

**TASMANIAN**

**UNIVERSITY**

**STUDENT**

**ASSOCIATION**

**Queers' Unique Experiences of the Educational Networks  
and Spaces of the University of Tasmania**

**QUEENS of UTAS**

TUSAxUC Student Led Research Project

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they/them

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## Executive summary

Although undeniable progress has been made to the inclusiveness of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual (LGBTQIA+) individuals into wider society, it is still a group that consistently fall behind on markers of social and psychological wellbeing both in Australia (Eres et al., 2020) and abroad (Cochran et al., 2003). This report is the first of its kind into the experience of LGBTQIA+ students at the University of Tasmania (UTAS). As such, it is focused on the wellbeing of students as both an overarching measure of student welfare and a general benchmark against which change can be measured after intervention.

**Research Question 1.** Do LGBTQIA+ students at the University of Tasmania experience different levels of wellbeing to their cisgender heterosexual counterparts?

**Research Question 2.** Do different subgroups of the LGBTQIA+ community experience different levels of wellbeing?

**Research Question 3.** Does the wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ students differ depending on the campus at which they study?

UTAS students were recruited complete a survey on inclusion on UTAS campuses. Questions relevant to this report addressed gender identity, sexual and romantic attraction, as well as several scales on wellbeing, inclusion, discrimination, psychological safety and equity. 153 students participated, of which 45.75% (n=70) identified with characteristics placing them within the LGBTQIA+ population.

LGBTQIA+ students showed significantly poorer wellbeing than their cisgender heterosexual counterparts. Initial investigation into the relationship with other metrics failed to illuminate any obvious reason for this difference and will require further investigation.

This dataset failed to support the hypotheses that there is a difference in the wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ students dependent on the campus at which they study, or that the subgroups of the LGBTQIA+ community have different levels of wellbeing.

**Recommendation 1.** TUSA should conduct further targeted research into the wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ students at the University of Tasmania, including directly addressing outness and community self-identification and participation.

**Recommendation 2.** TUSA should engage students and staff with educating themselves about the personal gender pronouns. This could include an informative webpage, an opt-in signature campaign, and directly lobbying senior executives.

**Recommendation 3.** TUSA must be an active voice for the rights of transgender constituents regarding bathroom and changing facilities on campus. This should include considering its own bathroom facilities, lobbying the University to include non-gendered bathrooms, and maintaining a list of non-gendered bathrooms available. TUSA should also consider preparing for future studies into the inclusion of non-gendered bathrooms.

## Introduction

Up until now, no research has been done into the experience of LGBTQIA+ students at the University of Tasmania (UTAS). The Tasmania University Student Association (TUSA) conducted a survey of the broader student community, asking about student's experience of inclusion on campus. This report focuses on the experience of the LGBTQIA+ community, using wellbeing as a broad measure of student welfare and a benchmark against which future studies can assess change, including after intervention. Specifically, we ask if LGBTQIA+ students report poorer wellbeing than their non-LGBTQIA+ counterparts, whether there are differences in wellbeing between subgroups of the LGBTQIA+ community, and over different university campuses. At the conclusion of the report, recommendations are made to the TUSA as to how the experience of LGBTQIA+ students could be improved.

## Background

It's well-documented that the LGBTQIA+ community continue to face specific social and psychological challenges at greater levels than the broader community. For example, in a study based on an Australian sample, Eres et al. (2020) found that LGBTQIA+ adults perceived lower social support and were at higher risk of social isolation and loneliness than non-LGBTQIA+ individuals. Further, their findings suggest that LGBTQIA+ individuals are more likely to experience clinical conditions such as social anxiety and depression, a finding that, whilst disappointing, is neither unexpected nor unprecedented. An epidemiological study on a large US sample (Cochran et al., 2003) found that homosexual and bisexual men showed higher rates of depression, panic disorders and psychological distress than did their heterosexual counterparts. For their part, lesbian and bisexual women displayed higher rates of generalised anxiety disorder. In general, access to psychological services was also higher within the lesbian, gay and bisexual population. Based upon these findings, it is hypothesised that:

*Hypothesis 1: LGBTQIA+ students will report significantly poorer wellbeing than their cisgender heterosexual counterparts.*

It is well documented that different groups within the LGBTQIA+ community face different challenges in society. Community resilience has been noted as an important coping resource for LGBTQIA+ people (Meyer, 2003), but not all members of the community benefit equally due to structural inequality within the community (Lookingbill et al., 2021). For example, people identifying as bisexual often perceive that they fit in neither within straight society nor amongst gay and lesbian peers (Hayfield et al., 2014). Asexual individuals face challenges involved in living in a society of sexual essentialism; where sex is pervasive in social settings, presumed to be a core component of human nature, and privileged above all other forms of intimacy (Scherrer, 2008). As the LGBTQIA+ community and culture are often hypersexualised, asexual individuals may experience additional ostracisation from the community to which they are supposed to belong.

