



Measuring Sexual Identity in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) launched its sexual identity project in 2006, which aimed to rigorously develop, test and implement a question measuring sexual identity on a large scale general household survey. The project was driven by an increasing demand for data on sexual orientation to meet UK legislative requirements. Although UK legislation refers to sexual *orientation*, ONS focused on collecting sexual *identity*, which is how people see themselves at the time the interview takes place.

This paper summarises the main stages of this project, which involved the review of previous studies, user engagement, focus groups, question testing, implementation onto the Integrated Household Survey (a large scale ONS household survey) and finally the evaluation of estimates and publication of user guidance on measuring sexual identity for use by other researchers. It concludes with the future plans ONS have for the collection and dissemination of sexual identity estimates.

Rational for the Sexual Identity Project

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) launched a sexual identity project¹ in 2006 looking at improving evidence on sexual identity in a social survey context.

The project was driven by an increasing demand for data on sexual orientation to meet UK legislative requirements. This project was given increased priority following an ONS review of Equality Data², which reinforced the need for robust data on sexual orientation (amongst other recommendations). Although UK legislation refers to sexual orientation, the ONS project focussed on sexual identity, which is how people see themselves at the time the interview takes place.

In 2010 a single *Equality Act*³ replaced all existing anti-discrimination laws with a single Act. This included a new Public Sector Equality Duty relating to race, disability and sex, and also covering age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity, and gender reassignment more fully.

Aims of the Project

The sexual identity project aimed to develop a question about self perceived sexual identity, which would provide robust estimates to meet the needs of the 2010 Equalities Act. The project, which ran between 2006 and 2010, looked at the rigorous development, testing, implementation and evaluation of a question on self perceived sexual identity for use on government surveys.

Wilmot (2007)⁴ outlined the aims of this project in a paper to the Annual Conference of the American Association of Public Opinion Research. This highlighted the need to consider the scope, confidentiality, acceptability and accuracy of the collection of sexual orientation/sexual identity data, and also the outlined the planned quantitative and qualitative testing strategies to be undertaken throughout the project.

The intended outcome of this project was the introduction of a single sexual identity question on a large scale government social survey, specifically the Integrated Household Survey (IHS). The IHS is an ONS survey, which collects a core set of questions across a variety of government surveys, to produce the largest social survey output in the UK (with 450,000 adults interviewed in the 2009-10 survey year). Further information on the IHS can be found on the on the ONS website⁵.

The project aimed to publish a user guide for researchers to enable other organisations to collect sexual identity information, and finally publish estimates of sexual identity in the UK, based on data from the Integrated Household Survey.

Why Sexual Identity and not Sexual Orientation?

Although the 2010 Equalities Act refers to sexual orientation, the ONS project focussed on sexual identity. Table 1, taken from the Sexual Identity Evaluation Report (Joloza, Evans, O'Brien, Potter-Collins, 2010)⁶, shows the different components of sexual orientation:

¹ **Sexual Identity Project (ONS):** www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/sexual-identity-project/index.html

² **Report from the review of equality data - Summary and recommendations (ONS, 2007):** www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/equality-data-review/index.html

³ **Equality Act 2010 – Guidance (2010):** www.gov.uk/equality-act-2010-guidance

⁴ **In search of a question on sexual identity (Wilmot, 2007):** www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/sexual-identity-project/question-development/in-search-of-a-question-on-sexual-identity.pdf

⁵ **Integrated Household Survey – User Guidance (ONS):** www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/social-and-welfare-methodology/integrated-household-survey/index.html

⁶ **Measuring Sexual Identity - An Evaluation Report (Joloza, Evans, O'Brien, Potter-Collins, 2010):** www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/sexual-identity-project/measuring-sexual-identity--an-evaluation-report.pdf

Table 1: Components of Sexual Orientation

Sexual attraction	This refers to a sexual interest in another person based on a combination of factors including a person's looks, movement, voice, smell etc that are appealing to the person attracted. Sexual attraction can also be defined as having sexual feelings towards someone.
Sexual behaviour	Refers to how people behave sexually. That is whether they have sexual partners of the same sex or not. Sexual behaviour does not necessarily form a basis for a person's sexual identity.
Sexual identity	How individuals think of themselves. This does not necessarily match their sexual behaviour or attraction and can change over time.
Sexual orientation	One's sexual orientation can be derived from any of the above.

