

Growing Up Queer

// Issues Facing Young Australians Who Are Gender Variant
and Sexuality Diverse

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YOUNGANDWELL
Cooperative Research Centre

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Copies of this guide can be downloaded from the Young and Well CRC website: youngandwellcrc.org.au

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Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre

The Young and Well CRC is an Australia-based, international research centre that unites young people with researchers, practitioners, innovators and policy-makers from over 75 partner organisations. Together, we explore the role of technology in young people's lives, and how it can be used to improve the mental health and wellbeing of those aged 12 to 25. The Young and Well CRC is established under the Australian Government's Cooperative Research Centres Program.

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Main Messages

Gender variant and sexuality diverse young people are subject to a range of socio-cultural, educational, political, and legal discriminations impacting on their health and wellbeing (Flood & Hamilton, 2005; Hillier, Turner & Mitchell, 2005; Robinson, Irwin & Ferfolja, 2002). This pilot research – Growing Up Queer – was conducted by academics from the University of Western Sydney in collaboration with Twenty10 incorporating GLCS NSW, a place where young people who identify as being of diverse genders, sexes and sexualities, their families and communities, can receive holistic, relevant and innovative therapeutic and practical support. The research, based on a national online survey and focus group/workshops, aimed to investigate the issues these young Australians are facing in relation to: gender and sexuality identity; family relationships; education; work-place experiences; and accessing relevant resources and support organisations. The research also included interviews with staff from Twenty10 who work with gender variant and sexuality diverse young people. Gender variance refers to expressions of gender that do not match that predicted by one's sex, including people who identify as transgender, transsexual, gender queer, or intersex (Riley, Sitharthan, Clemson & Diamond, 2011). Sexuality diverse is a broad term used to include people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, pansexual or questioning their sexuality.

The findings of this study overwhelmingly highlight the serious impact that homophobia, transphobia and heteronormativity can have on the health and wellbeing of young people who are gender variant or sexuality diverse – supporting the findings of similar research in this area (Hillier, Jones, Monagle, Overton, Gahan, Blackman & Mitchell, 2010; Meyer, 2009; Robinson, Irwin & Ferfolja, 2002). Particularly disturbing are the findings around self-harm and suicide ideation amongst the young people who participated in the online national survey. 41% had thought about self-harm and/or suicide; 33% had harmed themselves; and 16% had attempted suicide. Several young people participating in the focus groups also acknowledged they had attempted self-harm and suicide prior to finding support from organisations such as Twenty10. Many of the young people in this research experienced frequent and ongoing harassment, violence, marginalisation, ostracism from peers, and rejection from families, often resulting in feelings of despair, of being alone and of internalised homophobia or transphobia.

Young people in this study experienced homophobic and transphobic harassment and violence across different aspects of their lives – in schools, from families, in the workplace, on the streets, and at other public sites and sporting events. Almost two-thirds of the 1032 young people who completed the survey experienced some form of homophobia and/or transphobia, with some experiencing multiple forms of abuse – 64% had been verbally abused, 18% physically abused, and 32% experienced other types of homophobia and transphobia. Schools were identified as the major site in which homophobia and transphobia prevailed. Peers were most frequently the source of this homophobia and transphobia, but for many, it was the homophobia and transphobia perpetrated by some teachers that had the most profound impact in their lives. Homophobia and transphobia was experienced in the form of social isolation, physical, verbal and written abuse, being the target of rumours, graffiti, cyberbullying and humiliation. School curricula, policies and practices were not inclusive of participants' lives and experiences.

The failure of some teachers to intervene in harassment and abuse, and/or directing homophobic and transphobic comments at students, was experienced as a violation of trust (Meyer, 2009; Ressler & Chase, 2009). Young people suggested that teachers in government schools were more accepting than students, but in private religious affiliated schools students were more accepting than teachers: “teachers make your life hell so you leave because [then] they can't expel you”. Homophobia and/or transphobia had a serious impact on many young people's educational experiences, with some changing schools multiple times, while others dropped out of school all together. Young people frequently witnessed the bullying that often ensued as a consequence of ‘coming out’ at school, which resulted in many keeping their sexual diversity or transgender status a secret. This had ongoing implications for these young people's health and wellbeing.

Participants overwhelmingly reported that sexuality education in schools does not respond to their needs or experiences, a failing that exposes them to a range of social and health risks. This results in young people seeking knowledge from other areas such as the internet, pornography, media, peers, and personal experience.

Rejection by families, resulting from homophobia and transphobia, exacerbated the isolation and despair felt by many of the young participants. This often led to homelessness, economic instability and/or destitution for some of the young people. Homophobia and transphobia founded in cultural values related to different ethnicities and religious affiliations also influenced family, peer, and community reactions to participants' gender variance and sexuality diversity, increasing feelings of social exclusion. Growing up in rural and isolated communities also exacerbated some young people's feelings of being alone, with access to support services and resources often limited or non-existent in these areas.

Most participants used the internet for information about their sexuality diversity and gender variance, for meeting people, and accessing support services, but they also pointed out that there is a limit to the extent to wherein the internet and technologies offer possibilities for addressing, resolving or managing persistent doubts and anxieties. This research overwhelmingly demonstrates the need for greater community education and training of educators, doctors, and health professionals around the health and wellbeing issues facing young Australians who are gender variant and sexuality diverse.

Executive Summary

This pilot project, conducted with young people who identify as gender and sexuality diverse, was undertaken during 2012-2013. It was a collaborative project involving academics from the University of Western Sydney – Professor Kerry Robinson, Dr Peter Bansel, Dr Nida Denson, and Dr Georgia Ovenden; two external consultants with expertise in filmmaking, script writing and performance – Cristyn Davies and Elena Knox; and Twenty10 – a Young and Well CRC supporting partner, located in Sydney, New South Wales. Twenty10 is an organisation focusing on those needing support around identity issues associated with gender and sexuality diversity.

This pilot research aimed: (i) to gain an understanding of the experiences of young people who identify as gender variant and sexuality diverse across a broad range of issues such as identity, health and wellbeing, education, technology, and access to services; (ii) to work creatively and collaboratively with a group of these young people to begin to develop innovative, relevant and engaging resources based on research findings that would contribute to increasing professional and community awareness of their experiences and needs; and (iii) in the development of these resources, to provide this group of young people with a valuable and socially engaged experience of documentary-style video production using hand-held technologies – in this case, iPods.

The findings outlined in this report are based on the results of a national survey (see Appendix) conducted as part of this pilot research, completed by 1032 young people between the ages of 16–27 who identified as gender variant or sexuality diverse; as well as a focus group and interactive workshops involving approximately 20 young people, aged between 16–23, who volunteered to participate during their attendance at the Saturday afternoon drop-in activities at Twenty10 over several consecutive weeks. Gender variance refers to expressions of gender that do not match that predicted by one's sex, including people who identify as transgender, transsexual, gender queer, or intersex (Riley, Sitharthan, Clemson & Diamond, 2011). Sexuality diverse is a broad term used to include people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, pansexual or questioning their sexuality. The young participants who completed the survey attended a focus group and workshops, were primarily from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, but there were representations from Indigenous Australian, Asian, Maori, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, Central and South American, European and African backgrounds (see Appendix Graph 2). 53% of respondents completing the online survey were female identified, 39% were male identified, 4% were gender variant, 3% were transgender (1% male to female, and 2% female to male), and 0.3% were intersex (note that the total percentage adds up to 99% due to rounding) (see Appendix Graph 1). Almost all of the focus group and workshops participants were male identified, including transgender female to male. The majority, 61% of participants completing the survey identified as lesbian or gay, 25% were bisexual, 10% identified as queer, 3% questioning their sexuality, and 1% identified as heterosexual ('straight') (see Appendix Graph 4). Those attending the focus group were largely gay or queer identified. Most of the young people who completed the survey were working full-time (23.6%) or part-time (27.4%), or attending university (38.0%) or TAFE (7.8%), some were still at school (16.3%) and 12.9% were unemployed (see Appendix Graph 6). Just over half (50.1%) were living in the family home, with others living with relatives, in shared housing, with partners, rental accommodation, boarding houses, on the streets, or in refuges (see Appendix Graph 7).

This pilot report is part of a larger package of resources, which includes five discrete short documentary style video clips, titled *Growing Up Queer*, addressing issues of identity, family relationships, homophobia/transphobia, and sex education, developed in collaboration with young participants involved in the focus group and workshops; and a performed ethnography, which entails the development of a play script/scenario, based on the research findings, to be used as an interactive professional development resource, in this instance, for high school teachers. The performed ethnography is accompanied by critical facilitator questions. The development of these professional development and community education resources will contribute to current efforts in counteracting homophobia and transphobia in families, schools and broader communities. Homophobia encompasses a range of negative attitudes and feelings – e.g. hatred, disgust, contempt, prejudice, fear – towards those who identify as, or are perceived as being non heterosexual (or straight), such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, transgendered or transsexual. Transphobia is similar, but is the negative feelings and attitudes directed at people who are gender variant.

Key Issues Arising From This Research

COMING OUT: FAMILIES

- Participants identified multiple responses from their families to their 'coming out'. Some participants were supported by their families, while others were completely rejected by family members, who expressed homophobic and transphobic attitudes. This rejection often resulted in being thrown out of home, or young people choosing to leave. Some of these young people ended up in foster care or living in youth refuges and reported experiencing suicidal ideation or attempting suicide.
- Some participants had positive responses from family members, which meant that they could continue to live at home, while others were 'tolerated' by parents, but could not bring partners home.
- Many participants had left home before the age of 18 and accessed various government housing services, including short-term/emergency accommodation, hostels, and placements with foster families. They typically experienced multiple placements, often changing annually, some of which were satisfactory and many of which were not, each resulting in changing schools with significant interruptions to their education, resulting for some in uncompleted schooling (i.e. Years 11 and 12).

COMING OUT: COMMUNITY

- Geographical location (urban, regional and rural) affected both the choice to 'come out', and the coming out experiences of young people. Participants identified Western Sydney, the (Sutherland) 'Shire' and country areas as more homophobic/transphobic and difficult to negotiate than inner city locations. In rural and regional areas, safety and acceptance featured more prominently as major issues for young people given that there was a perception that most community members would find out about the young person's sexual orientation and/or gender variance. Participants in regional and country locations felt that there was no one to talk to about their sexuality or gender variance.
- Participants reported negative experiences in dealing with Government services and human welfare agencies, specifically issues associated with recognition and disrespect. Given that many young people had moved out of home prior to turning 18, they were reliant on government services for accessing income support and accommodation, and negative staff attitudes present another challenge for young people already experiencing difficulties.
- Participants recognised the extent to which perceptions of queer young people are based on stereotypes that do not represent them or their lived experience. It was noted, for example, that male/gay identity was negatively associated with promiscuity and predatory sexuality, nightclubbing, and excessive drug use. Further, these stereotypes were often perpetuated within the queer community.
- It was also observed that queer sexualities are often associated with disease and contagion, and it was suggested that more knowledge would help others see that "our insides are the same as everyone else's, not different". This reflected a general desire to be seen as similarly human and not treated differently on the basis of sexuality.

COMING OUT: SCHOOL

- Participants frequently watched and learned from other young people 'coming out' within their secondary school environments. More often than not, out young people were bullied, and this meant that other young people decided not to reveal their sexual orientation or transgender status. Keeping this information secret has implications for the health and wellbeing of these young people.
- The participants who did reveal their sexual orientation or transgender status within a secondary school environment encountered the following: homophobia from peers and teachers (especially Personal Development Health & Physical Education (PDHPE) teachers); extensive homophobia at a school level (policies and practices); social isolation; and disrupted education (many students attended multiple schools, or left school all together as a result of systemic homophobia (see Appendix Graph 14).
- Participants identified PDHPE as a specific curriculum area in which homophobic practices were often played out by teachers and students. Participants reported they were asked by PDHPE teachers to change their clothes in isolation from their peers; students received exemption from any and all sports from teachers if they were perceived by teachers to be a 'target' for other students' homophobic or transphobic violence; students were often relegated to sports traditionally associated with their sex e.g. netball for girls and football for boys, even if this did not interest the students or align with sporting preferences based on their chosen gender identities. Participants emphasised that these experiences did not result from the decisions of individual teachers, but rather reflected school-based policies and decisions.
- Geography was identified as significant in terms of suburb and schooling sector. Focus group and survey data suggest that teachers in government schools were more accepting and supportive than students, but

that in religious affiliated schools students were more accepting and supportive than teachers. As one participant commented: “Teachers make your life hell so you leave because [then] they can’t expel you”. Most participants indicated that they would not ‘come out’ to their teachers, regardless of school type, about their gender variance or sexuality diversity.

- Students identifying as transgender who attended single sex schools experienced the following: students were not able to wear a uniform that reflected their gender identity; students were policed by teachers who feared that they might try to engage sexually with other students; transgender students experienced homophobic violence (verbal and physical) from their peers; some students who experienced anger and frustration had to attend ‘anger management’ courses to ‘adjust’ their behavioural responses to ongoing homophobic/transphobic violence; and most students attended multiple schools and had disrupted educations.
- None of the participants in the focus group/workshops had experienced Ally Programs in their schools. Ally Programs aim to develop support systems between students who identify as heterosexual and those who are gender variant and sexuality diverse.
- There is a need for increased specialised anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia training of teachers in schools.
- Current exemptions of private schools from Anti-Discrimination legislation relating to sexuality need to be repealed so that gender variant and sexuality diverse young people have the same rights as their peers in government schools.

SEX EDUCATION

- Participants indicated that sex education at school was heteronormative and focused on reproductive sex only. It was perceived as irrelevant to their needs (see Appendix Graph 20). Students noted that sex education was frequently out-sourced to other organisations, which they considered problematic.
- Participants noted the mixed and confusing messages received at school – sex is an expression of love but very dangerous. Whilst sex education focused on heterosexual reproduction, it did not address issues of passion, desire, or intimacy. Nor did it adequately address issues of sexual health and care for oneself and one’s partner, or increasing risks of STIs. Participants noted that whilst they received no education about queer sexualities their identities were often ‘sexualised’, with teachers and peers making assumptions about their sexuality and treating them differently on the basis of these assumptions. There is a need for increased training of teachers in comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education.
- Participants identified learning ‘myths’ as part of their school sex education. Participants identified that in some cases gay men who were HIV positive came in to speak to students as an example of what not to do/be. Participants were regularly told that gay sex would lead to AIDS. One participant recalled receiving a booklet on safe sex that was about gay men only, cementing an association between ‘gay’ and ‘disease’ – HIV, AIDS and STIs. In some instances same-sex attracted young males would use multiple condoms simultaneously in sexual exchanges to protect themselves from ‘AIDS’.
- Few participants identified receiving sex education at home from parents/guardians; when it did occur, it was often homophobic and transphobic.
- Young people’s access to comprehensive sexuality education in primary and secondary schooling is a right, and is central to sexual citizenship and the fostering of health and wellbeing in all young people. There is a need to have appropriate comprehensive sexuality education training in teacher education programs.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- The majority (two out of three) of young people participating felt happy and content with their current lives, despite difficulties experienced in their younger years (see Appendix Graphs 24 and 25).
- Some participants pointed out that they often felt uncomfortable approaching, or having to ‘come out’ to doctors and other health professionals, who were often ill-informed about gender variance and sexuality diversity and were sometimes unsupportive and homophobic/transphobic. There is a need for increased training of doctors and other health professionals in the sexual health needs of these young people.
- For many, rejection, alienation, bullying, and harassment often led to depression, suicidal ideation, and attempted suicide. Some participants spoke openly about multiple suicide attempts as a result of negotiating their sexual/gender orientation at school, at home, and in their broader communities. Participants who had attempted suicide were generally living out of home in youth refuges, foster care, or alone once they had turned 18.
- In the national online survey, at least two out of five acknowledged thinking about self-harm (41%) and/or suicide (42%). In addition, 33% of queer young people who participated in our survey have harmed themselves in the past, and 16% have attempted to take their own lives (see Graphs A, B, C & D, pages 14-16).

HOMOPHOBIA AND TRANSPHOBIA IN THE WORKPLACE

- Participants identified homophobia and transphobia in the workplace (see Appendix Graph 13). Transgender participants found it particularly difficult to find casual or part-time employment. One of the issues participants identified was the disjuncture between birth names and chosen names (associated with different sex) on employment forms and unsuccessful attempts to find work as the result of homophobic/transphobic attitudes from employers despite the skills that young people had to offer.

TECHNOLOGY

- Although young people access information about gender and sexuality through online technologies and mobile phones (see Appendix Graphs 8, 9 and 10), participants strongly indicated the significance and importance of face-to-face contact with other young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) people in a “safe” space. Participants spoke of the isolation that was experienced despite accessing online technologies. Face-to-face contact was seen to address this isolation in a way that online technologies did not.
- Participants indicated the potential value of interactive videos/websites with information about sex, sexuality, gender, and safe sex practices to supplement learning. Participants also requested inclusive sex education in schools.
- Young homeless participants and participants from low socio-economic status backgrounds do not have easy access to online technologies, and may therefore have low technical literacy in this area. Face-to-face contact was imperative for these participants.

ACCESS TO, AND EXPERIENCES OF, SUPPORT SERVICES

- Most young people sought advice from well-promoted, established, and generic youth health services (often with a specialty in mental health) such as *beyondblue* first, or sometimes alongside, sexuality diverse and gender variant youth-specific support services.
- Young people had greater awareness of the generic support services offered before finding out about sexuality diverse and gender variant specific youth support services, such as Minus18 and Twenty10.
- Young people initially make contact via the phone, and/or also via the internet. If the young person’s first contact was a positive experience and the service also offered a face-to-face service that was within a viable travelling distance, a young person might follow up with accessing further support in person.

Growing Up Queer: Gender Variance and Sexuality Diversity

INTRODUCTION

This pilot project was conducted in 2012 with young people who identify as gender variant and sexuality diverse, and focused on experiences of homophobia and transphobia. The gender variant and sexuality diverse young people who participated in the study reported a range of contexts in which they experienced homophobia, transphobia, bullying and harassment, including the family, school, the community, online and the workplace. They also identified a range of people from whom they experienced homophobia, such as peers, teachers, parents, family members, employers and strangers. Homophobia and transphobia are understood by both the research team and participants to be both the openly negative attitudes and practices of others, and also the attitudes and behaviours that result from ignorance associated with sexuality diversity and gender variance. The study was a collaborative project undertaken between several members of the Diversities, Ethics and Education Research group at the University of Western Sydney – Professor Kerry Robinson, Dr Peter Bansel, Dr Nida Denson, and Dr Georgia Ovenden; two external consultants with expertise in filmmaking, script writing and performance – Cristyn Davies and Elena Knox; and with Twenty10 – a Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre supporting partner, located in Sydney, New South Wales. Twenty10 is an organisation focusing on those needing support around issues associated with gender and sexuality diversity.

This pilot research aimed to:

- (i) gain an understanding of the experiences of young people who identify as gender and sexuality diverse across a broad range of issues such as identity, health and wellbeing, education, technology, and access to services;
- (ii) work creatively and collaboratively with a group of these young people to begin to develop innovative, relevant, and engaging resources based on research findings that would contribute to increasing professional and community awareness of their experiences and needs;
- (iii) provide the participating young people with a valuable and socially engaged experience of documentary-style video production using hand-held technologies – in this case, iPods; and to
- (iv) develop a performed ethnography which is a play script developed from research participants' experiences, to be used as a professional development resource with teachers focusing on homophobia, transphobia, harassment, and bullying.

The findings outlined in this report are based on the preliminary results of a national survey completed by 1032 young people between the ages of 16–27 who identified as gender or sexuality diverse (LGBTQI), and one focus group and two interactive workshops involving approximately 20 young people who volunteered to participate during their attendance at Twenty10's Saturday afternoon drop-in activities over several consecutive weeks. This report is part of a larger package of resources, which include:

- five short documentary style videos, titled *Growing Up Queer*, developed with the young people who participated in the Saturday afternoon workshops. These videos address issues of identity, family, homophobia, transphobia and sex education;
- a performed ethnography, a play script or scenario developed from the research findings for use as a professional development resource. It is aimed, in this instance, at high school teachers, and is accompanied by a practical guide for facilitators working with teachers and students, to open discussion on the key concerns identified by the queer young people who participated in the pilot study.

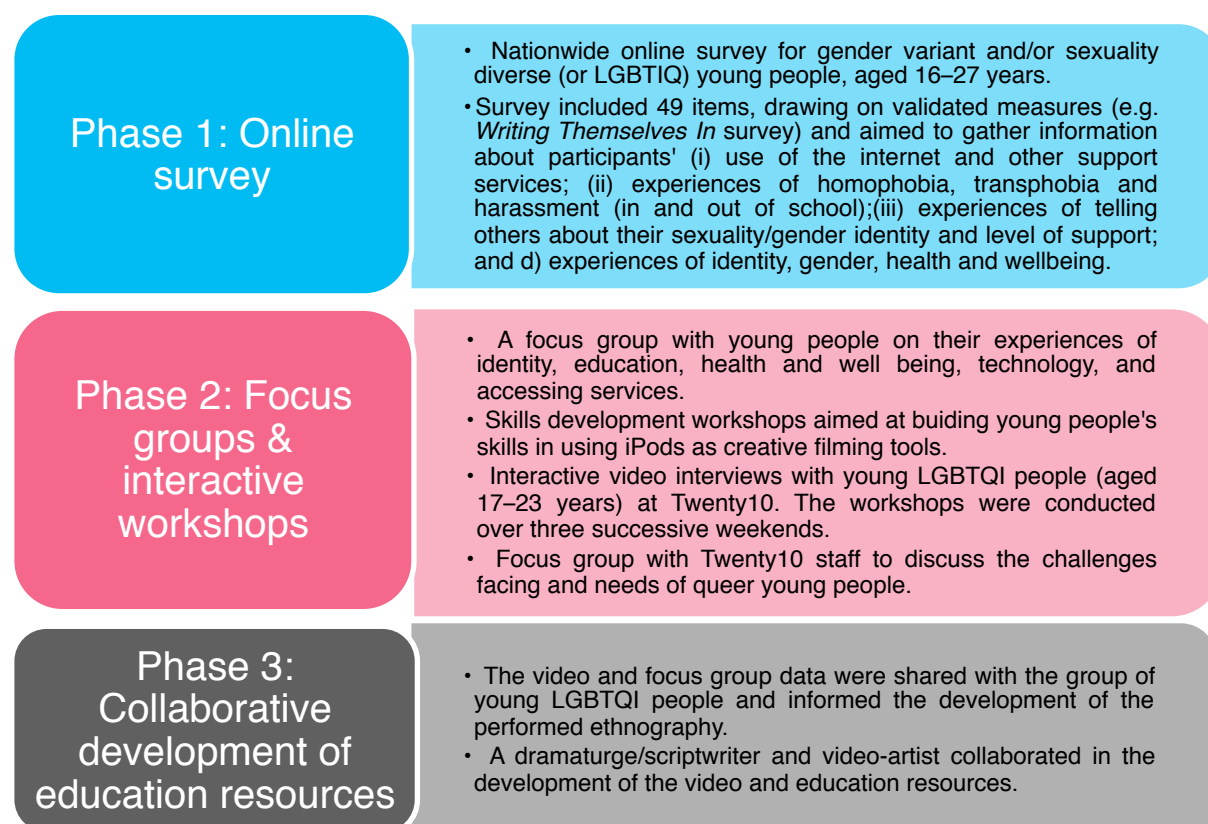
Queer young people are a marginalised group in society and are subject to a broad range of socio-cultural, economic, political, and legal inequities that can impact on their health and wellbeing (Flood & Hamilton 2005; Hillier, Turner & Mitchell 2005; Hillier & Mitchell 2008; Hillier et. al. 2010; Robinson, Irwin & Ferkolj 2002). Such inequities were identified in this research, which aimed to explore the experiences of young people, aged 16–27, who identify as gender variant and/or sexuality diverse, across a broad range of issues including schooling, sex education, health and wellbeing, use of technology and encounters with homophobia. These young people are a heterogeneous group and their experiences across these areas are multiple depending on a number of factors, for example: whether they have supportive families, friends, and teachers; where they live and their access to information and support services; whether they are out about their gender and sexual diversity; whether they can 'pass' as normative subjects if they so wish; and how they feel about themselves. Many of the young people in this research encountered verbal and physical harassment, and ostracism from their peers, adults, and families, who were steeped in homophobia, transphobia and heteronormativity (see Appendix Graphs 11, 12, 13 and 14). Additionally, many queer young people are unsupported and rejected by their families, which adds to their sense

of marginalization and isolation, making it even more difficult to negotiate their gender and sexual identities. This ostracism, harassment, and violence can start early in life for many of these young people, especially in their educational experiences in primary and secondary schooling. This was a major area of concern for young people who participated in this study. Consistent with previous research, the findings of this project also highlight the contradictory and often difficult experiences many gender variant and sexuality diverse young people experience at school (Meyer 2010; Ressler & Chase 2009; Hillier et. al. 2010). In many cases, homophobia and transphobia was more prevalent among teachers than peers – with institutional homophobia and transphobia in the curricula, policies and pedagogical practices, a clear reminder and perpetuator of their perceived difference and ‘outsider’ status.

Consequently, the family and schooling experiences of many of these young people in particular, left them feeling alienated and unsupported (Meyer, 2009, 2010; Ressler & Chase, 2009). This rejection often led to homelessness and economic instability and/or destitution. For some young people, their ethnicities, socio-cultural backgrounds, and religious affiliations influenced family, peer, and community reactions to their sexual orientations and gender variance. The geographical locations in which these young people live can also have significant impact on their experiences of homophobia and transphobia. Growing up in rural and isolated communities can result in fewer support options. Consequently, all these factors and more contribute to these young people being one of the more vulnerable groups in society, often leading to suicide, suicide ideation, homelessness, violence, and mental health issues (Cantor & Neulinger, 2000; King, Semlyen, Tai, Killaspy, Osborn, Popelyuk & Nazareth, 2008). For many, the internet became the only means through which these young people could seek support from others like themselves, or obtain the information that they required across a range of issues associated with their gender variance and/or sexuality diversity. The services and support offered by Twenty10 are, and have been, critical to the wellbeing of many of these young people, including all those who participated in this research (see page 30).

METHODOLOGY

In order to gather information about the experiences of young people who identify as gender variant and sexuality diverse, this pilot research conducted a nationwide online survey and a series of interactive workshops over several weeks with a group of young people who attended Twenty10 during the Saturday afternoon drop-in scheduled activities. The following diagram outlines the three key phases of the research process.



ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSIDERATIONS

Approval for this pilot research was obtained from the University of Western Sydney Ethics Committee (Approval number H9648) in July 2012. The diverse age range (16–27) of the young people targeted in this project meant it was important that all consent procedures, along with the survey questions, focus group questions and video interview questions, were appropriate to young people. The questions were developed and refined by the research team to ensure they could be understood, were contextually relevant, and captured the experiences and concerns of young LGBTQI people.

PHASE 1: SURVEY DESIGN AND RECRUITMENT

Online web-based surveys have been identified as an effective way to target young people owing to the large amount of time young people spend engaging in online communication (see *Media and Communications in Australian Families Report* 2008). The Queer Stories survey was designed using an online platform – Survey Monkey – that connected participants to the survey page via an active web link. The use of a web link was important to achieve a wide-reaching distribution, and allowed the survey to be transportable across email.

A number of the survey questions were adapted from an earlier study conducted by Hillier et al (2010). Additional questions were added which aimed to gather information about young LGBTQI people's racial, ethnic and religious identity, their experience of the internet as a form of support/information, as well as specific items concerning transphobia and gender variance.

Participants were recruited in diverse ways. Given the large number of existing online LGBTQI support services/groups, recruitment targeted online contacts that had web pages and mailing lists Australia-wide. A one-page information/advertisement flyer was developed by the researchers for email distribution and online networking. The wide dissemination of this flyer resulted in the 'Gay Press' taking interest in the project, which further increased awareness of the research, increasing recruitment numbers. The survey was completed by 1032 young people, who identified as LGBTQI, or who were questioning their sexual identities.