Whilst only two examples are presented above, it is expected that each individual subgroup of the LGBTQIA+ community faces their own unique stressors and challenges. What is less clear in the literature is the impact this has upon the differential wellbeing of each group. This leads to hypothesis two:

*Hypothesis 2: A significant difference will be seen in the wellbeing measures of different subgroups of the LGBTQIA+ population.*

Renn (2020), in the foreword to a book of research on LGBTQIA+ students, notes that experiences vary greatly depending on geographical location. The University of Tasmania has campuses in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie in Tasmania, and Rozelle in Sydney. Interestingly, the three Tasmanian campuses are situated in unique social climates, with regards to the LGBTQIA+ community. In the early 1990's, unprecedented resolutions by the then Ulverstone

Council to abandon any and all obligation to its gay and lesbian residents (Croome, 1992) led to Ulverstone being dubbed Australia's most homophobic town (Wade, 2018). Whilst a lot has changed since that time and the now Central Coast Council are making moves to amend past wrong-doings (Wade, 2018), Braddon, the Federal electorate encompassing the north-west and west coasts of Tasmania, were amongst the highest proportion of 'no' voters in the 2017 Australia same-sex marriage plebiscite (Perales & Todd, 2018), with 46% of respondents voting against same-sex marriage (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The electors of Bass, in which Launceston is located, voted against same sex marriage at a rate of 38.3%, whilst the electorate of Denison, including Hobart, has the lowest percentage of 'no' votes at 26.2% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Perales and Todd (2018) found a significant link between life satisfaction, mental health and general wellbeing in lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals, and their geopolitical location. In other words, individuals living in an area with a higher proportion of 'no' voters were more likely to experience poorer wellbeing. This leads to hypothesis three:

*Hypothesis 3: There will be a significant difference in measures of wellbeing in LGBTQIA+ students depending on the campus at which they study and its geographical location.*

## Method

### Data Collection

Participants were students at the University of Tasmania who participated on a voluntary basis. Participants were recruited largely through events run by the TUSA at the Sandy Bay, Newnham and Cradle Coast campuses, offering a small alimentary reward to those who engaged. Other participants were recruited through social media posts disseminated by the TUSA, clubs and societies and individuals.

### Sample

The total number of participants was 153, with a mean age of 27.6 years (SD 11.4, range 18-79). Of the sample, 34.0% identified as a man (n=52), 54.2% identified as a woman (n=83) and 10.5% identified as a gender outside of the man/woman binary (n=16; henceforth referred to under the 'non-binary' umbrella term). Only one participant was classified by researchers as being (binary) transgender: i.e., they endorsed the opposite binary options for the sex and gender questions. As this is not a sufficient sample size from which to draw population inferences; and further, doing so would jeopardise the confidentiality of this respondent, an aggregate category of *transgender/non-binary* was created. Two participants preferred not to specify their gender identity, representing 1.3% of respondents. 45.75% (n=70) of respondents endorsed one or more characteristic classifying them as part of the LGBTQIA+ population (see tables 1-3 below for breakdowns).

**Table 1.** Gender identity of LGBTQIA+ respondents

Gender Identity	n	%
Cisgender	55	77.5 %

**Table 1.** *Gender identity of LGBTQIA+ respondents*

<b>Gender Identity</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Transgender/non-binary	16	22.5 %

**Table 2.** *Sexual orientation of LGBTQIA+ respondents*

<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Heterosexual	10	13.7 %
Bisexual	27	37.0 %
Homosexual	14	19.2 %
Asexual	9	12.3 %
Questioning	5	6.8 %
Prefer not to Specify	1	1.4 %
Pansexual	7	9.6 %

**Table 3.** *Romantic attraction of LGBTQIA+ respondents*

<b>Romantic Attraction</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Heteroromantic	8	11.1 %
Homoromantic	13	18.1 %
Aromantic	6	8.3 %
Unsure	21	29.2 %
Prefer not to specify	5	6.9 %
Biromantic	11	15.3 %

