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Public Attitudes Towards Gender Equality: Results of a Local Survey

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Contents

- I. Introduction 3
- II. Demographics 3
- III. Summary of Key Findings..... 4
- IV. 1 Billion Voices Analysis of the Data 5
- V. Detailed Findings 5
- VI. Methodology 8
- VII. Conclusion 9

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I. Introduction

Although the topic of gender equality is frequently debated in media and schools, anecdotal evidence suggests that discussions of sexism in Australia can elicit controversy. The public's attitude towards this issue can vary greatly on topics such as the wage gap, quotas and feminists. This variety of opinion creates a complex and multifaceted issue with no clear solution.

The 1 Billion Voices Project aims to understand the public's attitudes towards these topics in hopes of starting a truthful conversation and creating more informed solutions.

High school aged students were selected as the target group for this study because their attitudes will shape the future culture in Australia. The local survey for The 1 Billion Voices Project was conducted among 173 teenagers from Brisbane, Australia.

This report analyses the data collected in the local survey in order to gain an understanding of the attitudes of young people towards topical issues surrounding gender equality.

II. Demographics

The demographics of the 173 survey respondents is as follows:

<u>Gender:</u> Female: 56.2% Male: 34.3% Other: 9.5%	<u>Age:</u> 13-18 years old: 78.7% 19 and above: 16.8%	<u>School:</u> School 1: 66% Other: 37%
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III. Summary of Key Findings

1. The prevalence and importance of gender inequality in Australia is widely disagreed upon.

The opinion of the survey respondents varied greatly as to the prevalence and importance of gender inequality in modern day Australia. While just over 50% of those answering acknowledged gender inequality is somewhat of an issue in Australia, 48% did not believe gender inequality was an issue. However, 84% of respondents admitted to witnessing sexism. Additionally, nearly 60% believe that at least in some cases, women are paid less than men. From these findings, it could be concluded that although many people believe gender inequality is present within our society, it is not seen as an important issue.

2. The majority of the survey respondents disagree with many conventional ways of combatting sexism.

Positive discrimination, such as scholarships for women and quotas in the workforce, are often used to help encourage women and achieve equality. However, both methods were not supported by the majority of those surveyed. 55% of respondents believed positive discrimination was sexist and 65% disagreed with the use of quotas.

3. Due to political correctness and recent forms of activism, the survey respondents reported that in some cases, they could not express their point of view on gender equality.

68% of respondents had experienced the inability to express their views, with 60% of these being men. This could be because many disagreed with the conventional and politically correct beliefs about gender equality however felt that they could not express their point of view with fears that they would appear sexist.

4. Of those who report experiencing sexism, 63% were women.

Contrary to the popular belief, that women experience sexism much more commonly than men, the survey revealed that both parties reported experiencing sexism. Women were only marginally the majority, therefore showing that although women do report experiencing sexism more often, a large number of men also experienced sexism.

5. The perception of 'feminists' is varied.

The respondents had varied responses to feminists and their actions. The responses were widely spread; hence the average fell in the middle at indifferent. However, 13.5% of respondents had a strongly negative perception while only 8.4% had a strongly positive.

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IV. 1 Billion Voices Analysis of the Data

The wide spread of opinions of survey respondents highlights the lack of clarity surrounding the truth about gender equality. Additionally, the small sample size could indicate that if this was extrapolated to the wider public, a greater variety of opinions would predictably be present due to the larger demographic.

The issue identified from these survey results is that not all teenagers agree that gender inequality is a pressing issue with modern Australia. Although the majority admitted sexism was present, many did not go on to believe this was a prevalent issue. This wide spread of value placed on the issue gives insight into one of the reasons there could be reported tension surrounding the fight for change.

Furthermore, many of the respondents believed that the current way of combatting sexism is ineffective. With such a large majority of the respondents disagreeing with the use of positive discrimination and quotas, it becomes clear why there is a seemingly bad reputation surrounding actions that support gender equality.

