

Technical note: Measuring Gender Identity

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Equality and Human Rights Commission

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First published Spring 2012

Revised edition June 2012

ISBN 978-1-84206-447-4

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Introduction

Asking for information on individuals' equality characteristics can be controversial. There may be objections, for example, to the way disability is defined or to the collection of data on sexual orientation. Questions have been developed for both these characteristics, and data collected in official surveys. However, there is currently no standard approach to asking questions or collecting data on the characteristic of gender identity, and a consequent lack of data.

The Equality Act 2010 gives protection to transsexual people, that is to people who intend to undergo, are undergoing or have undergone a process of gender reassignment. However, this note addresses collecting data on a broader group of people, which could give a more comprehensive picture of the trans population in Britain. We have chosen not to restrict attention to people currently protected by the legislation, but have opted for a more inclusive approach which allows other trans people to self-identify. Definitions of these and other terms can be found in Annex A.

A broad definition was also adopted by the Equality Data Review (ONS, 2007). This cross-Government review of equality data recognised the data gap and recommended "that Government agencies work with non-Government stakeholders to agree an approach to obtaining more equality information on transgender people and those undergoing the process of gender reassignment." (p39) However, after considering a range of methodological issues the Office for National Statistics (ONS) concluded "that data collection via ONS household surveys is not the most appropriate method for collecting this data." (ONS, 2009)

The decision to collect data on these issues requires careful consideration (EHRC, 2011). Nonetheless, there are various arguments for and against collecting these data. By developing a suite of questions on gender identity, an inclusive approach to collecting all equality characteristics is then possible.

In this paper, we outline the process followed so far in developing questions on gender identity and gender reassignment and we report results from testing a suite of five questions on an online, self-completion survey.

Choosing questions for testing

A wide range of questions are used to collect data on gender identity or gender reassignment because of the lack of a standard question or questions. We reviewed over 20 questions in the search for questions suitable for further testing. Some of the common problems we identified with these were:

- (a) Trans status being conflated with sexual orientation. For example, the British Social Attitudes Survey 2005 (NatCen, 2007) added a transsexual category to a question on sexual orientation.
- (b) Use of terminology which would not generally be understood. For example, 'Do you consider yourself to be a transsexual?'¹ (Civil Service, 2000)
- (c) The question only covering some groups of trans people and not others. For example, 'Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were assigned at birth?' or 'Do you live and work full-time in the gender role opposite to that assigned at birth?' (Unison, 2007)
- (d) Lack of compliance with the Gender Recognition Act 2004 (The National Archives, 2004). Under this legislation, trans people obtaining a Gender Recognition Certificate cannot be required to reveal their birth sex or gender history, although they may choose to disclose this information. This would rule out, for example, a compulsory question that asks for birth sex and only allows the responses 'male' and 'female'.

A short list of questions was then selected for testing and refining through a commissioned project using focus groups and cognitive interviewing with both trans and non-trans people (see Balarajan et al, 2011 for full details). The aim was to identify a suite of questions which would be acceptable and understood by a wide range of people. The project produced recommendations for five questions covering birth sex, gender identity, gender reassignment (two questions) and trans identity. See below for the wording and response categories for these questions.

¹ Note it is now considered to be impolite to use this term as a noun. It should always be used as an adjective, as in 'transsexual person'.

Questions recommended for testing

<p>Q1 At birth, were you described as....</p> <p><i>Please tick one option</i></p> <p>Male <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Female <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Intersex <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>I prefer not to say <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Q4 Continuing to think about these examples, which of the following options best applies to you?</p> <p><i>Please tick one option</i></p> <p>I am thinking about going through this process <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>I am currently going through this process <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>I have already been through this process <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>I have been through this process, then changed back <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>None of the above <input type="checkbox"/> _____</p> <p>I prefer not to say <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Q2 Which of the following describes how you think of yourself?</p> <p><i>Please tick one option</i></p> <p>Male <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Female <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>In another way: <input type="checkbox"/> _____</p>	<p>Q5 Which of the following describes how you think of yourself?</p> <p><i>Tick all that apply</i></p> <p>Trans man <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Trans woman <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Transsexual person <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Gender variant person <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Cross dressing/ transvestite person <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Intersex person <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>In another way <input type="checkbox"/> _____</p> <p>I prefer not to say <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Q3 Have you gone through any part of a process (including thoughts or actions) to change from the sex you were described as at birth to the gender you identify with, or do you intend to?</p> <p>(This could include changing your name, wearing different clothes, taking hormones or having gender reassignment surgery).</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> → Please go to Q4</p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/> → END</p>	

Method

Since the percentage of trans people in the population was expected to be small, it was important to choose a survey mode for testing these questions that would reach a large sample of people, and would achieve a good response rate. The sample was not required to be representative of the general population. However, it was essential to ask the questions in a confidential setting, since the topic is sensitive and respondents would need to feel safe when answering the questions.

