

CONSIDERATIONS FOR MEASURING SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY IN SURVEYS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

RESEARCH BRIEF

Over 20 years of GLSEN Research has established that LGBTQ+ youth face hostile school climates in which they experience bullying, harassment, discrimination, and punitive discipline based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, and that these hostile school climates are related to negative educational outcomes.¹ When schools are not safe for LGBTQ+ youth, they are denied equal access to the same education and opportunities that their peers who are not LGBTQ+ experience. This research also shows opportunities for K-12 learning communities to support LGBTQ+ youth in schools and to ensure they have the ability to fully participate in school and thrive.

In order to further understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth, they must be identified in surveys and data at the federal, state, and local level. Being able to identify LGBTQ+ youth in data, particularly in surveys and research about school climate and negative school experiences, including bullying, harassment, discrimination, and punitive discipline, is critical to improving school experiences and creating school environments that are safe for everyone. When these questions are not included, educators, policymakers, and researchers are unable to address the needs of LGBTQ+ youth. This gap in our current understanding was emphasized in the 2022 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) report, which calls for consistent and inclusive collection of data on sexual orientation and gender identity in surveys, in addition to medical records, and other administrative records.² Although the NASEM report focuses mostly on adult populations, recommendations include a call for more research on sexual orientation and gender identity measurement among youth population.

Although there is no one standard item for measuring sexual orientation or gender identity that is best for all situations and contexts involving youth, there are important considerations when designing surveys that can guide schools, local education agencies, state education agencies, and others toward measures of sexual orientation and gender identity that best meet their needs. This brief first discusses these considerations regarding sexual orientation and gender identity data collection in survey-based data collection. We discuss survey items that ask individuals to report their own sexual orientation and gender identity. For those interested in administrative data collection in schools and in other educational contexts, see [GLSEN Policy's brief on inclusive data collection](#). In the second part of this brief, we provide specific example items (which are referenced throughout the brief) for assessing sexual orientation and gender identity among youth.

Considerations for Measurement

When deciding how to measure sexual orientation and gender identity among a general population of youth, it is important to consider the following:

- Items must not be harmful or alienating to LGBTQ+ youth.**

Ensure that the terms you are using to describe sexual orientations and gender identities are the words currently being used by the LGBTQ+ youth community and are not outdated. For example, “homosexual” is viewed by many in the LGBTQ+ community as an outdated term. Additionally, surveys sometimes use “other” as a catch-all response option for LGBTQ+ identities. However, this positions these identities as “other” compared to “normal” sexual orientations and gender identities. Consider replacing “other” with “something not listed” or allow youth to write in a response.
- Items must be understandable to all youth.**

Youth who are not LGBTQ+ may not be familiar with specific terms that LGBTQ+ youth are familiar with. For example, LGBTQ+ youth may have a better understanding of the word “transgender,” or the concept of sex and gender being different from each other than do non-LGBTQ+ youth. When surveying general populations of youth, definitions for words and concepts that youth may not understand should be provided (for example, see G15). It is also important to consider the demographics of the population you are surveying. Including culturally specific terms, that may be more relevant to youth of specific races and ethnicities may be appropriate based on the demographics of your population. For example, “Two Spirit” is a term specifically used in Native and Indigenous communities. Additionally, in some cases, surveys may be translated into other languages. In these instances, it is important to make sure that the translations of identity terms are appropriate and relevant. This may require more work than simple word for word translation and may necessitate research on the identity terms used by youth in those languages.

- **Items should use developmentally appropriate language.**

It is appropriate to assess sexual orientation and gender identity in surveys of youth in secondary schools. However, items must be understandable to youth. There are resources that suggest best practices for measuring sexual orientation and gender identity among adult populations, such as the aforementioned 2022 NASEM report³, and multiple government surveys of adults include items assessing sexual orientation and gender identity.⁴ However, these items may not be developmentally appropriate for youth populations in terms of reading level and comprehension. Because of this, it is important to make sure that your items are clear, relevant, and understandable to youth.

