

Evaluating Proxy Response for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity: Paired Cognitive Interviews for the Current Population Survey

Matt Virgile, Renee Ellis, and Jessica Holzberg
Center for Survey Measurement, U.S. Census Bureau

Jennifer Edgar and Polly Phipps
Office of Survey Methods Research, Bureau of Labor Statistics

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Background

- U.S. Department of Labor sponsored research to explore feasibility of asking about sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) in the Current Population Survey (CPS)
- CPS uses proxy reporting (one person answers questions for self and all household members)
 - Other Federal surveys with SOGI items ask respondents to report for themselves
 - Little known about ability of respondents to report SOGI information for other HH members accurately

Background (cont.)

- Research was conducted by the Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2016-2017
- Four sites:
 - Washington, DC; Portland, OR; Nashville, TN; and Fargo, ND
- Two components:
 - Focus groups with members of the transgender population
 - Cognitive interviews with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) and non-LGBT respondents
 - Individual interviews – one HH member
 - **Paired interviews – two HH members interviewed separately**

Research Questions

- Can respondents accurately report SOGI information for other HH members?
 1. How accurate are SOGI reports from HH pairs, compared to current CPS questions?
 2. Does SOGI accuracy vary by pair or HH relationships?
 3. How confident are respondents in the accuracy of their SOGI reports for other HH members?

Recruitment

- Traditional cognitive interview recruitment methods, use of contractor's nationwide LGBT research panel
- All prospective respondents screened via telephone prior to scheduling
- Recruitment goals: diversity in household size and composition, LGBT status, age, race, sex, urban/rural region, and education

Limitations

- Few transgender respondents or households
- Few complex households with extended family or nonrelatives
- Mismatches detectable based on pairs only, imperfect measure of accuracy without interviewing entire HH
- Volunteers may be more cooperative, comfortable with the federal government than actual survey respondents
- Recruitment methods may have attracted persons more involved in the LGBT community (e.g., mention of LGBT in some recruitment methods, known LGBT research contractor)

Sample – Respondents (n=52)

| | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|
| LGBT/ Non-LGBT | LGBT | 33* (63.5%) |
| | Non-LGBT | 19 (36.5%) |
| Age | 15-35 | 26 (50.0%) |
| | Over 35 | 26 (50.0%) |
| Race/ Ethnicity | White Alone, Non-Hispanic | 35 (67.3%) |
| | Non-White/Multi-Race/Hispanic | 17 (32.7%) |
| Education | Less than Bachelor's Degree | 34 (65.4%) |
| | Bachelor's Degree or Higher | 18 (34.6%) |

*All 33 identified as LGB; 3 identified as both LGB and transgender.

Sample – Household Pairs (n=26)

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| HH Size | 2 people | 13 (50.0%) |
| | 3 or more people | 13 (50.0%) |
| Relationship in Pair | Spouses or partners | 21 (80.8%) |
| | Parent-child | 3 (11.5%) |
| | Other relative | 1 (3.8%) |
| | Nonrelative | 1 (3.8%) |
| Relationships in HH | Couple or triad only | 15* (57.7%) |
| | Couple with children only | 4 (15.4%) |
| | Any extended family | 4 (15.4%) |
| | Any nonrelatives | 3 (11.5%) |

*13 were couples only; 2 were triads only.

Question Wordings Tested

| | Sexual Orientation | Gender Identity: Sex at Birth | Gender Identity: Current Gender Identity |
|-------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Question stem: Self-response | Which of the following best represents how you think of yourself? | Was your sex recorded as male or female at birth? | Do you describe yourself as male, female, or transgender? |
| Question stem: Proxy response | To the best of your knowledge, which of the following best represents how [NAME] thinks of themselves? | To the best of your knowledge, was [NAME]’s sex recorded as male or female at birth? | To the best of your knowledge, does [NAME] describe themselves as male, female, or transgender? |
| Response options | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gay or lesbian • Straight; that is, not gay, lesbian, or bisexual • Bisexual • Something else | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male • Female | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male • Female • Transgender |

