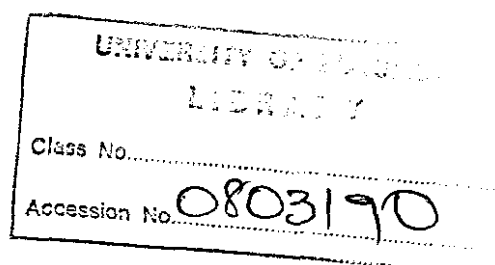


**THE EXPERIENCE OF THE MALE SEX-WORKER:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION**



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**2003**

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submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS**

in

**COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY**

at the

**UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND**

**SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR S.D. EDWARDS**

**FEBRUARY 2003**

**ABSTRACT**

This phenomenological study explores the experience of male sex-workers. The aim of this study was to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of this complex phenomenon and hopefully serve as a foundation for future research and counselling interventions in this field.

A comprehensive literature review examining the individual and contextual issues rooted in the world of commercial sex between men is provided, and forms a firm foundation and backdrop for this study.

The design of this study was qualitative and proceeded from a phenomenological stance. Data was collected through in-depth, unstructured interviews with four, white South African men who were currently working as male prostitutes. The interviews were recorded on audiotape and transcribed verbatim for each participant. The data was then categorized, coded and analyzed inter-individually in order to discover common and contrasting themes and patterns. These were tied together to form a hypothetical and general description of the experience of the male sex-worker.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Especially I wish to thank my creator and guide in this strange and exiting world, whose presence in my life has sustained and nurtured me, and whose light, love and healing have protected me throughout my existence.

Further, I would like to express my deepest thanks to my family and friends for many years of patience, generosity and confidence. Their belief in me has guaranteed the success of this long journey.

To the reviewers of my manuscript, Nicola Taylor and Prof. Steve Edwards, I am very grateful for their enthusiasm, their insightful and helpful suggestions and criticisms, which have improved this study with each draft.

Finally to Riaan Coetzer, my profound appreciation and admiration for his unflagging support, encouragement and understanding during even the darkest times, without which this endeavor would have never been started, sustained or completed.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	I
Acknowledgements	II
Chapter 1                      Introduction and motivation	1
1.1      Introduction	1
1.2      Statement of the problem	2
1.3      Aim and rationale of this study	5
1.4      Statement of assumptions	6
1.5      Statement of delimitations	7
1.6      Summary	7
Chapter 2                      Literature overview	9
2.1      The history of prostitution	9
2.2      Psychology's approach to homosexuality	13
2.3      Defining the male prostitute	17
2.4      Typologies of male prostitutes	18
2.5      Scope	22
2.6      Entering the trade	24
2.6.1      Childhood neglect and family dysfunction	25
2.6.2      Sexual abuse	25
2.6.3      Adolescent behaviours	26
2.6.4      Rational choice	26
2.7      Psychological characteristics of male prostitutes	27
2.8      Sexual orientation	29

2.9	Sexual practices	32
2.10	Drug and alcohol abuse	32
2.11	HIV and AIDS	34
2.12	Prostitution and South African law	34
2.13	Conclusion	35
Chapter 3	Research approach and method	37
3.1	Introduction	37
3.2	Theoretical framework of this study	38
3.3	Qualitative research paradigm	41
3.3.1	Justification for using a qualitative approach	42
3.3.2	The qualitative approach	42
3.3.3	Trustworthiness	43
3.4	Design of this study	44
3.4.1	Selection of the participants	44
3.4.2	Data collection	46
3.4.3	Data analysis	47
3.4.3.1	Transcription of the tape recordings	48
3.4.3.2	Bracketing and the phenomenological reduction	49
3.4.3.3	Listening to the interview for a sense of the whole	49
3.4.3.3.1	Hermeneutics	50
3.4.3.4	Coding data pages to their sources	51

3.4.3.5	Unitizing the data	51
3.4.3.6	Transformation of the meaning units into disciplinary language	52
3.4.3.7	Categorizing and coding the data	53
3.4.3.8	Formulating a hypothetical and general description of the experience	54
3.4.3.9	Conclusion	55
Chapter 4	Results	56
4.1	Introducing the participants	56
4.2	Themes and issues	57
4.2.1	Difficulty working as a male prostitute	57
4.2.1.1	Psychological distress	58
4.2.1.2	Degrading and humiliating treatment	59
4.2.1.3	Restriction and loss	60
4.2.1.4	Competitiveness	62
4.2.2	Lack of choice	63
4.2.3	Management	65
4.2.3.1	Drug use	65
4.2.3.2	Cutting off / being tough	66
4.2.4	Empathy for clients	67
4.2.5	Lies and concealment	68
4.2.5.1	Lying to others	68
4.2.5.2	Creating an atmosphere	70
4.2.6	Group affiliation	71

4.2.7	Financial reward	72
4.2.8	Fear	74
4.2.8.1	Fear of exposure	74
4.2.8.2	Fear of the law	76
4.3	Conclusion	77
Chapter 5	Integration of results, evaluation and conclusion	78
5.1	Results	78
5.1.1	The experience of difficulty	80
5.1.2	External locus of control	80
5.1.3	Management	81
5.1.4	Empathy for clients	81
5.1.5	Lies and concealment	82
5.1.6	Group affiliation	83
5.1.7	Money	83
5.1.8	Fear	84
5.2	Evaluation of this study	85
5.2.1	Strengths	85
5.2.2	Limitations	86
5.2.3	Suggestions for future research	87
5.3	Conclusion	88
References		90



# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction and motivation

*It is a story of twisted, tortured people...  
of blatant degradation...a sordid, shocking, gruesome  
story, and it has little trace of hope or uplift or joy...*

Murtagh & Harris (1961, p.9)

### 1.1 Introduction

Most people, if not all, automatically associate the word 'prostitute' with the feminine gender. Even though a sizeable percentage of the prostitutes in South Africa are men (Oosthuizen & Preston-Whyte, 1998), the sex work trade is most often perceived as a uniquely female issue. Every day, male prostitutes, that is, men who sell sex to other men, deal with the complex issues embedded in the industry of commercial sex-work with the added social stigma and prejudice that accompanies homosexuality.

"Ask anyone what the oldest profession in the world is and the odds are they will answer: Prostitution" (Van der Poel, 1992), yet very little of the literature reviewed has portrayed sex workers as individuals who engage in the activity as an occupational decision, or the outcome of a rational economic choice. The term 'prostitution' itself evokes many negative connotations, and the sex-work industry is often linked with many of society's traditional 'taboos' such as illicit sex, sexually

transmitted diseases, illegal drug taking, alcohol abuse and other dark criminal activities, concerning which factors much research has been undertaken.

The study that follows investigates the controversial area of male prostitution while attempting to work outside of this paradigm of deviance, thus avoiding any preconceived ideas, opinions, or biases with regard to the male sex-worker.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

As yet, there exists little theory of the male prostitute's experience of his prostitution per se. The broad phenomenon of prostitution has generally been viewed as deviant and problematic, evoking strong negative moral, and even religious connotations that translate into an encompassing "paradigm of deviance" on which the majority of corresponding scientific inquiry is based. It seems that this implicit prejudice is even more vehement in its application with regard to male prostitution and, although relatively little is known about this social phenomenon, the reaction to male sex-work is generally one of apprehension (Van der Poel, 1992).

Much of the scientific literature reflects this prejudice born of moral disapproval. Throughout the 1960's to the early 1980's, studies were predominantly biopsychologically based and focused on seeking the psychopathological characteristics of individual sex workers and their social milieu, with the main purpose being to discover the factors that predisposed an individual to engage in prostitution (Boyer, 1989; Cates, 1989; Chappell, 1986; Coleman, 1989; Coombs, 1974; Harris, 1973; Pieper, 1979; Riess, 1961). More recently, with the outbreak of the HIV and Aids pandemic, and the incorporation of sex work into the Aids context in the late 1980's,

much research has focused on HIV prevalence, rate of infection, and knowledge of the virus among sex worker populations (De-Graaf, Vanwesenbeek, Van-Zessen, Straver and Visser, 1994; Miller, Klotz and Eckholdt, 1998; Parker, Ward and Day, 1998; McNamara, 1994). In this regard, Browne & Minichiello (1992) are of the opinion that male sex workers have been singled out as a group worthy of research only as a vector of HIV into 'normal' society via their 'normal' clients.

Such foci have led to the stereotyping of the male sex worker as a psychopathological social misfit, who has been sexually abused as a child; a teenage runaway; a heterosexual who only prostitutes because he is desperate for money; a drug and alcohol abuser and as a primary catalyst in the spread of HIV and AIDS (Browne and Minichiello, 1992).

Thus male sex work has, in general, been studied on the basis of 'cause-cure assumptions' (Van der Poel, 1992), that is to say that the damaging influence of a prostitute's existence - to himself and to society at large - is self evident, with researchers seeking to develop strategies which will provide treatment for them and get them away from the 'evil life' which they live. Those who are identified as being associated with AIDS (which includes sex workers) are managed by segregation, discrimination, and exclusion (Plummer, 1988). Public opinion polls in the U.S. reveal that a substantial segment of the population express moralistic, vitriolic, anti-permissive views with regard to drugs, prostitution, and lifestyles involving homosexuality and promiscuity (Nisbet & McQueen, 1993). Not surprisingly, sex workers are subject to abuse and treated as social outcasts (Scrambler & Graham-Smith, 1992).

The result of such an intense focus on the deviance, maladaptivity and pathology of prostitution, as well as the accompanying social stigma, has been that male sex workers have, in general, not been studied in their own right, for their own benefit, or as members of society who can offer a valuable contribution to knowledge and, as a result, the interpersonal and sociopolitical contexts of male commercial sex work, and the personal interpretations and perspectives of the informants have been largely ignored. Thus, issues such as sexual orientation, knowledge of AIDS, health, sexual practices, drug and alcohol use, sexually transmitted diseases, as well as the politics involved in male sex work are all framed in this deviance paradigm, making them inaccessible to therapeutic work.

In this regard, Brown & Minichiello (1992) are of the opinion that the subjective meaning male sex workers give to their world cannot be pushed aside or taken for granted as a neutral link between predisposing factors and behaviours, as such an approach ignores the multi-variant use of meaning and reason in everyday life. In understanding male prostitution, it is necessary to obtain an indication of the process through which the male sex worker handles his world and constructs his action, examining the individual, perceptual, and interpretive situational factors involved:

*...in order to forge new directions in researching male sex work that are sensitive to the lived realities of male sex work...it is necessary to step outside confining conceptualizations of sex work as deviance. In doing so, male sex work can be explored in ways that provide an understanding of the micro and macro forces that are discrete, yet causally related, levels of reality influencing the conduct of male commercial sex and safe sex work practices... (1992, p.49).*

Thus, in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of male prostitution, it is essential that these "subjective meanings", that is, the actual nature of the experience on male prostitution, as experienced by male prostitutes themselves, are described, documented and explained.

This study proceeds from the phenomenological assumption that an experience is ideally related and understood from the frame of reference of the individual who experiences it. Understanding how male prostitute's experience and respond to the activity of sex-work is fundamental to effective therapeutic interventions within this relatively misunderstood population. Hopefully, the results and information gleaned in this study will have some practical value to those researching the phenomenon, and be of value to those who counsel clients involved in the male sex-work industry. In this regard, the study would serve as a foundation for future research and counselling interventions. Further, the exploration and interpretation of the experience of the male prostitute may also assist in the much-needed process of theory-building in this field.

### **1.3 Aim and rationale of this study**

When assessing current literature on male prostitution, it becomes evident that little information exists concerning the subjective experience of the male prostitute, his personal interpretations and perspectives. The aim of this study is therefore to describe and analyse the interview responses of a small sample of male prostitutes in order to discover their experience of male prostitution and to uncover patterns of meaning, similarities and differences across participants within the framework of phenomenology. The primary aim of this study is thus to enhance the readers

understanding of male prostitution, the purpose being a "thick" description of the experience of the male prostitute. Denzin (1989, p.83) defines this type of description as the following:

*Description is the art of describing or giving an account of something in words. In interpretive studies, thick descriptions are deep, dense, detailed accounts of problematic experiences. These accounts often state the meanings and intentions that organize an action. Thin descriptions, be contrast, lack detail, and simply report facts.*

Through this description, it is hoped that the present study will elucidate this hitherto ignored aspect of male prostitution and serve to discover and better describe and explain the regularities and variations in this complex phenomenon. Further, it is hoped that this study will serve as a basis for similar yet more extensive research into male prostitution in the South African context.

#### **1.4 Statement of assumptions**

This study is undertaken making a number of assumptions. The researcher assumes that the experience of the male prostitute is at least partly "knowable" or obtainable by means of an interview. This assumption rests on the premise that the participants will be able to verbally describe and explain their experiences. Based on the literature surrounding the phenomenon, the researcher assumes that the experience of sex-work impacts the male prostitute at a physical, psychological, and an emotional level. Further, the researcher assumes that there is no one "typical" experience of male prostitution, but rather a diversity of differing experiences that may share common

features. The researcher also assumes that the participant's descriptions of their experiences are not the "truth", but rather their perceptions and experiences of sex-work; that is, there is not one truth, only interpretations and perspectives.

### **1.5 Statement of delimitations**

It is important to acknowledge the incomplete nature of this text and to recognise its limitations. This study will be limited to a small sample of participants involved in male-to-male prostitution, and is not concerned with those male sex-workers who provide sexual services to women. Due to time and logistical factors, this study will only focus on those prostitutes who advertise their services in the Johannesburg press, thus excluding those men who ply their trade as street prostitutes. This study will not explore the perspectives or experiences of clients involved in the phenomenon. Being that this study is qualitative in nature, it will not attempt to quantify or measure variables involved in the phenomenon. This study aims to investigate the participant's perception and understanding of his experience, rather than the consequences of that experience in the medium or longer term.

### **1.6 Summary**

This introductory chapter highlighted the way in which male prostitution is placed firmly within the discourses of deviance throughout existing theory and research, as well as the problem that such a focus poses in attempting to understand the phenomenon. The aims, rationale, assumptions and delimitations of the study have also been set out. The following chapter focuses on some of the relevant literature in this field. Topics such as the historical context of male prostitution, etiological

theories, typologies, psychological characteristics, sexual orientation and other related issues are discussed.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature overview**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there exists very little literature on how the male prostitute experiences his world. Much research has been undertaken however, regarding individual and contextual issues embedded in the world of commercial sex between men and, as such, are pertinent to investigating and understanding their experience.

