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On the scientific work of CIRCoRe and the role of the RHCS workstream within it

Presentation for SU Council Special Meeting 2023/10/17
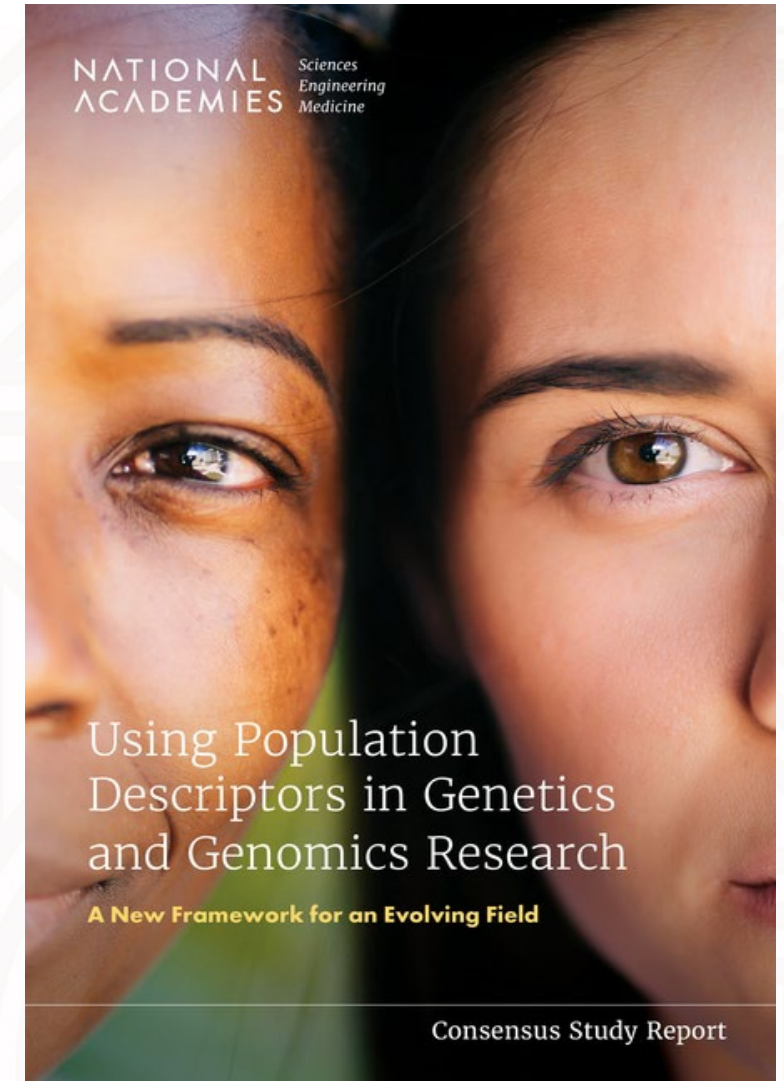Phila M. Msimang

Photo by Stefan Els

A living legacy and contemporary practice The problems of RHCS across the sciences

- Not only the past but present practices are problems: textbook way of doing things is exactly what has led us here: our training, methods, assumptions, etc.

- Difficulties: no definitive answers to key questions, we who caused the problem also tasked to fix it, some on the boat deny that there's such a problem.

- Optimism from how some disciplines tackling issue (e.g., health sciences), but problems remain across disciplines to different degrees/intensity.

- A challenge for us all: what am I doing in my practice that needs revision? Am I keeping up with knowledge on this issue and how it applies to my discipline?

Answering scientific questions is at the center of the long-term success of CIRCoRe's interventions

- Some factors perpetuating inequity are legacy issues, institutional culture, racial bias, Whites favored in employment + lack of transformation, etc.: CIRCoRe streams designed to deal with some of these issues.

- Streams mostly deal with applied cases (e.g., policy) dependent on pre-established understandings of the concepts in use, so success depends in great measure how we understand HCs to ascertain their correct or incorrect application in each kind of applied setting.

- Appropriateness of use is a scientific question about the validity of our concepts, definitions, methods, & applications: RHCS deals with the scientific question.

- Khampepe opened opportunity for trailblazing work.

NATIONAL ACADEMIES
Sciences Engineering Medicine

Using Population Descriptors in Genetics and Genomics Research

A New Framework for an Evolving Field

Consensus Study Report

How race is operationalized and understood affects what seems a solution, policy support

- Problematise standard approaches to disciplinary questions, e.g., intergroup research: Blacks paired with Whites in res. perform better academically, *therefore* Blacks should be paired with Whites in res.

- But: What is it that confers the benefit of better performance when Black students are paired with Whites? Why do Blacks perform worse when they are not White paired? Why is academic performance not affected for White students across race parings?

- Answers suggest different interventions than mere 'diversification', White pairing benefit no longer seen as solution but a symptom of deeper problems; Blacks not paired with Whites condemned to worse outcomes, sometimes no benefit when pairing leads to peeing.

