

Gender Diversity in Australia 2017



Trends in contemporary aspirations, challenges,
and attitudes

Gender Diversity in Australia

A report on the aspirations, challenges, health and life style of the gender diverse in Australia based on a survey of members of Transgender Radio.

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About the Survey

Purpose and Scope

There have been few studies of the gender diverse community in Australia. The internet support forum TgR is in a possibly unique situation as it has validated email communication with a population of gender diverse members. It was this latent potential to obtain representative and wide ranging data that led to the design of the first TgR Survey in 2011. The survey was repeated in 2017 to validate the findings of the earlier survey and identify any significant trends.

In summary the aim of the 2017 TgR Survey is

- to widen our understanding of contemporary transgender lives in Australia and New Zealand
- to validate our understanding by repeating measurements over time,
- to identify significant trends in the contemporary transgender experience,
- to share information that may help professionals providing services to gender diverse people.

Limitations

The TgR membership population cannot be considered totally representative of gender diversity in Australia. A major limitation in the survey is that responses were only accepted from people born male who are exploring their gender diversity with differing degrees of femininity.

The TgR population is also not representative of those under 40 years old.

Survey Design

The design of the 2017 survey was the subject of much discussion. The improvements in understanding that could be obtained by revising the questions asked in 2011 were clearly incompatible with a desire to identify trends. In the end it was decided that, where possible, the questions asked in 2011 would be reused. This would allow the survey to see how responses to identical questions have changed over 6 years.

An exception to reuse was made where the original question was poorly framed to a degree that made the underlying survey data unreliable.

The key design features of the 2011 survey were retained:

- **Avoid labels:**
The gender spectrum is conventionally described by labels such as “Cross dresser”, “Gender Queer”, “Transsexual”, and “Transgender”. Unfortunately these labels do not have universally accepted definitions, and the definitions adopted by individuals can overlap. The use of poorly defined labels in surveys potentially leads to incorrect interpretation of the data and consequent survey bias.
- **A snapshot in time:**
Reflecting society as a whole; the gender diverse community members also have their dreams and aspirations. Collecting such forward-looking data in the survey potentially obscures the

actual data about the present (or immediate past). The TgR survey was designed to focus as a snap-shot on the present.

In common with 2011 the 2017 survey clearly focusses on the respondent's gender¹ not sexual preferences. The survey encouraged the expression of non-binary genders, that is genders other than male or female.

Recruitment

Every survey of the transgender experience is challenged by sampling bias – reflecting how the participants were recruited.

- Surveys taken by gender clinics tend to highlight an urban population in need of medical support
- Open internet surveys using self-reporting are open to abuse, and show a bias towards a tech-savvy socially connected population.

The membership of Transgender Radio provides a valuable opportunity to examine an alternative subset of the transgender population. Transgender Radio membership includes a broad section of the population from those still hiding their gender identity through to those actively living their true gender in public.

The 2011 survey of the membership identified a significant bias towards participants aged 45+ assigned male at birth. It was expected that this bias would also be present in the later survey.

Unique, anonymous, invitations were sent out to the members of TransGender Radio and past attendees at Transformal (a social weekend celebrating gender diversity). All respondents had been previously validated to ensure that they identified as transgender

The survey was open for responses between October and December 2017. Of the 559 invitations that were sent out we received 225 validated responses.

There was a significant change in the survey population, 44% of the respondents said that they did not participate in the earlier survey.

Although few questions were mandatory most respondents answered all the questions that were asked.

¹ The distinction between sex and gender differentiates a person's biological sex (the anatomy of an individual's reproductive system, and secondary sex characteristics) from that person's gender, which can refer to either social roles based on the sex of the person (gender role) or personal identification of one's own gender based on an internal awareness (gender identity) - [Wikipedia](#)

Survey Overview

Structure

The 2017 TgR survey consisted of a pool of 37 questions presented in 4 sections. Individual participants were only asked questions that were relevant based on their prior responses.

There was also an opportunity to add free-form comments at the end of each section. Many of the free-form comments clarified earlier answers and where appropriate the raw survey responses were edited to reflect this understanding.

The four sections explored:

- the demographics of the survey population,
- how the respondents express their gender diversity,
- their journey to understand and express their gender
- the attitudes of the participants and their acceptance in society

Trends

Where identical questions were asked in 2011 and 2017 changes in the responses were analysed. This led to an understanding of what is changing, and what remains unchanged in the gender diverse experience.

What is changing

- The survey population has aged with a corresponding increase in the percentage of respondents who are retired.
- The 2017 survey pointed to a significant increase in the proportion of the respondents who had told a member of their family about their gender diversity. This included a 30% increase in the number of respondents in a relationship who had told their partner.
- The 2017 survey population is more likely to tell a GP about their gender diversity than they were in 2011. In the later survey the percentage confiding in a doctor rose from 29% to 40%. The survey also identified a significant increase in the use of hormones prescribed by a doctor. There were indications that the understanding of gender issues amongst medical professionals is also improving.
- More respondents reported positive feelings about being gender diverse in 2017. However this sentiment is far from universal. Approximately 40% of those surveyed still view their gender diversity as a neutral or negative factor in their life.

The percentage of those surveyed who consider that society is accepting of gender diversity has also increased. However the majority still perceive society as unaccepting.

What remains unchanged

- One in five respondents considered themselves to be totally male or female gender. All the other respondents identified their gender at intermediate points on a gender spectrum.
- Approximately half the respondents were in a legal relationship.
- There has not been an increase in the number of partners who support gender diversity in their relationship. This remains at just above 40%. The number of partners openly hostile, and strongly disapproving of gender diversity has also remained constant at 6%.

- A quarter of the respondents frequently expressed their gender in public, but on the other hand, a quarter were rarely seen in public.
- The majority of the respondents were aware they were 'different' before they turned 20.
- Most respondents felt that their appearance was of importance to their gender expression.

Challenges

The survey identifies a number of challenges for the gender diverse, areas where little or no progress has been made between 2011 and 2017.

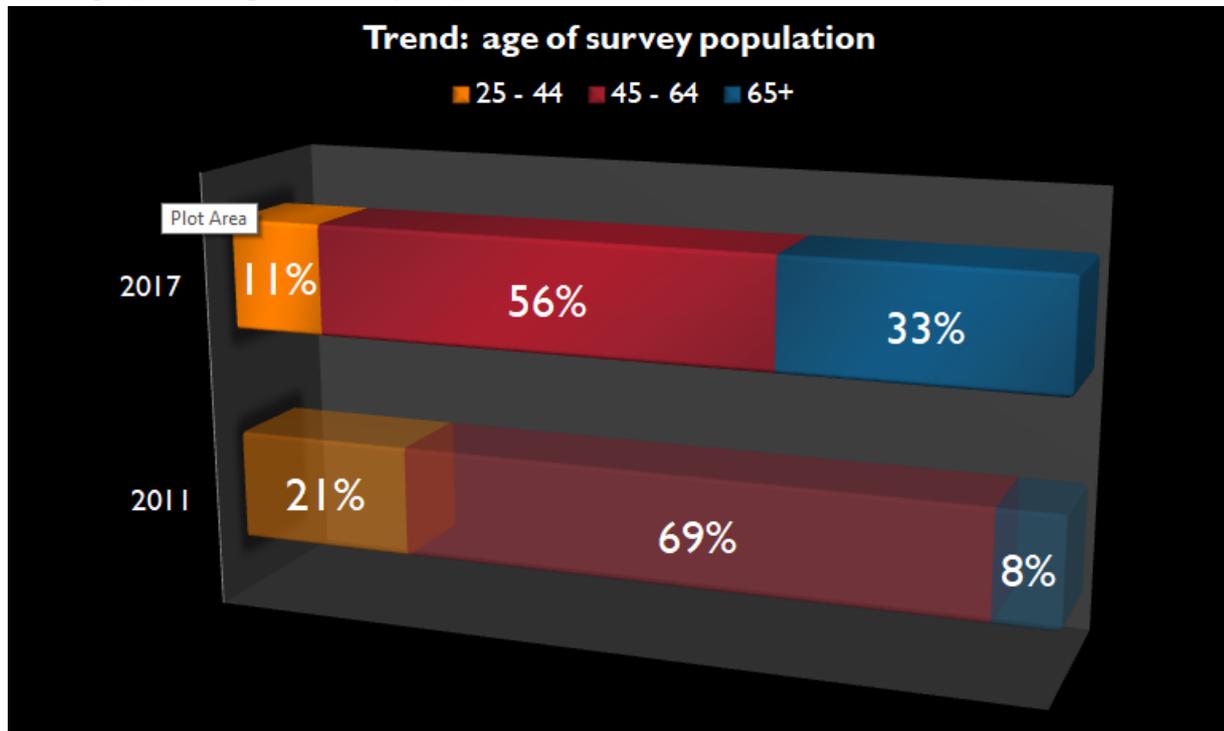
- Relationships
38% of partners continue to be strongly disapproving or unsupportive of gender diversity in their relationship.
- Presentation
A half of those surveyed present only infrequently in public as their true gender.
- Acceptance
There remains a perceived lack of acceptance of gender diversity in society.

