CONSTRUCTING MULTIRACIALITY IN U.S. FAMILIES AND NEIGHBORHOODS

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INTRODUCTION

The racial categorization systems used by the United States Census until the mid-1990s forced people to report race (or have their race reported for them) in singular and mutually exclusive categories. Under pressure from various groups, the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (1997) instituted the new "mark one or more" system of racial classification designed to accommodate the racial claims of multiracial people in time for the 2000 Census (Perlmann & Waters 2002, Williams 2006). This taxonomic shift lays bare the social construction of race at the national scale. This essay examines the construction of race, in particular multiraciality, at more local levels: by families in neighborhoods. Specifically, we ask what happens when parents of multiracial children are allowed to mark more than one category on the Census form? What are the sorts of neighborhoods where mixed-race couples are most apt to identify their children as multiracial on the Census? Does neighborhood racial diversity affect the likelihood of this choice? Will the whiteness of neighborhoods be reflected in the whiteness of choices mixed-race couples make when identifying their children? Will the "some other race" option retain its salience in certain contexts? This paper provides empirical answers to these questions based on an analysis of confidential 2000 Census data.

Our study connects two recent streams of research. First, several researchers utilized individual-level U.S. Census 2000 data to explore the emergence of multiraciality (e.g., Bratter 2007; Liebler 2010; Roth 2005) examining the likelihood that parents of multiracial children classified (or reported) their children with multiple racial categories. Each analysis had a particular goal and each accounted for local context in

some way. They conceptualized the impacts differently but all found that local context

mattered, typically with multiracial children more likely to be reported with multiple

racial categories when families live in places where multiracial populations concentrate.

All these investigations, however, were forced to measure contextual racial composition

using large geographic units with at least 100,000 people. Local neighborhood effects in

the 2000 Census, for example at the census-tract scale, remain unexplored.

Holloway et al. (2009) provide the only neighborhood-scale analysis of the racial claims

made for children in mixed-race families. With only single-race choices available for

analysis in 1990, their study leveraged mixed-race parentage to study local variation in

the racial claims these couples made for their multiracial children. They found that

mixed-race couples were more likely to report their children as white when they lived in

white neighborhoods and more apt to report a non-white category when they lived in

non-white neighborhoods. Intriguingly, parents of some multiracial children became

more likely to report a category other than one of their own two categories when they

lived in racially diverse neighborhoods, primarily through the Census-provided option

of "some other race," though this effect was statistically significant only for children in

white-black mixed-race households.

Now that the U.S. Census allows the marking of multiple racial categories, we re-open

the question of how the act of claiming race for multiracial children relates to the racial

configuration of neighborhood contexts. We understand this relationship as mutual and

reciprocal – i.e., families more likely to conceive of their children as multiracial may also

be more likely to live in certain kinds of racially configured neighborhoods, while at the

same time certain kinds of neighborhoods likely influence the way that parents conceive of and/or report their children's racial identity. While our empirical information does not allow us to sort out in which direction the causal arrow points most strongly, we frame our discussion and analysis by focusing on the ways that multiraciality emerges at multiple scales. We ground this investigation in a conceptual framework that stresses the importance of racial diversity, conceived of at three main scales: the body, the family, and the neighborhood. Before discussing our framework, however, we review existing research.

GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT AND MULTIRACIALITY

Geographies play into assessments of multiraciality and the choices people make or have made for them (e.g., Mahtani 2002; Holloway et al. 2009 Clark and Maas 2009 Johnston et al. 2006; Bratter and Heard 2009). For example, David Brunsma (2005) concluded that the interactions among gender, class, and context mediate the racial identification of multiracial children. In a related study, Wendy Roth (2005) focused on the racial categories reported for children from black/non-black interracial marriages using the 5% Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) from the 2000 U.S. Census. She was particularly interested in multiracial individuals with black heritage and the lasting effects of the so-called "one drop rule" that socially and legally codified anyone with any kind of African background as "black" (Hollinger 2005, Khanna 2010). Controlling for Census Division (region), her models included two racial composition variables measured on the basis of large geographic areas (Public Use Microdata Areas, or

