

Integrating Community Engagement with Preparation for Field Work on the Differential Undercount

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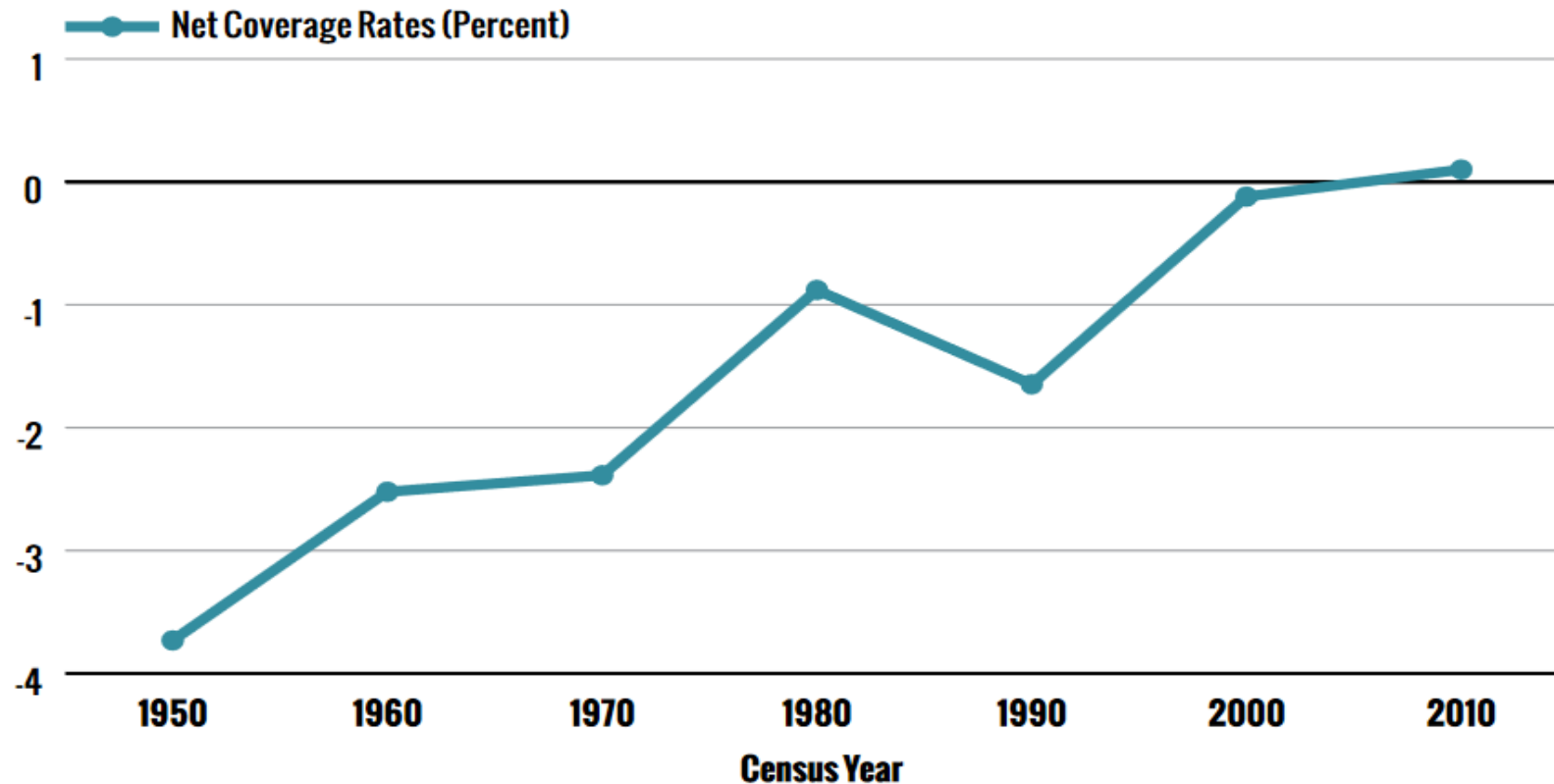