Survey Highlights

This section of the report highlights significant or interesting results obtained from the survey responses.

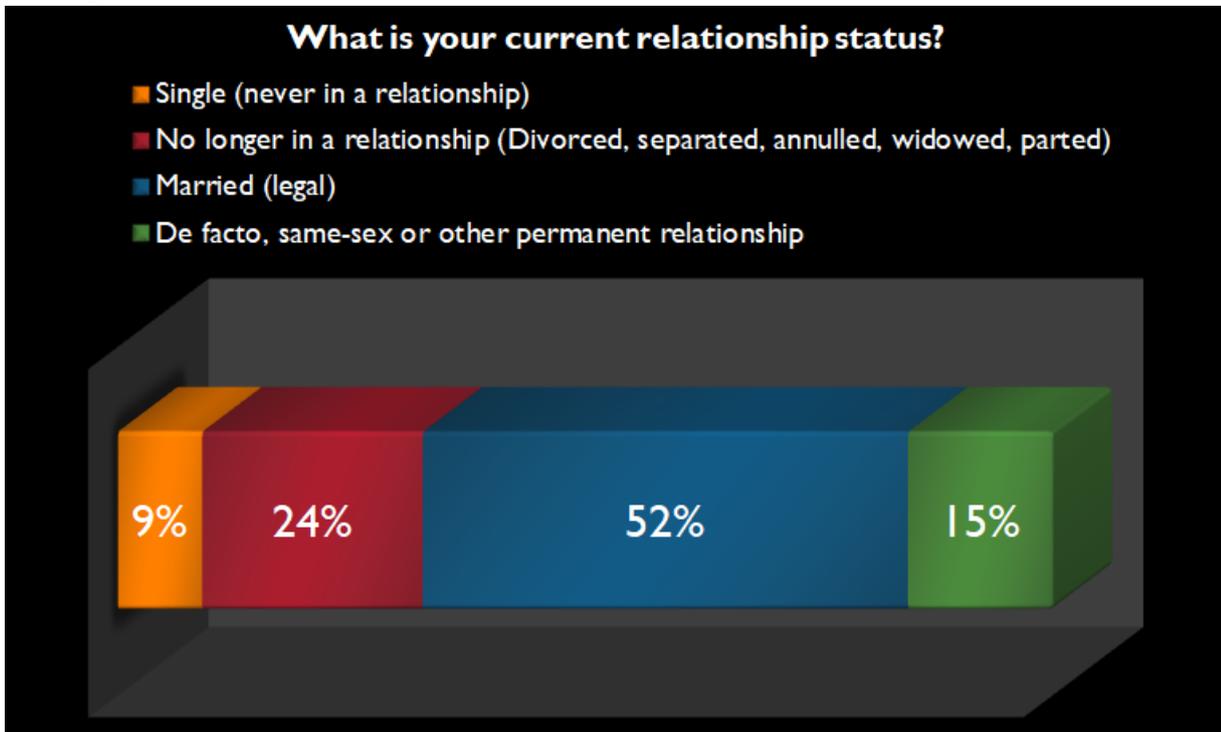
Demographics

Demographics: Age of Survey Population



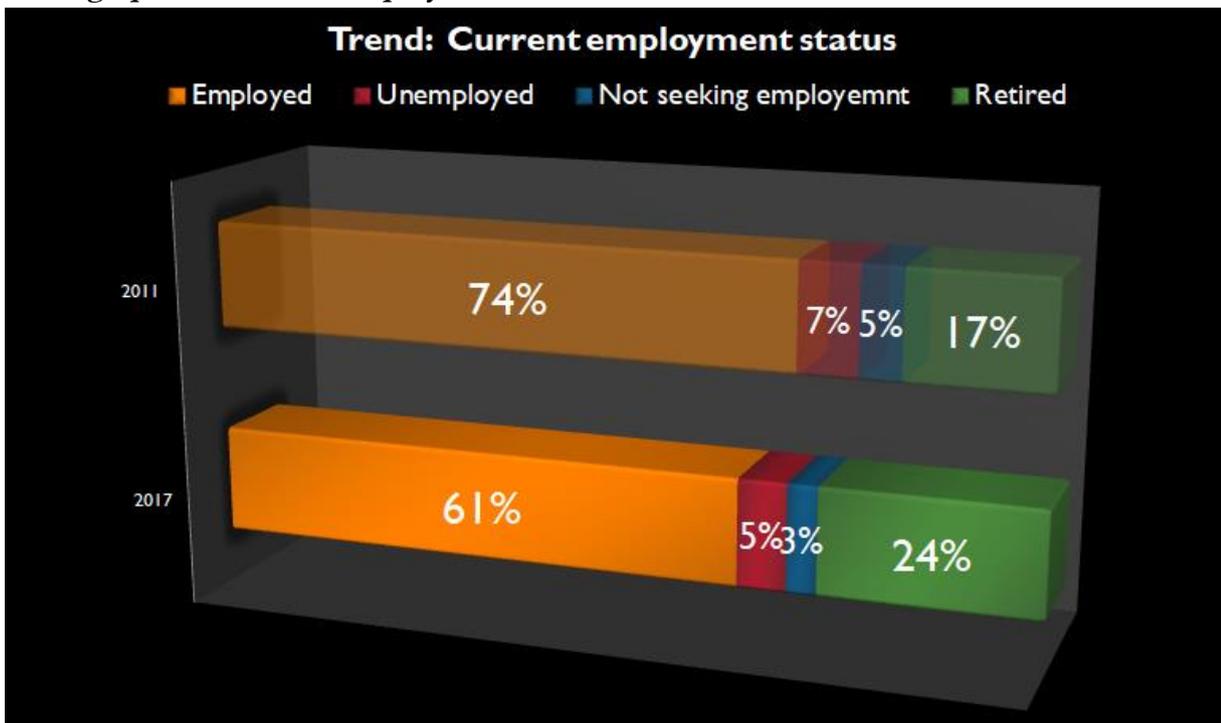
In the 6 years since the 2011TgR survey the membership of TgR has aged. As a result the survey population has become significantly less representative of those less than 45 years old. Correspondingly there has been an increase in the proportion of respondents who are over 65 and retired.

Demographics: Current relationship status



Just over half of the respondents in the 2017 survey were in a legal marriage. This question was reworded in the 2017 survey to separate single (divorced) from single (never married). Allowing for those changes there was no significant change in responses.

Demographics: Current Employment Status



The percentage of respondents who were retired rose from 17% in 2011 to 24% in 2017. This is consistent with an aging of the TgR population.

If the data from 2011 and 2017 is compared, omitting those who have retired from the workforce, the proportion in employment remained constant at 87%.

Gender Expression

Gender Expression: Gender Identity

Gender identity, in the context of this survey, always means the way the respondent feels internally about their gender. It is not necessarily the same as their current physical sex, nor legal gender. The survey avoided the use of labels to describe gender identity and instead gave each respondent a choice of five options