PHASE 2: WORKSHOP RECRUITMENT AND DESIGN

Young people who identified as gender variant and sexuality diverse and connected to our research partner organisation, Twenty10, were sent a research information flyer through the organisation's email database on behalf of the researchers asking for volunteers to participate in the research and workshops. All the workshops and focus groups were held at Twenty10's new premises in Chippendale, NSW. This provided a regular and familiar environment for the young people to participate in the research and workshop activities; the research and workshops became integrated into the scheduled activities of the organisation, and allowed Twenty10 staff members who were working on the scheduled days to be research/workshop observers. The times and dates of the focus groups and workshops were determined by the organisation and were scheduled on three consecutive Saturdays afternoons from 1–4pm. The fact that Twenty10 is primarily a drop-in service for many young people, coupled with the precarious and often unpredictable nature of many of the young people's lives, made it difficult to retain the same participants across the three weeks. This impacted significantly on achieving the continuity of the workshops as planned in the research design, particularly in order to build on young people's technological knowledge and skills around using iPods for filming purposes, and building relationships amongst the participants. However, several young people did attend all three sessions, with most coming along on two of the three weeks. Whilst there was a mix of male-identified and female-identified young people across the four weeks of the project, all the participants involved in the final filming workshop and the focus group were male-identified. Building on this pilot research experience, the next iteration of the project will target queer young people who are female-identified, and a more stable group in terms of attendance, if possible. Given that the time allocated by Twenty10 to conduct the focus groups and workshops was during Saturday afternoon drop-in time, the young people who participated in the focus group and video-making workshops were a random sample of those who attended the drop-in sessions, many of whom were either new or regular users of Twenty10's services. The purpose of working with this particular sampling of young people was to generate material for the short video-documentaries and the development of the performed ethnography. Further, the key issues and experiences identified from this sample were correlated with the larger sampling from the online survey. Identification of these correlations aimed to both highlight commonalities and compliment the quantitative data with the sort of detail that qualitative data offers. The correlations and commonalities identified are discussed in the Key Findings section of this report.

Before commencing the workshops, the aims of the research and nature of participant involvement were carefully explained to all the interested participants. To ensure participants had control over the level of their personal exposure with regards to being filmed, they were asked to articulate any requirements on the consent form prior to their involvement. On the day of the filming, some of the young people chose to be behind the camera, rather than taking upfront roles.

The research program included a series of three workshops on successive weekends, with a fourth for follow-up, and presentation of the video and the performed ethnography (see Phase 3, below):

Week 1

This session, led by filmmaker and performance artist Elena Knox, involved workshoping techniques for using the hand-held video devices – iPods, provided by the research project. Participants were encouraged to take the iPods home to experiment with the technology over a week and to make their own videos for sharing at the next workshop.

Week 2

In this session, participants who had experimented with the technology during the week shared their videos with the group. Several of the young people brought pieces to share. One of these film pieces is included in the resources package developed from this pilot study. The primary aim of this workshop was to hold a focus group with those young people attending the service on that Saturday afternoon, many of whom had not attended in Week 1 (the research was fully explained to the new participants and informed consent obtained). The focus group questions centred on: participants' experiences of being gender variant and sexuality diverse; 'coming out' or choosing not to 'come out'; experiences across community/family/school contexts; their use of technology and the internet; perceptions about their health and wellbeing; and experiences of accessing relevant community and government services. A focus group was also conducted with volunteer staff members at Twenty10. The data gathered across all the focus groups and workshops informed the development of the performed ethnography.

Week 3

This session involved working collaboratively with the young people to use the iPods creatively to voice the issues and concerns that they had identified in the previous focus group. The young people and the research team – the three UWS researchers and the project's consultant dramaturge/scriptwriter and filmmaker – collaborated with the participating young people to explore different formats for the filming session and final product. All participants agreed upon a documentary 'chat-show' format in which the young people took turns as interview guests and iPod camera operators, and members of the research team took turns as hosts, asking questions on topics that had emerged from the focus group interview.

PHASE 3: DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION RESOURCES

A core creative dimension of this project involved working collaboratively with young people to produce education resources aimed at counteracting homophobia and transphobia in the broader community. Consequently, the final phase of the project involved the development and writing of the performed ethnography from the research data – led by Cristyn Davies – and the development of the film material by Elena Knox into a series of short video clips aimed at not just a young audience, but also adults and professionals working with young people who identify as gender variant and sexuality diverse. The video clips, titled *Growing Up Queer*, focus on four discrete episodes: Identity, Family, Homophobia/Transphobia and Sex Education. In the next iteration of this project, these short videos will be incorporated into a public interactive video installation to be located in an environment such as a bookshop, library, or school. Both the performed ethnography and interactive videos were presented to staff at Twenty10 for comment.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data collected from the online survey was downloaded from Survey Monkey to SPSS and Excel to allow for quantitative and qualitative analysis. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were performed. Given the large number of participants who responded to the survey (1032 in total), a snapshot of the data will be included in the Appendix.

Qualitative data arising from the focus group with young people in the Week 2 workshop were transcribed and analysed for the purpose of: (i) identifying key themes that emerged from the conversation, and; (ii) developing a systematic analysis based on themes identified in the transcription of the conversation.

Data from the video workshop in Week 3 reiterated many of the themes raised in the focus group and were incorporated into the overall findings. In addition, data from the open-ended survey questions were analysed in relation to the following key themes that emerged from the interview data: identity; homophobia and transphobia; sexuality education; technology; health and wellbeing; and access to services.

Key Findings

The key findings identified in this report provide a snapshot into the lives of LGBTQI young people in Australia. The findings draw on data collected in the focus groups with young people and Twenty10 workers, video workshops and the national online survey. An overview of the specific findings of the national online survey in this research is provided in the Appendix of this report. The findings reflect considerable similarities regarding the issues raised by the young people who participated in the focus group and interactive workshops and the participant responses collected in the survey. For the purposes of this report on the key findings of the pilot study – including the focus groups, workshops and the survey data – four thematic categories are discussed: Identity; Homophobia and Transphobia; Sexuality Education; and Technology, Health and Wellbeing. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are from the queer youth who participated in the focus groups or completed the open response questions on the survey. Discussion is based on, and makes reference to, the researchers' analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data.

IDENTITY

Queer youth cultures encompass the heterogeneity that exist in the everyday lives of gender variant and sexuality diverse young people. It is important that any representations of queer youth acknowledge the complexities, contradictions and diversities of their subjectivities, embodiment, and their social lives that are intersected by experiences of class, ethnicity, age, geographical location and family relationships. These complexities, contradictions and diverse identities and experiences were reflected in this research, especially in the national online survey (see Appendix Graphs 1, 2, 3 and 4). Despite the homophobia, transphobia, and social and institutional exclusion that many gender variant and sexuality diverse young people experience, they are simultaneously dynamic, imaginative, creative, resilient, with many using experiences that are oppressive and injurious as points of inspiration to challenge the inequities that they often face (Driver, 2008).

Participants recognised the extent to which perceptions of queer or LGBTQI young people are based on stereotypes that do not adequately represent them or their lived experience. This misrepresentation and misrecognition is a form of homophobia and transphobia, and is often accompanied by bullying and discrimination. Participants also observed that queer sexualities are often associated with disease (HIV, AIDS, STIs), and suggested that more knowledge would help others see that 'our insides are the same as everyone else's, not different'. This reflected a general desire to be seen as similarly human and not treated differently on the basis of sexuality. The comments reveal the multiple positions and tensions through which gender variant and sexuality diverse identities are formed – reinforcing the findings of other research in this area (Cover, 2012; Driver, 2008; Hillier et.al, 2010; Meyer, 2009). Several main areas were raised with regard to identity formation: identification; representations and stereotypes; coming out/being outed; and religion. Homophobia and transphobia also significantly impacted identity formation, but this will be discussed as a separate issue after the section on Identity. Inevitably these issues overlap considerably and form a complex set of relationships through which queer identities are embodied, lived, experienced and perceived, and how young queer people feel about themselves and are treated by others.

Theme	Description
Identification	Perception of oneself/how I see myself, perceptions of others/how others see me.
Representations and stereotypes	Culturally available representations and stereotypes of queer identities, including TV, movies, celebrity and other media.
'Coming out' or being outed	Experiences of 'coming out' and of being outed by others.
Religion	The ways in which religion and faith impact on self-identification, recognition, and acceptance from others.

IDENTIFICATION

Sam

Sam identifies as a gay man, and is particularly emphatic about being a 'man'. He grew up in the country and can wield a chainsaw, but he also braids his niece's hair and does her nails. He describes himself as a 'superbitch', feminine, and as liking men.

Andi

Andi identifies as both male and female, and says that this confuses people. He says he doesn't particularly like or hate either males or females, so chooses to be both. When he came onto the gay scene aged 16, he wanted to be different from others. At age 17, he embraced the feminine and became a feminist: 'I can be whatever I want to be. I'm just me'. But, he says, 'our insides are the same as everyone else's, not different'.

Alex

Alex, a female to male transgender young person, describes himself as a straight man and as 'homophobic'.

Dave

Dave was outed as a lesbian by his sister, but he says she got it wrong because he identifies as a bi/transmale.

These four vignettes illustrate the multiple and complex ways in which gender variant and sexuality diverse young people negotiate their sense of self. They resist any stable or predictable relationship between biological sex, gender, and sexuality and as such their intelligibility to their families and peers challenges more common perceptions that you are, and must be, either, 'male' or 'female', 'masculine' or 'feminine', 'straight' or 'gay'. The act of 'coming out' figures prominently in queer life stories, in the materials that are offered by community support services and education providers, internet sites, social media, and in popular culture (Craig & McInroy, 2013; Driver, 2008; Rossi, 2010). But prior to 'coming out', queer young people need to decide who or what they are to come out as. There is then, for many young people, a period in which queer identities need to be explored, formed, embraced, practiced, and expressed:

I wasn't sure whether I actually wanted to come out or not even though from the beginning of the year I actually wanted to just identify as how I see myself.

A Twenty10 worker articulated this process of identity recognition and acknowledgement by young people in the following manner:

I think, generally, how it goes is that nothing will really start to happen until that young person is old enough to actually go, this is who I am and this is what I need. I think at younger ages, unless you've got a really amazingly supportive family and parents who are like, hey actually maybe you're identified in a different way to what we thought and let's do something about that in order to support you around that. (Twenty10 worker)

For some gender variant and sexuality diverse young people, self-identification, based on the available category possibilities and understandings of gender and sexuality, is a relatively straightforward matter. In many cases, the more limited or rigidly defined these categories are, the more limited are the possibilities for identification:

I knew that I didn't like women and in that little pocket of world, that's all there really was. You don't like that physique then you're a gay man. That's all there was.

For others, claiming an identity involves significant labour and struggle, and is not simply a matter of already knowing the truth about oneself, but often of finding a truth that matches with the identity that they perceive themselves as being or wanting. Both young people and Twenty10 workers noted the identities young people are currently negotiating are multiple and complex – and provide more options and choices than in the past. They also noted some of the historical, political and social changes that have produced these new possibilities:

When I came out, it was either straight, gay, bisexual, lesbian or trans. That's all I knew. Then after going to this camp [run by X organisation], it was like this whole different world. There were so many different ways you could identify. It was really good. I learnt a lot from that camp.

There's so much more options now for the way people want to identify and the words they want to use or not use or whatever. So it's not as – it adds a layer of complexity. (Twenty10 worker)
Like a lot of those labels that these young people have inherited are political labels. Those politics are different now. I had a young person today go what's queer? Is that the same as gay? I'm like, no... (Twenty10 worker)

Some women have penises. Some men have vaginas, just because it is. That's just life. (Twenty10 worker)

Negotiating these possibilities is not only a complex matter for young people, but also so for their families, friends, peer groups, teachers and schoolmates. Further, the responses of others – based on lack of knowledge and recognition of diversity in its multiple forms – makes self-identification for young people even harder:

Even [X] College was extremely hard because it's just – I don't classify as anything and when I go there they're all like are you gay? It's like well no. Are you straight? No. Are you bi? No. Are you a lesbian? No. That's a really hard thing. This [Twenty10] is the only place where I really get to be me, besides my house.

Finding a place to be, and to be safe, is a challenge for many queer young people, both prior to and after coming out:

Yeah, it's finding that spot. Those little spaces in between where they can flourish and be. They can't be in the family home. But they can in their room. Or they can't be in their family home, but they can on their Facebook page or you know? Like in those different ways. They can in this one class or at recess or they've got one friend; those little cracks in between remain... (Twenty10 worker)

This sense of being, and of being 'me,' is hard to establish if there is no safe and accepting place in which queer young people can feel free from fear of judgement, homophobia, transphobia and harassment. Organisations or services such as Twenty10 are spaces in which self-identification is made easier by virtue of the lack of demand from other young people and adults to categorise and explain one's preferred sex, gender and sexuality. This point was articulated in the following comments made by participants in the focus group:

I went to [X] which is run by [a Christian organisation]. It's when that minister was talking about how gays should be banished from the world, they're like a disease. So that was a very hard thing to do because I was in a school with Christians that obviously knew how I represent myself. Twenty10's been the only place I can come where I get to just pull my shoulders down if that makes sense.

[Twenty10] has really made me realise that I'm a person to be me, I don't have to be categorised as anything. I'm me. That's why when people go – even now – are you gay, are you a girl, or are you a boy? Some people reckon I'm a lesbian for some reason. I say to them no, I'm just me. At the end of the day, I do what I do. I wake up just like any other human being. Just because of what I like in the bedroom doesn't necessarily mean it makes me a different person.

These extracts highlight the struggle many gender variant and sexuality diverse young people experience in simultaneously establishing their own identities and managing the perceptions of others. Whether self-identification as queer was straightforward, confusing, protracted, came earlier or later in life, happened slowly or quickly, the experience of becoming 'me' was always formed and expressed in relation to others (who I like, who I am like; who I don't like, who I am not like). Identity was also figured in relation to the ways in which queer young people are perceived and treated by others. When one young male came out as gay to his family at 14, they wanted him to be 'normal', but he 'couldn't be anyone else'. Another, from a small rural town, said that although he had no education about queer sexualities his identity was read by others as 'gay' and that this assumption had been made about him from a young age when he himself didn't know who or what he was. Similarly, a Twenty10 staff member recalled that:

I had a call recently, a really young person going whack, you know, my mum's telling me that I needed shoes and that I'm a lesbian. But she was so confused because she didn't know what she should call herself. (Twenty10 worker)

Parents, families and friends have different reactions and demonstrate different degrees of acceptance and tolerance, and these mixed and sometimes unpredictable reactions further complicate what is already a complex process of identity formation, as pointed out by the following young people:

I think the one thing that always affects me about my mother was the fact that it's okay if you're bi – my sister's bi and that's okay. She can still have kids, she can still get married, but for me – the one thing she always said to me was why can't you just have a normal life? Why can't you just do something normal? Why can't you just be normal? That's the one thing she always says. I'm like, what's the definition of normal? Just because I'm different doesn't make me any less of a normal person than anyone else.

My experience has been all over the place where I've got people that are accepting to a point. My mates are - they see it as a joke, like a phase thing. They're accepting of it but they're not at the same time.

My older sister's still like, you know, you're a fag, that's all you're going to be, that's all you're ever going to be.

Perceptions of normality and deviance are based on heterosexual norms. Those norms are as much stereotypes as representations and perceptions of LGBTQI identities. However, the stereotypes associated with LGBTQI identities are largely negative and experienced by young people as such. This can make the negotiation of identities difficult and dangerous and have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of queer young people.

REPRESENTATIONS AND STEREOTYPES

Stereotypes are everywhere, and everyone is subjected to and measured against them. Young people who are negotiating a LGBTQI identity consciously and acutely observe these stereotypes, and in some ways conform to them, and in others resist them. This means that queer young people are often very active in recognising and negotiating stereotypes when forming and expressing their identities:

I knew that I wasn't – like everyone else – around Year 7 and at that first school it was full of Pacific Islanders and then you've got the typical Barbies or whatever. It was either that you were the sporty Pacific Islanders or you're the Barbies or you're just completely different. Then you had the nerds. There were just those four categories at that school. I ended up leaving that school because I was getting bullied and stuff. I changed schools and there I was bullied for being completely different.

Going through high school, I was in the Western Suburbs but it basically has every negative Australian stereotype out there, so I just thought I'd keep to myself and come out in my own space and time.

Workers at Twenty10, the queer young people interviewed, and those commenting in surveys all noted the centrality of information about, and representations of, sex, gender and sexuality to both the formation of young people's identities and to the perceptions others have of them. Many of these representations are recognised as stereotypes that simultaneously inform the development of a sense of an inner self and are experienced as external and artificial impositions on the development of that self. One young gay man made the following point:

The thing is, unless it's just – I don't know whether this is an opinion shared and I find it, especially being a gay man, I notice it a lot with a lot of older gay men in conversations I've had with them, that there tends to be about five or six years after you come out that you have to deal with your stereotype that you're thrown into. All that stereotypical stuff and by the time that you finish dealing with the stereotype, then you have to figure out who your identity is. I think it's really important that we don't allow that kind of real vulnerability that people have of stereotypes when they first think about coming out and that kind of stuff.

As previously indicated in the discussion of 'Identification', information about the multiple and fluid possibilities for defining one's own sex, gender and sexuality is frequently accessed online or from young people's support services such as Twenty10. In addition to these more information-based sources, culture is saturated with representations and stereotypes from film, television, magazines and newspapers, social media, and the internet. These representations and stereotypes shape what young people think they can (or must) be/come:

It was hard because I came out at 14 and then I started coming here when I turned 15. It was hard for the fact that I was so young and for some reason I thought there was a specific type of gay I had to be.

I thought the characters that are on TV and in the movies, that's how a gay person has to be. Obviously Twenty10 later told me that that's not true.

Negotiating these representations and stereotypes is a complex undertaking. On the one hand, stereotypes operate as models of possibility for young people – models through which they might form a sense of self and 'come out' as a particular self, while on the other hand they can feel at odds with one's own experience and self-perception or identification. That is, stereotypes can lead others to inappropriately 'box' young people who are perceived to be different and to make assumptions about who or what they are, and what they can or cannot do:

People need to realise that just because we're a certain way doesn't make us any lesser of a man or woman or trans or this or that than anyone else. Just because I'm a gay, feminine male doesn't mean that I can't fix a car or mow the lawn or something like that. I think that's what really needs to be put across. We're very human.

These stereotypical assumptions also circulate between and among other queer young people:

I think, sadly enough, even other gay people still try and stereotype me into a box. They say you'll love this place, but I actually wouldn't go there in a million years. That's what we had a discussion about before: places where my friends thought I would enjoy going. I'm like I'm not that kind of person. Just because I do drag and I can sew together a dress to perform, I tell stories. Everyone thinks that just because you're this type of person, you have to fit that box. That's where teens try and commit suicide, because they don't want to be that kind of person.

You should've seen what happened when I showed my boyfriend I could use a chainsaw. He was like – he was having a crisis.

The stereotypes of queer people and the queer community that dominate the media reinforce a narrow perception of all queer people as particular kinds of sexual subjects:

Media doesn't help though. I remember every time after Mardi Gras, the news shows the parade. They all just show the fun parades, not the protesting ones. The ones where they're in jockstraps and leather and whipping and cross-dressing. They never actually show the protesting, the signs for acceptance. They never show those ones, they just show oh look at him walking home at six in the morning drunk in a jockstrap. They don't actually show the meaningful side of... Yeah, so that's something that annoys me quite a lot as well. The media doesn't help the fact that we're seen as this type of stereotype.

However, despite this concern with the ways in which LGBTQI people are represented and stereotyped in the media, the young people interviewed agreed that more representations of queer characters on television would make it easier for queer young people to identify, come out and be accepted:

I think personally celebrities that aren't classified as heterosexual are very admired, especially in Australia, people like Ellen. She's got the most amazing personality. She's funny. People are like oh, she's amazing. I don't care if she's lesbian. Then they think that's what a lesbian is.

So there's TV shows, there's gay characters – heaps more gay characters and there's much more visibility for gays, problematic as it may be. So young people are seeing reflections of themselves in the media. So they are kind of coming to terms and acknowledging their own identities at a younger age, while they're in high school in this place that's not safe for them to do that in lots of ways. That's really challenging. So I think that's where organisations like Twenty10 and lots of other organisations can have an impact on culture because it's about seeing a reflection of yourself.

As the research participants identified, representations of queer people in the media can: provide positive role models for young people when forming their own identities and coming out; shape more positive perceptions and reception from families, friends and communities; and also perpetuate stereotypes that can lead to bullying, harassment and homophobia.

COMING OUT/BEING OUTED

Societal transformations have changed the ways young people 'come out' as well as when, where and to whom they choose to disclose their sexual orientation. For example, the average age of young people 'coming out' to their parents has been reduced compared to 10 years ago (Rossi, 2010: 1176). Rossi (2010) traces young people's 'coming out' to parents and peers, highlighting the significance of this process for the mental wellbeing of young people. However, there has been a great deal of tension between the perceived benefits of 'coming out' versus the potential risks of self-disclosure. Legate, Ryan and Weinstein (2012: 146) address this "paradoxical relation between concealment and wellness: Concealing is a strategy that individuals often use to avoid stigmatization or negative regard, yet concealment may relate to higher stress over time". Most literature increasingly recognises the act of 'coming out' as a process – often a strategic one (Orne, 2011) – rather than a moment, varying in differing social contexts and across relationships. Young people in this research were continually negotiating "just how out to be with different people" across different contexts (Legate et al 2012, 146). They were also frequently using new media technologies, such as the internet and social networking sites to digitally 'come out', often before 'coming out' offline. New media allows young people access to others who are gender variant and sexuality diverse, and to resources, enabling them to explore their identities (Craig & McInroy, 2013).

The act of 'coming out' (or not) impacts the discrimination and bullying that queer young people experience. 'Coming out' stories are frequently articulated as rites of passage or journey narratives of personal becoming, and mark the point at which the private self becomes public. 'Coming out' stories are easily found on the internet and, as discussed in the section below on Technology, figure strongly in young people's accounts of their own identity formation. LGBTQI people who have already revealed or no longer conceal their sexual orientation

and/or gender identity are out and serve as models for those who have yet to do so – or indeed, are not yet decided about their sex, gender or sexuality. Not all young people 'come out' at the same time in their lives or in the same way. 'Coming out' is shaped by factors such as safety, confidence, tolerance, support and so on; it can expose young people to rejection and alienation – and to depression and suicide. Alternatively, deliberate or accidental disclosure by someone else means that someone is outed and that agency is taken away from individuals to decide in what context and to whom one will 'come out'. This means that queer young people negotiate multiple and complex decisions and choices around privacy and secrecy, and around the consequences of publically declaring their non-heterosexual identities. The young people who attended the focus groups were aged between 16 and 23 and the two main issues related to coming out were about coming out at home and coming out at school – areas also acknowledged in the survey responses.

There is also a question of geography and cultural location (urban, suburban, rural) and the culture of acceptance and access to support that is available in a particular place. This has significant implications for access to support services and resources, and to community services that are located in urban rather than rural areas. Where there is no or limited physical access to services the internet becomes a significant resource for queer young people:

The main topic of coming out wasn't as hard as I thought, it's actually a lot harder now than it was back when I came out. I think it was also the fact – unlike [name], he had the country – a few of my other friends had western suburbs growing up, I was pretty much smack bang in the city where it was more tolerated. I could come to Twenty10 and get support and grow up having a backing of GLBTIQ centre that actually helps with that kind of situation. So unlike others, I was quite lucky.

Issues related to 'coming out' and schooling are many and varied: there is the question of education and information provided by the school that supports young people in the formation of their identity and assists them to 'come out'; and the consequences of coming out in regard to exposure to homophobia, transphobia, bullying, discrimination and harassment from both teachers and students. The extent to which students observed homophobia and bullying directed at other students shaped decisions about their identity, how to manage it, and whether to be out or not – this is discussed further in the next main section titled Homophobia and Transphobia. However, the following comments by a Twenty10 worker and by focus group participants highlight these issues:

Well I think the fact that so many young people don't kind of come out or talk about like that part of their identity during school that you need to give that information to all students. Because you don't know who's been affected by this stuff, because the majority of them do stay silent and just – they're waiting to finish school so they can then kind of be themselves. (Twenty10 worker)

What people find funny was I didn't come out to the normal person first; I actually came out to my art teacher. She was the most beautiful person in my life. She was so nice and so welcoming. She used to keep me back after class so – she would give me advice about stuff. So I was extremely lucky.

I didn't tell anyone because there were other openly gay students at my school that – people isolated themselves from them. Yeah. So I just thought I'll be myself and come out when I've finished school and it'll probably be a bit easier for me in a more mature environment. Yeah, there was a guy that went to my school and he was extremely feminine and the boys were really intimidated because they thought he was going to try and put it on them. I saw that so I just thought I'll wait until I finish school and it'll be a lot easier.

The negative reception of queer young people in the family context is homophobic violence that often leads to alienation, loneliness, poverty and homelessness, all of which have significant impacts on health and wellbeing (Baker, 2002). It also has a significant impact on educational outcomes (Baker, 2002; Hillier et.al, 2010). As reported by participants, the responses from parents to their children's queer identities were varied and ranged from abandonment and rejection to nonchalance and acceptance. Some parents recognised and accepted their children's identity as non-heterosexual even before their children came out, whilst others struggled with the knowledge after their children had come out. Given access to the internet, young people's knowledge and decisions about gender, sex and sexuality were often more sophisticated than that of their parents, and this was especially the case regarding transgender identities. This has significant implications for the education of parents about the multiple ways in which young people identify and express their sex, gender and sexuality. The following comments by Twenty10 staff highlight this point:

It's about coming out about sexuality identity that everyone does or whoever, but then talking about gender identity you're inviting people to participate in gender identity, calling you by your preferred name, calling you by your preferred pronoun, acknowledging that. It's actually quite a lot of work that people are asking their loved ones to do. It's a lot for them to get their head around.

Recently someone told me about how they came out to their mum about their gender identity, they were like, mum there's this massive list of identities. Like, fem and – you know, all these – a list of all different ways that you can express a gender identity. They were like androgynous or butch. It was like, mum which one would you see me as? They're trans-guy and their mum said, I see you as really androgynous. He was actually that makes sense for how I was pre-transition coming in. So, cool mum, that's really good input. So mum anchored that conversation in identity that she had got and they went from there and goes, hey actually, this is where I'm at right now. This is what's going on for me.

Not all queer young people are able to determine the time and place of their 'coming out'. Sometimes they are outed by others, including family members. This means that the boundary between the public and the private is crossed without their knowledge or consent, and this makes managing queer identities in the public realm especially complex, as queer young people may not be aware of who knows and who does not. Outing by others might be accidental and unintentional or consciously intended:

They didn't know that – I hadn't come out until – actually, I didn't come out until 2010 but I was outed in the end of 2008 by a family member who had no idea, just guessed.

My ex, who wasn't my ex a week ago, actually outed me to her friends who live in Sydney. She lives in Wagga Wagga and her mates are from Sydney and around my area. I was outed to them by her. I wasn't too comfortable with it just because it's a safety issue with me. There are a lot of issues there. Then I was outed to other people by them and it's just kind of gotten to be this big problem now where I don't know who I've been outed to. I was actually trying to control who I actually outed myself to.

Whether 'coming out' or being outed, queer young people face the challenge of managing the consequences of being out, especially as it can lead to homophobia and bullying and impact on their physical and mental health (Bromley, 2005; Sears, 2005; Hillier, et.al, 2010; Robinson, Irwin & Ferfolja, 2002).

