

Multi-Racial Extended Families in the U.S.

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ABSTRACT

This paper assesses the prevalence of multi-racial extended families in the U.S. and describes characteristics of members. We rely on descriptions of the racial/ethnic composition of their extended families provided by a national probability sample of U.S. residents participating in the 2010 General Social Survey (GSS). Some intriguing findings: Approximately 55% of non-Hispanic whites report having extended families that encompass people of color -- African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders and/or American Indians/Alaska Natives, including 28% claiming American Indian/Alaska Native representation. A number of relationships were identified between respondent characteristics and reports that people of color are included in respondents' extended families. To mention a few: As expected, Westerners are disproportionately likely to claim Latino, Asian American, and American Indian/Alaska Native relatives. Older respondents were less likely to report having diverse extended families, arguably a result of response bias. Better educated respondents were more likely to claim Latino and Asian American relatives, and less likely to claim American Indian/Alaska Native family members. Democrats were more likely than Republicans to report African American members of their extended families.

INTRODUCTION

On the basis of models developed using census and GSS data from the 1990s, Joshua Goldstein (1999) estimated that at that time 14% of white Americans (as well as 33% of black Americans, 80% of Asian Americans, and 95% of American Indians) belonged to multi-racial extended families—not including Hispanics as a distinct group.

That number of inter-racial extended families must be a quantum jump larger when Hispanic/non-Hispanic families are considered to be mixed, and when we ask about 21st century patterns. In a 2010 report, the Pew Research Center estimated that 14.6% of new marriages in the U.S. in 2008 were mixed, involving spouses of differing race or ethnicity, with Hispanics considered one category and non-Hispanic whites, blacks, Asians, American Indians, and “multiracial” or “other” individuals comprising the other categories. The 14.6% figure is roughly double the intermarriage rate in 1980.

Intermarriage is not the only source of growth in families that include a racial/ethnic mix of members. The number of Americans adopting children from other countries has also been increasing: By 2000 approximately 20,000 visas per year were granted to children from abroad being adopted by Americans (Ishizawa et al. 2006). In most cases, the adoptive parents are white, and for those white adoptive parents only 28% of the adopted children are white. Most of the adopted children documented in the Ishizawa et al. research were either Asian (53%) or Latino (approximately 18%).

For each instance of intermarriage or cross-racial/ethnic adoption, there are typically a number of extended family members whose family unit has thereby become racially or ethnically mixed.

The Present Study

The current project uses survey responses from a national probability sample of American households to address the following questions:

What percentages of non-Hispanic white respondents report their extended family to include: African Americans? Hispanics or Latinos? Asian Americans? American Indians/Alaska Natives? Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders?

What percentages of non-Hispanic whites have extended families where more than one of these traditional “outgroups” is represented?

What can be said about the region of residence, demographic descriptors, socioeconomic status, and political perspectives of non-Hispanic whites reporting extended families that encompass various other racial/ethnic groups?

We do not have detailed information about the extended families per se, other than their racial/ethnic mix, but learning about the GSS-respondent family members who serve as informants is valuable in itself.

METHODOLOGY

The sample.

Data for this project come from the 2010 General Social Survey (GSS). The 2010 GSS was administered to a stratified, multi-stage sample of non-institutionalized English- and Spanish-speaking Americans over the age of 17 by the University of Chicago’s National Opinion Research Center (NORC). The sampling technique is fully described in the General Social Surveys 1972-2010 Cumulative Codebook.

The data.

The survey item that serves as foundation for this research is the following multi-part question:

“Think about your own extended family, including children, grandchildren, parents, step-parents, spouse, parents-in-law, also including brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, first cousins, and all their spouses. Please tell me whether there are any members of your extended family from each of these racial/ethnic groups.¹

Are any members of your family Black or African American?

Hispanic/Latino? Asian/Asian American? White?

American Indian or Alaska Native?

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander?”