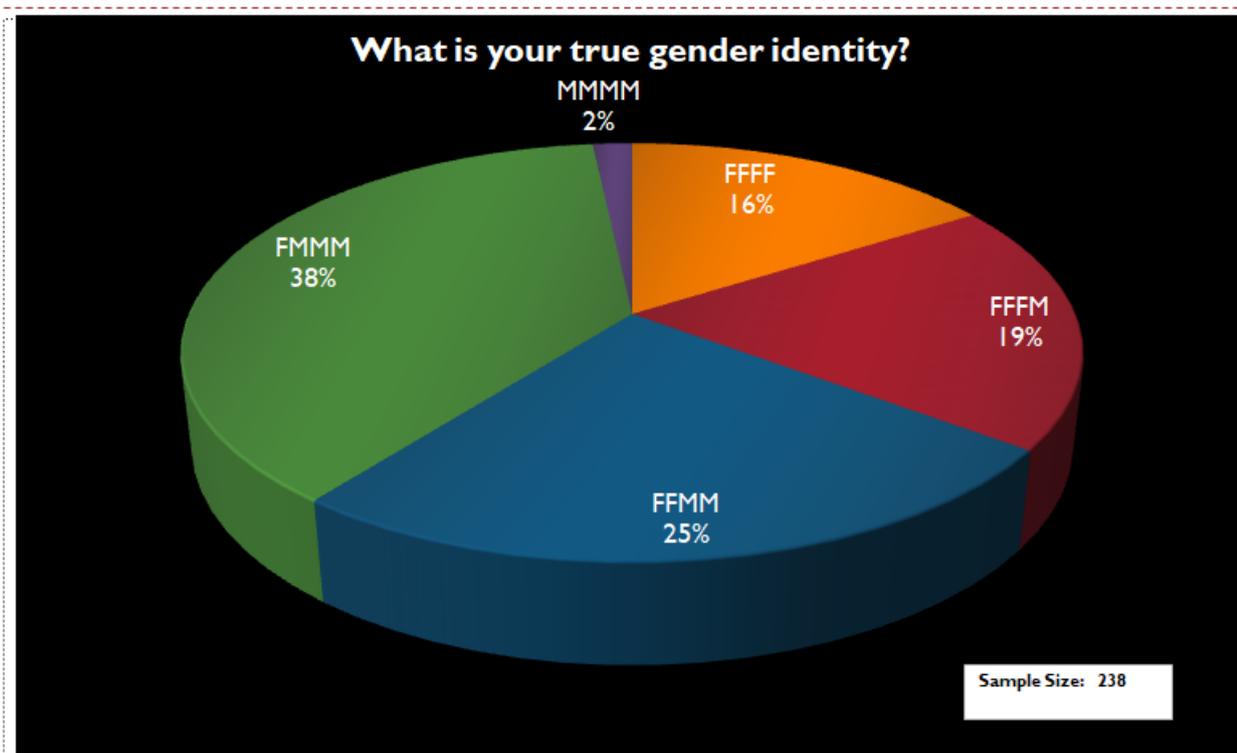
- Male (MMMM)
- Male - with some female aspects (FMMM)
- Neither male nor female (FFMM)
- Female - with some male aspects (FFFM)
- Female (FFFF)

The following examples were given to the participants to help understand the options offered above and distinguish them from sex and sexual preference. The description of the options was refined slightly from the 2011 survey to address reported confusion.

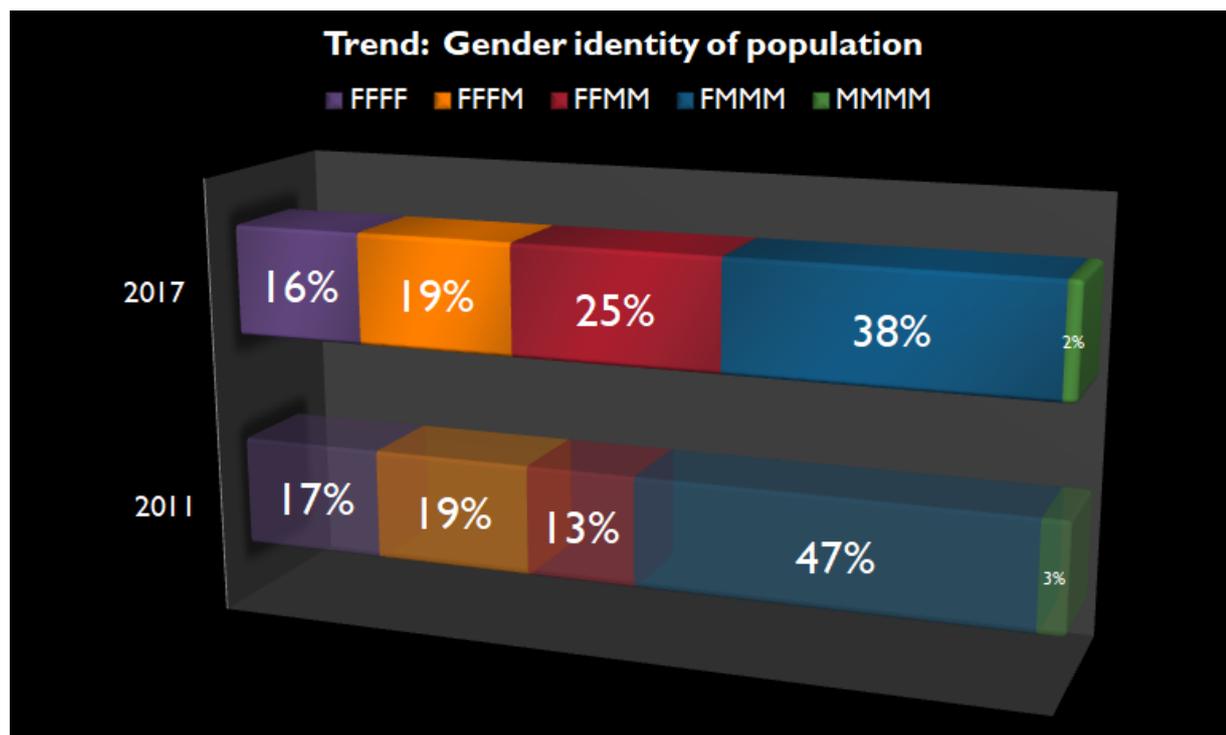
Code	Option	Example Description	Possible Gender Label
MMMM	Male	"I'm a man inside and am totally masculine."	<i>Man, Trans Man, CisMale, Crossdresser</i>
FMMM	Male with some feminine aspects	"I feel comfortable as a man most of the time, but sometimes I feel the need to explore a softer, emotional, empathetic side to my personality and I put on a dress."	<i>Crossdresser, Transgender</i>
FFMM	Male and Female	"I feel as if I am both masculine and feminine. I could present as a man or a woman but don't feel totally comfortable with either. I would prefer to embrace both my masculinity and femininity"	<i>Gender Queer, Non-binary, Agender, Transgender</i>
		"I would be comfortable presenting as either a man or a woman. I would be happy to swap between the two without a strong preference for either "	<i>Bi-gender, Gender Fluid, Transgender</i>
FFFM	Female with some masculine aspects	"I would prefer to express my femininity as a woman, but sometimes I would need to embrace a masculine side of my gender identity"	<i>Transgender, Transexual</i>
FFFF	Female	"I'm a woman inside. I would be totally comfortable living just as a woman."	<i>Transexual, Transgender, Cis Female</i>

For the purpose of analysing the responses, these five gender identities were assigned a 4 letter code also shown above. In the following report the term **FFFF** should be interpreted always as meaning

"The population of respondents who identified their true gender identity as FFFF".



In the 2017 survey only 18% of respondents identified with the gender binary of totally female (FFFF) or totally male (MMM). This is essentially unchanged from the 2011 survey population. The majority of those surveyed identified as a mixture of Male and Female.



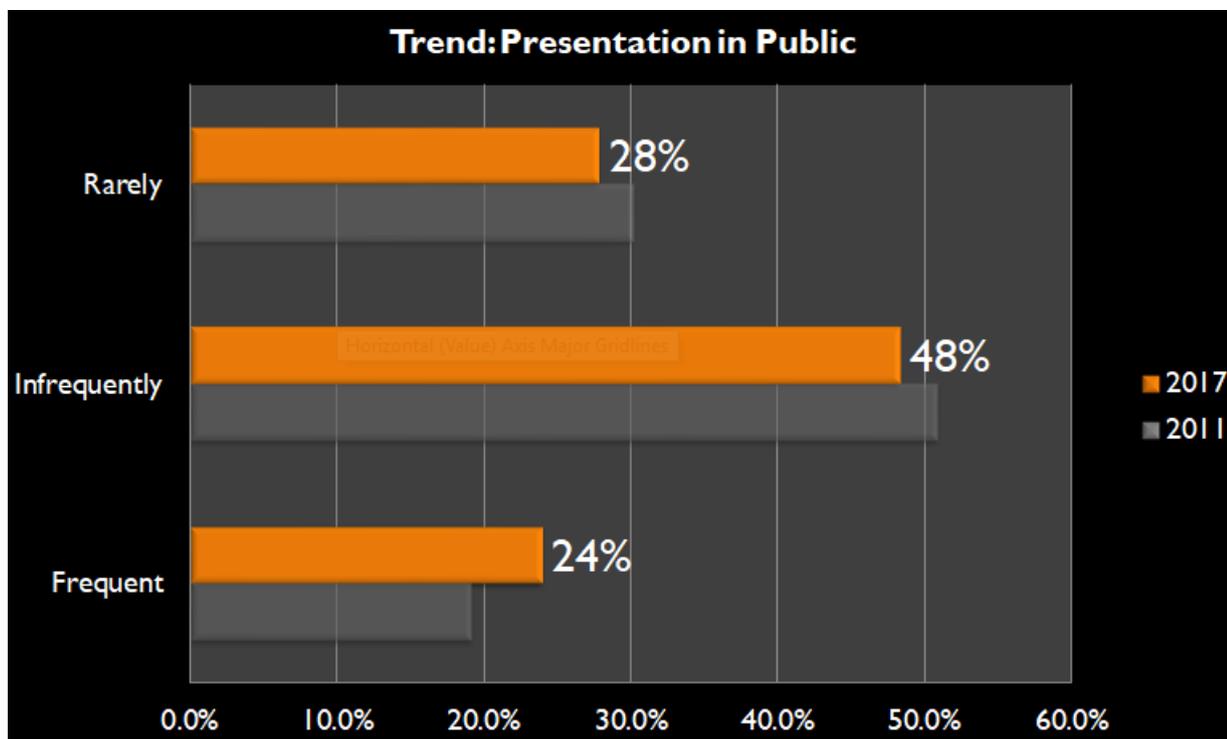
There was no significant change in the answers to this question between 2011 and 2017.

