

Who Chooses to Choose Two?
Multiracial Identity of Children with Parents of Different Races

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Prior to the 2000 Census, researchers estimated that the size of the multiracial population could range between 3.1 and 6.6 percent (Goldstein and Morning, 2000). However, many fewer (2.4 percent) identified as multiracial, and those that did are much younger than the population as a whole. Within a few of the primary biracial groups, median ages are extremely low: 9 for those who are identified as black/white and 18 for those who are identified as Asian/white. Thus, for a large number of multiracial Americans, parents assign racial identity.

In this paper, we focus on the children who would be most likely to be identified as multiracial: children with parents of different races. We use the 1 percent PUMS from the 2000 census, restrict our analysis to children living in two parent families, and ask the following questions. To what extent do parents of different races identify their children as multiracial? Do patterns of multiracial reporting depend on the specific race of each parent? Are the socioeconomic characteristics of the family relevant?

Our preliminary research finds that most parents of mixed race children choose *not* to identify their children as mixed race. Using multivariate logit models which control for age of the child, region of the United States, race of the mother, race of the father, educational attainment, nativity, and metropolitan status, we find the likelihood of reporting a child as multiracial depends very much on the specific racial combination of the parents (Figure 1).

Children of Asian/white and black/white interracial couples are far more likely to report their child as multiracial than Native American/white, non-Latino other/white, and Latino other/white parents. However, even among Asian/white and black/white couples, only about half report their children as multiracial. Among black/white couples, most who do not report their children as multiracial report them as black. Among Asian/white and Latino other/white couples, most who do not report their children as multiracial report them as white. Native American/white couples are about evenly divided between reporting their children as only American Indian or only white. Just as the levels of multiracial reporting vary between the racial combinations of the parents, we believe that the reasons for multiracial reporting are particular to each combination of multiracial parents.

Gender matters in the assignment of racial identity to children of mixed race couples (Figure 2). Multiracial identity is more commonly selected for children of a mixed race black/white couple if it is the father who is black rather than the mother, and the opposite pattern prevails among Native Americans. When a multiracial identity is *not* chosen for the child, the father's race is more commonly selected. That is, if the father is black and the mother is white and only one race is chosen for the child, the choice is more often black than white. If the father is white and the mother is black, the choice is more often white when only one race is selected for the child. Similar results are found for Asian/white couples. These findings are consistent with those of Saenz et al. (1995), Harris and Sim (2002), and Xie and Goyette (1998).

Mixed race couples with young children are more likely to identify that child as multiracial than mixed race couples with older children. This age pattern is especially

pronounced for children with one black parent and one white parent (Figure 2). For those children, well over half of one-year olds are identified as multiracial black/white whereas only 42 percent of 17 year olds are identified so identified. The pattern is also found among Asian and white parents, though it is much less pronounced. There are at least several reasons for this age pattern. First, parents with older children had those children many years ago when the only categories available on most forms and surveys were monoracial categories. Those parents are less likely to adopt the multiracial format for reporting their children's racial identity precisely because they have become accustomed to reporting their children as monoracial. Second, older children might be more likely to have a say in the reporting of their racial identity by their parents. Those older children might have had experiences that have led them to strongly identify with only one racial identity. Those experiences could include facing discrimination and/or prejudice directed at a monoracial group, identifying with a set of monoracial peers, and/or education that has raised an individual's ethnic or cultural awareness. Third, the finding could be measurement error, as older children are less likely to be the biological child of both parents in the household. Waters (1990) found that older people are less likely to identify as multiethnic than are younger people.

Finally, college-educated mixed race couples are more likely to identify their children as multiracial than less educated parents. More educated parents might be more savvy with respect to census forms than other parents, and are probably more likely to have followed debates and discussions about changing racial and ethnic understandings and categories.

Still, the most striking finding in our preliminary analyses of 2000 census data is how few mixed race couples identify their children as multiracial. Overall, fewer than half of children living with parents of different races are identified as multiracial. The proportions are especially low for two of the largest biracial groups, with only 13 percent of Native American/white couples and only 3 percent of Latino other/white couples identifying their children as biracial. Next steps in this paper will be to explore these correlates more carefully, examine multiracial identification among children living with single parents, and among children living with married parents who are not of different races.