PUMAs, which house at least 100,000 people); the percentage black and the share of the area's total population that is black-and-white. She found that in these black/nonblack households, multiracial children were more likely to be classified by their parents as black only, and less likely to classified as white only or white-and-black, when they lived in geographic areas characterized by a large black population. Conversely, when they lived in places where the multiracial share of total population is large, parents were more likely to categorize their child using a racial category other than black. Specifically, the odds of identifying a child as white-black grew in areas with elevated numbers of people who claimed to be black-and-white.

Jennifer Bratter's (2007) primary focus was on the impact of mixed-race parents on the racial classification of multiracial children. She organized the Census data into four groups defined by type of mixed-race family: white/non-white, black/non-black, Asian/non-Asian and American Indian/non-American Indian. For each of these groups except American Indians, living in a place with larger shares of population reported with multiple racial categories significantly predicts a greater likelihood that parents opt for multicategory racial classification for their multiracial children.

Carolyn Liebler (2010) explored patterns of multiraciality among American Indians who were intermarried and lived with their spouse and child(ren). She distinguished between what she called social context (i.e., the spaces of home and the family) and physical context, which she specifically defined as indigenous homelands that carry cultural meaning. Controlling for family ties and SES as well as the area's racial composition, she found a clear relationship between residence on an American Indian homeland and the

child's chances of being reported as single-race American Indian. She joins others, such as Khanna (2010), who observe that despite the dawning of a multiracial new day, the intergenerational transmission of strong and singular identities continues in the context of places freighted with cultural meaning.

FRAMING MULTIRACIALITY

Our conceptual framework builds on Holloway et al. (2009), which theorized processes of racial formation as multiply scaled and geographically contextual. We specifically argued that racial formation operates not just at scale of the nation-state (Omi & Winant 1994, Goldberg 2002), but also at the scales of neighborhood and household. The act of parents marking racial categories on behalf of multiracial children – i.e., making racial claims – for us represented a complex and contingent racial socialization that both reflected and shaped neighborhood racial configurations. Drawing on theory that posited the active constitutive role of space and place in racialized social processes (e.g., Delaney 2002), we argued that there may be a matching of neighborhood-level compositional diversity with the choice to mark children as neither white nor non-white.

> The composite racial identity of a place (i.e. not white, but also not singly black or Latino or Asian, etc.) associates with the composite racial identity of a multiracial child as not white and simultaneously not black, Latino or Asian. We are agnostic about the causal ordering of the association – it is certainly possible that families who imagine their children's racial identity as

composite will be drawn to live in places with a composite racial identity just

as it is also possible that living in a diverse place may encourage parents to

think of their children as outside the binary either/or categorization typically

employed.

(Holloway et al. 2009, p. 529)

Two changes guide us to extend and deepen our thinking in this essay. First, the

empirical results of our analysis of 1990 data were supportive of our understanding of

the relationship between racial claims and neighborhood context, but not

overwhelmingly so. Children in white-black households were more often reported as

"some other race" in our study when their families lived in racially diverse

neighborhoods. While this result was consistent with our expectations, the impact of

neighborhood racial diversity on racial claims outside the binary categorization was

more ambiguous for children in white-Asian and white-Latino/a households. Second,

changes in the racial reporting rules in the 2000 U.S. Census make forms of racial

diversity not observable in our analysis of 1990 Census data statistically legible for the

first time.

