Measuring the Diverging Components of Race in Multiracial America

Workshop Schedule

June 26-27, 2014
Hilton College Station & Conference Center
College Station, TX

Co-organizers:
Jenifer Bratter, Rice University
Mary E. Campbell, Texas A&M University
Wendy D. Roth, University of British Columbia
Thursday, June 26

8:00am    Continental Breakfast available

8:30am    Opening Remarks
Dr. José Bermúdez
Dean, College of Liberal Arts, Texas A&M University

8:45am    Welcome and acknowledgements
Jenifer Bratter

9:00am    Introduction to the conference
Wendy Roth

9:30am    Panel 1: State of the field: What are we measuring when measuring “race”?  
Presider: Wendy Roth

This session focuses on the complexity of racial conceptualization and race measurement in social science contexts. It illustrates some of the shortcomings with traditional survey research measures, and what can be learned by comparing multiple measures of race, particularly how such comparisons contribute to an enriched understanding of the strengths and limitations of each measurement approach.

“Surveying the Surveyors: Trends in the Measurement of Race and Ethnicity in U.S. Social Surveys”
Aliya Saperstein, Stanford University

This study traces the social scientific construction of knowledge about race and ethnicity in the United States through a systematic examination of questionnaires, manuals and other technical materials from the four largest and longest-running national surveys: the American National Election Study, the General Social Survey, the Panel Study of Income Dynamics and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. In particular, I examine how methods of measurement have changed over time and vary across surveys. I also aim to uncover the unspoken assumptions about what it means to be a member of a particular race or ethnicity that are implied by aspects of the survey design, including how, or from whom, such data should be gathered. Preliminary results suggest that although (or perhaps because) race scholars have been criticizing survey research for several decades, it is relatively common to ask multiple questions, allow multiple responses, and provide detailed definitions and explanations about the sources of racial data. Some simplification of U.S. racial diversity does happen at the data collection stage, but more appears to occur during later stages of data coding and analysis, when multiple measures and more detailed responses are shoe-horned into the standard umbrella categories people have come to expect.
“Conceptualizing and Measuring Race/Ethnicity in Interaction”
Jane Sell, Texas A&M University
Co-authored with Carla Goar, Kent State University

While identities are routinely discussed in terms of process, measurement of a dynamic is problematic. To assess a dynamic, we need to consider initial conditions, then the interaction process for both the actor and those around the actor. Race/ethnicity is a particularly salient identity, but also an identity that changes in different contexts and times. How is race/ethnicity read by self and others and then how do initial readings develop differently over time? We consider how group interactions shape both the opportunities and challenges associated with race/ethnicity. While identification may remain stable, what ethnic identity means in a group could change dramatically. We discuss and analyze one type of experimental study that can provide insight into ethnic identity.

“Latina/o Whitening: Which Latinas/os Self-Classify as White and Report Being Perceived as White by Other Americans?”
Nicholas Vargas, University of Texas at Dallas

Some scholars argue that Latinas/os in the United States may soon become White, much like the supposed Whitening of Eastern European immigrant groups in the early 20th century. High rates of White racial identification on surveys among Latinas/os is one explanation provided for this assertion. However, personal identification is but one element of racial boundary maintenance. It is when personal identification is externally validated that it is most closely associated with group based experiences. This article maps components of the White-Latino racial boundary that may be permeable to White expansion by examining conditions under which Latinas/os self-identify as White and report that they are externally classified as White by other Americans. Employing novel data from the 2006 Portraits of American Life Study, this article shows that nearly forty percent of Latinas/os sometimes self-identify as White, yet a much smaller proportion—only six percent—report being externally classified as White by others. Moreover, logistic regression analyses suggest that light phenotypical features and having high levels of socioeconomic status increase the odds of reported external Whitening. Interestingly, phenotypically light Latina/os with low levels of socioeconomic status have low probabilities of reporting external classification as White when compared to their phenotypically light and high socioeconomic status counterparts, suggesting that the combination of both skin color and class may be central to the Latina/o-White racial boundary. Results also indicate that many who report external Whitening do not prefer to self-identify as White. In sum, multi-dimensional measures of racial classification indicate that only a very small minority of Latinas/os may be “becoming White” in ways that some previous researchers have predicted.

11:00-11:15am Coffee Break

“New Perspectives on Race and Ethnicity in Latin America”
Edward Telles, Princeton University
11:45am - 1:00pm  Discussion

**Guiding discussion questions:**
- What theoretical models are most useful for capturing the multiple dimensions of race? Do these need to be adjusted?
- In what ways can or should concepts of biology or genetics be integrated into our understanding of race? Is there a role for genetic information in the measures we use in social science?
- What kinds of survey designs are needed to advance our understanding of how different measures of race are interconnected?
- What other research methods than survey research are needed to better capture aspects of the complexity of lived race? Can experimental research be used to push the field forward?

1:00pm  Lunch

2:30pm  Panel 2: Alternative approaches to capturing race and their implications

*Presider: Mary Campbell*

This session considers alternative ways of measuring race from what is often used in survey research. This involves both unique measures capturing distinctive dimensions of race in other survey questions (e.g. ancestry, ethnicity, parents’ place of birth) and using items other than respondent-completed survey questions (e.g. proxy reports) as creative strategies for measuring different components of race.