RELIGION

Issues of identity, of 'coming out,' and of belonging in the family and community, are made more complex by the presence of religious teachings and beliefs that explicitly prohibit and disapprove of non-heterosexual identities. This leads to experiences of homophobia and discrimination that alienate queer young people from their families and friendship groups, give rise to personal conflict, anxiety and confusion, and lead to feelings and experiences of alienation and rejection. If queer young people have been actively involved in their faith they may feel conflicted about choosing between being queer and being religious, as if these were separate, mutually exclusive identities. These were issues raised by participants, both young people and those working with them, in this research as highlighted in the following comments:

Like, I think it's a really hard, particularly for young people trying to balance or find some kind of – I can't think of the word, brain – and negotiate sexuality or gender and religion. I think that's really one that creates a lot of conflict. I think especially for young people who have grown up in a really close-knit religious kind of community and have felt really accepted and loved and that community is really important to them and it's who they are and all of these things, to them – want to bring another aspect of themselves into that and to be shut out from what they've always known. To try and feel AOK with that.

But there's a person I've met up with recently who's on the Feminine Spectrum and they were on hormones for a period of four months. They've got a traditional Christian background and their family are avidly against her. So they've threatened at this stage, well they'll have to leave the family home if they go back on hormones again. They said for themselves the issue isn't going on hormones, because in fact they've feel incredibly in their skin for the first time on hormones. It's more about the loss of family. (Twenty10 worker)

Recently a young person I've been working with the last couple of months – from a Seventh Day Adventist background – it's quite common for people to have religious families and that can be the primary issue and what they're not dealing with the most is someone's sexuality or their gender issue. So that – or people are just leaning to suicide or having attempted it a couple of times. Like even today I was doing an exit plan with a young person to go into a new service and they were talking about how they had several attempts in the last couple of years. (Twenty10 worker)

It is not only young people who struggle with their identity and their families' responses to it. Many families struggle to manage their faith and accept their child's preferred sex, gender and sexual identities (Baker, 2002). However, not all families feel compelled to choose between their religion and their children's' queer identities. As the following example relayed by a young person in the focus group shows, some also managed to find a way of reconciling their religion with their child's preferred sex, gender and sexual identities:

Then my adopted mum, who is of a Muslim background and she is the most beautiful thing. She goes to my fittings when I get dressed as a babe. She goes shopping with me. It's so nice because my real mum didn't even bother to begin like that. At first it was really hard because people were looking at me weird and judging me and stuff like that. Over time I came to see the person beyond the religion and that person is the reason, I guess, why I'm still here. She brought me up so well and taught me the values of not discriminating against anyone regardless of their religion or race or sex or anything. She's got a really strong point of view – it's not necessarily your religion that should be why you discriminate. It should be about your beliefs mixed with that as well. She obviously has beliefs. Her family still loves me but I went and prayed with her one day at a temple because I promised her one day I would and I was kicked out, I wasn't allowed to be in there. She left as well. She herself is fantastic. The rest were all – they started off being on the homophobic end but towards the end of the five weeks they were really accepting. I'm actually going out with the group tonight, which is pretty good. So we've all become really close.

Homophobia and Transphobia

Theme

Description

Homophobia/transphobia

Homophobia/transphobia – bullying, hostility and discrimination – experience at school, home, community and work based on gender variance and sexuality diversity.

Homophobia and Transphobia in the Workplace

Discrimination, bullying and harassment of gender variant and sexuality diverse young people in the workplace is prevalent, impacting their sense of self and economic security.

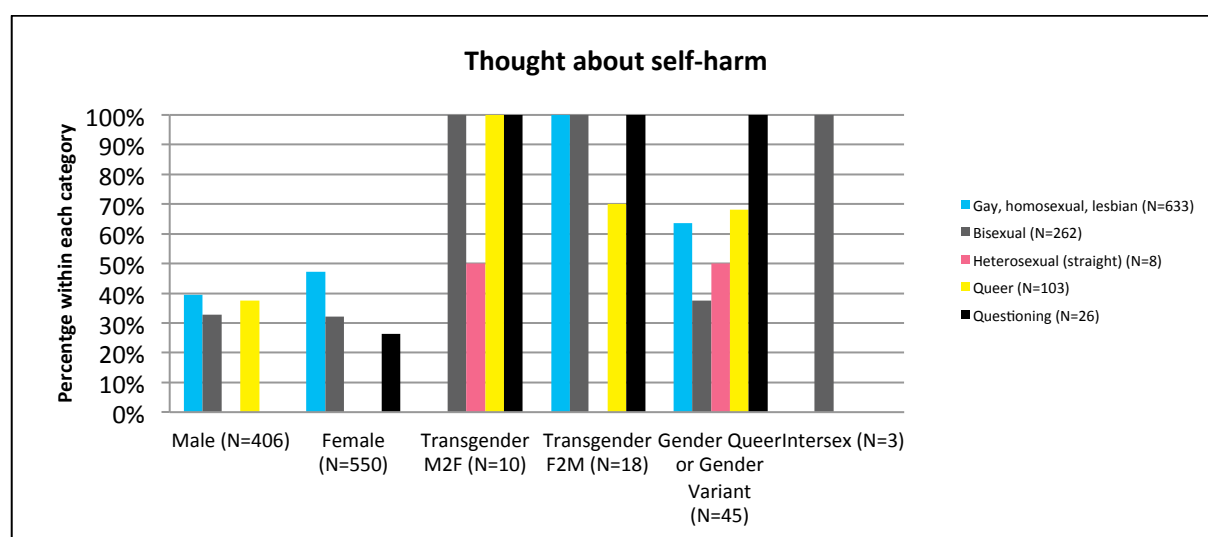
Homophobia and Transphobia in Schooling

Heteronormativity – the process through which heterosexuality is constituted as ‘natural’ and becomes the norm by which gendered relationships are framed and sexuality diversity is judged as unnatural and deviant – prevails in school curricula, pedagogies, policies, practices and schooling cultures.

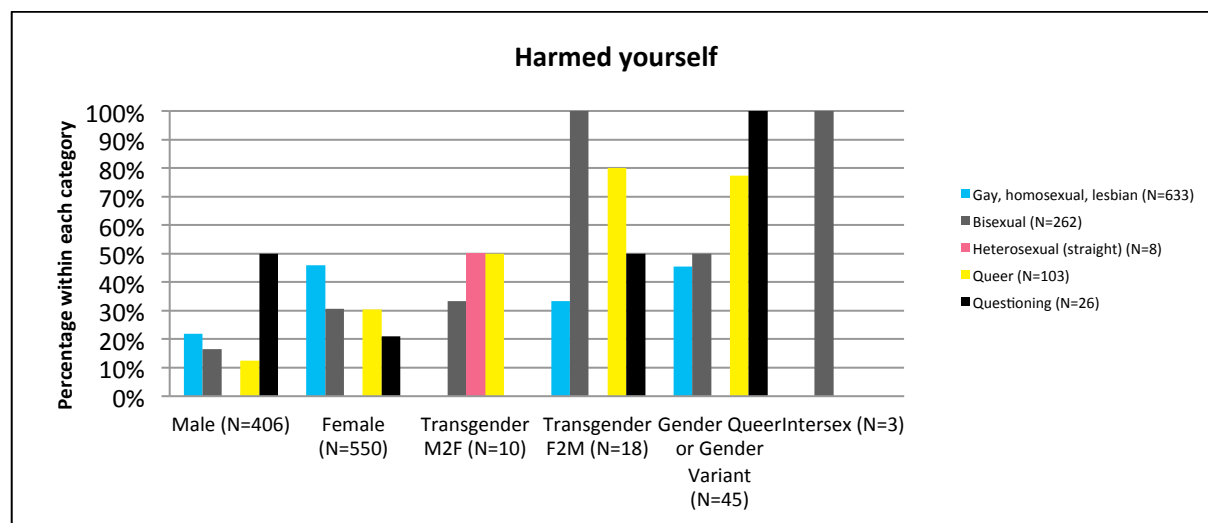
Social exclusion, rejection by families, discrimination, inequality, harassment and violence faced by many gender variant and sexuality diverse young people stems from the homophobia and transphobia that is prevalent in society. How gender variant and sexuality diverse young people respond to and negotiate these behaviours in their everyday lives is complex and varied. The depression and anxiety experienced by some gender variant and sexuality diverse young people associated with continually negotiating homophobia and transphobia alone, without the support of family, friends, or teachers, can result in suicidal ideation, self-harming, and alcohol and drug abuse. There is a great deal of evidence that gender variant and sexuality diverse young people are at greater risk of suicide (Cover 2012; Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Haas et. al. 2010; McDermott, Roen & Piela 2013). However, percentages vary greatly due to a lack of representative findings and difficulties associated with generating accurate statistics on the issue (Haas et. al. 2010:15–16).

The following four graphs illustrate the findings from the online survey, which indicate the percentages of young people who responded to homophobia and transphobia through engaging in self-harm, suicide ideation and attempted suicide. It is important to note that those identifying as straight in this research were trans-men or trans-women; and the number of young people identifying as intersex in this survey was small.

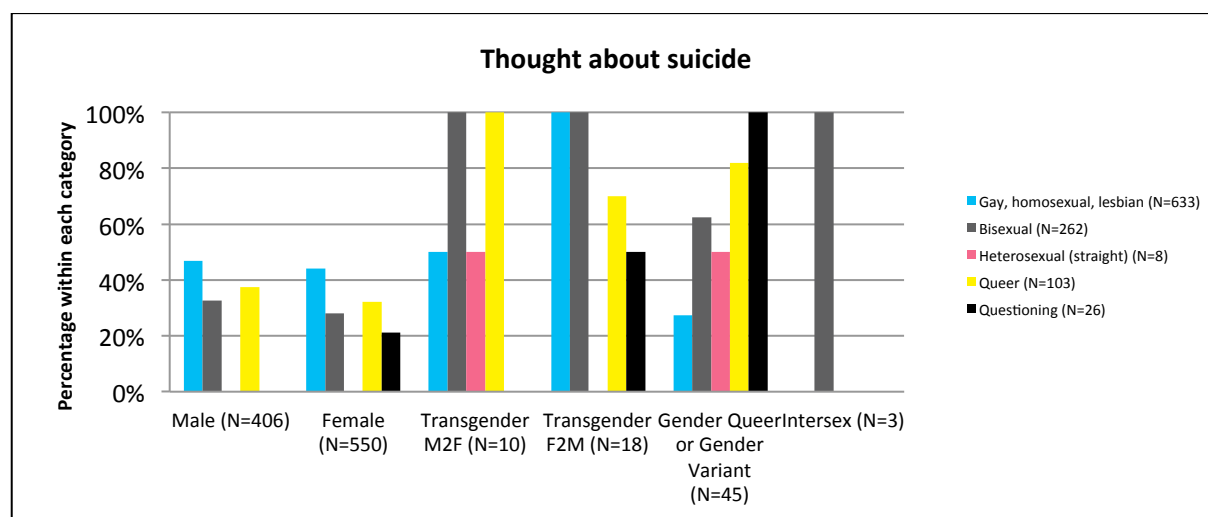
GRAPH A: THOUGHT ABOUT SELF-HARM



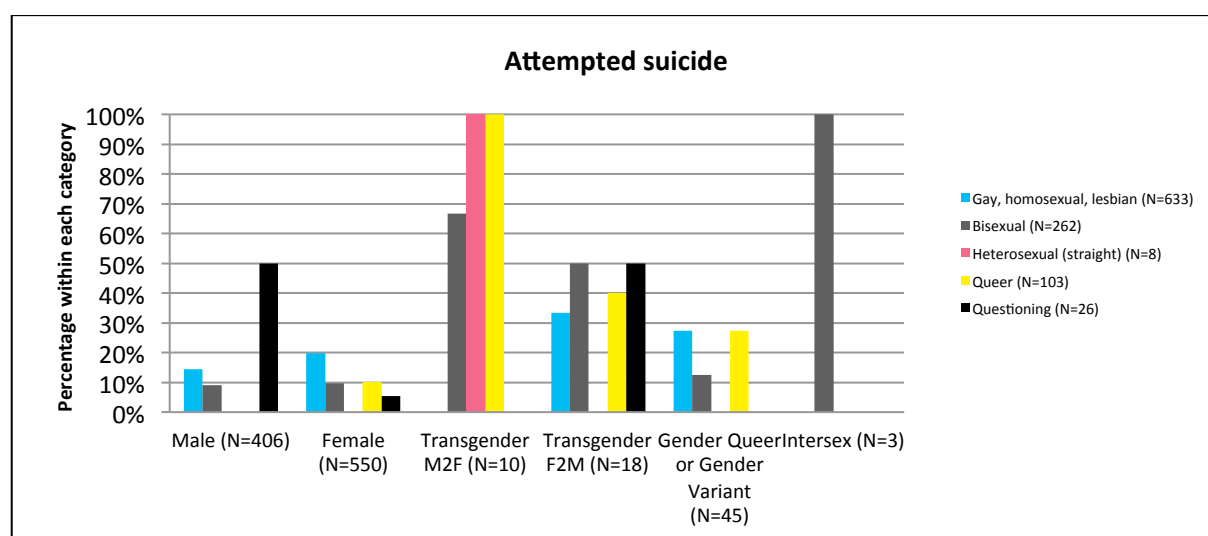
GRAPH B: HARMED YOURSELF



GRAPH C: THOUGHT ABOUT SUICIDE



GRAPH D: ATTEMPTED SUICIDE



Participants identified a range of intersecting reasons as contributing to their engagement in self-harm, suicidal ideation, and/or suicide attempts. These included: homophobia/transphobia (also internalised homophobia/transphobia); persistent bullying (including cyberbullying) and harassment; isolation (no one to talk to, and/or geographical); mental/emotional/physical abuse; lack of parental/family acceptance; lack of intervention when homophobia/transphobia had taken place; no where to live or go; and sexual abuse.

Those who acknowledged they had attempted suicide identified suffering from persistent depression and anxiety. The youngest first suicide attempt was by a gender variant young person at age 11, which was preceded by a period of continual self-harm from age 10. Most participants who had attempted suicide had done so multiple times. Participants who self-harmed cut their arms, legs, breasts and genitals, burnt themselves, starved themselves (in an effort to prevent menstruation), over-exercised (in an effort to delay puberty through weight loss) and banged their heads/bodies against hard surfaces.

It is also important to point out that the majority of young people who completed the online survey perceived themselves at the time to be either extremely happy (15%), pleased (31%) or mostly satisfied (23%) with their lives (see Appendix Graphs 24 and 25).

HOMOPHOBIA AND TRANSPHOBIA IN THE WORKPLACE

Participants in this research identified discrimination in the workplace as a significant issue. Discrimination is both common and infrequently acknowledged nor adequately dealt with by employers or work supervisors (who may also be the source of the problem). One young person commented: "I was discriminated against at work and it led me to leave because nothing was being done about it".

In young people's experience, homophobia, transphobia and discrimination reduced their chances of gaining low or semi-skilled casual work, or gaining workplace experience, a requirement in some TAFE, university and schooling courses. This was a particular issue for trans young people whose designated gender (and name) on legal documents did not match their preferred name or identification. Exclusion from work impacts on the possibility of queer young people gaining the work experience that is critical to ongoing employment (Willis, 2009). It also makes them financially more vulnerable, especially if they are living away from their family residence, and are in temporary or transient accommodation. It impacts on the extent to which queer young people might develop independence and autonomy, and hence resilience. One transman who participated in the focus group told his story of frustration:

Now that I identify as transmale, a lot of people won't hire me. They won't even give me the time of day. Instead of applying online because they can't see who I am or because there's two different names on the application form – I've got my email address, which is my biological name and then the name on the application form is – I have both names, my biological name and then how I identify. When I was doing that online, I wasn't being given the time of day and going in handing in resumes and stuff like that, they're like sorry, we're not looking for anyone. You can keep your resume here but there's a high chance that we won't get to it. In the last three years I've only had one interview. I do – I put resumes in every day. I did a little experiment first. I didn't put the name that I've chosen – how I choose to identify – I actually got a call back and that was for Gloria Jean's but then after talking – going and sitting in the interview, they just don't want anything to do with me. I called a week and a half later and they're like sorry, we're not accepting people – we're not hiring, when there was a massive sign clearly stating that they were hiring... I reckon in the workplace it's like yes, they've got things like discrimination is not tolerated in the workplace and stuff like that, but I reckon there's still a lot of discrimination going on in the workplace. You can't really talk to people higher up because it's not – they're either for or against it. A lot of them tend to be against it. Sometimes it's not because of them, it's because of people higher up than they are.

These various forms of homophobia, discrimination and bullying are commonplace, everyday experiences for many queer young people.

HOMOPHOBIA AND TRANSPHOBIA IN SCHOOLING

The social exclusion, discrimination, harassment and violence that many gender variant and sexuality diverse young people experience can start early in life, especially in their schooling experiences (Hillier, et.al. 2010; Meyer, 2009; Town, 2002; McInnes & Davies, 2008). Schooling often constitutes and perpetuates homophobic and heteronormative discourses through the curriculum, teacher pedagogies, and everyday cultural practices. Consequently, the schooling experiences of queer youth often leave them feeling alienated and unsupported by peers and teachers (Meyer, 2009; Ressler & Chase, 2009). The participants in this research, both young people and those who worked with them, highlighted schools as sites in which homophobia and transphobia were

especially prevalent (see Appendix Graph 13). Twenty10 workers made the following comments about homophobia and transphobia in schools:

I think it's – to be honest, it really is fundamentally acknowledging that it even exists, that homophobia even exists and that there's gays in your school. But, you know, there are queers in the school. There are trans kids in the school. There is just that simple acknowledgement.

Homophobia is gender-based bullying. Because when you refuse to acknowledge gender-based bullying, that's what homophobia is then you can't actually engage in what homophobia is. Like it's just band-aids all over the place.

Schooling has a significant impact on young people's lives, especially in terms of their developing identities, sense of self, respect for others, and building of friendships, as well as on the economic futures that are open to them (Hillier et.al. 2010; Meyer, 2009). For those young people who are perceived as 'different' and do not fit into the dominant cultures in a society, which are generally reflected and reinforced in official and unofficial schooling curricula, policies, and practices, schooling can be an alienating and marginalising experience. Homophobia and transphobia are prevalent in Australian schools, as elsewhere in the world (Davies & McInnes, 2012; McInnes & Davies, 2008). For many of the LGBTQI young people, and those questioning their sexual and/or gender identities, schooling was often both a difficult and negative experience. Most (68.3%) of the young people completing the survey went to government schools, with the remainder attending either a Catholic school or another Christian-based school (see Appendix Graph 15). Schooling for many was generally an unsupportive environment, except for a few close friends who accepted them for who they were. More frequently, school was a place where they were largely forced to hide their sexuality and gender variance in order to 'pass' as heteronormative subjects, so as not to be harassed. Schooling for others meant enduring daily physical, verbal and emotional harassment and alienation, from both peers and teachers. Of the 521 participants in the survey who indicated that they had been harassed, the majority acknowledged school peers – including friends and friends of friends – as the major offenders. Some indicated that teachers were often the main perpetrators responsible for the harassment they experienced.

Young people who had experienced homophobia and/or transphobia at school pointed out that it impacted their health and wellbeing, the equity and quality of their educational experiences, as well as their learning generally (see Appendix Graph 21). Based on the survey, of those young people who experienced homophobia and/or transphobia at school, approximately a third (33%, 336) indicated they could not concentrate in class, and 24% (243) acknowledged their marks dropped. Twenty percent (201) missed classes, 21% (221) skipped days, and 22% (224) hid at recess or lunch times in order to avoid harassers. Nine percent (95) of these young people felt that they could not use the toilets in their school – sites in which experiences of harassment prevail and frequently go unnoticed by teachers. Similarly, change rooms were also considered a problematic site. Fifteen percent (154) of the young people experiencing homophobia / transphobia pointed out they could not use the change rooms at school (see Appendix Graph 21).

Change rooms and toilets are areas in which power relations around personal/private spaces and normative bodies become intensified, increasing the tensions that exist around gendered and sexualised bodies that are perceived to be different. Change rooms also manifest an environment in which the teachers' gaze is often averted due to these tensions, allowing higher levels of harassment to prevail in these areas. One young man in the focus group, who openly identified as gay at school, raised his concern that it was often teachers who instigated the homophobia/transphobia that he experienced in school rather than the students:

I went to [X] High School where in general speaking they were quite good but I wasn't allowed to get changed in the boys' bathroom. That was the teachers' decision, not the students'. The students loved me. I fitted in, I was actually kind of popular because I had all the girls' roles in the drama room but the teachers wouldn't let me get changed in the change rooms. They made me get changed in the teachers' lounge. I wasn't allowed to get changed with other students.

This issue of discrimination at school is both interesting and complex. On the one hand the school may have sex/gender discrimination policies in place, and on the other they might routinely discriminate against students in the decisions they make. Our respondents frequently mentioned the curriculum area of PDHPE as problematic. Nowhere in the curriculum is there any more explicit address to bodies, bodily activities, sex and sexuality. Interestingly, sports changing rooms were seen by teachers as particularly dangerous spaces and sites of potential trouble for queer young people. This anticipation of trouble is however, managed through what amounts to inequitable and homophobic solutions and practices, as the same young man articulated:

Well I never got – I wasn't allowed to do sports at all, so I never did sports, which didn't really upset me. The school felt that I would be too much of a target in sports... so I didn't do PE. I was given an approved pardon from PE by [the teacher]. I just had to do all the assessments.

In addition, this young man was further separated from other boys and constructed as a non-normative subject when he had to do a 'beep test' (a fitness test). In this instance, he was required to do this test with the girls' group, rather than with the boys.

Negotiating physical education and sport was equally difficult for gender variant young people, as pointed out by the following participant who identified as a transgender male:

I was bullied all the way through primary school just because I was different. I was more the tomboy type, so I was always doing sports and whatnot. So I didn't really fit into any category. The teachers didn't want me playing sports with the guys because they were scared that I was going to get hurt. It was actually the other way around. They actually stopped me from participating in all the sports like football and stuff like that, that's generally a guy's sport. Basically the only sport they'd allow me to do was either softball or netball. I was like I'm not doing netball.

Experiences of homophobia and/or transphobia resulted in 13.6% of these young people dropping out of sports or extra-curricula activities altogether.

Of particular significance is that 8.8% (91) of the young people experiencing homophobia and or transphobia at school were forced to move schools, with some having to do this more than once, and 6.8% (70) left school altogether. The young people who were involved in the focus group discussions all left school before completing Year 12, and none have a tertiary qualification. One transgender male indicated that he had moved schools yearly during his high school years until he reached the legal school leaving age. Several of these young people were now undertaking TAFE qualifications, or were thinking about doing so.

For many young people, negotiating and responding to homophobia and transphobia in school, often over many years, was emotionally draining and impacted their health and wellbeing. How they responded to the harassment and bullying generally depended on the circumstances in which it occurred – who was doing the harassing, where the harassment occurred, how safe they felt at the time, and the persistence of the harassment. The range of responses articulated by the young people in this study included: tolerating and ignoring the behaviour, sometimes out of fear of exacerbating the situation; sticking up for themselves; attempting to reason and educate the harassers by pointing out the inappropriateness of their behaviours; using wit as a comeback to homophobic and transphobic comments; getting angry, yelling and/or fighting back physically and verbally; becoming depressed; turning to friends for support, which often resulted in having to review who their 'real' friends were when perceived close friends joined in with others in the harassment; and reporting the harassment to teachers and/or to school counsellors. Unfortunately, most of these responses did not result in the cessation of the harassment.

The following comments are examples of the responses that young people gave in the survey on how they responded to homophobia and/or transphobia:

When I was younger and in high school I experienced homophobia/biphobia/heterosexism. It hurt, however, at the time, I had no one that I could turn to about it. This put me in a state of fear, isolation and depression so I never had the confidence to stand up to bullies or family members. Instead I withdrew and turned to underage drinking, wagging school and cannabis consumption as a way of dealing with the homophobia.

Often it is hard to speak up, as it is very emotionally draining and your audience may not be very aware about queer politics, the importance of using correct gender pronouns etc. When speaking up would require that I out myself, I tended not to say anything, for fear of being stereotyped or thought of as disgusting.

I used to flirt outrageously with girls who tried to be awful to me. They'd say things like, "Everyone knows you're a dyke" and I'd say something along the lines of "Only for you, sugar." Then they'd freak out and look really embarrassed and leave. So, that worked for me.

Nothing, I mostly just ignore it, or look at the person disgusted. I don't think it's funny, but I don't really know how to react to it.

Nothing. I just felt ashamed and awful about myself.

As pointed out in many of these comments, shame, humiliation, disgust, and fear were typical effects of homophobia and transphobia for many of these young people. However, it is important to point out that 25.4%, (262) of these young people who experienced homophobia and/or transphobia at school pointed out that the experience led to their becoming activists in the areas of anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia in the schools they attended. The following young people pointed out how they challenged this behaviour:

I always do my best to stand up for the LGBTQI community :)

I used to just shut up and not say anything. When I became more confident though, I started calling people out on their behaviour, telling them off, telling a teacher if it happened at high school etc.

I say something to challenge a person's perceptions, if they say something homophobic. When I saw graffiti, which said, "Stand up against gay marriage" I crossed out "gay marriage" and wrote "homophobia", so that it now read "Stand up against homophobia".

Interestingly, 42% (435) of those young people indicating they experienced homophobia and/or transphobia at school stated that they did not believe that the experience had affected them at all.

THE FAILURE OF SCHOOLS TO INTERVENE IN HOMOPHOBIA AND TRANSPHOBIA

What is particularly concerning is the fact that in many cases, when teachers and school managers were informed about the homophobic and transphobic harassment experienced by young people, they did not intervene in an appropriate manner. Consequently, the harassment for many young people continued uncurbed. Participants reported that some teachers and schools often expressed and displayed homophobia and transphobia through their attitudes and practices toward young people who identified as sexuality and gender diverse. The following comments are examples from young people who tried to engage the support of teachers in dealing with the harassment:

I tried self-harm, attempted suicide and then eventually changed schools. Tried telling the school counsellor, who told the head of the middle school, who told me it was my problem to deal with and that I should start what I finished – by which I guess she meant it was my fault for coming out.

School was tough. One kid came out as bi and left a week later. The school counsellor sent me to the chaplain when I said I thought I was gay. My family was very much like school so I did not say anything. Leaving school was very liberating. I made some great friends. I joined the queer collective at uni and created a safe space for myself.

Growing up was tough knowing that I was gay. I had no support from school, school friends. The school was largely homophobic and transphobic, lucky there were no homophobic harassment as my school years were tough to go through. I was made conscious of my sexuality with a barrage of questions about if I like boobs and I remember one incident when my sexuality was called to question and I had to lie about my sexuality, who knows what would happen if I told the truth.

One young man pointed out that he learnt not to rely on school support for dealing with homophobic and transphobic harassment, stating that the response he received to his complaint about harassment was: "Nothing as the school was Catholic and had made it clear nothing could be done". This lack of support is not uncommon and is reinforced in Catholic schools through exemptions from Antidiscrimination legislation (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2007). A similar response was articulated by another young person attending a public school: "At first I reported it and nothing was done and over time I just had to accept it because nothing would be done about it". However, not all teachers failed to support or intervene in homophobia and transphobia as pointed out by one young person:

I had a teacher who I could talk to about anything. I was in a class with her from Years 10–12; the class had a bad rep[utation] because it was mainly kids with attitude problems and family problems. But the teacher was one set on making a difference; I know so many kids she's helped get through school and so many that wouldn't still be there if it weren't for her.

The above comment points out the significant difference support from a teacher makes to young people in schools. Another young person stated:

I waited til it broke me down and the school I attended spoke to EVERYONE and told them ALL to stop or it would result in punishment.