We also wanted an approach which allowed us to compare the response obtained through our suite of questions to the standard “are you...male/female” gender question without any order effects. We therefore chose an online, self-completion survey where respondents had already been asked the standard gender question during their panel recruitment process. We expected a good response rate since panel members had signed up to answer online surveys. Several of these surveys are run daily with a quota of 2,000 respondents each per day. Our suite of questions was run at the start of one survey on five days, giving a total sample of around 10,000 respondents. As a result of the methodology used, which allocates respondents to a particular survey only when they respond to an invitation, a response rate for the survey in question is not available.

The overall aims of the trial were: to check that the questions could be answered by the majority of the population, and to see whether the alternative questions (questions 1 and 2) produced different results from the ‘standard’ gender question that has only ‘male’ and ‘female’ responses. A further aim was to investigate how the questions worked together to identify different groups of people. For example, would trans people be identifiable from their answers to question 1 and 2, that is would their birth sex differ from their gender identity? Would the same or different people answer ‘yes’ to question 3?

The trial data cannot be used to estimate the percentage of the population in particular trans groups (for example, the percentage of transsexual people), nor does it provide evidence for the use of these questions in other survey modes, such as in a face-to-face interview. Further work would be needed before those issues could also be addressed.

In total, 10,044 respondents answered one or more questions and 10,026 answered all the questions that they had been asked (either questions 1-3 or 1-5, since those responding ‘no’ at question 3 were not asked the last two questions). This gives a drop-out rate of 0.2 per cent across the suite of questions and, although not

conclusive, suggests that the majority of people did not object to answering the questions.

Results

Measuring gender identity

In this trial, we had responses to three questions which may be used to measure gender identity: the standard gender question ('Are you... male/female?') that respondents were asked when recruited to the panel; plus birth sex and the gender identity question itself (see questions 1 and 2 for details of the latter two). These may be used to compare the impact of wording on the sex ratio (defined as the number of males divided by the number of females) and, when combined, allow us to identify certain minority groups. Based on the standard gender question, the trial sample has a sex ratio of 97.9 which, compared with a sex ratio of 95.2 for the adult population of Great Britain (ONS, 2011), indicates a small bias towards male respondents in the study.

Table 1 presents the results separately for the three questions. The responses to each of these were very similar, with fewer than half a per cent of respondents choosing a response other than 'male' or 'female'.

Table 1. Comparison of responses to standard gender question, question 1 and question 2

	Standard gender question (male/female)	Question 1 (birth sex)	Question 2 (gender identity)
Male	49.5%	49.4%	49.3%
Female	50.5%	50.4%	50.4%
Intersex or I prefer not to say	--	0.2%	--
In another way	--	--	0.4%
Sex ratio	97.9	98.1	97.8

-- Not applicable

If we calculate the sex ratio from the male and female responses only (i.e. for the moment ignoring the small numbers of other responses), these range between 97.8 and 98.1 males per 100 females. Hence the addition of extra categories in questions 1 and 2 appears not to have affected the sex ratio a great deal.

However, to get a full picture we need to consider the standard gender question and questions 1 and 2 together. By combining the answers to these three questions we can show how responses differ at an individual level. Taking the responses to these

three questions, there were 17 different answer combinations given by respondents, for example 'male' at the standard gender question, 'prefer not to say' at question 1 and 'in another way' at question 2. All 17 groups are shown in Annex B.