- **Sexual orientation and gender identity are two different constructs; do not conflate the two.**

Everyone has a sexual orientation and a gender identity, and they are not the same. Sexual orientation is one's inner feelings of who they are attracted to emotionally and/or physically. Sexual orientations include "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," "queer," "pansexual," "asexual," and many others. Gender identity is a person's deeply held knowledge and internal sense of their own gender.⁵ Gender is a combination of social and cultural expectations and norms, behaviors and expressions, and identities.⁶ Gender can include being a man, woman, transgender, nonbinary, another gender, no gender, or a combination thereof.

Sexual orientation and gender identity should be measured separately with separate items. Conflating sexual orientation and gender identity may perpetuate the common misunderstanding that sexual orientation and gender identity are the same, both among survey respondents and consumers of the data.

Where should items about sexual orientation and gender identity be placed?

Questions that ask students about their sexual orientation and gender identity should be placed with other demographic items such as race, ethnicity, and age. They should not be placed with questions about negative experiences or about health.

If a survey is to be taken in school with multiple students taking it at the same time, it is important that questions about sexual orientation and gender identity not be placed at the beginning of the survey when students are likely to be answering the same items at the same time to ensure privacy to LGBTQ+ youth. If questions about sexual orientation and gender identity were among the first questions asked in a survey, most students would be answering those questions at the same time, and would possibly be able to see each other's answers. This could lead to students unintentionally "outing" themselves if they identify as LGBTQ+ but are not out at school. This could be prevented if these questions are placed later in the survey, as students would likely answer survey questions at different paces and not be answering the same questions at the same time.

- **Gender identity and sex are not interchangeable.**

As defined above, gender identity is a person's deeply held knowledge and internal sense of their own gender, which is a combination of social and cultural expectations and norms, behaviors and expressions, and identities. Gender identity can include being a man, woman, transgender, nonbinary, another gender, no gender, or a combination thereof. Sex is assigned at birth based on biological features, including sexual anatomy and chromosomes, and is recorded on one's birth certification. This is sometimes referred to as "sex assigned at birth." One's sex assigned at birth may not be the same as their current gender identity. Because of this, knowing one's sex assigned at birth does not mean that you also know their current gender identity.

Some surveys use a two-step approach to measure gender. This involves asking about sex assigned at birth in one question, and then asking about current gender identity in the second question. Of our provided examples,

GI2, GI3, and GI4 all use a two-step approach. However, a two-step approach is not appropriate or feasible in all instances. For example, there may only be space for one question to assess gender. Additionally, there may not be capacity to code and combine the data from both questions to create one variable of gender identity. In such instances, it is more appropriate to use a single item (such as in Example GI1 and GI5) to assess gender.

- Some youth are intersex, or have intersex traits, which is separate from gender identity and sex assigned at birth.** Intersex variations include a variety of natural variations in reproductive and sexual anatomy. Young people may be aware of having these traits from personal experience, or from a medical diagnosis. Intersex youth may have any gender identity and any sexual orientation. Just as some youth who identify with a gender other than the one assigned at birth may not self-identify with the word “transgender,” youth with intersex traits may or may not embrace the word “intersex” as an identity term. While more youth today may self-identify with the term “intersex,” many others prefer other terms such as “variations of sex characteristics” or “differences of sex development.” The 2022 NASEM report on LGBTQI+ measurement states that intersex status is an important demographic to measure but cautions that measuring intersex identity by adding “intersex” as an option to a sex assigned at birth item is inappropriate because it is extremely rare for an intersex person in the United States to be assigned intersex at birth.⁷ Instead, NASEM recommends using a standalone item about intersex traits. While there has been less experience with intersex measures to date, the NASEM report presents examples and recommendations for best practices.⁸
- Only allowing single response options of male, female, and transgender is not sufficient and can be especially troublesome for those who are transgender.** Some transgender youth identify as male or female. Some transgender youth identify their gender identity only as transgender, but do not also identify as male or female. Others do not identify their gender using any of these terms. Providing “transgender” as one identity in a list of mutually exclusive options that also include “male” and “female” could pose challenges for transgender boys and girls as it forces them to choose between their gender identity of male or female or their transgender identity. If a transgender boy or girl can only choose one of the three options, transgender youth who select male or female are not counted as transgender, and any analysis of transgender youth is then incomplete. If transgender boys or girls select transgender instead of male or female, this data does not provide an accurate count of male and female youth in the survey sample, nor would it allow for accurate examination of the different experiences of transgender boys and girls.

