ETHNICITY IN MANAGEMENT STUDIES: TO ASK OR NOT TO ASK, THAT IS THE QUESTION

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Abstract

Many global changes in the past three decades pose new challenges for contemporary management, including the perception of ethnicity by individuals in different geographic entities. In the European Union (E.U.), Central and Eastern Europe, and Lithuania in particular, ethnicity and social identity are challenged by contemporary political, business, and social life, especially after the dissolution of the USSR and the restoration of independence of nations. The purpose of this study is twofold. First, to provide empirical evidence that issues of ethnicity matter at different levels in an organizational context in this six-country study. Second, we contribute to the body of knowledge in management and social science research on demographic survey items such as ethnicity. We contribute to changing approaches to the logic of specific survey items and shed new light on the response rate challenges and fatigue that can weaken empirical studies and stagnate the implementation of new knowledge. Findings suggest that in more homogeneous societies or societies facing domestic unrest, the ethnicity question may be perceived as unexpected, taboo, discriminatory, or confusing. This uncertainty among respondents can lead to a high dropout rate in research. We provide six specific recommendations for future research designs to address this challenge.

Keywords*: ethnicity, culture, focus group studies, contemporary management*

1. INTRODUCTION

Both the social science and business literature and national census research point to significant response problems for survey respondents when asked to self-report their ethnicity (Williams & Husk, 2013; Beresnevičiūtė, 2005; Lähdesmäki et al., 2016). This article follows up on the emerging literature addressing the above topic (Burton et al., 2010.) In particular, the research presented here builds on recent research by Minelgaitė et al. (2017), who investigated specific occupational differences in response patterns. We extend this

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study to include ethnic studies in Lithuania, Iceland, Norway, Ghana, Syria, and the United Kingdom. In doing so, we address the call for further research on the complexity of ethnicity and survey response problems within a qualitative data framework (Minelgaite et al., 2017). By investigating the possible causes of non-response to ethnicity survey items, we identify practical implications for management and economic research and propose improvements to item response theory in economic and sociological research. In this two-stage research project, our first study consisted of focus group studies in six countries selected for their geographic diversity to obtain respondents' views on the appropriateness of ethnicity questions in terms of clarity and difficulty of response.

The authors participate in and manage the Centre for Cross-Cultural Comparisons (see:https://crossculturalcentre.home-stead.com/); therefore, data and samples were available from three Nordic societies (Iceland, Lithuania, and Norway) and three contrasting societies (Ghana, Syria, and the United Kingdom). Thus, these samples are random. We use Lithuania as the primary case study country. We examine the possible effects of self-identity questions on item responses in more homogeneous and heterogeneous societies. In the second part of our study, we collected quantitative data from one of the target countries to test the possible effects of a self-identity question on survey completion rates.

This study follows the call for further research on respondents' reactions to demographic questions such as self-identified ethnicity and belonging in quantitative sociological research (Beresnevičiūtė 2005; Burton et al., 2010; Lähdesmäki et al., 2016). By exploring the issues of salience and sensitivity in responding to surveys about ethnicity/ethnic groups, we offer a new contribution to sociological studies. Not only is it about how individuals in different contexts respond to questions on ethnicity, but it can also serve as empirical evidence for Turner's well-known theory that social identity based on social context is a function of context, i.e., it becomes relevant in the presence of other groups.

Our results contribute to a better understanding of the extent to which such questions are valid, taboo, or confusing in heterogeneous and homogeneous societies. We aim to fill a gap in the literature by investigating: 1) the extent to which respondents' attitudes toward indicating their ethnicity differ across cultures in business and social science studies and 2) the extent to which such a demographic item at the beginning of a survey may confuse or offend respondents, leading them to drop out. Data is collected from different industries to identify possible sector-specific results in the case country of Lithuania.

Öhberg and Medeirosi (2019) investigated respondents' sensitivity to demographic questions on ethnic self-classification in national and census surveys. Their findings suggest that respondents in multicultural liberal democracies are accustomed to and willing to self-identify with a specific ethnic group. Several such case studies address the quantification of ethnicity, religion, and migration from different perspectives and classifications (Kuzio 2001; Supik and Spielhaus 2019; Surdu 2019; Will 2019). The distinctive contribution of field research should be recognized (Charmaz and Olesen, 1997).

Rolstad et al. (2011) found a general relationship between response rate and questionnaire length in a meta-analysis of surveys. Not surprisingly, response rates were lower for longer questionnaires. However,

the test for homogeneity of their survey sample shows that this relationship should be interpreted with caution, as it is impossible to separate the effects of *content* from the *length* of the questionnaires. They conclude that, given the inherently ambiguous nature of comparing questionnaires of different lengths, it is better to base decisions about instrument use on content rather than length. Menold (2017) also contributes to the study of questionnaire design by investigating the effects of labeling rating scales.

