

# the OUTLOOK study

## Experiences of LGBTQ2S High School Students in Waterloo Region



For this fact sheet, the OutLook team collaborated with the Waterloo Region District School Board to provide a snapshot of the experiences of LGBTQ2S high school students who participated in OutLook. We hope this information is helpful in improving the experiences of LGBTQ2S students in schools.

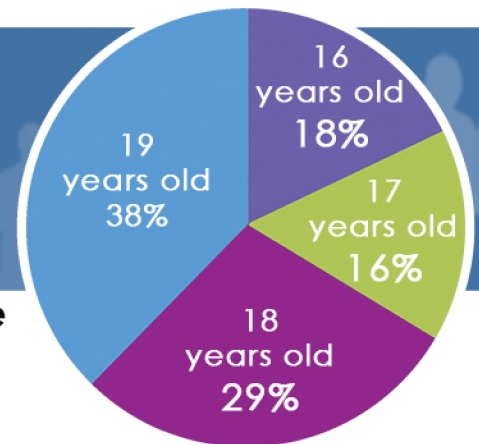
**Outlook** explores the well-being of the LGBTQ2S communities in Waterloo Region, Ontario, Canada. A coalition of community, academic, and public health stakeholders came together with the Waterloo Region Rainbow Community Council with the aim of promoting and supporting change for LGBTQ2S individuals locally.

# WHO WE SURVEYED

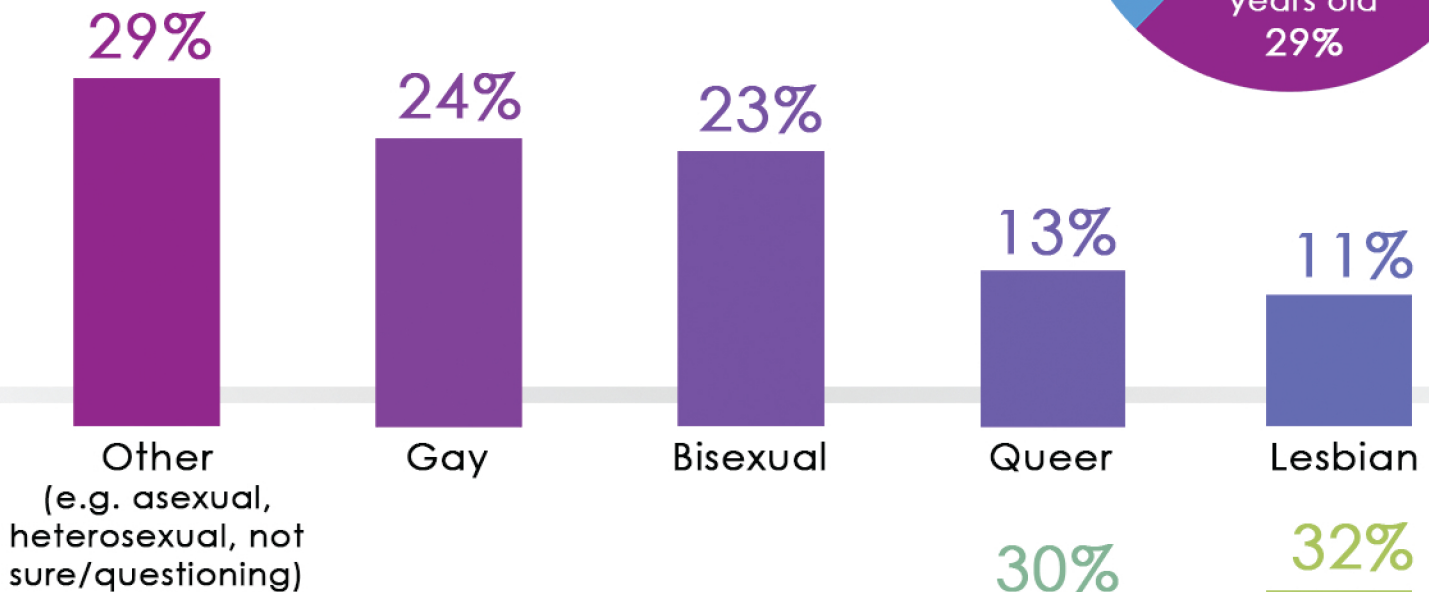
Of 526 participants, 63 were either in high school or had recently graduated.

We report on their experiences below.

