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THE CHANGING FACE OF AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

BY RICHARD E. GANS

The United States is undergoing significant demographic changes, which will continue well into this century. This cultural diversity will be seen in both the general population and the physicians who care for them. Audiologists and practices that understand and embrace the richness and opportunities associated with cultural diversity will enjoy the rewards.

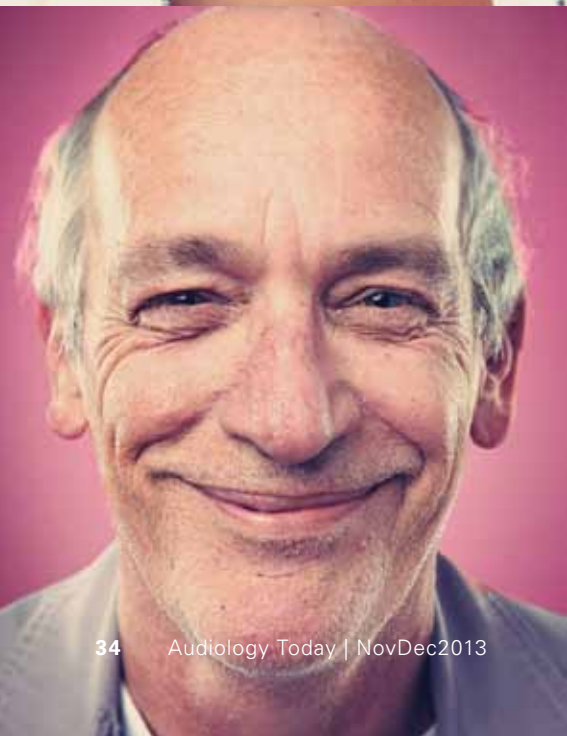
Miss America 2014, Nina Davuluri, an Indian-American, and runners-up Crystal Lee and Rebecca Yeh, Asian-Americans, epitomize the changing face of America the Beautiful. For those of us who have lived and worked in many U.S. cities, this does not seem like news at all. We are well aware of the richness of living in a culturally diverse community, which speaks languages other than English, eats a variety of foods, and has its own traditions and music, the people a tapestry woven with threads of many colors. As America's demographics change, we may ask, who will be our patients, what languages will they speak, and will audiology understand how to best reach, communicate with, and meet the needs of a population that is much more diverse? Diversity may be defined to include gender, culture, ethnicity, language, race, religion, and sexual orientation.

U.S. News and World Report has identified audiology as among the top professions of the future. Combined with an armamentarium of skills, competencies and technologies, our newly minted AuDs are ready and eager to diagnose and treat the hearing and balance needs of America's children and adults. They are embarking on a career that will take them well into the middle of this century. If we have taught them well, we have instilled the desire to be life-long learners. They will learn new scientific truths and clinical protocols that have yet to be discovered. Education and technology alone, however, may not be sufficient to connect with the new faces, languages and cultures of this new century. The purpose of this article will be to provide readers with an overview of the changing demographics of the population.

Bigger, Older, and More Diverse

It is estimated that by the middle of this century, the population of the United States will increase by 100 million to a total of nearly 400 million people. We are all aware that the boomers, those born between 1948 and 1964, are here. For the next 18 years, 10,000

persons each day will turn 65. This has been greatly anticipated within the hearing health-care space. The fact is, however, that although demographic of 65 years old and older will increase from 13 to 20 percent of the general population, this will not



be the group most responsible for America's growth.

Where will the largest growth come from? Babies. In 2006, the U.S. fertility rate reached a 45-year high of 2.1 births per female (primarily due to higher birth rates among immigrant population). The U.S. fertility rate is already 50 percent higher than Russia, Germany, Japan, and well above China, Italy, Singapore, South Korea, and virtually all of Europe. It is estimated that between 2000 and 2050, the age group between 15 and 64 years of age will represent 42 percent of the population. The U.S. will actually have approximately 350 million people under age 65 (Shrestha, 2011).

This is in stark contrast to the rest of the world, where the numbers of people younger than 65 are actually declining. The populations of Europe, Japan, China, and South Korea are aging without the surge of births. In each of these countries 30 percent or more of their populations will be over age 65. These countries, unlike the United States, do not attract immigrant populations.

Changing Demographics

The changing ethnic, cultural, and racial diversity over the next 40 years is a result of growing minority birthrates and immigration. In 2011, whites represented 63 percent of the population, with Hispanics and Asians representing 17 and 5 percent respectively (Smithsonian, 2013). See FIGURE 1 for the breakdown of population through 2050. By 2050 the United States will look like this:

- Whites will no longer be a majority—down to 47 percent.
- Minorities will exceed 50 percent of the U.S. population.
- No other advanced country will see this diversity.
- Latino and Asian populations will triple.
- Forty percent of all children younger than age five will be Hispanic.

