

# explores

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8 November - 21 November 2006

## Who chooses queer?



So how many people DO describe themselves as queer? Who prefers queer and who doesn't?

In February 2006 the GAPSS project approached men in Auckland to anonymously take part in a self-completed sex survey. Of the 1228 men from all ages, ethnicities and backgrounds, 85.0% ticked their identity as "gay/homosexual", 9.1% as "bisexual", 2.4% as "queer", 1.1% as "takataapui", 0.6% as "heterosexual" and 0.4% as "fa'afafine".

When we launched the same survey nationwide on Internet dating sites, 58.0% of the 2141 male participants identified as gay/homosexual, a third (32.7%) as bisexual, 3.7% as heterosexual, 1.9% as queer, 1.1% as takataapui, and 0.4% as fa'afafine. Bisexual is therefore a much more common identity among men who are online, but few males either online or offline chose queer.

These low results for queer are consistent with those reported from the recent Lavender Islands study by Mark Henrickson, in which around 5% of the 2276 men and women identified in this way.

Asking people for their preferred identity is one thing, but what about those who accept queer as a subsidiary identity? In the 1996 Male Call survey, participants were invited to state as many identities as they liked. A much higher proportion included queer (39.2%) using this format.

The larger sample of "queer" respondents in that dataset allows us to examine differences between those who accepted queer and those who didn't. Interestingly, queer was accepted most by males who were European/Pakeha, who were aged 25-39, who had a university degree, who lived in the main cities, or who were more involved in the "gay community".

These data don't explain why men adhere to different identities, how they might change over the lifespan, are activated in different contexts or how personal negotiations between ethnic and sexual identities are resolved. They don't explore gender, or biological sex, or personal sexual fetishes.

However, the advantage of engaging with large scale survey data is that they provide a broader window into the lives of people who are outside one's own personal, professional or play circles. For males, these data question the characterisation of queer as an identity preferred by the new generation, the dispossessed or diverse. In fact, males who were under 25, who weren't Pakeha, or who had less formal education were least likely to accept queer.

"Queer" of course can be more than a personal identity brand. Some use it as shorthand; others relate it to socio-political aspirations. A valid discussion includes why it is used, whether it achieves these goals, for whom it does so and who it excludes. One hopes that these discussions can be conducted with respect, without retribution or belittling language.

Peter Saxton