

Free2Be... Yet?

The second national study of Australian high school students who identify as gender and sexuality diverse

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Design and Aims

Free2Be...Yet?, a follow-up to the 2015 *Free2Be?* report, details the findings from a second nationwide survey of gender and sexuality diverse Australian secondary school students. The name, while also intended to signal the continuation of the original line of research, was designed to highlight the central research question for teenagers: Is your school a place where it is safe for you to be yourself? Are you *free to be* you?

As with the previous iteration of the research, the project's core aims were to:

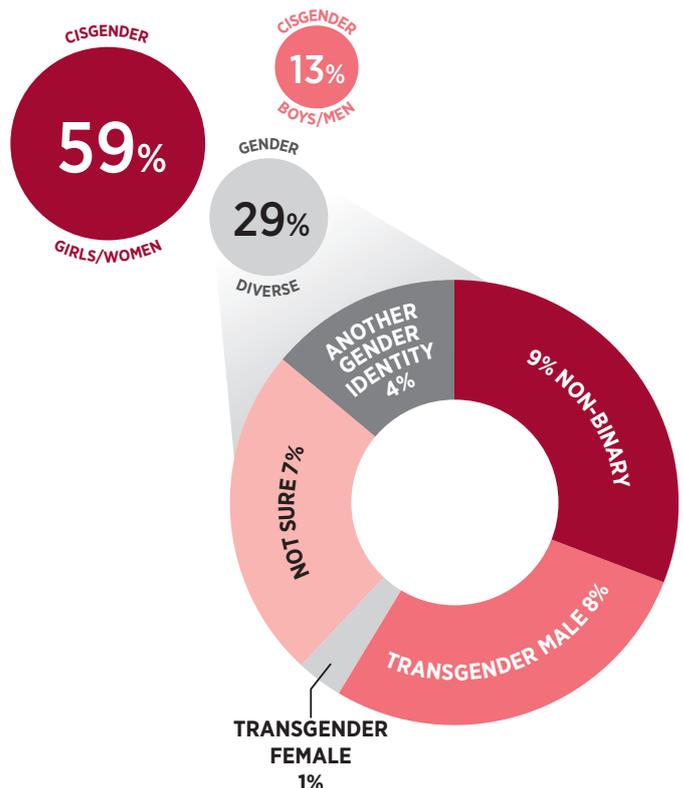
- 1 Gain a better understanding of how gender and sexuality diverse students experience their school environment(s) with regards to treatment of gender and sexuality diversity.
- 2 Investigate links between students' reported school climate and various measures of their school wellbeing and associated academic outcomes.

Demographics

2376 young people, aged 13-18 years and representing every state and territory in Australia, participated in the online survey.

In terms of reported sexuality, the largest cohorts identified as bisexual and as lesbian or gay, with a sizeable minority of participants identifying as pansexual and queer.

Most participants identified as female or male, with almost 9% of participants identifying as non-binary.



Schooling Experiences

While the young people in this study attended schools from across the sector, the majority of participants attended government schools (57%).

PARTICIPANTS OVERWHELMINGLY DEPICTED A SECONDARY SCHOOLING ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH HOMOPHOBIC LANGUAGE WAS A WEEKLY, IF NOT DAILY, OCCURRENCE AND WHERE SCHOOL STAFF DID NOT RESPOND WITH CONSISTENCY.

 **93%** of students had heard homophobic language at school.
37% heard this language daily.

 Only **6%** of students reported that adults within earshot always intervened

Participants depicted inconsistencies in adults' responses to school-based marginalisation ranging from purposive ignoring – and, in the worst cases, active participation in the marginalising behaviours – to issuing a warning or otherwise intervening to stop the marginalising language or behaviours. A minority number of young people described their teachers' acknowledgement of homophobia/transphobia and unwillingness to accept such language or behaviours. Many noted variations within their schools across school staff members' approaches to dealing with such incidents.

38% of students in public schools said their schools held activities or special events to support or celebrate LGBTQI people as compared to just **3%** of students in Catholic schools.

Relationships between School Climate and School Wellbeing

Students in school environments where peers used homophobic and transphobic language with greater frequency and with less positive adult intervention reported feeling:

-  significantly less connected to school
-  less confident their teachers were able to manage bullying and keep them safe
-  less assured that their teachers were personally invested in them and their academic success

GENDER AND SEXUALITY DIVERSE STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS WITH HARASSMENT POLICIES THAT WERE INCLUSIVE OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION SCORED BETTER THAN MAINSTREAM GOVERNMENT SCHOOL STUDENT COHORTS ACROSS MANY MEASURES OF POSITIVE SCHOOL CULTURE.

Compared to published averages for 15-year-old students worldwide using the *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) data, 15-year-old gender and sexuality diverse students from across Australia reported very low school-based belonging and high rates of school-based isolation, with scores notably far worse than even the lowest performing countries.

When compared to mainstream cohorts of Australian students, the participating cohort of gender and sexuality diverse students reported feeling:

-  significantly less connected to their schooling environment
-  less likely to say their peers and teachers respected diversity
-  and indicated lowered wellbeing scores across a range of measures of positive school culture

Academic Outcomes

Several self-report measures of academic outcomes were used to examine relationships between participants' sense of their own academic abilities and their reported school wellbeing and school climate. Participants describing a more positive schooling environment where they felt more personally connected to school and cared for by their teachers had stronger reported academic outcomes, including higher academic self-concept, greater intentions to attend university and fewer reported incidences of truancy. Taken together, these findings highlight the link between school climate, school wellbeing and academic outcomes and behaviours for gender and sexuality diverse students.

Where their schools were viewed as **positive** and **inclusive** towards **gender and sexuality diversity**, participants felt more **personally connected to school**



Participants who were **more connected** to school had **stronger reported academic outcomes**



including **higher academic self-concept**, **greater intentions to attend university** and **fewer incidences of truancy**

