Developing a "Perfect" Sexual Identity Measure

KRISTEN MILLER, PHD

NATIONAL CENTER FOR HEALTH STATISTICS
AUGUST 7, 2012

KSMILLER@CDC.GOV

Definition of Construct

- ## Sexual Orientation:
  - Generic term, catch-all

- ## Sexual Behavior:
  - Same-sex vs. opposite-sex behavior
  - Not necessarily consistent with self-conception or presentation of self
  - Design problem: what counts as "sex" varies across sub-groups

- ## Sexual Attraction:
  - Same vs. opposite sex/gender desire
  - Not necessarily consistent with self-conception or presentation of self
  - Latent and elusive phenomena, not tangible, not observable
  - Design problem: Variation in conceptualization, particularly in what respondents consider and actually report

- ## Sexual Identity
  - Conscious understanding and identification of self
  - Similar to racial identity
  - Represents individuals' relationship to social world
  - Design problem: complex and fluctuating

NCHS Sexual Identity Questions

Do you think of yourself as… 1) heterosexual, 2) homosexual, 3) bisexual, or 4) something else?	NSFG 2002-2003
Do you think of yourself as… 1) heterosexual or straight, 2) homosexual, gay or lesbian, 3) bisexual, 4) or something else?	NSFG 2006-2008
Do you think of yourself as… 1) heterosexual or straight (that is, sexually attracted only to women/men), 2) homosexual or gay/lesbian (that is sexually attracted to men/women), 3) bisexual (that is, sexually attracted to men and women), 4) something else, 5) or you're not sure?	QDRL 2001; QDRL 2009; NHANES2001-2008
What sexual orientation do you consider yourself to be? 1) heterosexual, 2) gay or lesbian, 3) bisexual, 4) other, 5) don't know	QDRL 2010
Do you consider yourself to be… 1) heterosexual or straight, 2) gay or lesbian, or 3) bisexual?	QDRL 2010

Current estimates

Survey		% Heterosexual	% Gay men	% Lesbian	% Bisexual	% Other	% DK/Refused
NSFG 2006-08		94.5	0.8	0.5	2.5	0.4	1.2
NSFG 2002-03		89.6	1.1	0.6	2.4	4.2	2.0
NHANES 2001-08		95.7	1.1	0.7	1.9	0.3	0.4
UK: HIS 2010		94.2	1.3	0.6	.05	0.5	3.8
Canada: CCHS 2009[1]		96.5	1.2		1.0	NA	1.3
YRBS	Boston 2001-2009	88.4	1.1		2.8	NA	7.8
	Chicago 2003-2009	84.9	2.5		3.4	NA	9.6
	Delaware 2003-2009	90.7	1.3		3.7	.7	3.7

Women: BMI by 'Sexual Orientation'

2002 NSFG			
	HETEROSEXUAL	**HOMOSEXUAL**	**BISEXUAL**
Normal	49.7	30.5	48.5
Overweight	25.6	35.3	29.6
Obese	24.7	34.2	22.0

2006 NSFG			
	STRAIGHT OR HETEROSEXUAL	**GAY OR LESBIAN OR HOMOSEXUAL**	**BISEXUAL**
Normal	40.7	38.2	36.5
Overweight	26.5	33.0	19.5
Obese	32.8	28.8	44.0

Examination of data from:

