

Measuring sexual identity

A guide for researchers

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Foreword

The right to equal treatment is a universal human right. It is about securing the freedom of choice and equality of opportunity of all individuals. Sexual orientation is one of six equality monitoring areas covered by legislation aimed at protecting the right to equal treatment.

On 30 April 2007, the Government introduced the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007, to tackle discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services on grounds of sexual orientation. This legislation is a major step forward in ensuring dignity, respect and fairness for all. As the National Statistician, it is my responsibility to ensure there is statistical information to support such legislation. The ONS has therefore developed a question on sexual identity and introduced it on all ONS social surveys. The purpose of the question is to estimate how many people in the population are lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB). Additionally, it can be used to help monitor equality of opportunity in such areas as employment, education and the provision of services such as housing by providing benchmark population estimates.

While the legislation refers to sexual orientation, this guidance is for a sexual identity question. This is because sexual orientation is an umbrella term that covers sexual behaviour, sexual attraction and sexual identity. During the development work, it became evident that in order to collect data on sexual orientation, we would need to develop a suite of questions. Such a suite would not only add to the cost of surveys but also increase the burden on survey participants. Sexual identity was identified as the one component of sexual orientation for which data would be robust enough to support the legislation.

It is important to ensure that in our quest to monitor outcomes or establish prevalence of the LGB population, we do not depart from our ethical responsibilities. We should particularly be wary of analyses at small area or sub group e.g. age and ethnicity analysis. These are likely to have small bases that compromise the confidentiality of survey participants and/or the statistical validity of the estimates.

This work would not have been possible without the dedication of colleagues in ONS who worked hard in developing the question and also the various experts from outside ONS who played a valuable advisory role during the process. I hope you will find this guide useful and will be encouraged to include the question in your surveys.



Karen Dunnell

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1. Introduction

The ONS's Sexual Identity Project was established in 2006 to meet user requirements for information on sexual identity. ONS had identified this project as a high priority and consulted widely. This has included discussions both within and outside government, including academics, non-governmental organisations and lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) groups.

The project had three main objectives: to develop a question on sexual identity, to test the question and implement, and provide user guidance on implementation for use by other researchers. This guidance fulfills the last of those objectives. It pulls together all the work carried out as part of the project into one reference document for use by researchers seeking to include a question on sexual identity. The guidance sets out the background to question development, the question itself, and covers key points pertaining to question administration and interpretation. For each section, key issues are followed by references to sources of further information.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Why ask this question?

Public sector organisations, academics, charities, research organisations and private sector organisations have all shown increasing interest, in recent years, in collecting data on sexual orientation (of which sexual identity is one component). There have been a number of reasons for this interest; key amongst these has been the increasing need for data on sexual orientation in order to meet current and future legislative requirements. The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007 extends the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation to the provision of goods, facilities and services and exercise of public duties.

As well as monitoring equal opportunities for employment and goods or service provision, organisations investigating social inequalities generally, or simply wishing to understand more about their client base, may also wish to collect data on sexual orientation.

As discussed below, the question developed by ONS concerns respondents' perceptions of their sexual identity. As sexual identity is the component of sexual orientation most closely related to experiences of disadvantage and discrimination, asking about it will enable organisations to fulfil their legislative requirements. By using the standard question set out by ONS, data collectors will be better able to benchmark their data against that collected by ONS as well as data collected elsewhere. They can also be sure that they are using a question that has been rigorously tested for acceptability and which we know provides high quality data. In addition, the question has also been formally adopted by the cross government National Statistics Harmonisation Group as a harmonised standard.

Where can I find out more?

Legal requirements and the benefits of monitoring are set out in more detail in Hand C and Betts P (2008) *Developing survey questions on sexual identity: The legal and policy framework*, available at: www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/legal-framework.pdf

The equality lobbying organisation, Stonewall, has also produced a handbook setting out the legal requirements and other advantages of data monitoring: *Monitoring: How to monitor sexual orientation in the workplace*.

The Government Equalities Office has a website outlining legislation around sexual orientation:

www.equalities.gov.uk/what_we_do/sexual_orientation/sexual_orientation_regulations.aspx

The Communities and Local Government website also gives more details about regulations and legislation around sexual orientation: www.communities.gov.uk/archived/general-content/communities/sexualorientationlegislation/

2.2 What does the question set out to measure?

Legislation uses the term ‘sexual orientation’ but the question sets out to measure the respondent’s self-perceived sexual identity. The relationship between sexual orientation and sexual identity is discussed below.

What is sexual orientation?

Sexual orientation is one of the six equality strands covered by legislation, the other five being: race, gender, disability, religion and belief, and age. Sexual orientation is an umbrella term which encompasses several dimensions including sexual identity, attraction and behaviour. For the purposes of the legislation, sexual orientation is not defined in terms of any specific dimension.

What is sexual identity?

