Applying a Critical Lens across the Research Data Life Cycle to Foster Greater Data Inclusivity: An LGBTQ+ Case Study

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LGBTQ+ Population (in Canada)

• Focus on sexual orientation
  – Sexual orientation largely used as the primary way to describe a person’s sexuality
  – Complex construct

• Extension of this brilliant piece!
Starting Assumptions

• RDM situated in a social, political and cultural context
• Data not neutral
• Structural oppressions shape data → increases marginalization
  – Harm in reduced value of research data (inaccuracies and dropping from study)
  – Harm to respondents
• Data inclusivity reduces invisibility and discrimination against marginalized groups AND empowers
  – anti-LGBTQ+ laws, social stigma, violence
Starting Assumptions

• Inclusivity affects all stages of the research data life cycle
  – Inaccurate, incomplete, irrelevant or misleading data

• Changes over time and status (shifts in sexual orientation, “sexual fluidity”)

• Critical lens needed to evaluate how LGBTQ+ data is used (critical data studies, critical theory and post-structuralism)
Ethical Considerations

Principles (based on LGBT Foundation adapting ESCR, UKRI principles)

1. Integrity and Quality

Are research questions worth asking / do they add to existing knowledge?

- LGBTQ+ communities not always strongly represented in existing research
- Good opportunity when research is identified where LGBTQ+ people are barely represented
- Ensure that LGBTQ+ participants are central to research
- How new knowledge benefits the community
- Amplify voices of LGBTQ+ participants rather than speak for them
Ethical Considerations

1. Integrity and Quality

Do I have a good knowledge of the community I intend to work with?

- Trans community research: how well you understand trans identities and issues?
- Familiarize yourself with full spectrum of gender identity, social and political issues affecting the lives of trans people
- Inclusive language
Ethical Considerations

2. Fully Informing Researchers and Participants

How informed and aware are the research staff?

- Make sure that researchers are not ignorant/prejudiced towards LGBTQ+ people
  - Participant discomfort, compromises research, and harm
- Ensure researchers are knowledgeable about LGBTQ+ issues and the topic you are researching to adequately inform participants
Ethical Considerations

3. Confidentiality and Anonymity

How might my research data affect confidentiality and anonymity?

- All topics involving LGBTQ+ participants should require extra care to preserve confidentiality and anonymity.
- Regardless of topic, not all LGBTQ+ people will be comfortable with their identities being known, so responsibility to make certain information is not shared outside of the research team.
Ethical Considerations

3. Confidentiality and Anonymity

How might my research methods affect confidentiality and anonymity?

• Group-based methods —important to stress to participants not to disclose identities of anyone in attendance—this could ‘out’ participants without their permission

• Consider setting carefully to avoid ‘outing’ participants without permission (e.g., school or work)
Ethics Approval

4. Avoiding Harm

What sensitivities will my research include?

- Discrimination can manifest in many ways and not be immediately obvious.
- What ways might discrimination be involved in the topic you are investigating?
- Is the language you are using LGBTQ+-inclusive?
- Try to make sure that you do not ask anything of your participants that could be considered offensive, disrespectful or invasive.
Collecting Data

• Intentional – theory and research design

• Only collect IF required for research question
  – Minimally, what is necessary?

• Identifying lacuna (consequences of not collecting for other future research)
Collecting Data

• Accurately represent sexual orientation in all its complexity
  – Gender is the de facto foundation for categorizing sexuality
  – Include gender?
  – Is it sexuality or gender?
  – How is sexual orientation defined if one is attracted to masculinity regardless of the sex of the person presenting or embodying it?
  – Two-spirited doesn’t differentiate
  – Focus (social, health, economic)
Collecting Data

• Multiple options (choose as many as apply)
  – Allows for more than one orientation
  – Generational differences
  – Some categories may be more stigmatized
Collecting Data

• Open ended
• Avoid “other categories”
• Optional responding
• To enhance accurate responding and willingness, consider:
  – Mode (e.g., survey vs interview)
  – Interviewer training
  – Enhance privacy wherever possible
Collecting Data

UCLA School of Law Williams Institute
Best Practices for Asking Questions about Sexual Orientation on Surveys
Sexual Minority Assessment Research Team (SMART)
November 2009
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT TO ASK</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-identification</strong>: How one identifies one’s sexual orientation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Heterosexual or straight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Gay or lesbian; or,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Bisexual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual behaviour</strong>: the sex of sex partners (i.e. individuals of the same sex, different sex, or both sexes)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past (e.g. year) who have you had sex with?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Men only</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Women only</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Both men and women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) I did not have sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual attraction</strong>: the sex or gender of individuals that someone feels attracted to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which best describes your feelings? Are you:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Only attracted to females</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Mostly attracted to females</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Equally attracted to females and males</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Mostly attracted to males</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Only attracted to males</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Not sure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***Ask separately from marital status and cohabitation***
Canadian Community Health Survey

### Canadian Community Health Survey - Annual Component (CCHS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Canadian Community Health Survey - Annual Component (CCHS)</th>
<th>Variable(s)</th>
<th>Summary of changes</th>
<th>Other reference periods</th>
<th>Related products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Sexual orientation of person, status

**Person** refers to an individual and is the unit of analysis for most social statistics programs.

The data for this variable are reported using the following classifications and/or lists:

- [Sexual orientation](#)
- [Sexual orientation, LGBTQ2+ status](#)
## Classification of sexual orientation, LGBTQ2+ status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>LGBTQ2+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Non-LGBTQ2+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Census of Canada, 2016

**Classification of opposite/same-sex married spouse or common-law partner**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - Opposite-sex married spouse or common-law partner</td>
<td>This category includes persons whose married spouse or common-law partner is of the opposite sex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - Same-sex married spouse or common-law partner</td>
<td>This category includes persons whose married spouse or common-law partner is of the same sex.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Processing and Analyzing Data

Storage
• Secure

Processing
• Open-ended text fields (consistency)

Analysis
• Recoding to a new variable for umbrella category
• Link with another e.g. older dataset (harmonization)
Processing and Analyzing Data

Analysis

• Ensure you keep disaggregated data for inferential analysis
  • 1.7% — The percentage of Canadians aged 18 to 59 who reported in 2014 that they consider themselves to be homosexual (gay or lesbian)
  • 1.3% — The percentage of Canadians aged 18 to 59 who reported in 2014 that they consider themselves to be bisexual
Processing and Analyzing Data

Confidentiality

• Creating de-identified / anonymized public use files
  – Aggregating (e.g. to higher geography to collapsing variables)
  – Document changes and version files
  – Keep masterfile

• If can’t sufficiently anonymise (lose analytic value; small sample) can also set up access by request with strong data use agreement
Preservation

• “only metadata” isn’t terrible if the data are too sensitive and cannot be sufficiently anonymized
• Granular metadata: study-level and variable-level metadata
• Codebook explaining methodology and data structure of datasets and processing work
• Deposit where LGBTQ+ researchers are likely to find it!
• Advocate for repository for inclusive metadata
• Crowdsourcing capability?
Sharing and Reusing Data

- Don’t just “park it” – advocate to key stakeholders (e.g., researchers and policy makers and the LGBTQ+ community!)
- Empowerment!
- Breakdown communication barriers by disseminating in accessible formats (data highlight reports, linking to open access publications)
Future Directions

• More standardized, richer and up-to-date metadata in repos
• Intersectionality – e.g., sexual orientation and gender identity
• Other data types (images, video, audio, text)
• More LGBTQ+ data (especially population-based studies)