

**Households and Families in Six Race/Ethnic
Groups: Issues for Surveys Identified in
Qualitative Studies**

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Households and Families in Six Race/Ethnic Groups

- Integrated set of exploratory ethnographic studies in six race/ethnic groups using the same methods, core questions, in the same time period during Census 2000
- Race/ethnic groups included: African Americans, American Indians (Navajo and Inupiaq Eskimo), Asians (Koreans), Whites and Latinos
- Focus was on (non-nuclear) complex households

Aims of the Complex Households Exploratory Ethnographic Project

1. Explore the range and functioning of complex households in the six race/ethnic groups
2. Examine how well the decennial census relationship question response categories capture emerging diversity of household types
3. Assess how well census methods, relationship questions and categories, and household composition types describe emerging diversity

What is a complex household?

- “Complex household” is a research category, not an official Census category
- Operational definition: Complex households are those with persons outside the nuclear family (married couples with or without their own biological children), including
 - Nonrelatives: unmarried partners, gay partners, roommates, etc.
 - More distant relatives not listed in the census form relationship categories: nephew/niece, cousin, brother/sister-in-law, etc.
 - Persons shared across households: those tenuously attached to 2 or more residences, children in joint custody arrangements, etc.
 - One nuclear family plus any other person(s), and/or
 - More than one family sharing a housing unit

Why did the Census Bureau fund this study of complex households?

- Complex households have been repeatedly identified as a barrier to full enumeration
 - Viewed as important factor by 2010 Planning staff
 - First of 11 barriers to full enumeration: Year 2000 R&D staff in 1992
 - Hypothesized cause of undercount (Brownrigg and Martin 1989)
 - Identified as a cause of errors in the 1990 census in nearly all 29 of the ethnographic coverage sites (de la Puente 1993)
 - Other studies: unusual living situations may be linked to census undercoverage (Shapiro, Diffendal and Cantor 1993)
- Greater understanding of complex households might suggest ways to improve census coverage, improve household composition data

Why is it important to demographers to study complex households?

1. The number of complex households in U.S. is likely to be rising, due to demographic trends and cultural/structural changes
 - Ongoing changes in the proportions of race/minority groups
 - Differential fertility rates
 - Increases in immigration – 11.5% in 2002 was foreign-born
 - Changing migration streams: in CPS 2002, 1/2 of the foreign born are from Latin America and about 1/4 from Asia, where complex household structure may be more prevalent
 - This growing diversity will affect work on methods, questions asked, and data presentation
 - Increases in remarriages, blended families, cohabiting, and children in cohabiting households
 - Increases in grandparent-maintained and in nonrelative households
2. Limitations of current census/survey questions may be masking the magnitude of this demographic trend, to some extent
3. Range of issues with complex households in international surveys has not received much attention (e.g., effects of polygamy on household type)

Methods used in this Study

- Exploratory qualitative study of complex households in 6 study groups in U.S. based on race/ethnicity:
 - African Americans
 - American Indian/Alaska Natives
 - Navajos
 - Inupiaq Eskimos
 - Asians (Korean immigrants)
 - Latino immigrants
- Ethnographic studies were coordinated: same methods, same core questions, at the same time during Census 2000
- Experienced ethnographers already embedded in ethnic communities. Each did 25 semi-structured interviews, had respondents complete mock census forms, collected all interrelationships in households

Limitations

This was a small-scale exploratory study of 150 purposively selected respondents among six race/ethnic groups

- Results are
 - exploratory and suggestive
 - not generalizable to any larger group
 - may or may not be replicated: many unique factors influenced the selection of these complex households
 - represent findings prior to September 11, 2001. Attitudes toward the government and willingness to respond may have changed.

Results: Three Issues for Censuses/Surveys Identified in these Qualitative Studies

1. Conceptual differences in the definition and application of our key concept, “household”
2. Cultural, linguistic, and nationality differences with census/survey concepts, methods, and procedures
3. Issues with the relationship question and the household type variable

1. Conceptual differences in the definition and application of a critical census/survey term, “household”

- Most censuses/surveys: **Structure** is the key to defining unit of data collection and unit of analysis: “household”
 - All people sharing one housing unit:
 - # of households equals # of occupied housing units.
- Navajo, Inupiaq, African American: **Social interaction** is the key
 - Sharing of domestic functions--earning/pooling income, childcare, sharing subsistence tasks, cooking, etc.--regardless of living in same unit
 - Emotional closeness
 - Results in “households without walls,” 2+ households in one housing unit
- Implication: If respondents in some subcultures don’t understand or ignore how we define key concepts like “household,” differential coverage errors and errors in household type classification may occur

2. Cultural, linguistic, and nationality differences with census/survey concepts, methods, and procedures

2.1 Naming customs of subgroups differ from U.S. norms and may not be consistently reported on survey/census forms:

- Latinos have 2 last names, married women may have three:

Juan Rodriguez Perales = Mr. Rodriguez

Ana Garcia Fernandez de Rodriguez = Ms. Garcia, or Ms. Garcia de Rodriguez, or Mrs. Rodriguez

Miguel Rodriguez Garcia is their child

Problem: Census/survey forms do not have space for two last names
– inconsistencies in responses: write one name or two?

