

Guidance: Gender and Sexuality Inclusive Language for survey questions

Rationale and background:

Many surveys include gender in demographic data. This has historically been male / female in many fields. All surveys and human research are concerned with gendered humans. As such, this is a consideration for all social researchers.

In order to accurately and meaningfully measure gender of participants, it must be acknowledged that growing numbers of people are identifying with a gender outside of man or woman. As well as reduced accuracy of data, neglecting to include these people in surveys may result in feelings of exclusion and discrimination. These two aspects make this a concern for ethical conduct of research.

Additionally, woman / man is now preferred to female / male as the latter is considered biologist and not appropriate when talking about gender (as opposed to sex). Sex assigned at birth and gender identity are sometimes both specified. It is proposed that for studies that are not explicitly about sex/gender, for pragmatism and ease, only gender is asked.

These guidelines include recommendations about respectful language for projects that are not specifically about sex/gender in content but have a demographic question about gender. They also include more detailed guidelines for projects that are specifically about gender, and another set of guidelines for those that are about sexuality or sexual identity.

Survey Questions Recommended Language

A. Projects that are not specifically about sex/gender

The key here is to allow for accurate representation of genders outside of men and women, as well as using man / woman (gender) rather than male / female (sex). Cameron & Stinson (2019) recommend the 'three-option gender' question. You can also add 'prefer not to say' if it is not essential data:

Woman

Man

I identify my gender as: _____ (please specify)

Prefer not to say

B. Projects that are specifically about gender

For projects that are interested in sex/gender as a topic, a two-step approach is recommended. In line with UNSW HREC guidelines developed in conjunction with key stakeholders and community groups, the following should be considered:

1. Sex recorded at birth (i.e. the sex on your original birth certificate)
 1. Male
 2. Female
 3. Something else (please specify) [open box]
 4. Prefer not to answer

2. How do you describe your gender?
 1. Man/male
 2. Woman/female
 3. Non-binary/genderqueer/gender-fluid
 4. I use a different term [open box]
 5. Prefer not to answer

3. Were you born with a variation of sex characteristics (sometimes called 'intersex' or 'dsd')?
 1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Don't know
 4. Prefer not to answer

C. Projects that are about sexuality

When undertaking a project where sexuality is a demographic question, this should avoid the reinforcement of a binary-only model and aim to be as inclusive as possible.

How do you describe your sexuality?

1. Heterosexual or straight
2. Lesbian
3. Gay or homosexual
4. Bisexual
5. Pansexual
6. Queer
7. I use a different term [open text box]
8. Prefer not to answer

A project about diverse sexuality requires engagement with literature around diverse sexualities and a rationale for questions used.

D. Projects that require sex-assigned-at-birth

Some projects, e.g. medical research, require information about sex-assigned-at-birth, commonly referred to as biological sex. In these cases, we suggest that the language used is:

What is your sex-assigned-at-birth (commonly referred to as biological sex)?

1. Female
2. Male
3. Intersex

References / Further Reading

Cameron, J.J. & Stinson, D.A. (2019), 'Gender (mis)measurement: Guidelines for respecting gender diversity in psychological Research', *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* Volume 13, Issue 11. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12506>

Peer Advocacy Network for the Sexual Health of Trans Masculinities, *Data Collection Position Statement* https://www.afao.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/PASH-tm-Data-Collection_FINAL-Position-Statement.pdf

Trans Hub, *Researchers*, <https://www.transhub.org.au/allies/researchers>

YGender, *How to Ask About Gender on Surveys and Forms*, <http://www.ygender.org.au/article/how-to-ask-about-gender-on-surveys-and-forms>

NB: This is a living document, as such it will adapt to evolving community preferences and priorities.

Nicholas, Lucy (2021)