

AOTEAROA ONLINE DATING & SEX SURVEY

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Project Gender is a social change agency creating positive impact through insights research, breakthrough campaigns and real-world solutions.

BACKGROUND

WHY DO A SURVEY ON ONLINE DATING AND SEX IN AOTEAROA?

Online dating has taken off in the last decade, with more and more New Zealanders using apps like Tinder, Bumble and Grindr to meet new people. No longer a source of embarrassment or shame, couples are now proudly declaring that they met on Tinder, and singles everywhere are using the apps to get laid, find a 'Friend with Benefits' or even just to make new friends.

Listening to the anecdotal evidence suggested that social norms may be changing around what is considered acceptable behaviour in a much-changed dating landscape. How prevalent is the practice of "ghosting" for example, how often do people feel comfortable lying about their age, and what counts as "normal" sex?

At Project Gender, it was time to put some stats behind the stories and take a look at how New Zealanders are using dating apps for one-night stands, to fall in love and everything in between. We wanted to hear from as many New Zealanders as possible in order to better understand the differences, if any, between how men are experiencing online dating compared to women, compared to non-binary people, whether it's different for gay men or lesbian women, and what disabled people's experience are and so on.

Project Gender will be using the insights gathered to develop real-world solutions for making online dating a safer, more enjoyable and better experience for all New Zealanders.

WHAT DID WE DO?

Project Gender designed and built an anonymous online survey, which was distributed mostly via Instagram using boosted posts/ads. We offered a prize incentive where those who completed the survey were invited to go into a draw to win one of three \$250 Visa Prezzy cards.

The survey was promoted as an open-eyed look at online dating and sex in Aotearoa in order to encourage as wide a range of people as possible to complete the survey and give their honest response.

