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ACTIVE LEARNING ACTIVITY - Critically Evaluating the US Census

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ACTIVE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Critically Evaluating the US Census

DESCRIPTION

In this activity, students will critically evaluate the United States census. Students will gather information to better understand the nature and importance of the census, apply knowledge of research methodology to evaluate the census, and work collaboratively to rewrite the census.

This activity was designed for use in an Introductory Psychology course, but it could be expanded to any course that evaluates social science research. Ideally, this activity would be implemented during coverage of research methodology, particularly coverage of sampling.

KEYWORDS

activity, in-person, discussion, introductory course, psychology, research methodology, government

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Compare and contrast samples and censuses in research.
2. Describe the purpose of the US census and how it is conducted.
3. Explain how the US census impacts individuals and communities.
4. Evaluate the validity of the self-report questions used in the US census.
5. Create new self-report assessments of variables measured by the US census.

Procedure, In-Person Classroom

1. Begin an open discussion that allows students to share what they know about censuses, particularly how they differ from samples used in most human research. Ask students to explore the pros and cons of conducting a census, versus a sample.
2. If no one mentions the US census, bring it up as an important example of a census. Direct students into 2–3 person small groups to discuss what they know about the US census, particularly how it's conducted, the resources required, and how it is used. Allow students to use their devices to look up information, if needed. Afterward, ask students to share important points highlighted in their small groups.
3. Distribute copies of the US census (Only pages 1–2 are necessary; https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/technical-documentation/questionnaires-and-instructions/questionnaires/2020-informational-questionnaire-english_DI-Q1.pdf) and ask students to complete the form.
4. Again, direct students into 2–3 person small groups to discuss the self-report measurements used in the census, particularly those measuring gender, ethnicity, and race. How did they interpret these questions? How might people from different backgrounds interpret these questions? Afterward, ask students to share some important points highlighted in their small groups.
5. In pairs, small groups, or individually, ask students to rewrite these questions in a way that will enhance their validity and maximize the value of the census. If desired, these draft questions can be submitted for credit.
6. Ask students to share examples. Display the examples via whiteboard or projection, allowing continuous discussion around measurement, identity variables, and the role of the census in the lives of individuals and communities.