



## GUIDANCE MATERIAL

### Designing questions about sex, gender and sexual orientation

When designing questions about gender and sexuality, it is recommended that sex, gender and sexuality be treated as separate constructs within a questionnaire.

In line with recommendations from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020), and ACON (2021) – Australia's leading LGBTQIA+ advocacy organisation, the following question formats are recommended. These question formats are designed to ensure respect is maintained for how individuals see themselves and participants are not 'othered' for not fitting normative categories. The questions also provide participants with the agency to provide the information requested in the survey.

*While it is noted that studies may not be explicitly exploring LGBTQIA+ populations, the recommendations below may also be used generally to conduct research in a more sensitive and inclusive manner. Given roughly 5% of the Australian population identifies with a diverse gender identity, and 10% with a diverse sexual orientation, it is highly likely that research samples – particularly quantitative surveys - will include people with a diverse gender identity, or a diverse sexual orientation, or both (Lewis & Reynolds, 2021).*

#### Sex

Sex represents the biological characteristics of the individual. Sex is typically recorded on the individual's birth certificate and is assigned at birth. When asking about sex, the following question is recommended:

***At birth, you were recorded as:***

*Male*

*Female*

*A different term (please specify)*

*Prefer not to answer*

Questions about sex are relevant when the research is focused on examining biological differences amongst participants. For instance, when studying health, or the use of contraceptives or hygiene products that are dependent on the sex of the individual.

*Please note this question does not capture if a participant was born with intersex variations, and research with people born with a variation of sex characteristics will need to follow the guidelines put forward by Intersex Human Rights Australia.*

## Gender

Gender is a socially constructed concept that signifies how individuals see and/or present themselves. Individuals may have a gender identity that departs from their sex. For instance, an individual may have been assigned male at birth but identify as a female. The following question is recommended:

***How do you describe your gender?***

*Man, or male*

*Woman, or female*

*Non-binary*

*I use a different term (please specify):*

*Prefer not to answer*

This question may also be asked as an open-ended question with a space for the participant to fill in their gender identity. This would require the researcher to code the data into categories as relevant as part of the analysis process. The following question may be used instead:

***How do you describe your gender?***

Questions about gender are relevant when the research explores how individuals see and/or present themselves. For instance, when studying clothing choices, as individuals may use clothing to express their gender, a question inquiring the gender of the participant would be more relevant.

The researcher can infer if an individual is transgender by asking a question about sex, followed by a question about gender. The ordering of these questions serves to reinforce how the individual currently sees themselves, demonstrating respect for the individual. Researchers may consider including additional gender variables for research exclusively focusing on transgender and gender diverse populations. In that case, a multiple-response format may be relevant instead of a single answer response format.



## Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation encapsulates sexual identity, attraction and behaviour. The following question may be used:

### ***How do you describe your sexual orientation?***

*Straight (heterosexual)*

*Gay*

*Lesbian*

*Bisexual*

*I use a different term (please specify):*

*Don't know*

*Prefer not to answer*

*Questions about sexual orientation are relevant for studies that are explicitly focused on the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer and other populations with a diverse sexual orientation (LGBQ+), or those seeking to infer differences based on sexual orientation. For instance, this could include studies on how physical or mental health needs differ.*

Questions on sexual orientation may include additional sexual orientations where appropriate. In that case, a multiple response format may be relevant as individuals may identify with multiple sexual orientations – for instance, an individual may identify as ‘gay’ and ‘queer’.

## References and resources

- ACON. (2021). *Policy & Research*. Retrieved 20/06/2022 from <https://www.acon.org.au/what-we-are-here-for/policy-research/#recommended-sexuality-and-gender-indicators>
- Australian bureau of Statistics. (2020). *Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables*. Retrieved 11/02/2021 from <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/standard-sex-gender-variations-sex-characteristics-and-sexual-orientation-variables/latest-release>
- Lewis, C., & Reynolds, N. (2021). [Considerations for conducting sensitive research with the LGBTQIA+ communities](#). *International Journal of Market Research*, 14707853211030488.

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