Self-perceived sexual identity is a subjective view of oneself. Essentially, it is about what a person is, not what they do. It is about the inner sense of self, and perhaps sharing a collective social identity with a group of other people. The question on sexual identity is asked as an opinion question, it is up to respondents to decide how they define themselves in relation to the four response categories available. It is important to recognise that the question is not specifically about sexual behaviour or attraction, although these aspects might relate to the formation of identity. A person can have a sexual identity while not being sexually active. Furthermore, reported sexual identity may change over time or in different contexts (for example, at home versus in the workplace).

Why measure sexual identity rather than sexual orientation?

No single question would capture the full complexity of sexual orientation. A suite of questions would be necessary to collect data on the different dimensions of sexual orientation, including attraction, behaviour and identity, and to examine consistency between them at the individual level. Although legislation refers to sexual orientation, research during question development deemed sexual identity the most relevant dimension of sexual orientation to investigate given its relation to experiences of disadvantage and discrimination. Testing showed that respondents were not in favour of asking about sexual behaviour in a social survey context, nor would it be appropriate in general purpose government surveys.

Where can I find out more about definitions of sexual identity and sexual orientation?

McManus S (2003), National Centre for Social Research, *Sexual Orientation Research Phase 1: A Review of Methodological Approaches* on behalf of the Scottish Executive, available at: www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2003/03/16650/19351

2.3 How do people decide which group to place themselves in?

We know from testing that how people decide which response category to select depends on a number of factors. Those identifying as one sexual identity may place different levels of importance on different factors from those identifying as another, and the way in which they do so was investigated in focus groups and cognitive interviews.

ONS research has found that understanding of the concept of sexual identity varied across groups. It is more salient for those identifying as lesbian and gay people than for those identifying as heterosexuals or bisexuals. Heterosexuals tended to be *latent identifiers* who had not thought much about the concept and answers were generally based on sexual attraction or behaviour. Gay and Lesbian respondents were *conscious identifiers* who had previously considered the concept. They may have considered a number of factors to come to decide which group they identified most with. Bisexuals were more likely to be *reluctant identifiers* (not wanting to put themselves in any group) and they were also more likely to be *fluid identifiers*, changing which category they put themselves in according to the context.

Where can I find out more?

Developing survey questions on sexual identity: Rationale and design of sexual identity questioning on the Integrated Household Survey (IHS), available at: www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/quest-test-and-implem/index.html

Betts P, Wilmot A and Taylor T (2008), ONS, *Developing survey questions on sexual identity: Exploratory focus groups*, available at: www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/quest-dev/index.html

2.4 When should this question be used?

The question should be used on all surveys where collecting information about diversity strands is of interest. Most research will investigate inequalities between different diversity strands (for example, by age, sex, ethnicity, religion) and sexual identity should be included as a key demographic variable in just the same way as the other diversity strands are. Including it in this way serves two key purposes:

- It allows data users to investigate whether there are inequalities by sexual identity, allowing a full picture of advantage and disadvantage to be painted
- It allows individuals to express their identity fully and treats sexual identity in the same way as other aspects of identity. For some, sexual identity is a defining aspect of who they are and a sexual identity question allows them to express this

This question alone will not provide all the information that may be needed for certain pieces of research. In particular, additional questions should be asked if:

- Sexual behaviour or sexual attraction is of key interest
- If further information about the 'Other' category is of interest

Both ONS and the GRO (Scotland) have carried out considerable research looking at UK and international experiences of asking questions on sexual identity, sexual orientation and related topics, and reference to relevant papers is made below. The UK was the first country to introduce the sexual identity question as a standard question on mainstream surveys. However, smaller or specialist surveys have asked questions on sexual identity previously both in the UK and elsewhere.

The question is not intended to gauge:

- Sexual activity
- Gender or transgender issues (a different concept altogether)
- Sexual behaviours
- Numbers of relationships
- Desires or fantasies

Where can I find out more?

Reference

Developing survey questions on sexual identity: Rationale and design of sexual identity questioning on the Integrated Household Survey (IHS), available at: www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/quest-test-and-implem/index.html

Betts (2008), ONS, *Developing survey questions on sexual identity: UK experiences of administering survey questions on sexual identity/orientation*, available at: www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/quest-dev/index.html

Taylor T (2008b), ONS, *Developing survey questions on sexual identity: Review of international organisations' experiences of administering survey questions on sexual identity/orientation*, available at: www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/quest-dev/index.html

McManus S (2003), National Centre for Social Research, *Sexual Orientation Research Phase 1: A review of Methodological Approaches* on behalf of the Scottish Executive, available at: www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2003/03/16650/19351

2.5 How was this question developed?

The question was developed after extensive research. The research checked people's understanding of the concepts involved, the acceptability of the question, suitable methods of administration and the quality of the data – including analysis of non-response and the bias effect of not asking the question of proxy respondents.

Specifically, the research included:

- Information reviews (including a review of the literature, a review of the legal framework and reviews of UK and International Surveys)
- Quantitative research (including a four-staged Omnibus Survey trial, longitudinal General Lifestyle Survey pilot, analysis of the effect of proxy data, comparative analysis of item non-response)
- Qualitative research (telephone interviews with those who preferred not to answer, feedback from interviewers and field observations, focus groups with members of the public, cognitive/in-depth interviews with members of the public)

Where can I find out more?