Interaction, Stereotypes and Performance. Evidence from South Africa

Lucia Corno, Eliana La Ferrara, Justine Burns*

Abstract

We exploit a policy designed to randomly allocate roommates in a large South African university to investigate whether inter-racial interaction affects stereotypes, attitudes and performance. Using Implicit Association Tests, we find that living with a roommate of a different race reduces white students' negative stereotypes towards black ones and increases inter-racial friendships. Interaction also affects academic outcomes: black students improve their GPA, pass more exams and have lower dropout rates. This effect is not driven by roommate's ability.

What we think the scientific status of human groups is affects how we do science with them

- Genetic/biological hypothesis still popular in most disciplines to explain Δs between groups, but this hypothesis lacks empirical support; must be undone.

- In health: assuming that disparities are a result in Δ in genetics between groups whereas most human Δ is not distributed by race/ethnicity; health Δ are mostly multifactorial and race/ethnicity is a SSDoH like SES.

- Psychology, education, economics: association tests with groups defined by genetic relatedness sampling from Cloetesville, Kayamandi, Paradyskloof, etc.: such studies will find Δs (income, IQ, educational attainment, etc.) associated with genetics, but why?

- Pop. → R/E → lang. spoken → culture = correlates?

What we think the scientific status of human groups is affects how we do science with them

- Forensic characterization of Coloured people using "Coloured Collection" misguided since group not a bio. group, their bio. characteristics stretch across the range of SA and is made up of Δ bio. populations.

- Forensics assumes physical traits → social identities, but it's only social info can determine social group belonging given how R&E classification works.

- Old classification & investigation of language families in Africa (Semitic, Hamitic, Bantu, Sudanese, and Bushman) based on racial myths reflecting ideas of 'languages of the folk' only recently being revised using methods not informed by race/ethnicity for classification, finding mechanisms of differentiation.

What we think the scientific status of human groups is affects how we do science with them

- Understanding of what race is, as shown in examples, will influence research design and will bias how empirical research and findings are interpreted.

- Understanding of concept will influence how policies are formulated and what problems they can solve.

- Math is not magic: junk-in junk-out problem of algorithmic bias, further ethical challenges when determining how much each variable is to weigh in decisions (e.g., SU admissions matrix).

- Producing best practices, guidelines, aligning policies and procedures, requires clarity on scientific questions (e.g., for journals, RECs, institutions).

- RHCS specific to a place, US recommend. Δ from SA.

How do we stop doing racist research, and how do we stop perpetuating the effects of racism

- Cartoonishly racist research gives impression that we do not do routinely racist research; 'the paper' was easy media bait, most scientific racism is not (it's just the standard approach for the last 200+yrs).

- We attempt to prevent racist research (e.g., RECs) but we pass research based on the standards of the literature. The literature is often racist, so we pass racist research (thus expect future issues here).

- Avoid by going back-to-basics in justification of use: correlations not enough, challenging presumptions within hypothesis necessary (e.g., the IQ example).

- Social and SU conditions of inequity influence what research our staff do, how they approach questions.

Where leading research is on these issues and some of what we aim to figure out

- General moral: racially Δ data can't tell you reason for Δ; it's an empirical question if group belonging is reason for Δ. Investigate mechanisms, don't assume.

- Categories you use for legislated M&E do not have to be treated as variables of analysis since groups used to track equity might not be dimension upon which the observed disparity is caused.

- Disaggregate, hypothesize, test: find 'causes' that could be common across categories irrespective of racially slanted distribution, but aware that racially slanted results can be caused by racism (you don't know until you have explored question empirically).

- Figuring out dynamics of Δ in SAn RHCS, revising.

Where cutting-edge research is on these issues and some of what we aim to figure out

- In science, the relevance of a concept depends on its justification as a variable: work out where race is justified and where it is not in analysis or M&E.

- Not using race in racially biased policies does not make a policy non-racial or not racially biased: we must ask how do policies affect different groups?

- Using racial classifications to investigate the causes of racial disparities is not necessarily correct.

- Races are social groups that certain things have happened to, races are not defined by specific things that happen to them (e.g., racism, SES, educational level, prison rate, etc.): view that they are *defined* by disadvantage is problematic.

Where this kind of work can lead and the kinds of outputs it produces

- Best practices for the use of RHCS, including guidance and standards for their use in research (e.g., journal articles, REC standards, etc.) and policy (e.g., transformation beyond EE, admissions).

- Creation of Common Data Elements for research and data management systems (e.g., biobanking, stats).

- Identifying discipline-specific gaps in education about RHCS and designing frameworks for intervention.

- Mechanisms to track the dynamics in and change of RHCS Categories relevant to research and policy.

- Leadership in this academic domain on both local and international fronts, esp. world leadership in creating tools & resources for the SA environ. (beyond RECs).

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