

DEVELOPING AND TESTING RACE AND ETHNIC ORIGIN QUESTIONS FOR THE CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY SUPPLEMENT ON RACE AND ETHNIC ORIGIN

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Introduction

This paper has two major objectives. The first objective is to describe how questions for the 1995 Current Population Survey supplement on race and ethnic origin (hereinafter the supplement) were developed and tested through the use of cognitive interviews. The second objective is to provide information on how the supplement was administered by Census Bureau interviewers through computer assisted telephone interviews (CATI). The latter was obtained through two focus groups with CATI interviewers. One focus group was conducted in the Tucson, AZ processing facility and the second focus group was held in the Hagerstown, MD processing facility.

This paper is structured as follows. First, background information is provided. This background material provides the context for the development and implementation of the supplement. This subject matter includes data which show that the U.S. population is becoming increasingly racially and ethnically heterogeneous. Also included are findings from Census Bureau studies indicating that, for a small but growing segment of the U.S. population, existing racial and ethnic categories are not adequate because these categories do not capture their racial and ethnic diversity.

The paper then briefly presents information on the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) review of Statistical Policy Directive No. 15 and the May 1995 Current Population Survey supplement on race and ethnic origin. This is followed by a discussion of how the supplement was developed and tested using cognitive interviews. Major findings from this cognitive work is also presented. The paper concludes by presenting focus group data on how the supplement was administered by Census Bureau CATI interviewers.

Background

While Statistical Policy Directive No. 15,¹ the current federal standard for the reporting of race and ethnic origin, is adequate for classifying the race and ethnic origin of most Americans, there is evidence that the current standard is inadequate for capturing the growing ethnic and racial diversity of the U.S. population.

Changing Demographic Characteristics

Census data show that the U.S. is more racially and

ethnically diverse today than in the past. For example, the number of non-White racial and ethnic groups in 1900 totaled 10 million and increased to 20 million by 1960. This number had grown to 60 million in 1990. Immigration to the U.S. was a key element in this growth.

Census data also show that racial minority populations have grown between 1980 and 1990. Between the 1980 and 1990 census, the rate of increase for Blacks (13 percent), American Indians, Eskimos and Aleuts (38 percent) and Asian and Pacific Islanders (108) exceeded the rate of increase for Whites (6 percent).²

The Hispanic origin population also exhibited growth between the 1980 and 1990 censuses. Hispanics of Mexican origin, the largest of the Hispanic subgroups, totaled 13.5 million in 1990 an increase of 54 percent over 1980. Similarly, Puerto Ricans, the second largest Hispanic subgroup, totaled 2.7 million in 1990 yielding a 35 percent increase since 1980. The Cuban origin population constituted 5 percent of all U.S. Hispanics in 1990 and showed a 30 percent increase between 1980 and 1990. Other Hispanics had a 67 percent increase between 1980 and 1990.³

Since 1960 the number of interracial married couples in the U.S. has increased rapidly.⁴ In 1960 interracial couples represented less than 1 percent (0.4 percent) of all married couples. By 1980 the percentage of such couples was 2 percent of all married couples. And in 1990 interracial couples represented about 3 percent of all married couples.⁵

As a result of the aforementioned demographic changes, the U.S. population has become increasingly racially and ethnically diverse. Consequently, a growing proportion of the U.S. population may not self-identify with a single race. This situation could pose significant challenges for the Census Bureau and other federal statistical agencies. For example, one such challenge involves the classification of racial and ethnic groups in a meaningful and useful manner. Meaningful in that race and ethnic categories should be, for the most part, widely accepted by stakeholders and the public in general (universal acceptance is highly improbable); useful in that the racial and ethnic categories should adequately meet the needs of government (legislative requirements and functions as well as formulation of public policy), business, the research and academic community and the public at large.

Overview of Findings From Census Bureau Studies

The Census Bureau's analysis of reporting in the 1990 census and the Content Reinterview Survey (CRS) revealed the following with respect to the 1990 census.⁶ (a) Some

respondents did not understand the intended meaning of the race question. Some checked "other race" and entered an ethnic origin such as Hispanic, Puerto Rican or another national origin. (b) The low response consistency in the American Indian category suggested reporting problems. And (c) the low response consistency for "other race" also suggested reporting problems.

