




Socio-Demographic Measurement Issues in Federal Data Collection

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The world is a constantly-changing place.

- BUT – We like to have nice, consistent measures stretching out over the decades
- What issues are we currently dealing with that represent new or evolving areas of social measurement in survey data collections?



3 different subjects that are measurement challenges within the federal data collection system:

- Same-Sex Marriages and Relationships
- Expanded Measures of Educational Attainment and Labor Force Human Capital
- Access to Technology



TOPIC 1:

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE & RELATIONSHIPS



BACKGROUND

- June 2013: Supreme Court overturns Section 3 of DOMA
 - Fed Gov cannot limit marriage to heterosexual couples only
- 2003: ZERO states legally sanction same-sex marriage
- TODAY: 18 states + DC; more on the way



THE ISSUE(S)

- Conventional surveys do not routinely collect data on same-sex couples
- Sensitive topic; some see as intrusive; not central to data needs of most surveys
- Data products do not present estimates of same-sex married couples
- Standards vary – in 1990 census same-sex married couples turned into opposite-sex
- With change in law, federal regulations must comply
- Cannot abandon existing data tabulations; can't go back and recalibrate
- Independent actions by independent agencies likely to cause confusion



ACTIONS

- Sec of Commerce (Census Bureau) asks OMB to convene group
- Interagency Group on Measuring Household Relationships in Federal Surveys (MRFHS) formed Fall 2009
- Focus on larger issue of all household relationships
- Agencies tasked to identify current practices and expanded data needs
- Agencies work to identify best practices and test/develop new measures
- “Unplugging the edit’ only does part of the job



CURRENT STATUS

- Final report nearly complete
- **RECOMMENDATION:** A small set of questions that more fully identifies same-sex married couples, and recognizes other closely-related relationship concepts
- Some surveys in progress (SIPP, AHS); others in test mode (ACS, Cen2020, CPS)

REVISED RELATIONSHIP QUESTIONS

How is this person related to Person 1? Mark (X) ONE box.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Opposite-sex husband/wife/spouse | <input type="checkbox"/> Grandchild |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Opposite-sex unmarried partner | <input type="checkbox"/> Parent-in-law |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Same-sex husband/wife/spouse | <input type="checkbox"/> Son-in-law or daughter-in-law |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Same-sex unmarried partner | <input type="checkbox"/> Other relative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Biological son or daughter | <input type="checkbox"/> Roomer or boarder |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adopted son or daughter | <input type="checkbox"/> Housemate or roommate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stepson or stepdaughter | <input type="checkbox"/> Foster child |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brother or sister | <input type="checkbox"/> Other nonrelative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Father or mother | |

Is this person currently living with a boyfriend/girlfriend or partner in this household?

- Yes
 No

Is this person currently in a registered domestic partnership or civil union?

- Yes
 No



THE FUTURE

- More testing/research needed
- Need data results from large-scale implementation
- Data products need to be redesigned, but made compatible with older products



TOPIC 2:

EXPANDED MEASURES OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



BACKGROUND

- 1940-90: educational attainment measured in “years of schooling completed”
- 1990: new method focuses on “highest completed college degree”
- Late 1990: Federal research group notes an increase in education and training offered by business and other non-collegiate organizations
- Possible hundreds of thousands of persons might have completed ‘certification’ programs



THE ISSUE(S)

- How do we best measure this ‘other’ postsecondary education?
- Can we embed it inside of ‘traditional’ educational attainment?
- Does it exist instead of, or in supplement to, traditional degrees?



ACTIONS

- New interagency group formed in late 2000's
- Council of Econ Advisors and Office of the President see training such as this as an economical way to provide expanded labor market skills at lower cost
- Cognitive work to see how holders of these programs see themselves - what are the words they use to describe themselves
- NCES - large-scale tests in the NATES and ATEs



