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**A guide on**

# **GENDER INCLUSIVITY**

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# What is gender diversity?

Increasingly, people are coming to learn that gender can be more complex than the binaries of men and women.



Some people are raised as male when they are women or girls, or vice versa, while others do not identify as male or female at all. There are many different ways that people can experience gender which can include identifying strongly as a man and a woman, identifying with a third gender, or feeling little to no concept of gender at all.

While we struggle to know how many people may be trans and nonbinary, estimates suggest that at least **600,000 people in the UK** identified this way in 2018. In social research, we often need to collect data about gender, so we must consider how to do this in ways that are inclusive and sensitive to the gender diversity of our samples.

# Talking about gender

**People describe their gender in all sorts of ways, but some of the most common terms are defined below.**

Not all gender diverse people identify with these umbrella terms, so it's still important that we ask people how they want to be described because labels can be significant for people to understand and express this core part of their identity.

## NONBINARY

'**Nonbinary**' is typically used to describe all genders which do not fit inside the binaries of male and female. Some people use it to include identities such as Agender, genderfluid and genderqueer.



## TRANS

'**Trans**' is typically used as shorthand for the term transgender and describes men and boys who were assigned female at birth as well as women and girls who were assigned male at birth.

## TRANS\*

'**Trans\***' is typically used to describe all genders where the person's gender does not align with their birth sex (i.e. everyone who is not cisgender). In this way, it encompasses both trans and nonbinary people as well as gender diverse people who may not identify as nonbinary. Some sources, however, use 'trans' and 'trans\*' interchangeably.



# What's the problem?



**Taking a look at how you talk and think about gender is an important task not just for researchers but for everyone in society too.**

In social research, we often need to ask people what their gender is, and how we do this is very important. Many quick and simple adaptations can be made to the ways we talk about and record gender data. These must be carefully considered as misclassifying people's gender by assuming that they are limited to male and female, or by assuming someone's gender based on their appearance, only serves to limit: the freedom of subjects to express their gender; the validity of our demographic data; and how ethically sound the research practices are.

When choosing to record data on the subject's sex it is important to consider if it is truly relevant to measure sex or simply an easier question than asking about diverse gender. This guide should help to inform on how to collect gender data and ensure inclusive research practices, though if the measurement of sex is needed for your research, remember to also consider that **biological sex isn't always binary either.**

**Misclassifying people's gender, only serves to limit how ethically sound the research practices are.**



# Asking the question



**There are so many different ways that people classify genders in research which can sometimes make it hard to know where to start.**

It is best practice to use an open response field so that there are no restrictions on the ways people can self-identify in your research. From this, you can group people by the most prevalent genders in your sample while being careful not to create a lump category like 'other.' Even if your samples are small, it's good practice to first specify the diversity of your sample and then go on to analyse men, women and people who identify in another way in your work. This is how the 2021 Census examined gender for example.



For research where closed responses are needed, it can be tricky to know what list of gender options to present to people. Many studies in social research typically use a list that includes 'transgender male' and 'transgender female,' and sometimes 'nonbinary' as well. It is generally regarded as good practice to categorise trans men as men and trans women as women, because part of inclusivity in research and wider society involves including these binary trans identities in the binary categories of M/F. Good options to include instead include nonbinary or Trans\*, as these are generally accepted umbrella terms. If there is the option to include a wider set of responses, look to having a choice for more specific labels such as agender, genderfluid, etc.

Though using closed response questions to ask about gender can be more limiting for the respondent, this approach also conveys that the researcher has sought to understand and consider diverse genders, which is important for people to feel assured that the work is inclusive and that their data will be genuinely considered as opposed to being overlooked as the inscrutable 'others.'