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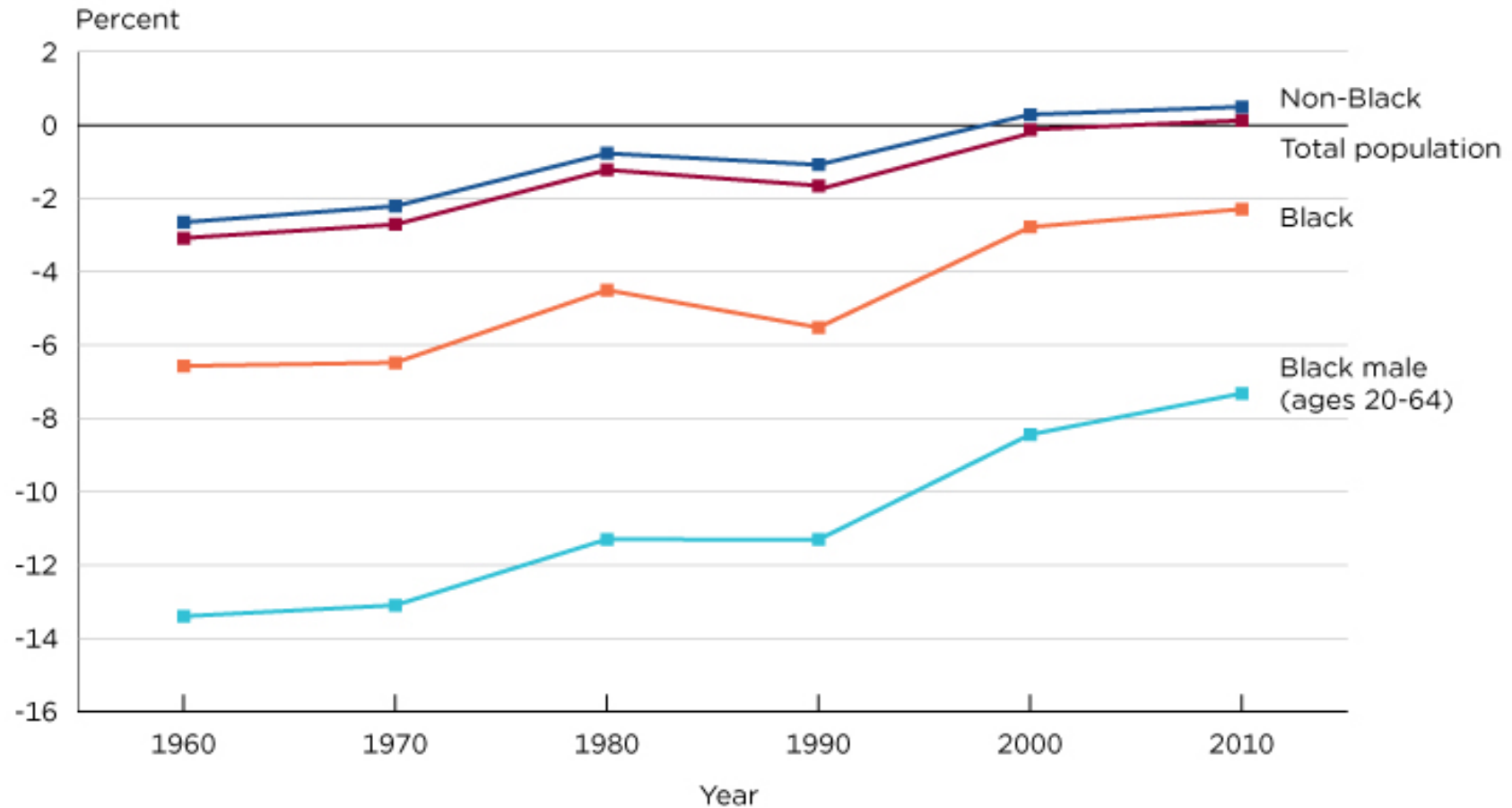
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Net Coverage of Total Population: 1950-2010

