MALE CALL / WAEA MAI TANE MA

A study of New Zealand men who have sex with men

Report one: methodology and demographic characteristics

A research project of the New Zealand AIDS Foundation funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand.
MALE CALL
Waea Mai, Tane Ma

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Methodology and Demographic Characteristics

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# Methodology and Demographic Characteristics

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MALE CALL/WAEA MAI, TANE MA
Report No. 1: Methodology and Demographics

Section I: Introduction and Methodology

Male Call/Waea Mai, Tane Ma was the first nationwide survey of men who have sex with men in New Zealand.¹ The Male Call survey was undertaken because at that time no large-scale data on men who have sex with men (msm) had been collected in New Zealand. While a number of other groups in New Zealand are affected by HIV, the virus is most significantly present in the group of msm, who account for over 80% of those with AIDS.² At present, as there is no vaccine or cure for HIV infection, behaviour change remains the only strategy available to manage the HIV epidemic. In order to develop effective and efficient HIV prevention programmes, there has been a recognition of the need for up-to-date, accurate data on the socio-sexual characteristics of msm. Thus the aims of Male Call were to:

- describe men who have sex with men's HIV/AIDS knowledge and their sexual practices with a special focus on the adoption of safer strategies;
- examine the ways in which HIV/AIDS knowledge and safe sexual practice are related to a number of important demographic and contextual variables;
- provide baseline data on the sexual behaviour of men who have sex with men which can be used to assist in the planning and development of HIV prevention programmes; and
- develop a core set of baseline questions which could be used in future surveys of men who have sex with men.

Male Call was extremely successful in recruiting msm to take part in the survey, and 1852 men completed the questionnaire.

¹ The term 'men who have sex with men' (msm) refers solely to sexual practice. It is not necessarily indicative of sexual identity, sexual orientation or sexual attraction. The only criterion for eligibility to take part in the Male Call survey was that the respondent must have had sex with a man in the past five years.
² The latest AIDS New Zealand figure to 30 June 1997 is 81.8% (AIDS Epidemiology Group 1997).
Surveying Men who have Sex with Men

Surveys of male sexual behaviour began with Kinsey's work in 1948 as part of the growth of the empirical social sciences. However, before the AIDS epidemic there were few other surveys which examined both sexual identity and sexual practices and of men who have sex with men, particularly those who do not participate in gay community activities or who do not identify as homosexual.\(^3\)

No data, of course, exists on the characteristics of the total population of "men who have sex with men" because they cannot be identified by anything other than their sexual practices which are usually carried out in private. Thus one of the biggest difficulties facing researchers is the identification and selection of respondents. Surveys of men who have sex with men tend to attract those men who both identify as gay or homosexual, and who are involved in the gay community. However, many men who have sex with men do not identify as gay or as members of the gay community and may lead 'heterosexual' lives in most respects.

Since the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, a substantial number of large-scale quantitative studies of the sexual activities of men who have sex with men have been carried out overseas (see for example Ekstrand and Coates 1990; Myers et al. 1993; Weatherburn, Hunt and Davies 1990). Australia has been in the forefront of AIDS research. For example, in 1989 the Social Aspects of the Prevention of AIDS (SAPA) study examined gay community attachment, sexual practices, social contexts and HIV avoidance. In 1992 the Australian National Centre in HIV Social Research carried out the first Project Male Call survey, using an advertising campaign to encourage men who have sex with men to ring an 0800 telephone number and talk in detail about their sexual identity, sexual practices and safe sex strategies (Kippax et al. 1994). This study has formed the basis of the New Zealand Male Call project.

HIV and AIDS bring to social research a particular set of methodological problems. Many of the practices which put men who have sex with men at risk of HIV infection are covert, stigmatised, illegal (in the case of injecting drugs) and socially proscribed. HIV has brought an extra burden of opprobrium into gay and bisexual men's lives because, in the minds of some people at least, the virus is associated with deviant and promiscuous

\(^3\) Examples of pre-AIDS research on male to male sexual activity include Gagnon and Simon 1977; Bell and Weinberg 1978; D'Emilio 1983; Harry and de Vall 1978; Hooker 1965; Humphreys 1970; Jay and Young 1979.
sexualities. Many men also fear that research will be used as a tool of identification and surveillance. While researchers are particularly concerned about issues of reliability and validity (see also McQueen 1992; Coates et al. 1988; Sudman and Kalton 1986), because of the issues discussed above, "strategies are often necessary which fall short of strict statistical acceptability" (Coxon and Carballo 1989:195).

A brief history of demographic accounts of msm in New Zealand
A hostile social climate in the past has meant that there has not been a lengthy history of studies on msm, not just in New Zealand but also internationally. Legislation that criminalised same-sex sexual activity had encouraged studies which treated homosexuality as an individual pathology. The arrival of the AIDS epidemic in the United States in the early eighties, and the subsequent obsession of the US media and the medical authorities to identify and blame "at-risk groups", compounded the negative construction of images of the population of msm. Quite apart from branding msm as being "sad, mad and bad" - and now a vector of disease - the overriding demographic impression from these portrayals was that msm were white, middle-class and well educated (Altman, 1986). McNab notes that this image, which largely reflected the demographic description of the highly visible American gay activists rather than the total msm population, was imported into New Zealand a short while later (1993:203-4).

