# Transgender and Gender Diverse (TGD) students' experiences in Australian schools, including Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education.

**Jessica (Jessie) Fletcher**

BA Women's Studies & Political Science, McGill University

MATL Master of Teaching & Learning, McGill University

A thesis presented to Macquarie University in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Master of Research (MRes)

Faculty of Arts

Macquarie School of Education

Macquarie University, Australia

Submission date: 28th, November 2022

# Table of Contents

# List of Tables

# List of Figures

## Abstract

Whilst research into TGD students' experiences of institutionalised marginalisation in Australian schools has increased significantly in the last decade, little is known about the experiences of this cohort in Alternative, Distance and/or Online Learning in or beyond pandemic times. To address the current gaps in research, the present study explores the experiences of TGD students who have accessed or are currently accessing Alternative, Distance and/or Online learning in Australia. The study proceeded from a trans-informed methodological approach privileging the experiential knowledge of TGD students. Survey methods focused directly on making space for their voices at times of their convenience. An online survey hosted on Qualtrics was utilised to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from a cohort of 1,670 TGD identifying students aged 14-25 years. Participants were recruited through established social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram as well as through TGD youth support organisations. Descriptive statistics were generated using SPSS, and thematic analyses was applied with the aid of the computer software Leximancer. Data suggests that TGD students' experiences in alternative settings were positive and improved their overall wellbeing as compared to mainstream face-to-face settings. TGD students who accessed online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic reported increased feelings of physical safety from bullying, while simultaneously reporting negative experiences of social isolation from peers, misgendering in online settings and a lack of structure and academic support as compared to mainstream face-to-face schooling. TGD students overwhelmingly reported that online learning during COVID-19 negatively impacted upon their wellbeing. Implications for policy making and education stakeholders including researchers, school administrators and educators are discussed, as results suggest that mainstream face-to-face schools and online settings may learn from alternative settings on how best to support TGD students.

# Statement of Originality

*This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.*

(Signed):                                                    Date:  28/11/22

Jessica Fletcher

## Acknowledgements

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.0 Introduction

Trans-inclusivity in all areas of life, including schools, remains a hotly contested topic in Australian society (Cumming-Potvin & Martino, 2018; Ferfolja & Ullman, 2021; Ullman, 2018). Despite some improvements in conditions for Trans and Gender Diverse (TGD) youth in schools, they continue to be exposed to institutionalised cisnormativity[1] in the form of transphobic bullying, sex segregation, student identification, non-inclusive curriculum, and other school-based practices (Cumming-Potvin & Martino, 2018; Ferfolja & Ullman, 2017, 2021; A. Hill et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2016; Payne & Smith, 2016; Russell et al., 2020; Strauss et al., 2020; Ullman, 2017, 2018). This thesis explores the experiences of Trans and Gender Diverse (TGD) students in Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education in Australia. Drawing on concepts from contemporary trans studies, including intersectionality, the study employed a trans-informed theoretical framework to understand the intersecting ways in which different educational settings and/or modes of delivery minimise or exacerbate educational inequities for TGD students in Australia from the perspective of TGD students themselves. This chapter introduces the background and context, describes the purpose of this research including its significance, scope and definitions and briefly outlines the remaining thesis chapters.

## 1.1 Background and Context

In Australia, Transgender and Gender Diverse (TGD) students attend every educational setting (Smith et al., 2014), including alternative educational settings. In recent years,

---

[1] Cisnormativity refers to describes a collective social belief in which sex/gender congruence is assumed to be the norm, where bodies and gender expressions that do not conform are seen as abnormal or somehow less legitimate Serano, J. (2007). *Whipping girl : a transsexual woman on sexism and the scapegoating of femininity*. Seal Press.

education research has increasingly documented marginalising practices enacted by students, staff and schools which contribute to negative school experiences, higher rates of poor mental health and wellbeing deficits for TGD youth (Jones, Bolger, et al., 2015; Jones, Smith, et al., 2015; McBride, 2021; McBride & Neary, 2021; Payne & Smith, 2016; Smith et al., 2014). Most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased online and alternative learning – broadly expanding the relevance of alternative education – internationally and across Australia (UNESCO, 2021, p. 263). This temporary shift brought existing educational inequities for student populations into the public consciousness, including TGD students who experienced increased housing precarity, unemployment and psychological distress during the pandemic (Smout et al., 2022). While research exploring the experiences of TGD students and discrimination in Australian schools has increased significantly in the last decade (see Hillier et al., 2010; Robinson, et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2014; Ullman, 2018 etc.), the educational trajectories and experiences of this cohort in Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education remains understudied. The following thesis *explores the experiences of TGD students who are currently accessing or have accessed, Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education in Australia in the last 5 years.*

**1.2 Purpose and Scope of the Research**

It has been well established that positive school experiences lead to higher levels of wellbeing and achievement for all students (Anderson & Graham, 2016; Borkar, 2016; McCallum & Price, 2016). Conversely, negative school experiences lead to poorer mental health, wellbeing and achievement outcomes for students both in and beyond school (Brännlund et al., 2017; Kosciw et al., 2013; Strauss et al., 2017; Strauss et al., 2020). Educational experiences are informed by the social values that shape them, including values around gender. Despite recent attempts to create more gender inclusive schools,

institutionalised cisnormativity remains embedded in school policies, practices, pedagogy and infrastructure in ways that produce educational inequities for TGD students (McBride, 2021). This study has two aims. First, to explore and interrogate intersecting factors that produce gender injustice and educational inequities for TGD youth in school settings. Secondly, by exploring the extent to which educational settings operating outside of the mainstream resist or replicate marginalising practices for TGD students, this study seeks to extend current research in the areas both of Alternative Education and Trans Studies in Education.

## 1.3 Thesis outline

This chapter outlined the background, context, scope, and significance of this study. Chapter 2 will review existing research and identify gaps in the literature, justifying the need for this study. Chapter 3 will describe the trans-informed theoretical approach used to frame this study. Chapter 4 details and offers justification for the methodology used to address each research question and Chapter 5 presents the findings for each of those questions. Finally, Chapter 6 offers a discussion of the results in relation to a trans-informed theoretical framework, outlines study limitations, implications for future research and education stakeholders and concluding remarks.

# Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

## 2.0 Introduction

The following chapter briefly reviews the literature on the terms 'TGD students' and 'alternative education'. It then reviews the research literature on TGD students' experiences in schools and alternative education, identifying current research gaps in this area. It finally outlines the core research questions for the present study reported on in this thesis.

## 2.1 Definitions

### 2.1.1 Transgender and Gender Diverse (TGD) Youth

In the United States, problematic concepts such as "Rapid-Onset Gender Dysphoria" (ROGD) have appeared in grey literature (Littman, 2018; Littman, 2019) to explain the increase in TGD identifying students in schools. Littman's 2018 study analysed survey results collected from 256 parents reporting that their adolescent or young adult (AYA) experienced a "sudden" onset of gender dysphoria. Results from the study suggested that, according to parents, AYAs may have been influenced by peers or peer groups in which other AYAs were transitioning and/or experiencing gender dysphoria. Littman's research methodology was heavily critiqued for being poorly designed and biased (Ashley, 2020; Restar, 2020). The study created controversy in academia and among trans activists who claimed that these kinds of studies serve to advance politically conservative agendas. Since the initial publication in 2018 (corrected in 2019), ROGD has been described by researchers and trans activists as pseudoscientific and anti-trans (Ashley, 2020; Restar, 2020; Rider & Tebbe, 2021). The term borrows clinical, diagnostic language from the DSM-5, suggesting gender dysphoria is a diagnosable mental health disorder that young people can develop by way of "social contagion" in places like schools. Although ideas like ROGD have been

criticised, they do point to an undercurrent of cisnormativity in schools and highlight the contentious nature of how we conceptualise youth and gender diversity in education.

What it means to be TGD can be difficult to define (Bragg et al., 2018; Davies et al., 2019; Frohard-Dourlent, 2018). This is because there is no one way to be trans or gender diverse, nor is there one correct defining or unifying feature that captures the complexity, nuance, and dynamism of gendered experiences over time and across contexts. It is critically important to note that gender is further complexified when considering the multiple ways that experiences of gender intersects with race, ethnicity, coloniality, class, dis/ability, age and wealth or poverty (Crenshaw, 2017).

This study acknowledges the complexities inherent in labelling identities or experiences of gender by engaging with definitions of trans and gender diversity that "celebrate the various ways in which individuals resist and uproot dominant understandings of gender" (Kean, 2021, p. 263). As there is no one way to be trans and no one way all trans people relate to their body and/or gender, this study employs expansive and inclusive definitions of TGD based on self-identification. Consistent with sociological literature, a trans or gender diverse person typically has a gender identity or identities or expression different to the legal sex they were assigned at birth and socially conditioned into (ACON, 2019).  Self-definition should be privileged in critical framings of TGD youth, as a consent-based approach resists reducing TGD youth to a single data point (Ruberg & Ruelos, 2020). Self-identification is informed by contemporary queer and transgender theories and critical bottom-up TGD youth activisms which takes into account the ways in which identity is socially constructed, and honours the layered and diverse nature of gendered experiences (Butler, 1990, 1993; Kean, 2021; Keenan, 2022; Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010).

*2.1.2 Alternative Education*

Globally, the provision of alternative forms of learning has increased in the last decade (Riele, 2007), including in Australia. Over 70,000 students across Australia access alternative forms of education and over 900 programs exist both within and outside the traditional schooling system (Johns, 2014; Riele, 2007; Te Riele, 2014), including TGD students. While the term 'mainstream schooling' is usually commonly understood, the term 'alternative education' is contested and may describe a variety of sites and practices (Johns, 2014; Kim, 2007; Riele, 2007). This study recognises that, at certain points in time and for a myriad of reasons some students, including TGD students, are unable to attend or choose to leave mainstream face-to-face schooling (Johns, 2014; Mills et al., 2016; Mills et al., 2017). This study is concerned with modes of educational delivery and educational settings that serve as alternatives to mainstream face-to-face learning. For the purpose of this study, as the majority of high school students in Australia attend either Public Government Schools or Private/Independent Religious Schools (ABS, 2021), these two settings are what will constitute mainstream face-to-face settings. Alternative delivery and/or settings will include permanent online learning programs (public and private), temporary online or at-home schooling due to COVID-19 lockdowns, Distance Education (DE), home-schooling, VET pathways, TAFE, Schools for Specific or Specialist Purposes (SSPs) including Hospital Schools and Youth Justice Schools, Big Picture Schools, TAFE, and secular Independent Schools, including schools sometimes referred to as 'last chance' or 'flexi' schools for students disengaged from mainstream face-to-face settings. Thus, alternative education is broadly conceived to include all the above, including ongoing, temporary or hybrid models. Justification for the inclusion of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic as alternative education will be discussed further below in section 2.2.2.

**2.2 Literature Review**

*2.2.1 TGD Students in Education*

Although iterations of gender diversity have existed across cultures throughout history (Bragg et al., 2018), aspects of gender diversity, especially in contemporary Western culture, have become increasingly visible in all areas of modern life. This includes among young people in schools. The enhanced social visibility of gender diversity can be attributed to the enactment of anti-discrimination legislation, which both reflects and drives societal change, combined with global, national and local research, activism (in particular by trans women of colour), advances in science, medicine and technology and increased media coverage of TGD youth (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2017; Jones, 2017; Jones et al., 2016; Kean, 2021; Ullman, 2017; UNESCO, 2019). While some level of increased social visibility has contributed to the disruption or interrogation of assumptions around gender and sexuality, hetero- and cisnormativity remain deeply ingrained in contemporary society and its institutions (Spade, 2015). TGD identities and experiences are still lacking in educational research and in education more generally, from policy and practice, pedagogy, and curriculum to teaching training (Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011; Kean, 2021; Keenan, 2017; Keenan, 2022). It is also important to note that some of benefits associated with increased social visibility are not felt evenly and that, for many TDG people, especially TGD people of colour, social visibility can be dangerous (Kean, 2021).

Unsurprisingly, alongside an increase in social visibility, there has simultaneously been growth in conservative messaging and policies seeking to challenge social gains made by and for TGD young people in Australia and beyond (Ullman, 2018). In 2017, after 4 years of conservative backlash, funding for Australia's first ever LGBTQIA+ education initiative by Safe Schools Coalition Australia ('Safe Schools'), which offered teacher training, resources, and other documentation to help schools support trans and sexuality diverse

students, was terminated and Safe Schools was disbanded (Ullman, 2018). In 2021, a press release by Human Rights Campaign reported that over 250 anti-LGBTQIA+ bills were introduced into state legislatures across the United States of America, the majority of which targeted TGD individuals (Ronan, 2021). Most recently in Australia, at the federal and state levels, bills such as the Religious Discrimination Bill 2022 (Cth) and related bills and the Education Legislation Amendment (Parental Rights) Bill 2020 (NSW) introduced by the Hon Mark Latham MLC would restrict the education access and representation rights of TGD identifying youth, including within educational settings.

In the last decade, several studies conducted in Australia have shown that TDG identifying students experience higher levels of discrimination in the form of bullying and harassment than their cisgender peers (A. Hill et al., 2021; Jones, Smith, et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2014).  The 2014 Australian survey *Growing up Queer* found that of all surveyed 1,032 young people aged 16-27yrs who had experienced homophobia or transphobia at school, a third reported that they could not concentrate in class and almost a quarter reported a drop in marks, missed classes, skipped days of school, and hiding at lunch or recess to avoid bullying (Robinson et al., 2014). In the 2010 national anonymous online *Writing Themselves In* survey of 3,134 students aged 14-21yrs (Jones and Hillier, 2013), TGD students were twice as likely as cisgender students to report that they moved schools because of discrimination (22%), left school altogether (22%), or were unable to use the toilet (24%) and the change rooms (35%). A greater portion of TGD students than cisgender students had difficulty concentrating in class (42%), dropped marks (34%), missed classes (36%), and missed days (35%). They were also at significantly higher risk than cisgender students of self-harm and suicidality.  Eleven years on, the 2021 *Writing Themselves In* survey showed more than one third of 6,418 queer participants aged 14-21yrs felt unsafe in their educational institution due to their sexuality or gender identity (A. O. Hill et al., 2021). The survey also found that almost two-thirds of trans

women, more than half of trans men, and almost half of non-binary participants reported missing days at their educational institution because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable – an increased proportion since 2010 (A. Hill et al., 2021). While current research provides valuable information on the experiences of TGD students in schools, to date there is little detailed commentary on the specific educational contexts outside mainstream education within which these experiences occur.

The seminal work by trans activist Dean Spade (2015) draws on feminist, queer and poststructuralist theories to show the harmful ways in which norms around gender and bodies "permeate our everyday lives" in the policies, programs and practices of public institutions that govern our lives, including schools. These kinds of institutional practices are so normalised that they become disembodied from the individual, thus acting upon them instead of being enacted by them (Frohard-Dourlent, 2016). This idea is echoed by data collected from International and Australian population-based studies of TGD students which suggests that schools are spaces where normative notions of gender and sexuality are promoted and policed by administrators, teachers, staff and students alike (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2017; Hillier et al., 2010; Payne & Smith, 2013; Ullman, 2018; Ward, 2017).

For example, while in recent years school anti-harassment and bullying policies have been expanded to include gender identity, negative school experiences in mainstream settings remain commonplace for TGD identifying young people. TGD students are more likely to experience transphobic bullying and harassment than their cisgender peers, and are also more likely to complete their school by alternative means (Smith et al., 2014). Potentially contributing to this shift towards alternative education are policies around bullying and harassment in schools that are informed by a victim-perpetrator model, locating the issue of bullying at the individual level, while ignoring the social contexts in which these acts occur

and the social function they serve in schools, such as, what Payne and Smith (2016) have called 'gender policing' (Payne & Smith, 2013; Payne & Smith, 2016; Ringrose & Rawlings, 2015; Ringrose & Renold, 2010; Ullman, 2018). The work of Davies et al. (2019) on school washrooms as sites of gender policing further highlights the ways in which schools are institutions where gender non-conforming students bodies and behaviours are regulated by gendered norms.

Sexuality Education in Australian schools is yet another way in which schools embody institutionalised cisnormativity. In the recently published *Sex(uality) Education for Trans and Gender Diverse Youth in Australia,* Shannon (2022) describes the ways in which sexuality education in Australia fails to meet the needs of trans youth or their cisgender peers. Sexuality Education, which is still delivered as part of physical health and education courses, remains "steeped in biomedical understandings of the body and the self" that are not affirming to TGD students. Shannon (2022) goes on to state that pedagogies which affirm TGD youth may be better fostered in other subject areas which are not bound to the same constraints and suggests broader reforms to tertiary teacher training to enhance teacher knowledge of gender diversity, as well as the development of TGD affirming policies, practices, and infrastructure in educational settings.

The work of Martino et al. (2020) speaks to the importance of resisting the enactment of policies and practices that are informed by a focus on individual rights, which fail to address "the structural inequalities at play in sustaining the erasure of trans personhood in school communities in the first place" (Omercajic & Martino, 2020b, p. 2). This line of thinking has led many researchers in the field to call for critical trans pedagogies/frameworks to address, interrogate, resist and dismantle the beliefs and practices in education that continue to marginalise TGD youth (Kean, 2021; Keenan, 2017; Keenan, 2022; Martino et

al., 2020; Martino & Omercajic, 2021; Omercajic & Martino, 2020a). Therefore, a study exploring TGD students' experiences in settings outside of mainstream face-to-face schools could help shed light on the ways in which alternative educational settings or modes of delivery, including Distance and/or Online Education may or may not act as sites of resistance to institutionalised practices like cisgenderism, including for TGD students.

*2.2.2 Alternative Education*

International and national research on the impact of alternative education has largely focused on educational outcomes such as retention rates and engagement as they relate to students who experience sociocultural and socio-economic disadvantage  (Johns, 2014; McGregor & Mills, 2012; Mills et al., 2016; Riele, 2007; Shay & Heck, 2015). Multiple Australian studies conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic have shown that TGD students engage often with alternative education programs or pathways (Hillier et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2014). To date, however, there has been a lack of exploration into the prevalence or reasons behind this engagement. The COVID-19 pandemic has also inspired a new set of psychological studies of small TGD student cohorts internationally who, alongside their mainstream peers, were temporarily in alternative education by virtue of the pandemic (Abrams & Schaefer, 2020; Chu & Li, 2022; Goldbach et al., 2021; Hawke et al., 2021; Hunt et al., 2021; Mavhandu-Mudzusi et al., 2021; Oginni et al., 2021; Woznicki et al., 2021). While these studies have considered increased outcomes of increased psychological distress, housing insecurity and isolation, with patterns consistent across the US, UK, Taiwan, Poland, South Africa, and Nigeria, they have stopped short of considering the structural drivers, advantages, and disadvantages of alternative education for TGD students.

Research into alternative educational settings as sites of social justice and resistance to the rigidity of mainstream educational settings has emerged in the last decade (McGregor,

2017; McGregor & Mills, 2011, 2012; Mills & McGregor, 2017; Mills et al., 2016) in response to the ways in which neoliberalism has reframed educational policy using neo-liberal principles such as standardization, uniformity, accountability, individualism, market-based practices of competition and managerialism that serve to further marginalise youth who do not fit into normalising practices (McGregor, 2017). Research in this area suggests that alternative educational settings are often more responsive to students' individual life circumstances, as they providing highly individualised learning programs in relaxed and informal learning environments, can offer more material supports to disadvantaged students, have potentially more restorative approaches to conflict and focus on caring relationships (Baroutsis et al., 2016; Hickey et al., 2020; McGregor & Mills, 2011, 2012, 2016; Mills & McGregor, 2017; Mills et al., 2016; Mills et al., 2013a; Riddle et al., 2021). For example, research conducted by Shay and Heck (2015) exploring the high rates of Indigenous students attending Australian flexible (flexi) learning schools found that positive aspects of those schools included nurturing the cultural identity of students, awareness and cultural competence of educators,  community engagement, the presence of Indigenous cultures, the employment of Indigenous peoples in schools and leadership in all those areas (Shay & Heck, 2015). While these aspects were positive, Shay and Heck (2015) suggested that further research is needed to consider how these schools benefit Indigenous people more and how mainstream schools can support Indigenous students (Mills & McGregor, 2017).

These studies have suggested that mainstream schools could learn from alternative approaches on how to be more inclusive of a diverse range of students needs and that data collection from alternative education could be used to interrogate and reform practices within mainstream schools that marginalise certain student cohorts (McGregor & Mills, 2012; Mills et al., 2016; Phillippi et al., 2021; Reimer & Pangrazio, 2020), but this body of research remains very small and makes little to no mention of TGD students as a specific cohort.

Additionally, it was difficult to find any research on the shortcomings or potential drawbacks of alternative educational delivery or settings. A gap remains then on TGD students' experiences in alternative education, including online learning; and how this compares and relates to mainstream education trajectories both in and beyond pandemic conditions.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a widespread move to online learning, radically altering the way in which education was delivered both globally and in Australia. It is worth noting that alternative modes of delivery do not necessarily mean alternative education. Not all online learning is "alternative", in that it may be delivered by mainstream face-to-face institutions such as was the case during the COVID-19 lockdowns.  While we acknowledge that not all online learning is "alternative", this study is interested in knowing if an alternative mode of delivery such as online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic led to more positive or negative educational experiences for TGD students. More specifically, if online delivery replicated existing educational practices that may marginalise TGD students (as per existing data on TGD student experiences in schools) or mirrored some of the practices more commonly associated with alternative educational settings (flexibility, informality, individualised learning).

