

Harmonised Concepts and Questions for Social Data Sources  
GSS Harmonised Principle

Sexual Identity

## About this document and Update history

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### GSS Harmonised Principle

#### **About this document**

This document forms part of a series of GSS Harmonised Principles, designed to provide approved harmonised questions, definitions and outputs for a variety of social and business related topics. The use of harmonised questions, definitions and outputs will provide greater consistency for survey producers and comparability when using data.

For more information, please see the Introductory Document, available on the GSS website:

<https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/statistics/methodology-2/harmonisation/>

#### **This is Version 1.3 published in June 2017**

This document has been updated to Version 1.3 to reflect the change away from 'Primary Principles' and 'Secondary Principles' to 'GSS Harmonised Principles'. There has been no change to the harmonised questions.

#### **Previous versions:**

##### **Version 1.2 published in May 2015**

This document was updated to Version 1.2 to correct minor formatting errors and to change the term '*Harmonised Standards*' to '*Harmonised Principles*' as agreed by National Statistics Harmonisation Group.

##### **Version 1.0 published in December 2008.**

This document was incorporated into the range of Secondary Principles in Dec 08 when Sexual Identity was removed from the Secondary Standard on National, Religious and Sexual Identity.

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## Introduction

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### GSS Harmonised Principle

The sexual identity question is now a national harmonised standard. It is important that the question is asked in a consistent way on all social surveys, for comparability across different sources. In view of this, a user guide has been developed to assist researchers. The evidence from the various stages of the project have been consolidated into one document with the aim of providing guidance to both users of sexual identity statistics and those organisations collecting data on sexual identity.

'Measuring sexual identity: A guide for researchers' was published in May 2009 and can be found here:

[https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjmW\\_-amKrNAhVJ1hoKHSYQCXIQFgghMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ons.gov.uk%2Fons%2Fguide-method%2Fmeasuring-equality%2Fequality%2Fsexual-identity-project%2Fguidance%2Fmeasuring-sexual-identity--a-guide-for-researchers.pdf&usg=AFQjCNGh78PeS7Tq9W\\_im9Rh-lWmVwpeCA](https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjmW_-amKrNAhVJ1hoKHSYQCXIQFgghMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ons.gov.uk%2Fons%2Fguide-method%2Fmeasuring-equality%2Fequality%2Fsexual-identity-project%2Fguidance%2Fmeasuring-sexual-identity--a-guide-for-researchers.pdf&usg=AFQjCNGh78PeS7Tq9W_im9Rh-lWmVwpeCA)

### Contact us

For more information about Harmonisation or to join our mailing list, please visit our website at:

<https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/statistics/methodology-2/harmonisation/>

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# Sexual Identity

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## Inputs

### Face-to-face

The following question should be asked on face-to face surveys. It should be asked exactly as it is shown here with no alterations. Even small alterations, such as slight amendments to the wording or order of the answer categories, may substantially affect the comparability of the data outputs with those from other sources (especially ONS benchmark data) and may affect the acceptability of the question to respondents.

The question was extensively tested with many different groups and the wording and order of the answer categories has been specifically designed to maximise response across all groups and should therefore not be altered. The question has been designed to collect data that will be comparable with the data collected on telephone surveys. Changes in mode of data collection may always have an affect on responses and response rates. The design of the question is suitable for all different face-to-face survey scenarios, whether it is only one interview in the household or more.

