

## Testing racial and ethnic origin questions in the CPS supplement

*Results show that combining race and Hispanic origin questions might decrease counts of Hispanics, and including a multiracial category might decrease counts of American Indians and Alaska Natives*

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Since 1977, Federal data collection agencies have been required to obtain and present racial and ethnic origin information according to Statistical Policy Directive No. 15.<sup>1</sup> The basic racial categories set forth in the directive are: American Indian or Alaskan Native; Asian or Pacific Islander; black; and white. Ethnic categories specified in the directive are: Hispanic-origin and not of Hispanic-origin. Federal agencies have used these standards for recordkeeping, data collection, and presentation of data on race and Hispanic-origin for almost two decades. However, they have come under increasing criticism from persons who believe that the basic categories do not reflect the growing diversity of the Nation's population. Some groups also have proposed changing the names of several categories.

In response to these concerns, the Office of Management and Budget established the Inter-agency Committee for the Review of the Racial and Ethnic Standards. From this committee, a research working group developed a research agenda, recommending that certain studies be conducted by Federal agencies. The research agenda included a supplement to the May 1995 Current Population Survey (CPS)<sup>2</sup> that was designed to collect information on several key issues under review.

This article describes the results of a May 1995 CPS supplement that tested different questions to assess race and ethnic origin. Results from the supplement also are compared with race and eth-

nic tabulations from the CPS, which contains only the basic categories in the directive.

### The questionnaire

All questions in the supplement were pretested in several rounds of cognitive testing with respondents representing the major racial and ethnic groups and geographical regions of the United States. (See the article by Ruth McKay in this issue for the results of these pretesting activities.) The supplement addressed the following issues: (1) the effect of having a multiracial category among the list of races, (2) the effect of adding "Hispanic" to the list of racial categories, and (3) the preferences for alternative names for racial and ethnic categories (for example, African-American for black, and Latino for Hispanic). The supplement was organized into four panels or versions, representing a two-by-two experimental design for studying issues 1 and 2. Questions relating to issue 3 were the same for all panels. The total sample of approximately 60,000 households was divided into four groups. Each group of about 15,000 households received one of the four panels. All respondents in a household received the same set of questions; household members 15 years and older were asked to respond for themselves, and parents answered for children too young to answer for themselves. The panels were:

Panel 1: Separate race and Hispanic-origin questions, no multiracial category

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**Table 1. Hispanic or non-Hispanic origin identification by panel, May 1995**

[Percent distribution]

|                    | Panel 1<br>Separate race and Hispanic-origin questions; no multiracial category | Panel 2<br>Separate race and Hispanic-origin questions with a multiracial category | Panel 3<br>A combined race and Hispanic-origin question; no multiracial category | Panel 4<br>A combined race and Hispanic-origin question with a multiracial category |
|--------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Total .....        | 100.00  | 100.00   | 100.00   | 100.00  |
| Hispanic .....     | 10.79   | 10.41  | 7.53   | 8.58  |
| Non-Hispanic ..... | 89.21   | 89.59  | 92.47  | 91.42   |

**Table 2. Racial identification by panel, May 1995**

[Percent distribution]

|   | Panel 1<br>Separate race and Hispanic-origin questions; no multiracial category | Panel 2<br>Separate race and Hispanic-origin questions with a multiracial category | Panel 3<br>A combined race and Hispanic-origin question; no multiracial category | Panel 4<br>A combined race and Hispanic-origin question with a multiracial category |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| Total .....                                   | 100.00  | 100.00   | 100.00   | 100.00  |
| Single race breakdown:                        |   |  |  |   |
| White .....                                   | 79.88   | 79.74  | 75.78  | 74.66   |
| Black .....                                   | 10.29   | 10.66  | 10.60  | 10.27   |
| Hispanic .....                                | ...   | ...  | 7.53   | 8.20  |
| American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut .....          | .97   | .73  | 1.06   | .79   |
| Asian or Pacific Islander .....               | 3.83  | 3.25   | 3.25   | 3.30  |
| Something else .....                          | 4.68  | 3.70   | 1.50   | .92   |
| Don't know/not ascertained .....              | .34   | .26  | .28  | .32   |
| Total multiracial .....                       | ...   | 1.65   | ...  | 1.55  |
| Multirace breakdown:                          |   |  |  |   |
| No race/don't know/not ascertained .....      | ...   | .02  | ...  | .0  |
| Something else as only one race .....         | ...   | .51  | ...  | .22   |
| Only one race .....                           | ...   | .53  | ...  | .15   |
| White-black/black-white .....                 | ...   | .09  | ...  | .16   |
| American Indian plus one race .....           | ...   | .20  | ...  | .28   |
| Asian or Pacific Islander plus one race ..... | ...   | .07  | ...  | .28   |
| One race plus something else .....            | ...   | .16  | ...  | .07   |
| Other two races .....                         | ...   | .0   | ...  | .20   |
| Three or more .....                           | ...   | .08  | ...  | .21   |

