

## COMMENTS 2/10/18, RE: 2019 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

Should the 2020 Census or the 2019 American Community Survey Link Questions About “Race” [Color/Physical Appearance] to “Ethnicity” [National Origin/Ancestry]? Why We Need to Keep these Question Separate for Protecting Vulnerable Communities

Census designers argue that the reason that they want to include a space for entering “ethnicities” under each race box is that this will provide everyone, not just Hispanics, an opportunity to recognize their unique ethnic origins, thereby ensuring “equitable” treatment of all groups. This justification is puzzling since a SEPARATE question on ancestry already exist in the American Community Survey (ACS) and it could have been easily included in the testing that took place of the separate question formats for the 2010 Alternative Questionnaire Experiment and the 2015 National Content Test for the 2020 Census.

Why would it be problematic to juxtapose “ethnicities” or “origin” under a given race box for the 2020 Census? The potential harms caused by this association far outweigh any potential benefits. Linking national origins to races may inadvertently contribute to oppressive racist, nativist and eugenicist ideas, policies and practices about who should be considered an "authentic" racial representative of a nation. If we want to create a more perfect union for all, we need to decouple the idea that certain ethnicities are ideal types or the most accurate representations of a given race.

Thank you for inviting comments. We need ethically accurate data that works toward creating a more perfect union for all, including the most vulnerable communities. It is my hope that these efforts include the introduction of legislation that protects the federal, state, local and other data infrastructure for civil rights monitoring, enforcement and policies in the 2019 ACS, 2020 Census and beyond.

\*Note: PDFs attached with relevant social scientific references citing research and evidence from many disciplines including sociology, economics, psychology, demography, political science, on the value added by separate questions on Hispanic origin, race and ancestry. **Any views expressed on the statistical and methodological issues in this comment are my own and they do not necessarily those of the the universities or other institutions with which I am associated.**

Below is my suggested format for separate Hispanic origin, race and ancestry questions that could accomplish these goals.

### APPENDIX 1: POTENTIAL QUESTION FORMATS FOR 2030 CENSUS TESTING

#### 1. HISPANIC ORIGIN:

\_\_\_ Are you of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin? (check all that apply)

\_\_\_ No, not of Hispanic or Latino origin

\_\_\_ Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano

\_\_\_ Yes, Puerto Rican

\_\_\_ Yes, Cuban

\_\_\_ Yes, another Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Group (e.g. Argentinean, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Spaniard, etc.)

Enter Specify Group (s):

#### 2. RACE: What is your race or color?

(Note: This question is used to detect if there is discrimination and civil rights violations in voting rights, housing, employment, education, etc. along the color line. While you may mark more than one box it would be most helpful if you marked only one. Consider answering this question by reflecting on this question: If you were walking down the street, what race do you think others that do not know you would automatically assume you were based on what you look like?)

- White (Non Hispanic/Latina/o/x)  
 Black, African American, or Negro (Non Hispanic/Latino/a/x)  
 American Indian or Alaska Native (Non Hispanic/Latino/a/x): Write Name Of Enrolled Tribe: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Asian or Asian American (Non Hispanic/Latino/a/x) Write Name of National Origin: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Hispanic/Latina(o) White  
 Hispanic/Latina(o) Afro-Latina(o)/Black  
 Hispanic/Latina(o) Mestiza(o)/Brown  
 Hispanic/Latina(o) Indígena / Indigenous Pueblo of Latin America/Brown  
 Middle Eastern/Arab/Brown (Non Hispanic/Latino/a/x) Write Name of National Origin: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Some other Race: (Please write in: \_\_\_\_\_)

IF WE WANT ANCESTRY DATA THEN WE NEED A SEPARATE QUESTION AS THE LAST QUESTION ON THE CENSUS

#### ANCESTRY:

What is your ethnicity, national origin (s) and/or or distant ancestry?

