Question development history for 2018 Census: Sexual Orientation

Overview

Summary	
Key driver for question development	• New Content • Data users have indicated that a question on sexual orientation needs to be able to identify specific population groups within the wider LGBTIQ population. This is in order to firstly identify the size of these population groups within New Zealand and secondly meet the health and service provisioning needs for these specific population groups for relevant organisations.
Quality priority level:	• 3
Outcome from question development <maybe we update this section in 2017>	• Cognitive testing • Usability testing • Mass completions • Volume test

1 – Purpose

The purpose of this document is to capture the question development process for the Sexual orientation variable, including findings from waves of testing conducted in 2015-2017.

The 2018 variable specification provided by the Customer Needs and Data (content) Team provides the background and scope of this variable.

This document is intended for use within Statistics New Zealand.

2 – Background

The information sought from this variable is to collect data on aspects of respondent's self-reported sexual identity, from the census usually resident population count aged 15 Years and over (ie New Zealand Adults). This is in order to meet the needs of data users for information on sexual minorities in New Zealand.

The information need for this variable is to identify the prevalence (number) of individuals who identify as non-heterosexual within the New Zealand population. This includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, and other non-heterosexual sexual identities.

Data users have indicated that a question on sexual orientation needs to be able to identify specific population groups within the wider LGBTIQ population (ie. gay, bisexual etc.) by itself or in combination with other census variables (most notably sex and any potential gender identity question). This is in order to firstly identify the size of these population groups within New Zealand and secondly meet the health and service provisioning needs for these specific population groups for relevant organisations (ie. health service providers involved in STI and HIV prevention). There is a strong desire for baseline population counts of the lesbian, gay and other sexual minorities in order for decisions affecting these population groups to have a strong evidence base than is currently available.

Currently there is no official definition of sexual orientation for use within statistical surveys in New Zealand. If data on sexual orientation/identity is to be collected in the 2018 Census, a definition for sexual orientation/identity will need to be developed.

Previous work undertaken for the OSS has given some background to developing an official definition of sexual orientation for statistical surveys in New Zealand:

Definitions of sexual orientation [(from Pega, F., Gray, A., & Veale, J. (2010) p.56)](#)

Given that the umbrella concept of sexual orientation is defined by three key measurement concepts, we propose that sexual orientation should be treated as a statistical topic, with three measurement concepts: sexual attraction, sexual behaviour, and sexual identity. The following working definitions for the statistical topic of sexual orientation and the associated measurement concepts are proposed:

Statistical Topic	Proposed Working Definition
Sexual Orientation	Sexual orientation is defined by three key concepts: sexual attraction, sexual behaviour, and sexual identity. The relationship between these components is that sexual orientation is based upon sexual attraction and that sexual attraction can result in various sexual behaviours and the adoption of sexual identities. The three key concepts are related, but not necessarily congruent continuous variables, each of which can independently change over time and by social context.

Measurement Concept	Proposed Working Definition
Sexual Attraction	"Attraction towards one sex or the desire to have sexual relationships or to be in a primary loving, sexual relationship with one or both sexes" (Savin-Williams, 2006, p. 41).

| Sexual Behaviour | "Any mutually voluntary activity with another person that involves genital contact and sexual excitement or arousal, that is feeling really turned on, even if intercourse or orgasm did not occur" (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994, p. 67). |
| Sexual Identity | "Personally selected, socially and historically bound labels attached to the perceptions and meanings individuals have about their sexuality" (Savin-Williams, 2006, p. 41). |

Early scoping work on a development of a Sexual Orientation statistical standard for the OSS has indicated that sexual identity is the concept that would be most relevant and suitable for general purposes.

This drew on [work done by the ONS](#) which used the following definition and rationale:

What is sexual identity?
Self-perceived sexual identity is a subjective view of oneself. Essentially, it is about what a person is, not what they do. It is about the inner sense of self, and perhaps sharing a collective social identity with a group of other people. The question on sexual identity is asked as an opinion question, it is up to respondents to decide how they define themselves in relation to the four response categories available. It is important to recognise that the question is not specifically about sexual behaviour or attraction, although these aspects might relate to the formation of identity. A person can have a sexual identity while not being sexually active. Furthermore, reported sexual identity may change over time or in different contexts (for example, at home versus in the workplace).

