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Developing survey questions on sexual identity:
Cognitive/in-depth interviews

Peter Betts
Data Collection Methodology
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Contacts

This publication

For information about the content of this publication, contact Peter Betts
Tel: 020 7014 2290
Email: peter.betts@ons.gsi.gov.uk

Other customer and media enquiries

ONS Customer Contact Centre
Tel: 0845 601 3034
International: +44 (0)845 601 3034
Minicom: 01633 812399
Email: info@statistics.gsi.gov.uk
Fax: 01633 652747
Post: Room 1015, Government Buildings,
Cardiff Road, Newport, South Wales NP10 8XG

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

There is an increasing requirement for data on sexual orientation or sexual identity in order to meet current and future legislative requirements. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) established a project that aimed to provide advice on best practice with regard to data collection in this field, and to examine the feasibility of providing benchmark data. The primary outputs will be a question asking people to self categorise to a particular sexual identity, for use on government and other social surveys, and a user guide discussing the conceptual issues as well as guidance on data collection and the interpretation of results.

The exploratory stage of the project concluded with the development of a prototype question and administration design for further testing in the project's main stage, which consisted of a quantitative pilot, on ONS's General Lifestyle Survey (GLF), and qualitative testing. This document reports on the qualitative testing using cognitive/in-depth interviews. Full information on the project, including reports on the other work packages, can be found at http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/index.html.

The cognitive/in-depth interviews aimed to evaluate how the prototype question was understood by respondents and whether they were able to provide answers consistent with the intended measure. They also explored issues relating to the acceptability of the topic in the social survey and other contexts, and views of the proposed administration method.

1.2 Methodology

Twenty nine cognitive/in-depth interviews were conducted with members of the public in summer 2008 across England, Scotland and Wales. The interviews were designed to build on the findings and recommendations from a series of focus groups conducted in the exploratory stage of the project, to provide collectively both breadth and depth of understanding of issues.

The purposive sample design targeted people from subgroups not well represented in the focus groups, including older and younger age groups; those living outside London; people with lower educational attainment; those identifying with ethnic minorities; those with particular religious affiliations; and transgender people. Other respondents had similar characteristics to the focus group participants. The sampling criteria thus included: sexual identity; sex (including transgender); age; ethnic group; religious affiliation; geographical location; educational attainment; and household type. See Appendix A for details of the achieved sample.

To put it in its proposed context, the question was administered among a sequence of other identity questions commonly asked on government social surveys – after national identity and ethnicity and before religion. Appendix B contains the paper questionnaire used in the interviews. Interviewers used a topic guide to prompt them to cover the relevant areas for exploration (see Appendix C).

The prototype question tested in the interviews was:

> 'Which of the options on this card best describes how you think of yourself?
> Please just read out the number next to the description.'

The response categories were: Heterosexual/Straight; Gay / Lesbian; Bisexual; Other. Respondents were given a show card and asked to answer by saying the number associated with the category. The numbers on the card were not consecutive or sequential. Spontaneous 'don't know' answers and refusals could be recorded by the interviewer.

1.3 Key findings

A sexual identity question was considered acceptable for inclusion on government social surveys.

The prototype question ('Which of the options on this card best describes how you think of yourself?' - Heterosexual/Straight; Gay/Lesbian; Bisexual; Other) achieved the intention of measuring self-perceived sexual identity. Despite some issues with terminology, the response categories were appropriate and optimised comprehension.

The system of concealed show cards was broadly successful in helping to maintain privacy without drawing undue attention to the administration. It is appropriate for use in interviewer-administered face to face surveys. For interviews conducted concurrently with more than one respondent, cards unique to each respondent should be used and a brief explanation that each card is unique should be given by interviewers at the point the sexual identity question is asked. However, some sexual minority respondents are reluctant to disclose their sexual identity and will give a socially desirable response, whatever system of administration is used.

Concerns were felt among respondents about asking a sexual identity question by proxy, regarding acceptability and accuracy.

In the Population Census context the question was supported in principle but there were concerns among respondents regarding privacy of administration within households. In the context of equality monitoring in the workplace and service provision, the relevance and effects of asking about sexual identity were questioned.

1.4 Recommendations

1. It is recommended that a sexual identity question be included on the ONS Integrated Household Survey and harmonised on other government social surveys[1] (See 3.3).
2. It is recommended that the sexual identity question be located with other identity questions, after national identity and ethnicity and before religious affiliation. (See 3.3).

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[1] As per Recommendation R5.1 in the National Statistics Report from the Review of Equalities Data (October 2007), http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/equality-data-review/index.html

3. An explanation of the purpose of the question need not be given to respondents routinely at the point the question is asked. Interviewers should be provided with an explanation to use should respondents query the purpose. (See 3.3).
4. The findings relating to views of the inclusion of a question in equality monitoring contexts (such as employment and service provision) should inform the published user guide on data collection and interpretation. (See 3.3).
5. The recommended question stem is 'Which of the options on this card best describes how you think of yourself' (as per the prototype question). No reference period (e.g. 'currently') is required. (See 4.7).
6. The recommended response categories are: Heterosexual/Straight; Gay/Lesbian; Bisexual; Other (as per the prototype question). (See 4.7).
7. It is recommended that no follow-up 'specify' question be asked when the answer is 'Other', for privacy reasons in interviewer-administered surveys. (See 4.7).
8. An explanation of the meaning of response categories should be available to interviewers to provide if respondents query them. The explanation should be in general terms, not prescriptive, due to the subjectivity of sexual identity. However, since the meaning is more likely to be queried by people who are heterosexual/straight, and heterosexual/straight respondents conceptualised sexual identity mainly in terms of sexual attraction, the explanation can be given in terms of attraction to people of the opposite sex, same sex or both sexes, as appropriate. (See 4.7).
9. The stem wording, the terminology used in the response categories and the need for different or additional categories should be reviewed in the future, in order to keep abreast of the public's conceptualisation of sexual identity, use of terminology, and the potential emergence of additional sexual identities. (See 4.7).
10. The general show card introduction that was tested should not be used. Instead it is recommended that a brief, low-key explanation that each card is unique be given by interviewers at the point the sexual identity question is asked in concurrent interviews: 'The numbers on each card are different for each person.' (See 5.7).
11. It is recommended that the other aspects of the show card system be adopted in interviewer-administered face to face surveys. That is, unique cards for each respondent, presented face down, with non-sequential and non-consecutive numbers for the categories. (See 5.7).
12. Interviewers should be briefed about the acceptability (as shown by the comprehensive testing), meaning and administration of the question, and assured that the question can be administered in the same matter-of-fact manner as other questions. (See 5.7).
13. It is recommended that a category such as 'prefer not to say' is not included, provided the respondent is aware before the interview that all questions are voluntary. Spontaneous refusals should be coded by interviewers in the same way as for other questions. (See 5.7).
14. It is recommended that the sexual identity question is not asked by proxy in social surveys, due to the concerns felt among respondents regarding acceptability and accuracy. This is consistent with the ONS policy not to ask opinion questions by proxy. (See 5.7).

2   Introduction and methodology

2.1 Background

There is an increasing requirement for data on sexual orientation or sexual identity in order to meet current and future legislative requirements. The key users of this data will include central government departments, local government, other public service providers, lesbian, gay and bisexual service providers, academia and other research organisations.

In 2006 the Office for National Statistics (ONS) established a project that aimed to provide advice on best practice with regard to data collection in this field, and to examine the feasibility of providing benchmark data. The primary outputs will be a question asking people to self categorise to a particular sexual identity, along with advice on administration. A user guide will be published, discussing the conceptual issues as well as guidance on data collection and the interpretation of results. The questioning was proposed for inclusion in government multi-purpose general population social surveys, primarily the new ONS Integrated Household Survey (IHS). The IHS combines most of ONS's continuous household surveys. All household members aged 16 or over are interviewed, primarily face to face with some interviews carried out by telephone.

Prior to the project the impact of asking a question on sexual identity on a multi-purpose survey was unknown. It was thought some respondents might be unhappy about being asked to provide what could be considered personal and sensitive information, particularly in a concurrent interview where other household members may be present. Response to the survey overall or to the individual question might be affected, as might willingness to be contacted again on panel surveys.

Issues relating to the administration of this question among particular groups in society needed to be explored. For example, people's cultural or religious beliefs may be offended. The age of the respondent may relate to their ability to answer or attitudes to such questioning. Examining personal barriers to response would help to suggest ways in which the administration of the questioning could be improved. Respondents' ability to comprehend the question and response categories has clear implications for data quality. Furthermore the comprehension and attitudes of interviewers are important since they are often called upon to justify the inclusion of a particular topic in a survey and the impressions they give to respondents might affect answers given.

2.2 The development and testing programme

The project managers in Socio-Economic Microanalysis and Reporting Division commissioned Data Collection Methodology-Social Surveys (DCM-S) branch of Methodology Directorate to conduct qualitative and quantitative development and testing work. The overall methodology is described in Wilmot (2007).

The exploratory stage of the project comprised several work packages employing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies.
- An examination of the equalities agenda and legislative context in which the project is being conducted (Hand and Betts, 2008).

- Reviews of survey questions on sexual orientation/identity previously conducted in the UK and internationally, including their designs, resulting estimates and feedback from researchers and respondents (Betts, 2008 and Taylor, 2008b).
- Four trials of variant questions and modes of administration on the National Statistics Omnibus Survey, including feedback from interviewers (Taylor 2008a, Taylor and Ralph 2008 and Malalgoda and Traynor 2008).
- Focus groups with members of the public (Betts, Wilmot and Taylor, 2008).

The exploratory stage concluded with the development of a prototype question and administration design for further testing in the project's main stage. The main stage consisted of a quantitative pilot, on ONS's General Lifestyle Survey (GLF), and qualitative testing. This document reports on the qualitative testing using cognitive/in-depth interviews. Full information on the project, including reports on the other work packages, can be found at http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/sexual-identity-project/index.html.

2.3 Purpose of the cognitive/in-depth interviews

The cognitive/in-depth interviews were designed to build on the findings and recommendations from a series of focus groups conducted in the exploratory stage of the project, to collectively provide both breadth and depth of understanding of issues. The focus groups provided a first, broad impression about the following topics: the conceptualisation of sexual identity; the language/terminology used and understood by people; potential question wordings and response categories; the acceptability of asking about sexual identity; and administration in the social survey context. The findings informed the design of the prototype question tested in the cognitive/in-depth interviews.

The first objective of the cognitive/in-depth interviews was to cognitively test the prototype question, that is, to evaluate how the question was understood by respondents and whether they were able to provide an answer consistent with the intended measure. This included exploring respondents' understanding of the measurement concept[2] - sexual identity - and whether the response categories and the terms used were appropriate. The second objective was to explore issues relating to the acceptability of the topic in the social survey context and other contexts. This included views of the proposed administration method - a concealed show card system - designed for use in a concurrent interviewing environment where more than one household member is interviewed at the same time. To the researchers' knowledge, no other survey administered concurrently has included a question on sexual identity.

The interviews crossed any boundary between cognitive testing and in-depth research. Being an identity-related question, respondents' comprehension and the processes by which they arrived at their answers entered the subjective territory of conceptualisation of sexual identity. To understand the issues required more in-depth probing than might a factual question. Being a potentially sensitive subject in the social survey context and household environment, the acceptability of asking and sensitivity of providing a response needed to be explored more deeply than would an innocuous topic. Furthermore, while the focus groups had laid a foundation for the

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[2] See section 4.1 for information about the measurement concept.

researchers' in-depth understanding of these topics, it was important for the interviews to address the same topics in order to determine whether our conclusions were generalisable to other people of the same types as those included in the focus groups, or to people of types which had not been well represented in the focus groups (see 2.4.1).

On the basis of the findings from these interviews, in conjunction with those from the GLF pilot, changes would be made, if necessary, to the question wording, response categories or administration method before the introduction of the question on ONS social surveys. The findings would also inform the training for survey interviewers and the guidance on the collection and analysis of data on sexual identity, for researchers in central and local government and the wider research community, due for publication in 2009.

2.4 Methodology

Twenty nine cognitive/in-depth interviews were conducted with members of the public in summer 2008 across England, Scotland and Wales.

2.4.1 The purposive sample

The purposive sample design for the cognitive/in-depth interviews targeted people from subgroups not well represented in the focus groups. Certain subgroups had been deliberately omitted from the focus group sample design, including those in older and younger age groups and living outside London. Other subgroups were sparsely represented in the achieved sample for the focus groups due to practical limitations on the number of sampling criteria it was feasible to cover fully. These groups included people of lower educational attainment; and those identifying with ethnic minorities or with particular religious affiliations. It was thought among focus group participants that people with religious views or living in non-metropolitan areas might find the questioning offensive or be less tolerant towards sexual minority groups; and that older and younger people and people from ethnic minority groups might have different opinions on the terminology which should be used.

Transgender people had not been included in the focus groups. Although the researchers recognised that gender identity and sexual identity are different concepts[3] and that transgender people comprise a small minority of the population, it was important for the project to ensure that they would be able to answer a question on sexual identity in a way consistent with the majority of the population. Therefore several interviews were conducted with transgender people of different gender identities and sexual identities.

Some cognitive/in-depth interview respondents had similar characteristics to focus group participants, to test whether the conclusions that had been drawn and applied in the design of the prototype question were supported.

Therefore the sampling criteria included: sexual identity; sex (including transgender); age; ethnic group; religious affiliation; geographical location; educational attainment

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[3] Indeed, among the transgender community, 'sexual identity' can mean physical/biological sex (as distinct from gender identity), rather than the identity dimension of sexual orientation which is the subject of the question being developed by the ONS project.

(distinguishing between 'below A level/equivalent' and 'A level/equivalent and above'); and household type. See Appendix A for details of the achieved sample.

2.4.2 Recruitment, interviewing and analysis

Recruitment was conducted by DCM-S staff in order that the composition of the achieved sample could be carefully monitored to match that intended. Sample sources included ONS's qualitative respondent register of former respondents to the National Statistics Omnibus survey (Wilmot 2005), people contacted via Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) organisations and contacts made through other channels. See Appendix D for information about the help LGBT organisations provided.

When recruiting heterosexual/straight people the research was explained as being about a set of questions on people's identity, including national identity, ethnicity, sexual identity and religion. This was in order that no particular attention was drawn to the sexual identity question in case potential respondents' willingness to take part in the test was affected. For example, they might refuse to take part due to self-perceived lack of knowledge or interest in this topic, or their (potentially negative) feelings about the topic or about gay, lesbian or bisexual people.

To test the question in context, it was explained at the beginning of all the interviews that an ONS survey typically includes questions about the socio-demographic characteristics of the people in the household (for example, age, sex, marital status, housing tenure, economic activity) including a sequence of identity questions. This identity sequence was then administered, in the order national identity, ethnicity, sexual identity and religion. Cognitive and in-depth probing was then conducted retrospectively on the sequence as a whole, before being concentrated on the sexual identity question. Appendix B contains the paper questionnaire used in the interviews. Interviewers used a topic guide to prompt them to cover the relevant areas for exploration (see Appendix C).

In line with usual practice, a monetary incentive was given to respondents as a token of appreciation for their participation and to cover any travel expenses incurred. The interviews were recorded, and summarised by the interviewer. A thematic analysis was then conducted.

2.5 Structure of the report

The interviews explored three main areas, each of which forms a chapter of this report.

- The acceptability of asking about sexual identity on social surveys and in other contexts (including some reference to the Census), including the location of questioning, understanding of the purpose of questioning and trust in the collectors of the data.
- The cognitive process in answering the question, including comprehension of the question and response categories, use of terminology, the basis for self-categorisation and the stability or fluidity of sexual identity over time.
- The administration of the question in the social survey context, including the disclosure of sexual identity in the household and other environments, maintaining privacy, mode of administration, interviewer effects and proxy data collection.

Findings about transgender respondents are included with those of non-transgender respondents where they are not specifically related to being transgender but reported separately where being transgender is pertinent to the findings.

Detailed conclusions and recommendations are given at the end of each chapter, with particular consideration given to the targeted subgroups and to the implications of findings for the design of question wording and method of administration.

2.5.1 Definition of key terms and concepts

To aid the reader's understanding of the report, some of the key terms and concepts found throughout are defined below.

The following conventions are sometimes used for describing respondents.
- **'Sexual majority'** means respondents identifying as heterosexual/straight (the terms are interchangeable).
- **'Sexual minority'** means respondents identifying as gay/lesbian, bisexual or 'other'.
- **'LGB'** refers to lesbian, gay and/or bisexual people.

The following concepts are used throughout the report. They are based on the findings from the focus groups which were largely supported by the findings from the cognitive-in-depth interviews.
- **'Salience'** of sexual identity refers to the degree to which respondents had thought about sexual identity previously, and how prominent it was in their minds.
- **'Importance'** refers to the degree of significance respondents gave to sexual identity.
- Salience and importance are not necessarily congruent in an individual.