At each stage the research was written up and details are available on the ONS sexual identity web page at:

www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/index.html

Betts P (2008), ONS, *Developing survey questions on sexual identity: UK experiences of administering survey questions on sexual identity/orientation*, available at:

www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/quest-dev/index.html

Betts P, Wilmot A and Taylor T (2008), ONS, *Developing survey questions on sexual identity: Exploratory focus groups*, available at: www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/quest-dev/index.html

Hand C and Betts P (2008), ONS, *Developing survey questions on sexual identity: The legal and policy framework*, available at:

www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/index.html

Joloza T, Traynor J and Haselden L (2009), ONS, *Developing survey questions on sexual identity: Report on the General Lifestyle (GLF) split-sample pilot*, available at:

www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/index.html

Malalagoda M and Traynor J (2008), ONS, *Developing survey questions on sexual identity: Report on National Statistics Omnibus Survey trial 4*, available at: www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/quest-test-and-implement/index.html

Taylor T (2008a), ONS, *Developing survey questions on sexual identity: Report on National Statistics Omnibus Survey trials 1 and 2*, available at: www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/quest-test-and-implem/index.html

Taylor T (2008b), ONS, *Developing survey questions on sexual identity: Review of international organisations' experiences of administering survey questions on sexual identity/orientation*, available at: www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/quest-dev/index.html

Taylor T and Ralph K (2008), ONS, *Developing survey questions on sexual identity: Report on National Statistics Omnibus Survey trial 3*, available at: www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/quest-test-and-implem/index.html

Wilmot A (2007), ONS, 'In search of a question on sexual identity' - paper presented at the 62nd Annual Conference of the American Association of Public Opinion Research, May 2007, available at: www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/quest-dev/index.html

3. The questions

3.1 Face-to-face

The following question should be asked on face-to face surveys. It should be asked exactly as it is shown here with no alterations. Even small alterations, such as slight amendments to the wording or order of the answer categories, may substantially affect the comparability of the data outputs with those from other sources (especially ONS benchmark data) and may affect the acceptability of the question to respondents. The question was extensively tested with many different groups and the wording and order of the answer categories has been specifically designed to maximise response across all groups and should therefore not be altered. The question has been designed to collect data that will be comparable with the data collected on telephone surveys. Changes in mode of data collection may always have an affect on responses and response rates. The design of the question is suitable for all different face-to-face survey scenarios, whether it is only one interview in the household or more.

ASK ALL AGED 16 OR OVER

INTERVIEWER: Allocate all cards, then ask the question to all

[INDICATE TO INTERVIEWERS WHICH SHOWCARD SHOULD BE GIVEN TO EACH RESPONDENT]

Which of the options on this card best describes how you think of yourself?

Please just read out the number next to the description.

(ONLY IF CONCURRENT INTERVIEW)

The numbers on each card are different for each person.

27. Heterosexual / Straight

21. Gay / Lesbian

24. Bisexual

29. Other

(Spontaneous Don't know/Refusal)

Where can I find out more?

Developing survey questions on sexual identity: Rationale and design of sexual identity questioning on the Integrated Household Survey (IHS), available at: www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/quest-test-and-implem/index.html

Betts P, Wilmot A and Taylor T (2008), ONS, *Developing survey questions on sexual identity: Exploratory focus groups*, available at: www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/quest-dev/index.html

3.2 Telephone

The following question should be asked on telephone surveys. It should be asked exactly as it is shown here with no alterations. Even small alterations, such as slight amendments to the wording or order of the answer categories, may substantially affect the comparability of the data outputs with those from other sources (especially ONS benchmark data) and may affect the acceptability of the question to respondents.

The question has been designed to be comparable with the data collected on face-to-face surveys and feedback from trials has shown that it is acceptable to respondents. Changes in mode of data collection may always have an affect on responses and response rates.

ASK ALL AGED 16 OR OVER

I will now read out a list of terms people sometimes use to describe how they think of themselves.

(INTERVIEWER: read list to end without pausing.

Note that 'Heterosexual or Straight' is one option; 'Gay or Lesbian' is one option.)

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

(Spontaneous Don't know/Refusal)

As I read the list again please say 'yes' when you hear the option that best describes how you think of yourself.

(INTERVIEWER: Pause briefly after each option during second reading.)

Where can I find out more?

Developing survey questions on sexual identity: Rationale and design of sexual identity questioning on the Integrated Household Survey (IHS), available at:

www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/quest-test-and-implem/index.html

3.3 Self-completion

ONS has not tested a question for self-completion surveys. However, many other organisations use these questionnaires as their primary tool for data collection and it is therefore important to have a recommended question which is set out in the box below.

It should be asked exactly as it is shown here with no alterations. Even small alterations, such as slight amendments to the wording of the answer categories or their order, may substantially affect the comparability of the data outputs and may affect the acceptability of the question to respondents.