Why measure sexual identity rather than sexual orientation?
No single question would capture the full complexity of sexual orientation. A suite of questions would be necessary to collect data on the different dimensions of sexual orientation, including attraction, behaviour and identity, and to examine consistency between them at the individual level. Although legislation refers to sexual orientation, research during question development deemed sexual identity the most relevant dimension of sexual orientation to investigate given its relation to experiences of disadvantage and discrimination. Testing showed that respondents were not in favour of asking about sexual behaviour in a social survey context, nor would it be appropriate in general purpose government surveys.

2.2 Where this data comes from

This information would be collected on the individual form in a new question. Its placement is likely to be later in the form (separate from the sex question and next to any potential gender identity question) and in the sections for those aged 15 or older.

Discussion of potential question formats informed by those used by other collections is below:

Definitions of sexual orientation [(from Pega, F., Gray, A., & Veale, J. (2010) p.56)](#) recommended a question of the following format for use in the OSS (in personal interviews)

ASK ALL AGED 16 OR OVER

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

Please just read out the letter next to the description.

(letter) Heterosexual or Straight
(letter) Gay or Lesbian
(letter) Bisexual
(letter) Takatāpui
(letter) Fa'afafine
(letter) Other
(Spontaneous DK/Refusal)

Sexual Identity has also been used as a concept and collected in the New Zealand Health Survey from 2014/15 (in interviews) in [their sexual and reproductive health module (pg 70).](#) The following question was asked:

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

1. Heterosexual or straight

2. Gay or lesbian

3. Bisexual

4. Other

.K Don't know

.R Choose not to answer

[Research done in the USA](#) for the purpose of collecting sexual orientation and gender identity data for electronic health records and in healthcare settings has also recommended a similar format which was indicated as a format which would produce necessary data by the NZ Aids Foundation in their submission.

Sexual orientation
Do you think of yourself as:
_ Lesbian, gay, or homosexual
_ Straight or heterosexual
_ Bisexual
_ Something else, please describe: _____
_ Don't know

The content team has recommended that initial testing of collection of sexual identity data follow the format of the questions recommended by the ONS used in the New Zealand Health Survey.

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

1. Heterosexual or straight

2. Gay or lesbian

3. Bisexual

4. Other

.K Don't know

.R Choose not to answer

This has been chosen instead of the recommendation from the previous research by Pega, Gray and Veale in New Zealand which included tick boxes for Takatāpui
and Fa'afafine for a number of reasons.

- The terms Takatāpui and Fa'afafine indicate a spectrum of identity which is broader than sexual identity and cross into other aspects of identity including gender identity.

- The question proposed by the previous New Zealand research was intended for personal interviews. If a question on sexual identity is included in the census, a question format that uses less space is ideal given the constraints of the paper questionnaire form.

- The New Zealand Health Survey team indicated that cognitive testing for their sexual and reproductive health module indicated that many people were not familiar with the terms of Takatāpui and Fa'afafine or interpreted them in different ways.

- The question format being tested will still allow for collection of individuals who wish to self-identify this way in the sexual identity question through the 'other' write in box.

3 – Design differences between paper and internet forms

n/a

4 – Findings from testing (or review) and rationale for revision

These tables summarise in chronological order the versions of this question set that were tested (or reviewed), along with brief findings, and rationale for revision.

Reasons for variables being omitted from a sprint may include: the content need or question design is not ready, or the variable is not a focus for that sprint (eg it is not suited to the target respondents), or the sprint is not a test of content.

Summary of sprints this variable has been tested in, plus testing type and mode type:

- Sprint 4; cognitive testing and mass completions of paper forms
- Sprint 5; cognitive testing and mass completions of paper forms
- Census programme test, July 2016
- Sprint 7; cognitive testing and mass completions of paper forms
- Sprint 8; cognitive testing and mass completions of paper forms

- Sprint 9A; cognitive testing and mass completions of paper forms

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SPRINT 4; COGNITIVE TESTING AND MASS COMPLETIONS OF PAPER FORMS
March 2016
Christchurch and Wellington

Aim:
- The primary objective of the testing is to provide recommendations to inform a Go/No Go decision on future development and testing of proposed 2018 Census content.
- Test question with targeted sections of the general public to assess understanding/potential for confusion/potential for drop off/potential for offence.

Respondents
The cognitive test participants included members of the public, students, and people with step family. The mass completion test participants included rural fire fighters, secondary students, and tertiary students (including young parents' college and ESOL students).

