

Dear Brenda,

We think both gender and age are important and useful independent variables which will allow us determine if there are any associations between the gender and age of a person with their knowledge of research misconduct.

Regarding the gender variable: Gender is important because women and men are different. Perhaps women pay more attention to learning about research misconduct in contrast to men. Perhaps women report that they learn in ways different than men. Men may also have preferred ways that they learn. In addition, in reporting such a study it is standard practice to report the proportion of responders that were men and women. That is a public health standard variable and is very important in knowing who responds to the study questions.

Regarding the Age Variable: Age also is important because people of different ages often think and do things differently. Since there is much research that reports that learning new information varies by age we believe that it is important to have that information to plan educational programs. We have modified the age variable as you suggested so that it captures age range rather than the exact age. However that is not our preferred method of capturing age. In another study that I have which is collecting data we ask for the date of birth and then we calculate age from that information. This is actually a preferable method over categories because it allows us to have a continuous variable rather than a categorical variable. Age too is used in reporting any public health research and is standard.

Tenure is not equivalent to Age: We are using tenure as a proxy variable for security. Tenure does not necessarily denote the age of a person since some research careers have very variable patterns. Further, if someone does not have tenure it does not tell us anything about their age. Some institutions do not tenure individuals and this pattern is on the rise. Thus tenure tells us primarily that a person feels they have job security or not – but it does not tell us reliably their age.

Overall – why we use demographic variables:

It is important in reporting the level of knowledge that faculty have to examine as many bases for learning as possible. The independent variables in our study are all necessary. Demographic characteristics for all evaluation research are critical in either ruling out differences or identifying or controlling on differences. This is very standard and very necessary in doing all evaluation research.