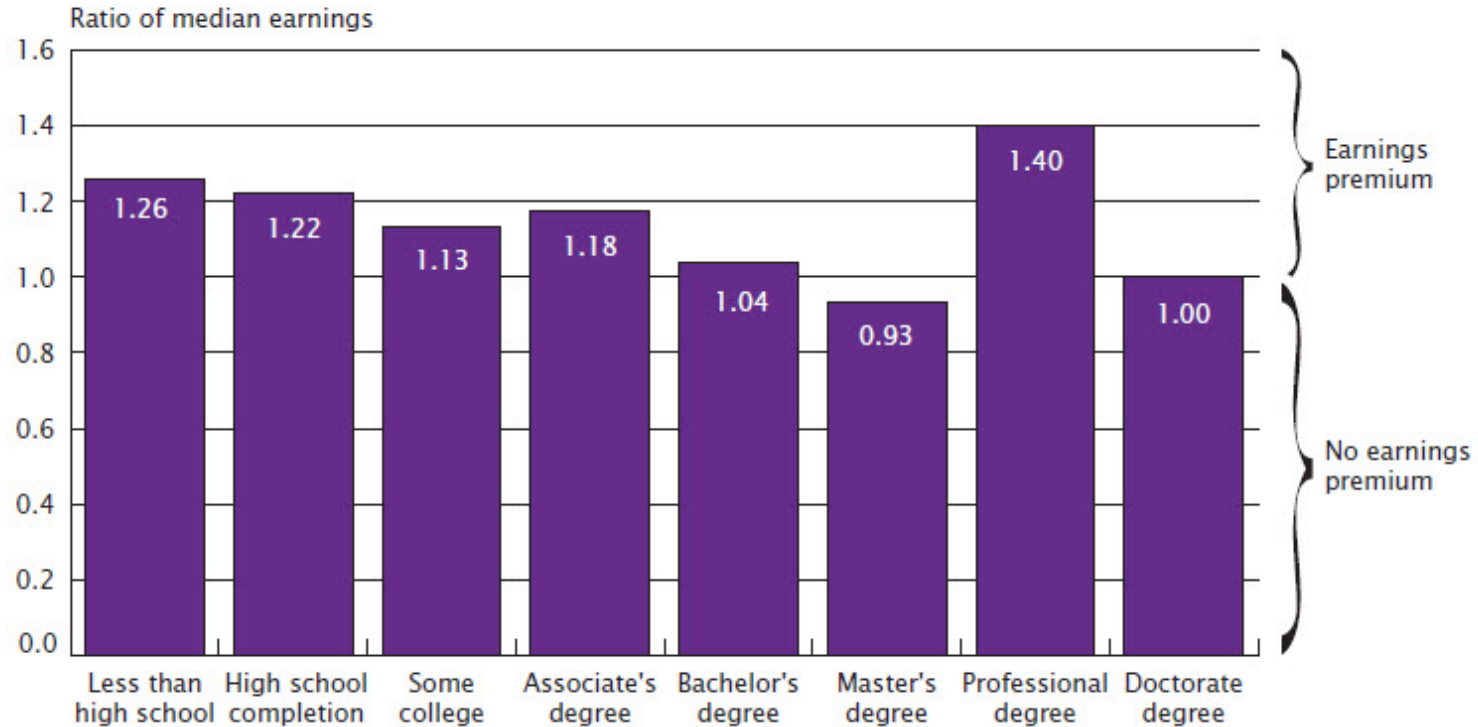
CURRENT STATUS

- Terms such as ‘certification and licenses’ have real and reliable meaning
- Respondents understand and react to these terms independent of their college degrees
- Terms like “certificates, apprenticeships and work-related training” are less solid
- A small set of questions gets useful data

Certifications provide significant financial value for low-education persons

Figure 2.

Median Monthly Earnings for Professional Certification or License Relative to No Alternative Credential by Education Level: 2012



Note: Nonrespondents are not included in estimates of alternative credentials. Only people employed full-time for the 4 months before the survey with positive earnings are included in these analyses.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2008 panel, wave 13.



THE FUTURE

- Continue development on ‘core’ questions
- Create a small set of questions that can be administered in routine general surveys (CPS, ACS, etc)
- Detailed subissues – multiple credential holders – require special studies
- Key relationship is between the training, the work it enables, and the labor market value it brings



TOPIC 3: ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY



BACKGROUND

- 1980: technology limited - mainframe computers, no Apples, no PC's
- World of today: portable technology everywhere
- Landscape/terminology constantly changing



THE ISSUE(S)

- How do we keep current in measurement when the object we are trying to measure is moving quickly?
- Where do boundaries disappear, other distinctions become relevant?
- Multiple parties with different vested interests – Ed, BLS, NTIA, FCC