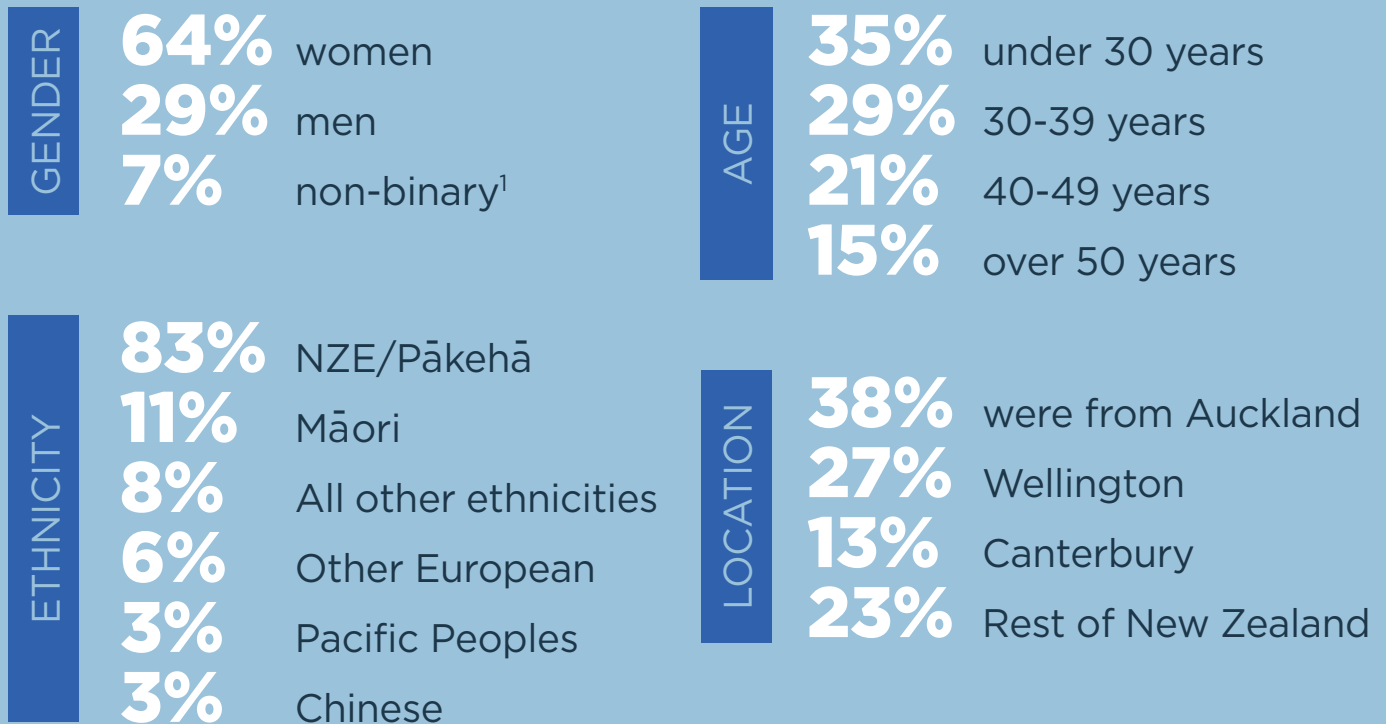


**“I’VE MADE SOME
GOOD FRIENDS, AND
LOVERS, AND FOUND
MY LIFE PARTNER
THROUGH TINDER”**

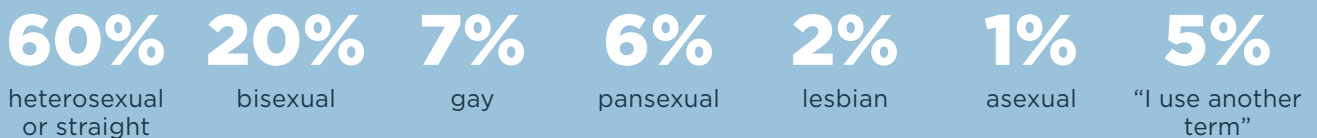
- BISEXUAL FEMALE RESPONDENT

WHO DID WE HEAR FROM

We heard from 823 New Zealanders aged 18+ who had been active on online dating apps in the past 12 months:



SEXUALITY



Without knowing the current demographic breakdown of the online dating population in New Zealand, we are unable to comment on the exact representativeness of the sample. We acknowledge that the self-selective nature of the survey does bring some limitations. However, the sub-samples achieved by gender², sexuality and age allowed us to present powerful insights into people's experiences of online dating and to highlight key areas for future focus.

¹ "Women" includes all respondents that selected "Female" and not "Non-binary" (regardless of any other selection).

"Men" includes all respondents that selected "Male" and not "Non-binary" (regardless of any other selection).

"Non-binary" includes all respondents that selected "Non-binary", and respondents that selected "Genderqueer", "Gender-fluid", "Intersex", "Transgender", "Takatāpui" or "Don't know/Questioning/Unsure" but did not select "Male" or "Female".

² Please note the relatively small sample size (n=60) for non-binary people. We present limited results for this segment where we believe they provide valuable preliminary insights for this population and where specific question sub-samples allow. Due to this small sample size, we are unable to present any results by sexuality for non-binary people. Non-binary people are at all times included in the age group analyses.

“PORN ISN'T THE PROBLEM, IT'S A SYMPTOM OF THIS UNTAPPED POTENTIAL. OMG YES IS ONE EXAMPLE BUT IT SITS BEHIND A PAYWALL. IF TOOLS LIKE THIS EXISTED FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, FOR MEN, FOR PARTNERS, FOR THOSE ACROSS THE GENDER SPECTRUM - AND EXISTED FOR FREE - THEN WE'D SEE MUCH LESS HARM AND FAR HIGHER SEXUAL SATISFACTION”