The question has not been fully tested for acceptability and comprehension in the same way as the face-to-face and telephone questions. The change in mode, may have affected both. In particular, the inclusion of a 'Prefer not to say' option and the likely increase in missing data will affect overall comparability with other benchmark data collected by telephone or through face-to-face interviews. However, after careful consideration ONS recommends the question for self-completion surveys. It is likely that this question will be comparable with other sources. Furthermore, in the absence of further testing and research, its general similarity to the recommended face-to-face and telephone questions make it the best option in light of the testing that ONS has done on face-to-face and telephone interviewing.

ALL AGED 16 OR OVER

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

1. Heterosexual or Straight,
2. Gay or Lesbian,
3. Bisexual,
4. Other
5. Prefer not to say

Please note:

1. Self-completion questionnaires differ from face-to-face and telephone surveys in a number of ways. In face-to-face surveys and, to a lesser extent, in telephone surveys, the interviewer has some control over the environment in which the survey is administered and the difference in the level of interviewer control over the environment will affect both the results and also how the question should be asked. In particular, interviewers can control:
 - a. Who is answering the question and check that it is not being answered by proxy
 - b. That showcards are used (or the correct procedure is used in telephone interviews) and that the respondent will not have to reveal their answer to anyone else in the room
 - c. That the respondent is asked the question and does not simply skip it because they did not see it or meant to return to it but forgot
2. A 'Prefer not to say' option is included on self-completion paper or web-based questionnaires when it is not explicitly included on face-to-face or telephone questionnaires. In face-to-face and telephone interviews, testing showed that the inclusion of an explicit 'Prefer not to say' category increased item non-response. Such a category was therefore not explicitly included but interviewers knew that they could always code 'Refused' if the respondent indicated that they did not want to answer the question. On a self-completion questionnaire, the respondent must be given the option to indicate that they do not want to answer the question as there is no interviewer there to code 'Refused'. However, the inclusion of this additional category is likely to increase non-response and will have an impact on all categories.

4. Key points for administration of the question

4.1 Question acceptability

- In testing and in live fieldwork the question has proved acceptable to the vast majority of respondents and has not affected overall response
- Early testing and trials showed that some interviewers were nervous asking the question. It is possible that if individual interviewers are concerned about this question, this may be passed on to respondents. It is therefore important that all interviewers are adequately briefed about the acceptability of the question and how to ask it

4.2 Who to ask

- The question should be asked of all aged 16 or over, including older people
- In cases where respondents are blind, have sight difficulties or are unable to read, the interviewer can read out the response options from the card but only if they are interviewing one person on their own and privacy is assured
- The question should not be asked of proxy respondents, that is, respondents who are answering on behalf of someone else. It is considered too personal and subjective for respondents to answer on behalf of others. In such cases, the question should be skipped altogether and not be coded as 'Don't know' or 'Refusal' as these are both valid codes
- The question should not be asked if family members or friends are acting as interpreters. It should only be asked if a professional interpreter is being used and there is no one else in the room who can hear the answer categories being read out

4.3 Introducing the question

- Treat the question just as any other survey question. Interviewers should not offer any special explanation about its meaning, purpose or confidentiality unless asked by the respondent

4.4 Assisting the respondent with the meaning of response categories

- Some assistance may be given if a respondent asks what any of the response categories mean. For example, 'Heterosexual or straight might mean, for example, that a person is attracted to people of the opposite sex.' For gay/lesbian substitute 'the same sex' for 'opposite sex'. For bisexual substitute 'both sexes'. Note that it is likely that such explanation would only be required for heterosexual respondents.
- If a respondent says, 'I'm normal' or 'I'm ordinary', the interviewer should not assume that means heterosexual/straight, but probe by asking, 'So which answer category would you choose?'

4.5 Don't knows/ Refusals and 'Other' answers

- Spontaneous 'Don't know' answers and refusals can be recorded by the interviewer but are not presented as options to respondents
- 'Please specify' is not included with the 'Other' category for privacy reasons

- If there are any legitimate circumstances in which the question cannot be administered interviewers should code 'Refusal' rather than 'Don't know' because 'Don't know' could be a valid response to this survey question

4.6 Where in the questionnaire to place the question

- The question should be asked alongside other identity questions, such as age, ethnicity, religion and sex. Testing to date suggests that it should be asked before a religion question

4.7 Maintaining respondent privacy and the use of showcards

- Answer categories should be presented to the respondents on showcards. Where more than one person in the household is being interviewed, each individual should be presented with a different showcard, each with a unique, non-sequential set of numbers for the answer categories. This ensures that confidentiality is maintained between respondents
- There is an additional sentence for interviewers to read out when one or more people are being interviewed concurrently (that is, 'The numbers on each card are different for each person.')
- This is important so respondents know why they might read out a different number to other household members. It might also enable respondents with disclosure concerns to answer honestly
- In Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing the response options should not be visible on the interviewer's computer screen. This is again to help maintain privacy should the interviewer's laptop screen be visible to someone else in the household

5. Interpreting the data

5.1 Which data source should I use to benchmark my dataset against?

ONS collects data on sexual identity on the core section of its Integrated Household Survey (IHS). This is a large scale random household survey. Rigorous sampling and other quality criteria are applied to the IHS and the quality of data collected on it is of a very high standard.