This report on our research process and findings is structured as follows: first, we provide a literature review of the conceptual framework of ethnicity in contemporary research. We then discuss the complexity of the concept in the context of the six sample countries we studied. Extensive data from focus group interviews are presented, and we compare the results of our qualitative data with response rates in the quantitative sample data set from the second step of our study in Lithuania. This dual exploratory methodology allows us to examine the extent to which findings from the focus group data support our hypothesis that response rates in quantitative surveys are influenced by sensitivity to the ethnicity question. These findings may also help to develop survey instruments that reduce survey fatigue in quantitative surveys. A question is also raised about the reliability and validity of ethnicity as a variable in business, social science, or management surveys in highly homogeneous or heterogeneous societies. Recommendations are made for future survey designs. We investigate the potential impact of self-identity questions on survey response and completion rates in Lithuania compared to other countries with multi- and monocultural liberal democracies and conservative societies, such as Norway, Iceland, Ghana, Syria, and the United Kingdom.

2. CONCEPTUALIZING ETHNICITY IN CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH

Ethnicity has been addressed from various perspectives in academic research (Hutchinson and Smith 1996). However, the most common definition is provided in a seminal work, "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries" by Barth (1969), in which he discusses the antecedents of contemporary ethnicity research and describes ethnicity as the social organization of the culture of difference. Barth (1969) challenged earlier definitions of ethnicity, developing a perennial model of ethnicity.

In the works of Eriksen (1993) and Jenkins (2008), the conceptualization of ethnicity emphasizes the importance of social interaction between individuals and their groups in forming feelings and accepting ethnicity. It should be acknowledged that research, data collection, and analysis have always been steered, consciously or unconsciously, by social climate changes and scientific views (Löfgren 1990). Nevertheless, international collaboration in ethnicity and ethnological research has a long history (Bringéus 1983) and has been interpreted differently. Ethnicity could be interpreted as ethnic affiliation, identity, sense of belonging within a historical context, presumed ancestry, cultural heritage, race, and physical features (Yang, 2000, Minelgaite et al., 2017).

Fangen (2007) introduced a shared myth of common ancestry as the basis for his framework, which encompasses an understanding of cultural practices as features of ethnicity and physical geographical affiliation. This notion encompasses the concept of shared historical memories, an association with a particular homeland, and a sense

of solidarity for significant segments of a population (Zagefka, 2016). Consequently, ethnicity is theoretically identified as both a social construct and a primordial phenomenon. The findings of Minelgaite et al.'s (2017) study suggest that most ethnic groups seek recognition and the freedom to express their cultural identity. Still, ethnicity can become part of nationalism when it takes a political form. Another essential issue in the literature is considering ethnicity as a substitute for nationality, race, minority, religious confession, etc. Ethnicity encompasses all of the above categories. However, the interchangeable use of these terms leads to confusion, the vagueness of meanings, and lower research credibility (Beresnevičiūtė, 2005; Ruegg, 2016).

To put the title of this article into perspective, we *must* ask the ethnicity question in many cases, such as government censuses and other cases where ethnicity is a political issue. The issue then becomes how we ask survey respondents to state their ethnicity in a way that shows respect and makes it easier to answer. The United Nations suggests that place of birth, ethnicity, language, and religion, are commonly used to describe the identity and cultural affiliation of individuals in a population (U.N. Statistics Division, 2003). These characteristics are typically examined in national censuses.

Clearly, in national censuses, ethnicity data is justified to measure levels of different ethnic groups within any one nation to ensure the preservation and survival of minority populations. In the six countries we studied: Iceland, Lithuania, Norway, Ghana, Syria, and the U.K., the concept of ethnicity is observed as follows:

2.1. Ethnicity in Iceland

The Icelandic census of 1703 was the country's first census and the first ever complete census of a country. The census recorded each inhabitant's name, age, residence, and social status. Those who did not have a permanent residence were recorded under the place where they spent the night before Easter. The census was conducted at irregular intervals until 1835. In 1960, the regular census was discontinued because the census yielded little after developing the *National Registry* records. According to *Statistics Iceland* (Hagstofa, 2017), "the Icelandic census is a register-based census in which information about the population is obtained from official registers. We do not have data on ethnicity, only on citizenship or country of birth. We have no information on the first language, and our data on religion come from official registers." The last complete census was conducted in 1981 (Halfdanarson, 2000). Given this situation, Icelanders are not used to identifying ethnic groups using regular census questionnaires. Since there is no tradition of self-identification of ethnicity, it might be challenging for respondents to answer this question.

