

Genetic Ancestral Markers, Social and Cultural Context, and Race/Ethnicity Identity

Our main objective is to understand how genetic and social/cultural heritage influence racial/ethnic identity taking advantage of a panel of about 180 ancestral genetic markers in the Roommate Study on 2,100 college students. Our first hypothesis is that genetic-marker-identified race/ethnicity is largely consistent with self-reported race/ethnicity. The correspondence should be about 90%. This is running counter to the often-heard claim that race/ethnicity is entirely socially and culturally constructed. The hypothesis has never been tested using a large-scale social science dataset. Our second hypothesis is that the correspondence between the two is poor for individuals with mixed racial background. Our third hypothesis is that individuals with mixed racial background tend to identify themselves with ethnic minorities. This is true even for those who are genetically predominantly Caucasians, emphasizing the predominance of social and cultural heritage.

The data collection for the Roommate study was completed in the spring of 2008. The data collection had two components: the web survey and the saliva DNA collection. The DNA has been extracted and purified from saliva and the genotyping is under way. We should be able to analyze the ancestral genetic markers in two months.