The types of identification with a sexual identity category were labelled as follows.
- **'Latent identifiers':** This term was used to describe heterosexual/straight participants. They had given sexual identity little, if any, thought in their lives yet were able to select the category when asked the question.
- **'Conscious identifiers':** This term was used to describe gay/lesbian participants because they had given their sexual identity more consideration in their lives.
- **'Reluctant identifiers':** This term was used to describe some bisexual participants, because they disliked categorisation on the basis of sexual attraction and relationships as defined by gender (that is with people of the opposite sex, same sex or both sexes).
- **'Political identifiers':** Bisexual participants also included political identifiers, who wanted to stand apart from heterosexual/straight and gay/lesbian identities.
- **'Fluid identifiers':** Bisexual participants – particularly women – also included fluid identifiers. They were wary of identifying as bisexual in certain environments or unable to decide whether they identified as gay/lesbian or bisexual, due to fear of losing their place in the gay/lesbian community.
- The last three types were not necessarily mutually exclusive - an individual could be a reluctant and/or a political and/or a fluid identifier.

An underlying paradigm of the report is that respondents would only want to select one category in answer to a question on sexual identity, rather than be able to choose

multiple categories. This is based on evidence from the focus groups and cognitive interviews.

- **'Internal' identity**: It can be concluded that focus group participants and interview respondents generally felt a single sexual identity within themselves. That is they identified internally *only* as heterosexual/straight, or only as gay/lesbian, or only as bisexual. An individual did not identify internally as, for example, both gay and bisexual. However, there were people for whom sexual identity was not necessarily clear or had developed later in life and thus there might be people who would not find it easy to decide on one category. Internal identity may be stable or may be fluid over time.

- **'Social' identity:** Furthermore, there were people (identifying internally as gay/lesbian, bisexual and 'other') who had not disclosed or would not wish to disclose their sexual identity to particular people or in certain environments or contexts, for fear of prejudice, who thus had a different social (or 'external') identity from their internal identity.

- **'Socially desirable' response**: In such cases a socially desirable response might be given in answer to a question on sexual identity, that is, one different to their internal identity.

2.5.2 Describing respondent characteristics and maintaining confidentiality

Details of what is included in the sample criteria categories are provided at Appendix A, the achieved sample composition. To maintain the confidentiality of respondents some categories have been combined.

Verbatim quotes from respondents are italicised. Quote attributions generally include the respondent's sexual identity ('heterosexual/straight' or 'sexual minority', encompassing gay/lesbian, bisexual and 'other'), sex and age group. Other characteristics are included if relevant to the context (ethnic group, religious affiliation, location, household type, educational attainment). Where particularly pertinent, characteristics given in quote attributions are more specific than in Appendix A (to illustrate, 'gay' rather than 'sexual minority'; 'Hindu' rather than 'other [non-Christian] religion').

In order to maintain an individual's confidentiality, where necessary one or more of their characteristics is suppressed, or is given at a more general level than in Appendix A (to illustrate, 'Ethnic minority' rather than 'Black'). For an individual respondent, the characteristics given may vary from quote to quote, for reasons either of relevance or of confidentiality. Thus unique respondents cannot be identified on the basis of their individual characteristics or combinations of characteristics.

2.6 The tested question

The prototype question tested in the interviews is below.

Which of the options on this card best describes how you think of yourself? Please just read out the number next to the description.

15. Heterosexual / Straight
10. Gay / Lesbian
17. Bisexual
16. Other

Interviewers read only the question stem. Respondents were given a show card and asked to answer by saying the number associated with the description. The numbers on the card were not consecutive or sequential. Further information on the concealed show card system is given in chapter 5. Spontaneous 'don't know' answers and refusals could be recorded by the interviewer but were not presented as options to respondents.

3 Acceptability of the topic and trust in data collectors and users

3.1 Asking about sexual identity on government social surveys

3.1.1 Sexual identity in the context of identity questions

Previous research conducted on the project had led to the conclusion that the sexual identity question should be included with questions on other aspects of a person's identity: their national identity, ethnicity and religion. The cognitive/in-depth probing began with the sequence of identity questions, to see what, if any, spontaneous reactions to the sexual identity question arose, and how it was compared to the other questions in the sequence.

Generally respondents across the sample subgroups (sexual identities, sex/transgender, age groups, ethnic groups, religious affiliations, locations and educational attainments) found the sequence of identity questions, as a whole, acceptable and answerable: *"no problem"* and *"fine"* were recurring comments. Most of the questions were familiar to people. The sexual identity question was considered to be acceptable and to fit into the identity sequence.

There were respondents across the subgroups who thought none of the identity questions stood out over the others.

> *"I think it's normal, you get it in everyday life whether you're filling in job application forms or not, you answer such questions."* [Heterosexual/straight woman; Black/Black British]

> *"Nothing astounded me."* [Heterosexual/straight man; Asian/Asian British]

Other respondents cited one or more identity questions as having stood out to them. The questions on national identity, ethnicity and religion were mentioned, mainly by heterosexual/straight respondents, but not exclusively. For these identity questions, the reasons related to the processes by which respondents chose which category to answer, particularly when deliberating between two categories. For example, when considering national identity, respondents mentioned having British nationality but also other cultural or ethnic backgrounds/influences, and when considering the religion question, respondents had to decide whether to respond on the basis of whether they were practising or on their upbringing (for example having been christened).

There was a greater variety of reasons for the sexual identity question standing out. To both sexual majority and sexual minority respondents the question was unfamiliar or surprising.

> *"I'd never come across that one before."* [Heterosexual man; 45-60; Black/Black British; <A level]

> *"I was quite shocked to see the sexuality one, not many things would have that…Whenever you've got your nationality and all that you don't really have your sexuality involved in it."* [Sexual minority woman; 16-19; White British]

Surprise could be apparent even if not stated verbally, being visible in the facial expression of an older heterosexual/straight female respondent identifying with an ethnic minority.

Among heterosexual/straight respondents, the sexual identity question also stood out for the following reasons.

- Negative views about homosexuality were expressed among respondents in the older age group, with lower educational attainment and/or who identified with a religion and/or lived outside London, for example:

  "It is not right in the sight of God…God show us that a man and a woman should be together, shouldn't be no other sex but a man and a woman…"
  [Heterosexual/straight woman; 61 and over; Black/Black British; Christian; Outside London]

  "I'm a bit old fashioned as far as that goes… I think there's far too much of it, publicising it, nowadays, quite honestly. Entertainment is rotten with it."
  [Heterosexual/straight man; 61 and over; White British; no qualifications; Outside London]

- Comprehension problems experienced among female respondents in older age groups and/or from ethnic minorities (reported in section 4.4.1).

Among respondents from sexual minority groups the sexual identity question also stood out for the reasons below.

- Appreciation of its inclusion: it would be
  "nice to be asked…on an appropriate survey" [Sexual minority woman; 45-60; White British]

- Having to deliberate over which category to select (reported in section 4.5.2).
- The importance of the subject.
  "Because it's my minority" [Sexual minority man; White British]

- The concealed show card method, which it was thought would maintain privacy.
- The personal nature of the question and concerns about disclosure.
  "The only one that feels a bit personal is the sexuality question really… You're basically revealing your sexual preferences to a stranger." [Sexual minority woman; White British]

Sexual identity was not necessarily alone in standing out to an individual. For the female respondent who objected to homosexuality for religious reasons, mentioned above, the religion question also stood out because of her opinion of the Muslim faith: *"they are serving the wrong God"*.

Despite the sexual identity question standing out, no respondents expressed any negative views of its inclusion or were reluctant to respond to it. All respondents had answered the sexual identity question without demur when the sequence was administered at the start of the interview[4].

The order of the identity questions was generally thought acceptable by people from all groups.

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[4] Respondents were willing to participate in the cognitive/in-depth interviews and their responses cannot be presumed to represent the views of survey respondents potentially less willing to answer a sexual identity question.

"It doesn't really matter." [Heterosexual/straight respondent; 45-60; Asian/Asian British]

"I think that order is fine." [Sexual minority man; 16-19; Black British]

The few specific comments made supported the order in which the four questions were asked.

- A heterosexual/straight respondent said sexual identity should not be the first one asked, as respondents might wonder where the questioning was leading to.

    "I think they were in the right order actually…To be given the first card on sexuality, you'd think, well where is this leading? … But the way you did it, it sort of worked up to it." [Heterosexual/straight woman; 61 and over; White British]

- A sexual minority respondent felt the religion question was *"a bit close"* to the one on sexual identity, feeling that it might *"cause trouble"* since

    "religions have strong opinions on sexuality in my experience." [Sexual minority man; White British; no religion]

    He did not suggest any change to the order of any question. This comment would support placing sexual identity before religion.

3.1.2 General reactions to the sexual identity question

The interviews then went on to probe reactions to being asked the sexual identity question specifically.

Generally respondents' reactions were positive. No respondents showed any reluctance to respond. Recurring comments used by respondents in describing their initial reaction were *"fine"*, *"comfortable"*, *"ok"* and *"no problem"*. This was the case across all the subgroups included in the sample.

"The question didn't embarrass me…" [Heterosexual/straight woman; 61 and over; White British; Christian; Outside London]

"I had no qualms" [Heterosexual/straight man; Asian/Asian British]

"I felt fine answering that question." [Sexual minority man; 16-19; Black/Black British; no religion]

Being asked the question was seen as positive in itself for several reasons. A heterosexual/straight respondent from an ethnic minority group spoke of the difference to her country of origin where sex is not much talked about, and that it was important to *"be free"* to do so:

"…in my country we can't talk about [sex] *with an adult person but here it's different"* [Heterosexual/straight woman; 16-19; Black/Black British; Other (non-Christian) religion]

Sexual minority respondents thought it positive or *"nice"* to be asked as it was an aspect of identity commonly overlooked.

"It is part of my identity that gets left out so many times… I want it to be normal to be a lesbian. Asking a question like that normalises it" [Sexual minority woman; White British]

The very act of deciding which answer to give was of help to a respondent who had some confusion as to whether she was lesbian or bisexual.

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"It's good you asked me that question so I can think to myself 'what am I?'"
[Sexual minority woman; 16-19; Black/Black British]

There were respondents from both sexual majority and sexual minority groups who had little reaction to the question at all when answering it.

"I'd no feeling at all" [Heterosexual/straight woman; 61 and over; White British; Outside London]

"I didn't feel no way, just gave the category" [Heterosexual/straight man; 45-60; Black/Black British]

"I didn't really have any emotion about that at all." [Sexual minority woman; 45-60; White British]

Respondents who expressed negative views about homosexuality nonetheless were content to be asked.

"Didn't bother me because I know what I am." [Heterosexual/straight man; 61 and over; White British; no qualifications]

Comments were made about the *"personal"* nature of the question among both sexual majority and sexual minority respondents. However they were content about the privacy of administration and confidentiality of data, and their willingness to answer was not affected.

"...but at the same time I don't mind answering it." [Heterosexual/straight man; Asian/Asian British]

The question was considered strange due to its unfamiliarity, causing a respondent to take care to understand the question before answering.

"It was strange as it was the first time I had seen it. I just was careful to see that I knew what it means before I answered it." [Heterosexual/straight man; 45-60; Black/Black British; <A level]

The view was also expressed that sexual identity was less sensitive than questions about financial matters such as savings.

There were respondents with previous experience of being asked a question on sexual identity/orientation. Contexts in which respondents had been asked included: the National Statistics Omnibus survey; another, unspecified, government survey; a survey at work; Equal Opportunities forms when applying for jobs, voluntary work and local authority housing; and when registering for a conference. There was evidence of 'normalisation' - that being asked becomes less surprising the more the question is experienced.

"The first time I thought what do they want to know that for, what's it got to do with them, and then I wasn't so bothered the next time and then of course the last time it was also on this survey so I just answered it and didn't think nothing of it this time I just answered." [Heterosexual/straight man; 45-60; White British]

3.1.3 Understanding the purpose of the question and providing respondents with a rationale

The interviews explored respondents' understanding of the purpose of asking about sexual identity in a government survey, and whether it had any bearing on their acceptance of it.

The purposes mentioned by people from all subgroups were largely correct, albeit that some ideas were not well-developed. Among respondents from sexual minority groups, for whom such issues were more salient, understanding was fuller and better articulated. The purposes mentioned included:

- to create a picture of the population by collecting another socio-demographic characteristic;
- to establish a baseline measure of sexual minority groups;
- to examine, understand or compare the condition or views of subgroups, for example, to find out *"if things are improving or getting worse"* for LGB people;
- for reasons relating to equal opportunities, discrimination and the diversity agenda;
- to inform government policy;
- for reasons relating to service provision, the distribution of funds or helping those in need; and
- for reasons related to health, including with regard to HIV/AIDS, but not further elaborated.

These opinions were broadly similar to the focus groups.

The relevance or potential use of the information was generally accepted across all subgroups. Sexual minority respondents were highly positive about the purpose of the question: it was considered *"vital"* and *"very important"*. Repeating what had been said in focus groups, it was thought the question and resulting data would make LGB people feel they are *"not alone"*, help counter anti-homosexual views, and challenge the *"offensive"* assumption, made for example by medical staff, that all people are heterosexual.

Compared with the focus groups, respondents had fewer thoughts on potential negative consequences of the data being collected. However, caveats expressed by sexual minority respondents included that, potentially, a government which was a *"theocracy"* or *"totalitarian"* might use the information against minorities, and that the information should not be used to deny LGB people of (unspecified) rights.

> *"Well if your plan is to find out these things about discrimination and change it for the better then that's great but if it is just used to go on the news and say that gay and lesbian people can't do this and can't do that then I wouldn't see a point in (doing that)."* [Sexual minority man; 16-19; Black/Black British; no religion]

Among sexual minority respondents there were concerns about how the media might present data relating to LGB people in a negative way, or that a false image of the affluence of gay people might be created.

There were heterosexual/straight respondents who had no idea of the question's purpose (*"I wouldn't have a clue personally"*) or whose ideas were not accurate. A young respondent could only guess that the information could be used in marketing, and a respondent with anti-gay views informed by religion was of the opinion that the

government could use the information to *"put a stop to this life"* (that is, sexual minority behaviour). A lack of awareness of the need for equality monitoring was also evident:

> *"If it would be published that there were so many hundreds of thousands of gay people in the country it wouldn't make any difference to anybody would it? ... I don't see how it would be of interest to anybody actually."*
> [Heterosexual/straight man; 61 and over; no qualifications; Outside London]

Respondents were asked whether they thought a rationale for the sexual identity question should be routinely provided on a survey. Both sexual majority and sexual minority groups included respondents who would not require one as they would assume what the purpose was. A clear explanation of the survey's *"overall aim"* was thought to be sufficient, as long as the inclusion of the sexual identity question could be seen to *"make sense"*.

> *"I know it's just another fact about people. I don't think it's too intrusive."*
> [Sexual minority woman; 20-44; White British]

Respondents who felt an explanation should be given did so out of curiosity or the need for reassurance. The lack of an explanation would not affect their willingness to answer.

> *"I'm interested; I would like to know why."* [Heterosexual/straight woman; 61 and over; White British; no qualifications]

> *"My assumption is that you want to do the things that I feel should be done* [with the information] *but I don't know that."* [Sexual minority woman; 61 and over; White British; A level>]

As had been said in the focus groups, a suggestion was made to have a general introduction, at the start of the socio-demographic questions.

> *"At the beginning of the survey you'd say we're going to be asking you all kinds of questions about your ethnic origin and your religion and your sexuality, you don't have to worry about that information being used for anything else, the only type of thing it will be used for is to reduce inequality and to fight discrimination."* [Sexual minority man; White British]

3.1.4 Confidence in the data collection organisation

Respondents across all subgroups were generally confident that the data collected by ONS would be secure and used in confidence. It was thought ONS was subject to legal constraints and its staff subject to confidentiality pledges. Provisos included that the data should not be used for commercial purposes, or respondents' anonymity breached.

Respondents were asked their views on other organisations collecting the data. Distinctions were made between private organisations conducting government surveys, which was broadly acceptable to respondents, and market research, about which they had some concerns. The image of the government department or research company was important. Concerns were expressed about the private sector 'cutting corners' or selling information. Respondents spoke in general terms about being against market research and were not necessarily singling out the sexual identity question.

3.2 Asking about sexual identity in other contexts

3.2.1 Population Census

Views were sought on the potential inclusion of a sexual identity question in the Population Census. All subgroups included respondents who were content for a sexual identity question to be included, to provide information for the government in gaining knowledge about society and to use in planning services.

> *"You want to know exactly what is in the communities don't you."*
> [Heterosexual/straight man; 45-60; Black/Black British]

Sexual minority respondents in particular saw being counted as positive:

> *"I think it would be good as it would recognise this group of people."* [Sexual minority man; 16-19; Black/Black British]

The method of administration used on the Census, which could allow answers to be seen by other household members, was discussed with respondents. Those heterosexual/straight respondents who lived with spouses, partners or with other family members (such as children or siblings) had no concerns about lack of privacy in their current household situation.