Source: *Measuring Sexual Identity - An Evaluation Report (Joloza, Evans, O'Brien, Potter-Collins, 2010)*

ONS focused on collecting data on *sexual identity*, which is how people see themselves at the time the interview takes place. The reason for this is no single question would capture the complexity of *sexual orientation*, and a suite of questions would be required to fully collect the different dimensions of sexual orientation

Research during the development of the question also 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.

User Engagement

A key requirement of this project was regular user engagement, which steered the direction of the development work. This involved engagement with:

- UK central government departments, local government and public service providers,
- Other national statistics institutions around the world,
- Expert groups comprising of academics / interested parties / those with expertise of research with Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) groups,
- Engagement with the wider public.

Regular engagement with these groups was maintained throughout the development, testing, implementation and evaluation of the project, with the impact of this engagement discussed over the next few pages.

Exploratory Stage

A considerable amount of research has previously been carried out with the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual community. As part of the exploratory phase of this project, a review was conducted of the experiences of other organisations in the UK, and internationally, focussing on surveys which had recently asked questions about sexual identity or sexual orientation.

Literature Review

A UK review of experiences of administering survey questions on sexual identity/orientation (Betts, 2008)⁷ identified 10 public sector surveys in the UK which asked a single question to capture sexual identity, rather than asking separate questions about its different dimensions. The review identified areas for further research, which included:

- mode of administration (whether to use face to face interviewer interaction, or self completion),
- location of questions (with studies choosing to place sexual identity questions among other socio-demographic questions, usually toward the end of interviewer-administered questionnaires),
- general wording used in question stems and response options (with a range of surveys explicitly referencing sexual identity in question introductions, and other surveys which left the subject to be

⁷ **Developing survey questions on sexual identity - UK experiences of administering survey questions on sexual identity/orientation (Betts, 2008):** www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/sexual-identity-project/question-development/uk-experiences-of-administering-a-question-on-sexual-identity.pdf

- inferred from the response categories by asking respondents which category '(best) described' them),
- acceptability of the question (with no evidence found to suggest that survey response rates had been affected by the inclusion of a question on sexual identity, and also higher rates of missing data were obtained when sexual identity questions were administered by self-completion compared with interviewer-administered modes)

Estimates were obtained for most of the surveys, with the proportion of respondents self-identifying as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual ranging from 0.3% to 3.0%.

A Review of International Organisations' Experiences of Administering Questions on Sexual Identity/Orientation (Taylor, 2008)⁸ reviewed 19 studies, which were primarily based in the United States and Canada. The review's findings included:

- all surveys were conducted in a household setting, primarily focussed on collecting health related data.
- although the question sometimes included a preamble introducing the term 'sexual orientation', this term was never actually included in the question stem
- most surveys collected sexual orientation information via a computer assisted telephone interview (CATI). Where surveys were conducted face-to-face, the question was often asked by audio-self completion to enhance privacy.

Due to the difference in methodologies and sample populations, the review was unable to make accurate comparisons of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual estimates across surveys.

Focus Groups

As part of this exploratory stage, a series of focus groups were conducted. The focus groups explored four main areas:

- conceptualisation of 'sexual identity',
- language and terminology related to the concepts which participants use and understand,
- acceptability of asking about sexual identity on social surveys and in other contexts,
- way in which the questioning should be administered in a social survey context.

Participants for each focus group were homogeneous with respect to sexual identity and sex (e.g. heterosexual men, heterosexual women, gay men, gay/lesbian women, bisexual men and bisexual women). Focus groups were set up in this way following advice from the expert user group, suggesting this would enable participants to feel more comfortable to provide their views. Some of the views expressed from these focus groups are expressed in Box 1.