2.2. Ethnicity in Lithuania

According to the statistics from the *CIA World Factbook* (2019), *Ethnic Lithuanians* are the largest ethnic group in Lithuania. Nevertheless, part of the unspoken legacy of the USSR annexation of Lithuania in 1989 is that Lithuanians have a heritage from other ethnic categories. There are 24 other CIA "ethnic" categories. Lithuanian identity is closely linked to Europe, which shapes people's beliefs about their ethnicity as "European." In the English version of the *Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania,* Article 37 states that "citizens belonging

to ethnic communities shall have the right to foster their language, culture, and customs," thus explicitly defining that ethnic groups have unique languages, cultures, and customs. In the 1897 census, when the country was part of the Russian Empire, the population of Lithuania was counted and classified by mother tongue, as it was during the Russian occupation from 1959 to 1989. In the post-Soviet Union censuses in 2001 and 2011, the population of Lithuania was counted by ethnicity, with the national, ethnic group defined as *Lithuanian* by self-identified homogeneous national origin.

2.3. Ethnicity in Norway

An official government study (Statistics Norway, 2019) shows that 86.2% of the total population are ethnic Norwegians. Small minority groups in Norway include Romani, Jewish, Kvener, first, second, or third-generation Polish, Lithuanian, African, Pakistani, Swedish, or Asian minority groups. Norwegians are not accustomed to self-identifying as an ethnic group in surveys, as this question is not usually asked in field research, and nearly 90% of businesspeople identify themselves as "Norwegian" (Statistics Norway, 2019). Since there is no tradition of self-identification of ethnicity, it might be challenging for respondents to answer this question. However, as many ethnic minority young adults enter the workforce, new identities are emerging and should be considered in future research (Fangen and Paasche, 2012).

2.4. Ethnicity in Ghana

In ethnically heterogeneous countries like Ghana, where ethnicity plays a vital role in society, members of society are aware of subgroups, recognize them, and can easily categorize them even in complex contexts. In countries and regions where social status, advancement, and even survival depend on integration into narrow groups, families, tribes, ethnicities, and language groups are well known in the country. In Ghana, several ethnic groups are known, including the majority Akan at 47.5%, Mole-Dagbon at 16.6%, Ewe at 13.9%, Ga-Dangme at 7.4%, Gurma at 5.7%, Guan at 3.7%, Grusi at 2.5%, Mande at 1.1%, and others at 1.4% (CIA World Factbook, 2019). The classification of ethnic groups in Ghana corresponds to the official Bureau of Ghana Languages classification used since the 1960 census (Ghana Statistical Service, 2019).

2.5. Ethnicity in Syria

The *CIA World Factbook* (2019) states that ethnic groups in Syria include: Arabs (50%), Alawites (15%), Kurds (10%), Levantines (10%), and others, including Druze, Ismaili, Imami, Nusairian, Assyrian, Turkoman, and Armenian (15%). The ongoing military conflicts in Syria and the migration and immigration crises have led to a distrust of sharing personal information about ethnic and religious affiliations or political beliefs. As a war-torn country, Syria and its people are rebuilding their identity, and people are culturally sensitive about stating their ethnicity publicly.

2.6. Ethnicity in the U.K.

The U.K. National Census uses a standard set of ethnic groups to collect and classify ethnicity data. In the 2011 census, 80.5% of people in England and Wales reported being White British, and 19.5% were from ethnic minorities (U.K. Government Statistics, 2019). Medoid and May (2001) found that while young ethnic minority Britons identify strongly with their ethnic minority background, they also have a clear sense of Britishness. In the 2011 census,

the most ethnically diverse region of the U.K. was London, where 40.2% of residents identified with either an Asian, black, mixed, or other ethnic group. In all regions of the U.K., multiculturalism is part of the country's demographic makeup. London had the lowest proportion of white Britons at 44.9%, and the Northeast had the highest at 93.6% (U.K. Government Statistics, 2019). Since 1991, most nationwide surveys have included questions about ethnic background, which has led to a clear sense of ethnic identity for all people.