NOTE: Detail may not add to totals due to rounding.

Panel 2: Separate race and Hispanic-origin questions, with a multiracial category

Panel 3: A combined race and Hispanic-origin question, no multiracial category

Panel 4: A combined race and Hispanic-origin question, with a multiracial category

In panels 1 and 2, the Hispanic-origin question was asked before the race question. The racial categories used in all four

panels were white; black; American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut; and Asian or Pacific Islander. Besides these specific racial categories, respondents were given the opportunity to select "something else" in all panels, and Hispanic (in panels 3 and 4 only) and multiracial, such as American Indian and white, or black and white (in panels 2 and 4 only). Respondents also were asked a question to determine their preference for the name of their race or ethnic origin. Hispanics were asked whether they preferred to identify themselves from a list of races that included Hispanic or through a separate Hispanic-origin question.

*Racial distributions.* The proportion of respondents identifying themselves as "white" is more than 4 percentage points higher in panels 1 and 2 when the Hispanic-origin question is

panels were white; black; American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut; and Asian or Pacific Islander. Besides these specific racial categories, respondents were given the opportunity to select "something else" in all panels, and Hispanic (in panels 3 and 4 only) and multiracial, such as American Indian and white, or black and white (in panels 2 and 4 only). Respondents also were asked a question to determine their preference for the name of their race or ethnic origin. Hispanics were asked whether they preferred to identify themselves from a list of races that included Hispanic or through a separate Hispanic-origin question.

### Major findings

Only results which address the major research issues are presented in this article, and these must be taken in context. That is, the questions were administered by interviewers, largely over the telephone, and a majority of the respondents had been asked in a previous nontelephone interview about their ethnic and racial backgrounds. Results using self-administered forms might differ from those presented here. Furthermore, the racial and ethnic proportions from the supplement must be interpreted within the context of the experiment, where only treatment comparisons are intended. The proportions are not expected to exactly match Census figures.<sup>3</sup>

*Hispanic-origin.* As can be seen in table 1, a higher percentage of people identified themselves as Hispanic when they were asked a separate question (panels 1 and 2) than when "Hispanic" was included as a racial category (panels 3 and 4). Even when respondents of panels 3 and 4 (for which "Hispanic" was a racial category) were given another opportunity to identify themselves as Hispanic, the proportion Hispanic remained below that in panels 1 and 2.

asked separately. (See table 2.) The proportion identifying themselves as Hispanic is about 8 percent, drawing from both the "white" category and the "something else" category. The multiracial category was included in panels 2 and 4, with very similar results—a little more than 1.5 percent identified themselves as multiracial. When the multiracial category is included, the proportion of American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut drops in both panels 2 and 4. The proportions for blacks and Asian or Pacific Islanders were not affected by the introduction of either the Hispanic or multiracial options in the list of racial categories. A sizable percentage of respondents selecting the multiracial category chose only one race or gave both their race and their ethnic group when asked to specify their races (for example, white and Irish). Respondents who specified two or more races were most likely to select a combination including American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut.

*Preference for a combined racial and Hispanic origin question.* A substantial majority of Hispanics from each panel preferred to identify themselves as Hispanic in the race question, rather than in the separate ethnicity question. This question was asked differently depending on the panel. Hispanic respondents in panels 1 and 2, who had a separate ethnicity question, were asked if they preferred that "Hispanic" be included in the list of races instead, and those receiving panels 3 and 4, in which Hispanic was a racial category, were asked if they wanted a separate Hispanic origin question. Those who received the separate ethnicity question had a somewhat lower percentage favoring the racial category.

