**What Defines a Minority Group?**

Minority groups are typically based on differences in visible characteristics or practices, such as sex, race, ethnicity, gender and gender identity, religion, disability, or sexual orientation. The main characteristic is the lack of power of a minority or subordinate group, not the census count.

A person may be a member of more than one minority group; this is referred to as *intersectionality*. Likewise, a person can both be in a minority group for some traits and also part of a dominant group.

Cultural anthropologists Wagley and Harris identified five characteristics that impact and define minority groups: (1) unequal treatment and less power over their lives; (2) distinct physical or cultural traits, like skin color or language; (3) involuntary membership in the group; (4) awareness of lower status; and (5) a high rate of marriage within their group.

**Four Major Types of Minority Groups**

The four major types of minority groups are race, ethnicity, sex or gender, and religion. Sex and gender are different concepts. Sex is biological, referring to the anatomy a person was born with. Gender can refer to either social roles based on the sex of the person or to gender identity.

Islamic women are a diverse minority who cannot be defined by skin color. They may fit into three or more minority groups.

**Racial Groups**

Race is classified according to obvious physical features, skin color being the most obvious. Cultures define physical differences in a variety of ways. Some racial groups have different cultural traditions, but in the United States, physical appearance is the foremost identifier.

The United States Census officially recognizes six racial categories: White/European, Black or African American, American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, or some other race. Middle Easterners are usually counted in the White category; however, in 2017 the US Census Bureau recommended a new category: Middle East/North Africa.

**Ethnic Groups**

Ethnic groups are identified by their national origin or distinct cultural patterns.

**What Is Ethnicity?**

Ethnicity describes the shared practices, values, and beliefs of a group. This might include language, religion, and traditions, among other shared traits. Like the concept of race, ethnicity is difficult to describe and its meaning is changeable.

The US Census looks at ethnicity only as *Hispanic or not Hispanic*. But the term*Hispanic* is not based on geography, race, ancestry, or ethnic heritage. Rather, it is a general word for Cuban, Mexican, South or Central American, or other peoples, including from Spain and Portugal. *Hispanic*first came into use in the 15th century during colonization of South and Central America. It was adopted by the Census Bureau in 1970. *Latino* was first coined in the 1860s. A new, self-determined, gender-neutral term is coming into use: Latinx.

**Gender**

While in many societies the population ratio of men and women is nearly equal, the status of women has led social scientists to categorize them as a minority group. Women experience four of the five characteristics of minority status. They are subject to social inequalities, whether they are denied education, subject to violence, or lack full and equal access to the same earning opportunities as men.

Gender minorities can include many types of gender-variant or -nonconforming people. LGBTQ people represent a numerical and social minority. They experience social inequalities stemming from their group membership, including social intolerance and isolation, unequal access to health care, employment, and housing.

**Religion**

In America, Protestant Christians are the majority religion. Minority religious groups are those outside the dominant faith, even those who are Christians from other denominations. People who are not a part of the Christian tradition can be misunderstood or stigmatized. In the US, these minorities include Muslims, Amish, Mormons, and Roman Catholics. Those not professing any religion (agnostics and atheists) are also a minority group. In the US, Jewish people are often counted as an ethnic minority.

Answer the following questions:

* According to the article, what are the different types of minority groups?
* What are some of the minority religions in the United States?