**Camp session:** Disaggregating race and ethnicity

**Date:** Tuesday

**Leader:** Ashley Williams Clark

**Note taker:** Cole Campbell

* Many state agencies have not updated to the new OMB guidelines. If people identify as two or more races, are we losing insight into small ethnic groups, such as Indigenous nations?
* Conceptually, I (Luc Schuster) don’t like the combined race/ethnicity question. White/Black are the only races, while Asian and MENA are geographies, and Hispanic is a language. The justification is that this reflects how Americans think about race, but I worry it reinforces unhelpful views on identity.
	+ It’s important to remember that race is a social construct, and there's overlap between these categories. However, the question is flawed; many Hispanic people choose “other” because race operates differently in Latin American countries, where there has been extensive mixing over centuries.
	+ In San Antonio, Hispanic people often avoid identifying as white, even if they have European roots.
	+ The 2020 Census saw an artificial increase in multiracial respondents, partly because if someone identified as coming from a “Latin American”-coded country, the Census retroactively assigned them another race.
* I’m working on a project with court data, which lacks data collection. My (ultimately rejected) suggestion was to purchase data from for-profit firms that already collect extensive information about us. It’s inexpensive to access their records, but has anyone compared that data against our sources to see how accurate it is?I (Devin Keithley) don’t trust that data. In HMDA, mortgage lenders essentially record race, and in LIHTC data, race is unreported for about 20% of tenants.
* Ashley Williams Clark – One reason I wanted to start this conversation is the experience of initially not being in a category and then being assigned one later. I want to avoid replicating these harms. We have a large MENA population in Michigan, which may significantly reduce our white population count. We’re part of a data aggregation project with the Johnson Center and D3, working to align local data collection with the new OMB guidelines to enable comprehensive disaggregation.
* Luc – I think we should represent data so multiracial individuals can be identified as such. The white/non-Latino category exists to make numbers sum to 100, but identity doesn’t work that way. In Boston, for example, there was a story about a decline in the Black population, but only when you count single-race responses. Including multiracial individuals showed a modest increase in the Black population.
* How do we discuss this with funders who aren’t used to collecting data this way? I don’t have an answer; it’s a challenge.
	+ Luc – My instinct is that funders generally don’t question how we categorize data, for better or worse.
	+ Stephanie – I heard that people are creating Python code to generate their own visualizations. Until you see the data, it’s hard to conceptualize it. For example, we know there are Arabic people in southeast Michigan, but it’s challenging to represent that visually.
* Ashley – My understanding is that people can opt out of the new guidelines if they provide a justification. There are concerns about losing categories like Afro-Latino.
	+ Luc – I think Census categories perpetuate misconceptions by following the “one-drop” rule, such as in projections of majority-minority demographics.
	+ Additional complexities arise because the Census doesn’t track ethnic categories like Jewish or Sikh.
	+ What is the future of the U.S. as mixing continues and people aren’t even sure “where they come from”? People should be able to identify with the ancestry they relate to.
* Ashley – How do you all report ethnic categories while avoiding erasure?
o Mariko Toyoji – We use all OMB categories but disaggregate to maintain privacy standards. We have a multiracial category, but it’s vague since it only indicates mixed heritage. We want to know how communities would prefer this data to be disaggregated. For instance, in Hawaii, where most people are multiracial, they sometimes distinguish Native Hawaiian-mixed, Asian-mixed, etc.
	+ Amanda Beavin – There’s always a compromise. The longer the table, the harder it is to read. There’s a balance between avoiding erasure and making data usable for the intended audiences.
		- Anne Kuhnen – Once you look at smaller geographies, you often suppress many groups. We take a similar approach, using single categories only.
	+ Ashley – I think it was Jon Schwabish who said, “do no harm.” To understand a community, sometimes you need to collect additional data. I like Luc’s idea that data doesn’t have to add up to 100.
	+ Luc – I agree that sometimes data simplification is necessary, but without including complexities, it may look like certain groups are declining when they’re not. For example, in Massachusetts, counting Native American-mixed populations yields a figure eight times higher than counting Native-only.
	+ Mariko – The Asian aggregate category has been problematic, as in our study on student mental health.
* Kendall Nash – In HMDA data, there are numerous race and ethnicity fields, plus derived fields that aggregate. For joint loans, they may differentiate between POC-only applicants and mixed-race pairs, which is significant for classifying loan “race.”
* Ashley – How you measure depends on what you aim to measure.
* Natalie Rodriguez – We work with a group focused exclusively on Pacific Islanders, a small but often underrepresented group. They conducted community surveys, and it was affirming for them not to be an asterisk or “other” category on a chart.
* Ashley – Has anyone engaged with state departments to educate them on updated data standards?
	+ Brandon Stanaway – We’ve started reaching out. It’s an easy sell to people who understand the issues, but you need to ensure you’re speaking to all relevant stakeholders.
* The Hispanic category can obscure diverse experiences across South America, where discrimination often follows a skin-tone continuum.
	+ One survey disaggregated by race and skin color.
	+ It would be interesting if BWDC gamified these nuances.
	+ Anne – The National Equity Atlas from PolicyLink includes categories and ancestry.
* It would be helpful for NNIP to collect resources on how other partners approach these complexities and tradeoffs.