

Street-Based Male Sex Workers in South Africa: Investigating constructions of the client-sex worker relationship

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Abstract

Sex work is often constructed as being an interaction between male clients and female sex workers. As a result, street-based male sex workers are continuously overlooked in the South African literature. This qualitative study explored male sex worker's subjective experiences and constructions of their male clients' identities, the client-sex worker relationship, and the underlying power-dynamics of this relationship. This research was conducted from a social-constructionist perspective, which allowed for a deeper understanding of the reasons and context driving the choices and actions of male sex workers, in order to make meaning of their reality. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with 10 South African men working as sex workers in Cape Town. Data was analysed through thematic analysis. The findings of the study construct the client-sex worker relationship in terms of a professional relationship, constrained choice, sexual identity and need, as well as companionship for pay, potentially highlighting underlying reasons for supply and demand. The data which emerged around the client-sex worker relationship and the clients' identities also served to illuminate the power-dynamics in this relationship. This data increases insight into the exploitation and disempowerment experienced by male sex workers through verbal abuse, physical and sexual violence, and unfairly enforced laws and regulations. The findings of this study suggest that, in the context of South Africa, male sex workers' experiences of the client-sex worker relationship cannot be completely understood without considering the intersectionality of the double stigmatisation, criminal status, ethnicity and lack of economic power, which systematically maintains marginalization. Legislation may serve to address the enforcement of equal human and health rights for sex workers, reducing the potential of exploitation of sex workers in South Africa.

Introduction

Despite being the world's oldest profession, commercial sex work is a highly controversial topic remaining a mystery to the general population through fallacy, bigotry and moral nihilism. In a declining economy where education and job opportunities are scarce (4.6 million South Africans are unemployed) (Statistics SA, 2013), the motivations for joining the sex trade industry are predominantly based around survival and subsistence needs (Dunkle, Jewkes, Brown, Gray, McIntyre & Harlow, 2004). This fact is often overlooked by the general public. Moreover, male sex workers, because they only occupy a small proportion of the sex worker population (5%) (Stacey, Konstant, Rangasami, Stewart & Mans, 2013), are frequently disregarded in the South African literature. Male sex workers across all religious, racial, social and cultural spectrums operate in South Africa (Luiz & Roets, 2000). The majority are street-based (Gould, 2008).

Human rights violations inflicted on sex workers are all too frequent in South Africa (Gould, 2008). According to various narratives, male sex workers are at risk of contracting HIV and other STIs, and are vulnerable to sexual and physical assault by clients, other members of society, and unjust brutality and arrest by policemen (Boyce & Isaacs, 2011; Gould, 2008; Isaacs, 2011). Although buying and selling sex in South Africa is illegal, the demand for the services of male and female sex workers continues to grow (Gould, 2008). Consequently, the legality of sex work has been brought into question. Those in favour of decriminalisation hope to reduce the vulnerability, marginalisation and abuse frequently experienced by sex workers, in order to empower and ensure their human rights (Gould, 2008; Jewkes, Morrell, Sikweyiya, Dunkle & Penn-Kekana, 2012).

While there is a vast amount of research on female sex work, gender based violence, female protection interventions and power dynamics between clients and female sex workers (Boonzaier, 2008; O'Connell Davidson, 1998; West, 1993), there is a paucity of literature around the experiences of South African male sex workers, and their male clients (Aggleton, 1999; Earle & Sharp, 2008; McAnulty & Burnette, 2006). The lack of research particularly regarding clients of street-based male sex workers creates difficulty in effectively contributing to the ethical and legal debate around the decriminalisation of sex work (O'Connell Davidson, 1998). This study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the male sex work industry in South Africa. It also aims to gain meaningful insight into the multifaceted relationship between the male sex worker and client, through exploring their constructions of this relationship.

Defining sex work

Male sex workers, typically regarded as prostitutes, gigolos and working boys, occupy an anomalous position within society (Aggleton, 1999; Harcourt & Donovan, 2005). Selling sex is a complex political and social issue, particularly hinging on the social perception of the occupation. Thus, as a consequence of various criticisms regarding the terminology of selling sex, the definition of “prostitution” and “sex work” need to be addressed (Bernstein, 1999; Wardlow, 2004).

Prostitution is inherently seen as an essential part of patriarchal capitalism (Pateman, 1999), leading to exploitation and physical and emotional harm of the female prostitute (Farley, 2006; Kempadoo, 1999). In liberal and feminist literature a widely accepted depiction of prostitution, which regards sex as a form of work, portrays prostitution as “the removal of humanity” (Farley, 2006, 112). Further, it is a formulated identity from a male perspective, where the subordinate individual does not have the authority to define or own his or her personal and sexual identity (Aronson, 2006). Prostitution also has connotations of sexual, domestic and intimate partner violence by clients and pimps, which serves to maintain stereotypes of vulnerability and weakness for those selling sex, strengthening the patriarchal roles within society (Bernstein, 1999; Farley, 2006; Kempadoo, 1999; Wardlow, 2004).

In opposition to this, the literature embracing the term “sex work” defines it as a political assertion where sex is monetized due to an economic need (Farley, 2006; Kempadoo, 1999; Wardlow, 2004). It is seen as a form of labour entitled to conventional rights (Bernstein, 1999; Farley, 2006; Gardner, 2009; Wardlow, 2004). This term in essence, holds the assumption that sex workers should have certified payment, safety, and the legalization of their trade (Wardlow, 2004). “Sex worker” also suggests an income-generating occupation as opposed to the notion of “selling one’s talent for an unworthy cause” (Aronson, 2006, p.359) resulting in a totalizing identity (Aronson, 2006; Wardlow, 2004). Through this, “sex work” serves to empower the individual instead of marginalising and maintaining the social stigmas that are attached to “prostitution” (Aronson, 2006; Kempadoo, 1999).

Accompanying the contested use of terminology in this field, the current debate regarding decriminalisation of sex work in South Africa continues to rage on as a means to enforce fundamental human rights for both male and female sex workers across the board (Gould, 2008). The current law surrounding sex work is based on the Sexual Offences Act (No. 23 of 1957) which serves to criminalise the sex industry and its various components, including living off of the gained income and brothel-keeping (Gardner, 2009). This act

criminalises both the sex worker and client, which jeopardises the economic survival of the sex worker (Gardner, 2009). Moreover, male sex workers occupy a subsidiary position within a heterosexist, “malestream society” (Gaffney & Beverley, 2001), which puts them at a greater risk for violence, HIV, and other STIs (Gaffney & Beverley, 2001; Gould, 2008; O’Connell Davidson, 1998).

The lack of neutral language around selling sex, shows that both value-laden terms of “prostitution” and “sex work” each have their own set of implications which has an effect on the way in which sex workers are perceived and understood. Thus, the term “sex work” will be used, as opposed to “prostitution”. This term has been chosen as it does not have explicit gender connotations. While prostitution is intrinsically grounded in the female sex trade (Bernstein, 1999), sex work remains impartial and does not contribute to the diminution of masculinity (Aggleton, 1999). “Sex work” also embraces the movement towards empowerment, legitimisation and legality for sex workers in South Africa. A change in the construction of sex worker identities within the research and literature supports prospective research that aims to empower such marginalised groups and provide sanction for their occupational choices.