References:

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Figure 1

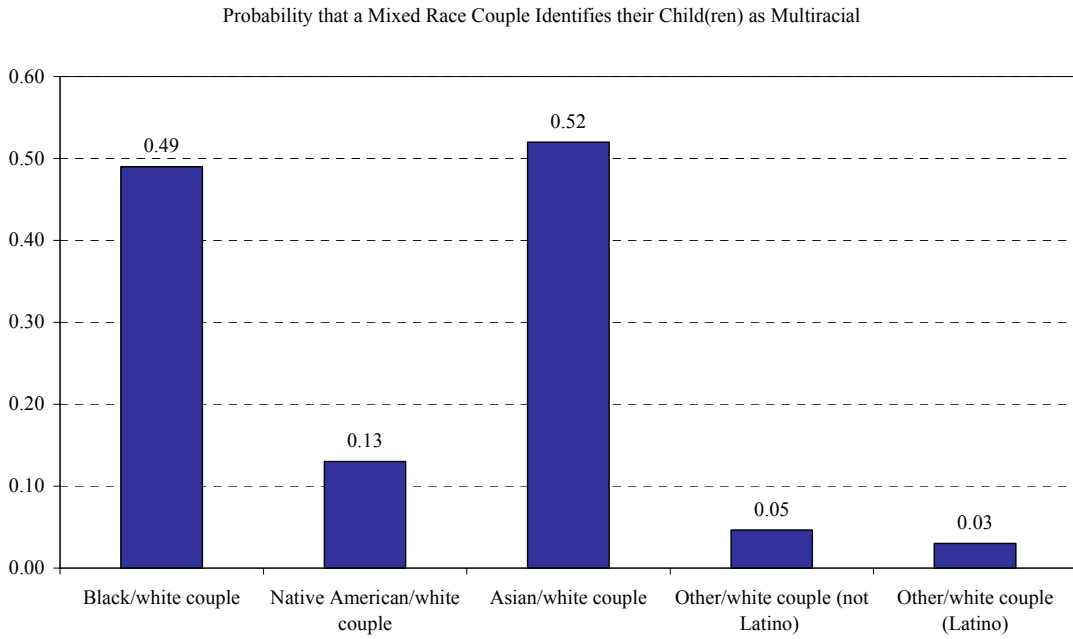


Figure 2

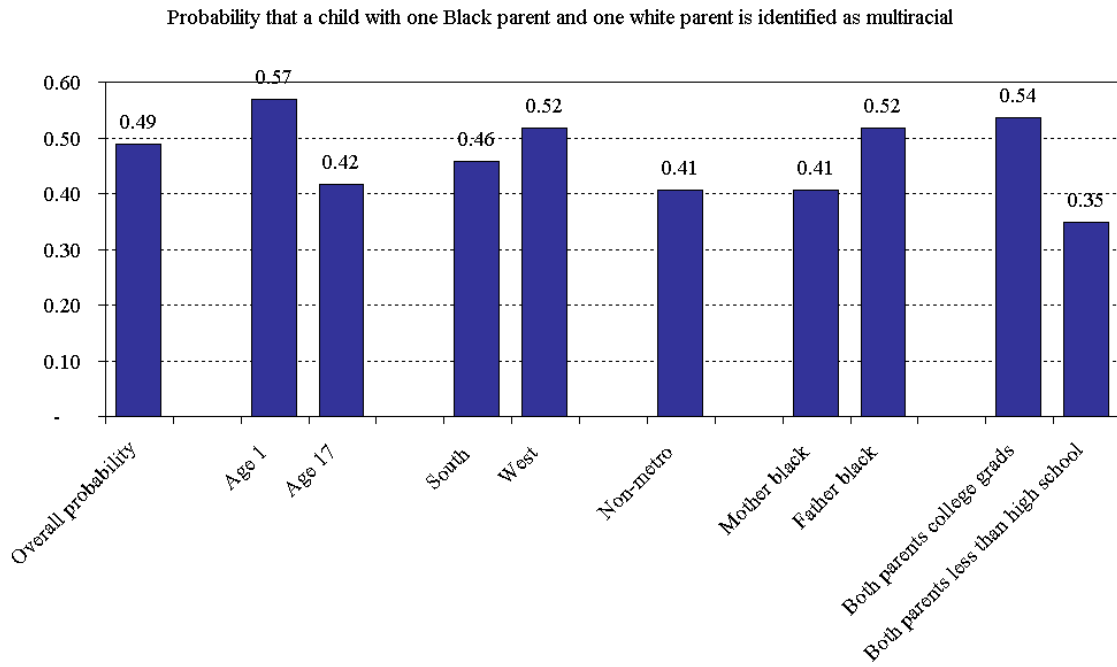