⁸ **Developing survey questions on sexual identity - Review of international organisations' experiences of administering questions on sexual identity/orientation (Taylor, 2008):** www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/sexual-identity-project/question-development/international-experiences-of-administering-questions-on-sexual-identity-orientation.pdf

Box 1: Focus Group Views

“It is not recommended that the term ‘sexual identity’ be included in the question stem as it is not a term in common use and its meaning varied somewhat.”

“The question should be treated as an opinion question - that is, its meaning and the basis for answer being subjective rather than prescribed.”

“The question should be located with other identity questions, so that respondents can infer meaning from the context and the question is not highlighted.”

“There was agreement that the three substantive categories heterosexual/straight, gay/lesbian and bisexual were all encompassing.”

“The term ‘homosexual’ was cited as being old fashioned with negative connotations and was felt to favour the concept of behaviour due to its use by the medical profession and the media. The term ‘gay’ was felt to be a better description of identity.”

“It was felt that those with strong religious beliefs relating to sexual minority behaviour and those living in less diverse urban environments may be more likely to object to the questioning.”

“Although participants considered the concepts of attraction and behaviour easier to grasp than sexual identity they were not in favour of asking about sexual behaviour in a social survey context, nor would it be appropriate in general-purpose government surveys.”

Source: *Developing survey questions on sexual identity - Exploratory focus groups* (Betts, Wilmot and Taylor, 2008)

A series of recommendations were published by Betts, Wilmot and Taylor (2008)⁹ which highlighted broad agreement that the prototype sexual identity question was acceptable in a social survey context, providing privacy and data security were assured. It also highlighted that participants from all focus groups were able to provide an answer to a question about sexual identity on a basis generally consistent with the intended meaning of the question.

Testing the sexual identity question

ONS launched a series of small scale quantitative trials on the ONS Omnibus Survey (now known as the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey)¹⁰. The first two trials took place between July and December 2006 and the third between July and August 2007. The final trial took place between November 2007 and January 2008.

Omnibus Trial 1 and 2

The first two trials (Taylor, 2008)¹¹, tested two different versions of the question on sexual identity. Although the main Omnibus survey was conducted by Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI), these sexual identity questions were asked via a Computer Assisted Self Interview (CASI), due to their potentially sensitive nature.

Interviewers were instructed to skip past this question if they believed the respondent to be unable to self-complete, or if privacy was compromised due to the involvement of a third person in the room. Respondents were also provided with “Prefer Not to Say” as an option in the question wording. Box 2 shows the main findings from these trials.

⁹ **Developing survey questions on sexual identity - Exploratory focus groups (Betts, Wilmot and Taylor, 2008):**

www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/sexual-identity-project/sexual-identity-focus-group-report.pdf

¹⁰ **Omnibus Survey / Opinions and Lifestyle Survey– (ONS):** www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/products-and-services/opn/index.html

¹¹ **Developing survey questions on sexual identity - Report on National Statistics Omnibus Survey**

trials 1 and 2 (Taylor, 2008): www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/sexual-identity-project/question-testing-and-implementation/sexual-identity-project-report-on-national-statistics-omnibus-survey-trials-1-and-2.pdf

Box 2: Findings from Omnibus Trials 1 and 2

“Interviewers were more likely to skip the question if they were interviewing older respondents, respondents from the lower socio-economic classification groups and respondents who were single.”

“The use of Computer Assisted Self Interviewing impeded administration of the sexual identity question.”

“Privacy was commonly mentioned as a problem because of the presence of another family member, often one who was interpreting or supervising.”

“No respondents dropped out of the interview immediately after being asked this question, thus allaying fears that it could have a detrimental effect on response.”

“Interviewer feedback was generally accepting of the topic. Interviewers often mentioned that the question was less problematic than they had anticipated.”

“The term ‘heterosexual’ was sometimes poorly understood, as demonstrated by interviewer comments and the increased selection of this first option when the term ‘straight’ was added.”

“More people chose the ‘Prefer Not to Say’ response than the three minority sexual identity groups combined. The respondent characteristics which were associated with choosing the ‘prefer not to say’ option were: being older; being female (particularly if the interviewer was male); having no educational qualifications; belonging to a lower socio-economic category; living in London rather than the North East of England; coming from a deprived neighbourhood.”

