

INTERVIEWERS' REPORTED BEHAVIORS IN COLLECTING RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN DATA¹

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BACKGROUND

The Census Bureau has proposed dropping the long census form from the 2010 census. Detailed data formerly collected on the long form would be collected in a very large ongoing survey: the American Community Survey (ACS). Full implementation of the ACS in three million households was scheduled to begin in 2003, but at this point may be postponed.

The first national-level pilot test of the ACS was conducted with 700,000 households over the calendar year of 2000. This ACS pilot test was called the Census 2000 Supplementary Survey, or C2SS. If the ACS is to replace the census long form, estimates for demographic characteristics that it collects should be consistent with estimates from the census. To test for consistency, staff compared estimates for demographic variables from the C2SS and Census 2000.

Unexpectedly large differences were found between Census 2000 and Census 2000 Supplementary Survey race estimates, particularly for Hispanics, and especially in the interviewer-administered modes.

¹ This paper reports the results of research and analysis undertaken

As shown in Table 1, Census interviewers reported 46% of Hispanics as "Some other race," compared to just 30% for C2SS interviewers. Conversely, census interviewers recorded 46% of Hispanics as white, compared to 64% in the C2SS interviews. The remainder for each survey chose other specific non-white race categories such as African American, Chinese, other Pacific Islander, two or more races etc.

These substantial differences in race reporting for Hispanics were identified in mid-2001, long after the census enumerators were released. We had no interviewer studies from 2000, but wanted to identify factors that might have led to these large race reporting differences. We decided to conduct debriefings with, and a census of, ACS CAPI field representatives to identify relevant factors.

STUDY DESIGN

We conducted semi-structured debriefing sessions with field representatives, or FRs, in two regional offices covering large numbers of Hispanic households. We reviewed the literature, then developed the mailout questionnaire. We posed 17 complex situations FRs might encounter in collecting Hispanic origin and race data, such as a respondent answering Hispanic to the race question, expressing confusion, or refusing to answer. The response categories presented different ways an interviewer might handle the situation, some acceptable, others not. We asked the FRs to mark the box describing how they handle each situation most of the time. We made every effort to minimize fears that their answers could affect their performance ratings. The questionnaire was sent to all supervisory and non-supervisory FRs who conducted American Community Survey, or ACS, interviews in November, 2001. We obtained a 73% response rate.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

In the first paper on this study that we presented at the American Association for Public Opinion Research Annual Meeting in May, 2002 (Leslie, Raglin, and Schwede 2002), Theresa Leslie reported results of our analysis of differences in interviewer behavior among those FRs who had mostly Census 2000 experience, some Census 2000 experience, and no Census 2000 experience. We used these categories as a very rough and indirect proxy for trying to assess differences

Table 1: Census 2000 Supplementary Survey and Census Estimates for Race of Hispanics: Interviewer Mode Only

Race	Census*	C2SS*
"White alone"	46%	64%
Named Non-white race**	8%	6%
"Some other race"	46%	30%

*12.6% of all persons were reported as Hispanic.
**All specified non-white race categories other than "Some other race," (e.g., Asian, African American, Other Pacific Islander, 2+ races)

by Census Bureau staff. It has undergone a Census Bureau review more limited in scope than that given to official Census Bureau publications. This report is released to inform interested parties of ongoing research and to encourage discussions of work in progress.

between actual Census 2000 interviewers and actual C2SS field representatives in 2000. We now think the associations found are better explained by variables other than amount of Census 2000 experience.

In this paper, we focus on FRs' use of the "Some other race" category for Hispanics who report their race as Hispanic. We compare ACS CAPI FRs who do report marking "Some other race" and writing in "Hispanic" with those who do not report doing this. By comparing the two groups working on the same survey at the same time, we control on survey task and time to identify factors that may affect the incidence of marking "Some other race" for Hispanics.

For this analysis, we include just those 700 responding FRs who reported they actually conduct interviews with Hispanics. The key question used to distinguish FRs who did and did not report accepting Hispanic as a race by marking "Some other race" was,

"During a personal visit interview, a respondent answers "yes" to the Hispanic origin question. When you ask race, she says, 'I just told you, I'm Hispanic. Do you: ...mark "Some other race" and write "Hispanic?"

Twelve percent of the FRs reported that most of the time they handle this situation by marking "Some other race" and writing in "Hispanic;" these 86 FRs will be referred to as the "SORS." The remaining 88% (614) will be called the "NONSORS."

