

The Issues of Categorizing Race and Ethnicity in Everyday Life

By: Don Crumley



Thesis Statement

- The ways official forms categorize people are not accurately representing everyone.
- There are complex differences between formal categories of race and ethnicity and the informal ways people self-identify.



Literature Review/Background

- “There is a clear need for a more encompassing term that captures multiplicity at the ethnic group/cultural background level”
(Peter J Aspinall, 2009)
- “Not only did I find the emphasis on racial categorizations in the United States perplexing, but I felt that the selection offered was limited and problematic.” (Gisela Ernst, 2002)



Target Respondents

- SIUE students
- Limited survey to College of Arts and Science (CAS) {8,432 students}
- Professors in 7 classrooms facilitated, but I personally conducted
- 217 total respondents



Method- Mixed Type Survey

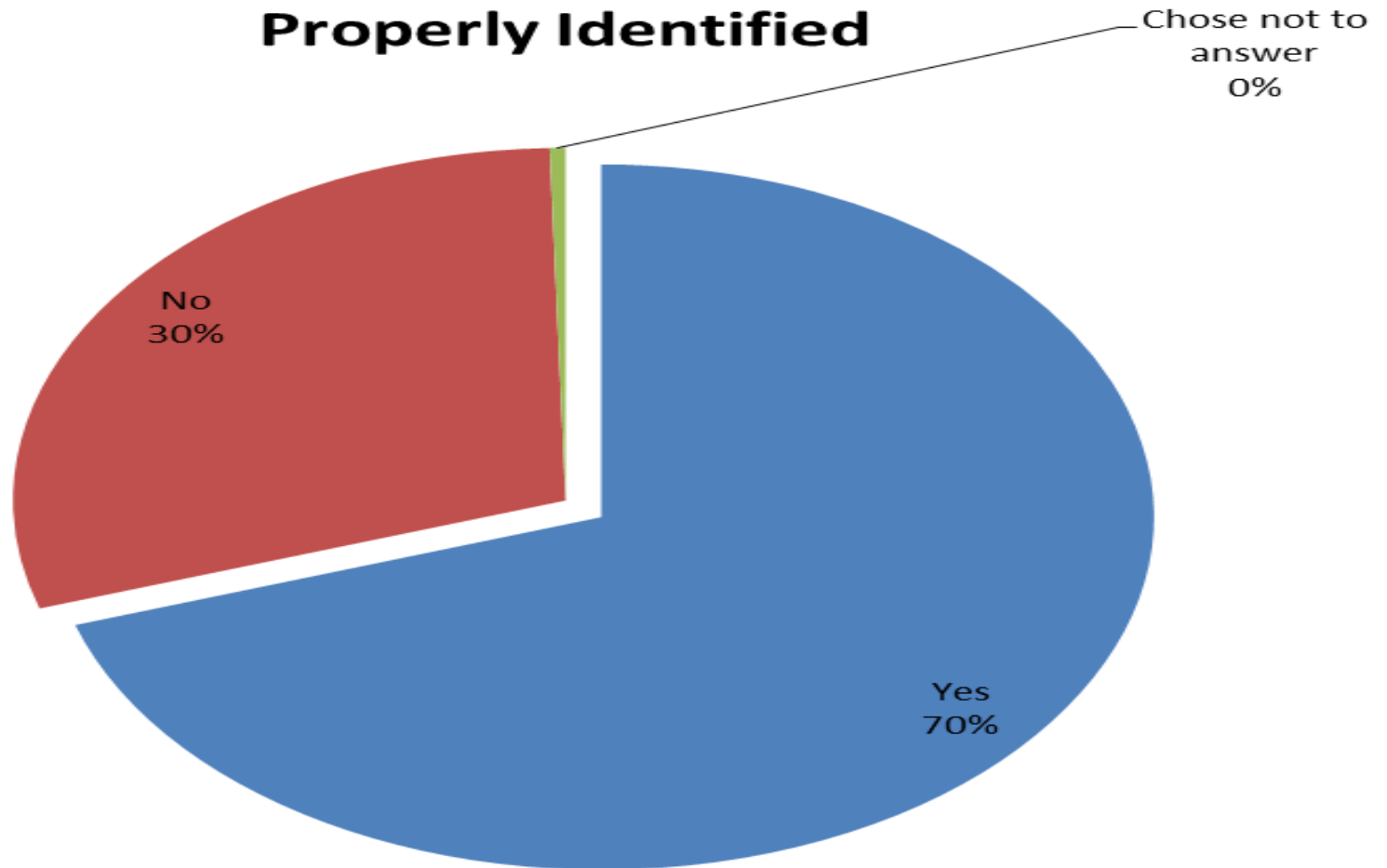
Quantitative

- 4 Demographic questions

Qualitative

- 4 Free listing questions

Do you feel that the selections of race or ethnicity used on surveys and forms properly identify you?





