ASKING DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS IN RESEARCH

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Science benefiting families

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A REFERENCE GUIDE

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WHY ARE DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS IMPORTANT?

Asking demographic questions allows researchers to get a better idea of their subject pool's composition of individuals. Data obtained from demographic questions can help inform how certain results or findings may differ across different demographic groups, which can help to better understand the interactions being observed within a study. It is also important to ask questions about demographics because historically science was only interested in investigating research questions relevant to the White working class, or higher.

For too long, marginalized communities had been excluded from scientific research, inhibiting any real data or understanding for these specific groups, which has resulted in adverse health effects for these groups today. Any efforts to minimize this disparity in science and research should be emphasized and integrated into scientific practice, which is the current aim for this reference guide.

DEMOGRAPHIC CATEGORIES ADDRESSED IN THIS GUIDE:

- Socioeconomic Status
- Race and Ethnicity
- Gender Identity
- Sexual Orientation
- Disability

GENERAL DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTION **TIPS**

★ **If applicable, allow for multiple selections**

EXAMPLE: "Select all that apply"

★ **Always Alphabetize Answers**

*In many questionnaires, the options are organized by majority identity, which suggests that many other response deviates from the norm, and this perpetuates bias in research.

★ **Include an "other" option that includes a space to write in an answer**

EXAMPLES: "Another race not listed," "Other Identity not listed," "Gender Identity not listed here," "Additional racial identity," etc. Avoid listing this option as simply "Other."

★ **Provide clarifications for terms that may not be clear**

EXAMPLES: Define who may be considered ethnically Hispanic, clarify what you mean by sex or gender, etc.

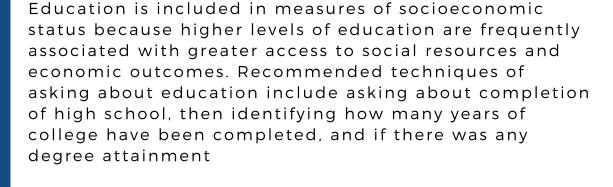★ **Tailor the list of options to choose from to the specific community**

EXAMPLES: It is common for Indigenous communities to use the term "two-spirited" as a gender identity, if your community has a large Cuban community it may be beneficial to have a specific option to claim that identity when asking about ethnicity, etc.

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

DIFFERENT FACTORS OF SES

EDUCATION

Education is included in measures of socioeconomic status because higher levels of education are frequently associated with greater access to social resources and economic outcomes. Recommended techniques of asking about education include asking about completion of high school, then identifying how many years of college have been completed, and if there was any degree attainment

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Household income is a significant indicator of socioeconomic status and when evaluating economic pressure. Income should be assessed at the individual level, as well as the household as a whole. Measurements of income can include wages and salaries, social security, unemployment insurance, dividends and interest, etc.

OCCUPATION

Understanding the nature of an individual's job or occupation is important when measuring socioeconomic status and should be asked about to understand the different ways an occupation can affect an individual. This can be asked with a simple fill-in-the-blank and/or a question that allows the participant to select the industry they work in. Additional information may be obtained like how many hours they work and what benefits are received if relevant to the study.

FAMILY SIZE/ RELATIONSHIPS

When specifically calculating whether an individual or family fall below the poverty line, you must include family size and composition in order to understand how many people this household supports. These questions can ask who lives in the home, and how many people live in the home annually.

SOURCED FROM: APA ; MEASURING SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND SUBJECTIVE SOCIAL STATUS

EXAMPLES OF **SOCIOECONOMIC** STATUS QUESTIONS

EDUCATION

Highest education level completed?

1-Below 6th grade
2-Partial junior high (6th or 7th)
3-Junior high school (8th)
4-Partial high school (9th-11th)
5-G.E.D
6-High school (private, parochial, prep, trade or public)
7-Some community college or vocational/specialized training courses

8 -Partial 4-year college (less than one year)
9-Partial 4-year college (at least 1 year)
10 - Specialized/vocational training completed
11 - Community college degree or certification
12-Standard 4-year college or university graduation
13-Some graduate courses
14 - Graduate degree

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

What was your gross annual household income? Include all sources of income (wages and salaries, social security, unemployment, etc.)