## 2.3 The Present Study: Research Gaps & Questions

To address the lack of research into TGD students in alternative and online learning, the present study aimed to explore the positive and negative experiences of TGD youth who have accessed or are currently accessing alternative education in Australia. Given TGD students' higher rates of engagement in alternative education and lower levels of reported wellbeing compared to cisgender students in education overall; the following **four research (RQ) questions were considered:**

- RQ1.: What are the some of the demographic characteristics of TGD students across Australia?

- RQ2.: Why are TGD students accessing Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education in Australia?

- RQ3.: How do TGD students' experiences of Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education compare to their experiences at mainstream face-to-face school?

- RQ4.: In what ways, if any, have TGD students' experiences in Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education impacted their overall wellbeing at school?

**2.4 Conclusion**

The literature reviewed suggested the need for a study which sits at the intersection of two distinct bodies of scholarship – the experiences of TGD students in educational settings, and the role and purpose of alternative education (including online learning). While each of these subjects have received significant academic attention, there is presently a gap in the research exploring the specific experiences of TGD students accessing alternative education in Australia. The rapid, widespread shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of critically evaluating alternatives to mainstream face-to-face schooling and identifying existing educational inequities for student populations, including for TGD students. This is because, in unpredictable times, the use of online learning and technology suddenly appears significantly less 'alternative'.

# Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

## 3.0 Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed the current literature on Alternative Education in Australia and on transgender and gender diverse (TGD) students' experiences in Australian education more broadly. This chapter describes the privileging of a trans-informed theoretical framework to understanding the lived experiences of TGD students in Australian Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education. It draws on concepts from contemporary trans studies to make sense of the intersecting ways in which schools as institutions reinforce, regulate and police gender, exposing some TGD students to "educational inequalities that make them vulnerable to extreme marginalization; while providing other with opportunities that enable them to circumnavigate the excesses of cisnormativity" (McBride, 2021, p. 104).

## 3.1 Trans-Informed Theoretical Framework

 Constructed around a liberatory framework inspired by theories of racial justice, queer and trans theories, trans-informed research questions and seeks to dismantle policies and practices that oppress, marginalise, and render gender non-conforming people illegible (Spade, 2015). At the heart of any trans-informed theoretical approach is the understanding that despite the strength, creativity and resiliency of TGD people, the group continue to be marginalised by intersecting factors as shown in Figure 3.1, including institutions that govern our daily lives (Keenan, 2017; Keenan, 2022; Wesp et al., 2019).
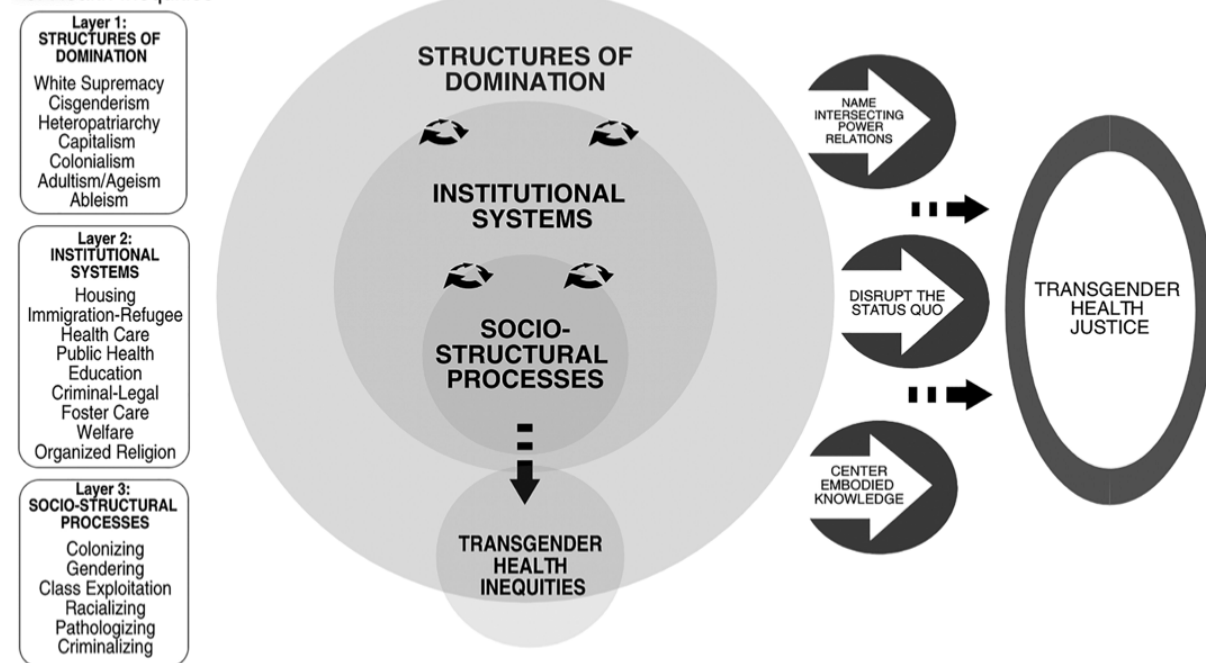
*Figure 3.1*: Intersectionality Research for Transgender Health Justice Framework (Wesp et al., 2019, p. 291)

*3.1.1 Structures of Domination: Cisgenderism*

Though originally intended as a health model for under TGD health inequities, Figure 3.1

aligns with and can be used to understand Kean's framework in which schooling similarly

sits within layers of inequities and marginalising practices (structures of domination

including cisgenderism, heteropatriarchy and other phenomena) that limit trans personhood

and contribute to "diminished life chances" (health and education inequities) for TGD people,

including TGD students (Omercajic & Martino, 2020a; Spade, 2015, p. 142). This reality

takes on a particular relevance in the Australian context, where schooling is compulsory until

between 15-17 years of age. Gender diversity remains a fraught topic in Australian society

and despite recent attempts by some state governments to create more TGD-affirming school

policies, cisgenderism continues to be play out in schools across Australia (Cumming-Potvin

& Martino, 2018; Ferfolja & Ullman, 2017; Kean, 2021; Keenan, 2022; Meyer, 2022;

Omercajic & Martino, 2020a; Payne & Smith, 2016; Shannon, 2016).  This is because

genderism, or 'cisgenderism' operates on individual, institutional and cultural levels (Kean, 2021).

  *Cisgenderism* "refers to the cultural and systemic ideology that denies, denigrates, or pathologizes identities that do not align with assigned gender at birth" (Lennon & Mistler, 2014, p. 63). Based on a binary division of male/female, cisgenderism assumes a person's sexed anatomy and gender identity are fixed from birth and congruent (McBride, 2021). *Cisnormativity* describes a collective social belief in which sex/gender congruence is assumed to be the norm, where bodies and gender expressions that do not conform are seen as abnormal or somehow less legitimate (Serano, 2007). Alongside social institutions such as family, media and religion, schools are key sites of socialisation of behaviour and regulation of identity where cisgenderism and cisnormativity are reinforced in educational policies, practices, pedagogy, curriculum and school infrastructure (Frohard-Dourlent, 2018; Kean, 2021; Martino et al., 2020; Meyer, 2022; Omercajic & Martino, 2020a; Spade, 2015; Ullman, 2018).

### 3.1.2 Institutional Systems: Education

Schools are institutions which can be framed within broader institutional (mainstream and alternative) systems of education (Figure 3.1), akin to public health, organised religion, welfare, and other systems TGD students may interact with. In schools, cisgender youth experience a form of gendered privilege while trans youth who disrupt norms around the gender binary are exposed to varying levels of institutional and individualised forms of injustice. Systemic injustice, or what McBride (2021) refers to as 'macroaggressions', refer to systemic forms of discrimination that exclude or invisibilise TGD youth in schools. School policies around bullying, student identification, sex-segregation in sport, non-inclusive curriculum and sex-segregated facilities are some of the ways in which this systemic marginalisation occurs in educational space (Cumming-Potvin & Martino, 2018; Ferfolja &

Ullman, 2017, 2021; Frohard-Dourlent, 2016, 2018; Jones et al., 2016; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2019; Martino et al., 2020; Martino & Omercajic, 2021; Omercajic & Martino, 2020a; Payne & Smith, 2016; Russell et al., 2020; Shannon, 2022; Ullman, 2017, 2018).

*3.1.3 Socio-Structural Processes: Gendering*

Individualised forms of socio-structural gendering injustice, or what McBride (2021) describes as *'cisnormative microaggressions'* refer to "unconscious patterns of communication that assume the naturalness of cisgender embodiment and deny the reality of validity of trans embodiment" (McBride, 2021, p. 107). These can include gender stereotyping, misgendering, and negative comments, reactions or insults directed at gender non-confirming people. While microaggressions involve interpersonal forms of prejudice, they serve a regulatory function, a way of upholding the gender binary by policing individuals who transgress gender norms (Payne & Smith, 2013; Payne & Smith, 2016; Ullman, 2018). While TGD youth may be commonly exposed to gender discrimination, they are a diverse group with intersecting identities and different lived experiences. Due to the short timeframe (9 months), and independent nature of this research project, an in-depth exploration of the complex ways in which intersectional factors impact upon TGD students' experiences in schools was not possible, however it must be acknowledged that intersectionality is an important part of any trans-informed theoretical framework. Cisgenderism does not impact all trans and gender non-conforming people equally, but intersects with other systems of oppression like (hetero)sexism, racism, classism, and ableism (Kean, 2021; Spade, 2015). Some TGD youth experience multiple forms of oppression at any given time, while others may simultaneously experience privilege in one area of life and oppression in another (Johnson, 2013; Kean, 2021; McBride, 2021; Spade, 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic has added yet another layer of complexity, as experiences of disasters

and emergencies can exacerbate existing inequalities, including ones relating to gender
(Grant et al., 2021).

As a structural analysis of how institutionalised cisgenderism and cisnormativity
impact upon TGD students in Australian schools, this study acknowledges the intersectional
nature of systemic oppression. It seeks to amplify TGD youth voices and centre their
embodied experiences as a valuable source of knowledge to better understand "the operation
of systems and institutions that simultaneously produce various possibilities of viable
personhood, and eliminate others" (Stryker & Aizura, 2013, p. 3). By engaging with
epistemologies privileging trans lived experiences we engage in what Foucault called an
"insurrection of subjugated knowledge" (Kean, 2021; Keenan, 2017; Keenan, 2022; Meyer,
2022; Nicolazzo, 2017) and in doing so, "add strength, nuance, and criticality to research that
centers gender and liberatory learning environments as priorities" (Meyer, 2022, p. 13).

### 3.1.4 Resulting Inequities?

In recent years, there has been an increase in scholarship exploring how cisnormativity and
cisgenderism operates in schools and impacts upon TGD youth equity (see Cumming-Potvin
& Martino, 2018; Frohard-Dourlent, 2018; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2019; Martino et al.,
2020; Martino & Omercajic, 2021; McBride, 2021; McBride & Neary, 2021; Omercajic &
Martino, 2020a; Payne & Smith, 2016; Ringrose & Rawlings, 2015; Shannon, 2016, 2022;
Shannon & Smith, 2017), but this body of research remains small. Educational research on
TDG students' experiences of inequities in the Australian school context, including health
and education outcomes, is increasing but is similarly small (see Cumming-Potvin &
Martino, 2018; Ferfolja & Ullman, 2021; Jones et al., 2016; Martino & Cumming-Potvin,
2019; Shannon, 2016, 2022; Shannon & Smith, 2017). With the exception of data suggesting
that TGD students are more likely to complete their schooling alternatively (Smith et al.,
2014), there is currently no research exploring TGD youth experiences in those settings, or

the ways in which alternative education or modes of delivery in Australia replicate and/or resist institutional practices like cisgenderism.  While alternative settings and modes of delivery are varied, many operate "within a paradigm of social justice" (Mills & McGregor, 2017, p. 13), serving as equity programs or educational alternatives for students whose needs are not being met by mainstream face-to-face schooling. They often seek to minimise adversity by providing social or material supports, flexibility and meaningful connections (McGregor & Mills, 2012, 2016; Mills & McGregor, 2017; Mills et al., 2013b; Shay & Heck, 2015; Wilson et al., 2011). The use of a trans-informed theoretical approach supports an analysis of the ways in which ways this paradigm of social justice may or may not extend to TGD youth in institutions operating outside the mainstream.

**3.2 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined and justified the application of a trans-informed theoretical framework for making sense of the experiences of TGD students in different Australian school settings across Australia. It described how this thesis will consider TGD youths' own reported experiences of multiple levels of intersecting inequities highlighted in both trans-informed health and education research, in the area of alternative/ distance education. Particularly, it will frame both mainstream and alternative education as potentially furthering and/or shielding TGD students' exposures to varying degrees of marginalisation by:

- 'Structures of Domination' (for the purpose of this study, cisgenderism),
- 'Institutional Systems' (including especially education), and
- 'Socio-Structural Processes' (including gendering and other phenomena).

Chapter 4 will outline, describe, and justify the methodology used to achieve these aims.

# Chapter 4: Methodology and Methods

## 4.0 Introduction

Chapter three described and justified the use a trans-informed theoretical approach to analyse

and understand the experiences of TGD students in various Australian educational settings.

This chapter sets out the research design utilised to answer the research questions outlined in

Chapter two, namely the demographic diversity and characteristics of Australian TGD

students aged 14-25 years, school types and educational trajectories, why TGD students

accessed Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education in the last 5 years, how those

experiences compared to their experiences in mainstream face-to-face school and the ways in

which those experiences impacted upon their overall wellbeing. Each component of the

research methodology will be discussed in greater detail, and will include justification of the

chosen research design, recruitment and participants, research instruments, tools, procedures,

strategies for data analysis and ethical considerations.

## 4.1 Research Design

This study was constructed using a Mixed Methods Research (MMR) approach. An MMR

approach in this case referred to a survey questionnaire with both quantitative and qualitative

components. While MMR may have its own practical and theoretical limitations

(Denscombe, 2008; Timans et al., 2019), this method allowed us to explore the complex

subjective realities of Australian TGD students' experiences from qualitative data, as well as

to look for potentially generalised patterns in the data (i.e. demographic characteristics,

school type, educational trajectory and experiences of bullying and/or harassment at school)

generated through quantitative research (Regnault et al., 2018). Gender operates on

individual, institutional and cultural levels (Kean, 2021) and TGD individuals experience

varying degrees of marginalisation as a result of policies and practices of institutions that

govern their daily lives, including educational institutions (Frohard-Dourlent, 2018; Kean,

2021; Keenan, 2022; Omercajic & Martino, 2020b; Spade, 2015).  Thus, an MMR approach

allowed us to explore both the individual differences among TGD students' experiences, as

well as patterns that may serve to highlight systemic issues in education impacting upon TGD

youth specifically.

> The study employed an emancipatory methodological approach privileging a critical

view of TGD students and framing them as a group often marginalised in institutions

providing educational services (Ozga, 2000). Specifically, we sought to foreground and

empower the experiences, interests and needs of TGD students as a group above those of the

institution or individuals serving in roles within these institutions (Jones, 2019). Youth

exercise their agency in daily life and their voices contribute to positive social change,

including educational reform (Baroutsis et al., 2016). For this reason, survey methods

focused directly on the TGD population and creating space for TGD students' voices was

privileged.

As mentioned in the Chapter 2 Literature Review, this study considered the following

questions:

- RQ1.: What are the some of the demographic characteristics of TGD students across Australia?

- RQ2.: Why are TGD students accessing Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education in Australia?

- RQ3.: How do TGD students' experiences of Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education compare to their experiences at mainstream face-to-face school?

- RQ4.: In what ways, if any, have TGD students' experiences in Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education impacted their overall wellbeing at school?

> An online survey hosted on Qualtrics was utilised to collect both quantitative and

qualitative data. The decision to conduct an online survey was partly informed by research

suggesting that methods such as online surveys can be effective for "investigating

marginalized and hard-to-access populations" (McInroy, 2016, p. 1) and can "reduce or

temporarily remove barriers associated with geography and age" (Hillier & Harrison, 2007, p.

84). Online surveys provide anonymity and can be done privately and without the physical

realities of gender presentation as a complication: thus, minimising potential issues relating to

comfort and safety for TGD youth (Smith et al., 2014; UNESCO, 2019). This increased the

feasibility of the study and was sensitive to the needs of the target population. Additionally,

gathering through an online survey is practical, low cost and allows for the collection of

potentially large amounts of data over a relatively short period of time (Regmi et al., 2016).

## 4.2 Participants

Total participants included 1,7,14 TGD identifying students aged 14-25 years inclusive, who

reported currently attending or having attended an Australian school in the last 5 years. Data

collection from a larger number of participants enhances the value of the study, as it allows

the research team to examine the prevalence of positive or negative TGD student experiences

in mainstream and alternative educational settings. A wider number of participants also

makes it more possible to observe potential patterns across education systems. Selection of

this particular age group was guided by the fact that the data is comparable to existing studies

on LGBTQIA+ youth (which is different to, but includes TGD youth); there is a strong

history of working with this age group in international and Australian research (A. Hill et al.,

2021; Hillier et al., 2010; Jones et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2014;

UNESCO, 2019).

**4.3 Materials and Measures**

*4.3.1 Participant Information and Consent From*

A Participant Information and Consent Form (PICF) was created and appeared at the beginning of the online survey. Participants were informed of the aims of the study, selection criteria (being between the ages of 14 and 25 inclusive and attending or having attended an Australian school in the last 5 years), implied consent, anonymity, confidentiality, risks to participation and data management/storage. Participants were provided with the contact details of several key supportive organisations (see PCIF in Appendix A) in the event that they experienced distress at any time during or after completing the survey. They were also informed that they could end the survey at any time. The PCIF form included the Macquarie HREC (Human Research Ethics Committee) contact information and approval reference number (520221218942121), as well as the research team contacts should any participants wish to raise concerns (see APPENDIX C).

*4.3.2 Demographics*

Demographic information was report on RQ1 (demographic characteristics of TGD students) and RQ2 (why TGD students accessed Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education) and included questions measuring age, gender, sex assigned at birth, sexual orientation, grade level, geographical location, religious affiliation, and language(s) spoken at home, current school, school type(s) attended, reasons for accessing Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education, While this study included demographics to highlight the intersectionality and diversity of TGD identifying students at a particular point in time, it takes a critical approach to data collection on gender and sexuality, firstly, by acknowledging that "dominant norms of demographic data do not sufficiently account for the complexities that characterise queer lives" (Ruberg & Ruelos, 2020, p. 1), secondly that responses can be temporal in nature

(especially as they relate to sexuality and gender), and finally by attempting to design, in

collaboration with the research team, questions that allowed for 'multiple, intersecting

elements that cannot be captured by a single data point' (Ruberg & Ruelos, 2020, p. 6).

Questions around gender and sexuality should involve community consultation and reflect

lived experiences of research participants (Dickert & Sugarman, 2005). As such, question

design was informed by the ACON Recommended Community Indicators for Research

(ACON, 2022), the UNESCO technical brief on monitoring school violence based on sexual

orientation, gender identity or gender expression (UNESCO, 2019) and the most recent

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex

Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables (ABS, 2020).


*4.3.3 Comparing experiences between face-to-face mainstream settings and Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education*

To address survey questions 25, 26 and 27 (see Appendix B) both quantitative and qualitative

measures were utilised. First, 2 closed-ended questions (25 and 26) were posed in which

students were asked to identify supportive/unsupportive features (for example, TGD support

groups, use of TGD inclusive language, positive or negative teachings about TGD people

etc.) in their face-to-face mainstream schools and in alternative, distance, or online settings.

Participants could select any or all applicable options. Second, one open-ended question (26)

was posed in which TGD students were asked how they felt their experiences of Alternative,

Distance and/or Online Education compared to their experiences in mainstream face-to-face

school. This question was analysed using both the Leximancer computer software program

and qualitative thematic analysis.

*4.3.4 Impact of Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education on TGD student wellbeing*

To address RQ4, one open-ended question (28) was posed in which TGD students were asked how they felt their experiences of Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education impacted upon their overall wellbeing. This study understands student wellbeing to involve "the psychological, cognitive, social and physical functioning and capabilities that students need to live a happy and fulfilling life"(OECD, 2017, p. 61). No one indicator was used to measure student wellbeing, instead this study sought to privilege students' own understandings of wellbeing in relation to their educational experiences. RQ4 was analysed using the Leximancer computer software program and qualitative thematic analysis.

**4.4 Procedures**

*4.4.1 Survey and social media page development*

In the earlier stages of this research, a mixed methods survey was developed to be advertised and widely disseminated via Facebook and Instagram platforms. The development of the online survey was guided by best practice as suggested by Regmi et al. (2016), Hill et al. (2022) and Johnson and Christensen (2020), with particular attention paid to developing a user-friendly design (Qualtrics), using clear and simple language for all the survey questions, and ensuring that all questions were relevant to the research questions I was seeking to answer. The survey was designed with the guidance of my research supervisor, Professor Tiffany Jones. Professor Jones provided ongoing constructive feedback in relation to survey question type, design, survey flow and length. Following approval from the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee HREC (HREC; Appendix C) Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/tgdandmestudentsurvey/) and Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/tgdandme/) pages were created using Meta Suite. Both pages

were titled 'TGD + ME Student Survey' and contained hyperlinks to the survey hosted on Qualtrics (Qualtrics, Provo, UT).

