

**THE EXPERIENCE OF VULNERABILITY,  
CONNECTIVITY AND RESILIENCE IN MALES WHO  
ENGAGE IN STREET-BASED SEX WORK:  
A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Myths, above all myths of freedom for self-determination, are not to be preserved artificially but to be made fruitful in their potency, through critical illumination.

**Hans Küng, *My struggle for freedom: Memoirs***

Professors Victor Minichiello and Jeffrey Kottler have been long suffering and ever supportive throughout my research, a project often delayed by my ongoing involvement in clinical work and a major building project at our agency. They have been supervisors, mentors and friends. Dr John Baron from the University of Notre Dame Australia, who was my third supervisor, provided a link between academe and clinical work and encouraged me to read Charles Taylor, an encounter that radically shifted the direction of my thinking in life generally, my clinical work and my academic pursuits. He was also a welcome pedant when it came to the fashioning of this final product. Dr Rodrigo Marino was an early member of my supervision team. Ms Sylvia Ransom (UNE Library) and Ms Leigh Kelly (Professor Minichiello's office) have provided encouragement and technical support. Ms Lisa Maier from Crandon Services helped with my Endnote Library. Ms Christine Yeats, from State Records of NSW, and Mr Peter de Waal both provided advice and research suggestions on the early colonial history of New South Wales. Dr Baron and Professor Kottler were the first to tackle my obsession with semi-colons. Dr Lorraine Shannon assisted with a final proof reading.

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Without exception, the participants in this project inspired me with their honesty, willingness to trust, thoughtfulness and insight, and most significantly, with their ability to move beyond the repetition of comfortable thoughts and into a place where they dared to articulate the silent, and sometimes fearful, internal dialogues that sustain and direct their lives. I hope I have done justice to their narratives. I also hope that this study—a *critical illumination* of, and reflection on, their thoughts and experience—positively affects the way we care about and support them in their struggle for *freedom and self-determination*.

## ABSTRACT

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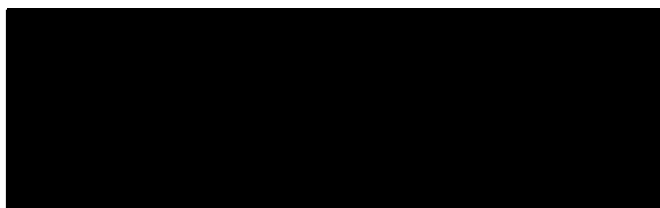
The literature on male prostitution or sex work paints a variable and complex picture that is often closely related to broader cultural movements — both permissive and punitive. Early research focussed on causal or associated pathological aspects of prostitution. More recent research has focussed on sex work as a vector of disease, on harm minimisation, and on the concrete sexual practices of male sex workers. To date, little research has focussed on the experiencing person and on relationships within and around the phenomenon of *street-based male sex work* (SMSW). This qualitative study provides empirical data in the form of in-depth interviews that explore the experiences of males, aged between 17 and 34. They have gravitated to, and engage in SMSW, at a location in Sydney known as *The Wall*. Interviews were analysed using a variant form of grounded theory. The analysis revealed a number of interrelated themes, some of which are developed across three chapters. The first analysis chapter explores the complex narratives of four young men: their history, identity, sex work experience, aspirations, vulnerability and resilience. The analysis then picks up on a significant emergent theme: relationships in the lives of those who work *The Wall*. Finally, and paradoxically, the emergent theme of education is explored. The findings of this study highlight the fact that, notwithstanding prior trauma, abuse and abandonment, these negative events and their vulnerability rarely quench the resilience that emerges through the relationships they encounter. Recommendations are made for psychosocial intervention with young people marginalised from social support. Areas for further research investigation are briefly identified.

## CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

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I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



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**David Andrew Leary**

**March 2007**

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## PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH TO DATE

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- Leary, D. A. (2000, 25-27 June). *Searching for the unspoken conversations of vulnerability and resilience: Rethinking the psychosocial health of young male sex workers*. Paper presented at the 3rd Pacific Rim NZAAHD Conference on Resiliency: Successful connections, Lincoln University, Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Leary, D. A. (2001, 5-10 October). *Discovering resilient processes in the cause of HIV prevention*. Paper presented at the 6th International Conference on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific, Melbourne.
- Leary, D. A. (2006, 8-11 August). *Education in the lives of males engaged in street-based sex work*. Paper presented at the Inaugural Postgraduate Research Conference of the Faculty of Education Health and Professional Studies: Bridging the Gap between Ideas and Doing Research, University of New England, Armidale.
- Leary, D. A., & Minichiello, V. (2007). Exploring the interpersonal relationships in street-based male sex work: Results from an Australian qualitative study. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 53(1/2), in press.