Male sex workers’ constructions of client identities and the client-sex worker relationship

Given the negligible voice male sex workers have in reality and the covert nature of their trade, virtually no research around the complex dynamics of the client-sex worker relationship from the male sex worker perspective has been conducted in South Africa.

In the international studies that have explored this aspect of male sex work, a large majority of clients have been described as individuals craving companionship (Aggleton, 1999; Smith, Grov & Seal, 2008) who turn to male sex workers for fulfilment (Bimbi, 2007). Clients have also been characterised as social isolates who struggle to form suitable relationships with others, and who fail with personality integration (Aggleton, 1999; Harriman, Johnston & Kenny, 2007). Thus, these clients use sex trade as a platform to gain emotional and physical connections that they are unable to form in their personal lives. Conversely, other studies show that many clients admitted to enjoying a sexual relationship, in which they are able to focus solely on their own sexual pleasure- without the complications of on-going emotional connections (Harriman, Johnston & Kenny, 2007).

Other narratives of male sex workers report that heterosexual clients tend to focus on the maleness of the sex worker as opposed to treating them affectionately as clients have

admitted to “having fears of turning gay” (Aggleton, 1999, p.254). They prefer male sex workers to take passive roles during intercourse as it enhances the image that they are “real men” (Aggleton, 1999, 253).

The socioeconomic status of male sex workers has been found to determine the type of client relationships they engage in (Kaye, 2007). Those who are financially stable are able to choose who they wish to interact with, while those who are economically disadvantaged are usually forced to accept any available opportunity (Kaye, 2007). In cases like these, clients are usually undesirable, violent and reluctant to use condoms- enhancing the potential risk of violence and HIV (Kaye, 2007).

Male sex workers’ experiences of power dynamics within the client-sex worker relationship

Research exploring the subjective experiences of male sex work is especially limited (Aggleton, 1999; Earle & Sharp, 2008; McAnulty & Burnette, 2006), and even more so in South Africa (Fipaza, 2010; Gould, 2008). Qualitative studies on female sex work have noted the prominence of violence in terms of rape, and physical, emotional and verbal abuse (Mattisson & Ekebrand, 2010). However, few have specifically considered the potential of violence experienced as a male sex worker at the hands of their clients.

Studies conducted in Canada show that male sex workers are less likely to report sexual or physical assault possibly as a result of upholding masculine identities (Aggleton, 1999). Furthermore, in countries such as Kenya, Eastern Africa (Boyce & Isaacs, 2011) and Germany (Grenz, 2005), violence inflicted on male sex workers is rife and is usually motivated by homophobia. Similarly, when men are violent towards women (Boonzaier, 2008), this questions whether violence is a motivating factor for men who buy sex from other men as it may create a heightened platform on which to exert power and masculinity on the male sex worker (Kaye, 2004; West, 1993). Additionally, studies in Nigeria have found that clients are more likely to be violent if the male sex worker insists on condom usage, or pay significantly less if they are asked to wear condoms (Okanlawon, Adebowale & Titilayo, 2012).

In Cape Town, approximately 40% of clients coerce sex workers to take drugs and drink alcohol with them (Gould, 2008, Isaacs, 2011). This links to irresponsible behaviour, immediate gratification, sexual arousal, as well as emphasising the need for risk-taking companionship (Stall et al., 2001). Risk-taking and the abuse of illicit substances are found to be used as mechanisms to gain control over the sex worker (Gaffney & Beverley, 2001;

West, 1993). Under circumstances where the sex worker is highly intoxicated, sex workers are prevented from protecting themselves from physical and sexual violence as well as from contracting and/or transmitting HIV (Wechsberg, Luseno & Lam, 2006). Additionally, the helplessness due to intoxication allows for the client to have more control over condom use, as well as with regard to what sexual acts occur.

Clients are often perceived as “sugar-daddies” who provide sex workers with drugs as payment (Aggleton, 1999; Isaacs, 2011; McAnulty & Burnette, 2006), or as “bargain hunters”, who wait until the sex worker is drugged to the degree that he lowers his rate for sex (Aggleton, 1999). Clients use their economic power, as well as the drug abuse of the sex worker to gain control over them (Wardlow, 2004), hindering the sex worker’s ability to insist upon condom usage (Pettifor, Beksinska & Rees, 2000).

Experimental heterosexual clients were found to develop “subtle behaviours that gain control over the [male sex worker]” (Gaffney & Beverley, 2001, 135), ensuring the subordinate role and masculinity is maintained. Labels such as “rent boy” and “souvenir” (Aggleton, 1999; O’Connell Davidson, 1998) are often imposed on young male sex workers in order to enforce a sense of immaturity and a need for discipline onto the sex worker, asserting dominant masculinity and maintaining the “heterosexual image” (Aggleton, 1999). Conversely, other studies have shown that labels such as “callboy” and “kept boy” can be of benefit to the sex worker if the client is of a high social status, as it makes them appear more marketable, and adds a sense of prestige (Bimbi, 2007; Harriman, Johnston & Kenny, 2007).

The gender identity and interaction dynamics of sex workers and clients are often found to be blurred, as engaging in same-sex sexual relations results in gender and sexual identity being called into question (O’Connell Davidson, 1998). Often, homeless male sex workers who begin sex work between 12-17 years old, self-identify as heterosexual, and are influenced by their peers to sell sex for money (Gaffney & Beverley, 2001). In turn, heterosexual clients have been found to benefit from the youthfulness and heterosexual self-identity of the sex worker, as it fuels an underlying need within the client to exhibit their masculinity and exert control (O’Connell Davidson, 1998). This particular need is one of the fundamental aspects worth investigating, as it brings forth the undercurrent of domination and violence inflicted on male sex workers (O’Connell Davidson, 1998; Aggleton, 1999).

Manipulation by the male sex worker is also a factor that has been found to contribute to the power dynamics of the client-sex worker relationship (Harriman, Johnston & Kenny, 2007). If customers are unpleasant, the sex worker is often less willing to spend more time with them, or reduces the intensity of the interaction while still charging the client the same amount of money

(Harriman, Johnston & Kenny, 2007). Sex workers have also admitted to theft at the hands of both client and sex workers, which puts both parties in a vulnerable position (Kaye, 2007; Niccolai, King, Eritsyan, Saffiullina & Rusakova, 2013).

Clients and their constructions of the client-sex worker relationship

Literature regarding male client demographics and the client-sex worker relationship in South Africa is thin. This may be as a result of the stigma attached to buying sex from men, where consequently, clients do not wish to share their experiences for fear of exposure or humiliation (Earle & Sharp, 2008; Kaye, 2004).