The IHS comprises a number of component surveys which can be added together. The total predicted number of people to be interviewed in 2009 and 2010 for each of the component surveys was:

Survey	Predicted achieved sample size per annum for 2009 excluding proxies	Predicted achieved sample size per annum for 2010 and beyond
Labour Force Survey	99,000	53,000
Annual Population Survey	105,000	31,000
General Lifestyle Survey	18,000	6,000
English Housing Survey	31,000	31,000
Living Costs and Food Survey	10,000	10,000
Omnibus/Opinions Survey	13,000	13,000
Total sample size	276,000	144,000

1. The predicted achieved sample sizes approximate figures only rounded to nearest thousand.
2. The predicted achieved sample sizes exclude proxies. Each survey predicts a certain proportion of proxy interviews. Since proxy interviews do not include the sexual identity question, they are not included in this count.
3. The IHS sample design will reduce the effective sample size to below these figures.
4. The numbers decline on the LFS, APS and GLF due to differences in routing to the question between the first and subsequent years..

The achieved sample sizes on the IHS are sufficiently large to give robust estimates against which to benchmark other surveys against. Furthermore, it is possible to add together years of the IHS in order to look at specific sub-samples of the population, for example, individual regions or demographic groups.

Key points about using the IHS dataset

Proxy data

If an interviewer is unable to contact a sampled individual within a household, they may collect some information by proxy; however, information on sexual identity is not collected in this way. Instead the response to the sexual identity question will just appear as missing in the dataset. The proportion of interviews taken by proxy on the component parts of the IHS varies from year to year but in 2008, the proportion of proxy interviews was:

Survey	Proportion of proxies
Labour Force Survey	32%
Annual Population Survey	22%
General Lifestyle Survey	7%
English Housing Survey	1%
Living Costs and Food Survey	11%
Omnibus/Opinions Survey	No proxies

Since proxy interviews are more likely to be given on behalf of younger people and males, and there is some correlation between these groups and having an LGB sexual identity, it is possible that the lack of data for proxy interviews will introduce some bias. At the time of writing this guidance, ONS has not been able to conclusively establish whether there is any bias or not.

Weighting

IHS sexual identity data is supplied with weights which account for different sampling fractions and which gross the data up to population levels. Details of how to apply these weights are available from the data supplier.

Adding years

Omnibus and General Lifestyle (GLF) trials suggest that less than 3 per cent self-identify as belonging to the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual population. This means that even though the IHS has a very big sample size, it will still be hard to analyse some small sub-populations within that, for example at regional or lower geographies or for particular age groups. However, it is possible to add together years of data to allow for these more detailed analyses.

5.2 Why might results from other surveys differ from the IHS results?

The IHS provides the best possible count of those who currently self-identify in this way within the household context. However, it should be noted that there is no guarantee that estimates (levels or proportions) from other sources will be numerically the same as estimates from the IHS due to sampling variability. In addition, counts which set out to measure other aspects of sexual orientation, for example, by using questions that focus on sexual behaviour, may get very different results. Furthermore, even where a survey has used the recommended question, there may still be differences in the size of the LGB population measured on different surveys. This may result from real differences in the proportion of people identifying in this way which have emerged over time, or in the population measured by the IHS and the population included in the survey being compared. However, some differences may result from differences in methodology and these should be taken into account in any analysis.

Self-completion data and ‘Prefer not to say’

Many surveys are self-completion and this mode of data collection necessitates a ‘Prefer not to say’ category. The difference in mode and, specifically, the inclusion of an additional category is likely to impact on the proportion of people giving a substantive answer to the question and hence the proportion of people saying that they have an LGB self-identity.

Sample differences

The IHS is a national continuous survey which uses sampling techniques which are designed to maximise precision. That is they use stratified random sampling techniques (some clustered and some unclustered). Details of the samples are available here:

General Lifestyle Survey (Formerly GHS)

www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_compendia/GHS07/AppendixB2007.pdf

General Lifestyle Survey (Formerly GHS): *GHS 2007 Appendix B: Sample Design and Response*, available at:

www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/Product.asp?vlnk=5756

English Housing Survey (EHS) user guide: no user guide currently available

Living Costs and Food (LCF) methodology note:

https://statistics.defra.gov.uk/esg/publications/efs/method/method_EFS_sampling.pdf

Living Costs and Food (LCF): *Sampling in EFS*, available at:

<https://statistics.defra.gov.uk/esg/publications/efs/method/default.asp>

Labour Force Survey (LFS) user guide:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=1537>

Labour Force Survey (LFS) user guide: *Volume 1 (2007) Background and Methodology*, available at: www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=1537

Opinions Survey (formerly Omnibus Survey): Sample and Data Collection:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/about/who-we-are/our-services/omnibus-survey/sample/index.html>

Where surveys use less robust sampling techniques, especially where the samples are not random, or only reflect part of the population, it is possible that the differences in estimates could be substantial.

