

Developing survey questions on sexual identity: Report on the General Lifestyle (GLF) split –sample pilot

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1 Background

This report describes findings from the General Lifestyle Surveys (GLF) split sample quantitative trial, in which final stage testing of a proposed question on sexual identity was conducted between April and September 2008.

This report builds on the qualitative and quantitative work conducted by the ONS Sexual Identity Project with regard to the development of a question on sexual identity for use in general purpose household surveys. This body of research includes:

Information reviews

- Review of the literature
- Review of the legal framework
- Reviews of UK and International Surveys

Quantitative research

- Sexual Identity Project Reports on National Statistics Omnibus Trials 1-4
- Report on Proxy Response for the Sexual Identity Project
- Report on the General Lifestyle (GLF) split -sample pilot trial

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

The aims of the GLF split sample trial are as follows:

- To gauge what effect, if any, the addition of a question on sexual identity would have on survey response rates and attrition.
- To pilot the method of administration of a question on sexual identity in a concurrent environment. Four previous quantitative trials on sexual identity questioning were conducted on the ONS Omnibus Survey with only one member of the household interviewed. Most ONS general purpose household surveys, including the GLF, are conducted with all adult members of the household in a concurrent interviewing environment.
- To gauge any order effects by placing the question on sexual identity before the question on religion in the first three months and after religion in the final three months.

Estimates of the Lesbian Gay and Bisexual (LGB) population

The results in this report should not be taken as estimates of the LGB population in the UK. ONS is conducting ongoing development work to provide reliable estimates of the proportion of the population who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. The results published in this report form part of this development process. They are responses to the specific question that was tested on the General Lifestyle Survey and cannot be interpreted as official estimates of the LGB community. On completion of the development work, a question on sexual

identity has been added to the Integrated Household Survey (IHS). First estimates from the IHS will be released as 'experimental' statistics and, subject to evaluation for reliability and robustness, released as official statistics in December 2010.

Sampling error

Since the data in this report were obtained from a sample of the population, they are subject to sampling error. The GLF survey has a multi-stage sample design, and this has been taken into account when identifying statistically significant differences in the report. An estimated design effect of 1.2 was used to calculate sampling errors. Any differences mentioned in the report are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, unless otherwise stated.

2 Method

The National Statistics 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 is administered to all adult members of the household using CAPI¹ concurrent interviewing and operates as a panel survey, re-interviewing respondents over four annual waves. For the sexual identity question trial, the sample was split in two halves. One half comprised even numbered addresses in the sample file and formed the control arm of the experiment where the sexual identity question was not asked. All odd numbered addresses formed the experimental arm of the trial and all adults in eligible addresses were asked the question. To guarantee privacy and confidentiality the question was not asked by proxy. To this effect, all interviews by proxy and involving respondents under 16 were removed from the control group to ensure that like was compared with like.

In all, there were two experiments underway. The first one was to test whether asking a question on sexual identity would have an impact on household response or individual response to the survey. The second one was to test whether placement of the sexual identity question would lead to any order effects that may impact on other equality information being collected about individuals.

The split sample experiment enables comparisons to be made in relation to overall household response and agreement to recall differences as a proxy measure of likely attrition rates. A true measure of sample attrition rates would have required a longitudinal comparison of response rates over a two year period which was prohibitively long.

In total, 4,386 households were eligible to take part in the trial. Of these, 2,223 households were in the experimental arm (sexual identity question asked) while 2,163 were in the control group (sexual identity question not asked). This resulted in each group having 3,663 and 3,634 individuals eligible for the trial

¹ Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI)

respectively. The total sample size of 7,297 was calculated to be sufficient size to give an 80% probability of a significant difference of $\pm 2.5\%$ or more in response rates to be detected at the 95% confidence level. The sexual identity question was placed within the suite of identity questions (ethnicity, religion, national identity) included in the GLF and asked in all waves. In the first three months of the trial, the sexual identity question was placed before the question on religion, and in the second three months after religion. This was done in order to gauge any order effect on both the sexual identity and the religion question.

