



# TOWARD INCLUSIVE GENDER IDENTITY MEASURES

Gloria Fraser

gloria.fraser@vuw.ac.nz

Supervised by Professor Joseph Bulbulia

School of Art History, Classics, and Religious Studies

Project Contributors: Lara M. Greaves, Marc S. Wilson, Chris G. Sibley

Public awareness of transgender issues has heightened considerably in recent years, yet the question of how best to measure gender identity in quantitative research has been largely ignored.

The overwhelming majority of survey designers opt for a single item measure of gender with two possible response options: 'male' and 'female'.

These measures cannot identify transgender participants.<sup>1</sup> This affects the ability to estimate the size of the transgender population, and to examine their strengths and needs.<sup>2</sup>

We argue for the implementation of inclusive gender identity measures in quantitative research. By 'inclusive' measures, we refer to those that capture data from people of all genders.

## NZAVS THE NEW ZEALAND ATTITUDES & VALUES STUDY

In the current study, we implemented an open-ended measure of gender identity in a longitudinal national probability study of social attitudes, personality and health outcomes ( $N = 15,822$ ). Previously, gender was assessed using a male/female tick box. Results showed that a small minority of participants ( $n = 15$ ) openly self-identified as transgender, or outside of the male/female binary.

This is, to our knowledge, the first study to analyse and code responses to a single qualitative measure of gender identity. We demonstrate that large-scale social surveys can feasibly implement inclusive measure of gender without compromising data integrity. For the full coding scheme, visit the NZAVS website.

## HOW SHOULD GENDER BE MEASURED? FOUR INCLUSIVE OPTIONS

Because no "gold standard" measure of gender identity exists, researchers must weigh the pros and cons of each approach, based on their research question.<sup>3</sup> For example, single item measures are unable to identify all transgender participants, as many transgender people do not self-identify as such.<sup>4</sup>

### 1 SINGLE ITEM: EXPANDED OPTIONS

What is your gender identity?

- ☒ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Trans Man/Trans Male
- ☐ Trans Woman/Trans Female
- ☐ Genderqueer
- ☐ Different Identity (please state)

### 2 SINGLE ITEM: TRANSGENDER STATUS

Some people describe themselves as transgender when their gender identity is different from their sex that was documented at birth. For example, a person whose sex was documented as male on their original birth certificate, but who identifies as a woman. Do you consider yourself to be transgender?

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

### 3 SINGLE QUALITATIVE ITEM

What is your gender identity?

### 4 THE TWO-STEP APPROACH

What is your gender identity?

What sex were you assigned at birth, on your original birth certificate?

- ☒ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Indeterminate
- ☐ No sex listed

## Barriers TO IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE MEASURES



In many studies, the number of transgender participants is too small to allow statistical analysis.<sup>5</sup> If descriptive data is reported, however, synthesis analyses can be conducted, or data in longitudinal studies can be aggregated across time.

Issues of gender may not be the focus of a research study. Nevertheless, imposing a gender binary on respondents, or excluding them from reporting their gender, arguably represents a failure to meet ethical obligations.<sup>6</sup>



Some researchers may be concerned that inclusive measures of gender identity will confuse or offend participants. Our research using inclusive measures, however, provides evidence that high quality gender identity data can be feasibly collected.

Methodologists differ in the extent to which they advocate keeping the same questions in longitudinal surveys.<sup>7</sup> We demonstrate that longitudinal surveys can update gender measures without high rates of missing data or participant non-response.

