Improving Measurement of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the Federal Statistical System

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Counting the SOGI Population

• The public relies on Federal statistics to describe the well-being of populations.
• These statistics are used to inform policy decisions and allocate funding.
• Recently, there has been even greater interest in the availability of Federal statistics describing the SOGI population.
Expanding Federal SOGI Statistics

To expand upon Federal statistics describing SOGI populations, there are at least three necessary tasks:

– Establishing policy priority
  ➢ Improving measurement
– Identifying the best survey vehicles

OMB, in its statutory role as coordinator of the Federal statistical system, works to expand the availability of SOGI statistics by improving Federal measurement.
Improving Federal Measurement

• Research from SOGI experts, experience from the field, and systematic testing among Federal agencies have informed current Federal measurement.

• Progress has been made within the Federal system, but more work remains to be done.

• To further support the quality of SOGI Federal statistics, OMB convened two interagency groups.
Interagency Working Groups:
A Collaborative Approach

• Describe current Federal measures
• Identify areas for improvement
• Leverage expertise and data collaborations to implement efficient testing
• Identify testing and fielding opportunities throughout
• Implement best practices as they are developed
• Provide results to public
Interagency Working Groups Focused on LGBT Measurement

- Interagency Working Group on Measuring Relationships in Federal Household Surveys (MRFHS IWG)

- Interagency Working Group on Measuring Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI IWG)
MRFHS IWG: Background

• Established in 2010 to address the long-term challenges in measuring household relationships

• Over 30 representatives from 22 Federal agencies across 14 Departments and independent agencies.
MRFHS IWG: Results

• Research focused on the measurement of same-sex unmarried couples living in the same household
  – Systematically reviewed current measurement of relationships in Federal household surveys and their uses.
  – Conducted and evaluated qualitative and quantitative research on household relationships, leveraging resources

• Report provided several suggestions for improved measurement. See:
SOGI IWG: Background

• Established in 2015 to examine sexual orientation and gender identity questions in Federal surveys with the goal of improving measurement

• Over 100 representatives from 35 agencies across 14 Departments and 7 independent Federal agencies
SOGI IWG: Mission

“The Working Group will explore measurement of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), considering multiple different dimensions of sex, gender, and sexuality.

The Working Group will examine variability in measurement by age, race, ethnicity, and cultural group. It will prepare recommendations to OMB and other Federal agencies for the development, testing, and usage of SOGI measures to more accurately describe LGBT populations.”
SOGI IWG: Sharing Knowledge

• Current Federal Measurement
  – CDC: YRBS
  – NCHS: NHIS, NSFG, NHANES
  – SAHMSA: NSDUH
  – BJS: NIS, NSYC, SPI

• Testing (non-Federal)
  – CHIS
  – Stanford

• Testing (Federal)
  – UCSF
  – CMS: MCBS
  – BJS: NCVS
  – EPA: Employee Survey
  – NCES: HSLS:09
  – NCHS QDRL (Youth)
  – BLS and Census: CPS
  – JPSM: Proxy Reporting
SOGI IWG: Writing Groups

• Current Measures
• Evaluation to Date
• Research Agenda
SOGI IWG: Current Measures

• Compilation of SOGI measures in surveys and administrative records
  – Past 5 years
  – Federal focus
Current Measures Paper

On Federal Committee for Statistical Methodology website, under Proceedings and Reports, Interagency Reports:

• Current Measures of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Federal Surveys, 2016: This working paper, authored by the Federal Interagency Working Group on Improving Measurement of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Federal Surveys, describes how the concepts of sexual orientation and gender identity are currently measured in U.S. Federal surveys.
SOGI IWG: SO Measures

• Sexual identity
  – 10 different items; 9 agencies

• Sexual attraction
  – 3 different items; 4 agencies

• Sexual behavior
  – 4 different items; 3 agencies
SOGI IWG: GI Measures

• Gender identity
  – 7 different wordings; 6 agencies
SOGI IWG: Evaluation to Date

• Comprehensive review of evaluations performed on SOGI measures
  – Journal articles
  – White papers/reports
  – Conference presentations

• Result: Meta-analysis reflecting the “state of the science” in SOGI measurement
SOGI IWG: Preliminary Findings

- Sexual identity: 25 evaluations
- Sexual behavior: 6 evaluations
- Sexual attraction: 8 evaluations
- Gender identity: 11 evaluations
- Gender expression: 3 evaluations
- Household relationships: 5 evaluations
SOGI IWG: Research Agenda

• Assessment of evaluation gaps in the literature (per ETD writing group)

• Establish and prioritize future research agenda
  – What kinds of testing are still needed? Which would make the largest impact?
  – Which testing is cost neutral? Which needs a significant financial commitment?

• Identify (with the IWG) opportunities to jointly inform these needs
SOGI IWG: Interviews

• Structured interviews with survey directors and non-Federal experts
  - Survey Directors
    • Years in role
    • Agency SOGI survey details
    • Past and future SOGI testing/implementation details
    • Additional research needed
  - Non-Federal Experts
    • Area of expertise in SOGI measurement
    • Current SOGI measurement research
    • Top 3-4 research projects if had funding
SOGI IWG: Next Steps

- Continue to collaborate across Federal agencies to leverage testing, development, and collection opportunities
- Share testing and main study results with the public
SOGI IWG: Next Steps

• Coordinate research and collection efforts to make continued progress according to the IWG’s research agenda (under development)
• Continue to learn from stakeholders and academia about ways to best collect SOGI-relevant information for statistical purposes
Expanding Measurement of the LGBT Population in Federal Surveys

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SOGI IWG: Example SO Measures

Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (2015)

Which of the following best describes you?

- Heterosexual (straight)
- Gay or lesbian
- Bisexual
- Not sure
Which one of the following do you consider yourself to be?

- Heterosexual, that is straight
- (Lesbian or) Gay
- Bisexual
National Household Interview Survey (2015)

Which of the following best represents how you think of yourself?

• (Lesbian or) gay
• Straight, that is, not (lesbian or) gay
• Bisexual
• Something else
• I don't know the answer