In the experimental group, the sexual identity question was administered to all people aged 16 or over resident in the household. Responses were not collected by proxy or where translators were being used. Previous research (focus groups in particular) had shown that proxy data collection was not recommended on the grounds of acceptability and accuracy.

The question was designed to be administered using a concealed show card form of administration for face to face interviews.

Box 1: Face to Face question (CAPI)

ASK ALL AGED 16 OR OVER

[NAME] SHOWCARD 1, [NAME] SHOWCARD 2, [NAME] SHOWCARD 3 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.**

[Blaise table P1, P2, P3 etc.]*

27. Heterosexual / Straight

21. Gay / Lesbian

24. Bisexual

29. Other

(Spontaneous Don't Know/Refusal)

Blaise is the preferred CAPI programme for the ONS

Spontaneous 'don't know' answers and refusals were recorded by the interviewer using special key strokes on the laptop, which is the normal procedure for most ONS general purpose household surveys.

The question administered in the telephone unit varied from that used in face-to face interviewing since they use CATI² which precludes the use of showcards as it is not possible to use them when interviewing over the telephone. Instead, a different design was used which maintained privacy, even if the interviewee was in the presence of other people during the interview. The question design is shown in the box below.

Box 2: Telephone unit 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.)

² Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing

The characteristics of respondents in each arm of the experiment are presented in Table 1. As the sexual identity question was not asked by proxy, proxies have been eliminated from the base samples of both arms. Those aged less than sixteen are also excluded.

Table 1 Demographic profile for each arm of the experiment

		Arms of the experiment		Total
		(Experimental)	(Control)	
Sex	Male	45.5	45.3	45.4
	Female	54.5	54.7	54.6
Age	16 to 24	8.3	9.8	9.0
	25 to 44	30.5	30.7	30.6
	45 to 64	35.9	34.3	35.1
	65 to 74	14.7	14.1	14.4
	75 Plus	10.6	11.0	10.8
	Base	3663	3634	7297
Region	North East	4.4	4.0	4.2
	North West	11.7	12.4	12.1
	Yorks and Humber	8.7	8.1	8.4
	East Midlands	8.2	8.2	8.2
	West Midlands	9.0	8.6	8.8
	Eastern	10.4	10.9	10.6
	London	9.2	8.1	8.6
	South East	14.4	15.4	14.9
	South West	9.1	8.6	8.8
	Wales	5.2	5.6	5.4
	Scotland	9.7	10.1	9.9
	Base	3663	3634	7297
Religion	Christian	79.1	77.2	78.2
	Other	4.6	4.2	4.4
	No religion	16.3	18.6	17.4
	Base	3663	3634	7297
Ethnicity	White	94.1	95.2	94.7
	Non-White	5.9	4.8	5.3
	Base	3663	3634	7297

There were no statistically significant differences in the sample profile between the experimental and the control arms. Table 1 clearly indicates that the demographic profile of the two arms was sufficiently similar to enable like for like comparison of observed response rate differences between arms.

As part of the trial, interviewers were asked to comment on their experiences in administering the question on the GLF survey. These comments were used to gauge the interviewers' acceptance of the question and their perception of respondents' views of the question. This is discussed separately in Section 3.4 of this report.

3 Response Rates

3.1 Household response rates

The major measure of response to general purpose household surveys is the overall response rate. A legitimate trial would require overall household response rates to be the same or similar across both arms of the trial. Overall household response rates show the percentage of people agreeing to take part in the survey as a proportion of the sample of households drawn. Households who did not take part in the survey, either because they could not be contacted or because no household member would take part in it, are non-responding households which count against the overall response rates. Since households are unaware of whether the question on sexual identity is to be included at the time of agreeing to take part in the interview, response rates should be the same across both arms of the trial. Table 2 shows that this is indeed true

Table 2 Overall household response rates GLF trial

Household response rates GLF trial	Response rate %	Non-response rates %	Base count
Experimental Arm (sexual identity question included)	96.7	3.3	2223
Control Arm (sexual identity question omitted)	96.8	3.2	2163
Total response (both arms)	96.8**	3.3	4386

**These response rates appear higher than expected as they represent only those households eligible for the trial. Not to be taken as overall response rate on GLF

Once respondents under 16 years old and proxy responders had been removed from the sample. The overall response to the GLF trial was 96.8%. This is higher than the typical response rates for ONS household surveys. Variation between the experimental and the control arm was not statistically significant (0.2%). The addition of a sexual identity question the GLF does not appear to have had any impact on overall household response rates.