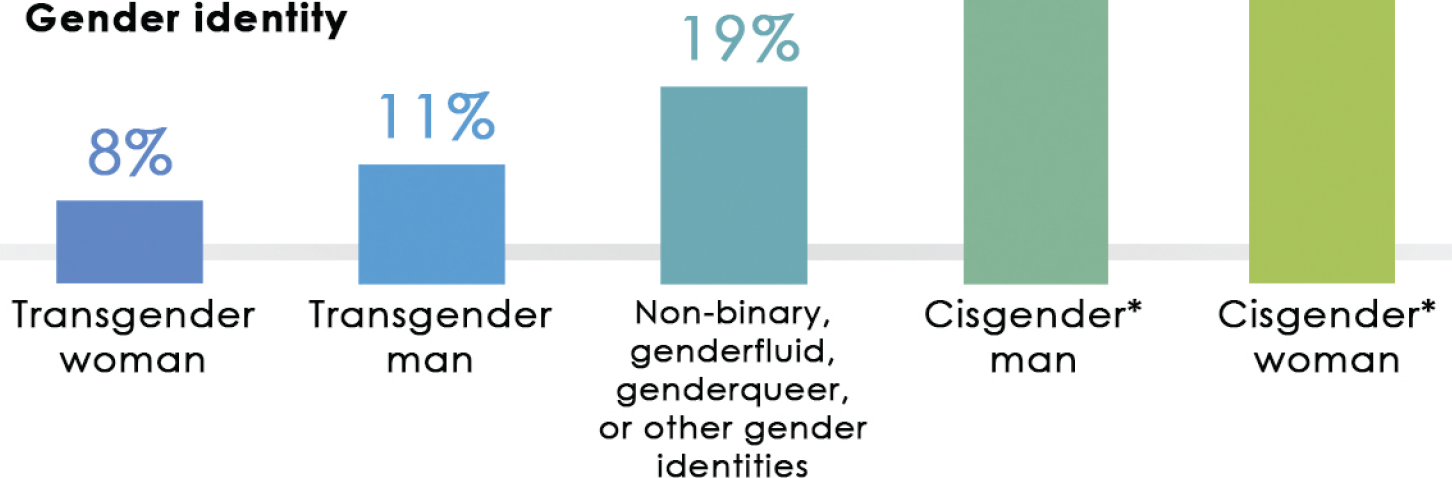
**Age**



**Sexual orientation**



**Gender identity**



\* Cisgender refers to people whose sense of gender identity corresponds with the sex assigned to them at birth.



# A WORD ABOUT TERMS

Below we use trans to refer to transgender participants (including transgender men and women and other non-cisgender identities), LGBTQ to refer to students who identify as cisgender and LGBTQ, and LGBTQ2S to refer to both communities.

## COMING OUT

Trans students are more likely to be out than cisgender LGBTQ students, especially in school, to classmates, and to teachers.



### Recommendation:

Although being out can be linked to more positive student wellbeing, being out in school may also put students at risk for LGBTQ2S bullying. Schools should be cognizant of this and plan accordingly by implementing anti-bullying programming and supporting affected students.

## SAFETY in PUBLIC SPACES

Trans students, compared to LGBTQ students, were consistently more likely to avoid public spaces in the community due to fear of harassment, being read as LGBTQ2S, or being outed.

Schools, gyms, and online spaces were also commonly avoided by LGBTQ2S students.

Although school avoidance was reported, it is unknown if students were skipping school, leaving as soon as school was over, or avoiding it in other ways.

### Recommendation:

Students may feel obligated to use a washroom or changing room that does not align with their gender identity. It is recommended to make gender-neutral, single stall washrooms and changing rooms accessible for all students.

**74%**  
trans students  
avoided  
public washrooms,  
the most commonly  
avoided place.

**45%**  
**LGBQ**  
reported  
low self-esteem



**70%**  
**trans**  
reported  
low self-esteem

## Recommendation:

LGBTQ2S-sensitive counselling services are needed to support LGBTQ2S students who are dealing with low self-esteem and other mental health issues. Initiatives that promote LGBTQ2S student wellbeing should be designed and implemented in consultation with students with their specific needs in mind.

# VICTIMIZATION and DISCRIMINATION

**83%**  
**trans students**

**63%**  
**LGBQ students**

were “made fun of or  
called names”

**88%**  
**trans students**

**90%**  
**LGBQ students**

have “pretended not  
to be LGBTQ2S”

A majority of students reported experiences with silent harassment (e.g., being stared at, being whispered about), verbal harassment, physical intimidation and threats, or sexual harassment.

Overall, trans students were more likely to report experiences of victimization and discrimination than cisgender LGBQ students.