> *"By the time the next one comes around its only between me and the wife, and we haven't got any secrets after thirty years so from our position we're probably gonna sit down together and answer it anyway."* [Heterosexual/straight man; 45-60; White British]

The above view was shared by sexual minority respondents who lived with partners, or whose sexual identity was known to the people they lived with, who included parents, siblings and housemates. They included respondents in the younger age groups and who lived outside metropolitan areas.

There were, however, respondents who said that if they were living in different circumstances they would not want other household members to know their answer. There were sexual minority respondents who said if they were still living with their parents, siblings or unrelated people they would not want to 'out' themselves. A view held among heterosexual/straight respondents was that privacy would be wanted if they were living with people to whom they were not related.

The concerns relating to privacy would potentially result in missing or misleading data. There were respondents who said they would not answer the question, or might give a socially desirable answer, rather than choose a 'prefer not to say' option (as was also the case in respect of social surveys – reported at 5.1.2).

> *"I think people would lie because if you don't answer people* [in the household] *might wonder why."* [Sexual minority man; 16-19; Black/Black British]

While all respondents said they would give a correct answer to the Census in their current household, an example was provided of when a socially desirable answer might be given. A young gay/lesbian respondent said they would answer 'other' rather than 'gay/lesbian' on a social survey because they were not out to immediate family members. In relation to the Census the respondent had a seemingly contradictory view, saying the fact that others could see it would not affect the

answer. The respondent was noted by the interviewer to be tiring at this point and it seems more likely that their feelings about the Census and the social survey context would be consistent.

Use of a separate form and envelope for each household member was suggested among respondents, but this might not overcome all privacy concerns, and would be complex to administer.

Aside from privacy in the household, other concerns about Census administration were felt. There were sexual majority and sexual minority respondents who thought the question should not be mandatory:

> *"You're obliging everyone. Censuses are subject to certain laws aren't they about completion."* [Sexual minority woman; 45-60; White British]

Among sexual minority respondents, concern was expressed about lack of anonymity, in that respondents can be identified personally from the form. For example, one said *"It's attached to your name"* and thought that a category was required for people who did not want to answer, such as *"do not wish to disclose".* He did not know whether or not he would disclose. However anonymity was not of concern to other sexual minority respondents.

Responding by proxy on the Census was not specifically asked about, having been asked in respect of social surveys (reported at 5.6). The mixed views, regarding the acceptability of asking by proxy and the accuracy of proxy data, can be assumed also to apply to Census context. Indeed, it was spontaneously said, among heterosexual/straight respondents, that answers on behalf of a spouse or adult child would not be provided.

There was an indication that acceptance of the sexual orientation diversity strand lagged behind other diversity strands. Among heterosexual/straight respondents its relevance to the general population headcount was questioned (as it had been on social surveys), whereas asking other identity questions was not.

> *"I don't see much point on it on a Census…On a Census you're only wanting to know the population of the country, why define between one and the other? …They should know about the number of different races that are in the country."* [Heterosexual/straight man; 61 and over; no qualifications; Outside London]

3.2.2 Equality monitoring in employment and provision of services

An aim of the project is to develop a question which can harmonise the collection and analysis of data across government and the wider public, voluntary and private sectors. Therefore respondents were asked for their views on data collection in contexts such employment and service provision.

The purpose of collecting sexual identity information on national surveys or the Census for statistical purposes was widely accepted. However there were respondents from all subgroups who did not realise that employers and other organisations need to collect their own data in order to monitor equality of opportunity by comparing them with baseline estimates.

Respondents from all subgroups questioned the relevance to employment or service provision, either as part of the application process or subsequently. Sexual identity was felt to be personal and irrelevant to a person's ability to do their job or need for a service. It was thought to be *"illegal"* for an employer to ask its employees.

> *"You think twice, what's the thinking behind this, do they want to employ people who are heterosexual or those who are gay?"* [Heterosexual/straight man; 45-60; Black/Black British]

> *"It makes no difference to how you do your job."* [Sexual minority woman; 45-60; White British]

> *"They have no right to ask."* [Sexual minority man; White British]

Sexual minority respondents included those who feared discrimination or had experienced it.

> *"It might not go down too well and you might not get that job."* [Sexual minority man; 16-19; Black/Black British]

> *"I often nowadays don't disclose on sexuality questions because I encounter a lot of prejudice doing so."* [Sexual minority man; White British]

Respondents in both sexual majority and sexual minority groups said they would refuse to answer the question. Among respondents in sexual minority groups were those who would select a 'prefer not to say' category or give a socially desirable answer.

> *"I wouldn't answer it."* [Heterosexual/straight man; 45-60; White British]

> *"I would cover it up."* [Sexual minority man; 16-19; White British]

> *"I would just say heterosexual because you wouldn't want anything to jeopardise your chances"* [Sexual minority woman; White British]

However, there were respondents who would answer correctly regardless of their concerns.

There were also respondents across all subgroups who felt it was *"fine"* to be asked in the employment or service provision context and were aware of the question's use in equality monitoring. Respondents, in particular from sexual minority groups, included those who were used to being asked such a question, and thought it was important: *"it should be a part"* of any monitoring form.

Reassurance about the use and confidentiality of the information was felt to be important. The anonymity of an equal opportunities form being separate to a main application form was understood among respondents. But anonymity was not always assumed, nor was it always thought necessary. There were respondents who thought that there would be positive effects as a consequence. For example, an individual's sexual identity would become widely known at work, which could end speculation by colleagues. It was thought that homophobic bullying, at an individual level, could be identified and brought to an employer's attention. The view was expressed that medical staff should have the information so that they do not assume a patient is heterosexual and deal with them inappropriately.

The range and nature of the views above were similar to those from the focus groups.

3.3 Acceptability and trust: conclusions and recommendations

The general reaction of respondents to a sexual identity question on general purpose government social surveys was positive. It was seen as acceptable to ask in that context.

The sexual identity question stood out from the other identity questions to some respondents, largely for reasons relating to it being unfamiliar. These reasons were both positive – appreciation of being counted among sexual minority respondents – and negative – by respondents who felt it to be personal, or who expressed disapproval about matters relating to homosexuality, or who had comprehension problems. However, to other respondents, across all subgroups, no questions stood out over others, or it was other identity questions which stood out due to considerations in choosing their answers. Those respondents for whom the sexual identity question stood out did not object to its inclusion or express reluctance to answer it.

Sexual identity fitted in to the sequence of identity questions along with national identity, ethnicity and religious affiliation. The order of the identity questions was generally thought acceptable, with sexual identity between ethnicity and religion.

The relevance of the question in the general social survey context was accepted across all groups, particularly positively received by sexual minority respondents. Respondents' ideas about the purpose of asking were largely accurate, relating to establishing a baseline measure of sexual minority groups, comparing subgroups and informing policy and service provision. There were heterosexual/straight respondents with no little or no idea of the purpose or the need for equality monitoring. Sexual minority respondents expressed some concern about potential misuse of data by government or its presentation by the media.

The focus groups had elicited mixed views as to whether a rationale for the question should be provided to survey respondents. The researchers subsequently concluded that one should not be given, unless asked for by a respondent, since it would draw undue attention to this particular question. The cognitive/in-depth interviews led to the same conclusion. There was no demand for the purpose of the question to be explained routinely at the point when it would be asked, arising either spontaneously or when the issue was prompted. This applied across all subgroups.

Respondents across all subgroups were generally confident that the data collected by ONS would be secure and used in confidence. Distinctions were made between the question being asked by private organisations conducting government surveys, which was broadly acceptable to respondents, and its use in market research, about which they had some concerns.

There were respondents from all groups who supported the potential inclusion of a sexual identity question in the Census in principle and who said they would answer honestly. However other respondents expressed concerns regarding: the privacy of the administration method, relating to living in households of unrelated people, or, among sexual minority respondents, in any households where they had not disclosed their sexual identity; the mandatory nature of the Census; and about lack of anonymity.

Data quality might be compromised by provision of socially desirable answers. These findings were, again, similar to those from the focus groups.

In the context of equality monitoring in the workplace and service provision, the relevance and effects of asking the question were questioned by respondents from all subgroups. The question might be refused or subject to socially desirable answers. However there were respondents who understood the relevance and were positive about the question being asked in this context, or who did not question it, or who would answer the question despite their concerns.

The opinions held by respondents from the subgroups which had not been well represented in the focus groups (those in the older and younger age groups, those living outside London, those with lower educational attainments, those identifying with ethnic minorities or with particular religious affiliations and transgender respondents) were broadly consistent with those of the focus groups participants and other cognitive/in-depth interview respondents of similar types to the focus group participants. The main exceptions were that negative views about homosexuality and reservations about the purpose of the question were expressed, among heterosexual/straight respondents in the older age band, and/or from an ethnic minority, and/or with religious affiliation, and/or who lived outside London, and/or with lower educational attainment. However, that is not to say that all respondents in those subgroups expressed such views. Nor was it the case that such views affected respondents' acceptance of the question on social surveys.

Recommendations
3.1   A sexual identity question is suitable for inclusion on the ONS Integrated Household Survey and for harmonisation on other government social surveys[5].
3.2   It is recommended that the sexual identity question be located with other identity questions, after national identity and ethnicity and before religious affiliation.
3.3   An explanation of the purpose of the question need not be given to respondents routinely at the point the question is asked. Interviewers should be provided with an explanation to use should respondents query the purpose.
3.4.   The findings relating to views of the inclusion of a question in equality monitoring contexts (such as employment and service provision) should inform the published user guide on data collection and interpretation.

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[5] As per Recommendation R5.1 in the National Statistics Report from the Review of Equalities Data (October 2007), http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/equality-data-review/index.html

4 Comprehension of the question, use of terminology and basis for self-categorisation

4.1 The measurement concept and challenges to designing a valid question

The question being developed is intended to measure the identity dimension of an individual's sexual orientation. That is, their self-identification based on internal feelings and/or because of feelings of commonality or community with other people[6]. Of key importance in designing a question for use in general population surveys is that respondents answer on this basis, rather than on the basis of other dimensions of sexual orientation, particularly sexual attraction and behaviour. It is also important that respondents understand that the question is about current, not former, sexual identity. This is because an individual's responses to questions on the different dimensions could be inconsistent, legitimately, either across different dimensions at a single point in time, or over time for a single dimension.

From the focus groups a number of challenges in designing the question wording were identified. They had potential implications for the question's validity: respondents might vary in their comprehension and the way they formulate responses.

- Several types of identifier were discovered, based on the salience and importance of sexual identity, and the processes of identification, which varied across people in the three commonly used categories of sexual orientation (see 2.5.1).
- The use and understanding of terms such as 'sexual orientation', 'sexual identity' and 'sexuality' varied across the categories, and within them.
- Potential question wordings or terms to use in response categories might imply dimensions of behaviour or attraction.
- Terms used might not be understood by, or acceptable to, respondents consistently.

Fortunately, the focus groups also provided reassurance. Although participants conceptualised sexual identity in different ways and based their self-categorisation on varying dimensions of sexual orientation, all were able to identify with a category in a way which would be appropriate to the intended data requirement. Heterosexual/straight participants had generally never considered themselves to be anything else. The distinction between dimensions of sexual orientation and the issue of understanding that the question was specifically about the dimension of identity were therefore unimportant. Those participants whose sexual orientation could potentially vary across dimensions or over time determined their answers by what they currently considered their internal or social identity to be, not simply on the basis of sexual behaviour/attraction. The findings led to the conclusion that despite the variations outlined above, people of all types could be asked the same question.

The assumption that a question would be answered on the intended basis across the population was then tested in the cognitive/in-depth interviews, which, as explained previously, involved subgroups not well represented in the focus groups.

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[6] For further explanation see Betts, Wilmot and Taylor 2008, section 4.1.

The remainder of this chapter presents the findings relating to three aspects of the cognitive process:

- the comprehension of the question overall, comprising understanding of:
    - the question stem; and
    - the response categories;
- the basis of selecting response categories; and
- the perceived reference period of the question.

The conclusion as to whether or not the question is valid is presented in the concluding section of the chapter, and is drawn from consideration of all the above aspects in combination.

4.2 Overall comprehension of the question

The prototype question cannot be understood from the question stem alone: 'Which of the options on this card best describes how you think of yourself?' Meaning has to be derived in combination with the response categories which provide the subject. Probing of each respondent's comprehension and answer processes began with his/her understanding of the question as a whole. They were asked what they thought it meant or to paraphrase it. This was to gain insight into the thought processes the respondent used in selecting their answer and any problems with comprehension or self-categorisation, which was then explored in more depth with him/her.

Sexual majority respondents interpreted the question in relation to the behaviour and attraction dimensions of sexual orientation. They expressed it, for example, as sexual *"preferences"*, *"whether you like men, or women, or both"* and *"what sexual activity I'm in"*. There was recognition that a person did not have to be *"practising"* in order to be able to answer.

Less well-educated sexual majority respondents put the question into different words without mentioning specific dimensions. For example, *"what is your sexuality"*, *"with these four groups, which do I fall into"*, or *"whether I was straight or gay or..."*

The question's meaning was unclear among sexual majority respondents due to miscomprehension of the response categories (reported at 4.4.1).

Despite the emphasis on sexual behaviour/attraction and there being no mention of the dimension of identity, heterosexual/straight respondents nevertheless answered the question consistent with the intended measurement concept, as shown at 4.5.1.

Gay/lesbian respondents placed greater emphasis on sexual identity in their interpretations. It encompassed internal feelings, thoughts and politics and was distinguished from behaviour.

> *"It's asking your own personal opinion about yourself."* [Gay man; 16-19; White British]

> *"It's what sort of a person you are rather than who you have sex with... It's about what I think. It's about my political standing... Do you identify yourself with any of these categories?"* [Gay/lesbian woman; White British]

There were also interpretations which were similar to those of the sexual majority, in terms of behaviour/attraction or without mentioning any specific dimension. These tended to be among the younger respondents.

> *"It just wanted to know the sexuality of me."* [Gay man; 16-19: Black/Black British]

> *"What are you – straight, gay, bi, whatever"* [Gay/lesbian woman; 16-19; White British]

Bisexual respondents interpreted the question both in terms of identity and behaviour/attraction.

> *"Which of these sexuality labels you associate with and identify with."* [Bisexual man; White British]

> *"It's asking about your sexual orientation and preferences."* [Bisexual woman; White British]

Transgender respondents who identified as heterosexual/straight or as gay/lesbian paraphrased the question without referring to any specific dimension or in terms of attraction/behaviour.

> *"What is your sexual orientation in relation to other people."* [Heterosexual/straight respondent; White British]

> *"Are you lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or prefer not to say."* [Gay/lesbian woman; 45-60; White British]

However, transgender respondents who identified as 'other' felt the question was not straightforward. The point was made that the question was based on a simplistic gender binary (the distinction between male and female).

> *"Which of these categories do I fit into in the classification of sexual orientation based on the straight division of people between men and women."* ['Other' respondent]

It was also felt that the question could be interpreted as about behaviour or identity, and that the two things were not necessarily the same. The following quote illustrates the distinctions that existed between the dimensions for some sexual minority respondents.

> *"It's about an identity that's limited by your sex life and that isn't always the case for some people. It feels like it's attached to your sex life…but on the other hand you could be celibate and be…any of these things. So it raises immediately the idea of who you are having sex with equals your identity, but on the other hand that's not the case because your identity is who you think of yourself."* ['Other' respondent; White British]

To this respondent, the wording of the stem of the question was key to how it was understood, which is further explored in the next section.

4.3   Wording of the question stem

Although comprehension of the question involved a combination of the stem and response categories, the stem in itself was important in conveying which dimension of sexual orientation was of interest.

4.3.1 'Which of the options … best describes how you think of yourself' and alternative wordings

The form of words 'which of the options … best describes how you think of yourself' was received positively, particularly by sexual minority respondents. It was preferred to alternative forms of words 'which of the options … do you consider yourself to be' and 'which of the options … are you' when these were probed subsequently.

The wording mattered more to those in sexual minority groups who distinguished between the dimensions of identity and behaviour/attraction or had reservations about being categorised. Those who preferred 'which of the options … best describes how you think of yourself' felt it implied identity over other dimensions such as behaviour.

> *"It felt better, about your own given identity, your own thoughts of yourself."* ['Other' respondent]

> *"Some straight people do have sex with people of the same sex but don't identify as being gay or lesbian. So I think 'best describes' is the best way you could do it."* [Gay/lesbian woman; White British]

'Which of the options … best describes how you think of yourself' allowed qualification and did not force people who did not necessarily fit one of the categories exactly.

> *"You're not trying to shoehorn us into a box, but it's only a rough approximation of what we associate with."* [Bisexual man; White British]

It implied recognition that sexual identity could be fluid.