However, once a household has agreed to take part in a survey, the inclusion of sexual identity questioning may impact on whether that household is a fully or partially responding household. This can happen in one of two ways:

1. Individual effect– individuals within the household may decide that they do not wish to continue with the interview after they have been asked the question. If there is an individual effect, the proportion of people who start the interview but do not complete it will be different in the two arms

2. Household effect - individuals within a household may decide not to start their interview once they have heard another member of their household being asked the sexual identity question. If there is a household effect, the proportion of households where one or more individuals eligible for the survey did not start the interview at all will be different between the two arms.

Table 3 shows the individual effect. That is the proportion of individuals from responding households who completed a full interview as well the proportions who only partially completed an interview and those who did not take part at all. There is no significant difference for any of these groups. Nine respondents (0.2%) in the experimental group and 3 respondents in the control group (0.1%) gave partial interviews out of 7,297 individual records (once proxy responses – which are also coded as ‘partial interviews’ - were eliminated). Although the information provided cannot explain why these respondents dropped out, we can surmise that the inclusion of a sexual identity question did not affect this as there is no significant difference between the experimental and control arms of the experiment.

Table 3 Overall individual response rates GLF trial

		Arm Arms of the experiment		Total
		(Experimental) Sexual identity question asked	(Control) Sexual identity question not asked	
Individual interview outcome	1 Full interview	99.8	99.9	99.8
	2 Partial interview	0.2	0.1	0.2
	3 No interview age below 16	0.0	0.0	0.0
	4 No interview ineligible	0.0	0.0	0.0
	5 Refusal	0.0	0.0	0.0
	6 Non contact	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total		3663	3634	7297

Table 4 shows the household effect. There is no significant difference between the proportion of people who took part or declined to take part in the survey on both the experiment and control groups of the experiment. Although it is not possible to explain why individuals dropped out, the lack of significant difference between the two groups suggests that the inclusion of a sexual identity question did not play a key role in decisions not to take part in the survey.

Table 4 Type of household response (responding households)

Table 4	Arms of the experiment		Total
	(Experimental) Sexual identity question asked	(Control) Sexual identity question not asked	
110 Complete Interview by required respondent(s)	81.6	82.5	82.1
120 At least 1 converted proxy case	3.1	3.4	3.3
Total complete household interviews	84.7	85.9	85.3
212 Household interview but non-contact with one or more respondents	0.7	0.7	0.7
213 Household interview but either refusal or incomplete interview by one or more respondents. All respondents contacted.	1.3	1.5	1.4
220 Partial Interview: partly by required respondent and partly by proxy	.0.0	0.1	0.1
223 Household interview but refusal with one or more respondents and proxy for one or more respondents	0.2	0.0	0.1
224 Household interview and interviews by all required respondents, including at least one proxy	13.0	11.8	12.4
Total Partial Interviews	18.1	14.1	16.1
<i>Base</i>	2223	2163	4386

3.2 Agreement to recall rates

Longitudinal surveys like the GLF experience two forms of non response: non-participation to a single wave and non participation to subsequent waves of the survey. In this report we have used the term non-response to refer to the former. The latter is termed attrition and can be considered in addition to non-response. Although attrition on the GLF could only be fully measured by measuring individual response rates in subsequent interviews, comparing the proportion of respondents agreeing to be recalled (or re-contacted) in subsequent waves in each arm of the experiment is likely to be a reasonable proxy for this. Table 5 indicates individual agreement to recall on the GLF trial between the two arms of the experiment.

Table 5 Agreement to recall

Table 5 Individual Agreement to Recall	Agree to recall %	Base count
Experimental Arm (sexual identity question included)	96.4	2863
Control Arm (sexual identity question omitted)	96.7	2779
Total response (both arms)	96.6	5843*

*Excludes all wave 4 cases as they are not interviewed in the following year

As Table 5 shows, the agreement to recall rate was uniformly high across both arms of the experiment. Table 5 shows that the addition of a question would not have a significant impact upon panel attrition.