However, small-scale studies conducted in Cape Town identify clients as male, employed, typically married, over thirty years of age and ethnically diverse, with the number of black clients steadily increasing (Gould, 2008). Furthermore, it is interesting to note that across most international studies, young male sex workers often speak of their clients as being prominent high SES figures in the community (Aggleton, 1999; Gaffney & Beverley, 2001; Lucas, 2005; Minichiello et al., 1999).

The client-sex worker relationship has also been characterised by convenience. Particularly in homosexual circles, the ease of a pre-negotiated sexual encounters results in a higher chance of personal satisfaction for the client, and there is a greater likelihood of completion (Harriman, Johnston & Kenny, 2007).

While there is a large demand from homosexual clients, the majority of clients do not necessarily identify themselves as homosexual (Aggleton, 1999; Boyce & Isaacs, 2011; Minichiello et al., 1999)- clients are also bisexual and as well heterosexual (Aggleton, 1999; Smith, Grov & Seal, 2008). Former research lacks insight into the reasons why self-identified heterosexual clients buy sex from men.

Research conducted in Germany and North America has found that clients who consider themselves heterosexual, often prefer their chosen sex worker to be heterosexual as well (West, 1993). Heterosexual clients have been found to express very little interest in the sex worker during sex and often do not expect them to reach orgasm. Furthermore, they rarely demand mutual masturbation, which is a salient feature that occurs between homosexual clients and male sex workers (McAnulty & Burnette, 2006). These characteristics are said to maintain the client's masculine identity, and the power that they have over the sex worker (Gaffney & Beverley, 2001).

The proposed study, through exploring male sex workers' construction of their client's identities, as well as the complex client-sex worker relationship and its innate power

dynamics, contributes to the current literature on sex work. It allows the voices and experiences of South African male sex workers to be heard- something that is missing both in the academic literature and in reality.

Aims and Objectives

Aim

The overall objective of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the way in which male sex workers view their clients and the dynamics of the relationship between male sex workers and their clients.

Research questions

- How do male sex workers construct the client-sex worker relationship?
- How do male sex workers construct their clients in the context of their relationship?
- What power dynamics occur within the client-sex worker relationship?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is located within a social constructionist paradigm. Social constructionism is concerned with broader systems of social meaning encoded in language, which assists individuals to make meaning of their experiences in relation to the world around them, as well as how others make meaning of them. (Terre Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006). As sex work is a sensitive topic, social constructionism also allows individuals to negotiate how they are willing to portray their subjective worlds (Hosking & Morley, 2004). This allows for a deeper understanding of the reasons and context that drive the choices and actions, that ultimately define their reality (Hosking & Morley, 2004).

Methodology

Research Design

Qualitative research design. A qualitative research design is best suited to this study as its methods and techniques are highly compatible with social constructionist research assumptions, objectives and philosophies (Flick, 2009). Qualitative research aims to maintain the integrity of narrative data and attempts to use the data to illustrate unusual or central themes rooted in contexts (Terre Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006). This is done by making an attempt to understand individuals' lives and how they create meaning (Flick, 2009).

Qualitative research is aimed at uncovering knowledge that is constructed in processes of social interchange, dialogue and descriptive language (Flick, 2009) – a fundamental characteristic of social constructionism. This allows for a meaning centred approach which allows the experiences and voices of participants to be the central focus of the study.

Sample

Access to the sample was gained through S.W.E.A.T, a Non-Governmental Organization which advocates for an empowered sex work industry in South Africa by creating awareness around the implementation of equal access to human rights, social justice and health care for sex workers. The purposively selected sample consisted of 10 social-networking and street-based male sex workers who are members of S.W.E.A.T and their male sex work group, Siyasebenza. The participants were black or coloured South African males from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds in Cape Town. All of the participants considered themselves to be active male sex workers; sex work is their primary source of income. Table 1 details the ages, ethnicity and home province of each participant.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Participant	Age	Ethnicity	Home Province
Participant 1	59	Coloured	Western Cape
Participant 2	55	Coloured	Western Cape
Participant 3	27	Coloured	Western Cape
Participant 4	28	Coloured	Western Cape
Participant 5	49	Coloured	Western Cape
Participant 6	36	Black	Eastern Cape
Participant 7	31	Coloured	Western Cape
Participant 8	48	Coloured	Western Cape
Participant 9	33	Black	Eastern Cape
Participant 10	22	Cape Malay	Western Cape

Data collection tool and procedure

Data was collected through the use of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. This was used to ensure that all the salient areas of interest were covered, while leaving room for feedback, as a means to further explore particular meanings with participants (Burck, 2005). For the purpose of this study, it was beneficial to use semi-structured interviews, as the thematic direction was given greater preference. It also allowed for specific focus on particular topics, guided by the researcher (Flick, 2009).

All of the interviews were conducted at S.W.E.A.T. in Observatory, Cape Town. In each interview the following questions were posed to the participants as a guide to frame the interview:

- How you became involved in this work?
- How would you describe your clients?
- Can you think of two clients of whom you would describe as having different relationships with?
- What kind of relationships would you say that they are?
- Why do you think men pay men for sex?

Participants received payment of R40 each. The interviews were recorded using a portable voice recorder. Recordings were transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used as the method of data analysis for this study as it provides core perspectives (Flick, 2009) of the male sex workers. This was suited to this study as it helped to illuminate connections between subjective realities and power relations (Riessman, 2008) within the client-sex worker relationship, and reported emerging patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis was predominantly theoretical. As there was no pre-existing coding frame for the male sex worker and client relationship, the thematic analysis was mainly driven by the researcher's theoretical and analytical interest in the area of male sex work (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The language and structure used in the interview was focused on, which is in accordance to social constructionist research (Hosking & Morley, 2004). This facilitated the exploration of participant's perceptions of their clients and how they construct the client-sex worker relationship, as well as their own experiences and identities.

Three predetermined areas relating to the research question were coded for in the

analysis. Each participant's transcript was analysed individually, identifying themes of significance within each interview. Through identifying, comparing and analysing the differences and similarities between interviews, data was organized in accordance with the common themes apparent to each predetermined category that were found to emerge across interviews.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for conducting the study was granted by the Psychology Department's Ethics Committee at the University of Cape Town.

Harm to subjects

Due to stigmas surrounding homosexuality, and sex work and social discredit, the prevention of psychological stress was taken into consideration. Semi-structured interviews allowed the participants a fair amount of control with what they were willing to speak about (Wengraf, 2001), reducing the possibility of psychological distress as they were not pressured to disclose experiences or information that they considered to be painful or traumatic to them. Anonymity and confidentiality of the participants' identities was ensured, and pseudonyms are used in research reports of findings

Informed consent and deception of respondents

Full disclosure of the research purpose, process and any other aspect of the research was given to the participants to avoid any deception. Participants each received a consent form (See Appendix 1), notifying them of the research purpose and processes. Included, was the participants confidentiality and their right to withdraw from the interview at any given time.

Debriefing of participants and referrals

Directly after each interview participants were debriefed by allowing them to reflect on the interviewing process and addressing any misconceptions. S.W.E.A.T also provides support and counselling services, to which participants were referred if needed.