Currently, there is no widespread effort to eradicate gender inequality and hence, struggles will surface as parties clash on opinions. This survey sheds a light on the need for a new way of combatting inequality that is involved less with the segregation of men and women and creates a solution that removes the social separation of these genders.

V. Detailed Findings

Figure 1: survey responses to the question “To what extent is gender inequality an issue in today's Australian society?”

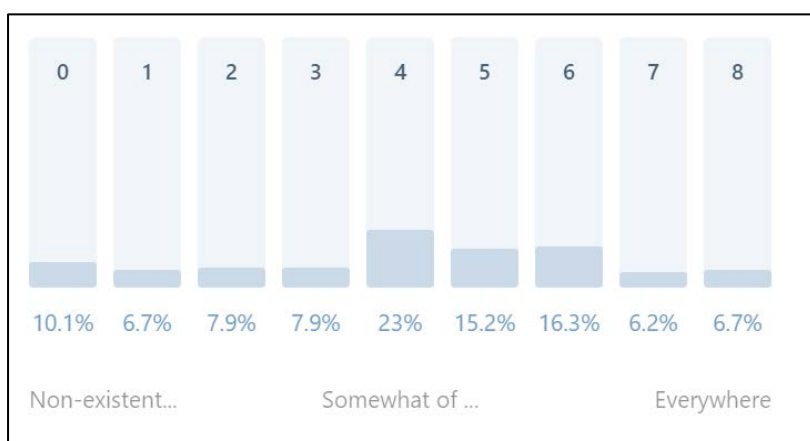


Figure 1 displays the wide spread of results with nearly one quarter believing gender inequality is only somewhat of an issue in Australia. This could indicate their lack of previous consideration for the issue or convey a lack of opinion held by many. At the extremities, more people believed gender inequality was non-existent as opposed to the number of people who believed it was everywhere.

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Figure 2: survey responses to the question “Have you ever seen sexism?”

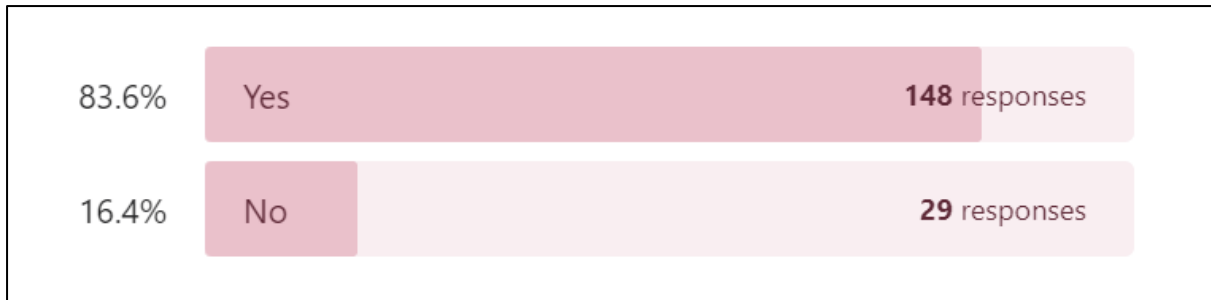


Figure 2 shows that 83.6% of respondents admitted to witnessing sexism. This demonstrates that the wide majority of public believe sexism is present.

Figure 3: survey responses to the question “Do you think there is a wage gap in Australia between men and women?”



Figure 3 shows the public’s notion of the wage gap. Although responses varied, when asked about the wage gap in Australia, just under 20% believed there was not a wage gap and another 20% believed there was only a wage gap on average however not within the same position. Therefore, nearly 60% believe that at least in some cases, women were paid less than men.

Figure 4: survey responses to the question “Do you think positive descrimination will help achieve equality?”



