Ways to measure race and ethnicity, with a particular focus on multi-racial individuals

The PEW Research Center conducted a study in 2015 to compare different survey methods of measuring racial identity, particularly for multi-racial individuals. Options are summarized below, and the survey methods are then listed below the summaries.

Summaries of options for measuring race and ethnicity

Standard two-question measure.

This method is currently used by the Census Bureau, it asks separately about race and Latine origins. In the PEW Research comparison study, 3.7% of adults identified as multiracial using this measure.

Census Alternative Questionnaire Experiment (AQE) measure.

The Hispanic origin question is included in mark one or more. In the PEW Research comparison study, 4.8% of adults identified as multiracial using this measure.

In comparison to the standard two-question measure, this has lower non-response and it is more common for respondents to mark two or more responses. We note that there has a recommendation to add a category for "Middle Eastern, North African, Arab."

Alternative Questionnaire Experiment (AQE) measure with follow-up about parents.

After the AQE is asked about an individual, a follow-up question asks, "Is your mother or father some other race or origin than the race you selected for yourself?" In the comparative study, this question doubled the number of participants reporting a multiracial background, to 10.8%.

Point Allocation measure (Lee, 2012).

This tool was developed to better capture the variations in racial or ethnic self-identification and increase the share of adults reporting multiple races. In the comparative study, 12.7% of adults gave points to two or more races using this measure.

Attitudinal measure.

"Do you consider yourself to be mixed race; that is, belonging to more than one racial group?"

Survey questions for measuring race and ethnicity

Standard two-question measure

- Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?
    - **No,** not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
    - Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano
    - Yes, Puerto Rican
    - Yes, Cuban

- Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin

  Print, for example, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, Guatemalan, Spaniard, Ecuadorian, etc:

  _____

- What is your race? Mark x one or more boxes AND print options
  - White

    Print, for example, German, Irish, English, Italian, Lebanese, Egyptian, etc.

    _____

  - Black or African American

    Print, for example, African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somali, etc.

    _____

  - American Indian or Alaska Native
    Print name of enrolled or principal tribe(s), for example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan, Aztec, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community, etc.

    _____

  - Chinese
  - Filipino
  - Asian Indian
  - Vietnamese
  - Korean
  - Japanese
  - Other Asian

    Print, for example, Pakistani, Cambodian, Hmong, etc.

    _____

  - Native Hawaiian
  - Samoan
  - Chamorro
  - Other Pacific Islander

    Print, for example, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese, etc.

    _____

- Some other race

  Print race or origin

  _____

Alternative Questionnaire Experiment (AQE) measure.

Which of the following describes your race or origin? You can select as many as apply.

- White

  Print, for example, German, Irish, English, Italian, Lebanese, Egyptian, etc.

  _____

- Black or African American

  Print, for example, African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somali, etc.

  _____

- Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin

  Print, for example, Mexican, Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Argentinean, Columbian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadorian, Spaniard, etc.

  _____

- American Indian or Alaska Native
  Print name of enrolled or principal tribe(s), for example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan, Aztec, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community, etc.

  _____

- Other Asian

  Print, for example, Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, etc.

  _____

- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

  Print, for example, Native Hawaiian, Guamian or Chamorro, Samoan, Fijan, Tongan, etc.

  _____

- Some other race
  Print race or origin

  _____

Alternative Questionnaire Experiment (AQE) measure follow-up question.

- Is your mother or father some other race or origin than the race you selected for yourself?

Point Allocation measure (Lee, 2012)

In thinking about their background, people often will describe which racial or ethnic groups best describe them. Imagine if we used a 10 point system where points are allocated to whichever racial or ethnic groups we think accurately describe a person.
For example, if you think of someone as half-white and half-Asian, you might allocate 5 points to each. Or if you think of someoen as mostly black but with some Hispanic heritage, you might allocate 8 or 9 points for African American and 1 or 2 points for Latino.
Now think of your own background in racial and ethnic terms. How would you describe your race and ethnicity using this 10-point system?

___ White
___ Black or African American
___ Asian or Asian American
___ Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
___ Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native
___ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
___ Other

Attitudinal measure.

- Do you consider yourself to be mixed race; that is, belonging to more than one racial group?

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