



CENTRE FOR
GENDER & SEXUAL
HEALTH EQUITY

Gender & Sex in Methods & Measurement

Research Equity Toolkit

Tool #1: Determining & Communicating Eligibility



THE UNIVERSITY
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Introduction

As part of research, we develop guidelines about who can and who cannot participate in our studies based on shared characteristics called **eligibility criteria** or **inclusionary criteria**. This tool is focused on determining and communicating eligibility criteria in ways that are attentive to the lives of people of marginalized and minoritized sexes and genders, which includes but is not limited to intersex, trans, non-binary and Two-Spirit people.

- 1. Precision** – This tool will help you precisely determine which variables are ultimately paramount to your study, and avoid the frequent conflation of aspects of gender, sex, and sexuality including identities, bodily features, social roles, experiences, and expressions.
- 2. Clear Communication** – This tool will assist you in communicating eligibility in a way that makes sense for people with minoritized genders/sexes/sexualities, whose concerns are often left out of this stage, as well as majoritized individuals, who are more typically centered.
- 3. Meaningful Inclusion** – Problematic assumptions are frequently used to exclude and/or communicate to potential participants about eligibility as it pertains to various aspects of gender, sex, and sexuality. This is especially the case for those who are minoritized based on gender/sex/sexuality, including intersex, trans, non-binary and Two-Spirit people. This tool will help ensure that your eligibility criteria do not inadvertently exclude prospective participants who hold these and others minoritized identities.

Decision guide

Use the following guide to help you think through what precise, clearly communicated and meaningfully inclusive eligibility criteria can look like – this is especially important if gender/sex/sexuality play a primary or central role in research, as main variables, moderators, or mediators. We recommend you start with your research questions or hypotheses and what eligibility criteria you are considering. As you go through the guide, you may realize you need a different or additional frame!

GENDER IDENTITY

(e.g., women, men, non-binary people, agender people, etc.)

Researcher's Thoughts

My research is focused on women's experiences of sexual violence while in jail and prison. Therefore, only women who are currently or have previously been incarcerated, and who have experienced sexual violence while incarcerated, are eligible for this study.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Is identity an appropriate shared characteristic among your prospective participants?

How is identity defined? As being public, internal, legal, and/or other? Does it need to be current identity, or are past identities relevant as well? How far in the past?

Who might be excluded if identity is used to determine inclusion and exclusion criteria? Is this exclusion reasonable?

Considerations

Is it the gender identities of participants that is of primary interest, or could this study be open to anyone who has an *experience* that may be sexed and/or gendered? Could it be open to those who have accessed a location, service or space that is itself gendered?

Researcher's Revised Thoughts

My research is focused on sexual violence within women's jails and prisons. It is violence within these gendered spaces that is of primary interest, recognizing that the people incarcerated in these spaces may have diverse gender identities. Therefore, anyone who has experienced sexual violence while incarcerated in a women's jail or prison is eligible for this study.

General Recommendation

If identity is the most appropriate shared characteristic among your participants, we recommend that you mobilize and communicate it expansively, where your research is open to anyone who identifies with that specific gender.

Therefore, if your study is open to women, communicate in your recruitment materials that your study is open to all women – including cis, trans, non-binary and anyone else for whom woman is a part of their gender identity. Determine whether you need the participants to identify as women now, or if someone who identified as a woman in the past may be eligible.

GENDER EXPRESSION

(e.g., masculinity, femininity, androgyny, etc.)

Researcher's Thoughts

My research is focused on how masculinity impacts sexual risk tasking. Therefore, only men are eligible for this study.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Is expression an appropriate shared characteristic among your prospective participants?

Are you conflating gender expression (e.g., masculinity) with gender *identity* (e.g., men)?

Who might be excluded if expression is used to determine inclusion and exclusion criteria? Is this exclusion reasonable?

Considerations

Someone can be masculine without identifying as a man, feminine without identifying as a woman, or androgynous without identifying as non-binary.

Masculinity, femininity, and androgyny are expressions and presentations, as well as sets of attributes, behaviours, and roles. While gender expressions are often associated with people of specific gender identities, they are not limited to those identities.