In our previous study, we understood the option of marking "some other race" as likely

indicative of a rejection of the binary single-category options available on the 1990

Census form. The new mark-one-or-more option of racial classification allows parents to

directly escape the confines of either/or classification. The racial claims made by parents

on behalf of their multiracial children are meaningful acts of racial identification

(Rockquemore, Brunsma and Delgado 2009) that reflect, if only imperfectly, their

understanding of who their children are racially, as well as who they may want their

children to become racially. The choice to mark multiple racial categories thus must be

understood as a claim of bodily racial diversity distinct from the alternative choices of

marking a single racial category. This explicitly multiracial form of racial diversity

attaches to the scale of the body, as reported by parents on the Census form.   We do not

contend that the act of a parent reporting her child's racial categories on a Census is

indicative or formative of the child's "true" racial identity. Moreover, children will be

racially identified by many people in multiple ways and will likely develop situationally

flexible personal racial identities over their life course, and our analysis cannot be

predictive of these developments. Even so, the act of claiming race on behalf of a

multiracial child does inform us about how and where multiraciality can be conceived of

within families.

The multiraciality that became legible with the change in official U.S. data collection

practices also forces us to reconceive the racial configuration of neighborhoods. In our

previous study, we focused on an aggregate and general form of compositional diversity,

asserting that racially diverse neighborhoods comprised a racial configuration distinct

from the singly raced types of segregated racialized neighborhoods more typically

imagined in U.S. metropolitan contexts – i.e., diverse neighborhoods are neither

predominantly white nor predominantly black. Subsequent to that analysis we have

come to recognize that there are multiple forms of neighborhood-level diversity

(Holloway et al. 2012; www.mixedmetro.com) that both enfold and are enfolded by the

more stereotypical understandings of segregated neighborhoods. Holloway et al. 2012

begin to differentiate compositionally diverse neighborhoods according to which racial

group remains in the plurality. Here, we take our cue from the recent studies that find an association between large geographic areas with a relatively large share of multiracial population and parents' racial classification of their multiracial children (Bratter 2007; Liebler 2010; Roth 2005). In sum, places in which multiracial people (i.e., people who mark or have marked for them multiple racial categories on the Census form) concentrate potentially signify a new kind of racialized diversity with distinct geographic expression that we are just beginning to comprehend.

Frey and Myers (2002) computed residential segregation indices for U.S. cities and metropolitan areas using 2000 Census data. They found that the population reporting two or more races is less residentially segregated, on average, than the single race population. Clark & Maas (2009) document some of the distinct geographic patterns associated with specific multiracial types for metropolitan areas in California. Both studies optimistically argue that multiracial people are more spatially integrated, and thus assimilated, with whites than single race non-white populations. The maps displayed in Clark & Mass (2009), however, portray a spatial pattern whereby multiracial people in California metropolitan areas concentrate in neighborhoods geographically distinct from both white and non-white populations. We build on these suggestive findings to portray our conceptualization and measurement of the neighborhood concentration of multiracial people as a potentially distinct spatial form of racialized diversity.

In summary, our conceptual framework contends that multiraciality should be understood as an emergent and newly legible form of racialized diversity that operates

simultaneously at the scales of the body, the family, and the neighborhood. Moreover,

multiraciality at one scale of expression affects its expression at the other scales. We

thus expect that the neighborhood concentration of multiracial people will contextually

influence the choices that mixed-race couples make about how to report the race of their

multiracial children. Specifically, we expect that residence in such racially diverse

neighborhoods will be associated with an elevated likelihood that parents will mark

multiple racial categories. Our framework resonates with the mixed-race theoretical

tradition that Rockquemore, Brunsma and Delgado (2009) describe as *ecological*

because it asserts that neighborhood contexts can affect expressions of multiraciality.

Even so, our conceptual and empirical focus remains on the multiply scaled expression

of this emergent form of racial diversity.

DATA AND ANALYSIS

Our analysis uses confidential individual- and family-level data from the 2000 U.S.