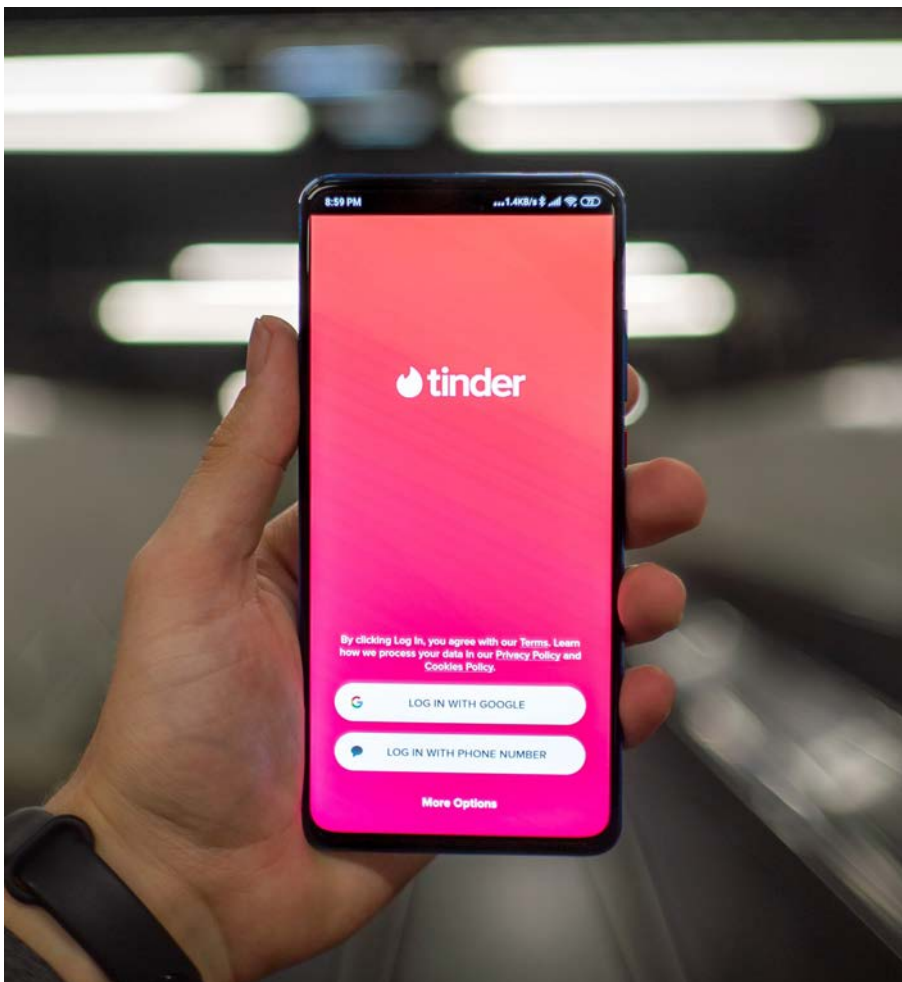
- STRAIGHT MALE RESPONDENT

WHAT WE FOUND OUT

WHICH ONLINE DATING APPS ARE BEING USED AND WHY

In the past 12 months, our online app users had mainly been active on Tinder (74%), Bumble (56%), Hinge (35%), Grindr (11%) and NZDating (9%). This differed by gender and sexuality most notably for gay and bisexual men, who unsurprisingly are more likely to be active on Grindr (78%) and less likely to be active on Tinder (56%).

Three-quarters (75%) of our survey respondents were on dating apps looking for committed relationships (sexual and/or romantic), 55% for casual sexual relationships, i.e. “no strings attached” or “friends with benefits”, 31% for one night stands or hook-ups, and 24% for friendship (non-sexual). These results differed by gender and sexuality, with nine out of ten (89%) straight women looking for committed relationships compared to three-quarters of straight men (76%), three quarters of lesbian and bisexual women (75%), 43% of gay and bisexual men, and 52% of non-binary people.



JUST 15% OF STRAIGHT WOMEN WENT ON TO THE APPS LOOKING FOR ONE-NIGHT STANDS OR HOOK-UPS, COMPARED TO 41% OF STRAIGHT MEN, 26% OF LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL WOMEN, 70% OF GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN AND 45% OF NON-BINARY PEOPLE.

“INTIMATE” PHOTOS AND TEXTS/MESSAGES

Eight out of 10 (78%) of our online daters messaging with people they had met online had received a sexual message/text in the past 12 months, and six out of 10 (58%), an intimate photo.



