

# Testing and Implementing Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Questions in the American Community Survey (ACS)

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**Jessica Holzberg**, Senior Methodologist, Center for Behavioral Science Methods,  
U.S. Census Bureau

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Disclaimer: All views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the U.S. Census Bureau.

# The American Community Survey (ACS)

- Surveys **3.5 million** addresses each year and covers **40+ topics**
- The sample covers both the 50 U.S. States and DC (“stateside”) and **Puerto Rico** (Puerto Rico Community Survey, or PRCS)
- Data are collected for people in **Housing Units** and in **Group Quarters** facilities (like dorms, prisons, and nursing homes)

## American Community Survey

*Helping communities make informed decisions*



# Data Collection Process

## Online Response



## Paper Questionnaire



## Computer-Assisted Interviewing

In-Person and Telephone



**Self-Response**  
(about 8 weeks)

**Personal Interviewing**  
(about 4 weeks)

# How a Question Becomes Part of the ACS

## Proposal

- A federal agency proposes a new or changed question.
- Requests undergo legal, technical, and policy review.
- OMB and Census Bureau decide whether the change has merit.

## Testing

- Wording options are created and cognitively tested.
- Question performance is evaluated in a field test.
  - A Federal Register Notice is published for the test.

## Evaluation

- Test results are reviewed by the Census Bureau and requesting federal agency.
- The Census Bureau solicits public comment through a Federal Register Notice.

## Decision

- A final decision is made in consultation with the OMB and Interagency Council on Statistical Policy (ICSP) Subcommittee on the ACS.
- If approved, the Census Bureau implements the change.

# Adding SOGI Content on the ACS

## ✓ Proposal

- The Department of Justice requested SOGI data.
- A legal review of the request confirmed that it met the strict requirements for adding content to the ACS.

## Testing

- Wording options are created
- Cognitive testing is conducted.
- Question performance is evaluated in a field test.
  - A Federal Register Notice was published.

## Evaluation

- Test results are reviewed by the Census Bureau and requesting federal agency.
- The Census Bureau solicits public comment through a Federal Register Notice.

## Decision

- A final decision is made in consultation with the OMB and Interagency Council on Statistical Policy (ICSP) Subcommittee on the ACS.
- If approved, the Census Bureau implements the change.

# Wording Options

# Collaboration and Research

- Recommendations from Research
  - [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine \(NASEM\) Report: Measuring Sex, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation \(2022\)](#)
  - [OMB Recommendations on the Best Practices for the Collection of SOGI Data on Federal Statistical Surveys \(2023\)](#)
- Interagency Working Group on Measuring Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (2015-2016)
  - [Current SOGI Measures Report \(2016\)](#), [Evaluation of SOGI Measures Report \(2016\)](#), [SOGI Research Agenda Report \(2016\)](#)
- Measuring Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Research Group (2017-present)
  - [Updates on SOGI Terminology Report \(2020\)](#)

# Stakeholder Engagement

- California State University, San Bernardino
- Center for American Progress
- GLSEN
- Harvard University
- Human Rights Campaign
- interACT
- Movement Advancement Project
- National Black Justice Coalition
- National Center for Lesbian Rights
- National LGBTQ Task Force
- National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance
- Stanford University
- Transgender Law Center
- The Trevor Project
- The Williams Institute
- Whitman-Walker Institute

Note: engagement does not imply endorsement from stakeholders



# Considerations for Asking SOGI on the ACS

- Response modes: self-response and interviewer-administered
- Respondents: self and proxy response
  - One person responds for themselves and for other members of the household
- Language: English and Spanish

# Sexual Orientation Question

- Aligns with NASEM and OMB recommendations
  - Reworded for proxy reporting
  - An explicit “Don’t Know” option is not offered for any questions on the ACS
- Only one version of the question being tested
- Asked of people age 15 and over