The great majority of respondents gave only 'male' responses (49.1 per cent) or only 'female' responses (50.1 per cent) (included are a few responding 'I prefer not to say' to question 1 who are included in these totals if they gave two 'male' or two 'female' responses to the other questions). The remainder of the sample contains gender identity minority groups as follows:

- those who say they think of themselves 'in another way' at question 2 (38 respondents);
- those who give their birth sex as 'intersex' at question 1 (four respondents);
- those who give different combinations of 'male' and 'female' responses (39 respondents if the three questions are considered, 15 respondents if only questions 1 and 2 are considered).

In total, these groups make up 0.8 per cent of the sample, split approximately equally between those responding 'In another way' to question 2 (gender identity) and those giving combinations of 'male', 'female' and/or 'intersex' responses.

A potential difficulty in interpreting these findings is that some of the responses which appear to come from trans people may not actually do so. For example, there were 24 people who changed their answers between when they were asked the standard gender question and when they were asked questions 1 and 2, i.e. answering 'male' at first but 'female' later, or vice versa. Only one of these 24 went on to answer 'yes' when asked directly about gender reassignment (see Q3), which makes it difficult to know how to interpret the other responses.

When restricting attention to questions 1 and 2 only (since all three questions would never be asked together in the same survey), the minority groups are the same as above, except that the third group contains only 15 respondents (the remaining 24 joining the majority group). Now, 99.4 per cent of respondents give only 'male' or only 'female' responses (including a few responding 'I prefer not to say' to question 1). This leaves 0.6 per cent of the sample giving other answer combinations to the two questions.

Further information about those answering 'in another way' at question 2 is available through the write-in answers that some respondents provided. These are varied and include: transgender, genderqueer, gender-fluid, some combination of male and

female, gender neutral, genderless, a person, human, normal, androgyne and neither/none.

Measuring gender reassignment

Questions 1 and 2 provide one potential measure for gender reassignment, where we might expect people who give different answers for birth sex and gender identity to have gone through some part of a gender reassignment process. Question 3 asks for this information directly, and the results are summarised in table 2 for four groups:

- male only = respondents answering 'male' or 'I prefer not to say' to the standard gender question and questions 1 and 2
- female only = respondents answering 'female' or 'I prefer not to say' to the standard gender question and questions 1 and 2
- 'In another way' at question 2 = all those answering 'in another way' at question 2
- other responses = all other combinations of 'male', 'female' and/or 'intersex' responses

Annex B shows a more detailed breakdown showing all 17 responses to the standard gender question and questions 1 and 2.

Table 2. Responses to question 3 which asks whether the respondent has gone through any part of a gender reassignment process (including thoughts and/or actions)

	Response to question 3 on gender reassignment			% responding 'yes'
	Yes	No	Not answered	
Male only	57	4,864	7	1.2%
Female only	26	5,002	2	0.5%
'In another way' at Question 2	12	25	1	31.6%
Other responses	5	37	1	11.9%
Total	100	9,928	11	1.0%

In total, 100 people, or one per cent of the sample, stated that they had gone through any part of a process (including thoughts or actions) to change their gender from that which they were described as at birth. This was significantly higher among those who described themselves as male in the standard gender question response (1.4 per cent compared with 0.6 per cent of those who described themselves as female).

Irrespective of their other responses, 1.4 per cent of those who said they were described as male at birth (question 1) stated that they had gone through any part of a gender reassignment process, as did 1.2 per cent of those who say they think of themselves as male (question 2). It should be noted, as seen above, that there is a large amount of overlap between these groups (99.4 per cent of those answering 'male' at question 1 also answered 'male' at question 2).

The majority (83 per cent) of those who state at question 3 that they have gone through any part of a process to change gender identity gave only 'male' or only 'female' responses to the earlier questions. Only one in eight of this group answered that they think of themselves 'in another way' at question 2 and another one in 20 gave other combinations of responses.

The small overlap between those saying that they think of themselves 'in another way' at question 2 and those answering 'yes' to question 3 suggests that these questions are mainly identifying different minority groups. Although the highest percentage answering 'yes' to question 3 is for those saying that they think of themselves 'in another way' at question 2, only a third of the respondents in this group said that they had gone through any part of a process of gender reassignment.

In reality, the standard gender question would not be asked in addition to questions 1-3, so minority groups would be identified solely through the latter questions. In the trial, 1.4 per cent of respondents would be classified into a minority group based on their responses to questions 1-3, made up of the following groups:

- 1.0 per cent answering 'yes' to question 3;
- a further 0.26 per cent who answered 'in another way' to question 2 (who did not answer 'yes' to question 3);
- an additional 15 respondents (0.15 per cent) with combinations of 'male', 'female' and/or 'intersex' responses (who did not answer 'yes' to question 3).

