

# Race: Evolving Definitions, New Identities, Old and New Conversations

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*"The division of the world's peoples into distinct groups - "red," "black," "white" or "yellow" peoples - has become so deeply embedded in our psyches, so widely accepted, many would promptly dismiss as crazy any suggestion of its falsity." Race: The Power of Illusion, California Newsreel*

### Race: Is it real?

When California Newsreel's PBS three-part series, *The Power of Illusion*<sup>(1)</sup>, was released in 2003 pronouncing race is a social construct with virtually no biological basis, a media storm erupted in the popular press. While the scientific community had been debating this contention for some time this series explained the research in lay terms designed for the masses to understand.

While these revelations might have quelled some of the divisive discourse about race, it actually heightened the controversy especially among those whetted, for a variety of socio-political reasons, to former theories of innate differences.

As an example as recently as an August 1, 2011 Washington Post article, *Role of Race reemerges in DNA-testing debate*, the divergent views among geneticists, socialists, bioethicists and anthropologists were revealed.<sup>(2)</sup> Some argued that designations such as black, white, Asian and Hispanic are outmoded classifications with little valid meaning for understanding genetic variations. The other side opined that meaningful DNA variations can track racial lines and to not explore them might jeopardize the

effectiveness of the emerging concept of personalized medicine, aimed at developing treatment based on a person's genetic makeup.

One of the contributors to the Washington Post piece, offered, "We recognize that race is a "fuzzy concept".

"Fuzzy" as it might be, it continues to be a divisive, complex topic fraught with painful memories and daily reminders for many. And for others, race is an issue that they want to bury once and for all either because it is just too uncomfortable to talk about or they really believe that we live in a "post racial society".

It is a topic that we don't like to talk about. In virtually every corporate diversity training session that I conduct race is avoided by both people of color and Whites. Euphemisms are used to describe situations that involve race. Typically only after several deeper level probes will the participant admit that race is at the root of the issue. In the U.S. it seems that there is a high sensitivity about being politically correct in racial discussions. Whites fear the repercussions for saying something that would be deemed offensive or inappropriate. They are likely reminded of highly publicized situations in which public figures have been immediately ousted or severely chastised for a racial faux pas, recoiling in shame branded with a big "R" on their foreheads. Blacks are skittish about talking about race because they are afraid of being labeled as too sensitive or "pulling the race card."

This chapter will explore the contemporary complexities of race and the implications for diversity and inclusion practitioners.

### **Definition of Race**

An anthropological definition that was accepted until recent years, laid out three races including Caucasoid (of European descent), Mongoloid (of Asian Descent) and Negroid (of African descent). These distinctions were primarily made on the basis of physical characteristics such as skin color, hair texture and body type.<sup>(3)</sup>

Today, According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the definition used to classify people is based on the notion that race is not "scientific or anthropological" and takes into account "social and cultural characteristics as well as ancestry", using "appropriate scientific methodologies" that are not "primarily biological or genetic in reference." The race categories include both racial and national-origin groups.<sup>(4)</sup>

Ethnicity has been considered separate and distinct from race defined as a group of people who share common culture (language, heritage, religion, geographic region). For example, Mexican might be considered an ethnic group and members could identify with different races within the ethnic group.

The term Hispanic emerged in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century with the migration of laborers from Spanish speaking countries. While Hispanic is not a race, the term now synonymous with Latino, is often thought of in racial terms. The definitions of both terms are non-race specific, and include people who consider themselves to be of distinct races (Black, White, Amerindian, Asian, and mixed groups).<sup>(5)</sup>

However, many social scientists have replaced the word *race* with *ethnicity* to refer to self-identifying groups based on shared beliefs, culture, ancestry and history. They have shifted away from the language of race to the term *populations* to talk about genetic differences.<sup>(6)</sup>

### History of Race

Race has not always been a recognized concept. For example, in ancient Greece people were classified by culture and language and not physical characteristics.

Even in early colonial America, class distinctions were more important than physical ones. On Virginia plantations, European indentured servants and African slaves mixed freely. However, as captured Africans started to be perceived as stronger workers by Europeans, owners turned increasingly to African slavery for labor, while granting increased freedoms to Europeans.<sup>(7)</sup>

In the first U.S. census in 1790 there was intense debate in congress on how to count slaves but the discussion was not so much about who was black or white but who was free versus enslaved and Enlightenment thinkers of the day held the belief of common humanity. Others believed Africans to be inferior more based on their circumstances than some inherent biological difference.<sup>(8)</sup> Thomas Jefferson was the first prominent American to suggest that Africans were innately inferior.