“Race by Proxy: Variation in Outsiders’ Race/Hispanic Reports to Census”
Carolyn Liebler, University of Minnesota
Co-authored with Sonya Rastogi and James Noon, U.S. Census Bureau

After repeated follow-ups fail to reach an individual, the Census Bureau asks a neighbor or other proxy reporter to give information such as race, age, and sex. Using individual-level linked data from twenty-first century decennial censuses and American Community Surveys, we assess the extent to which race/Hispanic proxy reports (“other-assigned” race) match self-reports (“self-reported race), showing, for example, variation in the group-specific match rate by urban/non-urban location and by county-level characteristics. We then delve into the cases in which the outsider’s report does not match the self-report, looking for patterns in the mismatch related to processes of social stratification. This research provides sociologically informative details about when and where observed race does and does not match expressed race, as well as practical information about these commonly used data sets.

“Measuring Ethnicity and Race by Proxy: The European Experience”
Patrick Simon, Institut National d’Études Démographiques, France

Statistics on ethnicity, if not on race, are common in a large number of countries around the world, but not in the western part of Europe. This divergence can be explained by legal prohibitions attached to data protection provisions and by a political reluctance to recognize and emphasize ethnic diversity in official statistics. Following different histories and political framings, European countries have implemented different ways of measuring ethnicity. Most
western European countries have strategically decided to focus on the place of birth and the nationality of the individuals and of their parents to characterize groups which may be called “ethnic minorities” and sometimes “visible minorities.” The chapter will discuss the choice of proxies in Western Europe from the point of view of their political and scientific background and their methodological implementation. These proxies are mostly based on immigrant ancestry on two generations (place of birth of parents), language spoken at home or onomastic classification. How far these proxies provide reliable and meaningful information on ethnic and racial diversity as well as on the experiences of ethnic and racial minorities will be assessed for a selection of countries (the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Belgium and France). Using two datasets collected in 2006 (“measuring diversity survey”) and 2008-2009 (“Trajectories and Origins survey”) by INED, multiple categorizations of “diversity” by citizenship, ancestry (parental birthplace and self-identification), race (by self-identification, self-reported observer identification, exposure to racial ascription) and religion will be compared to bring highlights that could contribute to the debate in the US.

“Essential Measures: Race, Ancestry, and Social Difference”
Aaron Gullickson, University of Oregon

Increasing diversity and intermarriage in the United States presents challenges to the relatively static and monolithic categories of race used by the federal government. Yet, since 1980, the US Census Bureau has employed a more open-ended option for self-identification in the form of the ancestry question. Furthermore, individuals can choose up to two different ancestry options that can freely cross racial and ethnic lines. In this chapter, I will examine the correspondence between ancestry and race responses, how this correspondence has shifted over time, and how these characteristics are jointly related to other characteristics and life chances. Addressing these questions helps us understand how refining our measures of race might better capture lived experience and how demographic changes are driving changes in racial boundaries.

4:00-4:15pm  Coffee Break

“Is There a ‘Best’ Way to Measure Race?”
C. Matthew Snipp, Stanford University
Co-authored with Nicholas Jones and Roberto Ramirez, U.S. Census Bureau

As social scientists have come to appreciate the complexity of racial identification in the United States, so too have the measures of race become more complicated. In an era when race was understood as an essential fixed characteristic, surveys followed suit with forced choice questions allowing respondents to select from a small number of possible options. However, over the past twenty years, the racial composition of the United States has become more heterogeneous, and social scientists have responded by crafting ever more complex ways to elicit information about racial and ethnic heritage. However, the criteria for assessing the quality of different instruments have remained elusive. To begin this review, we will look at two important surveys that measure efforts to measure race in significantly different ways; the General Social Survey (GSS) that includes a skin tone test, and the National Survey of Adolescent Health (Add Health) that relies on a battery of items pertaining to racial heritage. Given these two approaches to racial measurement, we will focus on two large-scale efforts
launched by the Census Bureau designed to test alternative questions about race. We begin by reviewing the results of the Census Bureau’s Racial and Ethnic Targeted Test that was conducted in 1996 and preceded a major revision of the federal government’s official racial classification in 1997. With this study as background, results from the 2010 Alternative Questionnaire Experiment will be presented and examined in light of possible future changes in the way that the federal government measures race. The paper will conclude with a discussion of the implications of these possible changes for other surveys, and the ways that Americans think about race.

4:45pm – 6pm Discussion

Guiding discussion questions:
- What are ideal measures for tapping different aspects of the lived experience of race (self-identification, identification by others, phenotype, etc.)?
- What kinds of proxy reports and measures would be most useful in future data collection?
- What kinds of international comparisons would be most useful for advancing our understanding of the lived experience of race?

Friday, June 27

8:30am Continental Breakfast available

9:00am Panel 3: The Implications of Racial Measurement on Social Inequality
Presider: Jenifer Bratter

This session focuses on how the way we measure race, or its various components, influences our understanding of social inequalities. Papers in this panel will discuss the implications of employing new approaches to measuring race in a variety of social realms.