Source: Developing survey questions on sexual identity - Report on National Statistics Omnibus Survey trials 1 and 2 (Taylor, 2008)

These trials generally found response to the sexual identity question was good, readily accepted by most. The following lessons were learnt from these trials:

- Terms such as ‘sexual identity’ and ‘heterosexual’ are poorly understood. In the second trial the term ‘sexual identity’ was avoided and the term heterosexual was clarified by adding the term ‘straight’. These changes appear to have contributed to an improvement in response.
- There should be a choice of modes of administration so that those who can’t or don’t wish to self complete on a computer are not excluded.
- Reassurance should be given to interviewers about the acceptability of the question as some interviewers had anticipated the question would be more problematic to administer than it was in reality.

Omnibus Trial 3

Trial 3 (Taylor and Ralph, 2008)¹² aimed to improve response to the question by allowing interviewer administration (CAPI) where respondents were unable to self-complete through CASI. Response order effects were also tested for in a split sample experiment by moving the heterosexual response option after the gay/lesbian and bisexual categories. The findings from this trial can be seen in Box 3.

Box 3: Findings from Omnibus Trial 3

“Offering interviewer-administration as an alternative to self-completion reduced the proportion of omitted cases from 15% in previous trials to 2.4%.”

“As in previous trials, interviewers were more likely to skip the question with older respondents.”

“The question was self-administered in around two-thirds of cases and interviewer-administered in around a third.”

“There was no significant difference by mode in the proportion responding lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB). However, a higher proportion selected the heterosexual or straight category when the question was interviewer-administered compared with self-administration.”

Source: Developing survey questions on sexual identity - Report on National Statistics Omnibus Survey trial 3 (Taylor and Ralph, 2008)

As with previous trials, no-one dropped out of the interview immediately after the sexual identity question, suggesting that the question had not been detrimental to the overall survey response rate.

The following recommendations were made following this trial:

¹² **Developing survey questions on sexual identity - Report on National Statistics Omnibus Survey trial 3 (Taylor and Ralph, 2008):** www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/sexual-identity-project/question-testing-and-implementation/sexual-identity-project-report-on-national-statistics-omnibus-survey-trial-3.pdf

- Administering the question solely in CAPI would maintain the flow of the interview and remove the awkwardness associated with self-completion.
- Some respondents still seem confused about the terms ‘heterosexual’ and ‘straight’. It might be useful to add an explanation of these terms that interviewers can refer to if necessary.
- The order of the response options did not affect the estimates produced. Therefore options should be presented in the order of the most prevalent first as is done with similar questions on ONS surveys, such as religious identity, ethnic identity and national identity.

Omnibus Trial 4

Malagoda and Traynor (2008)¹³ reported that trial four had three main objectives:

1. Test two different versions of the sexual identity question in a split sample trial,
2. Gauge any effect of moving to a CAPI concealed showcard system of administration from a mainly CASI method of self administration,
3. To investigate what effect removing a ‘prefer not to say’ response option from the question had on the data.

Box 4 shows the main findings from this trial.

Box 4: Findings from Omnibus Trial 4

“No significant differences were found in the two questions being tested, with the proportion of respondents choosing any of the response categories and the overall item non-response rates were similar.”

“The removal of explicit ‘prefer not to say’ option in the questionnaire (however still allowing a spontaneous don’t know / refusal response to be provided) was successful in reducing item non-response since respondents had chosen from the remaining response options rather than spontaneously refusing the question. However, results also indicated a rise in the heterosexual / straight response category. This was not unexpected since analysis of those electing to ‘prefer not to say’ in trial two had shown that this group were primarily heterosexual.”

“The move from a CASI administration to CAPI concealed show cards had reduced the impact on flow of the interview, which had previously made the sexual identity question ‘stand-out’ as being different from similar self-defined social identity questions (eg. ethnicity, religion). When analysing responses to this new mode of administration, the proportion of respondents reporting ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’, ‘bisexual’ or ‘other’ identities was not found to be significantly different from previous trials. However an increase in those reporting heterosexual identity when compared with previous trials was found to be statistically significant. It was concluded this increase in heterosexual response is more likely a result of dropping the ‘prefer not to say’ response option.”