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Figure 4 shows that over half of the respondents believed that positive discrimination, (e.g. scholarships and camps designed only for girls) were sexist and would not help achieve equality. While only 21.3% saw it as being necessary.

Figure 5: survey responses to the question “Do you think quotas in the workforce will help achieve equality?”

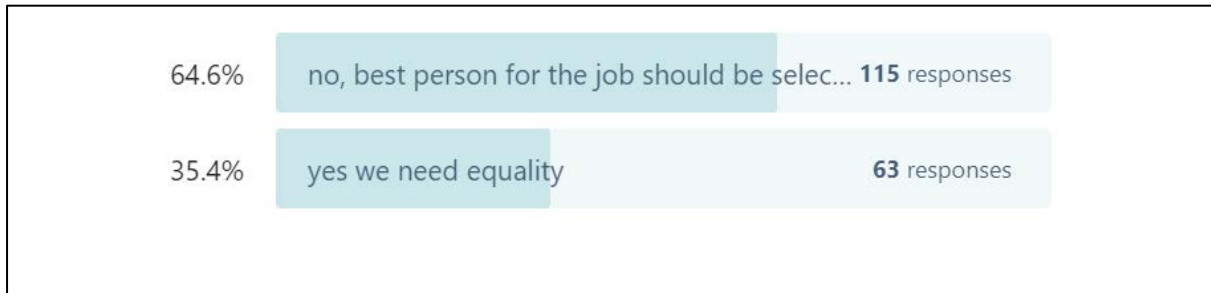


Figure 5 shows that 64.6% of those asked disagreed with the idea of quotas in the workforce. However, 35.4% believe it was beneficial for reaching equality. This demonstrates the range of opinions and beliefs among the respondents.

Figure 6: survey responses to the question “Have you ever felt that you couldn’t express your views about gender equality because it wasn’t politically correct?”