> *"Because sexuality isn't so necessarily fixed as those other things [that is, ethnicity and national identity] I think [best describes] is better."* [Bisexual woman; White British]

It was also said to be a *"friendlier"* form of words than 'which of the options … do you consider yourself to be'.

Among sexual minority respondents alternative wording such as 'which of the options … do you consider yourself to be' was disliked as being more limiting:

> *"It pushes more for an either/or answer, black and white."* [Gay/lesbian woman; 45-60; White British]

> *"It's more about labelling, 'are you in this camp or that camp?'"* [Bisexual man; White British]

Among sexual minority respondents who considered sexual identity to be very certain preference was expressed for 'which of the options … do you consider yourself to be' as being more *"definite"*.

> *"[It] is more straightforward, like, who you are, you've always got in your mind who you are but ... 'how you think of yourself' it does make you think."* [Gay/lesbian woman; 16-19; White British]

As in the focus groups, heterosexual/straight respondents generally had no preference. Indeed, the stem wording in itself was not always registered or understood, the question's meaning being taken from the response categories. The alternative forms of the stem were not distinct, but were *"the same thing"*. This reflects the fact that for

them the answer process was more straightforward because they did not distinguish between dimensions.

> *"People are going to put down what they are."* [Heterosexual/straight man; 61 and over; White British]

A third form, 'which of the options on this card are you?' was disliked by sexual minority respondents. It was described as *"accusatory"*, *"horrible"* and *"clunky"*. It was felt to be forcing people into a category when they did not necessarily feel one fitted.

> *"When you ask ... which am I, you're giving me a choice of four and I've got to be one. When you ask me which best describes myself, [it] indicates that none of them might actually be how I would describe myself... but I've got a choice...I'm being left to maybe choose the best of a bad bunch."* ['Other' respondent]

4.3.2 Exclusion of 'sexual identity' from wording

As in the focus groups, respondents across the subgroups varied in their definitions of terms which could potentially be used in the question, 'sexual identity' and 'sexual orientation'. Among heterosexual/straight respondents they were synonymous and largely defined in relation to behaviour and attraction. Among sexual minority respondents too they were not clearly defined or distinct from one another.

> *"I think there's no difference."* [Heterosexual/straight woman; 16-19; Black/Black British]

> *"They are identical aren't they."* [Heterosexual/straight woman; 61 and over; White British]

> *"I think they are basically the same thing."* [Sexual minority man; Black/Black British]

The terms 'sexual identity' and 'sexual orientation' were not familiar among less well educated heterosexual/straight respondents. They were misunderstood to mean whether a person is male or female (as had been the case in the focus groups).

> *"I think they relate to what sex you are."* [Heterosexual/straight woman; 61 and over; White British]

Furthermore, among transgender respondents the term sexual identity was interpreted as being about biological sex, as distinct from gender identity.

> *"If I was left to interpret it entirely on my own I would probably think of sexual identity purely in terms of physical sex."* [Transgender man; White British]

4.3.3 Communication of response

After the stem of the question, respondents were instructed 'Please just read out the number next to the description.' This was a feature of the concealed show card system intended to maintain privacy (reported further in section 5). Respondents evidently had registered the instruction as they generally communicated their response in this manner rather than by the category name. A respondent instead answered in words, having deliberated aloud between two possible answers (reported later).

4.4 Comprehension and acceptability of the response categories

Probing was carried out in relation to each response category. While the question related to the dimension of identity, not behaviour or attraction, it was necessary to

ensure that respondents' comprehension was correct with respect to the terms' underlying basis, attraction to or relationships between people of the opposite sex, the same sex or both sexes. The acceptability of terms used, and the potential need for alternative terms or categories were also probed. The findings relating to each category follow.

4.4.1 Heterosexual/straight

The heterosexual/straight category was generally understood across respondents of all subgroups to mean sexual attraction or relationships between people of opposite sexes. The two words were synonymous for sexual majority respondents and among sexual minority respondents – *"one and the same thing"* - the first being *"formal"* or *"medical"*, the second an *"everyday", "slang"* or *"layman's"* term.

The dimension of identity was not considered except among sexual minority respondents with respect to the word straight. A woman who identified as gay/lesbian knew women who identified as straight but *"tried to kiss"* her and therefore were not *"really"* heterosexual, implying that heterosexual was limited to the dimension of behaviour. A respondent who identified as bisexual defined heterosexual in terms of behaviour but saw straight as implying a person was *"straight laced"*.

An important finding was that heterosexual was not always understood by heterosexual/straight respondents (no such finding had arisen in the focus groups although it had been identified in previous research). Misunderstanding was found among respondents who were in the youngest and oldest age groups, and/or were less well-educated, and/or for whom English was not the first language. The extent to which this finding is generalisable more widely to people with these characteristics or with other characteristics cannot be known from this research. The impact on the accuracy of responses varied, as described below.

Older, less well-educated respondents included one who asked for clarification of the word heterosexual when she read the show card, and another who confused heterosexual with bisexual.
> *"You like either sex…It could be either woman or man…"* [Heterosexual/straight woman; 61 and over; White British; no qualifications]

Similarly a young white respondent was unsure of the meaning of heterosexual, uncertain if it was the same or different to straight, which she understood. However, all three respondents above understood the word straight and answered the question correctly, although potentially one of the responses could have been wrong.
> *"The part I wanted was straight…And I didn't know whether to say that or to say 'Other'"* [Heterosexual/straight woman; 61 and over; White British; no qualifications]

Conversely, it was straight which was unfamiliar to a young woman from an ethnic minority, for whom English was not her first language. She knew the meaning of heterosexual. Again, she answered the question correctly.

The cases above justify the inclusion of both terms in the category. Although the presence of both terms confused some of these respondents into thinking they might be different, one or other of the words was understood.

However, both terms were unfamiliar to another woman from an ethnic minority, again for whom English was not her first language, who did not understand any of the terms other than gay, and therefore answered as 'other'.

> *"I do not understand…Which one is normal? … Normal means male and female, husband and wife."* [Heterosexual/straight woman; 45-60; Ethnic minority; A level>]

A definition which potentially could be provided to survey interviewers, to help when respondents query category meanings, was tested on respondents with comprehension difficulties: 'Heterosexual or straight might mean that a person is only or mainly attracted to people of the opposite sex or only has partners of the opposite sex. But a person can think of themselves as heterosexual or straight without feeling attraction or having a partner.' It was not well understood, was considered too long, and should be revised.

Views were sought on the acceptability of the word straight. It was considered potentially offensive or 'politically incorrect' by people from both sexual majority and sexual minority groups -*"there are so many things you can or can't say"* - and could imply other people were *"bent"*. Sexual minority respondents said the term was outdated, mainly used by heterosexual/straight people themselves and even used in a derogatory sense by the gay community about heterosexual people. However, use of the term was widely accepted across all groups, including by respondents with such reservations, because it was commonly used to define heterosexual, was appropriate to the context, and because there was no alternative term. These views were broadly similar to those in the focus groups.

4.4.2 Gay/lesbian

The category gay/lesbian was generally understood in terms of attraction to or relationships with people of the same sex. Gay was more commonly associated with men, and lesbian specifically associated with women, particularly by the sexual majority group. Sexual minority respondents recognised that women also identify as gay.

All the respondents who did not know the meaning of 'heterosexual' or 'straight', or of both, knew the meaning of either gay or lesbian.

When probed on the meaning of gay/lesbian, sexual minority respondents varied as to whether they mentioned the dimension of identity. Respondents from London referred to the gay and/or lesbian *"community"*. There were gay and lesbian respondents who made no reference to identity when defining this category, but spoke of attraction and behaviour. However in other probing they did evidently feel a sense of sexual identity - either in personal or community terms – as is reported elsewhere.

The terms gay and lesbian were acceptable to respondents across all subgroups, and seen as *"commonly used" "nowadays"*. There was also acceptance of the need for labels.

> *"[Gay] is acceptable. I wouldn't hesitate to use the word…I've got no problems with [lesbian]…it's just another word."* [Heterosexual/straight man; 16-19; White British; A level>]

> *"I've no objection to any of the words. I mean, they've all got to have a title haven't they."* [Heterosexual/straight woman; 61 and over; White British; no qualifications]

Respondents' willingness to answer the question was not affected by any of the terms used, despite some negative views which were expressed. There were heterosexual/straight respondents who disliked the terms, though this was due to negative views of homosexuality rather than preference for particular words over others. There was also regret that the word gay was related to sexual identity.

> *"I don't like it associated with lesbian or homosexuals…I am happy but not homosexual."* [Heterosexual/straight man; 45-60; Black/Black British; <A level]

The pejorative use of 'gay' as a term of abuse was mentioned, by both sexual majority and sexual minority respondents.

> *"Nowadays people can use* [gay] *as an offensive word, whereas homosexual doesn't come across as offensive."* [Heterosexual/straight woman; 16-19; White British; <A level]

Among young gay women it was felt that gay was now preferred over lesbian. Dislike for the word lesbian was expressed. But lesbian was preferred among older female sexual minority respondents. It was felt appropriate for the two terms to be combined in one category.

Homosexual

Since there were negative views of the word gay, possible alternative terms were probed. Respondents were asked for their views on whether the word homosexual should be included. It was generally understood as a synonym for gay/lesbian, meaning sexual attraction or relationships between people of the same sex. The respondents with comprehension problems relating to heterosexual/straight varied whether they understood homosexual or had difficulty with meanings of all the formal/medical terms, heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual. Its use in the question would not aid comprehension.

Heterosexual/straight respondents varied in their views of the use of homosexual. There were respondents of all age and ethnic groups who considered it acceptable. There were heterosexual/straight respondents who had no preference between the terms gay/lesbian and homosexual. Use of homosexual was thought to be consistent with that of the word heterosexual. Among young respondents homosexual was thought *"nicer"* than gay which was sometimes used as a term of offence. As reported above it was preferred due to the dislike of the association of gay with sexual identity. The alternative view was dislike for the word as *"ugly"* and implying *"seedy"*.

In common with the focus group findings, sexual minority respondents were strongly opposed to the use of homosexual. Respondents saw it as *"old fashioned"*, *"posh"*, *"scientific"*, *"a dictionary term"*. It was felt to be a *"difficult"* term for older gay men. It was also associated more with men than women.

> *"It sounds a bit derogatory and … like it has connotations. I can just hear it being said in some homophobic rant."* [Sexual minority woman; White British]

> *"I understand why gay men do not like being called homosexual, that is an appalling term to apply to anybody …That goes back to Victorian days where we were considered to be deviant… and it was 'well, you need to be cured because you've got this disease' and it's not curable."* [Sexual minority woman; 45-60; White British]

At best it was seen to be complementary to the use of heterosexual. Sexual minority respondents repeatedly said that the word homosexual should not be used in the question.

4.4.3 Bisexual

Bisexual was generally understood by respondents from all subgroups to mean sexual attraction to or relationships with people of either sex or both sexes. Heterosexual/straight respondents who had comprehension problems included those who knew nonetheless that bisexual did not apply, and those who were confused by all the terms ending '-sexual'.

When the meaning of bisexual was probed, bisexual respondents defined it in terms of attraction/behaviour. However they did feel a sense of identity, as reported later.

There was a view among gay/lesbian respondents that bisexual implied the person was *"confused"* or had not settled their sexual identity as heterosexual/straight or gay/lesbian.

> *"When you're young you go through those times when you don't know whether you like women or men and they just put themselves as bisexual. To me they're still at the point where they don't know what they want."*
> [Gay/lesbian woman; 16-19; White British]

Use of bisexual in the question was acceptable across all subgroups. There were reservations among sexual minority respondents, including those who identified as bisexual: the word was *"old fashioned"*, and implied a lack of commitment by people who were really heterosexual/straight, or that a person was a *"swinger"*. However, no alternative terms were proposed or thought appropriate, other than slang terms which it was thought might imply *"profligacy"* and become outdated quickly. These findings were similar to those from the focus groups.

4.4.4 The 'Other' category

Background
The need for and definition of an 'other' category was an issue for the ONS development project to address. The sexual identity question is an opinion question. The way respondents answer cannot be prescribed as it is subjective. The three main sexual identity categories are defined with respect to gender, that is, with regard to a person's attraction to people of the opposite sex, same sex or both sexes, and the development of those feelings into internal or social identity. But the possibility must be allowed that there are people who do not identify as heterosexual/straight, gay/lesbian, or bisexual. To quote Kinsey et al (1948), 'The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats … It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories. Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separate pigeon-holes.'

Potentially an 'other' category could include different types of people. Firstly, it can not be assumed that all individuals will derive a sexual identity on the premise of gender attraction. Informed by the focus group findings, it was concluded that 'other' might be preferred by respondents who were against categorisation on the basis of the gender(s) of people to whom they are attracted or with whom they have sexual relationships. Another potential group is asexual people, who have no sexual feelings at all, although the project has not researched this phenomenon.

In the prototype question it was decided to collapse all types of people for whom the three main categories are not applicable into a single 'other' category, rather than adding specific categories for each type, for several reasons:

- it could not be concluded that the list would be exhaustive, thus still necessitating an 'other' category;
- the proportion of respondents who would select categories other than the three main categories was likely to be very small, limiting the analysis possible; and
- it was difficult to word the categories in such a way to prevent the inadvertent capture of people who could or should identify to one of the three main categories (for example, 'anti-categorisation' might be interpreted as 'objecting to the question' rather than rejection of the premise of labelling).

Since the sexual identity question is about identity rather than sexual attraction or behaviour, there are conceptually different phenomena which the category is not intended to capture.

- People who are sexually inactive (whether by choice – celibacy – or circumstances). They can still have a sexual identity.
- A transgender category - sometimes included in sexual orientation/identity questions - is not appropriate because transgender relates to gender identity. Transgender people have a sexual identity in the same way as non-transgender people (this hypothesis was based on consultation with transgender organisations and tested in the cognitive/in-depth interviews).
- Minority sexual behaviours, such as polyamory (relating to having more than one relationship at once), fetishes or illegal practices. These are not defined by gender in the way the main sexual identity categories are.
- Furthermore respondents may select 'other' as a way to avoid answering or to register objection to the question.

Findings

Respondents were positive about the inclusion of an 'other' option. The need for the category was acknowledged by transgender and non-transgender LGB respondents. It was thought that there would be few people who would select 'other' on the grounds of not identifying with any of the three main categories , but was also said to be a growing phenomenon, not just among transgender people but more widely in the LGB community. Although it might only capture a small group, it could be diverse.

> *"I was very pleased that there was 'other' in the list."* ['Other' respondent]

> *"That's a big topic. I don't think you've got time to cover all the variation within that, but at least it's acknowledged that there are more than just that handful of orientations ... Queer, gender queer… there's an awful lot of other forms of sexual identification ... It's good to allow that we appreciate that people may not fit into any one of those categories ...* [and to] *allow people to*

choose how they prefer to be identified." [Sexual minority woman; 45-60; White British; no religion; A level>]

In the cognitive/in-depth interviews, the 'other' category was deliberately chosen by transgender respondents who specifically identified as *"queer"*, and/or who rejected categorisation based on attraction to people according to gender and/or who rejected the male/female *"bipolar gender"* assumption (see section 4.5.4).

'Other' was also answered by one of the respondents who had problems comprehending the three main categories. She selected 'other' by a process of elimination because she had not heard of the other terms except gay, which she knew did not apply to her. Whilst sexual identity is not determined by sexual behaviour/attraction, the respondent was married and other comments she made indicated that she was heterosexual, therefore it can be concluded with a fair degree of certainty that her response would have been heterosexual/straight if the terms had been understood. Another of the respondents with comprehension problems said she might have answered 'other', though ultimately selected heterosexual/straight.

Respondents who identified as heterosexual/straight, gay/lesbian or bisexual were asked what they thought the 'other' category was intended to mean. A general sense was held that it covered people who did not fit the three main categories, but thoughts as to what that encompassed were varied within all subgroups.

There were respondents who said they had no idea what 'other' might include, particularly among less well-educated heterosexual/straight respondents.

Types of people thought to be relevant to this category included:
- *"transsexuals"* and *"cross-dressers"*;
- those who were *"polyamorous"*;
- those who were *"experimental"*;
- those who had *"fetishes"*; and
- those interested in *"extreme"* behaviours (*"unmentionables"*), such as *"sex with objects", "bestiality", "paedophiles"* and necrophilia.

However, these ideas were hypothetical. There was no evidence to suggest that people of these types would identify as 'other' rather than one of the three main categories. However it should be noted that there were participants in the focus groups who had described themselves as 'polyamorous', or similar, and indicated that they might answer as 'other'.

Asexuality was thought to be another possible inclusion under 'other'. The term was not familiar to some heterosexual/straight respondents. The distinction between being asexual (as an identity derived from having no sexual feelings) and sexually inactive (relating to behaviour but having sexual feelings now or in the past) was not clear to all. Respondents in both sexual majority and sexual minority groups thought the category could include people who were 'non-practising' due to personal circumstances (for example being older and widowed) or celibate by choice. Celibacy was mentioned as an identity in itself. However it was also recognised that celibate people could identify as one of the main categories. No respondents, including those who were widowed or without a spouse or partner, described themselves as celibate or

non-practising. Older heterosexual/straight respondents widowed or divorced and living alone spoke of their *"nature"* or of feelings of attraction as their basis for self-categorisation.