This chapter focuses on the prominent issues surrounding the phenomenon of male prostitution, examining how it is defined in the literature, its historical and legal background, and its incidence in society. The different ways in which male prostitution is categorized, the psychological characteristics of the men involved, as well as their reasons for entering the sex-work industry will also be inspected. Other issues, pertinent to the male sex-worker such as sexual practices, drug and alcohol use, and HIV and AIDS are also addressed.

### **2.1 The history of prostitution**

As discussed in Chapter 1, both prostitution and homosexuality have traditionally been explained within the conceptual frameworks of criminology, deviance, and social control (Browne & Minichiello, 1996). Thus male prostitution carries with it a double burden of stigmatization.

Historically, prostitution has not always carried this 'sinful load'. In many early societies, prostitution was an essential part of worship to the gods and deities of the time (Sanger, 1914). In Babylon, for example, women were required to perform an act of prostitution with a stranger at least once in her lifetime in order to satisfy the goddess Mytilla. Her earnings were presented at the altar of the goddess as an offering. In many other civilizations such as that of the Phoenicians, virgins were required to undergo ritual defloration by a stranger for payment before they were allowed to marry (Henriques, 1961). An example of this marriage between prostitution and religion is found in ancient Greece where sacred women, attached to various religious temples entreated their respective deities by performing sexual rites and dedicated their lives to prostitution in honour of their gods.

Such religious prostitution was not confined to women (Henriques, 1961). Sacred men attached to temples, frequently acted as homosexual prostitutes. As with their female counterparts, their station rested on the notion that because they themselves were sacred, sexual intercourse with them was in itself a sacred act. To the worshipper, sex with a temple prostitute - at a price - became sacred and meaningful religious adoration, uniting both god and devotee, and the exhilaration of the sexual act with the frenzy of the religious experience.

Thus for many ancient cultures, the idea of religious prostitution, male or female, was socially accepted and even sanctioned as part of daily life and so too, it seems, was the idea of non-religious prostitution. In ancient Rome, for example, the civil and social status of prostitutes was extensively examined in Roman private, criminal, and tax law, dealing with issues such as their status as Roman citizens, marriages and

adultery, prostitutes as slaves, and their contribution to state revenue (McGinn, 1998). This appears to imply that, although not on a par with other more 'noble' types of work, professional prostitution played an integral component within the working Roman society. Both men and women who engaged in prostitution had to register as prostitutes (or face arrest, punishment, and eviction from cities. Like their female colleagues, male prostitutes were also required to pay tax to the state.

A change in policy towards prostitution seems to have accompanied the change in Roman governance when Christian emperors began influencing Roman law with Christian doctrines and morality. McGinn, (1998) notes that sexuality is a field in which social values are often translated into legal norms. Although the progression was rather slow, the influence of Judeo - Christian principles seems to have turned this permissive yet controlled aspect of Roman law 'upside down'.

The belief that sexual intercourse should only take place for the purposes of procreation and then only within the bounds of holy matrimony, shaped the early Christian church's attitude towards prostitution. In the church's eyes, prostitution - as did any sexual activity outside of marriage - became sinful. This view of sex-work did not however translate into the complete outlawing of prostitution. Although looked upon as immoral, it was believed that prostitution served an important function within society - a necessary evil as it were - to satisfy the sexual needs of men in a way that would prevent adultery and the destruction of homes and families (Jordan, 1993). Thus prostitution was tolerated, and rather than eradicating the 'vice', the resulting legal measures were aimed at regulating and controlling the activity. Towards the end of the nineteenth century and at the height of Victorian sexual

conservatism, more repressive legislation regarding female prostitutes came into effect around Europe, resulting in the criminalization of the activity (Hyde, 1970). This legislation and the resulting penalties afforded by the legal system were relatively mild in comparison to those concerning homosexuality and male prostitution.

Male prostitution, indeed homosexuality as a whole, suffered very differently as a result of the change from pagan to Christian influence. The ancient Greek and Roman worlds appear to have classified individuals differently from the contemporary Western divisions of 'homosexuality' and 'heterosexuality'. Rather, they seem to have categorised people as either 'active' or 'passive' while ignoring the gender of the individual concerned (Hallett & Skinner, 1997) and under certain conditions creating a relatively indulgent atmosphere for same-sex sexual activities. Unlike these ancient Greek and Roman societies, the Jews of the Old Testament strongly disapproved of homosexual activity between men. This was a 'crime' punishable by death (Hyde, 1970). Such a view permeated western Christian traditions, where even homosexual acts between consenting adults were seen as "transgressions of the Divine Law by which Man's sexual nature is governed" (p.32) and could result in any number of penances, depending on the nature and form of the homosexual activity.

Just as Christian social values translated into legal norms with regard to female prostitution, so they translated into laws prohibiting and punishing homosexuality and by default, male prostitution. In England for example, from the reign of King Henry VIII to that of Queen Victoria, any man convicted of a homosexual act ('buggery' or

'sodomy') were subject to harsh punishments including life imprisonment with hard labour and very frequently death (Hyde, 1970).

Thus, prostitution took on shroud of abnormality, deviance, and 'sin', and male prostitution shares this characterization, but with an added dimension: homosexuality. Sex between men is by definition homosexual, regardless of the sexual orientation of the participants. Commercial sex between men is coloured by both the 'disgrace' associated with prostitution as well as the stigma attached to homosexuality.

## **2.2 Psychology's approach to homosexuality**

The founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, placed sexuality at the center of his theories and thus examined sexual orientation as well as homosexuality extensively. He postulated that all people are born with the innate potential to be bisexual (Herman, 1994), and during childhood, all individuals move through a homosexual phase on their way to becoming heterosexual. Further, this transitory phase of homosexuality never disappears entirely, but is slowly replaced in the course of the individual's development, thus resulting in heterosexuality.

Homosexuality was thus (in Freud's view), an arrest of this sexual development. In his study of Leonardo da Vinci, Freud (1957, p. 89) postulates that a "very intense, erotic attachment to a female person", - usually the child's overly tender mother and reinforced by an absent or weak father figure, - leads to a fixation in the child's sexual development. This attachment or "love of his mother" (p.100) is repressed, the boy begins to identify himself with his mother (he puts himself in her place) and places himself as a model on which to base the objects of his new love and sexual attraction.

By doing this he preserves the love for his mother and by seeking sex and affection from other men and not woman, avoids being unfaithful to his 'love'. In this way, Freud believed the boy becomes homosexual.

This 'pathologising' of homosexuality by Freud was of key importance to the development of a psychological approach to this sexual orientation. Freud's theory and openness about sexual matters revolutionized both European and American culture (Herman, 1994) and promoted the rapid spread of psychoanalytic thought throughout the world. Thus, the view that homosexuality was a mental disorder, a "sexual aberration" (Freud, 1957, p. 99) was fixed in the 'psyche' of psychological thought as well as in both the psychiatric and medical professions.

Ironically, although Freud viewed homosexuality as having its source or cause in abnormal or arrested development (which promoted its classification as a disorder), he never saw it as an illness:

*Homosexuality is assuredly no advantage, but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation, it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be a variation of sexual function produced by a certain arrest of sexual development. Many highly respectable individuals of ancient and modern times have been homosexuals, several of the greatest in among them (Plato, Michaelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, etc.). It is a great injustice to persecute homosexuality as a crime, and cruelty too (Freud, in*

Herman 1995, p. 32)

From this statement it may be postulated that, for Freud, homosexuality represented no impairment in judgement, reliability or social and vocational abilities. He even

went as far as to say that although the causes of homosexuality might be clarified by psychoanalysis, it could never hope to 'cure' it:

*It is not for psychoanalysis to solve the problem of homosexuality...to undertake to convert a fully developed homosexual into a heterosexual is not much more promising than to do the reverse (Freud, in Herman, 1994, p. 33).*

This view was however shared by few of Freud's colleagues and followers and thus homosexuality became a disorder, a mental illness that could be treated and cured, and a view that permeated the psychoanalytic school of psychology. This was then cemented into general psychological thought when in 1952, the first edition of "psychiatry diagnostic Bible" (Herman, 1994, p. 69), called the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual: Mental Disorders (D.S.M) was published. It listed homosexuality as a sexual deviation under the general umbrella of sociopathic personality disturbances, alongside pedophilia, fetishism, and sexual sadism (rape, sexual assault and mutilation). Under growing pressure from gay activism, gay psychiatrists and psychologists, and mounting research evidence, this characterization of homosexuality changed when on December 15th, 1973, the American Psychiatric Association's board of trustees, decided to remove homosexuality from the DSM. (Herman, 1994) and in 1975, the American psychological Association adopted the following resolution:

*Homosexuality per se implies no impairment in judgement, stability, reliability, or general social and vocational capability. Further, the APA urges all mental health professionals to take the lead in removing the stigma of mental illness that has long*

*been associated with homosexual orientation* (APA policy statements on lesbian and gay issues, 1998).

Thus homosexuality became 'normal', or rather it ceased to be pathological, a move that had a number of important implications for the APA's approach to homosexuality, implications that challenge the old ideas and myths about being gay. The APA does not consider sexual orientation to be a conscious choice that can be voluntarily changed. Sexual orientation is seen to be shaped at an early age through a complex interaction of biological, psychological and social factors (APA, 1996). Further, they agreed that homosexuality is not an illness, mental disorder or emotional problem that can be associated with emotional or social problems.

This 'unpathologising' of homosexuality by the psychological community has made extensive inroads into society's view of this sexual orientation and in many arenas, being 'gay' has become socially acceptable. The traditional conservative and prejudicial views of the past however, seem slow to change and this coupled with the deviance associated with prostitution, creates a harsh social climate in which the male prostitute is socially denigrated:

*There are perhaps few groups as marginalised or despised -  
even within the generally marginalised and despised universe of men -  
as male prostitutes* (McKenna, 1995, p.66).



### 2.3 Defining the male prostitute

Finding an adequate definition for the general concept of prostitution is at the very least challenging, such are the confusing variety of ideas attributed to it (Henriques, 1961). The 'meaning of words' often convey something of the wealth of received ideas and unhelpful moralizing that influence any general understanding of that which is being defined. Definitions are important because they reflect and even create the boundaries around the understanding of and attitude towards that which we seek to define (Shaw & Butler, 1998). Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of prostitution.

McGinn (1998, p.17) notes that "definitions of prostitution tend to be functional in nature. The specific motive for a definition inevitably affects its content. This is especially true of moral, legal, and medical definitions of 'prostitute'". Many researchers and authors disagree on its precise description, perhaps due to the many variations that occur within the male sex-worker community, as well as the moral and value biases that tend to slip in and around this 'distasteful' subject. In this regard, Van der Poel (1992) is of the opinion that:

*If we examine the nebulous mixture of problematic situations that the literature provides, looking for the sort of experiences that allow a person to call himself prostitute, it becomes clear that male prostitution is an elastic concept for many researchers (1992, p.263).*

In its broadest sense, prostitution may be defined as

*...any sexual acts, including those which do not actually involve copulation,  
habitually performed by individuals with other individuals...  
for a consideration which is not sexual* (Henriques, 1961, p.17).

Simon, Morse, Osofsky, Balson, & Gaumer, (1992) offer a similar definition of the male prostitute as a biological male who receives payment, either in money or trade, in exchange for sexual favours. Pieper (1979) takes a similar stance, but stipulates that the 'seller' derives no pleasure from his participation. The disadvantage that comes with such a broad definition is that, because it encompasses a wide range of possible money-earning behaviours within the social paradigm of male-to-male interactions, it becomes difficult to define the limits of male prostitution (Van der Poel, 1992). For most researchers however, preference is given to rather broad definitions, as will be the case in this research.

## **2.4 Typologies of male prostitutes**

A typology may be seen as a kind of conceptual framework in which phenomena are classified in terms of certain characteristics that they have in common with other phenomena. The literature concerning male prostitutes consistently uses such descriptive categories to divide male sex-workers according to certain differentiating denominators.

The sexual orientation of the prostitute has been used as one such denominator, with some studies classifying their subject as either heterosexual or homosexual (Deisher

& Paperry, 1983). More recent research includes bisexuality and 'uncertain of sexual orientation' into their classificatory systems (Cates & Markley, 1992; Boles & Elifson, 1994). Motive for engaging in male prostitution has also been used as a basis for classification. Markos, Wade & Walzman, (1994) note three distinct groups in this regard that may adopt the activity on either a full- or a part-time basis. The first group consists of those men that engage in prostitution as an additional source of income, the second are those that have character pathology and impaired reality testing, and the third are those that have no marketable skills or talents and engage in prostitution as their main source of income.

In other studies, the male sex-worker has been classified into more heterogeneous groups (Markos et al, 1994). Researchers differ as to what aspects dictate the structure of these groupings, and the numerous and sometimes overlapping categories attest to the variation of these divisions in the sex-work industry. There appear to be five main, general categories that appear in the literature regarding the distinctions found in the world of male prostitutes:

- street prostitution;
- organized male prostitution;
- call boys;
- kept boys; and
- delinquents.

### **Street prostitution**

A street prostitute (or street worker / walker / hustler) is defined as a person who solicits clients primarily on the streets or in bars (Simon et al., 1992). They generally operate independently, usually at night, and at known 'cruising spots' in mostly urban areas. Oosthuizen & Preston-Whyte (1998) refer to this category as "informal" prostitutes, who live from day to day, seldom making plans for their future. They tend to spend most of their time working to provide for their immediate needs. This places them in a vicious cycle from which they are unlikely to break out without some assistance. Their expectations and wishes are relatively modest, mostly only hoping for a stable occupation and secure income some time in future.

Van der Poel (1992) notes that this sector is easily accessible even for amateur sex-workers due to the fact that clients using street prostitutes are usually only paying for sex. The 'novelty value' of the street sex-worker determines the price he is paid. The longer he works in one place, the more his 'novelty value' diminishes, the more he must reduce his fees in order to attract clients.

### **Organised male prostitution**

These men work in established brothels or 'houses' where a madam (owner) provides facilities such as accommodation and advertising, as well as guaranteeing the safety of both prostitute and their clients in exchange for a part of the prostitute's earnings (Van der Poel, 1992). Oosthuizen & Preston-Whyte (1998) refer to this group as "formal" male prostitutes who work set hours and abide by certain 'house-rules' set down by the owner of the agency.

