LGBTQ+ Youth: Opportunities in Social and Behavioral Health Services

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Defining LGBTQ+ Demographics

▶ **LGBTQ+**
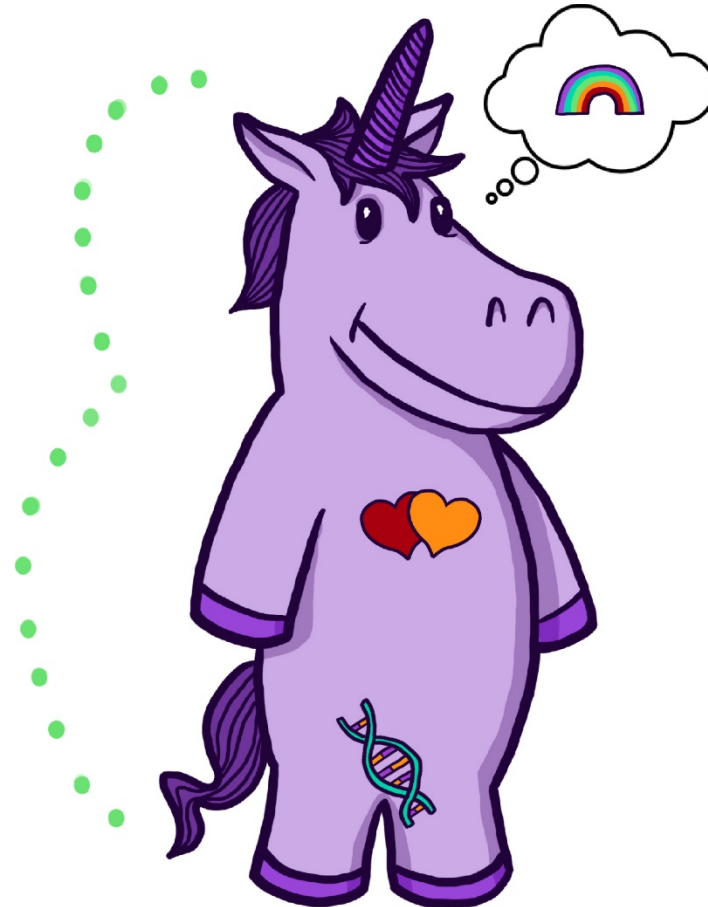 ▶ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/ questioning, +

▶ **SOGIE**
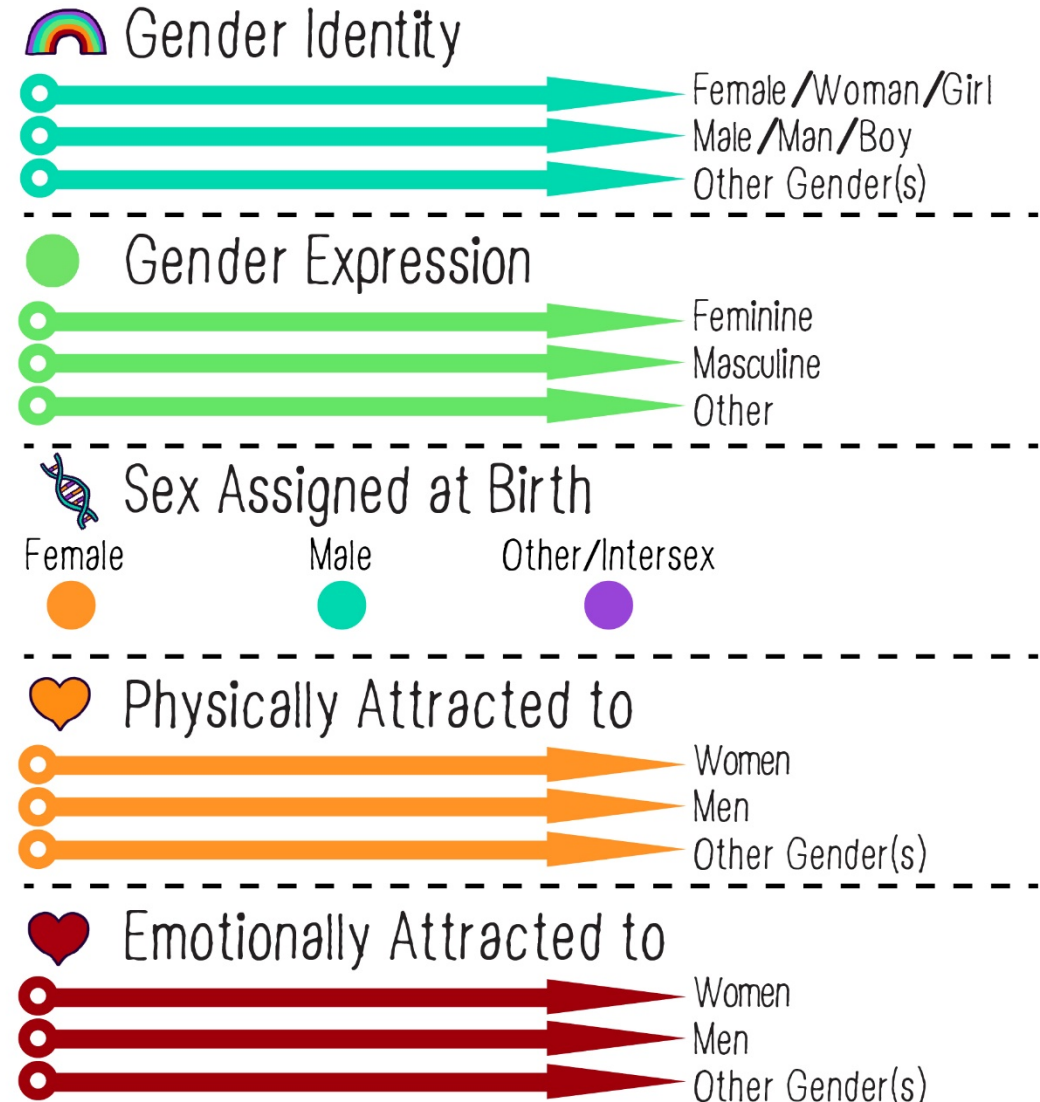 ▶ Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression

The Gender Unicorn

Gender Identity
Female/Woman/Girl
Male/Man/Boy
Other Gender(s)

Gender Expression
Feminine
Masculine
Other

Sex Assigned at Birth
Female   Male   Other/Intersex

Physically Attracted to
Women
Men
Other Gender(s)

Emotionally Attracted to
Women
Men
Other Gender(s)

To learn more, go to:
www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore

Washington State Healthy Youth Survey (HYS)

- Biennial measurement of health risk behaviors that contribute to morbidity, mortality, and social problems among Washington State Youth

- 2018 HYS administration sampled over 230,000 students across all 39 counties
  - 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grades

- Unless otherwise specified, data presented are from 2018 10th grade students
  - Variables examined:
    - Sexual orientation
    - Gender identity
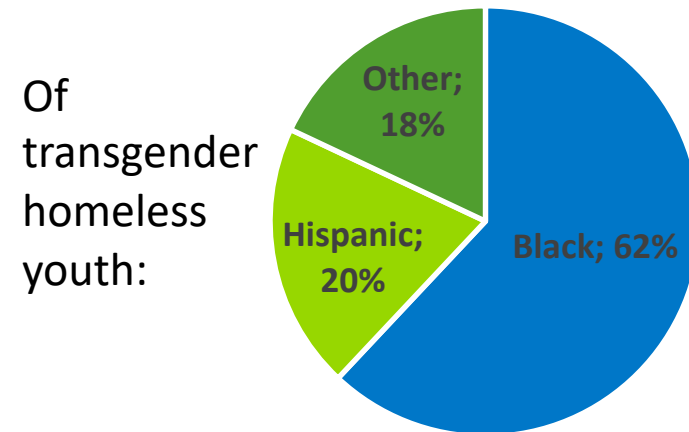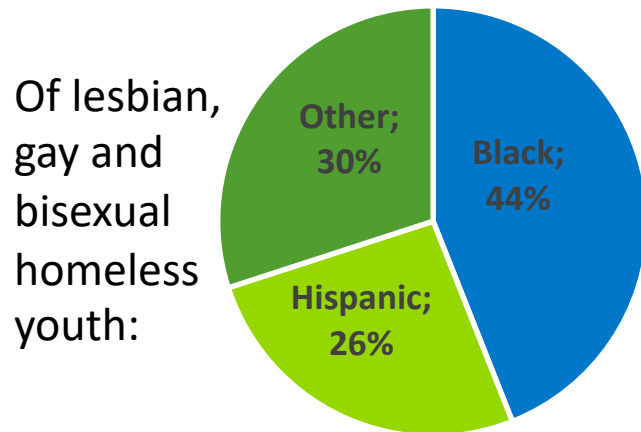
LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness Risk Factors

- With 2.2 times the risk, LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately represented among homeless youth
  - Among the general United States youth population, 5-7% identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender
    - Approximately 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ+
  - Increased rates violence, discrimination, poor health, unmet needs, and longer periods of homelessness
- Main drivers of elevated rates of LGBTQ+ youth homelessness include family rejection, harassment in schools, and experiences of shortcomings in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems

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LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness Risk Factors

- Once homeless, LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to experience victimization, mental health and substance use challenges, and engagement in unsafe sexual behaviors than non-LGBTQ+ homeless youth

- Presentation data represent LGBTQ+ youth, aged 12-24, for whom it is not safe to live with a relative or another designated caretaker
  - Inclusive of runaway, transitory or episodic, unaccompanied homeless youth and/or street-dependent youth
  - Washington-specific HYS data represents school-aged youth (approximately aged 12-19)

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Multiple Marginalized Identities

- Intersectionality plays an important role in addressing youth homelessness
- Research suggests that among LGBTQ+ homeless youth, youth of color are further disproportionately represented
  - 2007 survey of LGBTQ+ homeless youth in New York, NY reported

Of lesbian, gay and bisexual homeless youth:

Black; 44%
Hispanic; 26%
Other; 30%

Of transgender homeless youth:

Black; 62%
Hispanic; 20%
Other; 18%

  - Service providers additionally report a greater number of youth of color and higher rates of intersectional youth accessing LGBTQ+-specific programming
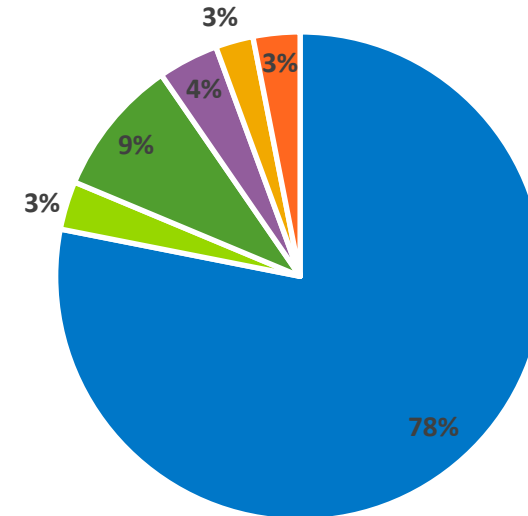
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Washington LGBTQ+ Youth Demographics

Gender Identity
HYS Grade 10, 2018

2% · 1% · 1% · 1% · 1%
44%
50%
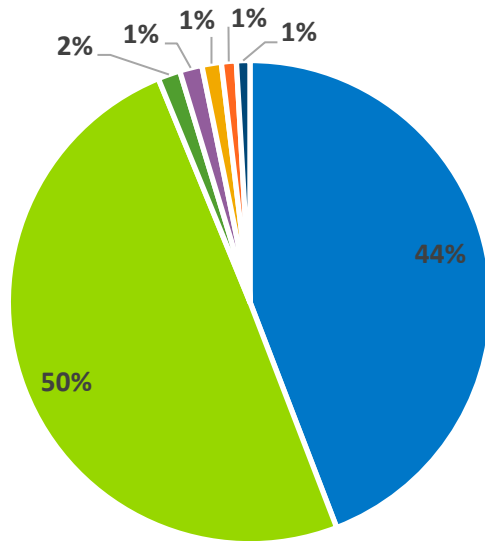
- ■ Male
- ■ Female
- ■ Transgender
- ■ Questioning/not sure
- ■ Something else fits better
- ■ Don't know what the question is asking
- ■ More than one response

Sexual Orientation
HYS Grade 10, 2018

3%
3%
4%
9%
3%
78%

- ■ Heterosexual (straight)
- ■ Gay or lesbian
- ■ Bisexual
- ■ Questioning/not sure
- ■ Something else fits better
- ■ Don't know what the question is asking

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Family Rejection and Lack of Support

- What is coming out?

