

Patterns in the Race Responses for Young Children of All Intermarriages for Half a Century

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How Do Intermarried Parents* Report a Child's Race?

Children who have interracially married single-race parents (theoretically) have equal claim to two single-race race groups.

Question 1: When two people of different races have a child together, what race(s) do they call the child when reporting to the census? Is a child reported as both groups? Or one? Which one?

Key finding 1: Race is socially constructed, not automatically assigned. Not all interracially married parents report their children as multiracial. There is no universally dominant race response for these young children.

Question 2: What can six decades of census data tell us about how intermarried parents decide how to report their child's race?

Key finding 2: Variation in predictors across types of intermarriage points to group-specific processes involved in forming and negotiating race group meanings and boundaries.

* There is evidence that in most families, the householder or spouse (the parents, in these cases) filled out the census form.

Data on Children of Intermarriage in Six Censuses

Data: Restricted-use full-count decennial Census microdata: 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010, and restricted-use 25% 1960 decennial Census microdata file.

Analytic sample: All children of the household head, ages 0-9, in families where the head and spouse report different single races. Triad was excluded if: a parent's or child's race or relationship status was imputed or allocated. Case counts in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Number of young children from 15 types of interracial marriage



Distribution of Child Race Responses Varies by Group and Time

Figure 2: Distribution of young children's reported races* in 1960 through 2010



* 15 parent race combinations are shown, with each pair shown twice (W-B is the same data as B-W). Note that Pacific Islander was not an option in 1960. A few children were excluded whose race response was not in the above categories.

Importance of Our Results for Demographers

- There has been *change over time* in how parents report their children's races. Strategies for assigning births to race groups should differ by decade.
- There are *differences across groups* in how parents report their children's races.
- Demographic models should recognize complexity; both single-race and multiple-race responses are common for children of interracially married couples.

DISCLAIMER: Any opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Census Bureau. All results have been reviewed to ensure that no confidential information is disclosed.

Predictors of Child Race Responses – Selected Regression Results

In the figures below, we depict significant coefficients (at the 90-percent confidence level) selected from 85 multivariate models predicting whether the child's race is reported as the same as parent X. Each bar shows the percent relative effect $(= (rrr-1)*100)$ of that significant coefficient in that family type in that year. All bars are on the same scale and truncated such that a 100 indicates that a child is at least 100% more likely (at least twice as likely) to be reported parent race X if the child/parent/area has that characteristic. Note that some effects exceed the scales. A blank column shows a non-significant coefficient or a variable that was not included.

Fig. 3A: Hispanic Ethnicity Responses Predict Child's Response

If parents and child all report Hispanic, the child is more likely to be reported as White and less likely to be reported as Black.

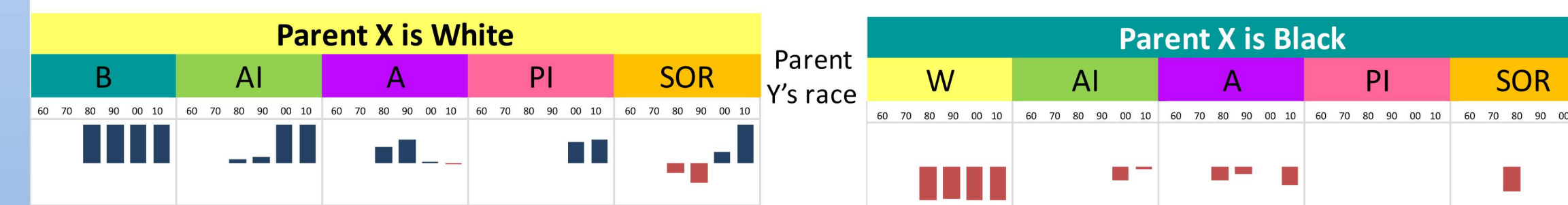


Fig. 3B: Child's Response Often Follows the Householder/Father

If a White father is the householder, the child is more likely to be reported as White. If the Black father is the householder, the child is more likely to be reported as Black (except in the case where the mother is White).

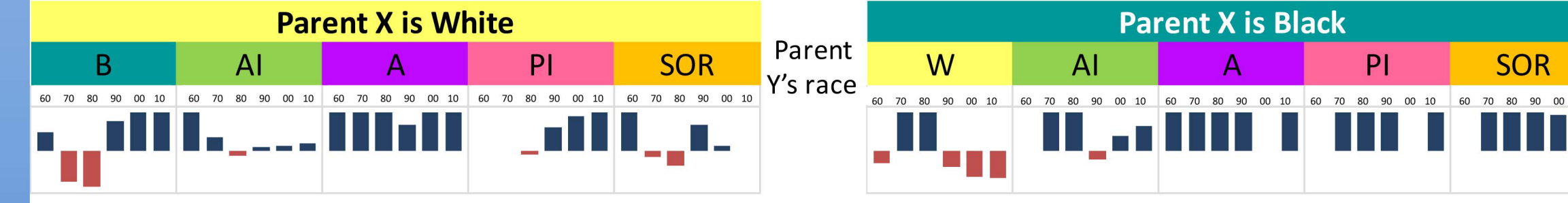


Fig. 3C: Living in the West Predicts Asian and PI Responses

Children of Pacific Islanders and of Asians are more likely to be reported as Pacific Islander or Asian if they live in the West.