Sexuality Education

Most of the participants received minimal sexuality education, if any at all. Most had not received any education in this area from parents or carers, though some pointed out that any information they did receive from parents was generally homophobic and transphobic in nature. One of the major areas of concern for many of the participants was the irrelevant and ineffectual nature of sex education in schooling, especially for LGBTQI young people, or young people who were questioning their gender and sexuality (see Appendix Graph 20) – an issue acknowledged in other research in this area (Allen, 2004; Carmody, 2009; Hillier & Mitchell, 2008; Hillier et. al. 2010; Robinson & Davies, 2008; Robinson, 2013). This lack of access to well-informed, up-to-date information about sexuality education and sexual health can have serious implications for the health and wellbeing of queer young people.

Theme	Description
Sexuality education	Comprehensive – covers a broad range of issues beyond reproductive sex, including desire, relationships, sexual health, and negotiating consent. Inclusive – relevant to the needs of gender variant and sexuality diverse young people.
The internet / queer media / popular culture	Queer websites, LGBTQI films, newspapers, magazines, and other popular magazines, directed at young people generally.
Sex education in schools	Heteronormative – irrelevant to the needs of gender variant and sexuality diverse young people.

THE INTERNET AND QUEER MEDIA AS A SOURCE OF SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Sexuality education for many queer young people was often a matter of seeking out information on the internet, in queer media (magazines, newspapers, films, TV), other popular magazines targeted at young people, talking with other queer adults or peers, and through personal experience (see Appendix Graph 19). The internet was generally acknowledged as the main source of information on homophobia and transphobia, gender variance, transgenderism, same-sex relationships, and safe sex. The following comments are typical of those made by young people:

While it does come under media the positive impact of the TV show 'Glee' was exceedingly helpful and cannot be understated.

Most of the information around gay issues was based on the internet and gay media until the last couple of years when gay issues have moved into the public sphere. I am pretty appalled by the lack of information regarding lesbian safe sex, as even doctors seem to be in the dark about it. The general perception is that lesbian sex is low risk so safe sex is not important. I never practiced any safe sex practices as a lesbian, mostly because I didn't know what they were, and I was afraid that any potential partners would laugh at me because it was so unheard of.

As reiterated by many in this study, there is a need for doctors and other health professionals to be educated around the sexual health needs of queer young people and around gender and sexual diversity. Many participants often felt uncomfortable 'coming out' to doctors and other health professionals who were often ill informed about queer young people sexual health needs, and sometimes unsupportive, homophobic and transphobic (see Appendix Graph 18).

SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

The majority of young people pointed out that the sex education in their schools primarily taught about heteronormative sexuality and reproduction – the mechanics of reproductive sex (Robinson & Davies, 2008; 2010) (see Appendix Graph 20). Sexuality education is generally located in the Personal Development, Health, Physical Education (PDHPE) curricula; not all topics included are compulsory, and it is largely dependent on the school, school leadership, and teachers responsible for teaching in this area. In some instances, young people learnt more about same-sex relationships in media and English classes. Sexuality education tends to focus on changing bodies at puberty, human reproduction, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) (generally not placed in

the context of same-sex practices), and pregnancy. Non-heterosexual relationships were generally viewed, if discussed at all, as problematic and often located within a homophobic/transphobic and deficit framework. Participants noted that whilst they received no education about queer sexualities, their identities were often 'sexualised', with teachers and peers making assumptions about their sexuality and treating them differently on the basis of these assumptions. Similar to doctors and health professionals, many PDHPE teachers do not have any expertise in sexuality education, and are ill informed about the sexuality and health needs of queer young people. A few participants did acknowledge that their experiences of sex education included creating healthy and good relationships, making choices about sexual issues, women's rights, and the fact that different cultures can have different views on sex and sexuality, but these experiences were rare. Participants noted the mixed and confusing messages received at school – sex is an expression of love but very dangerous. Sex education in schools did not address issues of passion, desire, and intimacy – issues that participants considered a critical component of the sexuality education they required and wanted. Nor did it adequately address sexual health and care for oneself and one's partner. Participants commented on their experiences of sexuality education in their schooling:

At school I received no information about lesbian relationships or lesbian safe sex. To this day I still don't know much at all about lesbian safe sex.

There is such poor information available to the LGBT young people of Australia. It should be compulsory that sexual education in school focuses on relationships as well as sex, and within this BOTH heterosexual and same sex relationships/partners/activities must be included.

One young person who participated in the survey pointed out that things would have been better for them: "If there was better education in schools about queerness. Not as something 'some other people are' but education that recognises that members of their audience are queer".

Technology, Health and Wellbeing

The following data gives a glimpse of the internet and technology usage of the young people who responded to the survey in this research (see Appendix Graphs 9 and 10):

- 98% of respondents have internet access where they live.
- The internet was a place where they 'can find friends they can trust' (49%) or a place where they 'feel accepted' (78%).
- 85% have used the internet to explore their sexual and/or gender identity.
- 24% of respondents indicated that they have accessed social support services, 70% indicated that they had not.

Theme	Description
Anonymity	The importance of anonymity and safety afforded by the internet – as well as recognition of its dangers.
Identity	Working out who I am, who I like and what I like.
Connecting to groups and services	Locating support services.
Connecting to friends	Finding others who share similar experiences and interests, building a supportive online community, and managing geographical isolation and finding sexual partners.
Coming out	Learning and gaining courage from the accounts of others.
Health and wellbeing	Dealing with physical and emotional wellbeing, anxiety and mental health.

All of the young people who had access to the internet used it for a variety of purposes: to connect to young people's services; chat with other queer young people; find support for coming out; search for information about gender, sexuality, sexual health and sexual practices (including pornography); and engage with social and political issues such as international gay rights and same sex-marriage. The following comments indicate the types of responses given:

To find answers that an organisation in your area would normally give you, obviously I use the internet for that kind of stuff. I research the YouTube videos, the coming out videos and this, that and the other. In that respect, yes, the internet was useful.

I watched a lot of gay movies.

Wikipedia's actually very good for LGBT stuff. I've actually looked up different rights in different countries as well. Yeah, a lot of Europe and Australasia's very forward whereas I didn't think that somewhere like Asia would be so intolerant. It just made me feel a little bit more secure, being here in Australia, knowing that you do have so many rights and registration and stuff like that.

Similarly, some staff at Twenty10 recognised the internet was a primary source for young people accessing information about sex, gender and sexuality:

I think, when we're talking about gender identity stuff, kids do a lot of research and because of YouTube and stuff, people are posting lots of their personal stories. I think that's around people experiencing bullying as well. You know, like even around homophobia and transphobia. There's a lot of posting going on, blogging, Tumblrs, all of that kind of stuff. I think lots of young people feel really connected through Tumblrs and that's visual imagery kind of stuff as well.

I think the young people that come here are quite savvy around self-education stuff. Like a lot of the time they're already linked in with forums and they were discussing that amongst peers.

They also noted, however, that young people were unlikely to find the breadth of information they required, or the detail, as their concerns and questions were becoming increasingly particular (e.g. transgendered young people). They suggested that the absence of such information left a gap in young people's knowledge.

But I think also I feel like there's a lot of stuff that they just wouldn't get information about from anywhere, because I guess with that you're looking for a particular thing. Like, I want a transition, I'm going to search for people who have transitional – had this surgery or whatever and find out their experience. I can search for a specific thing. But I feel like there's so many issues that – like even when we were talking about like the sexual health stuff education. It's not until you actually broach it that people are like, yeah. I didn't learn anything of use to me in school. I feel like they – it's often – they don't even realise that there's that knowledge gap.

Although the young people we spoke with accessed information about sex, gender, and sexuality through online technologies and mobile phones, they strongly indicated the significance and importance of face-to-face contact with other LGBTQI people, as pointed out in the following comment:

I think it's more about actually getting to know a gay person as a friend, which is better than getting information on the internet, I think. I would have preferred that when I was growing up in high schools. I would prefer to actually talk to a gay person and get to know what they're like and how it is to be gay instead of just reading it on the internet or... You can't really ask questions.

Further, for the young homeless participants, or participants from low SES backgrounds who did not have access to online technologies, face-to-face contact is imperative. Many participants spoke of the isolation they experienced despite accessing online technologies, and face-to-face contact was seen to address this isolation in a way that online technologies did not. Further, the opportunity to ask direct questions of people who had experienced similar things, or had greater knowledge, was highly valued. Importantly, connecting with services through internet searches had a significant impact on wellbeing for young people in need of professional support and intervention. Internet sites alone made a significant contribution for many but were insufficient for young people in crisis.

In recognising the limitations of currently available internet sites related to queer identities and issues, participants indicated the potential value of interactive videos/websites that located information about sex, and sexuality on one site rather than having to negotiate multiple, often contradictory, sources of information that needed to be pieced together (as is currently the case). They felt that this would streamline searches and offer succinct easily accessed information. This is a significant finding which contributes to the development of the research plan in Stage Two of this project: the development of an interactive website or phone app.

Seven hundred and fourteen (714) respondents elaborated on which internet sites they considered most helpful and how they have used them. Frequently mentioned sites reflect the variety of purposes and needs that young people bring to their internet usage. For developing friendship and for entertainment, the most frequently identified sites were Tumblr, Facebook, Mogenic, Pink Sofa, Reddit, YouTube, and SameSame. For seeking information, Google, YouTube, and Wikipedia were commonly used. For accessing health and community services support, many used the websites of ACON, beyondblue, Twenty10, PFLAG, and Minus18. In terms of making sexual contacts, Grindr and Manhunt were identified.

ANONYMITY

Respondents commonly commented on the importance of anonymity in their use of sites (the possibility of being and remaining unknown, using a pseudonym, carefully regulating the extent of their visibility, and trying out or testing different identities). Anonymity was also associated with freedom to 'be yourself' and to 'express yourself' and was described as an important step before 'coming out'. This feeling that the internet is a space of freedom and safety indicates the extent to which it is hard for many queer young people to feel free and find safety and acceptance in their own families and communities. There is a challenge here, to transfer this possibility for freedom and safety to the physical spaces these young people inhabit. This is especially important in the case of schools, which as pointed out previously, respondents consistently identified as significant sites of homophobia and transphobia. The following comments reflect the importance of the anonymity of the internet to many young people:

I visit sites that allow me the anonymity to freely explore my sexuality without the burden of having to explain myself to others.

I used the internet to explore because it was the most anonymous way to go about my research until I was comfortable telling anyone else.

I reckon the internet in general is pretty safe (despite the assholes) because it is anonymous a lot of the time and people feel more able to express themselves so even people in the closet might feel safe enough to talk about their sexuality. If we can't always be open in real life, we

conglomerate in places where we can be open and the internet is one such place, so there seems to be a very high percentage of people who are queer in some manner on the internet.

Mostly I find anonymous image hosting websites the ones in which I disclose and discuss my sexuality such as 4chan. I believe there are only three persons in my personal life that I have actually disclosed my sexuality to. I generally identify to people as straight. I do fully support Australian Facebook groups/pages that support gay marriages and rights.

There is however, also recognition that anonymity means that others with hateful or hostile views have the freedom to express themselves as well.

I mostly use Tumblr, and while it isn't the most friendly place in the world sometimes (e.g. anonymous hate and the like), it's easy to find people there that respect you and like you for who you are.

IDENTITY

Ease of access to information and anonymity are of particular significance to queer young people as they locate themselves and their explorations and expressions of gender and sexual identity within both heteronormative and queer identities, practices, and communities. Respondents used the internet for negotiating their identities in ways that shifted with their needs and purposes at different times of their lives:

YouTube also has a sub-community where people give advice on topics that are important when finding out your identity and things of that nature.

After I overcame the denial of being gay I found www.gayteenforum.org as a way of talking with other gay teens and to feel comfortable with my sexuality.

As I got older I joined an adult forum www.justusboys.com/forum to become involved in more mature discussion and become part of a community I could stay with (rather than a teen's site).

Early searches helped queer young people clarify questions of gender and sexuality and locate themselves within particular identity categories that made sense of their experience. Interestingly, this included not only self-identification but also an understanding of how other people saw them:

When I was around 13-years-old, I delved more into the internet and would secretly search gay blogs and forums to gain an understanding of who I was and what other people saw me as.

When it comes to exploring my own sexual identity, the internet has really helped me realise that there are other people experiencing the same feelings and going through the same repression as I am.

It would, of course, be naïve to assume all queer young people find a sense of positive identity, acceptance and belonging on the internet. It can also be a place where forms and expressions of identities become fixed, and their boundaries are policed by others, which can lead to bullying and harassment from other gender variant and sexuality diverse young people as pointed out in the following comment:

There seems to be a disparity between the acceptance that is talked about on websites and the one-on-one viewpoints of a lot of LGBTQI people. Many lesbians have expressed disapproval etc. of my current relationship.

Indeed, queer young people do not always find the affirmation and nuanced information they seek, and this can reinforce some identity categories and marginalise others. This is also indicative of the extent to which identities and their meanings proliferate and young people are active in defining, expressing and performing these identities rather than being mere consumers of them:

I've used YouTube a lot to find information (not the most obvious place to go for info, but yeah), there is a huge trans community on there, especially trans men, also a few genderqueer YouTubers and collab channels. Those have been very useful for me both when I was exploring my sexuality and gender. The young people website Minus18 is also pretty good with finding a sense of belonging so to speak especially as the site is targeted towards younger people. The problem that I've had with other sites for trans* people is that they are targeted almost completely to transmen and transwomen and the gender non-binary experience of trans* isn't represented as much/at all. A similar thing also happens with some LGBTQI sites, which almost completely cater for the LGB part of the community but not so much to the TQI part.*

I feel some issues are written about with ignorance, especially more unknown issues such as being transgender or intersex, a lot of the incorrect language is used and I don't like this as I feel akin to this issue because of my sexuality.

In addition to accessing information about their different experiences and expressions of gender/sex/sexuality, participants also connected to a larger public community (entertainment, celebrity, politics, activism, etc.) that situated their preferred identity within a legitimised, and to some extent normalised, domain. This built a sense of community, solidarity, acceptance and visibility:

I like to see who else is gay, specifically celebrities, as it is inspiring, and keeping up with gay events.

I did find the internet useful for locating LGBTQI movies – this was done using film review websites e.g. IMDb. Autostraddle was also quite good for this and the Ellen website.

I love to read stories about our struggle with equal rights, both here and overseas, and try to get involved when I can.

Identity, and sexual identity in particular, is not simply an abstract category of person. It is embodied and lived, and desire, sexual expression, and experience are critical aspects of sexual identity. Many participants spoke of the value of internet sites and services for exploring desire and finding sexual partners:

Other things I've found helpful on the internet is cybersexing with people, as it allows me to explore what I find attractive, and realise I just don't get aroused by thinking of myself as male, but when I think of myself as female it is so much more enjoyable and easier to suspend disbelief.

Grindr and Manhunt are also useful resources to chat to locals, for support, and also to meet people for sexual favours.

Consistent with a finding from the focus groups was the view that negotiating the internet for specific information can be both arduous and fruitless, and that oftentimes face-to-face contact and conversation with people who have had similar experiences would be preferable:

As for my sexual identity, that has been all over the place. I wasn't able to find anything to really help me when I needed it, just places to talk to other gay/lesbian identified folk. There's loads of information and I didn't need the support, I just would have liked more ability to talk personally with similar folk and learn from them and make a few friends with people sharing my experiences.

In this regard, the place of schools and young people's services for providing information, counselling and support, and connecting young people with each other, is of critical importance.

CONNECTING TO GROUPS AND SERVICES

The internet gives queer young people access to online forums, discussion groups, chatrooms, and other sites, services and support that: preserve their anonymity; may not be available to them in their specific geographical location; answer concerns and questions that are not addressed in school-based sex education; and are not discussed in the family. These range from unmediated social networking sites to those managed by professional government, community or private health services. In some instances, these sites function entirely online and in others are accessed online but lead to face-to-face support from a service provider. Respondents reported a variety of purposes and benefits from their internet searches for support: being linked to services; coming out; feeling accepted and building confidence; and meeting friends and partners. The following quotes from young people demonstrate the purposes and benefits of their internet searches:

I use the net for finding sites for information on community groups, safe sex, etc.

This site (queerattitude.com) also provides information links to social support services.

I looked for stories about other people coming out and found the group Minus18, which really helped me feel accepted and to meet other LGBT young people – they definitely saved my life.

Minus18 in Melbourne has made me feel safe and accepted. They have made me the person I am today. It's helped my confidence, my self-image and my understanding of homophobia and sexuality in general.

When I was 17 and I started having sexual feelings towards girls, I told my good friend about it. He was the first person I told. He sent me a counselling link, where you can ask someone a question or confide in someone and they get back to you within 24 hours. I thought this was a strange concept at first, but I was so desperate to talk to someone about it. I just thought I would give it a go. The response was fantastic, it was encouraging and even if it was a computer-generated answer (it might not have been) it helped me deal with the problems I was dealing with (whether or not I should tell my best friend I had feelings for her etc)

Twenty10 is a great cause; had counselling at school; really my friends were very supportive when I told them and they just were like nothing is different, you just like dudes, and that's fine.

In the past I have been to websites of mental health organisation such as beyondblue and ReachOut.

The extensive use of the internet to access information about gender and sexuality, and about both online and face-to-face support services, has significant implications for service providers to have a strong online presence that addresses the complex range of needs of queer young people. It is also important that schools are aware of those websites that might connect students to relevant and appropriate information and services and find sensitive ways of promoting and sharing them.

CONNECTING TO FRIENDS

Not surprisingly, connecting with individuals or groups who shared interests and experiences built a sense of community, and was widely reported by respondents. These connections were conducted anonymously, privately or publically depending on different contexts, purposes and needs. Significantly they were also used for networking and support, and as a place of visibility when openness was not possible in other places or situations:

I have a gay networking/support site for chatting with other LGBTQI people.

The only social internet site I really use now is Facebook and my relationship status and sexuality is not visible on my page, mainly because of family who I am friends with but don't know.

I don't belong to any internet communities anymore, but during my later teens I found it very helpful, as it was a struggle to come to terms with the knowledge that I wanted to be open about my sexuality. I knew that if my family didn't accept me I would still have a support network that I could count on filled with like-minded people. Many of the friends I made through those sites I still keep in touch with today and they are perhaps my closest friends.

Young people also recognised the necessity to manage their social media profiles in order not to out themselves online to friends and family who had access to their Facebook page but were unaware of their sexuality:

On Facebook (in my experience) I feel like I can't express myself because of the 'friends' I have there.

Social media can be a safe place, but it is also not. I'm open with close friends on social media but not publicly on my profiles.

Despite this recognition of the need to carefully manage online presence, issues of acceptance, safety, trust, and freedom from judgement were also cited as some of the benefits of online friendships:

A few years ago when I was accepting my sexuality and trying to make sense of how I felt about my best friend I remember typing into Google 'gay teens Melbourne' hoping to find something I could relate to. That was when I was first introduced to Minus18, which I am still using to talk to and make new friends who are like me. It was where I was able to find info, chat to people about my sexuality and coming out and where people wouldn't judge me for who I am.

The connections young people made online often helped them feel less alone, and often led to the extension of friendships into other social spaces and activities such as community events and nightclubs:

I have friends I know and trust I connect with on Facebook, email and Minus18. Minus18 helps me connect with likeminded people and get support. I did a lot of Googling, reading and reading stories and people's points of views on homosexuality and that makes me feel less alone.

Initially, dating sites helped me find others my age with similar situations, from there built friendships using chat services (MSN, etc.) met people in person, formed groups and joined online groups finding a whole range of like minded people and introduced to queer friendly night clubs and events.

When I was younger I used to access Mogenic, where I met a lot of friends locally including one who is still my closest friend (11 years later).

Significantly, those young people who lived in rural areas often found it difficult to be out and to meet other same sex attracted people. They relied heavily on the internet for forming friendships and locating possible sexual partners – which was not without its dangers:

I've explored a lot of gay/bi male profile sites, such as Manhunt, and Oasis more so to help me 'keep in touch' with other gay males. I currently, and have done in the past, lived in a rural area and meeting other gay men is quite difficult. This allows me, to a point, to keep in contact.

I grew up in a small country town; the only internet site I could find to link up with other gay men was gaydar.com.au. Fortunately, I didn't run into anyone who may have caused me harm but I was definitely in a position where it could have happened.

COMING OUT

The internet is identified by young people as a place where they can rehearse 'coming out' – who they tell, how to tell them, how to manage reactions and so on. The 'coming out' story is often situated as a journey to a queer identity, and reading about others' journeys is a source of comfort and encouragement. The internet is also a place the effects of coming out can be dealt with – especially the negative effects, including the confused, hostile and violent reactions of family, friends, peers at school and teachers:

When I was first starting to come out, I searched a lot of official websites for information, but more importantly I went on various forums to ask people their personal stories. This included watching coming out videos on YouTube. It was always more relate-able for me to think that I was getting first-hand advice from someone going through or who had gone through what I was about to.

Reading stories is helpful, particularly when I was in the coming out process, it was essential that I receive advice regarding what to expect and how to go about it.

I'm not too sure about which sites but I have mainly looked at teenage stories as I feel they are the most relevant stories to me. Most of which have been coming out stories as I am at that stage already but just reading other people's stories (good and bad) are helping me in the long run.

Interestingly, these forums for 'coming out' stories provide a sense of moving from a minority into a queer majority:

YouTube was a big help because there's many gay YouTubers who talk about things that we as gay people have to go through including coming out, these in the end gave me the determination to do it as well. I also found community reading online gay magazine news and websites like that, I guess because it felt like we were the majority.

This sense of identification, belonging, and acceptance makes a significant contribution to the health and wellbeing of queer young people.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Given that queer young people receive little or no sex education from either school or home, the internet is a primary source of information about sexuality, sexual health and sexual practices (see Appendix Graph 19) – all of which are correlated with health and wellbeing (e.g. stress, anxiety, depression, and suicide). The internet therefore plays a significant part in connecting young people to services, friends, and information that contribute to their health and wellbeing:

General web searches about sexuality and sexual health, connecting me with the greater queer population of my state, and the rest of Australia and sharing information necessary for my health.

ACON for sexual health information and chat/dating sites to meet new friends or sexual partners.

Reading stories, finding sexuality information, finding information related to sexual health (STIs and HIV), finding local community groups (ACON, Twenty10, etc.).

The online survey highlighted significant issues confronted by transgendered young people who had mixed experiences regarding the usefulness of their web searches. While some found their searches helpful, others were less enthusiastic. They suggested that there is less information available for their specific needs and that what is available is not always helpful. This points to the need for sites that give easier access to better information, and deal with more diverse and complex issues as the LGBTQI community becomes more complex, and a more diverse range of young people seek to confirm or understand their identities:

I've used sites to gather info about transgender people and have found these sites particularly useful in accepting who I am in addition to broadening my network, which has improved my health vastly.

When I became miserable and suicidal I was worried, I wanted help so I pleaded to Kids Helpline. That is the only site I've used for exploring the internet, I've found no help, there seems to be plenty out there for those going through male to female but not the other way around. I've been curious to how the penis would develop after surgery, the advancement of medics for it, functions, and just how they look in general. Even some past client results, but I have not succeeded in finding any.

I still question my gender frequently and went through about three years seriously reviewing who I am/who I was. I mainly used government websites to find out about FtM transitions as well as watching YouTube to learn about others and watch the vlog diaries of women who had transitioned to male bodies. I still question my gender and sometimes it triggers my depression again but after searching myself and the internet I don't believe I'll ever be fully comfortable in the body of a female or male.

Despite their value, experiences on the net are not always positive. Given the volume of unmediated information and chat sites, negative messages can be as easily circulated as positive ones. Further, there is a limit to the extent to which these sites can provide the emotional and practical support that queer young people need. There is also a limit to the extent they offer possibilities for addressing, resolving or managing persistent doubts and anxieties:

I actually remember reading [X service provider] stories about five years or so ago and they all ended up essentially saying 'but then I realised I wasn't gay'. I actually emailed them about it because I was questioning my sexuality at great lengths and it was completely unhelpful to read a site geared towards young people's mental health and getting the impression that being gay was something you got over.

I feel that I can help other people over chat rooms although I can't let myself depend on emotional support from a website.

ACCESS TO, AND EXPERIENCES OF, SUPPORT SERVICES

Survey participants were asked about which support services they accessed, and about their experiences of these services. Most young people sought advice from well-promoted, established, and generic youth health services (often with a specialty in mental health) first, or sometimes alongside, sexuality diverse and gender variant youth specific support services. Young people had greater awareness of the generic support services offered, before finding out about sexuality diverse and gender variant specific youth support services. In the first instance, young people would make contact via phone, and/or via the internet. If the young person's first contact was a positive experience and the service also offered a face-to-face service that was within a viable travelling distance, a young person may follow up with accessing further support in person. In addition to generic youth support services that were accessed frequently by participants, the sexuality diverse and gender variant service that was accessed most in the first instance was Minus18. This organisation provides mental health and peer-mentoring support to thousands of same sex attracted and gender diverse young people from all over Australia. Minus18 is Australia's largest youth-led network for gay, bi, lesbian and trans teens. Minus18 have resources and online chat facilities, in addition to organising workshops, and social events.

One of the most popular services accessed by the young people in this research is Kids Helpline, which is a free, private and confidential telephone and online counselling service for Australian children and young people aged between 5 and 25 years. The following comments point out why this service was viewed as helpful:

I called Kids Helpline as a kid because I was being bullied at high school for kissing a girl. They were great, they gave me helpful advice and made me feel like I had someone on my side and I wasn't in the wrong.

They gave good advice and helped me accept myself for who I am. Although I did talk to someone at Kids Helpline who told me that it was probably just a phase and that I'd get over it but that helped too because it made me realise that I didn't want it to be phase and that I didn't want to get over it because its who I was meant to be.

Other popular services included *beyondblue*, which is non-profit organisation established in October 2000 in the Australian context of the World Health Organization's projections of an increasing global burden caused by depression. *Youthbeyondblue* aims to empower young people aged 12–25, their friends, and those who care for them, to respond to depression and anxiety:

beyondblue was an extremely good help making me feel more positive about myself and in just reassuring me that everything was going to be okay.

Generic advice helps a bit. It helps me most to know that I'm not alone, and people I respect think I'm not a bad person just because of who I was born and who I love.

It was just nice to know that if it got any worse, I could always ring and hear a friendly voice.

Participants in the online survey also accessed **headspace**, a youth mental health initiative established by the Australian government in 2006. **headspace** offers support for those aged 12–25 years of age on a range of issues including depression, anxiety, stress, alcohol and drug use, sexuality, sexual health, personal or family relationship issues, and bullying. Other young people accessed support from Twenty10, a community not-for-profit that supports and works with young people, communities and families of diverse genders, sexes, and sexualities. Participants also accessed services at the AIDS Council of New South Wales (ACON), which is New South Wales' leading health promotion organisation specialising in HIV and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) health. Other young people accessed assistance from the Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service (which is now Twenty10, incorporating GLCS NSW), PFLAG, Camp Out, the Gender Centre, Lifeline, school counsellors, school teachers, university and community counselling services and psychologists. The Gender Centre, General Practitioners, and psychiatrists were also accessed by participants, but to a lesser extent. Many young people contacted more than one service to access the support they needed. For example, Kids Helpline was often accessed alongside *beyondblue* and **headspace**, or a LGBTQI specific support service.

I went to a youth group in Manly (GLAM) and in Newtown and both were run by Twenty10. They were both fantastic experiences with lovely people and great support. Helped me a lot.

When I was in high school groups such as ACON and Twenty10 came to my school to help me with the bullying I was experiencing. I felt like in school they were very supportive and helpful when they were there but that it was hard to access help outside of school as I was living in an area of Sydney where I had to travel over an hour to get to the support services.

I have received life changing support from Twenty10. Their slogan is 'Twenty10, a place to be you' and that's exactly how I felt when I was there.

Conclusion

This research report has highlighted some major concerns facing young people who are gender variant, who have diverse sexualities, or are questioning their gender and sexuality. Issues associated with identity formation, such as: the rigidity of gender and sexuality boundaries that define, restrict, and regulate individuals to male/female binaries; experiences of homophobia and transphobia in families, schooling, the workplace and broader communities; negotiating stereotypes and making critical decisions about how to 'pass' and/or publicly represent themselves as diverse gendered and sexual subjects to their peers, family, employers and co-workers.