- Family rejection
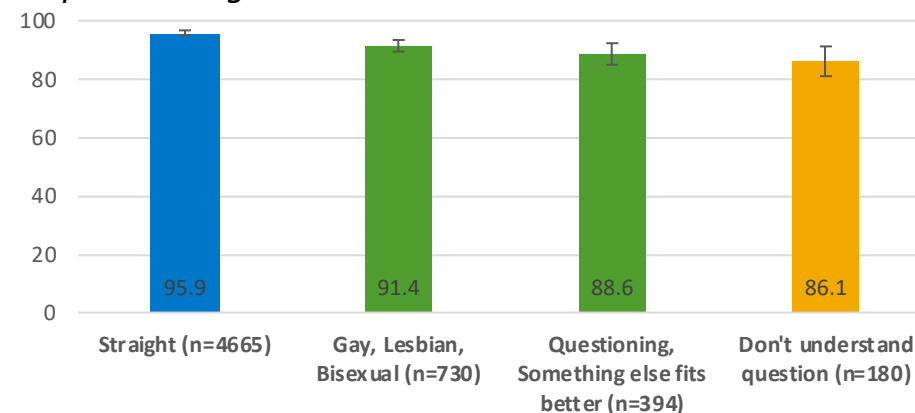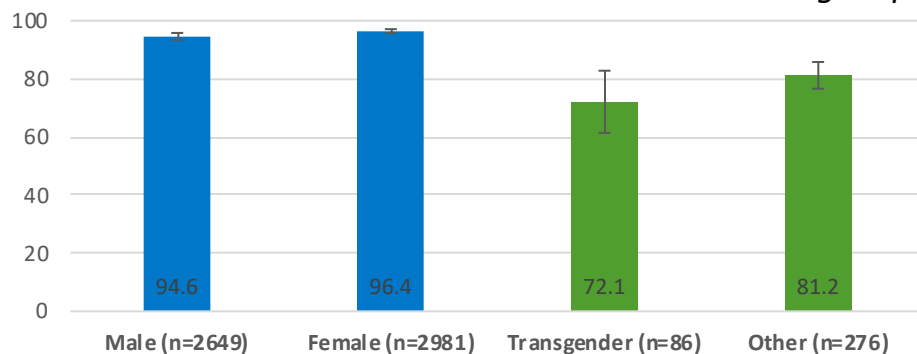 - Heard as messages of being fundamentally bad because of who you are
  - Associated with many negative consequences:
    - Challenges with self esteem, self acceptance, confidence, value, and worth
    - Higher rates of risky behaviors, including substance use and unsafe sexual practices
    - Greater challenges with academic performance and planning for the future
    - Increased feelings of isolation and decreased feelings of places to turn for support
    - Increased rates of illegal drug use (3x), high risk for sexually transmitted diseases/infections (3x), depression (6x), and attempted suicide (8x)

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Family Rejection and Lack of Support

- Family conflict and rejection due to sexual orientation and/or gender identity is the most common reason for homelessness cited by LGBTQ+ youth
  - ▶ Youth are coming out as LGBTQ+ at a younger age than in prior decades
  - ▶ While some youth leave willingly without their parents knowledge ('runaway' youth), others are forced out following rejection ('throwaway' youth)

**HYS 2018: Who do you live with most of the time in the last 30 days?**

Percentage reporting their parents or guardians

Male (n=2649)	Female (n=2981)	Transgender (n=86)	Other (n=276)
94.6	96.4	72.1	81.2

Straight (n=4665)	Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual (n=730)	Questioning, Something else fits better (n=394)	Don't understand question (n=180)
95.9	91.4	88.6	86.1

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Family Rejection and Lack of Support

HYS 2018: If I had a personal problem, I could ask my mom or dad for help

Percentage reporting 'yes'
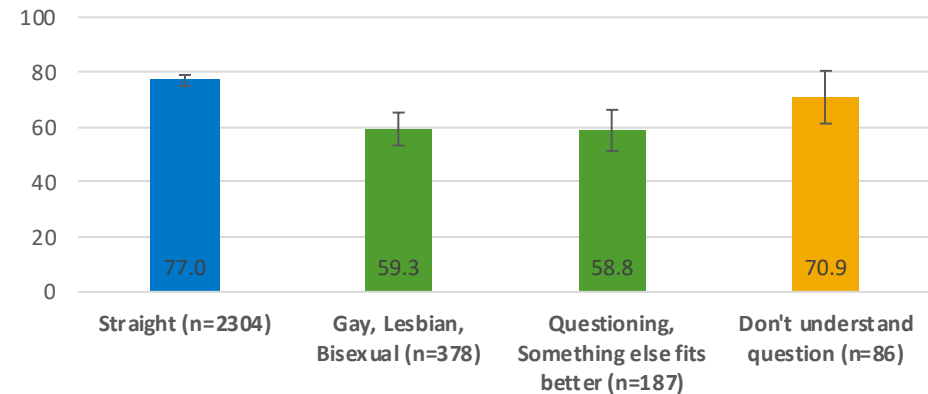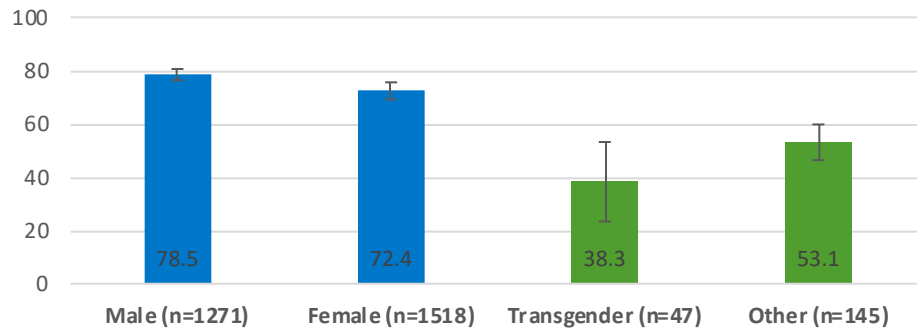
- The overwhelming majority of published research about youth coming out experiences pertains to lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth
  - Research on coming out as transgender is limited, however, indicates an even more challenging experience
    - Data and studies are particularly limited for transgender youth

School Climate Challenges

HYS 2018: During the past 30 days, on how many days did you not go to school because you felt you would be unsafe at school or on your way to and from school?

Percentage reporting missing at least one day
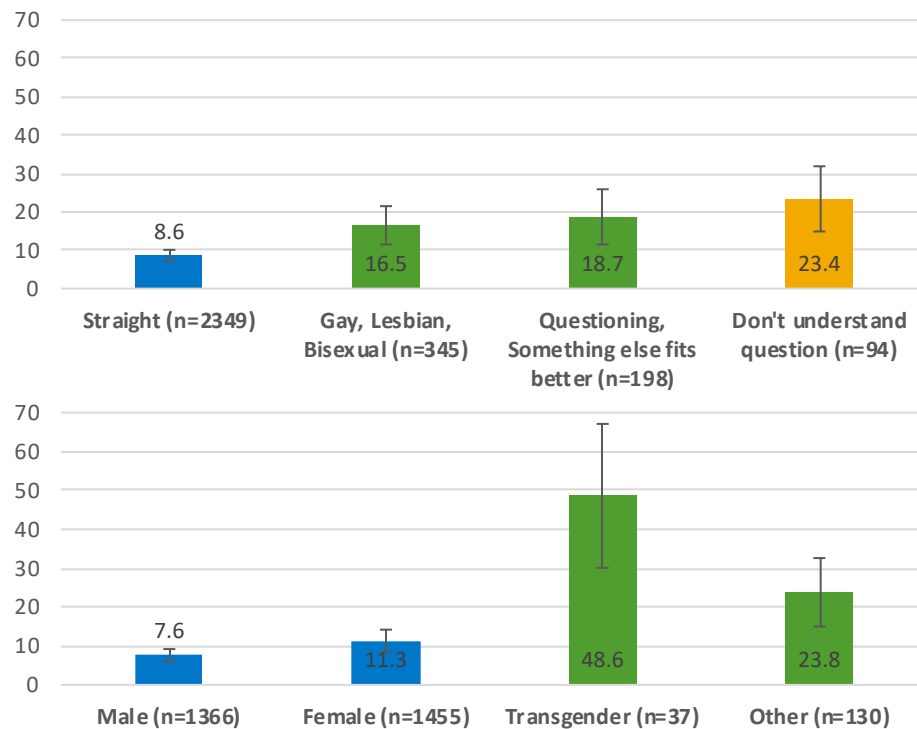
- GLSEN 2017 School Climate Survey Indicators
  - ▶ Biased and homophobic remarks on school grounds
  - ▶ Feeling unsafe at school due to personal characteristics (sexual orientation, gender identity, race/ethnicity)
  - ▶ Missing school due to safety concerns
  - ▶ Harassment and assault in school
  - ▶ School discriminatory policies and practices

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Social Safety Net Systems and Juvenile Justice

- LGBTQ+ youth often enter social safety net or juvenile justice programming for similar reasons to their non-LGBTQ+ peers
  - ▶ Abuse or neglect within the home environment
  - ▶ Incarceration due to criminal activities

- LGBTQ+ youth are additionally unfairly and disproportionally driven into child welfare and institutional systems
  - ▶ Most commonly due to family rejection or removal from the home directly due to conflict related with sexual orientation and/or gender identity

- Unfortunately, system involvement is too frequently a bridge into LGBTQ+ youth homelessness

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Social Safety Net Systems and Juvenile Justice

- ▶ LGBTQ+ youth in foster care
  - ▶ Up to 30% of youth in foster care report as LGBTQ+
  - ▶ When compared to non-LGBTQ+ peers, LGBTQ+ youth
    - › Are twice more likely to report being treated poorly while in care
    - › Experience a greater average number of placement disruptions
    - › Are twice more likely to be placed into congregate care
  - ▶ LGBTQ+ adults are underrepresented as foster parents
- ▶ LGBTQ+ youth report increased rates of running away from placement settings to avoid further conflict, abuse, or harassment
  - ▶ Due to lack of sensitivity toward specific needs, institutional prejudice, lack of cultural humility among providers or foster parents, or blatant discrimination by peers, foster parents, and/or adult caretakers

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Social Safety Net Systems and Juvenile Justice

- Involvement with the justice system may additionally impact an LGBTQ+ youth's ability to find housing when attempting to live on their own
  - Increased risk of being labeled as sex offender, even if not actually committing a sexually based crime
    - Among homeless youth, LGBTQ+ are three times more likely (27%) to have engaged in survival sex than non-LGBTQ+ homeless peers (9%)
    - More likely to be prosecuted for "age-appropriate consensual sexual activity" than non-LGBTQ+ homeless peers
  - Once a registered sex offender, these youth are more likely to face challenges in finding stable housing and employment with the increased burden of navigating laws, regulations, and social mores
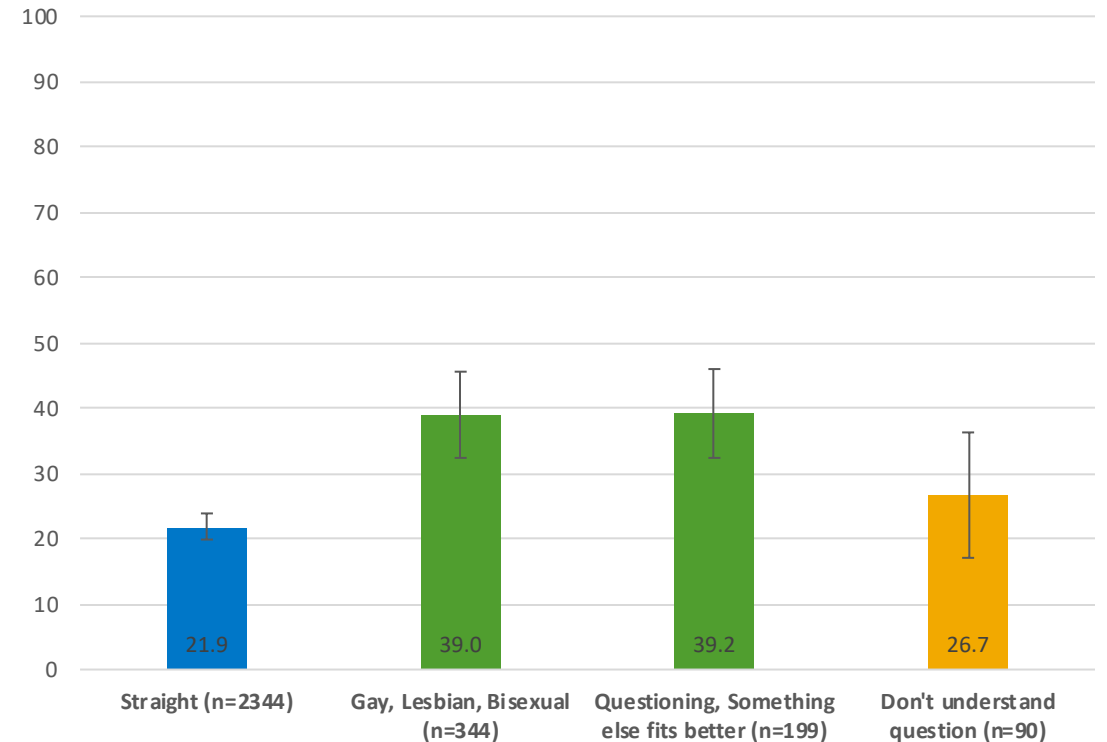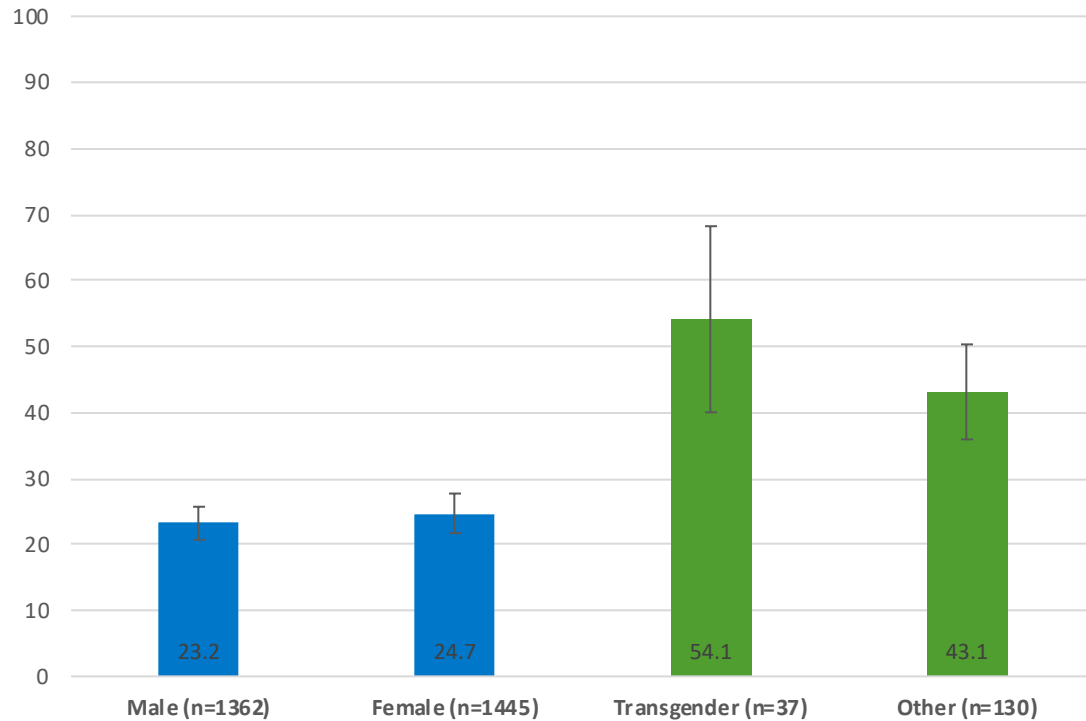
LGBTQ+ Youth Experience of Violence

HYS 2018: Have you ever been in a situation where someone made you engage in kissing, sexual touch or intercourse when you did not want to?

