

Developing survey questions on sexual identity:

Preliminary report on National Statistics GLF split sample trial

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1 Background

This preliminary report describes the findings of data gathered from the first four months of the GLF split sample quantitative trial in which final stage testing of a proposed question on sexual identity was conducted between April and September 2008. The report was written to inform ONS of any decision to include a question on sexual identity into the component surveys which make up the Integrated Household Survey (IHS) from January 2009. A final report using all six months data from the trial is to be published early in 2009.

The report builds on the qualitative and quantitative work already carried out by the ONS Sexual Identity Project with regard to the development of a question on sexual identity for use in general purpose household surveys. The body of research published by the Sexual Identity Project so far includes¹:

- Review of the legal framework
- Reviews of UK and International Surveys
- Four staged Omnibus survey trials
- Focus groups with members of the public.

Further publications will be produced in early 2009 including:

- A report on cognitive and in depth interviews with members of the public
- A report on the effect of not asking the question by proxy

The aims of the preliminary report 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 assess a concealed showcard method of administering a question on sexual identity in a concurrent environment. The previous quantitative trials were conducted on the ONS Omnibus Survey in which only one member of the household is interviewed. However, most ONS general purpose household surveys, including the IHS, are conducted with all adult members of the household in a concurrent interviewing environment.

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.

Any differences mentioned in the report are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, unless otherwise stated. For comparison, an estimated design effect of 1.2 was used.

¹ All publications can be found on the ONS sexual identity web pages at: www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/index.html

Estimates of the LGB population in Great Britain

The 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 and cannot be interpreted as official estimates of the LGB community. Once the development work is complete, it is intended that the question on sexual identity will be 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

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 CAPI² concurrent interviewing and operates as a panel survey re-interviewing respondents over four annual waves. The split sample experiment enables comparisons to be made in relation to overall household non-response rates, unit (or individual) response rates, 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.

The 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.

Box1: 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 DK/Refusal)

² Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI)

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 the telephone unit precludes the use of showcards. The design is intended to maintain privacy if the respondent is being interviewed in the presence of other people (whether or not they are also being interviewed on the survey).

Box 2: Telephone unit question

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 DK/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 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)	
		Sexual identity question asked	Sexual identity question not asked	
Sex	Male	46.0	46.0	46.0
	Female	54.0	54.0	54.0
Age	16 to 24	8.4*	12.2*	10.3
	25 to 44	31.5	30.8	31.2
	45 to 64	35.6	33.7	34.6
	65 to 74	14.0	12.8	13.4
	75 Plus	10.5	10.5	10.5
	Base	2531	2594	5125
Region	North East	4.8	3.7	4.2
	North West	12.3	12.9	12.6
	Yorks and Humber	8.8	8.7	8.8
	East Midlands	7.9	8.5	8.2
	West Midlands	7.9	7.6	7.8
	Eastern	11.4	11.1	11.3
	London	8.5	8.0	8.2
	South East	13.9	15.6	14.8
	South West	10.2	9.5	9.8
	Wales	5.0	5.3	5.1
	Scotland	9.2	9.3	9.2
Base	2530	2590	5120	
Religion	Christian	79.6*	76.3*	77.9
	Other	3.7	4.1	3.9
	No religion	16.8*	19.6*	18.2
	Base	2493	2541	5034
Ethnicity	White	94.7*	96.0*	95.3
	Non-White	5.3*	4.0*	4.7
	Base	2495	2544	5039

*statistically significant differences

There were some statistically significant differences in the sample profile between the experimental and the control arms. The experimental arm had slightly higher proportions of people who were younger, non-white, Christian or of no religion. Nonetheless Table 1 clearly indicates that the demographic profile of the two arms was sufficiently similar to allow comparisons of difference in response rates between the groups as a whole.

3 Response Rates

3.1 Household response rates

The major measure of response to general purpose household surveys is the overall response rate which indicates the proportion of households agreeing to take part in the survey compared with the sample of households drawn, that is households who did not take any part in the survey either because they could not be contacted or because no household member would take part in the survey. Adding a question on sexual identity should have no effect on overall household non-response rates since households are unaware at the time of agreeing to take part whether such a question is asked. This expectation is confirmed by Table 2 which indicates household response and non-response rates across both arms of the experiment.

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)	68.4	31.6	2123
Control Arm (sexual identity question omitted)	68.6	31.4	2124
Total response (both arms)	68.5	31.5	4247

Overall response to the GLF trial was 68.5% which is considered typical of ONS household surveys at this point in time. Variation between the experimental and the control arm was not statistically significant (0.2%). As expected 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. In order to check this, we need to see whether the proportion of individuals who start the interview but do not complete it is different between 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. In order to check this, we need to look at the proportion of households where one or more individual has not started being interviewed.