54% OF STRAIGHT WOMEN, 57% OF STRAIGHT MEN, 61% OF LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL WOMEN, 90% OF GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN, AND 62% OF NON-BINARY PEOPLE MESSAGING WITH PEOPLE THEY HAD MET ON ONLINE DATING APPS HAD SENT A SEXUAL MESSAGE OR TEXT IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS.

32% OF STRAIGHT WOMEN, 42% OF STRAIGHT MEN, 41% OF LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL WOMEN, 89% OF GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN, AND 47% OF NON-BINARY PEOPLE HAD SENT AN INTIMATE PHOTO.

The Under 30s were the least likely to send intimate photos of themselves to people they had met online – just 35% having sent one, compared to 48% of the Over 30s.

People had sent intimate photos most commonly to turn the other person on (71%), or because the other person requested it (70%), but 48% sent the intimate photos to turn themselves on. 13% said being drunk or high was also a reason why they sent intimate photo(s) of themselves.

53% of all of our respondents active on online dating apps in the past 12 months had received an unwanted sexual message/text during this time, and 37% had received an unwanted intimate photo. Unwanted intimate photos had been received by 41% of straight women, 15% of straight men, 35% of lesbian and bisexual women, and 49% of gay and bisexual men.

At the same time, lots of people received sexual messages/texts and intimate photos that they *did* want. Of the people who told us they'd been receiving sexual messages/texts, 82% said that at least one was welcome, and of those receiving intimate photos, 77% said that at least one was welcome.

FIRST DATES

80% of people we heard from had been on a first date with someone they matched with on a dating app in the past 12 months. Mostly these first dates happened in cafes/restaurants (73%), bars (50%) and outdoor public spaces like parks (46%), while just over one-third had met up for a first date in either their home or the home of the person they were meeting.

49% of all women “always” tell someone they know where they are going when on a first date with someone they have matched with via a dating app, compared to 13% of all men. Similarly, 46% of all women “always” have a plan on how to leave if they feel unsafe, compared to just 21% of all men.

22% of straight women have felt unsafe on a first date, compared to 3% of straight men. 29% of lesbian and bisexual women and 22% of gay and bisexual men have felt unsafe on a first date. Just under half of the non-binary people in our sample had felt unsafe on a first date.

The Under 30s are more likely to tell someone where they are going and why – 49% of this age group saying that they “always” do this, compared to just 26% of those 50+ years. But still, they are more likely to have felt unsafe on a first date – 29% having felt unsafe compared to 12% of those 50+ years.

The Over 30s were more likely to have called and spoken with someone that they matched with on an online dating app (with or without video) before meeting up – 56% having called and spoken to someone compared to 44% of Under 30s. 65% of our online daters 50+ years had called and spoken to someone they had met online in the past 12 months.

PROFILE SURPRISES

When meeting up face-to-face, our online app users often discovered that people had used false information and/or photos in their online dating app profiles. Most commonly, our respondents had come across people who had used out-dated profile photos (45% experiencing this), had lied about their age (25%), or had used a false name (23%). The Over 50s were the age group most likely to have gone on a first date with someone who turned out to have used a false name (35%), outdated photos (53%), or have lied about their age on their dating profiles (42%).

Straight women were more likely than straight men to have come across a profile where the other person had used profile photos that were out-of-date (47% of straight women, vs. 36% of straight men experiencing this), but straight men were more likely to come across profiles where the women had used digitally-altered profile photos, i.e. photoshopped or heavily filtered (23% vs. 11%).

Just 6% of lesbian and bisexual women had met up with someone who had used profile photos that were not of themselves, and 6% with someone who had used profile photos that were digitally-altered. 24% of gay and bisexual men had met up with someone that had used profile photos that were not of themselves, and 39% had met up with someone who had lied about their age.

“NOTICED THE YOUNGER THE GUYS, THE MORE VIOLENT THEY ARE IN BED. SEEMS TO BE NORMALISED CHOKING, AND SLAPPING. ONE GUY WENT TO SPIT IN MY MOUTH AND I STOPPED HIM AFTERWARD AND SAID I DIDN'T LIKE IT. CHOKING SEEMS TO BE VERY COMMON”

- BISEXUAL FEMALE RESPONDENT



UNWANTED SEXUAL INTERACTIONS

Of our online app users who had been on dates in the past 12 months, 16% had had someone they met via a dating app interact with them sexually and they didn't want it to happen. This was the case for 3% of straight men, 14% of gay and bisexual men, 16% of straight women and 21% of lesbian and bisexual women.

