



Inclusive Survey and Data Collection Practices Concerning Gender, Sex, and Sexual Orientation

When collecting demographic information around gender, sex, and/or sexual orientation, consider these questions: Why is the survey collecting information around gender, sex, and/or sexual orientation? How will the information be used? Will the data be broken down by category or used for cross-tabulation? Often the questions are asked because we feel like they should be asked, or because we consider them “standard” demographic questions, not because the data are necessary for cross tabulation.

Sex and gender are often misrepresented on surveys (e.g. using words associated with gender and listing the item as sex). Another common mistake is listing words associated with different categories under the same item. In other words, sex, gender, and sexual orientation should be distinct items. This does not mean all three items need to be on a survey; only ask the items that are relevant to the data being collected. Often times, this means including items for gender identity and sexual orientation. To clarify these items, definitions and options for each category are included below:

Sex refers to the biological make up in terms of chromosomes, hormones, and primary and secondary sex characteristics. When asking about sex as a category, words like male, female and intersex should be used.

Gender identity refers to the internal/psychological sense of self, regardless of what sex a person was assigned at birth. When asking about gender as a category, words like woman, man, and trans* should be used.

Sexual orientation refers to a person’s emotional, physical, and sexual attraction to other people. When asking about sexual orientation as a category, words like gay/lesbian, bisexual/pansexual, and heterosexual should be used. Please note that homosexual is not recommended as it is often used in a pejorative tone.

The most inclusive practice to collect data on surveys is to leave the item response open. This approach enables respondents to the survey to answer the question in the way that best fits them. An example is below:

Optimal wording for the question is: (Category): _____.

So if asking for gender, the question would be stated as: Gender: _____



If leaving an open response line is not an option because you will cross tabulate data, please use the alternative options listed below. Also, please note that the use of the word “Other” can be problematic and marginalizing; the preferred response option for respondents to communicate that the other options do not work for them is “Not Listed.”

1. Sex

- Female
- Male
- Intersex
- Not listed: _____
- Prefer Not to Say

2. Gender (Ideal: To which gender identity do you most identify?)

- Woman
- Man
- Transwoman*
- Transman**
- Genderqueer***
- Not listed: _____
- Prefer Not to Say

3. Sexual Orientation (Ideal: To which sexual orientation do you most identify?)

- Heterosexual
- Gay/Lesbian
- Bisexual/Pansexual
- Queer
- Not Listed: _____
- Prefer Not to Say

* **Transwoman**-- — An individual who is assigned male at birth, but has a feminine gender identity.

** **Transman**— An individual who is assigned female at birth, but has a masculine gender identity.

*** **Genderqueer**: a person whose gender identity is neither man nor woman, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. Often includes a political agenda to challenge gender stereotypes and the gender binary system.