*4.4.2 Advertising and Recruitment*

Participants for this study were recruited through paid Meta Suite Business advertising on both Facebook and Instagram. With good reason, targeted advertising to young people under the age of 18 is not permitted in Australia (Meta, 2021). As such, Meta Suite Business was utilised to create a Facebook and Instagram advertising campaign which targeted a broad Australian audience between the ages of 18-65 years. Two different recruitment ads were designed using Canva with photos purchased from iStock (APPENDIX D). The survey ads appeared on both Facebook and Instagram from 1/10/2022 until 11/10/2022. To reach TGD youth in a more targeted way, an email including a description of the study, a copy of the recruitment ads and a hyperlink to the online survey was disseminated to several key LGTBQIA+ youth organisations across Australia (for example Minus-18, Twenty10, The Gender Centre etc.).
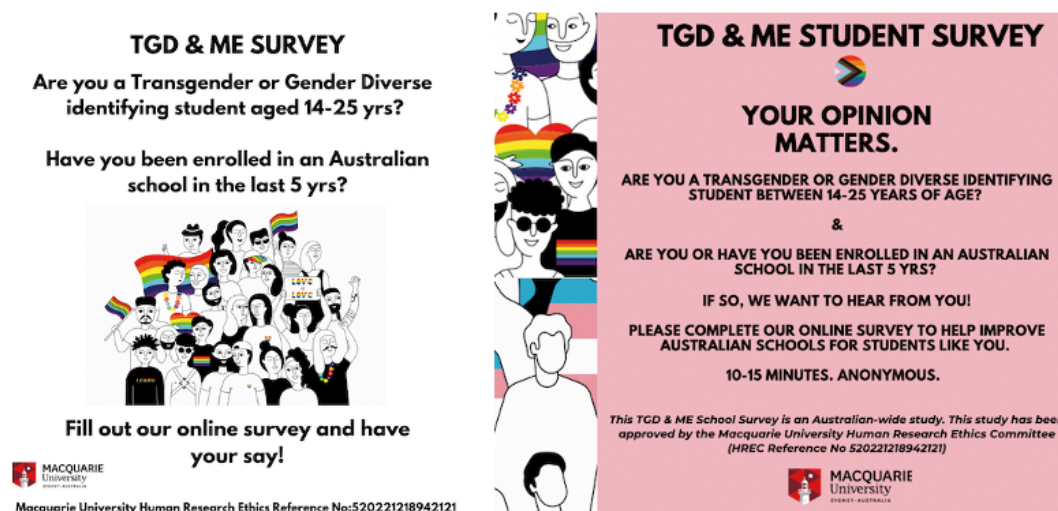


*Figure 4.1:* Recruitment ads for the 'TGD + ME Student Survey' Facebook and Instagram

*4.4.3 Online monitoring of social media accounts*

Once the Facebook and Instagram ads went live, it was important to monitor both pages and remove comments that contained discriminatory comments or hate speech. I monitored both pages regularly and removed comments that contained could be categorised as hateful, violent, or discriminatory.

**4.5 Data Analysis**

*4.5.1 Quantitative analysis (descriptive)*

Quantitative analysis was conducted through SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The data was converted into a SAV file by Qualtrics, then uploaded into the SPSS program. Data cleansing was conducted in SPSS. Of the 1,714 survey participants, 40 were removed for non-response (considered to be less than 7% of the total survey completed and/or less than 30 seconds spent answering survey questions), 2 were removed for declining to participate and 1 participant was excluded for not attending an Australian school, leaving a total of 1,671 participants. Descriptive statistics were produced and tabulated into frequency tables and histograms for 25 closed-ended responses. Due to time constraints, the large volume of data and limited word count for this Master of Research thesis, it was not possible to report on all the data. As such, it was decided that descriptive data most relevant to answering the research questions would be reported.

*4.5.2 Qualitative analysis (thematic and Leximancer-driven)*

Qualitative data was analysed using the Leximancer computer software program (V5.0.26; Leximancer Pty Ltd, 2022) and by conducting qualitative thematic analysis both before and after the Leximancer analysis. The Leximancer software was utilised as it has been shown to increase the trustworthiness and validity of qualitative data (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). According to Sotiriadou et al. (2014), Leximancer is suitable for exploratory studies such as

this one, is effective for large volumes of qualitative data, quickly identifies concepts removed researcher bias and increases reliability due to minimal intervention from researchers. As this study involved analysing a large volume of data, a short timeframe and was conducted independently, use of the Leximancer software was deemed appropriate.

The first step involved an initial thematic analysis which was guided by the 6-step framework of Braun and Clarke (2006); (Braun & Clarke, 2013, 2014, 2019), namely familiarising myself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and writing the report. After familiarising myself with the data, several in-depth discussions took place with my research supervisor regarding initial thematic coding. A Leximancer analysis was then conducted.

Leximancer is a semi-automated content analysis (SACA), or text mining software, that allows for quick visualisation and interpretation of large bodies of natural language text data (Lemon & Hayes, 2020; Leximancer, 2022; Rooney, 2005; Smith & Humphreys, 2006). As per Smith and Humphreys (2006), Leximancer goes much further than simple keyword searching, conducting instead a deeper content analysis by way of locating and extracting thesaurus-based concepts from the text data. Leximancer then represents identified concepts and co-occurrence information visually by generating concept map maps.

Following Leximancer manual guidelines (2022), open-ended items were downloaded from Qualtrics and converted into separate PDF files, which were then manually uploaded to the Leximancer program. Default Leximancer settings were used to generate Concept Seeds. Thesaurus Settings were also left on default (9* v5 default). Concepts seeds were minimally edited by merging concepts that were duplicates (better/better, online/online, worse/worse), singular and plural nouns (teacher/teachers, class/classes, person/people) and past/present or continuing verb tenses (feel/felt). To establish reproducibility and stability, the Leximancer

analysis was run several times simultaneously and in real time with my research supervisor over a Zoom video conference call. The same process was repeated for the second open-ended survey question. For each open-ended item, the Leximancer program generated concept maps representing dominant themes, corresponding concepts and how they related to one another. The program provided a synopsis of dominant themes in addition to Leximancer-selected typical quotes that most accurately represented each dominant theme and its associated concepts.

As an additional step, all participant responses for each open-ended question were downloaded into two separate Excel files. A keyword search of each Leximancer-identified dominant theme was conducted in Excel (RQ3: 'online', 'better', 'worse' and 'work'; RQ4: 'school', 'online', 'focus', 'mental' and 'depressed'. Responses containing the keyword were carefully read, coded, arranged thematically, and analysed. Responses most representative of typical answers were then selected for reporting alongside corresponding Leximancer-selected typical quotes for each dominant theme in the findings section. The decision to conduct a deductive thematic analysis was guided by a desire to guard against researcher bias in the interpretation of Leximancer results. The process of coding and analysing individual responses allowed for clear thematic patterns to emerge and for context to be taken into consideration (for example, student demographics and type of school participants referred to in their responses). It also allowed for the reading of tone, which Leximancer cannot perform.

**4.6 Ethical Considerations**

Consent was obtained from participants before they were able to proceed with the online survey, as informed voluntary consent is fundamental to ethical research (Roberts & Allen, 2015). Participants were provided with a comprehensive PCIF at the beginning of the survey to ensure they were made fully aware of confidentiality, risks, benefits, the voluntary nature

of participation and the ability to withdraw at any time during the survey (Roberts & Allen,
2015). Some survey questions asked participants to report experiences of bullying or
harassment in school settings. As such, a comprehensive list of youth mental health support
organisations was provided in the PCIF form and again in a message at the end of the survey.
The study was purely voluntary; there were no offers of reward or compensation for
participating.

Obtaining quality data is an essential part of conducting ethical research (Roberts &
Allen, 2015). The survey was designed in consultation with the research team to minimise
issues such as response rates, non-response, multiple responding, potential careless
responding, and survey fatigue. Questions were written in clear, simple language and the
survey was designed to be completed in no long than 10-15 minutes. Regmi et al. (2016)
suggest carrying out a pilot to ensure clarity, comprehension, and adequacy of response
options, but unfortunately due to time constraints, this was not possible. Instead, participant
feedback was welcomed, and researcher contact details were provided in the PCIF form and
again in a message at the end of the survey.

Creating survey questions that allowed for multiple and/or open-ended responses (for
example questions about gender identity or lived experiences) was a key ethical consideration
in the design of this study. This gender-expansive approach was guided by the desire to
privilege the many ways TGD young people choose to identify and give voice to their diverse
lived experiences.

Privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity were important ethical considerations in this
study. The online survey did not collect any personally identifiable information, including
email account information. This was made clear to participants in the PICF. All questions
were optional; participants were able to opt-out by selecting a 'prefer not to answer' option.

**4.7 Conclusion**

In summary, one of the overarching goals of this study was to contribute to a growing body of trans-informed research seeking to improve educational policy, practice, pedagogy, teacher training and school climate for TGD students. This chapter outlined the research methodology of this study which was guided by a critical trans-informed theoretical framework privileging TGD youths' experiential knowledge. An MMR approach, employing quantitative and qualitative methods in a non-experimental online survey, was used to fulfil this aim. Survey design was conducted collaboratively with a view of maximising TGD students' agency throughout. Justifications were made for key decisions, including the use of the Leximancer program to reduce researcher bias, optimise reproducibility of data analysis, as well as an additional deductive thematic analysis to support the interpretation of the Leximancer reports. Results from the study are reported in the findings chapter that follows.

## Chapter 5: Findings on TGD Students' experiences in Alternative, DE and/or Online Education

**5.0 Introduction**

Previous chapters described this present study's three aims to explore Australian transgender and gender diverse (TGD) students' demographic characteristics and educational trajectories and experiences in Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education. This chapter reports on the quantitative and qualitative data of the 2022 Australian TGD + ME youth schooling survey designed specifically to fulfil these aims. Findings on what Australian TGD student survey participants reflected and experienced are reported under the four question themes they relate to within this chapter, which addresses: RQ1) The demographic diversity and characteristics of TGD students; RQ2) Why they accessed Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education in the last 5 years, RQ3) Their reflections how their experiences in Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education compared to their experiences in mainstream face-to-face school; and RQ4) how their experiences in Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education impacted upon their overall wellbeing.

**5.1 Quantitative Results**

The first two research questions informing this study sought to gain insight into the demographic characteristics of TGD student participants, their schools, school trajectories and experiences within those schools. As such this section presents descriptive statistics of participants, types of school settings attended, educational trajectories and supportive/unsupportive features of school settings from the *'2022 TGD + ME Student Survey*.

*5.1.1 Demographic Characteristics of TGD students*

The demographic characteristics of TGD student participants are shown in Table 5.1 below. Participants were between the ages of 14 and 25, with the majority (87.2%) aged between 14 and 18 years. Almost 80% were high school students enrolled in Years 8-12, with over half 58% enrolled in Years 9, 10 and 11. Participants were mostly from Eastern states, primarily NSW, Victoria, and Queensland, followed by WA, SA, TAS, the ACT and finally the NT. Over 25% of participants reported that they lived in a rural or remote area. Interestingly, well over half (57.3%) of participants identified as being neurodiverse (for example as having attention deficit disorder [ADD], attention deficit hyperactivity disorder [ADHD], being on the autism spectrum [ASD] or other kinds of neurodivergence). Almost 85% (84.7%) of participants reported that they were assigned female at birth, with only 12.1% reporting they were assigned male. Most participants reported their gender identity as 'Transgender' (52.8%), 'Non-Binary' (41.1%) and/or 'Genderfluid' (17.2%). There was a vast range of terms used to describe other/additional gender identities; 13% of participants selected 'I use a different term'. This included the following: Agender, Agenderflux, Trans-Masc, Pangender, Masc-presenting Non-Binary, Genderqueer, Genderfae, Girlflux, Fluidflux Xenogender, Bigender, Systemgender, Genderfaun, Androgyne, Maverique, Voidgender, Genderless, Genderquois, Faeflux and Polygender. Overall, participants felt positively about their gender identity, with 20% reporting they felt 'very happy', 40.5% reporting they felt 'happy', 25.7% reporting they felt 'neutral' and only 6.8% and 1.6% reporting they were either 'unhappy' or 'very unhappy' respectively. This was despite the fact that over 56% of participants reported having experienced bullying or harassment at school because of their gender identity (see Figure 5.1) and that only 21.5% felt comfortable being open about their gender identity at school (see Figure 5.2).

Table 5.1: *Frequency distribution of participant demographic characteristics*

| Characteristic | % | | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Age** | | **State** | |
| 14 | 16.6% | New South Wales (NSW) | 28.4% |
| 15 | 20.5% | The Northern Territory (NT) | 0.5% |
| 16 | 22.3% | Queensland (QLD) | 22.0% |
| 17 | 20.5% | South Australia (SA) | 8.5% |
| 18 | 7.4% | Tasmania (TAS) | 3.1% |
| 19 | 4.1% | The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) | 2.6% |
| 20 | 3.0% | Victoria (VIC) | 23.5% |
| 21 | 1.9% | Western Australia (WA) | 11.0% |
| 22 | 1.6% | | |
| 23 | 0.7% | *(n=1,640)* | |
| 24 | 0.6% | | |
| 25 | 0.1% | **Sex assigned at birth** | |
| Under 14 | 0.8% | | |
| | | Male | 12.1% |
| *(n=1,667)* | | Female | 84.7% |
| | | Prefer not to say | 2.7% |
| **School Year** | | | |
| Year 7 | 0.5% | *(n=1,588)* | |
| Year 8 | 8.2% | | |
| Year 9 | 16.5% | **Neurodiversity** | |
| Year 10 | 22.8% | | |
| Year 11 | 18.7% | Yes | 57.3% |
| Year 12 | 13.5% | No | 16.7% |
| TAFE | 3.1% | Unsure | 26.0% |
| University | 9.0% | | |
| I am no longer at school | 6.5% | *(n=1,581)* | |
| Other (please specify): | 1.2% | | |
| | | **Gender Identity** | |
| *(n= 1,584)* | | | |
| | | Transgender | 52.8% |
| | | Non-Binary | 41.2% |
| **Living in a Rural or Remote area** | | Genderfluid | 17.2% |
| | | I use a different term (please specify): | 13.3% |
| Yes | 25.7% | I don't use labels | 7.2% |
| No | 63.3% | Demi-boy | 6.8% |
| Unsure | 11.0% | Unsure | 6.1% |
| | | Demi-girl | 4.9% |
| *(n=1,557)* | | Brother boy | 2.3% |
| | | Cis gender woman | 1.9% |
| | | Genderflux | 1.8% |
| | | Cis gender man | 0.8% |
| | | Sister girl | 0.5% |
| | | Prefer not to say | 0.2% |
| | | | |
| | | *(n=1,582)* | |

*Figure 5.1:* TGD Students' Experiences of Bullying or Harassment at School based on Gender Identity *(n=1,573)*



**Experiences of Bullying/Harassment based on Gender Identity**
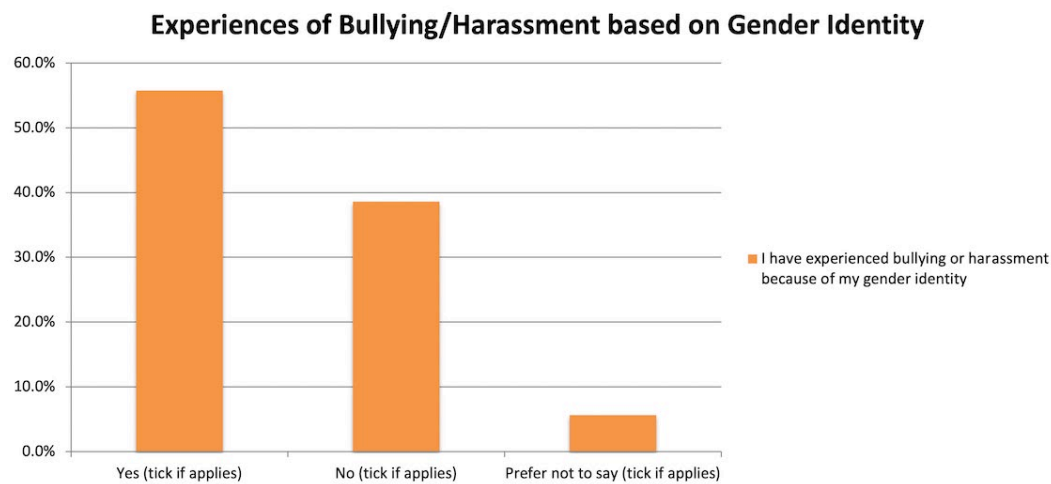
*Figure 5.2:* TGD Students' Level of Comfort being open about Gender Identity at School *(n=1,581)*



**Gender Identity at School**
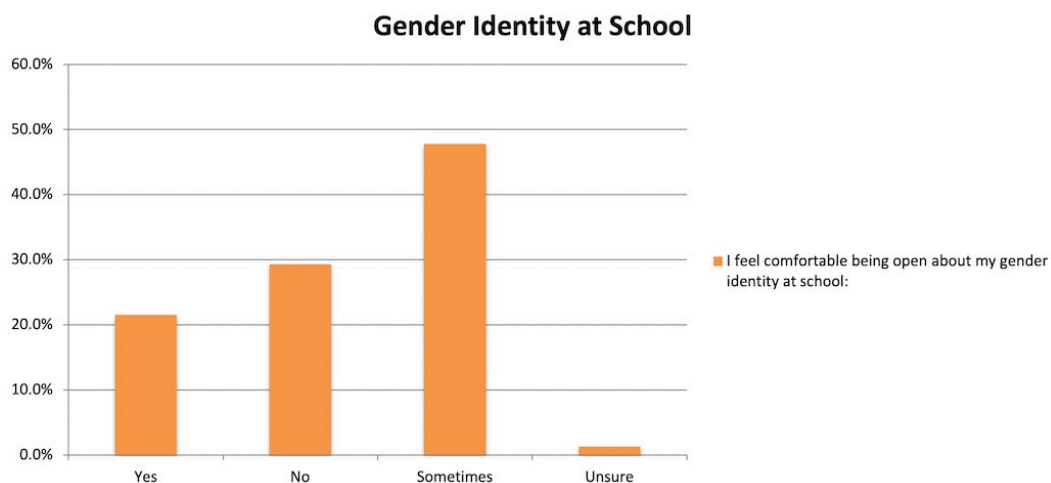
## 5.1.2 School settings

Most participants (n=1,577) reported current enrolment in either a Public/Government High School (53.8%) or a Private/Independent Religious School (24.8%). A further 17.7% reported being currently enrolled in one of the following alternative educational settings: Distance Education [DE] (1.8%), TAFE (4.6%), Schools for Special or Specific Purposes [SSPs] (2.7%), secular Independent Schools (4.5%), Homeschool (0.9%) and 'Other' (3.2%) such as vocational schools or University. Reports of past enrolment were similar, with the majority of participants reporting they had been enrolled in either a Public/Government High School

(67.7%) or a Religious Private/Independent School (36.9%) in the last 5 years. Results are further detailed in Table 5.2 below.

### 5.1.3 School Trajectory - Alternative Educational Settings

Over 30% (470 participants *n=1,582)* of participants reported leaving one school to attend another. Of that third, most participants reported changing school due to mental health needs (55.3%), followed by 'Other' types of bullying (37.4%), moving house (33%), transphobic bullying (22.8%), changes in family circumstance (18.9%) and gender transition (18.1%). A quarter (25%) of all students who reported changing schools enrolled in an alternative setting, including: Distance Education (6.4%), secular Private/Independent School (8.1%), SSP (6.2%), TAFE (1.1%), Homeschool (0.9%) or 'Other' which included community schools, vocational schools or alternative programs within mainstream schools (2.3%).

