**The destructive nature of the term race: Growing beyond a false paradigm**
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# The Destructive Nature of the Term *Race*: Growing Beyond a False Paradigm

Susan Chavez Cameron and Susan Macias Wycoff

*Originally based on a system of folk taxonomies, the term* race *has been used to group people by physical appearance, often with disruptive and harmful social consequences. Given that many national and international scientific groups have diminished their use of the term* race *in the classification of people, it is time for mental health professionals to seriously discuss the role and assess the usefulness of the term* race. *We recommend that the profession follow the lead of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1950/1978) in taking steps to question the use of the term, which UNESCO views as implying biological significance. In light of the lack of support to retain the term* race *as a scientific concept, and given the development of a no race position by anthropologists and geneticists, it is time for mental health professionals to become more active in addressing the use of this term. Specifically, although counselors in training are taught to use the term* race *to refer to cultural aspects of different groups of people, we believe the term itself is passé. In our opinion, the term, in varying degrees, contributes to the formation of false perceptions about various groups of people. These false perceptions are encountered by counselors when working with clients, professionals, and systems.*

In 1942, Ashley Montagu wrote, "Race is the witchcraft of our time . . . It is a contemporary myth. Man's most dangerous myth" (p. 3). At an extreme, the myth of race contributed to German Nazi race theories, the subsequent death of millions of Jews, and the destruction of large areas of Europe. For centuries, millions of people have been tortured and murdered as a result of their beliefs, ethnicity, or race. The Nazi atrocities are one of the most recent and well-known examples of the "myth of race," but possibly not the worst. See, for example, the Armenian genocide by the Turks, the Stalinist purges, the wars in Bosnia and Rwanda, and the Bible. Before there was a Western physiological classification system of race, groups of people discriminated against and killed other groups of people. The Chinese people referred to outsiders, including other Asian groups, as "barbarians," just as members of various city-states of Ancient Greece fought each other, and so forth.

On another scale, the concept of race has led to discrimination, accorded people unequal rights, and validated social inequities and injustices (Axelson, 1993; Kuhl, 1994; Marks, 1995; Smedley, 1993). According to Smedley (1993), the concept of race is a construct that acts to rationalize or advance the interests of those who maintain the notion of racial differences.

The purpose of this article is to argue that the term *race,* which should not be confused with the term *culture,* has no place in the counselor's professional lexicon. We explore the historical origins of the concept of race and examine the role that the scientific community has played in creating and perpetuating the notions of race and race theories. The divisive nature of the concept of race is explored, as well as the implications of the term in relation to working with the clientele we seek to serve. Finally, using anthropological and genetic research, we discuss the increasing scientific evidence against the existence of race and racial differences. Simply stated, the term evolved out of false beliefs concerning physiological differences and has never been completely extricated from its historical roots.

## THE AMERICAN REALITY OF RACE

In the social sciences, the notion of race and racial differences has been very destructive. In the past, practitioners who have used so-called intelligence testing have made incorrect assumptions when distinguishing between groups (within and between what are deemed racial groupings) based on the belief that intelligence was a mostly innate biological characteristic. Early in the profession, the Binet test was used on immigrants at Ellis Island to evaluate and cull the "feeble-minded," resulting in the rejection of 40 to 50% of select groups immigrating to this country (Gould, 1996), despite the fact that most of those tested could not speak English, were illiterate, and were unfamiliar with the cultural nuances of this country. Later, using his Ellis Island findings, Goddard and his team successfully lobbied Con-

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gress to pass the 1924 Immigration Act, strictly limiting immigration from certain parts of the world (Shaefer, 1990; Shipman, 1994). Simultaneously, other researchers, concentrating their efforts on identifying what they called "innate" academic abilities of racial groups, wrongly described the superiority or inferiority of visibly different populations. In more recent years, using the Stanford–Binet, Black children were found with greater frequency than their White peers to be below normal in intelligence or retarded and were subsequently placed in special education classes (*Larry P. v. Wilson Riles,* 1986). There has also been a resurgence of race-related research. For example, race has been used to explain the treatment of Black youth with psychotropic medications to control hyperactivity and aggressive behaviors (Leid, 1992), and again, as with the research of Herrnstein and Murray (1994), authors of *The Bell Curve: The Reshaping of American Life by Difference in Intelligence,* race was used to erroneously prove the inferiority or superiority of visibly different peoples.