Van der Poel (1992) argues that communicative and linguistic skills are of utmost importance to the success of men who work in such agencies. Clients visiting these 'houses' pay for interaction that transcends the sexual act and must therefore be able to converse and charm their clients, often taking on the guise of the type of partner the client is most likely to prefer.

### **Call boys**

These men offer their services through advertisements in the national newspapers and in magazines targeted at the homosexual market. They operate independently, using the phone to liaise and make arrangements with their clients and either work from home or a hotel room, or travel to their client's homes (Van der Poel, 1992). Oosthuizen & Preston-Whyte (1998) refer to this category as "semi-formal" workers, who can also conduct their business from gay bars and clubs. They work virtually all hours and often share accommodation with other prostitutes who operate in a similar fashion.

This sector tends to lack the visual means of attracting clients and must therefore sell their services over the phone by creating an illusion of the partner the client is looking for (Van der Poel, 1992). Clients making use of this sector tend to return to the same prostitute on a regular basis, thus ensuring that the bare minimum of individuals know of their visits. This creates the potential for client-prostitute relationships to deepen and risk emotional involvement: "Only the most professional call 'boys' succeed in preventing the emotional nature of the relationship from undermining its economic basis" (p. 271).

### **Kept boys**

These men have outgrown the normal everyday world of prostitution. They conduct a service quite unlike other types of male prostitutes. Often referred to as 'kept boys', they offer their clients the illusion of a loving relationship that the outside world will not recognise as prostitution. They invest more of themselves in the relationship with the client than prostitutes usually do, often spending anything from one night to many weeks in his company (Van der Poel, 1992).

### **Delinquents / pseudo-prostitutes**

This group uses the act of soliciting clients as a means to achieve some purpose other than prostitution (Van der Poel, 1992). Thus can include assaulting, robbing, blackmailing, or gay-bashing potential clients. Sexual contact is rare, and is usually limited to oral sex or masturbation when it does (Markos, 1994).

## **2.5 Scope**

Contradicting the longstanding impression that more females work as prostitutes than males, much of the literature suggests that males make up a relatively large percentage of the sex-work industry at large. The illegal nature and general disagreement surrounding the definition of prostitution, however, makes it difficult to estimate the number of people engaging in the activity (Weiner, 1997). The relative paucity of studies undertaken regarding male prostitution, especially in the South African context, greatly contributes to this deficit in knowledge of prevalence and number. The research into this obscured area reflects these hindering factors.

Although it is estimated that every year more than one million people work in the U.S.A as prostitutes, and a large proportion of this prostituting population are thought to be men of the approximately 100 000 people arrested annually on sex-work related charges, only 20 % are male (Weiner, 1997). Snell (1991) is of the opinion that this relatively small percentage is misconceiving due to the fact that female sex-workers are more likely to come to the attention of the authorities than men are. Men, he argues, are far less visible than their female counterparts, tending to merge into the atmosphere and activity of the street culture, "hanging out on street corners and parks, and in fast-food restaurants" (1991, p.293). Clahoun & Weaver (1996) support this argument, suggesting three reasons for this 'invisibility': firstly that male street prostitutes have no visible 'markings' with which to identify them as prostitutes; secondly, that many male sex-workers work sporadically, only when facing economic difficulties; and thirdly because many business which shelter male sex-work (such as nightclubs and bars), only operate late at night.

In his groundbreaking study of human sexual behaviour, Kinsey and his colleges estimated that the number of male 'homosexual' prostitutes in cities was not far less than that of females engaged in 'heterosexual' prostitution (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948). In another, more recent study, Weisberg (1985) found that more than half of all adolescent prostitutes on the streets were male, thus confirming Kinsey's results.

In his study of male-to-male sexualities in the developing world, McKenna (1995) reports that the extent of male prostitution is reasonably well-documented in developing countries. In Bombay, India, for example, it is estimated that there are

around 50,000 male prostitutes who ply their trade (in contrast to 250,000 female prostitutes). In Africa, "male prostitutes can be found in virtually all large (African) cities and tourist centers, around five-star and other hotels catering to a mainly expatriate clientele and the local rich" (McKenna, 1995, p.67). Closer to home in a study of prostitution in Johannesburg, Freed (1949) found that estimating the number of male prostitutes rather challenging. He relied on word-of-mouth evidence to gather his data:

*There was no means of estimating the number of adult homosexual prostitutes in Johannesburg. From what we could gather from the homosexuals whom we questioned, there must be several hundred of them in the city (1949, p.68)*

## **2.6 Entering the trade**

Historically, a considerable amount of interest has been devoted to understanding the factors that motivate individuals into the world of prostitution (Brown & Minciello, 1996). Within this literature, there appears to be two main perspectives concerning the antecedents to prostitution; the most widespread of these characterizes prostitutes (both male and female) as runaways from dysfunctional families involving parental alcoholism and interparental violence, victims of childhood sexual and physical abuse, or who are motivated to engage in sex-work due to low self-esteem and drug or alcohol addictions. The other view highlights rational choice as the primary motivation for entering the sex-work industry



### **2.6.1 Childhood neglect and family dysfunction**

Some researchers suggest that dysfunctional family environments may play a role in runaway behaviour by children and subsequent engagement in male commercial sex-work (Nandon, Koverola, & Schulderman, 1998). In one study, the majority of subjects (82 %) came from broken homes with abusive, absent, or alcoholic fathers, and over 70 % had ineffective mothers (Allen, 1980). In another, 50 % of the subjects interviewed reported physical abuse at home (Ritter, 1989). Markos et al. (1994) hypothesize that such individuals may respond to the psychosocial sequelae of adolescent abuse by running away from home, which places them at risk of engaging in sex work.

In contrast to these studies, male prostitutes were found to be no more likely to be raised by dysfunctional families, than a cross-matched group of non-prostitute males (Earls & David, 1989). Similarly, Widom & Kuhns (1996) found that, as opposed to their female subjects, early childhood victimization of male subjects was not associated with an increased risk of prostitution.

### **2.6.2 Sexual abuse**

Coombs (1974) proposed that prostitution is a learned behaviour resulting from the rewarding of adult-child sex. In a more recent study, males prostitution is described as the acting out of homosexual child abuse by the male prostitute in an attempt to gain back control of his body (Boyer, 1989). Browne & Miniciello (1996) argue that such studies fail to recognise that the majority of those who are sexually abused do not engage in prostitution, citing Robinson & Davies (1991) and Leahy (1992) who found no support for the hypothesis that child abuse predetermines prostitution. Within the

male prostitute population however, it appears that a large proportion has had some form of early sexual contact. Earls & David (1990) found that 60 % of their sample had been targets of sexual abuse by a family member

### **2.6.3 Adolescent behaviours**

Some authors have identified certain adolescent behaviours as possible predictors of prostitution activity, including drug and alcohol abuse. There is much debate however regarding the notion of causality between these behaviours and prostitution. Some studies identify drug and alcohol abuse as a motivating factor for engaging in prostitution. Bagley & Young (1987), for example, found that the primary reason for entering prostitution among their sample of juvenile prostitutes was the need to support a drug habit. In contrast, Silbert, Pines, & Lynch (1982) found that approximately equal numbers of prostitutes were addicted to alcohol and / or drugs prior to their first prostitution encounter and after becoming involved in prostitution. These almost contradictory findings call into question whether these behaviours lead to prostitution, or whether prostitution encourages issues of substance abuse.

### **2.6.4 Rational choice**

Rational choice may be defined as the way in which individuals act or behave in their environment in an attempt to maximize pleasure and minimize pain, governed by consideration of the potential for pleasure or pain. In their study of rational decision making among male prostitutes, Calhoun & Weaver, (1996) found that overall, the decision to engage in sex-work is a rational one in which the benefits of the activity are weighed against the possible negative effects. More often than not, many of the complex factors involved in prostitution were found to center around a cost/benefit

analysis of economic reward versus physical or psychological harm. The perceived benefits noted include financial reward, sexual pleasure (for homosexual males), flexible work schedules, the availability of drugs and alcohol, partying, and interaction with clients. The perceived liabilities of prostitution were noted as the possibility of being arrested, sexual activity with other males (for heterosexual males), the risk of sexually transmitted diseases (especially HIV and AIDS), the potential for violence, and not being paid for services rendered.

Those men who chose to engage and continue in commercial sex believed that the perceived benefits outweighed the potential risks. By using this cost versus benefit framework, they were able to rationalize and justify behaviour considered by many to be deviant, abnormal, dissolute and dangerous (Calhoun & Weaver, 1996). An example of such decision making is found in McKenna (1995), who reports that in South Africa and Zimbabwe, unemployment is the main reason for some otherwise heterosexual males engage in commercial sex with men. Many enter prostitution as an alternative to crime. In this regard, Browne & Miniciello (1996) note that:

*Entering into sex work as the outcome of a dignified rational choice for financial gain is the only reason cited in the literature that provides an account of the sex worker as a worker who is subject to the same socio-economic forces as any other person and describes sex work as a hobby rather than a psychological condition (p. 38).*

## **2.7 Psychological characteristics of male prostitutes**

As has been discussed in the preceding sections, the psychological stability of the male prostitute has historically being called into question due to the 'deviant' nature of

their occupation. Many earlier studies suggested that these men enter the sex-work industry as a result of some underlying psychological weakness or disorder, but current research tends to view the environment in which the prostitute works as the predominant source of psychological problems.

Simon et al. (1992) argue that the psychological 'symptoms' which are often found among male prostitutes such as mistrust, suspicion, feeling hopeless about the future, loneliness, and a sense of personal inadequacy and social alienation, are more likely a reflection of their lifestyle attributable to their work environment than to some innate psychological condition.

The world in which male prostitutes work can be disorganized, highly unstable and chaotic. Faced with the threat of HIV and AIDS, the stigma associated with homosexual prostitution, the fear of being apprehended by law enforcement agencies, a lack of education and job skills or stable employment history and the fear of not generating enough money to buy food for the day, they lead a life in constant fear for their immediate safety and well-being (Oosthuizen & Preston-Whyte, 1998).

Given these aspects of his work environment it appears that, contrary to popular belief, the male sex-worker shows remarkable resilience and fortitude in maintaining emotional stability. Simon et al. (1992) found that although these men experience more than twice as many psychological symptoms, and with a greater intensity than the general population, they report fewer psychological symptoms and are less distressed by these symptoms than a representative group of adult psychiatric outpatients. These symptoms included feelings of hopelessness, isolation, and

loneliness, feelings of personal inadequacy and inferiority accompanied by a desire to quit prostituting, and intense feelings of dysphoria, suspiciousness, social alienation, and mistrust of others. Many of their subjects stated that sex-work made them feel degraded and immoral, and that this caused them great distress.

## **2.8 Sexual orientation**

The nature of commercial sex between men seems to imply a strong homosexual percentage among male prostitutes. Being that the activity predominantly requires the male prostitute to have sexual contact with another male, the general assumption appears to be that the prostitute's sexual orientation must be gay in order to be able to engage in such sex-work.

DeCecco (1981) conceptualizes sexual orientation as being a distinct component of an individual's 'sexual identity' as a whole. This 'sexual identity' is seen as comprising such components as the following:

- Biological sex of the individual at birth.
- Gender identity, referring to the individual's basic belief or conviction of being either male or female.
- Social sex role, referring to the physical and psychological characteristics that are culturally associated with the roles of male and female (masculine and feminine stereotypes of how males and females should behave as a gender) including physical appearance, personality, mannerisms, speech, interests and habits.

- Sexual orientation, referring to the individuals physical sexual activity with, interpersonal affection for (love & trust), and erotic fantasies (mental images about sexual activity or romantic relationships) about members of the same or opposite biological sex.

Thus, sexual orientation (as a component of individuals sexual identity), determines or prescribes the sex of the person to whom the individual will be attracted and will fantasize about, physically as well as romantically. A heterosexual person is thus an individual who is attracted both physically and romantically to a person of the opposite biological sex, and a homosexual person to another of their own sex. These distinctions, by definition, imply two concrete and mutually exclusive sexual orientation, an idea that inspired the belief that sexual orientation is dichotomous and permanent (DeCecco, 1981).

Kinsey et al. (1948) refuted this view of polarized sexual orientation postulating that human beings have bisexual capabilities (are attracted to both male and female) and that sexual orientation involves a variety of interrelated dimensions between homosexuality, heterosexuality, and bisexuality. It may thus be inaccurate to assume that individuals are exclusively homosexual or heterosexual. Rather, it appears that they may exist on a continuum, varying in the degree of homosexual & heterosexual feelings they manifest and experience, both conceptually and practically.

Thus sexual orientation is not clear or concise, a situation which, as in the case of biological sex, gender identity and social sex roles, produces fear, contempt and prejudice. Of this complexity within human sexual behaviour, Kinsey et al wrote:

*The world is not divided into sheep and goats. Not all things are black nor all things white. It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discreet categories. Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separate pigeonholes. The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects. The sooner we learn this concerning human sexual behaviour, the sooner we shall reach a sounder understanding of the reality of sex (1948, p. 639).*

As with most literature concerning other aspects of the topic, there appears to be much contradictory evidence with regard to sexual orientation and the male prostitute. Challenging the notion that in order to work as a male sex-worker, one must by default be gay, it appears that men who participate in male to male prostitution are not necessarily homosexual. Earls & David (1989) found that only 70 % of the male sex-workers they interviewed identified themselves as homosexual or bisexual. In another study, Cates & Jeffery (1992) found that subjects identified themselves identified themselves primarily as homosexual, bisexual, or uncertain of their sexual orientation. In contrast to this, Boles & Elifson (1994) found that only 17,9 % of their sample of male prostitutes reported being homosexual, while 46,4 % reported being heterosexual, and 35,7 % bisexual.

From these seemingly contradictory findings it appears that, at the very least, all male prostitutes are not exclusively homosexual in their orientation, and that there may be a large proportion of them who are either bisexual or heterosexual. Not unlike the general population, the sexual orientation of these men seems to correspond to Kinsey's conception of a continuum of sexual orientation.

## **2.9 Sexual practices**

The range of sexual behaviours that male prostitutes engage in is varied, and often appears to relate to the preferences of both client and prostitute. The risk of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV / AIDS also seems to play a role in the area of sexual behaviour.

Some male prostitutes' commercial encounters with clients involve mutual masturbation as the only sexual activity. Some may not involve sex at all. For example, the client may prefer to just be massaged, acting out fantasy roles, or his need may be more of a social one requiring the sex-worker to accompany him to a restaurant or show, or to go on holiday with him. In their study of the sexual behaviour of young male prostitutes, Pleak & Meyer-Bahlburg, (1990) found that in their sample, of all the sexual encounters between sex-worker and client, 86 % involved masturbation, 71 % involved fellatio (22 % subject fellating the client), and 17 % anal intercourse (4 % subject receptive).