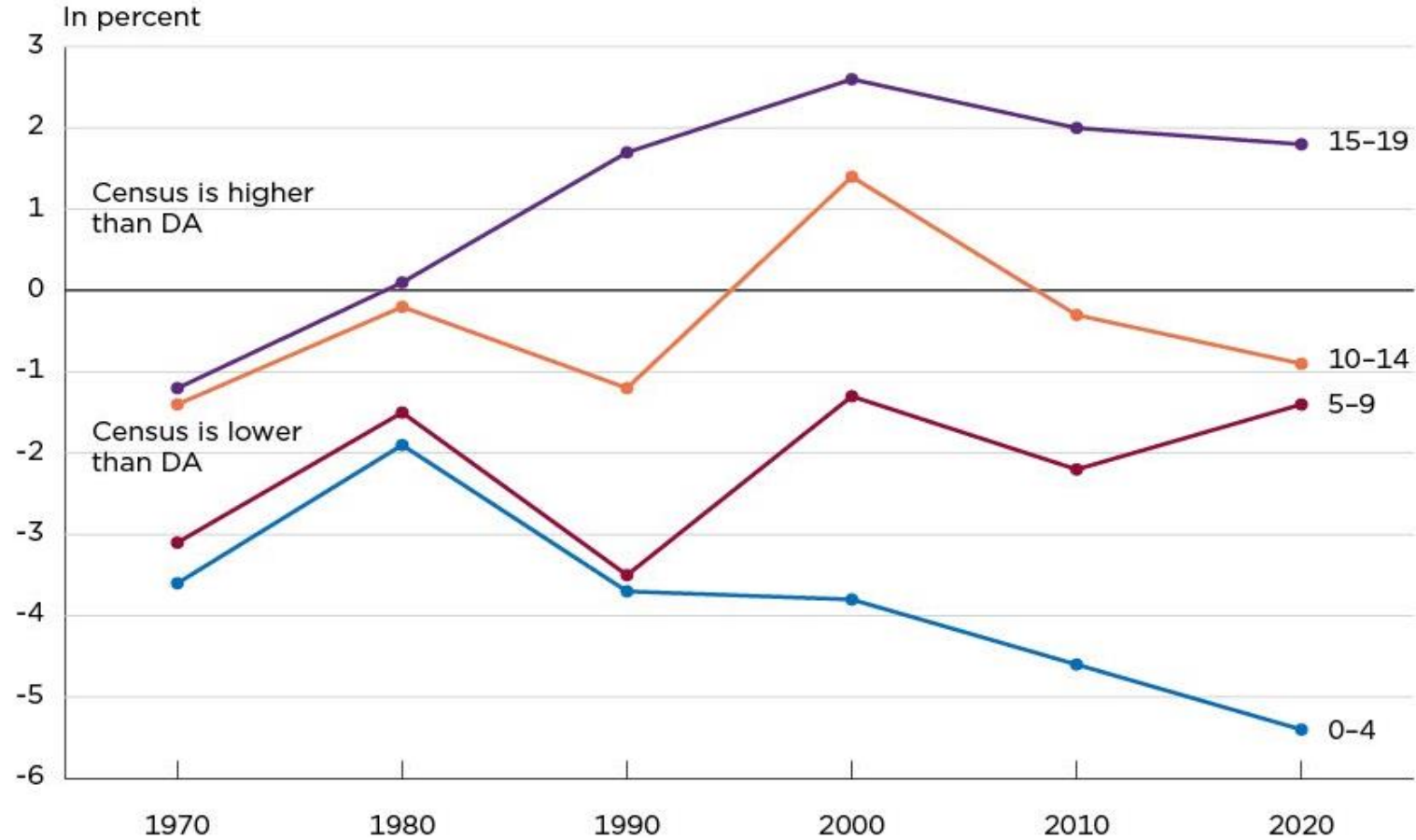
Percent Net Coverage Rates from DA, 1950 - 2010