3.3 Item non-response (experimental arm only)

In any survey, individual responders are able to refuse some questions either because they do not wish to answer the questions or because they are unable to formulate a response. As a result, response rates to individual questions' vary; and are termed item non-response. Table 6 shows both response and non response rates for the sexual identity question.

Table 6. Item non-response rates (experimental arm)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Heterosexual or straight	3201	93.0	98.3	98.3
	Gay or lesbian	28	0.8	0.9	99.1
	Bisexual	11	0.3	0.3	99.4
	Other	18	0.5	0.6	100.0
	Total	3258	94.6	100.0	
Missing	Refusal	136	4.0		
	Don't know	49	1.4		
	Total item non response	185	5.4		
Total		3443*	100.0		

*This excludes 220 cases where data was corrupted or where the question was not administered as directed

The total item non response to the sexual identity question in the GLF trial was 5.4%. This was made up of 4.0% of respondents refusing the question and 1.4% recorded as unable to answer the question. This was significantly higher than in the previous trial (Omnibus trial 4, non-response 1.0% (base=3,249)) where the same question had been asked and administered in the same fashion, but to only one adult in the household.

Although the administration of the question on both surveys used concealed showcards, the trial also investigated whether the difference between interviewing a sole household member versus interviewing several household members together may have led to higher rates of item non response in the GLF.

Table 7 shows response rates to the sexual identity question where one or more than one adult household member was asked the sexual identity question.

Table 7: Item non-response by number of adults asked the sexual identity question

Response to sexual identity	Number of adults asked sexual identity in each household				Total
	1	2	3	4 or More	
Heterosexual or straight	90.4	93.8	95.7	90.4	93.0
Gay or lesbian	1.7	0.6	0.0	0.6	0.8
Bisexual	0.6	0.2	0.5	0.0	0.3
Other	0.9	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.5
Don't know	2.2	1.0	0.0	5.6	1.4
Refusal	4.3	4.0	3.3	2.8	4.0
Total item non-response rate	6.5	5.0	3.3	8.4	5.8
<i>Base</i>	903	1966	396	178	3443*

*This excludes cases where data was corrupted or where the question was not administered as directed

The total item non response for households in which one person was asked the sexual identity question was 6.5% (table 7). Again this is significantly higher than the Omnibus trial four (1.0%). In both instances the question was administered to one person in the household, using the same question and mode of administration. Furthermore, no difference in item non-response was found between households where only one person had been asked the sexual identity question and those where two or more people had been asked the question (6.5%, 5.0%, 3.3% and 8.4% respectively). In fact, the lowest item non response was recorded where three people had been asked the sexual identity question in the same household (3.3%). This indicates that the move to the concurrent interviewing environment is unlikely to have been responsible for the rise in item non response between the previous trial on the Omnibus survey (trial four) and the GLF trial reported here.

In total, there were 240 interviewers who took part in the GLF trial. Wide variations in item non-response rates were noted between interviewers. Of the 240 interviewers who took part in the trial, 175 did not report a single respondent refusing to answer the sexual identity question. This means that 73% of interviewers had no item non response at all. This reflects that a very good proportion of interviewers had no problems administering the question.

To investigate this further we looked at the decile spread of item-non response rates among interviewers ranked from most item non response to least item non response (Table 8). Of the total item non-response (5.4%) the first decile of interviewers accounted for 48 per cent of the total item non- response (n=269). Their average item non-response rates were also very high (55 per cent) – in other words, on average just over half their caseload was coded as a 'refusal'. The first and second decile combined accounted for 86% of all item non response. There is a highly skewed distribution of interviewer specific item non response rates. This not that surprising given that the average number of item non-response per interviewer is 0.8.