Other sexual behaviours include rimming (oral-anal stimulation) and the more sadomasochistic and scatologic forms of sexual activity, although the latter appear to be relatively uncommon (Pleak & Meyer-Bahlburg, 1990).

## **2.10 Drug and alcohol use/abuse**

Much if not all of the literature reviewed suggests that drug and alcohol abuse is ubiquitous among sex-workers. In one study, researchers found that all of the subjects they interviewed used substances, primarily alcohol, marijuana and cocaine (Simon et



al., 1992). Of those interviewed, 80 % were 'polysubstance' abusers, that is, they used more than one substance in combination with another.

As has already been noted, substance abusers may turn to prostitution in order to support their habits, but many studies suggest that prostitutes turn to drugs in order to cope with the strain their profession places on them. Using certain drugs and alcohol can lead to both an increase in sexual arousal and sexual pleasure, and a decrease in sexual inhibitions and feelings of guilt associated with the sexual activity (De Graaf et al., 1994).

Morse, Simon, Balson, & Osofsky (1992a) found that the majority of male sex-workers are high on drugs and/or alcohol whilst engaging in acts of prostitution, suggesting that their social and work environments facilitate and promote substance abuse. Their findings also suggest that prostitutes who are experiencing internal conflict or psychological distress over performing sexual acts with other males, use drugs and alcohol as a means of coping with the negative feelings associated with the behaviour. Pleak & Meyer-Bahkburg (1990) found that 60 % and 70 % of their subjects reported having been sometimes or always under the influence of drugs or alcohol, whilst engaging in commercial sex with men, respectively. In their study of Durban street-prostitutes, Oosthuizen & Preston-Whyte (1998) found that the majority of their research participants used alcohol, cannabis, and mandrax. They stated that they used drugs primarily to help them in overcoming feelings such as anger, depression, guilt and shame, to which they are subject while they are working.

It appears that the use of drugs and alcohol mainly effect the way in which the male prostitute experiences his work, and may act as a coping mechanism against the subjective psychological distress of the sex-worker. The degree or intensity of this distress seems to be related to the individual psychological makeup of the sex-worker and his personal perceptions of his occupation.

### **2.11 HIV and AIDS**

As has previously been mentioned, the threat of HIV/AIDS infection is a primary concern for male prostitutes and an important factor in their daily working experience. It appears that when compared to their non-prostitute cohorts, male prostitutes are knowledgeable about HIV / AIDS, and this seems to be affecting their sexual behaviour, resulting in safer sexual practices with clients thereby reducing the risks associated with frequent sexual encounters (Pleak & Meyer-Bahlburg, 1990).

### **2.12 Prostitution and South African law**

In South Africa, prostitution is for the most part dealt with in terms of the Sexual Offences Act (23 of 1957) (South African Law Commission, Issue Paper 19, 2002). In brief, this Act (and its amendments) deems any of the following illegal under law:

- Unlawful carnal intercourse or indecent acts for reward
- Keeping a brothel
- Procuring any individual for prostitution
- Facilitating prostitution
- Soliciting
- Living on the earnings of prostitution

- Public indecency

The Act stops short of making it an offence to *be* a prostitute and instead focuses on various activities that are characteristic to prostitution in its enforcement. Although the Act never mentions male prostitution, it penalises “any person” who engages in sex for reward and therefore applies to male prostitutes as well as female prostitutes, thus making prostitution (both male and female) illegal.

The notion of decriminalizing prostitution has recently gained much popularity, resulting in a case (*Ellen Jordan v the State*) being brought before the South African Constitutional Court challenging the constitutionality of sections of the Act dealing with the exchange of sex for money and brothel keeping. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of October 2002, judgement was handed down in the matter. The court was divided 6 to 5 with the majority finding that the sections of the Act concerned were constitutional (Alexander & Sullivan, 2002).

The implications of the Constitutional Court’s ruling are that until the laws relating to the sex industry, selling sex and brothel keeping are changed, prostitution will remain a crime, the Sexual Offences Act will continue to be enforced and the threat of arrest and conviction will remain a significant part of prostitutes' daily experiences.

### **2.13 Conclusion**

Male prostitution is a complex phenomenon whose existence and nature is embedded within the social, religious, economic, and political fabric of society. The current chapter has focused on how male sex-work is described and defined within the

confines of societal, legal, and psychological science. It has also focused on the different factors and variables associated with the world of the male prostitute, all of which appear to be inextricably linked to his experience and perception of his occupation, and are therefore pertinent to any related research. The methodology and philosophical context of the study are explicated in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### Research approach and method

The literature review on male prostitution and the issues surrounding the phenomenon provide a comprehensive background against which to analyse and understand the experiences of the participants in this study. In this chapter, the study is positioned in the context of its phenomenological framework, the research methodology is described and the rationale for choosing a qualitative approach is explained. This is followed by a detailed description of the design of the study including such aspects as the sampling and selection of the participants, the methods of data collection and the analysis of the data.

#### 3.1 Introduction

In its broadest sense, the term *methodology* refers to the "process, principles, and procedures by which we approach problems and seek answers" (Bogdon and Taylor, 1975, p.1). Within the field of the social sciences, the term refers to the way in which research is conducted and it is the philosophical assumptions and principles of the researcher that determine this stance on how to do research.

This study is framed within a qualitative methodology and uses a case study approach in which the researcher conducts in-depth interviews with a limited number of participants, analyses their responses and discusses the findings. The qualitative researcher's task in this study is to gain a holistic, systematic, integrated and

encompassing overview of the experiences of the male prostitute, focusing on the whole person and the whole experience in its context.

### **3.2 Theoretical framework of this study**

The experience of the male prostitute will be studied in accordance with the principles of phenomenology. Phenomenology is described as a uniform and systematically developed philosophical method that found its most persuasive momentum in the work of the German philosopher, Edmund Husserl (1859 - 1938) (Solomon, 1980).

Husserl's main objective in his approach was to discover a scientific philosophy and corresponding methodology that would be as rigorous as empirical science, but that would not reduce its subject matter into constituent elements (Brennan, 1991). Empirical philosophies maintain that objective reality can be more accurately known by an observing subject and identified, measured and to some extent predicted by rational scientific processes. In contrast, phenomenology seeks the true nature of reality by setting aside all theory and preconception and going back to life as it is actually perceived and experienced (Valle & Halling, 1989). Rather than adhering to *only* the elementarism and reductionism of the empirical approaches, phenomenology tries to uncover and comprehend the truth of something by moving around it, experiencing it from different angles and perspectives and letting the expression of each perspective relate the truth of the subject directly (Chessick, 1995). As Giorgi (1997) explains:

*It is not so much that phenomenology is against empiricism as it is that*

*it is more than merely empirical. (1997, p.236)*

At the core of phenomenological thought is an emphasis on consciousness, that is, the events, occurrences, happenings etc. as they appear to the consciousness of the individual concerned, with little consideration for the external physical reality or for the 'objective'. Rather than existing as some theoretical mental instrument or a repository of experiences, Husserl defines 'consciousness' as a person's *being conscious* of something, that is, an individual's *experience* of an object (Brennan, 1991). Essential to this conception of 'consciousness' is 'intentionality' referring to the fact that consciousness is directional. Any act of consciousness always has an object, that is, it is always directed toward something. Thus, in order for consciousness to 'occur' it must exist in relation to an object. Giorgi (1997, p. 237) explains:

*...consciousness always takes an object, and the object always transcends the act in which it appears...there are not two independent entities, objects and subjects, existing in themselves which later get to relate to each other, but the very meaning of the subject implies a relationship to an object, and to be an object implies being related to subjectivity.*

To study consciousness, Husserl introduced the methodological tool of phenomenological reduction. The word "reduction" is derived from the Latin compound "*re-ducere*" meaning "to lead back to origins" (Koestenbaum, 1975) and in terms of phenomenology can be defined as:

*the philosophical effort to circumvent all interpretations, presuppositions, and adventitious aspects of the phenomena themselves. Only by going back to the original*

*and unadulterated presentations of the experiential phenomena themselves can the facts of being be adequately understood* (Koestenbaum 1975, p. LVI).

Similar to refining gold or some other precious metal, the phenomenological reduction takes an amalgam of unrefined consciousness and reduces or refines it into pure consciousness (or the 'essence' of consciousness) by 'burning off' or eliminating impurity, that is, that which is not pure consciousness. Thus, one sets aside as much as possible of one's current knowledge, expectations, assumptions and attitudes about the phenomena, rejects all assumptions of causation and takes a step back to describe and examine the phenomena under investigation as it presents itself (Owen, 1994).

Succinctly put then, phenomenology is "...a philosophical doctrine that advocates the direct investigation of phenomena as consciously experienced, without theories about their causal explanation and as free as possible from unexamined preconceptions and presuppositions" (Spiegelberg, 1982, p.810). Bogdon and Taylor (1975) regard this phenomenological perspective as central to their conception of qualitative methodology since it guides what the qualitative researcher searches for in his research, how he structures the research process and how he interprets the product of the research. According to these authors, the phenomenologist views behaviour (words and actions) as a product of how people interpret their world and the task of the researcher is to capture this process of interpretation. To do this requires what Weber (1968) called *verstehen*, taking a stance of empathic understanding and attempting to reproduce in one's own mind the feelings, motives and thoughts behind the actions of others. Thus in order to grasp the meanings of an individual's



behaviour, the phenomenologist seeks to see things from that individual's point of view.

Polanyi (1958, 1959, 1967) refers to this 'posture' adopted by the phenomenological researcher as 'indwelling': "To indwell means to exist as an interactive spirit, force or principle, and to exist *within* as an activating spirit, force or principle. It literally means to live between, and within. Perhaps this dictionary definition can be translated to qualitative research to mean being at one with the persons under investigation, walking a mile in another person's shoes, or understanding the person's point of view from an empathic rather than a sympathetic position" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1997, p.25). Although "indwelling" involves the attempt to 'live in' and experience the world of the subject as experienced by the subject, it is simultaneously reflective in nature. Thus the researcher not only seeks to experience the world of the subject, but also to place himself outside of the situation and review the meanings of the experience. In this study therefore, the researcher will undertake to empathically understand the phenomenological world of the male prostitute while reflecting on it.

### **3.3 Qualitative research paradigm**

The phenomenological approach, with its focus on subjective experience and the meaning which individuals attribute to it, forms the theoretical framework of this study. The subsequent sections describe the rationale underlying the choice of a qualitative design for this study, and the characteristics of qualitative research are briefly explicated. Measures for protecting the trustworthiness of this study are also considered.

### **3.3.1 Justification for using a qualitative research approach**

A preliminary review of research on male prostitution reveals that a considerable number of studies on this topic were conducted within the traditional empirical-analytic paradigm, with questionnaires dominating the way researchers collect their data. As a result, the interpersonal and socio-political contexts of commercial sex and the personal interpretations and perspectives of the participants, which may be best collected through the techniques of in-depth interviews and life histories (Browne & Minichiello, 1992), have received less attention.

In light of the above, the present study is conducted within the interpretive-hermeneutic paradigm (as opposed to the empirical-analytic paradigm), thereby attempting to study male prostitution from the perspective of the social actors themselves. Leedy (1997) is of the opinion that the qualitative approach is an inquiry process best suited to the understanding of a social or human problem. By reporting the detailed views of the participants gathered in their natural setting, qualitative research aims to build a complex, holistic picture of the phenomenon, formed with words.

### **3.3.2 The qualitative approach**

Leedy (1997) defines the purpose of qualitative research as to describe and explicate, to explore and interpret and, ultimately, to build theory. As opposed to quantitative research, qualitative approaches use an inductive form of reasoning, developing concepts, insights and understanding from patterns of data, deriving meaning from the participant's own perspective. The research design in qualitative approaches is usually flexible and unique and evolves throughout the research process (Schurink,

1998). Typically, the study begins with a broad question in response to which an extensive amount of verbal data is collected from a modest number of participants. Data are analysed by extracting themes and are presented in the form of words, quotes from documents and transcripts.

Qualitative research strives to be holistic, emphasizing the importance of social context in understanding the social world and maintaining that the meaning of a social action or statement depends, in an important way, on the context in which it appears (Neuman, 1997). Reality is regarded as subjective; the qualitative approach seeks to understand the subjective meanings that people attach to everyday life. In order to capture these subjective meanings, the researcher becomes immersed in the data, that is, he enters their minds and their lives, exploring their assumptions and biases and discovering what they take for granted, what they believe in and deny about their own experiences. In this study, the experiences of the participants are not separated from the individuals who are experiencing them and the participants themselves are not reduced to isolated variables.

### **3.3.3 Trustworthiness**

Krefting (1990) argues that terms like 'reliability' and 'validity' are relative to the quantitative view and do not fit the requirements and philosophy of qualitative research. Rather, qualitative research should be evaluated according to its level of 'trustworthiness'. Maykut & Morehouse (1997) define the trustworthiness of a qualitative research study as the extent to which confidence can be placed in its results and place important emphasis on the transparency of the research process. They maintain that by providing detailed information about the purpose and methods of the

study and inviting the consideration and scrutiny of the readers of the work, the researcher increases the likelihood that the reader will seriously consider and trust its findings. Poggenpohl (1998, p. 344) agrees:

*The important issue is that a researcher should be able to logically account for stages in the data analysis and that the final conclusions be based on the generated data.*

In order to provide for trustworthiness, this study provides clear and detailed information about the purpose of this study, how the participants became part of the sample, the data collection and analysis procedures used and the results or findings.

Having provided the rationale behind the qualitative approach of this study, the following section explains, in detail, the design of this study and the methodology followed.

### **3.4 Design of the study**

As indicated in the previous section, the design of this study is qualitative. There are, however, many different ways of conducting qualitative research and in this section information concerning the precise methodology of the study including aspects such as sampling and selection of participants, the structure of the data collection interviews and the way in which the data was recorded is provided.

#### **3.4.1 Selection of the participants**

As opposed to quantitative research, which seeks to generalise findings to a larger population, phenomenological research aims to clarify human experience (Hycner,

1985). Thus, rather than randomly selecting a sample, the phenomenological researcher searches for those individuals that have had the particular experience under study and who are also able to relate this experience effectively. This is often referred to as 'purposive sampling', as the sample is selected in a deliberate way with an explicit purpose or objective in mind (Punch, 1998). The only criterion for selecting the participants in this study was their personal experience of working as male prostitutes. Given the qualitative focus of this study, the goal of an in-depth description of the experience of male-prostitution and the extensive amount of data that can emerge from even one interview (Hycner, 1985), only a limited number of participants were selected.