A measure of gender expression should not be used to identify transgender youth.

Gender identity is one’s own held identity. Gender expression is not an identity, but instead is how one expresses or displays their gender identity, and can vary based on the perceptions of others. When one’s gender expression does not match societal expectations for their perceived gender, they may be referred to as “gender nonconforming.” There may be some overlap between students who are transgender and/or nonbinary and youth who are gender nonconforming. However, transgender youth may not identify or be perceived by others as gender nonconforming, and gender nonconforming students may not identify as transgender and/or. Because of this, items assessing gender expression should not serve as a proxy for items assessing gender identity or transgender status. However, a student’s gender expression can be a factor with regard to experiences with name-calling, bullying and harassment in school, and can be included in survey items about school experiences. For example, school climate surveys may assess whether students experience bullying or harassment based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

- **Nonbinary youth do not identify as solely male or solely female, and measures of gender identity should include a response option for these youth.**

“Nonbinary” is an umbrella term for people who identify their gender in a way other than male or female, or not exclusively as a man or woman.⁹ The term “nonbinary” first appeared in GLSEN’s National School Climate Survey as a youth’s write-in response on the gender identity measure in 2011, and an increasing number of youth have endorsed nonbinary identities, including genderfluid, agender, and genderqueer, since that time.¹⁰ The recency in popularity of the term among youth may explain why “nonbinary” is not included in many suggested or existing items measuring gender identity, such as the item recommended by the Williams Institute’s GenIUSS Group (see Example GI3) and the items on the Center for Disease Control’s (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) (Example GI2). While many existing surveys and past recommended measures did not include nonbinary response options. Going forward, researchers and survey creators may want to consider a gender identity measure that includes nonbinary identity, such as the gender identity measure used by the GLSEN Research Institute in the National School Climate Survey (see Example GI1), our suggested revision to the GenIUSS Group’s recommended item (see Example GI4), or our proposed original item (see Example GI5).¹¹ In fact, the 2022 NASEM report recommends future work to assess the use of nonbinary response options in measures of gender identity.¹² Some nonbinary youth also identify as transgender, while others identify as only nonbinary. To fully understand the diverse experiences of youth who identify in ways other than cisgender, response options should include a nonbinary option or options, in addition to a transgender option.

- **Open-ended response options and allowing multiple responses on measures of sexual orientation and gender identity allow youth to more accurately report their complex identities, but may not be appropriate for all surveys.**

Items assessing sexual orientation and gender identity are sometimes designed in ways that allow students to select multiple identities that apply to them. For example, in our National School Climate Survey (NSCS), students are able to check all the identities that apply to them (see Example SO1, GI1). With this approach, all students can accurately identify their sexual orientation or gender identity instead of having to choose the one closest identity to their own out of the options provided. However, this results in data that can be complicated to analyze for those whose data analysis requires single mutually exclusive identity categories as it requires coding multiple responses into those categories.

An alternative approach to a multiple choice “choose all that apply” response with an expansive list of options for sexual orientation and gender identity items is to provide an opportunity for youth to provide open-ended responses, in addition to or instead of a list of fixed response options (see in Example SO1). This approach also has challenges when it comes to data analysis and interpretation in that open-ended responses must be read, interpreted, and coded, which is a complicated and time-consuming process. Alternatively, an item with a multiple choice option can be followed by an item that asks students to pick the identity they identify with most strongly, if applicable, which is how the GLSEN Research Institute asks students about sexual orientation (see Example SO1). A best practice for this type of item would be to provide students with only the identities they selected in the previous item, but this requires use of survey tools with specific functions that some may not have access to. It is possible to ask this as a follow-up question and provide all the response options provided in the preceding question, but this could lead to some students choosing a different identity that was not among the identities they selected in the first item.