### 5.1.4 Online Learning

Over 80% of all participants (n=1,567) accessed online learning in the last 5 years. Of those participants, 90.8% reported COVID-19 as the main reason for engaging in online learning. This was followed by mental health needs (17.4%), 'other' types of bullying (37.4%), moving house (33%), transphobic bullying (22.8%), change in family circumstance (18.9%) and gender transition (18.1%). Other less dominant reasons for accessing online are represented in Table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2: *School Type and Educational trajectory of TGD student participants*

| School Type(s) and Educational Trajectory | % | | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Current School Type:** | | **Reason for changing schools:** | |
| TAFE | 4.6% | Mental health needs | 55.3% |
| School for Specific Purposes/Specialist School | 2.7% | Other type of bullying | 37.4% |
| Religious Private Independent School | 28.5% | Moved house | 33.0% |
| Public or Government High School | 53.8% | Transphobic bullying | 22.8% |
| Other (please specify): | 3.2% | Change in family circumstance | 18.9% |
| Non-Religious Private or Independent School | 4.5% | Gender transition | 18.1% |
| Homeschool | 0.9% | Course(s) not available at school | 16.8% |
| Distance Education Government High School | 1.8% | Other (please specify): | 12.3% |
| | | COVID-19 Pandemic | 4.7% |
| *(n=1,577)* | | Physical illness | 4.5% |
| **Type of School attended in the last 5 years:** | | Pursuing elite sports or performing arts (vocationally talented) | 3.8% |
| Public or Government High School | 67.7% | Hospitalisation | 3.8% |
| Religious Private or Independent School | 36.9% | Prefer not to say | 2.6% |
| TAFE | 6.3% | | |
| Non-Religious Private or Independent School | 6.2% | *(n=470)* | |
| Distance Education Government High School | 4.2% | **Accessed Online Learning in the last 5 years:** | |
| Other (please specify): | 3.2% | Yes | 81.4% |
| Homeschool | 3.0% | No | 18.6% |
| School for Specific Purposes/Specialist School | 2.7% | | |
| | | *(n=1,567)* | |
| *(n=1,577)* | | **Reason for accessing online learning:** | |
| **Left one school to attend another:** | | COVID-19 pandemic | 90.8% |
| Yes | 30.2% | Mental health needs | 17.4% |
| No | 69.8% | Course(s) not available at school | 6.6% |
| | | Physical illness | 5.7% |
| *(n=1,583)* | | Other type of bullying | 4.0% |
| **Type of school students enrolled in:** | | Transphobic bullying | 3.5% |
| Public/Government High School | 55.5% | Other (please specify): | 2.5% |
| Distance Education Public/Government High School | 6.4% | Hospitalisation | 2.2% |
| School for Specific Purposes/Specialist School | 6.2% | Gender transition | 1.9% |
| Non-Religious Private/Independent School | 8.1% | Change in family circumstance | 1.8% |
| Religious Private/Independent School | 19.6% | Moved house | 1.5% |
| TAFE | 1.1% | Prefer not to say | 0.6% |
| Homeschool | 0.9% | Pursuing elite sports or performing arts (vocationally talented) | 0.4% |
| Other (please specify): | 2.3% | | |
| | | *(n=1,084)* | |
| *(n=470)* | | | |

**5.2 TGD Students' Comparative Experiences of Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education**

To address the third research question of this study, TGD students were asked to compare their experiences of Alternative, DE and/or Online Education to their experiences at mainstream face-to-face school. Specifically, TGD students were asked: *How do your experiences of alternative/distance/online learning compare to your experiences at your mainstream face-to-face school?* Of the 1671 survey participants, ~53% (887) responded to this question.

Findings from the Leximancer analysis suggest that the answer is complex and nuanced. The Leximancer-generated visual map (see Figure 5.1) identified the following four dominant themes from the 887 responses comparing Alternative, DE and/or Online Education to mainstream face-to-face school experiences: 'online' (598 hits), 'better' (377 hits), 'worse' (364 hits) and 'work' (339 hits). TGD students who accessed online learning reported feeling physically and emotionally safer in an online learning environment, as they experienced less transphobic and/or homophobic bullying as compared to mainstream face-to-face school, but greater social isolation from peers and less academic support (planning, maintaining a work/study schedule, real time feedback and help completing tasks).

The themes and corresponding concepts identified by Leximancer will be described in greater detail below. As a way of further verifying the Leximancer findings, and in line with guidelines on conducting qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2014), a deductive thematic analysis of the words 'online' (306 hits),  'better' (261 hits), 'worse' (188 hits) and 'work' (125 hits) in the Excel response column for this question. Additional researcher-selected typical quotes were included for each theme.
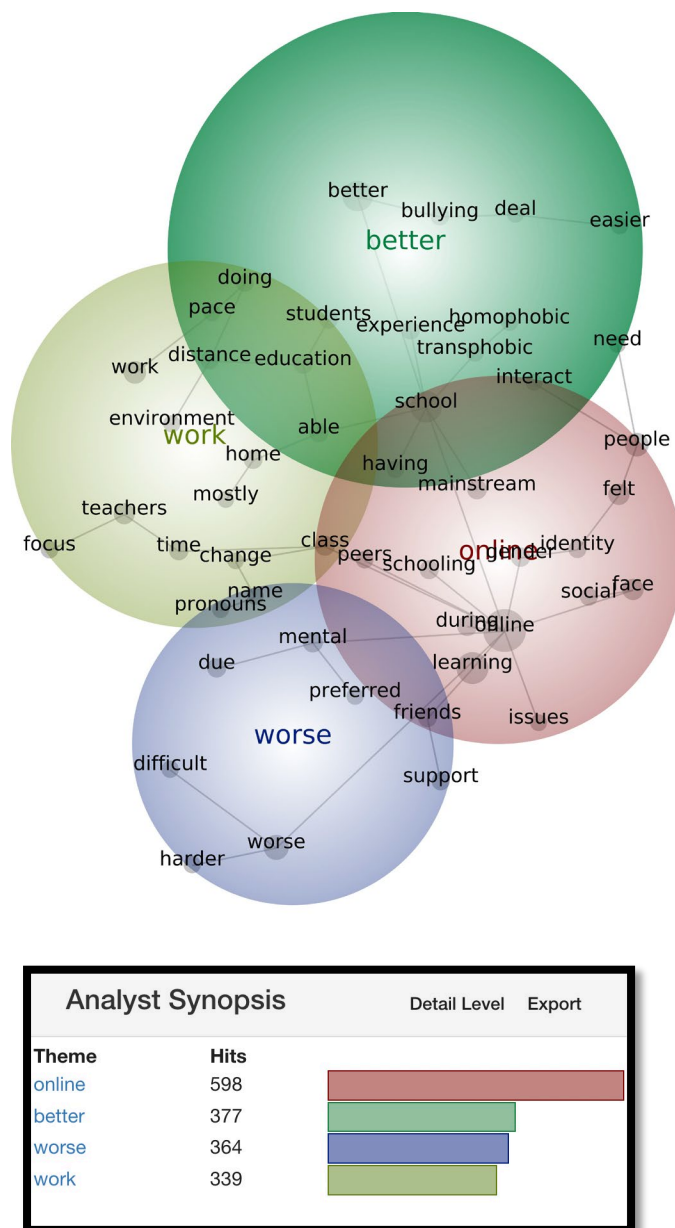
*Figure 5.3* Leximancer analysis comparing TGD student experiences in Alternative, DE and/or Online Education (n=878).

*5.2.1 Online*
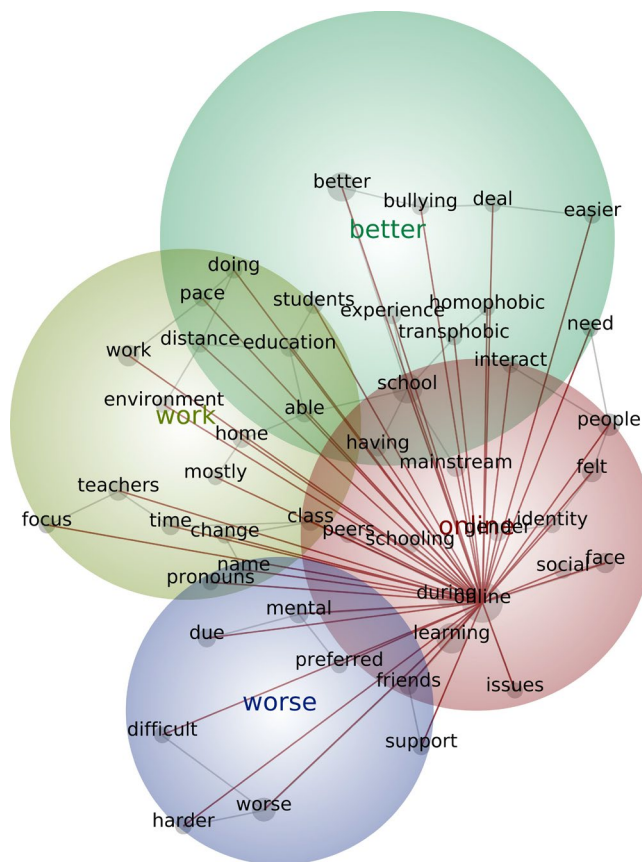


*Figure 5.4:* Leximancer Visual Map of the dominant theme 'online'

The first most dominant theme identified by Leximancer was 'online' (598 hits, combining

the concepts online, learning, school, people, face, felt, during, class, mainstream, gender,

schooling, identity, social, peers, having, interact and issues). It overwhelmingly suggested

that TGD students felt physically safer and more comfortable while studying online. This was

largely because they experienced less transphobic and homophobic bullying online than they

did in face-to-face mainstream settings. Two of the Leximancer-selected quotes for this

theme were indeed typical of the sort of phrasing used to express this reduced bullying:

> *...I feel safer completing online schooling, due to the fact that i do not interact face to face with*
> *my peers. it makes me less stressed on my gender presentation as well as being bullied.* (Ash,
> 16yrs, Year 10, Trans/Xenogender, Religious Independent School, SA).

> *...i liked online learning much more than face to face learning, i am not a social person and i*
> *was getting teased of my sexual/gender identity at face-to-face schooling (*Max, 14yrs,
> Transgender, Year 9, Government High School, VIC).

A researcher-selected typical quote showing how the theme 'online' related to

particular experiences of safety for TGD students was from Jax who wrote:

*In the context of my queer identity, online learning was better as I no longer had proximity to homophobic or transphobic people who would make discriminatory remarks* (Jax, 17yrs, Year 11, Genderqueer, Government High School, SA).

At the same time, TGD students who accessed online learning also reported feelings

of isolation and a lack of support in the online learning environment, in particular students

who accessed online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Two of the Leximancer-

selected quotes for this theme really emphasised that the reduced bullying came both because

of and at a cost of isolation in this way, which was typical across the hits, for example:

*...many problems of face-to-face school were entirely negated during online learning (issues connecting with peers due to identity, dysphoria) however online learning brought about challenges mostly relating to discipline.  As there was limited support [...], online learning was worse, but having the option to connect with largely only the people I chose to was very beneficial for me* (Kai, 15yrs, Year 10, Transgender/Genderfluid, Religious Independent School, NSW).

*...they have been better because at face to face school i hear people talk about me and  people have thrown paper at me and thrown pencils and pens at  me but online i don't have to  hear people and they can't throw stuff at me and also i can wear clothes that help with my gender dysphoria  i'd say worse bc i felt very isolated from peers and didn't  interact with anyone my age or  anyone not in my family* (Jake, 16yrs, Year 10, Transgender/Non-Binary/Demi-Boy, Government High School, SA).

Researcher-selected typical quotes showing this aspect of the 'online' theme from the

hits Leximancer uncovered also included Sam's (18yrs, Year 12, Transgender/Genderfluid,

Religious Independent School, VIC) point that *I think online learning was worse than*

*mainstream school because it was harder to connect with people and learn the content.* Frankie's

quote similarly drew together the two most typical elements of this theme:

*I feel like online learning was better and worse than in person schooling in a variety of ways. For example, I was less socially anxious in online learning because I wasn't around people, but I was pretty depressed because I was alone for so long* (Frankie, 17yrs, Year 11, Non-Binary, Government High School, VIC).

*5.2.2 Better*
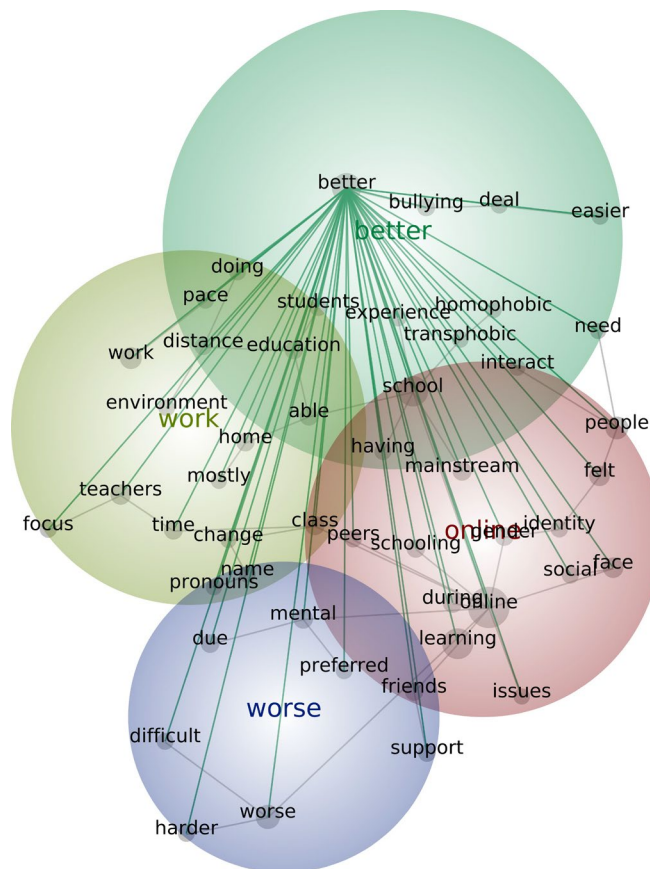


*Figure 5.5:* Leximancer Visual Map of the dominant theme 'better'

The second most dominant Leximancer-identified theme was 'better' (377 hits, combining the concepts better, students, bullying, experience, doing, transphobic, deal, easier, homophobic and need). The thematic visual map (Figure 5.X: above) and typical quotes generated by Leximancer suggest that 'better' was associated with TGD students experiencing less transphobic and/or homophobic bullying in online and alternative or DE settings than in mainstream face-to-face school settings. As with the first dominant theme, students also reported that while they felt safer and more comfortable about their gender identity in an online environment, in-person social supports remained important. Several Leximancer-selected quotes supported these findings. For example, Nic (14yrs, Year 9, Non-Binary, Government High School, VIC) said *They've been better because I don't have to deal*

*with the homophobic dickheads in my classroom…*Similarly, Lee (16yrs, Year 11, Transgender, Religious Independent School, VIC) offered that there was *less interaction with random homophobic/transphobic students.* Further, Jay (14yrs, Year 9, Non-Binary/Genderfluid, Religious Independent School, WA) said: *online learning was easier for me as i didn't have to deal with my classmates as often who hold a lot of internal homophobic/transphobic sentiments.*

Researcher-selected typical quotes echoed these findings, extending their application to teachers. For example, students said: *'At my alternate school though all the teachers use my preferred name and pronouns without fail, and they understand Queer terms and labels'* (Finn, 16yrs, Year 11, Transgender, School for Specific Purposes[2], QLD)*; and 'My experience with distance education is so much better than mainstream school. I can spend my lunches not hiding but doing what i want; teachers are a lot nicer here, too'* (Cam, 14yrs, Year 9, Transgender, Distance Education High School, QLD). However, researcher-selected quotes from the Leximancer-allocated theme hit collection also underscored that better as a concept only applied to a valuing of some reduced social strain, but not all aspects of Alternative, DE and/or Online Education. Specifically, Alternative, DE and/or Online Education were not necessarily better than mainstream face-to-face school where bullying or social anxiety was not at issue, for other kinds of social and educational experiences:

> *Online was better for removing some anxiety about presenting masculine enough. But in person is and was better in high school for engaging with classmates.* (Bry, 20yrs, University, Guy/Man, Religious Independent School, VIC)

> *Educationally and socially face-to-face school will always be better. But online school lessened bullying as I wasn't as visible and was able to sit silently during classes* (Jaime, 18yrs, no longer at school, Transgender/Non-Binary, formerly Government School/Distance Education).

---

[2] School for 'Specific' or 'Special' Purposes (SSP) are specialised schools for students who require additional support to meet intellectual/cognitive, physical, behavioural and/or mental health needs.

*5.2.3 Worse*



*Figure 5.6:* Leximancer Visual Map of the dominant theme 'worse'

The third Leximancer-identified theme in size was 'worse' (364 hits, comprising the concepts worse, mental, due, friends, support, harder, difficult, preferred, name, pronouns). Findings indicated that while students may have experienced greater safety and less transphobic and/or homophobic bullying in online environments, they felt worse about being isolated from key social supports (in this case from friends). Amery's response supports this finding *I preferred face to face bc I had my friends as support (*Amery, 14yrs, Year 8, Non-Binary, Government High School, NSW).

'Worse' was also associated with negative experiences in which TGD student's names and pronouns were used incorrectly online by teachers and students when learning moved online during the pandemic. For example, students said that *it has been worse as im ftm transgender trying to transition and most of my teachers ignored when i had said i go by a different*

*name and they didn't use my preferred pronouns (*El, Year 9, Transgender/Non-Binary/Genderfluid, Government High School, SA). The experience of pronoun and preferred name misuse during online learning was echoed by Ty who wrote *my experiences in online learning were worse than my mainstream school because it was harder to correct people about my pronouns and preferred name* (Ty, 15yrs, Year 10, Transgender, Government High School, QLD)*.*

The following researcher-selected typical quotes showed similar findings with regards to TGS students experiences of social isolation and the misuse of preferred names and pronouns in an online learning environment:

*My experience in online learning was worse than mainstream school due to increased sense of isolation from peers/other students* (Nat, 17yrs, Year 12, Transgender/Non-Binary, Government High School, VIC)

*Worse because it's online which is much harder and you can't build/ sustain social connections with others as easily* (Xi, 17yrs, Year 12, Transgender/Non-Binary, Religious Independent School, VIC)

*Worse. No support groups or one on one time with teachers to explain pronouns* (Lou, 17yrs, Year 11, Non-Binary, Government School, SA)

*5.2.4 Work*



*Figure 5.7:* Leximancer Visual Map of the theme 'work'

The smallest theme identified by Leximancer was 'work' (339 hits, comprising of concepts including work, teachers, time, able, education, home, distance, focus, pace, environment, mostly and change). Results were somewhat mixed, but overall, this theme suggested that though online learning provided flexibility, comfort, and safety for TGD students, many found that staying focused and organised and keeping pace with work was more difficult in the context of online and distance learning. The different experiences described by two students elucidate this variance. For example, Archer said *I enjoyed online learning much more then actually attending school, as I was able to complete my work at my own pace and be in my own environment.* (Archer, 17yrs, Year 12, Non-Binary, Religious Independent School, VIC), while Emory reported *I got more time to focus on finding ways to manage how I work at home, but it wasn't pleasant at all as i kept forgetting stuff, getting interrupted, and not understanding stuff* (Emory, 17yrs, Year 12, Non-Binary/Genderfluid, Government High School, NSW). Taylor reported

a similar experience, stating *i wasn't able to focus [...] it was a worse experience for my education in that sense but i was able to do it from my own room by myself which made me feel safe than in a classroom* (Taylor, 17yrs, Year 12, Genderfluid, Government High School/Distance Education, QLD). Recall that most students had experienced online learning as a result of city- and state-wide lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic: thus, while responses may in part reflect concerns specific to TGD students, they may also reflect more general challenges faced by all students when studying during lockdown.

Researcher-selected quotes were similar to those generated by Leximancer analysis for this theme and highlighted both general themes related to online learning and social experiences specific to TGD students. Experiences highlighting the general themes related to online learning include that of Archie who reported that *face to face was better in terms of schoolwork management but i was bullied and harassed constantly. distance learning was better in terms of reduced harassment but i couldn't do any work* (Archie, 17yrs, Year 11, Transgender, Government School, NSW). Similarly, Kit from a Government High School in Queensland stated *Online learning was more difficult, mostly because I found it difficult to motivate myself to do schoolwork when I was by myself.* (Kit, 16yrs, Year 11, Transgender/Non-Binary, Government High School QLD). An example specific to the experience of TGD students includes this response from Tui, a young Non-Binary/Iriwhiti student from New South Wales who spent time in face-to-face mainstream school DE and online learning, reported that:

*They were both equally traumatic in different ways. In face-to-face schooling I got threats of physical violence from peers and regular bullying on the basis of my identities, but in online learning I got significantly more work with significantly less help from my teachers, as well as the social isolation.* (Tui, 16yrs, Year 10/TAFE, Non-Binary/Irawhiti, Government School, DE & TAFE, NSW)

Therefore, in summary of the above data, the themes identified by Leximancer and supported by further researcher analyses paint a complex picture of TGD students' comparative experiences. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a higher level of TGD students participating in online learning – not primarily from TGD equity needs, but from broader contextual circumstances. Therefore, TGD students' 'online' and 'better' responses show

both that this type of schooling improves bullying and social equity problems to some degree but has its limitations. Overall, it was 'worse' in terms of isolation and educational 'work' motivation/pacing.