Limitations

The study was limited by the fact that the interviewer could not understand or speak Afrikaans or isiXhosa: 5 out of the 10 participants did not speak English as their first language. As a result possible meaning may have been lost, owing to this language barrier. Of the 5 participants, a number of them had little confidence in their ability to converse in English, hindering the spontaneity of speech and limited their expression immensely.

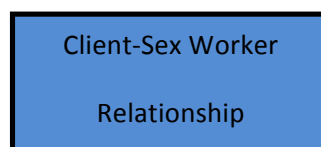
The relatively small (10) sample of men in the study may not be representative of all male sex workers. Furthermore, the male sex workers in this sample were all individuals who had sought and gained assistance from the organisation S.W.E.A.T., where their understanding of sex work may have been influenced somewhat by what they had learnt and experienced as a result of this affiliation. Accordingly, their characteristics and experiences may differ from those who did not belong to the organisation. However, the aim of this research was to explore and uncover the unique constructions and experiences of individual participants, rather than the broader population.

Reflexivity

As the researcher, it is important for me to acknowledge and reflect on my active role in the construction of meaning during the data collection and analysis. From a social constructionist paradigm, information obtained from research participants was constructed within the research context, more so than as a true objective reflection of reality (Burck, 2005). Furthermore, as I am a 21 year old, middle class female of mixed-race, my life experiences differ greatly to male sex workers'. This lack of shared experience may be noted as a limitation to this research in terms of creating a boundary between myself and the participants, whereby the development of rapport and a deeper understanding of their experiences was hindered.

Results and Discussion

The three main themes around which a number of sub-themes emerged were the client-sex worker relationship, client identities, and power imbalances. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of these themes and sub-themes.



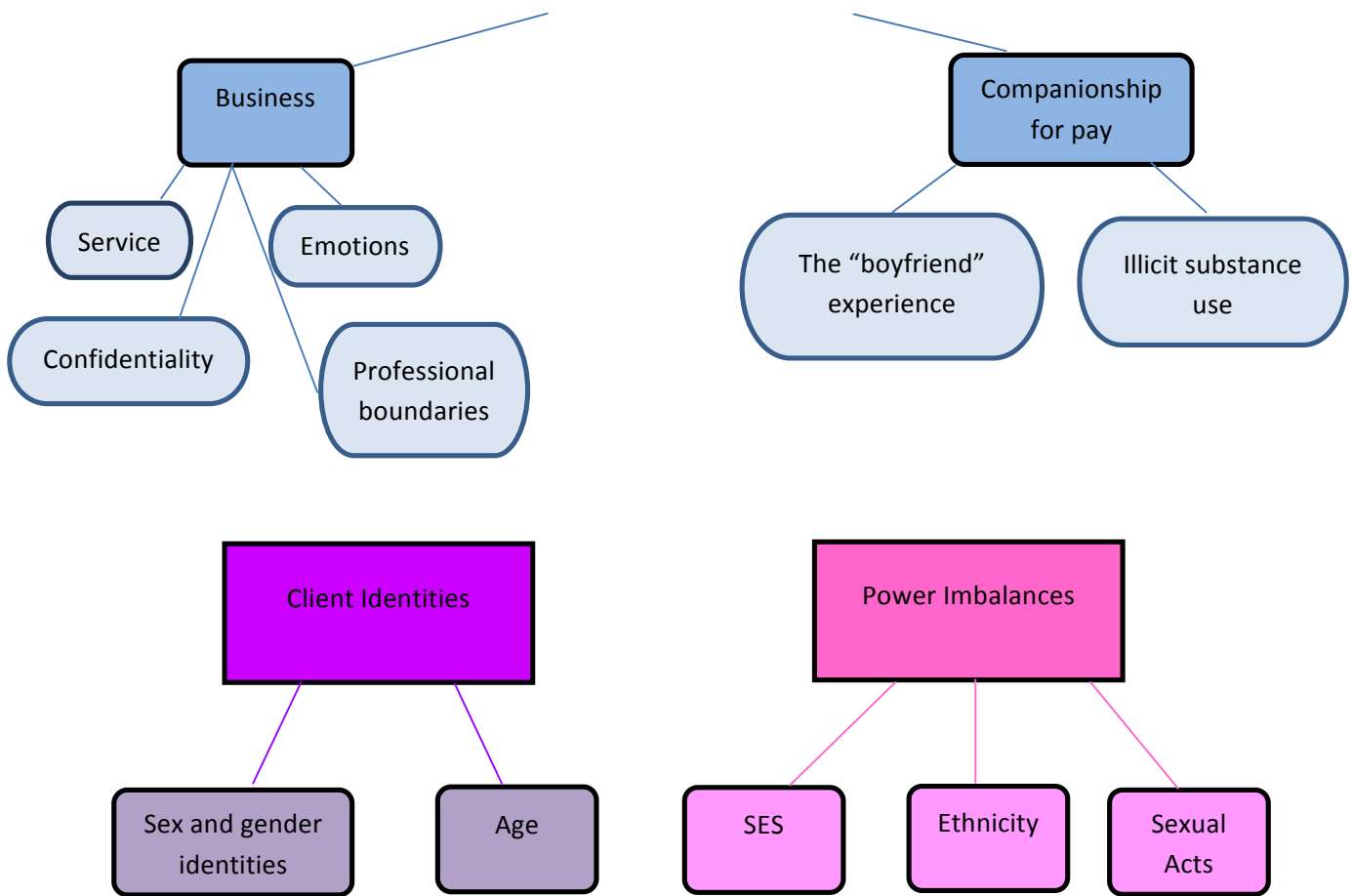


Figure. 1 The themes and sub-themes

Client-Sex Worker Relationship

The client-sex worker relationship in this context was defined as the reciprocal and consensual relationship between both parties. The nature of these relationships encompassed emotional and physical labour, performed as part of a business transaction. Thus, the relationships were predicated on a formal contract of agreement where payment was negotiated for particular sexual services provided.

Two dominant and somewhat contrasting themes relating to the client-sex worker relationship emerged from the data. All of the participants interviewed constructed the client-sex worker relationship as a *business deal*, characterised by the pre-negotiation of payment in return for sexual gratification. Paradoxically, yet understandably so, male sex workers also spoke of the relationship as being that of a mutual *companionship* defined as a relationship characterised by emotional support, fondness, and the enjoyment of one another's company in exchange for money or drugs.

Business. All 10 participants spoke of the client-sex worker relationship as a business deal characterised by supply and demand, and the transaction of money for their services. For the majority of sex workers in South Africa, motivation for joining the sex industry is fuelled by subsistence and survival needs, where transactional sex is a lucrative business opportunity (Dunkle, Jewkes, Brown, Gray, McIntyre & Harlow, 2004). Sex workers have the opportunity to choose the clientele that they engage with, and decide on the proposed price for their services (Aronson, 2006). Sub-themes relating to the business relationship include: *Service, confidentiality, professional boundaries and emotion.*

Service. Many of the male sex workers constructed their identities around providing a high-quality service where sex was a basic commodity used to fulfil the human need for sexual gratification. For example, Participant 3 reported his concern with providing a service that ensured complete fulfilment of the client in order for them to utilize his services again.