In New Zealand, few studies of msm that include demographic analysis have been conducted. While academic research on the lives of msm increased when the AIDS epidemic reached this country (Worth 1996) and after sex between men was decriminalised in 1986, these studies generally incorporated a small number of demographic variables. For example, most of these studies do report some demographic concentration in various age or ethnic groups. But these findings are based on "convenience" sampling - carried out amongst sauna clientele for example - and can not be held as representative of the range of msm throughout New Zealand. Furthermore, while a casual glance at any one of the data sets may give the impression of a demographic bias, the total sample from the combined surveys (e.g., Peperell 1983; Parkinson 1985; Rosser 1989; Horsley 1994) reveals a population that is much more heterogeneous and evenly distributed.

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4 This is perhaps explained by noting the balancing act required of researchers who investigate stigmatised behaviour (see Bell and Weinberg 1978) - where conflict exists between the demands of generating useful information on the one hand, and creating a sense of absolute anonymity on the other.
Another type of survey of men who have sex with men in New Zealand has been inspired by market research. The stereotype of gay men as highly educated and with high levels of disposable income has excited advertisers in the United States hunting for under-exposed niche markets, and this interest has recently filtered through to New Zealand. A 1993 readership poll of the national gay and lesbian newspaper *Man to Man* (now *express*) confirmed many of these assumptions. Amongst other things, it showed that *Man to Man* readers earned 55% more than the national average, were more likely to be in paid employment, and had higher levels of tertiary education (AGB McNair 1993). Yet again, most of these figures are not from diverse samples, and have been presented in ways that control their interpretation.

An awareness of the constraints surrounding each of these types of research is important, since research data is often used to support a number of both pro-gay and anti-gay agendas. For example, results from market research highlighting the economic power of some gay readerships have been employed by gay community leaders in attempts to secure better treatment in the marketplace. As claimed in an recent article, “marketing holds within it the seeds of recognition and empowerment through diversity” (Costa 1996:xviii). Yet the image of gay men as a high spending niche market can also lead to assumptions that all gay men (and, by inference, all MSM) share these characteristics. Consequently, people have claimed that MSM have no right to minority status since they do not exhibit all of the characteristics of a disadvantaged population. Such comments cast MSM into frames of privilege, imply that MSM do not suffer discrimination, and remove the responsibility for MSM’s health status away from society. This serves to reinforce negative public attitudes and antagonises political drives for equality, at a time when the achievement of better health status of MSM is crucial (Menn 1994; WHO 1998).
The Male Call/Waea Mai, Tane Ma Experience

Generating a Sample
Male Call faced a number of practical difficulties in wanting to investigate the sexual practices of men who have sex with men in the midst of the HIV epidemic. The major problem was generating a sample at all, given that men had to talk to a stranger about the most intimate aspects of their lives. Because of the difficulties of accessing the total population of MSM, Male Call had to come up with a method of collecting information that was confidential but attracted a large number of participants.

Telephone surveys present a number of advantages when surveying hard to access populations. Boulton (1994) argues that people are willing to answer questions about sensitive issues on the telephone as long as they can be assured of confidentiality (see also McQueen 1999). Boulton states, "[t]he fact that socially stigmatised behaviour is reported by telephone interviews also suggests that this form of contact facilitates openness and honesty in responses" (1994:10).

In 1991, a nationwide general population sex survey (see Davis et al. 1993) used random digit dialing to access a non-probability sample of the population. However, Male Call was the first telephone survey of sexual practice in New Zealand to use an 0800 phone number. The Male Call 0800 number allowed men to call in at no cost to themselves. It also obviated the intrusiveness that is often associated with the random digit dialling method used in general population surveys, and therefore the threat of being telephoned by a complete stranger. The subjects had a sense of control over the interview because the interviewers did not know who they were or the number from which they were calling. They could also call at a time which suited them, and when they would not be interrupted. The respondents could also, at any time, terminate the call.

The Questionnaire
The questionnaire was developed from the Australian Project Male Call survey (see Kippax et al. 1994). However, there are many cultural differences between Australia and New Zealand, and we decided that both the content and the form of the questionnaire needed to be thoroughly pre-tested. This was done in a pilot project (see Worth et al. 1995) which obtained feedback from the gay community and sexual health

5 Copies of the questionnaire are available on request from the New Zealand AIDS Foundation.
professionals. Before pilot testing began we added a number of questions to make the survey more relevant to the New Zealand context. We tested the revised questionnaire on thirty volunteers using the telephone.