All of these issues have serious implications for how these young people view themselves, and impact their health and wellbeing. All these issues also have serious implications for the economic independence and wellbeing of these young people. Family and schooling contexts play significant roles in their lives and the real and potential experiences of rejection and alienation from family members, school peers and teachers can result in depression, homelessness, engagement in drug and alcohol abuse and suicide ideation for many young people. In the schooling context, the continual exclusion of the experiences and needs of young people who are gender variant and sexuality diverse from sexuality education curricula, not only has serious implications for the sexual health of these young people, but also contributes to reinforcing heteronormative values that perpetuate homophobia and transphobia in schools and the broader community. Current sexuality education in many schools is a problem for all young people regardless of how they identify, especially in terms of its irrelevance and the lack of a comprehensive approach to sexuality knowledge (including desire and pleasure) to meet their needs. This experience is intensified for gender variant and sexuality diverse young people.

It is equally important to highlight the great resilience evidenced by the young people who participated in this research. Two out of three of these young people, despite the difficulties many of them often face, are happy and contented in their current lives. In fact, many of them acknowledged that the adversities they encountered made them more determined to develop strategies to counteract these experiences, building their enthusiasm for social justice and spurring them on to take up advocacy roles to support other gender variant and sexuality diverse young people. The role of services such as Twenty10 in contributing to this resilience cannot be overstated.

This research has also shown that technology is a central component of these young people's everyday lives. They use technology primarily to keep in touch with friends, to educate themselves around issues pertinent to their identities and to meet potential partners. Developing sites and applications that specifically deal with the gaps in what is already available for gender variant and sexuality diverse young people is an important next step in the aims of the larger project stemming from this pilot study.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This pilot research lays the foundations for future research directions and for the development of strategies that incorporate creativity and technology to enhance the wellbeing of young people, the aim of the larger project in which this pilot is located. Some of the more pressing issues to be addressed include:

- Targeted research in the specific areas identified in this pilot study as major concerns facing young people who are gender variant and sexuality diverse e.g. sexuality education; safe-sex practices; homophobia and transphobia in the workplace; homophobia and transphobia in schooling; and online experiences;
- Gender variant and sexuality diverse young people's need to readily access online (interactive) and off-line, up-to-date and relevant information about gender variance, sexuality diversity, safe-sex practices and other health related concerns, appropriate support services, and legal rights;
- Specific tailored training of medical practitioners, teachers, school administrators and other relevant professionals, focusing on the relevant needs of young people who identify as gender variant and sexuality diverse;
- Increasing medical practitioners' awareness of the importance of taking an 'open' and 'unassuming' approach to young people who they see in relation to sexuality, and, as a matter of course, provide the opportunity for young people to discuss issues about sexuality and safe-sex practices – young people do not generally initiate such discussions with their doctors, if in fact they actually see GPs;
- Seriously addressing peer and institutional homophobia/transphobia that is prevalent in schooling and the workplace;
- Adequately funding current services that are specifically addressing the needs of gender variant and sexuality diverse young people; and
- Developing creative strategies to address young people's need for a balance between face-to-face and online sources of information and support.

Author Biographies

Professor Kerry Robinson is in the School of Social Sciences and Psychology and is a leading foundational member of the Sexualities and Genders Research Network (SaGRN) at the University of Western Sydney (UWS). Her research interests include constructions of gendered and sexualised identities; gendered and sexual harassment and violence; constructions of childhood and sexuality; queer youth and technology; sexuality education; and sociology of knowledge. Professor Robinson is interested in the use of innovative research methodologies, transformative pedagogies, and the potential of performance ethnography as an expression of both these areas. She is currently the leading Chief Investigator on an ARC funded Discovery Project investigating building ethical relationships early in life and children's sexuality education. Professor Robinson, with Dr Bansel and Dr Denson, is currently undertaking a socio-cultural and historical analysis of queer young people's identities in New South Wales since the 1980s, a project funded by a UWS Research Grant and supported by Twenty10. Professor Robinson has published widely, including her recent book, *Innocence, Knowledge and the Construction of Childhood: The contradictory relationship between sexuality and censorship in children's contemporary lives* (2013, Routledge, London); and a co-edited collection *Rethinking School Violence* (Saltmarsh, Robinson & Davies, 2012, PalgraveMacmillan, London).

Dr Peter Bansel is a Research Fellow in the School of Social Sciences and Psychology (SSAP), and a member of the Sexualities and Genders Research Network (SaGRN) at the University of Western Sydney (UWS). Dr Bansel is an experienced educator and qualitative researcher, with particular expertise in conducting and analysing interviews and focus groups. He has worked on an ARC funded project examining the psychosocial impacts of changing labour markets on Australians aged 18–65. This research examined intergenerational differences and social connectedness in the context of changing patterns of education, employment and social organisation. Dr Bansel has expertise in the area of cultural diversity and equity (especially sex, gender and sexuality), experience in policy analysis (specifically in relation to education and employment) and is currently working on a research project with undergraduate students to develop ethical relationships and leadership skills.

Dr Nida Denson is a Senior Research Fellow and ARC Postdoctoral Fellow in the School of Social Sciences and Psychology (SSAP), and a member of the Sexualities and Genders Research Network (SaGRN) at the University of Western Sydney (UWS). Dr Denson's research interests focus on underrepresented minority and disadvantaged young people. She is currently Chief Investigator on two ARC Grants. The first is an ARC Discovery Project on maximising the benefits of diversity in university through cross-cultural interaction. The second is an ARC Linkage Project on intercultural understanding in primary and secondary schools. Dr Denson, along with Prof Robinson and Dr Bansel, is a Chief Investigator on a historical analysis of queer young people identities.

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Cristyn Davies is a Research Associate in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Sydney. Her areas of expertise include gendered and sexual subjectivities; sexual health and education; performed ethnography and innovative pedagogies; constructions of childhood and young people; cultural policy, regulation and moral panic; neoliberalism and governmentality; and narrative and (heritage and new) media. She has authored and co-authored articles in journals including but not limited to: *Sexualities*, *Cultural Studies*, *Feminist Media Studies*, *Cultural Studies Review*, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, *Australian Feminist Studies*. She is co-editor of: *Rethinking School Violence: Theory, Gender, Context* with Palgrave, Macmillan (2012), and *Queer and Subjugated Knowledges: Generating Subversive Imaginaries* with Bentham (2012).

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Appendix: Results of the Queer Stories Online Survey

METHOD

In early December 2012, we began the administration of a national survey for young people. The survey invitation was titled Queer Stories: A Survey for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning and Intersex (LGBTQI) Young People, Aged 16–27 Years. The survey was designed using an online platform (Survey Monkey), which connected participants to the survey page via an active web link and was based on a similar survey developed by Hillier et.al. (2010). The survey incorporated or adapted some of the items included in the Hillier et.al. survey, whilst other questions were specifically designed to address the information required from the targeted group in this research. Questions addressed issues about young people's sexual feelings, internet use, how others have treated them, their family and friends, secondary school experience, sex education information, self-harm and suicide, general health and wellbeing, access to social support services, experiences of transphobia, and conflicts between sexuality/gender identity, faith/religion, and cultural background. Participants were recruited through the websites and mailing lists of existing online LGBTQI services across Australia and through Young and Well CRC networks.

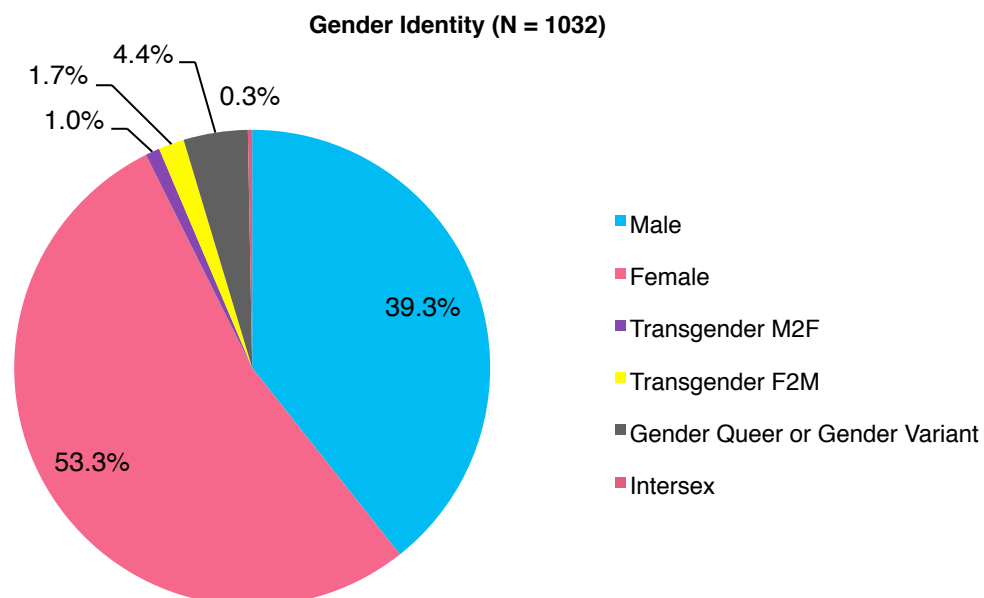
FINDINGS

The findings of the national survey provide us with a snapshot into the lives of LGBTQI young people in Australia, and are presented in the following sections: identity; use of the internet and social support services; experiences of homophobia, transphobia, and harassment; experiences of telling others about their sexuality and gender identity and level of support; and questions about sexuality, gender, health and wellbeing.

IDENTITY

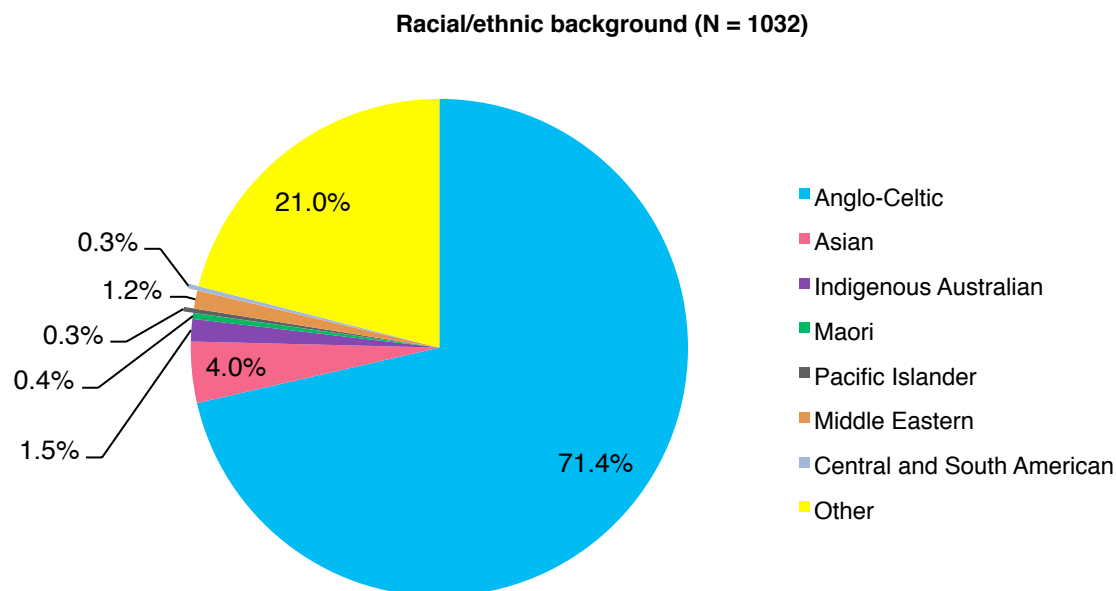
Graph 1

In total, there were 1032 young people who participated in the survey. Of these, 53.3% identified as female, 39.3% identified as male, with the remaining 7.4% identifying as transgender (2.7%), gender queer or gender variant (4.4%), or intersex (<1%).



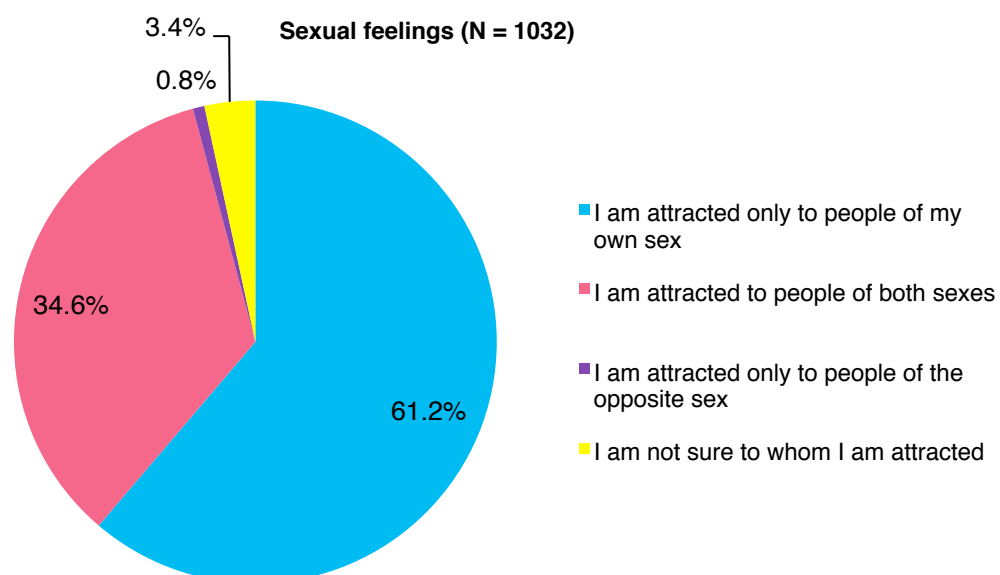
Graph 2

When asked in which country they were born, the vast majority (89%) stated in Australia. In terms of racial/ethnic background, the majority (71.4%) self-identified as Anglo-Celtic and 21% as 'other', with the remaining 7.6% identifying as Asian, Indigenous, Maori, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, Central and South American, and African. Of the 21% who self-identified as 'other', there was a range of responses. Some ticked the 'other' category and described themselves as "a bit of everything" or "mixed", while others elaborated ("Biologically Anglo-Australian with an Italian step-father. Brought up in a low-socioeconomic, multicultural community").



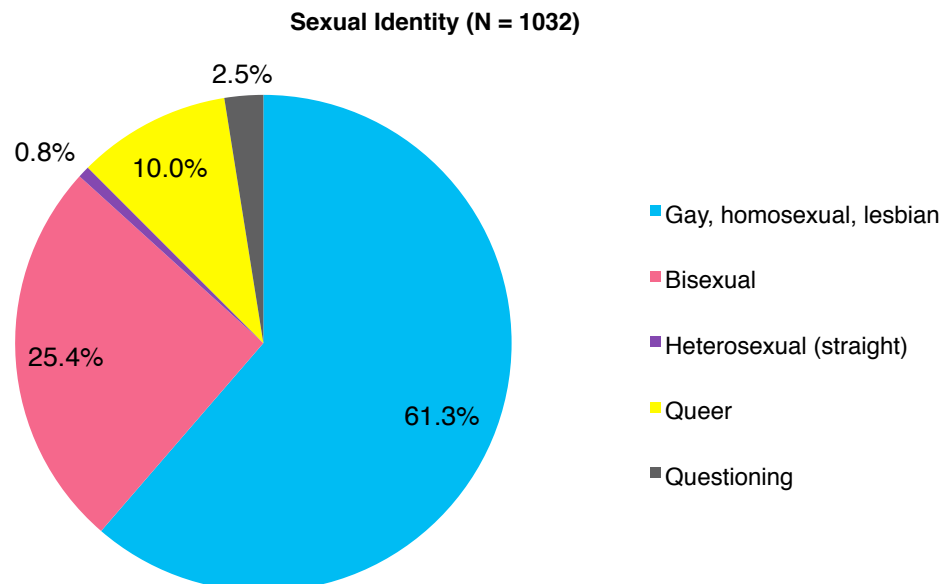
Graph 3

When asked about their sexual feelings and who they are attracted to, 61.2% reported being same-sex attracted, 34.6% were attracted to both sexes, 3.4% were unsure, and 0.8% were only opposite-sex attracted. Of all the respondents, 188 (18%) of the young people elaborated on their answers. For example, one respondent said "I identify as pansexual", another said "asexual", with another young person stating "I'm still trying to work out where I fit". The diversity in the open-ended responses highlights the fluidity of young people's sexual feelings and to whom they are attracted. When asked if and when they knew about their sexual feelings, 54% said that they always knew, with 46% said that they were unsure. When asked to state an age at which they became aware, 765 (74%) young people were able to state an age, with 267 (26%) young people were unable to state a specific age. For those who could state an age where they became aware of their sexual feelings, the mean age given was 13.4 years of age (SD = 3.5). Of these young people who stated an age, 15% knew by the age of 10, 33% knew by the age of 12, 76% by the age of 15, 98% by the age of 20, and 100% by the age of 27.



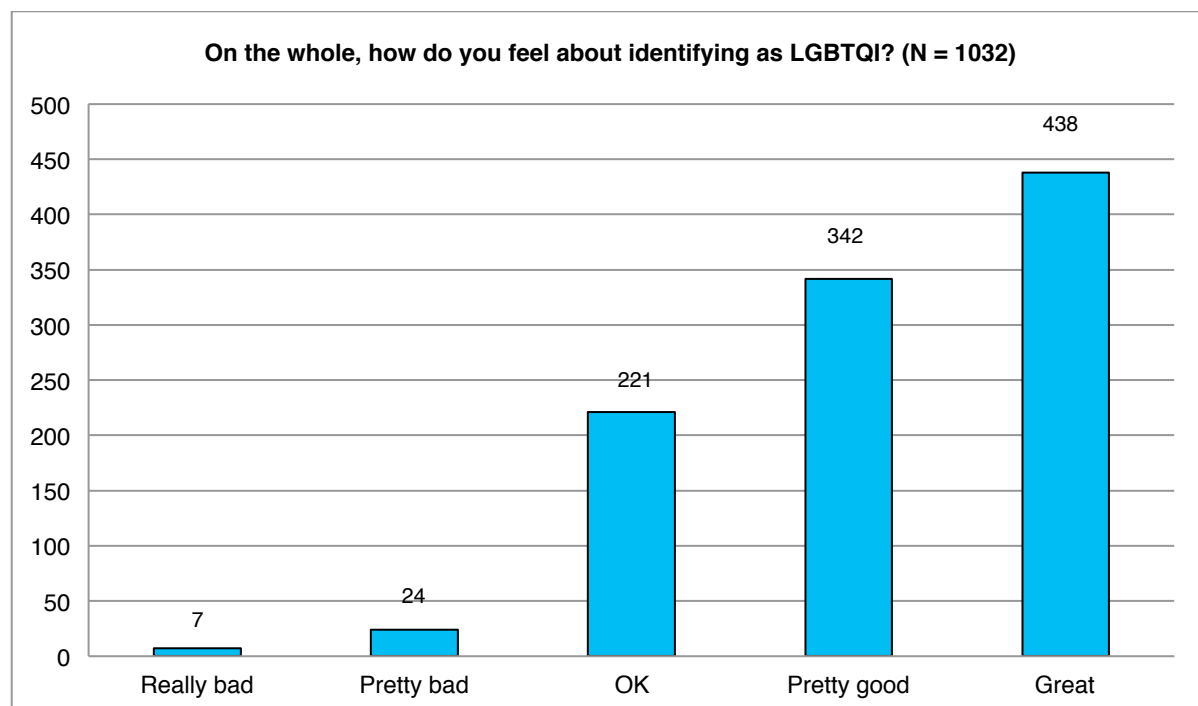
Graph 4

Of those who chose to self-identify, 61.3% identified as 'gay, homosexual, lesbian', 25.4% as 'bisexual', 0.8% as 'straight', 10% as 'queer', and 2.5% as 'questioning'. 8.4% young people also chose to write in an answer under 'other'. Of these, about half self-identified as 'pansexual', with the remaining answers consisting of 'asexual', 'heteroflexible', 'homoflexible', 'human', and 'I prefer not to label myself'.



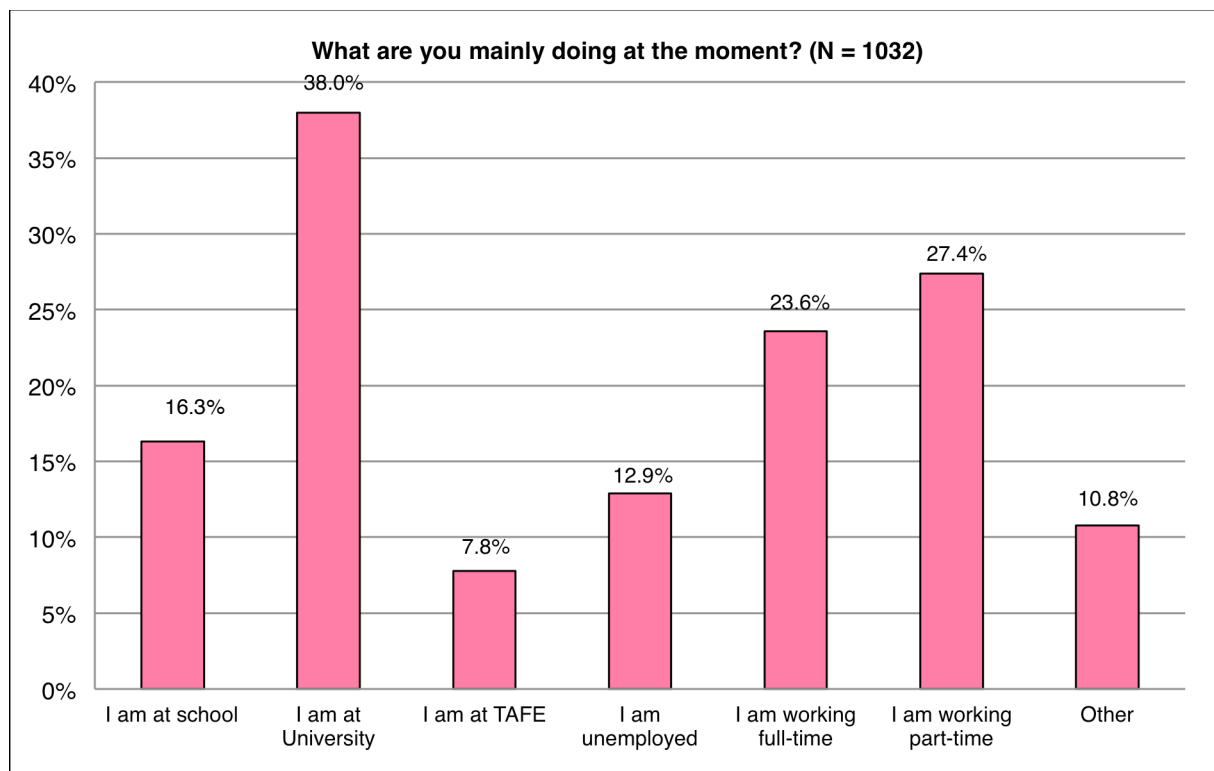
Graph 5

When asked how they felt about identifying as LGBTQI on the whole, 75.5% said 'great' or 'pretty good', 21.4% said 'okay', with 3% who said 'pretty bad' or 'really bad'. When asked to elaborate on their answer, 456 (44%) young people went on to explain further. The young people gave a wide range of responses. Some talked about accepting themselves ("It took quite a while to fully accept, but I'm pretty happy about it now"), while others talked about how society has still not fully accepted them ("I have no problems within myself regarding my identity but I wish that it was more accepted by society so I could be completely comfortable").



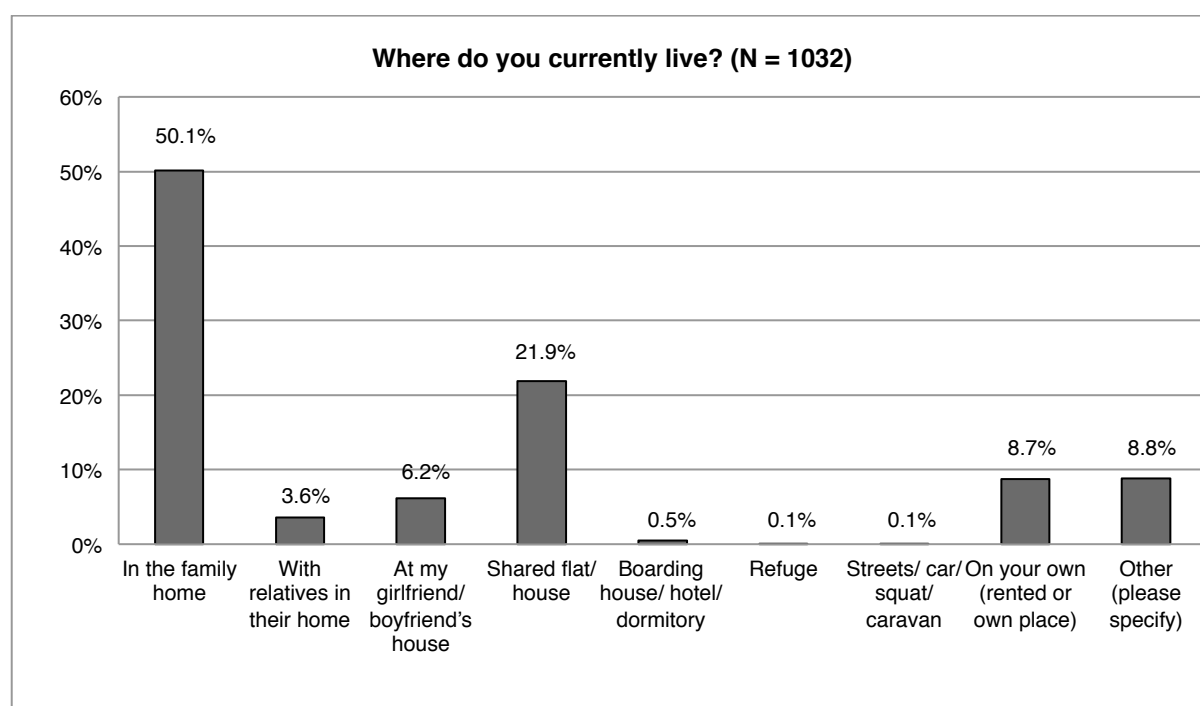
Graph 6

When asked 'what are you mainly doing at the moment', 38% were currently at university, 16.3% were at school, and 7.8% were at TAFE. In terms of employment, 27.4% were working part-time, with 23.6% full-time and 12.9% unemployed. Of those who specified 'other', responses ranged from "just graduated from school", "full-time mum", "self-employed", and "starting own business".



Graph 7

When asked 'where do you currently live', 50.1% responded in the family home, 21.9% in a shared flat/house, 8.7% on their own (rented or own place), 6.2% at their partner's house, and 3.6% with relatives. A minority (.5%) were living in a boarding house/hotel/dormitory, with less than 1% in a refuge or in the streets/car/squat/caravan.