Researcher's Revised Thoughts

My research is focused on how masculinity impacts sexual risk tasking. Therefore, anyone who describes themselves as or who resonates with masculinity is eligible for this study.

General Recommendation

If expression is the most appropriate shared characteristic among your participants, we recommend that you mobilize and communicate it expansively without limiting participation based on identity. Therefore, if your study is focused on masculinity, remember that there are men, as well as women, non-binary and Two-Spirit people who are masculine, as well as men who are not.

If expression is coupled with another determining criteria like gender identity, carefully consider why limiting based on gender identity is necessary, and what might be lost by excluding people based on that secondary criterion.

SEXED AND/OR GENDERED EXPERIENCE

(e.g., pregnancy, prostate cancer, uterine prolapse, participation in gendered sports, experience donating sperm, etc.)

Researcher's Thoughts

My research is focused on menstrual suppression strategies among teenagers. Therefore, only girls aged 13-19 are eligible for this study.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Is experience an appropriate shared characteristic among your prospective participants? Are you limiting your eligibility on the basis of gender *identity* despite being interested in an experience?

Who might be excluded if identity is used to determine inclusion criteria for a study that is primarily focused on a particular experience? Is this exclusion reasonable?

Considerations

We frequently ascribe gender to experiences that are associated with sexed embodiment. However, there may be people of all genders who experience that sexed phenomenon. Limiting based on identity may or may not be reasonable if you are researching a particular experience. Prospective participants may have experiences with spaces and services that are gendered. However, there may be people of all genders who have accessed those spaces and services.

Researcher's Revised Thoughts

My research is focused on menstrual suppression strategies among teenagers. Therefore, anyone between the ages of 13-19 who has attempted to suppress their menstruation is eligible for this study.

General Recommendation

If experience is the most appropriate shared characteristic among your participants, we recommend that you do not limit eligibility based on identity, expression or another factor unless doing so makes sense based on your research questions or hypotheses.

If experience is coupled with another determining criteria like gender identity, carefully consider why limiting based on gender identity is necessary, and what might be lost by excluding people based on that secondary criterion.

GENDERED SOCIAL ROLE

(e.g., parenting, partnership and familial roles, etc.)

Researcher's Thoughts

My research is focused on self-care practices among new fathers. Therefore, only men who became fathers in the last year are eligible for this study.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Is a gendered social role an appropriate shared characteristic among your prospective participants? Who might be excluded if you limit eligibility on the basis of a gendered social role, as opposed to having the research open more broadly?

Are you conflating parenting role (fathers) with gender *identity* (men)? Are you conflating a gendered partnership role (wives) with labour that may be gendered (childcare)?

Considerations

Not all men will identify as boyfriends, husbands, sons, uncles and fathers; and not all people who hold these identities will be men. Clarify for yourself whether you are interested in participants' who share a gender identity or a social role which may be gendered, or some component of the labour often associated with that role or identity.

Researcher's Revised Thoughts

My research is focused on self-care practices among new parents who work outside the home. How they describe and name their parenting role is secondary.

Therefore, anyone who became a new parent in the last year is eligible for the study. I will consider whether and how gender – among other variables - impacts the self-care practices of new parents who also work outside the home.

General Recommendation

If a gendered social role is the most appropriate shared characteristic among your participants, remember that people who identify with that role may have diverse gender identities, diverse embodiments and may have become parents using diverse methods. For example, some fathers are people who gestated and birthed their children. If social role is coupled with another determining criteria like gender identity, carefully consider why limiting based on gender identity is necessary, and what might be lost by excluding people based on that secondary criterion.

SEXUAL IDENTITY, ORIENTATION & BEHAVIOUR

(e.g., gay people, aromantic people, women who have sex with women, etc.)

Researcher's Thoughts

My research is focused on condom use as HIV prevention among gay men and other men who have sex with men. Therefore, only men who have sex with men are eligible for this study.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Is sexual identity or orientation an appropriate shared characteristic among your prospective participants? What assumptions are being made about the bodies and/or sexual practices of people who hold those specific sexual identities or orientations?

Are you using gender identity or sexual identity as a proxy for *body parts*? For example, are you interested in men who have sex with men, or people with penises who have sex with other people who have penises?

Considerations

We frequently conflate sexual identity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and body parts. For example, we assume that lesbian women are people with vulvas who have sex with other people who have vulvas.

