



Research In the News

Questions
About
the Article ?

MEASURING RACE AND ETHNICITY

Every 10 years, the U.S. Census is mandated to count the number of people who reside in the United States along with their demographic characteristics, including gender, race/ethnicity, age, and so on. As you might imagine, this is a very difficult task. Not only is it extremely hard to get people to respond to mailed or telephone surveys, as you will see in Chapter 5 on sampling, some people are simply not reachable by these means. How the Census asks questions are the survey is also another issue. The United States is a very diverse society, with an increasing percentage of the population having mixed racial/ethnic identities. The article quotes one 41-year-old woman how she felt about the questions that first asked her to identity her ethnicity (Hispanic/Latino or not) and then her race. She responded, “I’m all of these!” Many other ethnic groups grapple with answering the questions on the Census form, including Middle Eastern Americans and others.

1. What types of measurement errors are possible when demographic questions fail to reflect reality?
2. If you were asked to redesign the questions on gender, race/ethnicity, and religion for the U.S. Census, how would you do so?