The question design tested in sprint 4 was:

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

- heterosexual or straight
- gay or lesbian
- bisexual
- other. Please state:

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

or ○ prefer not to say

SPRINT 4, COGNITIVE TESTING AND MASS COMPLETIONS OF PAPER FORMS – FINDINGS
- English as second language and didn't understand "heterosexual"
- Male respondent happy with term "heterosexual" but thought term straight was a bit prejudiced
- Weird that you could select "prefer not to say" for this but not for gender question
- Some uncomfortableness (surprise at inclusion), and giggling at the question
- "Oh wow!, really?"
- a-sexual option suggested, considered to be as prevalent as bisexual

SPRINT 5, COGNITIVE TESTING AND MASS COMPLETIONS OF PAPER FORMS
March 2016
Wellington and Christchurch

Aim:

General Public

- The primary objective of the testing is to provide recommendations to inform a Go/No Go decision on future development and testing of proposed 2018 Census content.

Targeted LGBTQI testing

- Test question with targeted sections of the general public to assess understanding/potential for confusion/potential for drop off/potential for offence.
- Test with gay/lesbian/bisexual respondents to assess functioning of question in the New Zealand context, and as a paper self-complete.

Respondents

As with the previous sprint, cognitive test participants included members of the public, students, and people with step family. The mass completion test participants included secondary and tertiary students, Age Concern, retirement village residents, and a private workplace.

The question design tested in sprint 5 was:

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

- heterosexual or straight
- gay or lesbian
- bisexual
- other. Please state:

or
- prefer not to say

SPRINT 5 – COGNITIVE TESTING AND MASS COMPLETIONS OF PAPER FORMS – FINDINGS

General population cognitive testing:

- Uncomfortable answering in interview but happy to do it at home.
- Most people said they were happy to answer, but wondered about whether this might be difficult for others.
- Privacy envelope – didn't like idea as drawing attention to themselves – implying something to hide.

- Some respondents wondered why this information is needed *"what's the point?"*

Targeted LGBTQI testing:
- Respondents felt this question was asking about sexual identity, attraction, orientation etc.
- Several respondents made use of the other, please specify option. A few respondents found this question very difficult to answer: one is figuring this out; intersex respondent struggled with this.
- Some queried whether they could select multiple options.
- Were mostly comfortable answering this in a census context. On respondent had concerns about 'flow on effects' of this being asked more widely, data sharing.

CENSUS PROGRAMME TEST
July 2016
Online and Paper form

Aim:
Primary
- Test the proposed 2018 Census content on the public to see if question and response options are suitable for inclusion in a self-complete form

Secondary
- Learn if the inclusion of individual questions (new and changed content) impacts responses to other questions and completion rates (respondent burden is managed) and
- Ensure that question and response options; provide fit for use information to an acceptable standard across all modes (paper, online – desktop and online – mobile) and, have been tested appropriately with respondents so they find them easy to understand and complete.
- Give confidence that form content and design for proposed question and response options can be processed, do not increase respondent burden, does not impact on extra processing costs, meets expected quality.

Respondents

The mass completion test participants were recruited via community groups mainly The People's Panel (Auckland) and organisations, including: secondary and tertiary students, Age Concern, retirement village residents, and a private workplace.

The question design tested in CPT was:

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

- heterosexual or straight
- gay or lesbian
- bisexual
- other. Please state:

or ○ prefer not to say

Online Form

Which of the following options best describes how you think of yourself?   ❷ Show Help

- ○ heterosexual or straight
- ○ gay or lesbian
- ○ bisexual
- ○ other
- ○ prefer not to say

SPRINT 7, COGNITIVE TESTING AND MASS COMPLETIONS OF PAPER FORMS

June/July 2016
Version 1 - Christchurch, Wellington
Version 2 - Napier

Aim:

- Observe respondent attitudes to the presence of this question.
- Observe any difference between "object to answer" as opposed to previously tested "prefer not to say".

Respondents

The cognitive test participants included the general public, people with step family,

The mass completion test participants included: boarding school students, tertiary students, young farmers, permanent residents at a holiday park, sports team, retirement village residents.

