen among Asians. Similar to Hispanics, Asian Gen Z adults today are significantly more likely to identify with their cultural heritage of being Asian compared to the original findings in the Millennial study. Interestingly, the most significant shift between Asians in the two generations is that while older Millennial Asians desired to be seen as more American than Asian, far fewer younger Gen Z Asians want to be viewed as American and instead be seen as more Asian, or as equally Asian and American. Despite the fact that Asians in the U.S. represent a significantly smaller proportion of the overall U.S. population than Hispanics, it's important to note that they are the fastest-growing ethnic segment in the country and their influence will only continue to grow and more fully impact societal norms.

ASIANS - SELF PERCEPTIONS



One would think that the diverse composition of this generation is the reason for these shifts in self perceptions, and while it's no doubt a contributing factor, there are also several more deeply rooted social, economic, and political factors that are contributing to the core of these shifts. Continued escalations the last few years over immigration, building a wall between the U.S. and Mexico, holding kids in cages at the border, and police brutality toward Blacks have directly impacted people of color, which may be affecting their desire to be identified more closely to their original cultural identity instead of desiring to be seen as more American. In addition, these incidents may also be impacting the drop in national pride seen among Gen Z adults and influencing their desire to band together in defense of each other's individual communities.

“We are no longer fixated on becoming a better nation. We’re focused on being good people and fighting for the rights of individuals – it’s simply about everyone becoming better human beings.”
- Zoe, 18-year-old

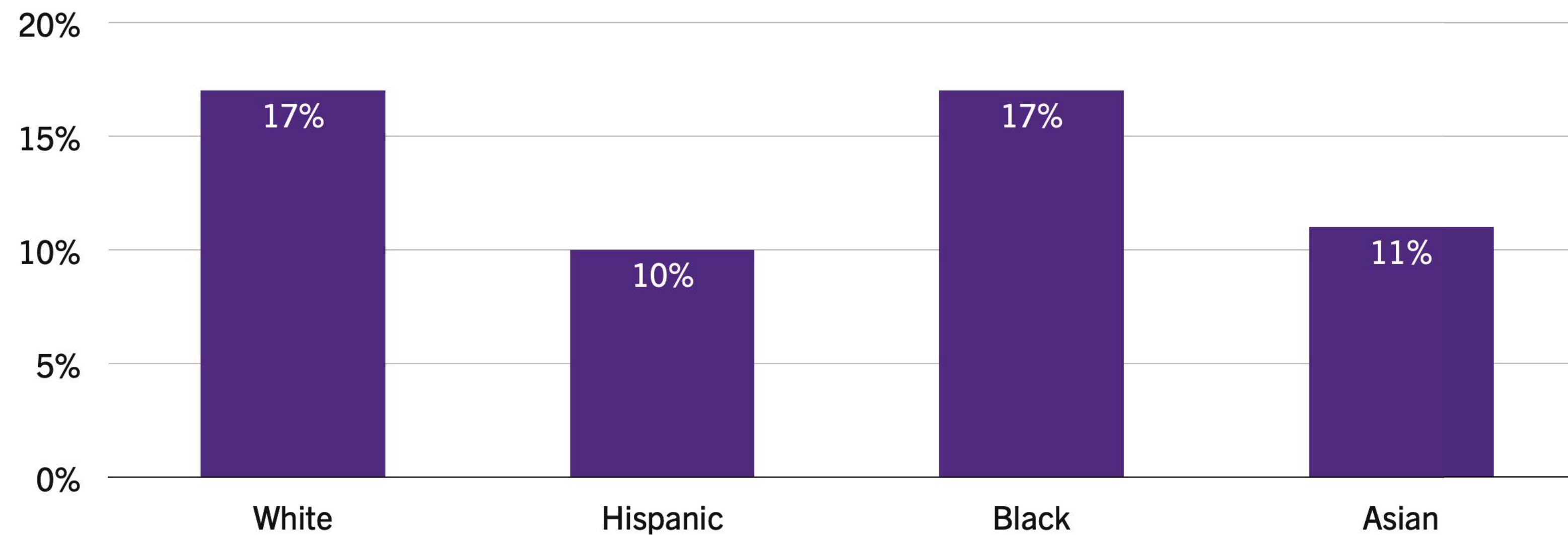
But one thing is certain, that as individuals of different ethnicities continue to more fully honor their personal cultural heritage and proclaim their ethnic pride while being open-minded and curious about others, the concept of Omniculturalism will only continue to grow.