ACTIONS

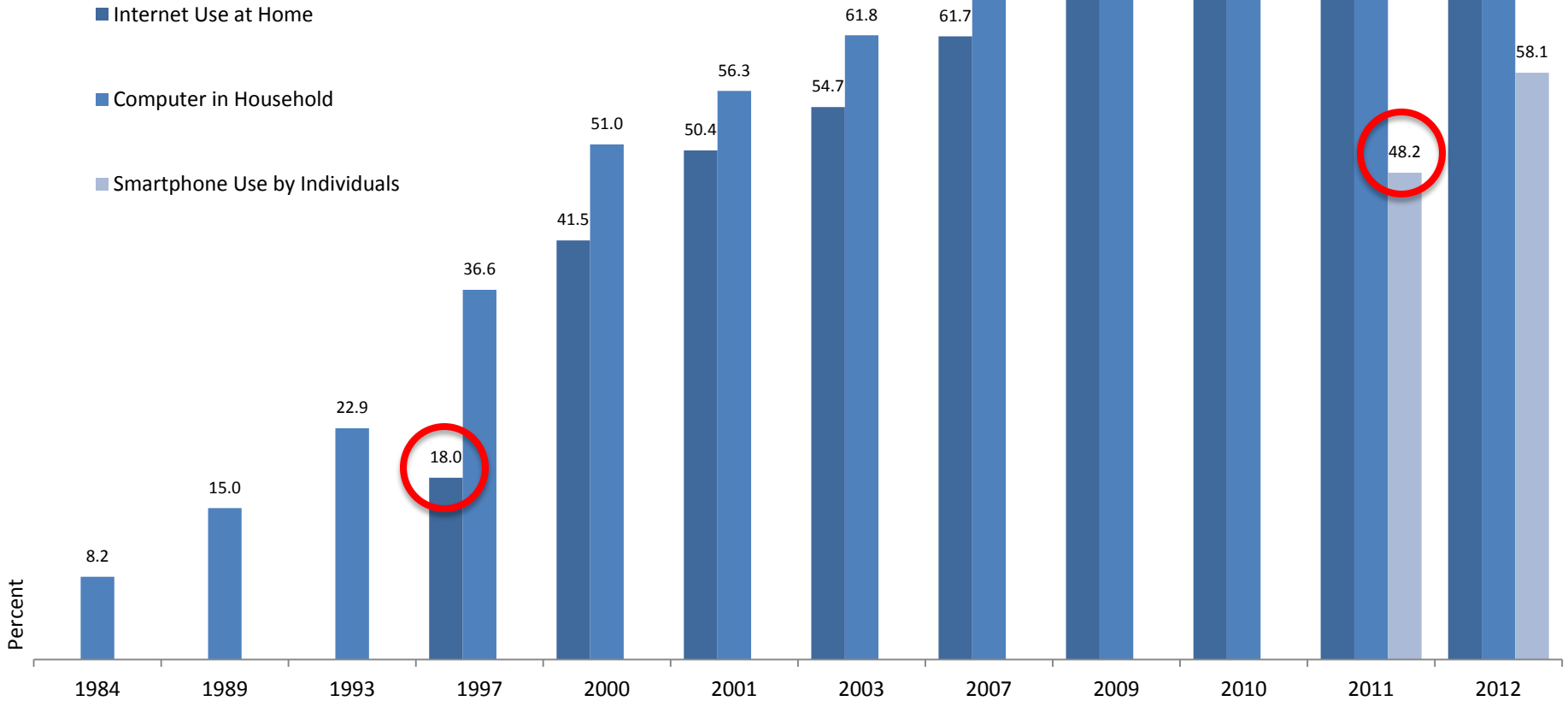
- 1984 -First personal computer supplement in CPS
- 1989 – Email added
- 1994 – Internet added
- 2006 – Law requests data on ‘broadband subscriptions’



CURRENT STATUS

- As new aspects appear, attempt to work into existing collections
- With change in FCC law, focus becomes Internet access, not devices
- “Paid subscriptions”, “broadband” ???
- Devices constantly evolving – no tablets or “phablets”
- Allow open-ended replies

Household Computer and Internet Use: 1984-2012



*Note: In 2007 & 2009 the Census Bureau did not ask about computer ownership. The estimates presented here for 2007 and 2009 reflect estimates made based on the ratio of computer ownership to Internet access in 2003 & 2010, respectively.

ACS Now

9 At this house, apartment, or mobile home - do you or any member of this household own or use any of the following computers?
 EXCLUDE GPS devices, digital music players, and devices with only limited computing capabilities, for example: household appliances.

	Yes	No
a. Desktop, laptop, netbook, or notebook computer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Handheld computer, smart mobile phone, or other handheld wireless computer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Some other type of computer Specify <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10 At this house, apartment, or mobile home - do you or any member of this household access the Internet?

Yes, with a subscription to an Internet service

Yes, without a subscription to an Internet service → SKIP to question 12

No Internet access at this house, apartment, or mobile home → SKIP to question 12

11 At this house, apartment, or mobile home - do you or any member of this household subscribe to the Internet using -

	Yes	No
a. Dial-up service?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. DSL service?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Cable modem service?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Fiber-optic service?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Mobile broadband plan for a computer or a cell phone?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Satellite Internet service?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Some other service? Specify service <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

ACS Proposed

Changes to question are in red.

9. At this (house/apartment/mobile home/unit), do you or any member of this household own or use any of the following **computing devices?**

- a. Desktop, laptop, or **tablet**
- b. **Smartphone** or other portable wireless computer
- c. Some other type of computer - *Specify*

10. At this (house/apartment/mobile home/unit), do you or any member of this household access the Internet?

- a. Yes, with a plan purchased from an Internet service provider
- b. Yes, without a plan purchased from an Internet service provider
- c. No Internet access at this (house/apartment/mobile home/unit)

11. At this (house/apartment/mobile home/unit), do you or any member of this household **connect to the Internet using -**

- a. **Mobile broadband or data plan for a computer, a smartphone or other device?**
- b. **Broadband (high speed) installed in the (house/apartment/mobile home/unit)?**
- c. **Satellite Internet service?**
- d. **Dial-up service?**
- e. **Some other service? - Specify**



THE FUTURE

- Need to find ways to bring new technology seamlessly into routine standardized data collections

SUMMARY

- As data needs keep changing, data collections will as well
- Not just about survey questions – have to utilize other data out there

Questions?
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