A few respondents evidently excluded spouses from their thinking when answering questions about their extended families. Where a separate response about the race/ethnicity of the spouse indicated representation of a group not included in the extended family responses, the data were adjusted to take spouses into account.

Linkage is examined between the racial/ethnic composition of respondents’ extended families and respondents’ *Region of Residence* (the four standard regions, built from the 9-level census divisions); *Age* (in years); *Gender*²; *Education* (years of schooling); *Occupational Prestige* (with scores ranging from 17 to 86); *Family Income*; *Political Ideology* (self-described liberal or conservative); and *Party Affiliation* (Democrat or Republican).

¹ Respondents were not asked about their own group.

² Gender should not be associated with racial/ethnic composition of extended families: We don’t expect the sex ratio in mixed-race families to differ from the average. But *reports* of extended family composition may show some co-variation with gender; thus we include it here. The same reasoning holds for Age. Although mixed-race families have been increasing in the U.S., older and younger respondents are in theory describing the same current extended family membership; however age is included here to allow for possible age differences in reporting.

RESULTS

Table 1 reveals that substantial percentages of the extended families described by the national probability sample of non-Hispanic whites contain members of color —African Americans, Latinos/Hispanics, Asian Americans, American Indians/Alaska Natives, and/or Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders.

With one exception, these percentages are what we might expect, given the population composition of the United States and our racial history. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander representation is limited in extended families, as it is in the population. Asian Americans are a rapidly growing but still small segment of the population; however whites' disapproval of Asians marrying into their family is relatively low (Pew Research Center 2010), and other factors like international adoption (Ishizawa et al. 2006) and "Korean war brides" work to increase the prevalence of Asian American relatives among non-Hispanic whites. Latinos are only recently the largest "minority" group in the U.S., but they are an ethnic rather than racial minority, and non-Hispanic white intermarriage rates with Latinos have been higher for those with blacks (Pew Research Center 2010).

The Table 1 information that may surprise readers is the large percentage reporting extended families with American Indian/Alaska Native members. It is reasonable to assume that almost all of the affirmative answers to this segment of the extended family question represent American Indians.

Even after very rapid growth in recent decades, in 2010 the percentage of U.S. residents claiming American Indian identity alone or in combination with other racial categories is 1.7% (U.S. Census Bureau 2012). The growth in self-reported American Indians has been of great interest to population researchers and other scholars, because it can't be accounted for demographically and must represent shifting identity (Eschbach 1995; Snipp 1997; Snipp 1998). Cynics sometimes assume this growth derives from attempts to

benefit from gaming revenues or affirmative action; however the rise of activism promoting American Indian rights and pride is the more plausible explanation (Nagel 1997). For many people who include American Indian ancestry along with other family roots (as do 7% of the non-Hispanic white respondents in the GSS), as well as some for whom American Indian is the primary identity, documentation is absent. Benign cynics suggest that it has become fashionable for white Americans to claim a little Indian heritage, perhaps since the time of Will Rogers. At some point anthropologists doing DNA testing to determine ancestry may be able to offer population estimates of American Indian roots in the U.S. (see Parra et al. 1998), but not yet. For the moment we must certainly conclude that American Indian identity is fluid, perhaps similar in some ways to the “symbolic ethnicity” said to characterize many European-origin Americans – an identity that can be celebrated at will, and may be ignored much of the time (Gans 1979; Alba 1992). So also inclusion of American Indians in descriptions of extended families must be considered fluid.

The contents of Table 2 underline the fact that the extended families of many non-Hispanic whites are not just biracial but multiracial, containing representatives of more than one racial/ethnic “outgroup.” Here we examine the prevalence of cases across a ten-category typology of extended families.³

Perhaps the most important fact revealed in Table 2 is that only a minority of non-Hispanic whites’ extended families (44.4%) are entirely non-Hispanic white, containing no members who are African American, Latino/Hispanic, Asian American, American Indian/Alaska Native, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

What are the regional locations of respondents reporting varied types of extended families, and their demographic, socioeconomic, and political characteristics? Table 3 begins to provide answers.