**5.3 TGD Student Perceptions on the impact of Alternative, DE and/or Online Education on their Overall Wellbeing**

The fourth research question of this study sought to better understand the impacts of different learning environments and/or modes of delivery on TGD student wellbeing. In the survey, participants were asked to describe the ways, if any, in which their experiences of Alternative, DE and/or Online Education impacted their overall wellbeing. Specifically, they were asked: *In what ways have your experiences in alternative/distance/online learning impacted your overall wellbeing?* This research question was explored via qualitative analysis. Leximancer analysis was used to identify dominant themes across the 850 (~50%) responses from TGD survey participants, and a secondary thematic analysis was conducted to further verify those findings. Leximancer identified the following 5 themes: 'school' (563 hits), 'online' (356 hits), 'mental' (262 hits), 'focus' (298 hits) and 'depressed' (111 hits). The findings are mixed but suggest that students who accessed online learning due to COVID-19 felt that their overall wellbeing decreased mostly due to social isolation, while students who accessed alternative educational settings, including DE, reported an increase in their overall wellbeing. A supportive, safe school environment, social connection with peers, flexibility and academic support were all identified as important aspects of student wellbeing by TGD students, regardless of school setting or mode of delivery.
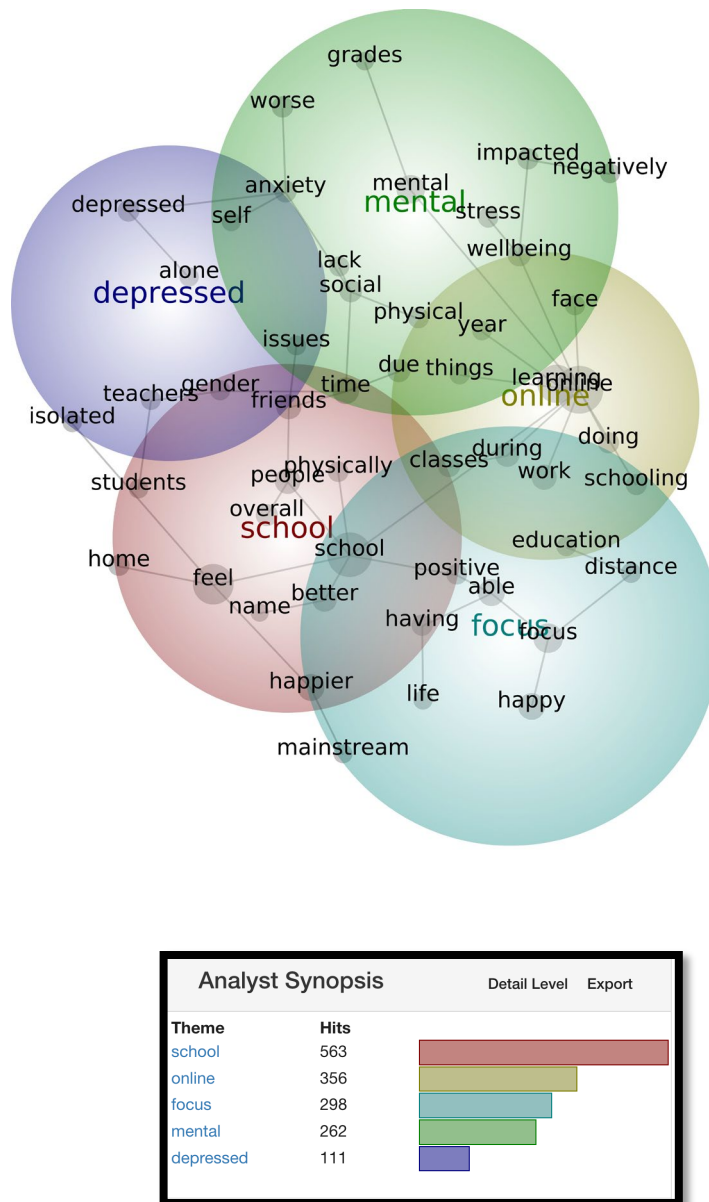
*Figure 5.8:* Leximancer analysis of how experiences of Alternative, DE and/or Online Education impacted TGD student wellbeing *(n=850)*
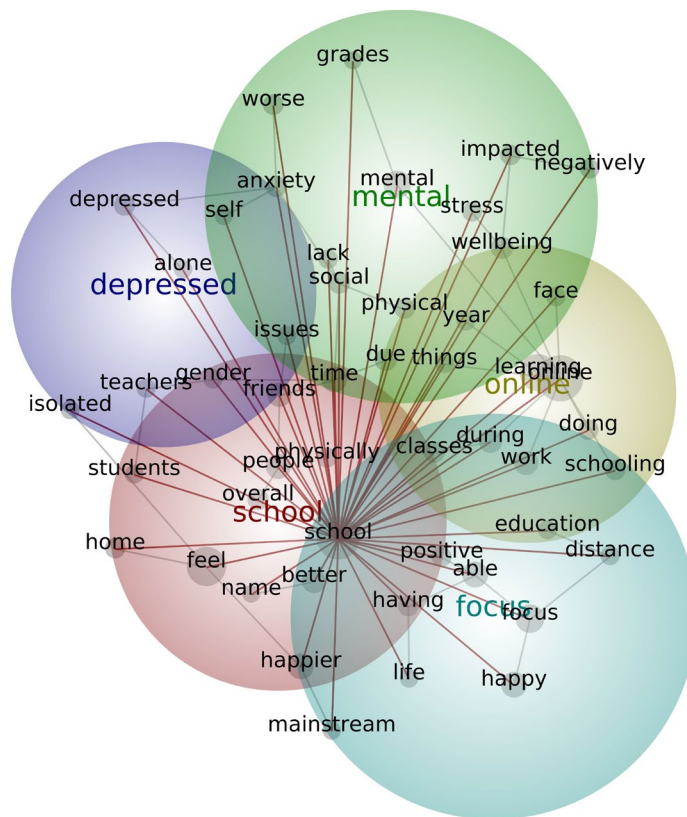
*5.3.1 'School'*



*Figure 5.9:* Leximancer Visual Map of the theme 'school'

'School' was the predominant Leximancer-identified theme (536 hits, combining

Leximancer-identified concepts including school, feel, happier, time, people, friends, better,

overall, physically, gender, students, and name). Findings suggest that for TGD students

accessing online learning during the pandemic, the theme 'school' was positively associated

with feelings of physical safety relating to gender identity, but largely related to a decrease in

overall wellbeing due to feelings of social isolation, workload stress, difficulty focusing, and

a lack of academic structure. 'School' was a dense theme, with typical quotes selected by

Leximancer highlighting both experiences that were specific to TGD students and mental

health trends that may be more broadly associated with online learning during the COVID-19

pandemic.  Nat, a 21-year-old former Government School student reported feeling *less happy,*

*I find it difficult to focus and stay accountable with online schooling. The lack of personal connection*

*and being stuck in the same environment made me sadder too* (Nat, 21yrs, no longer attending school,

Transgender/Non-Binary, Government High School, VIC). This researcher-selected quote

captions what may be more general mental health trends associated with accessing online

learning during the pandemic. Parker, a Trans man attending a public school in New South

Wales who engaged in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, described an

experience of wellbeing particular to TGD students:

> *I felt a lot  happier and safer emotionally compared to how I felt at school at that time, as I was bullied a lot  in my early high school  years for being queer, gender non-conforming,  and autistic, but how I feel  in school now, where I am recognised as a man and  referred to with the  correct name, and confident enough to address or ignore any  harassment I receive, is leagues better than my experience with either prior.* (Parker, 17yrs, Year 12, Government High School, NSW)

Other typical quotes identified by Leximancer underline the wellbeing impacts of online

learning that may be both general in nature, and particular to TGD students, for example:

> *I am generally not supported well at home, my parents aren't transphobic, they're just not comfortable with me being a trans man. It's easier to be around friends as they are supportive and use the right name and pronouns. I also have zero work ethic, so I find it difficult to keep up with work at home, I was very stressed and miserable learning at home.* (Jex, 15yrs, Year 10, Transgender, Government High School, WA)

> *Doing year 12 classwork close to HSC time was my lowest point mentally in years, I developed sores from stress during both large lockdowns. I was still in contact with my friends every day, socially I was doing fine but was suffering from decreased self-esteem every day.  2020 lockdown saw me discovering my gender identity, which was extremely painful at the time but was better later.* (Aaron, 19yrs, TAFE, Non-Binary, Religious Independent School/TAFE, NSW)
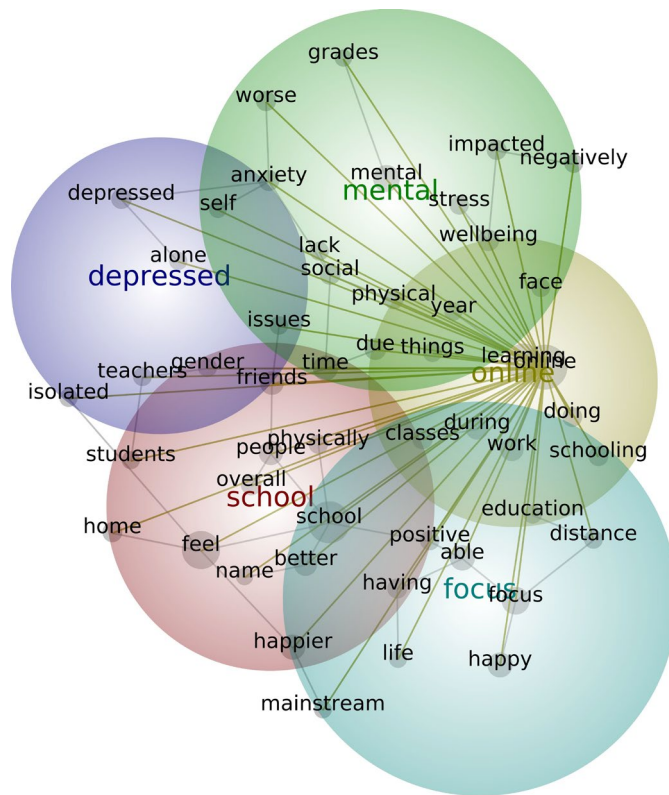
*5.3.2 'Online'*



*Figure 5.10:* Leximancer Visual Map of the theme 'online'

Leximancer analysis of the second most dominant theme 'online' (356 hits, comprising of concepts including online, learning, work, during, due, classes, doing, schooling, things, face, and year) was also complex. As with the theme 'school', analyses of the 'online' theme highlighted experiences specific to TGD students, as well as ones that may relate to broader mental health and wellbeing trends associated with online learning during the pandemic. Leximancer-selected quotes for the theme 'online' suggested overwhelmingly that, TGD students experienced a decrease in wellbeing due to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, largely due to increased feelings of isolation from supportive peers, workload stress, difficulty focusing, and a lack of academic structure. For example, Rory, a young Transgender student in Year 12 at a NSW Government School wrote that *online learning impacted me greatly at the time as I was severely undermotivated and unable to keep up with the extra workload given…* (Rory, 16yrs, Year 12, Transgender, Government High School, NSW). While

Rory's experience of decreased wellbeing was mostly associated with workload, Tate reported a decrease in wellbeing associated with a lack of access to the non-academic or social aspects of face-to-face school:

> *I found the experience of going through course work more or less equal while in online and face to face classes. However, I think my overall happiness and fulfilment with school was reduced during online learning because school became a space only for learning. I lost the other things that school can provide you like connection with others* (Tate, 23yrs, Non-Binary, University/Government School graduate, NSW).

Further deductive thematic analysis of the theme 'online' (206 search hits) echoed Leximancer analysis findings. For example, Casey a 16-year-old Transgender student accessing online learning during the pandemic wrote that:

> *online learning affected my social and emotional wellbeing as my interactions were limited. Focus was harder during online compared to in person. I feel positively about in person school due to the social support* (Casey, 16yrs, Year 11, Transgender, Government School, NSW).

Findings through thematic analysis also found that of the TGD students accessing Alternative, DE, or Online Education for reasons other than, or in addition to COVID-19, most reported an increase in feelings of wellbeing. Xander, a 21-year-old non-Binary student who attended DE wrote that *Distance education/online learning improved my wellbeing as i was able to do something productive and interact with people despite my illnesses* (Xander, 21yrs, University, Non-Binary, graduated from Distance Education, VIC). One Leximancer-selected quote for 'online' supported this finding. Shay, a 15-year-old Transgender student enrolled at a DE school in the NT due to transphobic and other bullying, mental health needs and physical illness reported *i am definitely mentally healthier doing online schooling* (Shay, 15yrs, Year 10, Distance Education, NT).

*5.3.3 'Focus'*



*Figure 5.11:* Leximancer Visual Map of the theme 'focus

The third Leximancer theme was 'focus' (298 hits, comprising of concepts including able, happy, having, positive, distance, education, life, and mainstream) and included many concepts overlapping with the 'online' and 'school' themes. Findings from the Leximancer analysis were somewhat mixed with most typical quotes describing experiences of TGD students who had either changed schools or accessed Alternative or Distance Education for reasons other than COVID-19. These quotes suggested that TGD students in these settings felt somewhat better overall, though this was not always related to the ability to focus, for example:

> *... I feel more positive about schooling in general now that I know that there are alternate ways to get an education. My focus has always been a thing that has slipped away from me which still occurred during my distance education, but I did start noticing when I needed breaks and I was able to take those without asking someone for permission or having to explain myself to anyone.* (Felix, 17yrs, Year 12, Non-Binary/Demi-Boy, Distance Education High School, NSW).

Ronan had this to say about changing from a Single-Sex Religious Independent School to a Co-Ed Non-Religious Independent school: *I was able to focus on my HSC, make friends, feel happy and positive about my life, and was able to begin my medical transition and was able to begin my medical transition* (Ronan, 19yrs, University, Transgender, Non-Religious Independent School, NSW).

The thematic analysis indicated that for TGD students who accessed online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic the theme 'focus' related to a decrease in wellbeing associated with difficulty focusing in an online learning environment. 138 student responses directly referenced 'focus' in the Excel response column for RQ4. 118 (~85%) responses were from TGD students who accessed online learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Of those 118 responses, 84 (~71%) reported that focus was much more difficult during online learning. Typical responses resembled that of Cal who wrote *less happy and not able to focus on school* (Cal, 14yrs, Year 8, no label/unsure, Government High School, QLD. Ari, a Year 11 student said *I felt more depressed, couldn't focus, wasn't handing work in on time or to the high standard that I usually set for myself* (Ari, 16yrs, Year 11, Genderfluid, Government High School, SA). Similarly, Zac said *it is harder to focus as the content was harder to learn* (Zac, 17, Year 12, Transgender/man, Government High School, QLD).
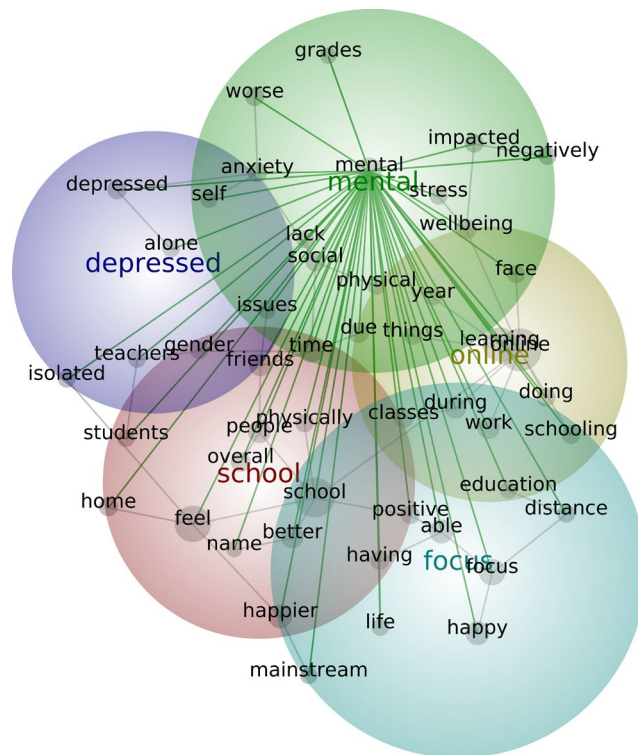
*5.3.4 'Mental'*



*Figure 5.12:* Leximancer Visual Map of the theme 'mental'

The fourth Leximancer theme was 'mental' (262 hits, comprising of concepts including

mental, wellbeing, social, anxiety, worse, impacted, physical, stress, negatively, lack, grades).

The Leximancer analysis indicated that, overall, the theme 'mental' related to feelings of

social isolation, lack of access to supports, depression, anxiety, difficulty focussing on

schoolwork and managing workload, and overall poorer mental health for TGD students who

accessed online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Alexis, a young Trans man from

Victoria reported that online learning during the pandemic *made my mental illness a lot worse*

*(anxiety, strong ADHD symptoms, depression) and meant i could not access therapy for a long time*

*because of a lack of privacy, i am still feeling the repercussions of that today* (Alexis, 16yrs, Year 10,

Trans man, Religious Independent School, VIC).  Other Leximancer-selected quotes underlined this

finding, including the experiences of Clark and Leo:

> *My wellbeing was overall negatively impacted with long lasting influences on self-image,*
> *confidence, and my social relationships. In particular,]my anxiety grew quite severe*

*concerning school and resulted in me losing the ability to enjoy school entirely, something I still struggle with despite the end of online learning.* (Clark, 16yrs, Year 10, Non-Binary/Agender, Government School, NSW)

*The two years of online learning due to the COVID -19 pandemic has negatively impacted my overall wellbeing. I struggled with generalised and social anxiety during this time, as well as being mostly unable to concentrate in class which further increased my levels of stress.* (Leo, 17yrs, TAFE student, Non-Binary, Government School, VIC).

The thematic analysis conducted showed similar findings for TGD students accessing online learning during COVID-19. As with the Leximancer findings, typical researcher-selected quotes associated the theme 'mental' (123 participant responses to RQ4 contained the word 'mental') with worse mental health and feelings of wellbeing due to social isolation and difficulty engaging in online learning during the pandemic. For example, Wren, a 14-year-old Year 8 student from Tasmania, reported that they *felt worse learning from home due to the loneliness which made my already bad mental health worse* (Wren, 14yrs, Year 8, Genderfluid, Religious Independent School, TAS). Elliot, a Year 12 student from NSW stated that *online learning was a very difficult period mentally. I did not complete or engage in nearly as much classwork as I would on a mainstream school day* (Elliot, 16yrs, Year 12, Transgender, Government High School, NSW).

Interestingly, as with the 'online' theme, thematic analysis of the theme 'mental' found that typical responses of students who attended Alternative or Distance Education settings for reasons other than, or in addition to the COVID-19 pandemic generally related to an increase in overall wellbeing. For example, 17-year-old DE student, Bryce *felt very good in online learning, it helped me improve my mental health a lot* (Bryce, 17yrs, Year 11, Transgender, Distance Education, TAS). Year 9 student, Jude, from South Australia enrolled in a DE high school had this to say:

*i finally feel like i'm able to learn again, after a long time of severe difficulty. while my mental condition is still not good, it doesn't put school out of the way anymore. i love my teachers and the supportive environment so i look forward to logging on each day. i learn so much better.* (Jude, 15yrs, Year 10, Transgender, Distance Education, SA).
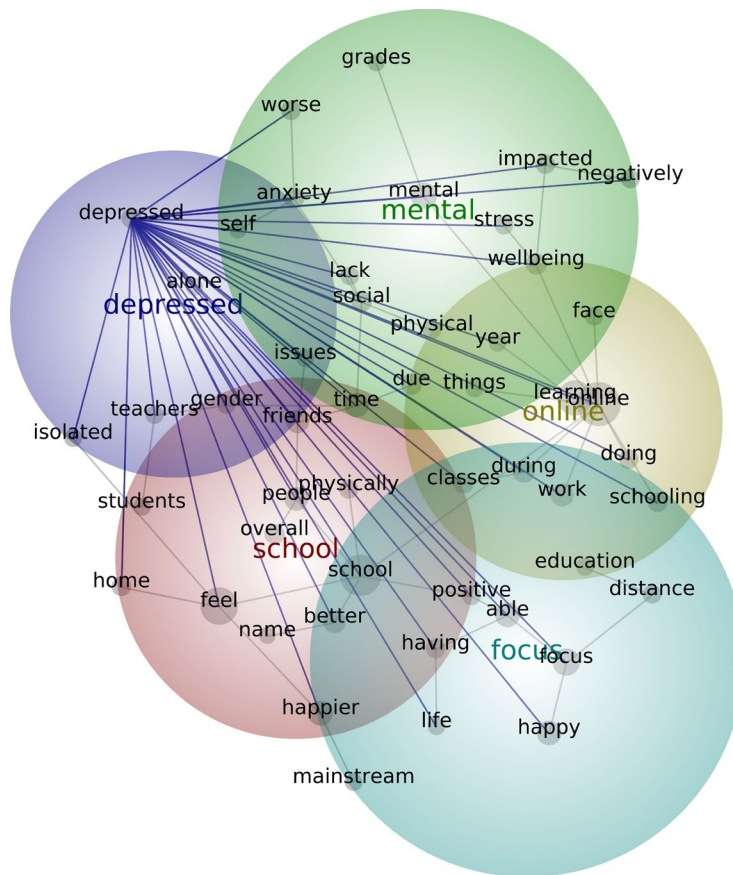
*5.3.5 'Depressed'*



*Figure 5.13:* Leximancer Visual Map of the theme 'depressed'

The final dominant Leximancer theme was 'depressed' (111 hits, comprising of concepts

including teachers, issues, isolated, alone, and self). There were few concepts in this theme,

mostly overlapped with those in the 'mental' and 'school' themes. Both Leximancer and

thematic analyses showed that 'depressed' was almost exclusively related to feelings of

social isolation, poor mental health, and depression in the context of online learning during

the COVID-19 pandemic. Leximancer-selected quotes typical of the theme 'depressed'

include:

> *I was alone and depressed.  It left me miserable.  I am an introvert but going that long without*
> *seeing more people really messed with me. I completely lost motivation to do any schoolwork, I*
> *ended up getting Ds or at the most Cs for most of my classes.*
>
> *It made me feel very isolated from the world, and in parts very depressed*

*I don't know if it really helped me or impacted me overall. it wasn't good on my grades as i struggle with self-management and untreated mental health issues and the isolation made me feel a little lonely, but it was less draining than going to school face to face.*

*I felt alone and depressed. The whole world was and still is collapsing and it was kinda the start of me figuring out my sexuality and gender identity*

Thematic analysis found 31 student responses in the Excel column for RQ4 that included 'depressed'. As with the Leximancer analysis, student response referred to feelings of social isolation, loneliness, sadness and/or poor mental health related to accessing online learning during the pandemic. Typical responses included ones like that of Jasper, who had this to say about their experience of online learning during the pandemic: *I fell behind in a lot of classes which built up my anxiety and depression, I felt more socially isolated, I didn't move around as much which contributed to feeling lazy and depressed* (Jasper, 15yrs, Year 10, Brother-Boy/Transgender/Non-Binary, Government High School, NSW). Artie said that during *online school due to COVID-19, I felt very depressed, and I was unable to focus on the subject matter.* (Artie, 15yrs, Year 10, no label, Government High School, SA), and Marlowe, a Transgender/Non-Binary Year 11 student from Victoria wrote that *online learning made me more depressed because of not having regular social interaction* (Marlowe, 18yrs, Year 11, Transgender/Non-Binary, Government High School, VIC).

