Are You Who You Think You Are?

When a group of Penn State sociology students took DNA tests, they were quite surprised at some of the results

By Emma Daly
in State College, Pa.
is not true—'I thought I was black, but I'm also Asian and white'—it leads them to have a different kind of conversation about race. It leads them to be less bigoted, to ask the deeper questions, to be more open to differences."

Natasha Best, a 21-year-old public-relations major, has always thought of herself as half black and half white, because her mother is Irish-Lithuanian and her father West Indian. But the test showed that she is 58 percent European and 42 percent African.

**FAMILY LINEAGE**

"I was surprised at how much European I was, because though my father's family knows there is a great-great-grandfather who was Scottish, no one remembered him," says Best, who grew up in Yonkers, N.Y. "I knew it was true, because I have dark relatives with blue eyes, but to bring it up a whole 8 percent, that was shocking to me."

But Shriver explains that although a great-great-grandparent would contribute on average 6.25 percent of a person's genes, any one ancestor might be represented at a higher or lower level in today's generation.

Best and Harrison are part of the fastest-growing ethnic grouping in the United States, one that was acknowledged in the 2000 census for the first time: mixed race. Yet the two students identify themselves in very different ways.

**GENETICS VS. CULTURE**

"I am 48 percent white—genetically I am, at least, but not culturally," says Harrison. "And the fact that I'm black is more important, because it's something I know. It's who I'm comfortable with."

Best says, "Some people think it's funny that I consider myself Irish and celebrate St. Patrick's Day—because no matter how you cut it, when you look at me you don't think, there goes a white girl."

Harrison, who says that as a child he molded himself to be more black, does not want this new information to change his identity.

"Just because I found out I'm white, I'm not going to act..."