*Preferences for racial and ethnic terms.* Respondents' preferences for racial and ethnic terms are shown in table 3. The majority of Hispanic respondents chose "Hispanic" as the term they preferred. A majority of whites chose "white." A plurality of blacks preferred the term "black," but almost as many chose "African-American" or "Afro-American." More than half of those identifying as American Indian or one of the classes of Alaska Native preferred either "American Indian" or "Alaska Native," but more than a third chose the more generic "Native American." Almost 30 percent of those identifying themselves as multiracial preferred the term "multiracial," but about as many had no preference. It should be noted that all choices of preferred terms could have been influenced by the terms given in the race questions that were asked earlier.

*Hispanic-origin comparisons.* A comparison between the Hispanic classification in the CPS and the Hispanic classification in the CPS supplement showed that the level of consistency differs across panels, and the differences can be attributed largely to the method for ascertaining Hispanic-origin in the supplement. With a separate ethnicity question, the agree-

**Table 3 Preference for racial or ethnic terminology, all panels, May 1995**

| [Percent distribution]   |         |
|--------------------------|---------|
| Preferred term           | Percent |
| <b>Hispanic</b>          |         |
| Total .....              | 100.00  |
| Hispanic .....           | 57.88   |
| Latino .....             | 11.74   |
| Of Spanish origin .....  | 12.34   |
| Some other term .....    | 7.85    |
| No preference .....      | 10.18   |
| <b>White</b>             |         |
| Total .....              | 100.00  |
| White .....              | 81.86   |
| Caucasian .....          | 16.53   |
| European-American .....  | 2.35    |
| Anglo .....              | .96     |
| Some other term .....    | 1.97    |
| No preference .....      | 16.53   |
| <b>Black</b>             |         |
| Total .....              | 100.00  |
| Black .....              | 44.15   |
| African-American .....   | 28.07   |
| Afro-American .....      | 12.12   |
| Negro .....              | 3.28    |
| Colored .....            | 1.09    |
| Some other term .....    | 2.19    |
| No preference .....      | 9.11    |
| <b>American Indian</b>   |         |
| Total .....              | 100.00  |
| American Indian .....    | 49.76   |
| Alaska Native .....      | 3.51    |
| Native American .....    | 37.35   |
| Some other term .....    | 3.66    |
| No preference .....      | 5.72    |
| <b>Multiracial</b>       |         |
| Total .....              | 100.00  |
| Multiracial .....        | 28.42   |
| More than one race ..... | 6.03    |
| Biracial .....           | 5.67    |
| Mixed-race .....         | 16.02   |
| Mestizo/Mestiza .....    | 2.25    |
| Some other term .....    | 13.87   |
| No preference .....      | 27.76   |

NOTE: Detail may not add to totals due to rounding.

ment is about 94 percent. If "Hispanic" is included as a race, the agreement drops to 80 percent.

*Comparisons of racial identification.* A comparison of racial identification in the CPS and the supplement showed that regardless of the panel, almost 95 percent of those identifying themselves as "black" in the CPS question also identify themselves as "black" in the supplement. The level of consistency for whites is about 96 percent in panels 1 and 2, but it drops to less than 91 percent in panels 3 and 4, for which some whites select "Hispanic" instead. The agreement for Asian and Pacific Islander respondents ranges between 86 percent and 93 percent, but no detectable pattern emerges across panels. Most of those who identified themselves as "other" in the CPS question selected either "something else"

(about 60 percent) or “white” (about 25 percent) in panels 1 and 2, but for panels 3 and 4, more than 70 percent of them chose “Hispanic.” In contrast to the other racial categories, the agreement rate between the CPS and the supplement for American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut never reaches more than 75 percent in any panel. It is only 60 percent when multiracial is included as a category in panels 2 and 4. An analysis of racial identification by ancestry indicates that respondents with both white and Indian ancestry may not consistently identify with one or the other.

*Hispanics of different nationalities.*

In panels 1 and 2, in which Hispanic-origin is determined by a separate question, Mexicans make up a smaller proportion of those identifying themselves as Hispanic than in panels 3 and 4, in which Hispanic-origin is determined by identification with the Hispanic racial category. (See table 4.) On the other hand, those identifying themselves as “Cuban” or “other Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish” make up a larger proportion of the Hispanics in panels 1 and 2. Cubans appear more likely than the other Hispanic nationalities to identify themselves as “white” in all panels.