**Table 3.** *Romantic attraction of LGBTQIA+ respondents*

Romantic Attraction	n	%
Panromantic	8	11.1 %

## Measures

The data used in this study was drawn from a wider survey addressing the student experience of inclusion at the University of Tasmania. It included in depth demographic questions relating to age, University study and teaching arrangements, sex, identification with LGBTQIA+ subgroups, and ethnic and spiritual background. The body of the survey consisted of questions about student's experience. The survey included subsets of questions from the National Survey of Student Engagement (Indiana University, 2021), the WHO (Five) Well Being Index (WHO Collaborating Centre in Mental Health, 1998) and the Bloomsburg University Campus Climate Survey (Bloomsburg University, 2012) measuring inclusion on campus, student wellbeing and discriminatory incidents, respectively. Questions were also adapted to the university context from Edmondson (1999) to measure psychological safety. A subscale of bespoke questions was written to measure equity on campus. Response format varied from Likert-type scales, radio boxes allowing participants to select all responses that apply, and open-field response. The research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number H0026148).

## Statistical Analyses

Analyses were performed using the open-source software Jamovi (version 1.6.23; The Jamovi Project, 2021). The effect of dependent variables on independent variables of sexual/romantic orientation, and gender identity, was measured using independent-sample t-tests and ANOVA. A significance cut-off of  $p=0.05$  was adopted. Bonferroni adjustments were applied to post-hoc analyses to minimise the likelihood of type I error. The relationship between scaled measured

was determined using Pearson's correlation coefficient. Data groups were manipulated into binary / aggregated categories as required for analyses.

## Findings

### Wellbeing Amongst All Students

On average LGBTQIA+ respondents scored higher on the wellbeing scale ( $M=3.88$ , median=3.80,  $SD=1.59$ ) than non-LGBTQIA+ respondents ( $M=3.29$ , median=3.00,  $SD=1.49$ ). As lower scores on this scale indicate better wellbeing, these results indicate that LGBTQIA+ respondents reported poorer wellbeing. Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that the assumption for a Student's t-test of normality was not met in these variables ( $W=0.981$ ,  $p=0.04$ ) so it was opted to use a Mann-Whitney U test. This showed that the difference between the groups was statistically significant ( $U=2242$ ,  $p=0.01$ , Ranked biserial correlation=0.214).

### Wellbeing Amongst LGBTQIA+ Subgroups

ANOVAs were performed to assess differences in wellbeing between different subgroups of the LGBTQIA+ community. Whilst transgender and non-binary respondents on average scored higher in the wellbeing scale ( $M=4.19$ ,  $SD=1.35$ ) than their cisgender counterparts ( $M=3.72$ ,  $SD=1.67$ ), this difference was not significant ( $p=0.26$ ). Similarly, no significant difference was found between the different sexual orientations ( $p=0.07$ ) or romantic attraction groups ( $p=0.40$ ).

### Wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ Students on Different Campuses

ANOVAs were once again used to assess differences in the wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ students based on the campus at which they study. Separate ANOVAs splitting respondents by individual campuses, and area of the state (i.e. North, North-West and South) were run. No significant differences were found between individual campuses ( $p=0.93$ ) nor area ( $p=0.87$ ).

## Correlation Between Wellbeing and Other Scales

To further explore what may be contributing to the poorer wellbeing expressed by LGBTQIA+ respondents, correlational analyses were conducted between the wellbeing scale data and that of each of the other scales. The results are summarised in table 4, below. As is shown, there is a strong, significant correlation between wellbeing and inclusion and campus accessibility. There is also a moderate significant correlation between wellbeing and equity, and a low, but still statistically significant, degree of correlation between open self-expression and wellbeing amongst LGBTQIA+ students.

**Table 4.** *Correlation between wellbeing and other scales*

	Pearson's r	p-value	Significance
Inclusion	0.511	< .001	***
Physical Safety	0.059	0.631	
Discrimination	0.152	0.204	
Exclusionary Behaviour	-0.080	0.517	
Psychological Safety	0.139	0.243	
Campus Accessibility	0.561	< .001	***
Open Self-Expression	0.275	0.027	*
Equity	0.359	0.002	**

## Discussion and recommendations

Given the findings of this report, more directed research into wellbeing of the LGBTQIA+ community at the University of Tasmania is warranted. It would be appropriate for this research to be directed at the LGBTQIA+ community alone, as this study highlights a disparity in wellbeing affecting the LGBTQIA+ community. Further, the principles of intersectionality would suggest that although the survey sample would be LGBTQIA+ individuals, apart from a few group-specific factors, the findings would be somewhat generalisable to the broader student population, thus modelling the vision of equity portrayed by artist Angus Maguire (2016).