2.7. Ethnicity as a variable in management and social surveys

According to Öhberg and Medeiros (2019), most European countries choose ethnicity as a demographic variable when collecting national census data. The arguments for collecting such ethnic background data relate to mapping social change at different points in time (Simon 2019). Supik and Spielhaus (2019) further contribute to this debate by investigating the specific taxonomic work of social scientists in capturing ethnicity issues in quantifiable form when collecting data in large national samples. They also argue that such taxonomy is essential in mapping demographic data in academic surveys. However, reporting ethnicity in the survey always raises additional questions and concerns, as a person might be identified, for example, as a Luo in Kenya, a Kenyan in London, and a black, Negro, or even African American in New York City. Scholars emphasize that "ethnicity is a changing, complex and multidimensional concept that cannot be measured by assigning individuals to a single ethnic group category" (Aspinall, 2011 in Gayle et al., 2015, p. 8). In field studies, interpretations of facets of ethnicity are "fluid and diverse" (Minelgaite et al., 2017), as suggested by the instrumentalist school of thought

that emphasizes the importance of "history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity. As well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated, and all knowledge is contextual" (Hall, 1992, p.257). In summary, the ethnicity application in this study is within an established multidimensional social science framework for understanding our cultural, racial, and national identities. Our research question in this study is, therefore:

To what extent can responses or non-responses to survey ethnicity questions vary by respondents' national and economic backgrounds?

The dual methodology used to investigate this research question combines focus group interviews in the study's first phase with quantitative data collected in a sample country of the study in the second phase.

3. METHODS

When we began this study on ethnic background data, we asked for research volunteers from several countries. These were in countries that offered a cross-section of different languages, cultures, and institutional settings to collect national data on ethnicity as a background variable.

The first task of this study was to validate the translation of the items of a field research instrument into the local languages of the countries. Countries were selected to be representative of ethnically homogeneous and culturally heterogeneous societies; researchers worked in Iceland, Lithuania, Norway, Ghana, Syria, and the U.K. The goal of translating the survey instruments, background information, and instructions for respondents is to achieve equivalence of the surveys in the different languages. The project used the Brislin method to translate

the instruments (Brislin, 1970; Jones et al., 2001), using at least two independent bilingual translators for each translation (McDermott and Palchanes, 1994). Focus group interviews were conducted to verify the items of the survey instrument in the native language to minimize response bias or misinterpretation.

Focus groups offer unique insights into the possibilities of critical inquiry as a reflective, dialogic, and democratic practice that already addresses real-world problems and asymmetries (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Focus groups such as those in this six-country study are complex, but using such groups for interviews to supplement and comment on quantitative findings allows the contextualization of individual responses in the process of "indefinite triangulation" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Focus group participants were selected from the same population as in the national studies. To ensure the quality and reliability of this data collection, informed consent was obtained from each participant for the use of the collected, recorded, and transcribed data during the interview sessions. The privacy of all participants was protected.

3.1. Focus group data collection

Two focus groups were organized in Iceland, each with 6 participants. The groups were diverse in terms of age, gender, educational and professional background. The key open-ended question for this research project was as follows:

The name of the ethnic group I consider myself to be a member of is (please complete) _____

In Lithuania, two focus groups were organized, comprising three people. The focus groups in Lithuania were also diverse.

In Norway, survey items and demographic questions such as the open-ended question: *The name of the ethnic group I consider myself to be a member of is (please complete)* _____ was translated into Norwegian Bokmål, as this is the primary written language used by the majority of the population. Two focus group sessions were held. The mixed-age participants in the two groups worked in business, finance, H.R., sales and marketing, and accounting.

In Ghana, a 90-minute focus group discussion was organized in Accra. The group consisted of eight male managers; they were 26 to 47 years old, well-educated, and middle-aged**.** Seven of them had worked in Ghana their entire careers; one had also worked in the U.K. Focus group participants had no difficulty answering the ethnicity question, except that the field provided was too small to identify multi-ethnic individuals accurately.

In Syria, two focus group discussions were conducted in Damascus. The first focus group consisted of four people, two men, and two women. The second focus group consisted of six female participants. The survey questionnaire was completed in standard Arabic.

In the U.K., three focus group sessions were held with 16 Britons. The respondents were from counseling, health care, education, general business, and sports industries. Age and educational background varied widely.

4. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Transcripts of focus groups conducted in a native language other than English were translated into English for comparative analyses of the six data sets to investigate possible sensitivities, misunderstandings, suspicions, or natural acceptance of the ethnic background question in the consortium studies. Using manual content analysis, the content of discussions about how ethnicity is understood was coded using thematic keywords derived from the interviews. The results of the initial coding provided keywords that were tested with each new analysis of the focus group data (see Figure 1).

4.1. Findings from focus groups

Participants in all six focus group discussions commented on the following questionnaire item: *The name of the ethnic group I consider myself to be a member of is (please complete)* _____ from the questionnaire.