With respect to Hispanic origin, findings from the Census Bureau's CRS show that a relatively high non-response rate for the "No (not Spanish/Hispanic)" category. Apparently non-Hispanics skipped the question instead of marking the "No (not Spanish/Hispanic)" category. CRS also showed misreporting in the "Mexican-Amer" category because it appears that some non-Hispanics checked this category. And finally, the "Yes, other Spanish/Hispanic" category also showed high inconsistency of reporting.⁷

A recent study by a Census Bureau contractor⁸ provided detailed information on how Hispanics, from different national origins, respond to key items on the 1990 Spanish language census long form. Items of interest included the race, Hispanic origin and ancestry questions. One of the major findings reported is that Hispanics experienced conceptual difficulties regarding the race, Hispanic origin, and ancestry questions. They had found it difficult to separate these three concepts. The study describes the difficulties encountered and provides suggestions for revising the census form.

OMB Review of Statistical Policy Directive No. 15

In 1993 Thomas C. Sawyer, then Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Census, Statistics, and Postal Personnel, held hearings on the measurement of race and ethnic origin in decennial censuses. OMB, in testimony provided on July 29, 1993, announced that it would conduct a comprehensive review of Statistical Directive No. 15.⁹ The first step in this review process was a workshop held on February 17 and 18, 1994 convened by the Committee on National Statistics of the National Academy of Sciences at the request of OMB. The purpose of this workshop was to provide informed discussion concerning the issues associated with the review of Directive No. 15. The workshop was attended by representative of federal statistical agencies, social science research firms, academia, private industry and interest groups.

Shortly after the workshop OMB established the Interagency Committee for Review Racial and Ethnic Standards. Federal agencies that collect and report data on race and ethnic origin are represented in this committee. This committee, in turn, created a Research Working Group charged with developing a research agenda for the review of the current federal standard. A key component of the research agenda proposed by the research subcommittee was the development of a supplement on race and ethnic origin to the May 1995 Current Population Survey (CPS).

The May 1995 Current Population Survey on Race and Ethnic Origin

The Current Population Survey is a national monthly survey of approximately 60,000 households. These households are a probability sample representing the civilian noninstitutional population of the United States. In addition to demographic information, the CPS collects labor force information such as employment, unemployment and earnings data. These data are used to develop socioeconomic statistics such as the National Monthly Unemployment Rate. Each month the CPS contains a supplement of additional questions on a selected topic. In May 1995 the CPS contained a supplement on race and ethnic origin.

The CPS supplement on race and ethnic origin is one among several initiatives launched by the Interagency Committee for the Review of the OMB Racial and Ethnic Standards. Thus, the CPS supplement was not intended to address all issues related to the review of Statistical Directive No. 15, but rather a subset of issues that the Interagency Committee's Research Working Group deemed appropriate for testing using the CPS. Thus the following research issues guided the choice of questions to be included in the CPS supplement. (1) Making available a "multiracial" category for persons who do not identify with one single race. (2) Combining race and Hispanic origin in one question instead of two separate questions, one for race and one for Hispanic origin. And (3) modifying current race and ethnic categories. For example, using "African-American" instead of "Black", and "Latino" instead of "Hispanic."

In order to examine these research issues four different panels were established. Each panel introduced differently worded questions on race and ethnicity. The first panel contained a separate race and Hispanic origin question with no multiracial category. The second panel had separate race and Hispanic origin questions but the race question included a multiracial category. The third panel included a combined race and Hispanic origin question with no multiracial category. And the fourth and last panel had a combined race and Hispanic origin question with a multiracial category. Households in the CPS sample were asked to respond to only one of these panels.