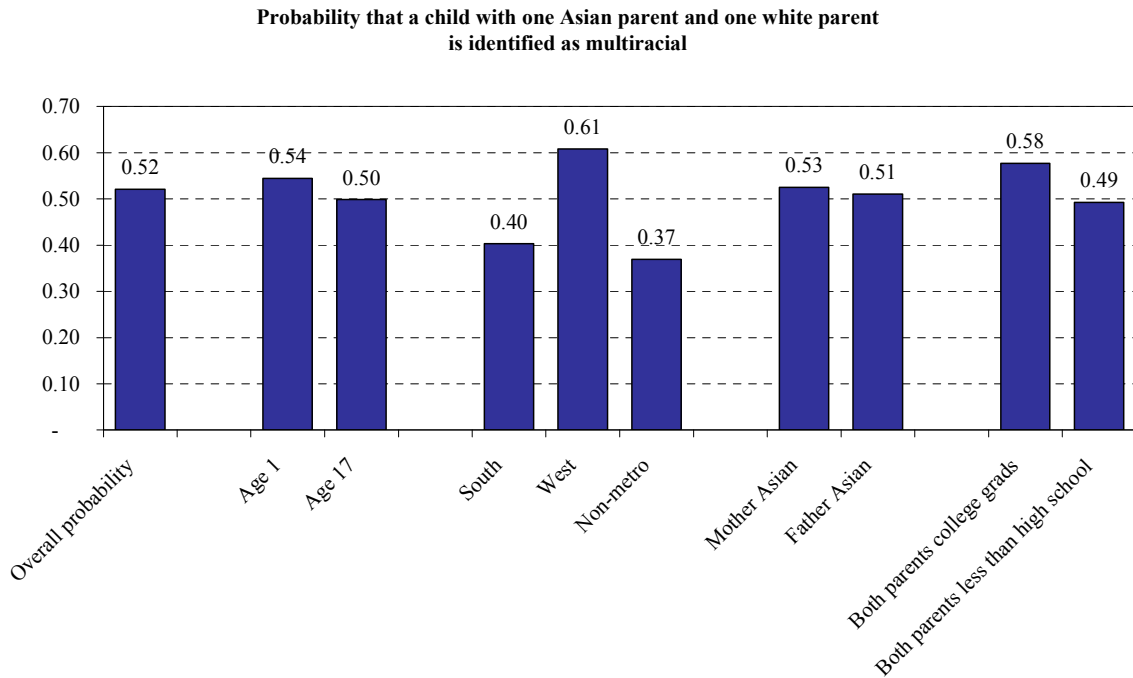
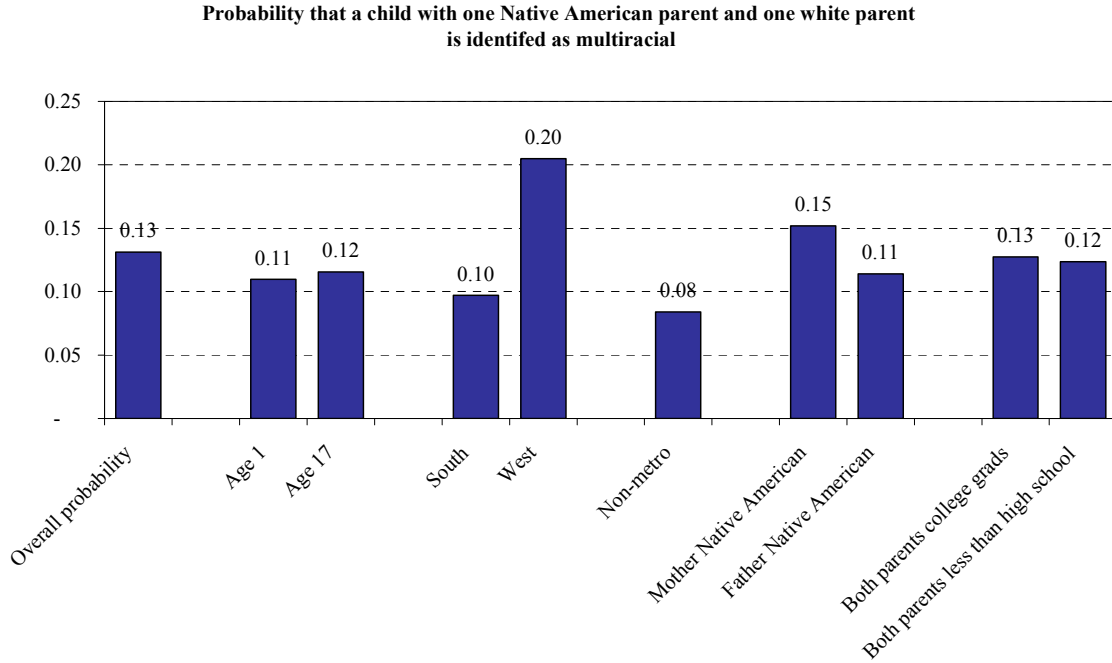


Figure 2
(Continued)



Note: Figures 1 and 2 present simulation results from multivariate logits.