

Using genetics to establish ethnicity often ignores social context

Researchers often seek to gather empirical data to make objective conclusions about their research. But pure scientific objectivity may actually lead to biased results, according to one researcher.

Ruha Benjamin, a former postgraduate fellow at the UCLA Institute for Society and Genetics, spoke...about the dangers of removing social context from scientific research....

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In her presentation, Benjamin discussed the emerging use of genetics by researchers to determine cultural identity...[and how] genetic testing is being used to qualify ethnicity, which disregards the social context of cultural identity.

She said the United Kingdom began administering genetic tests to asylum seekers in 2009 to determine the “true refugees” from an accepted list of nations like Somalia and the “fakes” from neighboring regions like Kenya. Similarly, ethnic groups in southern Africa have started using genetic testing to determine entrance to statehoods.

“In both cases [of genetic testing], officials sought an ‘objective’ technology to make decisions that would be free from bias,” said Aaron Panofsky, the vice chair for undergraduate education at the UCLA Institute for Society and Genetics. “But what they ended up with were decisions that reflected social biases.”

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion, and analysis. Read full, original post: [Researcher challenges the idea of scientific neutrality at UCLA talk](#)