1- Less than $4,999
2- $5-9,999
3- $10-14,999
4- $15-19,999
5- $20-24,999
6- $25-29,999

7- $30-39,999
8- $40-49,999
9- $50-59,999
10-$60-79,999
11- $80-99,999
12- $100,000 +

SOURCED FROM: APA BIAS-FREE LANGUAGE GUIDE

EXAMPLES OF **SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS** QUESTIONS

OCCUPATION

What is your current occupation?

If "retired" "disabled" or "unemployed, write down previous occupation as well. If "owns business," note what kind of business and estimated value.

Write in answer here
_____

What was your work status in the last month?

a. Working full-time
b. Working part-time
c. Student
d. Homemaker
e. Unemployed (looking for work)
f. Unemployed (not looking for work)
g. Unemployed due to COVID-19
h. Retired
i. Other not listed here

FAMILY SIZE /RELATIONSHIPS

How many children and adolescents (under age 18) living in your household?

How many adults (18 and over) living in your household?

Do any of these other adults act as a parent or caregiver to your student? Yes or No.

SOURCED FROM: APA BIAS-FREE LANGUAGE GUIDE

RACE AND ETHNICITY

SELF-REPORT TWO QUESTION FORMAT

Asking questions about race and ethnicity can be tricky due to the evolution of definitions regarding different race and ethnic identities. Researchers typically have to report race and ethnicity in a specific way in order to be compliant with reporting standards identified by the NIH, FDA, or other organizations.

Many studies opt for a two-question format, however this is not necessarily required. Other researchers may opt to combine the two questions so that Hispanic ethnic identity is included in the list of race options. This is fine although it may complicate the reporting of demographics, so researchers should consider that before combining.

Make sure to appropriately capitalize racial and ethnic identities and consider providing clarification on who is considered Hispanic/Latinx

EXAMPLE QUESTION 1 - ETHNICITY

Do you consider yourself Hispanic/Latinx?

- Hispanic/Latino refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish Culture or origin

-No, not of Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin
- Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano
- Yes, Puerto Rican
- Yes, Cuban
- Yes, another Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin

EXAMPLE QUESTION 2 - RACE

What is your race? Select all that apply.

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian or Asian American
- Black or African American
- Middle Eastern or Northern African
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- White
- Another identity not listed here:

SOURCED FROM: FDA, NIH REPORTING STANDARDS, JAMA NETWORK

RACE AND ETHNICITY

SELF-REPORT TWO QUESTION FORMAT

Another option to consider when asking questions about race and ethnicity is to have an extended list that includes more specific racial identities, then categorize them Into the general groups for reporting standards. This is typically preferred among participants and many researchers as you can analyze data for specific sub-groups to better understand the effects for a certain population. The **FDA** provides an example of this type of question:

Ethnicity Data Standard

Are you Hispanic, Latino/a, or of Spanish origin? (One or more categories may be selected)

a. _____No, not of Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin
b. _____Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano/a
c. _____Yes, Puerto Rican
d. _____Yes, Cuban
e. _____Yes, Another Hispanic, Latino/a or Spanish origin

> These categories roll up to the Hispanic or Latino category of the OMB standard

Race Data Standard

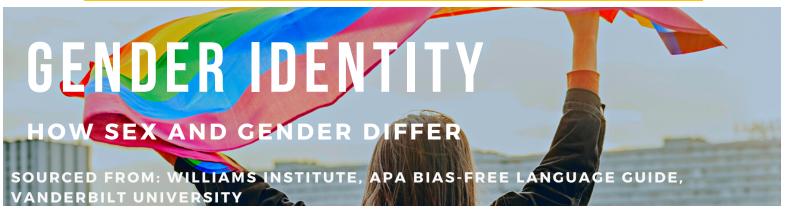What is your race? (One or more categories may be selected)

a. _____White
b. _____Black or African American
c. _____American Indian or Alaska Native

> These categories are part of the current OMB standard

d. _____Asian Indian
e. _____Chinese
f. _____ Filipino
g. _____Japanese
h. _____Korean
i. _____ Vietnamese
j. _____ Other Asian

> These categories roll up to the Asian category of the OMB standard

Note: In this example from the FDA, the list is not alphabetized, and racial identities from North Africa and the Middle East are not included

k. _____Native Hawaiian
l. _____Guamanian or Chamorro
m. ___ Samoan
n. _____Other Pacific Islander

> These categories roll-up to the Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander category of the OMB standard

GENDER IDENTITY

HOW SEX AND GENDER DIFFER

EXAMPLES:

Sex assigned at birth (sex reported on birth certificate):

- Intersex
- Female
- Male

Sex and gender refer to different constructs, and understanding these nuances is crucial in demographic data. Sex refers to the assigned sex at birth, as reported on one's birth certificate. Including this definition may help those less familiar with the different terminology. Possible responses for sex include intersex, female, and male.