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Johann Blumenbach, a German Anthropologist mapped a hierarchical pyramid of five human types, placing "Caucasians" (a term he is credited with creating) at the top. This model was widely embraced, sparking the thinking for future scientific claims about white superiority.<sup>(9)</sup>

In Europe by the sixteenth century, the French, German, Spanish, Italian, and English each had a similar sounding word to describe some kind of difference within species or breeds. Race as a concept had to do with the idea of national identity as a way of establishing cultural and social boundaries and political authority in medieval Europe.<sup>(10)</sup>

Even earlier, in the 1300's Spain engaged in a mass conversion of Jews to Christianity in an attempt to create religious and cultural homogeneity which ultimately led to the passage of the blood-purity statutes which barred those of "impure" blood from service in the church, from employment in public office, and from military service. The blood-purity laws have come to mark Europe's initial "racial" thinking.<sup>(11)</sup>

The U.S. also used blood-purity as well to classify Native Americans and African Americans. The famous "one drop" rule was used to deny rights to those with any African blood until ruled illegal by the Supreme Court in 1967. For Native Americans, an early treaty with the Osage tribe in 1825 introduced land allotment and federal Indian policy based on "blood" degree. Although land allotment policies end in the 1930s, the government continues to base program eligibility on blood, leading most tribes to adopt similar requirements for membership by the late 20th century.<sup>(12)</sup>

Frenchman Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau, wrote a piece in 1853 entitled: *Essay on the inequality of the human races*. His theory was that the European race was superior and in constant battle with the lesser

racess (black and yellow). The result of the mixing, he contended elevated lower races and degraded the white race. <sup>(13)</sup>

The rise of Social Darwinism and European imperialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries continued to evolve thoughts about race. Scientists of that day hypothesized a biological link based on head shapes, cranial capacity, and other physical measurements. The "size" theories allowed scientists identify and rank what they thought were different races within Europe. <sup>(14)</sup>

The Nazis' efforts in the 1930's to maintain a pure Aryan race coincided with the popular European beliefs about racial purity but what made the Nazis unique was the violent (extermination and mechanized killing) scale and geographical reach of their policies. <sup>(15)</sup>

Asian notions of difference were highly influenced by Aryan beliefs. Very concerned with issues of purity and pollution, the Indian Vedic texts (forerunner of Hinduism) divided people into different groupings called *varnas* ("colors"). Scholars of the day credited Aryans with bringing high civilization, Sanskrit and the caste system which was not only based on color but family lineage. Family determined one's social status for life with discriminatory social, political, and economical impact on the lower castes. <sup>(16)</sup>

Brazil's philosophies about race evolved quite differently from other parts of the world. There, racial identity is not governed by rigid descent rules, such as blood degree as it was in the United States and parts of Europe and Asia. A Brazilian child is not automatically identified with the racial ancestry of one or both parents rather racial classification is based on visible appearance of hair texture, eye color and skin color. There are over a dozen words used to recognize different "racial" categories based on visual inspection. <sup>(17)</sup>

The complexity of racial classifications in Brazil is a result of a high level of miscegenation. Brazil today continues to be a society that remains highly segmented along color lines.

Even though Amerindians, African-Americans, and European Americans have been classified as belonging to different races, immigrants came to the Americas from various regions of Europe, Africa, and Asia and miscegenation was common. The result is that most people who identify as African American have European blood and those who identify as White have African blood. However, prior to the Reconstruction period, efforts to track mixing between groups led to a proliferation of categories, such as mulatto and octoroon. During Reconstruction anyone with one drop of "Black blood" was considered to be Black, even if their physical appearance looked White. By the early 20th century, this notion was made law in many states. <sup>(18)</sup>

## **“Race” Matters**

*For the remainder of the chapter, I will continue to use the term race as a surrogate for ethnicity (self-identifying groups based on shared beliefs, culture, ancestry and history).*

With such a long, complex and somewhat convoluted history related to notions of race around the world, it is not surprising that we are still trying to make sense of its relevance. From early civilization we have been preoccupied with sorting people hieratically based on some arbitrary model that assigns power and status to those deemed superior and limits or denies equal rights to those who are ranked in the “lesser” categories. Often these disparities are based on color and or physical appearance.