Percentage reporting 'yes'
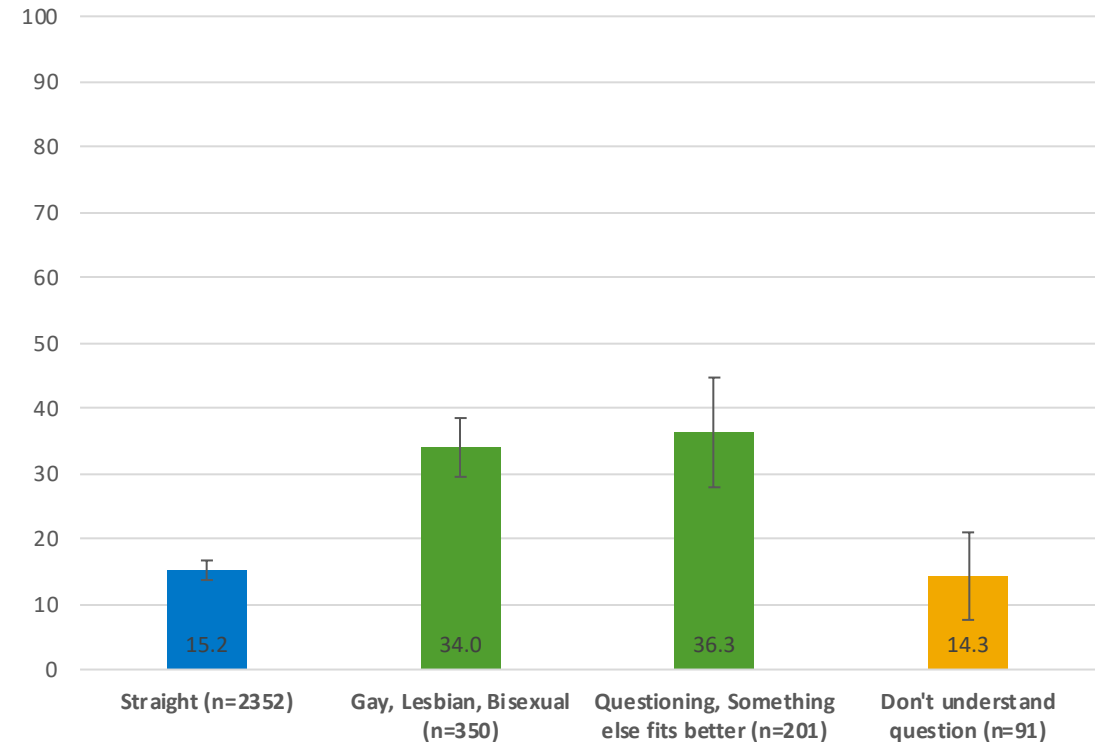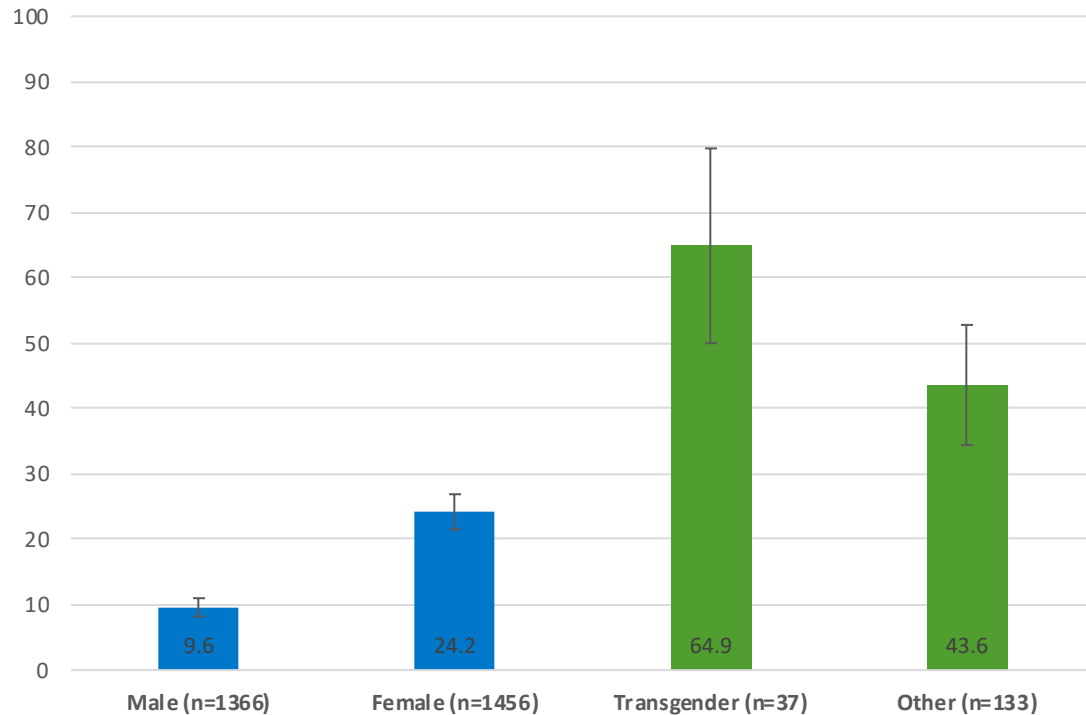
LGBTQ+ Youth Experience of Violence

HYS 2018: Has an adult ever physically hurt you on purpose (like pushed, slapped, hit, kicked or punched you), leaving a mark, bruise or injury?
Percentage reporting 'yes'

Left chart:
- Male (n=1362): 23.2
- Female (n=1445): 24.7
- Transgender (n=37): 54.1
- Other (n=130): 43.1

Right chart:
- Straight (n=2344): 21.9
- Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual (n=344): 39.0
- Questioning, Something else fits better (n=199): 39.2
- Don't understand question (n=90): 26.7

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Surviving as an LBGTQ+ Homeless Youth

- Following engagement in survival sex, youth are more vulnerable to acts of violence and rape, exposure to disease, and impacts of trauma

- Once homeless, LGBTQ+ youth face additional disproportionate risk. A 2010 study in Hollywood, CA reported that of LGBTQ+ youth, while experiencing homelessness:

  - Approximately 30% had been robbed (21% of non-LGBTQ+ peers)
  - 28% had been physically assaulted (18% of non-LGBTQ+ peers)
  - 22% had been sexually assaulted or raped (approximately 6% of non-LGBTQ+ peers)
  - 33% had been the victim of a hate crime due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity

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Surviving as an LBGTQ+ Homeless Youth

- LGBTQ+ homeless youth are more likely to reengage in survival sex
  - Layered additional risk factors of prior childhood sexual abuse, lack of supportive adult figures, lack of prevention/protective education, and inadequate opportunities to earn an income
- Approximately half of LBGTQ+ homeless youth report hostile encounters with police or facing experiences of police harassment
  - Given LGBTQ+ homeless youth are more likely to resort to criminal behavior for survival, they are also more likely to be arrested, face detainment, and navigate criminal labels

Surviving as an LBGTQ+ Homeless Youth

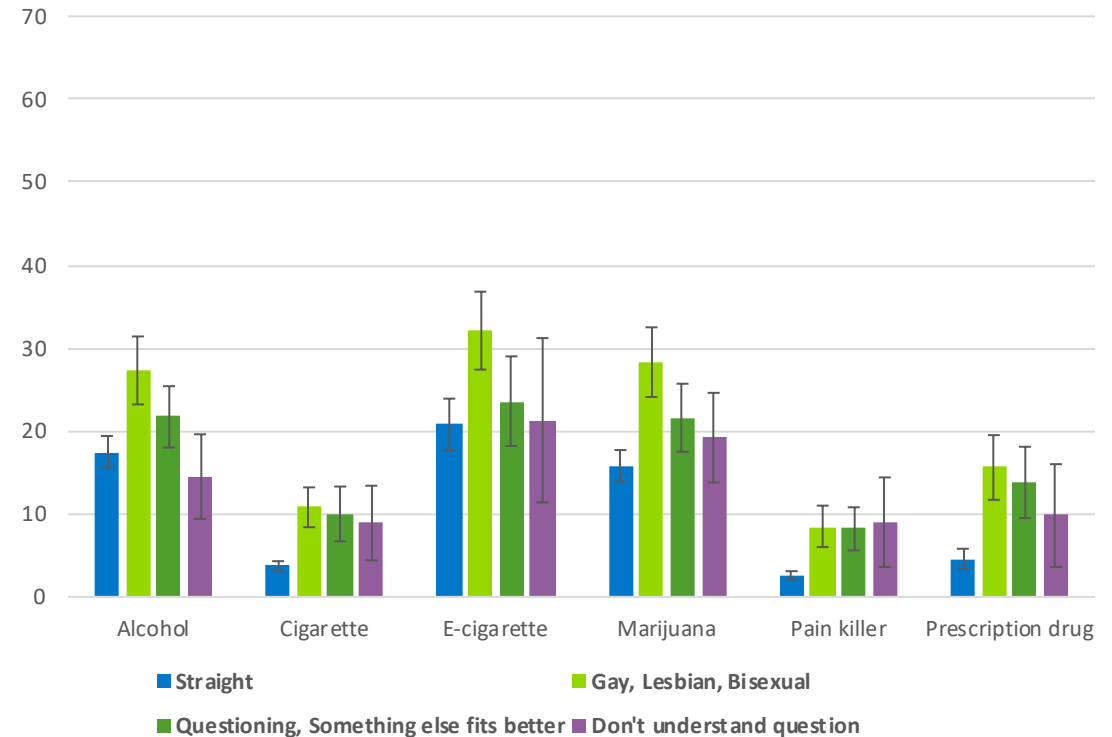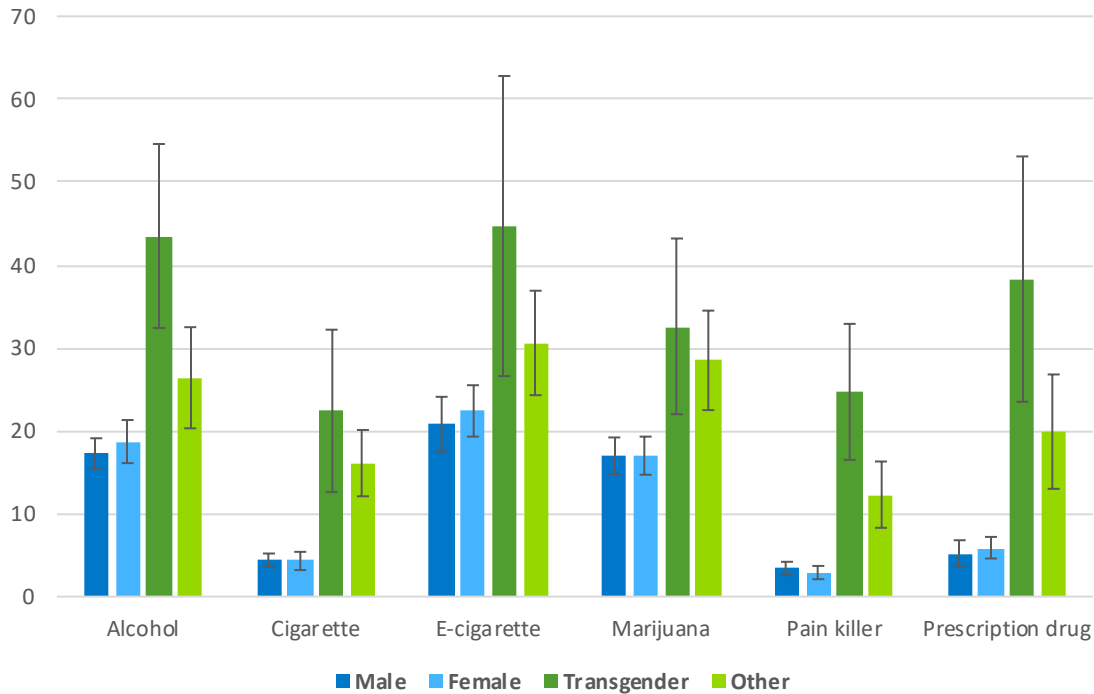- Drug use behaviors
  - Among homeless youth, LGBTQ+ additionally
    - Are at a greater risk for drugs or alcohol dependency and abuse
    - Are more likely to use intravenous drugs and hard drugs, such as cocaine, heroin, or methamphetamines during the last year
  - Despite these risks, there is some good news for LGBTQ+ homeless youth
    - Preliminary research LGBTQ+ homeless youth are not engaging more frequently in high-risk drug use behaviors (such as sharing needles)
    - LGBTQ+ homeless youth are more likely than non-LGBTQ+ homeless youth to seek out substance-abuse treatment opportunities

LGBTQ+ Youth Drug Use Behaviors

HYS 2018: During the past 30 days, on how many days did you use [alcohol, cigarette, e-cigarette/vaping device, marijuana, prescription drugs not prescribed to you, a pain killer to get high]?