The question design tested in sprint 7 was:

> **33** Which of the following options best describes how you think of yourself?
>
> ○ heterosexual or straight
>
> ○ gay or lesbian
>
> ○ bisexual
>
> ○ other. Please state:
>
> ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
>
> or ○ object to answering

SPRINT 7 – FINDINGS

Cognitive and group interview findings
- There were no strong themes that emerged from the data for this question. Most respondents answered the question with no difficulty and without comment. A few respondents had some difficulty interpreting the response options and selecting their response. One respondent sought clarification from the interviewer asking "heterosexual/straight - that's 'normal' isn't it?" A couple of respondents noted the 'object to answering' category and commented that they would prefer a 'prefer not to say' option, as they didn't necessarily object to the question being asked in the form, but they would personally prefer not to answer it.

Mass completion test findings
- There were no significant issues from mass completion data.

SPRINT 7 – RECOMMENDATIONS

- QMD recommends assessing data and respondent feedback from the Census Test (July 2016) for this question to further assess public sensitivity to the inclusion of this question. The compliant respondent sample in this testing sprint combined with interviewer presence may have masked any sensitivity toward this question which may be expressed in other types of test environments.

- QMD recommends that stakeholders consider the 'prefer not to say' versus the 'object to answering' response categories and the explicit and implicit meaning that these different response labels may convey to respondents. In addition QMD recommends comparing Sprint 7 results which tested 'object to answering' with previous testing and Census Test (July 2016) results to see if there are any observable effects introduced by these two variations.

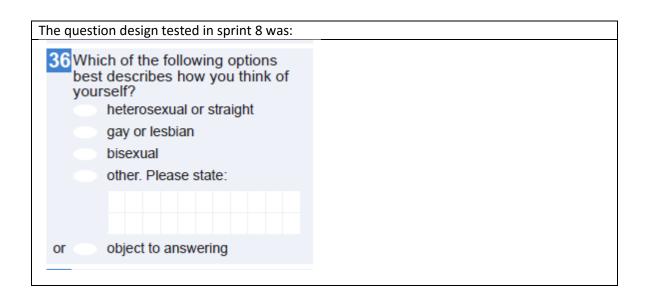| SPRINT 8, COGNITIVE TESTING AND MASS COMPLETIONS OF PAPER FORMS |
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July/August 2016
Wellington and Christchurch

Aims:
- The Sexual Orientation variable had no specific testing objectives in this sprint.

Respondents

The cognitive test participants included renters, people with step family and parents with children at home for proxy reporting. The mass completion test participants included retirement village residents and members of the general public.

The question design tested in sprint 8 was:

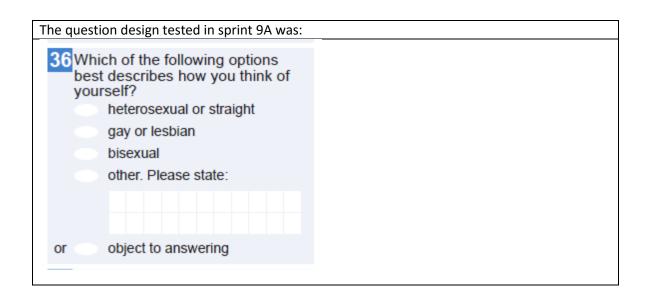## SPRINT 9A, COGNITIVE TESTING AND MASS COMPLETIONS OF PAPER FORMS
July/August 2016
Wellington and Christchurch

Aims:
- The Sexual Orientation variable had no specific testing objectives in this sprint.

Respondents
The cognitive test participants included renters, people with step family and parents with children at home for proxy reporting. The mass completion test participants included retirement village residents and members of the general public.

The question design tested in sprint 9A was:

5 – Data quality
<Expectations based on testing, known issues, question interactions (suggested edits). To be completed towards the end of QMD testing>

Appendix 1: testing methodology
Research objectives
The broad research objectives of testing may vary with each sprint, but generally are to:
- Understand how well individual questions and key concepts/definitions are understood by respondents
- Understand how well individual questions and the overall form design enables respondents to answer quickly and accurately
- Understand how new and changed questions may impact on other questions in the forms
- Understand respondent burden
- Understand public attitudes to new and changed questions which may influence their willingness to answer

Topics or questions may be allocated as a primary or secondary focus or not a focus of testing in a given sprint. This depends on the priority of the variable itself and how well it has tested previously.