Census. We selected 16 large metropolitan areas for study to balance the goals of

regional representation, a variety of economic bases, and being able to work with large

enough samples (these Census data are based on a 1-in-6 sample of housing units). To

facilitate our examination of racial claims made on behalf of children in mixed-race

households, we selected households with an adult male and an adult female reported as

either cohabiting or married. These households must also have a child less than five

years old. This restriction increases the chances that the child is the biological offspring

of the adults. It also reduces the time-frame in which the household could have moved

since the birth of the child. This reduces though does not eliminate the risk of endogeneity between a child's phenotypic appearance and the household's residential location. For example, by restricting our sample to pre-school aged children, we reduce the probability that a household with a multiracial child with dark skin tone and/or tightly curly hair has relocated to a segregated non-white neighborhood specifically in hopes of avoiding having their child be treated as racially distinct from peers in segregated white neighborhoods.

We further restrict our analysis to households that define themselves on Census forms as headed by white-black and white-Asian couples. The United States broadly defines as "Asian" any individual with East, Southeast, and South Asian ancestry. It is not possible with our data to distinguish between these sub-groups, as it is with UK data. We do include reported country of origin variables in some of our analysis. While there are many more white-Latino mixed-race households, our empirical analysis is greatly complicated by practice of the Census to collect data on Latino "ethnicity" with a question separate from that related to "race". We have operationally resolved this issue for adults by restricting our definition of race categories to "non-Hispanic" white, black, & Asian. As our focus here is on the racial classification of children, however, the interaction of Hispanic ethnicity with the race question creates too many possible responses and renders the empirical questions and methods distinct from those that we present here. Our choice to exclude white-Latino/a families is regrettable but mirrors choices made by, for example, Bratter (2007) and Roth (2005).

Structuring the analysis in this way produced a sample of 12,500 children, 8,071 in

white-Asian households, and 4,469 in white-black households. Table 1 reports the racial

claims made on behalf of these children aggregated across the 16 metropolitan areas.

Several patterns are evident. First, the majority of children are reported multiracially in

the two racial categories that match those reported for the adults in their household.

Second, substantial numbers of the children are reported either with a single racial

category matching only one of the adults in their household *or* with a single category or

multiple racial categories that do not match either adult.

[Table 1 about here]

The share of children marked multiracially with two racial categories matching their

adults is roughly the same for white-black households and white-Asian households. Just

under 59 percent of children in white-Asian households are marked as white *and* Asian,

and just under 58 percent of children in white-black households are marked as white

and black. The share of children marked with other options, however, differs

considerably between the two groups. Children in white-Asian households are much

more likely overall to be marked as white only (about 21 percent) than Asian only (about

13 percent), with all other possibilities only rarely marked (about 7 percent). Children in

white-black households show the opposite pattern, being marked as black only almost

twice as often as white only (about 22 percent vs. 11 percent, respectively). On the

surface, this pattern is consistent with the US's long standing and apparently still

socially significant "one-drop rule" of hypodescent. Notably, however, the share of

children in white-black households that are not marked with any combination of white

or black (about 10 percent) is larger than for children in white-Asian households. This perhaps reflects a transgressive rejection of the use of racial categories, including the now available option of marking two categories, thus signaling multiraciality. Roth (2005) presents similar findings in her provocatively titled paper "The End of the One-Drop Rule?". She interprets this pattern as indicative of the attempt by white-black couples to reject the one-drop rule and to form a more meaningful and specifically *interracial* identity for their offspring. She argues that marking *any* category or categories other than black alone is a rejection by white-black couples of the singularity of black racial identification for their multiracial children.

To assess the possible relation between the marking of racial categories and geographic contexts, we estimated child-level multinomial logit models that include measures of a location's racial composition, including measures of multiple facets of racial diversity. We refined the spatial frame of our analysis to assess the statistical effects of local neighborhoods on the racial identification of children. Following a long precedent in racial residential segregation and urban studies literatures, we allow census tracts to represent neighborhoods despite the conceptual problems that accompany this choice (Martin 2003). We are able to focus in on census-tract levels of racial configuration because we had access to confidential census data in secure research facilities. Other scholars interested in the racial contexts surrounding these processes using publicly available data (Bratter 2007; Liebler 2010; Roth 2005), by contrast, must measure "local" racial/ethnic concentrations using much larger areas of at least 100,000 residents (Public Use Microdata Areas) – the smallest spatial units for analysis available in that format.