The content analyses of the focus group interview data from the U.K. and Ghana show that the respondents in both rather heterogeneous societies knew their ethnic background since their early childhood. They were aware that belonging to an ethnic group leads to identity, status, and, not least, recognition in the community. In both countries, data on ethnicity have been collected for decades as part of the national consensus and the medical records of the respective governments so that the ethnicity question is asked and answered as naturally as questions about education and gender. In the U.K., the ethnicity question typically offers a scroll-down list, whereas, in Ghana, the question is often asked in the form of a box in which free text can be entered. Interestingly, respondents felt that a more extensive free text field or multiple options in a scroll-down list would provide richer background data as multiple ethnic, racial, and linguistic backgrounds are possible

Content analysis of the complete data from the focus group interviews reveals a thematic clustering of responses from Iceland, Lithuania, Norway, and Syria that strongly support three very different main conclusions. First, the focus group participants asked for clarification on what was meant by the question about "ethnicity." This suggests that the concept of ethnicity is unfamiliar or problematic to representatives of these countries. Second, the statements that they do not understand the question at all are very revealing. This suggests that "ethnicity" is perceived as even more "foreign" in Lithuania, Iceland, Norway, and Syria. Third, participants indicate that ethnicity is foreign in their respective cultural contexts. They implicitly acknowledge the relevance of the questions but emphasize that it is "a very unusual term" in their country.

Use in society

"Alien term"

Use by individuals

Unable to
understand

↖   ↗

The term is not
used in society   ←   ETHNICITY   →

↙   ↘

The term has
negative
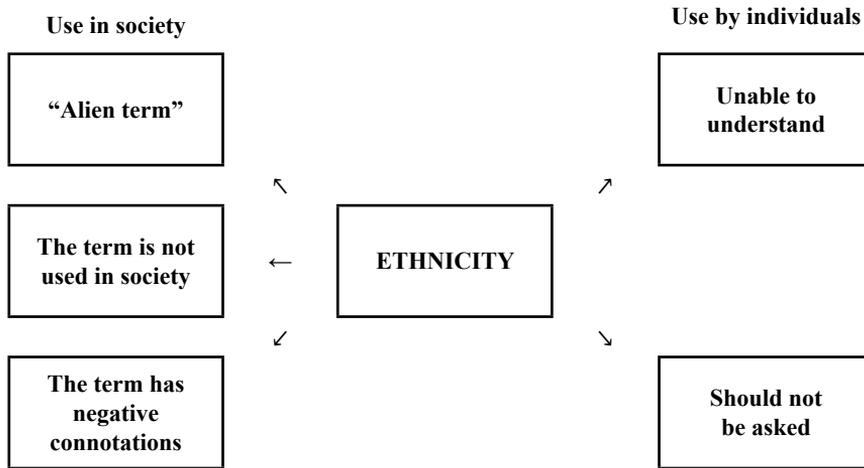connotations

Should not
be asked

Figure 1. Ethnicity items of the questionnaire, as seen by the focus group participants

After processing the qualitative data, our next step was understanding the response patterns of the quantitative survey items compared to the focus group data. This means using multiple sources to assess the percentage of responses to the full survey items for this society align with the focus group data regarding perceived ease or willingness to answer questions about ethnic and other backgrounds.

4.2. Quantitative data: The case of ethnically homogeneous Lithuania

After the pilot test phase of the study, the ethnicity item was deleted in the Icelandic, Syrian, and Norwegian quantitative survey instruments, respecting the strong objections from the focus groups. The country collaborators in the U.K. and Ghana had no non-response problems with the ethnicity item in the quantitative data collection. This confirmed the view of focus group members in the U.K. and Ghana that the ethnicity question is typical in social science surveys and that members of these societies are comfortable with their ethnic identity. The Lithuanian focus groups in the pilot phase of the study had reservations about collecting quantitative data on ethnic background; nevertheless, with Lithuania as the case study country, it was decided to collect data on this demographic question to investigate response /non-response patterns further. Quantitative data on the 100 survey items were used in this study only to measure missing data and non-response rates and to interpret the impact of the qualitative focus group data. For more information on the 100 survey items that measure culturally supported leadership, see Warner-Søderholm et al. (2019). The following descriptive statistics, which are comparisons of the ethnicity item from the Lithuanian sample, are subdivided into samples for each employment sector.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics: Responses

The question in the survey:	Previous item: Your current city	Your ethnicity	*
Not answered	1.1%	23.2%	4%
Answered	98.9%	76.8%	99.6%

Note: (N=457 responding participants)