Net Coverage by Race and Sex: 1960-2010



Net Undercount by Age: 1970-2020



Meta-Analysis of Research on the Differential Undercount: 1940-2024

“Chapters” of literature since 1940s on causes & correlates of the undercount:

- Early Days (1940s-1970s) research focused on:
 - Demographic groups affected (by age, sex, race, ethnicity)
 - Places affected (large cities, rural areas)
 - Process-related factors (proxies, call-backs, closeout cases)
 - Household composition (complex households, extended family, non-relatives, lodgers)
- 1970s-1990s: ethnographic methods to examine causes
- 1990s: wording of questions asking who “lives or stays” at residence
- 2010s: focus on the undercount of young children
- 2020s: blended data; administrative records

Highlights of Research Since 1940s: Chronic Causes and Correlates of the Undercount

1. Distrust: People are missing because they want to be missed
2. Missing Housing Units (e.g. converted basements, garages, sheds; rural roads with difficult access, ambiguous markers)
3. Missing People Within Households
 - a. Partial: We miss some but not all household members
 - a. Complex households: multiple families and fictive kin; multiple generations; unrelated individuals (e.g. workers); overcrowding
 - b. Cyclers: those with “partial residence” in multiple dwellings; no one place is “usual residence”
 - c. Transitioners: those in flux (e.g., new parents, immigrants, natural disaster/COVID refugees) staying “temporarily” with no plans for when or where to go next
 - b. Whole: We miss EVERYONE in the household

Sites and Target Populations of Ethnographic Evaluations (early 1990s)

BLACK	AMERICAN INDIAN	ASIAN	HISPANIC	UNDOCUMENTED
Urban Concentrated	Rural Concentrated	Urban Concentrated	Urban Concentrated	Urban Concentrated
Harlem NYC	Isleta Pueblo, NM	Koreatown LA, CA	San Diego, CA	Miami, FL
Orleans County, Louis.	Rural North Carolina	Queens NY	Rural Concentrated	Bronx, NY
Flint, MI	Rural Okfuskee OK	Chinatown NY	Rural Marion Cty, OR	Santurce, PR
Boward County, FL		Urban/Suburban Mixed	Urban/Suburban Mixed	Urban/Suburban Mixed
Rural Concentrated		South St. Louis MO	Hartford, CT	Houston, TX
Rural Logan Cty, OK		Chicago IL	New Orleans, LA	Long Island, NY
Rural Holmes Cty, Miss		North Beach, CA		San Francisco, CA
Urban/Suburban Mixed		Los Angeles		
North St. Louis MO				
Carbondale, IL				

Distrust as a Cause of the Undercount

- “**Distrust in government**...rooted in the false belief that census data are **not confidential**. They’d withhold information for a number of reasons: receipt of **public benefits**; undocumented immigrants...building owners conceal the fact that they have **illegal housing units** which they rent mainly to **undocumented immigrants**.” (de la Puente, 1995).
- “There is a **profound mistrust** among a significant proportion of the general **inner-city population** of mainstream society in general, and the Federal government in particular. People simply **do not believe that confidentiality will be respected**, nor **do they believe that any greater benefits will accrue** to them or to the community if a more accurate Census is achieved....As a high-level official in the New York Housing authority told me, ‘People simply won’t believe that government doesn’t talk to itself.’” (Bourgoise, 1990)
- “A considerable number of **immigrant and migrant farm workers** prefer not to be identified and, hence, will actively **avoid and frustrate efforts designed to enumerate them**. They will, moreover, often provide erroneous, false, and incomplete information when they are pressed by surveyors...Some...do not possess appropriate authorization to be and to work in the US; others, although authorized, resist **to protect family and friends** who are not (or boarders who are paying for a room); and many, although they have nothing to hide, have a deeply imbedded mistrust of any official government effort to identify, describe, and enumerate them” (Palerm, 1995).

- “All assurances to the contrary, many people **do not trust the motives of the census**....to be expected among impoverished or outcast minority groups...Members of the family, particularly males, are ‘protected’ from enumeration for fear that subsequently, they can be taxed, drafted, or arrested.” (Sharpless and Shortridge, 1975)
- “**Lack of trust** in formal procedures and officials, confusion between Bureau enumerators, police and other formal officials, who are seen in a punitive role, and a real **fear that any information can be potentially compromising**, all contribute to **routine and systematic non-reporting of people, and mis-reporting of information.**” (Hainer, 2007)
- “What have the politicians ever done for us?” or merely, “**What’s in it for me?**” or more aggressively “**How do I know what they will do with this information?**” (Bourgoise, 1990)
- “The social conditions underlying the most **resistant forms of concealment** present the most difficult problems for the Census Bureau. Public information programs attempting to convince people that the census is important, and that census data will be kept confidential were not very effective for the hard-to-enumerate population in the LA test census.” (Fein and West, 1988)