The participants selected for this study comprised of four white, adult males, currently working as prostitutes. They were all unknown to the researcher and were contacted via their advertisements in one of Johannesburg's daily newspapers. The first three men were contacted and interviewed within the space of one week during October of 2002 and the fourth during the first week of November of the same year.

Neuman (1997) suggests that, in order to conform to ethical codes of practice with regard to informed consent, the researcher should be as open and detailed as possible about his objectives and interview procedure and should negotiate a research contract with the participant. The participants in this study were informed as to its nature and its aim, namely to enhance and extend the understanding of male prostitution from the perspectives of the male prostitutes themselves, with the ultimate goal of providing some input to theory building and an important contribution to counselling practice.

The participants were also informed of the particulars of the researcher and how the results were to be disseminated. They gave written consent for the interviews to be recorded on audiotape and for the information gleaned from the interviews to be used in this study. The names and identifying details of the participants have been changed for the purpose of protecting their identity.

### **3.4.2 Data collection**

The method of data collection used in this study was the qualitative in-depth interview. The researcher personally conducted detailed interviews with each participant. Two of the interviews were conducted at the private residences (and workplaces) of the participants, one was conducted at a Johannesburg brothel where the participant lived and worked and the final interview was conducted at the Institute of Child and Adult Guidance where the researcher is currently employed. Each interview lasted approximately one to one-and-a-half hours, allowing the researcher to establish rapport and a relative climate of trust with each participant.

Rubin & Rubin (1995) describe qualitative interviewing as being a form of ordinary everyday conversation in that the interview process is unplanned and occurs in a logical, interactive, and reciprocal fashion. Thus, the composition, stream, and selection of topics of discussion change to match the experience of the individual participant. The qualitative interviewer focuses on this experience in a particular way:

*Qualitative interviewing requires intense listening, a respect for and curiosity about what people say, and a systematic effort to really hear and understand what people*

*tell you...you must be able to explore the topic with your interviewees...[and] you have to let them describe their experiences in their own terms* (Rubin & Rubin, p. 17).

In keeping with this method of interviewing, the interview format of this study was largely unstructured. Each interview began with a carefully phrased question: "Can you tell me about your experience of working as a male prostitute") inviting the participant to discuss his experience of male prostitution. Further questions were spontaneous and unplanned, emerging as responses to the participant's statements and were aimed at elaboration and extension of the details of their experience.

Since the interviews are the only source of data in this study, each interview was recorded on audiotape thereby ensuring that no information was lost. Taping interviews can be useful as the process provides a durable record of the interview data and allows the researcher to review the closest approximation possible of the participants own words (Neuman, 1997).

### **3.4.3 Data analysis**

Data analysis refers to the way in which researchers make sense out of and learn from the raw data collected in the field. As opposed to quantitative methods which use statistical or mathematical operations to analyze data, qualitative analysis methods utilize a variety of specialized nonmathematical techniques, similar to the practical analytic processes that are used by everyday people when thinking about everyday situations (Strauss, 1987). Bogdon & Taylor define qualitative data analysis as "a process which entails an effort to formally identify themes and to construct

hypotheses (ideas) as they are suggested by data and an attempt to demonstrate support for those themes and hypotheses" (1975, p.79).

The data analysis process in this study proceeds from a phenomenological perspective. One of the main aims of phenomenological inquiry is to derive the essential features (descriptions) of the experience from raw protocols. The resultant finding is known as the 'general structural description' or 'meaning unit' (Polkinghorne, 1989). These *meaning units* may be seen as self-definable, discrete segments of expression of individual aspects of the participants' experience (Holroyd, 2001). The transcribed, tape-recorded data will be analysed by this researcher in order to arrive at themes or common elements that would enhance the readers understanding of the participant's experience of being male prostitutes.

The following sections outline the phenomenological data analysis process followed in this study, and detailed descriptions of each aspect of the method are furnished.

#### **3.4.3.1 Transcription of the tape recordings**

Transcription of the raw interview data from the tape recordings includes transcribing and noting both the participant's literal verbatim statements and any significant non-verbal and paralinguistic communications such as mood, facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice (Hycner, 1985). Strauss (1987) suggests that an effective transcription process is essential for a full and varied analysis of the data. He recommends that recordings of the interviews be listened to intensely and repeatedly in order to remind the researcher of any aspects of the interview that were not fully recorded, that were forgotten, or that were not noticed at the time.



### 3.4.3.2 Bracketing and the phenomenological reduction

In phenomenological data analysis the researcher consciously adopts an attitude or state of mind necessary to elicit the units of general meaning known as 'bracketing'. This means to suspend or bracket as much as is possible of the researcher's own theories, meanings, interpretations, and understanding, and entering the unique world of the participant (Hycner, 1985). Keen (1975, p. 38) states that:

*...to listen for the meaning(s) as they eventually emerged from the event as a whole is to have adopted an attitude of openness to the phenomenon in its inherent meaningfulness. It is to have 'bracketed' our response to separate parts of the conversation and to have let the event emerge as a meaningful whole.*

Thus the research data, that is, the recordings of the interviews and the transcriptions, are approached with openness to whatever meanings have emerged. In this way the matrices of the participant's world view are used in order to understand the meaning of what the person is saying, rather than what the researcher expects that person to say.

### 3.4.3.3 Listening to the interview for a sense of the whole

After bracketing as much of his interpretations and meanings as possible, the researcher now seeks to obtain a sense or impression of the whole interview (Hycner, 1985). The data is read, repeatedly if necessary, to achieve a holistic and intuitive understanding of male prostitution. This is done in accordance with two principles by which written text may be more and more deeply understood and interpreted. These two principles are taken from the field of hermeneutics.

### 3.4.3.3.1 Hermeneutics

The term 'hermeneutics' derives from the Greek *hermeneutika* meaning "message analysis" or "things for interpreting" and is thus concerned with meaning and interpretation (Szabo, 1996). Valle, King, & Halling (1989) define hermeneutics as the study of understanding with reference to texts.

Two specific hermeneutic principles, the 'hermeneutic circle' and 'pre-understanding', illustrate the implications of hermeneutics for psychological research (Valle et al., 1989). When first reading a text, the researcher sees or reads only part of it, resulting in some misunderstanding because a sense of whole is lacking. It is only as he develops a sense of the whole, that the researcher comes to understand the parts. The 'hermeneutic circle' refers to this process of moving between the parts and the whole and back again which results in an increasingly deeper insight into the text as it is read over and over (Valle et al., 1989).

To deepen his understanding of the text, the researcher must become aware of his 'pre-understanding' of the subject matter. Valle et al. (1989, p.16) suggest asking questions such as "*what have I already assumed which may account for my failure to make sense of this section?*" and "*are their specific assumptions which this writer takes for granted, and which someone from my tradition would not take for granted?*". Similar to the process of bracketing, self-reflection facilitates the researcher's awareness of his prejudices and preconceptions (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Having carefully applied these two hermeneutic principles to the raw data, some general ideas, gleaned from the transcriptions and based on an understanding of the

meaning the participant intends to convey, will be noted and catalogued for easy reference at the end of the relevant transcribed interview. These personal notes help the researcher keep on track by comparing his conclusions at the end of the investigation with these rough notes. The data will then be read several times whilst the researcher listens to the tape-recordings, until such time as a fuller and deeper comprehension of their content and theme and an understanding of the whole are obtained. Thoughts, ideas, and themes that come to mind while the researcher reads through the transcripts will be jotted down as they emerge.

#### **3.4.3.4 Coding data pages to their sources**

Maykut & Morehouse (1997) emphasize the importance of maintaining an effective way of identifying the various data gathered in the research process, and recommend coding each page of data to its source. In this study, each page of data will be coded according to the type of data (e.g. transcript), the source of the data (e.g. participant), and the page number of that particular data set. All of the data will then be photocopied, and data analysis will proceed using these photocopies.

#### **3.4.3.5 Unitizing the data**

The next phase of data analysis is to identify chunks or units of meaning within the data; a process referred to by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as *unitizing* the data. Hycner (1985, p.145) defines 'units of general meaning' as "...those words, phrases, non-verbal or paralinguistic communications which express a unique and coherent meaning (irrespective of the research question) clearly differentiated from that which precedes and follows". The process of dividing the data into these parts comprises of discovering the essence of the meaning expressed in the text and crystallizing and

condensing what the participant has said, using as much as possible the participant's literal words. Giorgi (1997) recommends that the researcher slowly re-read the text, noting each time he experiences a transition in meaning in the description. He then continues reading until the next meaning unit is discriminated. It is important that these meaning units be determined by criteria that are consistent with the scientific discipline of the researcher (Giorgi, 1997). A meaning unit in this study will thus be considered as the smallest fragment of information that could stand by itself and make psychological sense.

The product of this rigorous process is a series of meaning units still faithful to the participant's everyday language. Once this has been achieved, the data must be organized and expressed into psychological and phenomenological language, a process that is explained in the following section.

#### **3.4.3.6 Transformation of the meaning units into disciplinary language**

Once the meaning units are formulated, they must be examined, probed, and re-described so that the disciplinary value of each unit can be made more explicit (Giorgi, 1997). Thus, each unit must be transformed from that of the everyday language of the participant to the language of the scientific discipline being utilized, that is, psychological and phenomenological language. Polkinghorne (1989) states that the researcher inevitably reads the text from the point of view of his own interests and discipline, and therefore suggests transforming the data by way of "...the ordinary human capacity to understand the meaning of statements"(1989, p. 52). In other words, the meaning that dominates the unit will be stated as simply as possible in the researcher's own language. He warns that during this process, the researcher should

take care not to theorise, but should regard the text as a naïve description of the participants experience. The products of the process of transformation should thus reflect the participant's experience and not that of the researcher.

#### **3.4.3.7 Categorizing and coding the data**

In the categorizing and coding phase, the researcher seeks to develop a set of categories that provide a reasonable reconstruction of the data he has collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative coding 'fractures' (Strauss, 1987), p. 29) the data and then rearranges it into categories which emerge from the data. These categories facilitate the comparison within and between the categories themselves, ultimately leading to the development of theoretical concepts. Maykut & Morehouse (1997) maintain that qualitative coding should be grounded in the particular data being analyzed. In this study therefore, coding categories will be developed inductively by the researcher during the analysis as well as from the conceptual structure of the participants themselves (often referred to as *emic* categories).

This study uses the *constant comparative method* of analysis (Maykut & Morehouse, 1997) to categorize and code the data. The method combines inductive category coding with simultaneous comparison of all meaning units uncovered in the unitizing phase (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As each new meaning unit is selected for analysis, it is compared to all other units of meaning and subsequently grouped (categorised and coded) with similar units of meaning. If there are no similar units of meaning, a new category is formed. Maykut & Morehouse (1997) describe this as a process with room for continuous refinement where initial categories are changed, combined, or omitted, and where new categories are generated and new relationships discovered.

Once several units of meaning, which are similar in their properties or characteristics, have been assigned to an identified category, a *rule for inclusion* (Maykut & Morehouse, 1997, p. 139) for that category is established. In other words, a rule that will serve as the basis for including or excluding a meaning unit should be written that stays true to the meaning or essence of the category of units. Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest writing the rule for inclusion as a 'propositional' statement or a statement of fact that is grounded in the data. It conveys the meaning that is contained in the data gathered together under a category name.

In the continuing process of analysis, each unit of meaning is again read and compared, this time with the rule of inclusion of the category to which it has been assigned. If the units do not fit their original placement, they are reassigned to other or new categories.

#### **3.4.3.8 Formulating a hypothetical and general description of the experience**

Once the meaning units have been essentialized according to the proper disciplinary perspective, coded and categorised and propositional rule statements written for each of the categories, the relationships and patterns across categories will be explored (Maykut & Morehouse, 1997). Giorgi (1997, p. 242) maintains that the ultimate outcome of phenomenological scientific analysis is not just the 'essential structure' of the phenomenon but rather the structure in relation to the varied manifestations of an essential identity:

*Structures can be understood as essences and their relationships. What is important about structures is not so much the parts, as such, but the interrelationship among parts...structures are not ends in themselves.*

In this stage of the analysis, the categories and their rules for inclusion will be compared with each other so to identify relationships, themes and patterns across the categories (Maykut & Morehouse, 1997). These will then be tied together and integrated in order to form a hypothetical and general description of the experience of the male prostitute.

#### **3.4.4.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter the research approach and methodology used in this study were described. In order to focus on the essential experience of the participants, a qualitative approach, grounded in a theoretical framework of phenomenology was utilized. Purposive sampling was employed in the selection of the participants, and data was collected through in-depth, unstructured interviews with four men who had personal experience of working as male prostitutes. The interviews were recorded on audiotape, and transcribed verbatim for each participant. The data was categorized and coded, and analyzed using the constant comparative method.

The following chapter presents the analysis and discussion of the data according to the methodology described in this chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### Results

This chapter presents the results of a phenomenological investigation seeking to explore participants' conscious experience of being male prostitutes. While each participant's experience was distinctive, there were common elements that appeared in many and sometimes all of the descriptions. Following a short introduction to the four participants, the common and contrasting themes and patterns that emerged from the analysis of the transcribed data are described.

#### 4.1 Introducing the participants

The participants in this study were four white South African men all of whom are currently involved in male-to-male prostitution.

**Carl** is a thirty-year-old, English speaking man who identifies himself as bisexual. He has been involved in male prostitution for the past five years. In that time he has worked at two brothels. He currently works as a full-time prostitute from his private home, advertising his services in the daily-classified column of a Johannesburg newspaper.

**David** is English speaking and in his early twenties. He identifies himself as heterosexual. He lives and works at a brothel. He left school in standard eight and has been working as a male prostitute on and off for the past four years.



**Paul** is an Afrikaans-speaking male in his mid-twenties identifying himself as homosexual. In the past four years he has worked and lived at three different brothels in Johannesburg

**Franc** is in his early thirties. He is employed in the hospitality industry, and works as a male prostitute part-time to supplement his income. He has been involved in prostitution for the past five years and works privately from his home. He has never worked at a brothel.

## **4.2 Themes and issues**

In this section, the various themes discerned in the participants' description of their experience of being male prostitutes are discussed theme by theme.