- **Understand your capacity for data cleaning and analysis.**

Before deciding to use a multi-check item or open-ended response option, consider whether there is capacity to do so — both in the time that it will take to interpret the responses, and in the knowledge and understandings of various identities and their meanings. Is there access to researchers or analysts, particularly those with knowledge about LGBTQ+ identities? Is there access to data analysis and survey software or other tools to manage the survey and data?

The size of your anticipated sample may also impact your ability to employ multi-check items or open-ended responses. For example, the YRBS is a national survey of youth and the thousands of written responses that would

result from an open-ended response option which could be challenging to be read and coded in a reasonable amount of time. Instead of providing an open-ended response option, the YRBS requires youth to choose one of the already provided responses (see Example GI2). However, if your survey is to be administered to a smaller number of youth, such response options may be more manageable.

Accurate, effective, and affirming sexual orientation and gender identity items without multi-check or open-ended responses are possible. One way is by providing a sentence in the item that acknowledges that many students have multiple identities, or identify in many ways that are not listed, but that this question requires you check the option that best fits your identity (see Example SO2).

Ensuring Privacy and Anonymity for LGBTQ+ Students

After data has been collected and results are being shared, it is important to ensure that you are presenting your data in a way that does not identify specific LGBTQ+ students. This is particularly a concern for small school districts or other relatively small populations of youth, where there may only be a few LGBTQ students. For example, if data was presented on the experiences of only a few transgender students, it may be possible for someone to identify the students that data is from. Disaggregating data by sexual orientation or gender identity and additional demographics makes it even easier to identify students, and so care should be taken when disaggregating and presenting data.

- **Sexual orientation and gender identity terms are constantly evolving and growing, especially among youth.**

Over time, the terms that youth use to describe their sexual orientations and gender identities change. For example, even though the terms “lesbian,” “gay,” and “bisexual,” have been and continue to be commonly used identities among youth over time, other identity terms, such as “pansexual,” and “asexual” have risen in popularity in recent years.¹³ Similarly, terms such as “nonbinary” and “genderfluid” have joined “transgender” as terms youth use to describe their gender identity. It is unlikely that terms such as “lesbian,” “gay,” “bisexual,” “queer,” and “pansexual,” will cease to be relevant among youth, so these evergreen terms are the best options to include in measures of sexual orientation. Similarly, regarding gender identity, the terms “cisgender,” “transgender,” and “nonbinary” are likely to be relevant to youth for the foreseeable future.

Over time new terms to describe sexual orientation and gender identity are likely to arise and grow in popularity among youth. It is important to listen to youth voices and to learn and understand the terms they are using to describe their sexual orientations and gender identities. If using an open-ended response option, note the emergence of new terms and if the rate of youth using them is increasing. Some terms may grow so much in popularity that it is appropriate to add the term to the list of response options, ensuring that your measures of sexual orientation and gender identity are current and reflective of the terms that are most common among youth. If there are no open-ended responses to learn from, reading current research on LGBTQ+ identities, following LGBTQ+ youth or topics related to LGBTQ+ youth on social media, and engaging with LGBTQ+ youth organizations provide ways to learn about how youth are currently identifying their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Examples for Measurement

We provide multiple examples for assessing sexual orientation and gender identity among youth, while taking into account the considerations described above.

All the following examples are written in age appropriate language for use among secondary school students and not harmful or alienating to LGBTQ+ youth. These items appropriately treat sexual orientation and gender identity as two separate constructs and also do not conflate sex and gender. However, these examples vary in how understandable they may be to general youth populations, their inclusion of nonbinary identities, and whether or not they allow open-ended responses and multiple responses. Each example is accompanied by explanations of the benefits and limitations of the item that we hope can guide you to the best item for your specific needs.

Measures of Sexual Orientation

Example SO1: GLSEN's National School Climate Survey

The following item was used by the GLSEN Research Institute in the 2021 National School Climate Survey (NSCS) to assess sexual orientation among a national sample of LGBTQ+ secondary school students. Because this survey is intended only for LGBTQ+ youth, a definition of "sexual orientation" is not provided. This item allows students to check multiple responses, and there is then a second item for students who selected more than one sexual orientation to indicate which one they identify most with. Youth can also provide a sexual orientation that is not provided in the open-ended response option. Although these options allow for a more in-depth understanding and analysis of youth's sexual orientations, it requires complicated data cleaning, coding, and analysis on the back end. The second item asking youth to select the identity with which they identify more provides data that identifies a single sexual orientation identity for students who answer this question, and this results in less data coding on the backend. However, this second item is not required of students, so some multi-check responses still need to be coded into single identity categories if your data analysis requires this kind of data. This could be prevented if these questions are placed later in the survey, as students would likely answer survey questions at different paces and not be answering the same questions at the same time.

