

Inclusive Design Survey Tips

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1. What is your justification for asking that particular identity question?

Do you really need to know or do you just want to know, and do your desires matter more than the discomfort it might cause the participant if you ask it wrong?

2. Have you done your research on best practices while inputting all the possible responses?

Identity is like language- the way we think about it changes over time, in response to changes in culture and society. Many options that seem new were actually always present in people's reality, but we didn't have a way to talk about them and we collectively agreed to ignore their existence. Now that we know better, there is really no excuse to continue to leave them off as survey response options.

Some might think an inclusion of diverse responses is too “political,” but that decision is also inherently political. It places the comfort of the dominant over the comfort of those whom society has traditionally erased.

3. Are you making respondents choose only one response option when they might actually need to select more than one?

Identity is much more complicated than many people realize. People can identify with multiple genders, multiple race categories, multiple nationalities... yes, this makes the data messier, but reality is messy. If you really need people to only select one for some sort of logistical reason, include the direction to select the one that best applies, in recognition of the fact that more than one might apply.

4. Are you providing an “other” option?

It is important to always stay humble and present with the fact that there are more categories than you are including in your options, even if you follow best practices. Without an “other” or “not listed here” option, you may be forcing people to misrepresent themselves under a label that they do not actually use.

This is especially important when you would otherwise be forcing respondents into binary categories. Even if this is the norm for that question, that doesn't mean it's correct or good science. For example, roughly two percent of the population is born intersex. What do you expect them to do when you ask if their sex is male or female and require a response before they can move on to the next question?

5. Are you enabling respondents to opt out of providing demographic/identity information for each option?

You do not know what is going on in the lives of your participants. They might have cause to be wary of reporting certain information to institutions. For example, even when surveys provide gender options other than “man” and “woman,” some gender minorities feel afraid of reporting their minority status to the government and resentful of the implication that they owe that sensitive information to anyone.

Disclaimer:

This is just my hot take, formed by my particular area of expertise. People with backgrounds in critical race theory, critical disability studies, etc. are welcome to chime in with additional considerations in the comments or reposts.