None of the few who responded 'female' at question 1 and 'male' at question 2 also answered 'yes' to question 3. These could indicate intentional or unintentional errors. Caution therefore needs to be applied when viewing these results as an unquantifiable amount of error may significantly impact the minority group results.

Questions 4 and 5 provide additional information on those answering 'yes' to question 3. In response to question 4, 17 per cent said they were thinking about going through a process, 20 per cent said they were currently going through a

process and 17 per cent that they had been through a process (including those who have since changed back). However, similar numbers also prefer not to say (19 per cent) or answer 'none of the above' (26 per cent). The latter group includes those who have only considered going through a process at some time in the past.

Measuring trans identity

Of the 98 respondents who answered question 5, over a quarter (27 per cent) preferred not to say, seven per cent described themselves as trans men, eight per cent as trans women and eight per cent as a transsexual person. A further seven per cent saw themselves as a gender variant person and 17 per cent as a cross dressing or transvestite person. Some (29 per cent) answered 'in another way' to question 5 and provided write-in responses: eight responded with a sexual orientation category (gay, lesbian, etc), seven responded 'female' and seven included the word 'man' or 'male' in their responses. Other write-in responses included 'human', 'normal', 'myself' and 'none'. The wide range of responses, plus the high rate of responses which were 'prefer not to say' or 'in another way' makes these results difficult to interpret.

Conclusion

The trial of the five questions on gender identity and gender reassignment has provided further evidence that it is feasible to collect data on these issues. The results suggest that the majority of people surveyed were prepared to answer these questions. Only 18 respondents out of over 10,000 did not answer all the questions they were asked on these issues. In addition, different wording and response options had little effect on the relative numbers responding 'male' and 'female'. The sex ratio ranged between 97.8 and 98.1 for the three questions in the trial.

There were several ways in which minority identities could be identified.

Respondents were able to report: different genders, intersex in response to the birth sex question, 'in another way' in response to the gender identity question or 'yes' to the question about gender reassignment.

There was relatively little overlap between different minority groups, which suggests that, to maximise the opportunities for respondents to choose minority identities, questions 1-3 all need to be asked. Relying on only some of these questions would miss some groups of respondents. For example, the majority of those that answered 'yes' to question 3 would not have been identified as a trans respondent under questions 1 and 2, while the majority of those who described their gender identity 'in another way' answered 'no' to question 3.

A potential difficulty in interpreting these findings is that some of the responses which appear to come from trans people may not actually do so. For example, there were 24 people who changed their answers between when they were asked the standard gender question and when they were asked questions 1 and 2, i.e. answering 'male' at first but 'female' later, or vice versa. Only one of these 24 went on to answer 'yes' when asked directly about gender reassignment (see Q3), which makes it difficult to know how to interpret the other responses. However, in a stand-alone survey, these responses would be placed in the majority group where the impact of any incorrect responses would be small.

Question space on surveys is often at a premium, so there is a need to justify asking all five questions or to consider whether they can be reduced in any way. Results from the trial appear to show that the questions measure almost-discrete groups: the more questions asked, the more minority groups are included.

Questions 1 and 2 were designed to measure gender identity in an inclusive way that allowed a respondent to identify with a gender other than male or female should they want to. The sex ratio obtained in question 2 does not differ significantly from that obtained using the standard gender question and therefore we recommend that this question be used in place of the standard gender question in online and paper-based surveys.

Adding in question 1 then allows additional minority groups to be identified which would otherwise be missed: those giving one 'male' and one 'female' response at questions 1 and 2 and the small number responding 'intersex' at question 1. So wherever possible, question 1 should be asked alongside question 2. It would not be appropriate to ask question 1 alone, since it would not allow respondents to self-identify their gender identity. Where question 1 is to be asked in addition to question 2, it would still be advisable to check its acceptability with respondents before carrying out the survey.