We may also use sexual identity or sexual orientation as a proxy for specific sexual behaviours. We might assume how people are or are not using their body parts. Or we might assume people are or are not engaging in certain kinds of sex with others, whose bodies and identities may also be assumed.

Researcher's Revised Thoughts

My research is focused on condom use as HIV prevention among people who have penile-anal sex. Therefore, anyone who has penile-anal sex is eligible for this study.

General Recommendation

If sexual identity or orientation is the most appropriate shared characteristic among your participants, ensure that you are not making assumptions about the gender identities, body parts, or sexual behaviours of those people. If sexual identity, orientation, or behaviour is coupled with another determining criteria like gender identity, carefully consider why limiting based on gender identity is necessary, and what might be lost by excluding people based on that secondary criterion.

MARGINALIZATION/OPPRESSION

Researcher's Thoughts

My research is focused on the experiences of intimate partner violence survivors, to investigate how sexism within judicial systems impact risks, consequences, and decision-making of survivors. Therefore, only women who are survivors of intimate partner violence are eligible for this study.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Are you using gender *identity* as a proxy for marginalization and experiences of oppression? For example, are you assuming that only people with certain gender identities are impacted by sexism? Will you consider how race, class, ability and other factors impact participants' experiences of oppressive systems? Could an expansive mobilization of gender identity be another intersectional consideration for your analysis?

Considerations

People of all sexes and genders are impacted by sexism. Intersex, trans, and non-binary people may be impacted by sexism alongside cisnormativity, endosexnormativity and transphobia. Two-Spirit people may be impacted by these oppressive systems alongside settler colonialism and systemic racism. Is it all people who are negatively impacted by certain, specific systems of oppression that are of primary interest in your research? Is it people who hold specific marginalized gender identities who are of primary interest?

Researcher's Revised Thoughts

My research is focused on the experiences of intimate partner violence survivors, to investigate how sexism within judicial systems impacts risks, consequences and decision-making of survivors. Therefore, my research is open to all survivors of intimate partner violence. My research will consider how these systems of oppression impact survivors differently, considering a variety of axes of identity, including but not limited to gender.

General Recommendation

If experiences of marginalization or oppression are the most appropriate shared characteristic among your participants, ensure that you have a firm understanding of everyone who is impacted by that oppression before limiting eligibility on the basis of gender identity or some other factor. If you are interested in studying people of marginalized genders, this would include cis women, but also trans men, trans women, femme men, non-binary people, Two-Spirit people, and many others.

If experiences of marginalization or oppression is coupled with another determining criteria like gender identity, carefully consider why limiting based on gender identity is necessary, and what might be lost by excluding people based on that secondary criterion.

CONSIDERATIONS INCLUDING & BEYOND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

1. If you are including people of marginalized and minoritized genders/sexes/sexualities in your research, you will need to ensure that all other facets of your study reflect their presence.

Have you made sure that your survey instrument, question guide, intervention protocol, and all other elements of your study design are appropriate for your diverse sample?

2. There is a dearth of intersex, trans, non-binary and Two-Spirit-inclusive research. If you choose to exclude these individuals/groups/communities/populations from your research, carefully consider the impacts – you should be able to justify why they have been excluded, in a way that does not further contribute to their marginalization or perpetuate falsehoods. For example, if your research is focused on motherhood, it would be unjustifiable to include only women under the false assumption that only women are mothers.

Are you contributing to the erasure and misconstrual of these individuals/groups/communities/populations by assuming that their experiences are not relevant to your research, or by failing to carefully consider how you are determining and communicating the shared characteristics that guide the inclusion and exclusion criteria for your study? Using this tool is one approach to ensuring that your eligibility criteria are not inadvertently exclusionary.

3. Words that we may take for granted as researchers (like male, female, man, woman, masculine, feminine, gay, lesbian, trans, for example) have unique and specific meanings across time, place, culture, religion, etc. Speak with experts (including people who have lived experience) to learn about these nuances. Avoid treating these words as universally homogenous and recognize the power you can hold in defining words to others.