You must give them what they want...because you know that if they're happy and satisfied, they're gonna come back. That's what you want your client to do- keep coming back. (Participant 3).

Despite the small number of South African male sex workers, participants indicated that the demand is large and continuously increasing. In such an industry where competition is rife (Okanlawon, Adebawale & Titilayo, 2012), client satisfaction is a vital element in ensuring that clients return in order to keep business lucrative and flowing. Participant 3 indicated that if they are unable to satisfy the clients' expectations, there are always other male sex workers who will. Sex workers are then more likely to oblige with what the client asks of them, in fear of losing clients, money and other business opportunities. Further, professionalism of the male sex worker communicates the validity and seriousness of their occupation to the greater society. Thus, while the predominant constructions focused on client satisfaction, it was evident that participants were also concerned with ensuring that clients would return in future, while constructing the image of sex work a professional service.

Like all service industry occupations, the service provider's manner and ability to maintain positive social interactions is an essential prerequisite for delivering a quality service. In the context of intimate sexual encounters, where emotional vulnerability and sensitivity are usually present, the sex worker's mood and attitude has a direct influence on the client's. Participant 3 reflects on how his mood has the potential to negatively impact the professional client-sex worker relationship.

[Feeling depressed] was not good for business at all. You can't wanna be in such a

mood when you're doing such work because you've got to keep them happy at all times.

(Participant 3)

Regarding Participant 3's reflection, feelings of depression are suppressed in order to ensure that the client comes first and remains satisfied with the service provided irrespective of the sex worker's own emotional functioning. The need for a reasonable work morale and motivation is another salient aspect of maintaining a professional relationship. Participants expressed the need for confidence in themselves, as well as the willingness and motivation to perform in order to provide a valuable service to the client.

Similarly, Participant 5 speaks of his discomfort and embarrassment regarding maintaining an erection when having feelings of anxiety, while still having to carry out a satisfactory service.

It was so awkward for me... It also had an effect on my erection, you know, because there's someone watching... and I have to do my job as well. (Participant 5)

This account reinforces how the sex worker's current state of mind directly impacts on sexual performance, and in turn, how it can serve to impair the quality of the service provided. Resultantly the sex worker's lack of arousal increases the difficulty of maintaining business repeat, professionalism, client satisfaction.

Confidentiality. The associated stigma attached to sex work emphasises the need for mutual discretion in the business relationship (Sanders, 2005). Despite all of the participants reporting that they often go out with their clients in public, the majority still wish for the relationship to remain confidential. Participant 2 recounts the secretive behaviour of one of his clients.

Sometimes he will leave his car at home... and then I must take a taxi... [He's] always undercover. No one must know. (Participant 2)

Secrecy around hiring male sex workers is particularly linked to men who are in heterosexual relationships, where they desire sexual gratification from men but feel that they are unable to reveal their desires in fear of divorce and the destruction of their families (Earle & Sharp, 2008; Kaye, 2004). Of the participants interviewed, 90% reported that they had encountered clients in heterosexual relationships. Similarly, the double stigma attached to hiring sex workers has dire implications for the client's personal, professional and social life especially when others are unaware of their homosexual tendencies- as there is a fear of being rejected by loved ones as well as the religious circles to which they belong, due to their attraction towards men.

Confidentiality is also salient where sex workers feel that they provide clients with

feelings and sexual experiences that elicit an idealised, desirable self, however clients wish for this to remain a “secret” self (Letiche & van Mens, 2002). As this new, emerging self cannot be expressed in clients’ daily lives, it can bring about a sense of shame and inadequacy. Consequently, they only find it acceptable to experience this relationship in secret where it feels natural and accepted.

Male sex workers too, have a need for confidentiality. Sexual autonomy, the demand for their services, and their construction of sex work as a business opportunity were participants’ main reasons for being proud to be sex workers. However, the stigma and illegality of sex work still renders it a covert operation implying the need for secrecy. In particular, heterosexual male sex workers often feel shame, as sex work is perceived to compromise their masculinity (Agglestone, 1999). Five of the participants, who either self-identified as heterosexual or were ambivalent towards their sexuality, expressed a sense of embarrassment when speaking of their occupation. Many had either been rejected by their families prior to joining the trade for reasons such as having deviant tendencies, or otherwise feared that they would be rejected by their families if they were to find out in the future (Letiche & van Mens, 2002). Thus, the need for confidentiality is just as vital to them as it is to their clients.

Professional boundaries. In most vocations, professional distance is characterised by maintaining a space between two professionals whereby boundaries are put in place as a means to separate the personal from the professional. In occupations such as sex work where physical intimacy is unavoidable, boundaries are set to separate the emotional and personal, from the physical (Sanders, 2005). Participant 4 reinforces the maintenance of professional distance and detachment by withdrawing from the emotional contact and intimacy of the sexual interaction.

I don’t speak a lot to them. I just come and do my business, and get finished and get out. (Participant 4)

Participant 4 reports the active detachment from any form of emotional intimacy. The lack of conversation minimises the chances of establishing emotional bonds between the client and sex worker, essentially maintaining a professional distance between an objective sexual experiences and avoiding the potential to illicit feelings of emotional intimacy. In relation to this, Participant 9 describes the need for emotional detachment between clients and sex workers in order to maintain a professional relationship so as to evade harassment and other emotional and social complications.

After a while they start stalking you, lots of phone calls, SMS’s, it starts to become an

emotional contract, which I do not have with my clients. It's strictly professional. It's from the time that I'm with them, until it ends. That's it. (Participant 9)

This account reinforces how the construction of boundaries protects the sex worker from clients who act inappropriately towards them outside of the professional relationship.

Emotion. In theory, male sex workers express that the relationship is strictly detached for professional reasons, but in reality the emotions attached to their engagement with clients is inevitable, as can be seen with Participant 5 whose anxiety had an effect on his service and sexual performance. Similarly to all service providers, instances where the sex worker is unable to fulfil the basic requirements of the client can lead to feelings of failure and a reduction in self-esteem, which may have a negative effect on the professionalism of their client-sex worker relationships to come. Further, the sex worker's masculinity could be questioned by the client, leading to feelings of embarrassment, a decrease in self-worth, depression and anxiety (Kaye, 2004).

Unavoidably interlinked, is the active alienation and emotional removal from the situation used as a coping mechanism in order to protect the self from psychological harm. Supported by Sanders (2005), sex workers use "acting" as a protection strategy in their relationships with clients.

[Sex work] is coming and being someone you're not. You understand what I mean? A lot of acting... because you are two different persons- two different personalities. (Participant 1)

Through crafting oneself a new identity during encounters with clients, the body becomes separated from the self in order to gain control over one's emotional world (Sanders, 2005). This alienation through performance detaches the sex worker from potentially traumatic events or triggers from past events. Furthermore, sex workers partition their personalities as a means to allow their manufactured alter-ego to accept and handle the intensity of the relationship, protecting their true selves from emotional and psychological burnout. Through acting and creating a new identity, the encounter itself does not render real to the sex worker if they are not allowing themselves to experience it as themselves. Thus, through distancing and emotional detachment from the relationship, sex workers can maintain a sense of sanity.