Although the social sciences have failed to produce studies supporting the biological fact of race, the concept of the existence of race is so embedded in American culture that people seldom, if ever, question its reality or its true meaning. In fact, the concept of race is so intrinsic to our worldview that the physical differences among people are interpreted as evidence of the existence of race, and the disparity (i.e., the perceived differences) separating people is seen as part of the natural order of things (Mason, 1994; Shaefer, 1990; Smedley, 1993). Often, the concept of race as an inclusive term remains such a pervasive factor in the U.S. that it continues to determine social rewards and, despite the vast changes that have occurred as a result of the civil rights movement of the sixties and seventies (Gould, 1996; Marks, 1995; Shaefer, 1990). (Of course, problems arising from racial disparity occur worldwide, not just in the U.S.)

The confusion between the terms *race, culture,* and *ethnicity* is highly problematic. These terms are frequently used interchangeably, but they are very different concepts. Race is an arbitrary classification system used to categorize people with a specified group of physical characteristics such as skin color, facial form, or eye shape (Zuckerman, 1990). The term *race* is meant to imply a common descent or heredity. On the other hand, culture represents the behaviors and beliefs that characterize a particular group. According to Axelson (1993), culture is basically the sum of the core concepts of a particular group of people, which is transmitted generation to generation. According to Triandis et al. (1980), culture is made up of two components: physical culture and subjective culture. Physical culture represents objects such as roads, tools, buildings, and so forth, and subjective culture is represented by things such as the social structures, systems and organizations, and the beliefs, values, and norms that represent the cultural group. Ethnicity is different from these. Ethnicity is embedded within the culture. It consists of characteristics that make up the smaller groups within the larger cultural group or society. Like culture, ethnicity is passed from one generation to the next, but is more discrete. Ethnicity is a complex, multidimensional construct that, according to McGoldrick, Giordano, and Pearce (1996), "plays a major role in determining what we eat and how we work, relate, celebrate holidays and rituals, and feel about life and death, and illness." (p. IX). Ethnicity and culture are integrally related, but they are separate.

Stated differently, in the United States, there is a national cultural identity. Components of this national culture are shared by most people within the nation's boundaries. These shared components, for instance, include the type of currency used, the kind of subjects taught in elementary school (for instance, a stronger emphasis on U. S. history versus Canadian history), the fact that cars are driven on the right-hand side of the road, and the manner in which legal recourse is sought. Tied to these social systems are national beliefs, such as, "All men are created equal" or "the right to equal opportunity" or the ideas of freedom of speech, religion, or the press. Within the national culture are ethnic groups. Within each ethnic group are behaviors, beliefs, and practices that are unique to that ethnic group, although some elements of an ethnic group may be shared by other groups. Elements of the ethnic group might be, but most likely are not, shared by the national culture. What should be clear is that culture and ethnicity are very often intertwined, maybe even sharing a rich history, but culture and ethnicity are not race.

*Racial identity* is another term that creates much confusion. As it is currently used (e.g., Carter, 1995; Cross, 1991; Harris, Blue, & Griffith, 1995; Helms, 1990), racial identity is a construct, not biologically based. The theory states that the differences in feelings, thoughts, and behaviors between people of color and White people are the result of conditions endured by people of color, in particular, Black people. These behavioral and cognitive differences helped people of color to survive in oppressive environments that denied them fair access to social resources or justified their mistreatment or domination (Helms, 1995). Racial identity theory acknowledges the critical role that the concept of race has played in this country, but it does not support the notion that visibly different groups are biologically distinct from one another.

Within the helping professions, according to Yee, Fairchild, Weizmann, and Wyatt (1993), there has been an ongoing debate, followed by much inactivity, regarding the use of the term *race* in the classification of clients and research participants. Yet, in cultural and biological anthropology, where race was once a core construct, the majority of the membership no longer supports the concept of race (Bower, 1991; Lieberman, Stevenson, & Reynolds, 1989), and others (e.g., Brace, 1964; Livingston, 1962) deny its validity. In an analysis of 58 introductory physical anthropology textbooks published in the United States from 1932 to 1979, we discovered that since 1970, there has been a significant



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and continued decrease in the frequency of the use of the term *race* and of the concept of race (Littlefield, Lieberman, & Reynolds, 1982). Evidence continues to collect that the term *race* is meaningless, used to point out differences in people that are not definitive.

In the field of genetics, researchers Cavalli-Sforza, Menozzi, and Piazza (1994) have concluded that the genetic differences between the so-called races account for only 0.012% of human biological variation. Farb (cited in Gould, 1994, p. 67) stated, "When analyzed statistically, the genetic difference between two geographical populations is very much the same as the difference within a single population." In other words, Europeans differ genetically from one another almost as much as a European person differs from an Asian person or African person.

