

Feedback from Transgender Focus Group Respondents on the Federal Collection of Gender Identity

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Background

- U.S. Department of Labor sponsored research to explore feasibility of asking about sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) in the Current Population Survey (CPS)
- CPS is about labor force status, including employment and unemployment
- CPS uses proxy reporting (one person answers questions for self and all household members)
- Little known about how these factors may affect respondents' willingness and ability to report SOGI information

Background (cont.)

- Research conducted by the Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) in 2016-2017
- Two components:
 1. Cognitive interviews with 132 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) and non-LGBT respondents
 - Individual interviews: one household member
 - Paired interviews: two household members interviewed separately
 2. **Exploratory focus groups with 29 members of the transgender population**

Research questions

Topic	Discussion
1) Self-identification	How do transgender respondents define “transgender” and “gender identity” (GI), and relate these terms to their self-identity?
2) Government collection of GI	How do transgender respondents feel about the collection of GI information by the federal government, both generally and in the context of the CPS?
3) Proxy reporting	How do transgender respondents feel about GI information being collected via proxy response?
4) Question wording	What feedback do transgender respondents have on wording of questions about GI?

Recruitment

- Traditional recruitment methods, use of contractor's nationwide LGBT research panel
- All prospective respondents screened by phone prior to scheduling
- Recruitment goals: diversity in household size and composition, age, race, urban/rural region, and education to maximum extent possible

Respondents

Site	Number of respondents
Washington, DC	9
Portland, OR	8
Nashville, TN	2 (Severe inclement weather affected attendance)
Fargo, ND	10
Total	29

One focus group was conducted per site

Findings

Government collection of GI

- Most respondents thought government should collect GI to have data on the transgender population
- However, some skepticism and concern about data use, privacy and confidentiality in the government, data security
 - How will it be used? Who will have access to it? What if it leaks?
- Those with concerns also support collection
 - Respondents have internal tension between value of statistics and need to provide personal information
- Respondents thought it would make sense to collect GI in the context of the CPS

Proxy reporting

- Respondents voiced concerns and objections related to proxy reporting
 - Accuracy
 - Appropriateness/sensitivity of answering on someone's behalf
- Some thought their household members would refuse to report on their behalf
- Mixed feedback on whether it matters *who* in the household is proxy reporting

Question wording

Gender Identity: One-Step

1. What is your current gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Do not identify as male, female, or transgender

Gender Identity: Two-Step

1. Was your sex recorded as male or female at birth?

- Male
- Female

2A. Do you describe yourself as male, female, or transgender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender

2B. Do you describe yourself as male, female, transgender or something else?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Do not identify as male, female, or transgender

2C. How do you describe yourself? (Check one)

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Genderqueer/ gender non-conforming/ non-binary

2D. How do you describe yourself? (Check one)

- Male
- Female
- Trans male/Trans man
- Trans female/Trans woman
- Genderqueer/ gender non-conforming/ non-binary
- Different identity (please state):

Question wording (cont.)

- Respondents had difficulty with all 5 GI question wording and response options
 - Also said other household members would also have difficulty selecting a response option on their behalf
- They generally understood the intent of each individual question but did always get how two-part questions work together
- No consensus on the most appropriate question wording
 - Open-ended question, mark-all-that-apply, “something else”

Conclusions

- **Government collection of GI:** Statistics supported by respondents, but logistics are problematic

Important data collection issues requiring additional research:

- **Proxy reporting:** Possibly inaccurate and inappropriate for this population?
- **Question wording:** All versions problematic; little consensus

Limitations

- Limited opportunity to set CPS context in focus group setting
- Volunteers may be more cooperative, comfortable with the federal government than actual survey respondents
- Recruitment methods may have attracted persons more involved in the LBGT community
 - Mention of LGBT in some recruitment methods, known LGBT research contractor, word-of-mouth in LGBT organizations

Future research

- Proxy response
 - More testing with transgender respondents
 - More testing with respondents in complex households (extended family, nonrelatives)
 - Field test SOGI questions in employment survey

Future research (cont.)

- Question wording
 - Continue to test other wording alternatives
 - Evaluate question stems
 - Test two-step question with gender identity asked first
 - Consider broad categories (other, none of these, something else)
 - Explore feasibility of mark-all-that-apply

Reports

Overall executive summary:

https://www.bls.gov/osmr/pdf/cps_sogi_executive_summary.pdf

Cognitive interview report:

https://www.bls.gov/osmr/pdf/cps_sogi_cognitive_interview_report.pdf

Focus group report:

https://www.bls.gov/osmr/pdf/cps_sogi_focus_group_report.pdf

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