Companionship for pay. The majority of participants spoke of relationship development as a result of the client and sex worker spending time together where sex is not necessarily present. Affection may be shown, experiences are shared, and emotional bonds are often made - particularly towards the male sex worker (Smith, Grov & Seal, 2008).

Participant 1 describes the client's need for intimacy beyond the sexual relationship, where he is not hired solely for the purpose of a sexual transaction.

They are alone as well; need some company. It isn't always sex, you understand what I mean? Sometimes we just talk and go out to a movie, or watch a movie at home... then I get paid for that too. (Participant 1)

Providing a service of companionship for the client has mutual benefits, namely that the sex worker is paid for their time, they are often pampered, receive gifts and get taken out for dinners. Further, if the sex worker likes the company of the client, providing a service of companionship is quite often an enjoyable experience.

Similarly to work by Sanders (2010), the majority of participants described their clients to whom companionship was important as "regulars". Through frequent contact between the client and male sex worker, familiarity is undoubtedly established. The sub-theme of companionship for pay encompasses *the "boyfriend" experience and illicit substance abuse*.

The "boyfriend" experience. In literature on female sex work, interactions that go beyond mechanical transactional sex that include affection, conversation and elements of romance has been termed "the girlfriend experience" (Weitzer, 2005). An identical form of interaction is mirrored amongst the relationships male clients have with male sex workers. Seven participants referred to these interactions as "nice times" characterised by flattery, affection, pampering, presenting gifts to the sex worker, going out for dinner and drinks, going to the movies, walks on the beach and weekends away together. Male sex workers recognise that fulfilling emotional needs of male clients is, too, an evident commodity market in the sex industry.

Participants perceived that male clients often resort to hiring male sex workers as a means to fulfil emotional needs that would typically be satisfied by one's partner. This is found especially where clients have experienced previous relationship failures, have discreet homosexual tendencies that they are unable to reveal to significant others, or individuals who lack the confidence or skills to form stable relationships in their personal lives. Participant 10 provides an explanation from his own experiences as to why male clients request emotional fulfilment from sex workers.

[Some clients] would want to have a more of a cuddle type thing, feeling more loved and want to have a conversation first- interact, cuddle a bit... [They] would... try to form a personal relationship. What I figured with most of the male clients is that, I think they are missing...a part [of themselves], trying to fill that space. [They] are trying to fill some lonely

space that, probably from a previous relationship that's been, probably a heartbreak. So they're trying to fill that void. (Participant 10)

While sex still remains a fundamental part of the client-sex worker relationship, it is coupled with emotional intimacy and the desire to care for and be cared for by another individual- something perceived as lacking in their personal lives (Brennen, 2004). Participants made sense of the clients' inability to form stable, mutual relationships with other individuals resulting from a lack of trust in others, where previous partners may have been disloyal. The fear of vulnerability and re-experiencing emotional pain from past relationships is therefore avoided by engaging in a "no-strings attached" form of emotional intimacy, where there is a mutual cognizance of what the relationship entails and what limits are involved, which provides a safety net for the client.

Emotional involvement between the client and sex worker can also result in various complexities as professional boundaries become blurred. Participant 1, who feels that his increasing age is a hindrance to attaining new clients, fondly recounts his relationship with a regular client that he has had for over 5 years.

I think me and [him] are very close, understand? Sometimes he gets jealous. If I say, like, "I can't come today, I'm busy", then he says, "But I need you", and then he'll ask me, "Where does your obligation lie? With me?" I told him we're not having an affair... Do I have feelings for him? (Laughs) We're like a couple... We fight; we get cross with each other. (Participant 1)

This demonstrates the emotional intensity clients may show towards male sex workers, although there is evidence of this being mutual. While the sex worker perceives the relationship he shares with his client to be close and couple-like, he puts limits on it to reinforce the client's awareness of it being a professional, monetary based relationship with no true emotional commitments. Despite Participant 1 speaking of his relationship with the client in a way that demonstrates emotional boundaries, there still remains an undertone of affection. Other participants expressed often not thinking about how much money they will receive or how much times they spend with certain clients if there is a physical and emotional attraction to them. Further, clients often become committed boyfriends.

Illicit Substance Use. Illicit substance use within the client-sex worker relationship is characterised by the mutual use of drugs such as marijuana, mandrax, cocaine, tik, and heroin. With the exception of one participant, each spoke of issues around the client's need for a drug-taking companion. Aggleton (1999) states that heterosexual male sex workers are more likely to use illicit substances and alcohol more frequently and in larger quantities than

homosexual and bisexual sex workers. In this study however, of the heterosexual male sex workers interviewed, only one reported drug use with clients, but never alone. Of the homosexual sex workers, two reported issues around drug addiction, and two spoke of occasionally engaging in drug use with their clients. The rest explicitly stated that they had strict boundaries around drug use, where abstinence from illicit substances was imperative. Reasons around this centred on needing to remain vigilant, and sober enough to enforce condom use.

Participant 5 reported that many clients refuse to continue the transaction if sex workers do not want to use drugs with them, in which case they frequently offer more money to ensure compliance, or pay significantly less if sex workers do not comply. Participant 2, who had once struggled with addiction, gave an account of the way in which clients use drugs for celebratory and bonding purposes with sex workers.

If you a druggie, then he's say, "Come too" Then he pay you drugs. They say, "Listen here. There's tik here for you, mandrax for you," and then you celebrate with him; with his friends...in the room with him- you celebrate. After then you sleep with him. If you are finished with him, he will now give you more drugs. (Participant 2)

The use of drugs such as mandrax can be used to enhance sexual pleasure (Rawson, Washton, Domier & Reiber, 2002). The decrease in anxiety and self-consciousness as a result of drug use may facilitate the enjoyment of the sexual interaction, especially in instances where the client feels shame around his actions hiring sex workers or engaging in homoerotic acts. Additionally, the use of illicit substances adds a heightened level of riskiness to the already taboo transaction (Gaffney & Beverley, 2001; West, 1993). The thrill of engagement in both illegal transactional sex and substance use can fuel the excitement and pleasure of the experience for clients who profit from sensation-seeking behaviour.

Drug use within the client-sex worker relationship has links to disapproval by significant others. Thus, clients can enjoy the experience of intoxication with another individual by hiring sex workers, where drug use is assumed to be a norm (Stall et al., 2001).

Client Identities

Client identities are defined as shared, yet distinctive personality and physical characteristics belonging to male clients. A number of ways in which male sex workers constructed the identities of their clients emerged in the data, however, *sex and gender identity*, and *age* were the leading forms of identification for male sex workers. Sex workers also constructed their clients' identities based on socioeconomic status, ethnicity and sexual

acts, which were riddled with power imbalances. Accordingly, these will be discussed later on.