In medicine, genetic differences are so negligible that surgeons can attest that in organ transplants a Black donor can be a better match for a White patient than another White person. (Gould, 1996). In short, the usual agreement between scientists is that the concept of race lacks scientific validity (LaVeist, 1994; Mason, 1994; Schulman, Rubenstein, Chesley, & Eisenberg, 1995), and "is not useful in research, obscures the understanding of human variation, and has harmful social consequences" (Littlefield et al., 1982, p. 641). Nevertheless, in the mental health field, race continues to be treated as a useful manner to differentiate between clients or to report research results.

## THE NOTIONS ABOUT RACE

How has U.S. society become so obsessed and confused about race? In the context of human history, race is a relatively new concept (Brace, 1964; Shreeve, 1994; Smedley, 1993). It is mostly the construct of Europeans, in particular northern Europeans (Brace, 1964; Gould, 1994; Miles, 1982). According to Brace, before the travels of Prince Henry the Navigator (1394–1460), people had relatively little perception or awareness of what might be deemed as the concept of race. Given the general isolation of northern Europeans, especially the British Islanders, there was very limited exposure to individuals physically or culturally different from themselves. Few had ever ventured to the Mediterranean or southernmost regions of Europe and fewer still traveled onto the Asian or African continents (Brace, 1964; Smedley, 1993).

Northern Europeans who did travel, mainly the Christians who marched to Jerusalem to fight in the Holy Wars during the Crusades of the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, did not categorize people in the "scientific" manner of their descendants (Brace, 1964). The Crusaders traveled on foot, camel, or horseback, and rarely covered more than 25 miles a day. Brace claimed that the physical differences that existed among newly encountered peoples were too subtle to inspire a notion of race similar to what exists today.

However, in Spain, Portugal, southern Italy, and the Mediterranean, people were far more aware of the extent of diversity found in the world. Southern Europeans intermingled with Middle Easterners, Asians, and Africans, exposing them to great diversities of physical features and cultural differences. Involved in complex trade, travel, political and commercial networks, southern Europeans were familiar with the human variability that appeared so unexpectedly for most northern Europeans (Brace, 1964; Gould, 1996; Smedley, 1993).

In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, during the Age of Exploration, things began to quickly change for northern Europeans. Instead of walking or traveling on horseback or camel, they began sailing vessels to reach distant lands. Rather than years required by inland travel, they could reach most countries within a matter of weeks or months. Consequently, the introduction and exposure to the physical differences that existed among peoples appeared "suddenly" and seemed profound and exaggerated. Brace (1964) and Smedley (1993) agreed that for northern Europeans, the concept of race represented people who lived at the far end of the European trade routes and, as such, there was a need to develop a scheme to explain the *physical differences* among the various groups of people that they encountered.

### *Race as a Folk Taxonomy*

Race is a social, cultural, and political creation, a product of human invention which itself has evolved in definition (Armelagos, Carlson, & Van Gerven, 1982; Marks, 1995; Miles, 1982). The concept of race was originally conceived to provide an explanation for the human diversity that had been encountered (Smedley, 1993). Later, it served to justify the exploitation and dispossession of supposedly inferior peoples (Montagu, 1942; Smedley, 1993). The concept of race also may have served to create emotional and psychological distance between Europeans and other visually different peoples. But it was not until the eighteenth century that the concept of race as a set of biologically inherited physical characteristics was developed to support the use of the term (Lieberman, Lyons, & Lyons, 1995; Smedley, 1993).

In 1735, Linnaeus, a Swiss botanist and explorer, published the first edition of *Systems of Nature*, a two-dimensional system for classifying plants and animals (Marks, 1995) that later became the foundation of modern taxonomy. According to Linnaeus' taxonomy, living things were grouped by species, genus, order, class, and phylum. Species are defined as a group of physically and genetically similar organisms that can mate and produce viable offspring (Wallace, Sanders, & Ferl, 1991). Thus, plants and animals of the same species can interbreed, whereas more distant plants and animals cannot. For example, domestic cats can interbreed with one another but not with an ocelot. And although horses and donkeys can mate, their young—the mule—is almost always sterile. In Linnaeus's taxonomy, species presumed to have a single common ancestor are grouped together in a genus for the purpose of understanding their evolutionary relationships.