We compared SORS and NONSORS on eight characteristics that we hypothesized would be related to use of the "Some other race" response: 1) length of time conducting Census Bureau interviews, 2) regional office, 3) interviewers' interpretation of what the race question is asking, 4) sensitivity of the race question to respondents, 5) difficulty for FRs in administering the race question, 6) proportion of interviews conducted with Hispanics 7) Spanish/non-Spanish interviewing language, and 8) supervisory/non-supervisory status.

In this paper we cover just the first three of these (see Schwede, Leslie, and Griffin 2002 for the full paper). We also present qualitative data collected 1) during 4 FR debriefing sessions in two field offices, and 2) during the survey with open-ended comments written on the forms by more than 40% of the FRs.

HYPOTHESES

Length of Time Conducting Bureau Interviews

We hypothesized that length of time doing interviews for the Census Bureau would be associated with marking "Some other race" and writing in "Hispanic" (SORS). This relationship, shown in Table 2, was found to be statistically significant.

Of those who conducted Census Bureau interviews

for three or fewer years, 15.6% were SORS, compared to only 7.9% for those interviewing more than 3 years to eight years. It is interesting to note that 10.6% of the FRs who had worked for the Bureau more than eight years were also SORS, but the number of cases in this category was quite small.

Table 2: Length of time interviewing for the Census Bureau by Percent SORS		
Number of years interviewing	Percent SORS	n=651
3 or fewer years	15.6	364
3+ to eight years	7.9	202
8+ years	10.6	85
Chi square = 13.2, DF 5, p = .02		

Regional Office

We also hypothesized differences among regional offices in marking "Some other race." Table 3 shows

Table 3: Regional Office Affiliation by Percent who mark "Some other race" and write in "Hispanic"		
Regional office area	% SORS	n=688
Atlanta	5.4	74
Boston	12.7	63
Charlotte	6.9	73
Chicago	13.6	66
Dallas	16.3	49
Denver	19.3	83
Detroit	2.4	41
Kansas City	6.7	45
Los Angeles	11.8	34
New York	17.8	45
Philadelphia	7.4	54
Seattle	23.0	61
Chi square = 23.91, DF 11, p = .01		

a strong significant difference among FRs who are SORS and NONSORS in the regional office areas in

which they work.

In the Seattle Regional Office including San Francisco and northern California, 23% of FRs conducting interviews with Hispanics were SORS, compared to just 11.8% of those to the south in the Los Angeles Regional Office area where many Hispanics live. Only 2.4% of those FRs from the Detroit Regional Office were SORS.

Interviewers' Interpretation of What the Race Question is Asking

We also postulated that the FRs' interpretation of what the race question is asking for would be associated with accepting Hispanic as a valid answer by marking "Some other race." Our most interesting difference is found between SORS and NONSORS when FRs are asked to mark the explanation of "race" they have found useful when a respondent says he/she doesn't understand what "race" means.

The genesis of this question lies in the debriefing sessions with FRs and SFRs. In all four sessions one or more interviewers asked questions or made comments about what the race question was asking for, such as:

- "I sometimes get confused about what race means."
- "Race means skin color and so forth."
- "Race is not about skin color; we need to put down 'Hispanic.'"
- "What are you trying to find out? Are you trying to find out the biological answer or the social answer? Race to me is different traits that can be passed on genetically from generation to generation. It's not a culture, it's not a religion."
- "Tell us what you are trying to find out...Find out how we really ask the questions."

The fact that wide differences in FRs' interpretations of what the race question is asking for came out of all four debriefing sessions suggests that interviewers in other regional offices may also have diverging interpretations of the race question.

These comments and questions stimulated group discussions about what the race question is asking for. In several of the groups, FRs pressed us researchers hard to explain just what it is headquarters wants them to collect with the race question.