On advice received during pilot testing, we made substantial changes to the questionnaire which increased its reliability and validity. We added some new questions on sexual attachment, sexual identity, and data about the respondents' HIV antibody testing history, and revised any inappropriately worded questions. This consisted primarily of pairing colloquial sexual expressions and medical terminology. For example, the term 'fucking' was matched with 'anal intercourse'. Biased and inappropriate response options were altered, and options were improved and standardised across the instrument. The questionnaire was better integrated by grouping together related questions. Several questions were removed because it was felt the questionnaire was becoming too long (in the event, it took 40 minutes on average), although the engaging nature of the subject material made the length less important than would otherwise have been the case.

**Sample Size**

It is impossible to enumerate the total number of men who have sex with men, because MSM are solely distinguished by male to male sexual practices (see Bartos 1993; Dowsett 1992). Various estimates have been made over the years from 10% (Kinsey 1948) to 2.3% (Davis et al. 1996). The likely lower bound figure is 4-6% of the total male population (see Brinson et al. 1995; Sell, Wells and Wypij 1995; Spira et al. 1992; Johnson et al. 1992). The aim of Male Call was to access a sufficient number and diversity of these men to be able to draw an accurate picture of their lives.

We were confident that, given other surveys on homosexual men in New Zealand (see Aspin et al. 1994), and the 7500 phone calls taken by the Australian Male Call study, that we would achieve a sample size of 1500. However, we were prepared to accept a minimum of 850 responses which would have enabled us to detect differences between groups. We found the best way to determine confidence in our data was to take an example from the Australian Male Call survey.

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6 Davis's claim is for male to male sex 'ever'.
7 While Male Call Australia recorded 7,500 phone calls they only completed 2583 interviews. This was due to problems with the phone lines, in particular insufficient lines for the number of callers (see Kippax et al 1994:3).
One of the main aims of the study was to investigate the ways in which knowledge and safe sexual practices are related to a number of demographic and contextual variables. We concluded that a sample size of 1500 would enable us to detect those differences between variables.

Recruitment of the Sample

The Recruitment Strategy was at the heart of the success of Male Call. The target population of the survey was all men in New Zealand who have sex with men. Three staff were hired specifically to undertake recruitment of subjects. In order to attract a wide range of respondents these workers liaised with gay and bisexual community groups and individuals, with an emphasis on those men outside the major centres. The groups and individuals became ‘key contacts’ and helped us in a variety of ways, such as the distribution of advertising materials, and by holding meetings about the survey in their communities. They were actively involved in recruiting volunteers to ring the Male Call telephone lines. Although Male Call utilised as many different media as possible, we found that personal contact from Male Call Recruitment Officers who visited community groups was a key part of the recruitment strategy.

In order to make recruitment easier, the target population was divided into three groups:

- men who identify as gay, homosexual and bisexual and who are attached to the gay community,
- men who identify as gay and homosexual, but are not attached to the gay community,
- men who have sex with men, but who do not identify as gay or homosexual and who are not attached to the gay community.

Targets were also set for different regions and ethnic groups in order to recruit as diverse a range of men as possible. Maori MSM in particular were targeted, with key Maori contacts such as health groups, community groups, and radio and television programmes included in the recruitment process. A high degree of support was engendered for Male Call through these channels, and this was felt to be a highly successful aspect of the whole campaign.
Media

While we had thought that we would use a wide variety of styles and types of advertisements in order to attract different target groups, in the end we chose a generic “in your face” advertising image using bold lettering and fluorescent colours. Some of the advertising was in Maori.

Both rural and non-gay identified men were specifically targeted through mainstream, local and community press advertisements as most are infrequent readers of gay publications. Radio advertisements were used to target Pacific Island and Maori men who have sex with men. The letter were also contacted through community magazines and newspapers. Fliers in video distributors’ catalogues (which were particularly successful in the Australian project) were used to target men who do not identify as gay or homosexual and who are not attached to the gay community.

The Male Call launch was held on Friday June 3rd, 1996 at lunchtime. It was covered live by TV1 Midday news programme and again on the 6pm One Network News and the 10.15pm Tonight show that evening. The ACNielsen McNair ratings for Midday were 48,040 viewers, for the 6pm Network News 576,480 and for the Tonight show at 10.15pm 192,160.

Other gay and mainstream media were used extensively through general press releases on the day the lines opened. While the launch caused a phone queuing problem for the first day, the coverage to men not usually canvassed by gay press was such that it was completely worthwhile.8

Sources of Bias in Male Call

The validity of the Male Call data was determined both internally and externally. There were a number of possible confounding biases such as hoax calls, men participating numerous times, and the possibility that certain types of men would take part for personal reasons. During Male Call there were a large number of hoax calls, but these individuals usually hung up as soon as the phone was answered. Those hoax callers that stayed on the line quickly became uncomfortable and terminated the interview before it had progressed very far.

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8 For fuller details of the media programme for Male Call see our Male Call Recruitment Campaign Evaluation Report (New Zealand AIDS Foundation 1996).
There were very few suspected completed hoax interviews, and internal inconsistencies in answers made these calls obvious. Any such questionnaires were discarded. Considered overall, given the broad recruitment strategy and advertising plan there was no single reason for taking part in the survey other than being a man who had sex with other men, and therefore many potential design biases were minimised.