Table 8 Proportion of total non-response, item non response and no none response by interviewer characteristics

	No of interviewers (interview caseload)	Average item non-response rate per interviewer (%)	Proportion of total item non-response (%)
1st decile of Interviewers*	n=24 (269)	48	55
1st two deciles of Interviewers	n=48 (716)	31	86
Interviewers with no item non response	n=175 (2259)	0	0
Total interviewers	N=240 (3443)**	3.4	

*interviewers ordered from most item non response to least

**This excludes cases where data was corrupted or where the question was not administered as directed

There are several reasons that could have led to the 27% of the interviewers to incur some item non response. Research shows that refusal is strongly related to respondent's characteristics like educational qualifications, socio-economic status and also attitude variables, such as the perception of self rather than purely factual variables like accommodation characteristics (Durrant 2006). Further analysis of item non response suggested that regional factors, rather than the cross-level interaction between the interviewer and the respondent could have contributed more to overall item non response. For example, Table 9 indicates that interviewers in West Midlands were twice as likely, to incur item non response than were those operating in Eastern England. There was no statistical evidence to suggest interviewer effects alone, were to blame for the high item non response incurred by a minority of the interviewers involved in the trial.

Table 9 Regional factors

Region	Total number of interviewers in Region	Total number of interviewers with no item non response	Percentage of interviewers in region without item non response
Eastern	27	20	74
North East	10	7	70
South West	24	15	63
East Midlands	26	15	58
Wales	11	6	55
North West	27	14	52
London	31	16	52
Scotland	20	10	50
Yorks and Humber	22	9	41
West Midlands	20	7	35
South East	57	20	35
Total by Region	275*	139	

* This number is higher than actual total number of interviewers due to some interviewers working across regions

3.4 Interviewer comments

There were 136 respondents who 'refused' to answer the question. Of these 92 were in the first three months when the sexual identity question was asked before the religion and 44 were in the last three months when the religion question was asked first. Reasons for refusal were given only in 43 out of 136 cases and these ranged from respondents not understanding the question to embarrassment on both the part of the interviewer and respondent. One respondent commented,
"Surprised that it was allowed".

In some cases the comments did not match the refusal outcome. Examples include,
"no problems as we were alone", "amusement", "no problem", and "good"

Yet the respondents for whom these comments were made had refused the sexual identity question.

A total of 49 'Don't Knows' were also recorded but only 10 reasons were given. On 7 cases, the interviewer said all was 'OK', 1 had technical problems and data was lost and the remaining 2 were due to interviewers not happy to ask the question,

"I didn't feel comfortable asking the question to a person I have never met, so I didn't ask it"

The comments also showed that the interviewers were uncomfortable asking the question in some cases, mainly due to not understanding why data is required on this equality strand,

"I feel I worry more about this question than the public, I hate to ask certain people and wish I wasn't put in a position of having to ask it! Please get rid of it, is it any of our business!"

Although the interviewer in this case had these concerns, their performance in terms of converting item non response was good with only 3.7% item non response for the sexual identity question.

Some interviewers commented that it would be difficult to ask religious people this question. However, none of the interviewers who made such comments actually recorded a refusal even in instances where the respondents had declared being religious.

Overall, most interviewers recorded that there were no problems in the administration of the question. As with the Omnibus trial, the majority of interviewers stated "OK or no problem with the showcard". This actually reflected the spread of item non response when all interviewers were considered. Some interviewers suggested that the showcards should have a blank cover to ensure privacy particularly in a setting where there is more than one person in the household. As the question becomes more familiar and with the continuing

training available to interviewers the proportion of item non response to the sexual identity question is likely to be reduced.

4 Order effects

The order of the sexual identity and the religion question was switched half-way through the trial to test for order effects; in the first three months sexual identity was asked before the question on religion, and in the subsequent three months after religion. Table 10 and 11 compare sexual identity and religion distributions between April and June (before religion) with July and September (after religion).