Cognitive Research

The first draft of the supplement was developed by the Research Working Group established by the Interagency Committee for the Review of the Racial and Ethnic Standards. The Working Group consisted of social and behavioral scientists from the federal agencies represented in the Interagency Committee. The first draft of the

supplement was then reviewed by a panel of questionnaire design experts from a number of federal agencies and by a panel of subject matter experts which consisted of academics with research experience with racial and ethnic minority populations.

The Cognitive Research Team

The cognitive research team consisted of an interdisciplinary group of behavioral scientists from several federal agencies and two universities.¹⁰ All members of the research team were experienced cognitive interviewers or were trained in cognitive interviewing specifically for this project.

The Research Design

The objective of the cognitive work was to cognitively test the CPS supplement questionnaire developed by the Research Working Group. The goal was to identify and correct problems with the CPS supplement questionnaire, such as, vague or imprecise questions, vocabulary and conceptual problems, and order effects.

The research design called for cognitively testing the four panels in the supplement with individuals from the following racial and ethnic groups: White, Black, Hispanic, Asian and Pacific Islander, American Indian and individuals of multiracial background. A total of 83 cognitive interviews were conducted with individuals from the aforementioned racial and ethnic groups across the four panels.

To the extent possible, we matched research team members with respondents by race or ethnic group. Since a Spanish language version of the supplement was developed in tandem with the English version, almost all cognitive interviews with Hispanics were conducted in Spanish by the two Hispanic research team members who were fully bilingual.

The 83 cognitive interviews were conducted in three separate phases. In Phase I, the cognitive researchers conducted 20 interviews in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area between November 4 and November 14, 1994. The researchers conducted a total of 54 cognitive interviews in Phase II. These interviews were conducted between December 9 and December 23, 1994. For Phase II interviews the research team traveled to seven different locations throughout the country in order to obtain regional representation.¹¹ In the third and last phase, the researchers conducted 9 interviews in early January 1995.¹²

These three phases represent an iterative process where revisions to the supplement were made after each phase. After Phase I, findings were summarized and sent to the questionnaire design experts and the subject matter experts for review. The supplement was then revised and Phase II interviews were conducted using the revised supplement.

After Phase II interviews were complete the research team met and discussed findings. Based on this discussion the supplement was once again revised and used in Phase III interviews. After this last phase the supplement was finalized and administered by the Census Bureau using computer assisted telephone or personal interviewing technology.

The Conduct of Cognitive Interviews

The cognitive research was conducted by using retrospective think-aloud cognitive interviews with the use of probe questions.¹³ These interviews were conducted individually and in person. Cognitive interviews that use the retrospective think-aloud and probe method call for respondents to respond to the survey under conditions that approximate the actual survey. The respondent's response is then reviewed and respondents are asked through probing how they arrived at their response, why they provided a particular response, and so on. The protocol contained a series of carefully worded probes that cognitive researchers introduced at predetermined and strategic points throughout the interviews.

In cognitive interviews one of the four panels was administered to the respondent using the following protocol. The cognitive researcher asked the respondent a supplement question. The respondent answered the question. The researcher then asked the respondent to paraphrase the question. At predetermined strategic points in the interview the researcher asked predetermined probe questions in order to elicit specific information. For questions containing concepts or terms of special interest (e.g., race, Hispanic, Latino, ethnicity, etc.) the respondent was also asked to provide a definition of these terms or concepts. For instance, to get the respondent to paraphrase a specific question the researcher asked: *"Can you tell me what this question means in your own words?"* To obtain the meaning a respondent assigned to a specific word in a question the researcher asked: *"Can you tell me what the word < fill in word > means in this question?"* In order to determine how respondents define a specific concept the researcher probed: *"What makes a person a < fill in concept, e.g., Hispanic, African-American, etc.>?"* We also wanted to know why respondents selected one response option and not others. For example, why the response option "Asian and Pacific Islander" was selected rather than "White" or one of the other racial categories. In order to obtain this information the researcher probed: *"Why did you choose that answer?"*

Major Findings

The cognitive research revealed that the supplement had a number of problems which can be summarized as follows.

The cognitive interviews indicated that the supplement had: (1) vague, ambiguous and imprecise questions, (2) questions found sensitive by some respondents, (3) questions that were too abstract, (4) terminology problems, (5) order effects and (6) perceived redundancy.¹⁴ Below are selected examples of such problems.