Questions 3 and 4 were designed to measure gender reassignment as defined by the Equality Act 2010 (The National Archives, 2010). At its most basic, question 3 needed to screen out the majority of respondents who had never thought about or gone through gender reassignment. Our results show that both questions appeared successful, although the fact that many responses to question 4 were 'prefer not to say' or 'none of the above' may suggest that the response options need further consideration.

Question 5 was designed to measure trans identity. However, given the overlap between the responses to question 2 (write-ins) and question 5, plus the high rate of 'prefer not to say' and 'in another way' responses, we believe that this question adds little in the way of further information.

We therefore recommend that, wherever possible and acceptable, questions 1, 2, 3 and 4 are asked. The Equality Act 2010 defines gender reassignment as a protected characteristic and then states that a transsexual person is an individual who has that protected characteristic. Questions 3 and 4 measure the definition of gender reassignment whereas questions 1 and 2 allow a larger population to be measured, including respondents who may not have considered gender reassignment but who wish to identify as other than 'male' or 'female'. As gender reassignment is a fluid process, asking questions 1-4 will provide information on those who are considering or in the process of transitioning and also those who have completed a gender reassignment process.

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Annex A – Definitions

The terms sex and gender may be used interchangeably when discussing issues relating to equality between women and men. However in the research literature, sex and gender are considered separately and their definitions differ as follows:

Gender - Gender refers to socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes. The terms 'man', 'masculine', 'woman', and 'feminine' denote gender identities and expressions.

Sex - Sex refers to biological and physiological characteristics. In Britain, the terms 'male' and 'female' are used in birth certificates to denote the sex of children.

The questions being developed by the Commission include some designed to collect data on the protected characteristic of 'gender reassignment', in relation to which we use the following terms:

Gender reassignment - The term 'gender reassignment' applies to the process of transitioning from one gender role to another. The adjective used in the Equality Act 2010 to describe people who propose to transition, are transitioning or have transitioned is 'transsexual'.

Transsexual - A transsexual person is one who proposes to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process of gender reassignment (which may or may not involve hormone therapy or surgery).

The study aims to be inclusive and provides other ways in which people with a minority gender identity may self-identify. The following terms are used in relation to this broader group:

Androgyne/polygender people and other gender non-conforming people -

Those who identify on the spectrum between man and woman and may express this in a wide variety of ways.

Gender identity - The way in which an individual self-identifies with a gender category, which can be at odds with their sex appearance and gender role; may be neutral, non gendered; may involve a transition from one gender to another; or may have aspects of both man and woman.

Intersex people - There are a number of intersex conditions (recently renamed Disorders of Sex Development), some of which lead to physical genital anomalies. Those born with them may experience inconsistency between their gender identity and the gender role assigned at birth.

Trans/Transgender people - The terms 'trans people' and 'transgender people' are both often used as umbrella terms for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from their birth sex, including transsexual people, transvestite/cross-dressing people (those who wear clothing traditionally associated with the other gender either occasionally or more regularly), androgynous/polygender people, and others who define as gender variant / non-conforming.

Annex B - Table showing breakdown of responses by the standard gender question and questions 1-3

Standard gender question	Birth sex (Q1)	Gender identity (Q2)	Number of responses	Gender reassignment (Q3)			Percentage of 'yes' responses to Q3 %
				Yes	No	Missing	
Male	Male	Male	4,923	56	4,860	7	1.1%
Female	Female	Female	5,027	25	5,000	2	0.5%
Male	PNTS	Male	5	1	4	0	20.0%
Female	PNTS	Female	3	1	2	0	33.3%
Male	Male	Female	2	2	0	0	100.0%
Female	Female	Male	2	0	2	0	0.0%
Male	Female	Male	3	0	3	0	0.0%
Female	Male	Female	8	2	6	0	25.0%
Female	Male	Male	12	0	12	0	0.0%
Male	Female	Female	11	1	9	1	10.0%
Female	PNTS	Male	1	0	1	0	0.0%
Male	Intersex	Female	3	0	3	0	0.0%
Female	Intersex	Female	1	0	1	0	0.0%
Male	Male	In another way	18	8	10	0	44.4%
Female	Female	In another way	17	4	13	0	23.5%
Male	PNTS	In another way	2	0	1	1	0.0%
Female	PNTS	In another way	1	0	1	0	0.0%
Total			10,039	100	9,928	11	1.0%

NB PNTS = 'I prefer not to say'

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