Table 10 Comparison of non response by sexual identity question placement

Sexual identity	Month		Total
	Sexual identity before religion (April to June)	Sexual identity after religion (July to September)	
<i>Heterosexual or straight</i>	91.4	94.5	93.0
<i>Gay or lesbian</i>	1.0	0.7	0.8
<i>Bisexual</i>	0.4	0.2	0.3
<i>Other</i>	0.4	0.7	0.5
<i>Don't know</i>	1.4	1.4	1.4
<i>Refusal</i>	5.5	2.5	4.0
<i>Base</i>	1680	1763	3443

*This excludes cases where data was corrupted or where the question was not administered as directed

Table 11 Item non response by religion by sexual identity question placement

Religion	Month		Total
	Sexual identity before religion (April to June)	Sexual identity after religion (July to September)	
<i>Christian</i>	79.6	78.8	79.2
<i>Buddhist</i>	0.5	0.3	0.4
<i>Hindu</i>	0.9	1.1	1.0
<i>Jewish</i>	0.4	0.6	0.5
<i>Muslim</i>	1.1	2.1	1.6
<i>Sikh</i>	0.5	0.1	0.3
<i>Any other religion</i>	0.7	1.1	0.9
<i>No religion at all</i>	16.4	15.7	16.1
<i>Don't know</i>	0.1	0.1	0.0
<i>Refusal</i>	0.1	0.1	0.1
<i>Base</i>	1679	1763	3442

*This excludes cases where data was corrupted or where the question was not administered as directed

The proportion reporting Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual identities was 1.4 percent in the first three months compared with 0.9% in the last three months (Table 10). The latter estimates (after religion) are much lower than expected when compared to estimates from other national and international studies. On the

other hand, the proportion of respondents reporting to be heterosexual is significantly higher when the sexual identity question is asked after religion.

This suggests that there are potential order effects when the religion question is placed after the sexual orientation question. Our recommendation would therefore be to place sexual identity before the question on religion.

No statistically significant differences were observed in the response to the question on religion, which appears to have remained unaffected apart from the proportion of respondents reporting to be Muslim which appears to double in the last three months of the trial (Table 11). This is due to more multiple households with adults reporting to be Muslim having been included in the last three months of the trial. This also applied to households reporting to be Sikh.

5 Other findings

5.1 Item non response by respondent characteristics

5.1.1 Response by Age

The older the respondent, the more likely the sexual identity question was going to be refused during the trial. Table 12 indicates that age did make a large impact on whether the question was going to be refused for respondents aged between 25 and 65. However, item non response increased within the age groups, 65 to 74 and those aged 75 and above. These were not statistically significant increases. It is clear that some interviewers were uncomfortable asking the question of the elderly,

“do elderly people really have to have these questions that they are likely to find offensive” -Interviewer

Table 12 Item non response by age of adults asked the sexual identity question

Response to sexual identity question	Banded age						Total
	16 - 24	25 -44	45 - 64	65 - 74	75 Plus		
Refusal	2.8	3.2	3.2	5.8	6.5	4.0	
Don't know	2.1	1.2	1.3	1.5	1.6	1.4	
Heterosexual or straight	93.6	93.8	93.8	91.1	90.1	93.0	
Gay or lesbian	0.0	1.0	1.1	0.6	0.3	0.8	
Bisexual	1.1	0.4	0.1	0.2	0.5	0.3	
Other	0.4	0.3	0.5	0.8	1.0	0.5	
Base	282	1052	1207	519	383	3443	

5.1.2 Item response by Ethnicity

Item non response by Ethnicity indicated that overall, those who reported being white registered a lower item non response rate compared to non white respondents. The highest item non response for the sexual identity question was observed among those reporting Chinese ethnicity followed by those reporting to be Black or Black British then those from a mixed ethnicity background Table 13.

Table 13 Total item non response by ethnicity of adults asked the sexual identity question

Response to sexual identity	White	Mixed	Asian or Asian British	Black or Black British	Chinese	Other	Don't Know	Total
Refusal	3.8	12.5	6.3	4.2	20.0	0.0	100	4.0
Don't know	1.2	0.0	3.6	12.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.4
Heterosexual or straight	93.4	87.5	88.3	83.3	80.0	89.5	0.0	93.0
Gay or lesbian	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	0.8
Bisexual	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	0.3
Other	0.5	0.0	1.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5
Base = 100	3242	16	111	48	5	19	1	3442*

*Denotes that system missing case is excluded

Placing the sexual identity question before the religion question appears to have an effect on the proportion of item non response of respondents from a black or black British background. Tables 14 and 15 indicates that in the first three months of the GLF trial, there was no item non response for those from black ethnic background but this increased significantly to 25.9% in the final three months of the trial (This interpretation should be used with caution as the bases were rather small).