From the stealing of land from Native peoples, to Apartheid In South Africa to mass elimination of Jews in Nazi Germany to Interned Japanese during WWII to Jim Crow laws in the U.S. and today’s denial of citizenship to immigrant Turks in Germany and Latinos In the U.S., we can find a plethora of examples of “race” making a difference throughout world history.

In modern day Europe old attitudes about “racial purity” persist. Massive immigration patterns across Europe are changing the ethnic makeup of countries like France, Germany, Spain and Switzerland. In addition, Muslims from North African and the Middle East and their offspring being born in Europe at such a rate they are expected to be one-fifth of various European countries by 2050.<sup>(19)</sup> As Europe becomes more diverse and Pan-European, many voices are pushing back, insisting on a very narrow definition of what makes one French or British or German or Swiss. An equally intense debate is taking place in the United States around Latino immigrant status.<sup>(20)</sup>

Angela Merkel, German Chancellor, believes Germany has “utterly failed” at creating a multicultural society and sees this as reason to discontinue any attempts to do so. British Prime Minister David Cameron also stated his resistance when he said, “under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and the mainstream. We have failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong.”<sup>(21)</sup>

Even in South Korea, we see purist sentiments. An exceptionally homogenous country, the influx of Southeast Asians from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand is creating great consternation among many Koreans who are not used to seeing the mixed nationality marriages taking place.<sup>(22)</sup>

France and the United Kingdom have experienced riots in recent years sparked by racial tensions.

While the U.S. has become a fairly politically correct country where most would not publically make disparaging remarks about Blacks or other “minority” groups, we continue to see gross inequities and disparate treatment among races. We only need examine any socio-economic indicator such as net worth, incarceration rates, educational attainment, employment equity, political participation, health status to find gross disparities based on race. As one stark example, according to a 2009 Pew Survey household net worth of whites is \$113,000 versus \$ 5677 for Blacks and \$6325 for Latinos.<sup>(23)</sup>

Relative to the workforce, people of color continue to be underrepresented at the top levels of organizations based on EEOC records. While Latinos and Asians appear to be making the most progress, the representation in leadership continues to be very low.

#### Diverse Representation in Officials and Managers Category 2008 Compared to 2000

Men	2000	2008	% change
<b>Total men</b>	66.2%	63%	-4.8%
<b>White Men</b>	57.5%	54%	-6.1%
<b>AA Men</b>	3.5%	3.4%	-2.9%
<b>Latino Men</b>	2.9%	4.0%	37.9%
<b>Asian Men</b>	2.0%	3.0%	50%
<b>Women</b>			
<b>Total Women</b>	33.8%	37%	12%
<b>White women</b>	28.1%	30%	6.8%
<b>AA women</b>	3.0%	3.2%	6.6%
<b>Latina Women</b>	1.6%	2.3%	44%
<b>Asian women</b>	1.1%	1.7%	54.5%

Source: EEOC

Race/ethnicity separates and divides us throughout the world. Who is included and who is excluded is very often determined by visible attributes with the most common being skin color. And those with the lightest color skin are favored over those with darker hues in most cultures around the world.

#### Colorism is Global

*“If you’re brown, hang around. If you’re yellow, you’re mellow. If you’re white, you’re all right. If you’re black, get back,”* is a common saying known to many in the African American community especially if you are baby boomer or older.

The amount of melanin in one’s skin matters. Colorism, a practice where those with lighter skin are treated more favorably than those who are darker manifests inter as well as intra-culturally. Within the African American community, the brown paper bag test was used throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to demark the acceptable amount of melanin for admission into organizations reserved for the Black elite. The color hierarchy started during slavery when lighter skinned slaves were granted better treatment and given better jobs, such as working in the “big house” rather than the harsher task of picking cotton.



“The Brown Paper Bag Test”

While some progress has been made with the introduction of darker skinned supermodels such as Naomi Campbell (Jamaican-British), Iman (Somali-American), and Alek Wek (Sudanese British), skin color stigmas remain. These models rarely top any mainstream American most beautiful lists and according to a recent survey conducted by Allure Magazine mixed-race women are considered the most attractive even over white women.<sup>(24)</sup> This is sort of a bitter sweet statement of progress but perhaps progress none the less.

Behavioral scientists have conducted numerous studies globally that show both whites and blacks are more favorably disposed toward people with lighter skin, rating them smarter, wealthier, even happier. One such study showed respondents sixty photos with some pictures of the same person mixed in, only altered to make their skin look darker. Both whites and blacks gave lower scores on intelligence to people with darker skin.