### **4.2.1 Difficulty of working as a male prostitute**

The theme of 'difficulty' emerges as the most common and widespread experience across all the data gathered. All the participants experienced working as male prostitutes as difficult or hard to deal with:

- **DAVID:** "It takes a lot out of a person - physically, emotionally, in every aspect that you can think of, I mean it takes a lot out of you."
- **PAUL:** "Um, basically you can see up to seven or eight people in a day - and it's tough work, really grueling and hard."
- **CARL:** "It's hard work, it's taxing work."
- **FRANC:** "It's difficult because it is quite taxing in every region, even physically..."

Within this broad category of 'difficulty', the participants experienced similar aspects of the work as arduous or grueling. These sub-themes will be discussed in the section that follows.

#### 4.2.1.1 Psychological distress

The participants all reported experiencing internal conflict and psychological distress over performing sexual acts with other men for remuneration and with other difficulties associated with being a male prostitute. To illustrate, Carl sketches his collective experiences of witnessing this distress and conflict in other male prostitutes that has worked with:

- "...he goes in there, does it (sex with the client). He comes out with a smile on his face, he's got money (*pause*)...puts the money in his pocket and he goes and sits down, and then you see it in his eyes, how his eyes sink. Then you hear it in his voice how the anger starts coming out...but now he's fighting with himself. He's thinking back what he's done and it starts mulling in his head. That's when he needs someone to tell him or show him another way out to release it, to get it out. Because you have to...you can't bottle it all up inside...you need to find a release mechanism..."

This mental and emotional discomfort appears to feature prominently in all of the participant's accounts. David, for example, referring to the fact that he is 'straight' or heterosexual in an occupation that calls for him to have sex with men, describes the negative emotions that are elicited by 'not being himself':

- "...you get really depressed because you (*pause*) first of all you're not yourself, you can't be with the people that you really want to be with..."

David experiences working as a prostitute as shameful and not "decent" or respectable. He reported that sex work makes him feel sordid and used and that these negative emotions were distressing to him:

- "We actually had a discussion the other morning with two boys upstairs and we all agreed that the garden boy that works outside has a more respectful job than we do, yet he is willing to work for 30 Rand a day."
- "...it's (sex work) demeaning, it's - how can I put it - it's degrading a person, um...ja (*sighs*) as I said, it's a hard job hey."
- "...you feel so dirty, its...not that you are dirty, you just feel dirty, because...this is how people use you..."

David also feels significant loneliness and isolation. He experiences feelings of depression and hopelessness at his present situation and the perceived lack of ways to 'escape'. He feels that if he had a choice he would find another way to earn an income:

- "It's (being a prostitute) a very lonely life, you take a lot of emotional strain..."
- "...just that isolation alone, it's depressing, getting to stages where you feel you can't breath anymore, you can't move. You feel that you're in too deep. It's overwhelming all at once where you think well, what else can I do...where do I start, um...since most of the guys living here, where will they start? Where are they going to find a flat or a place to stay?"
- "...there's people in this job, in this industry, that say that they enjoy it. They're talking bullshit 'cause there's not one person out there that I think that wouldn't give their right arm or leg to have a normal life..."

Similarly, Paul felt a great, almost inescapable sadness at being a male prostitute:

- "It's like...you obviously have the constant reminder, the constant knowledge of what you're doing which makes you sad".

#### **4.2.1.2 Degrading and humiliating treatment**

The experience of being treated in a degrading and humiliating way appears to feature prominently in the accounts of the participants. They expressed feeling treated as 'less-than-human' and in some instance as 'animals' rather than human beings, both by clients and by the owners of the brothels for which they worked.

Carl describes the experience of being treated as goods or merchandise by a brothel owner and has a sense of the emotional harm that such treatment can cause:

- "You know that the guy that owned that place didn't even care about that, because then, to him, we were just moneymakers, we weren't human beings anymore. You see that's where it becomes dangerous, when you're looked at as a commodity...you know like chickens and stuff."
- "...I just feel that...I feel that a lot of people get hurt, and irreversibly hurt in those circumstances..."

Paul described feeling like an "animal lead to the slaughter" during the process in which clients choose one of the boys from the agency, known in the industry as a "fish-bowl":

- "...the client would come in, speak to either one of the guys or the owner of the house, sit in the lounge, and the guys (the prostitutes) would come in one at a time and just introduce themselves, go back out and afterwards the client will choose one of them."

Paul also felt that to be a prostitute is to set yourself up as 'less-than-human' in the eyes of some clients. He experienced being treated as an object, where emotional, physical, and 'human' needs are ignored and not taken into consideration and where he felt like a non-entity, a "piece of meat":

- "...and that's what they're (the clients) paying for. You accept money not to be taken into account...as I've said, it's almost kind of a mistreatment, not really a physical, more an emotional...just not taken into account..."

#### **4.2.1.3 Restriction and loss**

The participants experienced a sense that they had either lost out on, missed, or were restricted from taking part in certain normal everyday activities due to the fact that they are male prostitutes.

David felt that he was missing out on the normal socializing associated with other people of his age. Isolating himself from the outside world for fear of being exposed as a male prostitute and the ensuing judgment that he expected to follow, he had a sense that he was losing much of his young adulthood to the world of prostitution:

- "...you can't really go out and meet new people either, it's...what do you tell the people? What work do you do? Where do you get the money to spend like this?"
- "...if you go out, you don't go out to meet people, or pick up people anymore...as with a normal lifestyle you would go out to pick up a chick or what not. You isolate yourself from that. You don't have the young adulthood that you should have."
- "...it makes you become hermit-like...you don't want to go out anymore because...there's nothing there for you its, you feel that you've lost nothing there, but in actual fact that's where you should be."

Similar to David, Paul had a sense that working as a prostitute had made him grow up too quickly. 'Entering the trade' almost right out of school, He felt that a loss of control over his life. As a child he felt secure and in control of his life. Prostitution seems to have shattered this 'illusion' for him. He experiences it as having grown up quicker, a loss of childhood innocence and naiveté:

- "I don't know if 'allow' is the right word, but it allows you to grow up a bit quicker. It forces you to - I mean it sort of - be shocked into not living in a kind of imaginary world, or it stops you from believing that everything is wonderful and everything will work out the way you want it to."

Franc and Carl had a sense of loss with regard to falling in love or having a romantic relationship. They seem to feel that being a prostitute restricts their opportunities for being accepted by a potential partner, experiencing romantic relationships in the context of being a prostitute at very least problematic:

- **FRANC:** "I've been single now for the last two and a half years...'cause it just doesn't seem right to be involved with somebody and do this on the side even though it's...like I say it's just purely for the massage, the person you're involved with...you'd have to reveal your...what you're doing, and the two wouldn't

mix together. I am probably denying myself that chance to be with someone special."

- CARL: "Relationships (*smirks*)? I call it 'hostage sieges' (*laughs*)...you don't form relationships, you take hostages. I'm not very good at them, this (prostitution) tends to get in the way a lot you know, jealousy and everything else. It starts off well, honeymoon period lasts about 2 months and then its like "oh I must go work"... "No, don't go work"... "no, I've got to go". It starts becoming a bit of a hassle, they don't like sharing too much."

#### 4.2.1.4 Competitiveness

The theme of competitiveness was common to the experience of the participants who had worked or currently work in brothels. They reported an atmosphere of rivalry within the brothel where work or business is at a premium. The prostitutes therefore feel driven to make themselves more attractive or 'marketable' to prospective clients, thus placing them in a better position to secure financial reward.

David had a sense that working in a brothel is "survival of the fittest". He experienced a need to be 'better' than the other boys and perceived the competition for business amongst the other prostitutes as aggressive and combative:

- "That's (the client's business) what you survive on. If you're not fit in this industry, you gonna land up on the streets."
- "The men are very competitive as well. You've got to look your best; you've got to be on your best performance all the time. You've got to keep a track record, it's a reputation that precedes you."
- "The house (brothel) there is very, very aggressive because of the competition amongst the boys. The fewer boys, the more the competition. So you'd always change your appearance (*pause*) you're always one step ahead of the next person. It does get very aggressive at times because you're basically all cooped here twenty-four-seven. You get a lot of friction, a lot of aggression and um...what was laughter turns into bitterness within a matter of moments. You never really know where you've put your foot wrong."

In Carl's account, he describes the "boys" of the brothel agreeing to unprotected sex in order to procure business from clients. He has a sense that in some instances, the need to make money drives the boys to compromise even their own safety:

- "...the other houses had like 14, 15 boys in them, and (*sighs*) the things that happened there were just disgusting, I mean because this one will have sex without a condom, right, that one has to have sex without a condom, and the guy comes in and says "I want a kiss", this one will say "I'll kiss you" because he doesn't want that one to get the business... it was down right disgusting."

#### 4.2.2 Lack of choices

The issues of 'choices' and 'options' featured prominently in the participant's descriptions of their experience of being male prostitutes. As a general theme, the perception of absence of choice or 'being forced' to do certain things emerges as a significant part of the general experience of being a male prostitute, and appears in many different contexts.

Some of the participants reported that they had little option in choosing to become male prostitutes. In these accounts, the perception that there "was no other way" to earn or to "survive" was common.

- DAVID: "It (prostitution) is not exactly what you want to do, but you're forced into it (*pause*) by your own mistakes."
- DAVID: "...this is a desperate measure that people take. It's not a nice thing that you're proud of, its basic survival. You go out there, you don't get an education and whatnot, end up with a lot of (*laughs*) misleading characters, and you end up in this industry (prostitution)."
- FRANC: "I know a lot of guys out there are desperate for cash..."
- CARL: "I needed to find a way that I could, in this world, enjoy my life, live in a place that's semi-decent, go out to restaurants, do what everyone else does in the world. And it just wasn't available to me, I was supposed to stay on the other side of the railway tracks with all the other people that can't make it in life, and this was my break through, this was my only chance to make it..."

In two of the participant's experience of working in brothels, they perceived themselves as having very little choice in terms of the clients that they "serviced" or in terms of which services they were to provide:

- CARL: "...we were just told to go and fuck that one, or go and do that or go and do that..."
- PAUL: "...if you're going to work there, you have to do certain things with anyone who was willing to pay for it. If you don't, you don't have a job. Also you were told who to go with, and you were told how to behave and what times to work etc. You didn't have much freedom."

Franc and Carl also commented on their experience of similar conditions in brothels that they had visited or knew about:

- FRANC: "...they're (the boys) forced to be like servants. They're subjected to their customer's demands...what the customer wants, you know. If the customer wants a full house (full sexual intercourse) then these kids have to do it...the whole toot on them...against their will, I'm sure...its not...it's quite hectic."
- CARL: "...I call them (brothels) 'slave labour camps' because the people aren't given choices, the people aren't given benefits, they're not given medical aids. They are dictated to work 12 hours a day which is so not right, their dignity gets stripped from them."

Similar to Franc and Carl, David likens his experience of living in a brothel to being stuck in quicksand. He seems to feel that the harder he struggles to free himself from prostitution, the more trapped he becomes and the less freedom to choose he has:

- "...it's like quicksand. It's quicksand...(pause)...the more you move, the deeper you go..."

Another aspect to the theme of choice and free will, emerged in their experience of deceiving and lying to others. In all accounts, the issue of having no choice but to lie and deceive others is common, with participants perceiving that they had no choice but to deceive others as to the nature and character of their 'occupation'. Paul, for example, appears to stress this lack of choice:

- "...one part is the fact that you *have* to hide it from everyone...you know, you *have* to hide your life from people like your family, and sometimes your friends, depending on how you live your life. You know, so *having* to lie to your parents and your brothers and stuff...just *makes* you live a false life."



### 4.2.3 Management

In all the participant's accounts of their experience of being male prostitutes, the idea of coping or 'getting through' the adverse aspects associated with the activity, appeared to be an important theme. Within this broad category, the participants described similar approaches or management strategies that they used to deal with these difficulties.

#### 4.2.3.1 Drug use

One such coping strategy, common to three of the participants interviewed was the use of illegal drugs. It appears that the mind and mood altering effects of substances such as cannabis and cocaine are used by these participants to help limit the emotional and psychological effects brought about by their being male prostitutes:

- DAVID: "I actually get by it quite easily hey...I use a bit of um dope and shit to carry on through...but ja, its just to keep me (*laughs*) moggy, to numb the senses..."
- PAUL: "Um, well, that was the time in my life that I used drugs most often. And it was...it made out a very big part of your life, you know, you sort of lived for it, you...that is why most guys spend so much of their money on it, cause that becomes part of your survival, that becomes like food, or like having sleep."
- DAVID: "It's (drugs) a way of just releasing themselves. The bit of freedom that they can get they go wild on, its their escapism, its there freedom to go out there...its not that they deliberately want to take drugs, they take the drugs to forget about it (prostitution)..."
- DAVID: "...because of the stress and everything that goes with it (*pause*) it (drug use) is your relief. It's escaping into a different dimension. It's laughing and having fun, its just being yourself..."

Carl reported that, although he had stopped using drugs two years ago, he had experienced using cocaine and cannabis. He felt that he understood the reason behind drug use by other male prostitutes:

- "...and they're usually addicted to stuff. They usually need it because they can't balance the emotion out (*pause*)...they're doing something they feel is wrong..."

#### 4.2.3.2 Cutting off / being tough

Within the general theme of 'coping' or 'getting through', managing stress and negative emotions by "becoming hard" or "cutting off" emerged as a strong sub-theme. Along with drug use, avoidance and denial seem to be common elements in the experience of the participants.

Some of the participants experienced "becoming hard" emotionally in order to cope with the stress and negative effects associated with their occupation:

- CARL: "it takes a tough person to survive in this industry...that's why you get paid so well 'cause you need to actually have a very hard center to be able to look in the mirror everyday, and still feel good about yourself."
- DAVID: "...you've got to be a very hard person to, to do this its...'cause you can't get yourself emotionally involved and it's tough hey!"

David also describes "switching off" emotionally in order to be able to deal with the hardships he faces whilst working:

- DAVID: "...you do become harder and more aggressive and, how can I put it (*laughs*), you're a totally different person when you're at work."
- RESEARCHER: "You switch off?"
- DAVID: "You have to. It's...you've got to switch off to all around you, to basically everything that happens."
- RESEARCHER: "And how do you cope?"
- DAVID: "Ever since I was young I've been able to bottle...I just bottle everything away...I forget about it, it's locked away..."