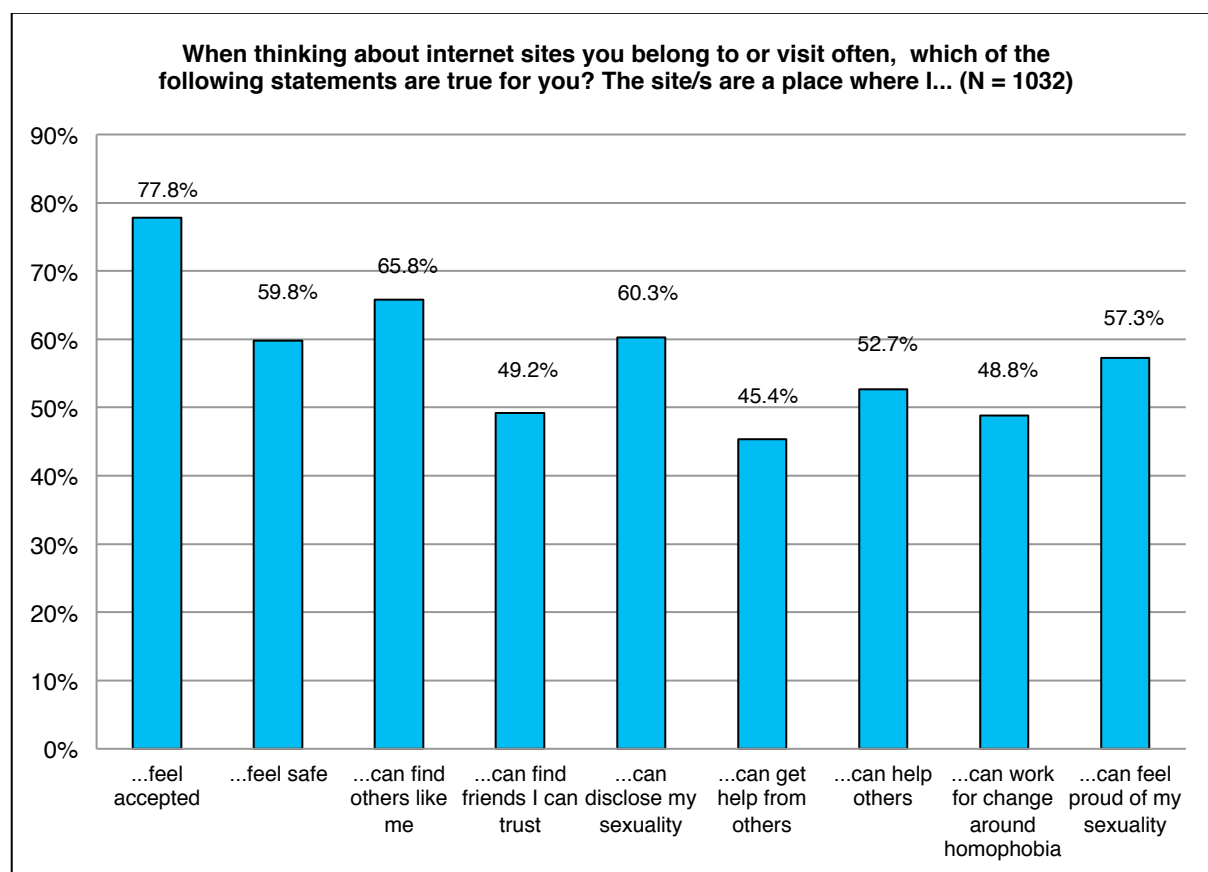
RELIGION

When asked if they practice a religion/faith, 15% reported they practiced a religion/faith, which included Christian, Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Buddhist, Hindu, Pagan, Wicca, and Agnostic. Of those who practice a faith/religion, 56% reported having experienced a conflict between their faith/religion and their sexuality/gender identity, 39% reported no conflict, and 5% were unsure. In terms of their cultural background, 18% reported having experienced a conflict between their cultural background and sexuality/gender identity, 77% reported no conflict, and 5% were unsure.

USE OF THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Graph 8

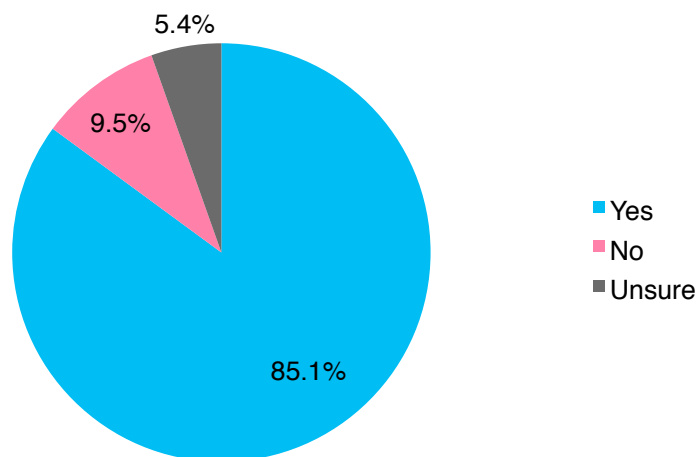
When asked if they had internet access where they currently live, the overwhelming majority (98%) said they did. In regards to the internet sites that they belong to or visit often, most conveyed they were sites that they 'feel accepted' (77.8%) and could 'find others like me' (65.8%). Fewer young people felt they could 'get help from others' (45.4%), 'find friends I can trust' (49.2%), or 'work for change around homophobia' (48.8%).



Graph 9

The vast majority (85.1%) of young people said they had used the internet to explore their sexual and/or gender identity. When asked to expand on their answer, 714 (69%) elaborated on which sites had been most helpful and how they had used them. Some of the internet sites which were commonly noted as being helpful were: Minus18, Tumblr, Facebook, and YouTube.

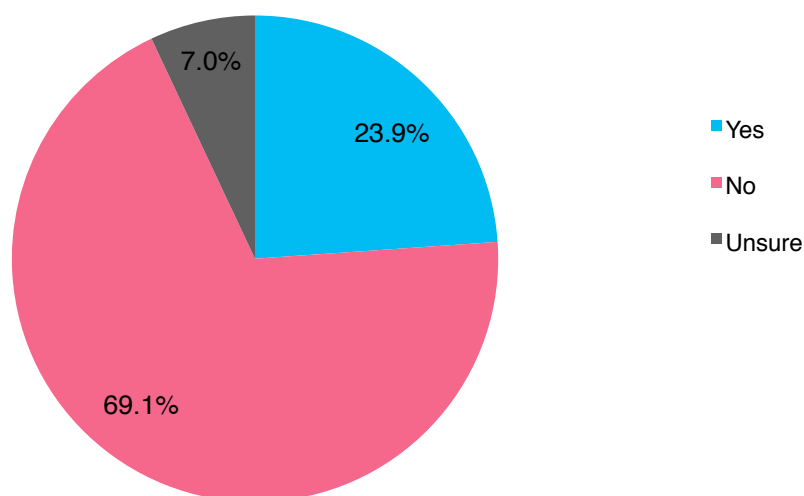
Have you used the internet to explore your sexual and/or gender identity? (N = 1032)



Graph 10

When asked if they had accessed any social support services for help, information, or support about their sexuality and/or gender identity, 69.1% young people said 'no', 23.9% said 'yes', and 7% were 'unsure'. Of those that said 'yes', 247 elaborated on the support services they accessed, with 265 elaborating on their experiences accessing support services. In regards to the support services they accessed, some commonly mentioned services were Minus18, ACON, Twenty10, Lifeline, and Kids Helpline.

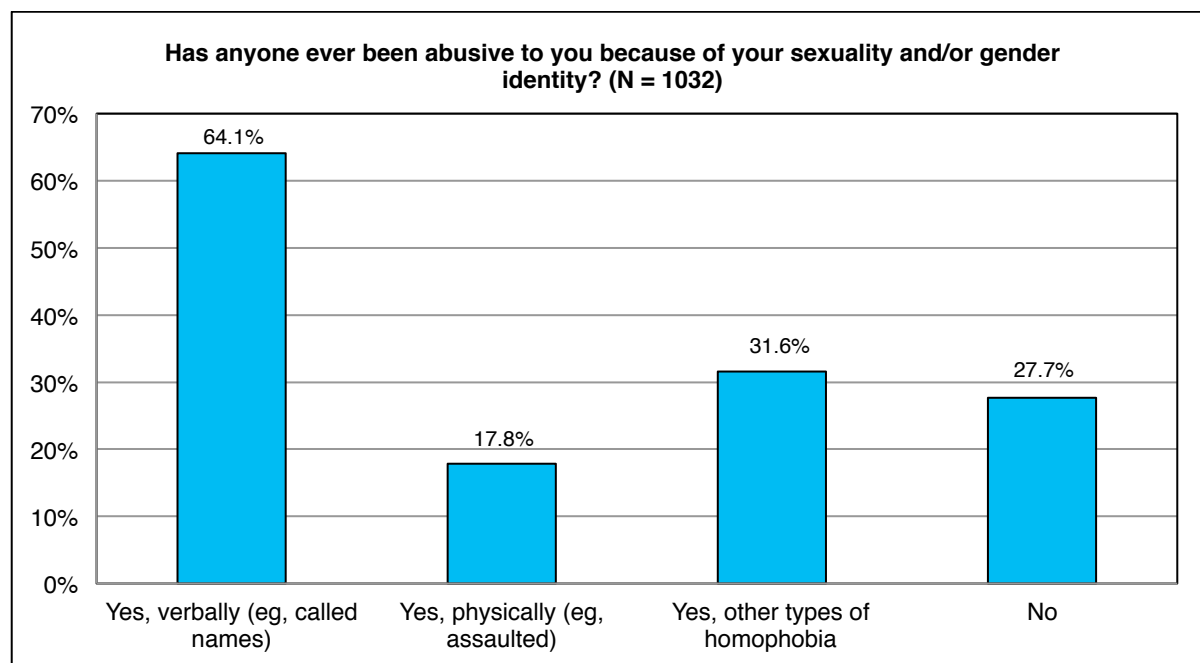
Have you accessed any social support services for help, information, or support around your sexuality and/or gender identity? (N = 1032)



EXPERIENCES OF HOMOPHOBIA, TRANSPHOBIA, AND HARASSMENT

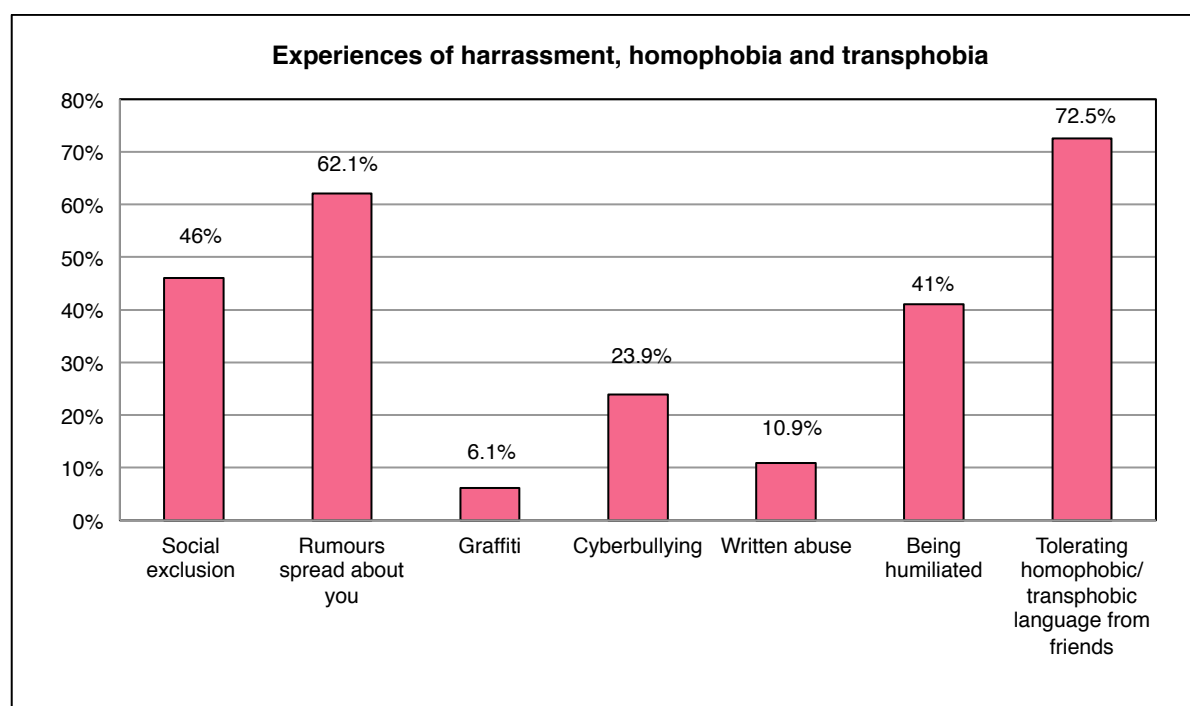
Graph 11

When asked if anyone has ever been abusive to you because of your sexuality and/or gender identity, 64.1% had been verbally abused (e.g. called names), 17.8% had been physically abused (e.g. assaulted), and 31.6% had reported other types of homophobia. Only 27.7% reported having never been abused.



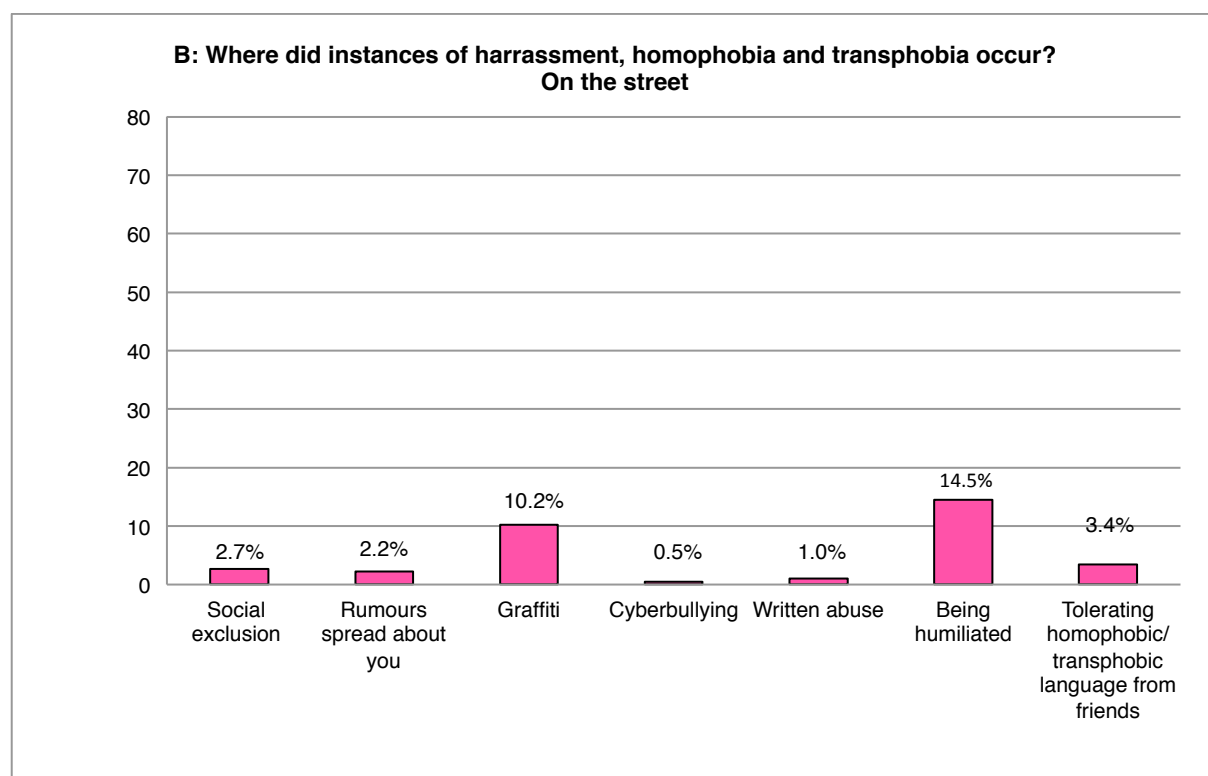
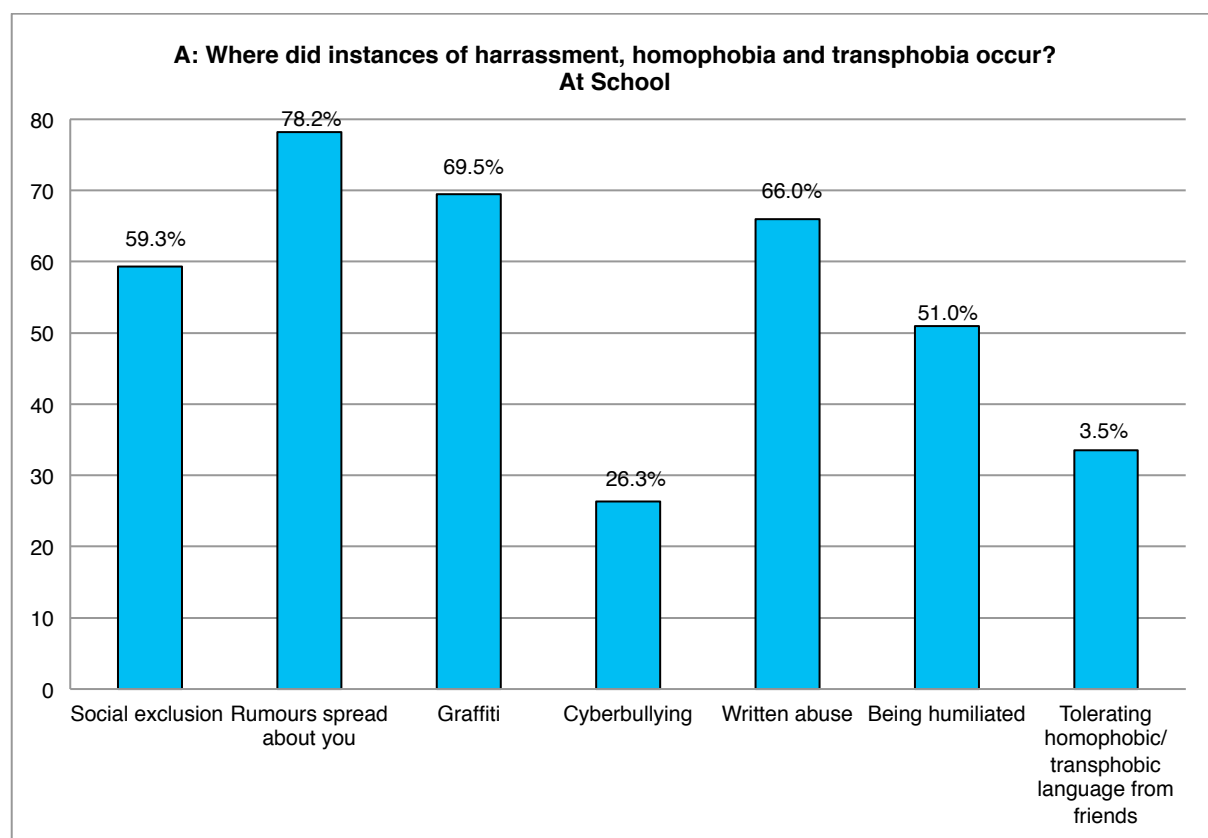
Graph 12

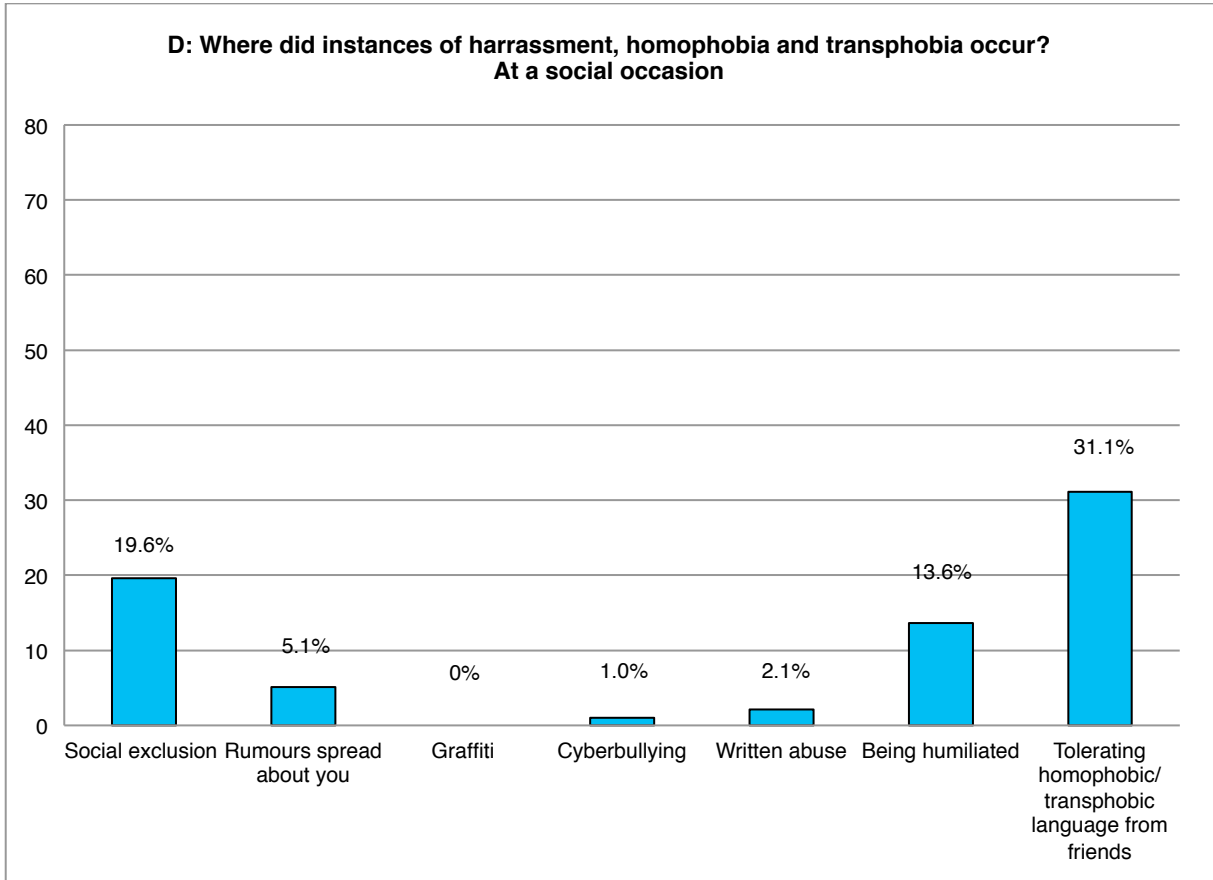
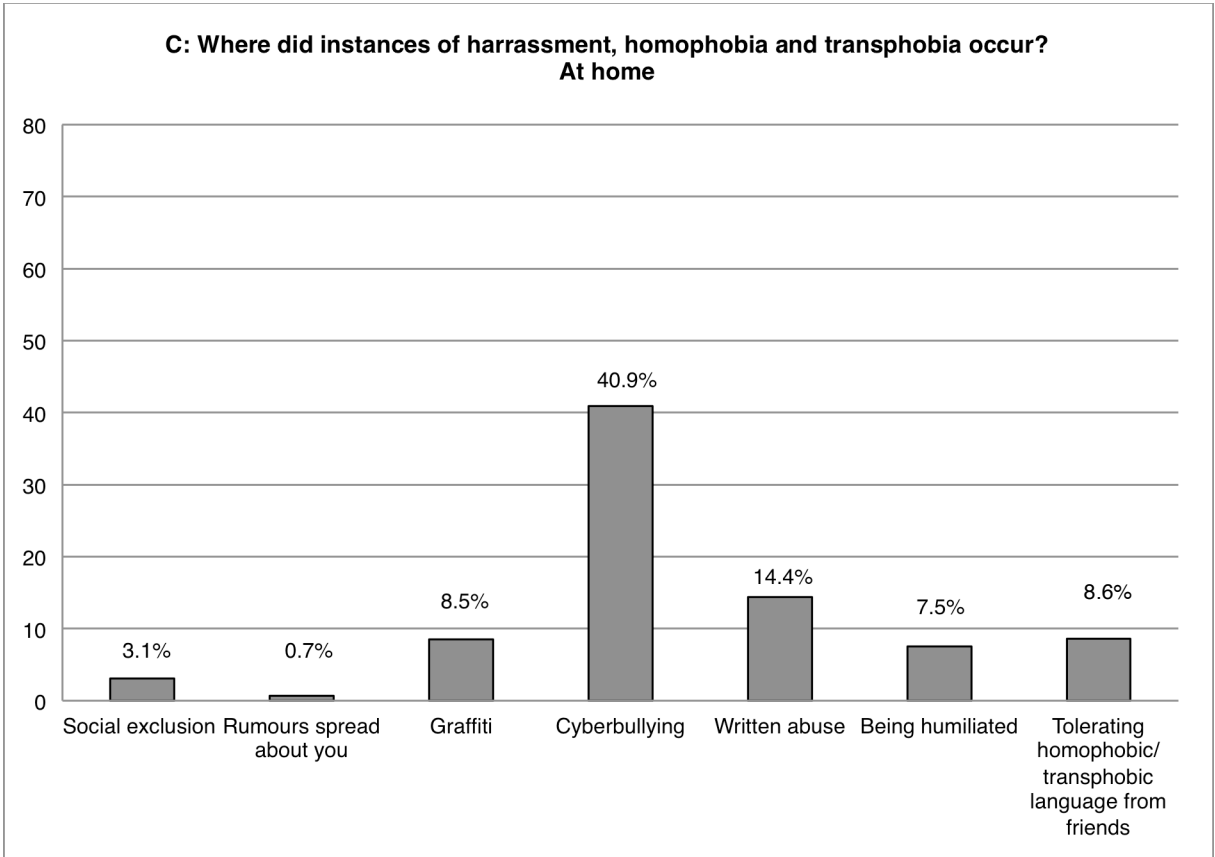
In terms of their experiences with other forms of homophobia/transphobia, 62.1% said rumours were spread about them, with 46% socially excluded, 41% humiliated, 23.9% cyberbullied, 10.9% experiencing written abuse and 6.1% graffiti. 72.5% said they tolerated homophobic/transphobic language from friends. The total number of respondents ranged from 896 to 970.



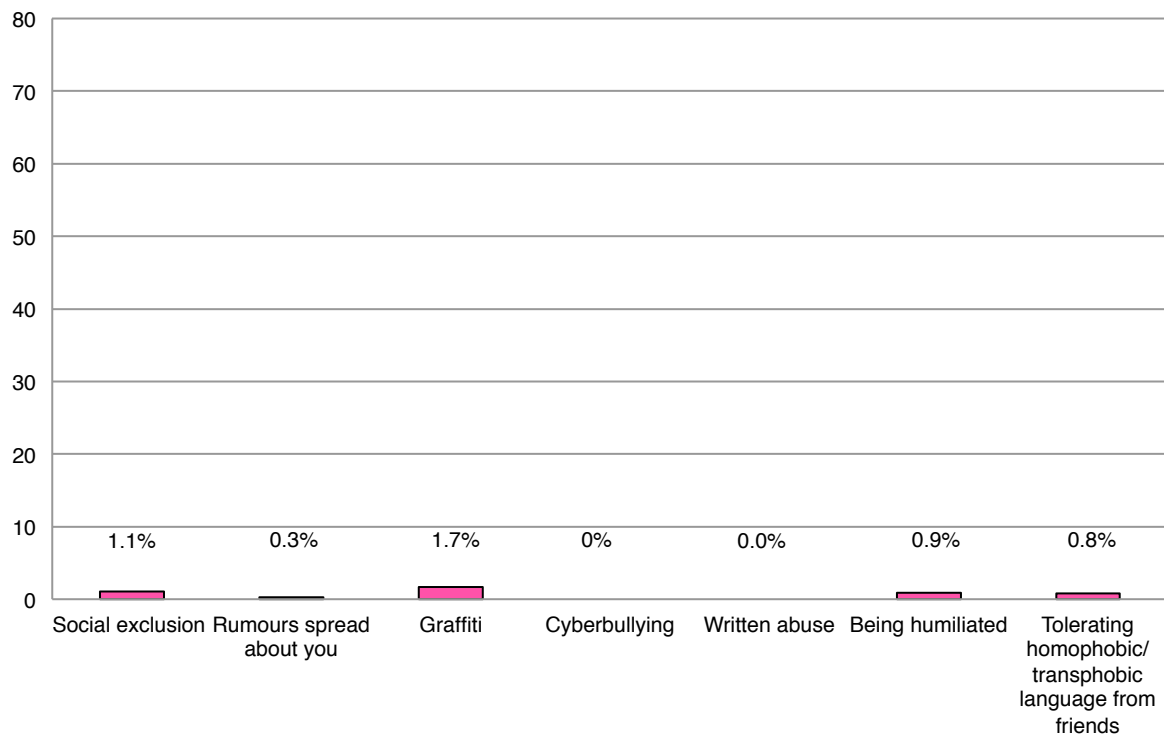
Graph 13

When asked where these instances occurred, the vast majority of young people said these experiences occurred at school, ranging from 26.3% for cyberbullying to 78.2% for rumours being spread about them. The total number of respondents ranged from 59 to 653.