Sex and Gender Identity. The client's sex is defined in this research as their biological and physical attributes defining them as men or women. Gender identity is defined as the way in which male sex workers construct their client's roles, behaviours and psychological and emotional attributes deemed suitable for their sex. As expected, all participants interviewed reported that the majority of their clients were male. They were mostly homosexual and bisexual. A smaller number were heterosexual, who were deemed as "experimenters" or "still in the closet" (Participant 3), where sex work was used as a platform for experimentation.

He's not even sure that he's gay. Then he told me that was the first time like he did [anal sex], and stuff like that. (Participant 3)

Burdened with social and religious expectations of heteronormality, hiring a male sex worker can be used to fulfil suppressed homosexual desires, or to provide emotional and psychological clarity on their issues of ambivalence. This avoids fears of stigma and rejection, which can lead to feelings of shame.

Male clients were also constructed as expressing feminine qualities in relation to the way they spoke, behaved and expressed themselves. Participant 5 spoke of the way in which his male clients' behaviours were similar to that of women.

They are like women... the way they express themselves and the feelings is like a woman, but it's in the body... I start to treat them like a woman... because it's like a woman which is in a man's body. (Participant 5)

In research by Aggleton (1999), clients who portray distinctively feminine qualities are frequently bisexual men in heterosexual relationships. In cases such as these, they often struggle to exhibit their femininity in fear of bringing on humiliation. Thus, when engaging in the client-sex worker relationship, their feminine identity can be revealed without the fear of judgement.

Interestingly so, two sex workers spoke of frequently having female clients. These clients were particularly characterised as being older, white, single and often divorced mothers. While this research did not specifically focus on the female clients of male sex workers, little information on the topic was obtained.

Age. Participants reported their clients to range from 25 to 60 years of age. Younger men were generally seen as more attractive than older men (Kurzban & Weeden, 2005). Younger clients were found to be more preferable as they were described as good-looking,

fun, provided more sexual pleasure to the sex worker, and enjoyed “kinky” forms of sex. Older clients were reported to need more physical attention and pampering, where sex workers prided themselves as “educators of sex”, enabling them to broaden their older clients’ limited sexual experiences (Lucas, 2005). Participant 8 provided a depiction of the importance of sexual discovery for older men in the client-sex worker relationship.

[Older men] are not really educated in the sex life... When it comes to sex, they're like a baby... they think just to squirt the sperm and that's it... I want to open them up, relax. So I say, "When you walk away from me, you've experienced all the body parts"... I enjoy educating people into sex. (Participant 8)

A number of the participants alluded to providing a platform allowing the older male to enjoy his body, and explore his sexuality in ways that were not possible in personal sexual relationships.

Power Imbalances in the Client-Sex Worker Relationship

The term sex work implies some form of equality in terms of negotiating and economic power, where there is a conceptual contract between client and provider (Aggleton, 1999). However, participant narratives were sullied with descriptions of power-imbalances, where neutrality between the client and sex worker is absent. Consistent with previous research, males’ reasons for entry into sex work were based on survival and subsistence needs (Dunkle, Jewkes, Brown, Gray, McIntyre & Harlow, 2004). Job loss, disability, trafficking, societal rejection, and desperation for an income, were reasons given by the 10 participants for entering sex work. These disadvantages automatically disempower sex workers in society. The criminality of sex work, too, inherently places sex workers in a position of vulnerability, frequently taken advantage of by clients. Thus, *socioeconomic status*, *ethnicity* and *sexual acts* were all themes characterised by power imbalances.

Socioeconomic Status (SES). Paying clients were automatically given a position of (economic) power, over economically disempowered male sex workers (Wardlow, 2004). In the client-sex worker relationship, clients generally belonged to a higher SES than male sex workers. Clients were found to have had more education and job opportunities, material wealth and had a higher social status in terms of the way in which they were ranked in society.

Clients holding a high SES, where termed “The Rich Guy”, or “The Business Man” by participants. They were specifically characterised as white, good-looking, well-dressed, owning expensive cars and lavish accessories. Participants saw this as a determining factor

indicating that the client would pay well, carry condoms, and that they were not HIV positive. By observing the physical appearance of clients, sex workers made assumptions hinged on the perception that if clients were wealthy and looked after themselves, the likelihood of them being HIV positive and carrying other sexually transmitted diseases decreased.

Through these constructions, power-imbalances dominated the client-sex worker relationship, where clients were seen to have economic and societal power over the sex worker. Participant 7 spoke of his disempowerment as a result of the economic power held by his client.

He's "the Rich Guy", and at first, I was afraid of him, you know? Because, just now I say something wrong, or I do something wrong, and then he's gonna push me away... I would never say no. I'd always say yes. Yes, yes, yes. 'Cause there's money... he's got all the money, so everything that he says I should just do. (Participant 7)

The notion that economic power determines the amount of control and influence clients have over the sex worker and sexual practices (Wardlow, 2004) is reflected in Participant 7's narrative. The majority of participants spoke of not being able to "say no", maintaining the lack of negotiation between the client and sex worker. This was mainly based on the sex worker's perception that wealthier clients pay more, and can provide them with possible connections to better material and job opportunities, and a higher social status. In line with previous research, sex workers also feared further rejection from people who were deemed highly in society (Aggleton, 1999). Thus, regardless of their own wishes, a potential leeway for exploitation is formed where the sex worker may feel obliged to comply with the client's requests, maintaining the disempowerment of the sex worker.

Ethnicity. Power imbalances were explicated through the way in which the participants' narratives reflected their perception of the clients' ethnicity and age. White, older male clients were associated with more economical and social power and were held in high esteem (Williams, 1999). Over half of the sex workers interviewed expressed preferring clients from certain ethnic groups, and avoiding others unless in desperate need of money. Participant 6 provided a description of the mutual respect shown between him and white clients.

The white clients... pay more. They listen to what [I say]... I do what they want me to do, [but] they respect my feelings as well. If the client is doing drugs, I just tell him I'm not on drugs, they respect that... One thing I like, if I say no sex without a condom, they respect that. (Participant 6)

Here, sufficient payment and respect for the male sex worker was believed to be determined by the client's ethnicity. The associations between white men, high SES, condom

use and an increased show of respect, could be borne from inherent prejudice within society that reinforces such stereotypes (Williams, 1999). Thus, while white male clients are placed in a position of economic power, they are also seen to have respect for the sex worker in terms of condom use, and the sex worker's boundaries around substance use.

Older, white male clients were also seen as wiser and knowledgeable figures who could introduce sex workers to elements of luxury that they would not have the opportunity to experience otherwise. Participant 8 describes the sense of admiration and appreciation he felt towards one of his older, white male clients, whom he felt broadened his cultural and life experiences.