In 2006 a study conducted by the University of Georgia found that, all other things being equal, light-skinned people were more likely to get hired for jobs over dark-skinned people.<sup>(25)</sup> It was worse for the men than women. In another study conducted in 2007, researched in part by Duke University estimated that light-skinned men, on average, earn about \$3 more per hour than dark-skinned men.<sup>(26)</sup>

While it is commonly understood in the Black community that skin color matters (not as much today within the community as it did even 40 years ago), Spike Lee was criticized for being so honest about colorism in his 1987 movie, "School Daze." In the film, light-skinned and dark-skinned girls faced off and called each other names like "tar baby," "Barbie doll," "wannabe white" and "jigaboo."

Malcolm Gladwell, the Canadian born, bi-racial author of the best-selling books *The Tipping Point* and *Blink*, among others, explains in an interview with Harvard historian Henry Lewis Gates that his "brown" Jamaican mother saw the stark contrast in how she was treated in Jamaica versus Britain. Her "brownness" won her preferential treatment in Jamaica because her color was relatively lighter than her country-people. However in Britain she was treated like the darker people would be in Jamaica.<sup>(27)</sup>

In Latin and South America, light skin is also seen as more attractive. In Mexico and in Brazil, light skin represents power. A dark skinned person is more likely to be discriminated against in Brazil. For example, most South American actors have European features. Skin color is such an obsession in these countries that specific words describe distinct skin tones from "hincha," Puerto Rican slang for "glass of milk" to "morena," which means "brown". Those with dark skin and coarse hair texture are more apt to be poor and the most disenfranchised.<sup>(28)</sup> A case in point, there are large health, education and income disparities between lighter and darker races in Brazil.

South Asians have historically seen whiter skin as more beautiful, especially in British India, where skin color delineated status. Consequently those with fairer skin color enjoyed more privileges and opportunities than those with dark skin. Indians with more European features were often more upwardly mobile and gained preferences in education and employment. Darker skinned individuals were socially and economically disadvantaged due to their appearance. In the caste system, lighter Indians were members of the higher castes.<sup>(29)</sup>

Indian women continue to be obsessed with trying to lighten their skin. In a recent piece penned by an Indian journalist in the *London Daily Standard* about this obsession, the sub-headline read: *"The best thing about being white - other than ruling the world - is that you don't have to slather your face in toxic crud in an effort to lighten your complexion."* <sup>(30)</sup> In eastern parts of Asia as well as West Africa, a preference for lighter skin remains prevalent. Perceived as a sign of wealth in ancient times, women there also buy whitening creams to lighten their skin. Four out of 10 women surveyed in Hong Kong, Malaysia South Korea, and the Philippines used a skin-whitening cream, an estimated \$18 billion market. <sup>(31)</sup>

Middle Eastern cultures also have a penchant for light skin tones where whiteness is the ultimate standard color in most Arab societies. Ranked second is "asmar" (brown) and last and least is azraq which literally means "blue", but it is used interchangeably with aswad which means "black". <sup>(32)</sup>

However, some men also have an obsession with lightening their skin as evidenced by retired major league baseball player Sammy Sosa who is from the Dominican Republic. Before and after pictures in 2009 revealed green contact lenses and considerably lighter skin which he attributed to a "skin rejuvenation" process. <sup>(33)</sup>



Dominican born Sammy Sosa Before and After skin bleaching

Of course perhaps the most blatant practice of colorism in contemporary times, is South Africa's Apartheid policies in force until the early 1990's, where there were explicit laws that discriminated against people based on skin color... Afrikaners (white) were at the top, then Indians, followed by coloreds (mixed race) and the lowest group were black South Africans. Analogous to the "brown paper bag test", South Africa used the "pencil test" to distinguish blacks from coloreds. If one's hair was "kinky" enough for the pencil to stay in it, the person was considered black. <sup>(34)</sup>

The evidence cannot be denied. White/light skin color is still considered superior around the world whether explicitly or implicitly and research shows that people with darker skin continue to be discriminated against based on color.

### Sorting out Identities

#### *What's in a Name?*

Is it any wonder that historically, brown and black people have faced identity crises, beginning with what to be called? For people of African descent who were born in the United States, we started with Negro as the common label, then colored, to Black and more recently African American. Blacks who are first and second generation African or Caribbean sometimes being called African American because it is not their cultural heritage. Therefore it is common globally to use the term "Black".