Source: *Developing survey questions on sexual identity - Report on National Statistics Omnibus Trial 4 (Malagoda and Traynor, 2008)*

Based on the findings of this trial, the following decisions were made regarding the questionnaire format:

- Question: “Which of the options on this card best describes how you think of yourself?”
- Response categories: “Heterosexual / Straight”; “Gay / Lesbian”; “Bisexual”; “Other” (and a spontaneous option for Don’t Know / Refusal)
- Mode of administration: Face-to-face interviewing in household (CAPI) using concealed showcard system of administration

Cognitive / in-depth interviews

A series of cognitive/in-depth interviews were conducted (Betts, 2009)¹⁴. These aimed to evaluate how the prototype question was understood by respondents. They also explored issues relating to the acceptability of the topic in the social survey and other contexts, and views of the proposed administration method.

Twenty nine cognitive/in-depth interviews were conducted with members of the public (specifically targeting subgroups not well represented in the focus groups). The interviews were designed to build on

¹³ **Developing survey questions on sexual identity - Report on National Statistics Omnibus Trial 4 (Malagoda and Traynor, 2008):** www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/sexual-identity-project/question-testing-and-implementation/sexual-identity-project-report-on-national-statistics-omnibus-survey-trial-4.pdf

¹⁴ **Developing survey questions on sexual identity - Cognitive/in-depth interviews (Betts, 2009):** www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/sexual-identity-project/question-testing-and-implementation/developing-survey-questions-on-sexual-identity--cognitive-in-depth-interviews.pdf

the findings and recommendations from a series of focus groups conducted in the exploratory stage of the project. Box 5 shows the main findings from this trial.

Box 5: Findings from cognitive / in-depth interviews:

“The sexual identity question was considered acceptable for inclusion on government social surveys. The prototype question achieved the intention of measuring self-perceived sexual identity.”

“The system of concealed show cards was broadly successful in helping to maintain privacy without drawing undue attention to the administration.”

“Some sexual minority respondents were reluctant to disclose their sexual identity and will give a socially desirable response, whatever system of administration is used. Concerns were felt among respondents about asking a sexual identity question by proxy, regarding acceptability and accuracy.”

Source: *Developing survey questions on sexual identity - Report on National Statistics Omnibus Trial 4 (Malagoda and Traynor, 2008)*

The following recommendations were made:

- The prototype question and response options should be tested in a large scale quantitative trial, with a view for their inclusion on the ONS Integrated Household Survey,
- The question should be located with other identity questions, after national identity and ethnicity and before religious affiliation,
- Unique show cards for each respondent, presented face down, with non-sequential and non-consecutive numbers for the categories, should be used to maintain confidentiality,
- The question should not be asked by proxy (e.g. a household member responding on behalf of an absent responder), due to the concerns felt among respondents regarding acceptability and accuracy.

Large Scale Quantitative trials

A large scale split trial was conducted (Joloza, Traynor, Haselden, 2009)¹⁵ with the aims to test whether:

- asking a question on sexual identity would have an impact on household response or individual response to the survey.
- placement of the sexual identity question would lead to any order effects that may impact on other equality information being collected about individuals.

The ONS General Lifestyle Survey (GLF) was chosen as the vehicle for carrying out the final pilot test of the prototype question on sexual identity. The survey was administered to all adult members of the household using CAPI concurrent interviewing, with an achieved eligible sample of around 7,300 individuals (with this sample split into a control and experimental group). The mode of administration was mainly through Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing, however a small section of the sample were also interviewed via Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing. Therefore a slightly adapted question was used for telephone interview settings.

In the experimental group, the sexual identity question was administered within the locality of other identity questions to all people aged 16 or over resident in the household. Responses were not collected by proxy or where translators were being used. The control group were administered the standard GLF survey. Box 6 shows the main findings from this trial.