He even prepared a nice meal... We had a bottle of wine. That was the first glass of wine I'd had in my life, and he shared the way they had their order when they had a meal on the table... [He was] the first person in my life...that took me out of my skin and showed me how to enjoy life. (Participant 8)

Participant 8's experience depicts the way in which older, white male clients serve to take on the role of a guide and educator. This maintains the power imbalances where they are perceived to hold sufficiently more knowledge and seasoned experiences than the sex worker. However, participants described a sense of appreciation towards the client for enlightening them in various aspects, and supplying them with life and self-knowledge that could serve to empower them. This differs remarkably from the way in which sex workers perceive themselves to be "educators of sex".

Substance abuse, particularly among black clients, was found to lead to exploitation, verbal abuse and lack of trust between clients and sex workers. Participant 6 described how sex workers are put in a position of vulnerability and disempowerment when engaging in business with black, substance abusing clients.

The black ones like to force. If you say you don't do drugs, they become rude- "Fuck you", "Go, walk away", "You don't want to do drugs. Fuck off." Most of them are like that... they say business first and then we negotiate the price later...They take advantage...They just do whatever they feel like doing. I won't go on my own. Sorry, no. I [need to] know that I'm safe. My black clients... I don't trust... I only go to them when I have no other option... Because I know how terrible it is. (Participant 6)

This comparison sheds light on different racial perceptions toward clients and the differing levels of power in the relationship. The participant remarks that black clients have a tendency to assert aggressive behaviour, forcefulness and a lack of respect. Other participants concurred with the high prevalence of drug-taking, and subsequent verbal abuse and refusal

to use condoms amongst black clients. Social constructions around racial stereotypes could also serve to reinforce the shared experiences among the sex worker community. Stereotypes reinforcing such beliefs include that black men are unintelligent, violent and have unprotected sex with multiple partners (Williams, 1999), resulting in sex workers feeling that their safety in the company of black male clients is compromised.

Sexual Acts. Participants defined and constructed the identities of their clients in terms of their preference to certain sexual acts. These acts specifically referred to receptive anal sex, penetrative anal sex, oral sex, solo and mutual masturbation, and deviant acts such as sadomasochism (S&M), group sex and voyeurism. Particular to the more “female” homosexual, bisexual, and heterosexual clients, receptive anal sex and oral sex was a dominant preference, as supported by Aggleton (1999). Solo masturbation was found to be a common occurrence amongst the older male clients, as reported by Participant 8.

When it comes to sexual pleasure... I must do everything on my own! Sometimes they like you to be naked and he just wants to wank... I'd go there and he would just lie on his bed, and I must lie with him and play with my dick, and he would wank himself crazy! And he gets a kick out of that. That's how he gets his pleasure by squirting all over himself- but I must be there with him. (Participant 8)

Sex workers felt that some clients saw themselves as sexually inadequate often because of their increasing age, or due to past insecurities. Sex worker's felt that this put them in a position of power, as they accordingly constructed their own identities as “educators of sex”. Sex worker's utilised their knowledge in the area, and used it as a means of empowerment. Client's insecurities around their sexual abilities potentially disempowers them, where sexual control is actively given to the sex worker in order to satisfy the client. However, clients' expectations of the sex worker hold power in the sense that the sex worker needs to sufficiently fulfil their clients' desires to earn their pay.

Participants also spoke of S&M acts requested by clients. Participant 6 recounted his experiences of the many clients requesting deviant sexual acts.

Some of the clients say you must pee in [their] mouth, or strangle [them] and do all that funny stuff... Without making love or anything, you beat the client. You beat him (laughs), or you strangle him, or you just pee in his mouth. And he swallows that pee...he just gives you money and walks away. All those funny things (laughs for a while)...but the clients enjoy it! (Participant 6)

Participants felt that clients requested such sexual acts from them, as they were sexually unsatisfied by partners who refused to engage in deviant sexual acts or to play a

dominant/submissive role, where sex workers were more likely to oblige. Participants also spoke of how sexually deviant clients have exceptionally high libidos as well as the need for stress relief, in which case sexual energy and tension may not be released through conventional intercourse, but more so through risqué and deviant practices (Cross & Matheson, 2006); a method used to satisfy sensation-seeking needs of clients.

Penetrative anal sex was perceived by a number of participants as a platform from which they could assert male dominance. In accordance to research by Kaye (2004) and West (1993), male-on-male sex increases the power, and in turn, pleasure felt by the individual occupying the active role on top. In relation to the need for dominance, Participant 3 explains why men buy sex from men.

You get guys that beat females up and end up raping them, and that gives them... krag (power) man. You now got power. You now overpower that person... Maybe, you get a better rush, or you reach a better climax if you're having sex with another male. Cause it's basically like you're overpowering him because he's a male, but he's more female than male. Because he's taking it. He's on the receiving end (Participant 3)

While there is a potential element of attraction involved, clients may have unaccepted, inhibited homoerotic desires. The anger and blame felt towards themselves is projected onto the male sex worker in form of sexual dominance. One of the 4 male sex workers who spoke of homophobic attacks, recounted an instance where his client made him perform oral sex and then proceeded to brutally beat him. Such violence could be attributed to the client's inability to manage his own feelings around sexuality. Clients may exert his anger on the sex worker who is in a position of vulnerability (Kaye, 2004).

Further, male sex workers often find themselves in a position of ambivalence and vulnerability, where they are aware that condoms need to be utilized in every sexual encounter, but clients frequently refuse, or offer more money for the sex worker not to wear one (Kaye, 2007). All of the participants reported experiences of clients' refusal to wear condoms during intercourse, which heightens the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Conclusion

This research aimed to explore how South African male sex workers talk about their experiences of their male clients and the client-sex worker relationship. This study has contributed to addressing the gap in sex work literature in a number of ways. It is evident that male sex workers construct their occupation as a professional business, that should be receive equal rights to other service providers (Dunkle, Jewkes, Brown, Gray, McIntyre & Harlow,

2004). Similarly to female sex work literature, male sex workers understood the motivation for men to buy sex as a need for the stress relief and the “boyfriend experience”, characterised by emotional and sexual fulfilment without the commitment (Weitzer, 2005).

Clients’ illicit substance use within the relationship was identified. This theme highlighted auxiliary criminal activity in South Africa’s sex industry (Gaffney & Beverley, 2001; Wardlow, 2004). Illicit substance use appeared to be prominent in terms of the client’s need for a “drug buddy” as well as to exert dominance over the sex worker, which has a negative impact on condom use. Moreover, participants were cognizant of the possibility of contracting STI’s and HIV/AIDS, especially in cases of intoxication, and were conscious of the need for protected sex through the use of condoms.

Additionally, male sex workers’ constructions around power-imbalances in terms of SES, ethnicity, and sexual acts, reflected the regularity of which exploitation and manipulation occurs. Where male sex workers are frequently demoralised and subjugated, this could serve as evidence for the decriminalisation of sex work (Boudin & Richter, 2009). Those supporting legalization, debate that legalization will initiate better control over the sex industry, leading to better protection and health outcomes for sex workers (Boudin & Richter, 2009; Yen, 2008).

To supplement this research, future studies could explore constructions from the clients’ perspective, so as to develop a holistic, deeper understanding of the client-sex worker relationship.

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