With greater global and cultural awareness and high diversity, Gen Z adults' perceptions of being an American and what an "American" looks like have become less stereotypical than ever. In fact, Gen Z adults are far less America-centric than older adults. They are less likely to say that being an American is important to their identity and more skeptical that the U.S. sets a good example for the rest of the world.

When asked how important being an American is to their sense of belonging to a community, a mere 13 percent stated it was within their top ten attributes for feeling a sense of belonging. Whites and Blacks ranked being an American as being a contributing factor to their personal identity only slightly higher than other ethnicities at 17 percent, while Hispanics, Asians, and Multi-ethnic Gen Z adults were lower at 10 percent respectively.

IMPORTANCE OF BEING AN AMERICAN TO THE COMMUNITIES YOU BELONG TO



When asked about the importance of being American, 18-year-old Zoe said, “Everyone’s experiences being an American are so different these days, so there’s no real unifying thought or meaning to it anymore. It’s no longer about manifest destiny and conquering land. We’ve all become more aware of our past and how America is so deeply flawed and we’re no longer very proud to be Americans like in the past.”



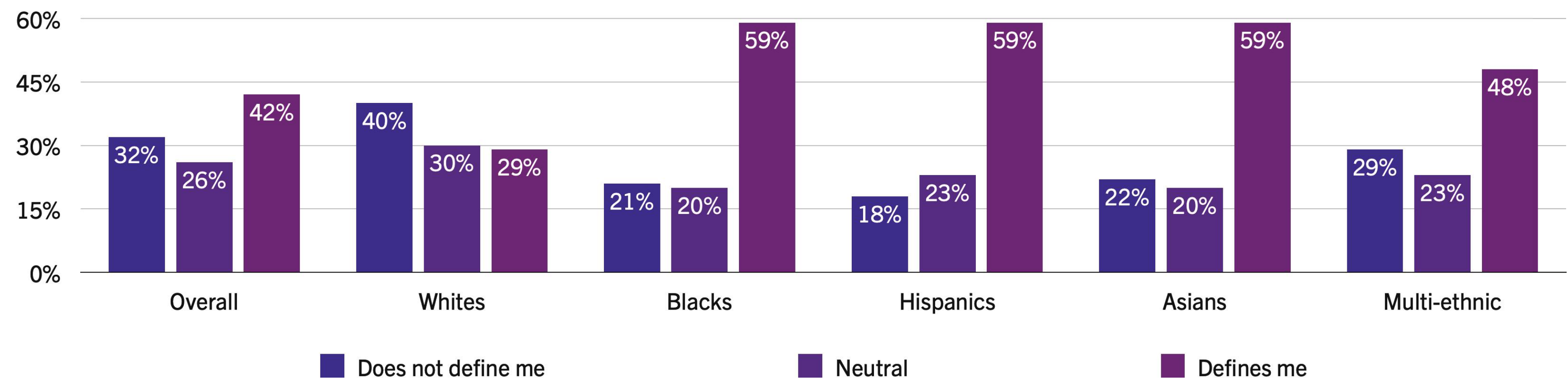
Nearly 60 percent of Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians, and nearly half of Multi-ethnic respondents claim that their race is a primary attribute that defines who they are, compared to only 29 percent of Whites. Gen Z adults feel strongly about their race being a defining element of who they are as individuals. As more and more in their generation and beyond become more open-minded and culturally aware, this generation's cultural pride and acceptance of their race as Hispanics, Asians, or Blacks will only continue to strengthen and influence society as a whole. They are not only more fully recognizing their cultural origins, but also embracing the sacrifices their parents made while raising them and the lessons and legacies of past generations. There is also growing awareness of race on a global scale and as such, Gen Z people of color continue to more fully understand and define themselves within their cultural identities.