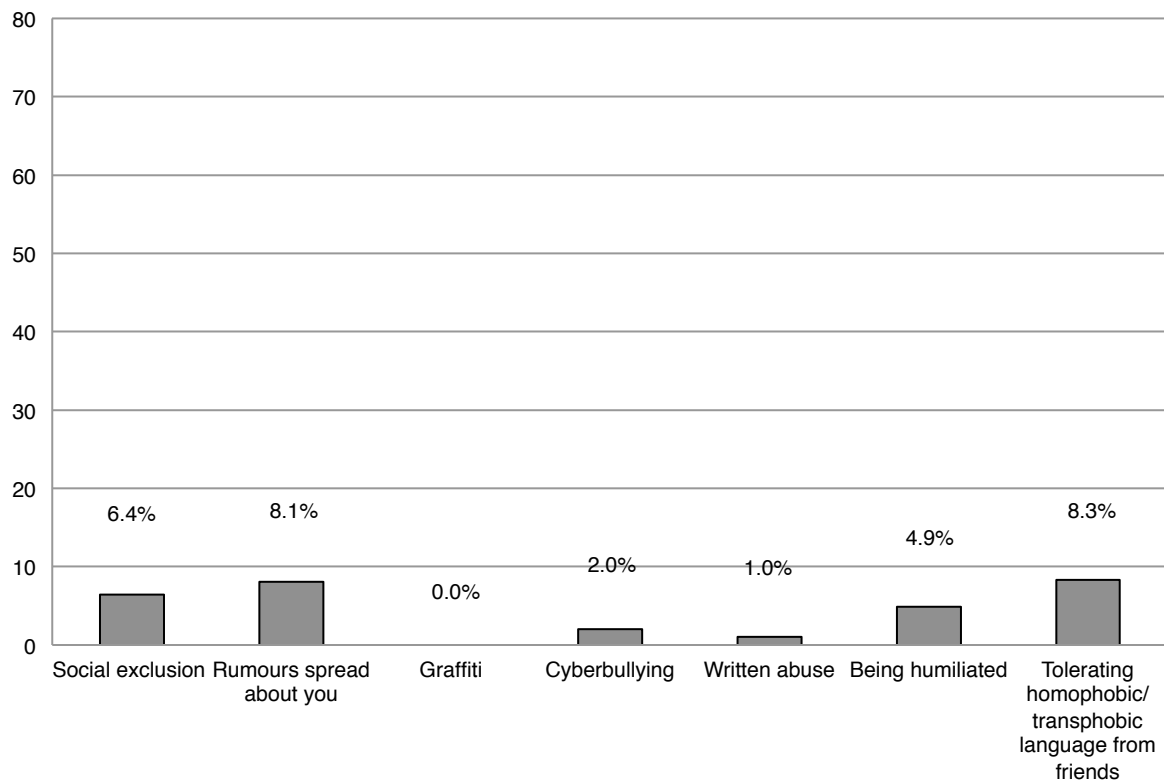


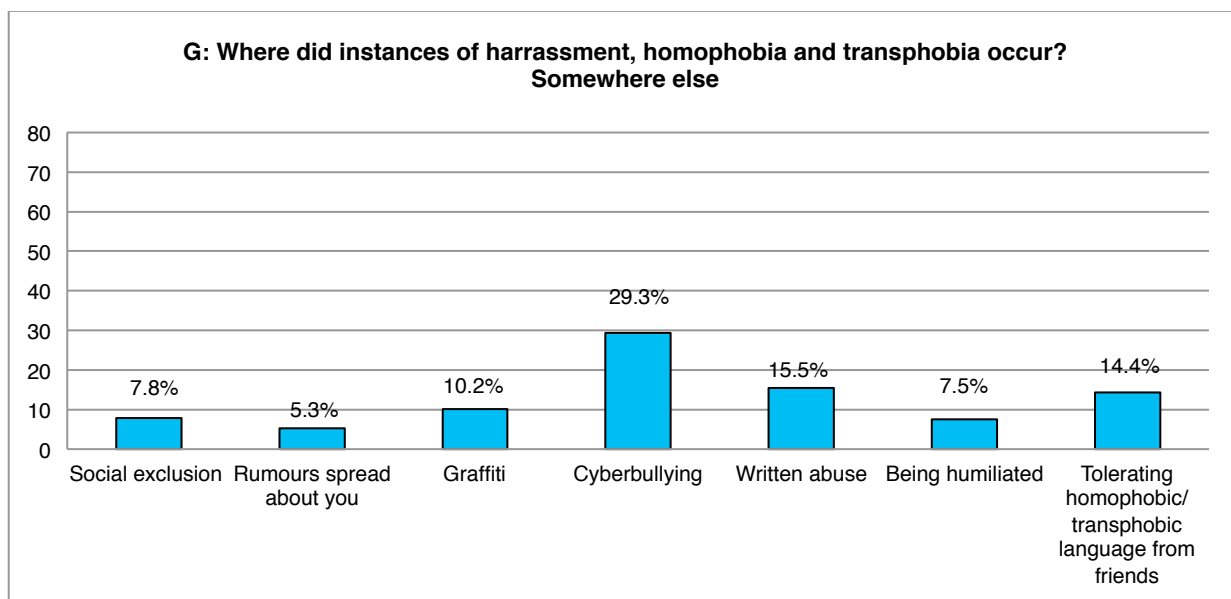


**E: Where did instances of harrassment, homophobia and transphobia occur?
At a sporting event**



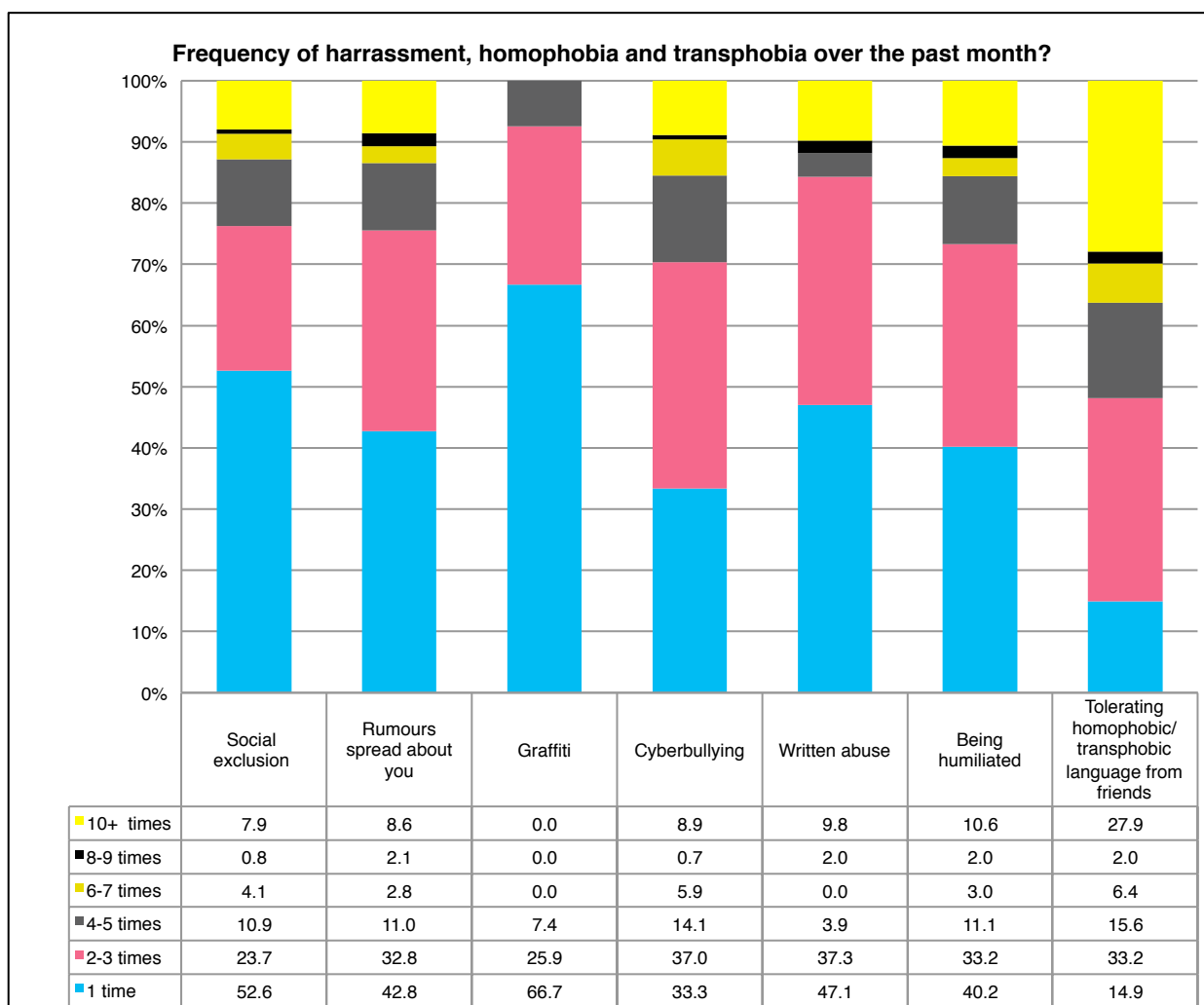
**F: Where did instances of harrassment, homophobia and transphobia occur?
At work**





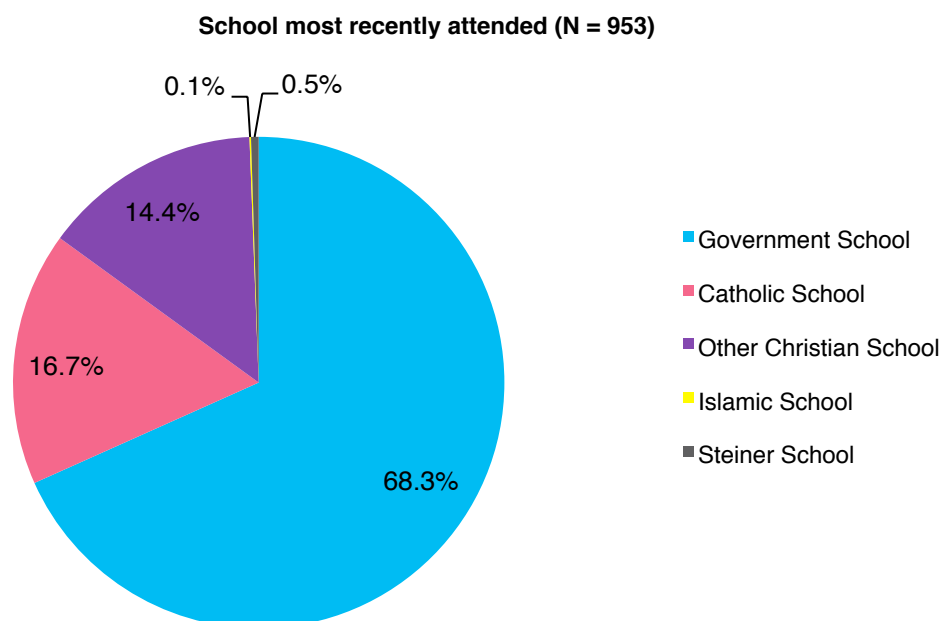
Graph 14

In terms of frequency of homophobia/transphobia instances, the young people reported they had to tolerate homophobic/transphobic language from friends the most often ($M = 3.31$; ranging from 1 = 1 time to 6 = 10 or more times). Cyberbullying was the next most frequent ($M = 2.31$), followed by humiliation ($M = 2.25$), rumours ($M = 2.14$), written abuse ($M = 2.02$), social exclusion ($M = 2.00$), and graffiti ($M = 1.41$). The total number of respondents ranged from 27 to 545.



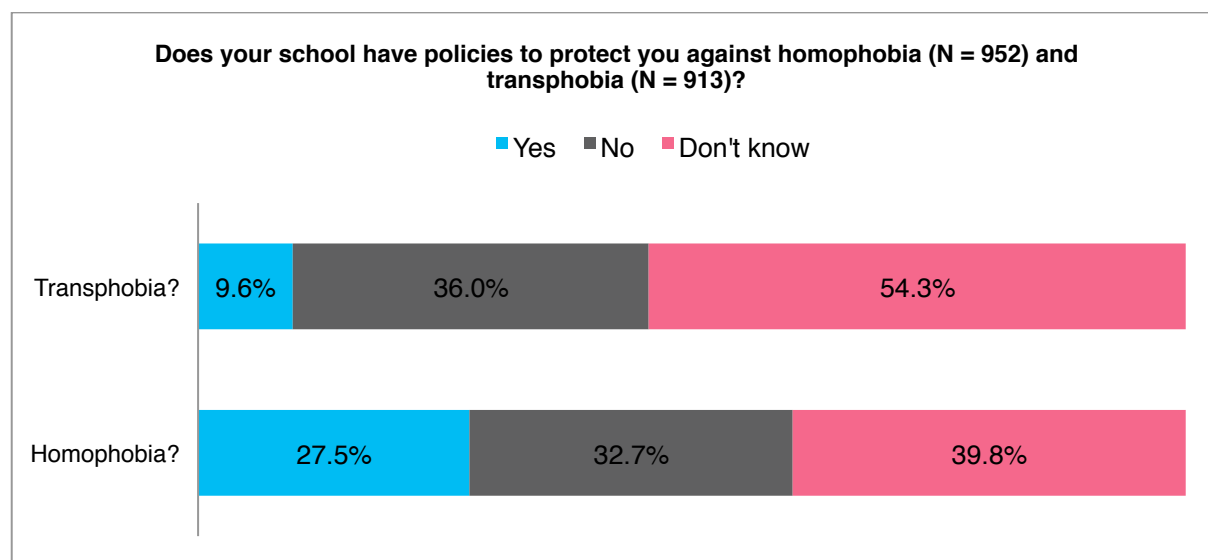
Graph 15

In regards to their schooling, the young people who participated in the survey attend (or most recently attended) a government school (68.3%), followed by Catholic school (16.7%), other Christian school (14.4%), with less than 1% that attend (or most recently attended) an Islamic, Jewish, or Steiner school.



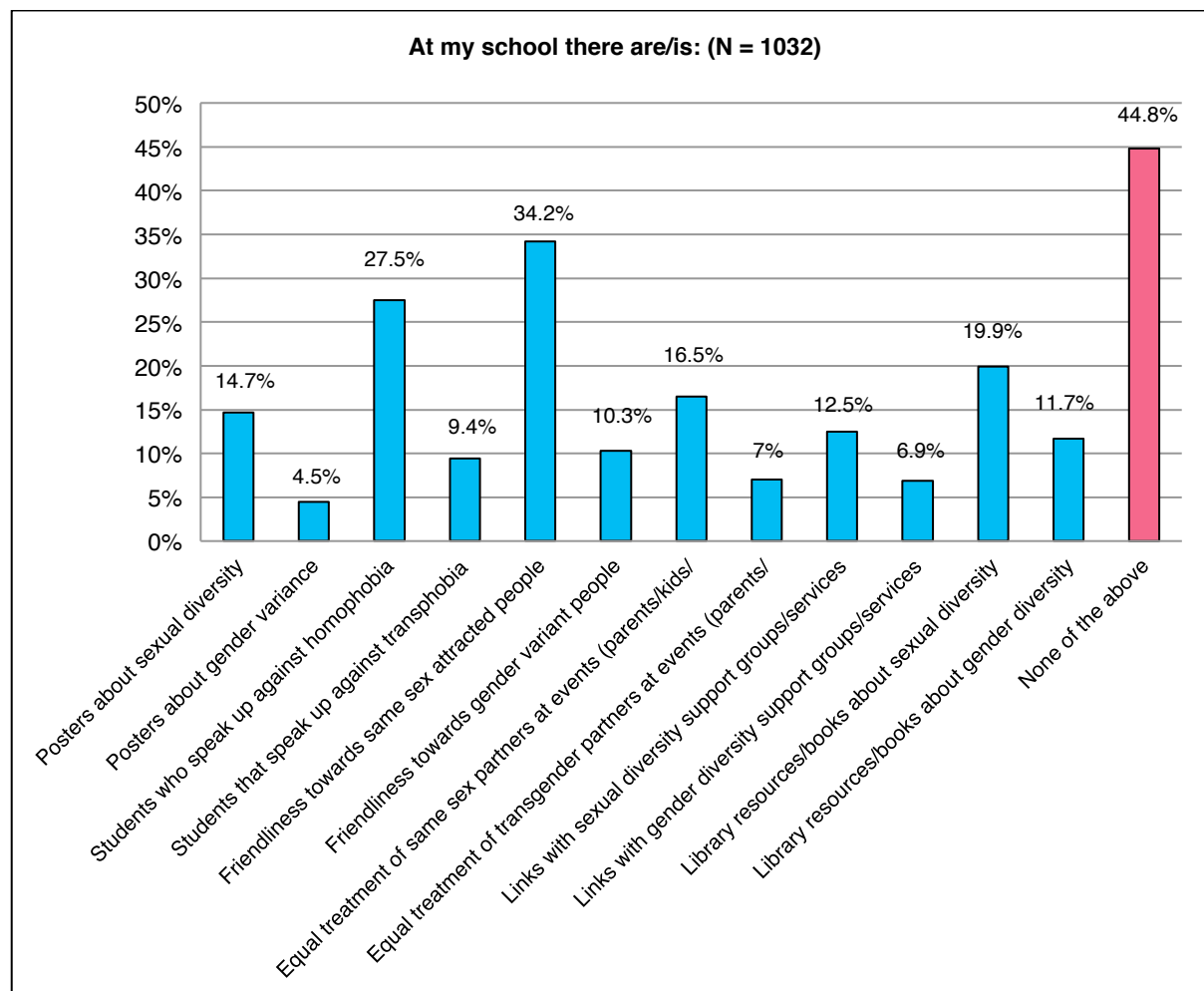
Graph 16

When asked if their school (or most recent school) has or had policies that protect them against homophobia, 32.7% said no, with 39.8% saying they don't know, and 27.5% who said yes. For transphobia, 36% said no, 54.3% said they don't know, and 9.6% said yes.



Graph 17

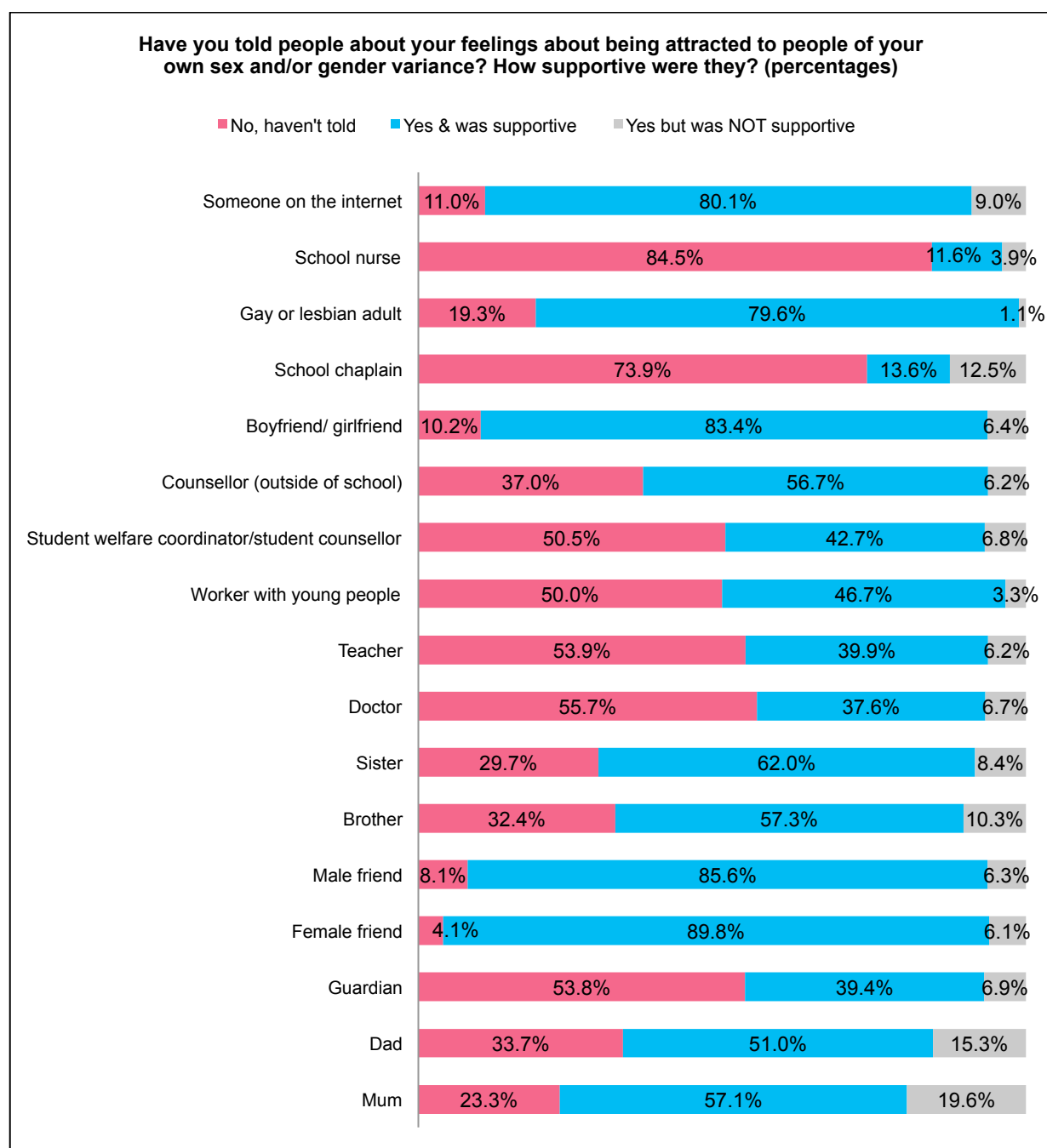
When asked if their school currently has (or had) information and resources about sexual diversity and gender variance, only 14.7% and 4.5% reported that their school had posters about sexual diversity and gender variance respectively. In addition, 19.9% and 11.7% said their school's library had resources or books about sexual diversity and gender variance respectively, and 12.5% and 6.9% said their school had links with sexual diversity and gender diversity support groups/services respectively. In terms of a supportive campus climate for sexual diversity and gender variance, 27.5% said that there were students at their school who speak up against homophobia, and 9.4% said that there were students at their school who speak up against transphobia. More than one-third (34.2%) said that there was friendliness towards same sex attracted people, and 10.3% said that there was friendliness towards gender variant people. In addition, only 16.5% said that there was equal treatment of same sex partners at events, and only 7% said that there was equal treatment of transgender partners at events. Almost half (44.8%) said that there was none of the above at their school.



EXPERIENCES OF TELLING OTHERS ABOUT THEIR SEXUALITY AND GENDER IDENTITY AND LEVEL OF SUPPORT

Graph 18

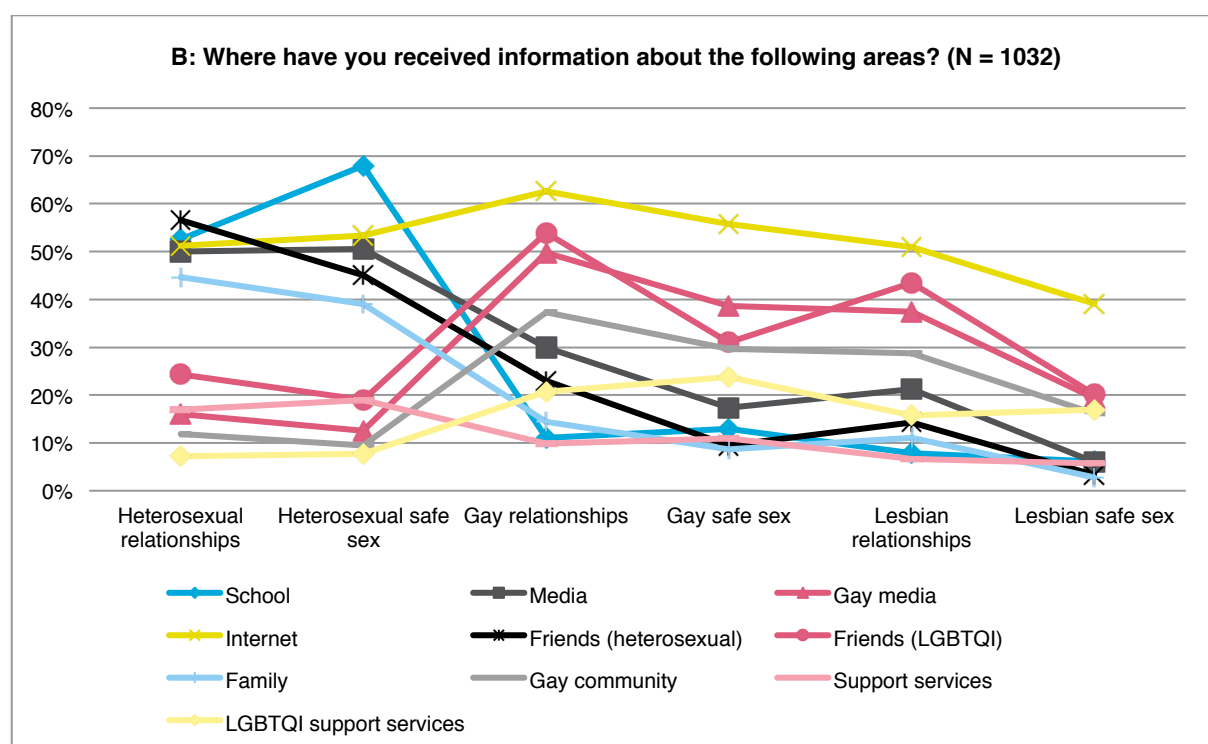
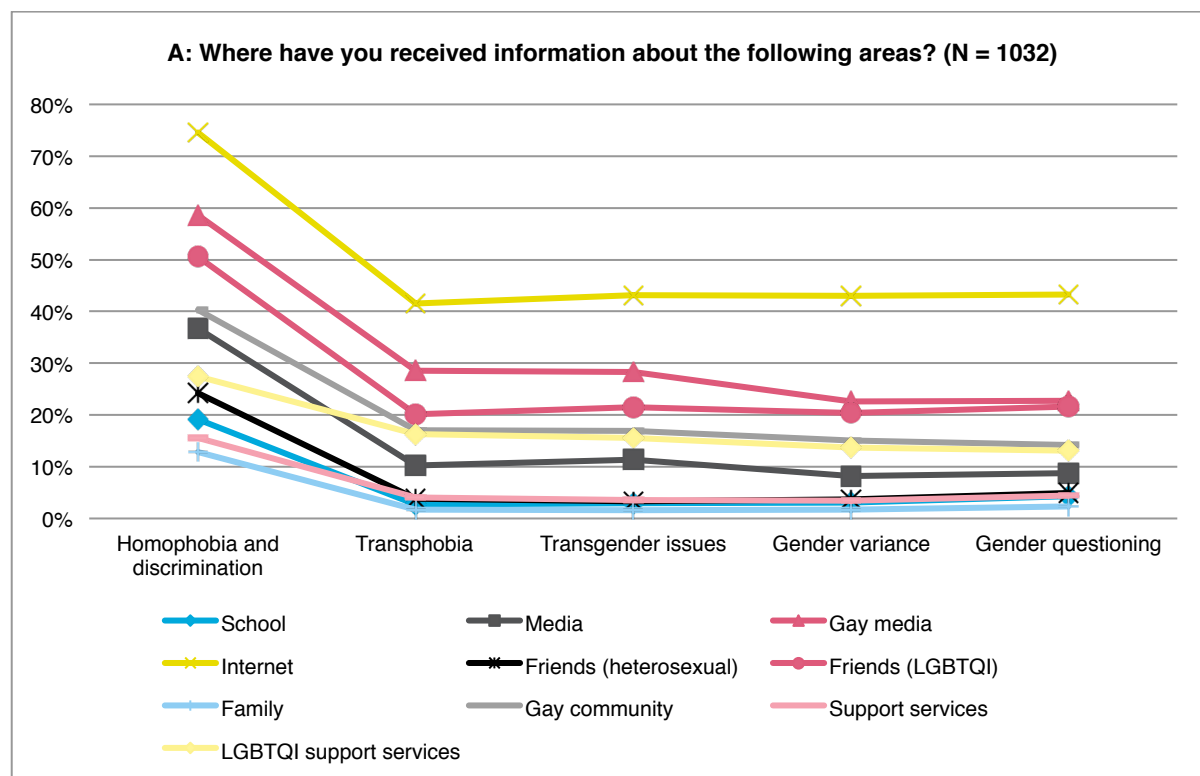
When asked who they have told and how supportive they were about their feelings of being attracted to people of their own sex and/or gender variance, the majority reported they told their family and friends and they were supportive. For example, 57.1% of young people said they told their mum and she was supportive, while 51% said that they told their dad and he was supportive. The young people reported confiding in their friends and they were supportive: 89.8% told a female friend who was supportive and 85.6% told a male friend who was supportive. While it seems that young people have a number of support relationships, their parents were also the least likely to be supportive: 19.6% told their mum and she was not supportive, 15.3% told their dad and he was not supportive. In addition, 23.3% of young people have not told their mum, and 33.7% have not told their dad. Young people are also very unlikely to tell their doctor (55.7%) and teacher (53.9%) about being attracted to people of their own sex and/or gender variance. The total number of respondents ranged from 277 to 1032.



