

Variable constructions in Longitudinal Research: Ethnicity

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<http://www.longitudinal.stir.ac.uk/variables/>

[VERSION 1]



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Variable constructions in Longitudinal Research: Ethnicity

1) Concepts and measures
2) Problems
3) Options and guidance

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2

Concepts of Ethnicity

- The problem of multiple 'referents'
 - National origins / national cultural heritage
 - 'Race' / skin colour / somantics
 - Religion
 - Language
 - Country of birth / parents birth / citizenship
 - ...*anything else..?*

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3

Measures of ethnicity

- Subjective ethnic identity
- Immigrant cohort
- Classification by appearance
- Religious affiliation

...The problem of 'integrating theory and research'...

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4

e.g.: Competing referents

	ESS	ISSP	WVS	LIS
Citizenship	√	{√}		{√}
Ctry of birth	√	{√}	√	{√}
Time in ctry	√		√	{√}
Parents ctry	√			
Language	√	{√}	{√}	{√}
Subjective	√ (dichot)	{√}	{√}	{√}
Religion	√	√	√	

- Real data: many sparse and/or uninteresting categories..
- Can achieve conceptual clarity [*cf. H-Z 2003*], but choices must balance theoretical prefs and practical options

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5

Ethnic group in the World Values Survey - Britain

Count	Wave				Total
	1981-1984	1989-1993	1994-1999	1999-2004	
-5 Missing: Unknown	18	0	0	0	18
-4 Not asked	0	1484	0	999	2483
-1 Don't know	0	0	1	0	1
40 Asian	15	0	0	0	15
70 Asian - Central (Arabic)	1	0	0	0	1
80 Asian - East (Chinese, Japanese)	0	0	3	0	3
90 Asian - South (Indian, Hindu, Pakistani, Bangladeshi)	0	0	11	0	11
130 Bangladeshi	0	0	1	0	1
200 Black African	0	0	4	0	4
210 Black-Caribbean	0	0	12	0	12
220 Black-Other / Black	9	0	2	0	11
810 Pakistani	0	0	7	0	7
1400 White / Caucasian White	1124	0	1044	0	2168
8000 Other	0	0	8	0	8
Total	1167	1484	1093	999	4743

Ethnic group in the World Values Survey - Mexico				
Count	Wave			Total
	1989-1993	1994-1999	1999-2004	
-5 Missing: Unknown	0	1	0	1
-2 No answer	0	0	29	29
-1 Don't know	0	832	0	832
70 Asian - Central (Arabic)	0	364	0	364
80 Asian - East (Chinese, Japanese)	5	8	0	13
90 Asian - South (Indian, Hindu, Pakistani, Bangladeshi)	0	84	0	84
220 Black-Other / Black	7	14	3	24
310 Coloured (medium)	544	0	0	544
320 Coloured (dark)	240	0	564	804
330 Coloured (light)	346	0	648	994
630 Indian (American)	86	0	0	86
640 Indigenous	0	0	25	25
1400 White / Caucasian White	303	335	254	892
8000 Other	0	685	12	697
Total	1531	2323	1535	5389

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Ethnicity and cross-national comparisons

[from Lambert 2005; cf. H-Z 2003]

- 4 well-known problems:

'Referents'
Sparsity

Dynamisms
National traditions

⇒ *Are there more; what are our options?*

⇒ This paper talked about 'absolutist' and 'relativist' approaches; I would now prefer 'universal' and specific'

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So: Diversity, sparsity, dynamism & local context are recognised, & celebrated in sociological theory, but problematic for comparative survey research

➤ **Retain all categorical boundaries:**

- Abandon (& attack) surveys for ethnicity research
- Restriction to context-by-context survey comparisons
 - Not always viable (eg sub-projects)
 - Still leads to same problems eventually (eg regions)

➤ **Manipulate categorical boundaries:**

- Universal (absolutist): prioritise some divisions only
- Specific (relativistic): weight / assess categorical distinctions

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10

Challenges: longitudinal variable constructions and ethnicity

Issues concerning...

1) Harmonisation	Low {lack of data}
2) Equivalence	Low {lack of data}
3) Life course context	V. High: cohort change / development
4) Household / family context	Med.: individual and household
5) History of topic	High: Short, potted, sparse
6) Events	High: demographic & political change
7) Methods and Correlations	High: Sparse categories; changing relations

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11

Example: Methods and correlations

- Often neglected element of research

Typically: rich data collected; collapsed to minority/majority dichotomy in analysis

↔ Pressure to collapse categories / reduce data

Issues:

- Pooled or separate cross-national / longitudinal analyses?
- Ethnic differences as focus v's background
- Substantial variation in related topics of interest over time
- Methods treatment often the *only* sphere of influence

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12

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13

UK: ONS data guides

- Input harmonisation within decades
- No harmonisation between decades
- Academic strategies – ‘black’ group, etc
- Addition of extra categories
- Mixed ethnicities, marriages...
- Lack of attention to alternative referents

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14

Universal solutions?

- Measurement equivalence by:
 - Survey data discipline [e.g. Modood et al 1997]
 - Related groups [e.g. Model 2005]
 - Longitudinal linkage [Platt 2005]
- Functional equivalence for categories:
 - Simplified categorical distinctions
 - Immigrant cohorts [e.g. Alba and Nee 2003]

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15

ii) A 'specific' solution?

- Existing problems centre on *categorical* boundaries and distinctions (too many..)
- Can we limit role of boundaries, but keep info?

Proposal : quantitative scores to indicate relative locations of ethnic categories in a low dimension space of ethnic differences

How?

- Single source metric(s) – eg years in country;
- Summary function (eg, theoretical placement; empirical derivation - 'SORs')

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16

UK example : 'SOR' scores describe 'persistent diversity' (Lambert 2002)

Subjective identity: W / Bc / I / Aa / P / Bg; Birthplace : U / A; Language : E / L; Religion : Mu / H / S / C

	FWLS			PSI		
-500	W	W		W	W	W-C
	Bc	Bc	W-U	Bc	Bc-A	Bc-C
-300			W-A			
			Bc-A,U	I-E	IPBg-C	
-100	I	I	I-E	Aa	Bc-U	
			P-E	I	I-L	I-H,S
100			Bg-E			I-Mu
		P	I-F			
300	P				PBg-E	
			P-F		P-L	
500			Bg-F	P	Bg-L	P-Mu
				Bg		Bg-Mu
700	Bg					
		Bg				

Cross-context examples?

- Reference to a consistent metric brings functional equivalence?
 - Derivation of metrics can be period specific, national specific, using large data sources and local expertise
 - LIS examples [Lambert and Penn 2001] → sensible metrics which explain *most* ethnic difference
 - (could further combine with specific dummies)

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18

Summary – Longitudinal variable constructions and ethnicity

- Tips – if nothing else
 - *Good science is explicit about assumptions (of equivalence)*
 - *And checks previous implementations(!)*
- Further issues?
 - *Theorise your way out – immigration...*
 - *Sequence analysis and careers? [e.g. Kogan 2007]*
 - *Longitudinal linkages*
 - *Specific approaches*

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19

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20