# Making assumptions

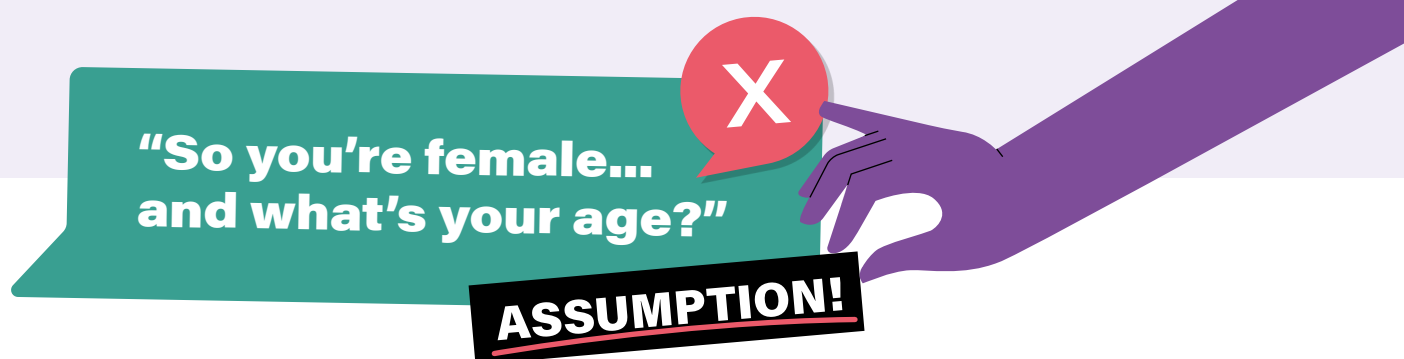


**It can be easy to assume someone's gender from their pronouns or their appearance and sometimes people aren't given the space to correct us.**

When communicating with participants it's important not to assign titles like 'Miss/Mrs/Mr' to people unless we've explicitly been told that they apply. It's also good to try and get into the habit of using the gender-neutral pronouns they/them when talking about people whose gender or pronouns haven't been specified. For example, a researcher interviewing a woman about the support their partner provides during their pregnancy should ask how they help rather than how he helps unless the participant leads with pronouns like he/him.

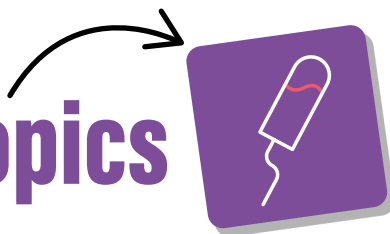
Similarly, when using quotes to express your qualitative data, it's good practice to refer to what they said unless they've shared their pronouns. Asking people to let the researcher know their pronouns prior to an interview or focus group, or when making introductions at the start, can facilitate a more open forum for gender diverse people to be included in social research.

Some researchers find that interviews are a particularly challenging environment to make gender-inclusive because they don't want to offend someone by asking about what they may consider as being their very obvious gender. In these situations, is it important again that the researcher does not record data based on their assumptions, or pose questions as exclusionary statements, for example noting out loud 'So you're female... and what's your age?'. To rectify the challenges of interviews, social researchers can enquire about gender before an interview, for example in a short enrolment questionnaire or when providing written consent.



When researchers need to know or access a person's legal name, for example by checking ID for age-restricted research, care must be taken to continue using the name the participant has told you they prefer. Some Trans\* people change their name and using a previous name, which is called a 'deadname', can be offensive.

# Gendered topics



**Social research can sometimes take us to explore topics that feel 'gendered' for example studying pregnancy and menstruation.**

This is a common pitfall in the field where some researchers recruit and communicate using terms like 'women's health' or 'new mothers' and willingly or inadvertently exclude gender diverse audiences who may also be affected by such issues. Consider, for example, that trans women do not have periods while some trans men and nonbinary people may have periods. It's important that the language we use when approaching topics such as these is inclusive by choosing neutral phrases like 'pregnant people' or the 'birthing partner'.

The breast cancer awareness organisation Coppafeel are a good example of inclusive language in action, as they use they/them pronouns in much of their discourse and talk not just of boobs but also chests and pecs of Trans\* people who are also at risk of breast cancer. These adjustments may seem clunky to some now but through continuous use, neutral phrases typically become integrated into our language for example it feels natural to describe a 'flight attendant' rather than 'stewardess'.

# Driving change



**Through these simple changes to survey questions, interview procedure and the way we communicate with participants, researchers can help to make their practices more inclusive and drive change across the field. Taking these steps will help to ensure that the data collected is accurate, comprehensive and ethically sourced.**

By demonstrating the consideration of gender diverse people in research and welcoming their authentic identities, these steps will also help to encourage a broader population of people to engage in social research. From this, not only does the data become more reliable and the findings more generalisable, but social researchers can help to set a precedent across wider society that no gender should be presumed or excluded.





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