Immigrants: The U.S. Economy Needs Them

According to the United Nations (Henning, 2012), it is estimated that two million persons move from poor countries each year, with 50 percent of this emigration wave moving to the United States. Without this influx

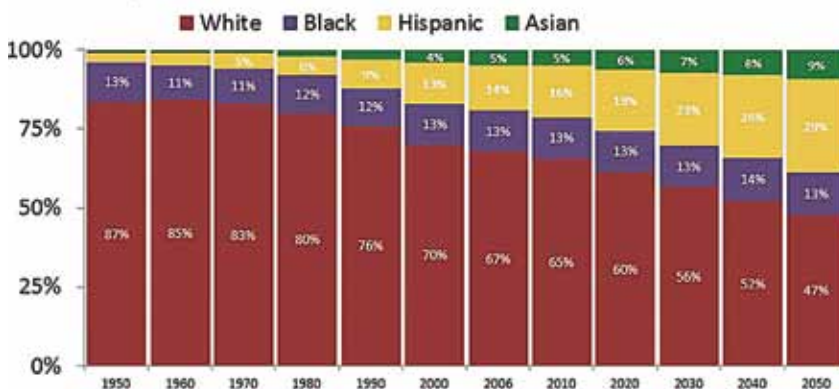


FIGURE 1. U.S. demographics through 2050.

of immigrants there would not be a sufficient working-age population to support the tax base and fund Social Security and Medicare for the increasing segment of the elderly population drawing on these services. Likewise, without a working-age population, who would do the work in the professions, manufacturing and service industries. Consider the following:

- The United States is home to 12.5 million skilled immigrants. This equals the combined total of skilled immigrants in Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and Japan.
- Between 1990 and 2005, immigrants accounted for one out of

four venture-capital backed public companies.

- Fifteen of the Fortune 100 companies have CEOs with foreign roots.

The Medical Profession: Same Demographic Changes

For past generations, the face of a physician was that of a white middle-aged male. You may remember *Marcus Welby, MD*, a popular television show of the 1970s, about the quintessential family doctor played by the actor Robert Young, who also played the dad in the *Father Knows Best* series of the 1950s. Diversity among physicians is growing and changing just as is the general population. This should be considered

whenever analyzing the entire landscape of diversity and the impact on how a practice may market or position itself within its community. The first significant diversity shift has been in the gender composition among physicians.

Gender

There was a 430 percent increase in female physicians between 1980 and 2009 (AAMC, 2011). Today, one-third of all physicians are women, and this will continue to increase, due to the approaching retirement of male boomer physicians and increasing entry into medical school by females. In 1980, females only accounted for 20 percent of medical students; by 2007 they were at 49 percent, and the number of females is projected to increase

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to 54 percent by 2025 (AAMC, 2011). A recent survey of female fourth-year medical students reported the distribution of their interests in specialties as follows: 73 percent pediatrics, 55 percent family practice, 45 percent internal medicine, and 83 percent OB/GYN. There is also an interaction between ethnicity and gender, with an increasing number of female physicians represented within all ethnic groups. The ethnicity of both male and female physicians in 2008 may be seen in FIGURE 2.

This pattern of increasing number of female physicians is an inverse relationship to the number of physicians in independent private practice. In 2000, 57 percent of all physicians were in an independent practice, by 2013, that percentage had fallen to 33 percent. It is estimated that the percentage of family and specialty physicians in a private practice may fall to as low as 12–15 percent within the next five years.

Quite simply, physicians are leaving independent practice to become employees of hospitals, health-care corporations, and multispecialty groups. This trend is based on a variety of factors including the complexity of managing a medical practice, reduced reimbursement, and payment incentives through the Affordable Care Act, which pays hospital- and organization-owned physicians a facility fee in addition to the physician charges, as part of Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs).

This allows today's female physicians the flexibility to work more reasonable hours or even the option of part-time schedules, unlike their predecessors, thus allowing them the balance of a fulfilling, well-paying career and a family.

Ethnicity

Beyond the significant gender shift, the shift in the ethnicity of physicians is substantial, and there is also an interaction between ethnicity and gender. The ethnicity of physicians in 2008 may be seen in FIGURE 2.

