

Using Multiple Methods to Understand Ethnicity Response

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Ethnicity Question

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

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

- **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

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**