An increase in the percentage of respondents identifying as FFMM was attributable to a clearer definition of the group in the 2017 survey rather than any change in the underlying population.

Not unsurprisingly very few members of TgR felt they were essentially totally male. This small group (4) was excluded from many subsequent questions.

Gender Expression: Presentation

The survey participants were asked how frequently they expressed the fact that they were gender diverse, in their private lives, and in public. It should be noted that this question did not ask if the respondents “dressed as women” – as the most of the survey population did not associate with binary genders. Instead the question asked how often their public and private expression was true to their stated gender identity.



There was no significant change in the responses to this question (both for private and public presentation). About 50% of the survey population present in public infrequently, and a quarter frequently.

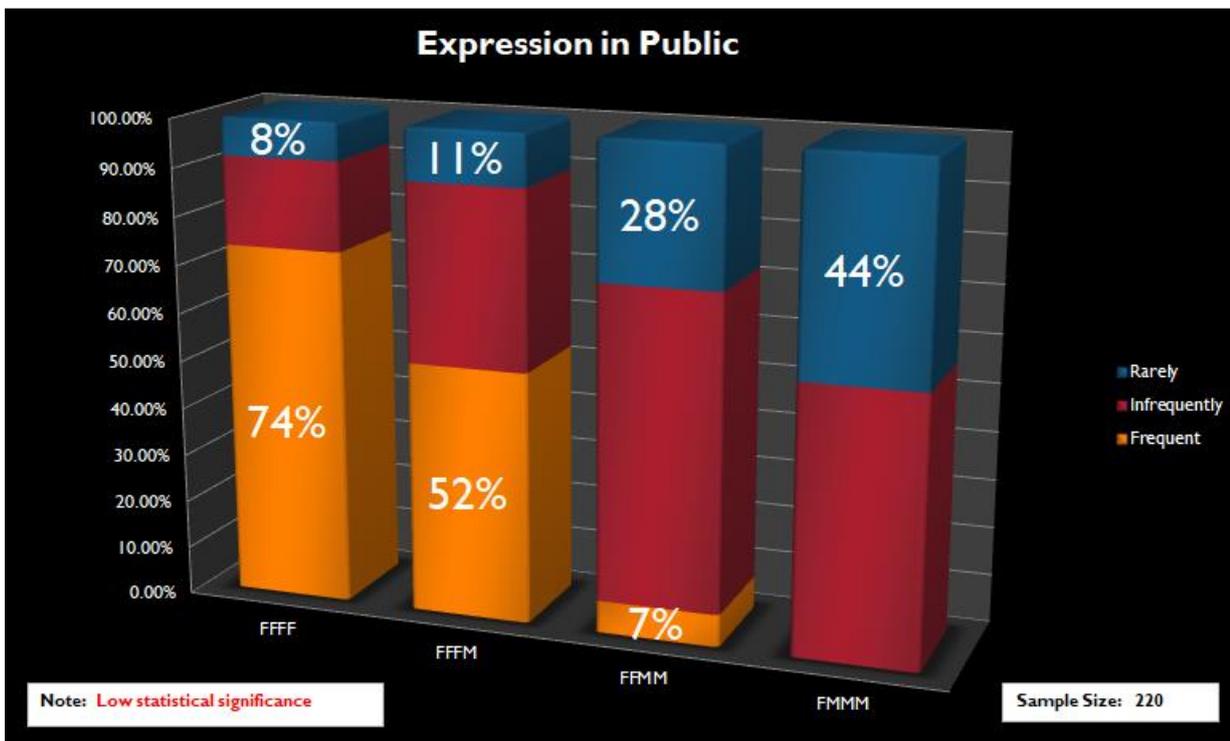
The chart above shows a simplified presentation of the results. It only includes presentation in public, and the frequency is reduced to three options:

All of the time & Most of the time => Frequently

Never & Once a year or less => Rarely

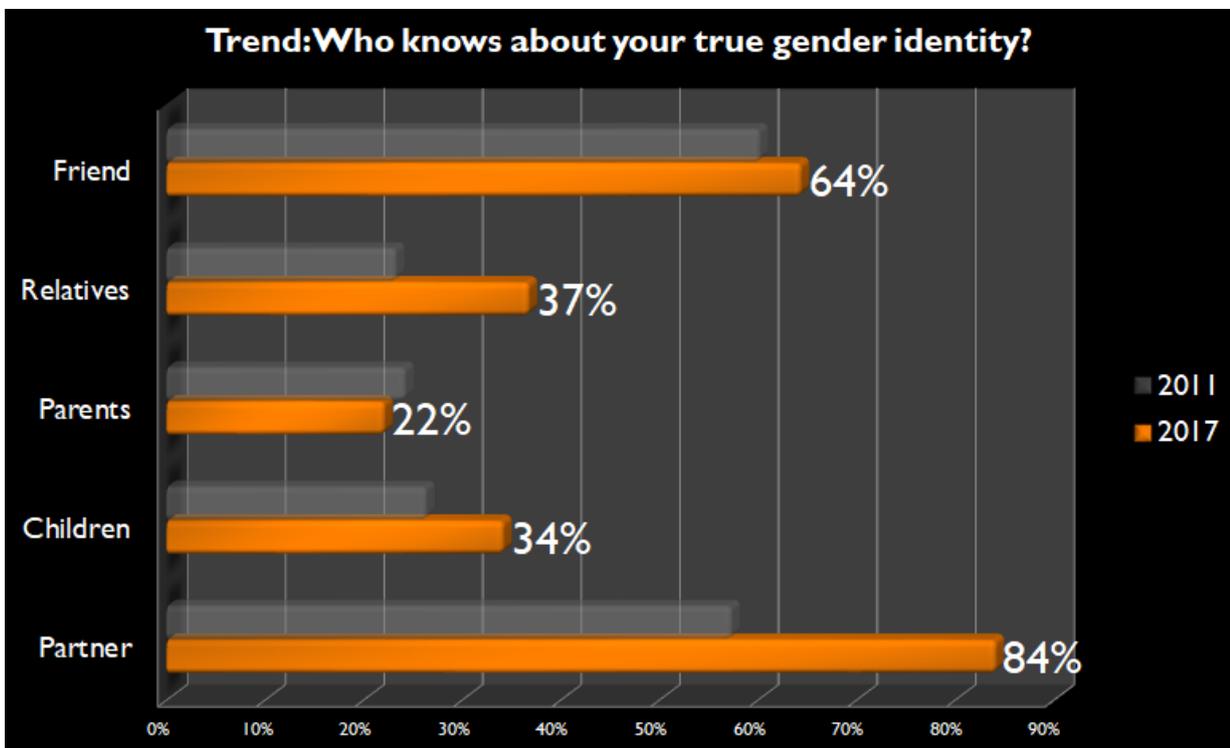
All other responses => Infrequently

The data for expression in public can be better understood by considering the gender identity of the respondents. The data breakdown shown below is based on much smaller sample sizes, but illustrates that the respondents who present most frequently identify as FFFF or FFFM.