Although Linnaeus was not the first to categorize humans into distinct groups, he was the first to do so scientifi-



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cally. In the first edition (cited in Marks, 1995; Smedley, 1993) of his work, Linnaeus grouped humans with higher primates such as monkeys and sloths, but said nothing of subdividing humans. Five years later in the second edition, Linnaeus undertook the issue of human diversity and subdivided humans into subspecies (Marks, 1995). Using the conventions of cartography and without explicit hierarchical ranking, he divided humans, the species *Homo sapiens*, into four geographic regions: the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa; *americanus*, *europaeus*, *asiaticus*, and *afer*, respectively (Gould, 1996).

In the tenth edition, rather than making his own observations, Linnaeus yielded to the taxonomic theories of his time and characterized each group by noting their color, humor, and posture. The term *humors* is derived from the Latin for "moisture," which reflects the ancient and medieval theory that a person's health, disposition, and temperament arises from a balance of four fluids: blood, phlegm, choler (yellow bile), and melancholy (black bile). Depending on which of the four substances dominated, a person would be labeled as optimistic (the realm of blood), sluggish (phlegmatic), prone to anger (choleric), or sad (melancholic; Gould, 1996).

The group from the Americas was identified as the subspecies *Homo sapiens americanus* and given the color red, the humor choleric, and the posture upright. They were described as obstinate, merry, free, and painted with fine red lines. European, *Homo sapiens europaeus*, were labeled as white, optimistic, and muscular, gentle, active, very smart, inventive, and covered with close vestments. Asians, *Homo sapiens asiaticus*, were identified as pale yellow, melancholy, stiff, severe, haughty greedy, and covered with loose garments. The African peoples, *Homo sapiens afer*, were described as black, slow, foolish, relaxed, crafty, indolent, negligent, and were people who anointed themselves with grease. According to Marks (1995), Linnaeus "was unable to classify subdivisions of human species in the same professionally biological manner as he classified those other species" (p. 51). Instead, his classification of humans was based on broad generalizations and value judgments that served to transmit the social prejudices of his time (Gould, 1996; Littlefield et al., 1982; Marks, 1995). Although not deliberate, there is also an implied and conventional ethnocentric ranking of Europeans first, Asians and Americans in the middle, and Africans at the bottom.

In 1775, Johann Blumenbach, a protégé of Linnaeus, established the most influential of the racial classification systems (Gould, 1996; Marks, 1995; Smedley, 1993); one that even today continues to dominate and regulate aspects of our culture (Kovel, 1970). Considered one of the greatest and most honored scientists of his time, Blumenbach presented his work, *On the Natural Variety of Mankind*, as a doctoral dissertation to the medical faculty at the University of Gottingen, Germany. In his dissertation, Blumenbach changed his mentor Linnaeus's four-race classification based on geographical locations (without explicit ranking) to a five-race classification scheme of hierarchical worth based on his personal perceptions of beauty. Not surprisingly, Caucasians were the ideal.

To understand Blumenbach's classification system it is important to understand the criterion he used to name the European race Caucasian. Adhering to the Biblical version of human creation, Blumenbach reasoned that if God created humans in his image, God certainly would have chosen White people as the variant (Smedley, 1993). Erroneously believing that original humans evolved from the region of the Caucasus Mountains in Russia, between the Black and Caspian Seas, and believing that the most beautiful of all Europeans were the Georgian women of this region, he named the "variety" of light-skinned peoples of Europe and adjacent parts of Asia and Africa *Caucasians* (Gould, 1996; Smedley, 1993).

The other four groups of peoples were also strictly defined by physical characteristics and, to a certain degree, geography. The "Mongolian variety" were all the inhabitants of east Asia, which included China and Japan; the "Ethiopian variety" were the black-skinned people of Africa; the "American variety" were the native populations of the New World; and the "Malay variety" were the Melanesians of the South Pacific, Polynesians, and the Australian Aboriginal (Gould, 1996). These five groups were not considered equal. They were ranked along a gradient of superior to inferior that was determined by the closeness or distance of a group from the mistaken epicenter of original humans (Smedley, 1993).