Below is a list of terms that people often use to describe their sexuality or sexual orientation. (Please choose all that apply to you).

- | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gay | <input type="checkbox"/> Bisexual | <input type="checkbox"/> Straight/Heterosexual | <input type="checkbox"/> Queer | <input type="checkbox"/> None of these apply to me, |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lesbian | <input type="checkbox"/> Pansexual | <input type="checkbox"/> Questioning | <input type="checkbox"/> Asexual | but I am ... _____ |

Among the terms you selected, do you identify with one more strongly than others?

- | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gay | <input type="checkbox"/> Bisexual | <input type="checkbox"/> Straight/Heterosexual | <input type="checkbox"/> Queer | <input type="checkbox"/> I do not identify with any one |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lesbian | <input type="checkbox"/> Pansexual | <input type="checkbox"/> Questioning | <input type="checkbox"/> Asexual | term more strongly than the |
| | | | | others I chose. |

Example SO2: Modified from GLSEN's NSCS

This following item is a modified version of GLSEN's NSCS, intended to be appropriate for assessing sexual orientation in surveys among the general population of secondary school-aged youth. A definition of "sexual orientation" is provided for those who may not understand the concept. Additionally, this item results in data that is easier to work with, as it requires students to select one identity, and does not provide an open-ended response option.

Your sexuality or sexual orientation describes who you are attracted to. Below is a list of terms that people often use to describe their sexuality or sexual orientation. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation. (We know that many people identify with more than one sexual orientation, or with sexual orientations that are not listed. However, for this survey please pick the sexual orientation on this list that best fits you.)

- Gay Bisexual Straight/Heterosexual Queer
 Lesbian Pansexual Questioning Asexual

Measurement of Gender Identity

Example GI1: GLSEN'S National School Climate Survey (NSCS)

The following item is used by the GLSEN Research Institute in the NSCS to assess gender identity among a national sample of LGBTQ+ secondary school students. This item allows students to check multiple responses and provides an open-ended response option. Although these options allow for a more in-depth understanding and analysis of youth's gender identities, it requires complicated data cleaning, coding, and analysis on the back end. This item does not define "gender identity" as the survey is intended only for LGBTQ+ youth who are likely familiar with the concept.

Below is a list of some terms that people may use to describe their gender identity. (Please choose all those that apply to you).

- Male Cisgender (your gender identity is the same as your sex assigned at birth)
 Female Transgender (your gender identity is not the same as your sex assigned at birth)
 Nonbinary Not Sure/Questioning
 Genderqueer A gender identity not listed here (please describe your gender identity): _____

Example GI2: Center for Disease Control's (CDC) Department of Adolescent and School Health's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)

The following item is how transgender status is assessed in the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) Department of Adolescent and School Health's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). This item is included in the optional question bank for consideration for state and local YRBS questionnaires, and because of this has been used in some states' and localities' YRBS surveys and therefore used among a broad population of youth. This potentially allows for comparative data if you are in a state or locality that uses this item in the YRBS. It is accessible to all youth as it includes a definition of the word "transgender." As this item is from the CDC which is a well-known, respected, and non-partisan government agency, it could be helpful to use this item if you anticipate push-back about including a measure of transgender identity.

Without a two-step approach, or the second item below assessing sex assigned at birth, this item does not allow for analysis or examination of the differences between transgender boys and transgender girls and nonbinary youth. Additionally, the response option for cisgender youth (“No, I am not transgender”) does not provide information on whether these students identify as male or female, and a second question assessing sex assigned at birth is required to identify these youth as cisgender boys or cisgender girls. Because of this, if using the following YRBS item assessing transgender identity, we recommend also including a question assessing youth’s sex assigned at birth (example below) which is used in GLSEN’s NSCS.