(Write in: \_\_\_\_\_ For example: German, Haitian, Italian, Arab, Chinese, Somali, Italian, etc.) You may write in more than one origin. \*\*NOTE A VERSION OF THIS QUESTION ALREADY EXISTS ON THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

REFERENCES AND OTHER BIBLIOGRAPHY ON WHY WE SHOULD NOT FLATTEN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RACE AND ETHNICITY OR ANCESTRY AND WE SHOULD NOT LINK RACE TO ETHNICITY OR ANCESTRY. DIFFERENT CONCEPTS REQUIRE SEPARATE QUESTIONS. JUST AS WE CAN MEASURE GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, OR SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH WITH ONE QUESTION, WE CANNOT MEASURE HISPANIC ORIGIN, RACE, ETHNICITY WITH ONE QUESTION.

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# VISUAL MATRIX OF DOMINATION (Collins 2009)

Part 1: Intersecting Systems of Oppression

**-Colonization-Patriarchy-Sexism-Structural Racism-Nativism-Ableism-**

Part 2: Arrangements of Power

Hegemonic/Cultural  
Domain of Power  
- Permeates all levels of  
Power

*Ideological Glue that  
cuts across all domains*

Structural  
Domain of Power

- Organizations
- Institutional Arrangements

Disciplinary  
Domain of Power

- Management
- Rules of the Game

Interpersonal  
Domain of Power

- Lived Experience
- Consciousness

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**TO FLATTEN OR NOT FLATTEN?  
CONCEPTUALIZING ONTOLOGICAL CONTESTS IN DATA COLLECTION,  
ANALYSIS, POLICY MAKING AND PRAXIS IN FEDERAL DATA COLLECTION  
& IMPLICATIONS FOR CIVIL RIGHTS AND SOCIAL EQUITY**

**IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RACE AND ORIGIN SOCIALLY MEANINGFUL FOR INTERROGATING SOCIAL**

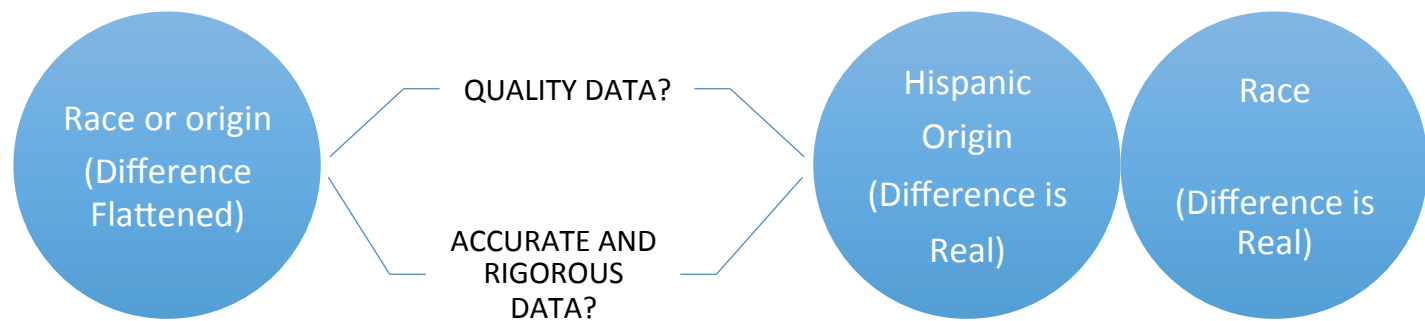
**INEQUALITIES? WHAT ABOUT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND SEX ASSIGNED  
AT BIRTH?**