Percentage reporting any substance use during the past 30 days

Left chart legend: ■ Male ■ Female ■ Transgender ■ Other

Right chart legend: ■ Straight ■ Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual ■ Questioning, Something else fits better ■ Don't understand question

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Surviving as an LBGTQ+ Homeless Youth

HYS 2018: During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities?
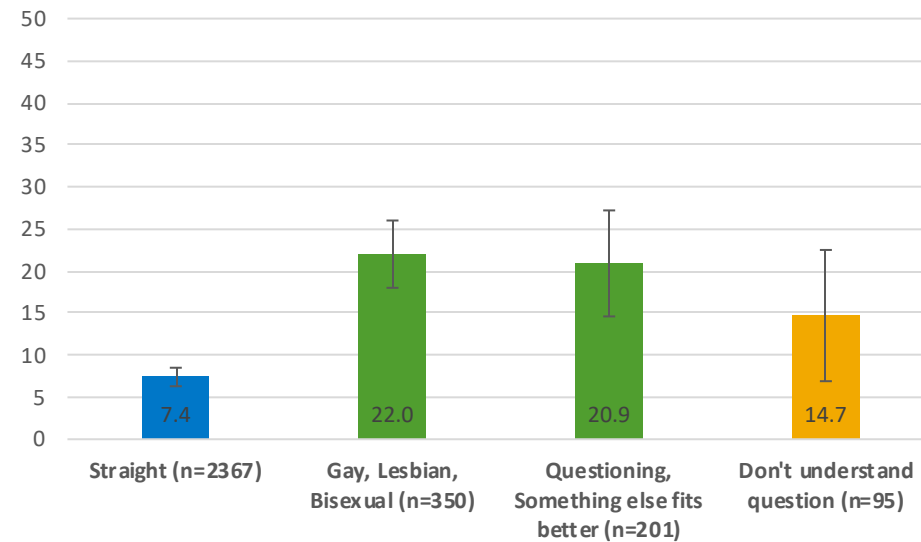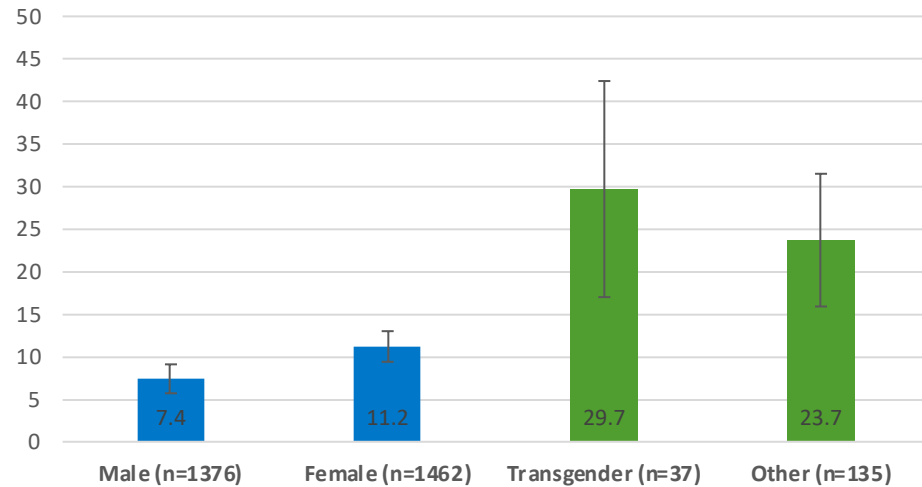
Percentage reporting 'yes'
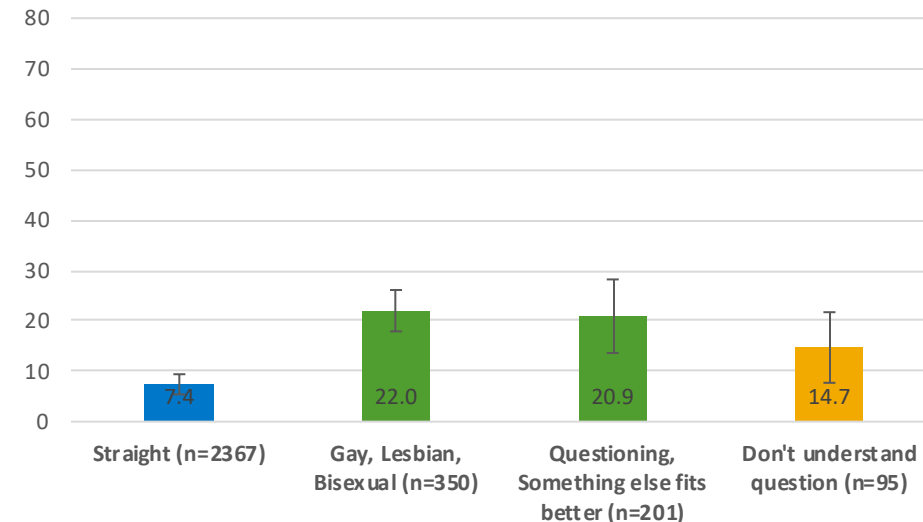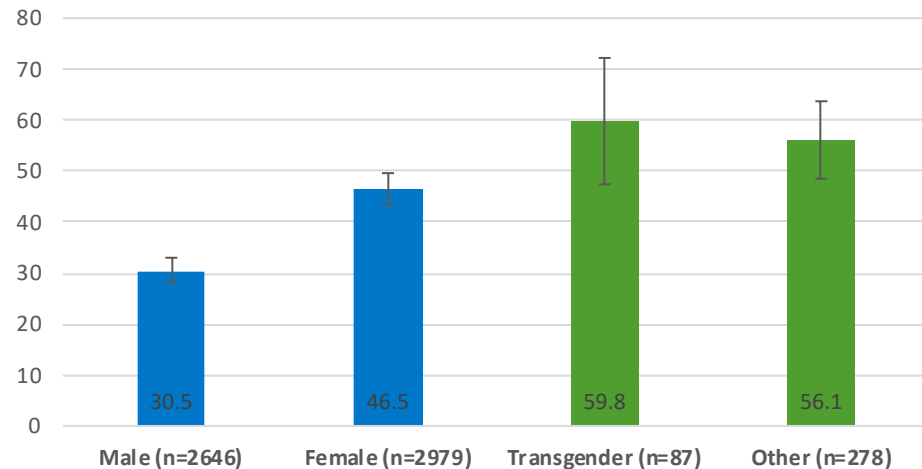
- ● Mental health indicators
  - ▶ Approximately 65% of LGBTQ+ homeless youth have a history of a mental health challenge, such as depression or anxiety
  - ▶ LGBTQ+ homeless youth are more than twice as likely to report a prior diagnosis of bipolar disorder when compared to non-LGBTQ+ homeless peers

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Surviving as an LBGTQ+ Homeless Youth

HYS 2018: During the past 12 months, how many times did you actually attempt suicide?

Percentage reporting 1 or more attempts

- Male (n=1376): 7.4
- Female (n=1462): 11.2
- Transgender (n=37): 29.7
- Other (n=135): 23.7

- Straight (n=2367): 7.4
- Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual (n=350): 22.0
- Questioning, Something else fits better (n=201): 20.9
- Don't understand question (n=95): 14.7

◉ Mental health indicators

▶ Suicidal ideation and attempts

> Approximately 73% of lesbian and gay homeless youth report suicidal ideation, compared to 53% of heterosexual peers

> 57% of lesbian and gay homeless youth report a prior suicide attempt, compared to 33% of heterosexual peers

> While research is limited, reports reveal these rates are the same or worse for transgender youth

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Serving and Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth

- Several factors influence greater rates of success for service access points serving LGBTQ+ homeless youth
  - ▶ Ease of access:
    - ❯ Drop in centers, LGBTQ+-sensitive outreach and services, and housing options receive higher engagement when located near or within communities most affected by homelessness
      - ➔ This is especially critical to consider for LGBTQ+ youth of color
    - ❯ Opportunity for connections to community and natural supports
  - ▶ Fair and equal housing opportunities:
    - ❯ Proactive strategic planning that is inclusive and demographically representative of the youth homeless population

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Serving and Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth

▶ Genuine consideration of unique needs and experiences:

> Provider education regarding violence, sexual exploitation and risk, mental health and substance abuse challenges, stigma, racism, transphobia, discrimination, trauma, etc.

> Rapid and sustained exits from homelessness, Integration of safe spaces, positive adult connections, and culturally sensitive mental and physical health supports

▶ Proactive planning for LGBTQ+-specific provisions and procedures:

> Access to Medicaid and eligible system resources

> Trauma informed training and approaches

▶ Cross-system collaboration and coordinated efforts:

> Community-based organizations, health centers, hospitals, schools/school districts, faith-based organizations, law enforcement, etc.

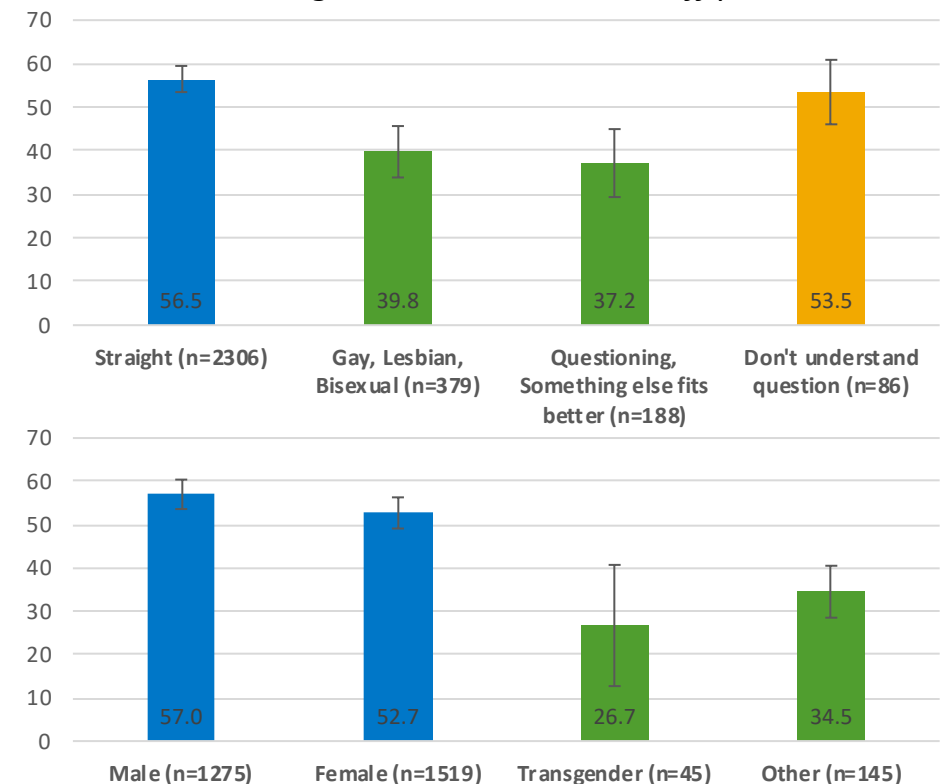▶ Involvement of LGBTQ+ youth voice in system and service revisions

Family-Based Interventions

- Utilize time during early stages of difficulty as an opportunity for LGBTQ+ youth homelessness prevention
  - ▶ Homelessness from family environments is rarely an abrupt event
  - ▶ Reports indicate gradual conflict and escalation over time, with an increased sense of feeling rejected

- Typically, a youth's sexual orientation and/or gender identity is a single contributing factor to a wider foundation of household tensions
  - ▶ Additional dynamics, not necessarily directly connected to the LGBTQ+ youth, frequently precede or co-occur with the youth's coming out
    - ➤ Addiction, mental health diagnosis, poverty, unemployment, housing instability, family violence, law involvement/incarceration, neglect, loss/grief
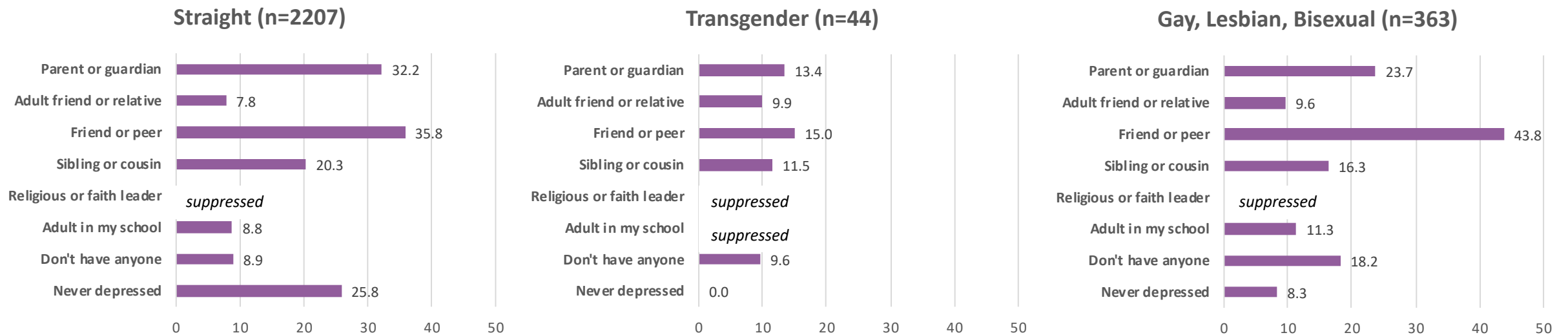
Family Acceptance and Support

▶ Families can be – and often are – a simultaneous support and stressor

  ▶ Feeling valued and understood by parents, caretakers, and family members helps youth learn to value, accept, and care about themselves

  ▶ Family engagement in services can be utilized as a key protective factor

▶ Opportunities for caretakers to access community programming that build parenting communication skills, cultural humility, and prosocial youth involvement within the family system

HYS 2018: Family protective factor – opportunities for prosocial involvement
Percentage calculated above cutoff point

Straight (n=2306): 56.5
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual (n=379): 39.8
Questioning, Something else fits better (n=188): 37.2
Don't understand question (n=86): 53.5

Male (n=1275): 57.0
Female (n=1519): 52.7
Transgender (n=45): 26.7
Other (n=145): 34.5

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Positive Adult Connections

▶ Finding valuable and affirming connections and social supports outside of the biological family is especially important