Question 4a is an example of a vague or imprecise question. This question was asked in order to determine if respondents identified with a more specific race or ethnic group than that reported in questions containing the OMB racial and ethnic categories (e.g., "White", "Black", "Asian", "Hispanic" etc.). Question 4a read:

"You selected [fill in race] from the list I read to you. Do you also have a more specific group that you belong to?"

If the response to this question was "Yes" then the respondent was asked to name the specific group that he or she belonged to by asking question 4b. This question read:

"What is the name of your specific group?"

Since these questions lacked specificity they elicited a wide range of unintended responses. For example, in response to question 4b, one African-American respondent said:

"Morris Science Temple of America, Black Muslims. It's a religion but more specific than black."

Another responded stated:

"I didn't understand phrase 'specific group.' Do you mean citizenship, community?"

The Research Working Group attempted to make questions 4a and 4b less ambiguous by adding "racial or ethnic group" instead of just "group." However, these efforts failed and the aforementioned questions were dropped from the final supplement.

Some respondents, particularly Whites, felt uncomfortable with the questions in the supplement because they believed that through the questions we were trying to determine if they were racist or had racist tendencies. To some extent, this could have been due to the probing that is required in cognitive interviews. However, the redundancy in the early version of the supplement, and direct questions asked in the supplement concerning the comfort level of the respondent, contributed to the level of discomfort experienced by some respondents.

For example, after being asked for their race a follow-up question asked respondents if they felt that the racial category they selected (e.g., "White", "Black", "American Indian", etc.) accurately describes the "group" they belong to. This was then followed with question 3c which read:

"Please tell me if using this category to describe your group would make you feel:

[] very comfortable

[] somewhat comfortable

[] somewhat uncomfortable

[] very uncomfortable"

Some White respondents interpreted this question as asking if they had racist ideas or tendencies. For example, a White respondent noted that she was uncomfortable because she objected to placing people into categories. Others were defensive and made it clear to the interviewer that they don't view or judge people by their race. As a result, these sensitivity questions were dropped from the final supplement.

Part III of the supplement contained conceptual questions on race, ethnicity and ancestry. The purpose of these questions was to learn how respondents define and think about these concepts. Part III was the most problematic section of the supplement and was eventually dropped from the final supplement. The difficulty with Part III was that the questions were too abstract to elicit meaningful response from respondents. Additionally, the questions in Part III were viewed as redundant by many respondents.

For example, in Phase I we asked the following open-ended question:

"What do you think is the most important characteristic that defines a person's race?"

[] _____
open-ended response

We asked identical questions concerning a person's ethnicity and ancestry. Respondents found these questions too broad or abstract. Some were embarrassed because they did not have a ready response and saw these questions as testing their intelligence. Others noted that they needed some "clues" or a list of response categories from which to choose.

For Phase II interviews we attempted to provide respondents with "anchors" for these questions. Thus we rewrote the earlier question as follows:

"People sometimes think of customs, or language, or physical appearance, or country of birth when they think of race. What comes to your mind as most important when you think of a person's race?"

[] _____
open-ended response

Respondents still found this question too abstract. Many requested that this question be repeated. Because of the difficulties with Part III of the supplement the research team decided to omit this section of the supplement.

In panels 1 and 3 where a "multiracial" category was not offered in the race question, respondents were asked if they would have liked to have had a multiracial category to best describe themselves or describe those living in their household. This question read as follows in Phase I of the cognitive research:

"Earlier you said you were <race>. Would you have liked to have had a 'Multiracial' category on the list?"

[] *Yes*
[] *No*
[] *No preference*

Respondents thought that this question was asking them for their opinion concerning the inclusion of a "multiracial" category in the race question. Instead, the question was intended to determine if the respondent would have liked a "multiracial" category to better describe himself or herself.

Based on cognitive research the Research Working Group revised the question as follows:

"In addition to <race> would you have liked to have had a "Multiracial" category on the list to better describe yourself?"