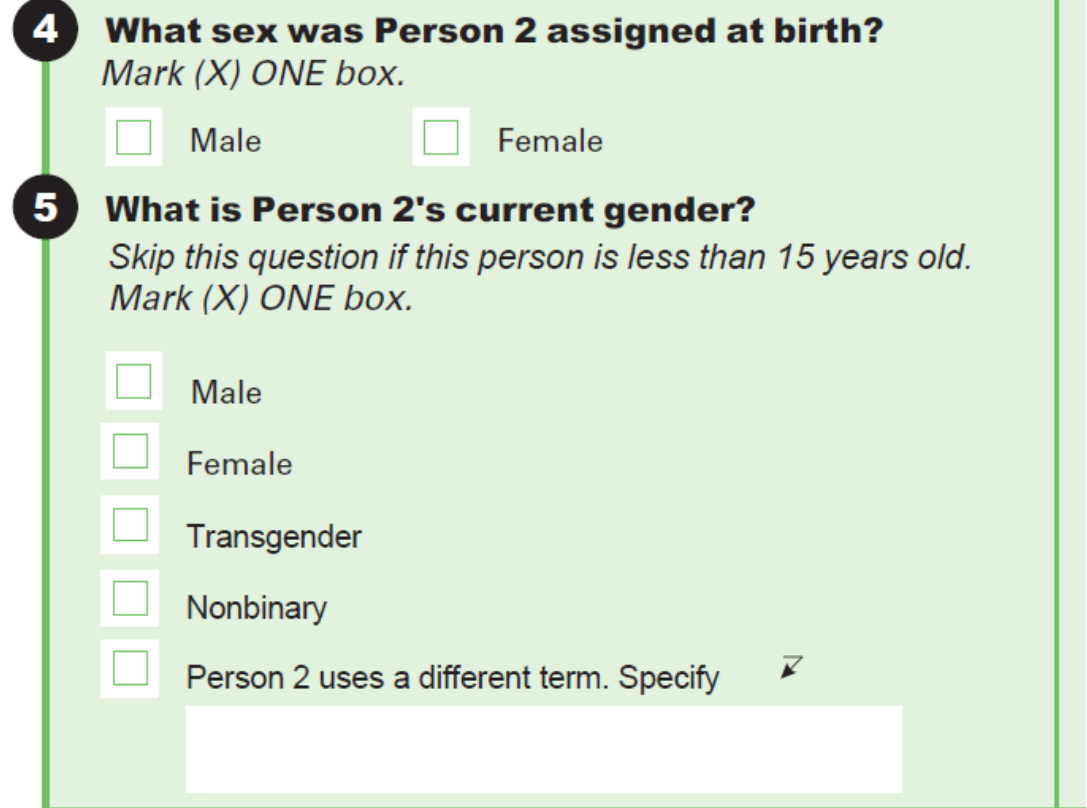
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**Which of the following best represents how this person thinks of themselves?** *Mark (X) ONE box.*

- Gay or lesbian
- Straight, that is not gay or lesbian
- Bisexual
- This person uses a different term - Specify ↴

# Gender Identity


- Two-step question
- Questions replace the sex question on the ACS (What is Person 2's sex? )
- Similar to NASEM recommendation, except:
  - Question stem reworded for proxy response
  - Removed language about birth certificate in sex assigned at birth question
  - Male and Female category order matches other Census Bureau surveys
  - Added nonbinary category to current gender question
- Current Gender question asked for people age 15 and over



**4 What sex was Person 2 assigned at birth?**  
Mark (X) ONE box.

Male  Female

**5 What is Person 2's current gender?**  
Skip this question if this person is less than 15 years old.  
Mark (X) ONE box.

Male  
 Female  
 Transgender  
 Nonbinary  
 Person 2 uses a different term. Specify 

# Gender Identity Treatments

**Treatment 1: Only one response option can be marked.**

**4** What sex was Person 2 assigned at birth?

Mark (X) ONE box.

Male  Female

**5** What is Person 2's current gender?

Skip this question if this person is less than 15 years old.  
Mark (X) ONE box.

Male  
 Female  
 Transgender  
 Nonbinary  
 Person 2 uses a different term. Specify ↴

**Treatment 2: More than one response option can be marked.**

**4** What sex was Person 2 assigned at birth?

Mark (X) ONE box.

Male  Female

**5** What is Person 2's current gender?

Skip this question if this person is less than 15 years old.  
Mark (X) one or more boxes.

Male  
 Female  
 Transgender  
 Nonbinary  
 Person 2 uses a different term. Specify ↴

# Confirmation Question for Gender Identity

- Automated modes only
  - Not included on the paper questionnaire
- Question is asked when Sex Assigned at Birth and Current Gender responses don't match
- However, we are asking the question for everyone in the test to get a bigger picture of measurement error

# Relationship Question

## CURRENT QUESTION

How is this person related to Person 1?  
Mark (X) ONE box.