Of course, the self-selection of Male Call respondents means that the sample is not a random one. The sometimes covert nature of the target group and the fact that its only signifying feature is its sexual practices also makes it difficult to make broad claims about the representativeness of the sample. However, as we will show, this method of recruitment generated a far broader sample demographically than any previous survey of men who have sex with men in New Zealand. This method of recruitment has also been recognised as particularly suitable for surveying men who have sex with men in Australia and Great Britain (Kippax et al. 1994; Ford Hickson, letter to author 1995).

In any case, none of these potential difficulties can negate the major benefits to be gained from investigating the range and incidence of male homosexual practices. The results are extremely important because they provide a large body of up-to-date information on this group which are particularly relevant to health promotion and HIV prevention programme design. One of the important features of this survey is that it has given us baseline data which highlights areas for further investigation and will, in the future, allow us to compare changes over time when further surveys of men who have sex with men are undertaken.

Data Collection

Rather than collect hard copy data and subsequently enter it into a computer, Male Call used Sis-Tab software via CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview system). Interviewers sat at a computer with a telephone headset, reading questions directly from the computer screen. Responses were entered directly into the computer software, which allowed frequencies to be generated and reported on a twice weekly basis so that the investigators were able to monitor the effectiveness of the recruitment campaign.
Interviewers

One of the important variables in determining the internal validity of the Male Call data was the ability of the interviewers to elicit extremely personal information, to be sensitive to the needs of the respondents and to detect hoax calls. The interviewers were selected by the Investigators and were given careful training beforehand. Interviewers had two half-day training sessions at which they were taught how to handle difficult questions, cultivate an empathy with subjects, and how to use the CATI equipment proficiently. Following the strategy used in Male Call Australia, most of the interviewers were gay men who were recruited through the gay press. We also used women interviewers although respondents were offered the option of speaking to a man. Interviewers were chosen for their ability to ask sexually explicit questions in a non-judgmental manner. One Pacific Island and two Maori bilingual were recruited.

Analysis

The data was checked for inconsistencies and cleaned prior to analysis. The computer software package Scy-Tab was also used for data management and analysis. Statistical analyses were carried out using standard univariate and multivariate techniques to investigate the relationships between knowledge of HIV/AIDS and safe sex practices, as well as demographic and contextual variables. Statistical analysis was undertaken using SAS.
Section II: The Demographic Characteristics of Male Call Respondents

Demographic characteristics is a term used to describe a population sample in terms of a specific set of variables, such as age, education level, income, ethnicity, and geographic distribution. In public health research it is important to understand the demographic characteristics of a sample if health agencies are to offer effective programmes of any kind. This is particularly true in the case of "at risk" populations, large numbers of which may be covert. In addition to this, perceptions of demographic characteristics can form the basis of stereotypes and commonly held prejudices, especially when the population is a minority, as in the case of men who have sex with men. Demographic descriptions can therefore have an enormous influence on the ways in which health providers and the general public understand and treat a particular group, as well as how members of that group understand themselves (or their "identity"). Both of these factors can directly impact upon the effectiveness of targeted health promotion strategies.

The purpose of Male Call was to provide an accurate and reliable snapshot of the MSM population in New Zealand. A central feature of the sample was its diversity, which challenges many of the prevailing stereotypes of MSM. It is a goal of Male Call that this contribution to knowledge will help to change both attitudes and policies towards MSM, and lead to improved health outcomes for this group.

In the end, 1852 men who have sex with men participated in the survey. The demographic diversity and large size of the Male Call sample is a reflection of the success of the research methodology. Male Call not only exceeded the 1500 hoped-for calls (by 352) but also attracted a broad cross-section of MSM due to a recruitment campaign that spanned both mainstream as well as gay media, and engendered enormous amounts of support from the gay community.

No other survey of MSM in New Zealand has ever captured such detailed data on a nationwide scale. Whereas other surveys on MSM have generated demographically-specific samples, and have consequently been restricted to studying the relationships between variables for a narrow population, Male Call's aim was partly to define what the actual parameters of male to male sexuality are. The great variety in the demographic data gives us the confidence to believe that we have a good indication of what is actually...
going on. In fact, Male Call/Waea Mai, Tane Ma is proportionately the largest survey of its kind of any country's MSM population.\footnote{Male Call/Waea Mai, Tane Ma interviewed 1852 men out of a total male population aged 15 and over of 1,349,964 - a sample of 0.14%. Canada's Men's Survey '91 surveyed 4803 men (=0.04% of their male population at the time). Project Male Call Australia (1992) surveyed 2583 men (=0.03%). Project Sigma (1987-91) in England and Wales surveyed 1003 men (=0.004%).}

**Publicity**

Respondents to Male Call heard about the project through many different sources. As outlined in the methodology, a variety of advertisements covering both mainstream and gay media were used, and the diversity of the sample reflected this decision. Most respondents (45\%) stated that they had heard about Male Call through the mainstream media - radio, press, One Network News (Figure 1). Other successful publicity sources included the gay press (40.7\%), word of mouth through friends (35.4\%), gay television programme express Report (28.2\%), and posters (27.3\%).
The launch of Male Call on One Network News proved especially valuable. A quarter of the sample (24.9%) listed it as a source of information. Proportionately more respondents who tend to be less involved in the "gay community" (e.g., Maori, men in a low socioeconomic group, those who were not from main urban centres) heard about Male Call in this way.