29% of those who had been on dates had been pressured into doing something sexual they weren't comfortable with by someone they met online in the past 12 months (29% of straight women, 11% of straight men, 41% of lesbian and bisexual women, 24% of gay and bisexual men). Most commonly, this occurred by the other person "Wearing you down by repeatedly asking you to do it" (14%), "Making promises about the future of your relationship" (11%), "Suggesting that you're boring i.e. "vanilla", prudish" (9%), and "Being unhappy and moody unless you agreed to do it" (9%).

In the past 12 months, the Under 30s were more likely than the Over 30s to have had someone they met via a dating app interact with them sexually and they didn't want it to happen (20% compared to 14%), and more likely than the Over 30s to have been pressured into doing something sexual they weren't comfortable with by someone they had met via an online dating app (36% compared to 25%). Just 20% of the Over 50s had been pressured into doing something sexual they weren't comfortable with.

In the past 12 months, just under a third of our non-binary sample who had been on dates had someone they met via a dating app interact with them sexually and they didn't want it to happen. Almost half had been pressured into doing something sexual they weren't comfortable with by someone they met online in the past 12 months.

“BEING ON THE APPS HAS BEEN A REVELATION FOR ME. I’M OLD, FAT, HAVE GREY HAIR AND AM NOT PRETTY (BY SOCIETY’S STANDARDS). I GAINED SO MUCH CONFIDENCE AND HAD LOADS OF FUN. THE APPS GAVE ME BACK MY SEXUAL SELF AND OPENED ME UP TO SO MUCH PLEASURE AND A BROADER SENSE OF WHAT SEX IS”

- STRAIGHT FEMALE RESPONDENT

CONSENSUAL SEX

82% of those who had been on a date with someone they met on a dating app went on to have one or more consensual sexual interaction(s) with them in the past 12 months. 20% of straight men had more than five sexual partners in the past 12 months, as did 7% of straight women, 13% of lesbian and bisexual women, and 40% of gay and bisexual men.



ONLY 32% OF OUR SAMPLE OF ONLINE DATERS WHO HAD CONSENSUAL SEX WITH SOMEONE THEY MET ONLINE IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS “ALWAYS” USED STI PROTECTION, WHILE 21% “NEVER” DID.

THE OVER 50S WERE BY FAR THE LEAST LIKELY TO CONSISTENTLY USE STI PROTECTION WHEN HAVING SEX WITH PEOPLE THEY HAD MET ONLINE IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS – JUST 16% “ALWAYS” DOING SO COMPARED TO 34% OF UNDER 30S. 42% OF OUR 50+ GROUP “NEVER” USED STI PROTECTION.

31% had discussed HIV status with one or more of the people that they met online in the past 12 months and had sex with - 19% of straight women, 23% of straight men, 30% of lesbian and bisexual women and 68% of gay and bisexual men.

12% “always” drank alcohol prior to and/or during the date(s) where they interacted sexually with people they had met online, and 21% “most of the time”. Drug use was much less common - 0% “always” using drugs prior to and/or during these dates, and 2% “most of the time”.

We asked people, “How much of the sexual interaction you’ve had with people you’ve met in person via a dating app has been enjoyable for you?”. About a quarter (23%) gave 10 out of 10, saying they enjoyed “All of it”. 45% of straight women, 62% of straight men, 48% of lesbian and bisexual women and 58% of gay and bisexual men gave a score of 8 or above out of 10.

39% of the Under 30s gave a score of 8 or above for how much of the sexual interaction they had had with people they had met in person via a dating app had been enjoyable for them, compared to 61% of the Over 50s.