The 'other' category was also seen as a way to avoid the question, a *"safe haven"* for people who did not want to disclose. Indeed there was evidence that sexual minority respondents might use 'other' to give a socially desirable response in certain situations, such as to avoid disclosure of sexual identity to family members whilst still indicating their difference in a non-specific way. However, this issue relates to privacy of the question's administration (reported in Chapter 5), not to self-identification.

4.4.5 Discussion of additional categories

The categories in the question being tested were generally seen as comprehensive by respondents. It was thought possible to go *"too fine grained"* for a general survey. The only spontaneous suggestion for an additional category was queer, as reported later. When the need for additional categories was probed, asexual was mentioned. Young gay and lesbian respondents suggested *"unsure"*, *"questioning"*, *"confused"* and *"experimental"*. However these were not with respect to themselves, but their opinion of what might be appropriate for others.

Transgender
Sexual minority respondents who discussed the need for a transgender category agreed that it was right not to have one. As had been the case in the focus groups, it was generally understood that transgender related to the different concept of gender identity. The transgender respondents shared this view. Transgender respondents included those who identified with respect to their gender identity, for example, as a *"transman"*, but also those who thought that the term transgender related to the process of transitioning only and that once this was complete, the individual was not in a gender category separate from other people.

> *"It doesn't make sense… Your identity would be different from your transitioning gender status. These questions are about your sexual identity, not about your maleness or femaleness, your moving through transition to be comfortable in your body."* ['Other' respondent]

Queer
Queer was discussed in some of the interviews with sexual minority and/or transgender respondents. Views on the acceptability of queer to respondents varied. Respondents weighed up the word's older *"pejorative"* use and negative *"connotation for older gay men"*, against its *"reclaiming"* by LGB and transgender people. There were respondents who were in favour of its use. Indeed a respondent who answered 'other' self-identified as queer – reported later. A younger respondent who had identified as bisexual thought she could equally identify as queer, which she considered was more acceptable to the gay community than the category bisexual. There were also respondents who were against its use, considering it *"quite an extreme word"* and associated with being *"odd"*. It was thought queer was encompassed by the 'other' category.

Queer would not necessarily be mutually exclusive to the gay/lesbian and bisexual categories: it was said it could be used by people in those groups. Nor was its use

exclusive to the concept of sexual identity: it related to gender identity too (*"gender queer"*). It encompassed people who wanted to move away from traditional sexual and/or gender identities.

It is recommended that queer is not used as a term or response category in the question, due to the views against it use and the conceptual issue.

4.4.6 Follow-up question to describe 'other' sexual identity

In surveys use of an 'other' category may be followed by a separate question for respondents to specify details. The tested question did not include such a follow-up. A respondent who answered 'other' identified as queer and wanted to be able to specify this either in a separate category, or at a follow up question. If the respondent had been aware of the lack of such a question, they might have preferred - reluctantly - to answer bisexual so as not to *"disappear off the statistics"*.

4.5 Processes in selecting response categories

4.5.1 Heterosexual/straight respondents

Heterosexual/straight respondents across all the subgroups were latent identifiers. They felt that being heterosexual/straight was their *"nature"* and something they just knew. Being *"normal"* and in the majority were mentioned (just as being 'the norm' had been said in the focus groups).

> *"If you're gay or lesbian that's, like, different, whereas I'm just straight so there's not really any question about what I am."* [Heterosexual/straight woman; 16-19; White British; <A level]

They tended not to have thought about sexual identity much before, or had never considered the possibility that they were anything other than heterosexual/straight. There was some difficulty among respondents in articulating what made them heterosexual/straight. Yet they were able to select the appropriate answer with ease.

> *"I knew right away the first one applied to me…It was straightforward… because I'm straight…It's your nature probably."* [Heterosexual/straight man; 61 and over; White British; no qualifications]

> *"It was an automatic reaction, because there's no real question about it, so I don't really know what I was thinking about ... Because I am straight, I don't have to think about it really, straight away I knew that it was me."* [Heterosexual/straight woman; 16-19; White British; <A level]

Heterosexual/straight respondents' answers were generally based on sexual attraction, or sexual behaviour.

> *"It's asking me the way I am. As I've said I've always been perfectly normal. I grew up liking boys and still do … If you're normal you don't really think about it."* [Heterosexual/straight woman; 61 and over; White British; no qualifications]

> *"I've never been inclined or excited about people of the same sex as me. I know my sexuality. It's never crossed my mind to be anything other."* [Heterosexual/straight man; 45-60; Ethnic minority]

> *"I've got a girlfriend."* [Heterosexual/straight man; 16-19]

The dimension of identity was considered in their answers only among the female heterosexual/straight respondents:

> *"Identity is what makes me different from the other person, what says* [I am] *this person, what everybody can see when they meet me. That's how I thought about it rather than attraction."* [Heterosexual/straight woman; 45-60; Black/Black British; A level>]

Otherwise among heterosexual/straight respondents it was felt that sexual identity was important only to sexual minorities.

> *"Presumably they want to be classed as in that box and if they are proud to be lesbian and go on their lesbian week in Manchester and if you're gay and go on your gay pride they want people to know that's exactly what they are…so they have an identity…"* [Heterosexual/straight man; 45-60; White British; <A level]

Rather than positively identifying as heterosexual/straight, some respondents identified by process of elimination, considering the other sexual identities to be non-applicable.

> *"For me personally… do I look at myself as bisexual, whatever, whatever, but I just answered heterosexual/straight because I don't swing both ways… I don't have sex with men."* [Heterosexual/straight man; 45-60; Black/Black British; <A level]

Among respondents with religious affiliation, answers were informed by Biblical teachings.

> *"I know who I am… I am married with two children… I am a Christian so from that point of view I know I am heterosexual because of the description in the Bible."* [Heterosexual/straight man; 45-60; Black/Black British; Christian]

The importance of the subject to heterosexual/straight respondents varied: it was little considered and not talked about with family and/or friends. Among respondents identifying with an ethnic minority or religion, sexual identity was said to be of lower salience than those aspects of identity.

As previously reported there were problems in comprehending the heterosexual/straight category among respondents in older and younger age bands and/or with lower educational qualifications and/or for whom English was not the first language. This unfamiliarity with terms relating to sexual identity reaffirmed that it was of low salience to them. Among these respondents there was difficulty articulating how they chose their answers.

4.5.2 Gay and lesbian respondents

As in the focus groups, gay and lesbian respondents were conscious identifiers.

Sexual identity was salient to gay and lesbian respondents. It was commonly seen as being a natural part of self as it was for heterosexual/straight respondents. There were respondents who said they found the question *"easy"* to answer. The naturalness of sexual identity meant it was not necessarily as easy for respondents to articulate what made them gay or lesbian.

"I'm pretty happy about who I am so I could answer that straight away…I don't know [what makes me a lesbian] *… it's just who you are and who you like I suppose."* [Gay/lesbian woman; 16-19; White British; < A level]

As in the above quote sexual attraction was commonly mentioned by gay and lesbian respondents as a factor in their natural sense of sexual identity.

"I'm attracted to women. I have a feminist stance, a political stance. I just like being with other women." [Gay/lesbian woman; White British; A level>]

Sexual behaviour was also mentioned as a consideration but did not determine sexual identity – the two could be inconsistent.

"I know I only like boys. …That's my sexual identity, but obviously with everyone there's …more detail to go into than just this or that. I wouldn't say I'm bisexual at all… My general sexual identity would be gay. [But I want to have children one day] *the natural way."* [Gay man; 16-19; White British]

Sexual identity was also something of which gay/lesbian respondents were aware and had previously considered to a greater degree than had heterosexual/straight respondents. The importance of sexual identity to respondents' overall identity varied. Sexual identity was viewed as central to sense of self, and a matter of pride. There were respondents involved in LGB organisations and interested in LGB issues.

"It's there through my whole life. Everything I do. It's what I am. It's the point I'm coming from." [Gay/lesbian woman; White British]

There were also those for whom sexual identity was not central, particularly younger respondents.

"It is just a part of life, like anyone else, heterosexual, gay, whatever, it is just who you are." [Gay man; 16-19; Black/Black British]

"Your sexuality doesn't make you a person. It's who you are that makes you a person." [Gay/lesbian woman; 16-19; Black/Black British]

"It's a big part of who people are but it doesn't really come into much I don't think." [Gay/lesbian woman; 16-19; White British]

An individual's sexual identity was not always felt with certainty, though ultimately a category was selected.

"I'm confused about life in general. It's good you asked me that question so I can think to myself, what am I? … It was like a war with myself. I was thinking are you bisexual or are you a lesbian? … I've finally accepted who I am now so it wasn't hard in that sense but it was hard to identify myself with a category… I was thinking do I really like boys? But I know I like girls more so I have to be a lesbian because I wouldn't sleep with a boy now." [Gay/lesbian woman; 16-19; Black/Black British]

4.5.3 Bisexual respondents

Sexual identity was an issue bisexual respondents had thought about before and therefore they were able to answer the question without difficulty.

"I don't have to think about it because that's who I identify as." [Bisexual woman; White British]

> *"It was very easy… because I've had a long journey to arrive at an identity, which is bisexual."* [Bisexual man; White British]

In common with heterosexual/straight and gay/lesbian respondents, sexual attraction was a factor in sexual identity, but sexual behaviour was not synonymous with identity. This was particularly relevant given that bisexuality is about orientation of an individual to people of both sexes.

> *"I've had gay relationships, heterosexual relationships. … I'd say it's about attraction for me, in that I've found people of both sexes attractive, so to me that must mean I'm bisexual."* [Bisexual man; White British]

> *"You can identify as bisexual but be in a lesbian relationship. How you identify may be different to what you're actually doing."* [Bisexual woman; White British]

There was dislike for categorisation and labelling, on the basis of the genders of people to whom attraction was felt or who were sexual partners. Sexual identity was only important because of other people's perceptions of them. They would however answer a social survey question.

> *"Sometimes I don't like having to label myself. But I'm more uncomfortable with labelling myself in a social situation than I am for reasons such as this."* [Bisexual woman; White British]

> *"I have a bit of a problem with labels per se, that people have to define their sexuality... Why are we so interested in people's sexuality and what they do in the bedroom? Why does it matter? … But I still use* [the labels] *because everybody uses them and you've got to describe something somehow."* [Bisexual man; White British]

It was said that bisexuals were not a group in the same way as gay/lesbian and heterosexual/straight groups, but stood apart, rejecting those cultures and their prejudices toward bisexual people.

> *"Gay is a cultural group, and I suppose heterosexual is also a societal group too, in a way, although it's a very broad group, but then it comes down to us… we don't really have any kind of identity or societal group. My theory is because of the kind of prejudice you've become an underground group. A lot of the prejudice I've experienced has been from both of these groups, pretty much equally."* [Bisexual man; White British]

The same themes had arisen in the focus groups, where the same types of identification were found: reluctant (against labelling) and political (resistant to gay and heterosexual/straight cultures).

4.5.4 Transgender respondents

The findings relating to transgender respondents are reported separately from the non-transgender respondents. Although sexual identity and gender identity are different concepts, the interviews explored the relationship between gender identity and the process of transitioning with sexual identity. For background to aid understanding of the findings, all transgender respondents were 'post-transition', living permanently and full-time in a gender different to the one they were assigned at birth. The transgender respondents variously identified as heterosexual/straight, lesbian and 'other'.

Sexual identity was an issue that transgender respondents had thought about previously. Its importance was related to their transgender status. For example it was seen as being of low importance post-transition but had been high during the process of transitioning. For a married respondent, it was quite important because it was *"difficult"* as a transgender person to feel part of the *"queer community"* and simultaneously to feel *"ordinary"* with their spouse.

Transgender respondents varied as to whether they arrived at their answers in a way common with non-transgender respondents or uniquely related to their transgender status.

For those transgender respondents who identified as heterosexual/straight or gay/lesbian, sexual identity was based in sexual attraction and behaviour, like non-transgender respondents. It was straightforward to select their answers.

> *"Very easy. But that's probably because I fit one of the boxes pretty exactly… I'm married … to a* [person] *who identifies as straight … I wouldn't have married a* [person of the opposite sex] *if I wasn't attracted to one."*
> [Heterosexual/straight respondent]

> *"Not difficult at all…It's how I feel, it's me…I'm simply attracted to women, always have been, always will be."* [Gay/lesbian woman; 45-60]

There were male and female transgender respondents who had views which paralleled those of the bisexual perspective reported above, but for reasons related to being transgender chose the 'other' category instead. They did not like labelling on the basis of the gender of partners or who they were attracted to. Furthermore, the categories were said to be based in an assumption of gender bipolarity (that is, a straightforward dichotomy between male and female), on which, as transgender people they had a different perspective. However, they still wanted to be recognised by the question.

> *"There are people who aren't boxed in by these terms…It's about finding new language now, for people who are outside of heteronormative and lesbian and gay normative terms. It's a mixture – you don't want to be boxed in but at the same time you want to stand up for what you are."* ['Other' respondent]

> *"These classifications, heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual… they're all forced into this bipolar sex thing which I'm not absolutely sure I agree with…We're perpetuating the idea that people can't live as they want to live. …I wouldn't label our relationship …and out of honour for it I'm not prepared to pick up one of those titles which is why I picked 'other'… Sexual orientation means nothing. Everything in the relationship is what matters for us."* ['Other' respondent]

They differed in whether they identified with a specific group or label. Queer was the choice volunteered in one instance, which applied to the dimensions of sexual identity, attraction and behaviour.

> *"All linked – my queer identity, queer sexuality and queer lovers."* ['Other' respondent]

Queer was a distinct identity, a concept crossing both sexual and gender identity. It was thought to be a growing movement in metropolitan areas, encompassing anyone who questioned traditional labels.

> *"Queer…can include a broader spectrum of people who might be gay or lesbian, might be bisexual, might even be queer straights, but have a different outlook in terms of being slightly outside these boxes and these limits …It's broader than just the trans community, also the aware lesbian and gay community …"* ['Other' respondent]

Another respondent who identified as 'other' was less certain and did so more by default than choice:

> *"It's simply because I haven't arrived at a conclusion on the others. Bisexual would be the easy one but it's just a cop out … My ideas of how I was attracted to people when I lived* [in my former gender] *have been completely undermined by what I've done to live* [in my new gender]*."* ['Other' respondent]

This respondent was living as one gender but had not undergone gender reassignment surgery (GRS) or legally changed gender, and was still legally of the gender assigned at birth. The respondent was married to a person of the same gender [sic]. The answer was in part a way of the respondent avoiding labelling their spouse or their type of relationship. The respondent might have taken a *"lead"* from the spouse if they were interviewed together.

> *"If* [my spouse] *answered heterosexual, I'd say either heterosexual or 'other', because it's in relation to* [him/her]*. If* [he/she] *said* [gay/lesbian]*, which I very much doubt, I might chime in and support* [him/her]*."* ['Other' respondent]

The different self-categorisation processes related to transgender respondents' gender transition, as reported in the next section.

4.6 The reference period and the fluidity of sexual identity over time

As was the intention, respondents answered the question with respect to their current sexual identity, although no reference to time was given in the question stem. This was evident from the way they expressed their identities in the present tense – for example 'I am straight' – and for those in sexual minority groups how they described their answer processes and development of their identities.

The potential for change over time was discussed with sexual minority and/or transgender respondents. (In the focus groups heterosexual/straight participants had not felt it to be fluid). This was to see what implications there might be for analysis of quantitative data collected using the question.

Sexual identity in different environments or contexts is reported at 5.1 and 5.2.

4.6.1 Gay and lesbian respondents

In the focus groups it was apparent that gay/lesbian identity developed over time. Emerging awareness of sexual attraction and being different to the sexual majority, often in childhood or adolescence, could lead to an individual feeling confused. When they found community or otherwise became aware there were other people like them, they understood and accepted their sexual identity. For the men it then remained fixed. The women varied as to how fixed they felt it was.

The findings from the cognitive/in-depth interviews were similar. Gay and lesbian respondents felt that sexual identity did not change once it was clear to them. This

included even the youngest gay and lesbian respondents, who felt confident that their identity was fixed and unlikely to change.

> *"I might experiment with women… but I think deep down I'll always be attracted to men."* [Gay man; 16-19; White British]

The young respondent reported previously as having debated with herself whether to answer bisexual or lesbian was *"ninety-five per cent"* certain that it would not change.