Proportionately more younger respondents (under 20) were also reached through the Network News (32.3%), as well as through friends (40.5%) and posters (37.5%). Those from main urban centres listed posters and the gay press more than other respondents. However, the gay press was not as successful in reaching Maori MSM, with only 24.1% of Maori respondents (compared to 42.3% for non-Maori) listing it as a source. Instead, proportionately more of this group reported "other" sources.

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10 Television audience ratings supplied by AC Nielsen McNair for One Network News on May 3rd 1996 estimated that 579,490 people, or 24% of the potential audience were watching when Project Male Call received coverage.
Geographic Breakdown

One of the most satisfying outcomes from Male Call was the wide range of places from which respondents called. As the weekly updates came in, it became clear that MSM were to be found in all parts of the country. As the map below illustrates, men called from every geographic region - from main centres such as Auckland and Christchurch, to smaller centres like Stratford, Invercargill, and Napier, to rural townships and communities as far away as the west coast of the South Island (Figure 2).
However, while a diverse range was exhibited, respondents were not equally distributed. Concentrations of callers occurred in the main urban centres, and this was a remarkably different result when compared to the total population (Figure 3).

*Figure 3*

*All comparisons in this report are based on the 1996 Census male population aged 15 years and over (n=1,349,964). However, the population distribution by sex was unavailable at the time this report was released. Figures 3 and 4 are therefore based on the 1996 Census total population distribution.*

Other concentrations were also apparent. As Figure 4 (over) illustrates, many more respondents lived in Auckland, and to a lesser extent Wellington and Christchurch, when compared to the rest of the population. However, not all main urban centres experienced these concentrations, with smaller cities such as Hastings and Gisborne recording proportionately fewer responses.

These results, which suggest that msm tend to favour urban versus rural centres, and certain cities in particular, are supported by other recent census information. According to the 1996 Census, men who were living in the same household and who stated that they were a couple demonstrated highly similar patterns of residence to Male Call's findings, especially in Auckland (Figure 4 over). This congruence is important, as it provides compelling evidence to support the validity of the Male Call sample. Within the larger cities such as Auckland, a higher proportion of Male Call Respondents also came from certain suburbs. This suggests that a "gay ghetto" of some sort exists, as 18% of
those living in Auckland for example resided in the so-called "gay" suburbs of Ponsonby, Grey Lynn, Herne Bay and Freeman’s Bay.\textsuperscript{11}

However, these concentrations are not nearly as marked as some overseas cities - by way of comparison, 48\% of the Sydney based men who called Project Male Call in Australia came from the “Oxford St ghetto” (Kippax et al. 1994). Conversely, there were also suburbs in our study, notably in South Auckland, which reported relatively few responses.

Social and cultural environments could account for most of these variations. For example, the Ponsonby-central city area abounds with venues where MSM can interact

\textsuperscript{11} Data for 279 responses was missing from the total sample of 1852 when calculating this figure.
reasonably safely with each other. Obviously this is not the case everywhere and this may provide an incentive for MSM to relocate to these areas. Attributes such as the attitudes of neighbours, shop staff, and community service providers, as well as the visible presence of other MSM, might contribute to a sense of "community" in these areas. These qualities are not always demonstrated for MSM in other communities, which are defined by physical boundaries or ethnic distinctions. The concentration in such suburbs within a city, in the same way as the concentration in urban versus rural centres, is likely to be one of behaviour-affirmation, and a movement away from spaces where MSM feel more alienated.

In spite of this, there is still an enormous diversity in places of residence. Although the "ghetto" phenomenon appears to exist, it is not as pronounced as might have been expected. Other Auckland suburbs such as Mt Albert and Remuera recorded just as many respondents as "ghetto" suburbs such as Herne Bay. In certain centres such as Dunedin, the proportion of Male Call respondents living there was almost identical to its proportion of the total population. Also, a surprising number of men (9.8%) called from secondary urban, minor urban and rural areas. This points to the progressively greater legal and social acceptance of same-sex behaviour in New Zealand, where men are increasingly able to participate in local communities without fear of harassment. This would be consistent with other Male Call findings such as disclosure of same-sex attraction, which indicates that on the whole, MSM encounter less resistance being "out" in New Zealand than anywhere else (see Male Call/Waea Mai, Tane Ma: Report No.7: Gay Community Involvement).

