



CONNECT

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Multiracial Challenges

By: **Cedalia Ellis, MSW, LCSW**

What are you? You don't look like you are... You don't talk like you are... On the surface, these statements can appear to be harmless. Still, such questions can impact how a person embraces their identity, affecting an individual's primary development and feelings of belonging. Often, multiracial individuals are forced to "choose a side" and feel pressure to assume whatever identity society deems most appropriate – based on their most salient physical traits. Being forced to choose a side can leave a multiracial individual or family feeling uncomfortable, anxious, and isolated. Multiracial individuals face high racism, separation, and suicide rates due to the dominant social construct of race. The history of social construction was created to divide and place more dominancy on one thing, making all others outside the standard less superior. As staff who work in the mental health field, we must break down the barriers of social constructs by disrupting the dominant narratives of race. This can be done by a willingness to expand our knowledge about multiracial individuals and families. Understanding that multiracial is not just Black and White, it encompasses all races. To truly see a person, we must be willing to see the whole person.

**DIVERSITY EQUITY &
ENGAGEMENT
NEWSLETTER**

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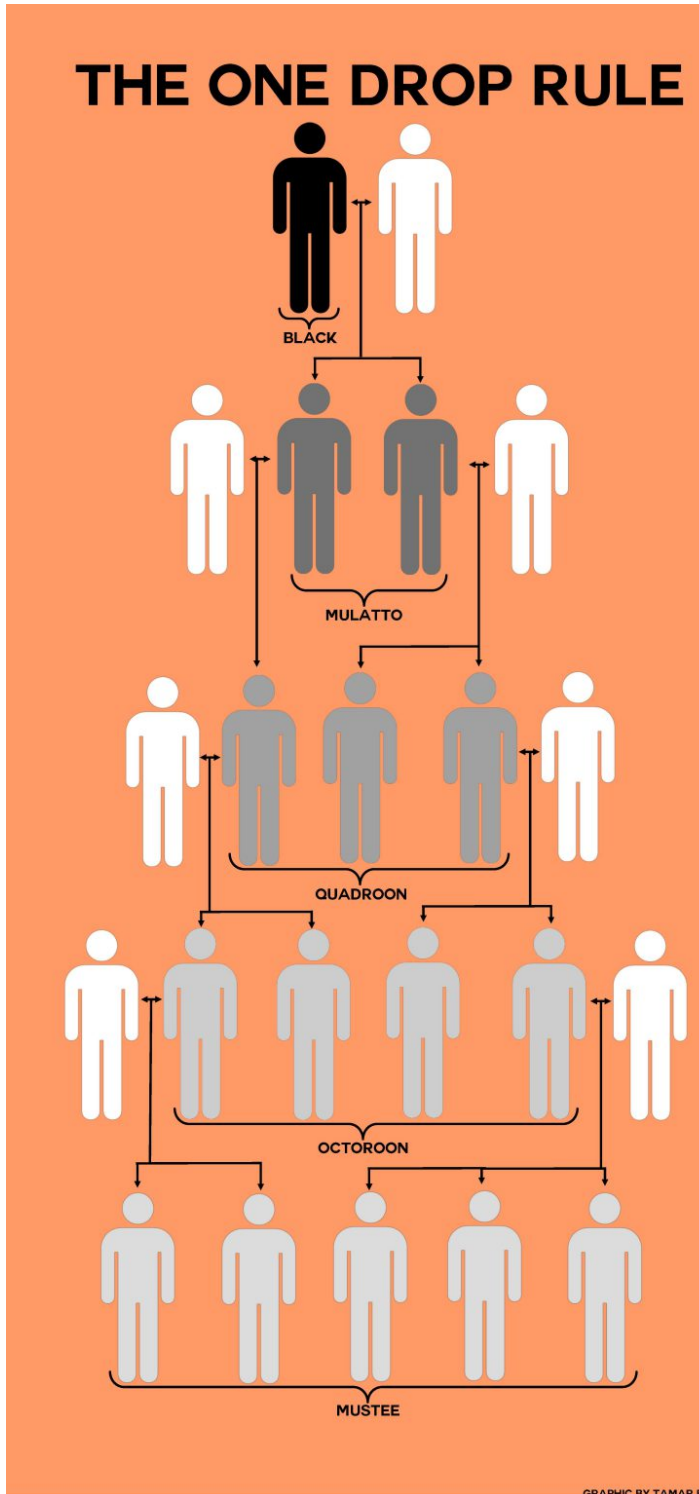


The One-Drop Rule

By Terry Gish

The One-Drop Rule declared, both socially and legally, that the presence of one Black ancestor (no matter how distant) classified someone as Black. People who fell under the One-Drop Rule would then be subject to the restrictions and legal discrimination applied to any Black American, no matter how fair their skin's complexion was. We can look back now and see how antiquated and unjust these and other relics of Jim Crow were, but the mentality imposed by the One Drop Rule is still present today.

