Using Multiple Methods to Understand Ethnicity Response

Lyn Kaye: Statistics New Zealand
Ethnicity Question

- Key variable in NZ Census & social surveys
- Well known and generally accepted
- Increase in number of people writing in ‘New Zealander’
NZ Ethnicity Question

Which ethnic group do you belong to?
Mark the space or spaces that apply to you.

- New Zealand European
- Māori
- Samoan
- Cook Island Māori
- Tongan
- Niuean
- Chinese
- Indian
- other. such as DUTCH, JAPANESE, TOKELAUAN. Please state:
UK Ethnicity Question

What is your ethnic group?

Choose one section from A to E, then tick one box to best describe your ethnic group or background.

A White
- English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
- Irish
- Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Any other White background, write in

B Mixed / multiple ethnic groups
- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Any other Mixed/multiple ethnic background, write in

C Asian / Asian British
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Any other Asian background, write in

D Black / African / Caribbean / Black British
- African
- Caribbean
- Any other Black/African/Caribbean background, write in

E Other ethnic group
- Arab
- Any other ethnic group, write in
Aims of research

- Identify the characteristics of respondents opting to write in a ‘New Zealander’ response
- Understand why respondents opting to write-in ‘New Zealander’
- Determine how a ‘New Zealander’ tickbox would impact on respondents’ answers
- Identify if, and how additional related questions might influence answers to the ethnicity question.
Multiple Methods

- Inter-censal matching
- Focus-groups & in-depth interviewing
- Cognitive interviews
- Field testing
- Split sample research
Inter-censal matching

- Largest impact on ‘NZ European’ category
- Losses from ethnic minority groups as well – eg. Maori, Pacific and Asian groups
- Smaller numbers – but notable impact for minority ethnic groups
Results of qualitative testing

- Concept not understood uniformly by all respondents
- Range of themes identified with ethnicity
- Broad themes of ancestry, race and nationality
- Loose fit with the Stats NZ definition
Respondent motivations

- General preference for the term ‘New Zealander’
- Greater sense of national identity than ethnic identity
- Disassociation with Europe
- Protest (opting-out) – question perceived as divisive
- Signal assimilation with New Zealand culture
What it means to be a New Zealander

“Being born here. Having had your family be here for more than two generations. You like L&P and pies and gumboots and pineapple lumps.... that makes you a New Zealander. So its just all of the things we stand for.”
Minimal reading / satisficing

- Respondents often read only part of the question and thought they could only select one response.
- Respondents often missed a ‘New Zealander’ category appearing last in the list.
Answers shaped by response categories

- Respondents usually comfortable selecting a response category from the list (without a ‘New Zealander’ option)
- Respondents who preferred the description ‘New Zealander’ chose to tick another option, rather than write in that response (‘other’ responses under-reported)
Generational attachment questions

7. Which country was your mother born in?
   - New Zealand
   - Other. Please print the present name of the country:
   - Don't know

8. Which country was your father born in?
   - New Zealand
   - Other. Please print the present name of the country:
   - Don't know
Generational Attachment questions

- Assimilation Effect – answers to these questions may increase the number of respondents selecting ‘New Zealander’
- Subtraction Effect – answers to these questions may decrease the number of respondents selecting ‘New Zealander’
- Or….. no perceptible impact either way
Conclusions to date

- Significant shift in statistics likely if a tickbox is included
- Further quantitative research required to measure strength of that shift
- Further research to determine influence of a national identity question
- Reinstate question from 1996 ‘Mark all the spaces you need to show……’
- Uses of data / information needs should shape final decision

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Value of multiple methods

- Multiple methods provide a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the issue
- Each method makes a unique contribution to the issue
- Findings from one method can support and confirm findings from another
- Strengths and weaknesses in each method
- Together provide greater confidence in results for decision-making