Implication:

If respondents inconsistently record last names from one data collection to another (e.g., the census and the A.C.E.), the number of matches for Latinos vis-à-vis other groups may be reduced.

Possible result: understating of undercoverage for Latinos

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Naming customs differ for other nationality groups too: e.g., Chinese

2. Cultural, linguistic, and nationality differences with census/survey concepts, methods, and procedures (continued)

2.2 Navajo matrilineal kinship system and different kinship terms

- Relationships on the male and female side differ
- “Grandchild” is insufficient: Child of one’s daughter or one’s son?
- When “grandchild” checked, it always meant child of one’s daughter;
- This could lead to misclassifying relationships for paternal kin

2.3 Inupiaq Eskimo grandparents often adopt their grandchildren, either formally or informally:

- What should they mark on the census/survey form? Grandchild or adopted child? Both technically correct; “adopted” leads to masking and undercounting of grandparent-maintained, multi-generational households

2. Cultural, linguistic, and nationality differences with census/survey concepts, methods, and procedures (continued)

2.4 “Foster child” and “adopted child” are culture-bound relationship terms that apply to specific U.S. social and legal institutions

- Some immigrant Latinos and Koreans didn’t understand or properly apply these terms: no such institutions in their countries

2.5 Translations on foreign language forms may not be functionally equivalent, and lead to errors:

- Spanish translation of foster child as “hijo de crianza” is not functionally equivalent: a child one is raising for a friend or a relative (no government involvement)

Implication: our counts of Latino “foster children” may be too high; the translation was not functionally equivalent and not pretested

3. Issues with the relationship question and household type variable

- 3.1 The census and most surveys collect relationships to Person 1 only.
 - This method masks some interrelationships in some households

- Example: unmarried couple with woman's child:
 - A. She is Person 1 → female householder family household
 - B. partner is Person 1 → male householder non-family household

- Implication: Method of collecting relationships may skew household type distributions in U.S. and in overseas surveys. May have effects on: distribution of federal program funds; counts of persons in poverty; other programs and policies

- Possible solutions: 1) add new category “child of unmarried partner” to census/survey relationship question; 2) collect all interrelationships with individual-level question (2001 England census did this)

3. Issues with the relationship question and household type variable (continued)

3.2 The number and types of stand-alone relationships response categories are not static: they reflect each decade's changing norms for household composition:

The number of relationship categories has steadily increased over the last 3 decades to reflect growing diversity: from 5 categories in 1970 to 13 in 2000.

These changes expanded categories for nuclear and lineal households.

Lateral relations--brother-in-law/sister-in-law, cousin, niece/nephew, aunt/uncle—still intermixed in the “other” category

3. Issues with the relationship question and household type variable (continued)

- Laterally extended households are important to distinguish
 - 51% of Census 2000 relationship write-ins: laterally extended kin
 - Laterally extended households may be more common among minorities; minority and/or large households are undercounted
- Adding laterally extended categories to relationship question could
 - improve specificity of data for demographers and other data users,
 - cut POP staff time and labor costs in recoding write-in responses, and
 - possibly improve coverage in minority and/or large households
 - improve our understanding of household structure patterns for non-white subpopulations

3. Issues with the relationship question and household type variable (continued)

3.3 Inconsistencies in marking “husband/wife” and “unmarried partner” and our official definitions may distort household type:

- Inconsistencies between official definitions and census categories:
 - In Census 2000 Technical Documentation, “married couple” includes “spouses” in common law marriages, but
 - The Census 2000 form has neither a category for common law partners nor a note on how to mark them; this may cause inconsistent reporting and distortion of household types
- Differing cultural connotations of “husband/wife” and marriage

Suggestions to Improve Census/Survey Collection of Household and Family Type Data

1. Consider revising the relationship question for U.S. and overseas censuses/surveys by

- Adding new response categories for lateral, lineal kin: nephew/niece, uncle/aunt, brother/sister-in-law, cousin, and grandparent
- Adding “child of unmarried partner”
- Standardizing relationship categories across the census, ACS, and other surveys: the expanded census categories allow a greater range of household types to be identified.
- Developing and testing an individual-level question to identify all interrelationships in the household (2001 England census)

2. Test the relationship question

- Conduct exploratory and cognitive research
- Conduct a split-panel test in 2005 census test - approved

Suggestions for Censuses/Surveys (continued)

- 3. Design qualitative and quantitative research related to marital status:** assess how accurately “husband/wife” and “unmarried partner” categories in censuses/surveys differentiate “married couple” from other household types
- 4. Increase the scope and size of language and translation projects** to identify linguistic, cultural, cognitive and methodological issues in developing foreign language forms, for U.S., as well as international censuses/surveys

Suggestions for Censuses/Surveys (continued)

5. Design and conduct new ethnographic research as part of the decennial census testing cycle

Design a new ethnographic study in the 2006 census test on household composition, residence rules and coverage by race/ethnicity.

6. Plan and conduct new ethnographic research on marital status in different race/ethnic groups in the U.S. and overseas to improve a range of censuses/surveys used by demographers

7. Plan and conduct a qualitative study to identify and assess factors contributing to persistent omissions across data collections for different race/ethnic and age groups in the U.S. 2006 census test

Comments, Questions, New Ideas?

Full report available at:

<http://www.census.gov/pred/www/rpts/Complex%20Households%20Final%20Report.pdf>

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