[] *Yes*
[] *No*
[] *No preference*

This question was included in the actual CPS supplement.

This section has provided a handful of examples illustrating the problems encountered in early versions of the CPS supplement. The next section reports findings from focus groups conducted with CPS CATI interviewers.

Findings From Focus Groups with CPS CATI Interviewers

Cognitive interviews had revealed that some questions in the supplement were sensitive to some respondents. Although we believe that problematic questions in the supplement were modified or eliminated as a result of the cognitive work, we wanted to determine if respondents still had difficulty with some questions. Additionally, we also wanted to obtain the feedback from CPS interviewers concerning the implementation of the supplement. In order to achieve this we collected the following information. First, we audiotaped approximately 400 computer assisted telephone interviews (CATI) interviews (about 100 were Spanish language interviews) in the Census Bureau's Tucson, Arizona and Hagerstown, Maryland processing offices. These audio tapes will be used for

behavior coding. And second, we conducted two focus groups, one in the Tucson processing office and one in the Hagerstown processing office. This section reports findings from the focus groups and a later paper will report findings from the behavior coding.

Focus group participants were all Census Bureau employees who administer the CPS every month through computer assisted telephone interviews in the Tucson and Hagerstown processing offices. Participants were recruited by the processing offices.

The focus groups were designed to obtain information on three related topics which, together, indicate how the supplement was implemented. These were: (a) the extent to which respondents understood the questions in the supplement, (b) determining if questions in the supplement were found sensitive by respondents and (c) establishing if CPS interviewers had difficulty in administering the supplement.

Concerning respondents' understanding of the questions in the supplement, we asked focus group participants: How often were you asked to repeat the question? How often were you asked to explain the meaning of the words or phrases contained in the question? Did you get a response that did not fit the question? How many said "I don't know" or provided a similar response to the question?

Regarding question sensitivity we asked focus group respondents: Did anyone say that the question being asked was too personal or sensitive?

To determine the extent to which the supplement was difficult to administer, we asked focus group participants: Did you have any difficulty reading this question? Were you interrupted by the person being interviewed before you had the chance to read this entire question? Were you provided with an answer that was not on the list of regular response options?

In the focus group we explored these issues by focusing on specific questions in the supplement. These questions fell into one of the following categories: (a) Questions that asked for a person's race, Hispanic origin or ancestry. (b) Follow-up questions to the Hispanic origin question eliciting Hispanic subgroups. And (c) questions that elicited respondents' opinion on the use of alternative categories to describe a person's racial or ethnic background. For example, the use of the term "Latino", "African American" or "multiracial."

Question Comprehension

According to focus group participants some respondents had problems with understanding certain terms used in supplement questions, while others were puzzled by question wording as indicated by the need to repeat the question or explain the intent of certain questions. Further, focus group participants offered suggestions for minor wording changes for a handful of supplement questions.

The term "multiracial" presented problems for some respondents. Two panels had race questions with "multiracial" as one of the response options. The problems with the term "multiracial" did not seem to occur in these questions perhaps because interviewers seldom read this category, which was listed next to the last response category in the race question.

In two other panels where the race question did not have "multiracial" as a response option, respondents were asked:

In addition to <fill in race from race question> would you have liked to have had a "Multiracial" category on the list to better describe yourself?"

[] Yes

[] No

[] No preference

It is in this context that "multiracial" was problematic for some respondents. Focus group participants noted that this question had to be repeated, and in some instances, explained to the respondent. One interviewer said that even after the term "multiracial" was explained some respondents still had difficulty with the question.

The focus group participant who conducted Spanish language interviews said that he had to repeat this question in all of his interviews. He added that most Spanish speaking respondents claimed not to know what is meant by "multiracial." Another focus group participant stated:

"To suddenly have a word like 'multiracial' come out of the blue I think it just didn't connect with the idea."