Some people describe themselves as transgender when their sex at birth does not match the way they think or feel about their gender. Are you transgender?

- No, I am not transgender Yes, I am transgender
 I am not sure if I am transgender I do not know what this question is asking

Followed by an item assessing sex assigned at birth from GLSEN’s NSCS:

What sex were you assigned at birth (what the doctor put on your birth certificate)

- Male Female

Example G13: The Williams Institute GenIUSS Report

The following items to assess gender identity and sex assigned at birth have been cognitively tested¹⁴ with youth.¹⁵ The stem of the question is short and may be easy to understand for all youth. This item defines the term “transgender” for those who do not understand it. This item results in data that is easier to work with, as it requires students to select one identity, and does not provide an open-ended response option. Additionally, the item allows for transgender youth to identify as male or female, allowing for examination of the differences in transgender youth based on male or female identity. However, this item is not inclusive of nonbinary or genderfluid youth, which is a growing population of LGBTQ youth.¹⁶ The response option for cisgender youth (“I am not transgender”) does not allow full understanding of cisgender youth’s gender identity and a second question is required to identify these youth as cisgender boys or cisgender girls. We recommend a question assessing youth’s sex assigned at birth (example below) which is used in GLSEN’s NSCS.

When a person’s sex and gender do not match, they might think of themselves as transgender. Sex is what the doctor labeled you when you were born. Gender is how a person feels. Which one response best describes you?

- I am **not** transgender I am transgender and identify as a girl or woman
 I am transgender and identify as a boy or man I am transgender and identify in some other way

Followed by an item assessing sex assigned at birth from GLSEN’s NSCS:

What sex were you assigned at birth (what the doctor put on your birth certificate)

- Male Female

Example GI4: Modified from The Williams Institute GenIUSS Report

The following item to assess gender identity is derived from an item that has been cognitively tested with youth,¹⁷ but includes additional and edited response options to be more inclusive of nonbinary identities. This revised item has not yet been cognitively tested. The stem of the question is short and may be easy to understand for all youth. This item defines the term “transgender” for those who do not understand it. This item results in data that is easier to work with, as it requires students to select one identity, and does not provide an open-ended response option. Additionally, the response option “I am not transgender” has been edited to “I am not transgender and identify as a boy or girl” to ensure separate response options for those who are not transgender and identify as male or female and those who are not transgender and identify as nonbinary. Finally, unlike Example 3, there are response options for youth who identify as transgender nonbinary or transgender genderfluid, as well as students who identify only as nonbinary or genderfluid.

The response option for cisgender youth (“I am not transgender and I identify as a boy or girl”) does not allow full understanding of cisgender youth’s gender identity and a second question is required to identify these youth as cisgender boys or cisgender girls. We recommend a question assessing youth’s sex assigned at birth (example below) used in GLSEN’s NSCS.

When a person’s sex and gender do not match, they might think of themselves as transgender. Sex is what the doctor labeled you when you were born. Gender is how a person feels and identifies. Which one response best describes you?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am not transgender and I identify as a boy or a girl | <input type="checkbox"/> I am transgender and identify in some other way other than a boy or girl |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am transgender and identify as a boy or man | <input type="checkbox"/> I am not transgender and identify in some other way other than a boy or girl |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am transgender and identify as a girl or woman | |

Followed by an item assessing sex assigned at birth from GLSEN’s NSCS:

What sex were you assigned at birth (what the doctor put on your birth certificate)

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Male | <input type="checkbox"/> Female |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|

Example G15: Proposed by GLSEN Research Institute

If it is not possible to ask two questions (one assessing transgender status and one assessing sex assigned at birth), you may consider using a single item to assess gender identity. An example of such an item is provided below. However, this item has not yet been tested or piloted with youth. The following suggested item may be appropriate for assessing gender identity in surveys among the general youth population. Definitions of “gender identity,” “cisgender,” “transgender,” and “nonbinary” are provided for those who may not understand these terms. Additionally, this item results in data that is easier to work with, as it requires students to select one identity, and does not provide an open-ended response option. Because this item includes male, female, and nonbinary options for cisgender and transgender youth, this item can serve as the only item in a survey to assess gender identity. However, the stem of this item is long and dense, and the response options are wordy, which may affect how comprehensible it is to all students.