Young respondents had already been through the development process which had been described by the (older) focus group participants. Their understanding and acceptance of their sexual identity had not always been easy. As in the focus groups, confusion in young life, lack of role models, pressure to conform to heterosexual/straight norms and late development were mentioned. For example a young man had been *"confused"* at age 13-14, but accepted himself at 15 - *"I don't mind what I am"* - then joined a gay youth group where he realised you can *"live life quite easily."* [Gay man; 16-19; White British]

An ethnic minority male respondent had been *"at the max of confused"* in early adolescence, attracted to men but not women. Although he had a girlfriend he was not attracted to her. Having had no gay role models he labelled himself as bisexual. By age 17 he had accepted that he was gay.

Older respondents provided examples of how an individual's awareness or certainty of their sexual identity could change over time, depending on personal circumstances. An older male respondent's life had been dominated by disability, which meant relationships and sexual identity were not prominent issues for him in early adulthood: *"I never got to the stage of girlfriends."* Only in later life did he start to think he might be gay. Through advice from friends he found community with other gay men, and following his first sexual experiences his gay identity developed. A female respondent identifying as lesbian had once been married and had children. She had been vaguely aware of her lesbian identity but been unable to be open, but later her identity developed more fully.

> *"Because of my upbringing that's what I did and there were little windows in my life where I could have gone through. Because of the circumstances I didn't and it wasn't until later in life that I actually was able to say 'right, I'm going to go for it'. I think there was always something there."* [Gay/lesbian woman; White British]

4.6.2 Bisexual respondents

Bisexual respondents thought sexual identity might be fluid over time. They felt society wanted identity to be fixed, but that *"blurring boundaries"* was healthy. Sexual identity was independent of the type of relationship they were in (as defined by being with a person of the same or opposite sex). However, there were contrasting views as to whether they personally might identify differently if their relationships lasted long term. One respondent was certain that his sexual identity would be consistent.

> *"Even if I was to stay in my heterosexual relationship for the rest of my life…I'd never identify as straight because I still have feelings and attraction to both genders."* [Bisexual man; White British]

The other view allowed the possibility of change in sexual identity in time.

> *"I'd like to think I could be comfortable with still identifying as a bisexual and being in a lesbian relationship. But then maybe over a long period of time… it might change and I might not feel bisexual any more. I might feel fully lesbian."* [Bisexual woman; White British]

4.6.3 Transgender respondents

Sexual identity for transgender people should be considered in respect of their gender identity, rather than their biological sex. For transgender respondents, the issue of change over time was complex, due to the interrelationships between gender identity, biological sex and sexual attraction. There were instances of sexual identity being the same before and after gender transition, and being different. It should be noted that transition did not necessarily involve GRS.

When a respondent's gender identity and sexual attraction had both been consistent before and after transition, sexual identity was also consistent. Female respondents who had always been attracted to women, and identified as women even when they were men in body, consistently identified as lesbian.

> *"I always considered myself female. I was always attracted to females so naturally I assumed I was a lesbian."* [Gay/lesbian woman; 45-60; White British]

They would have answered a sexual identity question the same, before and after transition, because they were basing it on their gender identity. It was thought that other people might have questioned that, because they would base their perception on biological sex:

> *"You would have looked at me and said 'what's this man answering as a lesbian for?' that's the problem."* [Gay/lesbian woman; 45-60; White British]

For the other transgender respondents, whether sexual identity had changed after gender transition was said to be difficult to say, since it had not been clear prior to it. One respondent's feelings of sexual attraction had been consistently to one sex before and after transition. But the respondent labelled their sexual identity differently pre and post transition because they changed their perceptions of their gender identity and biological sex.

> *"When I was quite young I tried going out with* [members of the opposite sex]*, believing myself to be* [of my pre-transition sex]*...It didn't really work at all. But I would have considered those to be straight relationships at the time… Then I met my* [spouse/partner – of the same gender as respondent pre-transition; of the opposite gender to respondent post-transition] *and although labelling myself as* [gay/lesbian] *didn't really seem to fit it was the best available label."* [Transgender respondent]

The respondents who identified as 'other' said they found it difficult to say what their sexual identity had been before gender transition. Unlike the respondents previously reported, they were not attracted to one sex only, which might explain their difficulty. One, who had not undergone GRS, might have identified as straight but was uncertain. The other was behaviourally gay/lesbian but would have identified as bisexual or 'other'.

It was said that during transition, sexual identity can be confused, and the individual uncertain as to how they will feel at the end of the process.

4.7 Comprehension of the question, use of terminology and basis for self-categorisation: conclusions and recommendations

The conclusion to be drawn from the cognitive/in-depth interviews is that the question was valid. In summary, respondents from all subgroups were able to select an answer which can be considered to be appropriate to the intention of measuring self-perceived sexual identity.

This conclusion is based on analysis of: respondents' comprehension of the question overall - comprised of understanding of the question stem and the response categories; the basis on which respondents selected their answers; and the perceived reference period of the question.

For some respondents, particularly heterosexual/straight, the dimensions of identity and/or attraction/behaviour were synonymous. Gay/lesbian respondents placed greater emphasis on the identity dimension. No-one misconstrued the question to be specifically about other dimensions of sexual orientation, in particular sexual attraction or behaviour, where this could have led to different answers.

The exclusion of an explicit reference to the measurement concept 'sexual identity' from the question was justified. The nuances of the term's intended meaning were generally lost on respondents. To transgender respondents the term implied biological sex.

The question stem 'which of the options … best describes how you think of yourself' successfully implied the identity dimension. It was received positively, particularly by sexual minority respondents who thought it allowed qualification and recognised fluidity of sexual identity. They preferred it to alternative forms of words 'which of the options … do you consider yourself to be' and 'which of the options … are you'. Heterosexual/straight respondents generally had no preference.

Respondents followed the instruction within the question, 'Please just read out the number next to the description.'

On the whole, the response categories were defined correctly by respondents, in respect of the underlying basis of attraction to/relationships with people of the opposite sex, the same sex or both sexes. There was some miscomprehension of terms among heterosexual/straight respondents. Those with comprehension problems varied as to whether they were able to select an appropriate answer by process of category elimination or recognition of other terms (e.g. understanding 'straight' if not 'heterosexual'), or provided a wrong answer. A definition of terms for use by a survey interviewer if meaning is queried by a respondent was tested but was not well understood and revision is recommended.

Taking everything into consideration, the terms used in the prototype question were appropriate and optimised comprehension. There was variety across respondents within and across subgroups in the terms they used for the different sexual identities

and the acceptability of those terms to them. Reservations were expressed about use of 'straight' and 'gay'. However, their inclusion did not affect the responses given, they were recognised to be in general use, and no suitable alternative terms emerged from the research. As a potential alternative term to gay, 'homosexual' was acceptable among heterosexual/straight respondents but sexual minority respondents were against its use. The word 'normal' was used by heterosexual/straight respondent but would not be appropriate due to the implication of other categories being abnormal.

The inclusion of an 'other' category was justified. Among bisexual respondents and the transgender respondents, the rejection of the premise of sexual identity (categorisation on the basis of sexual attraction/relationships defined by gender) and the need for an 'other' category to encompass such views was identified. The 'other' category successfully captured respondents who did not identify with the first three categories.

However, 'other' was also selected due to the miscomprehension of the three main categories. An explanation of the response categories can be given to respondents who have difficulty.

Some respondents' ideas about the types of person or behaviour 'other' might capture were not consistent with what is intended: for example, transgender people, people in multiple relationships, experimenters/fetishists/extreme behaviours and non-sexually active people. These relate to concepts other than sexual identity (gender identity, sexual behaviour/attraction) and are not necessarily mutually exclusive to having a sexual identity covered by the three main categories. However respondents were hypothesising about other people and no-one answered 'other' on such a mistaken basis.

Possible additional categories were discussed with respondents but none were appropriate, either because respondents were hypothesising (for example, 'questioning') or for reasons of acceptability to the mainstream and potential overlap with gay/lesbian and bisexual categories ('queer').

A follow-up 'specify' question is not appropriate when the question is administered face to face, due to the difficulty of maintaining privacy, particularly in a concurrent interviewing situation. Analysis of open-ended responses would not be feasible: based on previous quantitative data collection the numbers of respondents answering 'other' is likely to be too small for analysis. It would not be possible to provide a comprehensive list of response categories without further research. It is therefore recommended that no follow up question be included.

The potential emergence of additional identities, including asexual and rejection of the premise of categorisation according to gender attraction, indicate that the categories recommended at the culmination of the development project should be reviewed in future.

Respondents' thought processes in selecting response categories reflected the focus group findings on the salience and importance of sexual identity and how it was conceptualised. The same types of identifiers were found. Heterosexual/straight respondents were latent identifiers (who had not thought much about sexual identity

yet felt a natural identity and were able answer easily). Gay/lesbian respondents were conscious identifiers (who had considered sexual identity, felt it naturally and also answered easily). Bisexual respondents were reluctant identifiers (against labelling, but accustomed to using the label which best fitted), and political identifiers (resistant to gay and heterosexual/straight cultures). Transgender respondents identifying as heterosexual/straight and gay/lesbian arrived at their answers in ways similar to non-transgender respondents. Transgender respondents who answered 'other' had an anti-categorisation perspective similar to that of bisexual respondents, plus a rejection of the simple dichotomy between male and female which is a premise of the categorisation of sexual identity.

It can be concluded that respondents considered the sexual identity category with which they had answered the question to correspond to their internal identity. Respondents did not say they felt different internal sexual identities at the same time, depending on, for example, which environment they were in - with friends/socially, with family, at work. However, for some respondents the sexual identity they presented to others might change, their internal identity hidden in certain contexts, for reasons relating to fear of disclosure explored in the following chapter.

No problems regarding the intended reference period were found in the interviews – as intended, respondents answered in respect of the present time. Therefore it can be concluded that the question wording does not require any reference to time, for example '…how you currently think of yourself?'

The development of sexual identity in an individual varied as to whether it was easy or difficult, or occurred early or later in life. The case histories of gay/lesbian respondents indicated that some survey respondents might be clear of their identity from a young age, and that identity remains consistent through life. Difficult or late development of sexual identity was experienced among sexual minority and/or transgender respondents. Therefore other survey respondents' answers might differ at different points in time. However, respondents thought that sexual identity was likely to remain fixed once an individual had accepted it.

There were, though, respondents – bisexual and 'other' – for whom fluidity of sexual identity over time was a possibility.

Bisexual respondents felt that bisexual identity did not instantly change to be consistent with the type of relationship they were in (that is, on the basis of the behaviour dimension). The implication of this is that an individual's response would not change, for example, to heterosexual/straight because they changed from having a partner of the same sex to one of the opposite sex. However, for some individuals sexual identity might change over a longer period if a relationship endured.

For transgender respondents, the issue of change over time was complex, due to the inter-relationships between gender identity, biological sex and sexual attraction. Implications of the findings relating to transgender respondents for collection of sexual identity data include the following.
- Post-transition transgender respondents will be able to answer a sexual identity question, on the basis of their gender identity, whether or not they have had GRS.

- Pre-transition respondents may find it difficult to self-categorise, or may self-categorise on the basis of biological sex rather than gender identity.
- During the process of transition respondents may find it difficult to self-categorise.

The opinions held by respondents from the subgroups which had not been well represented in the focus groups (those in the older and younger age groups, those living outside London, those with lower educational attainment, those identifying with ethnic minorities or with particular religious affiliations and transgender respondents) were broadly consistent with those of the focus groups participants and the other cognitive/in-depth interview respondents. The key differences were as follows.

- Heterosexual/straight respondents who were in the youngest or older age groups, and/or were less well-educated, and/or for whom English was not the first language, did not understand one or more terms used in the response categories (mainly those ending '–sexual') and thus had difficulties in answering, sometimes resulting in error. However, not all respondents in these subgroups had comprehension problems.
- Transgender respondents included those who answered 'other' for reasons similar to bisexuals – dislike of categorisation on the basis of people's gender(s) – with the additional dimension of rejection of the assumption of gender bipolarity. Transgender respondents also had particular issues relating to change in sexual identity over time, due to the interaction between gender identity, biological sex and sexual attraction before and after gender transition.

Recommendations
4.1   The recommended question stem is 'Which of the options on this card best describes how you think of yourself' (as per the prototype question). No reference period (e.g. 'currently') is required.

4.2   The recommended response categories are: Heterosexual/Straight; Gay/Lesbian; Bisexual; Other (as per the prototype question).

4.3   It is recommended that no follow-up 'specify' question be asked when the answer is 'Other' (for privacy reasons in interviewer-administered surveys).

4.4   An explanation of the meaning of response categories should be available to interviewers to provide if respondents query them. The explanation should be in general terms, not prescriptive, due to the subjectivity of sexual identity. However, since the meaning is more likely to be queried by people who are heterosexual/straight, and heterosexual/straight respondents conceptualised sexual identity mainly in terms of sexual attraction, the explanation can be given in terms of attraction to people of the opposite sex, same sex or both sexes, as appropriate.

4.5   The stem wording, the terminology used in the response categories and the need for different or additional categories should be reviewed in the future, in order to keep abreast of the public's conceptualisation of sexual identity, use of terminology, and the potential emergence of additional sexual identities.

5 Administration of a question on sexual identity in social surveys

5.1 Disclosing sexual identity in the household environment

Respondents' views on being asked a sexual identity question in the presence of other household members, in particular when being interviewed concurrently, were probed. This was to explore any potential issues about invasion of privacy, embarrassment, sensitivities relating to religious or cultural beliefs around the topic of sexual identity, or concerns about disclosing sexual identity in the household environment. Respondents who did not live with anyone else were asked to consider households in which they had previously lived or might in future live. (Note that the impact of the show card system on opinions is considered separately at 5.3).

5.1.1 Heterosexual/straight respondents

Heterosexual/straight respondents in the main had no concerns about being asked the question in the presence of other household members. They were, for example, *"happy"*, *"fine"* and *"comfortable"* to answer in front of spouses, adult children/step-children, siblings, grandchildren and parents. This applied across all the subgroups, with the exception of Muslim respondents.

Male and female Muslim respondents felt discomfort due to the *"cultural background we come from"*:

> *"It's something we do not sit and talk about, your sexual orientation and how you would feel about it if I was this, that or the other… Maybe you're afraid to find something coming out of the closet… I think we'd all find it very uncomfortable."* [Heterosexual/straight respondent; Muslim; living with related adult(s)]

> *"I think that would be difficult because we never talk about sex with parents, never."* [Heterosexual/straight respondent; Muslim; living with related adult(s)]

The effect of these respondents' discomfort on how they said they would respond to the question varied. Respondents said they would nonetheless answer the question honestly in the presence of the immediate family members in their households (relationship types included spousal, parental and sibling) though perhaps be nervous. But answering in front of parents was felt to be difficult.

Heterosexual/straight respondents were also unconcerned about other household members being asked the question. Nor were they concerned that other household members themselves would react negatively to being asked the question or to the respondent being asked. The exception, again, was among Muslim respondents. Their views included no objection to immediate family members in the household being asked the question, but that those people would also feel uncomfortable in a concurrent environment or might feel *"shock"* at the question.

5.1.2 Sexual minority respondents

Sexual minority respondents varied as to whether their sexual identity was known to members of their households. Those respondents who were not out at home varied as to whether they would answer a sexual identity question honestly.

There were respondents who were out in their current or former households and would answer the question honestly in the presence of partners, parents and siblings. They included young and/or ethnic minority respondents.

There were also sexual minority respondents who currently were not out to parents and siblings, or had not been out with family in the past. In both circumstances a socially desirable answer would be given.

> *"If I was living at home I would have huge problems with it and I'd have to say heterosexual because I have never disclosed anything about my sex life to my parents and they just assume I'm heterosexual."* [Sexual minority man; White British]

The socially desirable answer would not always be heterosexual/straight. A gay man had in the past identified as bisexual to his family to *"soften the blow"* of not being heterosexual/straight, so there was still *"a hope for their dream"* of him having children. Another respondent would not answer honestly in the presence of her *"seriously religious"* mother, but might indicate elliptically that she was not heterosexual/straight.

> *"If I put 'other' my mum would be like 'phew, she's not a lesbian'."* [Sexual minority woman; 16-19; Christian]

Within shared households, the honesty of answers might depend on the sexual identity of the sharers. Young sexual minority respondents said they would answer honestly if sharing with sexual minority people, but if sharing with heterosexual/straight people might have concerns about safety. However, such concern was not always felt. A young sexual minority respondent would *"probably answer"* openly despite sharing a house with people whose sexual identities were not known to each other. Indeed it was thought it might provide a comfortable opportunity to come out to them.

There were respondents who said their answers might be influenced by those of others in their households. For example, a sexual minority respondent might answer queer as this was the identity preferred by a flatmate; and a transgender respondent who might be led by their spouse's likely answer.

There were contrasting views about whether parents would be happy for young sexual minority respondents to be asked the question. One was that parents would be ashamed or uncomfortable when the respondent was asked. A socially desirable answer might be given, but not necessarily.