“Does How We Measure Race Matter for Disparities in Mental Health?”
Verna M. Keith, Texas A&M University

Research has long documented black-white disparities in psychosocial indicators of emotional well-being such as self-efficacy and depressive symptoms. Much of this research relies on secondary data from large national surveys that proceed as if African Americans are a monolithic group, the one drop rule. As the African American population becomes more diverse due to mixed-raced parenting and immigration, racial classification schemas used in research are becoming more complex and often yield diverse findings depending on which schema is used. Scholars have observed, for example, that racial inequality is more severe for blacks of darker complexion than those who are lighter. This study evaluates how blacks, variously classified, differ from whites on several mental health outcomes. More specifically, data from a national study of young adults are examined to determine whether findings are consistent across the following contrasts: (1) white and black; (2) white, mono-racial black and multi-racial black; and (3) white and black—light, medium, and dark.
“Biology and Race: Evolving Debates about the Nature of Difference”
Ann Morning, New York University

Measuring race is a complicated statistical and sociological challenge. Varied and conflicting ideas abound about the indicators that best capture it: self-identified race, external racial classifications, geographic ancestry, skin color, etc. In the midst of such debates among sociologists and demographers, however, a growing biological and social scientific literature has asserted the utility of genetic measures in identifying individuals’ racial membership. This scholarship bolsters the longstanding American belief that race is first and foremost a physical characteristic, and it is intertwined with new products that concretize that belief: race-specific pharmaceuticals, for example, or DNA racial ancestry tests. This paper aims to make two contributions to the discussion of evolving measures of race. First, it provides an overview of current scientific debates about whether individuals’ race is grounded in their genome. More importantly, however, it explores the relationship between claims about the genetic foundations of race and current sociological and demographic practices for classifying Americans by race. In other words, is contemporary scientific, media and popular discourse about race and genes likely to affect the ways in which researchers and policymakers try to measure race on the census and in surveys and interviews?

“The Shift toward Clarifying the Boundaries of Color and Race in Brazil”
Stanley R. Bailey, University of California at Irvine

The Brazilian state has undergone a paradigm shift in its approach to racial inequality in the last 15 years. Core to that shift is the wide-spread institutionalization of race-targeted policy for non-white Brazilians in higher education and in other spheres. Moreover, state discourse now often uses the language of race as opposed to color to describe and to administer its population’s diversity. How have these changes affected racial and color classification among Brazilians? Using national survey data that provide a longitudinal lens, I find that indeed shifts are occurring along at least two dimensions of color/race: expressed race (i.e., self-classification in an open format) and official race (i.e., self-classification in the census format). I describe these shifts as a growing alignment or consistency between those two dimensions for white and brown Brazilians, but not for black Brazilians. The latter are opting for the extra-official category “negro,” more clearly a race than color classification, reflecting the state’s new racialized discourse and the language of some race-targeted policies. I conclude by offering some thoughts on the future of the multidimensional race construct in Brazil.

“Race and Inequality: Disentangling the Effects of Racial Self-identification and Classification by Others”
Andrew Penner, University of California-Irvine
Co-authored with Aliya Saperstein, Stanford University and Jessica Kizer, University of California-Irvine

The literature on racial inequality in the United States is vast and varied. We add to this research by examining whether racial classification by others and racial self-identification are differently related to inequality across a number of outcomes. While previous research on
racial inequality typically views these two dimensions of race as inextricably linked, we highlight four analytic approaches to disentangling the effects of self-reported and interviewer classified race. Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, we show that these two dimensions of race can independently influence outcomes of interest, and that they can do so in different ways. Further, our analyses suggest that the best-fitting models often include measures of race from both self-identification and others’ classification, stressing the importance of moving beyond a unidimensional conception of race.

11:15am – 12:30pm Discussion

Guiding discussion questions:
- What do various measures suggest about the relative amounts of inequality? Do new measures shed light on new aspects of inequality that have not previously been theorized?
- Are there some aspects of race that have a greater impact on certain types of outcomes than others? For instance, what dimensions of race are most useful for understanding racial differences in income and earnings, residential segregation, and mental or physical health?
- How can what we have talked about today inform a discussion of shifting racial hierarchies? What are the implications, for example, of differences in skin tone or self-identification for understanding if race is stratified along Black/non-Black lines or if we are living in tri-racial world?

12:30pm Lunch

2:00pm Session 4: What’s New at the Census and What Comes Next?
Presider: Jenifer Bratter

"Update on Race and Hispanic Origin Research for the 2020 Census"
Nicholas Jones and Roberto Ramírez, U.S. Census Bureau

2:30pm Q&A

3:00-3:15pm Coffee Break

3:30 – 6pm Discussion of Future Steps and Closing Remarks
Presider: Mary Campbell

We will close the day and the workshop with a discussion of:
1. An agenda for developing more advanced measures and strategies for encouraging survey designers to consider them.
2. How can we make the contributions of these multiple measures accessible to researchers who are interested in measuring racial disparities?
3. Potential collaborations and dissemination strategies for the workshop outcomes.