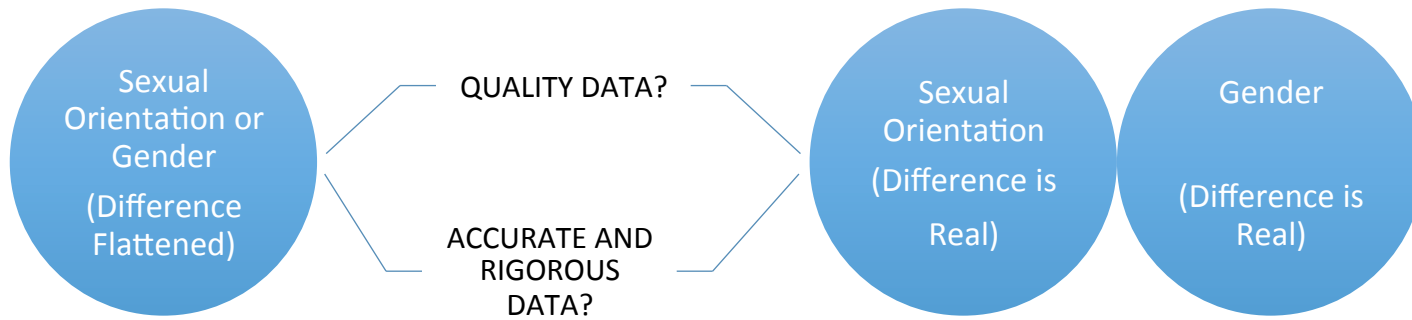
**2.) WHAT WILL HAPPEN FOR CIVIL RIGHTS ENFORCEMENT AND POLICY MAKING FOR FAIR HOUSING, VOTING  
RIGHTS, EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, HEALTH, LAW ENFORCEMENT IF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RACE AND  
ORIGIN IS FLATTENED? WHAT ABOUT GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH?**

**3.) WHICH QUESTION FORMAT WILL HELP US SERVE VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES?**

FIGURE 1: VISUALIZING THE ONTOLOGICAL CONTESTS IN FEDERAL DATA COLLECTION SYSTEMS:

**WILL THE PLETHORA OF SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH EVIDENCE FOCUSED ON THE COLOR LINE AMONG LATINOS COMMUNITIES THAT MAP ONTO RACIALIZED SOCIAL INEQUALITIES IN VOTING RIGHTS, HOUSING, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT BE USED TO INFORM THESE ONTOLOGICAL CONTESTS?**







## WHY THE 2020 CENSUS SHOULD KEEP LONGSTANDING SEPARATE QUESTIONS ABOUT HISPANIC ORIGIN AND RACE

*by Nancy López, University of New Mexico*

The distinction between race and ethnic or national origin is real. Scholarly research from many disciplines shows that people regardless of ethnic or national origins experience racial discrimination based on how others perceive their physical characteristics, such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features. There are well documented social inequalities related to physical appearance variations among Hispanics in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States. Despite these realities, the designers of the 2020 census are considering asking about race and origin in a single, combined question, which would make it impossible to identify race for many respondents – especially because white, brown and black Hispanics would be grouped together. To ensure that the information collected in the census is useful for understanding and solving the problem of racial discrimination in the United States, these questions should not be combined.

### Street Race and Inequality

The current set of census questions asks first about Hispanic origin (Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, or other Hispanic origin) and then about race. Census designers argue that the new question format would reduce the number of Latin-heritage respondents who choose the write-in and “Some Other Race” options. These designers also argue that all origin groups should be treated equitably, and that everyone should all be able to “see themselves” reflected in the census question. Why should Hispanics receive “special treatment” with their own separate question?

To understand why such arguments are problematic, we must first understand that achieving equity requires different treatment. In the United States, the enslavement of Africans and colonization of Native American sovereign groups created systems of racialized inequality, with reverberations in employment, poverty, and many social spheres. Visual markers such as skin color, hair texture, and other racial features are imbued with historically embedded social meanings that map onto many societal inequalities. This means that darker-skinned Latin-origin people often experience more discrimination than their lighter-skinned kin.

Consider what would happen if three Latino-origin men, Ricky Martin, Sammy Sosa, and George López happened not to be famous and found themselves dressed in a t-shirt and jeans on a New York City street, looking for a cab. Who would be able to catch a cab first – or at all, for that matter? Likely, Ricky – a light skinned Puerto Rican American would have the least trouble, while George – a brown-skinned Mexican American and Sammy – a black-skinned Dominican American, would be left standing on the street longer.