> *"I think it would make them feel a bit uncomfortable, to actually hear me say out to a stranger that I am gay, it would make them feel a bit shocked… It wouldn't affect my answer but you've got to have respect for the family as well."* [Sexual minority woman; 16-19; White British]

In contrast, another young respondent thought his mother and father would be comfortable about him being asked.

5.2   Disclosing sexual identity in non-household environments

Gay and lesbian respondents varied as to how they would identify in different environments. Some would be consistently open; others might not be open but would not deny their sexual identity if the subject was raised; and still others that they would

give a socially desirable response. Disclosure was thought to depend on the relevance to the context, or how well the respondent knew the other people and their likely reaction.

Among older respondents it was said that the assumption by other people that they had no sex life made it difficult to disclose sexual identity.

A young gay/lesbian respondent not out to family said they would identify as bisexual to heterosexual/straight friends for fear they would tell the respondent's mother (whom it was felt would react better to her child being bisexual than gay/lesbian).

As a result of prejudice and *"stigma"*, bisexual respondents felt reluctance (for example, *"I'm cagey"*) to disclose sexual identity at work or in social situations, due to negative views of bisexuality. They said they would sometimes identify as gay/lesbian, or not disclose at all, when with gay people; and/or they would identify as heterosexual/straight, for example, at work. They therefore can also be considered to be 'fluid identifiers', as had been found in the focus groups.

Transgender respondents said their sexual identity would not change by context: respondents would always identify as gay/lesbian, or always identify as heterosexual, or always identify as 'queer'. It was said that assumptions might be made about sexual identity being gay due to appearance (and consequently homophobia experienced), or because in the LGB community there was little accommodation of transgender people.

5.3   The concealed show card system of administration

The findings in section 5.1 have implications for data collection in the household survey context. Sexual minority respondents might or might not answer honestly in the household environment. There will be heterosexual/straight respondents who are comfortable being asked themselves or for other household members to be asked, but also respondents who are not comfortable. This section considers whether the mode of administration which was tested overcame barriers to answering or prevented discomfort.

Previous research had led the researchers on the ONS project to conclude that the sexual identity question should not be treated differently to other questions. This was to avoid drawing attention to it in case sensitivity was increased among respondents or interviewers, resulting in item non response. However administering the question as a running prompt or using a show card common to all household members would not overcome respondents' potential discomfort in disclosing their sexual identity in the presence of others. Therefore a concealed show card system was designed, with unique cards to be provided to each respondent interviewed concurrently. The intention was to allow respondents to answer the question in a discreet manner, and enable those who had concerns about disclosure to other people to answer the question honestly.

5.3.1   General show card introduction

Due to the difference in the administration compared to other questions where the same show card is given to the respondents being interviewed concurrently, a general introduction to the use of show cards was proposed, to be given by the interviewer at

the start of the survey interview (see Appendix B). The introduction mentioned that cards were different for some questions and that sometimes answers would be given as a number rather than words, without mentioning sexual identity in particular. No special introduction or explanation was to be given at the point the sexual identity question was asked. The general introduction and the concealed show card administration were tested in the interviews.

Understanding of the intended meaning of the show card introduction varied, across and within all subgroups.

There was some understanding, particularly among younger respondents, that answers could be given as a number instead of in words and that privacy would be maintained when more than one person was being interviewed because each card would *"probably have totally different numbers"*.

> *"Whatever answer I'd arrived at, I'd give you the number rather than saying the words because the number would probably hide the information a bit more."* [Heterosexual/straight woman; 16-19; <A level]

> *"There will be a degree of individual confidentiality between the two respondents."* [Heterosexual/straight man; A level>]

> *"Only you and I know what the numbers mean so it's confidential."* [Sexual minority man; 16-19; in education]

> *"No-one can know the information. It's just between us two."* [Sexual minority woman; 16-19; A level>]

However, respondents spontaneously asked for the introduction to be repeated and for clarification of its meaning. It was also thought to be *"confusing"*, *"unclear"*, vague and lengthy, and some misconceptions were apparent. Respondents did not necessarily get the message that each person interviewed would be given a different card. It was clear that the explanation only made sense once the respondent had experience of show cards being used – it was too abstract or *"hard to visualise"* before then. Responses to other questions in the identity sequence indicated that the impression had been taken that all could be answered with a number, which was not the intention. Indeed, if a respondent answered the ethnicity question with a number, further probing was required to determine which subcategory under the main grouping was being given, given the way they were listed on the card for that question.

The erroneous impression was given by the drafting of the introduction that the interviewer would not be aware which category the number corresponded to.

> *"[The interviewer]* won't know what you're admitting to." [Heterosexual/straight man; 61 and over; no qualifications]

> *"I wouldn't think you would know I was disclosing it to you because we were just using the numbers… You don't know what I'm telling you."* [Sexual minority woman; A level>]

> *"You're trying to preserve the privacy of the people answering the questions from the questioner."* [Sexual minority woman; 45-60; A level>]

Indeed there were respondents who realised the system would not maintain privacy between respondent and interviewer.

> *"Surely when I give you the card back you can read the card."*
> [Heterosexual/straight woman; 61 and over; no qualifications]

> *"It was a bit of a fallacious statement."* [Sexual minority woman; 45-60; A level>]

While the scenario being tested was somewhat hypothetical as the cognitive/in-depth interviews were conducted with individual respondents, on the whole the intended message, that cards were unique and that in concurrent interviews other respondents would not know which answer had been given, was not understood clearly.

5.3.2 Views on the show card administration

Respondents across all subgroups were not overly conscious of this question's show card administration being different to the other identity questions. They showed little or no awareness that the show card used for this question was taken from a set which was separate from the main pack of cards used for the other questions. They repeatedly said they had not noticed any difference.

Respondents varied as to whether or not they remembered the cards being handed to them face down.

> *"You gave it to me face down so that there was only me reading it."*
> [Heterosexual/straight woman; 61 and over; no qualifications]

> *"Upside down, just like playing cards."* [Sexual minority man; A level>]

> *"I didn't notice a difference."* [Heterosexual/straight woman; 61 and over; no qualifications]

Similarly, respondents varied as to whether they had been aware that the numbers on the card were non-consecutive and/or non-sequential.

> *"They were not always one, two, three, four…"* [Heterosexual/straight man; 16-19; A level>]

> *"They were higher numbers …they started at twenty-something didn't they."*
> [Heterosexual/straight woman; 61 and over; no qualifications]

> *"It didn't dawn on me."* [Heterosexual/straight man; 61 and over; no qualifications]

Respondents also varied whether they had understood the purpose of non-consecutive and/or non-sequential numbers in maintaining privacy.

> *"People can't guess what you've said."* [Sexual minority man; 16-19; in education]

> *"I hadn't joined the dots."* [Sexual minority woman; 45-60; A level>]

Respondents had mixed views of the show card system as a whole. There were respondents with little idea of how it was intended to work or its purpose until it was explained to them, or even after explanation. But it was also thought to be a good way of maintaining privacy between respondents.

> *"I think it's a fairly private way of asking the question."* [Heterosexual/straight man; 16-19; A level>]

"That makes sense, the same answer from different cards ...but with a different number. You may get a more honest answer." [Heterosexual/straight man; 45-60; <A level]

The heterosexual/straight respondents who had expressed discomfort about being asked the question in the presence of family members felt the show card system would help. Giving the answer and hearing others' answers as a number would be *"more comfortable"* than saying or hearing the corresponding words.

"If they said the word, they said the word, it's nothing shocking these days, but maybe saying the number may be better than the actual word." [Heterosexual/straight respondent; Muslim; living with related adult(s)]

Sexual minority respondents with disclosure concerns had mixed views on the effectiveness of the system. Positive views were that the show card system would maintain privacy, would avoid a respondent's answer being influenced by those given by other household members, and might help respondents answer honestly in a concurrent environment, as long as they were clear that the cards were unique.

"That would be ace. Where someone is not settled you have to be careful." [Sexual minority man; A level>]

"If [the cards] were the same I might prefer her to go first because I might be led by her in making my decision in how I'd classify myself ... If I knew they were different it wouldn't make any difference whether I knew her answer or not because I wouldn't know what her answer was." [Sexual minority woman; 45-60; living with related adult(s)]

"It would be a good way. But the thing is that if you are going to have people in the room with their family, you need to assure them that it is completely private and make sure they believe it or they are not going to answer you." [Gay man; 16-19; in education]

As reported above a general show card introduction given at the start of the interview had not been well understood. It was thought that for the system to work as intended, an explanation that each person's card was unique should be given at the point the question was asked.

"It would help, make things easier… You'd all know that the answers you were going to give would most probably be different." [Gay/lesbian woman; 16-19; living with related adult(s)]

Conversely it was thought that that to explain the cards were unique might lead people to ask each other how they had answered.

"Curiosity killed the cat – 'you said number 36, what was that?'" [Heterosexual/straight man; 45-60; A level>]

On balance, a brief explanation should be given, in an effort to provide respondents with concerns over privacy in the household with reassurance at the appropriate time.

Not all respondents with disclosure concerns were reassured by the system. The attempt to provide privacy was appreciated but people would err on the side of safety.

"I think anyone who is…circumspect about their sexuality is going to be so careful that they'll answer heterosexual, no matter how easy you make it for them… I think it's a nice strategy but if your sexuality is not an open thing in

the place where you're doing the survey people are going to lie and you're not going to get accurate data. [People will not risk revealing] *a cautiously guarded secret, just for a survey."* [Sexual minority man; A level>]

Alternative methods of administration were suggested by respondents which would be impractical on the IHS, such as on-line administration and interviewing people individually in private.

Methods of self-completion in a face to face interview were considered inappropriate among sexual minority respondents.

> *"You're making it furtive and secret and that's a bit strange…* [Using an envelope would be] *Victorian…your sexuality is something which should be sealed away out of sight."* [Sexual minority man; A level>]

It was said that no method of administration would be sufficient to reassure some people who did not want to disclose their sexual identity.

> *"It's easiest to be consistent …then you can't be uncovered."* [Sexual minority man; A level>]

A heterosexual/straight respondent who had experienced the CASI mode of administration on one of the Omnibus survey trials favourably compared the show card system as quicker.

> *"It's quicker this way… I'd prefer to do it this way, do it by the cards, pick a number…"* [Heterosexual/straight man; 45-60; <A level]

Thus it can be concluded that the unique, concealed show card system is the optimum method of administration in the context of face to face surveys in a concurrent environment.

5.4   Interviewer effect

Respondents were asked if the characteristics of the survey interviewer administering the question, for example their sex, age or ethnicity, would affect their reaction to being asked, or their answer.

Generally there was no concern among heterosexual/straight respondents. There were women who identified with an ethnic minority and/or a religion and/or were in older age groups who said they might feel discomfort or embarrassment if the interviewer was male, but would still feel obliged to answer.

> *"The last one could have been a bit embarrassing if it was a male. That sexual one … Well, there's only one way to answer it really so I'd have to answer it the same way as I have done."* [Heterosexual/straight woman; 61 and over; Christian; no qualifications]

Sexual minority respondents were also happy in the main to be interviewed by anyone, provided they behaved appropriately. It was thought important to have built a rapport before being asked (that is, it should not be one of the very earliest questions).

> *"I wouldn't mind as long as they weren't some raging homophobe. As long as they were professional and nice."* [Sexual minority man; A level>]

There was a view from an older sexual minority respondent that interviewers from particular religious backgrounds, for example *"Caribbean Christianity"* or Muslim, might hold the *"homophobic"* view that being gay *"is a sin or disease"*. However, the response to the question would not be affected.

5.5   Option to refuse the question

No option to refuse to answer or indicate objection to it (for example, 'prefer not to say' or 'object to question') was included on the show card. Spontaneous refusals could be recorded by the interviewer.

Respondents personally felt that a separate category was not required. No heterosexual/straight respondents said they would rather refuse to answer than give their sexual identity in a social survey context. All had answered the question willingly. No objections to the question being asked were expressed. Sexual minority respondents felt that provided people were aware of the general survey *"conditions"* and that questions were voluntary *("no compulsion"* to answer) they could withhold the answer if they wished.

Hypothetical views were expressed by sexual majority and sexual minority respondents about other people. It was thought that people objecting to the question would answer 'other' unless a refusal/objection category was included on the show card. There were sexual minority respondents who felt that a category such as *"prefer not to disclose"* should be included for people who did not wish to reveal their sexual identity. However, as reported above, sexual minority respondents with disclosure concerns said personally that they would prefer to give a socially desirable response. This backed up a similar finding from the focus groups that to answer 'prefer not to say' would draw attention and suggest that a respondent was not heterosexual/straight

5.6   Proxy data collection

In the focus groups the general consensus had been that the sexual identity question should not be asked of people by proxy, that is, another household member responding on their behalf in their absence. While there was some agreement to proxy data collection, there were felt to be issues of acceptability – people's personal right to give the information, or withhold it – and of accuracy.

In the cognitive/in-depth interviews respondents were asked for their views on proxy data collection. A similar range of views was held.

There were respondents who had no reservations about proxy response, both by themselves on behalf of other people and by others on their behalf. This view was largely confined to heterosexual/straight respondents. It applied to respondents' household relationships with spouses/partners, parents, adult children, siblings and grandchildren.

> *"It's fine by me."* [Heterosexual/straight man; White British; living with related adult(s)]

> *"I have no problem with* [answering for my wife]*."* [Heterosexual/straight man; 45-60; Black/Black British; living with related adult(s)]

> *"I wouldn't mind because we've always been open with one another."*
> [Heterosexual/straight woman; White British; referring to her adult child]

There were also respondents across all subgroups who objected to proxy response, for two main reasons.

The first type of objection was on the grounds that it was a person's right to answer on their own behalf.

> *"It's their question so even if I had the same answer it wouldn't be specifically from them, it would be my view of them and it's meant to be their personal view of themselves."* [Heterosexual/straight woman; White British; living with related adult(s)]

> *"I think I know the answer but that should be hers to answer."* [Heterosexual/straight man; White British; living with wife]

Proxy response might however be given reluctantly.

> *"I would rather they do it themselves but if it came to a situation was impossible for them to do so only then would I answer it for them."* [Heterosexual/straight man; 16-19; Ethnic minority; living with related adult(s)]

Respondents sometimes felt it was acceptable for someone else to answer on their behalf but they would be less comfortable to respond on behalf of other people. For example one said that if someone else answered on his behalf it *"wouldn't matter to me"* but if he were asked about someone else said

> *"Not sure if you should ... Maybe you should just do it for yourself."* [Sexual minority man; White British; living alone]

For an individual, views could vary by the relationship, for example, proxy being acceptable between spouses but not by adult children on behalf of parents.

> *"My son perhaps might not feel comfortable being asked* [on my behalf] *... about this particular thing. I mean he'd answer it but he might not feel comfortable. But my wife* [would feel comfortable] *... There's a line that you draw as a father, between parents and children, in certain things."* [Heterosexual/straight man; 45-60; Ethnic minority; living with related adult(s)]

A young respondent did not think it acceptable for her parents to have to answer on her behalf because they would be uncomfortable, due to her identifying with a sexual minority, though she thought they would give an accurate response. Conversely she would be happy to answer for her immediate family members.

> *"I know they're all happy with who they are so I could answer them quite confidently."* [Sexual minority woman; 16-19; living with related adult(s)]

It was felt that unfair pressure was put on the person being asked to respond on the respondent's behalf.

> *"No, because it is about self identification and that is a personal thing so I think the person should answer it themselves. She would give the right answer but it wouldn't be right for her to be put in the position of giving that answer."* [Heterosexual/straight man; White British; living with related adult(s)]

Another respondent distinguished between it being acceptable to answer on behalf of relatives but not on behalf of unrelated people.

"If it was someone in my family I would feel quite comfortable but if it was someone that wasn't in my family I would probably feel very uncomfortable about it." [Heterosexual/straight man; White British; living with related adult(s)]

The second type of objection to proxy data collection was potential inaccuracy of data. This was a concern of respondents from different subgroups. Doubts about the accuracy of data collected by proxy included that the proxy respondent might not know the truth or might make a false assumption.

"I can't give an answer for them because they are grown up … I do not know what he is doing outside." [Heterosexual/straight woman; 45-60; Ethnic minority; living with related adult(s)]

"I would feel able but I wouldn't because my answer might be totally different to the answer they would give… I would not like to answer for anybody." [Heterosexual/straight man; 45-60; Black/Black British; referring to partner]

"I think I'd know but I might not know so I'd be giving you my thoughts or guess." [Sexual minority man; 16-19; referring to family members]

"No. They might not know. You just cannot know …Because it's your identity. If you were with a partner they might be having a change of mind. You just can't know how other people identify themselves. It's very much something that comes from within." [Sexual minority woman; White British; living alone]

"[My partner] is predominantly [of one sexual identity/orientation] but I don't think [they would] rule out anything …I try not to make presumptions." [Bisexual respondent; White British]

Transgender respondents had specific opinions about the accuracy of responses given on behalf of a partner, due to the effect of their own change in gender identity and/or sexual identity on the partner.

