‘Mixed Race’ Patients: How Should They Inform Our Healthcare Interactions and Decisions?

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[Image: Only 3% of registered donors worldwide are mixed race.]
Three Presentation Objectives

1) to provide an over-view of the interdisciplinary concept of ‘mixed race’ and illustrate the ways in which this global, historical and political idea is neither new nor fixed

2) to define and critique contemporary ‘mixed race’ categories, identities, and studies

3) to engage with ‘mixed race’ identities and categories as lived experiences and as they pertain to healthcare interactions and decisions
Important Caveats: Paradoxes of ‘Mixed Race’

- As long as modern humans have populated the earth and migrated within and across continents, inter-group mating and marriages have been inevitable and commonplace.
- There are no discrete or pure biological ‘races’.
- There is more genetic variation within a group socially designated as a race than between groups socially identified as different races.
- Yet, the idea of ‘mixed race’ persists and in fact continues grow in spite of the fact that genetic explanations for ‘racial’ differences have been contested.
Abbreviated Working Definition of ‘Mixed Race’

Like ‘race’, ‘mixed race’ is also an historical, social, cultural and political construct, which does not travel easily.
Social applications of the term ‘mixed race’ highlight the paradoxes of kin and color and tensions between complex familial identifications and lived experiences versus simplistic and superficial public designations.
Tashiro’s 5 Dimensions of Multiracial Identity

1) Cultural Identity
How the individual internalizes cultural core values influenced by family and community experiences

2) Ascribed Racial Identity
How one is racially identified and labeled by others based on physical appearance or phenotype

3) Racial Identification to Others
How one labels oneself publicly, both on official forms and in response to others’ social demands for categorization

4) Racial Self-Identification
An individual’s internal sense of who they are

5) Situational Racialization of Feeling
How different contexts bring out different aspects or “sides” of one’s identity or heritage
Global ‘mixed race’ identities, categories and politics are embedded in my own multiethnic, multiracial and multinational family background and upbringing. I was born in London, England to an Irish/English/Guyanese mother and an Igbo/Nigerian father and spent three childhoods in England, Nigeria and Los Angeles, California.
My Maternal Grandparents

Married in 1925

Lionel Freeman (in the British Merchant Navy)

(from Le Guan, Guyana)

Mary Freeman

(from South Shields, England)
My Paternal Grandparents

Nando, Onitsha, Nigeria
Summer, 1976

Chief Aaron Nsiegbuna
Ifekwunigwe

Florence Ugoye
Ifekwunigwe
My Parents
Onitsha, Nigeria
Circa 1959
Dr. Muriel St. Clair Ifekwunigwe
and
Dr. Aaron Ezebuilo Ifekwunigwe
Serendipitous Doctoral Dissertation Project

My intellectual interest in global ‘mixed race’ identities, categories and politics was serendipitously created for me while initially conducting doctoral dissertation ethnographic research in Bristol, England on transformations of political consciousness for British-born youth of immigrant parents.
Scattered Belongings (Routledge, 1999) was based on this longitudinal ethnographic field work in Bristol, England with a multi-generational cohort of 25 ‘mixed race’ adults on ‘mixed race’, identities, families and memories. Across space and time, the study highlighted the shifting and gendered dynamics of British ‘race’ relations.
My next research project (Routledge, 2004) specifically focused on North America and traced the interdisciplinary evolution of ‘mixed race’ as an intellectual idea and a social movement. From the 19th to the 21st century, it identified three ‘ages’: the age of pathology, the age of celebration and the age of critique.
18th and 19th Century Age of Pathology: Miscegenation and Moral Degeneracy

ideological and pseudo-scientific belief that interbreeding across ‘racial’ borders would threaten the assumed purity and supremacy of the ‘white race’

http://56608592.weebly.com/introduction-to-miscegenation.html
20th (and 21st Century) Age of Celebration

actor-centered conceptual and biographical approaches which presume that ‘mixed race’ identities are fluid, shifting, contingent, situational and complex
In popular and scholarly discourses, ‘mixed race’ categories, identities and politics continue to be contested and debated, particularly as they extend beyond ‘black and white’ and pertain to the Census and social justice issues. 
https://escholarship.org/uc/ucsb_soc_jcmrs
In the global context, in different societies, which were or are differentially organized on the bases of specific hierarchical ‘race’/color systems and hierarchies, there are specific rules or statuses, which determine the social positions and lived experiences of individuals socially designated and/or self-identified as ‘mixed race’. Status is frequently defined in a relational fashion based on one’s phenotypic “proximity” to whiteness.
‘Mixed Race’ Communities, Gender, Labor, and Migration

