Master Status between Race and Region

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While stereotypes are a form of cognitive economy, they can have serious negative consequences. Stereotypes influence the behavior, thoughts and feelings of those who are stereotyped as well as those who are doing the categorizing.

I believe that stereotypes of Southerners remain one of the last socially acceptable stereotypes often presented as the “truth” in all aspects of popular culture. Given the demographic characteristics of the South, is it possible that what people define as a “typical” Southerner is in fact a descriptor of rural life, regardless of region? Obviously, “Southern-ness” affects how people perceive various regions or locations as having desirable characteristics and/or development potential. Additionally, when exploring status, it is intriguing to distinguish master status from given status.

In the fall, I will launch a web-based survey aimed at University of Kentucky students. This survey will collect perceptions of race and region. Before the spring semester ended I began survey construction, IRB training, and obtained an expedited IRB approval. My mentor Lori Garkovich will oversee my entire project. She has agreed to allow this project to count as an independent study course for my minor in Sociology.

This summer, I have reviewed literature relevant to research on stereotypes, stigma, master status, cognitive mapping, identity construction, and Southern-specific research. Through meeting with Dr. Garkovich, I have narrowed my research focus to identifying whether a master status exists between race and region. Does race have an impact on regional identity or vice-versa? Is this different across regions or races? The current survey utilizes two regional identifiers, Southern and Non-Southern, and two racial identifiers, Caucasian and African-American.

The web-based survey consists of demographic questions, open-ended questions, scenario-based questions, and slider questions. Currently this survey is not finalized or IRB approved. Once IRB approval is obtained, the survey will be launched. It will be open for responses for approximately 60 days or until October 30, 2010. During the survey window, I plan to test the data at the halfway point to determine if significant differences, relationships, or correlations exist. Once the survey window has closed, the data will be analyzed using SPSS Statistical software. Descriptive and inferential statistics will be used to identify if meaningful differences, relationships, or correlations exist within the data. Once the data has been run, a report will be written detailing my findings and their implications to social stereotype research. I hope to present this paper at NCUR 2011, as an oral presentation, as well as at the Rural Sociological Society’s Annual Meeting in 2011.