- ## Qualitative Studies
  - 7 cognitive testing study results
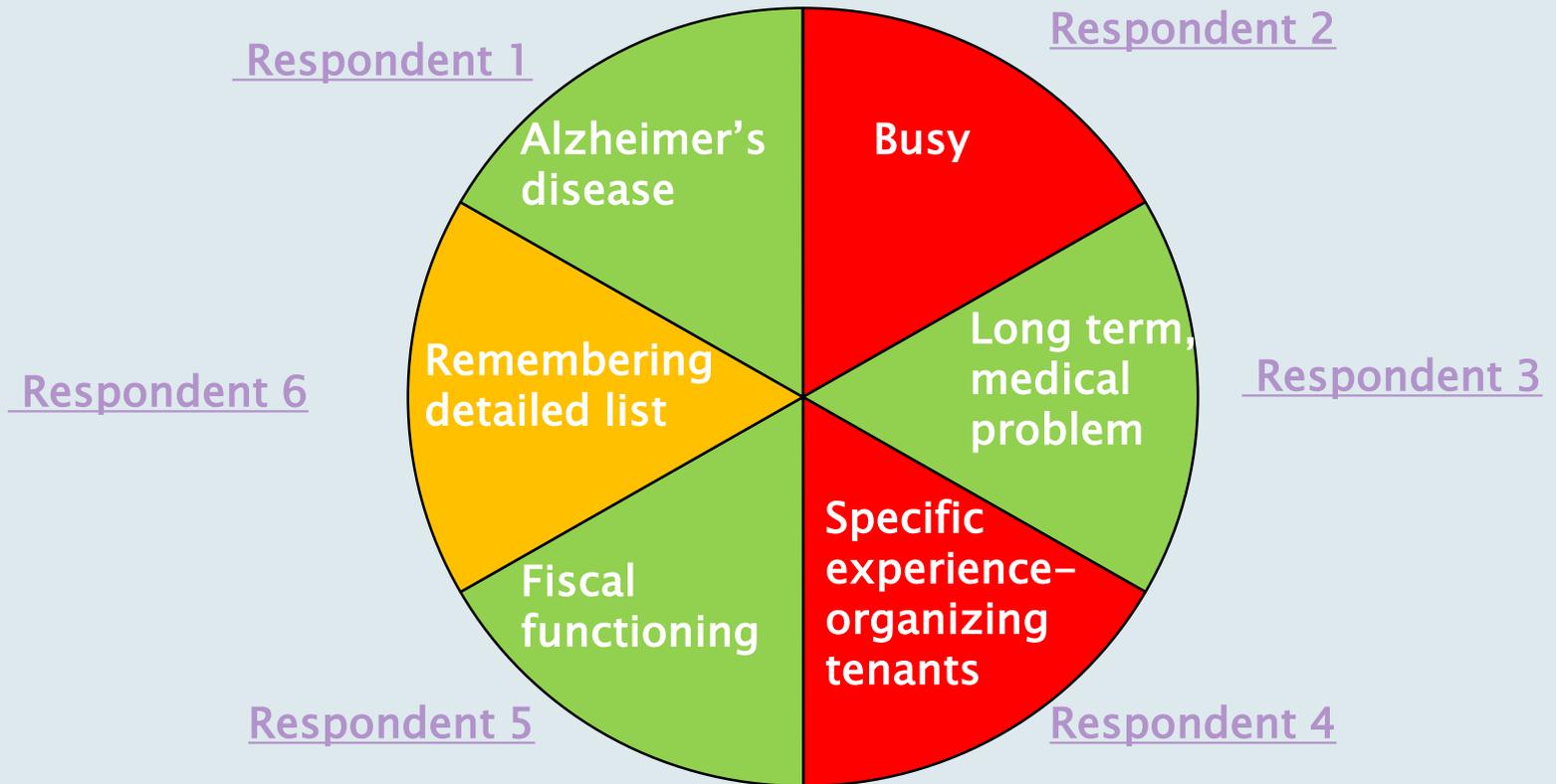 - This project 139 interview
  - Total 377 cognitive interviews

- ## Quantitative Studies
  - 2001-2008 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES)
  - 2002 -2003 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG)
  - 2006-2008 NSFG
  - 2001-2009 YRBSS

Question Response Process
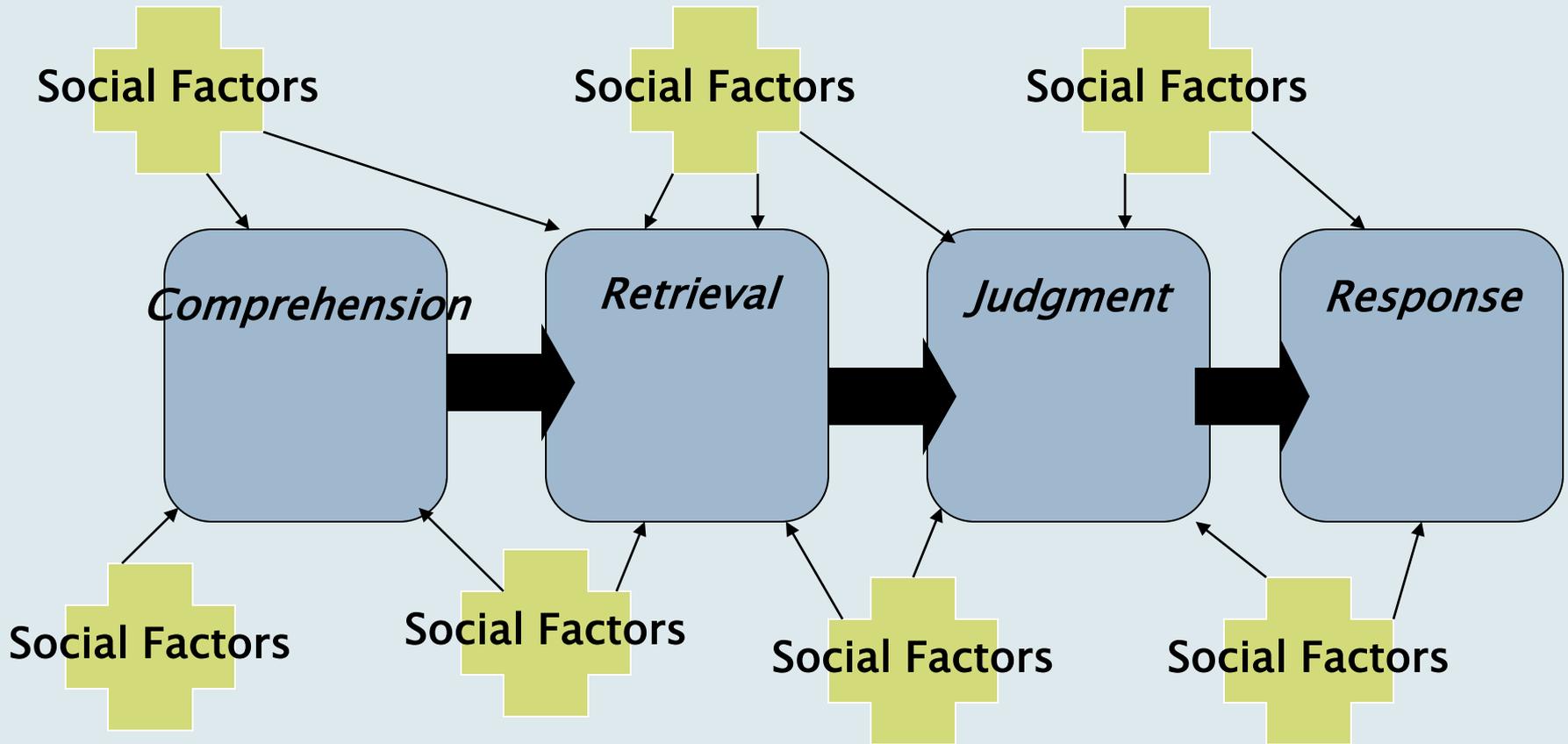
Overall, during the past 4 weeks, how much difficulty did you have with thinking clearly and solving daily problems?