Throughout the 1800s, many states declared that someone was Black if they were "one-eighth or more Negro blood." I'm unsure how this was verified in the days before DNA testing, but it seemed to satisfy the requirements for what the ruling class at the time deemed proper. The more stringent application of the One-Drop Rule would actually not take hold until the 1900s.



Taballard. (2018, July 28). Hypodescent: The "One-Drop" Rule. *Passing Beyond Passing*. <https://pages.vassar.edu/passingbeyondpassing/hypodescent-the-one-drop-rule/>.

Implementing the One-Drop Rules became a political mission for legislators who needed a way to push back on the expanding freedoms of Black Americans in the early 1900s and to try to put an emancipated group of citizens back in their perceived place. It also sought to root out undeclared people of color. Records reflect that One-Drop Rule laws, defining someone as Black if they had any Black ancestry at all, were enacted in Tennessee and Louisiana (in 1910), Arkansas and Texas (in 1911), Mississippi (in 1917), North Carolina (in 1923), Virginia (in 1924), and Alabama and Georgia (in 1927). Plus, eight additional states (including Indiana and Kentucky) changed their own legal definitions of Blackness to essentially qualify as their own One Drop Rules.

The notion of the One-Drop Rule suggested that the make-up of African-American DNA is so potent that it overpowers all other genetic contributors. It was perceived to taint the purity of European bloodlines, and thus needed to be identified and segregated. As someone who would have been judged by the One-Drop Rule, I would have legally been labeled Black, and it would have been a crime for me to marry someone white. In our superior 21st Century wisdom, though, the One-Drop Rule way of thinking is long forgotten, right? Except that it's not. Some perceptions related to the One-Drop-Rule linger still in certain minds and practices.

In American History, the One-Drop Rule was the invention of a frightened political leadership who wanted to portray Black DNA as a corruptor, so powerful that it overtook and overruled every other part of a person's genetic identity. As the racist laws died out over the years, though, part of that perception remained. Today, I am glad to be able to check multiple boxes on demographics questionnaires, for we are the sum of many parts, a pool of many drops.

RACIAL IDENTITY

U.S. CENSUS

If you had to describe your racial background using one word, could you accurately do so?

By: *Jennifer Greenlee*



If you had to describe your racial background using one word, could you accurately do so? For a growing number of Americans who identify as multiracial, this would be an impossible task. Until 2000, however, people who identified as more than one race were forced to “mark the race they most closely identified with” in the context of the U.S. Census racial identity box (Ceridon, 2020). This is problematic for several reasons.

According to the Social Science Data Analysis Network, approximately 6,826,228 people identified with more than one race in the 2000 census (“Our Censuses”, 2020). While the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 2.1% of adults are multiracial, Pew Research estimates that this number is closer to 6.9%, due to discrepancies between how adults self-identify, and the racial backgrounds of their family who came before them (Parker, Horowitz, Morin & Lopez, 2015). When the census allowed more than one racial identity box to be checked in the 2000 census, nearly 6.8 million people chose to do so (Ceridon, 2020). This number increased to over 9 million people in the 2010 census (Ceridon, 2020). With some models anticipating the United States to become a minority-majority by 2045 (Ceridon 2020), I personally expect that this number will continue to grow in the coming decades.



RACIAL IDENTITY

U.S. CENSUS

Allowing individuals who identify with more than one race the option to check multiple racially descriptive boxes on the census is a step in the right direction. Accurate and intersectional identification and representation is important and meaningful, especially when the U.S. Census is used to determine funding, government assistance, legislative district lines, and building community resources, such as schools, supermarkets, and hospitals. In the context of serving the severely mentally ill population, specifically those who seek and receive services from Southwestern Behavioral Healthcare, it is crucial that we as providers recognize and respect those who come from multiracial backgrounds. According to the American Psychiatric Association (n.d.), racial and ethnic minorities often lack accessibility to high quality mental health care services, experience “cultural stigma surrounding mental health care, discrimination, and overall lack of awareness about mental health” (“Mental health disparities: Diverse populations,” n.d.). Due to these factors, minorities are frequently subject to poor mental health outcomes (“Mental health disparities,” n.d.). As a company, we must revere cultural and racial competence as indispensable priorities to ensure that the needs of every person are being met appropriately and with respect.



"A single family can have members of varied appearance, so never make assumptions."



No, Really, That's My Mom

BY: TERRY GISH

Kris Beauchamp and I have commiserated over the years about our shared experience of flying under the radar of ethnic perception. In Kris' case, it's not just that most people don't realize she's Chinese; they often don't comprehend that Kris and her mother are related, even when they are together.