Many Latinos in the United States do not want to be called Hispanic because it is a word made up for the convenience of the U.S. Census Bureau to combine people from Spanish speaking countries into one category. Today, many prefer the term Latino and some want to identify with their country of origin to

recognize the vast cultural differences. This shift required the Census Bureau to expand the categories in 2000 to include Mexican, Puerto Rican and Cuban.

Similarly, until the 2000 census, people from Asia had only one choice on the census form, “Asian-Pacific Islander.” Asia represents over 50 countries, 50 different forms of government and 80 languages making the all in one descriptor not only inadequate but inaccurate. As of 2000 Asian was split out as a separate category from Pacific-Islander, and there are now 6 choices plus “other Asian” on the census form. <sup>(35)</sup>

People from East Asia were commonly referred to as Oriental until the mid-sixties when there was a movement to replace Oriental with Asian, the former being considered colonialist and therefore derogatory.

The term people of color, to describe people who were other than white, has emerged in the United States as an alternative to non-white and minority, both terms now deemed as pejorative. The term non-white presupposes white as the standard and minority promulgates the perception of being “less than” in ways beyond representation in the population. In more and more cases the term is a misnomer because the minority is now the majority in states, counties and cities throughout the U.S. Civil Rights activists started using people of color in the 70’s but it only gained widespread popularity in the 90’s. As Joseph Tuman, Professor of Political and Legal Communications, San Francisco State University; explains, the term *people of color* is attractive because it unites disparate racial and ethnic groups into a larger collective in solidarity with one another. <sup>(36)</sup>

However, not all “people of color” embrace the term. Some lighter skinned people have said that it puts too much emphasis on color which does not determine race. It often does not resonate with Latinos and Asians who do not identify themselves as “of color”, and again feel lumped into a category that dilutes their identity. Others have said it is simply a euphemism for “Black or African American”.

Labels are a moving target, changing with the socio-political ideologies of the day, just another poignant example of the complexities of race. While the debate on how to classify different racial/ethnic groups continues, the conversation is becoming even more complex with the rise of multi-racialism.

### *The Emergence of Multi-racialism*

*Definition of Multi-racialism: Multiracialism is a concept or ideology that promotes a society composed of various races, while accepting and respecting different cultural backgrounds. It is a society that consists of a diverse mix of people, whether it be relative to their ethnicity, language, culture, religion, and traditions* <sup>(37)</sup>

Compounding the ability to clearly define racial categories is the rise of multi-racialism. With a significant rise in multiple race births in both the U.S. and Europe, many Individuals who claim ancestry from more than one race are no longer willing to be forced into checking only one box.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 1992, for the first time in history, the number of biracial births was increasing at a faster rate than the number of single-race births. Since 2000, more than 5 million U.S. residents have identified themselves as more than one race. The U.S. Census estimates that the

mixed-race population grew 3.4 percent since 2007. The Bureau also reported that by the year 2050, one in five U.S. citizens will be multi-racial. The current demographic statistics on multi-racial individuals indicate they already are larger population than Native Americans and Pacific Islanders. <sup>(38)</sup>

A similar pattern is manifesting in Canada and the United Kingdom. In 2000, *The Sunday Times* reported that "Britain has the highest rate of interracial relationships in the world." The 2005 birth records for the country state at least 3.5% of newborn babies were mixed race. By 2020 the mixed race population is expected to become Britain's largest ethnic minority group with the highest growth rate. <sup>(39)</sup>

For centuries, multi-racial people lived on the margins of their identities, not feeling totally connected to any of them. Interculturalist Janet Bennett describes the phenomena of cultural marginality as "internal culture shock" -- the conflict between two cultural voices competing for attention among oneself. <sup>(40)</sup>

We see a burgeoning multiracial movement across the United States and Canada, as people who identify as mixed race seek more recognition, access, and representation. Groups like Swirl Inc., I-Pride, the Association of Multiethnic Americans, Project Race, and Mixed kids, have been forming since the late 1970s, all seeking to change the way North Americans view racial identities. <sup>(41)</sup>

*Racial identity can make your life or screw it up all together. But the saddest thing is; most mixed race individuals have no control over their own identity. Their destiny at different points and situations in life ends up being dependent on other people's perception of who you they are – based on appearance – and not what they truly are!!!* Blog Post, Is Multiracialism Such a Hard Concept to Grasp. (<http://www.interracialdatingcentral.com/fyooz/is-multiracialism-such-a-hard-concept-to-grasp/>)

Luminaries such as President Barak Obama, golf phenom Tiger Woods and Academy Award winning actress Halle Berry are from mixed race backgrounds but are more likely to be labeled "African American". Here, old paradigms of race based on skin color and the "one-drop rule" come into play.