Context differences

Different results may occur because of differences in context. The context in which the questions are asked may affect the way in which a person thinks about themselves and the determinants of their own sexual identity, causing them to give different answers. It may also affect the acceptability of the question and the trust respondents have in their answers being kept confidential¹ or their willingness to answer the question at all. Factors which were identified during focus groups and cognitive/in-depth interviews as potentially affecting answers given were:

- *Type of data collection exercise* – Question testing showed that the question was generally seen as acceptable but levels of acceptability were associated with context in relation to the type of data collection exercise and perceived anonymity as well as question relevance. Participants felt more comfortable with the questioning in a government social survey context where they did not think that the data would be linked to them personally and the statistical purpose was appreciated, as opposed to equality monitoring forms where the relevance of the information was questioned
- *Questionnaire content* – the content of the questionnaire may result in respondents thinking about their sexual identity in different ways. For example, a survey which is largely focused on health behaviour may prompt the respondent to think more about

¹ Betts P, Wilmot A, Taylor T, *Developing questions on sexual identity: Exploratory focus groups* (2008)

sexual behaviour when formulating their ideas about sexual identity. Likewise, a questionnaire with components about family may make the respondent think more about their sexual identity when interacting with their families or when a questionnaire has a health component, sexual behaviour may be given additional weight by the respondent

- *Social environment* – where a person is at the time of completing a questionnaire can be an influencing factor on how they respond. An individual may think about themselves differently according to whether they are at home with their family, in a work situation, in a social situation with friends, or talking to a health care provider. In each case, different factors will contribute differently to their perception of self. Furthermore, they may have different concerns regarding privacy in each setting.
- *Organisation carrying out the survey* – focus groups and cognitive interviews suggested that some respondents might be sensitive to the organisation carrying out the interview, trusting some more than others. On the whole, the evidence was that respondents trusted surveys conducted on behalf of public sector organisations (even when the survey was carried out by a market research company) to safeguard their data more than wholly private sector surveys, and this could influence the way that they answered the question
- *Current events* – different types of current events can stimulate people to think about self-identity differently but they may also make people think about data collection organisations differently. Events which erode the trust in some or all data collection organisations (or indeed which enhance that trust) may have an impact on a respondent's willingness to answer. Similarly, events which generally result in more positive or negative images of people with lesbian, gay or bisexual identities may impact the likelihood of individuals responding or giving an answer which includes lesbian, gay or bisexual.

5.3 What do we know about those who identify as 'Other'?

Sometimes including an 'Other' response option is used in question design as a 'catch all' and respondents are used to seeing/hearing it offered in surveys. While the three substantive categories might cover all sexual identities, some people, such as those who describe themselves as asexual, may feel no sense of sexual identity at all. They may be unhappy about being forced to choose one of the three that are offered.

Evidence from quantitative trials showed that the proportion who answered 'Other' was small and comprised mainly those who were heterosexual but did not understand the terminology (particularly before the introduction of the word 'straight' in the question design).

Some non-heterosexual qualitative research participants said they would choose the 'Other' category because they were either anti-categorisation or because they rejected the 'simplistic' male/female 'gender binary' (this was particularly mentioned by some transgender participants). It should be recognised that those who use this category will in effect be excluded from analysis.

5.4 How can I interpret this data in relation to other key demographics?

Examining the data in relation to gender or other demographics such as age or ethnicity is key for some analyses. In this case, the data can simply be broken down using bivariate tables (for example, sexual identity by sex to give men and women who identify as lesbian/gay separately) or multivariate analysis. When doing this it is worth noting that:

- The numbers involved may be small (early experience shows that the proportion of people identifying as gay/lesbian on the IHS is likely to be in the region of 3 per cent) which will limit such analysis
- More robust analysis can be undertaken by adding together years
- It is best to use labels as they were used in the question and talk in terms of men who identify as lesbian/gay (or gay men) and women who identify as lesbian/gay (lesbian/gay women) rather than simply gay (for men) and lesbian (for women) as there are many women who prefer the term gay to lesbian and so gender must always be explicit
- Ethical considerations will also need to be taken into account. Great care should be taken when analysing data at lower geographical levels. Always ensure that respondents' confidentiality is not compromised at anytime.

Annex 1

SEXUAL IDENTITY QUESTION

Interviewer Briefing Note

From January 2009 a question on sexual identity is included in the Integrated Household Survey core questionnaire. This note provides you with the key points to note about the question and its administration, together with further explanation. The document also includes important points to note, and helpful tips on what to do in particular circumstances informed by feedback from interviewers.