Understanding the work of both Linnaeus and Blumenbach is important for two reasons. First, the use of racial classifications remains a pervasive element in Western thought and experience and cannot be ignored. Second, and more important, within the profession the notion of race continues to be treated as a useful concept to denote differences, even when there is abundant evidence to the contrary. It is clear that Linnaeus was unable to remain unbiased in his biological descriptions of the human species, using traits like clothing and supposed traits of character, disposition, and behavior to distinguish his subspecies of humans. And although Blumenbach did not use biological or cultural characteristics in his description of populations as Linnaeus had, Blumenbach used the supposed objectivity of science to validate his own social prejudices. In short, both of these men "failed to divorce the processes of culture and biological evolution from each other" (Marks, 1995, p. 68), an error common then and today. The classification systems they developed were really commentaries on the scientific study of humans. The study of human biology or behavior—any study—is infused with the cultural values and the preconceptions of the times (Green, 1981). All scientists, just as Linnaeus and Blumenbach, are citizens and as such bring their social values to their research—contemporary social scientists are no exception. For example, Ginter (1989), stated that "labeling someone always represents some sort of socially embedded process and too often is less 'scientific' than we assume" (p. 341).

But the scientific study of humans is unlike other biological sciences. Although Linnaeus's taxonomy allowed scientists to distribute species into biologically concrete and ex-



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clusive groups, social scientists are unable to classify human species with the same degree of accuracy. For instance, when social scientists classify people by racial groups, how light does an individual have to be to be categorized as a "White person," or how dark does a person have to be before he or she is categorized as a "Black person?" The term *race*, as it is used in the social sciences, is not sufficient to explain the variation in our physical features, attitudes, and behaviors. The term *race*, as it is used in the mental health field, is based on a folk taxonomy, not a scientific one.

The study of humans cannot be done dispassionately. When a social scientist reaches a conclusion about a particular group of people, "lives can be wasted or cultivated according to the ideas that are considered scientific" (Marks, 1995, p. 95). Unlike animal studies in other biological sciences, the welfare of people who are the focus of a study could be dependent on the outcome of the study. Counselors need to ask whether, by continuing to treat the term *race* as a biologically useful differentiating concept, we are not furthering the current inequities each of us is working to address in our work.

## THE USE OF RACIAL CATEGORIES

In 1993, the *New York Times* ran an article written by attorney Lani Guinier, President Clinton's 1993 nominee to head the civil rights division at the Department of Justice. In the article, Guinier described herself as "Black." But a photo caption of Guinier described her as being "half-Black." How can a person be Black and half-Black at the same time? In algebraic terms, this seems to describe an illogical formula whereby $x = 1/2x$, to which the only solution is $x =$ zero. One might argue that the inconsistency in the *New York Times* was trivial. We argue that it was revealing.

Applying such formulas has led to much absurdity regarding racial classification. For some U.S. citizens, having one Black great-grandparent is sufficient to define a person as a Black person, but having seven White great-grandparents is insufficient to define a person as a White person. This definition was devised in pre-Civil War America (Lieberman et al., 1989; Zuckerman, 1990) and allowed the citizenry of the times to deny "the humanity of slaves in law and social beliefs, even when the treatment of them appeared most brutal" (Smedley, 1993, p. 128).

For American Indians, the logic is different but still paradoxical. A full-blooded Native American with grandparents from eight different tribes is considered a non-Indian or a White person. (U. S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1991). To be recognized as Native American, an individual must be not less than one-quarter American Indian from one tribal group. This means that one grandparent is a full-blooded American Indian from a single tribe. Here, race and biology are demonstrably at odds. And the problem is not semantic but conceptual, because race is presented and validated as a category of nature (Gould, 1996).

To further complicate the issue of racial classification, in the United States the racial classification of individuals is determined by the National Center for Health Statistics (1988). Before 1989, an infant could only be considered White if both of the child's parents were White; if one parent was non-White, the child was assigned the race of the non-White parent. In 1989, the National Center for Health Statistics changed its system of classification and now the race of the mother determines the racial category of the infant (La Veist, 1994). But what race is an infant when the mother is one-quarter (each) Hispanic, Asian, White, and Black? More important, why are people so intent on collapsing all human variation into so few categories?

The Guinier article encapsulated a long-standing problem in our use of racial categories. When Guinier is described as "half-Black" the statement is one of biological ancestry, for one of her parents is Black. When Guinier describes herself as Black she is using a cultural category. In South Africa, individuals can petition a special government board that reassigns people to different racial categories (Marks, 1995; Root, 1996; Smedley, 1993; Zuckerman, 1990), while in most of South America individuals are simply free to change their racial classification (La Veist, 1994). In many countries where exclusive racial categories do not exist, an individual can claim membership in several ethnic groups. But in the United States, there is neither social nor legal recognition of "mixed-race." One can either be Black or White, but not both (Root, 1996).