¹⁵ **Developing survey questions on sexual identity - Report on the General Lifestyle (GLF) split-sample pilot (Joloza, Traynor, Haselden, 2009):** www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/sexual-identity-project/question-testing-and-implementation/developing-survey-questions-on-sexual-identity.pdf

Box 6: Findings from General Lifestyle Survey trials

“There were no measurable difference in response between the experimental arm and the control group, including: total household nonresponse; within household non-response; individual non-response and agreement to recall to future ONS surveys.”

“The sexual identity question should be placed before the question on religion, to limit the impact of ordering effects.”

“The testing of a CAPI and CATI question had been tested rigorously, and as such it was found these questions could be used on all survey formats. A detailed set of user guidance would be produced to assist those adopting the question for their own surveys.”

Source: Developing survey questions on sexual identity - Report on the General Lifestyle (GLF) split-sample pilot (Joloza, Traynor, Haselden, 2009)

The trial concluded there was strong evidence supporting the inclusion of the sexual question to the Integrated Household Survey at the earliest opportunity.

From Development to Implementation

Implementation of the Question

Following the development stage of the sexual identity project, the following question was added to the Integrated Household Survey in 2009 (Box 7 shows the question used in face to face interviews, and Box 8 shows the question used during telephone interviews).

Box 7: Face to Face question (CAPI)

ASK ALL AGED 16 OR OVER, USE CONCEALED SHOWCARD FOR RESPONSE OPTIONS

Which of the options on this card best describes how you think of yourself? Please just read out the number next to the description.

27. Heterosexual / Straight

21. Gay / Lesbian

24. Bisexual

29. Other

(Spontaneous Don't Know/Refusal)

(NUMBERS ASSIGNED FOR EACH CATEGORY CHANGE FOR EACH RESPONDENT INTERVIEWED)

Box 8: Telephone Interview question (CATI)

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.)

The question was asked to respondents aged 16 years and over and was not asked by proxy. Proxy interviews are defined as those when answers are supplied by a third part (upon receiving consent), on behalf of the household member. Respondents were excluded who did not speak English and who responded to the questionnaire through a household member acting as an interpreter. This was to maintain the confidentiality within the household and also the reliability of the data.

The Integrated Household Survey (IHS) is the largest social survey produced by ONS. The survey comprises of a core suite of questions collected on a series of ONS household surveys. In 2009, the survey interviewed around 450,000 adults in the UK, providing the biggest pool of UK social data after the census. As the IHS is a relatively new survey, it is designated as an experimental statistics. This is the title given to new official

statistics undergoing evaluation, which are published in order to involve customers and stakeholders in their development. Further information on the IHS can be found on the on the ONS website¹⁶.

Publication of results and User Guidance

Publication of User Guidance

ONS published a comprehensive set of user guidance in April 2009 (Haseldon, Joloza, 2009)¹⁷, which pulled 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.

The sexual identity question is also a UK national harmonised standard, encouraging a standardised approach to the question wording and implementation across other UK surveys. More information on the UK harmonised question standards can be found on the ONS web site¹⁸.

Measuring Sexual Identity: An Evaluation Report

The first results on Sexual Identity were published as part of a Measuring Sexual Identity Evaluation Report (Joloza, Evans, O'Brien, Potter-Collins, 2010)¹⁹.

This followed a detailed evaluation of the project, which involved ongoing dialogue with key stakeholders in the project. This report evaluates the sexual identity question after its first year on the IHS (April 2009 to March 2010). It presented the first headline estimates of people who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual in the UK, a significant milestone for the project. The report also examined the impact of introducing the question on response rates and how the results compare with other survey estimates. The report concluded with an analysis of the characteristics of those who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Headline Estimates

The IHS results for April 2009 to March 2010 showed that 1.4 per cent of the population identified as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (Table 2).

Table 2: Sexual Identity, April 2009 to March 2010 (IHS)

Population aged 16 and over		
	Thousands	Percentages
Heterosexual / Straight	46,659	94.2
Gay / Lesbian	466	0.9
Bisexual	229	0.5
Other ¹	246	0.5
Don't know / refusal	1,597	3.2
Non response ²	320	0.6

¹ Other is a valid response provided by the responder.