**Conclusions**

Some of the findings from this CPS supplement seem clear while others are not as easy to interpret. In either case, the results should be considered in light of the way these data were obtained. The supplement followed an administration of a panel survey in which the respondents already had been asked about their race and ethnicity. The questions were administered by an interviewer, and most of the interviews were conducted over the telephone.

Given this context, it appears likely that the number of Hispanics would decline if “Hispanic” is included as a category on the race question. If this combined race/ethnic origin question is used, however, an “other” or “something else” category will not be chosen as frequently. Although Hispanics favor the combined race and ethnic origin question format, they probably do so without the knowledge of the potential effect that this format may have on the overall count of Hispanics. Furthermore, the characteristics of the resulting Hispanic population may also differ depending on whether Hispanic origin is measured as a separate question or is combined with the race question. Some groups of His-

**Table 4. Hispanic national origin, by panel, May 1995**

[Percent distribution]

| Hispanic origin                            | Panel 1<br>Separate race and Hispanic-origin questions; no multiracial category | Panel 2<br>Separate race and Hispanic-origin questions with a multiracial category | Panel 3<br>A combined race and Hispanic-origin question; no multiracial category | Panel 4<br>A combined race and Hispanic-origin question with a multiracial category |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| Total .....                                | 100.00  | 100.00   | 100.00   | 100.00  |
| Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano ...     | 59.45   | 60.49  | 67.06  | 65.21   |
| Puerto Rican .....                         | 9.66  | 9.33   | 10.04  | 10.46   |
| Cuban .....                                | 4.69  | 4.12   | 1.96   | 2.40  |
| Central American, South American .....     | 13.00   | 10.61  | 11.93  | 11.78   |
| Other Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish .....   | 11.82   | 13.89  | 8.73   | 9.58  |
| Not really Hispanic, Latino, Spanish ..... | .85   | 1.29   | .20  | .42   |
| Don't know/not ascertained .....           | .54   | .28  | .07  | .15   |

NOTE: Detail may not add to totals due to rounding.

panics, such as Cubans, might choose to identify themselves as white rather than as Hispanic if they must choose between the two. The proportion of the population that currently identifies themselves as white also will decrease if there is a single race and Hispanic-origin question.

The proportion of the population identifying as “multiracial” in this context was less than 2 percent, and the only racial group that might have been affected by the addition of the multiracial category was American Indian/Alaska Native. There does appear to be some question about how well the term “multiracial” is understood throughout the population. The multiracial category was chosen by some Hispanics who reject existing racial options, and by some non-Hispanics who report multiple ethnicities.

A substantial number of blacks prefer the terms “African-American” or “Afro-American,” and a sizable minority of American Indians and Alaska Natives chose the more generic term “Native American.” In both cases, however, the terms currently used were chosen more often. There is no way to know from these data how strongly these preferences are held.<sup>4</sup>

This CPS supplement represents only one in a series of studies to be conducted by the Federal Government that will focus on the measurement of race and ethnicity. The Bureau of the Census is currently conducting two studies—the National Content Survey and the Race and Ethnicity Targeted Test—to prepare for Census 2000. Both of these studies test various ways of asking about race and ethnicity. The results of these efforts, along with the CPS supplement and other research, will be evaluated carefully by the Office of Management and Budget prior to any decision to revise Statistical Policy Directive No. 15. □

## Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Statistical Policy Directive No. 15, issued by the Office of Management and Budget in 1977, is entitled, "Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting."

<sup>2</sup> The Current Population Survey (CPS) is a sample survey of 60,000 U.S. households. Each month, labor force statistics are derived from the CPS, which is conducted by the Bureau of the Census for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. BLS analyzes and publishes labor force statistics, classified by demographic, social, and economic characteristics.

<sup>3</sup> The data were weighted to compensate for nonresponse to the CPS and

to the Race and Ethnicity Supplement. These weights, however, do not compensate for the fact that some racial or ethnic groups are underrepresented in the CPS. This correction would require weighting to racial and ethnic census counts. Although this is routinely done for labor force estimates from the CPS, to do it in this case would distort the effects of the supplement's experimental design.

<sup>4</sup> Further information concerning the results from the CPS race and ethnicity supplement is available from a report in the BLS Statistical Notes Series and can be obtained by calling (202) 606-7390. A public-use data set also is available, and can be obtained by calling (202) 606-7516.

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