## 5.4 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter outlined strong overarching themes in the data. Firstly, the TGD student sample from the survey reported in this thesis were largely aged 14-18 years, from NSW, Victoria and Queensland and identified as Transgender, Non-Binary and/or Genderfluid. Most reported they were assigned female at birth and well over half identified as being neurodiverse. Their schooling largely now occurred in either Public/Government High Schools and Religious Private/Independent Schools. A third of participants had changed schools, largely due to mental health needs and/or experiences of bullying at school. Of that

third, a quarter reported enrolling in an alternative setting (Distance Education, SSP, TAFE, Homeschool, secular Independent School or Vocational school). In terms of COVID-19 pandemic, impacts were felt by almost all students (90.8%) who reported accessing online learning in the last 5 years.

Qualitative descriptions of positive experiences of Alternative, DE and/or Online Education included an increase in feelings of physical safety due to the reduction in experiences of bullying or harassment based on gender identity, as well as more flexibility with regards to the pacing of schoolwork. Negative descriptions of the limits of Alternative, DE and/or Online Education included feelings of social isolation from peers and social supports, though this was almost entirely related to online learning in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Positive experiences of mainstream face-to-face education included supportive peers and social connection, as well as a structured environment and real time feedback from teachers. Negative descriptions of mainstream face-to-face education emphasised that participants overwhelmingly still experience bullying, or harassment based on their gender identity and feel unsafe or unhappy in face-to-face settings. The following discussion and conclusion chapter will offer a consideration of these overarching themes in relation to both the theory used for this thesis and the existing domestic and international studies in the alternative education and TGD youth fields, to draw key conclusions locating the study and its practice and stakeholder implications.

# Chapter 6: Discussion & Conclusion

## 6.0 Introduction

Previous chapters outlined the research questions of this study (Chapter one), reviewed

existing research, and identified gaps in the literature (Chapter two), explained the theoretical

approach used to frame this study (Chapter three), described the methodology used to address

each research question (Chapter four) and presented the findings for each of those questions

(Chapter five). The following chapter incorporates a trans-informed theoretical framework

into a discussion of the findings for each research question, locating these results within the

context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings are compared to other studies conducted

locally and internationally throughout. Conclusions are presented in response to the research

questions and implications for research and stakeholders are discussed. Almost all

participants from this study reported engaging in online learning due to the COVID-19

pandemic. As such, the results are highly reflective of the pandemic years. While the

COVID-19 pandemic played a major role in shaping the educational experiences of

participants, findings from this study highlight existing intersecting factors that contribute to

educational inequities and wellbeing deficits for TGD students both during and beyond

pandemic times. As an exploration of how educational institutions embody structures of

domination like cisgenderism, enacting policies and practices that marginalise TGD youth,

this study contributes several findings that extend this area of theory.

## 6.1 TGD Student Characteristics

### 6.1.1 Participant rates

Though online advertising for this study was conducted over a relatively short period of time

(10 days total), participant numbers were high (1,670). Evidence from recent studies suggest

that digital spaces may offer TGD youth a safe space in which to share their experiences,

have their voices heard and explore or develop their identities (Austin et al., 2020; Erlick, 2018; Nicolazzo et al., 2023; Shannon, 2022). The high participation rate also suggests that TGD youth are keen to share their knowledge and experiences, and to participate in research which seeks to promote wellbeing and advance social justice outcomes for TGD youth more broadly. Existing research in Australia has found that TGD students engage in more youth activism overall as compared to their cisgender peers (Bragg et al., 2018; Jones, 2017; Smith et al., 2014), through actions for transgender rights and other social causes. This is potentially due to experiencing higher levels of discrimination, though motivating factors for TGD youth activism have not yet been fully explored (Jones & Hillier, 2013; Jones et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2014).

### 6.1.2 Gender Identity

TGD participant responses to the question on gender identity highlight the creative, dynamic nature of self-identification and support the notion that there is no one way to be trans and no one way to 'do gender' (Spade, 2015). While TGD students mostly identified as Transgender (52.8%) or Non-Binary (41.1%), many students also identified with a wide range of other gender identities, identified with more than one identity, or chose not to identify at all.

### 6.1.3 Sex Assigned at Birth

Almost 85% of TGD participants reported that they were assigned female at birth (AFAB), much higher than the 12% who reported being assigned male at birth (AMAB). This data is comparable to other TGD studies conducted in Australia indicating that TGD youth AFAB are much more likely to participate in online surveys than TGD youth AMAB (see Callander et al., 2019; A. Hill et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2014; Strauss et al., 2017). It is unclear why participants AFAB are more likely to respond to surveys. More

research is needed to address this asymmetry, including the exploration of potential barriers

to participation for youth AMAB and research focused specifically on trans women, girls or

non-binary youth assigned male at birth (A. Hill et al., 2021).

*6.1.4 Neurodiversity*

Well over half (57.3%) of participants identified as 'neurodiverse'. For the purposes of this

study, neurodivergence could include, but was not limited to, having attention deficit

hyperactive disorder (ADHD) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), though this survey

question was based on self-identification alone, not a diagnostic label. In recent years, several

studies exploring the intersection of gender diversity and neurodivergence have been

conducted. Studies suggest a co-occurrence between gender diversity and ASD, though the

connection is not yet well understood (George & Stokes, 2018; Glidden et al., 2016; Strang et

al., 2018; van Vlerken et al., 2020; Warrier et al., 2020). Additionally, variations in co-

occurrence rates have been reported due to differences in research methodology, data analysis

and possible conflation of gender diversity with Gender Dysphoria (Manjra & Masic, 2022).

What is known is that youth who are both trans and have ASD are at high risk for mental

health issues (Strauss et al., 2020), therefore, further research in this area is needed to provide

effective, targeted support to this group.

*6.1.5 Experiences of Gender-Based Bullying in Schools*

Only a minority of students reported they felt comfortable being open about their

gender identity at school (21.5%) and more than half of TGD student participants reported

that they had experienced bullying or harassment based on gender identity while at school

(56%). These results echo similar to findings from other International and National studies

reporting high rates of school-based bullying and harassment based on gender identity (see

Budge et al., 2018; Day et al., 2018; A. Hill et al., 2021; Hillier et al., 2010; Hillier et al.,

2005; Jones, Bolger, et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2014; UNESCO, 2019).

Bullying will be discussed in greater detail in section 6.3 below.

Despite high rates of reported gender-based bullying at school, TGD student

participants overwhelmingly reported feeling either 'very happy' (20%) or 'happy' (40.5%)

about their gender identity. This suggests that poor mental health outcomes and/or reports of

adverse experiences by TGD youth may not relate to how feel about their gender identity, but

instead to the repercussions associated with transgressing gender norms (Jones, 2017; Jones,

Bolger, et al., 2015; Jones & Hillier, 2013).

## 6.2 Why are TGD students accessing alternative education, including online learning in Australia?

### *6.2.1 Alternative Education*

Mental health needs, alongside experiences of bullying, including transphobic bullying,

played a major role in TGD students' decision to change schools. This is consistent with

research indicating that TGD youth report high experiences of poor mental health, including

anxiety, depression, high rates of self-harm and negative experiences of bullying that

contribute to poor mental health (Callander et al., 2019; Clark et al., 2014; Ferfolja &

Ullman, 2017; A. Hill et al., 2021; Hillier et al., 2010; Hillier et al., 2005; Jones & Hillier,

2013; Jones et al., 2016; Kean, 2021; Martino et al., 2020; Martino & Omercajic, 2021;

Omercajic & Martino, 2020a; Payne & Smith, 2016; Robinson et al., 2014; Smith et al.,

2014; Ullman, 2018). Of the 470, (30%) participants who reported changing schools, 117

(25%) enrolled in an alternative setting. It was not possible to locate detailed aggregate

student enrolment data on school type, likely in part due to a lack of consensus on what

constitutes 'alternative education'. Data on educational trajectory was similarly absent.

School trajectory, in particular for marginalised populations, is an understudied area.

Mapping educational trajectory could provide depth and scope to any structural analysis of

educational inequities. Qualitative and quantitative data on school trajectory could potentially serve as a diagnostic tool to help identify and solve systemic problems across and between various educational settings for all students, including TGD youth.

*6.2.2 Online Learning*

COVID-19 (90%) was the major driver of online learning for study participants. This is unsurprising given that the pandemic marked a widespread shift to remote learning globally and in Australia (Abrams & Schaefer, 2020; Mavhandu-Mudzusi et al., 2021; Page et al., 2021; Reimers et al., 2020). The sudden nature of this shift, meant that school policies and processes around online teaching and learning, modes of delivery, pedagogical structures, student expectations and communication were not yet in place (Page et al., 2021), exacerbating existing educational inequalities for vulnerable student populations, including TGD students. Findings from this study suggest that online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted upon TGD students' mental health and wellbeing both positively and negatively in complex and sometimes conflicting ways. These impacts and their implications will be discussed in more detail in the sections that follow.

**6.3 How did TGD students' experiences of Alternative, Distance and/or Online Learning compare to their experiences in mainstream face-to-face school?**

*6.3.1 Less bullying, more social isolation*

While most student responses to this research question described experiences of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, students attending alternative settings such as SSPs and DE, felt that their experiences were much better than in mainstream face-to-face school, reporting a decrease in instances of bullying and more trans-affirming support in their alternative school. Due to time constraints, the independent nature of the MRes research

project, as well as the sheer volume of data collected, it was not possible to extract conduct a more substantial in-depth analysis of all the qualitative data from TGD students who attend or have attended alternative settings. Despite this, result suggests alternative settings may offer safer and more supportive spaces for TGD students. More research in this area is needed.

TGD participants accessing online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic overwhelmingly reported feeling safer and less anxious in an online learning environment, as they experienced less gender-based harassment and bullying as compared to mainstream face-to-face school. At the same time, however, this cohort also reported feeling worse about the lack of social support from peers, which contributed to feelings of social isolation and loneliness. While negative experiences associated with a lack of social connection were likely exacerbated by online learning in the context of the pandemic, they do suggest that safety from bullying and harassment at school may come at a cost. TGD students should be able to enjoy the support of peers and benefit from the social connections provided by a face-to-face setting in an environment where they are not targets of gender-based bullying. Research into bullying of TGD youth conducted in the United States and Australia has described gender-based bullying as a form of 'gender policing' reduced to individual acts of victimisation by anti-bullying policies that "depoliticise harassment" (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2021, p. 806; Payne & Smith, 2012, 2013; Payne & Smith, 2016; Ullman, 2018). These studies found that school anti-bullying policies are often ineffective, as they focus on a victim/perpetrator binary, placing the burden of victimization on individuals. In doing so, they fail to interrogate the structures of domination and socio-structural processes (Wesp et al., 2019) that harm TGD students and perpetuate gender-based bullying in schools, such as cisgenderism, heteronormativity, and the ideology of patriarchy. Trans-affirming practices which

interrogate these structures, must be woven into pedagogical practices and school anti-

bullying policies to create safe, supportive educational environments for TGD students.

*6.3.2 Misgendering in online settings*

Participants negatively associated online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic with

experiences of being misgendered or having their deadname used by teacher and peers on

online platforms. This is understandable because names usually appear, and are constantly

reflected back at participants, in online educational forums and environments. A study on the

wellbeing of LGBTIQ Tasmanians during the COVID-19 pandemic reported similar

experiences of participants being misgendered while working by phone or internet (Grant et

al., 2021). Existing research describes misgendering as a form of epistemic injustice and

suggests that experiences of being misgendered are associated with negative mental health

outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and poor self-image (Argyriou, 2021; Gunn, 2020;

Howansky et al., 2022; McNamarah, 2021; Whitley et al., 2022). Though this issue was

likely exacerbated by the lack of planning and preparedness for the rapid move to online

learning, it highlights the ways in which institutionalised cisnormativity can be replicated

across platforms and learning environments in ways that negatively impact TGD students.

Online learning environments need to be designed deliberately, with inclusive, trans-

affirming practices in mind, to avoid simply reproducing processes that exclude or

marginalise TGD youth. This is especially important given that online and other hybrid forms

of education are likely to become increasingly commonplace both within and beyond global

emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic.

**6.4 TGD students' experiences of Alternative, Distance and/or Online Education and overall wellbeing?**

*6.4.1 Better wellbeing outcomes for students in Alternative and/or Distance Education*

Student responses to this research question highlighted the multi-faceted and complex nature of wellbeing. Participants attending alternative settings and/or engaging in online learning for reasons other than COVID-19 reported that these settings were more flexible, gender affirming, and improved their overall mental health and wellbeing. These students reported less bullying, and more gender affirming practices like the correct use of pronouns and teachers who were either queer or TGD informed. This suggests that trans-affirming school environments do make a difference to TGD students' mental health and wellbeing, though more data is needed to explore this further.

*6.4.2 Online learning and COVID-19: Safer from bullying, poorer mental health and wellbeing outcomes for TGD students*

For students engaged in online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, wellbeing was positively associated with feelings of physical safety from gender-based bullying experienced at mainstream-face-to-face school, but very negatively associated poor mental health, depression, and increased anxiety due to social isolation from peers, as well as difficulty with motivation and focus due to lack of school structure and academic support. Recent research has indicated that social isolation, a lack of school structure and academic support may have been common experiences for all students accessing online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, potentially more so for vulnerable student populations (Abrams & Schaefer, 2020; Brown, 2020; Drane et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2021; Maher, 2021; Mavhandu-Mudzusi et al., 2021; Reimers et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2021). TGD students from unsupportive households may have felt the impacts of this social isolation more acutely as family environment is an important indicator of mental health and wellbeing for TGD youth (Fish et al., 2020; Goffnett et al., 2022; Hawke et al., 2021). Peers and social connections made at school may be the main source of emotional and psychological support for TGD youth from home environments which are unsafe, unsupportive, or un-affirming of their gender identity. While an in-depth

discussion of peer support as a protective factor for TGD youth is beyond the scope of this study, research has found that it plays an important role in their wellbeing, especially given that TGD youth experience higher levels of victimisation and poor mental health including anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicidality as compared to their cisgender peers (Austin et al., 2022; Hunt et al., 2021; Jones & Hillier, 2013; Kia et al., 2021; Russell et al., 2020; Sansfaçon et al., 2018).

## 6.5 Limitations

Due in part to the time constraints of the MRes program requirements (1 year) and to complexities introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic, this study had some limitations. They are as follows:

- COVID-19 complicated the data such that some TGD students may have had worse wellbeing outcomes related to COVID-19 and lockdowns for which we did not have direct measures. Due to time constraints and the focus of this study, we did not ask questions about lockdown lengths, frequencies or time spent online learning due to the pandemic. In Australia, the length of lockdowns and time spent online learning varied dramatically. A longitudinal study exploring educational equity and experiences of online learning in non-pandemic times could prove useful.

- Data associated with the COVID-19 pandemic far outweighed the data collected on Alternative and/or Distance Education, making it difficult to draw comparisons to mainstream settings. Further in-depth research exploring TGD students' experiences in particular alternative settings (for example Distance Education or SSPs) would provide more insight into the supportive/unsupportive features of alternative educational settings.

- Educational trajectory is complex and would be more effectively ascertained by face-to-face interviews with students, as opposed to via an online survey. For example, student interpretation of 'school type' varied by state and by individual interpretation making it difficult to classify the data.

- Due to the short time frame and independent nature of this research project, it was not possible to fully explore how intersectional factors such as race, socioeconomic status, housing, ethnicity, citizenship or visa status, indigeneity, ability etc. may have impacted the experiences of TGD students in alternative settings or online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is an area that warrants further research.

## 6.6 Implication for stakeholders

Despite the limitations outlined above, this study has clear implications for both researchers and education stakeholders which include:

- Educational Leader & Policy Makers – For educational policies to be effective, policymaking must be trans-informed and move beyond an individual rights-based framework by addressing what Wesp et al. (2019) refer to as the structures of domination (cisgenderism and cisnormativity), and socio-structural processes (gendering) that contribute to educational inequities for TGD students. TGD students' embodied experiences should be considered as valuable sources of knowing and could support effective policy making in this area. These processes should apply equally to disaster-related educational planning and policymaking, as well as online or hybrid models of educational delivery.

- Researchers - School trajectory, in particular for marginalised populations, is an understudied area. Mapping educational trajectory could provide depth and scope to any structural analysis of educational inequities. Qualitative and quantitative data on

school trajectory could potentially serve as a diagnostic tool to help identify and solve systemic problems across various educational settings for all students, including TGD youth. TGD youth voices should be privileged in this research. Additionally, research exploring how different educational contexts reinforce or resist structures of domination and socio-structural processes that marginalise TGD students could support better, more effective policy making strategies.

- Teacher training – All students deserve a safe, supportive, affirming and academically supportive school experience. Teachers should be explicitly trained to think critically about how structures of domination and socio-cultural processes shape education, and the ways in which intersecting factors like race, class, ability, age, sexuality, and gender produce educational inequities for students in schools. Teachers should be given tools and strategies that empower them to resist these forces through pedagogy and practice.

## 6.7 Conclusion

Several conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, cisgenderism and cisnormativity remain powerful ideological structures embedded in school environments that, when left unexamined, are self-perpetuating. They continue to expose TGD students to various types of gender-based harm within school settings. All schools, regardless of setting, must take this into account. Results from this study suggest that context matters. Students attending schools in which they were free from gender-based violence and affirmed in their gender were happier and experienced higher levels of wellbeing. Further exploration into the nature and prevalence of TGD supportive features in alternative educational settings as compared to mainstream settings is needed. In depth face-to-face interviews with TGD students attending alternative educational settings would be useful here.

Through lack of time, preparation and planning, Online Education during the COVID-19 pandemic reproduced some of the marginalising practices TGD students experienced in mainstream face-to-face schools. Social isolation exacerbated mental health issues for this cohort, leading to wellbeing deficits. While most all students would benefit from better social supports in online learning environments, especially during times of emergency, those benefits may be particularly importance for TGD youth. Creating safe, trans-affirming opportunities to connect socially with peers and/or school staff should inform planning and design of online education models.

Given that global disasters are likely to reoccur, disaster education planning must interrogate the ways in which intersecting factors like race, class, ability, age, sexuality, and gender produce or reinforce educational inequities in online settings. In the context of increasing globalisation and advances in technology this interrogation should similarly be applied when developing online and other hybrid modes of educational delivery.

# References

Abrams, S., & Schaefer, M. B. (2020). "Making the Unusual Usual:" Students' Perspectives and Experiences of Learning at Home during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

ABS. (2021). *Schools*. ABS. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/latest-release

ACON. (2019). *A language Guide: Trans and Gender Diverse Inclusion*. https://www.acon.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/TGD-Language-Guide_2019_updated.pdf

Anderson, D. L., & Graham, A. P. (2016). Improving student wellbeing: having a say at school. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *27*(3), 348-366. https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2015.1084336

Argyriou, K. (2021). Misgendering as epistemic injustice. *Las Torres de Lucca*(19), 71-82.

Ashley, F. (2020). A critical commentary on 'rapid-onset gender dysphoria'. *The Sociological Review*, *68*(4), 779-799. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026120934693

Austin, A., Craig, S. L., D'Souza, S., & McInroy, L. B. (2022). Suicidality Among Transgender Youth: Elucidating the Role of Interpersonal Risk Factors. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *37*(5-6), NP2696-NP2718. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260520915554

Austin, A., Craig, S. L., Navega, N., & McInroy, L. B. (2020). It's my safe space: The life-saving role of the internet in the lives of transgender and gender diverse youth. *Int J Transgend Health*, *21*(1), 33-44. https://doi.org/10.1080/15532739.2019.1700202

Baroutsis, A., McGregor, G., & Mills, M. (2016). Pedagogic voice: student voice in teaching and engagement pedagogies. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, *24*(1), 123-140. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2015.1087044

Borkar, V. N. (2016). Positive school climate and positive education: Impact on students well-being. *Indian Journal of Health & Wellbeing*, *7*(8).

Bragg, S., Renold, E., Ringrose, J., & Jackson, C. (2018). 'More than boy, girl, male, female': exploring young people's views on gender diversity within and beyond school contexts. *Sex Education*, *18*(4), 420-434. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2018.1439373

Brännlund, A., Strandh, M., & Nilsson, K. (2017). Mental-health and educational achievement: the link between poor mental-health and upper secondary school completion and grades. *Journal of Mental Health*, *26*(4), 318-325. https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2017.1294739

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research : a practical guide for beginnners*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2014). What can "thematic analysis" offer health and wellbeing researchers? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, *9*(1), 26152. https://doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v9.26152

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health*, *11*(4), 589-597. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806

Brown, N., Te Riele, K., Shelley, B. & Woodroffe, J. (2020). *Learning at home during COVID-19: Effects on vulnerable young Australians. Independent Rapid Response Report.* .