To investigate the extent to which the employment sector impacts non-response behavior. Respondents were selected for quantitative data collection using systematic random sampling. The purpose was to examine whether the respondents' industry sector could influence response rates. Our random sampling allowed the categorization of participants into the healthcare, education, and general business sectors. A comparison of non-response rates to the ethnicity question by industry is shown in Figure 2. Figure 2 compares data across the three sectors to examine sectoral differences in responses to the ethnicity question. Respondents from the business sector were most likely to identify themselves as Lithuanians. Responses from those in the education sector were more inclined to fill in alternative categories; perhaps, as analysts, they are more accustomed to broader categorization. Healthcare workers were the group most likely not to answer the question. An explanation for this could be that ethnicity is not a critical factor in medical treatment, and physiology is nearly identical regardless of ethnic background (Minelgaite et al., 2017).
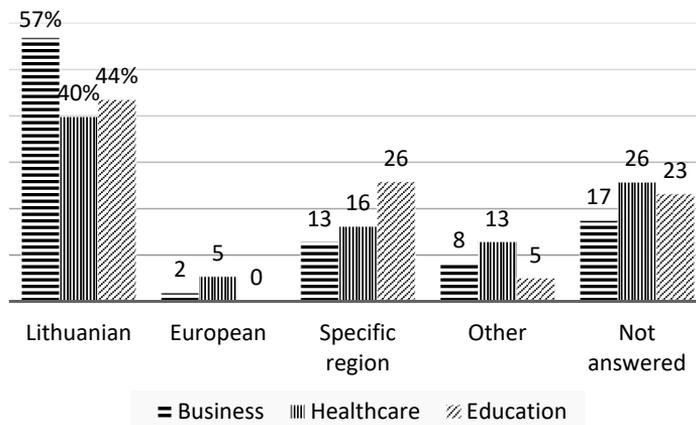

Figure 2. Percentage of respondents who answered the ethnicity question: All Lithuanian samples

Note: Business sample, N=215, Health care, N=241, Education, N-457.

Regarding our research question: To what extent can answering or not answering the ethnicity question in surveys depend on their national origin and the economic sector? —We see that the economic sector has a significant impact on responses.

4.3. Responses from the healthcare sector

The number of respondents who did not answer the ethnicity question represents 25.7% of the sample. However, almost all respondents answered the previous and subsequent questions. Responses in the category "other" included unexpected descriptions: "city inhabitant," "Vilnius" (name of the capital), "middle," "hired laborer," "young family," "white skin" etc. (see Minelgaite et al., 2017).

4.4. Responses from the education sector

"Vilnius resident" and "Lithuanian" were among the responses in the category "other" found in the education sector responses. However, the responses from this sector included even more interesting responses, such as: "servant," "intelligent," and "traditional." Once again, this suggests that the ethnicity item was complex or confusing for those who chose to respond (Minelgaite et al., 2017).

4.5. General business sector

There are considerable differences in the "Not answered" categories for the general business sample. Figures 3 to 5 show the relative frequencies of participant selections in the samples in Lithuania, indicating differences in the interpretation of the meaning of *ethnicity*.
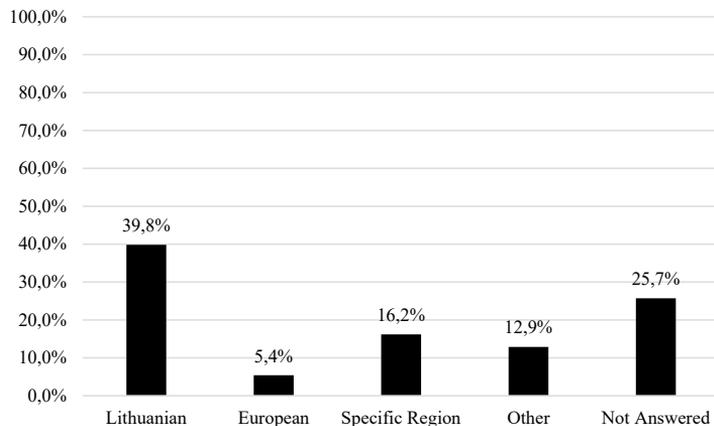

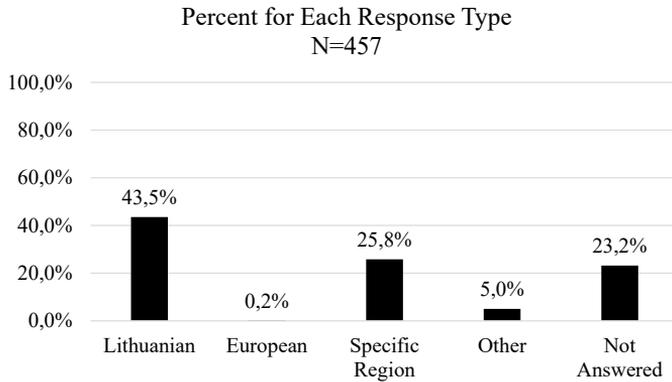**Figure 3.** The relative percentage of responses to the question on ethnicity: Lithuanian healthcare sample (N=241)