▶ Acceptance of the youth as both an LBGTQ+ identified individual *and* a holistic, valuable, and multidimensional individual
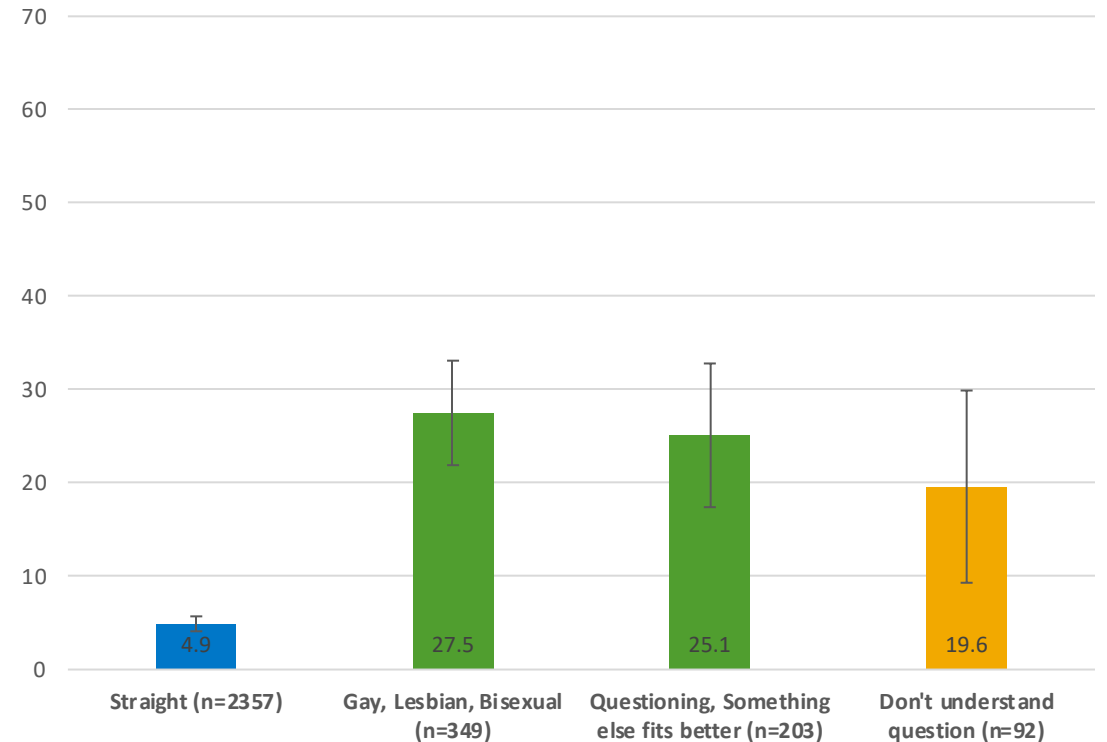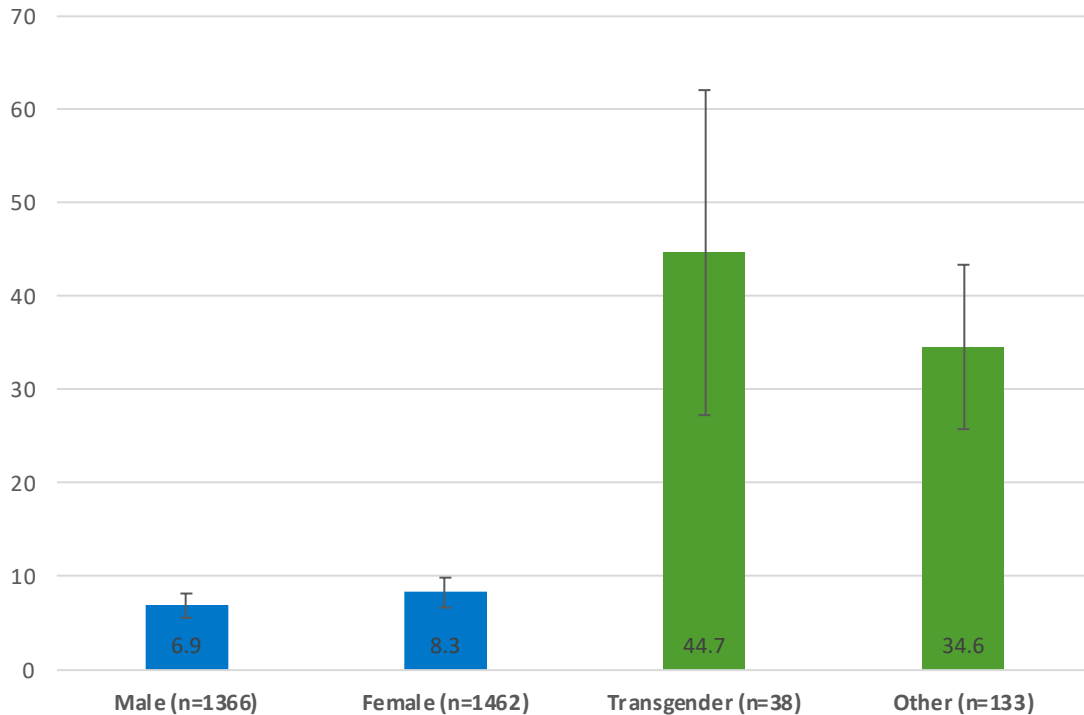
Straight (n=2207)

Parent or guardian	32.2
Adult friend or relative	7.8
Friend or peer	35.8
Sibling or cousin	20.3
Religious or faith leader	*suppressed*
Adult in my school	8.8
Don't have anyone	8.9
Never depressed	25.8

Transgender (n=44)

Parent or guardian	13.4
Adult friend or relative	9.9
Friend or peer	15.0
Sibling or cousin	11.5
Religious or faith leader	*suppressed*
Adult in my school	*suppressed*
Don't have anyone	9.6
Never depressed	0.0

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual (n=363)

Parent or guardian	23.7
Adult friend or relative	9.6
Friend or peer	43.8
Sibling or cousin	16.3
Religious or faith leader	*suppressed*
Adult in my school	11.3
Don't have anyone	18.2
Never depressed	8.3

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School Interventions

- Establish and maintain standards that protect LBGTQ+ youth from bullying, harassment, and discrimination in schools

- Access to school-based resources
  - GSAs/QSAs (gay-straight alliances/queer-straight alliances) or similar organizations
  - Supportive and comprehensive policies, specifically inclusive of transgender and gender nonconforming students
  - Supportive school staff and teachers
  - Curricular resources that are inclusive of LGBTQ+ topics (such as historical context, culturally appropriateness, health and sex education, etc.)

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Establishing a Safe Space

HYS 2018: In the past 30 days, how often were you bullied, harassed, or intimidated at school or on your way to or from school: Because someone thought you were gay, lesbian, or bisexual (whether you are or are not)?
Percentage reporting any incidents of harassment

Left chart (values):
- Male (n=1366): 6.9
- Female (n=1462): 8.3
- Transgender (n=38): 44.7
- Other (n=133): 34.6

Right chart (values):
- Straight (n=2357): 4.9
- Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual (n=349): 27.5
- Questioning, Something else fits better (n=203): 25.1
- Don't understand question (n=92): 19.6

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Surviving in the System

- Targeted efforts to address LGBTQ+ structural barriers within care systems for homeless and displaced youth. Creating affirming environments for:
  - Gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth
  - Transgender and gender-expansive youth
  - Continuum of gender expression, identity, physical attraction, and emotional attraction
- Staff are knowledgeable, competent, and willing to learn
  - LGBTQ+ youth report that the most important factor in deciding whether to engage with service agencies is if they will be entering into a safe and affirming space

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LGBTQ+ Adults – Placement Families?

- LGBTQ+ adults remain an untapped resource for child welfare agencies
  - ▶ Fear of being turned away
- As of June 2019, nine states have license to discriminate laws that impact child welfare and placement with LGBTQ+ adults
  - ▶ Washington is one of 13 states with non-discrimination laws and protections for LGBTQ+ adults to become licensed foster parents
- When placed with LGBTQ+ foster parent(s), LGBTQ+ youth report a better understanding of their experience from their caregiver(s) as well as an increased sense of safety

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Supportive LGBTQ+ Youth Services

- Services existing and being accessible is not sufficient for engagement
  - Youth judge an agency or resource reputation prior to engaging
  - While identifying as LGBTQ+ is an important factor in choosing whether to access services, research indicates it's only a piece of the consideration
    - Will this be demonstrably safe for someone like me?
- Beyond housing: protecting quality of life and prioritizing youth voice
- Efforts for improvements - increased sensitivity in data collection and research
  - Do LGBTQ+ youth access services at similar rates?
  - Do youth who access services remain engaged?
  - How do LGBTQ+ youth service experiences differ when additional demographic variables are considered?

Additional State Agency Resources

Washington State Department of CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

- Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families
  - https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services
- At risk/runaway youth
  - Family reconciliation services
  - HOPE Act
  - Crisis residential centers
  - Secure crisis residential centers

STATE OF WASHINGTON Department of Commerce

- Washington State Department of Commerce, Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protective Programs
  - https://www.commerce.wa.gov/
- Priority areas
  - Stable housing
  - Family reconciliation
  - Permanent connections
  - Education and employment
  - Social and emotional well-being

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Further Reading

- Center for American Progress (https://www.americanprogress.org/)
  - Seeking Shelter: The Experiences and Unmet Needs of LGBT Homeless Youth

- Family Acceptance Project; San Francisco State University (https://familyproject.sfsu.edu/)
  - A Practitioners Resource Guide: Helping Families to Support Their LGBT Children
  - Establishing a New Field of Family Acceptance

- GLSEN (https://www.glsen.org/)
  - 2017 National School Climate Survey
  - 10 Ways School Staff Can Help LGBTQ Youth Experiencing Homelessness

- National Alliance to End Homelessness (https://endhomelessness.org/)

- Northwest Journal of Law & Social Policy (https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/)
  - Forgotten Youth: Homeless LGBT Youth of Color and the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act

- The Trevor Project (https://give.thetrevorproject.org/)

- The Williams Institute; University of California Los Angeles Law School (https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/)
  - Serving Our Youth in 2015: The Needs and Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth Experiencing Homelessness

- United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (https://www.usich.gov/)
  - Homelessness in America: Focus on Youth

- Voices of Youth Count; Chapin Hall, The University of Chicago (https://www.voicesofyouthcount.org)
  - Missed Opportunities: LGBTQ Youth Homelessness in America

- Washington State Healthy Youth Survey (HYS) (https://www.askhys.net/)

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Thank you!

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LGBTQ+ Family Conditions

HYS 2018: Where did you live most of the time in the last 30 days?
Percentage reporting 'in my family's home'
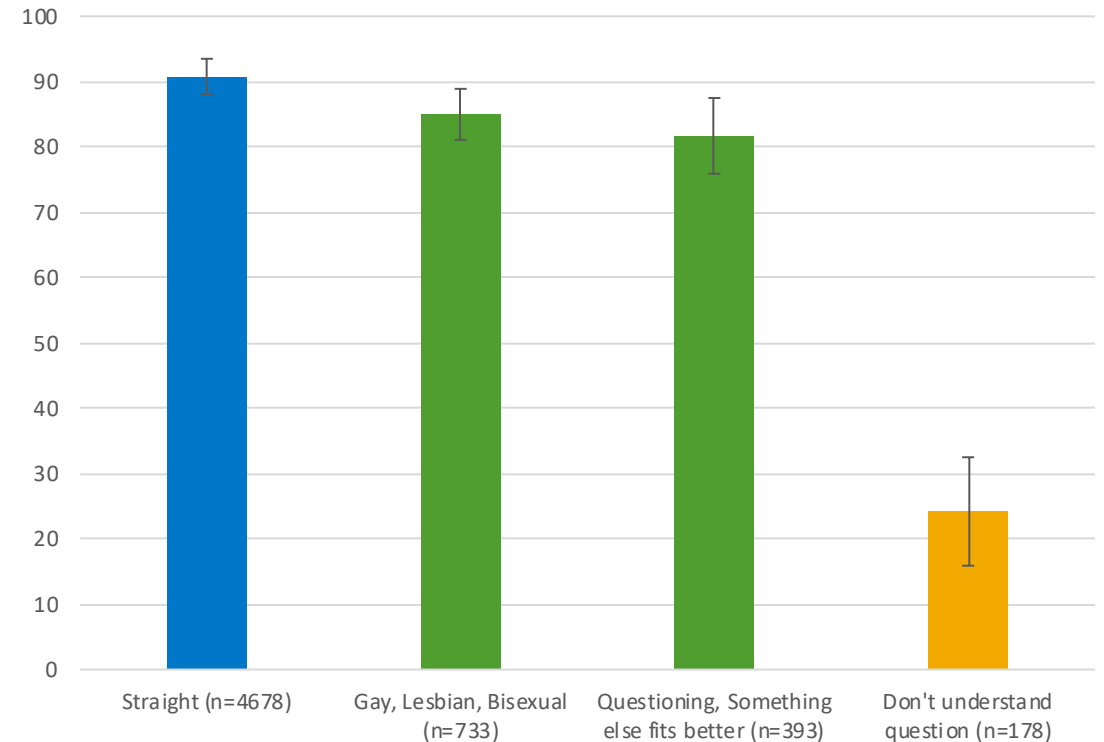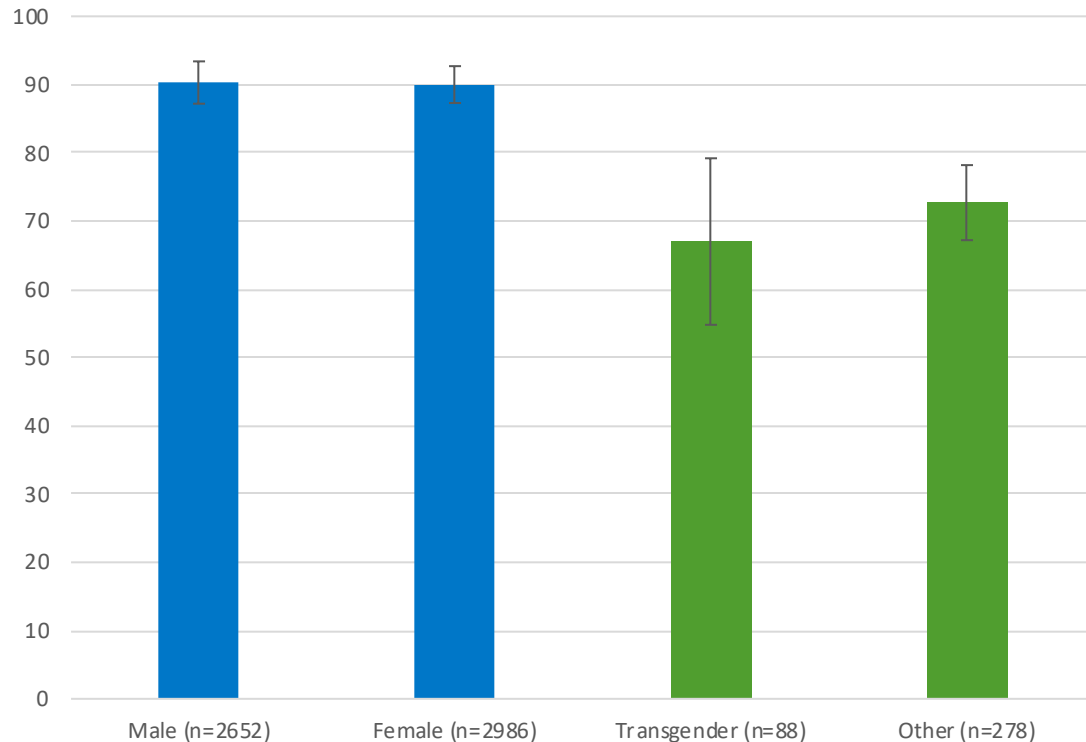
LGBTQ+ Family Conditions