The current survey did not directly address outness, which the literature suggests to be an important correlate of wellbeing. Meyer (2003) added concealing sexual orientation as an additional group-specific stressor to his initial model of minority stress (Meyer, 1995). This theoretical understanding supports the findings of Kosciw et al. (2015), that outness has an indirect effect on academic performance, mediated by self-esteem and mood. A recent study also found that outness has significant, positive direct or indirect effects on wellbeing amongst several racial groups in the United States. Moreover, LGBT community connectedness fully mediated the relationship between outness and psychological wellbeing in some ethnic groups (Roberts & Christens, 2021).

As discussed in the introduction to this report, Meyer (2003) names community resilience as an important protective factor within the LGBTQIA+ community. However, benefitting from such resources requires self-identification with, and participation in, the community. The survey administered asked respondents about several characteristics that identify those who can be categorised as an LGBTQIA+ individual. It did not, however, invite participants to self-identify as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, nor address involvement in the community. It is expected that this information may help illuminate why some LGBTQIA+ individuals fare better

than others, both on campus and in the broader community.

**Recommendation 1.** TUSA should conduct further targeted research into the wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ students at the University of Tasmania, including directly addressing outness and self-identification and involvement with the community.

In the sample, three students indicated that broadening knowledge and use of personal gender pronouns would make them feel safer and more included on campus. Whilst a seemingly small number, it represents almost 20% of gender-diverse respondents; the only population who could reasonably be expected to consider pronouns when asking about one's personal experiences. Further, given the broad nature of responses to this open-field question, this is one of the more common response trends amongst all respondents.

These findings are consistent with the Transgender Inclusive Policies and Practices Report (Maldonado, 2020) at the 'Big 10' Universities in the United States which states that senior-level administrator use of personal gender pronouns in email signatures can create a gender-affirming environment. Many Universities in the United States and Government bodies in Australia and New Zealand have created webpages with helpful information about gender pronouns and how to include them in email signatures (see: New Zealand Public Service Commission, 2020; Queensland Human Rights Commission, 2021; Washing Univerity in St Louis, 2021). These resources are especially useful when hyperlinked in the email signature, so people who are unaware of what personal gender pronouns are, and why they are important, can gain further information.

**Recommendation 2.** TUSA should develop a multi-faceted action plan to engage students and staff to engage with educating themselves about the importance of personal gender pronouns to create a trans-inclusive environment.

**Recommendation 2a.** TUSA should develop an informative, user-friendly webpage

with information about gender pronouns for current and future staff and students. This could be done in conjunction with the University and/or the Ally Network.

**Recommendation 2b.** TUSA could build an inclusive signature campaign for students and staff to sign onto using pronouns in their emails that link to a TUSA information page (see recommendation 2a).

**Recommendation 2c.** TUSA could directly lobby senior administration staff at the university to include their gender pronouns in the signature on all email communication, and on their professional biography pages, and consider adding them on an opt-out basis to official university templates.

Another frequently-occurring comment from survey respondents regarded the inclusion of gender-neutral bathrooms and change facilities on campuses. Agans (2007) affirms that 'students who identify as transgender struggle to find social and structural acceptance because many colleges and universities have not taken the initiative to provide non-gendered bathrooms' (p. 201). This indicates that inclusive bathroom options are not merely a place where students who are transgender or variations of non-binary gender identities can feel comfortable whilst fulfilling a biological human function, but a sign that they are welcome and accepted on campus.

Knowledge of non-gendered facilities that are currently available was also poor. Although the wording of the related survey question appeared to lead many respondents to the assumption that it was asking specifically about sporting facilities (an example of responses that indicate this is "*I don't use the sport spaces*"), of all respondents, only 3.9% (n=6) indicated they were aware of non-gendered facilities on campus, 49.7% (n=76) were not aware of non-gendered facilities on campus, and 28.1% (n=43) did not respond to the question. The remaining 18.3% of respondents (n=28) gave responses that were difficult to classify. These included the above-mentioned comments referring only to sporting facilities, and a handful of responses that listed one or two facilities of which the respondent was aware. Even amongst transgender and non-

binary respondents, only three (18.8%) indicated having any knowledge of non-gendered facilities available.