ROUGH/VIOLENT SEX ACTS

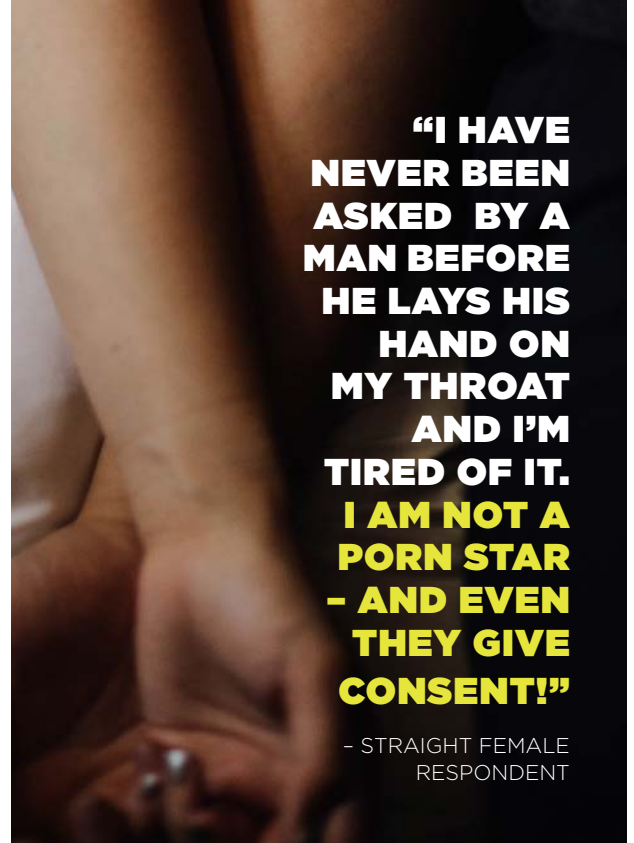
We asked the respondents who had had consensual sex with someone they had met via a dating app, *“In the past 12 months, has any of the following happened during sexual interaction with someone you met via a dating app and wanted to interact sexually with?”*.

Men were more likely than women to have done each of the rough/violent sex acts to one or more partners they had met online in the past 12 months:

- **42%** of men and **15%** of women had pulled a sexual partner’s hair
- **39%** of men and **10%** of women had slapped a sexual partner
- **32%** of men and **28%** of women had bitten a sexual partner
- **27%** of men and **6%** of women had choked or suffocated a sexual partner
- **25%** of men and **8%** of women had restrained a sexual partner with handcuffs/tied them up
- **17%** of men and **4%** of women had pushed, shoved or slammed a sexual partner against something
- **14%** of men and **3%** of women had spat on a sexual partner
- **3%** of men and **0%** of women had hit or kicked a sexual partner

30% of those who had consensual sex with someone they had met online in the past 12 months had been choked or suffocated during sex (15% of straight men, 25% of straight women, 30% of gay and bisexual men, and 41% of lesbian and bisexual women).

Under 30s were more than twice as likely as those over 30 to have been choked/suffocated during consensual sex with someone they met on a dating app in the past 12 months, with 43% saying they had been choked/suffocated, compared to 22% of over 30s.



CONSENT AND ROUGH/VIOLENT SEX ACTS

Just 53% of people who had been choked or suffocated during sex in the past 12 months said they “always” consented to it happening, while 22% “never” consented and 8% “rarely”. Similar proportions reported that they “never” consented when asked about the times that they had been slapped, bitten, spat on and had their hair pulled by a sexual partner. In contrast, just 1% said they “never” consented when they had been restrained with handcuffs or tied up, and 88% said they had “always” consented. These statistics around consent showed little to no difference across age groups.

ONLINE PORN

80% of our respondents have looked at porn online in the past 12 months (65% of straight women, 96% of straight men, 85% of lesbian and bisexual women, 99% of gay and bisexual men and 85% of non-binary people)³. 68% of all men watch porn online more than once a week compared to 15% of all women. Similar proportions of online porn watchers were found in each age group.

ONLINE DATING ETIQUETTE

In the past 12 months, 72% had been ghosted by someone they had been messaging with, 39% of those going on dates had been ghosted by someone they'd met up with, and 35% of those having sexual interactions with people they met online had been ghosted by someone they'd had sex with.