Some focus group participants suggested that the term "biracial" may be more widely understood than "multiracial." In the cognitive work we examined the term "biracial" as well as other terms intended to convey how people describe their racial heritage such as "more than one race" and "mixed race." The cognitive work did not identify major problems with the term "multiracial."¹⁵ Moreover, "multiracial" seemed to be the preferred term among persons of mixed racial background. The difficulty with this term may be largely due to question wording rather than the term itself.

Although no focus group participant noted that the Hispanic origin question was misunderstood, there were relevant comments made about this question. The question reads:

First, are you one of the following: Hispanic, Latino or of Spanish origin?

[] Yes

- No
- Don't know
- Refused

Some focus group participants said that, when they asked this question, a few Hispanics would provide their national origin such as Salvadoran, Mexican or Guatemalan while other Hispanics thought that they had to select one of the three terms offered: "Hispanic", "Latino" or Spanish origin." Overall, however, the question was understood and no misclassification problems were reported.

It was also reported that some non-Hispanics asked for the meaning of the aforementioned terms. There is indication that this occurred partly because the question caught some non-Hispanics by surprise since it was the first question in the supplement. One focus group participant said the following concerning the Hispanic origin question:

"It was rather a sudden question and its so very specific I think because they were not expecting something like that."

Individuals who said that they were of Hispanic origin from Central or South America were asked the following question:

Which Central American or South American group is that?

- <group>
- Don't know
- Refused

Focus group participants reported that a handful of Hispanics did not understand this question and had to be repeated or explained. It was suggested that the word "group" threw off some respondents.

Virtually all focus group participants agreed that the race question was difficult to administer as evidenced by respondents' request that the question be repeated and by the tendency of respondents to interrupt the interviewer before he or she finished reading the entire question. As noted earlier, response options for the race question varied by panel. For example, the race question in panels 2 and 4 had "multiracial" as a response option, the other two panels did not. The race question reads as follows in the control panel (panel 1):

Which one of the following list are you: White; Black; American Indian; Eskimo, or Aleut; Asian or Pacific Islander; or Something else?

This question was then followed by the response options, including an open-ended response option for those

who selected the option "something else."

Focus group participants were asked if respondents requested that certain terms in the race question be explained or defined. For example, "Aleut" or "something else." No one reported the need to explain these terms. Perhaps this is partly due to the fact that, in many cases, respondents did not give interviewers the opportunity to finish reading the question before responding. (This topic is addressed below.)

Other questions that respondents had difficulty in understanding were a series of questions designed to determine why respondents self identified as "multiracial" or why they would have selected "multiracial" if this response option were offered in the race question. This question reads:

I am going to read you a list of reasons people give for using the "Multiracial" category. Please tell me if you would use "Multiracial" for any of the following reasons:

Because your parents are from different racial groups?

Because your ancestors before your parents were from different racial groups?

Because the specific group that you belong to is mixed?

Because of some other reason?

For those who selected the last option their reason for doing so was recorded.

Most focus group participants reported having to re-read this question, explain the question or paraphrase it in order for respondents to understand the question. Several focus group participants said that the third response option "Because the specific group that you belong to is mixed?" caused confusion because it is redundant with the first two response options. That is, if an affirmative answer was provided for either response option one or response option two then response option three would also require an affirmative response.

Also, as noted earlier, respondents had trouble understanding the question containing the term "multiracial" which preceded the a aforementioned question. This probably contributed to the difficulty experienced with the aforementioned question.

A number of focus group participants said that they had to either repeat or explain the meaning of the ancestry question. This question reads:

Now, what is your ancestry or ethnic origin?

The focus group participant who conducted Spanish language interviews noted that some Hispanics did not understand what is meant by "ancestry."

Participants also mentioned that, to most respondents, "ancestry" and "ethnic origin" mean the same thing. We also found this to be the case in the cognitive work. Focus group participants also noted that "American" was a common response and that some respondents, mainly Blacks and Whites, did not know their ancestry and responded "Black" or "White" to the ancestry question or simply stated "don't know." Findings from the cognitive work also confirm these points.¹⁶

Question Sensitivity

The cognitive research indicated that issues concerning race and ethnic origin in the context of a personal interview can be a sensitive for some people. For example, a number of respondents felt defensive when questioned about either their racial and ethnic identity or that of others in their household. Other respondents were less than candid with their response to our questions presumably because they wanted to provide us with the "politically correct" point of view. Based on cognitive interviews the Research Working Group revised or eliminated the sensitive questions in the supplement.¹⁷ Nonetheless, some respondents may still find some of the supplement questions sensitive. Thus question sensitivity was one of the topics discussed in the focus groups.