To simplify the analysis and to provide analytical focus, we specified the dependent variable in these multinomial logit models as a three category classification based on how the child was marked racially – white only, minority only (either black only or Asian only), and multiracial matching the racial categories marked for the two adults in the household (either white *and* black or white *and* Asian). This strategy includes the overwhelming majority of options recorded for the multiracial children in our sample; it excludes only those observations where the child was identified outside these three possibilities – a situation that is more difficult to account for theoretically and would complicate interpretation of the results if it were included in the model.

We identified a list of individual and child-, family- and household-level attributes that potentially influence the racial claims made on behalf of multiracial children (Table 2). We added a set of metropolitan dummy variables to account for potential regional differences and a set of national ancestry dummy variables for the Asian adult in white-Asian households. We also included a set of tract-level controls: percent of the population in active military service, median household income, percent of adults with college education, percent of the population older than 65, and percent of the population currently in school. Finally, in accordance with the primary interest of this essay, we included the following measures of neighborhood (census tract) racial composition: percent white, scaled entropy as a measure of composite general neighborhood racial diversity that takes its largest values for neighborhoods where each of the racial groups are represented in equal shares (see Holloway et al. 2009 for a

complete explanation of this measure), percent foreign born, and percent of the total

population that reported two-plus races (i.e., percent multiracial).

[Table 2 about here]

Neighborhood percent white and scaled entropy were identified in previous research as

important contextual assessments in analysis of 1990 U.S. Census data (Holloway et al.

2009). To these we added two measures that capture alternative facets of diversity

within neighborhoods. To acknowledge the increase in the foreign born share of the U.S.

population in the last 50 years, and the increased share of neighborhoods with

substantial numbers of immigrants, we examined the impact of living in an immigrant

residential concentration. We included neighborhood percent foreign born because

newcomers to the U.S. often arrive with different racial sensibilities than the native

born. We suspected that residence in an immigrant neighborhood would decrease the

chances of parent reporting multiple races for their children.

Given that our central intent in this essay is to examine the impact of multiracial

neighborhood diversity on the probability of children being marked multiracially, we

included the overall share of tract population marked with two-plus racial categories (cf.

Roth 2005; Liebler 2010; Bratter 2007). In preliminary analysis, we examined the

possibility that young children may constitute a large share of the total population

marked with multiple racial categories. We found that in the vast majority of tracts

young children constitute a small share of the total multiracial population, and that the

maximum share is very modest. The model estimates the effects of these four

neighborhood racial context measures on child racial identification controlling for

metropolitan location and neighborhood socioeconomic structure.

The multinomial logit models were estimated separately for children in white-black and

white-Asian households, which allowed us to include the Asian ancestry variables. We

built the models sequentially, adding the tract-level variables after controlling for the

metropolitan area dummy variables. For both groups of multiracial children, the tract-

level variables provided a statistically significant improvement to the fit of the models.

In addition, the four tract variables capturing neighborhood racial configurations were

jointly significant in both models.

There are dozens of coefficients estimated by these models, which can be challenging to

interpret (we will gladly make the full results available upon request). We focus our

attention in this essay on visual representations of the impacts of the four tract variables

that capture neighborhood racial configurations. Figure 1 shows the impact of these

variables for children in white-black households and Figure 3 shows their impact for

children in Asian-white households. Given the dependent variable's three categories,

there are three types of pair-wise comparisons generated in the form of odds (e.g., the

first block of bars in Figure 1 depicts the odds of a parent reporting black only vs. white

only). The length of the bars indicates the magnitude of the effect of the tract variable on

the odds – specifically, the percentage change in odds that results from a standard

deviation increase in the value of the tract variable. This approach allows us to compare

the magnitude of the effects across variables with different units of measurement. The

figure depicts the effects directionally – bars extending to the right indicate a positive

effect while bars extended to the left indicate a negative effect. Black bars indicate

statistically significant effects (p < .05).