- “The **Haitian population in south Florida is characterized by a profound mistrust of outsiders**, especially those associated with the **government**, high numbers of **undocumented** aliens plus others who have only a very recent and highly tenuous legal status, high rates of poverty, extreme residential mobility, complicated household composition, widespread illiteracy, monolingualism in Haitian Creole or such poor English that it is non-functional, and finally significant **underground economic activities**. We believe all of these factors may contribute to an undercount of Haitians and make gathering other information (e.g. employment and income) extremely difficult.” (Stepick et al, 1990).
- “There is a long and **conflict-filled history of relations between American Indians and the Federal Government** that affects the census count. Some adults living in Oakland can recall elders of their grandparental generation telling of the agonies of forced marches, death, and loss of land which they experienced as a result of conflicts with the United States government. These vivid family memories may be augmented by direct personal experiences that have left feelings of fear, anger and mistrust related to the government.” (Lobo, 1990)

- “Many [problems/causes] are not soluable without the trust and cooperation of the community of poor Blacks. It is important to understand that **underenumeration reflects a reluctance on the part of the community** more than any inadequate effort on the part of local interviewers to locate and document respondents.” (Hainer, 2007)
- On deliberate concealment:
 - “Willingness to report can be approached by considering the perceived **costs and benefits of reporting** for respondents.” (Dillman, 1978).
 - “There has been much discussion of the perceived costs of census reporting. People may fear that disclosure of adult males will **jeopardize welfare eligibility**, that persons illegally in the country will be **deported**, that reporting more persons than **allowed by a lease will prompt landlord troubles**, and that police will be informed of the whereabouts of lawbreakers (Bailar and Martin, 1987). Such fears may cause noncompliance when there is **disbelief in the Census Bureau's promise of confidentiality**.” (Fein and West, 1988)

Distrust is Chronic and Persistent; Same Themes Emerging in Recent Research

- Recent Research on Barriers to Participation, e.g.:
 - Census Bureau Partnership Program (Terry et al., 2023)
 - Interviews with staff serving historically undercounted populations (Fobia et al, 2023)
 - Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (2018)
- Common Themes:
 - Fear of census data being used against the respondent
 - Concerns about loss of benefits, deportation, green card and DACA status
 - Skepticism about if/how Census participation helps the individual or community
 - Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) staff report their constituents are distrustful of census
 - “Worried the information will be used against me...could interfere with Social Security, Medi-Cal and other benefit procurement...of particular concern when people have waited years to get an eligibility determination to receive lifesaving supports or services.” (DREDF, 2020)

What Can Be Done?

Observation and a Proposal from the 1960s

Donald Bogue (urban sociologist; founder of Population Association of America flagship journal *Demography*):

- “[The census interviewer] is a personification of the national government, and his very presence [a] legal summons to furnish information. Long-term census employees...have many anecdotes to illustrate the point that, with his portfolio under his arm, the census taker is Uncle Sam himself to the unwilling as well as the willing respondent.”
- “Experiment with building **semi-permanent civic organizations** to recruit enumerators at the time of the census.” (Bogue, 1965)

What Can Be Done?

A “Proposed Solution” from the 1970s

- Valentine and Valentine (1971): Ethnographer team commissioned by Census Bureau do conduct ethnographic study on the undercount in NYC
- Problem: “These devices [e.g.: PR campaigns; hiring locally], all are ineffective because they do not deal with the **basic problem of the relationship between those who are seeking the information and those asked to provide it.**”
- Proposed Solution:
 - “Intensive, long-term **resident participation** in the life of the community by independent researchers...the only means by which researchers can come to be regarded as trustworthy, for it is the only way to give people convincing experience that they will not be compromised or injured by revealing themselves.
 - Direct observation of actual behavior...accumulated through **experience by persons who are known to live under the same conditions as those whom they study.**
 - Additional personnel might be commissioned and...trained for this work...means to increase opportunities for **members of minority groups to become social scientists and contribute to the understanding of their own and other communities.**”

2000: Establishment of the Census Bureau Partnership Program

Following 1990 Census, bureau partnered with other federal agencies; state, local, and tribal governments; religious, community, and social service organizations; and private businesses →

Partnership Program: “stemmed from the Bureau’s recognition that a successful head count required the local knowledge, experience, and expertise that these organizations provide.”

Objective: “Get Out The Count” encourage people — especially hard-to-count populations — to participate in the census

Multiple Forms of Community-Based Engagement: Outreach and Research

1. Outreach

- Partnership Program has grown and evolved over the years
- “Enhancing External Engagement” project underway for 2030

2. Research: engaging the community in the research itself

- Evolution of ideas proposed in 1960s and 1970s → Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR)
- Practiced since ~ 1970s; picking up steam over the years, e.g.:
 - National Institute of Minority Health and Disparities Community-Based Participatory Research Program, launched in 2005
 - Harvard Catalyst Community Engagement Program, founded in 2008
 - University of Maryland Office of Public Health Practice & Community Engagement; launched 2022

Community-Based Participatory Research at the Census Bureau?