Each race of Gen Z adults has faced its own unique history, challenges, and hardships of living in the U.S. that continue to define their personal identities and life perspectives. More than any other generation, Gen Zers are on the cusp of adulthood and directly facing their individual culture's past while cultivating their own personal ideals and identities and setting new precedents for the future. Their personal viewpoints and beliefs are now the catalysts amidst the current political climate and are helping people come to terms with the many decades of oppression their communities have faced and they are becoming more committed than ever to standing up to make the changes needed to move in more positive directions into the future.

Race plays a much more significant role in how multicultural Gen Z adults personally define themselves.

In light of recent events with George Floyd, Gen Z as a generation of young adults will be more tuned in to the evolving political climate than ever. The data indicates that 59 percent of the Black members of Gen Z feel that their race defines them. It can be inferred that the current events within the Black community will be a key defining moment for this generation that strongly identifies with their blackness and ethnic identity.

MY RACE/ETHNICITY DEFINES ME



“Ultimately, it’s going to be up to a new generation of activists to shape strategies that best fit the times.”

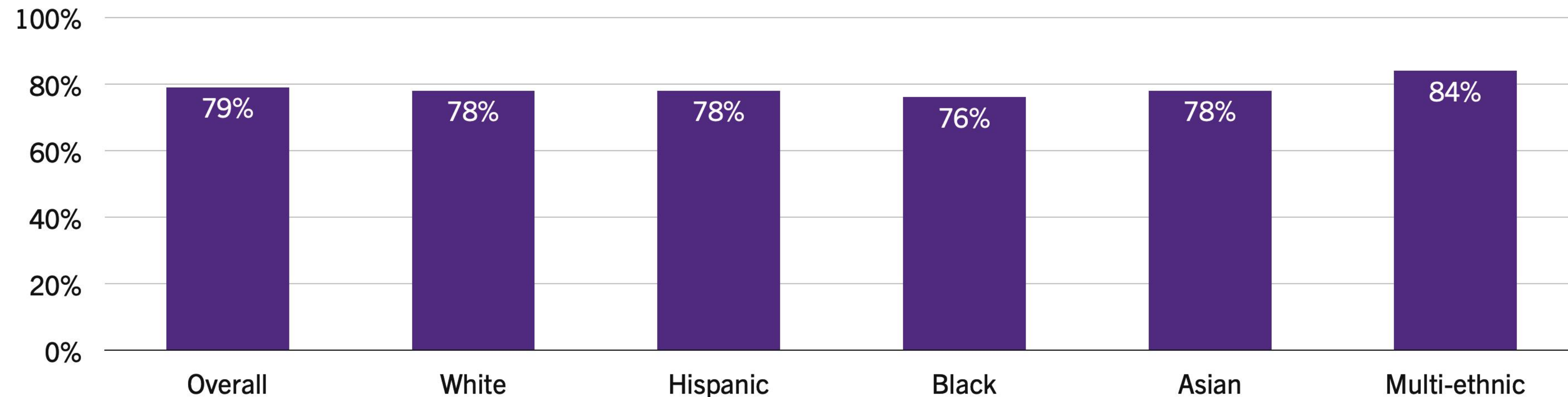
-Former U.S. President Barack Obama

While ethnic minorities are significantly more likely to claim that their race is a key component of what defines them than Whites, all ethnicities have strong agreement on the importance of social equality. In correlation with their significant shifts to a more Omnicultural mindset, White Gen Z adults equally agree that diversity is overall good for the U.S., once again proving that the mindset has permeated across all ethnicities and groups. While Gen Z insists on being more unique and individualistic, they're overall more accepting and appreciative of others than previous generations.

When asked about diversity, 18-year-old Marissa explained, "Social media today has raised awareness of diversity and different cultures not just in the U.S., but throughout the world, so our interactions have expanded to people that have different world views and experiences."