Gender Expression: Secrecy

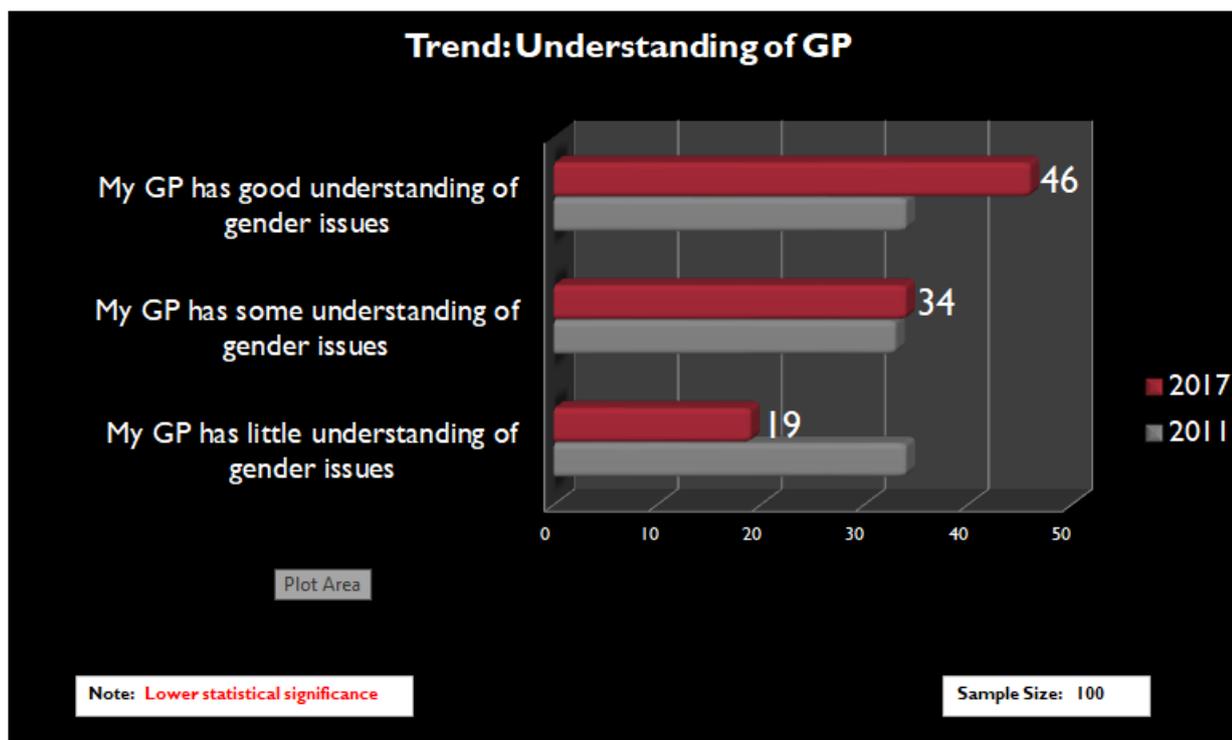
Participants were asked to nominate who knows (or has known) of their true gender identity.



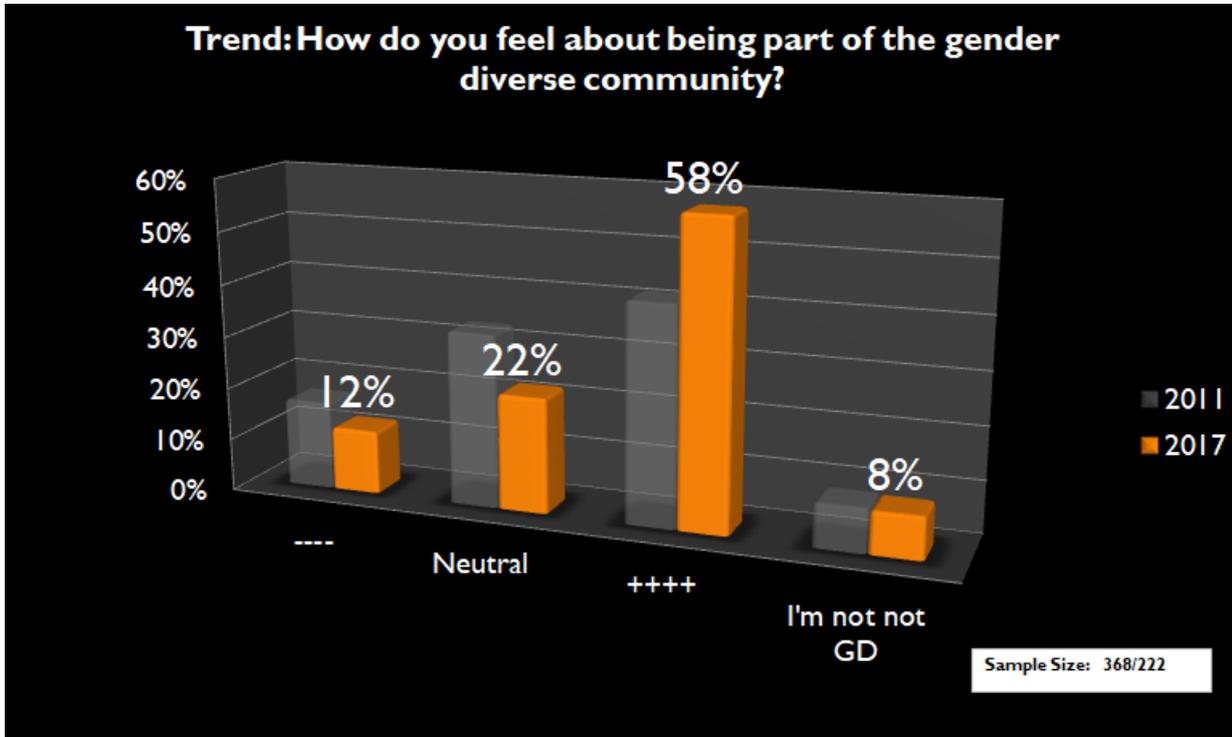
There was a significant change in the responses to this question. In the current survey, most of the respondents (91%) had told at least one member of their family about their gender identity. Six years ago the corresponding proportion was only 61%.

In 2017 84% of the respondents who have a current partner have told their partner, up from 55% in 2011.

A second question explored if the respondent had shared their gender identity with their General Practitioner (doctor). In the current survey the proportion who had told their GP was 40%, a significant increase from 29% in 2011.. This trend is underpinned by an increasing feeling that their doctor understands gender issues.



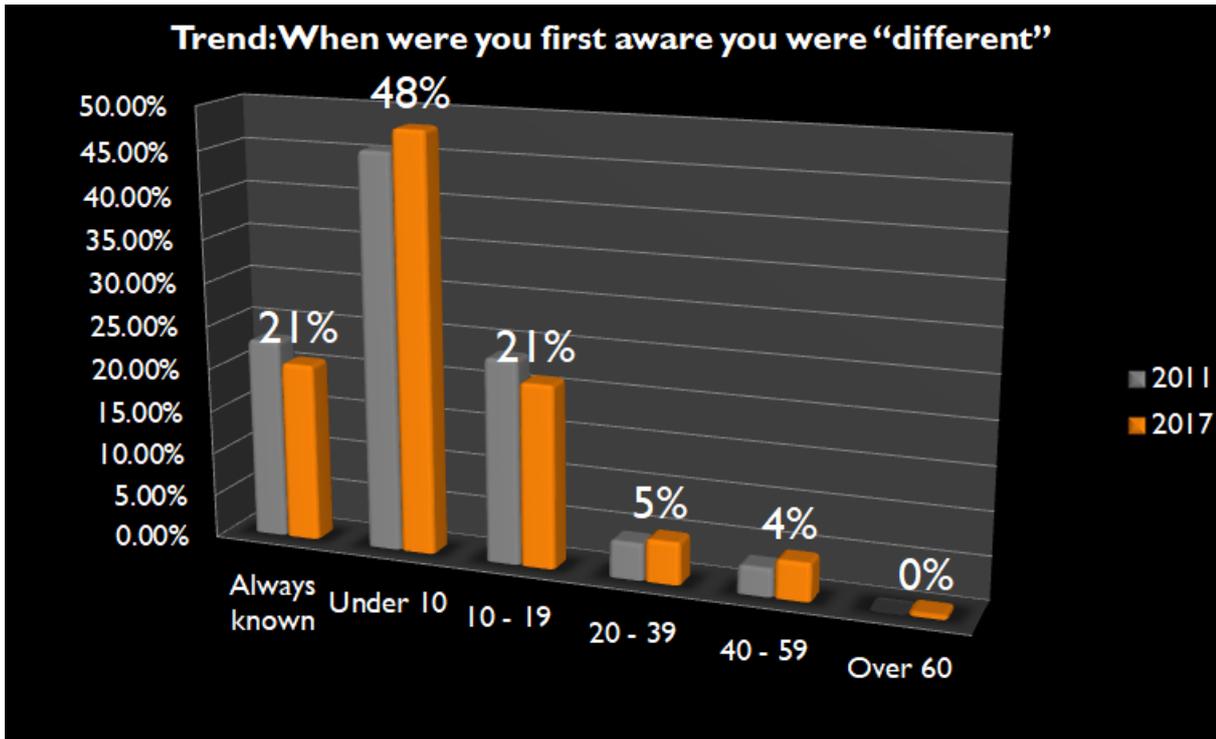
Those respondents who had told their doctor were then asked to rate how well the GP related to their issues. Although the sample sizes are low, there was a positive change reported in the perceived understanding about gender issues. Half (46%) of the doctors were rated as having a good understanding, a significant improvement from 34% in 2011.



Participants were asked how they felt about being gender diverse. In the 2011 survey only 42% of the respondents viewed being gender diverse as a positive in their life. In the current survey the proportion of positive responses rose to 58%.