There appears to be no clear answer to this. Here is the actual ACS interviewer-administered race question (the mailout form question differs):

"Using this list, please choose one or more categories that best indicate your race. MARK ALL THAT APPLY"

- 1) White
- 2) Black, African American, Negro
- 3) American Indian or Alaska Native
- 4) Asian Indian
- 5) Chinese
- 6) Filipino
- 7) Japanese
- 8) Korean
- 9) Vietnamese
- 10) Other Asian (FOR EXAMPLE: CAMBODIAN, HMONG...)
- 11) Native Hawaiian
- 12) Guamanian or Chamorro
- 13) Samoan
- 14) Other Pacific Islander (FOR EXAMPLE: TAHITIAN, FIJIAN)
- 15) Some other race

Official interpretations of the meaning of race appear to differ, depending on whether we look at the way the race question is worded or at the response categories. In all Census 2000 questionnaire versions as well as the mailout ACS version, the race question asks for what race or races the person considers himself to be. However, the ACS CATI and CAPI question asks for the "one or more categories that best indicate your race," which may not be measuring the same domain as what race the person considers him- or herself to be. There has been some discussion within the Census Bureau about standardizing the race question across demographic surveys and the census. (Gerber and Martin 2001).

The response categories for race on the Census and the ACS present a strange pastiche of skin color (white or black), internal indigenous ethnic groups (e.g., American Indian/Alaska Native), U.S. Island Areas (e.g., Samoan), nationality (e.g., Japanese), and geographical region for many countries (other Asian).

In our self-administered questionnaire, we asked FRs, "When a respondent says he/she doesn't understand what 'race' is, what explanation have you found useful?" We included categories for skin color/appearance, where a person and his/her ancestors are from, whatever the person considers himself/ herself to be, whatever the person thinks, or something else.

Multiple answers were allowed and we coded the five explanations as yes/no variables. Only one of these explanations of race is significantly different for SORS and NONSORS. This is explanation 3: race is whatever the person considers himself/herself to be.

Table 4: “Race is whatever that person considers himself/herself to be” by “Mark Some other race and write in ‘Hispanic’		
Does FR say “race” is whatever that person considers himself/herself to be?	% SORS	n=700
Yes	15.4	377
No	8.7	323
Chi square = 7.28, DF = 1, p < .01		

As shown in Table 4, nearly twice as many FRs who marked that “race is whatever that person considers himself/herself to be” recorded Hispanics as “Some other race,” and wrote in Hispanic, compared to FRs who did not report this behavior.

DISCUSSION

There is considerable evidence from research over the last decade that Hispanics consider “Hispanic” to be a race (Carrasco 2002a, 2002b; Bates et al. 1995; Kissam et al. 1993; Elias-Olivares and Farr 1990; Martin et al. 1990; McKenney et al. 1988). “Hispanic” is also seen as a race by some non-Hispanics (McKenney and Bennett 1994; Gerber, de la Puente, and Levin 1997; McKay et al. 1996; Gerber and de la Puente 1996; Schechter, Stinson, and Moy 1999; Schwede 1997a and 1997b). Some Hispanic respondents are uncomfortable with the use of the color categories “white” and “black” (Davis et al. 1998) and many felt that the Hispanic and race questions were redundant (see also McKay and de la Puente 1996).

We turned to our qualitative findings from the debriefing sessions and from the write-in comments on the questionnaires. In reviewing the volunteered comments FRs wrote, we found that at least one FR from nearly all of the 12 regional offices commented that Hispanics view “Hispanic as a race.” Some of these wrote statements indicating that trying to get a respondent to change his answer to a race listed on the flashcard can be problematic. In the words of one FR:

“Many of my Hispanic respondents end up as ‘other,’ then I type in ‘Hispanic.’ I find many don’t want to choose black or white. Some respondents that are nice to begin with become upset if I probe too much.”

It should not be surprising that respondents might get upset when they are asked what best indicates their race and they give an honest answer only to have the FR try to get them to change that answer.

Thus there is clear evidence from both the debriefing sessions and from the volunteered write-in comments in our survey that many FRs consider Hispanic to be a race and hence mark “Some other race” and type in “Hispanic.”

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this paper, we’ve focused on a specific type of interviewer behavior that produced large differences between the Census and the C2SS in recording the race of Hispanics: marking “Some other race” and writing in “Hispanic.” We compared FRs who do (SORS) and do not (NONSORS) report this behavior in terms of characteristics which we hypothesized from previous research and the debriefings might be significantly associated with accepting Hispanic as a race.

Three of our hypothesized characteristics were associated with marking “Some other race” and writing in “Hispanic.” The first was length of time interviewing for the Bureau. Nearly twice as many FRs who had interviewed for three or fewer years were SORS (15.6%) as those interviewing more than three and up to eight years (7.9%). Those who interviewed for more than eight years fell in between (10.6%).