It is prudent, however, to look at the trends for entry into medical schools to understand the future ethnic composition of America's physicians. Just as with the increasing female attendance, we see an increasing percentage of minority representations. Why is this important? It has been reported (Chen, 2013) that across the general population, patients have long-lasting and more harmonious relationships with physicians of the same race. Patients view their doctor appointments as more satisfactory and intimate and their doctors as more caring and compassionate. This is an important factor, as according to the American Medical Association, over 25 percent

of all physicians are foreign trained. In my practice, we have utilized these trends, as can be seen in FIGURE 3, when marketing to the medical profession. In addition we continue to reach out to the global medical community with education in their own languages as seen in FIGURE 4 (Passel, 2008).

Diversity Marketing

Corporate giants such as Chevrolet, Walmart, and yes, even McDonald's, have crashed and burned when they arrogantly or ignorantly failed to recognize the power of cultured diversity apart from language alone. Attempting to insert one's own brand, style, product, or successes from elsewhere into another culture is naïve and may not produce the expected results. Likewise, not recognizing the growing diversity of the population may impair your practice's ability to reach a sizable and valuable segment of the community.

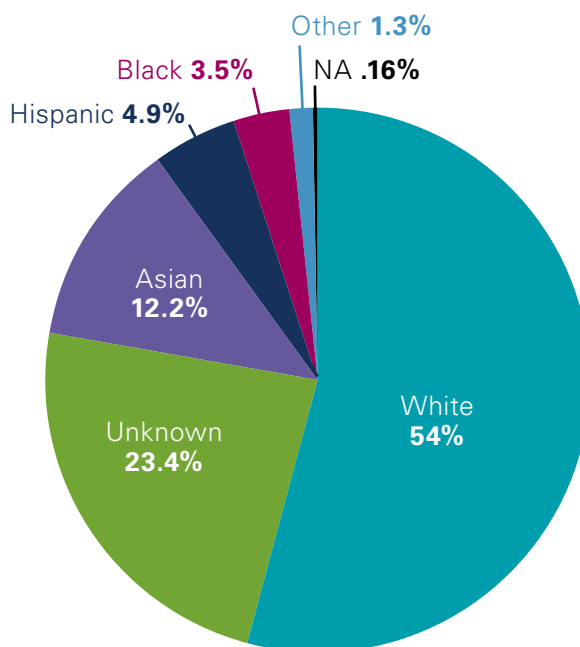


FIGURE 2. Ethnic representation of U.S. physicians.

This set of specific consumer tastes based on different life experiences, cultures, and social settings is referred to as “cultural programming” (Bloor, 2010). Because of the lasting imprint of cultural programming, the tastes, values, expectations, beliefs, ways of interaction, ways of entertaining, and lifestyle preferences of these groups tend to be different from others. These differences require the creation of customized marketing strategies. By catering to the racial, ethnic, and cultural differences in a diverse population, sophisticated businesses expand their market share and attract a new and loyal customer base by providing products and services desired by each minority group.

One only needs to spend an hour watching commercials on the Spanish-language television stations Telemundo and Univision to see how differently well-known companies and brands advertise to the Hispanic community. Products are positioned and merchandised within a cultural context, not just a translation from English into Spanish. Whether the product is dishwashing soap or cars, the entire marketing experience is shaped for the target audience. Companies that have enjoyed market penetration into these culturally diverse communities understand “Hablamos su idioma”—we speak your language, a much more powerful commitment than simply “Hablamos Espanol.”

Understand that there is diversity among minority groups themselves. For example, in Florida we have a large and diverse Hispanic population. They are not at all homogenous, coming from Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. Remember Latin America represents twice the land mass of the continental United States and twice the population. The entire continental



FIGURE 3. Medical marketing to a changing physician demographic.



FIGURE 4. Multilingual education.

United States would fit neatly into Brazil, whose native language is Portuguese, not Spanish. So if you are targeting a growing, well-educated, and affluent Brazilian immigrant population, recognize that your messaging needs to reflect not only a different culture but a different language than their South American neighbors. This certainly is the case as well with regions on the West Coast with large Asian populations representing immigrants from India, Indonesia, South Korea, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand, and Japan. To lump these very distant cultures into “the Asians” is insensitive and one which will not produce a good outcome.

Conclusion

The United States is undergoing significant demographic changes,

which will continue well into this century. The combined buying power of America’s minorities will increase from \$1.6 trillion in 2010 to more than \$2 trillion by 2015. The Hispanic market alone, at \$1 trillion (in 2010), is larger than the economies of all but 14 countries in the world. Moreover, 46 percent of all mothers in the United States are Latina, black, or Asian. This cultural diversity will be seen in both the general population and the physicians who care for them. Audiologists and practices that understand and embrace the richness and opportunities associated with cultural diversity will enjoy the rewards. ❶

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