One day, Kris was with her mother at a Chinese restaurant on the east side, and Kris ran into a coworker. Making introductions, she gestured to her mother and said, "That's my mom." The coworker loudly laughed. Kris looked directly at the coworker and said, "No, really, that's my mom." The coworker stared, confused, and uttered an embarrassed, "Oh."

At least twice, in Taiwan, people stated that they thought Kris' mother was instead her employee, translating for her and serving as a local guide to an American tourist.

Another time, Kris and her mother were working together at a casino. Referencing Kris, her mother told a fellow casino employee, "That's my daughter."

The casino worker, trying gently to correct this apparently confused colleague, said, "You mean your daughter-in-law." Kris' mother said, "No !It's my daughter."

Kris, seeking to add some levity to the awkward situation, leaned into the employee and half-whispered, "She's adopted. We're just not telling her yet."

There are numerous other examples of people trying to correct Kris' mother by stating that Kris must be her daughter-in-law, not her biological child. In fact, it happened again the night before I'm writing this.

Over her lifetime, Kris has become accustomed to the misunderstandings and looks of confusion. She is able to laugh about it now and say that she uses it as an opportunity to educate people. A single family can have members of varied appearance, so never make assumptions. And yes, really, that's her mom.

Multiracial Celebrities



Pete Wentz

Pete Wentz is a longtime member of the rock group Fall Out Boy. He's the son of a white father and Black mother, and his maternal grandfather is a 1st cousin of former Secretary of State Colin Powell.

PHOTO CREDIT: MINGLE MEDIA TV
([HTTPS://WWW.FLICKR.COM/PHOTOS/MINGLEMEDIATV/15399017499/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/minglemediatv/15399017499/))

Kristin Kreuk

Kristin Kreuk played the part of popular high school student Lana Lang in the television show Smallville. Kristen is the daughter of a Dutch father and Chinese mother.



PHOTO CREDIT: CAROLS ALENDAREZ
([HTTPS://WWW.FLICKR.COM/PEOPLE/74254314@N00/](https://www.flickr.com/people/74254314@N00/))

Sharon Leal

Sharon Leal is an actress who has played the part of a witty Black woman in many film and television features. Many people may not realize, however, that her mother is Filipino.



PHOTO CREDIT: Mingle Media TV
(https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sharon_Leal_at_the_36th_Annual_Gracie_Awards_Gala.jpg)

Rashida Jones

Rashida Jones has played a wide range of characters, including Italian-American Karen Filipelli in the sitcom The Office. In real life, though, Rashida is the daughter of music legend Quincy Jones and former Mod Squad actress Peggy Lipton.



Photo Credit: Miami Film Festival
(<https://www.flickr.com/photos/55155430@N03/33591379005/>)

Multi-Ethnic Books

RECOMMENDED BOOKS WHEN EXPLORING MULTI-ETHNIC IDENTITY

1. *Black, White, Other* by Lise Funderburg

The author interviewed many people who identify as multi-ethnic and shares their individual stories. This book shows that each person's experience is unique, and everyone approaches the subject in different ways.

2. *Dear Senator* by Essie Mae Washington Williams

This book is the autobiography of an amazing woman who was the daughter of a Black mother and a white father, outspoken segregationist Strom Thurmond. The book discusses the secret relationship that she maintained with her father throughout her life.

3. *Life on the Color Line* by Gregory Howard Williams

This intriguing autobiography takes a look at the author's stark transition growing up. As a young boy, his family identified as white, but when it was revealed that his paternal grandmother was Black, his entire life changed. His parents split up, and he relocated to Indiana, where he attended a segregated Black high school and started reevaluating the meaning of identity.

4. *Mixed Blessing* by Doris McMillon

This memoir by journalist Doris McMillon begins with her life as the adopted daughter of an American Black family and culminates in her adulthood as she meets her white, German birth mother.

5. *The Black Count* by Tom Reiss

This historical book takes a look at the life of General Alex Dumas. Alex Dumas was the father of celebrated author Alexandre Dumas, whose works include *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers*. Alex was also the son of white man and a Black enslaved woman. He overcame prejudice and racism to become a fearsome military leader.

6. *The Color of Water* by James McBride

This is a great read by an author who tells his story of growing up in poverty, seeking to understand his white mother's background so that he could have a better understanding of his own history.

7. *The Meaning of Mariah Carey* by Mariah Carey

Before you dismiss this book, thinking it's probably filled with stories of the author's vocal acrobatics and her hand-waving stage routine, take another look. A significant portion of this autobiography discusses her reconciling her own identity with that of her mother (who is Irish-American) and her father (who was Black and Venezuelan).

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