## ACCOUNTING FOR "RACIAL" DIFFERENCES

If there is no such thing as race or if there is so little variability between peoples, how does one account for the physical differences between people? Why are some people Black and others White? Why are some groups of people more prone to certain types of health problems and others not? Why do certain populations possess particular physical features such as long noses, when others have short noses? How is it that these differences have regional expression?

### *Genetic Theory of Human Evolution*

The genetic theory of human evolution begins with the supposition that original humans were genetically relatively homogenous and evolved in one area—Africa (Montagu, 1942/1974). According to the theory, as early humans migrated from their ancestral lands, natural barriers such as mountain ranges, deserts, and oceans created gene pools (Cavalli-Sforza & Cavalli-Sforza, 1995; Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, 1981; Jenkins, 1982; Lewontin, 1972; Montagu, 1942), meaning that the frequency of various genes and the morphological (physical) features they encoded began to cluster. Through the processes of isolation, mutation, natural selection, and genetic drift changes from one region of the world to the next became visibly different and regional expression of physical characteristics became more predictable throughout the world.



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Today, few population groups remain isolated and gene flow now prevails. Where there is active gene flow, population differences are reduced, and characteristics once attributed to one group become shared within the larger group and a new characteristic is formed (Wallace et al., 1991). For example, if a population with tall stature mixes with a population dominated by short stature, the number of both tall and short people will decline in favor of an increasing population of medium height (Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, 1981; Stringer, 1990).

According to Kuper (1994), the differences attributed to "racial" groups are embedded in sociocultural and environmental differences, not in biology. Characteristics usually thought of in U.S. society as "racial traits," such as skin color, hair texture, skeletal structure, and so forth, are a result of physiological adaptation to climate and geography differences over the millennia (Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, 1981; Gould, 1996; Jenkins, 1982; Marks, 1995; Montagu, 1942).

## THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN GEOGRAPHY AND HUMAN BIOLOGY

The anatomical features used to differentiate people from one another do not cluster into discrete groups but rather are distributed across the globe along a geographical gradient. When counselors or other mental health professionals group clients or research participants into "racial" categories, they often make certain assumptions about them based on morphological (physical) characteristics. In the following section, we argue that this is the most unreliable and restrictive way to group people.

### *Skin and Skin Color*

Not all dark-skinned people are African, even in their ancestry. Some people of the South Pacific, Australian aborigines, and certain peoples in India also have dark skin. Skin color is the result of the presence of melanin, a dark brown pigment found in the skin. With the exception of albinos, all people have the same number of melanin-forming cells in their skin. Melanin migrates to the skin's surface when stimulated by sunlight to produce darker skin, protect the body from the harmful effects of the sun's ultraviolet rays, and to decrease the production of toxic levels of vitamin D. Where sunlight is weaker, such as in higher latitudes, light-colored skin allows maximum penetration of ultraviolet light, which promotes the production of vitamin D to fight rickets and produce strong bones (Wallace et al., 1991). Melanin seems to be the result of a biological adaptation to life in the tropics (cited in Wills, 1994).

But how does one account for brown skin? Why do the tropical populations indigenous to the Americas have lighter skin than the indigenous peoples of Africa or Australia? In keeping with the gene theory of human evolution, the process of melanin adaptation has not been sufficient to run its course in the Americas. It has been estimated that early Americans migrated to this region only 13,000–30,000 years ago, quite recent compared with those in tropical Africa and Asia (Marks, 1995; Montagu, 1942). In short, skin color is a marker of environmental adaptation and natural selection and nothing else.

### *Physical Differences*

Body size and mass, although regulated by genetics, is also influenced by environmental conditions. According to Bergmann's Rule (Marks, 1995; Stini, 1975) there is a general relationship between mean body size and mean annual temperatures. In warmer climates, people are naturally more slender whereas in cooler areas they are heavier and stockier. Food availability and diets also vary by annual temperatures (Armelagos et al., 1982; Stini, 1975). In cooler climates or at higher latitudes, food sources tend to be more stable and abundant than in warmer climates. In short, environmental conditions are central in determining the physical characteristics of human populations.

The shape and size of the human skull is also influenced by the environment. Believing that skull shapes would yield distinct racial groups, anthropologists of the past classified humans into one of three general categories: long-, medium-, and round-headed (Gould, 1994; Marks, 1995). But in 1912, Franz Boas showed that the shape of the human skull was not determined by genetics alone, but also by environmental factors (Gould, 1994; Marks, 1995). Controlling for heredity, Boas selected Jews (round-headed) and Sicilian (long-headed) immigrants coming to the United States who had relatives in this country. Measuring the skulls of the immigrants and American family members, Boas found that American-born Jews had longer heads than their relatives immigrating to America, and Sicilians born in the United States had rounder-shaped heads than their foreign-born parents.