Women were more likely to ghost someone they had been messaging with than men - 64% of women compared to 50% of men, but we found similar results for men and women when it came to ghosting people they had had sex with (24% and 26% respectively for women and men). Under 30s were more likely to ghost people they had been messaging with (71% compared to 55% over 30s) and people they had had a sexual interaction with (35% vs. 20% of over 30s).

22% of our online daters had been stood up in the past 12 months by someone from a dating app who they had arranged to meet - 20% of straight men, 16% of straight women, 42% of gay and bisexual men, and 19% of lesbian and bisexual women. Under 30s were less likely to have been stood up - 16% compared to 25% of over 30s.

Of our online daters who had a sexual interaction with someone they met online in the past 12 months, 8% of women and 26% of men had one or more of these interactions while in a committed relationship with someone else. 28% of the time, the person that they were in a committed relationship with was unaware that they were using a dating app to meet other people (the sample was too small to present this for men and women separately). Those over 30 were twice as likely to have had a sexual interaction with someone they met via a dating app while they were in a committed relationship with someone else compared to the Under 30s (19% vs. 10% respectively).

31% HAD REPORTED SOMEONE'S PROFILE ON A DATING APP IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS. 20% OF STRAIGHT MEN, 30% OF STRAIGHT WOMEN, 39% OF GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN, 33% OF LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL WOMEN, AND 49% OF NON-BINARY PEOPLE HAD REPORTED SOMEONE. WE SAW SIMILAR RESULTS HERE FOR ALL AGE GROUPS.

³ We included questions relating to online porn in our survey to try to discover more about how New Zealanders are consuming online porn, how it may relate to other areas of the survey, and what role porn might play, if any, when designing solutions.

WHAT ARE DATING APPS DELIVERING OVERALL

When asked what online dating had delivered for them in the past 12 months, 40% had had casual sex (one-night stands or hook-ups), and 40% had entered one or more casual sexual relationships (“no strings attached” or “friends with benefits”). 36% said they had a sexual interaction with someone who wasn’t their usual type, and 31% had tried new sexual techniques.

When it comes to finding committed relationships (sexual and/or romantic), dating apps under-delivered for all groups in the past 12 months. 89% of straight women and 76% of straight men signed up to dating apps online looking for a committed relationship, but just 31% of straight women and 37% of straight men found one. 43% of gay and bisexual men and 75% of lesbian and bisexual women were looking for a committed relationship, but only 27% of gay and bisexual men and 33% of lesbian and bisexual women found one.

However, friendship (non-sexual) was an unexpected bonus for many (36%), especially men – just 25% of men were looking for friendship when they joined the online dating apps, and yet 45% found new friendships in the past 12 months via these apps.



OVERALL, SATISFACTION WITH ONLINE DATING APPS IS INCREDIBLY LOW FOR NEW ZEALANDERS. WHEN ASKED, ON A SCALE OF 0 TO 10, HOW LIKELY THEY WERE TO RECOMMEND ONLINE DATING APPS TO FRIENDS LOOKING TO MEET PEOPLE, JUST 9% GAVE A SCORE OF 9 OR 10, 24% A SCORE OF 7 OR 8 AND 66% OF 6 OR LESS. THIS GIVES ONLINE DATING APPS A NET PROMOTER SCORE OF -57 (ON A SCALE OF -100 TO +100) – WHAT WOULD GENERALLY BE CONSIDERED A VERY POOR SCORE. THERE WERE NO GENDER, SEXUALITY OR AGE GROUPS PRODUCING A NET PROMOTER SCORE OF MORE THAN -37.

**“I’M GENERALLY
SLIGHTLY
WARY ABOUT
ALL FIRST
DATES WITH
MEN, BUT I
EXCLUSIVELY
DATE WOMEN/
GENDERQUEER
NOW AND
SINCE THEN
HAVE FELT
MUCH SAFER”**

- LESBIAN RESPONDENT

**WHAT DO
THESE
RESULTS
MEAN FOR
PROJECT
GENDER?**



“ONCE YOU SEND A PICTURE YOU HAVE NO CONTROL WHERE IT GOES OR WHO SEES IT. I HAVE BEEN SENT MY OWN PICTURES BY GUYS SAYING IT IS THEM!! I IMMEDIATELY TELL THEM THEY ARE FAKE. SOME APOLOGISE, OTHERS JUST BLOCK”

- GAY MALE RESPONDENT

At Project Gender, we are most interested in the safety issues highlighted throughout the data, and how New Zealanders in different age groups, genders and sexualities have different approaches to, and experiences of, being able to keep themselves safe when online dating.