- Opposite-sex husband/wife/spouse
- Opposite-sex unmarried partner
- Same-sex husband/wife/spouse
- Same-sex unmarried partner
- Biological son or daughter
- Adopted son or daughter
- Stepson or Stepdaughter
- Brother or sister
- Father or mother
- Grandchild
- Parent-in-law
- Son-in-law or daughter-in-law
- Other relative
- Roommate or housemate
- Foster child
- Other nonrelative

## PROPOSED QUESTION

How is this person related to Person 1?  
Mark (X) ONE box.

- Spouse
- Unmarried partner
- Biological child
- Adopted child
- Stepchild
- Sibling
- Parent
- Grandchild
- Parent-in-law
- Son-in-law or Daughter-in-law
- Other relative
- Roommate or housemate
- Foster child
- Other nonrelative

# Fertility Question Instructions and Pronoun Changes

person's sex at birth was female and they are

- Skip instruction for fertility question updated
  - People assigned female at birth should answer

*Answer question 25 if this ~~person is female and~~ 15 – 50 years old. Otherwise, SKIP to question 26a.*

- Removal of “his/her” pronouns throughout questionnaire
  - Most commonly replacing with “their”

their

**Does this person have any of ~~his/her~~ own grandchildren under the age of 18 living in this house or apartment?**

# Cognitive Testing



# Cognitive Testing

- Testing conducted in collaboration with RTI across all four modes of the ACS
- 64 English interviews, 80 stateside Spanish interviews, 74 Puerto Rico Spanish interviews
- Respondent Recruitment: Split between those with LGBTQIA+ identities and those who are straight/cisgender

# Cognitive Testing Goals

- Assess respondents' ability to comprehend and answer SOGI across languages, survey modes, and subgroups (e.g., sexual/gender identities, education level, geography)
- Probe respondents on willingness and ability to proxy report
- Evaluate performance of the “nonbinary” category in the current gender question
- Evaluate performance of the gender-neutral relationship categories
- Evaluate performance of fertility skip and pronoun changes
- Collect preliminary feedback on a question about intersex status

# Intersex Question

- Almost no information about how this type of question would perform in a representative federal survey
- Researchers and stakeholders are increasingly interested in this type of data
- Cognitive interviews can provide some very preliminary feedback to one of the NASEM recommendations:

**Were you born with a variation in your physical sex characteristics?** *This is sometimes called being intersex or having a difference in sex development, or DSD.*

Yes

No

- Intersex question only included in cognitive testing; not in the field test

# Field Test

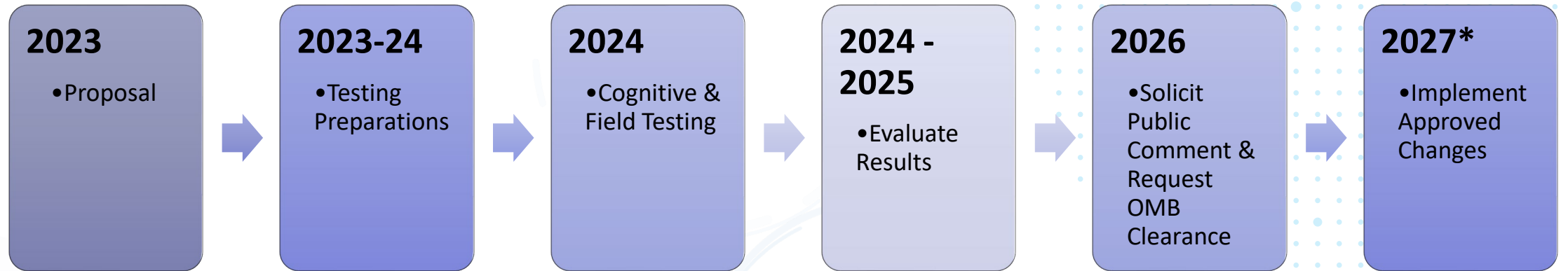
# Field Test Plans

- Field test kicked off in summer of 2024
- Initial testing will focus on self-response modes: internet and paper
- 2 wording treatments
- Sample: 240,000 cases per treatment
- Personal interview component of the test planned for spring of 2025

# Content Followup (CFU) Reinterview

- CFU measures response reliability and is the main data source for assessing SOGI proxy response
  - Some CFU cases conducted with the same respondent as the original interview
  - Some CFU cases conducted with a different respondent (adult)
  - Compare reliability between same and proxy respondents
  - Will also compare SOGI reliability to other questions

# ACS SOGI Content: Tentative Timeline



\*Subject to change.



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JESSICA.HOLZBERG@CENSUS.GOV

