Developing a "Perfect" Sexual Identity Measure

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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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Survey Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think of yourself as...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) heterosexual, 2) homosexual, 3) bisexual, or 4) something else?</td>
<td>NSFG 2002-2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think of yourself as...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) heterosexual or straight, 2) homosexual, gay or lesbian, 3) bisexual, 4) or something else?</td>
<td>NSFG 2006-2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think of yourself as...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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?</td>
<td>QDRL 2001; QDRL 2009; NHANES2001-2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What sexual orientation do you consider yourself to be?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) heterosexual, 2) gay or lesbian, 3) bisexual, 4) other, 5) don’t know</td>
<td>QDRL 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you consider yourself to be...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) heterosexual or straight, 2) gay or lesbian, or 3) bisexual?</td>
<td>QDRL 2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Current estimates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>% Heterosexual</th>
<th>% Gay men</th>
<th>% Lesbian</th>
<th>% Bisexual</th>
<th>% Other</th>
<th>% DK/Refused</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSFG 2006-08</td>
<td>94.5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSFG 2002-03</td>
<td>89.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHANES 2001-08</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK: HIS 2010</td>
<td>94.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada: CCHS 2009¹</td>
<td>96.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YRBS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston 2001-2009</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago 2003-2009</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware 2003-2009</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Women: BMI by ‘Sexual Orientation’

### 2002 NSFG

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>HETEROSEXUAL</th>
<th>HOMOSEXUAL</th>
<th>BISEXUAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Normal</strong></td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overweight</strong></td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obese</strong></td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2006 NSFG

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>STRAIGHT OR HETEROSEXUAL</th>
<th>GAY OR LESBIAN OR HOMOSEXUAL</th>
<th>BISEXUAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Normal</strong></td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>36.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overweight</strong></td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obese</strong></td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
Overall, during the past 4 weeks, how much difficulty did you have with thinking clearly and solving daily problems?

Respondent 1: Remembering detailed list
Respondent 2: Busy
Respondent 3: Long term, medical problem
Respondent 4: Specific experience-organizing tenants
Respondent 5: Fiscal functioning
Respondent 6: Alzheimer’s disease
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Minority Patterns</th>
<th>LGBT Patterns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of salient sexual identity</td>
<td>Highly salient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No concept of sexual identity but rather dis-identification</td>
<td>Identity rooted in complex process of negotiating and forming a sexual identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“not me,” “I’m normal,” “soy mujer,” “I don’t know”</td>
<td>Shifting sexual identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For transgender respondents, intersection of gender and sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided response categories:</td>
<td>Provided response categories:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation of ‘heterosexual’ as gay; ‘bisexual’ as heterosexual</td>
<td>Use of non-traditional identity categories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Problematic Response Patterns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Minority Patterns</th>
<th>Result</th>
<th>LGBT Patterns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High rate of ‘something else’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Because doesn’t know terminology</em></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Because uses another label</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High rate of ‘Don’t know’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Because doesn’t know terminology</em></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Because shifting sexual identity</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Misclassification into ‘bisexual’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Because believes implies heterosexuality</em></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Because interprets question as attraction or behavior</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 **something else**, do you mean that...

- You are not straight, but identify with another label such as queer, trisexual, omnisexual or pansexual
- 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 Don’t Know, 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
- Transgender, assigned male
- Transgender, assigned female
- Feminine, assigned male
- Masculine, assigned female

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