Gender Journey

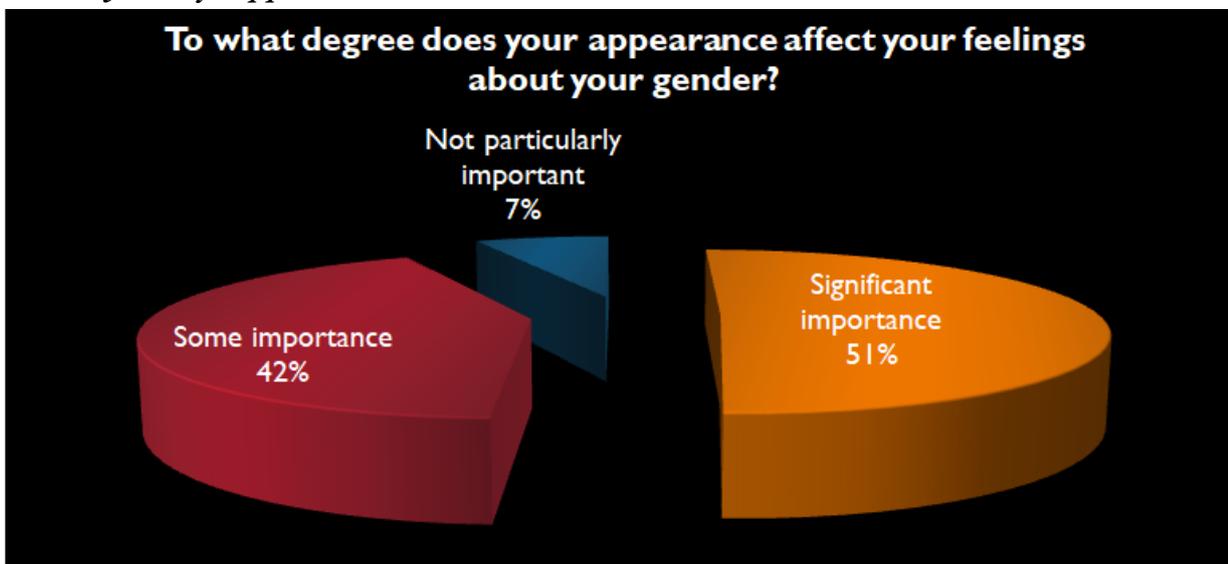
Gender Journey: Awareness



The survey participants were asked when they first became aware that they were 'different' from others in a way that they now attribute to their gender diversity. The majority of the survey population (69%) has been aware of their differences from early childhood. In contrast very few respondents (7%) became aware of their gender diversity only in adult life. The responses from the 2017 survey validate similar results obtained in 2011.

In the sample population 90% were aware they were 'different' before they turned 20.

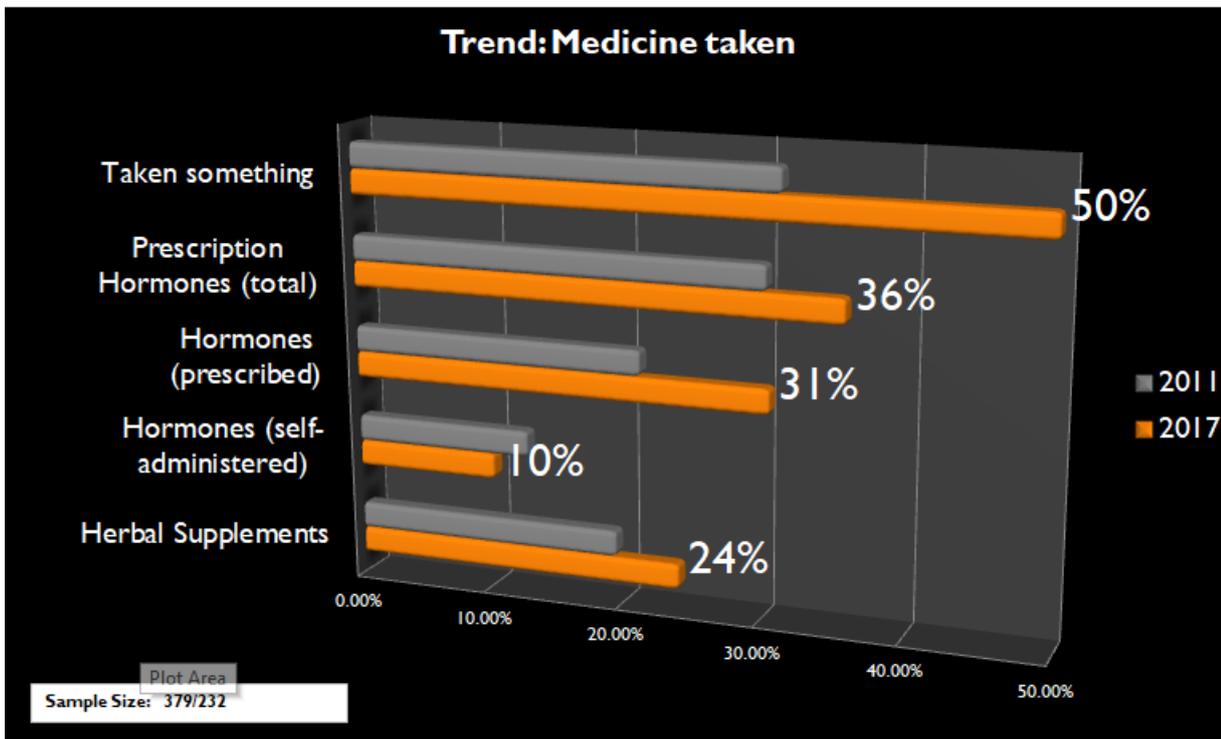
Gender Journey: Appearance



The participants were asked how their physical appearance affects their gender expression. Once again there was little difference from 2011 data, with about half the survey population having significant concerns about their appearance.

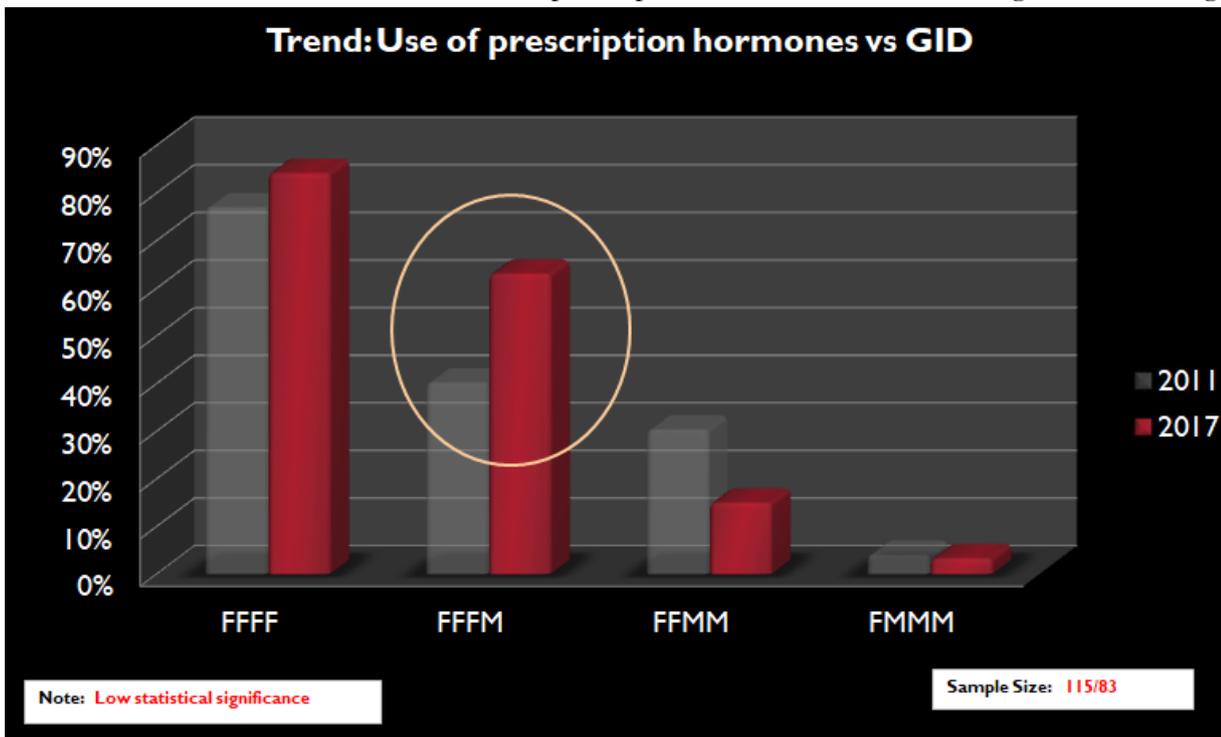
Gender Journey: Interventions

As appearance is a significant concern of the population, the survey asked what interventions the participants had taken to enhance their perception of their gender identity. The first question in this section asked about the use of medicines.



The responses to the 2017 survey showed a significant increase in the use of prescribed hormones (from a doctor). There was also a smaller increase in the use of herbal supplements.