"I am pretty sure which answer [my partner] would give. [My partner] wouldn't say [gay/lesbian, but] would say heterosexual, although [my partner] might have changed [their] mind. So no, I'm not even sure." [Transgender respondent]

"[My partner] had to re-evaluate [their] sexuality … so there … could be a misunderstanding." [Transgender respondent]

It was thought that the proxy respondent might want to give a socially desirable answer. For example a sexual minority respondent said her father accepted her sexual identity but might not want to disclose it.

Sexual minority respondents living in shared households with people they did not know well felt they could not answer accurately on their behalf and that the other household members could not answer accurately for the respondent. However it was felt answers could be given accurately on behalf of sharers they knew well.

"I know their sexuality and know what they identify as so I wouldn't have a problem." [Sexual minority respondent; in shared household]

Exactly which category was answered by someone else was not always of concern to sexual minority respondents, provided it was not heterosexual/straight. For the respondent above, the flatmate's proxy response

"wouldn't be wrong, it just might be different." [Sexual minority respondent; in shared household]

Sexual identity was singled out from the other identity questions as being more prone to misreporting due to its subjectivity.

> *"This one is more about you personally and … your personal opinion. So I don't think it would work if my mum answered for me because she'd probably answer with her opinion and just pretend I'd think the same."*
> [Heterosexual/straight woman; 16-19; living with related adult(s)]

5.7 Administration: conclusions and recommendations

Views on disclosing sexual identity in the household environment were similar to those in the focus groups. Heterosexual/straight respondents were in the main content to answer in the presence of other household members, and for other household members to be asked the question. They did not think that other household members themselves would react negatively to being asked the question or to the respondent being asked. The exception was Muslim respondents for whom it would be uncomfortable to respond in certain relationships, particularly between adult children and parents.

In non-household environments, sexual minority respondents varied as to whether they would be open about their sexual identity or give a socially desirable response. Those sexual minority respondents who would identify differently in different contexts can be considered 'fluid identifiers' as had been found in the focus groups (where some participants in the bisexual women group found it difficult to choose between bisexual and gay/lesbian identities, and concealment of sexual identity in household and other environments had also been found among gay/lesbian focus group participants).

These findings have implications for the collection and analysis of data in different contexts including the household and equality monitoring in the workplace or related to service provision. A sexual minority respondent might disclose their internal identity in certain environments but give a socially desirable response in others, or give socially desirable responses in all environments. The comparison of national and sub national baseline estimates collected on social surveys with figures collected in other environments might be compromised by individuals' inconsistency of response.

The system of unique, concealed show cards designed to overcome disclosure concerns in the household survey environment was broadly successful. The general introduction to the use of show cards, to be given at the start of a survey interview, did not work well and it is recommended that instead a brief explanation that each card is unique be given at the point the sexual identity question is asked, in concurrent environments. Respondents were either largely unaware or not overly conscious of the features of the show card system (unique cards for each respondent, handed face down, using non-sequential, non-consecutive numbers) which made it different to others. Heterosexual/straight respondents who said they would feel discomfort in a concurrent interview situation thought the system would be helpful. It would enable some sexual minority respondents with disclosure concerns to answer honestly.

However for others no method of administration would be sufficient to reassure them of privacy.

The findings indicated that generally there will be no problems in administering the question relating to respondents' feelings about an interviewer's age, sex or other characteristics, and that interviewers should approach the sexual identity question in the same matter-of-fact way they do any other question.

Provided respondents are aware that all questions on a survey are voluntary, and can thus be spontaneously refused in the same way as other questions, the findings indicated that an option such as 'prefer not to say' is not required when the question is interviewer-administered. Respondents with disclosure concerns said they would prefer to give a socially desirable response rather than answer 'prefer not to say' which might suggest they were not heterosexual/straight.

In general, heterosexual/straight respondents were more accepting than sexual minority respondents of the sexual identity question being asked by proxy. There were respondents who did not object to answering on behalf of other people or to other people answering for them. However, there were reservations about acceptability (a respondent's right to answer for themselves and placing undue pressure on a proxy respondent) and accuracy (sexual identity being subjective and not necessarily known to the proxy respondent), expressed by respondents from both sexual majority and sexual minority groups. On balance, such reservations lead to the conclusion that sexual identity should not be asked by proxy.

The views held by respondents from the subgroups which had not been well represented in the focus groups were broadly consistent with those of the focus groups participants and the other cognitive/in-depth interview respondents. The key differences were:
- Muslim respondents felt discomfort at being asked the question in the presence of other household members, and vice versa.
- There was greater acceptance of proxy response among heterosexual/straight respondents than had been the case in the focus groups. No particular subgroups were more accepting than others - other heterosexual/straight respondents expressed similar reservations to those found in the focus groups and among sexual minority respondents to the cognitive interviews.

Recommendations
5.1   The general show card introduction that was tested should not be used. Instead it is recommended that a brief, low-key explanation that each card is unique be given by interviewers at the point the sexual identity question is asked in concurrent interviews: 'The numbers on each card are different for each person.'
5.2   It is recommended that the other aspects of the show card system be adopted in interviewer-administered face to face surveys. That is, unique cards for each respondent, presented face down, with non-sequential and non-consecutive numbers for the categories.
5.3   Interviewers should be briefed about the acceptability (as shown by the comprehensive testing), meaning and administration of the question, and

assured that the question can be administered in the same matter-of-fact manner as other questions.

5.4   It is recommended that a category such as 'prefer not to say' is not included, provided the respondent is aware before the interview that all questions are voluntary. Spontaneous refusals should be coded by interviewers in the same way as for other questions.

5.5   It is recommended that the sexual identity question is not asked by proxy in social surveys, due to the concerns felt among respondents regarding acceptability and accuracy. This is consistent with the ONS policy not to ask opinion questions by proxy.

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Appendix A: Achieved sample composition

To maintain the confidentiality of respondents some categories within sample criteria have been combined in the table below (i.e. those followed by 'includes…'). See section 2.5.2 of the report for further explanation of how respondent characteristics are described in the attributions of quotes. Note: the table below includes several transgender respondents. They included male and female respondents, and heterosexual/straight and sexual minority respondents.

Sampling criteria		Number	Notes
Sexual identity	Heterosexual/straight	16	
	Sexual minority (includes gay/ lesbian, bisexual and 'other')	13	
	Total	*29*	
Sex	Male	15	Heterosexual/straight (H/S): men slightly outnumbered women. Sexual minority (SM): women slightly outnumbered men.
	Female	14	
	Total	*29*	
Age band	16-19	8	All age bands included both H/S and SM respondents. There were more H/S respondents in the two older bands.
	20-44	4	
	45-60	11	
	61 and over	6	
	Total	*29*	
Ethnic group	White British	17	There were White and Ethnic minority respondents in both H/S and SM groups. H/S included more Ethnic minority respondents. SM included more White respondents.
	Black/Black British (includes African and Caribbean)	8	
	Asian/Asian British	3	
	Mixed	1	
	Total	*29*	
Religious affiliation	Christian (various denominations)	13	All three categories included both H/S and SM respondents. H/S included more respondents with religious affiliation. SM included more respondents with no religious affiliation.
	Other (non-Christian) religions (includes Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, 'other religion')	5	
	None	11	
	Total	*29*	
Location	London	14	Both categories included H/S and SM respondents. H/S included more respondents outside London. SM included more respondents in London.
	Outside London (includes South England, Midlands, North England, Wales, Scotland)	15	
	Total	*29*	
Household type	Lives with no other adults	11	H/S included more respondents living with related adults. SM included more respondents living with no adults.
	Lives with related adults	16	
	Lives with unrelated adults	2	
	Total	*29*	
Highest Educational Qualification	No formal qualifications	5	There were respondents whose educational attainment was below A-level/equivalent and others whose was A-level/equivalent and above, in both H/S and SM groups. H/S included more respondents below A-level/equivalent. SM included more respondents at A-level/equivalent & above.
	Below A-level/equivalent	5	
	A-level/equivalent and above	15	
	Overseas qualification	1	
	Still in full-time education	3	
	Total	*29*	

Appendix B: Paper questionnaire

Read show card introduction
"Cards are used with some questions which show the answer options available and help to maintain privacy. Sometimes you will each be given the same card and sometimes you will be given different cards. I will not always know which answer you have chosen from the card if you give me the number associated with your answer."

Q1. Show Card 2-E (in England); 2-S (in Scotland); 2-W (in Wales)
What do you consider your national identity to be? Please choose your answer from this card, choose as many or as few as apply.

2-E (England)	2-S (Scotland)	2-W (Wales)
1 English	1. Scottish	1. Welsh
2. Scottish	2. English	2. Scottish
3. Welsh	3. Welsh	3. English
4. Irish	4. Irish	4. Irish
5. British	5. British	5. British
6. Other	6. Other	6. Other

Don't know (spontaneous)
Refusal (spontaneous)

If 'other': How would you describe your national identity?

Q2. Show Card 3
To which of these ethnic groups do you consider you belong?

1. White:	British
	Any other White background
2. Mixed:	White and Black Caribbean
	White and Black African
	White and Asian
	Any other Mixed background
3. Asian or Asian British:	Indian
	Pakistani
	Bangladeshi
	Any other Asian background
4. Black or Black British:	Caribbean
	African
	Any other Black background

5. Chinese
6. Any other ethnic group
Don't know (spontaneous)
Refusal (spontaneous)

Q3. Interviewer note: select one from the set of 8 cards. Hold the printed-side down as though shielding from the view of anyone else, raising the printed side just as you hand it over.

Which of the options on this card best describes how you think of yourself?
Please just read out the number next to the description.

15. Heterosexual/Straight
10. Gay/Lesbian
17. Bisexual
16. Other
Don't know (spontaneous)
Refusal (spontaneous)

Q4. (NB No show card)

What is your religion, even if you are not currently practising?

1. Christian
2. Buddhist
3. Hindu
4. Jewish
5. Muslim
6. Sikh
7. Any other religion
8. No religion at all
Don't know (spontaneous)
Refusal (spontaneous)

Appendix C: Topic Guide

Introduction
- Introduction of self and ONS
- Background and aims of project in brief
- Interview procedure
- Tape recorder, confidentiality, consent

Identity sequence
Ask identity sequence as per survey interview
- National identity
- Ethnicity
- Sexual identity
- Religion

General impressions
- Feelings about answering identity questions
- Any questions stood out? If so – comprehension, reasoning behind answer given, terminology used.
- Views on order of questions
- Purpose of questions
- Objectors to sex ID also objectors to other questions?
- Ease or difficulty of using show-cards.

Cognitive testing of sex ID
Explain one of the questions is new so we'd like to ask a few questions about it

Overarching: if any objections, concerns, problems – what if any impact on whether sex ID answered or which answer given

Order may vary – take respondent lead

General reaction and salience
- Feelings when asked question
- If objections – probe reasons
- Thought about topic before?
- Importance to sense of self
- Previous experience of being asked about sex ID
- Purpose of asking in a survey interview

Understanding and answer process
- Understanding of question
- Put question into own words
- How easy or difficult to arrive at answer?
- How arrived at answer
- What is it that makes you heterosexual or straight/gay/lesbian/bisexual/'other'?

- Dimensions considered (attraction, behaviour, identity)
- Would answer the same if asked about who attracted to/preferred partners?
- Is sexual identity fixed or does it change over time/in different situations?
- Understanding of and differences between sexual identity/sexual orientation
- Understanding of 'best describes how you think of yourself'
- Compare with 'which of the options on this card are you' and 'which of these do you consider yourself to be'
- Understanding and acceptability of heterosexual, straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, 'other'
- Should gay and lesbian be single categories?
- Other terms used for any of the categories
- Meaning and acceptability of 'homosexual'
- Should any other categories be included?

Transgender people are also asked to provide some information about their past and present gender identity and whether they would answer the sex ID question the same or differently pre and post transition.

Privacy and confidentiality within households
- Feelings about presence of others when answering sex ID
- Understanding of show-card introduction
- Understanding of show-card administration – presentation, numbering, unique cards
- Views on show card system and maintaining privacy

Other acceptability issues
- Effect of interviewer characteristics
- Respondents views on other household members being asked
- Views of other household members about respondent being asked

Proxy data collection
- Views on answering the question on behalf of others/others answering on your behalf – acceptability; accuracy

Data Security
- Confidence in ONS
- Views if survey carried out by different organisation

Census and other contexts
- Views about sex ID/identity questions asked on the next census
- Views about being asked sex ID in other contexts – application for jobs, services (e.g. council), equal opportunities monitoring

Adjourning
- Anything else?
- Reminder of confidentiality
- Thank you

Appendix D: Assistance provided by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender organisations

Katherine Ralph, Data Collection Methodology - Social Surveys

Part of the sampling strategy for this project was to contact lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) organisations to gain access to a population for whom conventional sampling frames did not exist. Organisations were found largely through internet research, accessing gay publications and contacts obtained from our focus group work. Organisations also passed on information about our project to other LGBT groups they thought might help.

These contacts provided useful information about the LGBT communities they represented, including the preferred terminology to use, how best to recruit participants and how a question on sexual identity might be viewed and answered. Working with these organisations enabled us to reach groups that might otherwise be unwilling to talk with researchers as their representatives often acted as mediators. The following is a summary of important points learned and illustrations of how this aided recruitment of respondents and development of topic guides. We are very appreciative of the time and help that has been given to us.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual organisations
We contacted a range of organisations. Some only represented minority groups within the LGBT community, such as older lesbians or teenage gay men. Other larger organisations provided services for different age groups, sexual orientations and ethnic groups. Talking with these organisations identified sub-groups from within the community that could be included in the research, in addition to those we had already considered. They would be of interest due to the processes involved in determining their sexual identity and due to potential sensitivity in providing a response, for instance the possibility that they would give socially desirable responses to a survey question. Suggestions included men who may identify as bisexual as they are not yet clear about their identity or ready to identify as gay, and men who sometimes have sex with men but who would identify as heterosexual (and might be married).

Furthermore, we were advised that older gay people may be less likely to be open about their sexual orientation due to discrimination experienced by multi-oppressed groups. That is, groups experiencing disadvantage as they belong to more than one minority group.

Contact with these organisation allowed us to tailor our approach to recruitment and improve the chances of finding participants willing to get involved. An organisation that represented older lesbian women advised that members of the group may not have access to the internet. As this group met just once a month they could be very hard to reach. Therefore early contact was crucial and we provided printed recruitment details that could be passed round.

We were also advised that young people still living with their parents may find it particularly hard to self identify in an environment where they may not be "out". LGB organisations acted as mediators; they provided reassurance to potential respondents

by providing confidential rooms in which to conduct interviews and by hosting the process so that respondents had support before and after the interview. Without this assistance it would have been difficult to accomplish interviews with certain types of young people.

Transgender organisations
Support networks representing transgender communities provided further assistance. Their main aim is to promote better understanding and greater tolerance within society. The discussions with transgender organisations were helpful in informing the purposive sample design for the interviews with transgender people, and the cognitive and in-depth probing. The organisations helped us find transgender respondents by disseminating our recruitment information within the community and reassuring potential respondents that the research was genuine and worthwhile.

Talking to their representatives suggested to us that there are very diverse views within the communities regarding gender and sexual identity and that individuals' acceptability of terms used for them may vary widely. We were advised that there are many different ways in which transgender people can describe their transgender status, ranging from simply "man" or "woman", to, for example, "gender variant", "gender queer" and "woman with a transsexual history". Therefore, having been made aware of this issue we were able to modify our approach by asking each individual interviewed what their preferred terms were and to use those as appropriate.

Initially we were unsure how transgender people would conceptualise "sexual identity". It became clear through talking to contacts that some transgender people define sexual identity as biological sex, rather than being associated with sexual orientation as per the intended measure. Therefore, the topic guides were adapted to reflect this difference and all transgender respondents were asked to define their understanding of "sexual identity" and "sexual orientation" for clarity.

The representatives felt that transgender people would answer a question on sexual orientation on the same basis as other people. As long as the question is about current sexual identity then it was perceived it should be answerable. It was thought transgender people might want to qualify answers and make reference to gender too. For instance, "I'm a heterosexual woman in a man's body". The groups also advised that it is not liked within the community when transgender is included in a response category within a sexual orientation question. The contacts believed it important to make very clear during the recruitment process that we understood the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation. Furthermore, they raised the issue that transgender people don't like being considered as a third gender at a question on respondent's sex, although this is out of the cope of the Sexual Identity Project. Also mentioned was that "Other" could be acceptable as response category, as it could be considered to be not specific to transgender people.

Discussion informed us that transgender respondents' gender identity might change, be complicated and be interconnected with their sexual identity (which might also fluctuate over time), so probing about respondents' gender identity and sexual identity both past and present was included in the transgender topic guides. This was in order to ascertain whether changes in identity are likely to occur during transition and

whether any problems would be encountered as a result when answering the sexual identity question.