[Figure 1 about here]

The racial category reported for multiracial children in white-black households is

responsive to tract percent white and percent multiracial, regardless of the pair-wise

comparison of racial categories. Based on previous research results, we had expected

neighborhood racial diversity to come into play. Here, however, the measure of general

racial diversity (scaled entropy), which is maximized in neighborhoods with equal

shares of the 6 racial groups, does not prove to be statistically significant. In general,

marking children in white-black households as black only is less likely in segregated

white neighborhoods, and marking children as multiracial is more likely in

neighborhoods where the multiracial population appears to concentrate.

Figure 2 presents the results in a different and perhaps more easily interpretable form.

In each panel, we display predicted probability plots for the three outcome categories as

influenced by the statistically significant tract-level racial composition variables

(percent white in Panel A and percent multiracial in Panel B). The least shaded portions

of these plots reflect the most commonly observed range of values for the tract variables

– shaded portions of the plots reflect tract values that are rarely observed across the

sample of 16 metropolitan areas. For children in white-black households, we see that

white segregation produces a trade-off between marking white only and black only – the

probability of marking both white *and* black is not affected. Neighborhood

concentrations of multiracial people, however, produce a very different pattern. Children become much more likely to be reported multiracially as black *and* white, and much less likely to be reported as white only, in neighborhoods where multiracial people concentrate, despite the fact that the neighborhood shares are rather small.

[Figure 2 about here]

Figure 3 shows the magnitude and significance of the effects of neighborhood racial variables on the racial classification of multiracial children in Asian-white households. Percent multiracial has a large and positive impact on the odds of marking children as both Asian *and* white. Percent foreign born reduces the odds of reporting children as multiracial in contrast to white only. Figure 4 shows these trade-offs from a different angle. In the first panel, parents become more likely to report their children as white *and* Asian as the neighborhood percentage of the population that reports two-plus races increases, accompanied by reductions in the probability that children are reported as either white only or Asian only. The relation between racial claims and the immigrant status of neighborhoods (Panel B) suggests that white-Asian parents become more likely to report their children as white only as the foreign-born population constitutes a larger share of the population, accompanied by reductions in the probability of claiming either Asian only or white *and* Asian.

[Figure 3 about here]

[Figure 4 about here]

CONCLUSIONS

Multiracial children are increasingly on the public radar in the United States. A *New York Times* article (Saulny 2011) examining the early returns from the 2010 Census (U.S. Census Bureau 2011), for example, found that multiracial children were the fastest growing group of young people between 2000 and 2010, increasing by almost 50 percent to more than four million. The total number of multiracial people increased by 32 percent since 2000, with growth rates much higher in some states in the South and Midwest. The number of people marking white and black increased by a remarkable 134 percent between 2000 and 2010. These trends highlight the importance of understanding both the forces that are promoting the formation of mixed-race romantic partners *and* the forces that affect the multiracial racial claims made on behalf of the children of these relationships. We argue that this behavior is affected by a newly visible form of neighborhood racial diversity; and our research findings support this argument.

Our analysis of the racial claims mixed-race couples make for their young multiracial children in 2000 indicates that many do, indeed, use the mark-more-than-one choice when filling out the U.S. Census form. They took advantage of the new options to claim more than one race in Census 2000 by marking the two racial categories for their children that match their own categories. We also discover, however, that a non-trivial share of parents mark only a single racial category matching one of their own racial categories, or mark one or more racial categories that do not match their own. Central to

our thesis that neighborhood context matters, our study reveals a systematic

relationship between these choices and the kind of neighborhoods in which these

families live.

When young children in white-black households live in mostly segregated white

neighborhoods, their parents are apt to report them as white-only. The probability of

marking a child as black *and* white is not affected by this neighborhood characteristic.