QUESTIONS ABOUT SEXUALITY, GENDER, HEALTH AND WELLBEING

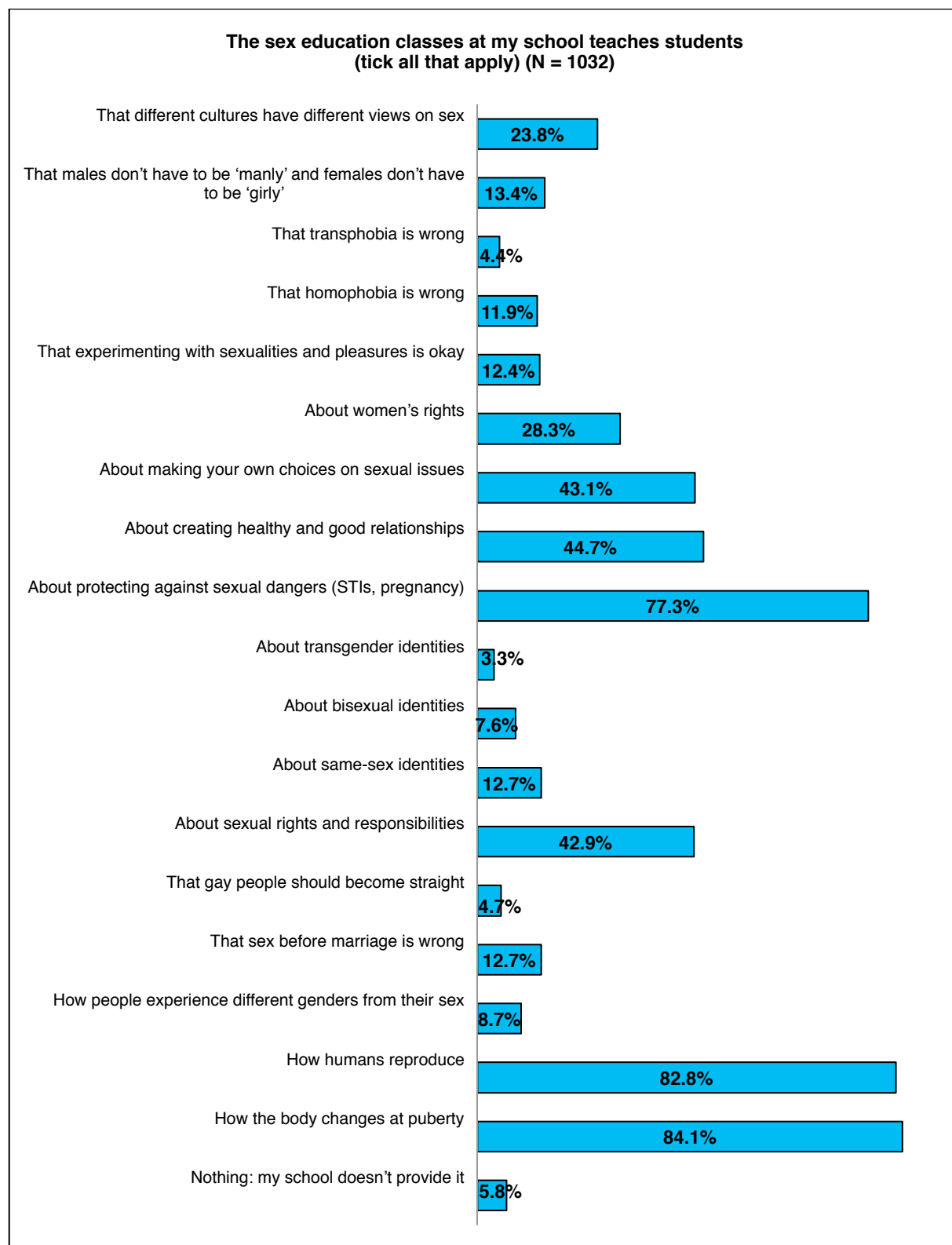
Graph 19

When asked if they had received any useful information about the following topics from these sources, the majority of young people said they received useful information from the internet (ranging from 39.1% for lesbian safe sex to 74.6% for homophobia and discrimination). The exceptions were that they learned about heterosexual safe sex from school (68%) and heterosexual relationships from their heterosexual friends (56.6%).



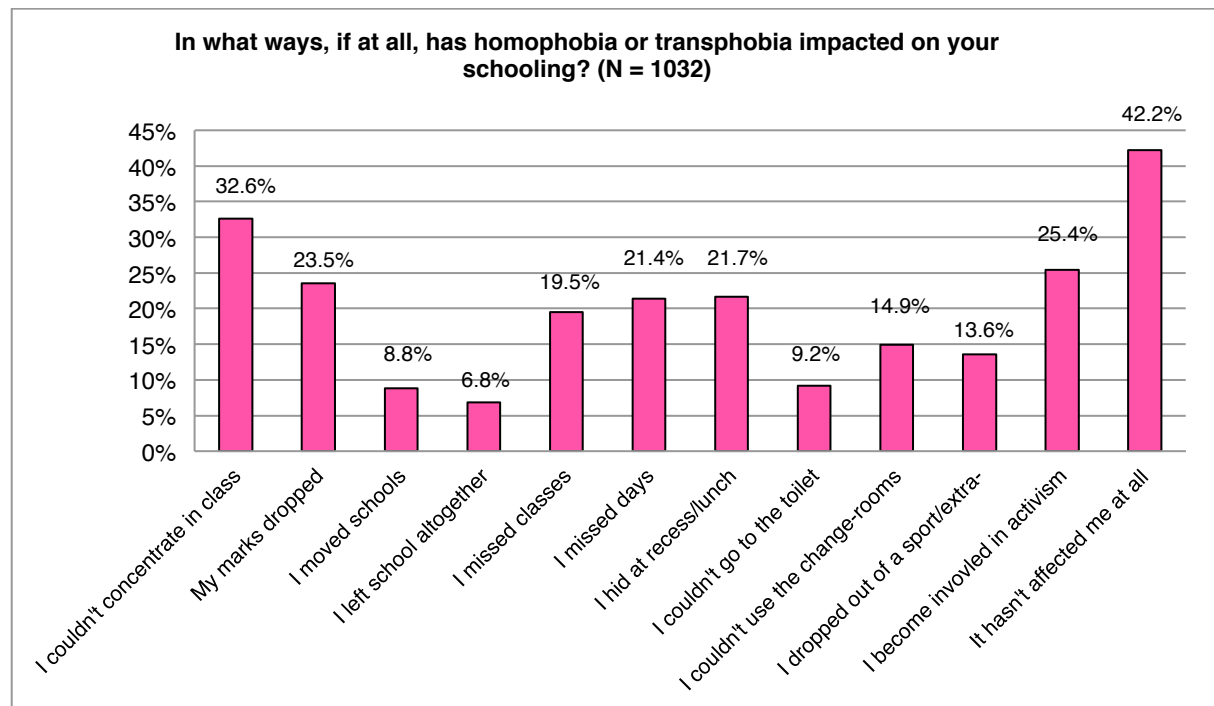
Graph 20

Regarding sex education at their school, the vast majority said they were taught about how the body changes at puberty (84.1%), how humans reproduce (82.8%), and about protecting against sexual dangers (77.3%). Conversely, very few were taught about transgender identities (3.3%), bisexual identities (7.6%), that transphobia is wrong (4.4%), that gay people should become straight (4.7%), and how people experience different genders from their sex (8.7%). Of all the young people that responded to the survey, 5.8% said that their school doesn't provide any sex education at all.



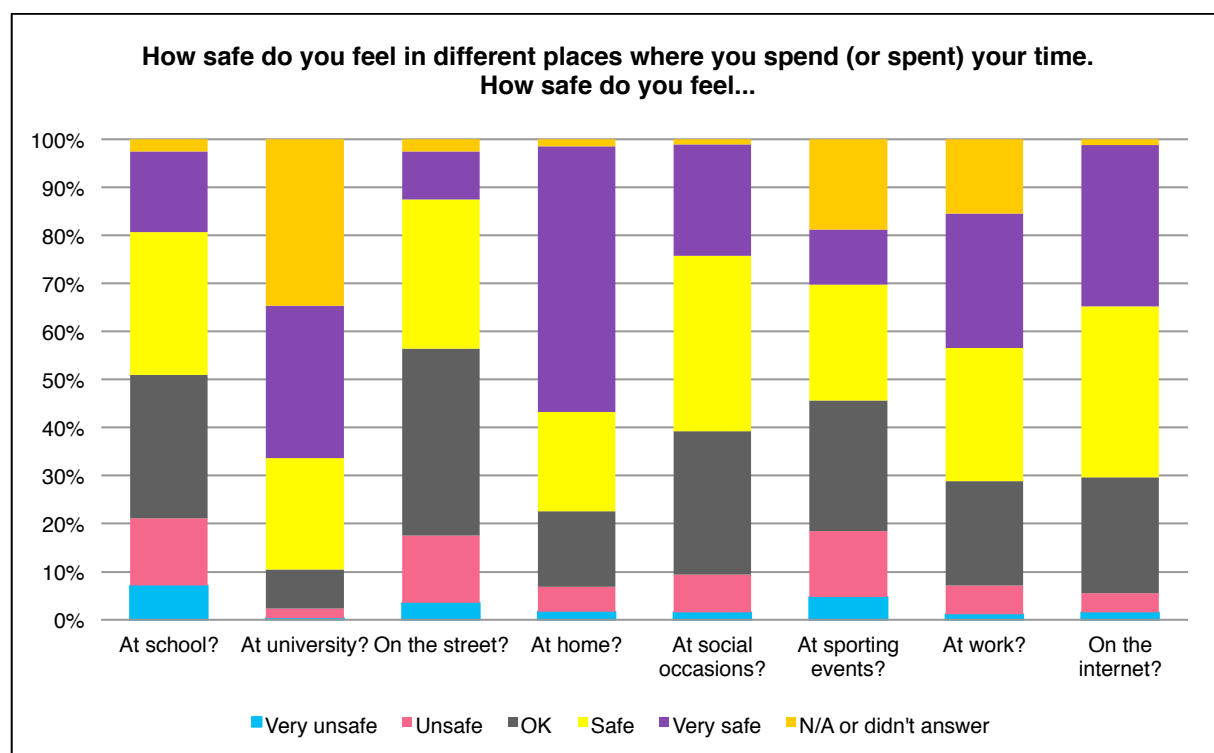
Graph 21

When asked in what ways has homophobia/transphobia impacted on their schooling, on the one hand 42.2% said that it had not affected them at all. On the other hand, 32.6% reported they couldn't concentrate in class, 23.5% said their marks dropped, 21.7% hid at recess/lunch, and 21.4% missed days. Interestingly, about a quarter (25.4%) became involved in activism.



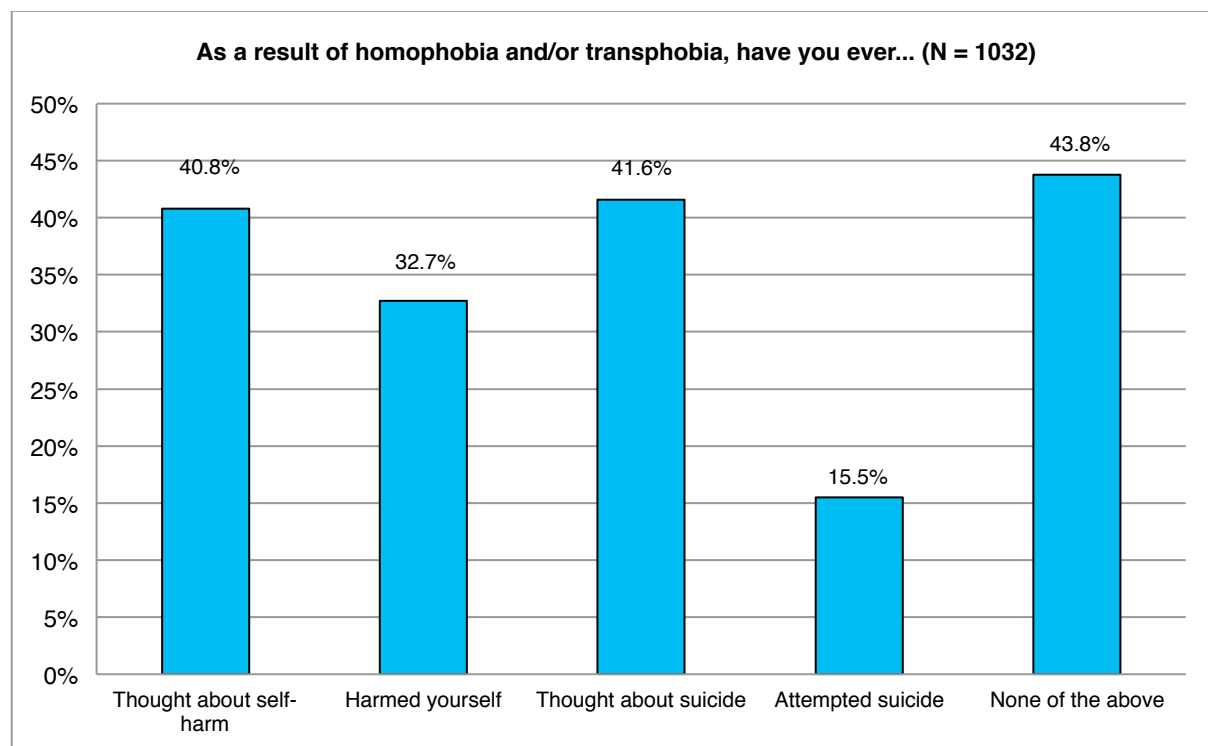
Graph 22

When asked how safe they feel in different places, the majority of young people feel 'very safe' or 'safe' at home (75.8%), on the internet (69.1%), at social occasions (59.8%), at work (55.6%) and university (52.9%). Less than half feel 'very safe' or 'safe' at school (46.6%), on the street (41.1%), and at sporting events (35.5%). The total number of respondents ranged from 651 to 1022. The total number of respondents ranged from 651 to 1022.



Graph 23

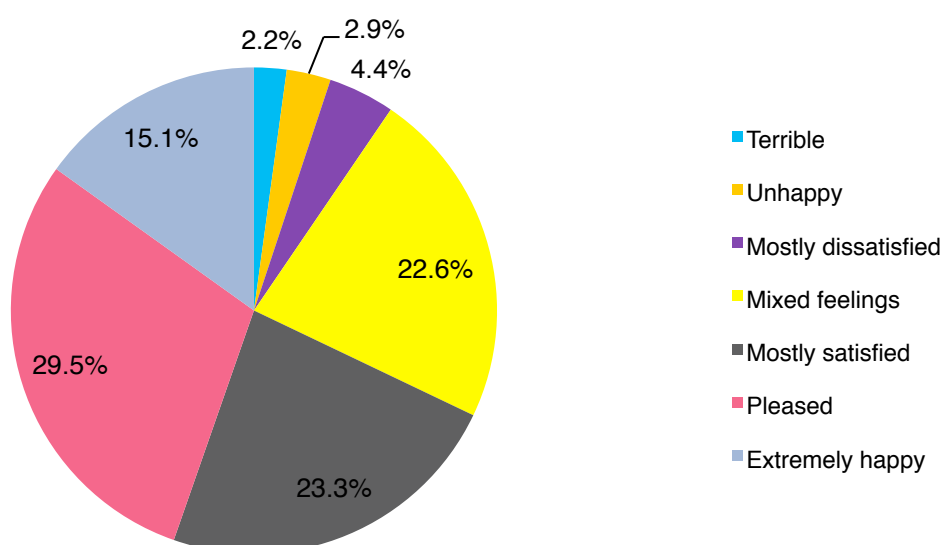
When asked about self-harm and suicide, 40.8% and 41.6% thought about self-harm and/or suicide, 32.7% had harmed themselves, and 15.5% had attempted suicide. A little less than half (43.8%) said they had not thought about or attempted to harm themselves ('none of the above').



Graph 24

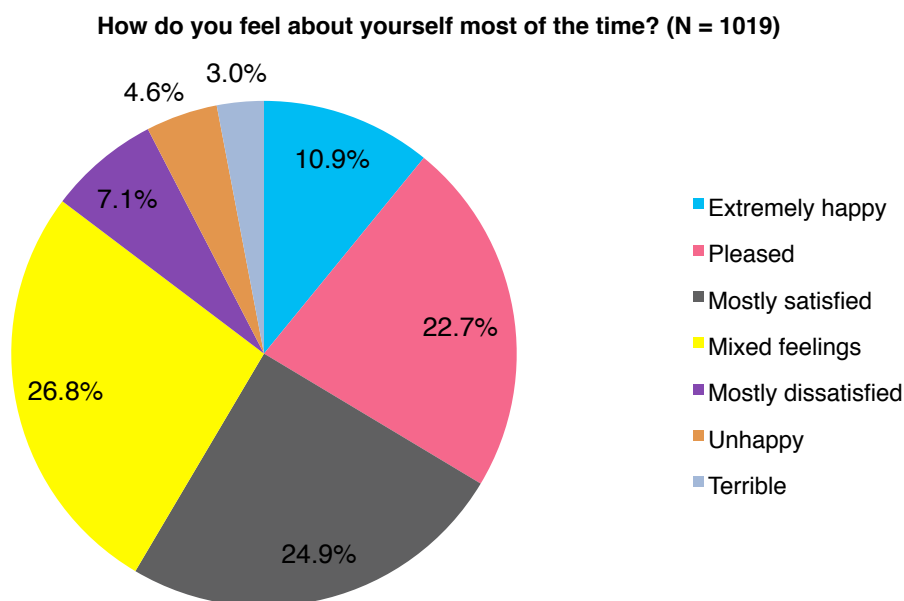
When asked how they feel about their life as a whole, 15.1% said they were 'extremely happy'. Altogether, 67.9% said they were 'extremely happy', 'pleased' or 'mostly satisfied', with 22.6% having 'mixed feelings' and 9.5% being 'mostly dissatisfied', 'unhappy' or 'terrible'.

How do you feel about your life as a whole? (N = 1019)



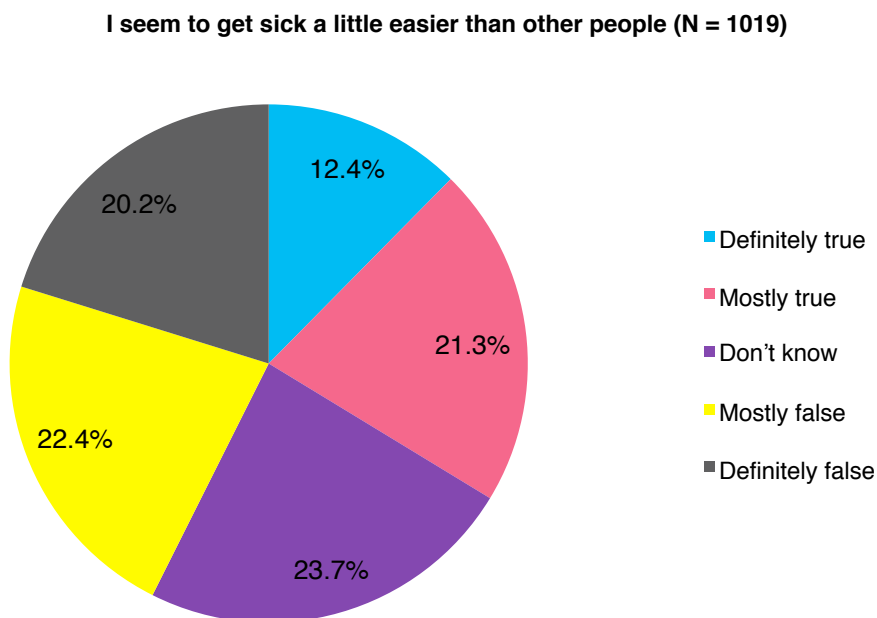
Graph 25

When asked how they feel about themselves most of the time, 10.9% said they were 'extremely happy'. Altogether, 58.5% said they were 'extremely happy', 'pleased' or 'mostly satisfied', with 26.8% having 'mixed feelings' and 14.7% being 'mostly dissatisfied', 'unhappy' or 'terrible'.



Graph 26

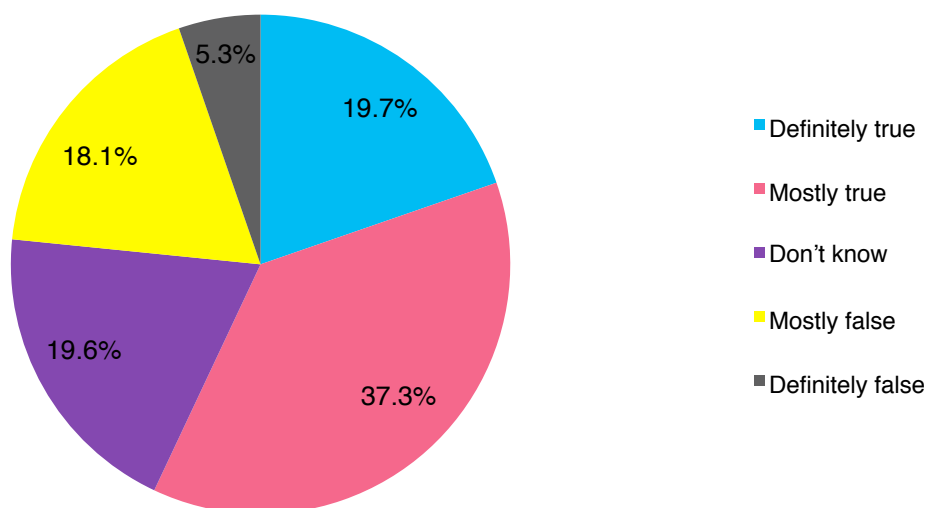
When asked if they seem to get sick a little easier than other people, 33.7% said 'definitely true' or 'mostly true', with 23.7% who said 'don't know' and 42.6% who said 'mostly false' or 'definitely false'.



Graph 27

When asked if they were as healthy as anybody they know, 57% said 'definitely true' or 'mostly true', 19.6% said 'don't know', and 22.4% said 'mostly false' or definitely false'.

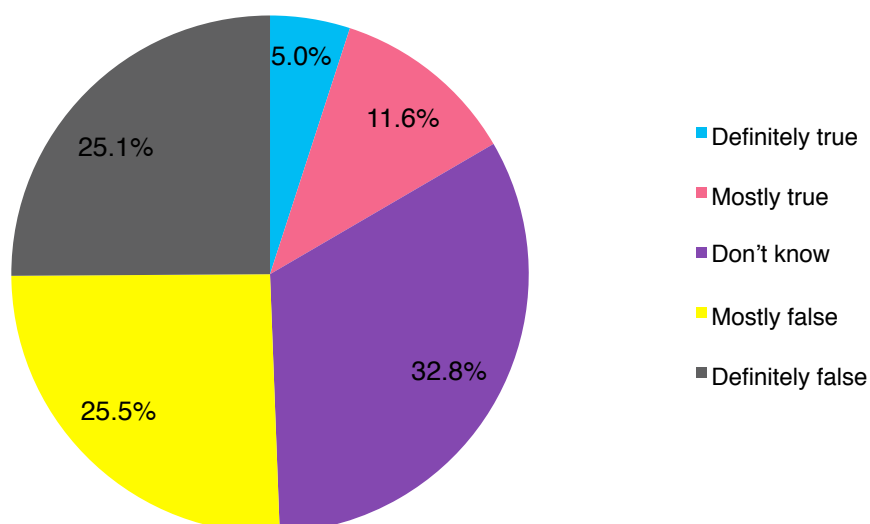
I am as healthy as anybody I know (N = 1019)



Graph 28

When asked if they expect their health to get worse, 16.6% said 'definitely true' or 'mostly true', 32.8% said 'don't know', and 50.6% said 'mostly false' or definitely false'.

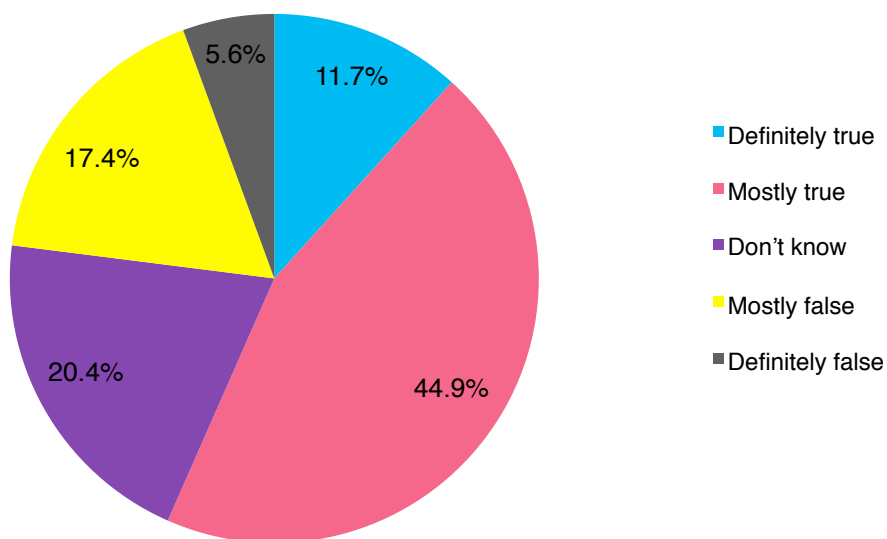
I expect my health to get worse (N = 1019)



Graph 29

When asked if their health was excellent, 56.6% said 'definitely true' or 'mostly true', 20.4% said 'don't know', and 23% said 'mostly false' or 'definitely false'.

My health is excellent (N = 1019)



Graph 30

In general, 34% said their health is 'excellent' or 'very good', 31.5% 'good', and 34.5% said 'fair' or 'poor'.

In general, would you say your health is... (N = 1019)