Furthermore, such geographic diversity could have a significant effect on the way identity is constructed. The data at least in part challenges the dominant MSM stereotype of urban gay men. An MSM growing up in Opotiki, for example, can be reassured that while his sexual attractions may make him feel different to other men, the fact that he lives where he does and that he has developed his own local identity is not extraordinary. Rather, he would appear to share similarities with other MSM who live in smaller rural communities.
Age

When compared with the census, there were proportionately more respondents in each age group from 20 to 39 years old (Figure 5). Fewer men aged 50 and over participated in the survey, as was the case with those aged 15-19. The mean age of the sample was 34.5 years old, compared with 33.1 for Male Call Australia, and 41.7 for all men in New Zealand aged 15 and over.\textsuperscript{12}

![Figure 5: Male Call respondents by age](image)

This result is consistent with other similar studies of MSM such as the Australian project Male Call and the British SIGMA studies (Weatherburn et al. 1992). The latter asserted that this skew “almost certainly reflects the influence of gay liberation” (Davies et al. 1993:83). This might be an appropriate explanation for the scarcity in the 50 and over range, who would have grown up in an era when sex between men was neither socially acceptable nor legal.

However, there are many reasons for the relatively low response rate of men aged under 20. For a start, political issues prevented Male Call from being advertised in secondary schools, and this undoubtedly affected participation. This low participation may also be associated with uncertainty about sexual identity. While most respondents stated that they realised they were attracted to men by the age of twenty, a minority

\textsuperscript{12} Averages were calculated from grouped data.
(around 17%) reported realisation at a later age. Younger men in this situation would be unlikely to call, even if they had previous male to male sexual experiences.

This absence may also be due to the vulnerable position of many young msm in society. Various studies on gay identity development (e.g. Cox and Gallois 1996) have argued that strategies for arriving at a positive gay identity are problematised when young men are living in some state of dependency. Whether this dependency comes in the form of social interaction and status at school, or emotional support within one's family, the threat of being excluded from or tormented (even physically) within these networks may discourage young msm from taking certain risks. It is quite possible that in the eyes of many of these young men, acting on their sexual attraction, or even participating in a 40 minute phone survey, constitutes a risk of exposure that is simply too great.

This leads to perhaps the most obvious explanation, that many young men who harbour same-sex attractions might not actually have had sex with another male at all. Since Male Call was primarily concerned with sexual behaviour, rather than attraction or identity, this would then disqualify them from participating in the survey.\(^\text{13}\)

**Ethnicity**

Male Call attracted a higher proportion of men identifying as New Zealand European/Pakeha compared to the rest of the male population. Previous studies of msm have been characterised by the absence of minority ethnicities in their samples (e.g. Davies et al. 1993; Kippax et al. 1994). While most respondents identified as NZ European (82.4%), 9.2% or 170 men described themselves as Maori (Figure 6 above). A further 2.6% identified as a Pacific Island ethnicity, and 5.5% described themselves as some "other" ethnicity.

\(^{13}\) Respondents must have had sex with another man at least once during the previous five years to participate in Project Male Call.
Some researchers have suggested that different expressions of homosexuality operate in these cultures, rendering conventional methods of recruitment inappropriate, and that this makes it difficult to target men from these groups (Connell et al. 1988). In Male Call however, an advertising campaign which reflected a commitment to Maori participation resulted in a highly successful sampling of this group.

Although most of the sample identified as NZ Europeans, the successful level of Maori recruitment testifies to the importance of targeting certain populations. This is reinforced by the lower turnout of Pacific Island men, and reflects the fact that a specific recruitment campaign was not developed for this group.

Although many sources promoting the survey would have been shared by both Maori and Pacific Island men (such as radio stations popular with these groups), several factors that are characteristic of Pacific Island cultures almost certainly affected their participation. Data from the 1996 Census suggests that many Pacific Island men experience language and financial barriers, and this would reduce their chances of encountering Male Call promotions (e.g. through television, radio, telephone, venues). Pacific Island men living in large households would also have limited opportunities for making a private phone call as well as negative attitudes to discussing intimate sexual details. Issues ranging from the social patterns of sexuality (i.e. the popularity/necessity of visiting "straight" venues for sexual partners) to those of identity (such as the Samoan
fa’afafine) are perhaps even more important determinants. The way in which fewer Pacific Island men have been captured by Male Call therefore has important implications for educators and others seeking to reach minority populations in the future.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the sample was ethnically diverse. Thirty seven men described themselves as Chinese (2%), and fifteen describing themselves as Indian (0.8%) took part. Both Chinese and Indian men were represented at levels close to their total male population share. In addition, fifty men were of an “other” ethnicity.

Labour Force Status and Occupation
Male Call respondents were involved in a wide variety of occupations: as truck drivers, accountants, supermarket packers, farmers, lawyers and nurses. However, proportionately more men were in the paid workforce (82.3%) compared to the general male population in New Zealand (65.9%, see Figure 7). This undoubtedly reflects the age structure of the sample, where a low turnout of men aged fifty or over would account for the lower numbers of MSM who were not in the paid workforce (13.2%). Unemployed comprised 4% of the sample, compared with 5.3% of the male population.