HYS 2018: The rules in my family are clear
Percentage reporting 'yes'
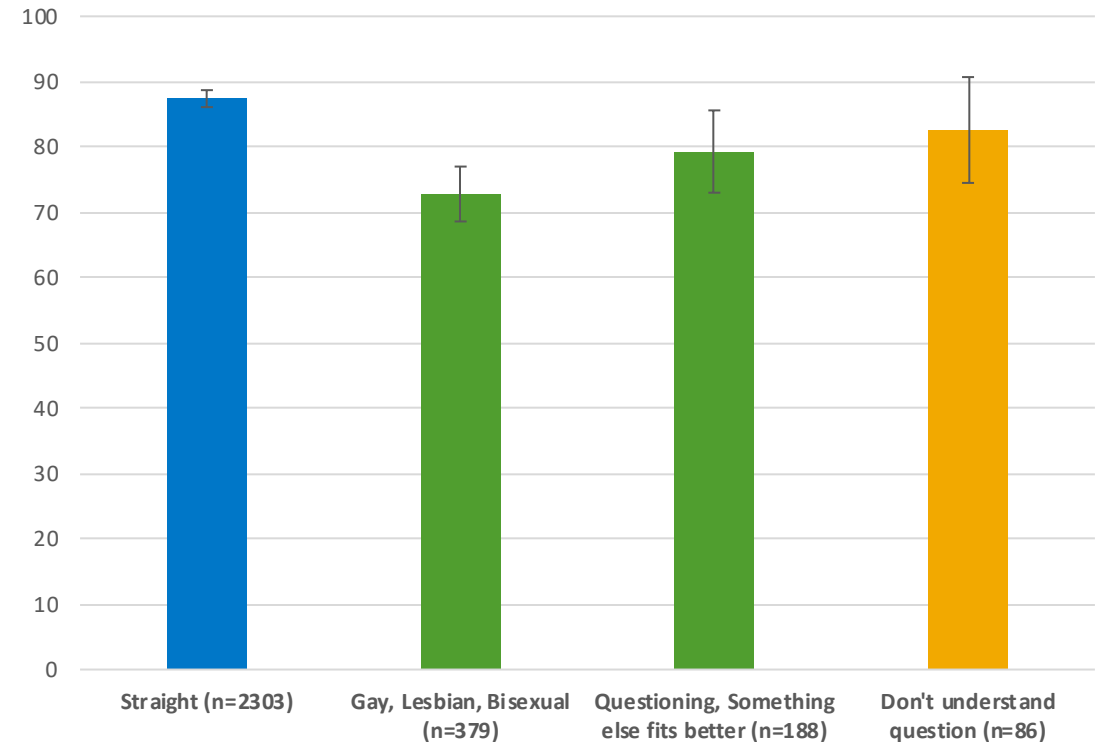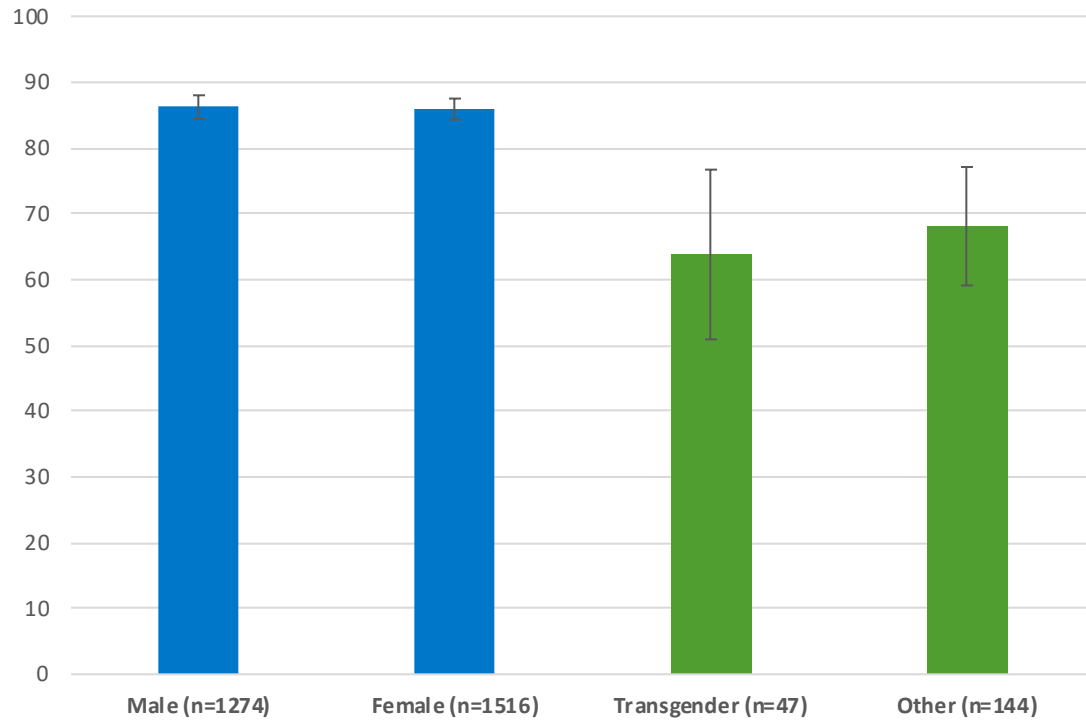
LGBTQ+ Family Conditions

HYS 2018: My parents ask me what I think before most family decisions affecting me are made
Percentage reporting 'yes'
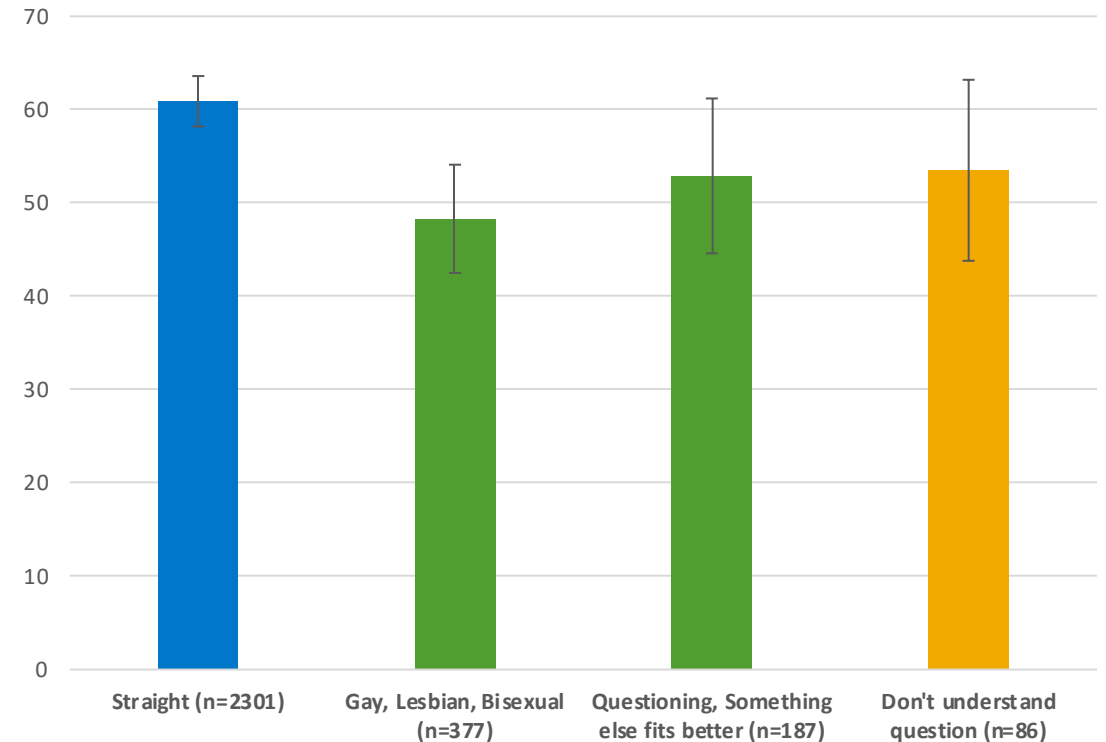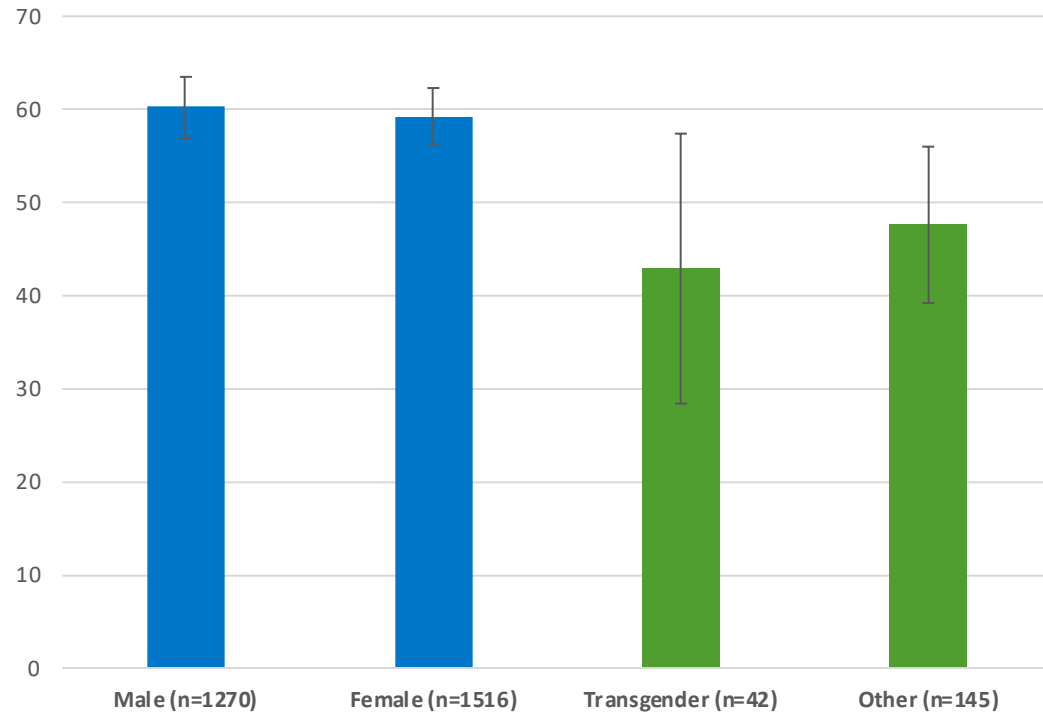
LGBTQ+ Family Conditions

HYS 2018: My parents give me lots of chances to do fun things with them
Percentage reporting 'yes'
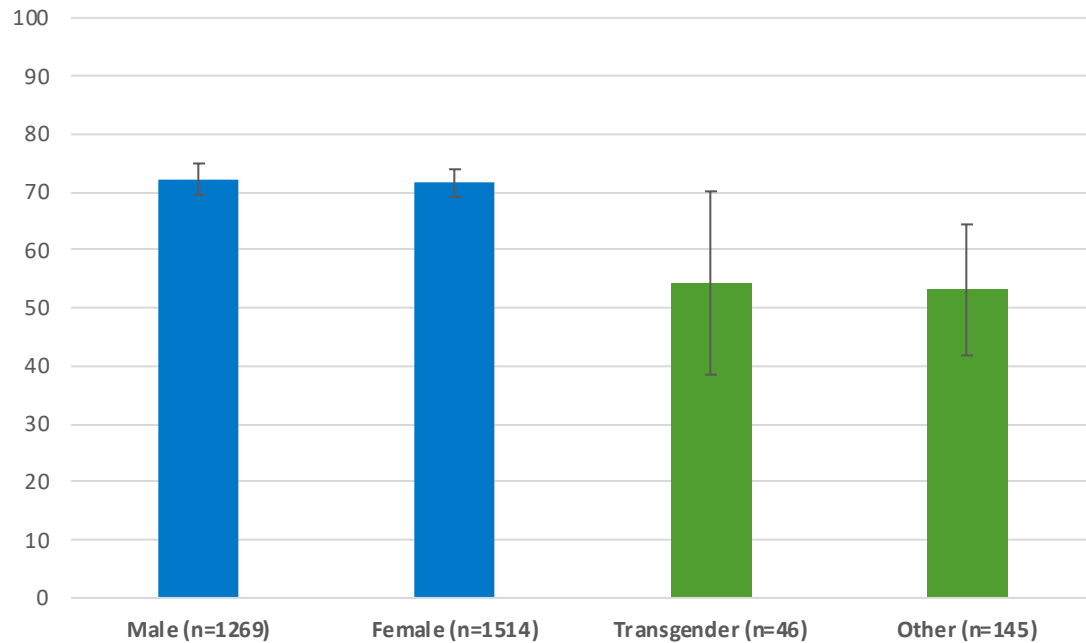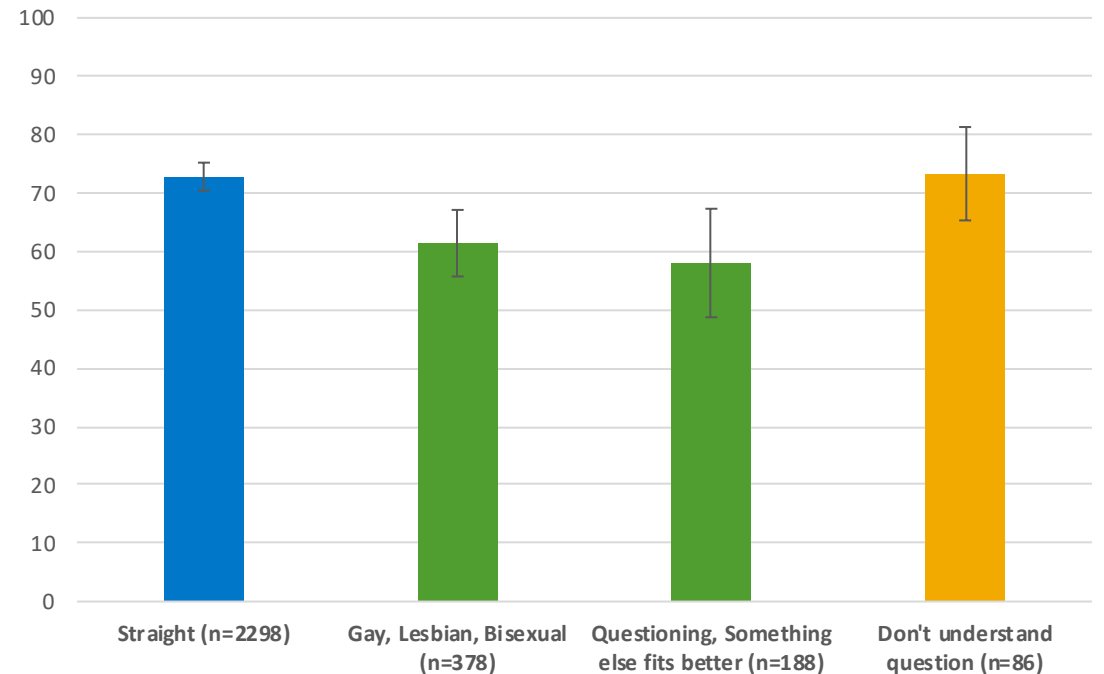
LGBTQ+ Family Conditions