³ Because the numbers of Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders are small, and there is substantial representation of American Indians in descriptions of all family types that include any members of color, the typology includes categories for families where Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders or American Indians/Alaska Natives are the only relatives of color, but does not break out the other diverse family categories in terms of whether they do or do not include Pacific Islanders or American Indians.

As would be expected, non-Hispanic white respondents living in the West were significantly more likely than other respondents to say their extended families include Latinos, Asian Americans, and/or American Indians/Alaska Natives, and more likely than others to claim Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander relatives by a nearly significant amount). Southerners were significantly more likely than other respondents to claim the inclusion of American Indians/Alaska Natives in their extended families, and nearly significantly less likely to claim Latino or Asian American relatives. Northeasterners were significantly less likely than other respondents to report having American Indian/Alaska Natives or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders as members of their extended families. Midwestern respondents were significantly less likely than others to claim Latino or Asian American family members, and were nearly significantly more likely to claim Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders as relatives – a surprise. There are results here that bear further investigation.

We now turn to questions about demographic correlates of membership in multi-racial extended families. Table 4 provides interesting evidence that is troubling from a methodological point of view: Older respondents are significantly less likely than younger respondents to report having African Americans, Latinos, or American Indians/Alaska Natives in their extended families. As noted earlier, multiple factors have been working to increase racial/ethnic diversity in U.S. families over the years. Thus, over their lifespan, older Americans will have experienced less diversity in their families than younger Americans eventually will. However, in 2010, a given level of family diversity existed, on average, and older and younger respondents were in theory describing that same reality. The explanation for the relationship of respondents' age to their family diversity answers must lie in reporting bias: Older respondents, shown in many earlier studies to have more negative views about racial and ethnic minorities, are less likely to claim inclusion of people of color in their extended families. This is a reminder that even if respondents' racial/ethnic perspectives do not affect e.g. their cousins' entry into racially mixed marriages, respondents' willingness to acknowledge those marriages may be affected by their own racial views. Conclusions based

on GSS respondents' reports about the prevalence and correlates of mixed-race extended families must be tempered by this realization.⁴

We looked for evidence of a gender difference in reports of multi-racial extended families, which again would be interpreted as reporting bias. Male respondents were somewhat less likely to claim that their families included any "outgroup" members except American Indians/Alaska Natives; however, in no case did these gender differences attain statistical significance.

Tables 5-7 address questions about links between reports of multi-racial extended families and respondents' socioeconomic status. Better educated respondents were significantly more likely to claim Latino and Asian American inclusion in their extended families and less likely to claim American Indian/Alaska Native inclusion. These associations with education are echoed, but with less strength, in the findings for occupational prestige and family income. The only statistically significant occupational prestige association was with reports of American Indian/Alaska Native relatives, respondents with more prestigious occupations being less likely to claim that their families included members of this "outgroup." In similar fashion, respondents with higher family incomes were significantly less likely than the low income group to claim American Indians/Alaska Natives as relatives. And respondents with higher incomes were significantly more likely to claim they had Asian American relatives.

As revealed in Table 8, political ideology seemed to bear little relationship to reports of multi-racial families, with one exception: Respondents claiming to have Asian American relatives are significantly more likely to describe themselves as liberals than as conservatives.

With respect to political party identification, Table 9 reports a single significant effect: Democrats are more likely than Republicans to say that their extended families include African Americans. It should be

⁴ Significance tests reported for relationships with respondent characteristics represented in Tables 4-9 refer to associations between family composition reports and interval/ratio measures of age, education, occupational prestige, family income, political ideology, and political party identification. These respondent characteristics were dichotomized for ease of presentation in the tables.

noted that the non-significant differences for Latino, Asian American, and American Indian/Alaska Native relatives are all in the same direction – Democrats being more likely to report that these groups are represented in their extended families.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

These 2010 GSS data suggest that more than half of non-Hispanic white Americans have extended families that include people of color. Many of these families are multi-racial, not just bi-racial. Congruent with other evidence that claims of American Indian ancestry have been expanding, more than a quarter of the non-Hispanic white GSS respondents report having American Indian family members. If some proportion of these claims are suspected of being specious, and reports of American Indian/Alaska Native family members discounted entirely (the most extreme adjustment possible), the estimated percentage of non-Hispanic white Americans with extended families that include people of color drops from about 55% to about 45% -- still a sizable share of the non-Hispanic white population.