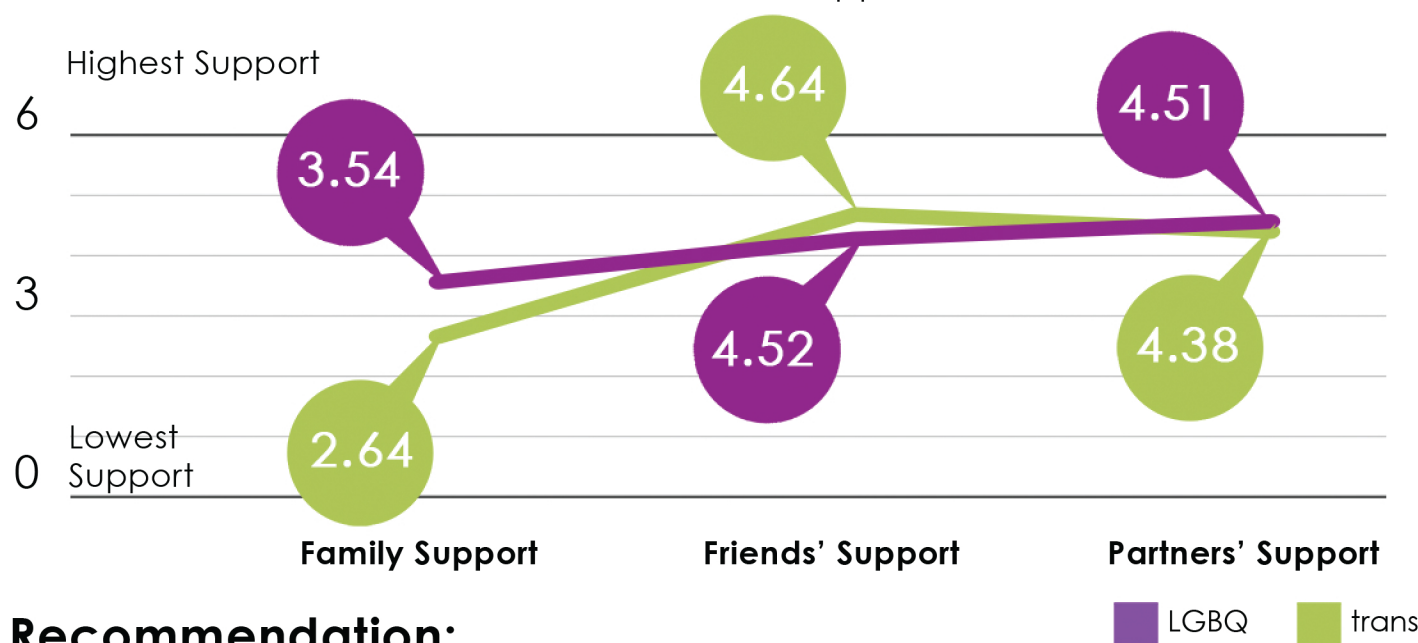
## Recommendation:

Implement a zero-tolerance policy for all forms of discrimination, including silent harassment. It is especially important to address discrimination that targets trans students, including recognizing intentional misgendering (i.e., not using the correct pronouns and/or name) as harassment.



# SOCIAL SUPPORT

Trans students, compared to LGBTQ students, reported lower levels of support from their families and lower levels of overall support.



## Recommendation:

Although support from the school cannot replace support from parents and family, it is important to recognize that support in the school environment can play a key role in the absence of family support.

# INVOLVEMENT in GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCES

**21%** **59%**  
**trans** **LGBTQ**  
**students** **students**  
 reported that their school has a GSA.

Of the participants who had a GSA,

**100%** **47%**  
**trans** **LGBTQ**  
**students** **students**  
 were members.

## Recommendation:

GSAs should be created in all schools. Involving numerous and diverse teachers/administrators in the formation and running of GSAs indicates support for LGBTQ2S students and reduces the burden on individual staff.