Key points to remember

- The large majority of respondents find this question acceptable (see section 1)
- The purpose of this question is to provide benchmark statistics on the size of the lesbian, gay and bisexual population, which can be used for equality monitoring (see section 2)
- Sexual identity is an opinion question so its meaning should not be explained if asked. It should not be administered by proxy or via an interpreter (see section 3)
- You can help respondents with response category meanings if asked (see section 4)
- Like any other question, administer it to all respondents in a confident and matter of fact manner (see section 5)
- To help maintain privacy, this question uses a separate showcard for each respondent. Respondents are asked to answer with a number, which is unique to them (see section 6)
- When interviewing people concurrently, read out the additional sentence, explaining that each card has different numbers, just before handing out the showcards (see section 6)
- Like other questions, 'Don't know' and 'Refusal' are available as spontaneous only (see section 7)
- If a respondent provides no answer at all or another household member answers on behalf of a respondent then code as a refusal (see section 8)
- If you have any concerns about this topic remember to talk to your field manager or mentor

The Question

Face to face administration

SID1

Interviewer: allocate all cards, then ask the question to all
[NAME] showcard1, [NAME] showcard2, [NAME] showcard3, etc

Which of the options on this card best describes how you think of yourself?

Please just read out the number next to the description.

²**The numbers on each card are different for each person.**

	AxName	SIDTUQn	SIDFtFQn
QSID[1]	NAME[1]		[answer]
QSID[2]	NAME[2]		[answer]
etc			

Response category numbers are unique on each card and are not in sequence. The response categories – not shown on screen – are: Heterosexual/Straight; Gay/Lesbian; Bisexual; Other.

Telephone administration

I will now read out a list of terms people sometimes use to describe how they think of themselves. Heterosexual or Straight, Gay or Lesbian, Bisexual, Other.

Note that 'Heterosexual or Straight' is one option; 'Gay or Lesbian' is one option.

As I read the list again please say 'yes' when you hear the option that best describes how you think of yourself.

Pause briefly after each option.

Running prompt

1. Heterosexual or Straight?

4. Other?

2. Gay or Lesbian?

3. Bisexual?

	AxName	SIDTUQn	SIDFtFQn
QSID[1]	NAME[1]		[answer]
QSID[2]	NAME[2]		[answer]
etc			

² This will appear on-screen if you are interviewing more than one person concurrently.

1. Introduction

There has been a programme of development and testing for this question, covering the wording, the response categories, and how it should be administered. Different versions were tested on the Omnibus Survey in 2006 and 2007. There was also a split sample experiment on the GLF for 6 months in 2008 where half of all households were asked the question. The final design and administration has been informed by feedback from interviewers and field managers, which was predominantly positive. Focus groups and cognitive/in-depth interviews have also been conducted with members of the public (including participants of different sexual identity groups, ages, ethnic backgrounds and faith groups). Again the feedback from these focus groups and interviews was positive.

You may have the perception that a question on sexual identity might be sensitive for some respondents. We know that some interviewers have been reluctant to administer the question. Please be reassured that the evidence from work conducted by ONS shows that the vast majority of respondents find the question as acceptable as others such as ethnicity, nationality and religion. Sexual identity also had a lower refusal rate than the income question. No one dropped out immediately after being asked the question and household response rates were not affected.

A confident but matter of fact approach does work. Please remember you should not hesitate to ask for further help from your field manager if you have any concerns.

2. Purpose of question

Sexual orientation is one of six equality monitoring areas covered by a range of legislation. The others are gender, ethnicity, religious belief, age and disability, all of which are already asked about on ONS surveys. As the national statistical body it is our responsibility to provide statistical information to support such legislation. The purpose of the question is to help find out how many people in the population are lesbian, gay or bisexual. Together with other data (from the ONS survey, or from other sources) the information will be used to monitor equality of opportunity. This will help identify discrimination and disadvantage experienced on the basis of sexual orientation in areas such as employment, and the provision of services such as housing.

3. Question Administration

You must ask the question of everyone aged 16 and over (except by proxy or via an interpreter). Everyone can have a sexual identity regardless of, for example, their age or whether they are in a relationship. If you cannot legitimately administer the question you should code 'Refusal' rather than 'Don't know'.

3.1 Opinion question

The concept of 'sexual orientation' includes aspects including sexual identity, attraction and behaviour. We are asking about sexual identity, which is most related to certain groups' experiences of disadvantage and discrimination. Sexual identity is a subjective view that a person can derive in many ways. A person might answer questions about sexual identity, sexual behaviour and attraction consistently, but for some people the answers can differ. For example, there are men who sometimes have sex with men but do not identify as gay or bisexual. A person can have a sexual identity while not being sexually active.

Since sexual identity is subjective, and for some people can change over time or in different contexts, it is an opinion question. If the respondent asks you what the question means, please explain that it is whatever it means to them.

3.2. No administration by proxy or via an interpreter

As with all opinion questions, this question is skipped for respondents being interviewed by proxy. Also you should not administer it to respondents who require an interpreter (including signers for the deaf) – please code as ‘Refusal’. However, the question can be asked by a professional interpreter who is not known to the respondent, if the interview is being conducted with the respondent alone and in private.