Desktop review (paper and online)
Questions and questionnaires (paper and/or online) are reviewed before they are tested with respondents. The aim of desktop review is to:

- Check whether the forms accurately match content and design specifications;
- Identify any usability issues in the online forms (across a range of devices, operating systems and browsers);
- Identify any potential issues that should be subjected to further testing with the public.

Test participants
Testing aims to include people from a wide range of backgrounds, with a mix of age, sex, ethnicity, income, employment status, etc. However an individual sprint may target respondents with particular characteristics, for example, students, people who have children or stepfamily, Māori, or tenure (renting, home owners, etc).

Test participants have been recruited using a variety of methods. These have included flyers posted in public spaces such as libraries and YMCAs, Twitter and Facebook posts, contacting community groups eg LGBQTI+, Step Family Network and the Retirement Village Association.

Testing methods
Three testing methods have been used, each with a different focus.

Cognitive testing
This is a qualitative, observational research method that helps identify problems with questionnaire design. This methodology involves one-to-one interviews where respondents complete a questionnaire. It uses techniques such as concurrent probing, retrospective probing and think-aloud to highlight how respondents get to their answers and how they interpret certain terms.

Cognitive tests last around one hour, during which the first 30-40 minutes will involve the researcher observing the respondent completing their dwelling form and individual form. The remaining 20-30 minutes will take a semi-structured interview approach. This time will be used to probe in-depth on the focus questions described in this plan, which are relevant for respondents.

Mass completion + group interview

Mass completion tests involve asking a large group of respondents to complete a questionnaire unobserved, in a supervised environment. Mass completion is a useful diagnostic tool to confirm suspicions about a particular design or uncover unexpected reactions to questions using a larger group of respondents.

Mass completion and group interview will last about one hour. In the first half of the session, respondents will be asked to complete one or both Census forms. The remaining time will be used to probe in-depth on the focus questions described in this plan, which are relevant for respondents. The same semi-structured interview protocol can be used for cognitive testing and group interview.

Usability testing (online)

User testing involves one-to-one interviews where respondents complete a set of given tasks (e.g. complete household set up page, complete Individual/Dwelling form) on a device ie a tablet, smartphone or desktop. It is a qualitative, observational research method used to identify problems with a user interface. User testing employs think-aloud, concurrent probing, and retrospective probing techniques to understand how the design of the user interface impacts on the user experience.

Analysis

From sprint 7 onwards, findings were coded to approximately 20 codes, which were further summarised into themes:

Table: Analysis of testing findings – codes and themes used		
Codes	**Themes**	**Theme Description**
Total nonresponse due to sensitivity	Sensitivity	Relates to how and why respondents perceive question content to be sensitive to themselves and other people. Sensitivity is often based on the individual person's personal experiences, worldview and personal values and can affect their willingness to respond.
Protest response		
Selection of 'object to answer' response		
Reluctant response		
Sensitivity on behalf of others		
Questioning why we ask	Value / Value +	Relates to the explicit or implicit value judgements that respondents make about a question and whether they perceive it as having value, or not. Whether respondents perceive a question to have value or not will affect both their willingness to answer and the quality of their response should they choose to answer.
Questioning use of data		
Willingness to answer based on value judgement		
Positive comment volunteered regarding info need		
Difficulty in recalling the requested information	Burden	Relates to the ease with which respondents are able to answer questions and the extent to which they have a positive respondent experience. There
Difficulty in interpreting the question		

Difficulty in fitting their answer into the response formats/ categories		are many aspects of respondent burden which respondents may experience when answering questions. Some of these arise from ambiguous or unfamiliar terms or concepts in the questionnaire, while others may be a direct effect of the poorly designed question or form.
Confusion or difficulties arising from interactions between questions		
Effort required to answer		
Missed routing instructions	Error	Relates to causes of respondent error that can affect data quality and reliability. Sources of error usually arise from poor question and form design, but may also include contextual factors specific to the respondent which can't be controlled for.
Instructions missed or incorrectly followed		
Subjective response		
Proxy response error		
Guesses		
Poor question construction	Defective design	Relates to respondent burden and error, specifically arising from poor question and form design. A fundamentally defective question or set of questions may negatively impact on data quality and/or the user experience.
Dissatisfaction with question/response options		
Visual design of form		

Testing collects information about people's willingness and ability to answer. Not all of these findings will result in alterations to the questionnaire, and any changes that are made may not necessarily resolve the issues found.