



AUSTRALIAN GENDER
EQUALITY COUNCIL
working for balance

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Australian Gender Equality Council releases world-first research on relationship between gender differences in adolescent confidence

Australian Gender Equality Council (AGEC) has released its inaugural report, a world-first research piece setting out the facts with regards to gender differences in adolescent children. Titled 'Hands Up for Gender Equality: A Major Study into Confidence and Career Intentions of Adolescent Girls and Boys', the research was undertaken in a bid to dispel common myths about differences in the confidence of adolescent boys and girls.

Dr Terry Fitzsimmons, AGECE's Managing Director, led the research together with Professor Victor Callan and Dr Miriam Yates of the University of Queensland Business School. The project was inspired by findings of a 2011 study into the lack of female CEOs of listed public companies in Australia. That research highlighted key differences between men and women in the areas of self-efficacy, leadership development pathways and the relative lack of women entering some STEM careers. *Hands Up* was designed to shed further light upon factors that shaped gender differential experiences had in high school years, and how they subsequently impact gender disparity in certain industries and senior leadership roles in particular.

The research was conducted among 10,000 girls and boys in high matriculation single sex schools in Queensland. These types of schools were selected as they produce significantly more university applicants and are actively working to improve leadership, self-efficacy and the career outcomes of the student bodies. Additionally, girl's schools might potentially shield girls from some of the negative structural effects identified as reducing women's confidence in the workplace. In designing the study, the project team met individually with the principals and deputy principals of each school involved in the research, as well as receiving the support of the Alliance of Girls Schools Australasia in testing the studies protocols and assumptions.

The key findings of the research showed:

Self-confidence: There was no difference between confidence levels of girls and boys at any age

Activity Predictors: The activities which predict self-confidence are: i) travel ii) team sport iii) participation in leadership roles and leadership development. Conversely, computer gaming and social media usage were identified as the greatest detractors from self-confidence development

Unsupervised Activities: Activities which do not have direct adult oversight (although they may have a role in framing them) are a significantly greater source of self-confidence

Study: Girls spend more time per week studying than boys at all ages.

Age: Levels of self-confidence decline for both girls and boys as they get older

Chores: Boys are more likely to engage in outdoor chores. Similar findings emerged from the Westpac 'Kids and Money' 2016 report. When combined, it would seem to indicate that outdoor chores are more valued by parents in terms of remuneration

Part-time jobs: Those with part-time jobs had greater levels of self-confidence than those without

Travel: Travel – particularly intra-state and inter-state – has a great impact on self-confidence.

Participation: Students who held a leadership role, past or present, enjoyed significantly higher social efficacy compared to those who had not

Work desires: The study found girls and boys listed their reasons for wanting to work identically, by order and by proportion. The one critical exception was where girls ranked the need to help others as fourth in their reasons for wanting to work whereas this ranked much lower for boys.

Priorities: The research found a significant difference by gender in preferences for activities related to particular career domains and therefore the career domains themselves

Awareness: Boys had a greater and earlier understanding of their mother's and particularly their father's occupations and qualifications.

Privilege: Boys are privileged with 1.5 times the amount of campus space compared to girls, and 3 times the amount of outdoor play area compared to girls.

Dr Fitzsimmons commented “Hands Up puts to bed once and for all the ubiquitous myth that adolescent boys are more confident than adolescent girls. The research also clearly demonstrates that boys and girls confidence levels are influenced similarly, to the same extent, by the same activities such as travel, sport, part-time jobs and leadership roles. However, the study also revealed some fascinating insights, particularly that boys are more likely to perform outdoor chores, for which they are compensated better than girls, who tend to perform indoor chores. Traditional societal roles still seem to be being shaped in childhood as evidenced by boys greater awareness of parental career choices, and the desire to help others by girls as a top five career motivator. However, one of the more surprising discoveries for the research team was that boys are afforded at least 300% more play-space compared to the girls’ in the top ten boys and girls schools. This is an artefact of over 100 years ago, when these schools were established. However today, such a disparity seems completely illogical.”

AGEC Chair, Victoria Weekes, commented “This research is a watershed moment in understanding the roots of gender inequality. Clearly, when adolescent boys and girls have the same confidence levels, and are influenced equally by the same activities, then logic dictates there should be no impact on a girls career path choice, and subsequent entry into leadership roles or into STEM careers. However, with the imbalance shown in the study’s findings on chores and physical space, this suggests that culture is to blame. Subconsciously, we are telling girls to stay inside – be compensated less – and also telling them to take up less physical space as they study and play. We cannot expect to reach gender equality when we adopt this stance for 51% of the population.”

Hands Up makes a number of recommendations for schools and parents, all contained in the full report available at www.agec.org.au. AGECE will be presenting its research report findings to the various State Ministers for Education as well as distributing it to schools via the Alliance of Girls Schools Australasia.

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For more information, please contact:

Pascale Helyar-Moray: 0458 500 613 media@agec.org.au

ABOUT AGECE

AGECE is Australia’s first independent, national body dedicated to driving gender equality. It has a member network representing over 500,000 women and girls, all of whom seek the same rights and opportunities when it comes to pay, superannuation and treatment in the workplace and society.

AGECE has the following four driving principles:

1. To act as an authoritative and independent voice for gender equality in Australia
2. To advocate for and raise awareness of gender equality in Australia
3. To develop research driven policy in the area of gender equality in Australia
4. To raise awareness of the impact upon gender equality of policy and legislation