In addition, the proportion of respondents reporting to be heterosexual increased when sexual identity was asked after the religion question. The increase is mainly in those who have said they are religious.

This appears to suggest a clash between the respondent's sexual identity and their religious identity. That is respondents being unwilling to report a sexual identity that would be in conflict with the expectations and morals of the religious identity they had declared earlier.

Table 14 Item non response by ethnicity when the sexual identity question asked before religion

	Ethnicity	White	Mixed	Asian or Asian British	Black or Black British	Chinese or	Other ethnic group?	Don't Know	Total
Sexual id before religion	Heterosexual or straight	91.7	80.0	81.0	100.0	100.0	13.0		91.4
	Gay or lesbian	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0		1.0
	Bisexual	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0		0.4
	Other	0.3	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.0	0.0		0.4
	Refusal	5.3	20.0	12.1	0.0	0.0	0.0		5.5
	Don't know	1.3	0.0	5.2	0.0	0.0	0.0		1.4
	Base =100%	1575	10	58	17	4	15		1679

Table 15 Item non response by ethnicity when the sexual identity question asked after religion

	Ethnicity	White	Mixed	Asian or Asian British	Black or Black British	Chinese or	Other ethnic group?	Don't Know	Total
Sexual id after religion	Heterosexual or straight	94.9	100.0	96.2	74.2	0.0	100.0	0.0	94.5
	Gay or lesbian	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.7
	Bisexual	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2
	Other	0.7	0.0	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.7
	Refusal	2.4	0.0	0.0	6.5	100.0	0.0	100.0	2.5
	Don't know	1.1	0.0	1.9	19.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.4
	Base =100%	1667	6	53	31	1	4	1	1763

5.1.3 Non response by Gender

In terms of gender, men were equally likely to answer the question on sexual identity as women. Table 16 shows that the responses to the sexual identity question for males are similar to those of females. The proportion of item non response for male respondents to the question was 5.3% while that of women was slightly higher at 5.5%. This is not a statistically significant difference indicating that the question is suitable to be administered to all respondents regardless of their sex.

Table 16 Item non response by sex of respondent asked the sexual identity question

		Male	Female	Total
Response to Sexual identity question	Heterosexual or straight	92.9	93.0	93.0
	Gay or lesbian	1.1	0.6	0.8
	Bisexual	0.1	0.5	0.3
	Other	0.6	0.4	0.5
	Refusal	4.0	3.9	4.0
	Don't know	1.3	1.6	1.4
	Base =100%	1583	1860	3443

5.1.4 Non Response by Marital Status

Table 17 shows that when analysed by marital status, no item non response was observed in those reporting to be in a civil partnership. The highest item non response was observed in those reporting to be legally married but separated from their spouse followed by those reporting to be widowed, single, divorced and married respectively. It was not possible to use the available data to gauge why those on separation were the most likely to refuse the question.

Table 17 Item non response by the marital status of the respondent

		Single	Married	Married but Separated	Divorced,	Widowed	Civil Partnership	Total
Sexual identity	Heterosexual or straight	90.9	94.5	90.5	91.7	92.4	0.0	93.0
	Gay or lesbian	1.8	0.1	0.0	1.0	0.0	100.0	0.8
	Bisexual	0.6	0.2	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.3
	Other	0.4	0.4	1.6	1.0	1.0	0.0	0.5
	Refusal	4.5	3.6	3.2	3.8	5.5	0.0	4.0
	Don't know	1.8	1.2	4.8	1.7	1.0	0.0	1.4
	Base = 100%	778	2016	63	288	289	9	3443

5.1.5 Non response by qualification and Socio Economic Status

Respondents reporting to have a degree qualification had a lower item non response rate and a higher proportion reporting to be LGB when compared to those who did not report having a degree. This reflects the most item non response results on ONS surveys where responders are likely to be those who are well educated and belong to the higher socio economic classification (Durrant, 2006). The proportion of item non response was lowest in those in managerial and professional occupations followed by those in intermediate occupations while those in routine and manual occupations had the highest proportion of item non response. Those who had never been employed or were long term unemployed also had a higher proportion of item non response when compared to those in non classified occupations.

