Results of a Cognitive Interview Evaluation of the Revised Race Question, with Special Emphasis on the Newly Proposed Middle Eastern/North African Response Option

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- Conducted in collaboration with OMB Interagency Working Group/MENA Subgroup

Measuring Race and Ethnicity: What's Different?

- Combined race and ethnicity

- Addition of Middle Eastern/North African category

1. What is your race or ethnicity?
   Mark all boxes that apply AND print ethnicities in the spaces below. Note, you may report more than one group.

   ❑ WHITE – *provide details below*.
   - ❑ German
   - ❑ Irish
   - ❑ English
   - ❑ Italian
   - ❑ Polish
   - ❑ French
   - ❑ Print, for example, Scottish, Norwegian, Dutch, etc._____

   ❑ HISPANIC, LATINO, OR SPANISH – *provide details below*.
   - ❑ Mexican or Mexican American
   - ❑ Puerto Rican
   - ❑ Cuban
   - ❑ Salvadoran
   - ❑ Dominican
   - ❑ Columbian
   - ❑ Print, for example, Guatemalan, Spaniard, Ecuadorian, etc. _____

   ❑ BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN – *provide details below*.
   - ❑ African American
   - ❑ Jamaican
   - ❑ Haitian
   - ❑ Nigerian
   - ❑ Ethiopian
   - ❑ Somali
   - ❑ Print, for example, Ghanaian, South African, Barbadian, etc. _____

   ❑ ASIAN – *provide details below*.
   - ❑ Chinese
   - ❑ Filipino
   - ❑ Asian Indian
   - ❑ Vietnamese
   - ❑ Korean
   - ❑ Japanese
   - ❑ Print, for example, Pakistani, Cambodian, Hmong, etc. _____

   ❑ AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE – *provide details below*.
   Print, for example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan, Aztec, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Tlingit, etc.

   _____

   ❑ MIDDLE EASTERN OR NORTH AFRICAN – *provide details below*.
   - ❑ Lebanese
   - ❑ Iranian
   - ❑ Egyptian
   - ❑ Syrian
   - ❑ Moroccan
   - ❑ Israeli
   - ❑ Print, for example, Algerian, Iraqi, Kurdish, etc. _____

   ❑ NATIVE HAWIIAN OR OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER – *provide details below*.
   - ❑ Native Hawaiian
   - ❑ Samoan
   - ❑ Chamorro
   - ❑ Tongan
   - ❑ Fijian
   - ❑ Marshallese
   - ❑ Print, for example, Palauan, Tahitian, Chuukese, etc. _____

   ❑ SOME OTHER RACE OR ETHNICITY – *print details below*.

   _____

Research Questions

- How do respondents understand the new question? How do they arrive at answers? Do they have difficulty doing so?

- Does the MENA category in particular function as intended? Do respondents with this background have any difficulty with the new category?

Methodology: Cognitive Interviews

- 89 cognitive interviews
  - Interviews took place between Jan. 20 and Feb 17, 2017
- 43 self-administered interviews (using census format)
- 46 interviewer-administered interviews (adapted to NHIS format)

Sample Composition: Gender

Gender	Number
Female	44
Male	45
Other ("Gender Queer")	1

Sample Composition: Age

Age	Number
18-29	27
30-49	36
50-64	13
65 and over	12
Missing/refused	1

Sample Composition: Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity*	Number**
White	25
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish	4
Black or African American	26
Asian	11
American Indian or Alaska Native	2
Middle Eastern or North African	23
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1
Some other race or ethnicity	2

*Categories are not mutually exclusive.
**Numbers based on initial answers to the survey question.

MENA Subgroups Represented

- Groups with a checkbox included in sample
  - Lebanese
  - Iranian
  - Egyptian
  - Syrian
  - Moroccan
- Israeli only "checkbox group" not represented
- "Other-specify" groups written in: Jordanian, Sudanese, Iraqi, Saudi, Yemeni, Palestinian, Berber, and Armenian

Interview Protocol

- Race/ethnicity question embedded among other demographic questions

  - Age

  - Educational attainment

  - Marital status

- Administer survey question as intended

  - Self-Administered: allow respondent to complete PAPI questions

  - Interviewer-Administered: administer questions as NHIS field interviewers would

- Follow-up probes ascertained respondents' self-perceptions of race/ethnicity and how they arrived at answers

Key Finding

- Different format (especially the additional categories) resulted in respondents thinking about and answering this question perhaps differently from other standardized race/ethnicity questions

Examples: Respondent Reaction to Different Format

- MENA: *"Because usually this [MENA category] won't be listed…I was like, whoa, this threw me off."*

- Black: "*Out of the category [Black/African American], the only one [ethnicity subcategory] that kind of fits me is African American. But it doesn't sound right to me. I don't know their language. I think the whole demure of a Black American and African American is different. We were brought up different. We don't have anything in common."*

- White: *"Because it was a more detailed question than I'm used to, I assumed more information is better than less…The way these details are asked are unusual and I haven't seen them before. So it made me feel like I should be thoughtful about it and be as thorough as possible."*

Thinking About Race and Ethnicity

- Ability to report race and ethnicity differently

  because…

- Think about personal race and ethnicity in different ways

- Each answer is authentic

How respondents decided to report their race and ethnicity: Four patterns of question response

1. Cultural: feelings of connectedness to a group

2. Ancestral: answering based on genealogy

3. Administrative: answering for official purposes

4. Social: identified by others as belonging to a particular race/ethnicity

1.Cultural Pattern: Connectedness to a group expressed as...