Political analyst Earl Ofari Hutchinson believes the multi-racial movement is stronger with the under-30-year-old Millennials. "They are more fluid and flexible on race, and not as tradition-bound with rigid black and white categorizations," he believes. <sup>(42)</sup> In addition, as members of the post civil rights era, they did not experience the same racially segregated world as previous generations. The new message is that they want their own identity to cross, rather than stop, at various boundaries.

"The movement behind the multi-racial category as a standalone is the idea that people of more than one race were being dissed," says Kim Williams, associate professor for public policy at Harvard University. "It came from a place of empowerment.... The more people you can get to identify as multi-racial, the more influence multi-racial people can exert." <sup>(43)</sup>

The U.S. decennial Census in 2010 attempted to address this by allowing, for the first time, people to identify as more than one race and, if none of the provided boxes accurately described them, to insert their own.

In a Blog called *Beyond the Border: Identity: Shifting Labels, Blurring perceptions*, blogger Marrison Mitchell, says young Hispanics do not fit into distinct categories. The Hispanic identity comes in many nationalities, colors and racial classifications. In the 2000 Census, nine out of 10 Hispanics reported either “white alone” (48 percent) or “some other race alone” (42 percent). Less than 4 percent said they were solely black or African-American, American Indian and Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian.

Emily Goulding, program manager of Voto Latino, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization based in Washington, D.C., says they urged their members to write in “mestizo” on the 2010 Census form to address the limitations of the categories. Mestizo, in Latin America, means someone of mixed ancestry, primarily of European and Native American descent.

“Mestizo is a middle-of-the-road, catch-all term,” Goulding says. “Goulding adds that, in her experience, Latinos embrace their mixed ancestry, which can include European, Native American and African ancestry. And filling out the census form is an opportunity to express that pride.”<sup>(44)</sup>

In Brazil many also are choosing to fully embrace their multi-dimensionality and refusing to be categorized into one group or the other. Brazilian soap opera actress Idly Silva found that 71 percent of her genes are European and 19 percent African. “People don’t see me as either black or white,” she says. Genetically she now can prove why that is. “The mixing of races so evident in Brazil will become more prevalent around the world, with people originating from a sole geographical area becoming increasingly rare,” says Harvard Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr.<sup>(45)</sup>

Brazilian censuses do not use a “multiracial” category. Instead people are sorted by skin color categories, with Pardo (brown) that includes people of varied “mixed racial” ancestry, “making up 42.6% of Brazil’s population. After Africa, Brazil has the largest population of people of African descent.

From a racial/ethnic perspective, the awakening of so many individuals who are refusing to be bucketed into just one category will force the rethinking of generally accepted categories.

This is creating a growing challenge to the long-established practice of counting how many employees of the different groups companies have, which is required by equal employment laws in the United States.

The only choice that might be offered for multi-racial workers is “Other.” And the number of *Other* is growing so large that it has become a statistically significant number, diluting the numbers companies can claim as being part of the underrepresented group numbers (Black or African American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, Alaskan/Pacific Islander) they work so hard to increase.

## The Psychological Impact of Race

People of color have endured centuries of identity confusion with classifications, categorizations, misclassifications, recasting and recategorizations based largely on the political whims of the power wielders of the day. That these ever-evolving and often negative labels have led to identity confusion and even self-hatred should not be surprising.

Throughout the African diaspora, black people internalized the racism they experienced under slavery and colonial rule and there is still a great deal of self-hatred among black people today. With years of conditioning, societies were made to believe that blackness was bad, and anything associated with blackness was inferior and undesirable.

It was not until the Civil Rights era of the 60's that American blacks began a widespread campaign to reverse the negative image of "blackness. Rhythm and blues icon James Brown repeated the refrain *I'm Black and I'm Proud* over and over in his hit song of the same name and sang it with such passion as if he knew he needed to convince black people that the statement was really true. Around the same time the phrase, "Black is beautiful" became popular and many black women stopped straightening their hair in favor of a natural look that was dubbed "The Afro". Black men also sported Afros in favor of "processed" hair. Heretofore black people were obsessed with trying to look white and for the first time, we were boldly and proudly claiming our identity.

"Black is beautiful" later made its way around the world and is found prominently in the Black Consciousness Movement writings of Steve Biko, noted anti-apartheid activist in South Africa in the 1960s and 1970s.

