

LGBT youth know to look 'straight' ahead

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World-leading research on policing and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) young people has found that many are still experiencing harassment from police, despite sexuality and gender diversity training. The findings have been published in the inaugural issue of *The International Journal for Crime and Justice*.

Dr Angela Dwyer, from QUT's new Crime and Justice Research Centre, wrote "Policing Visible Sexual/Gender Diversity as a Program of Governance" and describes how the visibility of mild [harassment](#) by police of LGBT young people "demonstrates to them and to the public that [public spaces](#) are, and should remain, heterosexual spaces".

The journal's release follows the official opening of the Crime and Justice Research Centre at QUT late last year. The centre brings together distinguished international researchers with an emphasis on applied research that focuses on common challenges confronting governments and criminal justice systems around the world.

Dr Dwyer conducted in-depth interviews with 35 LGBT young people who talked about how they regulated their gender diverse behaviour after seeing how other LGBT young people were treated by some police in public places.

"They reported incidents such as seeing a transgender person, who identified as female, embarrassed when police pulled her wig off. Another reported seeing police reprimand a young transgender person who had retaliated against taunting from others on a train and not those

who were doing the harassment - this made him wonder whether those who are gender diverse could expect help from police in times of distress," Dr Dwyer said.

"LGBT young people also said if they expressed their gender diversity in public they thought they were stopped and searched more than if they were looking 'straight'.

"They are stopped by police and questioned about where they have been in the last half an hour and/or asked to empty their pockets."

Dr Dwyer said it was only some officers who engaged in these forms of harassment.

"Senior police were horrified when I told them of these reports. They said it was not acceptable for police officers to stop same-sex couples and ask them to stop holding hands," she said.

"The problem is compounded for LGBT people because they are often kicked out of home and are more likely to be homeless than other young people and so are more visible in public places.

"Police have set up liaison services between LGBT young people and [police](#) but these are not being used. I am conducting research in Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia to find out why."

Dr Dwyer said her article in the *International Crime and Research Journal* was also aimed at changing the ways LGBT people are talked about.

"At the moment there is a dichotomy that they are at-risk and vulnerable or that they are risky and dangerous. I am hoping my article will show there can be a range of positive and negative outcomes for LGBT [young](#)

[people.](#)"

Crime and Justice Research Centre director Professor Belinda Carpenter said the new centre would take an important role in highlighting the lack of criminal justice for many marginalised groups by fostering research, such as Dr Dwyer's, to occur independently of government and industry.

"Often such research is critical of government policies or industry initiatives but this research is also crucial to [justice](#) for the wider society," Professor Carpenter said.

"Research on contentious issues such as carbon trading fraud, violence in mining communities, and sex trafficking legislation would not occur without university centres providing the space for researchers to put their ideas forward without fear."

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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