Paul felt that it was better to deal with the strong emotions he experienced when having sex with clients "at a later stage" than at that very moment. He thus seems to have avoided the negative aspects and feelings and dealt with them when he felt more able to:

- "...to me it was much easier dealing with it on a daily basis than at that moment. I remember going through hell while I am...in the hour that you spend with the client. You know I used to be on the verge of walking out, of packing my bags and leaving...but afterwards, when you get paid and you're back in a kind of a protective environment, then it's easier to deal with..."

Franc had the experience of developing feelings for one of his clients. He now reports that in order to avoid similar situations in the future, he "protects himself" emotionally by keeping his interaction with his clients purely professional:

- "...you know like I say, a patient shouldn't get emotional with his...(pause)...a doctor shouldn't get emotional with his patient. The same sort of thing applies here."

Both Carl and Franc spoke of focusing on the service-providing side of prostitution as a way of coping. That is, to reframe the idea of prostitution as sex-work (where the prostitute is 'used' by the client for sex) into providing a much-needed service and a way of actually helping the client. In this way it appears that they avoid or minimize some of the negative aspects of the activity:

- CARL: "You actually have to manage your emotions very well. If you look at it that you're helping people, it takes away the negative aspect that you're actually having sex with people...you know, so then you can put yourself in a therapeutic line and it makes you feel better about yourself."
- FRANC: "...sort of therapy we'll call it, and you have got to appreciate the fact that its just an hour of making someone feeling good, and you must just cut off their personal beings. I'm not in it to make myself feel good, I'm getting paid to give someone a decent hour of massaging."

#### **4.2.4 Empathy for clients**

All four participants experienced considerable empathy and understanding for their clients. In their accounts, the participants identified themselves with their client's life-worlds and mental and emotional states, as well as their reasons for making use of male prostitutes.

- DAVID: "I actually feel sorry for a lot of the clients that do come here. Ninety-nine percent of them, they are fat, obese, ugly, old people, its um, its what the healthy nation would call the scum, the rejects, its...and a lot of those people are heartbroken, cause nobody wants to accept them. The only way that they feel accepted is when they come here."
- FRANC: "I put myself in their shoes, and think when I'm 60 or 70, would I be the same? Would I resort to the same...phone young 20 year olds to come and...it must be tough for them as well to make the call. They know they don't have sex appeal any more, they've past their best...we'll have to pay for ourselves one day. We'll have the need, the craving for satisfaction..."
- CARL: "...my business is lonely people. You know, you've been lonely (*motions to the researcher*)...and you just think, if only I could bump into that right person. But now take that, add fifty, thirty years to yourself, add a nice big boep, chances are you're even worse..."
- CARL: "...70 percent of them (the clients) are the most divine creatures that walk the earth. They really beautiful, they're caring, they just never...you know they just never had the body, the never had the face, they never had the hair style, they just never were the 'in-crowd'. In their lifetime they've had sex what, 9, 10, 11 times? So they never really had a good structure of that either...so they're lonely"

#### 4.2.5 Lies and concealment

Common to all the participant's accounts was the theme of lying, concealment and 'make-believe'. They experienced concealing their life as male prostitutes from others as necessary and routine. They also experienced 'game-playing' and pretence with clients as an important part of their *modus operandi*. The following section discusses these two sub-themes that fall within the broader theme of 'lies and deception'.

##### 4.2.5.1 Lying to others

It seems that all the participants felt that being open to others regarding their 'work' risked shame and prejudice. Purposeful concealment of this information from all those not in the "industry" appears to an important aspect of the experience of these participants. Paul, for example, perceived concealing his involvement in prostitution from others as important to his "survival". He experienced lying as eventually

becoming habitual within and intrinsic to life as a prostitute, regardless of whether lying was called for or justified:

- "The way that you work...(pause)...you work in secrecy. You obviously don't advertise or display what you do..."
- "...people learn to survive, so you learn to lie...you learn to live a lie. Whenever you have to do something or whenever you have to answer a question or give information about anything, your first response is to look for a way of lying, whether its necessary or not. Like just about everything else about human beings it becomes a habit, you do it out of habit, not always out of necessity."
- "Where making friends and stuff is concerned, it has quite a big effect because you have to decide between taking a risk of telling people who become friends etc. not accepting it without understanding it, or lying to them until you can be sure that you will understand it. Either way you're taking a risk..."

In a similar way, David experienced this 'dishonesty' as inherent to his everyday life as a prostitute. Although he has a sense that it may have negative consequences, he is motivated to conceal this part of his life to maintain "the peace" and from fear of embarrassment:

- "...you're not honest with the people around you. You can't be honest with yourself either...(pause)...you're always putting on this mask, this masquerade, even if it is just to keep the next person smiling, just to keep the peace..."
- "...you've got to pretend you're somebody that you're not. As they say, one lie builds on to another and by the end of the day you're stuffed. You can lie so much and no more, especially in social circles...(pause)...people also look down on you if you had to say to them this is what I do for a living. On top of that you're also very embarrassed about the situation. It's not like you want everybody to know either...(pause)...for god's sake, family doesn't even know that I do this...and even having to lie to your family gets to that...to that stage..."

Franc also experienced the need to conceal his second job from others, especially his family. He feels that he must "protect them from the truth", sensing that they would be hurt if they were to discover his secret:

- "...my family must never find out. It's...I'm sure my sister knows (*sighs deeply*). My mom wouldn't take lightly to it..."

In contrast to the other participants, Carl perceives himself as never having lied to his friends and family as such. However, he doesn't reveal his occupation to them either, passively concealing his secret:

- RESEARCHER: "But your family doesn't know?"
- CARL: "No, no. It would be...(pause)...they know that I'm a massage therapist, they just don't know what else I do, but then they don't actually have to know, now do they (*smiles*)? You know they've never blatantly asked me so I've never really lied to them. And if they blatantly ask me I think I'd be honest with them..."

#### 4.2.5.2 Creating an atmosphere

A second facet of the general theme of 'lies and concealment' delineates the relationship between prostitute and client. The participants parallel their interactions with their clients to "theatrical productions" or "plays" in which the prostitute 'puts on' a 'performance' that caters to the needs and desires of the client. It seems that in this performance, the client is made to feel attractive, desired and important to the prostitute. It also seems that the participants feign intimacy, affection and emotional attachment with the client because they perceive the client to need this. Paul, for example, reports that:

- "I think that is sort of...it's a created atmosphere. It is what they want..."

Carl likewise reports that these "little lies that are told are actually just to enhance the atmosphere and create the mood and the setting so much better", and that this 'act' makes up a large percentage of the service rendered to the client. He feels that sex forms a rather small part of the session with the client:

- I'd say that about 7 percent of the entire session as they call it...(pause)...it's about 7 percent actual contact (sex). The rest is more being in contact with someone that actually affords you the time, the relaxation of being able to get away from the world outside, the closeness, the proximity of someone to you, you know, that doesn't shy away..."

In a similar way, Franc feels that lying to clients regarding his own feelings is an important part of the service he offers:

- "...sometimes you have to deal with guys that you wouldn't sort of look at in the street and here you've got to pretend that they're making you feel good. While they're in your presence they ask you how you're feeling and how you're doing and are you enjoying this, and you've actually got to lie to them..."

By pretending that the client is giving him pleasure, Franc feels that he makes the client feel important and needed. He has a sense that it sets them at ease and "more at home".

Carl has the same impression and in his experience both prostitute and client co-create a false reality between themselves to add to and enhance the meeting:

- "People lie to make other people feel more at home. If I think about it, there's not one person ever been inside my working venue that I've told the whole truth to...Everything about what's happening there is not real anyway. So that's your (the client's) time to actually make up fantasies for yourself. You become rich for an hour and you let yourself be thought of as rich. Even though afterwards you know that that guy lied to you and visa versa..."

#### **4.2.6 Group affiliation**

In two of participant's descriptions, the experience of being affiliated with other male prostitutes or a certain feeling of group identity emerged from the transcriptions. In contrast to Carl and Franc who work privately and independently, David and Paul work at brothels together with other young men. In this context, it appears that they have developed a group identity with the other male prostitutes with whom they work and with the owners or madams of the agencies. Both perceived themselves as being part of a "family" at the agency, benefiting from the shared experience, knowledge and support that the other prostitutes brought into the group:

- DAVID: "...there's a lot of compassion and camaraderie because you all know where you stand with each other, you can push things to a certain limit. In that sense we are a family, we all know what each other does, you respect each other."
- PAUL: "It gives you a kind of...almost a small society that you become part of, like a kind of protection...you have to almost function as a family member. You have to take part in the normal running of the house."

David experienced the gay couple that owned the agency as being like 'parents' or caregivers who offer support and assistance to their 'children' (the boys). Although this support appears to be somewhat conditional, David had a sense of being able to rely on it:

- "...we officially call them (the owners) mom and dad. They really are like a mother and father. It's actually nice to know that they do take interest in the boys."
- "You get the backing when you need it, but you've got to put in the initial effort yourself...and ja, even though I've been here three weeks, with John and James, they've been really good..."

Paul emphasized the social acceptance gained from living and associating with others in the same position as himself. He experienced:

- "Most of the times the guys who work in the house are either only friends with other guys in the house or with other guys that do the same sort of thing...By having people around you who do the same thing makes it easier for you to deal with. In a way you can learn from their experiences, especially when you start out new, and you don't know much, you know, what it's all about."
- "...in a way also, it feels easier to do something if you're not doing it alone (pause)...if there's a kind of support base or a kind of society that you become part of. It's also a way of protecting yourself psychologically, you don't have to feel like you're the only one doing it...you can at least say well, I am doing it but I'm not doing it alone. So apart from the obvious physical protection and structure...it give you a hiding place from yourself...(laughs)."

#### **4.2.7 Financial reward**

Money or financial reward appeared to be an important element in the experience of all the participants. It seems that in all the accounts, the participant's experienced



financial reward as being the primary motivating factor for their engaging and remaining in sex work:

- PAUL: "...which is one of the reasons why I got into it (prostitution)...my introduction to it was (pause) the need for money."
- CARL: " My motivation? Money!"
- DAVID: "I've got a four year old son who's what, ten, fifteen minutes away from here...and ja, I've got to support him and bring him up. So the financial side does help."

Following on from the above, it appears that the participants experienced working as a male prostitute financially more lucrative than other occupations, thus making sex work a more 'attractive' option:

- PAUL: "The average rent-boy earns much more than the average other person, and you obviously don't pay tax on it so..."
- CARL "Oh ja! No well it's a quick...you make a lot of money that's tax free...you make a lot of money, and it's tax free."
- FRANC: "...and I'll carry on doing it (prostitution), it's good extra money..."
- PAUL: "It (prostitution) opened up as an opportunity for me because I needed to earn money. When I started I was earning money as a waiter, but I realized that unless I do something else, I will stay a waiter."

The participants appear to experience financial reward as such a strong motivator that even in the face of great difficulties and emotional distress associated with the activity, they continue to engage in sex work. David, for example, experiences sex with clients as offensive, but is motivated to continue because of the financial reward:

- "It's (sex with clients) not pleasant (*pause*)...it's not pleasant (*sighs deeply*). You do it because you have to, because you need to make money. It's not that you want to..."

Paul, for example, experienced receiving payment after seeing a client as making the hardships and stress of the activity things easier to deal with:

- "You know I used to be on the verge of walking out, of packing my bags and leaving...but afterwards, when you get paid...then it's easier to deal with."

#### **4.2.8 Fear**

In the participant's descriptions, the experience of fear emerged as a prominent theme. Fear may be defined as an emotion caused by impending danger or pain, and in all the participant's accounts, the experience of a persistent feeling of fear with regard to possible consequences associated with being a male prostitute was common.

##### **4.2.8.1 Fear of exposure**

Three of the participants experienced a constant or reasonably frequent fear of being exposed as male prostitutes. They experienced the fear of being misunderstood by others (including their families) and the perceived prejudice and intolerance that may follow. This fear seems to motivate the lying and concealment by the participants of their occupation. This in turn appears to fuel further anxiety of the possibility that they may hurt others (especially those close to them), should it be discovered that they have lied.

Franc, for example, experienced constant anxiety that his other career would be adversely affected should his employers and work colleges find out he is working as a prostitute. He also suggests that he may not be able to cope with others around him knowing and argues that continuing to conceal his "part-time" occupation would be beneficial:

- " I've actually been considering putting my advert on the Internet but I'm not sure that's a clever thing to do in my line of work. I've got quite a responsible, high profile position and I don't know if it would affect my career prospects if word got out to my management team. So I think I should just leave it at this level and not make a massive issue out of it...I'm not sure if I can handle it or not if everybody around me knew too much, you know."

David also dreaded the idea of people outside the industry discovering that he was working as a male prostitute. He feels "embarrassed" and "ashamed", and is afraid of other's opinion of him:

- "...people also look down on you if you had to say to them this is what I do for a living. On top of that you are also very embarrassed about the situation. Its not like you want everybody to know either...for God's sake, my family doesn't even know that I do this."

David also experienced great concern that his young son would be judged because of what he (David) was doing to make a living. This fear appears to motivate him enough to want to quit prostitution altogether and find another occupation before his son can be exposed to such prejudice when he enters primary school:

- "I want to get my son through school and what not...with him being in school, I can't have him going to school, and you know when the teacher asks you "what do your parents do?" or "what does your father do?"..."oh ja, he's a prostitute (sighs). Very nice (sarcastically)! No, I don't want my son to go through that, it's not just demeaning for me then, it's demeaning for him as well. I've got to get out there and do something, I've got at least two years to do it."

Paul had a very real sense of the experience of being ostracized or rejected. He likens his fear of being exposed as a prostitute to being "self-conscious" and experiences a heightening of this fear when around "outsiders". He felt that using drugs is a way of avoiding these feelings:

- "...irrelevant of how well you deal with it, its still not nice to be...to be judged by it, to be pushed aside because they don't accept it."
- "...if you walk into a shopping center and you're amongst other people it's constantly on your mind...it occupies your mind. It's almost as if you can only escape from it when you're alone. When you're among other people, it starts occupying your mind. It's like being self-conscious...it was actually such a big thing that I almost...that's where drug use comes in. At the end of the day drug use is just a form of escape."

Carl's fear of being exposed appeared to center around his family and what he may lose should they find out about his occupation:

- "...if I do get found out from my mother I'll lose a massive inheritance, so I don't really want to get found out."