Respondent 1

Respondent 2

Respondent 3

Respondent 4

Respondent 5

Respondent 6

Alzheimer's disease

Busy

Long term, medical problem

Specific experience– organizing tenants

Fiscal functioning

Remembering detailed list

Patterns of Interpretation/Construct Equivalence

Non-Minority Patterns	LGBT Patterns
Lack of salient sexual identity	Highly salient
No concept of sexual identity but rather dis-identification	Identity rooted in complex process of negotiating and forming a sexual identity
"not me," "I'm normal," "soy mujer," "I don't know"	Shifting sexual identity For transgender respondents, intersection of gender and sexuality
Provided response categories: Interpretation of 'heterosexual' as gay; 'bisexual' as heterosexual	Provided response categories: Use of non-traditional identity categories

Problematic Response Patterns

Non-Minority Patterns	Result	LGBT Patterns
	High rate of 'something else'	
Because doesn't know terminology		*Because uses another label*
	High rate of 'Don't know'	
Because doesn't know terminology		*Because shifting sexual identity*
	Misclassification into 'bisexual'	
Because believes implies heterosexuality		*Because interprets question as attraction or behavior*

Design for New Question

Goals for New Question:
1. Reduce misclassification, especially for non-minorities
2. Reduce "something else" and "don't knows"
3. Sort non-minority from minority cases

Revision Based on Principles:
1. Use labels that respondents use to refer to themselves
2. Do not use labels that respondents do not understand- especially if not required by any respondents
3. Use follow-up questions to meaningfully categorize 'something else' and 'don't know'

Revised sexual identity question

Do you think of yourself as…

- Lesbian or gay

- Straight, that is, not gay

- Bisexual

- Something Else

- Don't Know

Revised sexual identity question

By <u>something else</u>, do you mean that…

- You are not straight, but identify with another label such as queer, trisexual, omnisexual or pan-sexual

- You are transgender or transexual

- You have not or are in the process of figuring out your sexuality

- You do not think of yourself as having a sexuality

- You personally reject all labels of yourself

- You made a mistake and did not mean to pick this answer

- You mean something else

What do you mean by something else?

Please type in your answer

_____

Revised sexual identity question

By <u>Don't Know</u>, do you mean that…

- ☐ You don't understand the words

- ☐ You understand the words, but you have not or are in the process of figuring out your sexuality

- ☐ You mean something else

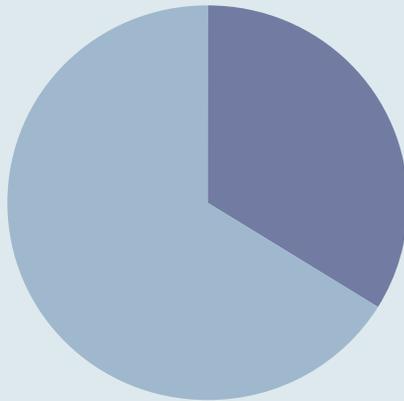# What do you mean by something else?