![Figure 7: Male Call respondents by labour force status](image)

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14 According to the 1996 Census, the proportion of men over 15 describing themselves as Chinese in New Zealand was 2.1%. The figure for men describing themselves as Indian was slightly higher than the responses Male Call received at 1.1%.
A high number of Male Call respondents were in professional/semi-professional and clerical/technical occupations (Figure 8).  

Small differences compared with the total male population occurred in skilled and semi-skilled occupations. However, if these two occupational groups are combined, there was no evidence of difference. The proportion of the sample describing their occupation as labourer was identical to the general male population. The occupational diversity of the sample suggests that previous observations about MSM, which described a gravitation towards “safe” occupations, may need to be revised. Although certain sectors of employment such as the hospitality industry have traditionally attracted MSM (and probably still do so), these results point to a more even distribution of MSM throughout all sectors of the New Zealand workforce. Tentative conclusions can therefore be drawn about the effect of Homosexual Law Reform, the Human Rights Act, and general public attitude changes, in making workplaces here more “gay-accepting”.

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15 The system of organising occupations into categories used in Male Call differed from the system used in the census. Consequently, the categories of “professional” and “semi-professional” have been combined in order to avoid misinterpretation.
Education

Male Call respondents generally showed higher rates of education compared to the total male population (Figure 9). Similar to other studies, large numbers of tertiary educated men were present in the sample. In discussing Australian research on MSM, the comment has been made that "[i]n many studies, one could be forgiven for thinking that a university degree is mandatory to be a fully fledged gay man" (Dowsett 1992:314). These findings are often attributed to recruitment environments such as universities, and the tendency of MSM with higher education to participate (Connell et al. 1998).

While an overt recruitment bias may occur in some studies, the Male Call recruitment strategy did not target tertiary institutions in any discernible manner. With 46.4% of the sample reporting a professional/trade certificate or some university degree (compared with 32.6% of the general male population), seeking higher education appears to be a characteristic of the MSM population.
Income

Income, like occupation and labour force status, suffered bias because of the sample's age structure. Lower numbers of those aged 15-19 and 50 and over would have certainly reduced the incidence of MSM who are economically more vulnerable, since it does not take into account many men who have smaller or no incomes. This could offer some explanation for the larger numbers of respondents in each income bracket over $30,000, compared to the general population (Figure 10 over). It is also likely to reflect the higher education levels and therefore higher earning capacity of part of the sample, as well as its concentration in large centres such as Auckland.

![Figure 10: Male Call respondents by gross personal income](image)

Respondents to Male Call earned on average $35,428, which appeared to be higher than the total male average income. These results are consistent with other studies, which argue that wealthier MSM are more likely to respond to this type of survey. Again, while there is inevitably some truth in this, the consistency with which large-scale studies such as this have reported higher incomes suggests that it is probably not an artefact of method. Many MSM do enjoy higher incomes, and this is likely to be a characteristic of this population.

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16 Average male income was calculated from gross personal incomes, less those who declined or did not know. The average male income for all men in New Zealand was $26,836 (1996 Census). However, large amounts of data was missing for this figure (120,650 men, or 8.9% declined to answer this question). Twenty men (1.1%) declined to answer this question in Male Call.
On a further explanatory note, high personal income (like high educational levels) may be sought as a “buffer” against potential discrimination. Western discourse and social systems have consistently defined and treated MSM in negative ways. Thus, many MSM experience varying degrees of powerlessness, both legally and socially. Working in occupations that attract higher incomes could therefore be a form of “insulation”, a way of gaining power over, and control of, the spaces within which MSM must live their day to day lives.

The apparent economic privilege which the income data relating to MSM suggests must therefore be checked against the social context of continued discrimination. The experience of many of these men - young MSM, pensioners, and men on other benefits - should not be forgotten. Similarly to the rest of the population, some MSM rely on the state or other agencies for income support. Fifty five men (3%) received an invalid benefit, 120 (6.5%) obtained a student allowance, and 186 men (10%) received some “other” form of government assistance (Figure 11).

![Figure 11: Male Call respondents by sources of income](image-url)
The often-quoted "dink" (double income no kids) status attributed to MSM in relationships, for example, has to be qualified with an awareness of the insecurities that they face. And while the average income of respondents seems to be higher than that of the rest of the male population, there are still many MSM who earn incomes below the male mean.

An 'under-class' of men who have sex with men

Several overseas studies of MSM have drawn attention to the low participation of working-class men (Connell et al. 1991; Dowsett et al. 1992; Connell et al. 1993), pointing to a focus on gay community attached men and large urban centres in sampling strategies. Dowsett et al. (1992:313) described an underclass effect which is constituted through "unemployment, poor education, poverty, and cultural marginalisation". They claimed that HIV/AIDS prevention needed to recognise the impact of these factors, since the patterns of sexuality often differ for men in this situation, many of whom fell outside the 'gay community'. Male Call was interested to find out whether such men had participated in sufficient numbers to enable further analysis.