HYS 2018: My parents ask if I've gotten my homework done
Percentage reporting 'yes'
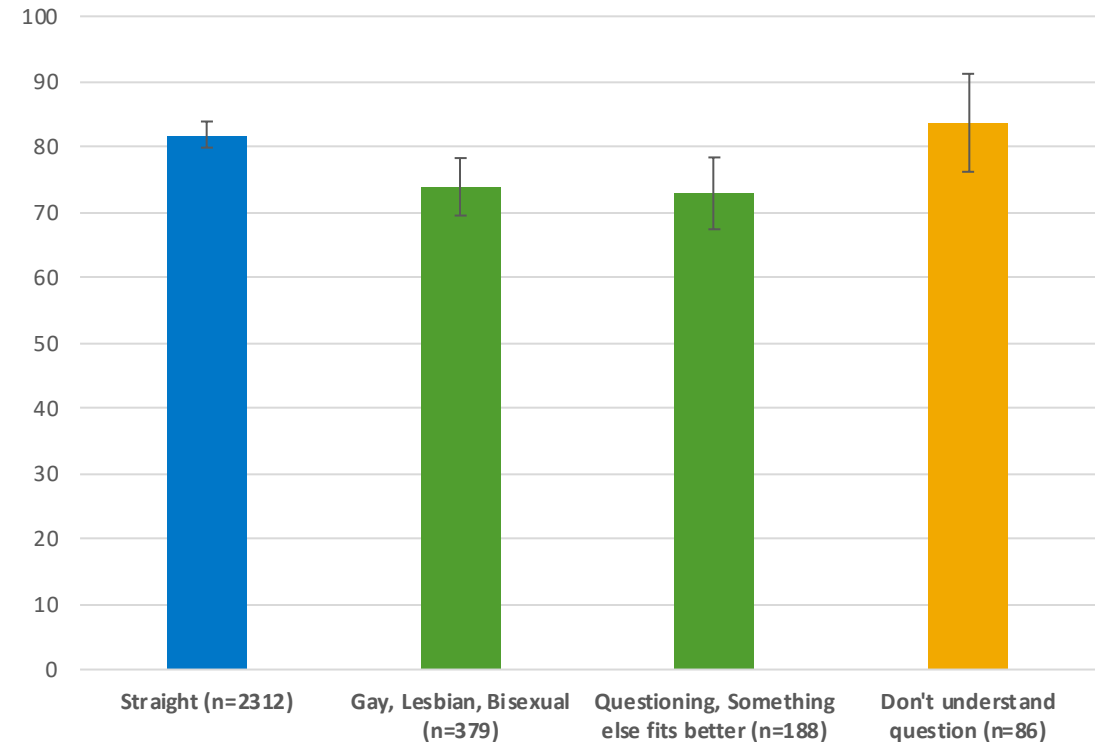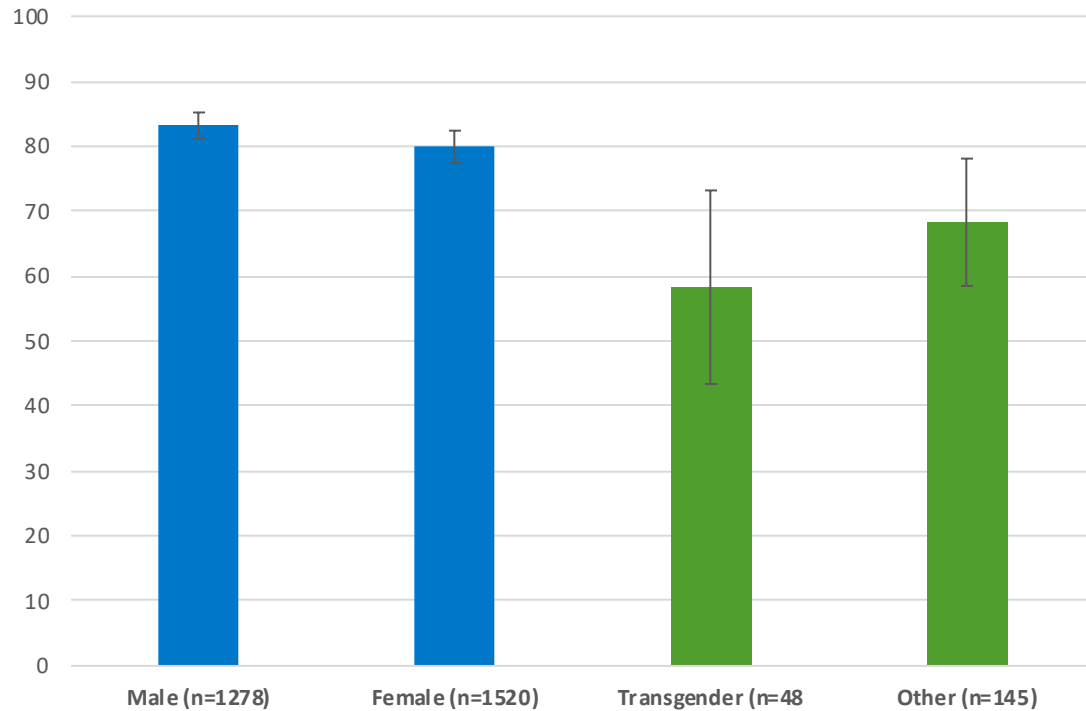
LGBTQ+ Family Conditions

HYS 2018: When I am not at home, one of my parents knows where I am and who I am with
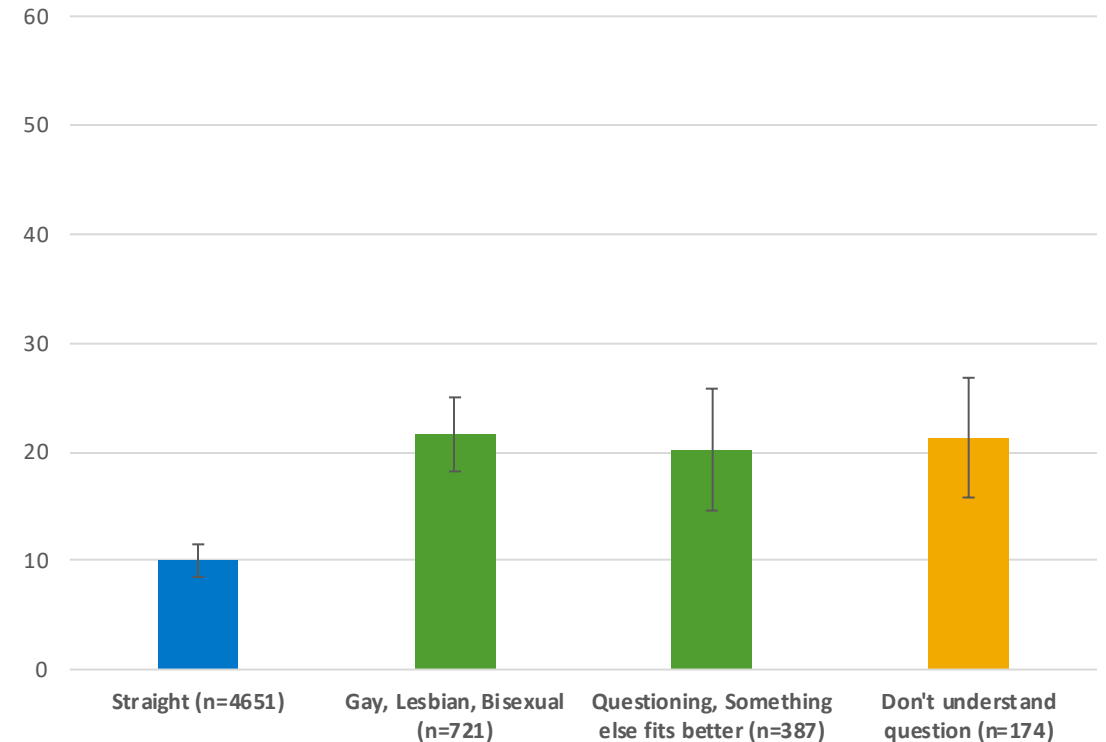*Percentage reporting 'yes'*

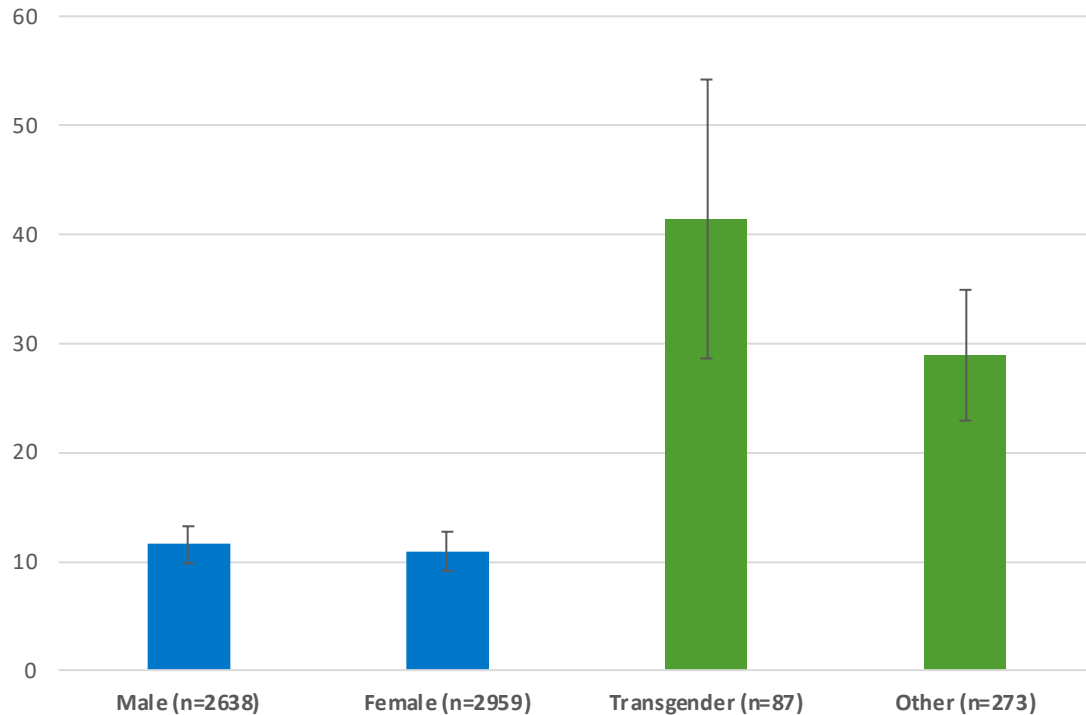Washington State
Health Care Authority
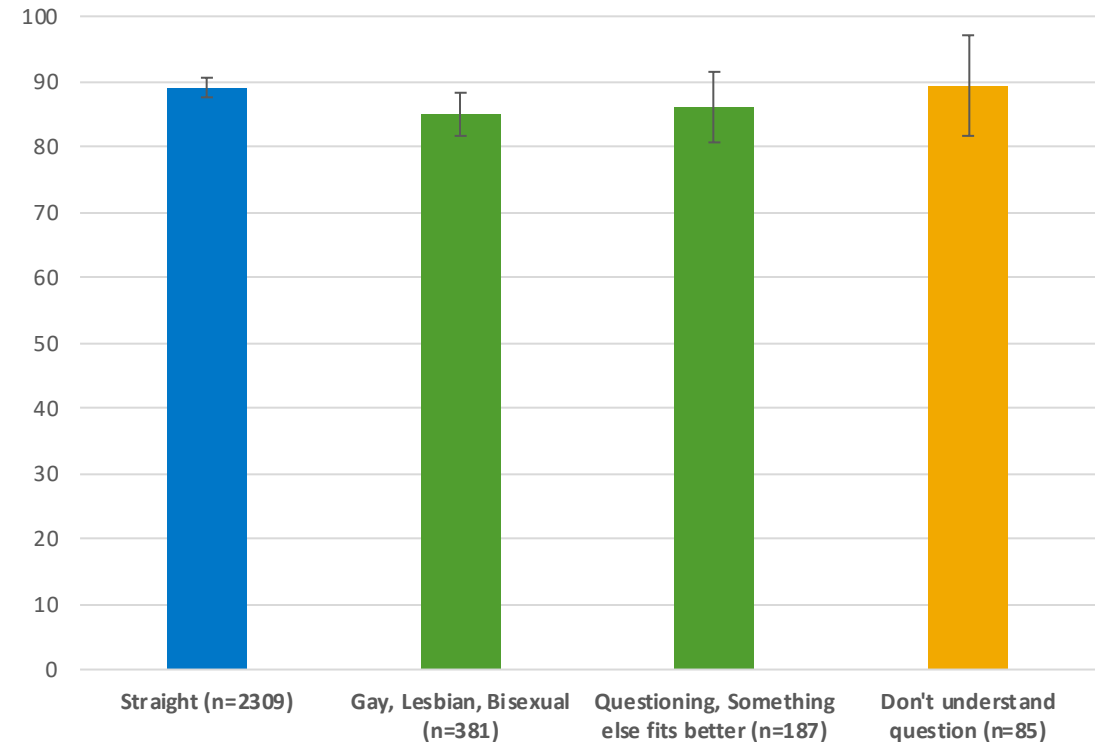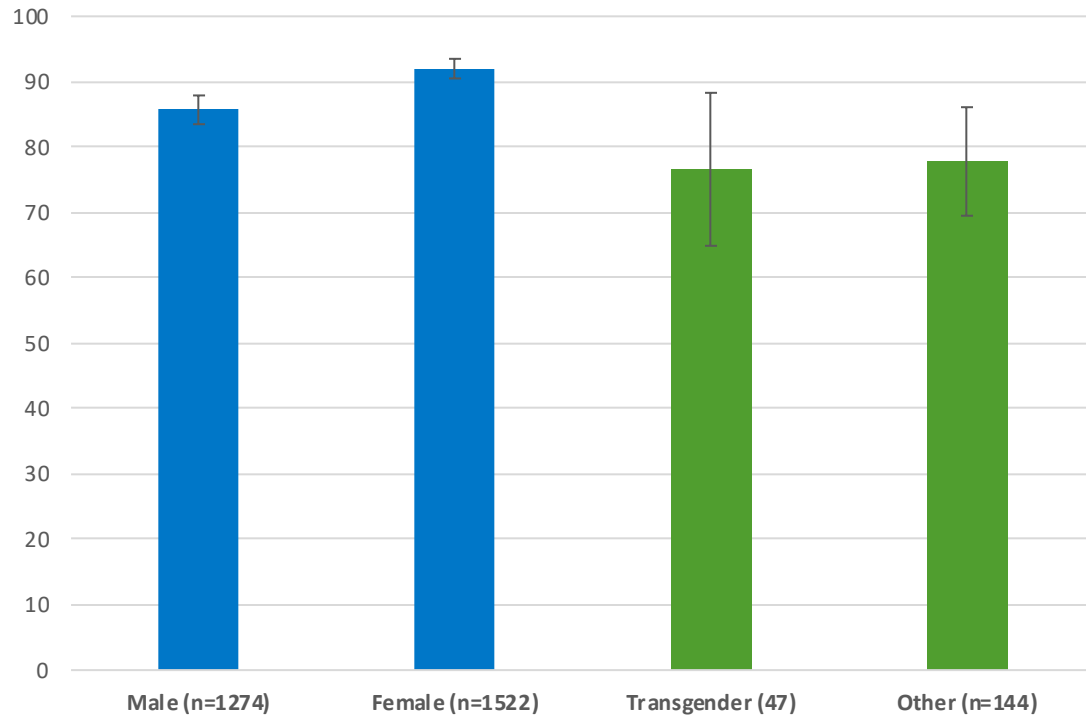
LGBTQ+ Family Conditions