Gender Identity (Select all that apply):

- Agender
- Genderqueer or Genderfluid
- Man
- Non-binary
- Questioning or Unsure
- Transgender male/man
- Transgender female/woman
- Woman
- Gender identity not listed here:

Gender identity is someone's personal sense of having a particular gender. There are many different gender identities, but ideally a survey would be tailored to include the most relevant gender identities to the community being surveyed. This is helpful because different communities use different terms or identities from other groups, so understanding what terms would be most familiar to your featured subject pool will minimize any confusion regarding the terms.

Pronouns (Select all that apply):

- she/her
- he/him
- they/them
- other pronouns not listed here:

Although most reporting standards don't require it, researchers may find it useful to also ask what pronouns are used by the subject to ensure they are being properly referred to throughout the study.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

BEING INCLUSIVE OF DIVERSE SEXUAL IDENTITIES

SOURCED FROM: WILLIAMS INSTITUTE, APA BIAS-FREE LANGUAGE GUIDE, VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

Sexual orientation refers to the individual's preferences regarding sexual attraction to different gender(s). Different terms have different definitions explaining who an individual may be sexually attracted to based on their gender identity. As with gender identity, researchers should tailor their options to match the community, and should also be sure to update terminology as it continues to evolve. It is also important for researchers to emphasize the use of this demographic data, as revealing some of these personal details may feel vulnerable to certain individuals.

EXAMPLE:

Please identify your sexual identity /sexual orientation (select all that apply):

- Aromantic
- Asexual
- Bisexual
- Fluid
- Gay
- Lesbian

- Pansexual
- Queer
- Questioning or unsure
- Same-gender-loving
- Straight (heterosexual)
- Another identity not listed here:

DISABILITY CATEGORIES

DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES PREFER DIFFERENT LANGUAGE

Person-First v. Identity-First Language

Different communities with disabilities may prefer different terminology when being addressed because of the connotations associated with the language. When in doubt, you should always refer to what the specific community has identified as their preference, however if this is not readily available try to be as objective as possible. Two different approaches most frequently used are person-first language and identity-first language.

Person-first language - referring to an individual with a disability by focusing on the person first, then the disability.

EXAMPLES:

- Person with substance-use disorder

- Person with a disability

Identity-first language - referring to an individual with a disability by stating the disability first. This is usually preferred by groups who have reclaimed their disability as a part of their culture and identity.

EXAMPLES:

- Autistic person

- Deaf person

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DISABILITY CATEGORIES

DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES PREFER DIFFERENT LANGUAGE

Disability Categories Identified by the U.S. Census

The United States Census Identifies 6 different categories of disability that they report under. These include:

Ambulatory difficulty, Having serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs (DPHY).

Cognitive difficulty, Because of a physical, mental, or emotional problem, having difficulty remembering, concentrating, or making decisions (DREM).

Hearing difficulty, deaf or having serious difficulty hearing (DEAR).

Independent living difficulty, Because of a physical, mental, or emotional problem, having difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping (DOUT).

Self-care difficulty, Having difficulty bathing or dressing (DDRS).

Vision difficulty, blind or having serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses (DEYE).

REFERENCES/USEFUL RESOURCES

APA Bias-Free Language Guide:
https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language

APA Measuring Socioeconomic Status and Subjective Social Status:
https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/class/measuring-status

FDA:
https://www.fda.gov/media/75453/download

ITHAKA S+R: https://sr.ithaka.org/blog/four-strategies-for-crafting-inclusive-and-effective-demographic-questions/

JAMA Network:
https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2783090

NIH Race and Ethnicity Categories:
https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/not-od-15-089.html

UC Davis:
https://health.ucdavis.edu/medresearch/grants-facilitation/nih-updates.html

United States Census Bureau:
https://www.census.gov/topics/health/disability/guidance/data-collection-acs.html

Vanderbilt University:
https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lgbtqi/resources/how-to-ask-about-sexuality-gender

Williams Institute, UCLA:
https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/geniuss-trans-pop-based-survey/