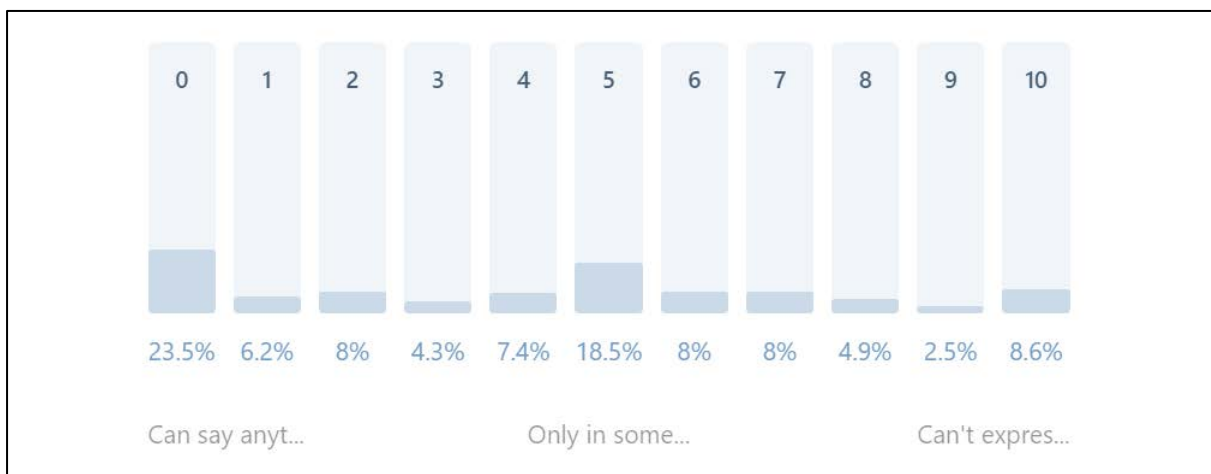


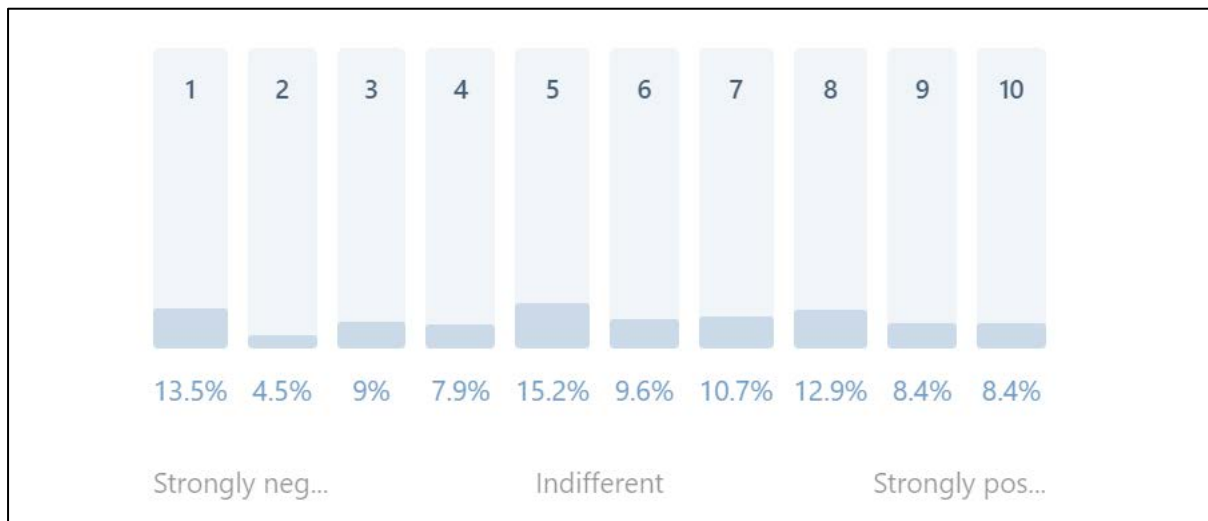
Figure 6 shows just over 50% stating that they have felt that they could not express their views about gender equality in some instances. 60% of male respondents claimed they felt restricted in what they could say in some instances, whereas only 40% of females felt that they were limited.

However, nearly a quarter of respondents stated that they could say anything. Conclusively, there is a wide spread of opinions as to the extent their views on gender equality could be expressed.

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Figure 7: survey responses to the question “How do you perceive feminists and their actions?”



As shown in figure 7, at the extremities, 13.5% of respondents had a strongly negative perception while only 8.4% had a strongly positive. However overall, no conclusion could be drawn about the majority of the public’s perception as the results were widely spread.

VI. Methodology

This survey was created and distributed online. The reliance on computers to complete the survey produced bias in the demographic of teenagers surveyed. High school students from 4 schools in Brisbane, mostly in grade 10 and above, completed the survey. However, 66% of responses came from one school, hence creating a skew in the opinions presented. A small number of adults also completed the survey however their point of view is underrepresented in the results.

As only 178 people completed the survey, the results are not representative of the greater public in Australia.

When analysing the data, the decision was made to minimise the comparison of men and women’s responses. The rationale behind this was to avoid distinguishing between the genders’ opinions, as this perpetuates the assumption that they have different points of view. Fighting gender inequality must involve all people and requires a solution that aims to create an equal society. Therefore, it was decided to analyse the data as a whole population in most instances.

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VII. Conclusion

This survey, conducted by the 1 Billion Voices Project, collected data on the opinions of teenagers in Brisbane, Australia, surrounding many controversial topics of gender equality.

The results of this local survey highlighted the lack of consistency of opinion of teenagers surrounding gender equality. This could shed a light on one of the reasons tensions arise in the discussion of gender equality.

The results conclusively showed that sexism is present, however the opinion of the importance of the issue varied widely. The majority of respondents disagreed with the conventional ways of combatting it such as quotas and positive discrimination.

Conclusions drawn from this data can help shape the future fight for gender equality.