

FACT SHEET: Mixed Race Reporting

Mixed race ethnic identification reporting

Census Bureau research indicates that the number of children living in mixed race families has been increasing since 1970. In 1970, the number of children living in mixed race families was 460,000, in 1980 this number was at 996,070 and by 1990 this number grew to 1,937,496. In 1997 the Office of Management and Budget made the decision to provide the option for mixed race persons to “mark one of more races”, which would also serve to measure the increased diversity in the United States (Census 2000, March 2001). Racial identity is first established in the context of families. A striking result of the 2000 Census is that most in interracial parents do not report their children as multiracial. A report published by the Russell Sage Foundation and the Population Reference Bureau found that less than 44% of children living with parents of different races chose to identify their children as multiracial. These percentages were especially low for children of American Indian/white couples and Latino SOR/white couples.

- ❑ The preponderance of possible multiracial combinations is a direct reflection of the relative population sizes of the single race groups. Of 15 possible biracial combinations, only two, SOR and white and AIAN and white, have population counts over 1 million. The racial combination most frequently selected was of SOR and white, composing 35% of all biracial responses. The majority of those who selected SOR alone were Latino, resulting in two thirds of these respondents also identifying as ethnically Latino. In a separate census question that elicits ancestry, the non- Latino third of this group reported an array of different ancestries including Greek, Italian, Irish, Russian, Ukrainian, Albanian, Egyptian, Iranian and Arab. For these respondents, their identity may reflect mixed parentage, and understanding of race at odds with census categories, or an ancestry that is nominally white but an experience in the society at large as only marginally white (Tafoya, Johnson & Hill, 2004).
- ❑ The next two largest groups were represented by Asian and white comprising 13.6% of the biracial population and Black and white comprising 12.3% of the biracial population. Both of these counts were greater than half a million but less than one million. These two combinations are made up primarily of non-Hispanics: ninety three percent of all Asian and white respondents were non-Hispanic as were 89% of black and white respondents. These two groups account for one fifth of the biracial population (Tafoya, Johnson & Hill, 2004).
- ❑ Whether a child is reported as multiracial or not appears to depend on the specific racial combination of the parents. One of the most striking results of the 2000 Census was the discovery that most interracial couples do not report their children as multiracial. Research by the Population Research Bureau (Tafoya, Johnson & Hill, 2004) found that over half (66%) of multiracial children were identified as monoracial. These numbers were especially low for the two of the largest biracial groups. Of American Indian/white couples, only 13% identified their children mixed race and of Latino SOR/white couples, only 3% identified their children as mixed race. Parents who are more likely to report their child as multiracial are Asian/white and black/white interracial couples. Among Asian/white and Latino SOR/white couples, most of these parents reported their children as white. American Indian/white couples tended to be divided evenly between reporting their children as American Indian or white. The reasons for multiracial reporting appear to be particular to each combination of multiracial parents (Tafoya, Johnson, Hill, 2004). For example, the American Indian

- population includes a large number of people with mixed ancestry and with varying degrees of strength in an AIAN identity (Snipp, 2002).
- ❑ Those who strongly identify as American Indian are likely to report their children as monoracial American Indian, even if one parent is white. Most American Indian tribes allow members individuals who have one “full blooded” grandparent (Thornton, 1996). Therefore, an AIAN parent with strong connections to a tribe is likely to report their child as American Indian regardless of their spouse’s ethnicity. Relatedly, those who do not identify strongly as AIAN, which is an apparently large share of the AIAN population in the United States, and who have a child with a white spouse, report the child as white. The low levels of multiracial reporting among Latino mixed race SOR can be attributed to the prominence of Latino identity rather than racial identity.
 - ❑ Couples were the most likely to identify their children as multiracial when both parents are multiracial. Of this group, 83% identified their children as multiracial. Even the presence of one multiracial parent increased the probability of a child being identified as multiracial – over 50% of children identified as multiracial have at least one multiracial parent. The gender of the parent reporting a mixed race identity also factors in (Tafuya, Johnson, Hill, 2004).
 - ❑ The Multiracial category in Census 2000 was at 6.8 million, or 2.4% of the total US population, though this may be undercounted, as centuries of adhering to the “one drop” rule still pervade U.S. racial categorization. This number includes the majority of multiracial selection of bi-racials, with a smaller portion claiming three or more races. This number is projected to be 7.5 million in 2007. Of this group, 42 percent, or 2.9 million, of these multiracial individuals were under 18. Geographically, Hawaii is “off the chart” at 21.4% multiracial, followed by Alaska at 4.9%, California at 4.7%, and Oklahoma at 4.5%.
 - ❑ Hawaii is unusual because unlike the typical pattern, more of its residents claim 3 or more races (16.7%) than claim only 2 races (4.7%). In the rest of the US, only 1.10th of multiracial residents claim more than 2 races. Russell Sage Foundation demographer Reynolds Farley estimates that mixed race young people currently number at least four million, and that while a quarter of them are of black and white parentage, about 70% are from families where one parent is white and the other parent is Asian American, Latino/Hispanic or Native American.
 - ❑ Because one third of all biracial Americans are also Hispanic, the geographic distributions of Hispanics has an influence on the overall distribution of biracial Americans. Over one third (37%) of biracial Americans in the West are also Latinos. This differs most notably from the Midwest, where only 19% of biracial Americans are also Latino (Tafuya, Johnson & Hill, 2004: 8). Latinos choose SOR + white as the most common biracial response, particularly in the West. The second most common biracial combination for Latinos is the SOR + black, which is the most common in the Northeast, where Puerto Rican and Dominican national origin groups compose a large, at 53%, share of the regional Latino population (Tafuya, Johnson & Hill, 2004). Puerto Ricans and Dominicans are more likely than other national origin groups to identify as racially black (Tafuya, Johnson & Hill, 2004: 12).