This paper reported links between respondents' inclusion of people of color in descriptions of their extended families and those respondents' region of residence, age, education, occupational prestige, family income, political ideology, and political party identification. The next steps are to ask about linkages with characteristics of the communities in which respondents live and, importantly, to assess relationships between membership in multi-racial extended families and the racial/ethnic attitudes of these non-Hispanic white respondents.

Finally, small subsample sizes are a limit, but we intend to examine responses of African American and Latino respondents to the battery of questions that ask about the race/ethnic composition of their extended families.

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Table 1. Prevalence of Racial/Ethnic “Outgroup” Members in the Extended Families of Non-Hispanic White GSS Respondents.

Percentage reporting African American family members: (N = 1105)	21.4%
Percentage reporting Latino/Hispanic family members: (N = 1104)	24.7%
Percentage reporting Asian American family members (N = 1109)	15.7%
Percentage reporting American Indian/Alaska Native family members (N = 1070)	27.7%
Percentage reporting Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander family members (N = 1108)	6.0%

Table 2. Prevalence of Nine Types of Racial/Ethnic Mix in Extended Families of Non-Hispanic White GSS Respondents. (N = 1105)

Black(s) but no Latinos or Asian Americans ^a	9.3%
Latino(s) but no Blacks or Asian Americans ^a	11.4%
Asian American(s) but no Blacks or Latinos ^a	6.0%
Black(s) and Latino(s) but no Asian Americans ^a	6.2%
Blacks(s) and Asian American(s) but no Latinos ^a	2.8%
Latino(s) and Asian American(s) but no Blacks ^a	4.3%
Black(s), Latino(s), and Asian American(s) ^a	2.5%
American Indian(s) or Alaska Native(s) only	11.1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders only	2.0%
No members of any groups of color	44.4%

^a These extended families may also include American Indians/Alaska Natives, and/or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders.

Table 3. Prevalence of Racial/Ethnic “Outgroup” Members in the Extended Families of Non-Hispanic White GSS Respondents, Broken Down by Region of Residence.

	Respondent Region of Residence			
	South (Ns=350-369)	West (Ns =222-227)	Northeast (Ns=202-205)	Midwest (Ns=296-311)
% Family includes African Americans	22.1%	19.3%	24.9%	20.0%
% Family includes Latinos/Hispanics	21.5%+	36.6%***	25.0%	19.6%*
% Family includes Asian Amers.	13.0%+	21.6%**	19.1%	12.3%*
% Family includes Amer.Indian/AlaskaNat.	31.7%*	33.8%*	17.3%***	25.3%
% Family includes Native Hawaii./Pacific Isl.	4.3%	8.5%+	2.9%*	8.0%+

+ Difference from the other three regions nearly significant (.10 level)

* Difference from the other three regions significant at .05 level

** Difference from the other three regions significant at .01 level

*** Difference from the other three regions significant at .001 level

Table 4. Prevalence of Racial/Ethnic “Outgroup” Members in the Extended Families of Non-Hispanic White GSS Respondents, Broken Down by Respondent Age.

	Respondent Age	
	Less than 51 years (Ns = 504-525)	At least 51 years (Ns = 563-582)
% Family includes African Americans*	22.5%	20.3%
% Family includes Latinos/Hispanics*	26.7%	22.9%
% Family includes Asian Amers.	15.0%	16.4%
% Family includes Amer.Indian/AlaskaNat.*	30.4%	25.2%
% Family includes Native Hawaii./Pacific Isl.	7.2%	4.8%

* Age effect significant at .05 level

** Age effect significant at .01 level

*** Age effect significant at .001 level

Table 5. Prevalence of Racial/Ethnic “Outgroup” Members in the Extended Families of Non-Hispanic White GSS Respondents, Broken Down by Respondent Education.