5.1.6 Non response by number of children still in household.

When the sexual identity question was asked in households, respondents in households with 5 children under the age of 18 were the most likely to say they did not know which option to choose from the showcard. This accounted for this category of respondents having the highest item non response. However, in terms of overall item non response, having children in the household was not in itself a major factor. Those with no children under 18 years old in the household were equally likely not to answer the question. Table 18 shows that respondents who had no children are equally as likely not to have lower item non response when asked the sexual identity question as those with children in the household. This indicates that the question is suitable to be asked to both respondents with children and those without.

Table 18 Item non response by number of children aged under 18 in respondents household

	Number of children aged 18 or under							Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Heterosexual or straight	92.3	91.4	96.0	97.1	100.0	91.7	100.0	93.0
Gay or lesbian	1.0	0.8	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8
Bisexual	0.3	0.6	0.2	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
Other	0.6	0.6	0.2	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5
Refusal	4.6	2.8	3.1	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.0
Don't know	1.2	3.8	0.4	0.0	0.0	8.3	0.0	1.4
Base =100%	2280	498	453	171	27	12	2	3443

6 Comparison with non response of other equality questions on General Lifestyle Survey

Asking questions like ethnicity, religion and national identity is considered too sensitive in some countries such that they are not included in household surveys. We can therefore consider these to be equally sensitive questions in the UK and have compared their proportion of item non response on the GLF to that of the sexual identity question.

Table 19 shows that a higher proportion of respondents did not answer the sexual identity question (5.4 per cent) compared to other equality measures (range 0.0 to 0.10 per cent). This can be attributed to several factors including respondents being much more reluctant to answer the question on sexual identity and interviewers finding the sexual identity question more sensitive than the other equality questions. We can also not rule out the fact that being a new question some interviewers may be reluctant to ask the question as they consider it to be too intrusive. It may be a good idea at some point in the future, when the question has bedded in on the IHS, to replicate this analysis to check whether familiarity with the question could lead to lower item refusal rates.

Table 19 Comparison of Sex Id question item non response with that of other equality questions

Responses to question	Ethnicity	National identity	Limiting long standing illness	Religion	Sexual identity
Number of responses	99.97	99.97	100	99.9	94.6
item non-response	0.03	0.03	0	0.1	5.4
<i>Base=100%</i>	<i>3432*</i>	<i>3442*</i>	<i>3433</i>	<i>3442*</i>	<i>3443</i>

* Denotes 1 system missing case in base

7 **Recommendations**

Recommendations based on the evidence from the first four months of the GLF trial are as follows:

- Since there has been no measurable difference in response between the experimental arm and the control group, including: total household non-response; within household non-response; individual non-response and agreement to recall, the evidence supports the argument for adding a sexual identity question to ONS household surveys at the earliest opportunity.
- With respect to the location of the question, the evidence supports its inclusion before religion. This has been based on the trial finding where we placed the question on sexual identity before the question on religion in the first three months and after religion in the final three months. The trial findings indicate question order effects impacting on the location of the sexual identity question within the 'identity' suite of questions.
- Differences in item non-response between the GLF pilot and previous trials indicate that this is concentrated within a small group interviewers (who perhaps have concerns about asking the question) rather than as a result of the move to a concurrent interviewing environment. It is recommended that overall and interviewer level item non-response be monitored regularly and appropriate training or support provided where necessary.
- To alleviate interviewer concerns over privacy, ensure that when administering the question face to face a blank cover for the showcards is provided in all surveys asking this question.
- The testing of the question has been rigorous and robust and as such it can be used on all survey formats. Those adopting the question for self completion whether online or postal self completion the version below should be used.

Box 3: Self completion version

ANSWER IF AGED 16 OR OVER

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

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
5. Prefer not to say

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