But today even with more people of color openly and proudly claiming their racial identities, there is a mixed bag when it comes to self-image. We see a proliferation of black women who prefer straight weaved hair and wigs in favor of a more natural style. In the U.S. Blacks purchase a disproportionately high level of Health and beauty aids, driven primarily by hair products.

In 2006 filmmaker Kiri Davis recreated the famous "doll study" first conducted by educators Kenneth and Mamie Clark in the late 1930's and early 1940's that showed black children preferred to play with white dolls over black ones. Davis found the same results which she documented in a film entitled *A Girl Like Me*. In both studies, black children, both boys and girls, labeled the white dolls as "good" and "pretty" whereas the black dolls were called "bad" and "ugly".<sup>(46)</sup>

Some Asian American immigrants who see themselves as negatively stigmatized because of their darker skin color or accented English speech feel a sense of hopelessness and may be less willing to acculturate, believing that such negative views will persist regardless of their competencies.<sup>(47)</sup> While Asian Americans have been dubbed the "model minority" because of their higher than average socio-economic status, this label can have a negative impact on their psychological well being. They may feel that they are under greater pressure perform at a higher standard, but are still never quite accepted as equal to their white counterparts as evidenced by their lack of upward mobility.

In the Dominican Republic where 90% of the population is of African Descent, only 11% identify as black and there is a widespread dislike for Haitians with whom they share the island. Scholars theorize this is due to hatred of anything associated with Blackness.

As recently as August 2011, retired Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu has said apartheid had left South Africans suffering from "self-hate" which he believes is in part the cause of the country's high crime rate. Tutu was quoted as saying, "the nation was no longer surprised by statistics of violent crime, murder, rape as when you suffer from self hate you project it to others who look like you."<sup>(48)</sup>

Many social scientists have researched the issues of the impact of race on self concept. One group of researchers studied the correlation between membership in devalued social groups and psychological well being as measured by depression, hopelessness, and life satisfaction. While there was a correlation for Asians and Blacks between their psychological well being and aspects of their membership in their respective identity groups, such as how they were perceived by other groups or their private evaluation of their group, no such relationships were found among the white participants in the study.

William Cross, professor and head of the doctoral program in social personality psychology at the CUNY Graduate Center is a well known researcher in area of identity theory and developed a model that describes five stages of Black racial identity and the implications of racial identity development for personal self-esteem. The earliest stage of Cross' model involves pre-encounter attitudes, which reflect the internalization of the values of the dominant culture. In the pre-encounter stage of development, some Blacks value Whites and devalue their own race. Other research suggests that pre-encounter attitudes among Blacks are associated with lower personal self-esteem and depressed mood.

Culturally, many in the African American and Latino communities do not talk about psychological disorders nor do they seek treatment for them at the same rate as whites. Pent up internalized oppression can have devastating effects on individuals' ability to find peace of mind and function effectively in life.

### **Race Schizophrenia**

*Schizophrenia defined: an offensive term for a state characterized by contradictory or conflicting attitudes, behavior, or qualities*<sup>(50)</sup>

The lingering oppression is exacerbated by living in a world that is schizophrenic about race. With all of the noble attempts in the last century to understand race and to correct the plethora of social inequities, there continue to be glaring dichotomies that are dizzying and by definition schizophrenic.

One minute the world is appalled that some prominent person made a racial slur and the next we are defending racial profiling as a matter of international security. We are perplexed by the failure of public education to succeed at educating Black and Brown children while we support what Jonathon Kozel calls "apartheid" schools.<sup>(51)</sup> American schools are more segregated and resource deprived today than they were in the 1970's. We actively promote diversity programs in our organizations yet don't understand why black and brown people are disproportionately absent in higher level positions. Incarceration and recidivism rates for blacks are four times that of whites and twice that of whites for Latinos and rather

than taking preventative measures we build more jails and some states actually predict the number of jails to build based on fourth grade reading scores.

We espouse that we want people to bring all of themselves to work but there are companies that ban certain ethnic hair styles, like locks. More subtly, there are often strong unwritten rules that require complete assimilation for success.

We celebrate Hispanic heritage month, purport to love Latino culture (food and dance) but fight mightily for English only work settings and to keep “those people” on their side of the border.

The one-drop rule was voted unconstitutional in the United States in 1967. However, as recently as 1986, the U.S. Supreme Court, in effect, allowed the one-drop rule to stand by refusing to hear a case against the state of Louisiana’s racial classification procedures.