As we have seen from the previous quote, less experienced FRs might be more likely to accept “Hispanic” as a valid answer to the race question because they are concerned that steering respondents away from “Hispanic” might anger them and result in losing the rest of the interview. FRs told us they’ve had respondents terminate interviews because of the race question; some said that they accept the answer of Hispanic by marking “Some other race” if they think the question will jeopardize the rest of the interview.

Some FRs said they are taught in general interviewer training to accept respondents’ answers without question, even if they seem patently false. This suggests that marking “Some other race” may be situational for some FRs who may have been classified as NONSORS in this study because they don’t do this “most of the time.” Future research could include observations of live interviews or asking some FRs to keep diaries of when they did and did not mark “Some other race” and write “Hispanic.” However, this won’t be possible if the Census Bureau 2003 race test plan to delete the “Some other race” option is implemented.

The second significant characteristic associated with marking “Some other race” and writing “Hispanic” was regional office; the proportion of SORS in the Seattle office area was nearly 10 times the proportion in Detroit, with other ROs falling between.

These results suggest differences in regional office cultures in whether or not Hispanic is considered a race. This is possible and even likely. The verbatim oral and written training materials for ACS interviewers provide

only a general overview of appropriate ways to ask survey questions. There is no section in the written or oral training materials that specifically delineates what are appropriate and inappropriate ways of asking the race question. Trainers in different ROs may develop their own guidelines on handling the race question.

The third characteristic significantly associated with FRs marking “Some other race” and writing in “Hispanic” is the interpretation that race means “whatever the respondent considers himself/herself to be.” The notion of Hispanic as a race also came through clearly and frequently in the debriefing sessions and in the write-ins.

Could these three factors explain, at least in part, why we obtained large differences between Census 2000 and the Census 2000 Supplementary Survey in marking “Some other race” and writing in Hispanic? This is possible, but we will never be sure of this.

We have three recommendations. The first is to conduct an evaluation in the 2003 Census Test of how Hispanics answer the race question without the “Some other race” category. The second is to conduct more research on race and behavior of both interviewers and Hispanic respondents.

The third recommendation is offered by a field representative in Boston:

“I think you should add ‘Hispanic’ as a race category. The [Hispanic] respondents...are not suddenly going to get an epiphany and start answering ‘white’ or ‘black’ or more than one of these. It is very rare that a Hispanic respondent answers the race question either ‘white’ or ‘black.’ Invariably they will say ‘Hispanic’ over 90% of the time, even after I repeat the race categories. They just don’t conceptualize race in those terms. Maybe we should join them in reconceptualizing race as well and add ‘Hispanic’ as a category, since we end up doing that anyway, by marking ‘other’ and writing in ‘Hispanic’ for race since they can’t give us anything else.”

As this FR suggests, a solution to this problem that has been proposed frequently is to combine the Hispanic and race questions, so that Hispanic would be another race category, like white or black. This was tested in the mid-90s in a nationwide census of juvenile facilities and found to be successful (Schwede 1997). It was also tested in a Current Population Survey (CPS) Supplement in 1995 with one answer allowed (U.S. Dept. of Labor 1995), and in two panels of the Census Bureau’s Race and Ethnic Targeted Test (RAETT), one of which allowed multiple answers. In the RAETT panel with a combined question permitting multiple

answers, the overall number of persons identifying as Hispanic was not significantly different from the numbers obtained with separate Hispanic and race questions (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1997).

However, when only one answer was allowed to a combined race/Hispanic question in the 1995 CPS Supplement, a lower-than-expected estimate of the proportion of Hispanics in the total population was identified (Tucker et al. 1996). It seems that this decline in the proportion of Hispanics with a combined question permitting just one answer might have been part of the reason that research on a combined question was discontinued in the mid-1990s.

These tests were conducted as part of the Office of Management and Budget review of its 1977 directive for the collection of race and ethnicity data by federal agencies (OMB 1977), which allowed just one race per person. After these tests were completed, OMB revised the rules to allow marking more than one race (1997). The Census Bureau has no plans to field a combined race-Hispanic question in the 2003 mailout test.

The evidence from our debriefings, the volunteered write-ins, and the growing literature that both Hispanics and non-Hispanics consider Hispanic to be a race strongly suggests that further improvement and testing of a combined race/Hispanic question could be done now that multiple answers are permitted to the race question. We ask Office of Management and Budget and Census Bureau decision makers to consider future testing of a new combined race/Hispanic question.

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