	Respondent Education	
	Less than 14 years of education (Ns = 513-531)	At least 14 years of education (Ns = 557-579)
% Family includes African Americans	23.4%	19.6%
% Family includes Latinos/Hispanics**	22.7%	26.6%
% Family includes Asian Amers.***	11.9%	19.2%
% Family includes Amer.Indian/AlaskaNat.***	32.7%	23.0%
% Family includes Native Hawaii./Pacific Isl.	6.0%	5.9%

- * Education effect significant at .05 level
- ** Education effect significant at .01 level
- *** Education effect significant at .001 level

Table 6. Prevalence of Racial/Ethnic “Outgroup” Members in the Extended Families of Non-Hispanic White GSS Respondents, Broken Down by Respondent Occupational Prestige.

	Respondent Occupational Prestige	
	Below the median level of occupational prestige (Ns = 510-532)	Above the median level of occupational prestige (Ns = 527-544)
% Family includes African Americans	22.4%	21.1%
% Family includes Latinos/Hispanics	23.1%	25.5%
% Family includes Asian Amers.	13.8%	17.7%
% Family includes Amer.Indian/AlaskaNat.*	29.8%	25.4%
% Family includes Native Hawaii./Pacific Isl.	7.1%	4.6%

* Occupational prestige effect significant at .05 level
 ** Occupational prestige effect significant at .01 level
 *** Occupational prestige effect significant at .001 level

Table 7. Prevalence of Racial/Ethnic “Outgroup” Members in the Extended Families of Non-Hispanic White GSS Respondents, Broken Down by Respondent’s Family Income.

	Respondent’s Family Income	
	Less than \$50,000 (Ns = 458-477)	At least \$50,000 (Ns = 526-541)
% Family includes African Americans	22.2%	21.7%
% Family includes Latinos/Hispanics	21.5%	28.3%
% Family includes Asian Amers.**	13.2%	18.0%
% Family includes Amer.Indian/AlaskaNat.*	29.3%	27.2%
% Family includes Native Hawaii./Pacific Isl.	5.7%	5.7%

* Family income effect significant at .05 level
 ** Family income effect significant at .01 level
 *** Family income effect significant at .001 level

Table 8. Prevalence of Racial/Ethnic “Outgroup” Members in the Extended Families of Non-Hispanic White GSS Respondents, Broken Down by Political Ideology.

	Respondent Political Ideology	
	Liberal (Ns = 275-286)	Conservative (Ns = 405-418)
% Family includes African Americans	22.2%	21.1%
% Family includes Latinos/Hispanics	26.9%	25.8%
% Family includes Asian Amers.*	21.3%	13.9%
% Family includes Amer.Indian/AlaskaNat.	25.8%	25.7%
% Family includes Native Hawaii./Pacific Isl.	6.7%	7.0%

* Political ideology effect significant at .05 level
 ** Political ideology effect significant at .01 level
 *** Political ideology effect significant at .001 level

Table 9. Prevalence of Racial/Ethnic “Outgroup” Members in the Extended Families of Non-Hispanic White GSS Respondents, Broken Down by Political Party Identification.

	Respondent Political Party Identification	
	Democrat (Ns = 428-445)	Republican (Ns = 455-466)
% Family includes African Americans*	24.0%	18.7%
% Family includes Latinos/Hispanics	27.5%	22.2%
% Family includes Asian Amers.	18.7%	14.2%
% Family includes Amer.Indian/AlaskaNat.	28.0%	26.8%
% Family includes Native Hawaii./Pacific Isl.	4.9%	6.7%

- * Political party identification effect significant at .05 level
- ** Political party identification effect significant at .01 level
- *** Political party identification effect significant at .001 level