#### 4.2.8.2 Fear of the law

The legal ramifications of working as a prostitute, that is, heavy fines or imprisonment appear to form part of the general experience of fear that the participants encountered. For example Carl, reflecting on a previous brush with the law and consequent time spent in jail, was adamant that he "...could not spend another day behind bars". This appears to have motivated him to be extremely careful when dealing with clients to avoid prosecution. He is also able to deal with the fact that he is selling sex by rationalizing it into something less anxiety provoking:

- "...I don't even mention sex on the phone when I'm selling it. I mention the massage, erotic and stuff like that...cause its illegal to sell sex. So I basically sell my massage service over the phone and then the rest they get thrown in for free. That way I'm not doing it illegally either...'cause it's not illegal to sell a massage, its illegal to sell sex. So you throw the sex in free and just charge for the massage...(laughs)..."

In contrast to Carl's fear of being incarcerated, David denied any anxiety at the prospect of spending time 'behind a cell wall'. Rather his fear centered on the loss of home, income, and support should the police close the agency down:

- " We're (the agency) not exactly protected...there's still a good chance that they might close the agency down...what's going to happen to the guys when that happens...where do they all go?"

It seems that, to some extent, David experienced the recent High Court battle and subsequent failure by interested parties to have brothels and prostitution decriminalized, as affecting his earning potential. This appears to have aggravated his existing concerns regarding the safety of his job:

- "...the last, what three weeks, has been bad because obviously guys like look at newspapers, and television and shit, ja so that's pulled down a lot of the clientele that we used to get and its getting harder... as it is we've had three guys leave here already because of it.

It appears that David's fear of the law and being arrested is tied in to a fear of not generating enough money to support himself and that this fear supercedes any other in his experience.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the results of an analysis of the experience of four male prostitutes. The themes and patterns that emerged from the analysis were discussed, resulting in a detailed description of the participant's experience of being male prostitutes.

The results of this study broaden our understanding of the phenomenon of male prostitution, as experienced by the male prostitutes themselves. It furnishes some insights into their affective and psychological responses to working as a male prostitute, as well as to the interpretations and meanings that they attribute to their experience.

In the closing chapter, the merits of this study are assessed and the information gleaned from the literature review is integrated with the results of this study.

## CHAPTER 5

### **Integration of results, evaluation and conclusion**

In this concluding chapter, the findings of the analysis of the data are integrated with findings from other relevant studies as discussed in the literature review. These integrated findings constitute the contribution of this study to understanding the participant's experience of being male prostitutes.

This chapter also presents an assessment of the current study in terms of its relative strengths and weaknesses, and directions for future research are suggested. Hopefully the results and information gleaned in this study will serve as a foundation for future research and counselling interventions, have some practical value to those researching the phenomenon and may also assist in the much-needed process of theory-building in this field.

#### **5.1 Results**

The analysis of the participant's reported experiences of being male prostitutes yielded some common themes and patterns, which are summarised below. It is stressed that this summary should not be taken to exemplify an archetypal experience of male prostitutes, which erases or obscures the distinctive features of each experience in its individual and social context. In addition, although the following themes emerged as

distinct categories, they exist in relation to one another and should not be viewed as separate entities.

#### **5.1.1 The experience of difficulty**

The participants in this study all experienced working as male prostitutes as difficult. It appears that, across the participant's accounts, different aspects of their occupation such as work environment and emotional and psychological factors are experienced as difficult or exacting and these areas of difficulty appear to contribute to a general feeling of hardship for the participants.

Psychological distress and internal conflict appear to be major factors in the every day experience of the participants. Moral dilemmas around prostitution appear to contribute significantly to this distress, causing feelings of worry, guilt, shame, self-reproach and fear of the future. The participants experience humiliating and degrading treatment at the hands of some clients and brothel owners resulting in feelings of worthlessness and personal inadequacy.

Working as male prostitutes seems to have resulted in the experience of loss or feelings of restriction in the participants. Some of the participants isolate themselves from 'normal' society for fear of judgment, shame, complication, or hurting their loved-ones. They also felt that being male prostitutes restricted them from many of the social activities associated with 'normal' society such as forming romantic relationships resulting in disappointment and feelings of loneliness.

Competitiveness between prostitutes at brothels featured as a difficulty some of the participant's accounts. This competition appears to increase levels of tension amongst the brothel workers resulting in feelings of anger and anxiety. It furthermore appears that this experience of rivalry and competition for financial reward results in the prostitute engaging in behaviours he otherwise would have avoided (such as non-protected sex). This may in turn exacerbate emotional and psychological distress as well as expose him to further dangerous behaviours that offer greater financial reward.

### **5.1.2 External locus of control**

The findings of this study suggest that all the participants perceive their involvement in prostitution as being controlled by forces outside of themselves. It appears that the choices they are 'forced' to make are grounded in necessity, with survival as the core-motivating factor. They attribute this lack of control to factors such as lack of education, mistakes that they made and lack of financial opportunities, and feel that due to these factors they have no choice but to work as male prostitutes or in take part in those activities characteristic to the occupation.

Some of the participants also report feeling 'stuck' or trapped and unable to "escape". This appears to correspond with Abramson, Seligman, & Teasedale's (1978) revised theory of learned helplessness which suggests that people become helpless when they attribute their failure and negative outcomes to causes that are internal (personal), stable (unchangeable) and global (pervasive). Such attributions, they theorise, lead to passivity and learned helplessness, resulting in emotional problems such as depression and lack of motivation. The depression, hopelessness and great sadness experienced



by the participants may thus be related to their perceived lack of control and choice over their lives.

### **5.1.3 Management**

Managing or 'dealing with' a highly stressful and difficult environment seems to form an important aspect of the general experience of the participants. The use of illegal substances such as cocaine and cannabis was common to three of the participants. In their experience, they used (or had used) drugs to "escape" from negative emotions and to lessen the anxiety over the perceived potential negative consequences of their situation. This appears to correspond with much of the literature on male prostitution, especially De Graaf et al. (1994) who suggest that prostitutes turn to drugs in order to cope with the strain their profession places on them. The participants in this study also experienced dealing and coping with strong negative emotions by deliberately trying to suppress these unwanted feelings and "be tough" in the face of adverse circumstances.

Although these strategies may not appear effective, productive, or psychologically or physically safe (with the participants reporting that they were aware of the dangers and consequences of drug abuse), the participants suggest that, in their experience drug use is functional and in the context an adequate coping mechanism.

### **5.1.4 Empathy for clients**

Within the seemingly difficult and distressing context of having sex with men for remuneration, the participants all experienced considerable empathy for one of the major sources of their hardship: their clients. Each participant experienced putting

himself "in the client's shoes" and seemed able to sympathize with their reasons for using male prostitutes. This seems to suggest that, at least to some extent, the participants in this study see prostitution as 'pseudo-altruistic' in nature, where the motivation to work as a prostitute is framed as an unselfish desire to help those in need.

This reframe may be an attempt to deal with the realities of selling sex and an effort to escape feelings guilt and shame by focusing on the 'helping' side of the activity. As such, it may represent an important coping mechanism amongst the participants.

#### **5.1.5 Lies and concealment**

The results of this study suggest that lying, concealing and pretense form a major part of the experience of those interviewed. The participants hide their lives as male prostitutes and actively deceive others regarding this information. They seem to feel that revealing the nature of their work to others would expose them to prejudice and elicit negative responses from those they care about. This behaviour seems to correspond to what Goffman (1959) calls *impression management* or the idea that all individuals engage in various forms of behaviour to control other's impressions of them and ultimately the way in which they are treated. Thus, the participants may purposefully hide aspects of themselves in order to avoid undesirable treatment or negative consequences.

Regardless of the participant's motivation for deceiving others, the activity of deception seems to take up much time and energy in their lives. It appears to complicate meaningful social bonds, engender mistrust and cause feelings of guilt and

severe anxiety of being caught out. This may exacerbate existing feelings of isolation and social alienation, adding to the general levels of emotional and psychological distress that the participants experience.

#### **5.1.6 Group affiliation**

Some of the participants who are currently working in brothels experienced a great sense of group affiliation with the other members of the brothel. It appears that in each participant's account, a cohesive group formed amongst the brothel members and that they experience this group as a type of "family" unit with its own norms and designated roles for each member. It seems that this unit is an integral part of these participants' experience, serving as a support structure that they can rely and depend on for acceptance, understanding, parenting, knowledge and other supportive measures. Protection and the sense of security that results from membership in a group, tends to make accepted group members healthier and happier than non-members (Moreland, 1987). Thus it appears that this group membership may ease the negative emotional and psychological factors associated with the experience of male prostitution.

#### **5.1.7 Money**

Money or financial reward features prominently in the experience of the four participants and seems to be one of the primary motivating factors for entry into male prostitution. Paradoxically, the participants also seem to experience financial stability as the only way of 'escaping' prostitution. They experienced prostitution as being more lucrative than other job opportunities, with other jobs perceived as a waste of time due to the small amount of cash earned. For some of the participants, the

motivation to earn money was intertwined with drug use, with much of their earnings spent on drugs. This seems to cause feelings of entrapment in the industry, loss of control and helplessness. This may suggest that, at a therapeutic level, financial management and planning would be an important part of any intervention strategy.

#### **5.1.8 Fear**

From the findings it appears that fear and anxiety are a common feature of the everyday life of the male prostitute, consistent with the research findings of Oosthuizen & Preston-Whyte (1998). Most of the participants experienced constant fear of being exposed as male prostitutes to friends, family, and society in general and were apprehensive as to the negative emotional and social consequences if they disclosed their 'unusual' occupation. One participant feared that if he were exposed, his career prospects in other areas would suffer. Other's experienced fear over the possible legal aftermath of engaging in prostitution such as incarceration, heavy fines, as well as the potential loss of much needed income that could result from being in.

Although this category is relatively strong and emerged as a singular aspect within the participant's experience, it can be related to the difficulty and hardship associated with being a male prostitute. It also appears to be an aspect with which the participant's deal on an everyday basis and can therefore also be associated with the management strategies they use.

Significantly absent from the participant's accounts was the issue of HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. To what extent these issues form part of their experience is, in the context of this study, unknown.

## **5.2 Evaluation of this study**

This section provides an evaluation of the present study in terms of its relative strengths and weaknesses. Suggestions for future research are also presented.

### **5.2.1 Strengths**

This study provides a theoretical overview of the existing literature concerning male prostitution supplying future researchers and counsellors a comprehensive knowledge base from which to broaden their understanding regarding the experience of the male prostitute.

This study followed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological focus, which allowed the personal interpretations and perspectives of the participants to emerge, permitting the actual nature of their experience to be described and documented. The analysis yielded the distinctive themes and features of their experience, which was then formulated into a more general hypothetical experience.

A number of suggestions for future research were also generated by this research. The various themes and hypothesis proposed in this qualitative study can be tested by future confirmatory quantitative research.

The sample selection in this study followed a 'purposive sampling' approach (Punch, 1998) which permitted the selection of a more homogenous sample (all white, male, adult, currently working as male prostitutes).

The open design of the interviews allowed the most immediate characteristics and 'essences' of the participant's experience to emerge. This may have proved unsuccessful with a more formal interview or questionnaire format, which tend to extract answers rather than original or unsolicited information.

This study focused on a relatively unexplored aspect of male prostitution, that is, the experience of the male prostitute. Hopefully, this study has made some contribution to this scantiness of research, has noted some of the variables concerned with the phenomenon, and raised a number of implications for clinicians counselling male prostitutes. Further, it is hoped that this exploration and interpretation of the experience of the male prostitute can make some contribution towards theory-building and therapeutic practice in this field.

### **5.2.2 Limitations**

While the qualitative approach used in this study allowed a wealth of detail to emerge, the drawback of the present research methodology is that it is unclear as to what extent its results can be generalized to the broader population of male prostitutes. Since any knowledge derived from its employment is 'local knowledge' (Readings, 1991), much of what has been discovered may only be true for the particular and circumscribed situations in which the research was undertaken. Also, given the modest number of participants in the sample and their relatively homogenous nature, it would be impossible to generalize these findings to male prostitutes from different cultural, ethnic or racial backgrounds, or those who work as street prostitutes.

A second issue with regard to the limitations of this study is the subjective influence of the researcher. As with all research, the researcher's presence at and contribution to the entire research process had without question an influence on the outcome of the findings. In contrast to the natural scientific viewpoint, the phenomenological approach used in this study views *objectivity* as the attempt to be as comprehensive and inclusive in responding to the phenomenon as possible (Hycner, 1985).

Thus, the phenomenologist believes that there is no way to eliminate the subjective influence of the researcher and that it is the very nature of this 'subjectivity' which allows for greater 'objectivity'. True 'objectivity' in a phenomenological sense therefore uses every device possible to be as faithful to the phenomenon as possible. In this respect, the current study utilized aspects such as bracketing, phenomenological reduction and hermeneutic principles to achieve a more comprehensive and 'objective' viewpoint of the experience of the participants.

### **5.2.3 Suggestions for future research**

The findings of this study suggest that there is yet room for further studies on the phenomenon of the experience of the male prostitute. Such studies could add to the findings of this study by:

- Investigating and describing medium and long-term consequences of the behaviour.
- Exploring the perspectives and experiences of the clients that this group of sex-workers serves.

- Investigating and describing the experiences of a more heterogeneous sample of male prostitutes including different ethnic and racial groups, as well as different types of male prostitute such as those plying their trade on the streets.
- Examining the differences and similarities between brothel workers and those who work privately, especially in terms of their daily functioning and coping strategies.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The data and information in this study helps us to broaden our understanding of the phenomenon of male prostitution, as experienced by the male prostitutes themselves. It furnishes some insights into their affective and psychological responses to working as a male prostitute, as well as to the interpretations and meanings that they attribute to their experience. In accordance with its phenomenological orientation, this study has attempted to comprehend and describe the experience of the male prostitute, as well as to determine the significance of it for the persons studied.

As mentioned in the introduction, a sizeable percentage of the prostitutes in South Africa are men. Every day, these men deal with complex issues embedded in the industry of commercial sex-work with the added social stigma and prejudice that accompanies homosexuality. These issues have detrimental consequences for the male prostitute and all the systems of which he is a part - physical, emotional, familial, social and vocational aspects of life and living are disturbed or disintegrated, creating further risk of psychological and emotional difficulties.

The purpose of this study was to glean information that is useful in understanding, helping and further researching male prostitutes. It is hoped that this study has



generatively and productively added to the information available concerning the male prostitute's experience of his work as a prostitute. It is also hoped that this information can ultimately be used to serve male prostitutes by increasing the understanding of their experience and developing therapeutic interventions aimed at assisting them.

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