² ONS defines non response as no data provided to the question by an eligible responder.

Source: Measuring Sexual Identity - An Evaluation Report (Joloza, Evans, O'Brien, Potter-Collins, 2010)

¹⁶ **Integrated Household Survey – User Guidance (ONS):** www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/social-and-welfare-methodology/integrated-household-survey/index.html

¹⁷ **Measuring sexual identity - A guide for researchers (Haseldon, Joloza, 2009):** www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/sexual-identity-project/guidance/index.html

¹⁸ **UK National Harmonised Standards – (ONS):** www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/harmonisation/harmonisation-index-page/index.html

¹⁹ **Measuring Sexual Identity - An Evaluation Report (Joloza, Evans, O'Brien, Potter-Collins, 2010):** www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/sexual-identity-project/measuring-sexual-identity--an-evaluation-report.pdf

Impact on Response Rates

There was no evidence of an adverse impact on response rates. This confirmed the general acceptance of the question. Non response to the question was low with less than 4 per cent of eligible respondents refusing to answer, saying they did not know the answer or not providing a response.

Comparisons with other survey estimates

The IHS estimate was found to be broadly consistent with other comparable surveys in the UK, which suggested it provides a reliable benchmark for the size of the LGB population in the UK. The report noted there may be differences with estimates from surveys which measure other aspects of sexual orientation such as behaviour and attraction.

Table 3 shows a comparison of LGB proportions on the IHS and other UK surveys that have asked the sexual identity/orientation questions in a similar way to that of the IHS.

Table 3: Comparison of LGB estimates; surveys from within the UK

Survey	Coverage	Year	LGB (%)	Sample Size	Non response (%)
Integrated Household Survey	UK	2009/10	1.4	238,206	3.8
Citizenship Survey	England and Wales	2009/10	2.3	9,203	2.7
British Crime Survey	England and Wales	2009/10	2.2	22,995	2.7
General Lifestyle Survey	Great Britain	2008	1.1	3,443	5.4
Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey	Northern Ireland	2005	1.7	1,199	1.3
British Social Attitudes Survey	Great Britain	2005	1.4	1,732	1.4
Scottish Census Small Test	Scotland	2005	1.3	692	14.7
DTI Fair Treatment at Work Pilot Survey	Great Britain	2008	2.4	2,704	9.0

Source: *Measuring Sexual Identity - An Evaluation Report (Joloza, Evans, O'Brien, Potter-Collins, 2010)*

The estimates in the household surveys listed in Table 3 are based on surveys that have differences in sample designs, question wording, response categories, mode of administration and other aspects of survey design. There was also a difference in the age ranges to which the question was asked. For these reasons it was not surprising that the estimates differed to some degree.

The report also investigated comparisons between international estimates from US, Canadian and Norwegian surveys against those from the IHS (Table 4).

Table 4: Comparison of LGB estimates; international surveys

Survey	Country	Year	LGB (%)	Sample Size	Non response (%)
Integrated Household Survey	UK	2009/10	1.4	247,623	3.8
Norwegian Living Conditions Survey	Norway	2010	1.2	6,238	8.5
Oregon Behavioural Risk Factor Surveillance System	USA	2006	2.4	9,853	2.3
Canadian Community Health Survey	Canada	2005	2.0	132,947	1.6
California Health Interview Survey	USA	2005	4.1	12,571	1.8
North Dakota Behavioural Risk Factor Surveillance System	USA	2004	1.0	3,045	3.8
National Health and Nutritional Examination Survey	USA	2003/04	3.1	10,122	0.7
Vermont Behavioural Risk Factor Surveillance System	USA	2002	4.6	4,239	6.8

¹ The seven international surveys are primarily health surveys, while the IHS is a general, multi-purpose survey. This could be a major factor in explaining any differences the estimates.