Percent for Each Response Type
N=457

Figure 4. Responses to the question on ethnicity: sample of Lithuanian employees in education
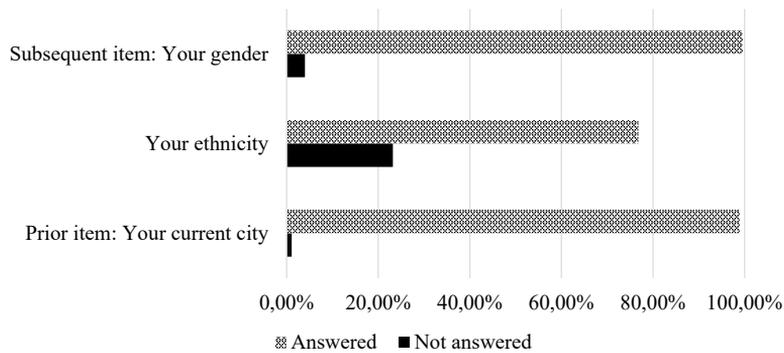

Figure 5. Previous, ethnicity, and subsequent item responses: Lithuanian sample

5. DISCUSSION

Our study examines individuals' specific opinions on issues of ethnicity and their respective responses in this six-country study. From a cross-national perspective, we fill this gap in research on survey responses in the management and social sciences. Looking at the focus group responses in the first phase of the study and the response patterns in the quantitative data from the sample country Lithuania, in the second phase of our study, we find complex relationships among culture, institutional environment, the development of a nation-state, and its socioeconomic structure. Such factors, such as ethnicity, may influence or hinder the barriers to answering survey questions. Samples from more homogeneous societies such as Iceland, Lithuania, and Norway had considerable difficulty answering an item on ethnicity, as did the sample from the conservative Middle Eastern state of Syria. Interestingly, data from focus groups in the multicultural liberal democracy of the U.K. suggest that respondents did not report being culturally sensitive or confused by questions about their ethnic identity in quantitative surveys, as these questions have been the norm for over two decades. In a national society like Ghana, where ethnicity and similar demographic categories are essential aspects of one's identity, study participants can easily position themselves in such a complex ethnic environment.

The members of the Icelandic focus group represent a very homogeneous society in which more than 84% of the population is indigenous (The Official Gateway to Iceland n. d). During our research, a high level of frustration and discussion about the question of *ethnicity* was noted in the questionnaire. Respondents strongly indicated that this question could even lead to opting out of the survey, as it makes one feel "incompetent" when confronted with a question one does not understand or cannot answer.

Supik and Spielhaus's study (2019) outlines a heuristic framework for studying and quantifying diverse societies, and our research supports this framework's logic. First, drawing on previous research by demographers and social scientists, they propose a typological classification of diverse populations. In the first step, "preparing to count," we show why it is critical to plan what demographic data one needs. We provide examples for the second step and discuss survey length, avoiding survey fatigue, and complying with GDPR legislation. In the third framework step, Supik and Spielhaus (2019) suggest an appropriate interpretation of statistics. Our study supports this result. The fourth and final framework step outlines reasons for quantifying demographic data. We want to complement this finding by extending this rationale for measuring people both "at" or "as" risk (Supik and Spielhaus 2019:4) by applying this framework to the decision to count "in the name of multiculturalism," or "choosing not to count" to avoid respondents feeling threatened when their nation-state is in an early stage of democracy or at war.

6. CONCLUSIONS, MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, it sought to provide empirical evidence that issues of ethnicity matter at different levels and management areas in the six studied countries. The results show that this is the case and build on previous findings (Minelgaite et al., 2017). Second, we aimed to contribute to the state of knowledge in management and social science research on demographic survey items such as ethnicity. Our review of the state of research on demographic survey items offers new insights into why ethnicity is not asked. Consequently, we aimed to help change approaches to the logic of specific survey items to shed new light on the problems of response rate and response fatigue that can weaken empirical studies and stagnate the implementation of new findings.

We come to two conclusions. First, the results suggest that in more homogeneous societies or societies facing national unrest, as in Syria, the ethnicity question may be unexpected, taboo, or at least confusing. Second, unwillingness or inability to answer such demographic questions could contribute to high dropout rates in survey research. Thus, if your research design does not include splitting the data to examine the effects of race/ethnicity, do not collect data on a variable you will not use: Pay attention to the demographic data you plan to include in the survey. Based on the analysis, we make six recommendations for future research designs in the business, economics, or social science research:

- When social science and business research are struggling with survey fatigue, the research design should

include a clear strategy for taxonomy and clarity of demographic survey items.