An under-class is constituted at the intersection of low qualifications, unskilled occupations and low income. In order to obtain a measure of this under-class, Male Call isolated those respondents who earned less than $20,000 a year and whose highest educational qualification was School Certificate. While others (e.g. Davies et al. 1993) have used occupation in similar equations, we viewed occupation as an imprecise and problematic measure, and therefore did not include this in the Male Call filter. As a result, 171 men (9.2%) were identified as being in an under-class. This was a large enough sample with which to make confident assessments.

Further demographic information about these men reveals that their average income was in fact a third of the total sample's at $11,856. They were slightly more likely than the rest of the sample to be of a non-NZ European/Pakeha ethnicity, and more likely to come from secondary urban and minor urban centres. While the average age was similar at 33.4 years old, the distribution between age groups was much more even. Although this suggests that both younger (<25) and older (>50) MSM were more likely to

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17 For example, how does one account for the increasingly higher levels of qualification ("credential inflation") required for certain industries? This, as well as changing levels of part-time versus full-time work and the rising remuneration for other occupations, has the effect of blurring traditional "class" distinctions between occupations.
be in this position, there were still a large number of respondents for whom it is a lived reality throughout their lifespan. Perhaps unsurprisingly, proportionately fewer of men in an under-class position heard about Male Call through gay-associated channels, such as the gay press (28.7%:48.7%) and express Report (19.3%:28.2%).

Class is important because it provides another dimension within the broader contexts that mediate men's decisions about sex. For example, decisions made by men occupying an underclass position may be influenced by a lack of access to gay-community targeted prevention messages. Class may also influence the particular patterns of sexuality men practice (e.g., where they go to meet other MSM, and what they do sexually). As Connell et al. (1993) discuss, sex between men in working class settings is often more constrained than in other, more privileged situations. Ideologies such as the "traditional family", notions of masculinity and an "aggressive heterosexuality" can compound the problems of identity and disclosure that most gay men face anyway. Taking account of the class factor is therefore important in that it highlights the social, in addition to the interpersonal, nature of sexuality.

Marital status and children

Men who have sex with men are often assumed to have a "gay" identity, and to lead a "non-heterosexual" way of life. It was therefore interesting, though not altogether surprising, to learn that 206 respondents (11.1%) were married or in a de facto relationship with a woman at the time of the interview (Figure 12).

![Figure 12: Male Call respondents by marital/de facto status with a woman](image)

A further 417 men (22.5%) reported having been in a marital or de facto relationship with a woman at some time in the past.
These men were more likely than the rest of the sample to be aged 40 years or over, and this is likely to reflect the social and legal environment prior to Homosexual Law Reform in 1986. At the same time, these results offer an important insight into the sexual practices of parts of the outwardly "heterosexual" population.

![Figure 13: Male Call respondents with child/children](image)

In a similar vein, 400 respondents (21.6%) reported that they had fathered a child or children (Figure 13). Again they were more likely to be older, although 77 (19.3%) of these men were under the age of 35.

**Conclusion**

The diversity of responses in Rosser's survey of Auckland msm led him to suggest that the term "gay community" as a global description of the sample was inappropriate (Rosser, 1989:170, based on research conducted in 1987). Almost a decade later, Male Call's results confirm the accuracy of this claim for the msm population in New Zealand as a whole. Heterogeneity, as opposed to homogeneity, characterised the sample, and this leads one to view the broad description "community" as somewhat problematic.

The demographic information about msm in New Zealand reported here leaves an overwhelming impression of diversity. It paints a picture of male to male sexuality that is not based solely on relatively affluent, highly educated, white, gay-identified men. Furthermore, the information gained about respondent's behaviour is rendered credible by this diversity, being the best indicator of the representativeness of the study and a reflection of the efficacy of the methodology. The similarities with respect to the 1996
census data on male couples reinforces the fact that msm are not distributed randomly throughout the population, and this reinforces the need to oversample urban areas if accurate information is to be gleaned.

The importance of this data is that it challenges traditional stereotypes. Many new insights have been uncovered, and in particular, the idea that all msm live a unitary "gay lifestyle" is called into question. For example, the geographic, occupational, and ethnic diversity suggests that the wider social environment in New Zealand allows msm a freedom that is not always found in other countries. Many msm are doing well in education and succeeding financially. Yet, the smaller numbers of younger msm and Pacific Island men, and concentrations of respondents in certain urban centres hint that many men still experience situations where their homosexuality is problematic. Clearly, some men are still seeking to protect themselves from hostile social environments.

This information will be invaluable for those working in the field of HIV and AIDS. But aside from their obvious use for health strategists and planners, these results also provide an important baseline demographic description of a minority group that has been traditionally difficult to research, and about which we are just beginning to learn.
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