A number of focus group participants said that some non-Hispanics found the Hispanic origin question sensitive. However, when asked to provide examples of respondents' reaction to the question focus group participants could not cite specific examples. Their response was based on impression, or as one focus group participant noted: "[respondents] gave vibes like they were offended." We believe that most respondents were reacting to the fact that the Hispanic origin question was the first question in the supplement and were caught off guard by it.

The sensitivity or discomfort expressed by some respondents cannot be attributed solely to specific questions. Rather, the issues addressed in the supplement as a whole evoked negative reactions or some indication of discomfort. The questions that summoned the most negative reactions were those that asked for the race and ethnic origin of the respondent or that of others in their household.

Some respondents spontaneously expressed their dislike or objection to these questions while the reactions of others were more subtle. For the latter group, their dislike of the questions surfaced in the form of jokes or sarcasm.

A focus group participant noted that one respondent told her:

"Why are you asking these kinds of questions. We are all Americans if we live in America."

Other focus group participants noted that they received similar reactions from their respondents.

According to focus group participants some respondents were less direct in expressing their displeasure. One focus group participant noted that several of her respondents refused to answer the race question and said that this information was provided in the initial CPS interview. In fact, according to this participant one respondent told her: "I already told you before so look it up." Other respondents felt uncomfortable with the question and would not let the interviewer read the entire question. One participant noted that one of her respondents interrupted and said: "Why do I have to listen to this. What are these things [referring to the list of response options in the race question]"

Some focus group participants said that they would get sarcastic or comical comments from respondents when they were asked the race question. One focus group participant noted that a male participant responded as follows to the race question. "Well the last time I looked in the mirror I was White."

Another focus group participant remarked that a female respondent gave the following response when asked to provide the race of her husband: "Eskimo because he is so cold." Still another participant said that one of her respondents said she was "Pacific Islander" because she wanted to take a trip to the Pacific Islands.

Based on these focus group data it is not possible to determine, with confidence, how often such comments were made. Behavior coding will provide some indication. Also, the examples noted above could have been isolated instances that focus group participants were able to recall because the responses were so outlandish.

It is quite possible that the majority of respondents did not provide frivolous answers to questions concerning race. One focus group participant stated:

"My people were, you know, there may have been a couple who were sensitive about it. But as far as they had a category where they could put what they wanted to say, they were fine with it."

Difficulty in Administering the Supplement

The first two components of the supplement's implementation -- the extent to which respondents understood the questions in the supplement and the extent to which respondents found the questions in the supplement sensitive -- were covered above. These topics touched on our third component of implementation, the extent to which CATI interviewers found the supplement difficult to administer, apart from difficulties of respondents not understanding or being sensitive to questions.

In order to obtain an indication of how easy or difficult the supplement was to administer we asked CATI interviewers to tell us: Were there any difficulties in reading the questions? Were you interrupted by the person being interviewed before you had the chance to read the entire question? Were you provided with an answer that was not on the list?

Virtually all focus group participants said that the race question was awkward to read. Some suggested dropping the word "list" from the question. Further, a number of focus group participants said that they had to reword the question in order to provide respondents with a question that did not need to be repeated. One rewording of this question was as follows: "Which one of the following are you?" This omitted the word "list." Another rewording was: "I want to offer a list to choose from." The list would then be read to the respondent.

Focus group participants also noted that when they asked the race question they were often interrupted by respondents who wanted to provide their answer before all racial categories were read. Further, the same situation was reported when obtaining race information on proxies. One focus group participant stated that she seldom gets beyond the "White" category when interviewing White households. Another participant said that she had a very difficult respondent the day before the focus group. This respondent yelled at her: "You sound like a robot!" when the interviewer insisted on reading all the racial options provided in the race question.