Global ‘mixed race’ individuals and communities in particular local geographical contexts are produced by specific sets of gendered historical, economic and political circumstances.
A “buffer community”, Anglo-Indians: products of white British fathers (employees of British Empire i.e. British East India Company) and local Indian women; from 18th century to late 19th century; when white women began to arrive; mixture of British and Indian parentage

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6932623.stm
From the 1800s to the 1970s, “half-white” Aboriginal children were removed from homes and raised in boarding schools or fostered by white families.
VIETNAM

Vietnam War (1964-1975)
Babies

or “Children of the Enemy”

Born to Vietnamese mothers and U.S. fathers, who were servicemen or civilians stationed in Vietnam

http://a142.idata.over-blog.com/500x348/2/43/23/13/after-the-rain/nuo/005.jpg
“Geordie-Yemenis”

Yemeni sailors first arrived as early as 1860 and began inter-marrying with local English women. The British-Yemeni community is now 6 generations deep.

http://www.theyemeniproject.org.uk/content/pages/img/integration_image1.jpg
Dictates that the offspring of a ‘Black’ and a ‘White’ union takes on the ‘racial’ identity of the ‘subordinate’ parental group. In particular, one known and ‘visible’ Black/African ancestor designates a person as Black.

http://affability.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/obamamom1.jpg
Predominance of Black/White Discourses on ‘Mixed Race’

Much popular and scholarly emphasis is placed on the binary black/white dynamics of socially defined races, interracial relationships/marriages, and the offspring of these unions as this dialectic emerged from a particular set of historical, economic and political circumstances, including the subjugation of people of African descent during and after enslavement.

- [Since 2000] “Racial categories have changed over the course of census-taking in the United States, with implications for defining and counting racial mixtures” (Charmaraman et al. 2014: 337).

- There is a lack of academic and popular consensus about which terminology (i.e. ‘mixed race’, biracial, multiracial, mixed parentage, etc.) to use.

- There is a great deal of diversity between and among various ‘mixed race’ sub-groupings.
Current Size of U.S. ‘Mixed Race’ Population

Pew Research Center (2015)

Multiracial in America: Proud, Diverse and Growing in Numbers, Washington, D.C.
3 Examples of ‘Mixed Race’ Healthcare Implications and Decisions

- 1) Clinical Interactions
- 2) Categories and Patient Intake Forms: “What is Your Ancestry?”
- 3) Bone Marrow Donors and Transplants
In healthcare, self-reported ‘race’ is frequently treated as a proxy for genetic explanations instead of either ancestry or social determinants of health, such as environmental or social factors i.e. education, poverty, or access to health insurance.

Very little is known about the longitudinal health outcomes of ‘mixed race’ individuals or populations, in part, because prior to 2000, when the US Census provided an opportunity for individuals to identify as more than one ‘race’, we did not know who these people were.
Screen “Mixed Race America and the Future of Health” TEDxUIUC Talk by Karen Tabb Dina (6:05-11:46)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWAQzD5wcFc
It is vitally important to the health of every individual that as much racial and ethnic information as possible is collected. There are diseases that are more likely in certain racial and ethnic groups. Researchers need to be able to promote studies that look at people of multiracial and/or multiethnic heritage, which will benefit all of society. Please take the time to fill in what you know about your or your children’s background.