Are you worried about the potential for pushback or confusion among the majority, if you use precise, clear, and inclusive language that may be new and unfamiliar to them? What are the consequences of using majority-oriented and normative language, if this contributes to the erasure of already structurally marginalized and minoritized people from the research landscape?

4. People may have dynamic, fluid, and unfixed understandings of their own and others' genders, sexes, and/or sexualities. These may be different from your conceptualizations and/or operationalizations. This may make for challenging determinations of eligibility criteria – but rising to this challenge will only improve your research.

If your research is interested in men's sexual risk taking, consider that a prospective participant may have identified as a man last year, but not today, or might identify as a man as well as non-binary. Would this person be eligible for your study?

5. While this tool is concerned with inclusive research practices, there are also gender-specific approaches to research, where you limit your sample to only people of marginalized and minoritized genders/sexes/sexualities, including for example, intersex, trans, non-binary or Two-Spirit-specific studies. If you are undertaking a project where eligibility will be limited to these communities, be sure to check out resources like CPATH's "Ethical guidelines for research involving transgender people and communities," Vincent's (2018) "Studying trans: Recommendations for ethical recruitment and collaboration with transgender participants in academic research," Intersex Human Rights Australia's resource "[Researching intersex populations](#)" and the [OCAP Principles](#).

What if gender/sex/sexuality aren't central to my study?

(e.g., they are covariables, exploratory variables, demographic descriptors)

We recommend communicating that your research is open to all. Remember to use clear, precise, and inclusive language so that prospective participants are not confused about their eligibility. For example: If your research is focused on the sexual education experiences of current high school students, you could say, “Are you a current high school student? If so, I’d like to hear about your sexual education experience. People of all sexes, genders and sexualities are welcome to participate.”

Avoid using gendered language like “boys and girls” that inadvertently signals a more limited eligibility criteria than you are intending. You may decide to be even more explicit – to indicate that people with minoritized genders, sexes, and/or sexualities are especially encouraged to participate. This is both more welcoming and can boost successful recruitment of participants who hold these identities.

A note on intersex inclusion

There are likely intersex people in your sample, even if you do not explicitly recruit them – make sure that you provide opportunities for intersex participants to disclose this aspect of their experience and/or identity.

Consider that the descriptions of ‘cis’ and ‘trans’ are not always sufficient and attentive to the differences between intersex and non-intersex (called endosex) people’s gender identities and experiences. For example, if all your participants are endosex trans men you should consider naming them as such in your manuscripts and reports. Their experiences of their sex assignment and current gender identity may be fundamentally different from intersex trans men.

A note on Two-Spirit inclusion

Remember, Two-Spirit is not an Indigenous version of any Western gender or sexual identity. It is a community organizing strategy or tool and a way to describe selves and communities. Two-Spirit people embody diverse gender identities, gender expressions, gender roles and sexual identities and Two-Spirit may be claimed as an aspect of an Indigenous person’s sexual and/or gender identity.

Additionally, Two-Spirit may present and be seen as a challenge to Western conceptions of sexuality, gender, and identity in the first place. Sex and gender binaries, along with endosexnormativity, cisnormativity and heteronormativity are colonial impositions, which are entangled with white, Western and Christian worldviews and then treated as ahistoric, universal truths. One component of decolonizing research praxis is recognizing the complexity of gender, sex, sexuality, etc. and refusing the universalization of binaries and dominant ideologies about these facets of personhood.

Additional reading

Want to learn more about designing research that is inclusive to people of marginalized and minoritized genders/sexes/sexualities, including intersex, trans, non-binary and Two-Spirit people?

Want to ensure that your eligibility criteria are appropriate for the topic, issue, identity or experience you are studying? Check out these articles!

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10. Springmann, M. L., Svaldi, J., & Kiegelmann, M. (2020). Theoretical and methodological considerations for research on eating disorders and gender. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, Article 586196, 1-6. doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.586196
11. Webster, L. (2021). "Ties that bind": The continued conflation of sex, sexuality and gender. *Journal of Language and Sexuality*, 10 (1), 63-70. doi.org/10.1075/jls.00015.web
12. Tebbe, E. A., & Budge, S. L. (2016). Research with trans communities: Applying a process-oriented approach to methodological considerations and research recommendations. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 44 (7), 996-1024. doi.org/10.1177/0011000015609045

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