Please type in your answer
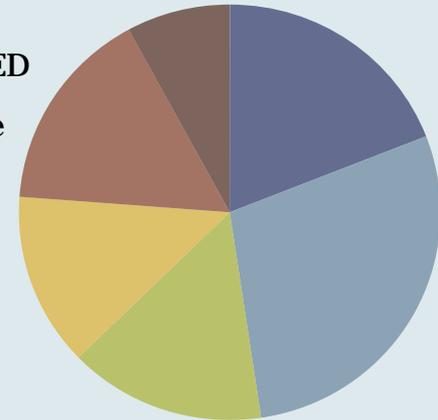
_____
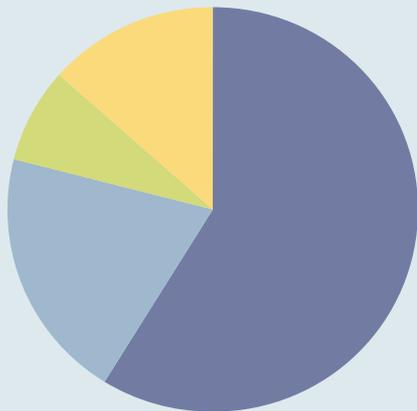
139 Cognitive Interviews conducted

Language

- ■ Spanish
- ■ English

Education
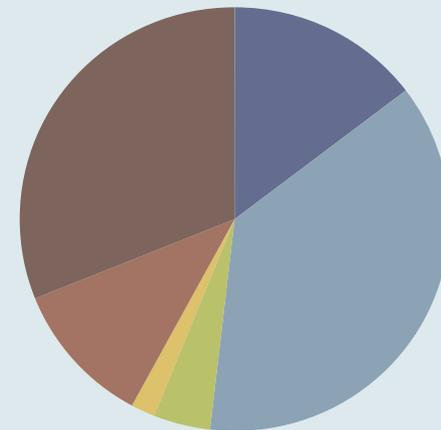
- ■ Less than HS degree
- ■ High School Degree/GED
- ■ Some college, no degree
- ■ Associates Degree
- ■ Bachelors
- ■ Graduate School

Sexual Identity

- ■ Straight
- ■ Gay or Lesbian
- ■ Bisexual
- ■ Something Else

Race/Ethnicity

- ■ White
- ■ Black
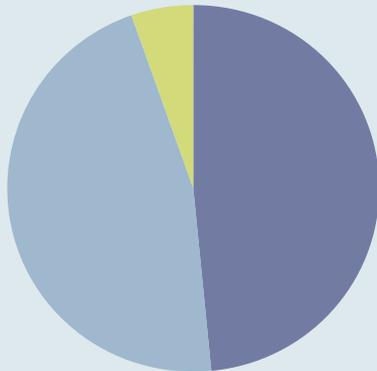- ■ Indian American
- ■ Asian
- ■ Other
- ■ Latino

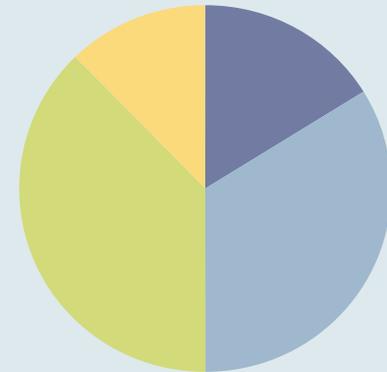# 139 Cognitive Interviews conducted

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Other

Age

- Under 25
- 26-40
- 41-60
- Over 60

21 Transgender Respondents

- Male
- Female
- Transgender, assigned male
- Transgender, assigned female
- Feminine, assigned male
- Masculine, assigned female

Iterative Testing

- English: No changes for 93 cognitive interviews
- Spanish: 1 change after 28 cognitive interviews
  - Misclassification: Cases where heterosexuals chose 'something else,' 'bisexual,' 'lesbian or gay'
  - Originally, 'No es gay'
    - The word 'straight' is not used because no equivalent in Spanish
      - Slang terms vary significantly by country
    - The word 'gay' not always understood – thought 'gay' was an English term; implied bisexuality or didn't know
    - While not consistently used across respondents, the word 'heterosexual' is more commonly used in Spanish than in English
  - Changed to 'heterosexual, o sea, no es gay'
    - Tested in 18 Spanish-speaking, heterosexuals
    - No errors identified

Testing results

- Confirmed findings from previous studies

- All but a few respondents successfully categorized
  - Couple respondents reported behavior (bisexual) rather than identity (gay/lesbian)
  - Several Spanish respondents: did not know 'gay,' but instead knew the word 'heterosexual'
  - Transgender respondents: some reported straight, some reported transgender

Limitations/Additional work

- Washington DC metro region
- Different vocabulary can vary (particularly true for Spanish)
- Field Tests and Field Problems