Among all ethnicities, White Gen Z adults are the most hopeful about diversity.

ETHNIC DIVERSITY IS GOOD FOR OUR COUNTRY



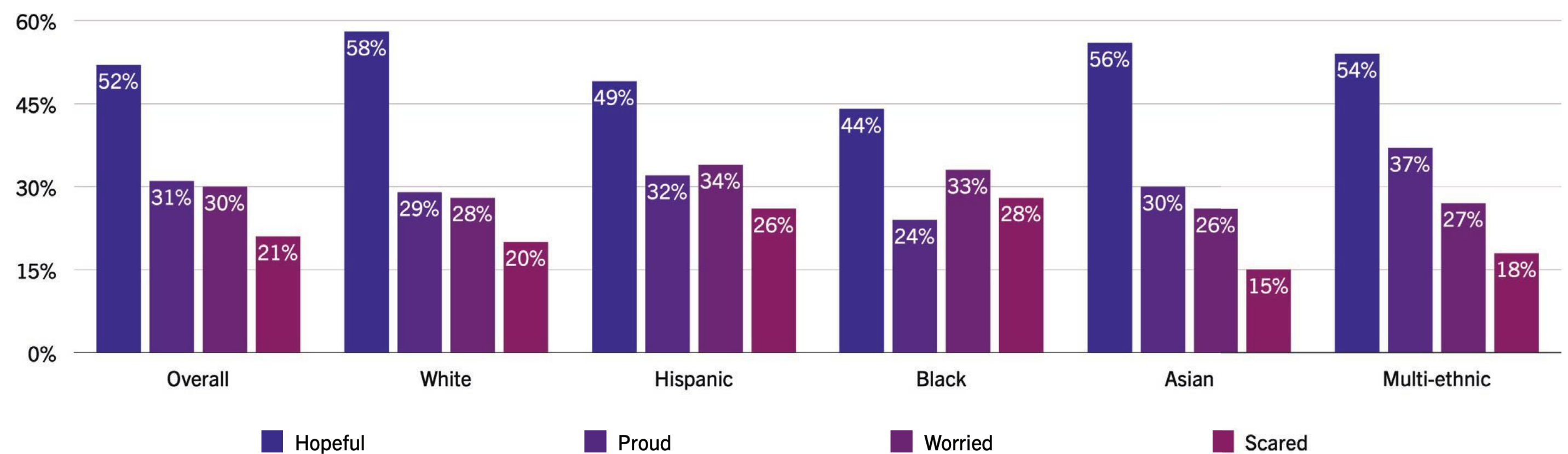
“Diversity is incredibly important in our country. I think the awareness of diversity has become much better, but we still have a long way to go. It’s important mainly in the fact that politically and socially we need to be recognizing diversity and working to create an even playing field of opportunity for all,” said Marissa.



Overall, approximately half of all Gen Z adults state they are hopeful about diversity in the U.S. However, it's Whites that are the most optimistic and hopeful about diversity in the country, whereas Blacks claimed to be the least hopeful of all ethnic segments. Hispanics, Asians, and Multi-ethnics claimed higher levels of pride in ethnic and cultural diversity compared to Whites and Blacks, while Hispanics and Blacks were more likely to describe being worried and scared about diversity in the U.S. today.

Among all ethnicities, White Gen Z adults are the most hopeful about diversity.

HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT THE IMPACT ETHNIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY HAS ON THE U.S. TODAY



“Whites are most hopeful because we are not the ones that have had to endure the discrimination of what other ethnicities have had to face directly. It’s a lot easier for us since we haven’t had to face the serious repercussions of trying to maintain hope for equal treatment. White people of our generation recognize that historically, Whites have been a large part of the racial divide and discrimination and we feel the need and obligation to make a difference. It’s almost like we have White guilt,” expressed Michael, a 19-year-old.