Your gender identity describes your internal sense of your own gender. In other words, your gender is the gender you understand and know yourself to be. Your gender identity may be different than the sex you were assigned at birth (what the doctor put on your birth certificate).

Some people are cisgender. This means that their gender identity is the same as their sex assigned at birth. Some people are transgender or nonbinary. This means that their gender identity is not the same as their sex assigned at birth.

Below is a list of ways people can describe their gender. Which of the following best describes your gender. (We know that many people identify with more than one gender identity, or with gender identities that are not listed. However, for this survey please pick the gender identity on this list that best fits you.)

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cisgender boy/man | <input type="checkbox"/> Transgender girl/woman | <input type="checkbox"/> I am questioning my gender identity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cisgender girl/woman | <input type="checkbox"/> Transgender nonbinary | <input type="checkbox"/> I do not understand the question |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transgender boy/man | <input type="checkbox"/> Nonbinary (but not transgender) | |

Conclusion

Assessing sexual orientation and gender identity among youth is complex work that requires much thought and consideration to ensure they are being assessed appropriately. As our examples show, there is no one single established best practice for measuring sexual orientation or gender identity among secondary school students. Schools, administrators, and all others interested in including measures of sexual orientation and gender identity in student data, in addition to policymakers and state and local education agencies who are responsible for establishing and implementing school survey-based data collection must understand that “best practice” is contextual and dependent on the various needs and capacity of their school, district, state or local education agency, or other type of institution.

When school surveys and student data include LGBTQ+ identity, educators, policymakers, and advocates at the local, state, and federal level can better understand the unique school experiences and challenges that LGBTQ+ students face. Data about LGBTQ+ youth are critical for transforming school climates, providing essential information to guide the development and implementation of affirming school programs and inclusive policies, and enforcing civil and education right and nondiscrimination protections. Creating safe and affirming school climates ensures equal access to education and opportunities for improved academic success and well-being for all students.

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Endnotes

¹ Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., Truong, N. L., & Zongrone, A. D. (2020). The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's school. New York: GLSEN.

² National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2022. *Measuring Sex, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

³ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2022. *Measuring Sex, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

⁴ Examples include the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey, the Center for Diseases Control's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, and the Bureau of Justice Statistic's National Crime Victimization Survey.

⁵ Definition adapted from The Trans Language Primer, a trans community sourced guide to the language of gender which provides up-to date definitions for terms related to transgender identities and issues.

⁶ Definition adapted from The Trans Language Primer, a trans community sourced guide to the language of gender which provides up-to date definitions for terms related to transgender identities and issues.

⁷ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2022. *Measuring Sex, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

⁸ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2022. *Measuring Sex, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

⁹ Definition adapted from The Trans Language Primer, a trans community sourced guide to the language of gender which provides up-to date definitions for terms related to transgender identities and issues.

¹⁰ Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., Truong, N. L., & Zongrone, A. D. (2020). The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's school. New York: GLSEN.

¹¹ Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., Truong, N. L., & Zongrone, A. D. (2020). The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's school. New York: GLSEN.

¹² National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2022. *Measuring Sex, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

¹³ Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., Truong, N. L., & Zongrone, A. D. (2020). The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's school. New York: GLSEN.

¹⁴ Items that are cognitively tested have been administered to a sample of youth before being used in surveys, to evaluate the item and whether it is properly measuring what the researchers intend it to measure.

¹⁵ The GenIUSS Group. (2014). *Best Practices for Asking Questions to Identify Transgender and Other Gender Minority Respondents on Population-Based Surveys*. J.L. Herman (Ed.). Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute.

¹⁶ Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., Truong, N. L., & Zongrone, A. D. (2020). The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's school. New York: GLSEN.

¹⁷ The GenIUSS Group. (2014). *Best Practices for Asking Questions to Identify Transgender and Other Gender Minority Respondents on Population-Based Surveys*. J.L. Herman (Ed.). Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute.

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