Source: *Measuring Sexual Identity - An Evaluation Report (Joloza, Evans, O'Brien, Potter-Collins, 2010)*

As in the UK, deriving an individual's sexual orientation from a suite of questions results in higher LGB estimates in the US compared with using a single sexual identity question. The US and Canadian estimates were higher than the IHS results while the Norwegian results are similar to those from the IHS. However direct comparisons could not be made between the IHS and the others surveys from the US, Canada and Norway due to differences in methodology. It was therefore not surprising that findings were different.

Characteristics of LGB population

An initial analysis of the characteristics of those identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual shows that the LGB population have a younger age distribution than heterosexuals. Those who identified as gay or lesbian were more likely to be men whereas those who identified as bisexual were more likely to be women. Those who identify as gay or lesbian were more likely to be in managerial or professional classifications, employed and qualified to a higher degree. Similar proportions of those who identify as LGB and heterosexuals were in perceived good health although the former were more likely to smoke, or have smoked in the past.

Latest results from the Integrated Household Survey

ONS have published a series of updated figures on sexual identity, most recently in the 2012 Integrated Household Survey Bulletin²⁰. Table 5 shows that the proportion of people identifying as LGB have remained relatively stable over the last 4 years (e.g. there has not been a statistically significant change in the numbers identifying as LGB).

Table 5: LGB estimates; 2009/10 to 2012 (IHS)

Category	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012
Heterosexual / Straight	94.2	94.0	93.9	93.5
Gay / Lesbian	0.9	1.0	1.1	1.1
Bisexual	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.4
Other	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.3
Don't know / Refusal	3.2	3.6	3.6	3.6
No response	0.6	0.7	0.6	1.1

Note: In 2012 the reference period for reporting was changed from April – March, to January-December.

Ongoing User Consultation, and Future Plans

Since the implementation of the sexual identity question on the IHS, ONS have maintained ongoing dialogue with users regarding the collection and production of sexual identity estimates.

As well as receiving positive feedback from users for this project, some users also expressed concerns regarding the size of the ONS estimate of the LGB population, with some users feeling the actual size of the LGB population is larger than the ONS figures. Whilst the ONS figure provides a robust estimate of sexual identity, some reasons for differences with some users expectations could include:

- The question measures self perceived sexually identity in the home environment. Sexual orientation includes dimensions of attraction and behaviour as well as identity. We know from research, not all those who are attracted to people of the same sex or engage in same sex behaviour, identify themselves as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual.
- Some respondents will not be 'out', both generally and in the household environment and this may affect how they answer the question.
- Some respondents may be undecided and will not know how to answer the question.

²⁰ **Key Findings from the Integrated Household Survey: January 2012 to December 2012 (ONS, 2013):**

www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/integrated-household-survey/integrated-household-survey/january-to-december-2012/stb-integrated-household-survey-january-to-december-2012.html

ONS also launched a consultation in 2013²¹ looking at the frequency of sexual identity estimates, and found a strong public and government support for the continued annual collection on this information.

Therefore, ONS plans to conduct a review of the sexual identity results in late 2014 / early 2015, to ensure our methodology is still meeting the initial aims of this project. ONS also plans to publish a “Measuring Sexual Identity – 5 years on” report in 2015 which will review the existing methodology, and highlight some opportunities for pooling results across survey years to allow a more detailed analysis of sexual identity in the UK.

Information about the author

Tim Vizard is the survey manager of the Integrated Household Survey, and is responsible for the questionnaire development, survey delivery and the annual publication of results from the survey. The Integrated Household Survey is used to collect sexual identity information in the UK.

Information about the Office for National Statistics

The Office for National Statistics is the UK’s largest independent producer of official statistics and is the recognised national statistical institute for the UK. It is responsible for collecting and publishing statistics related to the economy, population and society at national, regional and local levels. It also conducts the census in England and Wales every ten years. ONS plays a leading role in national and international good practice in the production of official statistics. It is the executive office of the UK Statistics Authority and although they are separate, they are still closely related.

For more information about ONS, visit: www.ons.gov.uk.

²¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/get-involved/consultations/consultations/integrated-household-survey-questionnaire-content-review---2014/index.html>