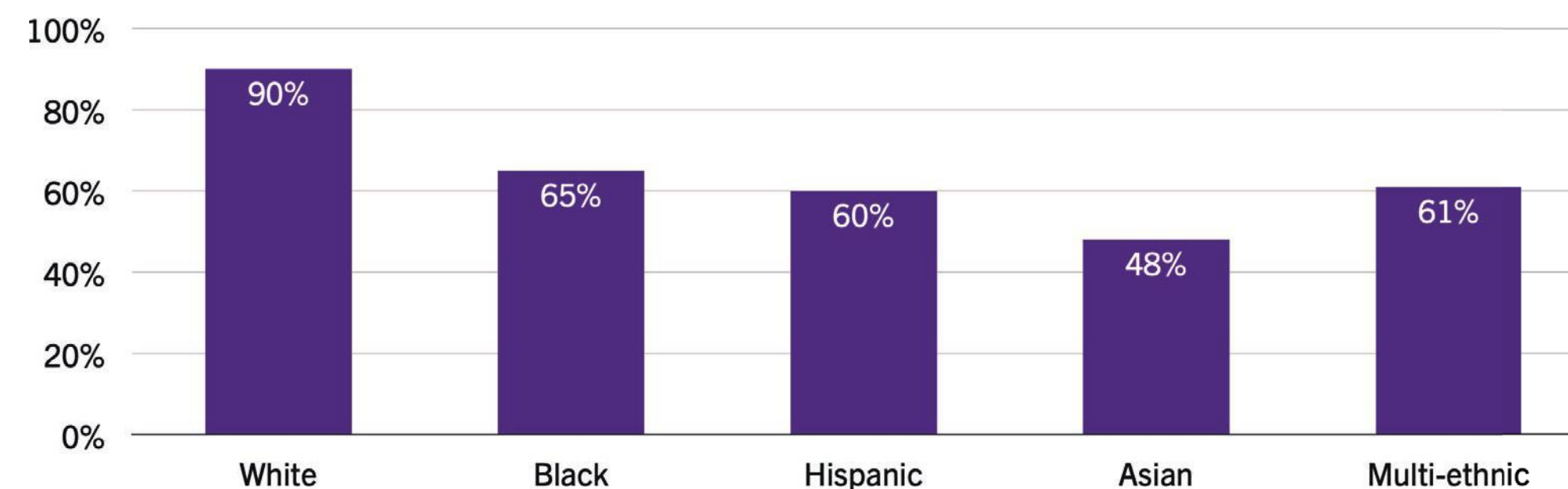
Even before the George Floyd incident, when asked what they believe to be the leading issues facing our country today, Gen Z adults stated “race” as the leading issue. Among the various ethnicities, it was White Gen Z adults who rated Race most highly on the list of potential issues.

Perhaps the higher concern among Whites about race may be attributable to the “White guilt” mentioned by several Gen Z adults we interviewed, but more importantly, the Gen Z generation overall is much more aware, sensitive, and respectful of their peers’ unique cultural heritage and identities.

While this generation may be advocates of “you do you,” their unique admiration and acceptance of each other’s individual differences have only made them a stronger and more unified group that will continue to shift outdated perspectives and traditional norms by inspiring, innovating, and helping society evolve into a more united collective.

Race is considered to be the leading issue facing our country today.

RACE IS A LEADING ISSUE FACING OUR COUNTRY TODAY



METHODOLOGY: Gen Z Deconstructed

“Gen Z Deconstructed” is a collaborative research study that was conducted in partnership by LERMA/ and The University of Texas School of Advertising & Public Relations. The initial study was completed via an online national panel in December 2019 and a follow-up study was completed in May 2019, both among 2,500 Gen Z adults between the ages of 18 and 23 with representative national averages among Whites, Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics. A series of qualitative one-on-one interviews were conducted following the online surveys to gain additional insights into the findings. For more information on survey data, please contact Shannon Dunbar-Rubio at srubio@lermaagency.com or Matthew S. Eastin at matt.eastin@utexas.edu.

SOURCES:

1. Pew Research
2. SIMMONS 2019 Fall NCS/NHCS Adults Full Year Courtesy of MRI-Simmons - SM9HF
3. Morning Consult, “Understanding Gen Z,” 2019

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