3.3. Respondents with sight difficulties

In cases where respondents are blind, have sight difficulties or are unable to read, you can read out the response options from the card but only if interviewing one person on their own and privacy is assured.

4. Assistance with meaning of response categories

If a respondent asks what any of the response categories mean, you may assist. But because of the subjectivity of sexual identity only speak in general terms. For example, you can say:

‘Heterosexual or straight might mean, for example, that a person is attracted to people of the opposite sex’.

For gay/lesbian, substitute *‘the same sex’* for *‘the opposite sex’*. For bisexual, substitute *‘both men and women’*.

If a respondent says *‘I’m normal’* or *‘I’m ordinary’*, do not assume they are heterosexual/straight but probe:

‘So which answer category would you choose?’

If you think for any reason a respondent has given the wrong answer, you must accept it unless they ask for any assistance with meanings of categories.

Respondents who identify as ‘Other’ should be doing so because they feel the previous response options do not apply to them. ‘Other’ should not be coded because of comprehension or answering difficulties. It is important to understand that people who are currently celibate or have no sexual partners can still identify as heterosexual/straight, gay/lesbian or bisexual. People identifying as ‘Other’ could be asexual (people who are never sexually attracted to anyone) or people who dislike categorising themselves. Some transgender people (those who feel they were born in the wrong gender and are now living in a new gender of their choice) may choose this option, though others will answer in the same way as non-transgender people. A ‘please specify’ question is not asked, for privacy reasons.

5. Treat the question the same as any other

Make no remarks when asking the question, as comments could be construed as flippant or insulting even if not intended to be. Even facial expressions and body language that give an impression of nervousness or awkwardness on your part could have the same effect.

The majority of interviewers who worked on the trials had no problems or concerns, but a small number did in certain situations. Do not make any assumptions about the respondent's sexual identity (for example, on the basis of being married/widowed or having children), or their ability or willingness to answer the question (for example, because of their age, or ethnicity, or religion). Everyone has the right to answer this question.

Testing has shown that the question should not be given any special explanation about its purpose or confidentiality (although these can be explained if you are asked). This is because interviewers said that doing so simply served to highlight the question to respondents. By including the question in the identity sequence, along with national identity, ethnicity, etc, purpose was self-evident.

6. Maintaining privacy within household – unique showcards

To maintain privacy when interviewing people concurrently, for this question you have a separate set of 8 showcards. The aim of the showcard system is to enable people who might be embarrassed, or concerned about disclosing their sexual identity, to answer truthfully.

- Each card has a set of numbers unique to that card
- The laptop will indicate which card to provide to each respondent
- Firstly hand all respondents their cards at the same time. Hand them over face down, taking care that other people cannot see the printed side
- Then ask the question to all the respondents
- The respondent is asked to say the number associated with the category which applies rather than answer in words. The numbers on the card are not consecutive, so that no inference can be drawn as to the category to which it corresponds. For example, a heterosexual respondent who was given show card 1 might answer '*fifteen*':

Show card examples:

Show card 1
15. Heterosexual/Straight
10. Gay/Lesbian
17. Bisexual
16. Other

Show card 2
36. Heterosexual/Straight
34. Gay/Lesbian
35. Bisexual
38. Other

- There is an additional sentence to read out in concurrent situations so that respondents know that the number they read will be different to other people's. This is because interviewers said some respondents queried the fact that their numbers were different which interrupted the flow of the interview

'The numbers on each card are different for each person'.

- You must use the correct showcard, because you will record the number without the corresponding response category being shown on screen (again, to maintain privacy). If you use the wrong card you will not be able to enter the number that the respondent answers with. In such instances a check will appear stating:

The response XX does not coincide with the responses available on the showcard. Check the response again with the respondent, if they give the same response check the correct showcard has been administered (Show Card SIDXX).

- In the rare situation of there being more than 8 adults in the household, the laptop will reassign the cards to adults 9 and above. It is highly unlikely that the same card will be assigned to the people being interviewed concurrently
- If a respondent states they can't read showcards and asks you to read out the categories you should only comply if privacy is assured

7. Don't know and refusal to answer

Don't know responses (CTRL+K) and refusals (CTRL+R) are available for you to code but only if the respondent answers in this way spontaneously. They are not shown on the showcards.

8. Specific situations

Based on interviewers' experiences of administering the question there were issues concerning some respondents from Black and Minority Ethnic and religious groups and the elderly. The following provides guidance on procedures to follow in specific situations that may arise.

- In a situation where a respondent does not volunteer an answer to the question but reacts in a way indicating embarrassment or offence, such as total silence, code as a refusal. Even when it appears that the respondent is likely to be heterosexual, this cannot be assumed with complete certainty
- If a male head of household, or anyone else in the household, answers the question on behalf of other household members these answers should be coded as a refusal

During our trials and discussions with interviewers we have found that some interviewers are reluctant to administer this question to, for example, older women. However it is important that everyone is asked the question and to remember that older people do have a sexual identity and they have the right to be allowed to answer this question