Affirmative action court cases, on the other hand, in instances where a person visibly looks White but claims Black ancestry to obtain some type of redress are mixed. In some cases, courts have held that such claimants are guilty of “racial fraud,” despite their claim of a Black grandparent. In other instances, such as the 1988 Denver case of schoolteacher, Mary Walker, who was a person of fair complexion, green eyes, light brown hair and no documented Black ancestry, the courts ordered employers to accept her as Black for EEOC purposes. In another case in 1997, a Detroit businessman, a Black-looking immigrant actually from Africa (Egypt), was denied benefits because North Africans are considered to be White.<sup>(52)</sup>

The riots in UK in August 2011, sparked by the killing of an African-Caribbean man by police, were attributed primarily to criminal behavior (42%) and not racial tensions (5%) according to a poll conducted by YouGov, an international internet-based market research firm of over 2000 Brits.<sup>(53)</sup> Even though the riots were racially inspired and occurred in multi-racial neighborhoods the respondents saw little connection to race. However, perhaps code for “race”, Prime Minister, David Cameron, called for a reversal of what he described “as a country being dragged down by many citizens’ laziness, irresponsibility and selfishness”.<sup>(54)</sup>

What is the cure for this type of Schizophrenia? Is there a treatment plan that we can recommend for the world to resolve our conflictions about race or are the wells of history just too deep? Are issues of race just too big to solve? Do we need to stamp this issue as unsolvable, file it away and move on to easier topics like diversity of thought?

### **Diversity Practitioners Call to Action**

Conflicted, confusing, elusive and complex as the topic might be, I urge us to press ahead and not let race issues get the short end of the diversity learning stick among the array of tough issues that we are charged to deal with. I realize that they are all difficult...gender, sexual orientation, generations, work-life balance, etc. Some topics, however, are more contentious than others and race happens to be one of them. I find that participants in diversity sessions today love to talk about generations, it is fun, not as controversial and a topic they can readily connect to either because they are now managing millenials or because they are a parent of one.

In the early days of the diversity movement, the focus was primarily on race and gender. With the widespread acceptance of the expanded definition of diversity, I fear that it has become all too tempting to minimize race.

Several years ago a senior leader at a large corporation was charged with introducing a session that I was facilitating for his leadership team. He unabashedly arose and declared, "Diversity is not about race and gender anymore". I could see his team's body language immediately move to a more relaxed state and I felt mine get tenser. For the rest of his introduction I was preoccupied with thinking about how I was going to clean that one up without directly contradicting the leader, who was hailed as one of the company's star diversity champions. Soon after I was introduced, I emphasized with the group that diversity was not *only* about race and gender. Participants tensed up again, fearing that the session would primarily be about race, especially since I was visibly African American.

As a global society, we have people on high alert not to make any mistakes when it comes to race. Most diversity practitioners do not want to make their stakeholders and champions feel too uncomfortable for fear of losing total support for diversity and inclusion initiatives. Related to race, some feel we have worn out that subject. It is an old conversation that no longer needs as much focus.

As we foray into the global sphere, gender has become the accepted universal topic and most companies are putting their focus there. I maintain that there are new global conversations about race to be had, including colorism and the rise of multi-racial individuals who want to be acknowledged as such.

I therefore leave you with the following recommendations:

1. Embrace the concept that race is a social construct with little genetic meaning and consider reframing race discussions using the lens of ethnicity and color. Colorism is still a significant global issue that is very seldom explored in any depth.
2. Give employees "permission" to talk about race by teaching them how to talk about it in constructive ways. We have been lamenting for years that we, as a society try to avoid discussions of race. We need courageous and culturally competent practitioners who can effectively bring the real issues to the fore, creating safe spaces for the tough discussions.
3. Develop robust content to have meaningful and instructive dialogue around the global issues, including an historical perspective that frames the topic, not strictly from a U.S. Civil Rights Movement lens.
4. Support employees of color with their own issues about addressing race. There are generational considerations. Baby boomers have had very different life experiences than millennials. Tensions arise when millennials of color declare that race is not an issue for them and boomers decry that race is an issue for everyone of color.
5. Address the "They need to get over it" sentiment that is often today's reaction to race. Just like diversity as the umbrella subject is ongoing and ever evolving, race as an aspect of the diversity milieu, is inextricably entwined with many socio-economic and political problems of the day. We will not alleviate these problems without facing race as the crux.

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