

Preliminary results from testing a question on sexual identity, and some challenges around collecting gender identity

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UK Context

- *Three Census taking authorities in UK:*
- *ONS (England and Wales)*
- *National Records of Scotland*
- *Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency*
- *All work closely together*
- *Presentation focuses on England and Wales*



What do we mean by sexual identity

- Subjective view of oneself, up to the individual how they define themselves, may change over time
- Sexual orientation
 - Sexual identity
 - Sexual attraction
 - Sexual behaviour

User need

- All three UK offices identified a user need for information about sexual identity and gender identity through topic consultations related to the Equality Act 2010

Sexual identity – previous research

- ONS – 2006
 - Concerns regarding privacy, accuracy, acceptability and conceptual definitions
- ONS – sexual identity project 2009
 - Developed a harmonised question used on the Annual Population Survey
 - Also developed harmonised self-completion question
- NRS – Scottish census small scale test
 - question the “accuracy” and “utility” of the data

Sexual identity – a self-completion question

- ONS has undertaken initial testing of a self-completion question
 - Spring 2016 – focus groups
 - Summer 2016 – cognitive interviews

ASK ALL AGED 16 OR OVER

Which of the following options best describes how you think of yourself?

⇒ This question is voluntary

1. Heterosexual or Straight,
2. Gay or Lesbian,
3. Bisexual,
4. Other

Sexual identity – research findings

- Question wording
 - Question stem does not refer to the topic – need to look at response categories for guidance
 - Cognitive testing – answered in accordance with meaning
 - Recommend question wording remain the same
- Response categories
 - Response categories should be used unchanged
 - Consider inclusion of additional category of “asexual” however this is untested
 - Review responses to “Other, write in”

Sexual identity – research findings

- Acceptability and scope
 - Support and objection
 - Ask of those aged 16 and over
- Voluntary status and prefer not to say
 - Voluntary status would allow refusal
 - However this could impact on data quality and utility
 - “Prefer not to say” – complex, no firm conclusion
- Answering within a household
 - Answer accurately, socially acceptable answer, not answer

Sexual identity – research findings

- Proxy responses
 - Challenging!
 - Inaccuracy and discomfort in some circumstances
 - Difficult to explain and enforce a “no proxy” approach, especially as not done for other questions
- Private response
- Question location
 - No consensus from research
 - Could place with demographic or identity questions, or at end of questionnaire

Sexual identity – next steps

- Decision on approach to inclusion of question in 2017 test
 - Where to locate the question
 - Whether to include “prefer not to say”
- Public acceptability testing, 2016/17
 - Reactions to providing response
 - Reasons for non-response
 - Impact on completing the Census

Sexual identity – evaluation of 2017 test

- Overall response
- Overall response by population group
- Questionnaire drop-off
- Item non-response
- Quality of responses
- Quality for other questions
- Public reaction

Gender Identity – What do we mean?

- Gender identity – “the way in which an individual identifies with a gender category”
- Trans – an overarching term used to describe those whose gender identities do not match the sex assigned at birth
- Gender reassignment – people who are proposing to undergo, are undergoing, or have undergone a process (or part of a process) for the purpose of reassigning their sex – Equality Act 2010

Gender Identity – Challenges

- 2009 – ONS – Household surveys not appropriate for collecting gender identity
 - Sensitivity of topic and terminology
 - Respondent burden – no of questions needed
 - Whether data collected would be fit for purpose
- Concerns regarding public acceptability and privacy
 - Those who have legally changed their gender are not obliged to reveal their gender history
 - Data collection should not adversely impact on collection of other variables e.g. sex

Gender identity – research plan

- Review the ONS ‘Trans data position paper’ published in 2009
- Seeking to learn from other NSI’s
- Working with stakeholders to understand the data required, and concepts to be measured
- Exploring options to meet the user need
- Public acceptability research alongside sexual identity

Legislation

- ONS expect that including a question on sexual identity or gender identity would require an amendment to the Census Act 1920

Conclusion

- Clear user need for these topics in relation to the Equality Act 2010 across the UK
- People who identify with minority categories within these concepts are hard to count populations due to the private nature of the attribute being measured.
- ONS conducting further research into the most appropriate way to meet the user need, taking into account data quality, public acceptability and Census legislation.
- Research will inform a decision on whether to recommend inclusion in the 2021 Census.