- Where you come from
- Shared group experience
- Shared culture

1.Cultural Pattern: Connectedness to a group

- **Where you come from**
  - **Growing up in homogeneous neighborhood** – prominent among White respondents

  "There is nobody in my neighborhood who wasn't White. We were the whitest of white…we weren't exposed to anyone who wasn't White."

  - **Where you are born and raised** – prominent among immigrants and first or second generation Americans

  "If you grew up there and your family's there, that's who you are. Because you remember the place you grew up forever…you will always be attached to the place where you are born."

1.Cultural Pattern

- **Shared group experience** – Prominent among Black/AA respondents

"I'm basing it on how I was brought up. How I was treated. And that's how Black folks are treated. They were treated as if they were the lowest thing ever…When we were going to school…we had to pass a White school down the street from our house and walk 5 miles to another school that was one little room. That struggle ties Blackness, to me."

1.Cultural Pattern

- **Shared culture** – Prominent among immigrant and non-White respondents

"From childhood, from our family, we speak Oromo language. Speaking Oromo language makes us Oromos. Then we are culturally connected to the Oromos. Psychologically connected to the Oromos. We grow up with the Oromo values, so we consider ourselves Oromo."

- **Arab Culture** – prominent among MENA respondents

"The Middle East is just one piece, and it's just different countries, but we speak the same language, we have the same food. We can say, almost the same traditions. You cannot separate, you are Arab or you are from Jordan. You speak Arabic and you are from the Middle East, you are Arab."

2.Ancestral Pattern: Based on genealogy

- **"Laundry list" of family heritage** – prominent among White respondents

"Well, because for me, I knew I was a mutt. So to try to think about exactly…I don't know. It just seemed is it okay for me to check all these options? Am I truly…how much Irish do I really have in me? I just knew I was multiple things. So I could definitely check off the English because I primarily have a lot of British in me. I know I have Scottish in me. But it's just some of the other things that I sort of question that I heard was in my family background. But I hadn't done the research myself. And you asked me about it and I'm like, well…so I've heard that's my background. I was difficult for me."

2.Ancestral Pattern

- **Exception = American Indian (not included in "laundry list")**
  - **Lack of "Proof"**

  "On my mother's side they claim a lot of…they claim Native American, but there's no documentation of it. There's no proof of it."

  - **Specific Criteria**

  "Technically, there is a lot of criteria that makes you American Indian and allows you to qualify for different things. And it's something like 1/16 and I think I am 1/32. I can't exactly remember what it is, but there is a very specific criteria."

  - **Implications of choosing the category**

  "I simply don't want to appropriate the Native American experience. I don't want to claim that or minimize their cultural experience without them having to worry about Whitey over here claiming that I'm 1%."

3.Administrative: Reporting for official purposes

- **Purpose of who's asking** – Prominent among non-White and multiple-race respondents (including MENA)

"First thing I ask myself: why are they asking me this question. Sometimes I just answer because it's part of the [job] application."

"For TSA precheck I would not select it. However, let's say it was for a Middle Eastern scholarship, maybe…Because I think there are certain connotations that come with that part of the world. Especially anything relating to any kind of commercial aviation."

3.Administrative

- **Political climate pros and cons** – prominent among MENA respondents

  - **Pro = Being acknowledged on equal footing with other groups**

    "I think it's time for Arab-Americans to get some recognition, to have our voices heard. And to basically have a count, have a number and not just be part of...lumped into various categories, whether it's 'Other' or 'White' or whatever. But I think it's time to have, you know, whatever percentage we are in this country, to have our voices heard. I think it's very important to give us some credibility for the work we're doing."

  - **Con = Fear of being identified and stereotyped**

    "I will be very honest with you. If there was a government survey that had Middle Eastern as a box, I would not check it. Not right now...I will tell you that I have no desire to be on an Islamic or Muslim country registry. My grandparents came here to escape from oppression and I don't really think I need to go back to that."

4.Social Pattern: How others see you

- **Told by others how to report race** – Prominent among MENA respondents

"When I went to school I asked my professor. He said, most of Americans are asked this question [on race]. I asked him what should be who I am? He said, 'Where are you from?' I said from North Africa. He said the North African and Middle Eastern, they belong to the White…Since the professor, whenever I go to apply for a job, we have to choose this, I have no choice, I have to go with 'White'."

- **Decide how to report race based on U.S. experience** – prominent among Black/AA respondents

"As far as society is concerned, I am looked upon as African American…And in the U.S., just one drop means you're Black."

Conclusion:
Wording makes a difference

- Respondents intuit the intent of a race/ethnicity question just as they must for any other survey question

- Survey designers should bear in mind that there are different constructs (i.e., cultural, ancestral, administrative, social) measured by race and ethnicity questions