Budge, S. L., Belcourt, S., Conniff, J., Parks, R., W. Pantalone, D., & Katz-Wise, S. L. (2018). A Grounded Theory Study of the Development of Trans Youths' Awareness of Coping with Gender Identity. *Journal of child and family studies*, *27*(9), 3048-3061. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-018-1136-y

Butler, J. P. (1990). *Gender trouble : feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.

Butler, J. P. (1993). *Bodies that matter : on the discursive limits of "sex"*. Routledge.

Callander, D., Wiggins, J., Rosenberg, S., Cornelisse, V., Duck-Chong, L., Holt, M., Pony, M., Vlahakis, E., & MacGibbon, J. (2019). *The 2018 Australian Trans and Gender Diverse Sexual Health Survey: Report of Findings*.

Chu, Y.-H., & Li, Y.-C. (2022). The Impact of Online Learning on Physical and Mental Health in University Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *19*(5), 2966. https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/19/5/2966

Clark, T. C., Lucassen, M. F., Bullen, P., Denny, S. J., Fleming, T. M., Robinson, E. M., & Rossen, F. V. (2014). The Health and Well-Being of Transgender High School Students: Results From the New Zealand Adolescent Health Survey (Youth'12). *Journal of adolescent health*, *55*(1), 93-99. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2013.11.008

Crenshaw, K. W. (2017). *On intersectionality: Essential writings*. The New Press.

Cumming-Potvin, W., & Martino, W. (2018). The policyscape of transgender equality and gender diversity in the Western Australian education system: a case study. *Gender and education*, *30*(6), 715-735. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2018.1483491

Davies, A. W. J., Vipond, E., & King, A. (2019). Gender binary washrooms as a means of gender policing in schools: a Canadian perspective. *Gender and education*, *31*(7), 866-885. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2017.1354124

Day, J. K., Perez-Brumer, A., & Russell, S. T. (2018). Safe Schools? Transgender Youth's School Experiences and Perceptions of School Climate. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, *47*(8), 1731-1742. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-018-0866-x

Denscombe, M. (2008). Communities of Practice: A Research Paradigm for the Mixed Methods Approach. *Journal of mixed methods research*, *2*(3), 270-283. https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689808316807

Dickert, N., & Sugarman, J. (2005). Ethical Goals of Community Consultation in Research. *American Journal of Public Health*, *95*(7), 1123-1127. https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2004.058933

Drane, C. F., Vernon, L., & O'Shea, S. (2021). Vulnerable learners in the age of COVID-19 : A scoping review. *Australian educational researcher*, *48*(4), 585-604. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-020-00409-5

Erlick, E. (2018). Trans Youth Activism on the Internet. *Frontiers (Boulder)*, *39*(1), 73-92. https://doi.org/10.5250/fronjwomestud.39.1.0073

Ferfolja, T., & Ullman, J. (2017). Gender and sexuality in education and health: voices advocating for equity and social justice. *Sex Education*, *17*(3), 235-241. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2017.1306379

Ferfolja, T., & Ullman, J. (2021). Inclusive pedagogies for transgender and gender diverse children: parents' perspectives on the limits of discourses of bullying and risk in schools. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, *29*(5), 793-810. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2021.1912158

Fish, J. N., McInroy, L. B., Paceley, M. S., Williams, N. D., Henderson, S., Levine, D. S., & Edsall, R. N. (2020). "I'm Kinda Stuck at Home With Unsupportive Parents Right Now": LGBTQ Youths' Experiences With COVID-19 and the Importance of Online Support. *Journal of adolescent health*, *67*(3), 450-452. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.06.002

Frohard-Dourlent, H. (2016). 'I don't care what's under your clothes': the discursive positioning of educators working with trans and gender-nonconforming students. *Sex Education*, *16*(1), 63-76. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2015.1022819

Frohard-Dourlent, H. (2018). "The student drives the car, right?": trans students and narratives of decision-making in schools. *Sex Education*, *18*(4), 328-344. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2017.1393745

George, R., & Stokes, M. A. (2018). A Quantitative Analysis of Mental Health Among Sexual and Gender Minority Groups in ASD. *J Autism Dev Disord*, *48*(6), 2052-2063. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-018-3469-1

Glidden, D., Bouman, W. P., Jones, B. A., & Arcelus, J. (2016). Gender Dysphoria and Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *Sex Med Rev*, *4*(1), 3-14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sxmr.2015.10.003

Goffnett, J., Paceley, M. S., Fish, J. N., & Saban, P. (2022). Between cornfields and Kinfolk: Identity management among transgender youth in Midwestern families and

communities [https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12759]. *Family Process*, *n/a*(n/a). https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12759

Goldbach, C., Knutson, D., & Milton, D. C. (2021). LGBTQ+ people and COVID-19: The importance of resilience during a pandemic. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *8*(2), 123-132. https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000463

Grant, R., Gorman-Murray, A., & Briohny Walker, B. (2021). The Spatial Impacts of COVID-19 Restrictions on LGBTIQ Wellbeing, Visibility, and Belonging in Tasmania, Australia. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *68*(4), 647-662. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2020.1868188

Gunn, H. A. (2020). *The Experience of Misgendering among Trans and Gender Diverse People* ProQuest Dissertations Publishing].

Hawke, L. D., Hayes, E., Darnay, K., & Henderson, J. (2021). Mental health among transgender and gender diverse youth: An exploration of effects during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *8*(2), 180-187. https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000467

Hickey, A., Pauli-Myler, T., & Smith, C. (2020). Bicycles, 'informality' and the alternative learning space as a site for re-engagement: a risky (pedagogical) proposition? *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, *48*(1), 45-59. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2018.1504281

Hill, A., Lyons, A., Jones, J., McGowan, I., Carman, M., Parsons, M., Power, J., & Bourne, A. (2021). *Writing Themselves In 4: The health and wellbeing of LGBTQA+ young people in Australia. National report*. https://opal.latrobe.edu.au/articles/report/Writing_Themselves_In_4_The_health_and_wellbeing_of_LGBTQA_young_people_in_Australia_National_report_/13647860

Hill, A. O., Lyons, A., Jones, J. R., McGowan, I., Carman, M., Parsons, M., Power, J., Franklin, J. D., & Bourne, A. (2021). Writing Themselves In 4: The health and wellbeing of LGBTQA+ young people in Australia. New South Wales summary report.

Hill, J., Ogle, K., Santen, S. A., Gottlieb, M., & Artino Jr, A. R. (2022). Educator's blueprint: A how-to guide for survey design. *AEM Education and Training*, *6*(4), e10796. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/aet2.10796

Hillier, L., & Harrison, L. (2007). Building Realities Less Limited Than Their Own: Young People Practising Same-Sex Attraction on the Internet. *Sexualities*, *10*(1), 82-100. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460707072956

Hillier, L., Jones, T., Monagle, M., Overton, N., Gahan, L., Blackman, J., & Mitchell, A. (2010). Writing Themselves in 3: The Third National Study on the Sexual Health and Wellbeing of Same Sex Attracted and Gender Questioning Young People. *Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society*.

Hillier, L., Mitchell, A., & Turner, A. (2005). *Writing Themselves in Again – 6 Years On: The Second National Report on the Sexuality, Health and Well Being of Same Sex Attracted Young People*.

Howansky, K., Wittlin, N., Bonagura, D., & Cole, S. (2022). Him, her, them, or none: misgendering and degendering of transgender individuals. *Psychology and sexuality*, *13*(4), 1026-1040. https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2021.1978529

Hunt, C., Gibson, G. C., Vander Horst, A., Cleveland, K. A., Wawrosch, C., Granot, M., Kuhn, T., Woolverton, C. J., & Hughes, J. W. (2021). Gender diverse college students exhibit higher psychological distress than male and female peers during the novel

coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *8*(2), 238-244. https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000461

Jennings, T., & Macgillivray, I. K. (2011). A content analysis of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender topics in multicultural education textbooks. *Teaching Education*, *22*(1), 39-62. https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2010.538474

Johns, N. (2014). *Flexible And Alternative Education: Hearing The Voices of Young People* Melbourne].

Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. B. (2020). *Educational research : quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches* (Seventh edition. ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Johnson, J. R. (2013). Cisgender privilege, intersectionality, and the criminalization of CeCe McDonald: Why intercultural communication needs transgender studies. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, *6*(2), 135-144.

Jones, B. A., Bowe, M., McNamara, N., Guerin, E., & Carter, T. (2021). Exploring the mental health experiences of young trans and gender diverse people during the Covid-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Transgender Health*, 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2021.1890301

Jones, T. (2017). Evidence affirming school supports for Australian transgender and gender diverse students. *Sex Health*, *14*(5), 412-416. https://doi.org/10.1071/sh17001

Jones, T. (2019). *A student-centred sociology of Australian education : voices of experience.*

Jones, T., Bolger, A., Dune, T., Lykins, A., & Hawkes, G. (2015). *Female-to-Male (FtM) Transgender People's Experiences in Australia*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-13829-9

Jones, T., & Hillier, L. (2013). Comparing Trans-Spectrum and Same-sex-Attracted Youth in Australia: Increased Risks, Increased Activisms. *Journal of LGBT youth*, *10*(4), 287-307. https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2013.825197

Jones, T., Smith, E., Ward, R., Dixon, J., Hillier, L., & Mitchell, A. (2015). School experiences of transgender and gender diverse students in Australia. *Sex Education*, *16*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2015.1080678

Jones, T., Smith, E., Ward, R., Dixon, J., Hillier, L., & Mitchell, A. (2016). School experiences of transgender and gender diverse students in Australia. *Sex Education*, *16*(2), 156-171. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2015.1080678

Kean, E. (2021). Advancing a critical trans framework for education. *Curriculum inquiry*, *51*(2), 261-286. https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.2020.1819147

Keenan, H. (2017). Unscripting Curriculum: Toward a Critical Trans Pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review*, *87*, 538-556. https://doi.org/10.17763/1943-5045-87.4.538

Keenan, H. B. (2022). Methodology as Pedagogy: Trans Lives, Social Science, and the Possibilities of Education Research. *Educational researcher*, *51*(5), 307-314. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X211065740

Kia, H., MacKinnon, K. R., Abramovich, A., & Bonato, S. (2021). Peer support as a protective factor against suicide in trans populations: A scoping review. *Social science & medicine (1982)*, *279*, 114026-114026. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114026

Kim, J.-H. (2007). For Whom the School Bell Tolls: Conflicting Voices inside an Alternative High School. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, *7*.

Kosciw, J. G., Palmer, N. A., Kull, R. M., & Greytak, E. A. (2013). The Effect of Negative School Climate on Academic Outcomes for LGBT Youth and the Role of In-School Supports.

*Journal of School Violence*, *12*(1), 45-63.
https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2012.732546

Lemon, L. L., & Hayes, J. (2020). Enhancing trustworthiness of qualitative findings: Using Leximancer for qualitative data analysis triangulation. *The Qualitative Report*, *25*(3), 604-614.

Lennon, E., & Mistler, B. J. (2014). Cisgenderism. *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, *1*(1-2), 63-64. https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2399623

Leximancer. (2022). https://www.leximancer.com/

Littman, L. (2018). Parent reports of adolescents and young adults perceived to show signs of a rapid onset of gender dysphoria. *PLoS One*, *13*(8), e0202330. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0202330

Littman, L. (2019). Correction: Parent reports of adolescents and young adults perceived to show signs of a rapid onset of gender dysphoria. *PLoS One*, *14*(3), e0214157. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0214157

Maher, D. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 Lockdowns on Australian Primary and Secondary School Students' Online Learning Experiences. *Social Education Research*, 298-314. https://doi.org/10.37256/ser.2220211062

Manjra, I. I., & Masic, U. (2022). Gender diversity and autism spectrum conditions in children and adolescents: A narrative review of the methodologies used by quantitative studies. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *78*(4), 485-502. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.23249

Martino, W., & Cumming-Potvin, W. (2019). 'Effeminate arty boys and butch soccer girls': investigating queer and trans-affirmative pedagogies under conditions of neoliberal governance. *Research papers in education*, *34*(2), 131-152. https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2017.1402082

Martino, W., Kassen, J., & Omercajic, K. (2020). Supporting transgender students in schools: beyond an individualist approach to trans inclusion in the education system. *Educational Review*, 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2020.1829559

Martino, W., & Omercajic, K. (2021). A trans pedagogy of refusal: interrogating cisgenderism, the limits of antinormativity and trans necropolitics. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, *29*(5), 679-694. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2021.1912155

Mavhandu-Mudzusi, A. H., Mudau, T. S., Shandu, T., & Dorah, N. N. (2021). Transgender Student Experiences of Online Education during COVID-19 Pandemic Era in Rural Eastern Cape Area of South Africa: A Descriptive Phenomenological Study. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology*, *6*(2), 110-128.

McBride, R.-S. (2021). A literature review of the secondary school experiences of trans youth. *Journal of LGBT youth*, *18*(2), 103-134. https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2020.1727815

McBride, R.-S., & Neary, A. (2021). Trans and gender diverse youth resisting cisnormativity in school. *Gender and education*, *33*(8), 1090-1107. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2021.1884201

McCallum, F., & Price, D. (2016). *Nuturing wellbeing development in education : 'from little things, big things grow'*. Routledge.

McGregor, G. (2017). Counter-narratives that challenge neo-liberal discourses of schooling 'disengagement': youth professionals informing the work of teachers. *British journal of sociology of education*, *38*(4), 551-565. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2015.1113859

McGregor, G., & Mills, M. (2011). Sketching alternative visions of schooling. *Social alternatives*, *30*(4), 20-24.

McGregor, G., & Mills, M. (2012). Alternative education sites and marginalised young people: 'I wish there were more schools like this one'. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *16*(8), 843-862. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2010.529467

McGregor, G., & Mills, M. (2016). ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION: PROVIDING SUPPORT TO THE DISENFRANCHISED. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, *7*, 198-217. https://doi.org/10.18357/ijcyfs72201615718

McInroy, L. B. (2016). Pitfalls, Potentials, and Ethics of Online Survey Research: LGBTQ and Other Marginalized and Hard-to-Access Youths. *Social Work Research*, *40*(2), 83-94. https://doi.org/10.1093/swr/svw005

McNamarah, C. T. (2021). Misgendering. *California law review*, *109*(6), 2227. https://doi.org/10.15779/Z38CV4BS4M

Meyer, E. J. (2022). Sex, Gender, and Education Research: The Case for Transgender Studies in Education. *Educational researcher*, *51*(5), 315-323. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X211048870

Mills, M., & McGregor, G. (2017). Alternative Education. In: Oxford University Press.

Mills, M., McGregor, G., Baroutsis, A., Te Riele, K., & Hayes, D. (2016). Alternative education and social justice: considering issues of affective and contributive justice. *Critical Studies in Education*, *57*(1), 100-115. https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2016.1087413

Mills, M., Renshaw, P., & Zipin, L. (2013a). Alternative education provision : a dumping ground for 'wasted lives' or a challenge to the mainstream? *Social alternatives*, *32*(2), 13-18.

Mills, M., Renshaw, P., & Zipin, L. E. W. (2013b). Alternative Education Provision: A dumping ground for 'wasted lives' or a challenge to the mainstream? [Article]. *Social Alternatives*, *32*(2), 13-18. http://simsrad.net.ocs.mq.edu.au/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=101076855&site=ehost-live

Mills, M., te Riele, K., McGregor, G., & Baroutsis, A. (2017). Teaching in alternative and flexible education settings. *Teaching Education*, *28*(1), 8-11. https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2016.1263613

Nagoshi, J. L., & Brzuzy, S. i. (2010). Transgender Theory: Embodying Research and Practice. *Affilia*, *25*(4), 431-443. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109910384068

Nicolazzo, Z. (2017). Introduction: what's transgressive about trans* studies in education now? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *30*(3), 211-216.

Nicolazzo, Z., Jones, A. C., & Simms, S. (2023). *Digital Me Trans Students Exploring Future Possible Selves Online*. Rutgers University Press. https://doi.org/doi:10.36019/9781978822818

OECD. (2017). *PISA 2015 Results (Volume III)*. https://doi.org/doi:https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264273856-en

Oginni, O. A., Okanlawon, K., & Ogunbajo, A. (2021). A commentary on COVID-19 and the LGBT community in Nigeria: Risks and resilience. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *8*(2), 261-263. https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000476

Omercajic, K., & Martino, W. (2020a). Supporting Transgender Inclusion and Gender Diversity in Schools: A Critical Policy Analysis. *Frontiers in sociology*, *5*, 27-27. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2020.00027

Omercajic, K., & Martino, W. (2020b). Supporting Transgender Inclusion and Gender Diversity in Schools: A Critical Policy Analysis [Original Research]. *Frontiers in Sociology*, *5*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2020.00027

Ozga, J. (2000). *Policy research in educational settings : contested terrain / Jenny Ozga*. Open University Press.

Page, A., Charteris, J., Anderson, J., & Boyle, C. (2021). Fostering school connectedness online for students with diverse learning needs: inclusive education in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, *36*(1), 142-156. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2021.1872842

Payne, E., & Smith, M. (2012). Rethinking Safe Schools Approaches for LGBTQ Students: Changing the Questions We Ask. *Multicultural perspectives (Mahwah, N.J.)*, *14*(4), 187-193. https://doi.org/10.1080/15210960.2012.725293

Payne, E., & Smith, M. (2013). LGBTQ Kids, School Safety, and Missing the Big Picture: How the Dominant Bullying Discourse Prevents School Professionals from Thinking about Systemic Marginalization or … Why We Need to Rethink LGBTQ Bullying. *QED (East Lansing, Mich.)*, 1-36. https://doi.org/10.14321/qed.0001

Payne, E., & Smith, M. J. (2016). Gender Policing. In N. M. Rodriguez, W. J. Martino, J. C. Ingrey, & E. Brockenbrough (Eds.), *Critical Concepts in Queer Studies and Education: An International Guide for the Twenty-First Century* (pp. 127-136). Palgrave Macmillan US. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-55425-3_14

Phillippi, S., Thomas, C. L., Gastanaduy, M., Hammack, A., & Sawyer, M. (2021). Inclusive policy development in a community-based alternative education program serving LGBT youth. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, *65*(2), 155-162. https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2020.1858740

Regmi, P. R., Waithaka, E., Paudyal, A., Simkhada, P., & van Teijlingen, E. (2016). Guide to the design and application of online questionnaire surveys. *Nepal J Epidemiol*, *6*(4), 640-644. https://doi.org/10.3126/nje.v6i4.17258

Regnault, A., Willgoss, T., Barbic, S., & On behalf of the International Society for Quality of Life Research Mixed Methods Special Interest, G. (2018). Towards the use of mixed methods inquiry as best practice in health outcomes research. *Journal of Patient-Reported Outcomes*, *2*(1), 19. https://doi.org/10.1186/s41687-018-0043-8

Reimer, K., & Pangrazio, L. (2020). Educating on the margins: young people's insights into effective alternative education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *24*(5), 479-495. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1467977

Reimers, F., Schleicher, A., Saavedra, J., & Tuominen, S. (2020). Supporting the continuation of teaching and learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Oecd*, *1*(1), 1-38.

Restar, A. J. (2020). Methodological Critique of Littman's (2018) Parental-Respondents Accounts of "Rapid-Onset Gender Dysphoria". *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *49*(1), 61-66. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-019-1453-2

Riddle, S., Howell, A., McGregor, G., & Mills, M. (2021). Student engagement in schools serving marginalised communities. *International journal of inclusive education*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.1956605

Rider, G. N., & Tebbe, E. A. (2021). The SAGE Encyclopedia of Trans Studies. In. SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781544393858

Riele, K. (2007). Educational alternatives for marginalised youth. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, *34*, 53-68. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03216865

Ringrose, J., & Rawlings, V. (2015). Posthuman performativity, gender and "school bullying": Exploring the material-discursive intra-actions of skirts, hair, sluts, and poofs. *Confero: Essays on education, philosophy and politics*, *3*(2), 80-119.

Ringrose, J., & Renold, E. (2010). Normative cruelties and gender deviants: the performative effects of bully discourses for girls and boys in school. *British Educational Research Journal*, *36*(4), 573-596. https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920903018117

Roberts, L. D., & Allen, P. J. (2015). Exploring ethical issues associated with using online surveys in educational research. *Educational research and evaluation*, *21*(2), 95-108. https://doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2015.1024421

Robinson, K., Bansel, P., Denson, N., Ovenden, G., & Davies, C. (2014). *Growing up Queer: Issues facing Young Australians who are Gender Variant and Sexuality Diverse*.

Ronan, W. (2021). *Year in Recent History for LGBTQ State Legislative Attacks as Unprecedented Number of States Enact Record-Shattering Number of Anti-LGBTQ Measures Into Law* https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/2021-officially-becomes-worst-year-in-recent-history-for-lgbtq-state-legislative-attacks-as-unprecedented-number-of-states-enact-record-shattering-number-of-anti-lgbtq-measures-into-law

Rooney, D. (2005). Knowledge, economy, technology and society: The politics of discourse. *Telematics and informatics*, *22*(4), 405-422. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2004.11.007

Ruberg, B., & Ruelos, S. (2020). Data for queer lives: How LGBTQ gender and sexuality identities challenge norms of demographics. *Big Data & Society*, *7*(1), 2053951720933286. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951720933286

Russell, D. H., Anderson, J. R., Riggs, D. W., Ullman, J., & Higgins, D. J. (2020). Gender diversity and safety climate perceptions in schools and other youth-serving organisations. *Children and youth services review*, *117*, 105334. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105334

Sansfaçon, A. P., Hébert, W., Lee, E. O. J., Faddoul, M., Tourki, D., & Bellot, C. (2018). Digging beneath the surface: Results from stage one of a qualitative analysis of factors influencing the well-being of trans youth in Quebec. *The international journal of transgenderism*, *19*(2), 184-202. https://doi.org/10.1080/15532739.2018.1446066

Serano, J. (2007). *Whipping girl : a transsexual woman on sexism and the scapegoating of femininity*. Seal Press.

