Evolving Identities: Survey Changes over Time

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Overview
• What’s happening on your campus?
• Brief intro to NSSE
• Terminology
• Complications
• “Best practices”
• Things to keep in mind
• NSSE’s evolution and findings
• Final thoughts and questions

What’s happening on your campus that brings you to this session?

NSSE
• National Survey of Student Engagement
  • An annual survey of first-year and senior students measuring their participation in educationally effective experiences
  • Topics cover content such as aspects of academic challenge, learning with peers, experiences with faculty, campus environment, and high-impact practices
• Participation
  • More than 1,500 colleges and universities have participated in NSSE since 2000
  • 1,030 institutions participated in 2014-2016

Sex Versus Gender
• **Sex**: biological characteristics that are used to categorize individuals (male, female, intersex)
• **Gender**: socially constructed characteristics with psychological, social, and behavioral dimensions (man, woman, masculine, feminine)
• **Transgender**
  • A diverse population that departs significantly from gender norms (Institute of Medicine, 2011)
  • Anyone who has a gender identity that differs from their sex assigned at birth (Spade, 2008)
  • **Cisgender**: a person whose gender identity and sex assigned at birth are consistent

What exactly are you trying to study?
• **Sexual identity**—the way someone identifies with a given sexual orientation
• **Sexual attraction**—the sex or gender to which someone feels attraction (can include affection, affiliation, and emotional preference)
• **Sexual behavior**—the sex of a person's sexual partners
• **Gender identity**—an individuals’ self-identified sense of gender
• **Gender expression**—an individuals’ external manifestation of gender
What do we call the people?

Non-straight (Queer?)
- Sexual minorities
- Queer
- GLBQ

Gender variant
- Gender minorities
- Trans*
- Trans-spectrum
- Gender non-conforming

Language and Cultural Difficulties

- “Straight” has become far more common than “heterosexual” but, for example, “straight” doesn’t translate easily in Spanish so “not gay” may be better
- Comprehension and terminology use differs by age, race/ethnicity, level of education....
- Some terms are very culturally specific such as “two-spirit” for American Indian tribes, “fa'afafine” from Samoan culture, “same-gender loving” or “DL, or Down Low” are used by Black or Latino men
- Gender and sex are often used interchangeably or are conflated
- Gender variant respondents may have difficulty choosing a sexual orientation, for example “straight” might apply but not feel right

With all of these complications, how do we ask about these aspects of identity?

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What terms do you or others at your institution use?

Questionable Questions from the Recent Past...

With all of these complications, how do we ask about these aspects of identity?

Best Practice? Maybe Not

What is your sexual orientation?
- Lesbian
- Gay
- Queer
- Bisexual
- Heterosexual
- Celibate
- Other
- Decline

What is your gender?
- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Genderqueer
- Something else
- Decline

With all of these complications, how do we ask about these aspects of identity?

Best Practice? Maybe

What is your current gender identity? (check all that apply)
- Male
- Female
- Trans male/Trans man
- Trans female/Trans woman
- Genderqueer/Gender non-conforming
- Different identity (please state):

What is your current gender identity? (check all that apply)
- Male
- Female
- Trans male/Trans man
- Trans female/Trans woman
- Genderqueer/Gender non-conforming
- Different identity (please state):

Sexual orientation (choose all that apply)
- Asexual
- Bisexual
- Gay
- Straight (heterosexual)
- Lesbian
- Pansexual
- Queer
- Questioning or unsure
- Same-gender loving
- An identity not listed please specify
- Prefer not to disclose

Gender identity (choose all that apply)
- Agender
- Androgyne
- Demigender
- Genderqueer or gender fluid
- Man
- Questioning or unsure
- Trans man
- Trans woman
- Woman
- Additional gender category/identity: please specify
- Prefer not to disclose

Best Practice? Maybe
General Best Survey Practice

- Limit check-all-that-apply questions
  - Respondents tend to “satisfice” (aim for a satisfactory answer rather than the optimal answer) resulting in the options at the top being selected more often or several incorrect/random responses chosen
  - Primacy/ordering effects are exaggerated when options are not mutually exclusive
  - Long lists worsen all of these issues
  - Check-all data is difficult to analyze, in statistics respondents must belong to a single category
  - Write-in responses can be resource-intensive to analyze and difficult to use