- General concept: hire community-based organization (CBO) staff on a project-basis to become “co-researchers” along with Census Bureau staff for pre-testing
- Mechanism: hire contractor to recruit, hire, train and pay CBO staff to work in tandem with Census and contracted researchers
- First pilot project: pre-test questions used to collect roster of household members to identify whether and why young children (0-4) are left off:
 - identify issues with question wording, instructions, etc. that contribute to erroneous omissions
 - modify methods to reduce omissions and the undercount
- Benefits of working with CBO staff as co-researchers:
 - Gain unique perspective of those who “live under the same conditions as those whom they study” to inform research protocols, analysis and narrative
 - Builds trust:
 - Demystifies the data collection and analysis process
 - Brings benefits to the community (e.g., builds data literacy, provides skills and wages to local staff)

Exploratory Research: Scoping Interviews

- Census Bureau staff involved in any kind of external outreach or engagement:
 - National and regional/local partnership and communications staff
 - Liaisons to community-based outreach offices that facilitate usage of census data:
 - Data Dissemination Specialists
 - State Data Centers
 - Census Information Centers
- Community-Based Participatory Research Practitioners and Experts
 - Summer at Census experts
 - Harvard Catalyst Community Engagement Program
 - American University
- Advocates, Experts, Stakeholders working with vulnerable populations
 - Young children
 - People with low literacy
 - People with disabilities

Highlights: Unpacking the “Community Based Organization”

- Diversity of CBOs:
 - Size and populations: large well-established CBOs have wide reach but may be missing key segments of the population
 - Funding: some have more established, stable funding streams than others
 - Dynamic: e.g., COVID era → more coordination among CBOs
- CBOs have limited resources:
 - It can be costly to engage with outsiders, especially with no assurance of a benefit
 - Trust is not static; needs to be earned and re-earned
 - Need to invest in long term relationships → become a known and trusted quantity
 - Even bringing a small amount of resources into a CBO can have an outsized impact for both the organization per se and the community in general
 - Potential for a win-win: even small investments (e.g., project-based opportunities for side jobs for CBO staff) over a long period of time could be a feasible way to build trust; CBO staff could become our “ambassadors” among their constituents

CBO versus Target Population: It's Complicated

- Project to study “missing men” in inner-city neighborhoods
 - engaged with CBOs, but found their clientele were mostly women and young children
 - needed to explore other ways that men were attached to the community
- Teen pregnancy research project:
 - started with CBOs but found they operated mostly 9-5 weekdays, when their target population (teenagers) were in school
 - trained “walkers and talkers” to get outside the CBO walls and into the community to interact with teens
- Project to improve economic status of people with disabilities; struggling with questions such as:
 - Who makes up the disability population?
 - Where are they?
 - Many people with disabilities in the community are not receiving any disability related services and are completely unknown to service providers and data collectors

Literacy Navigators: Built-in Infrastructure for Reaching Vulnerable Populations

- Services for low literacy populations can happen on many fronts via “helpers” or “literacy navigators” embedded in existing community-based infrastructure, e.g.:
 - Meals on Wheels
 - Bookmobiles
- Census could tap into existing low literacy infrastructure to learn about:
 - What services they provide
 - Who is their clientele
 - How do they provide the services
- Digital Equity Act (2021) provides \$2.75 billion for 3 grants promoting digital equity and inclusion
- Track recipients of those grants to identify CBOs, their mission, services, target populations, etc.
- Explore potential to train up existing CBO staff in digital and forms literacy services and embed Census literacy into the curriculum

Conclusions

- For decades, distrust has been identified as a root cause of non-participation in the census
- It is impossible to know the “counterfactual:”
 - what would the undercount be *in the absence* of the many research and outreach programs undertaken over the decades?
- Nevertheless, the differential undercount persists
- Community-Based Participatory Research has potential to:
 - Address long-standing distrust among historically undercounted populations
 - Reduce the differential undercount

THANK YOU!!

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