It is common that the only non-gendered bathrooms that are available are the accessible toilets for people with physical disabilities or mobility issues. Whilst these are often seen as the safer option by transgender people, one student respondent (24M) noted “...*this is not at all gender-affirming*” whilst another (27 non-binary) noted that there “*seems to be a lot of judgement if people who have no visible mobility problems use them.*”

Whilst support in the academic literature for non-gendered bathrooms is vast, socially and politically they are a contentious topic. Certainly, in reviewing the literature, there is no support for the common objection from sceptics that non-gendered bathrooms leave women vulnerable to sexual assault. Universities are excellent candidates to pioneer the rollout of non-gendered bathrooms, as they are well-placed to monitor, report and disseminate outcomes to the wider community, to fill the hole that currently exists in literature. It is also a critical moment in the university’s history to address this, with buildings being built and retrofitted by the university *en masse*, particularly in the Hobart CBD.

**Recommendation 3.** TUSA must be an active voice for the rights of transgender constituents at this critical time.

**Recommendation 3a.** TUSA should keep bathroom arrangements in mind when considering its future location(s) and consider ensuring that, at a minimum, non-gendered bathrooms are available in all their facilities.

**Recommendation 3b.** TUSA should lobby the university to review building principles, ensuring non-gendered bathroom spaces are included.

**Recommendation 3c.** TUSA should prepare to facilitate future studies into the student opinions and outcomes of the inclusion of non-gendered bathrooms, with

the aim of a) making the rollout as smooth and beneficial to all stakeholders as possible and b) publishing findings for the benefit of the broader community going forward. This could be in the form of future student-led research projects, and/or grants or scholarships for postgraduate researchers.

**Recommendation 3d.** TUSA could design and maintain a smartphone app/online guide to available bathrooms and change facilities on all campuses based on preferences. This could also include creating appropriate signage to put in gendered bathrooms, to increase student awareness of available facilities.

## Conclusion

The findings of this report into the wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ students at UTAS echo those in the literature on the general LGBTQIA+ community: they consistently experience poorer wellbeing than their cisgendered heterosexual counterparts. As no direct comparison is made between general levels of wellbeing amongst LGBTQIA+ individuals and UTAS students specifically, it could be argued that the problem belongs with society in general, and not UTAS specifically. However, it is the firm belief of the author that institutions such as UTAS have the responsibility to their students to not just meet societal norms, but continue to advocate for better standards, particularly when it comes to marginalised and/or minority groups. The recommendations presented address this inequity, including measures to assist some of the most marginalised of the community to feel safe and welcome, as asked for in their own voices.

## Limitations

The current dataset represents a goldmine of information, of which the scope of this report

barely scratches the surface. Wellbeing was deemed an important starting point to explore the experience of LGBTQIA+ students, as well as a good benchmark against which to measure efficacy of interventions, hence why it was the focus of this report. However, it is by no means the whole picture of the rich experience of the LGBTQIA+ community at the University. Further hypothesis testing and modelling using the gathered data must be performed to fully understand relationships between the measured variables and the LGBTQIA+ community.

Several limitations of the survey itself are mentioned in the discussion section, and briefly recapped here. Firstly, the format of the demographical questions did not allow for individuals to self-report as members of the LGBTQIA+ community, but rather asked questions that allowed the researchers to categorise respondents. It is expected that the implications of this methodology are significant and future studies could benefit from including both. Further, outness and participation within the LGBTQIA+ community are likely to be both important mediators of wellbeing and realistic targets of implementations, yet they were not addressed within the survey. Although not detrimental to the scope of this report, from the findings and literature review it is clear that consideration of these limitations of the current survey will be beneficial for future research projects.

It is expected that sampling bias affected the number of respondents in this survey. This was intentional: responses were actively sought from the LGBTQIA+ community through advertising within the Pride Society social media and targeted posters, along with general publicising. This should not affect the validity of the presented results; in fact, this method of recruitment was necessary in order to obtain a sample of LGBTQIA+ respondents large enough to make meaningful comparisons with the cisgender heterosexual population. It is important to note, however, that assumptions about the number of LGBTQIA+ students at UTAS cannot be made based on their representation in this survey.

Conversely, it is suspected that the sampling methodology used impacted upon the ability to

accurately address research questions 2 and 3. In future, using a quota-sampling method to obtain, for example, a set number of respondents from each sub-group of the LGBTQIA+ community would allow for more balanced comparisons.

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## Conflict of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to report.

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