- Avoid automatically asking many demographic questions, such as ethnicity or religion, simply because 'this is the norm in your field.'

- If you do not intend to use demographic variables in analyses, especially ethnicity, we recommend excluding these items from your instrument.

- Provide transparency in your survey introduction to show respondents how this data will help you solve societal or business problems and guarantee that your research complies with GDPR privacy collection, especially in societies experiencing civil unrest.

- For all demographic questions, especially ethnic background and gender questions, offer a list of specific choices where appropriate. That is, offer respondents all the national societal choices available in the particular society in which you collect data.

- Among the choices, also offer the option "other/please specify."

All studies have their limitations, and this one is no exception. In hindsight, in the second step of our study, it would have been of additional value to collect quantitative data from all six countries to create a more comprehensive database with data sets for the industrial sector. New studies should collect quantitative data for all countries to ensure complete transparency. Another limitation was that respondents in all countries were selected using a random sampling logic to collect rich qualitative data if respondents who matched the respondent profile were willing to participate in this study. Future studies should build on our study to provide a broader base for data collection. Even with a small dataset, we believe that the proposed improvements in applying item-response theory to survey design are applicable in many settings, especially in societies where ethnic items can lead to survey dropout. As business and economic scholars, we work with hybrid and multiple identities in the context of research on citizenship, nation-state, and cultural identity. We need to ensure that respondents feel comfortable participating in research projects if we are to collect enough "Big Data" to continue such critical dialogues. The developments and changes in survey designs recommended in this article should also help to shorten the duration of surveys and thus counter survey fatigue.

The dual methodology used in this research combined focus group interviews with quantitative data collection in Lithuania as a case study. Our findings suggest that questions that are difficult to understand and answer generally lead to higher non-response.

In culturally homogeneous societies, the non-response rate to the ethnicity question ranges from 78% to 99% (Minelgaite et al., 2017). The data suggest that respondents with an educational or healthcare background are more likely not to answer the ethnicity question. Still, when they choose to answer, they are more diligent in specifying ethnic identity than respondents from the business sector. This could be explored further in a more comprehensive study. Furthermore, the qualitative data confirms these findings and explains why

respondents do not answer this question because of the unclear meaning of the word "ethnicity" and the "foreign" nature of the word ethnicity in their respective cultural contexts.

We have answered the call to combine qualitative and quantitative methods to 'dig deeper' into the problem of non-response to ethnicity questions in contemporary management research and to fill a gap. Suppose we hope to avoid survey fatigue and ensure higher survey response rates. In that case, we should ask only those critical questions to the survey and avoid an excessive number of demographic questions that are secondary to our study. If we hope to change our global mindsets in social, business, and economic contexts, we should leave behind the issue of ethnicity and promote a mindset of 'one world identity.'

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NACIONALNOST U ISTRAŽIVANJU MENADŽMENTA: PITATI ILI NE PITATI, PITANJE JE SAD

Sažetak

Brojne globalne promjene u protekla tri desetljeća postavljaju nove izazove pred suvremeni menadžment, uključivši i percepciju nacionalnosti pojedinaca u različitim zemljopisnim područjima. U Europskoj Uniji (EU), centralnoj i istočnoj Europi, a posebno u Litvi, nacionalnost i društveni identitet se susreću s izazovima suvremenog političkog, poslovnog i društvenog života, što posebno dolazi do izražaja nakon raspada SSSR-a i ponovne uspostave neovisnih država. Ovaj rad ima dvostruki cilj. S jedne strane, on pruža empirijske dokaze da je pitanje nacionalnosti značajno na različitim razinama organizacijskog konteksta u šest zemalja, koje su obuhvaćene istraživanjem. S druge strane, rad doprinosi postojećem znanju iz područja menadžerskog i društvenog istraživanja o demografskim pitanjima u anketama, a koja uključuju nacionalnost. Autori pružaju doprinos

promjenjivim pristupima logici konstruiranja posebnih anketnih pitanja i pružaju nove spoznaje o izazovima stopa povrata upitnika, kao i umoru od anketa, koje može zaprijetiti uspjehu empirijskih istraživanja i provedbi novih znanja. Rezultati ukazuju da se u homogenim društvima, ili društvima suočenim s unutarnjim konfliktima, pitanje nacionalnosti može percipirati kao neočekivano, zabranjeno, diskriminatorno, ili zbunjujuće. Ovakva nesigurnost među ispitanicama može voditi prema visokim stopama odbijanja odgovora. Stoga pružamo šest specifičnih preporuka, kako bi se u budućim istraživanjima suočilo s navedenim problemom.

Ključne riječi: *nacionalnost, kultura, istraživanje putem fokusnih skupina, suvremeni menadžment*