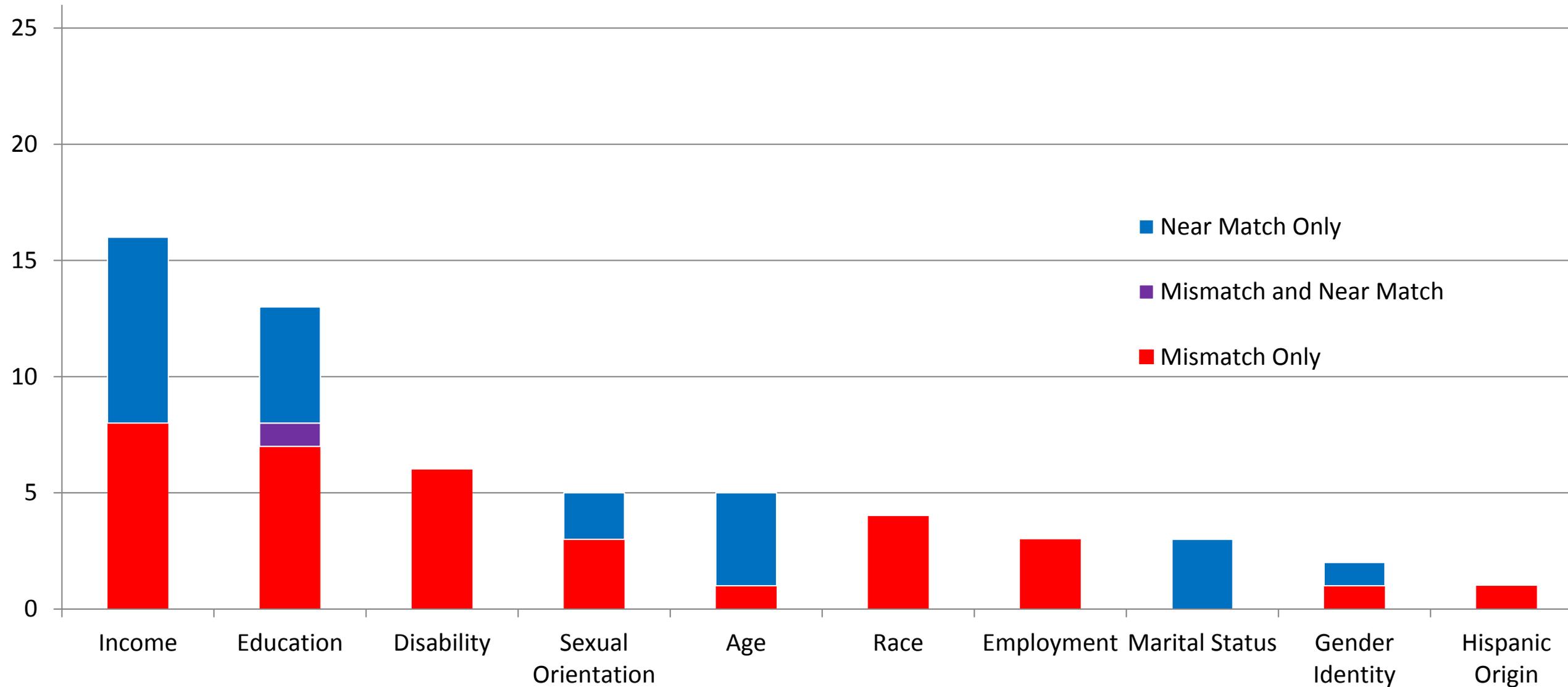
SOGI questions asked only of household members age 15 and older.