Conclusion

The cognitive research identified a number of problems with the supplement, including vague and imprecise questions, vocabulary problems and order effects. Most of these difficulties were corrected through an iterative process where revisions were made to the supplement after each of the three phases of cognitive interviewing. Although serious problems with the supplement were addressed and corrected via this iterative process either through rewording or reordering of questions or, in some cases, dropping problematic questions, some questions proved hard to understand and difficult to administer as evidenced by focus group data.

We believe that some of the difficulties identified by CATI interviewers in the focus groups are a function of the supplement's subject matter and the mode in which the supplement was administered.¹⁸ That is, survey questions on race and ethnic origin are sensitive to some respondents. Insights obtained through cognitive interviews can, as we have demonstrated, minimize this sensitivity factor but cannot completely eliminate it. Further, necessarily lengthy questions, such as a race questions with all the required racial categories, prove difficult to administer in a CATI environment. Again, cognitive research can identify such

problems and perhaps suggest ways of addressing this concern but such research cannot fully ameliorate the problems.

NOTES

- ¹ Hereinafter referred to as Directive No. 15 or the federal standard.
- ² Census Questionnaire Content, 1990 CQC-4. Race.
- ³ Census Questionnaire Content, 1990 CQC-7. Hispanic Origin.
- ⁴ Interracial married couples are White and Black, White and American Indian, Black and Asian, etc.
- ⁵ Claudette Bennett, Nampeo McKenney and Roderick Harrison. "Racial Classification Issues Concerning Children in Mixed-Race Households. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America. San Francisco, CA, April 6-8, 1995.
- ⁶ U.S. General Accounting Office. Census Reform: Early Outreach and Decisions Needed on Race and Ethnic Questions. GAO/GGD-93-36. January 1993. Page 16.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Edward Kissam, Enrique Herrera and Jorge M. Nakamoto. Hispanic Response to Census Enumeration: Forms and Procedures. Submitted to the U.S. Census Bureau under Task Order No. 46-YABC-2-66027. March 1993.
- ⁹ For more information on the OMB review process and the events that led to the OMB review of Directive No. 15 see Suzanne Evinger, "How Shall We Measure Our Nation's Diversity?" Chance Vol. 8, No. 1, 1995.
- ¹⁰ The research team members were (listed in alphabetical order): Adalberto Aguirre (University of California, Riverside), Patricia Bell (Oklahoma State University), Ada Costa-Cash (Bureau of the Census); Manuel de la Puente (Bureau of the Census), Eleanor Gerber (Bureau of the Census), Ruth McKay (Bureau of Labor Statistics), Luann M. Moy (General Accounting Office), Jorge Nakamoto (Aguirre International, Inc.) and Jaki Stanley (Department of Agriculture).

¹¹ List locations and the racial or ethnic group interviewed are as follows: Albuquerque, NM (American Indians), Chicago, IL (Blacks), Houston, TX (Hispanics and Whites), New

Orleans, LA (Creoles), New York, NY (Hispanics and Whites), rural southern California (Hispanics), rural Mississippi (Blacks), Rural West Virginia (Whites) and San Francisco, CA (Asians and Pacific Islanders, Hispanics and multiracials).

¹² Five of these interviews were conducted with White respondents in West Virginia and four were conducted with Hispanics in suburban Maryland.

¹³ For more information on this and other cognitive laboratory methods see Barbara H. Forsyth and Judith T. Lessler "Cognitive Laboratory Methods: A Taxonomy." in Paul P. Biemer et al. (eds.) Measurement Errors in Surveys. Pp. 393-418 New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

¹⁴ For a complete discussion of our findings see Ruth B. McKay and Manuel de la Puente "Cognitive Research in designing the CPS Supplement on Race and Ethnicity." Paper presented at the Bureau of the Census 1995 Annual Research Conference, March 19-23, Rosslyn, Virginia.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Approximately 25 percent of the supplement interviews were face-to-face and the remaining 75 percent were telephone interviews.