Shannon, B. (2016). Comprehensive for who? Neoliberal directives in Australian 'comprehensive' sexuality education and the erasure of GLBTIQ identity. *Sex Education*, *16*(6), 573-585. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2016.1141090

Shannon, B. (2022). Sex(uality) Education in Australia from Past to Present. In B. Shannon (Ed.), *Sex(uality) Education for Trans and Gender Diverse Youth in Australia* (pp. 29-55). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92446-1_3

Shannon, B., & Smith, S. J. (2017). Dogma before diversity: the contradictory rhetoric of controversy and diversity in the politicisation of Australian queer-affirming learning materials. *Sex Education*, *17*(3), 242-255. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2017.1302325

Shay, M., & Heck, D. (2015). Alternative Education Engaging Indigenous Young People: Flexi Schooling in Queensland. *The Australian journal of indigenous education*, *44*(1), 37-47. https://doi.org/10.1017/jie.2015.8

Smith, A. E., & Humphreys, M. S. (2006). Evaluation of unsupervised semantic mapping of natural language with Leximancer concept mapping. *Behavior research methods*, *38*(2), 262-279. https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03192778

Smith, E., Jones, T., Ward, R., & et al. (2014). *From blues to rainbows: the mental health and well-being of gender diverse and transgender young people in Australia* [Report]. https://apo.org.au/node/41426

Sotiriadou, P., Brouwers, J., & Le, A. (2014). Choosing a qualitative data analysis tool: A comparison of NVivo and Leximancer. *Annals of Leisure Research*, *17*, 218-234. https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2014.902292

Spade, D. (2015). *Normal life : administrative violence, critical trans politics, and the limits of law* (Revised and expanded edition. ed.). Duke University Press.

Strang, J. F., Janssen, A., Tishelman, A., Leibowitz, S. F., Kenworthy, L., McGuire, J. K., Edwards-Leeper, L., Mazefsky, C. A., Rofey, D., Bascom, J., Caplan, R., Gomez-Lobo, V., Berg, D., Zaks, Z., Wallace, G. L., Wimms, H., Pine-Twaddell, E., Shumer, D., Register-Brown, K., . . . Anthony, L. G. (2018). Revisiting the Link: Evidence of the Rates of Autism in Studies of Gender Diverse Individuals. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry*, *57*(11), 885-887. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2018.04.023

Strauss, P., Cook, A., Phd, S., Watson, V., Toussaint, D., & Lin, A. (2017). *Trans Pathways: the mental health experiences and care pathways of trans young people. Summary of results*.

Strauss, P., Cook, A., Winter, S., Watson, V., Wright Toussaint, D., & Lin, A. (2020). Associations between negative life experiences and the mental health of trans and gender diverse young people in Australia: findings from Trans Pathways. *Psychological medicine*, *50*(5), 808-817. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291719000643

Stryker, S., & Aizura, A. Z. (2013). *The transgender studies reader 2* (1 Edition. ed.). Routledge.

Te Riele, K. (2014). *Putting the jigsaw together: flexible learning programs in Australia*. https://vuir.vu.edu.au/31758/

Timans, R., Wouters, P., & Heilbron, J. (2019). Mixed methods research: what it is and what it could be. *Theory and Society*, *48*(2), 193-216. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-019-09345-5

Ullman, J. (2017). Teacher positivity towards gender diversity: exploring relationships and school outcomes for transgender and gender-diverse students. *Sex Education*, *17*(3), 276-289. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2016.1273104

Ullman, J. (2018). Breaking out of the (anti)bullying 'box': NYC educators discuss trans/gender diversity-inclusive policies and curriculum. *Sex Education*, *18*(5), 495-510. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2018.1431881

UNESCO. (2019). *Bringing it Out in the Open: Monitoring school violence based on sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression in national and international surveys. Paris: UNESCO* (Technical Brief, Issue.

UNESCO. (2021). Pandemic-related disruptions to schooling and impacts on learning proficiency indicators: A focus on the early grades.

van Vlerken, R. H. T., Fuchs, C. E., & van der Miesen, A. I. R. (2020). Caring for Transgender and Gender Diverse Youth with Co-occurring Neurodiversity. In M. Forcier, G. Van Schalkwyk, & J. L. Turban (Eds.), *Pediatric Gender Identity: Gender-affirming Care for*

*Transgender & Gender Diverse Youth* (pp. 137-148). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-38909-3_10

Ward, R. (2017). 'I Just Want to Be Myself': How We Can Challenge Homophobia, Transphobia, and Racism in Australian Schools. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, *38*(4), 469-479. https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2017.1341397

Warrier, V., Greenberg, D. M., Weir, E., Buckingham, C., Smith, P., Lai, M. C., Allison, C., & Baron-Cohen, S. (2020). Elevated rates of autism, other neurodevelopmental and psychiatric diagnoses, and autistic traits in transgender and gender-diverse individuals. *Nat Commun*, *11*(1), 3959. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-020-17794-1

Wesp, L. M., Malcoe, L. H., Elliott, A., & Poteat, T. (2019). Intersectionality Research for Transgender Health Justice: A Theory-Driven Conceptual Framework for Structural Analysis of Transgender Health Inequities. *Transgender Health*, *4*(1), 287-296. https://doi.org/10.1089/trgh.2019.0039

Whitley, C. T., Nordmarken, S., Kolysh, S., & Goldstein-Kral, J. (2022). I've Been Misgendered So Many Times: Comparing the Experiences of Chronic Misgendering among Transgender Graduate Students in the Social and Natural Sciences. *Sociological inquiry*, *92*(3), 1001-1028. https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12482

Wilson, K., Stemp, K., & McGinty, S. (2011). Re-engaging young people with education and training: What are the alternatives? [Other Journal Article]. *Youth Studies Australia*, *30*(4), 32-39. https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/ielapa.681831612675199
https://search.informit.org/doi/full/10.3316/ielapa.681831612675199
https://search.informit.org/doi/pdf/10.3316/ielapa.681831612675199

Woznicki, N., Arriaga, A. S., Caporale-Berkowitz, N. A., & Parent, M. C. (2021). Parasocial relationships and depression among LGBQ emerging adults living with their parents during COVID-19: The potential for online support. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *8*(2), 228-237. https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000458

Yan, L., Whitelock-Wainwright, A., Guan, Q., Wen, G., Gašević, D., & Chen, G. (2021). Students' experience of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic: A province-wide survey study. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, *52*(5), 2038-2057.

# **Appendices**

## **Appendix A – Participant Information and Consent Form**



### Participant Information and Consent Form

You are invited to take part in this study because you may be a **student (14 years or older)** who may identify as **Transgender or Gender Diverse (TGD)** with experience being enrolled in an **Australian school.**

The goal of this study is to *explore* **what is happening in different Australian school settings** for **students between the ages of 14-25 years** who may identify as **Transgender or Gender Diverse.**

**Contact Information**

**Contact information**

This study is being conducted by **Jessica Fletcher (email: jess.fletcher@hdr.mq.edu.au)** to meet the requirements for the Master of Research) MRes degree under the supervision of **Professor Tiffany Jones (contact phone number: 02 9850 9437, email: tiffany.jones@mq.edu.au)** and Professor Penny Van Bergen (**contact phone number: 02 42 393828, email: pennyvb@uow.edu.au)** of the School of Education at University of Wollongong. If you have any questions or concerns, please use the contact via the phone numbers or email addresses above.

This survey is voluntary. You **do not have to take part** in the study, and **you can stop at any time for any reason without consequence.** Your **responses will be recorded up to the point you decide to stop** taking part in the study.

**Risks**

While we will not be asking you to relive any experiences of discrimination, you may feel that some of the topics we ask about your school experiences are upsetting. *If at any time you do not want to answer a question, you can skip it and go to the next question, or you may stop the survey immediately.* Your responses will be recorded up to the point you decide to stop taking part in the study.

If for some reason, you become distressed when thinking about your experiences, now or at any other time, we strongly recommend you contact support services such as:

- **KIDSHELPLINE** at any time on **1800 55 1800** or **visit kidshelpline.com.au** Kids Helpline is Australia's only free (even from a mobile), confidential 24/7 online and phone counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25.

- **Lifeline** at any time at **13 11 14** or visit **lifeline.org.au** Lifeline provides online chatting services at **https://www.lifeline.org.au/Get-Help/Online-Services/crisis-chat** Lifeline is a non-profit organisation that provides free, 24-hour telephone crisis support service in Australia. Volunteer crisis supporters provide suicide prevention services, mental health support and emotional assistance, via telephone, face-to-face and online

- **Suicide Call Back Service at any time on 1300 659 476** Suicide Call Back Service is a national 24/7 telehealth provider that offers free professional phone and online counselling for people living in Australia. Online or video chat is also available at **https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au/phone-and-online-counselling/**

referral for people in Australia wanting to talk about sexuality, identity, gender, bodies, feelings, or relationships

**Privacy & Confidentiality**

All information or personal details gathered in the study are **confidential**, except as required by law. **No individual will be identified in any publications of the results**. All data collected will be stored on password protected disks in locked cabinets in the researchers' drawers in our offices. Only Jessica Fletcher and Professor Tiffany jones will have access to these disks/ office drawers. Data may be used in future research papers with the sole purpose of improving educational policy, practice, and outcomes for TGD identifying students.

This survey is anonymous. We **will not ask you** for any information that can be used to identify who you are, or where you go to school. We encourage you not to use names in your responses. **If your answers include things that could identify you like names of teachers, friends, or your school, this information will be changed to protect your privacy.** Only Professor Tiffany Jones, Professor Penny Van Bergen and Ms. Jessica Fletcher at Macquarie University and University of Wollongong will have access to your information.

The results of this study - including quotes - may be reported in peer- reviewed publications and academic publications aimed at improving schools for people who identify as TGD. **The final report and results will be made available from the researchers' profile pages on the university website.**

**Ethics**

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Reference No:

If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics & Integrity (telephone (02) 9850 7854.

**Appendix B – 'TGD & Me Student Survey'**

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE**

1. Do you agree to take part in the TGD + ME Student survey?

☐ Yes, I agree to participate

*I have read and understood the information above, and I agree to participate in this research survey, knowing that I can stop at any time but that I cannot withdraw my response once the survey has begun.*

☐ No, I do not agree to participate in this study

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

2. What is your age? (14-25 years)

☐ Under 14
☐ 14
☐ 15
☐ 16
☐ 17
☐ 18
☐ 19
☐ 20
☐ 21
☐ 22
☐ 23
☐ 24
☐ 25
☐ Over 25

3. What living situation best describes your own?

☐ I live with one or more of my parents
☐ I live with one or more of my grandparents
☐ I live with a guardian other than my parents or grandparents (including extended family)
☐ I live on my own
☐ I live on my own with housemates
☐ I live in 'out of home' care (including support homes and youth refuges)
☐ I am currently living in hospital
☐ I do not currently have a home
☐ Other (please specify): _____
☐ Prefer not to say

4. My school is (was) located in:

☐ The Australian Capital Territory (ACT)
☐ New South Wales (NSW)
☐ The Northern Territory (NT)
☐ Queensland (QLD)
☐ South Australia (SA)
☐ Tasmania (TAS)
☐ Victoria (VIC)
☐ Western Australia (WA)
☐ I have never completed any schooling (including distance or online learning) in Australia
☐ Other (please specify): _____

5. I am currently in:
Please choose only one of the following:

☐ Grade 6 and below
☐ Year 7
☐ Year 8
☐ Year 9
☐ Year 10
☐ Year 11
☐ Year 12
☐ TAFE
☐ University
☐ I am no longer at school
☐ Other (please specify): _____

6. I live in a rural, regional, or remote area:

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Unsure

7. I identify as neurodiverse:

*for example, as having: attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or being on the autism spectrum (ASD)*

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Unsure

8. I would best describe myself as:

☐ Christian
☐ Agnostic
☐ Muslim
☐ Jewish
☐ Atheist
☐ Buddhist
☐ Spiritual
☐ Unsure
☐ Other (please specify): _____

9. At home, I mainly speak:

☐ English
☐ Italian
☐ Greek
☐ Cantonese
☐ Arabic
☐ Mandarin
☐ Vietnamese
☐ Other (please specify): _____

10. At birth I was recorded as:

☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Another term (please specify): _____

11. How do you best describe your gender identity? (Tick any/all that apply)

*Gender refers to current gender, which may be different to sex recorded at birth and may be different to what is indicated on legal documents*

☐ Transgender

☐ Non-Binary
☐ Cis gender man
☐ Cis gender woman
☐ Brother boy
☐ Sister girl
☐ Genderfluid
☐ Genderflux
☐ Demi-girl
☐ Demi-boy
☐ I don't use labels
☐ Unsure
☐ I use a different term (please specify): _____

12. How do you mostly feel about your gender identity?

☐ Very happy
☐ Happy
☐ Neutral/or unsure
☐ Unhappy
☐ Very unhappy

13. How do you best describe your sexual orientation? (Tick any/all that apply)

☐ Gay
☐ Lesbian
☐ Bisexual
☐ Asexual
☐ Demisexual
☐ Omnisexual
☐ Pansexual
☐ Queer
☐ No label
☐ Unsure
☐ I use a different term (please specify): _____

14. How do you mostly feel about your sexual orientation?

☐ Very happy
☐ Happy
☐ Neutral/or unsure
☐ Unhappy
☐ Very unhappy

15. I feel comfortable being open about my gender identity at school:

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Sometimes
☐ Unsure

16. I have experienced bullying or harassment at school because of my gender identity and/or sexual orientation (Please tick ONE of the options)

| I have experienced bullying or harassment at school because of my: | Yes (tick if applies) | No (tick if applies) | Prefer not to say (tick if applies) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender Identity | | | |
| Sexual Orientation/Attraction | | | |

17. I am (or have most recently) been enrolled in a:

☐ Public or Government High School
☐ Distance Education Government School
☐ School for Specific Purposes/Specialist school
☐ Non-Religious Private or Independent School
☐ Religious Private or Independent School
☐ TAFE
☐ Homeschooling
☐ Other (please specify): _____

18. In the last 5 years, I have been enrolled in a:

☐ Public or Government High School
☐ Distance Education Government School
☐ School for Specific Purposes/Specialist School
☐ Non-Religious Private or Independent School
☐ Religious Private or Independent School
☐ TAFE
☐ Homeschooling
☐ Other (please specify): _____

19. Have you ever left one High School to attend another school?

☐ Yes
☐ No

20. If yes: what was the main reason for changing schools? (Please tick all that apply)

☐ Moved house
☐ Change in family circumstance
☐ COVID-19 pandemic
☐ Course(s) not available at school
☐ Pursuing elite sport or performing arts (vocationally talented)
☐ Mental health
☐ Hospitalization
☐ Gender transition
☐ Transphobic bullying
☐ Other type of bullying
☐ Physical illness
☐ Prefer not to say
☐ Other (Please specify): _____

21. If yes, what type of school did you enroll in?

☐ Public or Government High School
☐ Distance Education Government School
☐ School for Specific Purposes/Specialist School
☐ Non-Religious Private or Independent School
☐ Religious Private or Independent School
☐ TAFE
☐ Homeschooling
☐ Other (please specify): _____

22. In the last 5 years, have you completed your schooling remotely, for example online or via Distance Education?

☐ Yes
☐ No

23. What type of remote learning did you engage in?

☐ Online learning (online classes, lessons and coursework)
☐ Distance Education (online or paper-based/mailed out work from a Distance Education School
☐ Other: please specify _____

24. If yes, what were the main reason(s) for accessing remote or online delivery? (Tick all that apply)

☐ COVID-19 pandemic
☐ Moved house
☐ Course(s) not available at school
☐ Pursuing elite sport or performing arts (vocationally talented)

☐ Change in family circumstance
☐ Mental health
☐ Hospitalisation
☐ Gender transition
☐ Transphobic bullying
☐ Other type of bullying
☐ Physical illness
☐ Other (Please specify): _____
☐ Prefer not to say

25. At my mainstream-face to face school there is/was (please choose all that apply):

☐ Visuals indicating supports around gender and sexuality diversity (e.g. rainbow flags, symbols etc.)
☐ Equal treatment of same-sex partners at school events (e.g. same-sex parents, students in same-sex relationships, teachers in same-sex partnerships)
☐ Sexuality and gender support groups or Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA's)
☐ Books, digital resources or other resources in the library that contain information about LGBTQ+/TGD people, history or events
☐ Positive teachings about LGBTQ+/TGD people, history or events
☐ Negative teachings about LGBTQ+/TGD people, history or events
☐ LGBTQ+/TGD topics or health issues in sex education or health class
☐ LGBTQ+/TGD forms of family diversity (e.g. same-sex parents, surrogacy, foster/adoptive parents) in classes on family and family trees
☐ Teachers and school staff trained in LGBTQ+/TGD topics and issues
☐ My school doesn't include any of the above

Another Option: _____

26. At my alternative/distance/online school there is/was (please choose all that apply):

☐ Visuals indicating supports around gender and sexuality diversity (e.g. rainbow flags, symbols etc.)
☐ Equal treatment of same-sex partners at school events (e.g. same-sex parents, students in same-sex relationships, teachers in same-sex partnerships)
☐ Sexuality and gender support groups or Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA's)
☐ Books, digital resources or other resources in the library that contain information about LGBTQ+/TGD people, history or events
☐ Positive teachings about LGBTQ+/TGD people, history or events
☐ Negative teachings about LGBTQ+/TGD people, history or events
☐ LGBTQ+/TGD topics or health issues in sex education or health class
☐ LGBTQ+/TGD forms of family diversity (e.g. same-sex parents, surrogacy, foster/adoptive parents) in classes on family and family trees
☐ Teachers and school staff trained in LGBTQ+/TGD topics and issues
☐ My school doesn't include any of the above

Another Option: _____

**OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS**

27. How do your experiences of alternative/distance/online learning compare to your experiences at your mainstream face-to-face school?

28. In what ways have your experiences in alternative/distance/online learning impacted your overall wellbeing? *(For example, do you feel more happy or less happy, or the same about school? Do you feel more engaged in school, less engaged in school or the same?)*

29. In what ways, if any, have your experiences in alternative education and/or online learning impacted your engagement at school? (*For example, has your attendance improved or decreased? Has your desire to attend school increased, decreased or remained the same?)*

30. Is there anything else you want to tell us about your experiences in alternative educational settings?

## Appendix C – Ethics Approval

Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)

Research Services
Research Hub, 17 Wally's Walk
Macquarie University
NSW 2109 Australia
T: +61 (2) 9850 7987
http://www.research.mq.edu.au/
ABN 90 952 801 237
CRICOS Provider No 00002J

**MACQUARIE University**
SYDNEY·AUSTRALIA

27/09/2022

Dear Professor Tiffany Jones,

**Reference No:520221218942121**

**Title: 12189 Transgender and Gender Diverse Students in Australian Schools**

Thank you for submitting the above application for ethical and scientific review. Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee HREC Humanities & Social Sciences Committee considered your application.

I am pleased to advise that ethical and scientific approval has been granted for this project to be conducted by Professor Tiffany Jones and other personnel: Ms. Jessica (preferred name Jessie) Fletcher, Professor Tiffany Jones.

**Approval Date:** 27/09/2022

This research meets the requirements set out in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007, updated July 2018) (the *National Statement*).

**Standard Conditions of Approval:**

1. Continuing compliance with the requirements of the *National Statement,* which is available at the following website: http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/book/national-statement-ethical-conduct-human-research

2. This approval is valid for five (5) years, subject to the submission of annual reports. Please submit your reports on the anniversary of the approval for this protocol.

3. All significant safety issues, that adversely affect the safety of participants or materially impact on the continued ethical and scientific acceptability of the project, must be reported to the HREC within 72 hours.

4. Proposed changes to the protocol and associated documents must be submitted to the Committee for approval before implementation.

It is the responsibility of the Chief investigator to retain a copy of all documentation related to this project and to forward a copy of this approval letter to all personnel listed on the project.

Should you have any queries regarding your project, please contact the Ethics Secretariat on 9850 4194 or by email ethics.secretariat@mq.edu.au

The HREC Humanities & Social Sciences Committee Terms of Reference and Standard Operating Procedures are available from the Research Office website at: https://www.mq.edu.au/research/ethics-integrity-and-policies/ethics/human-ethics

The HREC Humanities & Social Sciences Committee wishes you every success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Karolyn White
Chair, HREC Humanities & Social Sciences Committee
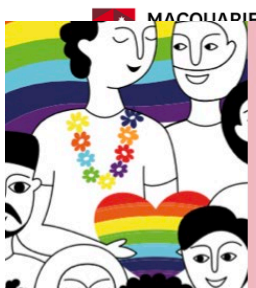
**Appendix D – Facebook and Instagram Advertisements**