Methodology

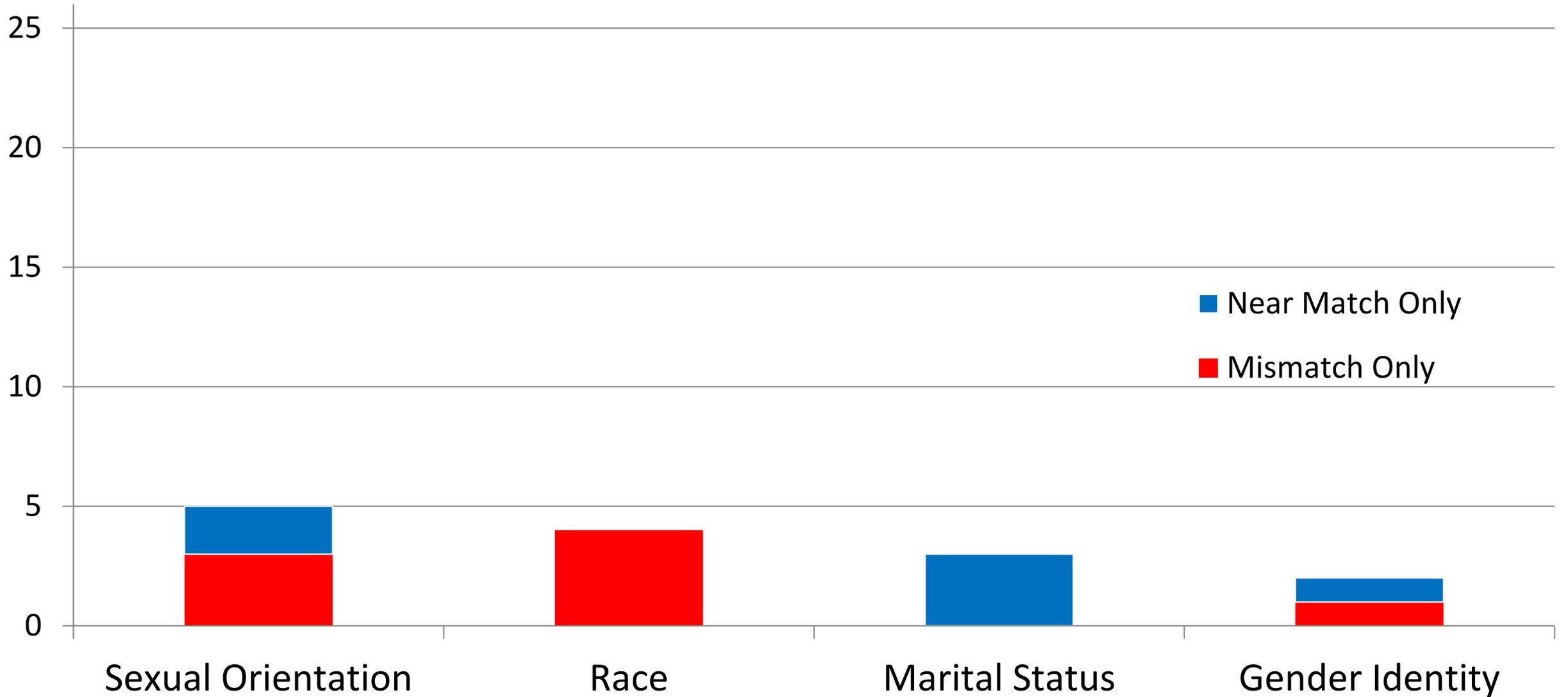
| Question Type | Questions | Mismatch | Near Match |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|
| Binary “Yes/No” | Disability, employment, Hispanic origin | Pair reported opposing options | N/A |
| Ordered list 15+ options | Income, education | Pair reported different options that were NOT next to each other in the list | Pair reported different options that were next to each other in the list |
| Open-ended | Age | Pair reported values that differ by more than one year | Pair reported values that differ by one year |
| Categorical 3-6 options | Sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, race | Pair reported different options leading to a different classification (SO: “Straight” vs “gay or lesbian”) (GI: “male” sex / “female” ID vs “male” sex / “male” ID) | Pair reported different options leading to the same classification (SO: “Bisexual” vs “gay or lesbian”) (GI: “male” sex / “female” ID vs “male” sex / “transgender” ID) |

Methodology based on Fulton, Davis, & Henderson (2017).

Number of Household Pairs with Any Mismatch, by Question (n=26)



Number of Household Pairs with Any Mismatch, by Question (n=26)



Relationships with SOGI Response Accuracy

- Sexual Orientation
 - 3 mismatches
 - 2 opposite-sex couples, for female spouse/partner in pair
 - Parent-child pair, for child/sibling out of pair
 - 2 near matches
 - Same-sex couple, for spouse/partner in pair
 - Same-sex triad, for partner in pair and other partner out of pair
- Gender Identity
 - 1 mismatch
 - Same-sex couple, for a roommate out of pair
 - 1 near match
 - Same-sex triad, for partner out of pair

Expected SOGI Response Accuracy

- Sexual Orientation
 - Pairs that mismatched had one or both respondents indicate some mismatch was likely or possible
 - Opposite-sex couples thought the other might report differently for female spouse/partner
 - Parent admitted he may not know the exact term for child's identity
- Gender Identity
 - Pairs that mismatched did not indicate likelihood of mismatch, but had one or both respondents indicate issues with the response options
 - Respondent chose “male” for roommate which matched their birth sex but also described them as questioning and nonbinary
 - Pair in triad objected to allowing selection of only one option

Conclusion

- SOGI questions had similar rates of agreement to current CPS questions
- SOGI mismatches occurred for a variety of relationship types (spouse/partner, relative, or nonrelative)
- Pairs that mismatched on sexual orientation acknowledged their uncertainty or expected others to misreport
- Pairs that mismatched on gender identity indicated issues with the response options

Suggestions for Future Research

- Proxy response
 - More testing with transgender respondents or households
 - More testing with respondents in complex households
- Question wording
 - Continue to test other wording alternatives
 - Consider broad categories (other, none of these, something else)
 - Explore feasibility of mark-all-that-apply

Reports

Overall executive summary:

https://www.bls.gov/osmr/pdf/cps_sogi_executive_summary.pdf

Cognitive interview report:

https://www.bls.gov/osmr/pdf/cps_sogi_cognitive_interview_report.pdf

Focus group report:

https://www.bls.gov/osmr/pdf/cps_sogi_focus_group_report.pdf

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Matthew.Virgile@census.gov