This study was replicated a few years later by Shapiro and Hulse (Shapiro, 1939). Adding a control group of family members who remained in Japan, Shapiro and Hulse studied Japanese who immigrated to Hawaii and compared them with Japanese born in Hawaii. Just as Boas had discovered, something in the new environment and life created physical changes. Japanese born in Hawaii differed from Japanese immigrants, who differed again from the Japanese control group. The cephalic indices for Japanese immigrants to Hawaii changed by 2.6 points, or six times the standard deviation—a major shift.

In just one generation, physical changes between children of immigrant parents and the families they left behind were measurably different. Clearly body size and shapes, including cephalic index (the ratio of the breadth and length of the skull), are not static or fixed entities. Although changes in nutritional quality and quantity may influence bone structure and head shapes, environmental changes and possibly changes in cultural practices, such as the use of cradle boards or the practice of bundling infants, may also contribute to the physical changes humans experience as they migrate. Physical changes transpire rapidly and the practice of grouping people into racial categories based on physical characteristics confuses biology and cultural heredity because both



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biology and culture affect the expression of given traits (Gould, 1996; Marks, 1995; Shapiro, 1939).

### *Blood Types*

In 1900, the discovery of blood types held out great hope for some researchers for a new, more scientific way to identify racial populations (Morris, 1971). Unlike phenotypes that were vague and subject to the biases of the researcher, blood types seemed a more accurate means of determining racial categories given that a person can have only one of four blood types: A, B, AB, and O (Marks, 1995; Wallace et al., 1991).

But in 1919, wanting to prove the existence of racial groups, Hirschfeld and Hirschfeld quickly identified three ABO types: European, Asian-African, and Intermediate. The blood groupings did not correlate to the morphological clusters of human population except in very general ways and only for specific isolated populations such as Sami, also known as Lapps (Morris, 1971). People believed to be related because of similarities in phenotypes, such as Native Americans and Europeans, were now very distantly related using the ABO blood typing system. Using a frequency distribution of ABO, new group classifications were formed. Estonians and Japanese formed one group; Swedes, Xhosas, Fulani, the Ainu of Japan, and Italians formed another; and Germans, Senegalese, Vietnamese, and New Guineans clustered together (Marks, 1995). This system did little to help identify membership into customary race groups.

### *Forensic Anthropology*

When forensic anthropologists decide a person's racial grouping, they do so based on factors other than physical characteristics. Geography and demographic factors are extremely important to forensic anthropologists. According to Sauer (1992), because the bulk of U.S. population consists of West Africans, Europeans, American Indians, and Asians, U.S. forensic standards are specifically designed to discriminate between these groups.

Age, sex, stature, and race are the cornerstones of reconstructing a specific human identity. Three of these characteristics are firmly anchored in empirical fact: age, sex, and stature; they are not matters to be revised, interpreted, or dissected into their constituent parts. But the fourth cornerstone—race—is a much more troublesome concept. According to Sauer (1992), the use of racial categories in forensic anthropology has little to do with whether race exists or not. In forensic anthropology there exist complex sets of lists containing distinctive biological traits and physical characteristics used to assign a cadaver to one of the four groups. These characteristics are not specific to any one racial group but are *averages* of the biological and physical characteristics of each of the cultural groups.

Because there is a great deal of overlap between ethnic populations and significant variability within groups, the forensic anthropologist looks for characteristics that cluster together with some degree of predictability in particular geographical regions. If the cadaver is 10 to 20 years old, a list of missing persons whose descriptions generally fit the biological data of the cadaver is generated and the data of the cadaver is compared with individual data from missing persons' records, such as dental records or x-rays.

Using this method of comparison, a forensic anthropologist can make a better than random guess about which "racial" category the cadaver falls into. Populations from vastly different parts of the world can be reasonably distinguished from one another. But this does not imply that racial divisions actually exist. "Most anthropologists have rejected the concept of race for human populations both as a research tool and as a valid representation of biological diversity" (Sauer, 1992, p. 110). In lieu of using racial categories and given the mounting scientific evidence refuting the concept of race, scientific communities are moving away from the use of racial categories, focusing instead on the cultural and ethnic variances between populations. We in the helping professions should do the same. One step in this direction is to stop using the term *race*.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE HELPING PROFESSIONS

What are the implications to the profession and our clientele if counselors and other mental health professionals continue to maintain the term *race* within our professional lexicon? First, the concept of race is neither about objectively sorting humans by phenotypes into convenient categories or about defining them in scientific terms. We believe that continuing to use the term *race* is to ignore the fact that modern science has been unable to produce the kind of studies that confirm its reality (for example, studies such as Cavalli-Sforza et al., 1994; Jenkins, 1982). Furthermore, we believe, as Bowen (1976) stated, that using the term *race* implies to many people that human groups are exclusive and biologically discrete from one another and that there is some sort of hierarchical ordering of groups. We believe this helps to foster differing beliefs about, and discriminatory treatments of, people.