What if these three went to vote? Or went looking to rent the same apartment? Or interviewed for the same job? Or drove through a border checkpoint? Or ended up in the same hospital emergency room with the same symptoms? Their differences in physical appearance would lead

to similar results, according to a plethora of research revealing unequal treatment based on “ascribed racial status.” I call this “street race,” because the concept refers to the race strangers on the street would likely assign a person based on their physical characteristics.

### **The Research Value of Separate Questions**

Empirical studies underline the value of separate questions about Hispanic origin and race.

- The Urban Institute sent 8,000 testers to apply for housing around the country and found that applicants who were a “visible minority” were dramatically more likely to be told there were no apartments available or were shown significantly fewer apartments than white applicants.
- Thomas LaVeist-Ramos and his colleagues found that people who share ethnic backgrounds have similar health outcomes, but in access to services “Black Hispanics’ visual similarity with non-Hispanic blacks may... subject them to similar levels of discrimination.”
- Rogelio Sáenz and Maria Cristina Morales found that Latin national origin groups such as Cubans and South Americans that most often identified as white in the 2010 census experienced less wage disadvantage than national origin groups such as Dominicans and Guatemalans with lower percentages identifying as white.

### **Street Race, National and Ethnic Origins, and the Future of Census Questions**

Both everyday life and social science research show, in sum, that street race is not the same as national origin, ethnicity, cultural background, language background, or genetic lineage. To return to our example, Ricky, George, and Sammy may share a genetic lineage that includes Native American, European, African, and Asian origins. If they did share this mixed lineage and were asked on the 2020 census a single question about race and origin they might each mark the same races and origins – even though they appear to be different colors in the street racism world. This is where the combined question becomes a problem. In asking about origins and race as if they were the same thing, it becomes impossible to use the data to understand how Ricky, George, and Sammy’s experiences with “street race” and discrimination may differ. More importantly, a combined question would also make it impossible to use the census data to understand how street race interacts, at the population level, with social inequalities in other arenas such as education, socio-economic status, housing status, marital status, criminal status and so forth.

If the U.S. Census starts to ask about origin and race in one question, it would imply a false equivalency between race and ethnic or national origin. Beyond confusion, this move could contribute to what sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva calls “color blind racism” – the idea that the best way to achieve racial equity is to ignore the reality that many structured disparities of treatment happen based on skin color and other visual markers. Ignoring this reality – including the reality of color lines within Latin communities – would not, however, make racialized inequalities disappear. Instead, changing Census categories would prevent the collection of data that inform meaningful efforts to further racial justice. Without the needed information, civil rights enforcement for visible minorities would be comprised.

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Read more in Nancy López, Edward Vargas, Melina Juarez, Lisa Cacari-Stone, and Sonia Bettez, [“What’s Your ‘Street Race’? Leveraging Multidimensional Measures of Race and Intersectionality for Examining Physical and Mental Health Status among Latinxs,”](#) in *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*. (2017).

# A TOOL FOR CONCEPTUALIZING & VISUALIZING INTERSECTIONALITY

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*“Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people’s lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other.*

*Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves...People use intersectionality as an analytic tool to solve problems that they or others around them face.*

*(Collins & Bilge 2016, p. 2).”*

*“An intersectional paradigm or conceptual universe takes identity categories embedded within systems of inequality as a starting point to understanding the interactions between individuals and systems and among individual identities, systems, and social locations across the life course (López & Gadsden 2016, p. 8). “*

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THIS IS AN INVITATION TO ENGAGE IN SELF-REFLEXIVITY ABOUT THE SIMULTANEITY OF RACE, GENDER, CLASS, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, ETC.

CONSIDER HOW YOUR IDENTITY, VALUES, SOCIAL LOCATION AND LIFELONG CUMULATIVE EXPERIENCES WITHIN SYSTEMS OF POWER, PRIVILEGE AND DISADVANTAGE SHAPE YOUR COGNITION, POSITIONALITY AND PRACTICE (ACTION AND REFLECTION)

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