The Over 50s are the least cautious when it comes to their online activity and meeting up in public. They are more likely to send an intimate picture with half having sent one in the last 12 months compared to a third of Under 30s having sent one. They are also less likely to “always” tell someone where they are going and why on a first date, with just over a quarter keeping themselves safe in this way, compared to just under half of the Under 30s.

And yet, the Over 50s are not feeling a lack of safety when it comes to meeting up with someone from an app: just 12% have felt unsafe on a first date, compared to 29% of the Under 30s. This is despite the Over 50s being much more likely to have gone on a first date with someone who turned out to have used a false name, outdated photos, or to have lied about their age on their dating profiles.

However, compared to the Under 30s, the Over 50s are less likely to be pressured into doing something sexual they’re not comfortable with and they are enjoying the sex they are having to a greater extent. But 42% of Over 50s having sex never use STI protection (compared to 16% of the Under 30s).

While the Under 30s delivered seemingly more positive results when it comes to their public safety, including their online activity and sexual health in terms of STI protection, what is happening for them when it comes to their safety while having sex is less straightforward.

Although good news stories exist for some within our data, the incredibly low NPS scores from all our gender, sexuality and age groups, along with the mismatch for many between the relationships that they were looking for, and what was delivered for them, suggests that there is room for improvements and/or alternatives for New Zealanders looking online to hook up, find committed relationships, and everything in between.

Under 30s are more than twice as likely as those over 30 to have been choked/suffocated during consensual sex in the past 12 months, with 43% saying they had been choked/suffocated. Just under half of those having been choked/suffocated across all age groups did

not always consent to this, and therefore just over half did always consent.

The number of young people experiencing choking/suffocating without consent is a critical social problem which needs addressing. But also, with what we know about the risks of choking/suffocating, the huge number of young people who told us that they are consenting to choking or suffocating with people they have met online in the past 12 months is incredibly concerning. Choking and suffocation carries huge risk of cardiac arrest, brain damage and death. Simply giving consent, or hearing that consent has been given, is surely not all that is required to keep all parties involved safe.

AT PROJECT GENDER, OUR PLAN IS TO CONTINUE TO WORK ON THE ISSUES RAISED BY THE AOTEAROA ONLINE DATING & SEX SURVEY RESULTS. WE ARE SEEKING TO COLLABORATE WITH THOSE WORKING IN SEXUAL HEALTH, CONSENT EDUCATION AND RESEARCH, IN ORDER TO SEE WHAT OPPORTUNITIES EXIST TO DELIVER REAL-WORLD SOLUTIONS THAT WILL BRING ABOUT POSITIVE CHANGE.

“I HAVE EXPERIENCED A RANGE OF DIVERSE SEXUAL INTERESTS THROUGH DATING APPS. THE “HONEYMOON PERIOD” IS GREAT FOR UNLIMITED SEXUAL INHIBITIONS”

- STRAIGHT MALE RESPONDENT



THE AOTEAROA ONLINE DATING AND SEX SURVEY IN THE MEDIA

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/ninetoonoon/audio/2018844389/online-dating-and-sex-who-s-doing-it-safely>

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/300602330/i-have-never-been-asked-by-a-man-before-he-lays-his-hand-on-my-throat-is-rough-sex-on-the-rise>

<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/dating-dangerously-nearly-half-of-women-over-50-never-use-protection-against-stis/NVSX4I2UY55IKYIC2YITDDKMBQ/>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/rougher-sex/id1594986109?i=1000564822569>

<https://www.tvnz.co.nz/shows/seven-sharp/clips/nz-s-dating-scene-who-s-dating-who>

PROJECT+**GENDER**

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