This choice is also unaffected by general neighborhood racial diversity. In contrast, a

specific and newly visible type of racial diversity – the multiracial percentage of tract

population – does have a significant effect. Specifically, the probability that parents

mark the multiracial option of black *and* white increases markedly as the neighborhood

share of multiracial individuals increases.

For children in white-Asian households, claiming multiraciality for children is also

responsive to variations in the neighborhood percentage of multiracial individuals; the

probability that parents mark white *and* Asian increases as this form of diversity

increases. Parents of white-Asian children also respond to an additional facet of

diversity – the foreign-born population. As the proportion of immigrants in a

neighborhood increases, parents become more likely to mark their young multi-racial

children as white only, and less likely to mark them as Asian-only or white-and-Asian.

The decrease in the odds of claiming a multiracial identity for their children reflects,

perhaps, a different sets of racial sensibilities in communities with a significant foreign-

born presence. The increase in the chances of those children being identified as white

captures perhaps an "assimilation-to-white" gesture by white-Asian parents in such locales.

Our focus has been on the way that neighborhood space conditions the manner parents in mixed-race partnerships racially identify their young multiracial children. Multiracial neighborhood diversity matters in these choices, suggesting a connection between the configuration of multiraciality across space at the scale of neighborhoods and its acknowledgement within the space of the household. Multiraciality is an emergent form of diversity that is increasingly visible at the scales of the body, the family *and* the neighborhood. How the relationships between these spatial scales play out when children grow up and begin to assert their own identities, especially as they move away from home, is another question. Harris and Sim (2002) suggest that multiracial youth engage in situationally transient racial identification between home and school environments, depending on the immediate presence/absence of parents and peer groups. Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, and Peck (2007) find that multiracial people are much more aware that race is a social construction than are monoracial people, which may account for the contextual contingency and situational flexibility of racial self-identification. As Rockquemore, Brunsma and Delgado (2009) stress, we recognize that the parental reporting of racial categories for small children is not the same phenomenon as racial *identity* that is developed over the children's life course. We argue, however, that since parents are reporting racial categories, our work really deals with an instance of racial *identification*. A question for future research should ask how flexible self-identifications in adolescence and early adulthood might be conditioned by diversity and racial composition in neighborhoods and other geographic contexts

experienced during early childhood. We wonder if growing up in neighborhoods marked

by multiracial diversity will promote multiracial self-identification and/or multiracial

identity over the life course.

Only time will tell whether multiracial ecological settings will elevate the odds of

multiracial self-identification in adulthood. If Barack Obama's decision to claim a black

rather than multiracial identity on the U.S. Census – despite being raised by a white

single mother and her parents and despite growing up in Hawaii, the most diverse state

in the country – is anything to go by then we should not be too eager to project that the

flourishing claims of multiraciality exhibited in youth will translate into multiracial

identification in adulthood. Racial hierarchy and the resultant racial stratification of

key realms of life in the U.S. unfortunately remain an enduring fact. Whiteness remains

a key advantage (Lipsitz 1998) and is unlikely to fade as such in the foreseeable future in

our view. To be sure, the substantial growth in the population of multiracial youth

disturbs the foundation of the racial hierarchy, which may be shifting in a variety of

ways to accommodate them (see Ellis 2001; Gans 1999; Bonilla Silva 2004). The

external pressures for them to fit within the single-race categories that continue to

demarcate the overwhelming majority of the population will, however, be immense.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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TABLE AND FIGURE CAPTIONS

Table 1: Racial claims made on behalf of young children in mixed-race households.

Table 2: Variables included in the multinomial logit models.

Figure 1: Effects of tract-level racial configuration on odds of racial reporting for
children in white-black households.

Figure 2: Predicted probability of racial classification in response to (A) census tract
percent white and (B) census tract percent multiracial for children in white-black
households.

Figure 3: Effects of tract-level racial configuration on odds of racial reporting for
children in white-Asian households.

Figure 4: Predicted probability of racial classification in response to (A) census tract
percent multiracial and (B) census tract percent foreign born for children in white-
Asian households.