- ❑ Without factoring in the multi-racial backgrounds of most Latinos and American Indians, according to a 2002 report by the Population Division of the U.S. Census, the 2000 Census may actually reflect a vast underreporting of the potential pool of multiracial children, which may be closer to 4.5 million (Nakazawa, 2003: pxi-xii). In the United States, (2000 data) 1 in 16 children under the age of eighteen are now multiracial. When looking at current birthrates, that number is significantly higher, and in 2003, as many as 2 in 10 babies may be multiracial. The rate of mixed marriages is an increasing trend. In 1990 there were 1.5 million mixed marriages. In 2000 there were 4 million mixed marriages. The number of multiracial births is likely to grow exponentially (Nakazawa, 2003).
- ❑ Multiracial youth now compose one of the fastest growing segments of the U.S. population. Demographers look to the under 18 population to predict ways in which the profile of our country is growing and changing. The multiracial population is, as a group, younger than their monoracial counterparts. Of the 6.8 million reported multiracials, 42% were under the age of 18 compared to 25% for monoracial Americans (Tafoya, Johnson & Hill, 2004:9). It is estimated that 54% of multiracials are under the age of 25, while 42% are under the age of 18. When we compare this to the population as a whole, only 25% are under age 18 (Wellner, 2003).
- ❑ The most striking difference is in the age differences of monoracial youths. This suggests that multiracial identities are being chosen by the parents. Both black and white and Asian and white individuals skew significantly younger than other Asians or Whites. For AIAN and SOR plus white groups, age and sex profiles appear to be comparative to monoracial group age profiles. Several reasons attribute to the reporting of these very young multiracials. For one, biracial couples are more of a contemporary occurrence, and their offspring would then be relatively young. Racial boundaries that were more historically constrained are less so. These racial boundaries would have forced a multiracial to choose one race over the other. Also, younger multiracial individuals are more likely to identify as such that their older cohorts, who were more likely to choose only one race.
- ❑ The one drop rule, or hypodescent, is a US tradition that has distant roots in the anti Roman traditions of northwestern Europe. Most male colonists came to North America with their wives or found wives among their own segregated ethnic communities once they arrived in the English and Dutch colonies. Therefore, in the beginning there was little chance that significant numbers of persons of mixed race descent would even occur. During this time, the two numerically significant non- European groups were Native Americans and Africans, the former being considered internal nations without the rights of citizenship. This discouraged intermarriage. Race theories during the 19th century also posited natural boundaries between the European and non-European groups. These theories gave European ethnic groups rights under international law but did not recognize the case of non-Europeans because they were not considered nations like the Europeans. Thus, the non-European races had rights a white man was compelled to respect by law. In North America, this type of thinking translated to the easy breaking of treaties with native Americans and the enslavement of Africans, as well as violating the sovereign territories of Mexico, the Philippines, Puerto Rico and Hawaii (Fernandez, 1996).

- ❑ After the end of the Civil War, as the federal troops left the South and the Reconstruction ended, notorious Jim Crow laws appeared, including antimiscegenation laws. Antimiscegenation laws were directed toward mixed bloods. By making interracial liaisons illegal, the offspring of these unions would be illegal, and therefore unable to inherit property, which is an important basis for capital accumulation and power. The one-drop rule was used to prove that any nonwhite ancestry, no matter how small, was proof of nonwhite status. The rule of hypodescent continues to apply to anyone whose surname or appearance suggest a particular ethnicity, even when in fact they are multiethnic (Fernandez, 1996: 22).
- ❑ Another strong predictor of multiracial self identity on the US Census is age. Most multiracial respondents to the 2000 Census tended to be younger than their monoracial counterparts. Twenty year old black householders are nine times more likely to report a multiracial identity than 60 year old blacks, and 20 year old Asian American householders are almost twice as likely to identify as multiracial as 60 year old Asians (Tafoya, Johnson & Hill, 2004). This age pattern is undoubtedly a reflection of increasing rates of intermarriage over time. Younger individuals are more likely to have been born to parents of different races than older individuals. In addition, younger adults developed their own racial identities in very different social, political and cultural settings than older adults, and might feel less restricted by traditional monoracial categories (Tafoya, Johnson & Hill, 2004: 14).

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