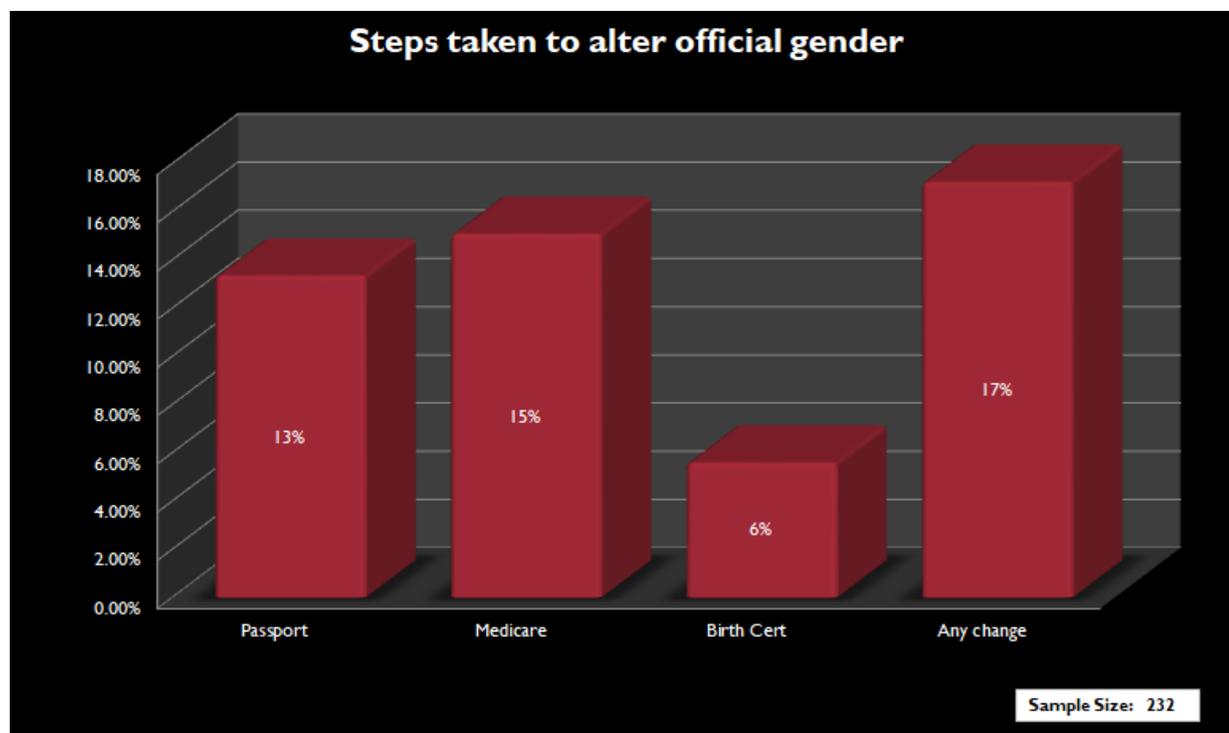
The data for the use of prescription hormones was analysed by GID. Although the sample size is small there is some indication that the increase in prescription hormone use is occurring in the FFFM group.



The participants were also asked about any surgical procedures they had undertaken. The responses to this question show that 7% of the respondents had had a surgical sex affirmation procedure (SRS). The rate of surgical procedures has doubled since 2011.

Gender Journey: Official records

In the six years since the 2011 survey it has generally become easier to harmonise the gender recorded on official documents with that expressed by the individual. It is no longer necessary to have had surgery and/or hormone therapy for the recognition of a change of gender in federal government records. A new question was added to the 2017 survey to explore the extent to which respondents had taken advantage of these new opportunities.



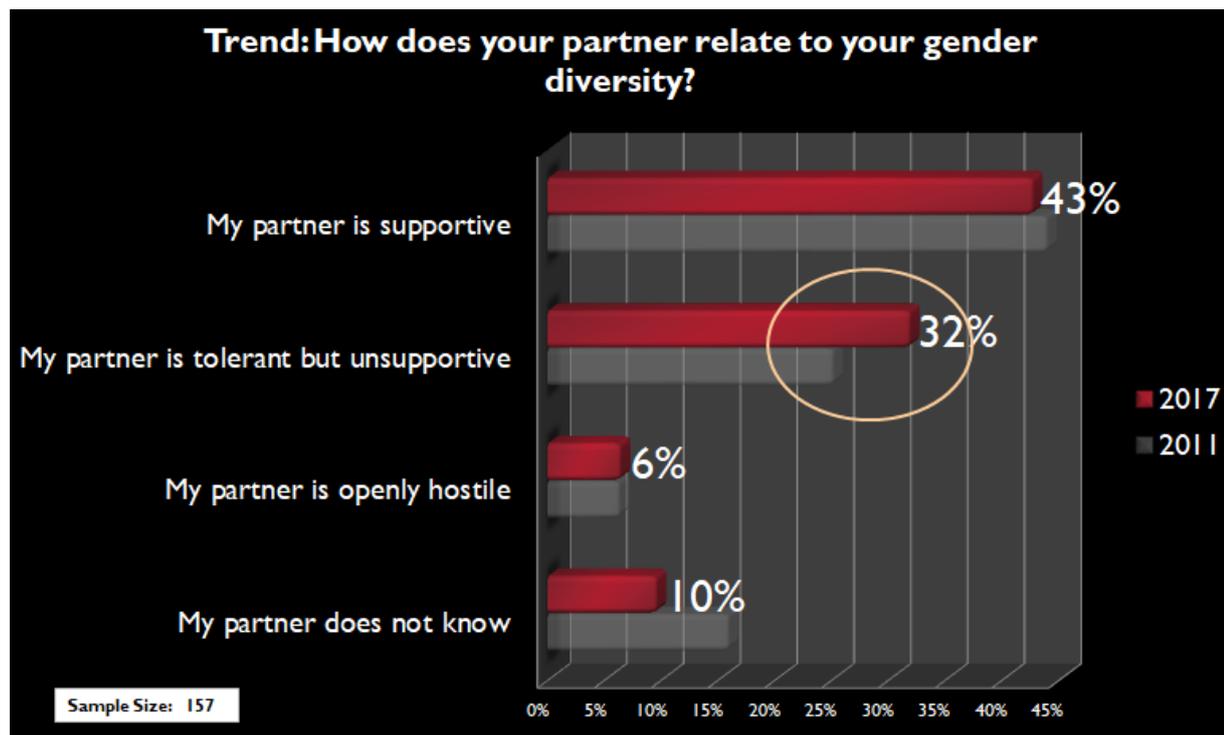
The 16 respondents who had sex affirmation surgery had changed the gender on their Medicare health card, but 6 of them had not changed the sex recorded on their birth certificate. The delay in updating birth certificates could possibly be explained by the need to avoid nullifying a pre-existing marriage (The 2017 survey occurred before SSM was legalized in Australia), or the difficulty changing a birth certificate issued overseas (or even in a different state).

Over 6% of the respondents who had changed the gender on their travel document or health card had not had any surgery.

Attitudes and Acceptance

Attitudes: Partner

Those survey participants who were in a relationship, were asked how their partner related to them being gender diverse.