Second, whether consciously or unconsciously, insisting on using the term *race* within a professional context validates, supports, and continues to perpetuate the myth of race as a valid theory (Dobbins & Skillings, 1991). The concept of race is and should be treated as a socio-political concept (Shipman, 1994; Smedley, 1993) or a psychological concept (Carter, 1995; Cross, 1991; Harris et al., 1995; Helms, 1990). It is a cultural invention with no basis in contemporary science (Cavalli-Sforza et al., 1994; Gould, 1996; Marks, 1995.) If counselors focus on the history of the term *race*, rather than simply using the term, the current biologically-based definition would be rendered irrelevant. We believe, as do Dobbins and Skillings (1991), that the counselors and other helping professionals have unintentionally promoted the superficial assessment of culturally different people based solely on phenotypes and behavioral variations with occasionally profound negative effects.



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Third, as the 21st century approaches, we believe the ability of the profession to address social ills such as racism will, paradoxically, be determined by counselors' willingness to abandon the term *race* and the ideas it encompasses from the lexicon (Keita, 1993). We argue that counselors are hampering their ability to fight the ills of racism by continuing to use the term, *race.* McGoldrick and Giordano (1996) stated that the language we use reflects the social biases and beliefs of the larger society. We add that the words used in the counseling profession and in our research directly convey what and how counselors think of others and how we look at and evaluate them. According to the linguist Hiyakawa (cited in Axelson, 1993), unexamined key words, in this case the term *race*, hinder and misdirect our thought by creating the illusion of meaning where no clear-cut meaning exists. To continue to insist on defining people by racial categories creates a barrier, making an open dialogue about racism extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Fourth, in 1987, Pedersen spoke of the fragmentation that exists between academic disciplines. He pointed out that counselors do not usually exchange questions or insights with people in other disciplines. In this article, we have attempted to review and summarize the research literature in other disciplines that not only questions the concept of race but in many circumstances denies its existence as a useful qualifying term. Racism, a social problem, has its origins in the biological sciences (Gould, 1996; Marks, 1995; Smedley, 1993), and we therefore need to look to the biological sciences as well as to other disciplines to guide our own discussion regarding the relevance of the term *race* in our own field.

Last, the "racial" differences separating us, according to Farb (cited in Gould, 1994), are negligible. People are not separated from one another by race, but by cultural, social, and economic differences. Allen and Adams (1992) wrote that the concept of race is "confused, inconsistent, and scientifically unsound" (p. 167); it simply serves as a device to justify one group's domination over another (Smedley, 1993), and we contend that the term has no place in the helping professions.

## CONCLUSION

Are there differences between people? Yes, but they are not racial differences. The term *race* is not sufficient to explain the variation in attitudes, physical features, and behaviors encountered around the world. Nor is it an explanation of cultural differences which are rooted, not in different biological backgrounds, but in historical circumstance. Race is a term with multiple definitions that lacks empirical support—a term that continues to be used by some people in a manner with destructive results.

Simply stated, use of the term *race* helps to perpetuate the belief that physical characteristics are linked to intellectual, behavioral, and moral qualities. Culture is the term that requires our attention. We believe that understanding the implications of this term is imperative to helping people develop a healthy perspective about themselves and about life in general.

A quotation from the APA *Publication Manual* (4th ed., 1994) seems appropriate with ACA (American Counseling Association) substituted for APA (American Psychological Association):

> As an organization, [ACA] is committed both to science and to the fair treatment of individuals and groups, and policy requires authors of [ACA] publications to avoid perpetuation demeaning attitudes and biased assumptions about people in their writings . . . Scientific writing should be free of implied or irrelevant evaluation of the group or groups being studied. (p. 46)

We in the helping profession should ask ourselves, Can we simultaneously perpetuate the falsehoods of race through the use of this term when promoting our clients' mental health or the mental health of society as a whole?

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