Table 3 shows the individual effect. Here we see that the proportion of individuals from responding households who completed a full interview as well as the proportions who only partially completed an interview and those who did not take part all. There is no significant difference for any of these groups. Most notably, only six respondents (0.2%) in the experimental group and six respondents in the control group (0.2%) gave partial interviews out of 5125 individual records (once proxy

responses – which are also coded as ‘partial interviews’ - were eliminated). Although we cannot say from the information provided why such respondents dropped out, we can surmise from such a low proportion of cases that the sexual identity question had little effect on individuals dropping out of the interview part way through.

Table 3 Overall individual response rates GLF trial

Individual outcome 1	Arms of the experiment		Total
	(experimental) Sexual identity question asked	(Control) Sexual identity question not asked	
Full interview	98.4	97.9	98.1
Partial interview	0.2	0.2	0.2
No interview ineligible	0.0	0.1	0.1
Refusal	0.7	1.1	0.9
Non contact	0.6	0.6	0.6
<i>Base</i>	<i>2531</i>	<i>2594</i>	<i>5125</i>

Table 4 looks at the household effect. Here we look at all the responding households and see what proportion had one or more individuals not take part in each of the control and experimental groups. Although it would be impossible from the information provided to say why some members of the household chose not to respond, the lack of a significant difference between the two groups means that we can, again, surmise 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)	82.6	81.8	82.2
120 At least 1 converted proxy case	3.9	4.3	4.1
Total complete household interviews	86.4	86.1	86.3
212 Household interview but non-contact with one or more respondents	0.8	0.9	0.8
213 Household interview but either refusal or incomplete interview by one or more respondents. All respondents contacted.	1.0	1.4	1.2
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	0.1	0.1	0.1
224 Household interview and interviews by all required respondents, including at least one proxy	11.6	11.4	11.5
Total Partial Interviews	13.6	13.9	13.7
<i>Base</i>	<i>1453</i>	<i>1458</i>	<i>2911</i>

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, a proxy for the effect on attrition can be ascertained by comparing the proportion of respondents agreeing to be recalled (or re-contacted) in subsequent waves in each arm of the experiment. Table 5 indicates individual agreement to recall on the GLF trial between in the two arms of the experiment.

Table 5 Agreement to recall (Waves 1 -3)

Table 5	Agree to recall	Base
Individual Agreement to Recall	%	count
Experimental Arm (sexual Identity question included)	95.6	2053
Control Arm (sexual identity question omitted)	94.9	2039
Total response (both arms)	95.2	4092

As Table 5 shows, the agreement to recall rate was uniformly high across both arms of the experiment. If it is reasonable to assume that willingness to be re-contacted is a good proxy indicator of respondent’s likelihood of taking part in subsequent waves of a panel survey, then Table 5 clearly demonstrates that the addition of a question would not have a significant impact upon panel attrition.

3.3 Item non-response (experimental arm only)

In a survey environment individual responders are able to refuse any individual question either because they do not wish to answer the question or where 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	2090	92.7	98.4	98.4
	Gay or Lesbian	18	.8	.8	99.2
	Bisexual	7	.3	.3	99.5
	Other	10	.4	.5	100.0
	Total	2125	94.2	100.0	
Missing	Refusal	99	4.4		
	Don’t know	31	1.4		
	Total	130	5.8		
Total		2255*	100.0		

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

The total item non response the sexual identity question in the GLF trial was 5.8% with 4.4% 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=3249)) 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 a concealed showcards, we first 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	5	6	
Heterosexual or straight	90.7	92.6	96.5	93.8	100.0	100.0	92.7
Gay or Lesbian	1.6	0.6	0.0	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.8
Bisexual	0.7	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
Other	0.9	0.2	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4
Don't Know	1.8	1.3	0.0	5.0	0.0	0.0	1.4
Refusal	4.4	5.0	2.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.4
Total item non-response rate	6.2	6.3	2.7	5.0	0.0	0.0	5.8
<i>Base</i>	569	1330	255	80	15	6	2255*

*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 6.2% which is still 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 people had been asked the question (6.2% and 6.3% respectively). In fact, the lowest item non response was recorded where three people had been asked the sexual identity question in the same household (2.7%). 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 183 interviewers who took part in the GLF trial. Wide variations in item non-response rates were noted between interviewers. Of the 183 interviewers who took part in the trial, 133 did not report a single respondent refusing to answer this question. There is a highly skewed distribution of interviewer specific item non-response rates. This is not that surprising given that the average number of non-responses per interviewer is 0.7. Even so, it does suggest that interviewer effects may have had some impact on item-non-response rates. This requires further investigation and will be covered in the final report using all six months data gathered from the pilot.

4 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.
- Since the analysis suggests the move to the concurrent interviewing environment is unlikely to have been responsible for the rise in item non-response and that interviewer effects may have impacted on non-response rates. It is recommended that interviewer level item non-response should be monitored regularly and appropriate training or support provided where necessary and; detailed investigation of any potential interviewer effects be carried out when the full six months data becomes available.