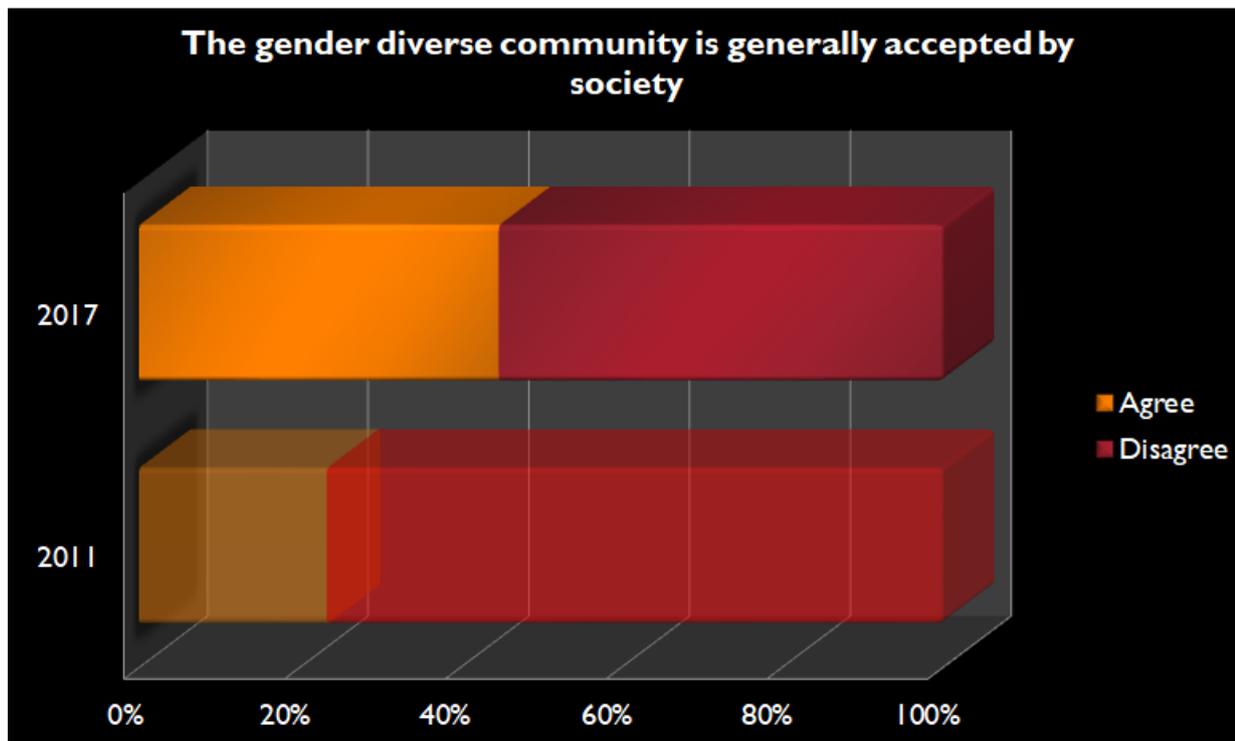


There has been a significant increase in the number of partners who are aware of gender diversity. But the percentage of partners who are openly hostile, and the percentage that are supportive, has remained constant since 2011.

The increased awareness appears to have resulted in an increase in the proportion of partners who are tolerant (but unsupportive).

Acceptance: In Society

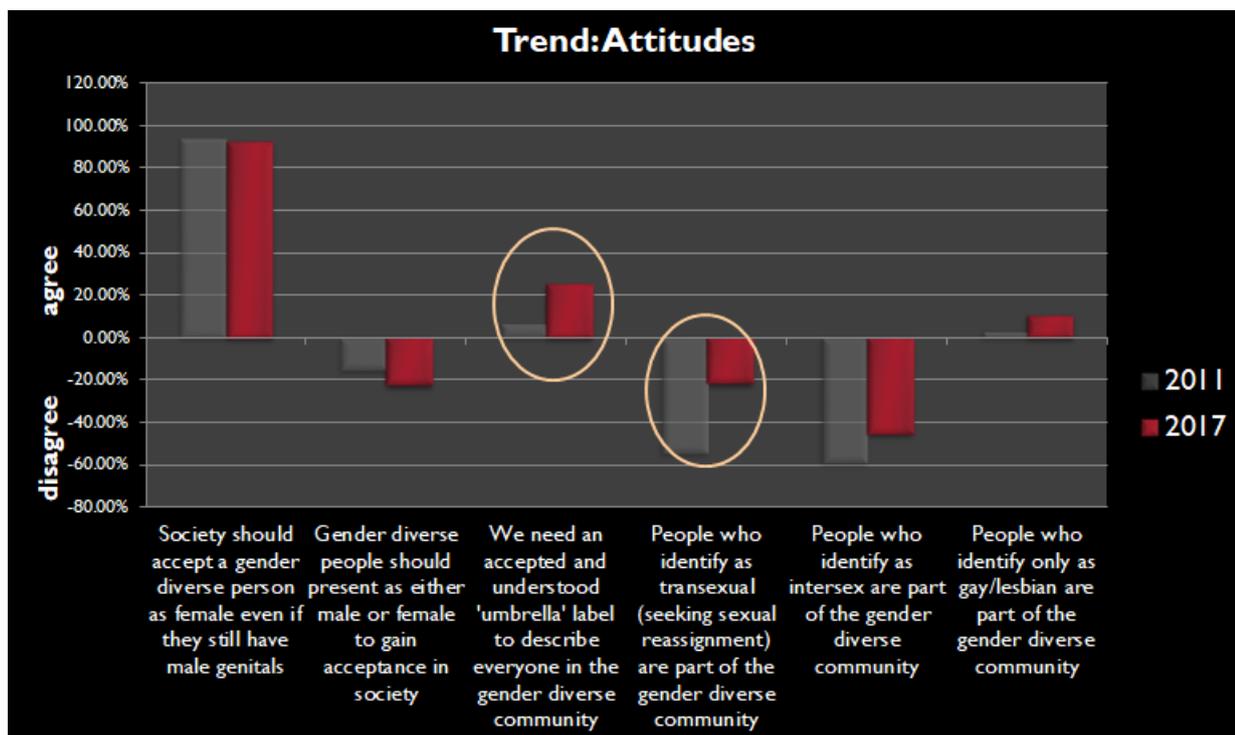
The survey participants were asked if they felt gender diversity was accepted by society



The survey responses show that society is perceived as being more accepting in 2017 than it was in 2011. Unfortunately the majority of respondents still consider that society is not accepting.

Attitudes: Of gender diverse respondents

To discover trends in attitudes within the gender diverse community, some statements that were presented in the 2017 survey were repeated. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with each statement.

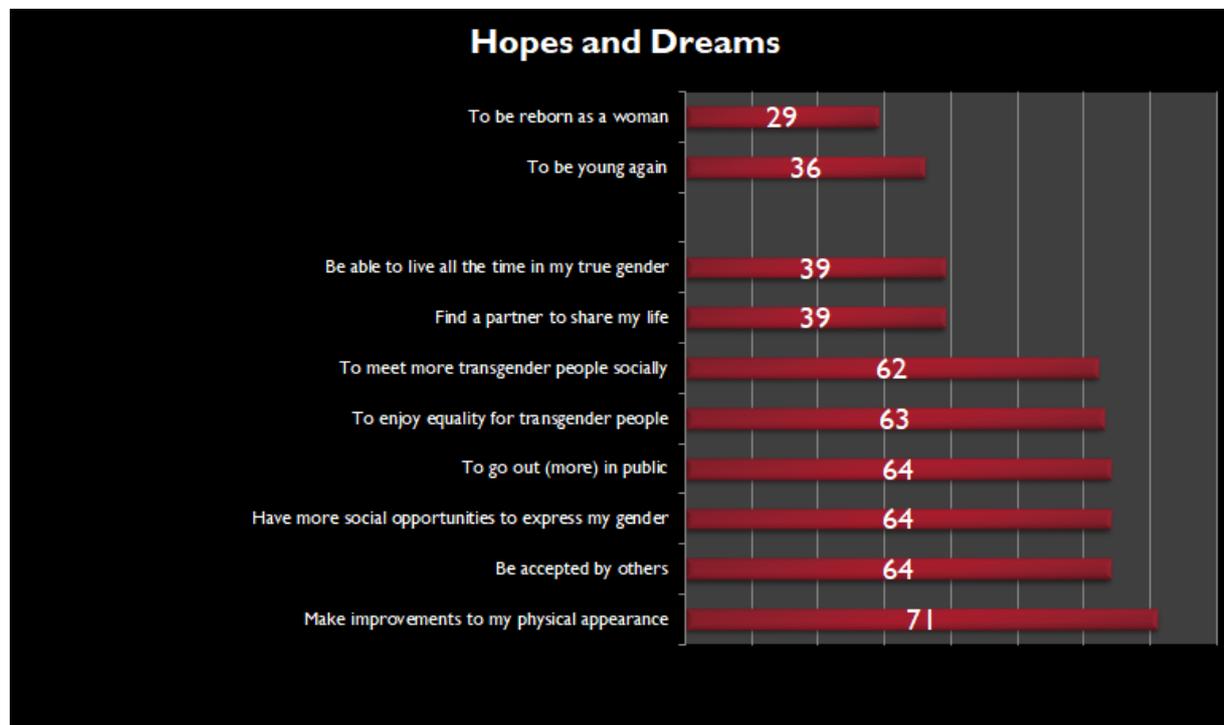


In 2011 the umbrella labels ‘trans’ and ‘transgender’ were relatively new and there were mixed opinions about the value of a label that included everyone who identified as gender diverse. The 2017 survey shows that such labels are attracting growing support.

There is also growing acceptance that transsexuals (those seeking sex affirmation surgery) are part of gender diverse community. The bitter division between groups identifying as ‘cross dressers’ and those identifying as ‘transsexuals’ that occurred in the past appears to be weakening.

Attitudes: Hopes and Dreams

The final question in the survey asked respondents to choose up to three hopes and dreams commonly shared by transgender women. The list was compiled from the free-format responses to a similar question in the 2011 survey.



Many respondents dream about **being reborn as a woman**, or **being young again**.

But more practically they hope to make **improvements to their physical appearance**.

Other hopes that were expressed frequently include:

- **Being accepted by others**
- **Having more social opportunities to express their gender**
- **To go out more in public**
- **To enjoy equality for transgender people.**