Demographic Analysis: Race

- This breakdown is remarkably similar to the racial/ethnic breakdown of CAS students (White 72.3%, Black+ Other 27.7%)
- Cannot test this variable because I would need to use the formal categories which I hypothesized are inadequate
- I would had to make race a closed ended question in order to test the relationship



Informal Responses to Race/Ethnicity Lumped into Formal Categories

Statements:	responses	percent age	rank
White/Caucasian	207	64%	1
African Am./Black	56	17.4%	2
Hispanic/Latino	26	8%	3
Asian	17	5%	4
Native American	15	4.6%	5

Please list all of the terms for Race & Ethnicity that best describe you:

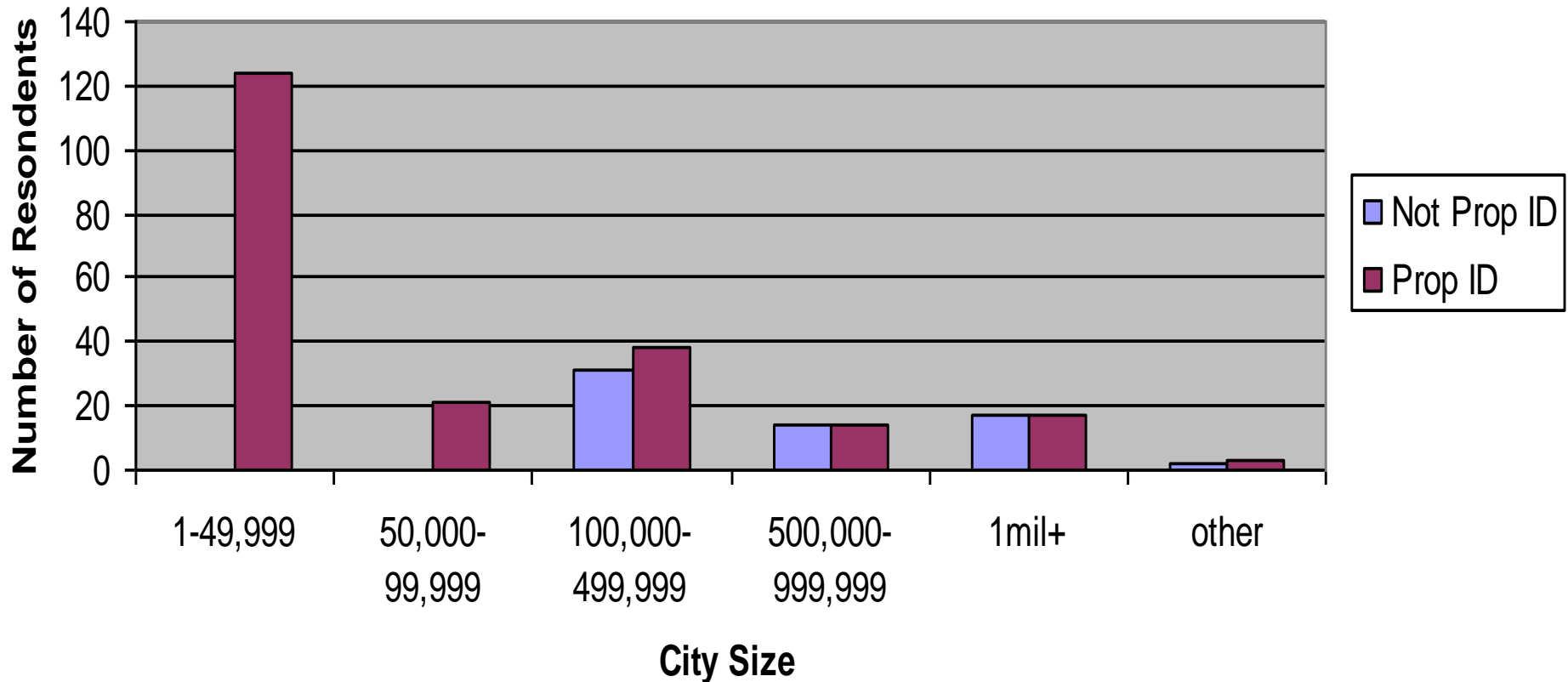
Other (all responses below rank 10 combined)	118
White	111
Caucasian	86
African-American	29
German	23
Black	22
American	21
Irish	16
European (Northern, Central, Eastern and Western)	14
English/British	11

■ Examples of "Other"

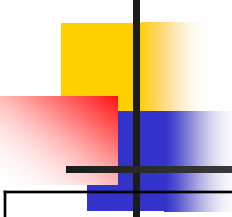
Mixed	3
Anglo-Saxon	2
Catholic	2
Brown	2
Human Being	1
Unknown	1

Demographic Analysis: City Size

Relation between City Size and Satisfaction with Formal Categories



Reasons for Dissatisfaction among the 30% of Respondents who indicated that the formal categories were inaccurate



Race and Ethnicity not good identifiers	26	18.80%
Not many options	11	7.90%
Mixed	9	6.50%
It doesn't matter	8	5.70%
I am white	7	5.00%
Prefer specifics	7	5.00%
Unfair clumping of race and Ethnicity	7	5.00%
Caucasian	6	4.30%
Race/Ethnicity identified with nationality	6	4.30%
More than just white	5	3.60%



Interpretation

- 118 “Other” – respondents that wrote something other than the normal categories
- Race and Nationality closely tied together
- Informal lumping was more in-depth than SIUE Fact Book
- Could city size be a factor regarding identity?



Thank You!!

Dr. Cory Willmott-Anthropology (Mentor)

Dr. Animato Cairo-Anthropology

Dr. Tom Lavallee- Foreign Language

Dr. Lisa Tellor-Kelley-English

Dr. Francis Odemerho-Geography

Dr. Mariana Solares-Foreign Language

A special thanks to those who responded!



Bibliography:

- Aspinall, Peter J. 2009. ‘Mixed race’, ‘mixed origins’ or what? Generic terminology for the multiple racial/ethnic group population. *Anthropology Today*. 25(2):3-8.
- Ernst, Gisela. 2002. “Pais de Mis Suenos: Reflections on Ethnic Labels, Dichotomies, and Ritual Interaction.” In *Distant Mirrors: America as a foreign culture*, Philip R Devita and James D Armstrong, Pp. 102-108. New York: Wadsworth Publishing.