Awesome Resource: Iowa State

- Tips and suggestions for asking questions with different levels of inclusivity
  - [http://www.libtss.dso.iastate.edu/library/Research](http://www.libtss.dso.iastate.edu/library/Research)
- Terminology list
  - [http://www.libtss.dso.iastate.edu/library/education/terms](http://www.libtss.dso.iastate.edu/library/education/terms)
- Suggestions and FAQs for different areas of campus (admissions, housing, healthcare, etc.)
  - [http://www.libtss.dso.iastate.edu/trans](http://www.libtss.dso.iastate.edu/trans)
  - Student services and resources
    - [http://www.libtss.dso.iastate.edu/library/education/gi-ge](http://www.libtss.dso.iastate.edu/library/education/gi-ge)

Potential Bias and Error

- Measurement error
  - Not understanding the terms or concepts being asked about. Adding definitions may help.
  - Concepts on a continuum are often asked as nominal categories, some may be “between” categories. Check-all questions may help, but are difficult to analyze.
- Social desirability or anxiety
  - To some people these are sensitive questions. Assurance of privacy may help.
- Nonresponse bias
  - Any population may not want to respond if they generally feel marginalized. This is a cultural problem!

Things to Think About

- How do you plan to analyze the data you collect?
- How will you use, recode, or combine categories?
- Who will you be reporting the information to?
- How will you use the information to disaggregate other information?
- What will be the consequences for choosing a select-all-that-apply question versus select-one?
- What is it that you really need to know?
- What is your balance between useful survey data and inclusivity?

So how does NSSE ask about gender identity and sexual orientation?

Asking about Gender Identity: NSSE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Your sex:</th>
<th>What is your gender?</th>
<th>What is your gender identity?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Male, Female</td>
<td>Male, Female</td>
<td>Man, Woman, Another gender identity, please specify: I prefer not to respond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-present</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**NSSE: Your sex:**

**NSSE: Gender Evolution**

**What is your gender?**

**What is your gender identity?**

**NSSE: Gender Identity**

**Another Gender Identity: Larger Groups**

- Genderqueer, nonbinary, gender non-conforming, etc. (23%)
- Gender fluid, fluid, pangender, polygender, demifluid, tri-gender, etc. (15%)
- Agender, gender neutral, non-gender, etc. (13%)
- Transgender, trans, FTM, MTF, etc. (8%)

**Engagement Differences: Higher Engagement**

- Reflective & Integrative Learning
- Discussions with Diverse Others
- Student-Faculty Interaction

**Engagement Differences: Lower Engagement**

- Higher-Order Learning
- Learning Strategies
- Collaborative Learning
- Effective Teaching Practices
- Quality of Interactions
- Supportive Environment
- Perceived Gains
Reflective & Integrative Learning

Student-Faculty Interaction

If You Started Over, Would You Go to the Same Institution?

Asking about Sexual Orientation: NSSE

Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

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- Some big changes in 2017
  - Edited “Straight (heterosexual)”
  - Reordered response options
  - Added “Queer”
  - And one other very important thing...

Another Sexual Orientation: Larger Groups

- Pansexual, omnisexual, multisexual, polysexual, etc. (33%)
- Asexual, aromantic, nonsexual, etc. (25%)
- Queer (11%)
- Demisexual, gray, etc. (6%)
- Flexible, fluid (2%)

Straight (uuuuhhh!) (8%)

Engagement Differences: Lower Engagement

- Higher-Order Learning
- Learning Strategies
- Collaborative Learning
- Effective Teaching Practices
- Quality of Interactions
- Supportive Environment
- Perceived Gains
- Satisfaction

Engagement Differences: Higher Engagement

Gender Identity (gender variant) Sexual Orientation (non-straight)

- Reflective & Integrative Learning
- Discussions with Diverse Others
- Student-Faculty Interaction

Reflective & Integrative Learning
Final thoughts or questions?

Thanks for joining us!

nsse.indiana.edu

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References


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