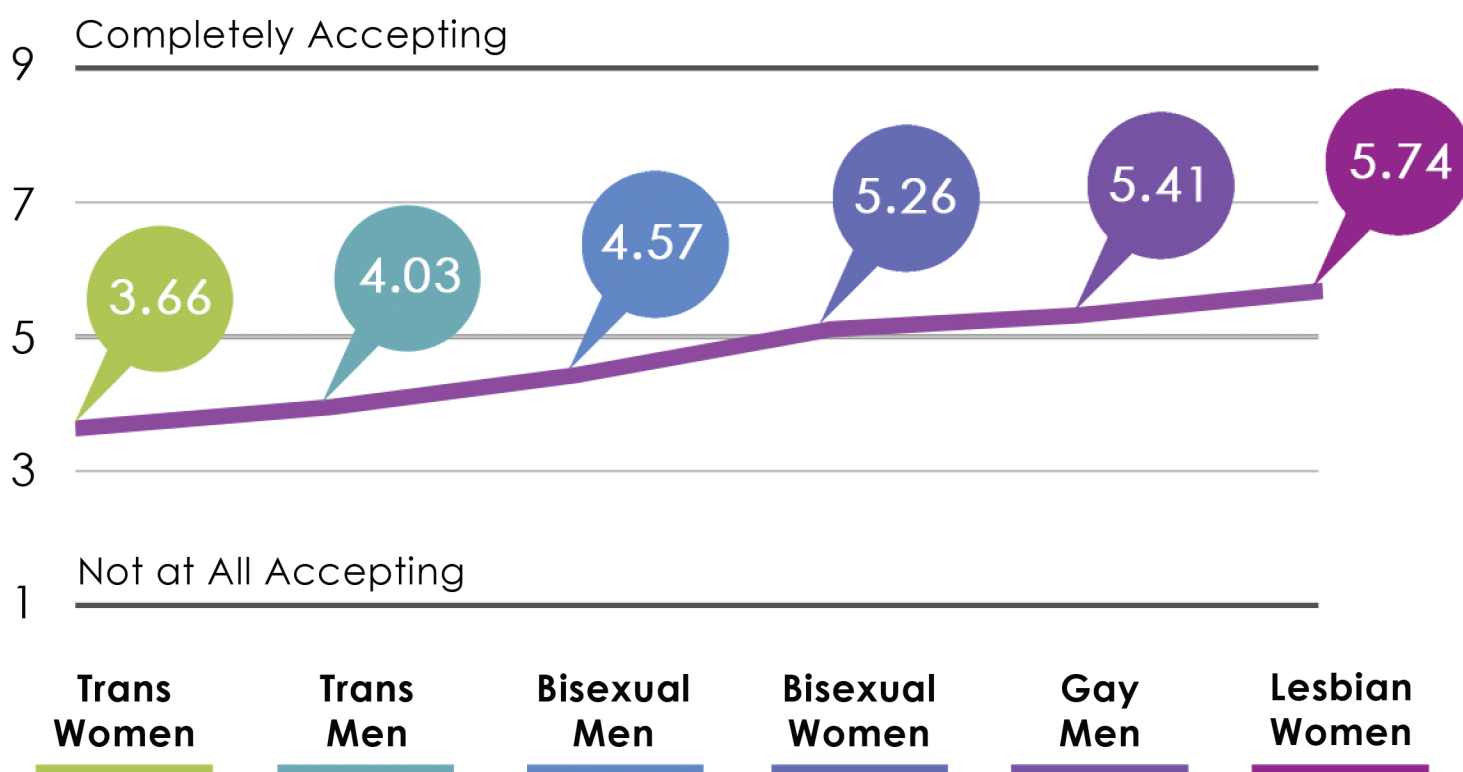
# PERCEIVED ACCEPTANCE

Students generally perceived trans people to be less accepted in Waterloo Region than LGBTQ individuals.

Trans women were perceived as the least accepted group, followed by trans men, and bisexual men.

Even though gay men and lesbian women were perceived as the most accepted groups, they were perceived as only moderately accepted.

## LGBTQ2S+ Students' Average Perception of Acceptance in Waterloo Region



Acceptance of different groups in the LGBTQ2S Community

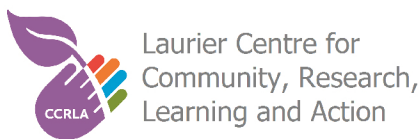
## Recommendation:

Educators should ensure that diverse sexual and gender identities are represented in the classroom by including LGBTQ2S content in the curriculum. Teachers should be prepared to address any negative comments about this content, should any arise.

Further research should be conducted with Two Spirit and racialized students to better understand their experiences, and ways to foster their inclusion and acceptance.



# the OUTLOOK study



Region of Waterloo  
PUBLIC HEALTH AND  
EMERGENCY SERVICES

*Promoting excellence and innovation  
in HIV research and care*

## **Suggested Citation:**

Goldfarb, R., Davis, C., Coulombe, S., Armstrong, E., Calabria-Yaworski, J., Ishak, M., Kocovska, E., Martineau, L., Navaz, E., Woodford, M., Travers, R., & The OutLook Study Team. (2019). *Experiences of LGBTQ2S High School Students in Waterloo Region*. Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario. pp.1-7

## **Acknowledgements:**

This project was supported by a grant from The Ontario HIV Treatment Network and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

We would like to thank the 526 LGBTQ2S individuals in Waterloo Region who gave their time to complete our study. Special thanks to the 63 young people whose experiences are presented in this report.

## **The OutLook Study Team Includes:**

Ruth Cameron (ACCKWA)  
Todd Coleman (WLU)  
Simon Coulombe (WLU)  
Charlie Davis (WLU)  
Rachel Goldfarb (WLU)  
Victor LeFort (ACCKWA)

Eve Nadler (ROWPHE)  
Jeremy Steffler (RCC)  
Robb Travers (WLU)  
Benjamin Warren (ACCKWA)  
Sue Weare (CCRLA)  
Ciann Wilson (WLU)  
Michael Woodford (WLU)

Thanks to Deepa Ahluwalia, Equity and Inclusion Officer, WRDSB, for her feedback on the report and her suggestions.