ASK ALL AGED 16 OR OVER

INTERVIEWER: Allocate all cards, then ask the question to all  
[INDICATE TO INTERVIEWERS WHICH SHOWCARD SHOULD BE GIVEN TO  
EACH RESPONDENT]

**Which of the options on this card best describes how you think of yourself?**

**Please just read out the number next to the description.**

(ONLY IF CONCURRENT INTERVIEW)

**The numbers on each card are different for each person.**

1. Heterosexual / Straight
  2. Gay / Lesbian
  3. Bisexual
  4. Other
- (Spontaneous Don't know/Refusal)

### Where can I find out more?

*Developing survey questions on sexual identity: Rationale and design of sexual identity questioning on the Integrated Household Survey (IHS)*, available at:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/sexual-identity-project/question-testing-and-implementation/index.html>

Betts P, Wilmot A and Taylor T (2008), ONS, *Developing survey questions on sexual identity: Exploratory focus groups*, available at:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/sexual-identity-project/question-development/index.html>

### Telephone

The following question should be asked on telephone surveys. It should be asked exactly as it is shown here with no alterations. Even small alterations, such as slight amendments to the wording or order of the answer categories, may substantially affect the comparability of the data outputs with those from other sources (especially ONS benchmark data) and may affect the acceptability of the question to respondents.

# Sexual Identity

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## Inputs

The question has been designed to be comparable with the data collected on face-to-face surveys and feedback from trials has shown that it is acceptable to respondents. Changes in mode of data collection may always have an affect on responses and response rates.

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.)

**Where can I find out more?**

*Developing survey questions on sexual identity: Rationale and design of sexual identity questioning on the Integrated Household Survey (IHS), available at:*

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/sexual-identity-project/question-testing-and-implementation/index.html>

### **Self-completion**

ONS has not tested a question for self-completion surveys. However, many other organisations use these questionnaires as their primary tool for data collection and it is therefore important to have a recommended question which is set out in the box below. It should be asked exactly as it is shown here with no alterations. Even small alterations, such as slight amendments to the wording of the answer categories or their order, may substantially affect the comparability of the data outputs and may affect the acceptability of the question to respondents.

The question has not been fully tested for acceptability and comprehension in the same way as the face-to-face and telephone questions. The change in mode, may have affected both. In particular, the inclusion of a 'Prefer not to say' option and the likely increase in missing data will affect overall comparability with other benchmark data collected by telephone or through face-to-face interviews. However, after careful consideration ONS recommends the question for self-completion surveys. It is likely that this question will be comparable with other sources. Furthermore, in the absence of further testing and research, its general similarity to the recommended face-to-face and telephone questions make it the best option in light of the testing that ONS has done on face-to-face and telephone interviewing.

ALL AGED 16 OR OVER

**Which of the following options best describes how you think of yourself?**

1. Heterosexual or Straight,
2. Gay or Lesbian,
3. Bisexual,
4. Other
5. Prefer not to say

# Sexual Identity

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## Inputs

Please note:

1. Self-completion questionnaires differ from face-to-face and telephone surveys in a number of ways. In face-to-face surveys and, to a lesser extent, in telephone surveys, the interviewer has some control over the environment in which the survey is administered and the difference in the level of interviewer control over the environment will affect both the results and also how the question should be asked. In particular, interviewers can control:
  - a. Who is answering the question and check that it is not being answered by proxy
  - b. That showcards are used (or the correct procedure is used in telephone interviews) and that the respondent will not have to reveal their answer to anyone else in the room
  - c. That the respondent is asked the question and does not simply skip it because they did not see it or meant to return to it but forgot
  
2. A 'Prefer not to say' option is included on self-completion paper or web-based questionnaires when it is not explicitly included on face-to-face or telephone questionnaires. In face-to-face and telephone interviews, testing showed that the inclusion of an explicit 'Prefer not to say' category increased item non-response. Such a category was therefore not explicitly included but interviewers knew that they could always code 'Refused' if the respondent indicated that they did not want to answer the question. On a self-completion questionnaire, the respondent must be given the option to indicate that they do not want to answer the question as there is no interviewer there to code 'Refused'. However, the inclusion of this additional category is likely to increase non-response and will have an impact on all categories.

Information for researchers is found here

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/sexual-identity-project/guidance/index.html>

Further information on the Sexual Identity Project can be accessed at:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/sexual-identity-project/index.html>