HYS 2018: Would your parents know if you did not come home on time?
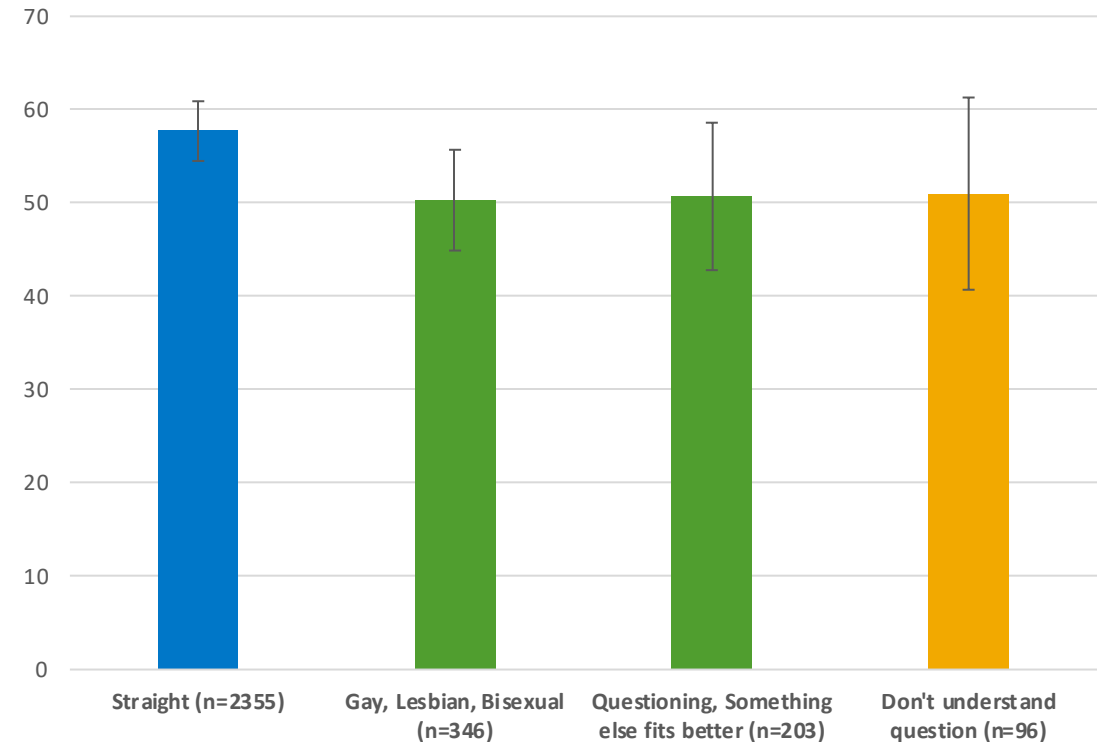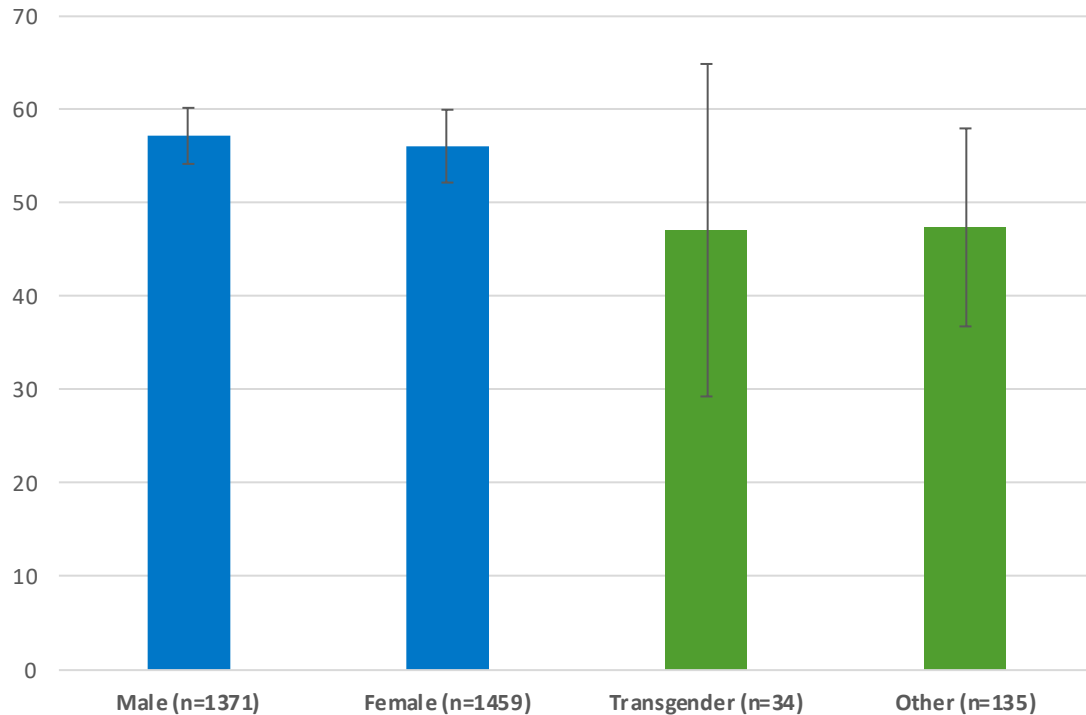*Percentage reporting 'yes'*
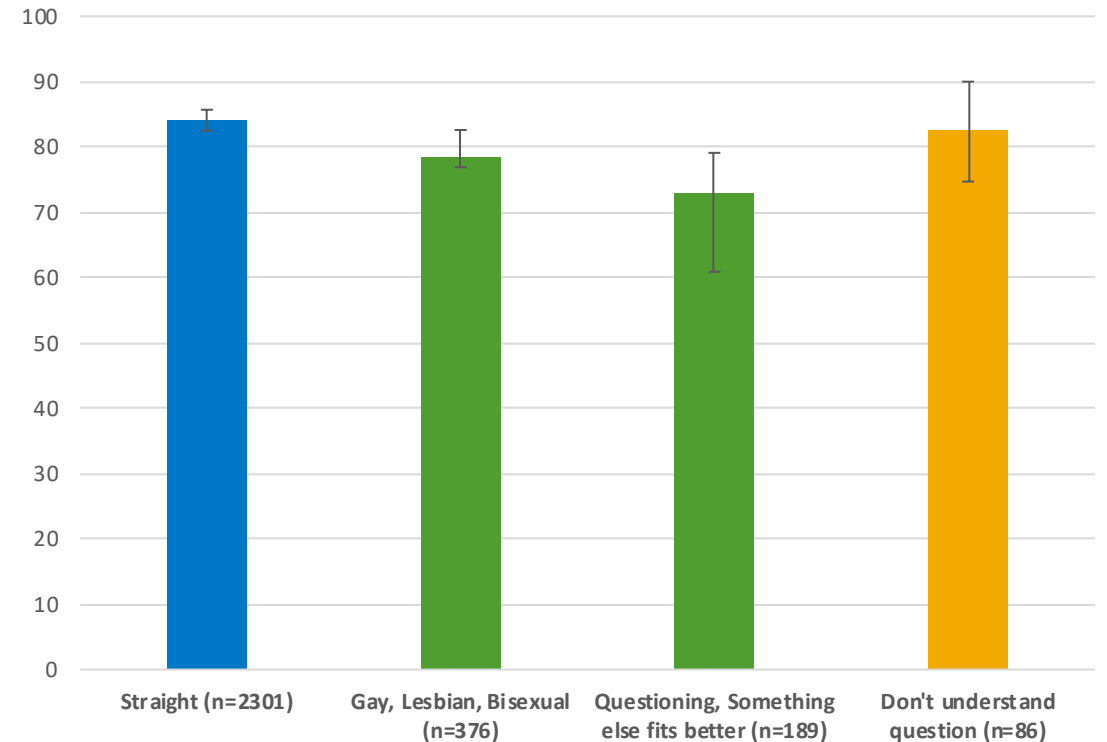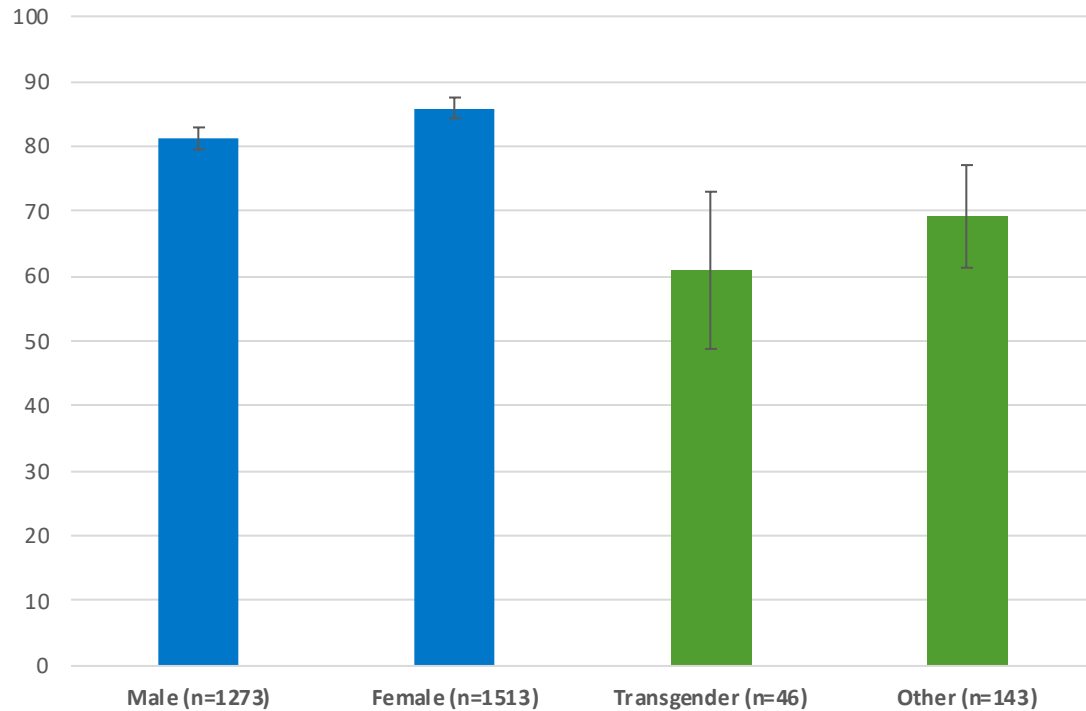
LGBTQ+ Family Conditions

HYS 2018: How often in the past 12 months did you or your family have to cut meal size or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
Percentage reporting 'yes'

Washington State
Health Care Authority

LGBTQ+ Family Conditions

HYS 2018: Did you eat breakfast today?
Percentage reporting 'yes'