For each member of your family listed below, please indicate their racial and/or ethnic origins (if known). For multiracial people please list as many as necessary.
Please fill in letter and number combinations:

_______ The racial and ethnic background(s) I consider myself to be.

_______Mother    _______Father

_______Maternal Grandmother    _______Paternal Grandmother

_______Maternal Grandfather    _______Paternal Grandfather

_______Maternal Great Grandmother    _______Paternal Great Grandmother

_______Maternal Great Grandfather    _______Paternal Great Great Grandfather
From A to E, there are Five Major Census Categories Each with Multiple Sub-Categories of Ancestry or Ethnicity

1)  Asian/Pacific Islander
2)  Black/African-American
3)  Hispanic/Latino
4)  American Indian/Alaska Native
5)  White/Caucasian
project race sample questionnaire: sub-categories of ancestry or ethnicity

- Black/African-American
- North African
- Black or African American
- Caribbean
- Central American
- South American
- Sub-Saharan African

Black or African American racial or ethnic designations that do not appear above:

B-7 ___________________________
B-8 ___________________________
D. American Indian or Alaska Native
D-1 American Indian
D-2 Alaska Native
American Indian or Alaska Native racial or ethnic designations that do not appear above:
D-3____________________________
D-4____________________________
Modification of Project RACE Sample Questionnaire

- Project Race’s Sample Form is a very important step in the right direction. If I were to modify ALL of the sub-categories, I would provide individuals with the opportunity to include/write-in more fine-tuned and specific ethnicities, such as Senegalese for (B7) and Cherokee for (D3).

- In other words, at the end of the list of sub-categories, I would provide patients with the option of writing in a specific ethnicity similar to the “any other race” option on the 2010 Census.
2010 Census: Any Other Race Question

Mixed Marrow Project

Began as a response to the need for outreach due to both the lack of public knowledge as well as the paucity of registered donors for ‘mixed race’ individuals. They are dedicated to finding bone marrow and blood cell donors for these ‘mixed race’ patients.

Mixedmarrow.org
“Mixed Match is an important human story told from the perspective of mixed race blood cancer patients who are forced to reflect on their multiracial identities and complex genetics as they struggle with a nearly impossible search to find bone marrow donors, all while exploring what role race plays in medicine.”

http://mixedmatchproject.com/
Screen “Mixed Match”
Documentary (2:30 minutes)
https://vimeo.com/179551767
‘Mixed Race’ Identities, Multiple Ancestries, Social Categories and Healthcare Interactions: My New Qualitative Research Pilot Study

Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, the aim of this pilot study is to understand how healthcare interactions are related to both the complexities of individual interpretations of ‘race’, ‘mixed race’, and multiple ancestries as well as dynamic perspectives on identities, kinships, families and lived experiences.
Concluding Points

1) We cannot assume that we know anything about someone’s lived experiences by simply “reading their phenotype”. Ask people about their families and their growing up experiences!
Concluding Points

2) As potent constructs and categories, neither ‘race’ nor ‘mixed race’ travels easily. We have to understand the complex and specific histories of societies organized on the bases of hierarchical and gendered ‘race’/color systems and how they have influenced official and popular categorizations of ‘race’ and ‘mixed race’.
Concluding Points

3) Across time, within different social contexts, and across generations within families, shifting self-identification represents both the multi-dimensional as well as the situational nature of identity for ‘mixed race’ individuals.
Concluding Points

4) How ‘mixed race’ individuals self-identify and/or are identified by others, including medical practitioners, can influence psychological well-being and health.
Concluding Points

5) Rather than eliminating ‘race’, which is an important political, demographic and epidemiological monitoring category, probing deeper to enquire about the multiplicity of individuals’ ethnicities and ancestries may yield more accurate results.
6) The unique and complex characteristics of ‘mixed race’ families and individuals make them relevant and important subjects for clinical trials and health disparities research.
8 Concluding Points

7) Across the life course, we need to examine the similar and differential ways in which ‘mixed race’ individuals interpret ‘race’, ‘mixed race’, multiple ancestries, and genetic information and how these may affect social identities and health.
Concluding Points

8) Rethinking how we interact with and care for ‘mixed race’ patients is not simply about addressing diversity and inclusion or inter-cultural competence, it can be a matter of life or death.
www.mixedracestudies.org

Mixed Race Studies: Scholarly Perspectives on the Mixed Race Experience

Excellent, Comprehensive and Interdisciplinary Online Resource and Database

http://www.mixedracestudies.org/?tag=sickle-cell-anemia
Thank you!

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